

Linking Peace to Democracy

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Example of Scandinavian countries with reference to “democratic peace zone” and the theory of “democratic peace” is gaining a wider currency. If democracy has the power to bring peace and security among states, there must be some linkage between peace, security and democracy in national or domestic context. “Three somewhat different stories,” which are required to run concurrently in a democratic polity,[i] are very pertinent here:

democracy as a principle or doctrine of government;

democracy as a set of institutional arrangements or constitutional devices; and

democracy as a type of behaviour

Although, all of these dimensions are indispensable for a flourishing democracy, but, in Pakistan’s context democracy as a type of behaviour and democracy as a principle of government seem to be more important.

Democracy as a set of institutional arrangements or constitutional devices: Though, from different corners there have been rising voices of discontent over the Constitution of Pakistan and some of the groups and individuals demand a new “social contract,” generally no serious problem lies with the Constitution. Almost all of the necessary provisions have been made for a democratic system of governance and provincial autonomy. In a very clear-cut manner it is provided in the Preamble that the federating “units will be autonomous....”

Democracy as a principle or doctrine of government: Here lies the key problem of governance in Pakistan. On one hand, military coups have been taking place throughout the country’s history, violating the Constitution. And, on the other, democratically elected governments have also been acting in an authoritarian manner. This is why they not only “failed to create sustainable democracy”[ii] but also jeopardized its future. Consequently, democratic structures and institutions could not take firm roots in the country.

Democracy as a type of behaviour: Democratic behaviour is badly lacking in the political environment of Pakistan. Even those who claim or pretend to be democratic rulers or democratic forces rarely behave democratically. It may be taken as the gravest problem in the way of strengthening democracy and ensuring peace in the country. Democratic parties and leaders – possibly with few exceptions – only pay lip service to democracy but their conduct shows serious deficiencies in this regard. Democratic norms are observed scantily.

A strong link may be developed between Democratic constitution and peace in a region or state, both at national and international levels. But, in Pakistan, undemocratic government and undemocratic behaviour mainly determine the existence or non-existence of peace and conflict in the country. Undemocratic behaviour of the governments and political elites creates resentment among the stakeholders. This resentment, in the long run, leads to animosity and hatred. The animosity and hatred culminates into violence – shattering peace of the society.

Undemocratic behaviour and governance have been giving rise to various (violent as well as non-violent) movements in different parts of the world. Pakistan is no exception. Separatist movement in East Pakistan, which culminated into the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, was the most prominent one. Another movement forced Ayub Khan to resign. Tehreek-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat against Bhutto Regime was another.

Undemocratic decision of supporting US-led coalition forces against Taliban Government in Afghanistan gave rise to the extremist movement in tribal areas and in North Western Frontier Province (NWFP). Ongoing lawyers' movement may be taken as the latest example demanding Pervez Musharraf's resignation. It has also led to huge losses of life and property – another blow to already weakening peace.

Moreover, almost all of the political forces make use of undemocratic means to serve their interests. This behaviour has manifested itself many times in the form of political violence in the political history of Pakistan where political opponents are harassed, kidnapped and sometimes even killed. False lawsuits are also filed to punish or get rid of the rivals. Governments have also been arm-twisting their opponents employing different methods and means. Political leaders are frequently detained, sent to jail or confined to their homes.

A number of politicians including prominent figures have been assassinated. Liaqat Ali Khan, first prime minister of the country was shot dead in Rawalpindi while addressing a public meeting. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was hanged in the same city, in an allegedly fake murder case. Assassination of Benazir Bhutto, two-times former prime minister, on December 27 last year, at the same place where Liaqat Ali Khan was killed, is the most recent example.

Weak democratic process also explains part of the story. Lack of credibility in the democratic process is also one of the factors behind conflict and violence in the country. Groups and individuals, who think the process cannot ensure prevalence of justice, resort to violence in order to remedy the socio-economic and political injustices meted out to them. They think it is the only option they have. Electoral process is every time said to be maneuvered by the establishment and influential groups and individuals.

Upholding human rights is a fundamental value of democracy. But in Pakistan, human rights' violations are a routine matter. Newspapers and other media sources report only a part of these violations and abuses. Even then it is very hard to find a paper not having such reports. It speaks a lot about the quality and quantity of democracy in the country.

In other words, almost every kind of undemocratic means and tools are employed in order to get into power, to promote or safeguard vested interests or elongate one's rule.

As a result, peace in the society is retreating giving way to increased levels of violence and terrorism. Despite all the efforts made by the authorities and law enforcement agencies there is no respite. Acts of violence and terrorism are taking place unabatedly. Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS) recorded 1442 terrorist attacks and incidents of political violence during the last year. As a result, 3448 lives were lost and 5353 others were injured. The figures speak themselves of the gravity of the situation and decreased levels of peace and security.[iii]

Development, non-development and underdevelopment are also critical factors in determining the fate of democracy and peace in a society. If there is no development or it is skewed, it will create a sense of deprivation among the losers. Sense of deprivation and conflict are strongly correlated. Similarly, where it is argued that development advances democracy, it is also reasoned that "democratic regimes foster economic and political freedoms." [iv] Development in all three sectors – economic, political and social – has to go side by side. Only then it can be peaceful and play its part in sustaining societal peace. Thus, "economic growth without the expansion of civil and political rights is unlikely to lead to democracy in Pakistan." [v]

International community is also, at least indirectly if not directly, responsible for the lack of democracy and peace in Pakistan. Western powers, particularly, have been supporting military governments to promote their ideal of stability under misperceptions or for safeguarding their own interests. They do not tend to be willing to understand the fact that “democracy is not the alternative to stability; it is Pakistan’s only hope.”[vi]

In many corners it is being felt that Pakistan, “with a proud tradition of tolerance and moderation” is “now under threat from the extremists on its fringes.”[vii] The only hope for restoring peace in the country is democracy, democratic rule, promotion of democratic values and norms, strengthening democratic institutions and structures. A democratic government can perform better to deal with the menaces of extremism,[viii] violence and terrorism in order to bring back peace an.

[i] Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, p. 5.

[ii] Mahmood Monshipouri and Amjad Samuel, “Development and Democracy in Pakistan: Tenuous or Plausible Nexus?” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, No. 11. (Nov., 1995), p. 976.

[iii] PIPS security report 2007 (www.san-pips.com)

[iv] Mahmood Monshipouri, p. 975.

[v] Ibid.

[vi] “The world’s most dangerous place.” *Economist*, 1/5/2008, Vol. 386, Issue 8561.

[vii] Ibid.

[viii] Ibid.