

The path of xenophobia

MOSHARRAF ZAIDI

The growing xenophobic tendencies being baked into Pakistani public policy violate our country's traditional strengths of openness, hospitality and generosity.

Closed doors are guaranteed to restrict Pakistan's potential for economic growth and increased international relevance. Worst of all, limiting the access of foreigners to Pakistan may not help Pakistan address the issues of national security that are at the heart of this newfound xenophobia.

Xenophobia – the fear of people from other countries – is manifest in Pakistani decision-making across a spectrum of recent events and decisions. A quick zooming out can help identify at least four separate examples of this. First, there has been the marked increase in negative narratives about Afghan refugees, especially since 2014. Second, there is the growing distrust of Pakistanis with more than one passport, as manifest in the Supreme Court case on judges, and other public officials holding dual nationalities. Third, there is the long-standing issue of denial of registration to several prominent international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), especially since 2011. Fourth, there is the example of a delay of over one year in the issuance of clearance to a Malaysian company waiting to invest approximately \$1 billion in Pakistan.

Whether it is Afghan refugees, or dual nationals, or INGOs, or foreign companies investing in Pakistan, the foundational issue often gets lost in syrupy narratives that appeal either to the goodness of embracing everyone and everything, or stark narratives that appeal to the need for constant and unceasing vigilance against enemies, even if such enemies have to be fashioned out of thin air. But the xenophobia that is driving these policy trends or decisions should not really be judged from a lens of good or evil. There is neither any inherent goodness in having an open border, free-for-all, nor is there any inherent evil in attempts to secure the borders. The debate needs to be a little bit more nuanced. What is good for Pakistan, now for the medium to long-term future? And how can Pakistan be protected from the evil of malign actors, now and for the medium to long-term future?

These questions cannot be staggered. We cannot choose one and place it above the other. Pakistan cannot grow without being secure. But Pakistan will never be secure if it remains poor, isolated and dependent. This catch-22 is not unique to Pakistan – it afflicts the entirety of the European Union experiment, and it defines the emerging identity politics of a United States of America projected to be a minority-majority country by 2043. The European response to perceived changes in economic and security realities includes Brexit, Marine Le Pen, and Golden

Dawn. The American response is Donald Trump, who calls for building a wall to protect Americans from immigrants, whom he refers to as animals and terrorists, and Mexicans, whom he calls rapists.

Of course, Pakistan is not the European Union, and it is not Trump's America. Pakistan is the country that has endured 40 years of superpower-fuelled wars in Afghanistan. It is the country that has hosted at least two and a half million Afghans, for four decades, without a break. It is the country whose founders imagined it to be a homeland for those seeking freedom from fear and oppression. And it is the country that was dismembered in 1971 because it abandoned its own people out of fear of what the enemy might be doing to misguide them. But Pakistan is so much more than these things.

Pakistan is among the world's most generous refugee hosting nations. Pakistan is the world's seventh highest destination for foreign remittances. Pakistan has among the world's most capable and experienced NGO and INGO sectors – forged through decades of dealing with catastrophes like the 2005 earthquake and the 2010 floods. Pakistan has among the world's largest and most potent demographic dividends, or youth bulges. Whilst the rest of the world gets older, and struggles to maintain productivity and consumption, Pakistan is, by the force of its young population, destined to grow for

decades to come. A self-confident Pakistan that believes in its destiny would lean in to its strengths, not cave into its fears. No one can deny that malign foreign actors have had too much freedom in Pakistan, but the question is: what should the authorities be targeting? The freedom or the malignancy?

If it is freedom that is the object of corrective action, then perhaps xenophobia is absolutely the right response. If it is malignancy, then the appropriate response would be improved and better targeted counter-intelligence.

