

Ideological Fencing: A Fenced Border, an Unfenced Mind in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: Over the last 50 years, the story has silently replaced the soldier in the twenty-first century. This article defines what people refer to as 'ideological fencing', in which the deliberate construction and protection of a controlled, indigenous ideology is meant to protect a nation's 'cognitive territory' as walls and trenches once did for its physical territory. The article discusses the history of the border in the four phases — physical, legal-cartographic, ideological (cold war) and digital — and suggests that the border has been moved from the ground, to the map and to the mind — with states that protect only the first two protecting a line that no one is going to challenge. Based on Gramsci's concept of hegemony and the organic intellectual, it analyzes how the U.S., China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey practice ideological fencing, and then considers the central case of Pakistan, a 'state built on an idea', which has physically fenced its most hazardous border while simultaneously establishing an ideological buffer in Afghanistan — that is, a 'buffer' narrative — in the imitation of the British empire's 'buffer' policy. The article concludes with a blueprint of five programmes to build an indigenous fence of Pakistan in its own ideology, but not in borrowed narratives, based on Iqbal's reconstructive method.

KEYWORDS: Ideology, Hegemony, Hybrid Warfare, Borders, Gramsci, Pakistan, Organic Intellectuals, Narrative Security

Introduction

I have never found an answer to this question that is satisfactory: whether a nation is made for humans or humans are made for a nation. What is the reason for sacrificing one's own life for a nation when there are nations for humans? If there are humans, then why are there nations?

So, whatever the outcome, recorded history bears witness that man has been involved in two activities all the time — the expansion of land owned and the protection of land owned. As humans began living outside caves and along rivers, families became tribes, tribes were associated to form villages, villages were coalesced as towns, towns were merged as cities, and cities evolved into states and empires. As the growth occurs, there is always the same question that arises: How to maintain what has been built?

As long as there's been a history, the answer has always been physical. People have dug trenches along the edges, raised walls such as the Great Wall of China, or hidden behind mountains, rivers, or oceans. But all physical barriers have been overcome by a more powerful attack: Alexander conquered the Hindu Kush, the Mongols conquered the Great Wall, and aircraft rendered every moat irrelevant. Today, in the 21st Century, the meaning of war, victory, and

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defeat is different. The nations have thus come to have another type of defence, the most up-to-date, and, I will maintain, the most effective: ideological fencing.

From Mud to Mind, the Evolution of the Border

In order to understand why it's become necessary for ideological fencing, it is necessary to first see what the border itself is. The history of the border is told in four different ways, the first of which is concrete, the second abstract, and the third even more so, and the fourth even more still.

The physical border. The oldest border is a thing you can touch: the trench, the rampart, the wall. The Great Wall of China, Hadrian's Wall, the moats of the medieval castles all follow the same principle: "prevent hostile bodies from entering friendly territory. This border protects territory, but is ineffective when an enemy finds a more efficient method of human transportation.

The legal border. The border went from the land to the map after the Peace of Westphalia (1648). It was no longer a line stanchioned with stone but by mutual recognition between sovereign States, guarded by passports, visas and treaties and not by archers. It is this cartographic boundary that colonial powers exported to the rest of the world – the Durand Line of 1893 and the Radcliffe Line of 1947, which separate Pakistan's borders to the west and east respectively, are children of this stage – lines that were drawn in ink before they were walked on the ground. But as Benedict Anderson reminds us, the nation with such boundaries is an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983/2006, pp. 6–7), and the map was as much a product of the nation as the nation a product of the map.

The ideological border. A third stage was uncovered during the Cold War. Churchill called the new divide between the two societies an “Iron Curtain” (Churchill, 1946)—and the metaphor is apt: a curtain, not a wall, because it divided two ideologies. In essence, George Kennan's doctrine of containment was a fencing proposal, and communism was to be fenced and liberal democracy fenced around (Kennan, 1947). The Berlin Wall is the big declaration of this period – not an army that was going to cross it, but an idea that was going to cross. When a state has to erect walls against its own citizens' convictions, the ideological wall has already been crossed.

The digital border. In this present century, the border has been erased and swept into the network. The Great Firewall of China is the first border in history that is not along a river nor a ridgeline, but running through servers and screens, wherever a citizen's cell phone goes. Brown (2010), a political theorist, notes a paradoxical surge in physical wall construction in the post-Cold War world – at the US–Mexico border, around Israel, along the Indian borders and on Pakistan's own Durand Line. The middle of my argument is her explanation that these walls are theatre. States erect amazing physical walls because sovereignty spills everywhere else – in the capitals, in the media, and in the narratives. The wall is a memorial to an outdated border.

