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By

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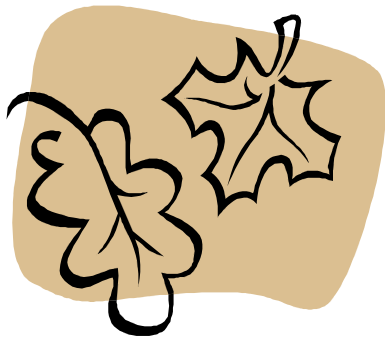
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The Long March—Evaluation of its Narratives and discussion on its Impact on the War against Terrorism

1. Introduction: Dawn, a national daily published from Karachi, Pakistan in its March 05 2009 edition reports, that “The lawyers announced that the long march would begin simultaneously from Quetta and Karachi on March 12 to reach Sukkur in the evening. The caravan of lawyers will go to Lahore from Multan on March 14 and will leave for Lahore from Rawalpindi on March 15 which is expected to reach Islamabad on March 16 for a sit in. Caravans from the northern part of the country will also reach Islamabad on the same day”. It is yet to be seen whether the long march will be able to achieve its avowed objectives but what is obvious is that the long march has effectively diverted the attention of the people of Pakistan from the major threats to the very existence of the state. Besides, there is every probability that the march might get the nascent democratic institutions in Pakistan derailed once again.

The powerful elites, the civil and military establishment of Pakistan, tried to take on PPP right after the Feb 2008 elections in Pakistan because the establishment has always seen Pakistan People’s Party as a mass movement having a liberal political outlook which might challenge the status quo but what the Governor’s rule imposed by Zardari in Punjab suggests is a top-down approach as against the PPPP bottom-up politics; and hence a big blow for democratic institutions in Pakistan.. Interestingly, Zardari consequently got into the trap. In order to understand the emerging political scenario in Pakistan and its broader implications such as its impact on the ongoing war on terror, one has to critically evaluate the discourse, the power structure, and the realpolitik of the lawyer’s movement besides the objectives of the rightists supporting the movement though some small avowedly nationalist progressive parties of Sindh and Baluchistan provinces of Pakistan have also stood by the movement. We intend to focus the objectives and discourse of the rightwing in this report and leave discussion on the objectives of the avowedly small nationalist progressive parties of the left for some other occasion.

2. The Discourse: The underlying philosophy as has been constructed and presented by the lawyer’s movement is that the movement represents a people’s revolution. We can watch the lawyers’ leadership singing rhymes for the people and debating the issue earnestly by focusing “justice” as a cure to all the ills of the people. The “justice” and “rule of law” as defined by the lawyer’s movement passed through several shifts over the past one and a half years. Initially, the movement seemed to challenge the status quo and provide middle class leadership to a mass movement. This was the case when General (Rtd) Musharraf imposed emergency rule in Pakistan in Nov 2007. The movement has noa reached a stage where it supports Nizam-e-Adl (Sharia) Regulation recently promulgated in Malakand division of the North Western Province of Pakistan which shows the type of justice the movement intends to perpetuate. Support of the movement by Jamati Islami, PML (N)¹ and Imran Khan’s Tahreek-i-Insaf make sense in this context. They give reference to the suo moto action of the Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudry during his last active days in office before he was made

¹ It is to be recalled that Mian Nawaz Sharif passed the Sharia Bill during its last tenure in office in 1997--1999). The bill was intended to concentrate all imaginable state power in the hands of Nawaz Sharif as a prime minister besides putting the country on the track of ultra conservatism.

dysfunctional. According to them, the deposed justice became an icon of people's voice after his "glorious No" to General Pervez Musharraf. The perceived philosophy also got strengthened after the civil society, media and some political parties joined the movement. But far from being a people's revolution, the movement does not touch directly the very chords of the people's genuine sentiments. Fighting for the country and fighting for the people are two contradictory arguments and the lawyers are more prone to embark upon the former than the latter since the inception of the movement. While fighting for the country represents the traditional banal expression of the power holders or apologist-cum blackmailers, fighting for the people should be the desired discourse which is so uncommon in Pakistan as far as revolutionary ideals are concerned. In Pakistan, the revolutionary fervor must stretch horizontally as far as the demand for a true federation is concerned but it becomes a farce when it relies on climbing upon vertical steps of the power pyramid. This is the reason that the lawyers' movement was lavishly used by politicians, NGOs and media men to push their agendas a few steps upwards in the power corridors. The people's muffled voices reverberate and silence down inside their psychotic cocoons which have been woven around them either by themselves or by their 'saviours'. The movement and the resultant long march represent the status quo in its essence and not the otherwise.

3. Power Structure: The movement uses "rule of law" as the supreme preamble to redress the power structure of the country. The perceived solution to the power structure is a readymade and superficial remedy adopted from the normative sciences focusing upon the institutional parities and accountability within the different pillars of the state. In this sense, it becomes a top-down approach envisioning a Chief Justice at the top of an independent judiciary as a safer guarantee to balance the powers of executive and legislature on the one hand and seeing the masses as plaintiff on the other hand. This power structure is taken for granted and is more like a formal abstraction than the desired power structure within Pakistan. A bottom-up power structure, on the other hand, is political at the societal level leaving no room for any gaps or conflicts at the state level. The lawyers initially attracted the politicians and civil society for giving them impetus to launch a massive movement against a usurper by filling the power structure vacuums at the grassroots' level, and were eventually successful to help in bringing democracy but rather than becoming part of the political process, the lawyers reverted to their abstraction by trying to reinvent the wheel.

4. Realpolitik: This brings us to the political aspect of the movement. The current movement is doing realpolitik by all means. There is enough testimony to the fact that right wing political paradigm within the state is woven around this movement. PML (N), Jumat-e-Islami, Tahreek-i-Insaf and Pakistani establishment are all for a sovereign state with its right winged security apparatus intact. Due to the movement, the credibility of the Pakistan People's Party is at stake at the centre and the war against terror has gone behind the screen. PML (N), by the virtue of its very existence, supports a centralist, non-federal, rightist and elitist state paradigm while the zeal of the lawyers' movement has been effectively manipulated by Jammati Isami in favour of the above-mentioned paradigm. The interests of the people, the interests of the smaller provinces and the war against Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorists all are going to be out of the ambit of the present political turmoil in the shape of the long march.

5. Conclusion: AIRRA seeks to urge all the stakeholders such as the government, international community and the Lawyers to revive and rethink their strategies vis-à-vis a bulk of internal and external pressure and threats. Significantly in this regard is religious militancy in the Pashtun belt. The organization of the militant inside Pakistan which has a strong command and control system in the centre can be consumed by an effective, accountable and targeted coercive means only. Their foot soldiers, our coming generation, should be kept aloof from their influence through a comprehensive, people-centric and coordinated developmental framework while the tribally affiliated manpower of the religious militants may be engaged in negotiations on the condition of surrender to the state. The present elitist political turmoil in Pakistan may push the war against terror a few steps backward in the wake of the Taliban organizations forging alliances in FATA and the Pashtun belt.