In the case of Afghan refugees, no one, not even the Afghan government, argues that Pakistan should accept the status quo. But how Pakistan argues and pursues a solution to the complex refugee puzzle will determine whether four decades of hospitality will serve Pakistan's future interests, or will destroy the remaining goodwill in Afghanistan for Pakistan. Meanwhile, any and all activities by malign actors in Afghanistan to undermine security in Pakistan should be dealt with brutal and lethal efficiency that strikes the fear of God into the enemy. But this should be done without harming innocent Afghans, who are – just like their Pakistani brothers and sisters – victims of war.

In the case of dual nationalities, the issue isn't whether Pakistan can take advantage of its diverse and talented stock of dual nationals, or whether dual nation-

als are loyal to Pakistan. The issue is whether Pakistan can frame consistent and coherent laws that do not require the award of certificates of exception. If any Pakistani is allowed to hold dual nationality, such a Pakistani should have all the same rights and responsibilities as any other. If not, then such a person should not have citizenship at all. Consistency, rather than exceptionalism, requires basing policy on principles, instead of on temporary fear and xenophobia.

In the case of INGOs, it is the coherence of the Pakistani state that is in play, nothing less. Recent court judgments at the Islamabad High Court, and committee hearings at the Senate have exposed the heavy-handed lack of sophistication that is driving the INGO registration fiasco. All organisations must be subject to the law of the land, but Pakistan has no law governing the humanitarian and development interventions made by other countries, directly or indirectly. The regulatory function across the humanitarian and development nexus is thus shared by the Economic Affairs Division, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Human Rights, the Planning Commission, and a host of other agencies. But decisions about clearance are made through the Ministry of Interior, by the intelligence community. This is a recipe for continued and sustained embarrassment. And, to be clear, the embarrassment is not that Pakistan is trying to secure itself from

machinations of hostile foreign interventions – but that Pakistan is doing so in a haphazard and clumsy manner. Every few months, when the Ministry of Interior attempts to tighten the noose around unwelcome INGOs, other parts of the system act to loosen it. This confuses not only the INGOs and the international community, but also the public servants that are tasked with protecting the country.

Perhaps most important of all, however, is the case of a Malaysian company whose security clearance has been denied for over a year. The ostensible reason is that the telecom regulator, PTA, has not had a chairperson for several months. But the real reason may be the fear that such companies are Trojan horses for malign actors to own stakes in vital national infrastructure like mobile phone towers. Legitimate or not, such fears should prompt a more urgent conversation. In the years to come, artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) will create unprecedented connectivity and utility. But these new technologies will also generate unparalleled system-wide vulnerability. Some countries will respond to the opportunity and the challenge by training millions of young people with the ability to develop home-grown technological solutions and plug-ins to tackle questions of security and vulnerability. Other countries will respond with fear and xenophobia.

Whitewashing the Bush legacy

AZEEZAH KANJI

If “the present conducts the past the way a conductor conducts an orchestra”, bringing forward “these particular sounds, or those, and no others” – as the great Italian novelist Italo Svevo observed in an often quoted metaphor – then American mainstream media's posthumous treatment of George HW Bush can only be described as a one-note symphony of glorification, contrasting the 41st president's supposed virtues with the vices of the office's current occupant. “The only part of [the past] that is highlighted”, as Svevo had noted, “is that part that has been summoned up to illumine, and to distract us from, the present”.

Among the instruments of selective historical memorialisation is the taboo against speaking ill of the dead – which is articulated as a universal principle but applied, in reality, with extreme partiality. When luminary of the South African anti-apartheid struggle Winnie Madikizela-Mandela died in April, Western media coverage rushed to highlight her alleged participation in acts of violence. The very first sentence of the New York Times' story about her death, for example, stated that Madikizela-Mandela's “hallowed place in the pantheon of South Africa's liberators was eroded by scandal over corruption, kidnapping, murder, and the imposition of her fabled marriage to Nelson Mandela”, and the Times' original headline (subsequently revised following complaints) described her as a “tarnished leader of South Africa's liberation”.