The border, in short, has gone from ground to map to mind. A state that defends its first two defends its frontier no longer guarded by its enemies.

Wars in the 21st Century

Modern wars in the XXI century are no longer carried out mostly by cavalry or by bullets. They are engaged in by the use of ideas and ideologies, and sometimes they are more potent than physical weapons. Theoretically, this is what military men term hybrid warfare (Hoffman, 2007): a combination of conventional force and irregular operations, cyber operations and — most importantly — information warfare, which is a war fought on the opponent's mind. Joseph Nye's term for the weapon of this war is “soft power” – the power to make others want to

do what you want, rather than coerce them (Nye, 2004, p. 5). Its medium of transmission is the Internet — as vital as the atomic bomb was in the past century.

This change was predicted a century ago by Gramsci in his cell. As Ramos (1982) succinctly puts it:

It is safe to argue that the evolution of the working class out of the simple economic struggle for corporate goals and into the field of complex political struggle proceeds further into the decisive ‘war of position’ waged mainly at the cultural front as an ideological struggle. While engaged in the ideological struggle the proletariat “attempts to forge unity between economic, political and intellectual objectives, . . . thereby creating [its] hegemony [as] a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate ones.” (“War of Position” section)

It is that “war of position” on the cultural front, which Gramsci (1971, pp. 229–239) termed that, which is being waged by great powers against one another. The U.S. is no longer engaged in physical conflict to assert its interests in Asia; it disseminates ideologies that advance its interests (liberal democracy, the market economy) throughout Asia. This leaves us with a question, which we shall consider later, why do China and Russia look back to old ideology in a new century?

What is Ideology?

Antoine Destutt de Tracy used the word “ideology” for the first time in 1796 in his French philosophy (Kennedy, 1979). Since then it has been variously defined. For Gramsci (1971), every social group creates its own intellectuals, who give it “homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields” (p. 5). Louis Althusser extended the idea: ideology is not just a set of ideas, but “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 1970/2024, p. 256) — the way in which people live their world, which is reproduced by IDEA: the ideological state apparatuses, which include schools, media, and religious institutions.

In his book *Ideology: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton (1991) helpfully categorizes four uses of the word ‘ideology’:

- ▶ the production of meanings, signs and values of social life;
- ▶ the ideas of a specific class or social group.
- ▶ ideas that help to legitimate a dominant political power;
- ▶ false ideas that help to legitimate a dominant political power.

In my opinion, ideology may be explained more simply, in two ways: as a system of actions for the attaining of a common goal, and as a cooperation for the attainment of common goals.

How is this relevant to countries? Ideology is the technology of large-scale human cooperation. It is a human group that will survive, not a single human alone in a jungle, as Harari (2014) would put it in *Sapiens*, because they can build shared fictions and cooperate around them. A nation is just such a shared fiction, such an Andersonian ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983/2006), and it lives only as long as that fiction lives. That is why the most devastating strike on a country isn’t done on the land, it’s done on the story.

Ideological Fencing: Definition

While many countries have long had the practice of fencing with ideas, the idea of fencing hasn’t been widely recognised. I define it as such:

Ideological fencing involves the intentional creation, propagation, and preservation of an indigenous ideological framework that (1) provides a people with an internally consistent account of who they are and why they exist; (2) filters in foreign narratives that are appropriate for a particular people and excludes those that are not, and (3) generates organic intellectuals who can challenge the cultural front on behalf of a people.

Word fence is selected on purpose, against wall. A wall closes, a fence filters. A wall is what a wall is, and over time it cracks — North Korea is a wall, and eventually the Soviet Union was a wall as well. The Fences are gates: through them, trade, scientific and technological progress flows; through them, predatory narratives are barred at the perimeter of the fence. Meiji Japan erected the classic fence, which was summed up in the slogan: *wakon-yōsai* — Japanese spirit, Western technique: import the machine, keep the soul (Jansen, 2000).

The mechanism is again provided by Gramsci. Ideological struggle, as Ramos (1982) explains, involves a process of “disarticulation-rearticulation” of given ideological elements. It is really the struggle between two “hegemonic principles” for the appropriation of those elements, an appropriation constituting the unification of various ideological elements into an all-encompassing ideology—organic ideology. (“War of Position” section)

But a successful fence isn't a fence that conquers everything, everything that is foreign; it is a fence that breaks apart foreign elements from the foreign hegemonic project and breaks them back into an indigenous project. The Islamic idiom of democracy, the technology of a national purpose — that is fencing, not walling.

