

How Pakistan Weaponized ‘Love for Prophet Muhammad’

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How Pakistan’s anti-Ahmadiyya campaigns links to a recent assassination attempt.

On Sunday, Pakistan’s Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal survived an assassination attempt during a corner meeting in his native city Narowal. He was shot by a 21-year-old man affiliated with Tehrik Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY), a political party founded on “sending blasphemers to death.” Earlier in November TLY had kept the capital hostage to express their “love for Prophet Muhammad.”

This violent expression of love was “necessitated” by the first draft of the Election Reforms Bill 2017, passed in early October, over changes made in the *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat* (finality of prophethood) clause, omitting 7B and 7C of the Conduct of the General Election Order 2002, which mandates a separate voters list for the Ahmadiyya community – an Islamic sect excommunicated by the Pakistani constitution in 1974.

For decades, Pakistanis have maintained persecution of Ahmadis as an expression of love for Prophet Muhammad, owing to the community’s ostensible breach of belief in *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat*, which conservatives hold as a fundamental part of Islam. Radical Islamists perceive the Ahmadiyya sect’s theological beliefs themselves as blasphemous – a “crime” punishable by death in the country.

Pakistan’s weaponization of *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat* has its roots in the pre-Partition anti-Ahmadiyya campaigns in the 1930s, after many renowned Muslims had come under the influence of the movement, including poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal, celebrated as an ideological founding father of



Pakistan.

Following Pakistan's creation, the first major instance of anti-Ahmadiyya violence was the 1953 riots in Punjab spearheaded by the Islamist parties demanding formal declaration of Ahmadi Muslims as heretics.

The Justice Munir Commission report on the riots reached the logical conclusion by asserting that no two Muslim sects thought alike, and prophesized that "any change from one view to the other must be accompanied in an Islamic State with the penalty of death, if the Government of the State is in the hands of the party which considers the other party to be *kafirs*."

This prophesy came true a decade after 1974's Second Amendment to the constitution, with Gen Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorial regime passing the death penalty for blasphemy, and Ordinance XX in the Penal Code that ordered prison sentence for Ahmadis "posing as Muslims."

Even so, while then-Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto touted the apostatizing of Ahmadi Muslims as "solving a 90-year-old problem" in the 1970s, and Gen. Zia barred them from using Islamic greetings or titles under the blasphemy sword, the fanaticism associated with *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat* continues well into the 21st century and the targeting of non-Ahmadis under the same pretext.

Ahsan Iqbal, a Sunni Muslim, was targeted on Sunday because his party didn't, or couldn't, put forward a scapegoat for the first draft of the Election Reforms Bill in October. Scapegoat is being used here in the most literal of senses – for any admission of reforming the discriminatory clauses of the bill is an invitation for mob slaughter.

This is why then-Law Minister Zahid Hamid's resignation came with a loud disclaimer that he wasn't the culprit, along with a video expressing his own belief in *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat* and denunciation of Ahmadis — all after his ancestral home in Sialkot had been attacked.

One would've thought that with violence brewing in the capital courtesy of the TLY mob, and politicians being brazenly targeted – all owing to weaponizing of *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat* – state leaders would step in and put an end to the madness.

But instead both the Army leadership and the opposition parties made inflammatory comments as apologia for instigation of violence.

These included the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), now co-chaired by Bhutto's son-in-law Asif Ali Zardari and grandson Bilawal, who lost one of their senior leaders in Salmaan Taseer, then governor of Punjab, to a similar murderous expression of "love" when his bodyguard Mumtaz Qadri shot him on duty seven years ago.

TLY was created as an ideological extension of Qadri – a man judicially executed as a terrorist by the Pakistani state who hogs the electoral banners of the party, with the government acting as silent bystanders.

That the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) – including Ahsan Iqbal himself – has made apologetic claims about the blatant weaponizing of *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat*, even while criticizing the TLY



thugs, signifies that writ in Pakistan belongs to anyone that militarizes Islam.

The tools are molded such that any counterargument becomes blasphemous, in turn necessitating the use of the arsenal – or threat thereof – against anyone putting forward a dissenting viewpoint.

How these self-devouring tools are passed on from one generation to the next is symbolized by Ahsan Iqbal. His grandfather Chaudhry Abdul Rehman Khan was a prominent member of the Majlis-e-Ahrar that orchestrated the 1953 anti-Ahmadiyya riots and Iqbal's mother, Appa Nisar Fatima, was instrumental in getting the death penalty mandated for blasphemy.

That this gauntlet of radical Islam continues to be inherited and used by Pakistani leaders underscores the cause behind the shambles the state continues to find itself in. That this self-mutilation is carried out as manifestation of “love” for the Prophet of Islam is emblematic of the fatal inertia against reform of Islamic theology in the Muslim world.

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