But for George Bush, who had the privilege of directing acts of mass violence from afar, the abuses and atrocities tarnishing his leadership have been treated as mere footnotes to the main story – if they are accorded any attention at all. While commentators have fawned over cartoons depicting Bush's projected arrival in heaven, they have erased the victims consigned to hell on Earth by his policies. Expunged from the hegemonic hagiographies is Bush's complicity as CIA director with Operation Condor: a CIA-supported collaboration between South American military dictatorships that kidnapped, tortured, murdered, or disappeared thousands of political dissidents – including former Chilean Foreign Affairs Minister Orlando Letelier, who was assassinated on American soil during Bush's directorship of the agency. While the New York Times, the Washington Post, and MSNBC all managed to feature in-depth analyses of Bush's penchant for patterned socks, not one bothered to men-

tion the far more significant pattern of the CIA's involvement in projects of state-sponsored terror, such as Operation Condor under Director Bush.

Bush's decision as president to banish thousands of Haitian asylum seekers to detention camps at Guantanamo Bay, which his administration claimed laid outside the protections of international law, has also been completely ignored – in notable contrast to his decision to banish broccoli from his dinner table, which was the subject of fond reminiscences in the Washington Post and New York Times. In the hands of the panegyrists at the Washington Post, the US-led “humanitarian intervention” in Somalia initiated by Bush in 1992 has been framed as an example of the former president's guiding “concern for humanity”. Omitted was the fact that the operation quickly degenerated into an assault on Somali humanity – bombings of hospitals and gatherings of elders, unprovoked shootings of unarmed civilians, and culminating in the slaughter of approximately 1,000 Somalis in the Battle of Mogadishu – by American soldiers heard repeating the slogan “the only good Somali is a dead Somali”.

Bush's 1989 invasion of Panama has likewise been repackaged and sold as a humanitarian triumph: “a successful invasion to oust Panama's strongman General Manuel Antonio Noriega”, in the words of the New York Times. Nevermind that the UN General Assembly condemned it at the time as a “flagrant violation of international law and of the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of [Panama]”, and that it “inflicted a toll in civilian lives that was at least... 12 to 13 times higher than the casualties suffered by US troops”, according to Human Rights Watch. In a CNN interview following Bush's death, Bush military adviser Colin Powell channelled Orwellian newspeak to celebrate the invasion for “putting Panama back on a path of democracy and freedom” – a characterisation that went unchallenged by host Jake Tapper, who has previously spoken in soaring language of the journalistic responsibility to “tell the truth and report the facts regardless of whom those facts might benefit”.

Similar deficits of truth-telling are apparent in representations of Bush's military follow-up to Panama, the First Gulf War, almost universally depicted as a courageous confrontation against the evils of dictator Saddam Hussein. Inconvenient details – that Hussein's evils had been enabled by Bush, who facilitated sales of military equipment to the Iraqi leader and continued to protect him

from sanctions even after he massacred thousands of Kurds with poison gas at Halabja in 1988; that the war was sold to the American public with deliberately fabricated lies about Iraqi soldiers ripping babies from incubators; and that the execution of the war itself involved such atrocities as the annihilation of the Amiriyah bomb shelter, which killed at least 400 civilians, and the use of enough depleted uranium weaponry to toxify the land for 4.5 billion years – have been scrubbed from the record. A CNN panel of journalists reflecting on Bush's presidency contrasted him favourably to Trump for having “respected media's role” – neglecting to mention that the Bush administration imposed unprecedented restrictions and censorship on media coverage of the First Gulf War, turning media into a mouthpiece for jingoism. While mainstream American media organisations rail against the proliferation of “fake news”, they continue to propagate half-truths: a severely partial perspective in which Trump is portrayed as an aberration in American political history rather than a product of its deeply entrenched regressive forces. The recent eulogies masquerading as journalism not only sanitise Bush's individual legacy, but conceal and distort elements of the past that are vital for understanding the present. Operation Condor, for instance, prefigured the CIA's extensive use of terrorising tactics such as extrajudicial assassination, extraordinary rendition, and torture in the name of counterterrorism. George HW Bush's treatment of Guantanamo Bay as an extra-legal warehouse for unwanted humanity laid the foundations for his son's employment of Gitmo as an indefinite detention and torture camp for “war on terror” detainees.

