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## Pakistan: Bread for Poor or Bombs for Barrels

Even after more than six decades of independence, one out of every two Pakistanis is short on food<sup>1</sup>. One out of every two Pakistanis is food-insecure<sup>2</sup>. One out of every two Pakistanis is managing to subsist on less than 2,350 calories per day. In March 2007, there were 60 million Pakistanis short on food. That number now stands at 77 million; a 28 percent increase in just one year. 70% of Pakistani population is living either on or under two US dollars per day, according the Federal Minister for Information, Sherry Rahman in April 2008.

According to the World Food Program (WFP), over the past year, *“food prices in Pakistan have risen at least 35 percent, whereas the minimum wage has risen by just 18 percent, leading to a nearly 50 percent decline in the purchasing power of Pakistan's poor...”* On March 27, the World Bank warned that *“Pakistan must take immediate action to prevent its economy from collapse”* and that *“painful adjustments”* would be needed to prevent a crisis. These painful adjustments required abolishing the subsidies that the government used to provide on various essential items from petroleum products to wheat. This would further result in increasing the gap between the purchasing power of the poor and the prices of even the daily sensitive products.

While one out of every two Pakistanis is going hungry we go out and buy killing machines. Over the past five years our decision makers have bought killing machines worth \$4.55 billion from the U.S. alone. The total amount spent on the purchase of weapons is estimated at \$6 billion over the past five years. Pakistan is now officially more water-stressed than is Ethiopia. What have we done about it? Well, we have bought 500 AMRAAM air-to-air missiles, 1,450 two-thousand pound bombs, 500 JDAM bomb tail kits and 1,600 Enhanced Paveway laser-guided bomb kits. The bill: \$667 million entirely paid with Pakistani national funds. The barrels may keep getting their bullets and bombs but a poor man's stomach may not get the bread. It's ironic especially when the founding fathers of Pakistan dreamed of a social

welfare state and not a security state for its citizens.

**UNICEF says that 200,000 Pakistani children die annually** because of unsafe drinking water--dysentery, diarrhea, typhoid, and gastroenteritis. What do we do? We go out and buy 60 mid-life update kits for F-16A/B combat aircraft. Total value: \$891 million (of which \$108 million was paid by the U.S. under its Foreign Military Financing). During the same period, the Musharraf government (2002-08) announced that the whole country will have the clean drinking water by the end of 2007 and it has become a joke. Many water filtration plants that were installed went out of order even before getting operational but certainly all the armaments purchased would be fully operational.

**Pakistan hasn't built a major dam in 27 years** but we have paid out a colossal \$1.43 billion for 18 new F-16C/D Block 50/52 combat aircraft with an option to buy 18 more. Not just that, we have already transferred \$298 million to the U.S. treasury for a hundred Harpoon anti-ship missiles (of which 70 have been delivered) and \$95 million for 500 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles (of which 300 have been delivered). And the government recently abandoned the construction of Kala Bagh Dam, which though was politically controversial but this decision was taken without getting into any kind of political debate either in the parliament, media or at people's level.

**What is the U.S. up to?** They have provided us \$1.6 billion in Foreign Military Financing when they know very well that we actually need food for our undernourished citizenry and clean drinking water for our children. Would the US ever have interest in the Pakistani people, nation and its democratic institutions or it sees the services as its only allies in all the wars that it has directly fought or financed? Would the US cease to exist as a civil-military complex for Pakistan and start existing as a responsible global power and a democratic state believing in filled stomachs and healthy minds and bodies? The indications at the moment are not encouraging.

According to the Pakistan Water Gateway, within the next 15 years at least *“one out of every three Pakistanis will face critical shortages of water threatening their very survival.”* And, how are we preparing for that eventuality? Well, we have 4 Agosta 90B and 3 Agosta 70 class submarines. To be certain, an Agosta 90B has a crew of 36 plus 5 officers so in effect 164 of our brother Pakistanis will be safe. Their defense of offense capability may not be questioned but what is the sum of national exchequer spent on building dams, managing water resources and pumping potable water for the Pakistani citizens during the same period of time? None knows. None dares to question; not even the democratically elected Parliament that already has “wasted” nearly 100 initial days which usually depict all days to come of any new government. Their performance, thus far, is nothing but utter disappointment for the ordinary people of Pakistan and this is just not stopping here.

According to Gallup Pakistan, *“Sixty-six percent of a national sample of respondents from the rural and urban areas of all four provinces say they have lately faced difficulties in obtaining aata (flour) for their daily food consumption.”* What do we do? We go out and buy six AN/TPS-77 surveillance radars for a cool \$100 million. With a bit of technological amendments, couldn't these radars be used for tracing down the movement of wheat flour? Our defense establishment needs to sit and think about it.

The story doesn't end at \$4.55 billion going into the U.S. treasury. Now we are looking at buying Class 214 submarines from Germany's *Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft* or is it France's *Direction des Constructions Navales Services*. Our new big-ticket idea will cost us Euro1.2 billion. And during the same period of time, the social agenda of the state remains vague, uncertain and unpopular.

Imagine; the Islamic Republic routinely submerges into absolute darkness of dark ages while our Muslim leaders contemplate buying ultramodern Class 214 submarines featuring air-independent propulsion using polymer electrolyte module hydrogen fuel cells.

No bread for the poor but bullets and bombs for the barrels. Couldn't there be a balance? Who would these killing machines really protect when half of the nation already is dying hungry and a large part of the remaining half is quickly slipping downwards? Could there be an answer? What is our parliament doing; if at all it believes in doing something?

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<sup>1</sup> WFP survey of Pakistan analyzing the daily intake of required calories per day.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.