The disaster in Somalia exposed the persistently racist dynamics underlying military operations pitched as “humanitarian interventions”, presaging the recurrent failures and abuses of such interventions across the formerly officially colonised world, from Haiti to Libya. The invasion of Panama “inaugurated the age of pre-emptive [American] unilateralism, using ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ as both justifications for war and a branding opportunity”, as New York University historian Greg Grandin has observed.

Cutting through the bush of media's posthumous propaganda is not about disrespecting George HW Bush in his death, but about respecting the lives of those victimised by his policies – and the lives of those who will continue to suffer as long as the structures of American imperial power he helped construct re-



Brexit's darkest hour

MUNEEB QADIR

The UK government, led by Prime Minister Theresa May, has faced its worst crisis and all of it boils down to Brexit.

The need to hold the Brexit referendum had stemmed from the UK's wish to control immigration from the EU and to relieve itself from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice [ECJ]. The challenge is to achieve these two primary aims.

The crisis that unfolded the week before last has its source in the inflexibility of the EU and the UK MPs. In this tug-of-war between the two, it is Theresa May who finds herself faced with the nearly impossible task of reconciling their differences.

Studies have revealed that the British economy would be worse off in the event of a “no-deal” situation. The deal that the UK has to strike with the EU is one which should not create a “hard-border” between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, since this was a promise made by the UK government to the Northern Irish people in 1998 under what is known as the “Good Friday Agreement”, the breach of which could threaten Northern Ireland's union with Great Britain. This leaves May

trying to resolve the following: how to secure a trade deal with the EU which avoids the need to create a Hard Irish Border yet leaves the UK free to negotiate its own trade deals with non-EU countries while also relieving the UK from the ECJ's jurisdiction as well as controlling immigration from the EU.

The current withdrawal agreement which May had secured from the EU provided for the UK to remain in the “customs union” for a transitory period, depriving it temporarily from negotiating independent trade deals with non-EU countries. If the UK were still to fail to reach a permanent deal with the EU, the withdrawal agreement provided for a “backstop arrangement” leaving the UK tied up to the customs union indefinitely and subjecting it to the ECJ's jurisdiction.

Undoubtedly, such an “arrangement” was doomed to failure at the outset, having been widely criticised. Consequently, May decided not to present it in the UK parliament, promising that she would renegotiate the deal with the EU to reintroduce it for a final vote in parliament before January 21, 2019. This led disappointed MPs from within the ruling Conservative Party to trigger a vote of no confidence in PM May's lead-

ership which she narrowly managed to escape. Despite that, tough challenges lie ahead of her owing to her failure to convince the EU to limit its “backstop” agreement to a maximum period of 12 months. In the absence of flexibility by the EU and the UK, a disastrous no-deal situation is inevitable. Possible solutions therefore include: one, tying up only Northern Ireland to the EU single market and customs union to avoid creating a hard Irish border [a position which would be unacceptable to the DUP, the party whose support in parliament allows the current Conservative-led government to remain in office]. Two, to agree upon a “Norway-EU style deal” making the UK part of the European Economic Area thereby giving access to the EU's single market but also relieving the UK from the ECJ's jurisdiction. Three, to enter into a “Canada-EU style” trade agreement removing tariffs and quotas in trade with the EU but leaving the UK free to make its own trade agreements with non-EU countries. And, four, the EU will have to agree upon limiting the “backstop” to a 12 months' period as requested by Theresa May.

With a March 29, 2019 deadline, time is running out fast and that's where the problem lies.

Letters to the Editor

Mental stress

Unrealistic academic, social or family expectations can create stress among students. When things go wrong at school or home, teenagers often overreact. Many young people feel that life is not fair or that things “never go their way”. They feel stressed out and confused. To make matters worse, teens are bombarded by conflicting messages from parents, friends and society. Today's teens see more of what the life has to offer – both good and bad – on television, at school, in magazines and on the internet. Teens need adult guidance more than ever to understand all the emotional and physical changes they are experiencing. When teens' moods disrupt their ability to function on a day-to-day basis, it may indicate a serious emotional or mental disorder that needs attention. In our country, parents barely pay attention to their children's mental health issues and try to brush them off. The number of teen suicides is increasing at an alarming rate. This calls for parents and guardians to provide extra care to their children and make sure to listen to their problems.

Sehar Irfan
ISLAMABAD

Preserving history

Gilgit-Baltistan has 6,000-year-old artefacts. Some people are busy digging the ancient sites in different parts of GB, especially in various parts of district Diamar, to unearth urns, beads, pottery and other historic artefacts for quick money. Residents generally do not complain and remain indifferent towards such plunderers because they do not understand the historical significance of the artefacts and the ancient sites of previous civilisations. In order to protect these ancient sites, which can serve as popular tourist spots, the relevant authorities should raise awareness of their historical significance among people and encourage the local authorities to preserve these sites.

Zahid Ali Zohri
NAGAR

With dedication

Prime Minister Imran Khan has shown incredible devotion and dedication to his work. He meticulously prepares for his talks and speeches, voraciously goes through files and papers, and keeps his routine packed, remaining continuously engaged in official matters,

meetings and visits. Unlike his predecessors, he has volunteered excessive time and effort for the national cause which is truly commendable.

Sajjad Rizvi
LAHORE

Potable water

In the past few years, various national and international surveys have concluded that Pakistan is at a serious dearth of safe drinking water. A large number of people are facing life-threatening health issues after consuming contaminated water. Throughout the country, drinking water sources, both surface and groundwater are laced with microbial, toxic metals and pesticides. To overcome this issue, the government must take immediate measures for the treatment of drinking water. It must installed desalination and distilled water plants to ensure the supply of safe drinking water. This initiative will not only provide healthy and safe water to public, but will also reduce the scarcity of potable water.

Ar Sahar Amjad
LAHORE

Jobs for youth

At present, Pakistan needs to generate around two million jobs to accommodate young people. Currently, almost four million young people are unemployed. By 2020, this number is expected to reach 8.6million. With such high unemployment ratio, there will be an imbalance in society. The crime rate will increase, use of drugs will surge, and even militants will get space to recruit young jobless people. This issue requires the government's undivided attention.

Hyder Ali Abbasi
SHIKARPUR

Indian brutalities

The recent rise in atrocities of Indian forces in Indian-held Kashmir is quite alarming. The unwarranted brutal killing of Kashmiris is a sheer violation of human rights. International organisations who are flag-bearer of human rights must step forward and pressurise India to stop this act of barbarity. The plebiscite that was once recommended by the UN must be conducted and Kashmiris should be allowed to decide for their future.

Ifthikhar Mirza
ISLAMABAD

Cottage industry

Islampur is a village near Swat Saidu Sharif and is famous for its cottage industries which produce high-quality scarves, woolen coats, caps and shawls on the national level. These products have the potential to compete in the international market, however the government hasn't taken any steps to enhance the exports of these finished products. Last year, the PTI-led KP government expressed that it will work towards uplifting such industries in the province, but so far no action has been taken by the government.

Imtiaz Alam
SWAT

Incomplete flyover

We, the commuters who use the road around the Shaukat Khanum flyover, hoped that the traffic mess will vanish once the adjoining roads are laid, but the situation is still precarious. It seems that no one is bothered about it. The roads are messy and there are diversions which add to the commuting time, making it difficult for people who are trying to drop their children at school to reach their destination in time.

Rukhsana Zafar
Lahore