It is practiced by the great powers all. China is a nation that opposes liberal democracy with “socialism with Chinese characteristics” behind its Great Firewall. Now, post-Soviet Russia's fence is not socialism but a narrative of the civilisational values of Orthodoxy, tradition, and “sovereign democracy.” Iran is a theocratic democratic state that is surrounded by two enemies: Western and Arab infiltration. Saudi Arabia exports Salafism; Turkey exports a moderate Islamism (neo-Ottomanism); the United States exports a liberal democratic economy that is still linked to the West. So, let's take a step back to the previous question: China and Russia are by no means nostalgic for old ideas. They have to keep their ideological fences because to tear down one's fence in the middle of a war of position is not reform, it's surrender. It's how the Soviet Union came to an end.

The Oldest Fence, Iran

Iran is one of these cases, though, and is the oldest continuous practiser of ideological fencing in history, and you'll find that a good fence can stand for hundreds of years. In the seventh century, the Arab armies conquered Persia, and most of the conquered civilisations in the region (Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, North Africa) were not only Islamised, but also Arabised, and over time they were deprived of their own languages, their own calendars, and much of their pre-Islamic memory. Persia was the only nation that did not split. It embraced Islam, but did not embrace Arabness, and it fought against it ideologically. The *Shahnameh* (Ferdowsi, 2006), a work that was composed around the year 1010 and which, in deliberate fashion, was written in Persian with a minimum of Arabic words, is certainly the greatest single act of ideological fencing in world literature: a wall of language put up around a civilisation's memory.

The turning point was when in 1501, Twelver Shi'ism became the official religion of Iran under the Safavid dynasty (Nasr, 2006). Iran was surrounded by Sunni Ottomans to the west and Sunni uzbeks to the east, and thus it embraced Islam in a way that made it a part of Iran. That conversion was all but political: Shi'ism enabled Iranians to be all things Muslim without being assimilated into the Arab–Ottoman Sunni world. This is why Iran has always supported Shi'ism, as a creed as well as the load bearing pillar of a civilisational fence to ensure that the Persian identity would never be absorbed into the Arab identity. The fence remains to this day after 500 years. Iran is a

Persian island in a predominantly Sunni ocean, its language intact, its calendar intact (Nowruz is 1300 years old and has withstood the pressure), its civilisational memory intact. The Islamic Republic's vilayat-e-faqih is, thus, not a new assault on 1979, but the newest facelift to this old fence, this time protecting against Western liberalism on one side and Saudi-funded Salafism on the other.

Iran is the yardstick to which Pakistan must be compared. For five hundred years, Iran's fence has been standing because it was made of native elements: native language, native poets, native understanding of Islam. As we will discover, Pakistan's fencing efforts have been unsuccessful for just the opposite reason—the bricks were borrowed.

The Laboratory: Afghanistan

The most easily seen laboratory of the ideology of fencing is Afghanistan, and its failure. Each of the big powers that joined the war waged an ideological struggle over their own vision, not for the benefit of the Afghan people, but for their own self-interest. The Soviets wanted to establish a socialist state; the Americans, liberal democracy. They both lost, and for the same reason—in neither case was the ideology native, and it therefore had no footing. The United States even went so far as to creating religious extremism in the 1980s with its creation of a radical leadership that eventually came against it (Johnson, 2000; Rashid, 2000). The same fight has been raging in South Asia and the Middle East for decades, and the same weapons are now being used – capitalism, democracy, the market economy, women's rights and secularism – as weapons of hegemony – whatever their values.

However, the Afghan story is not just about that; it has a deeper component which exemplifies Pakistan not merely as a silent spectator but as a fencer in its own right. Britain's nineteenth-century wars to secure Afghanistan were fought not for the purposes of conquest, but to maintain Afghanistan as a buffer between British India and a growing Tsarist Russia (Hopkirk, 1992). The Great Game was not the city of Kabul, but the space around it. The agreement was formalized in 1893 and came to be known as the Durand Line – a belt of land that any hostile military force had to traverse before entering Afghanistan.

The frontier and the anxiety were Pakistan's, not the empire's. The British policy was a buffer state to Afghanistan, and Pakistan has changed the word for the new millennium: it has looked for an ideological buffer. Islamabad also believes that there is only one ideology available in Kabul that it can accept and that is Islam oriented as all other ideologies pose a direct threat to Pakistan. The Pashtunistan demand is resurrected in Kabul, the Durand Line is disregarded, a communist Kabul welcomed the Soviets, and a liberal-nationalist Kabul is leaning towards New Delhi. A religious ideology, on the other hand, transcends ethnic lines: A Pashtun Muslim has little need for Pashtunistan if he views himself as a Muslim first. It is perhaps this that is really the opposite of the "strategic depth" as it is crudely interpreted, not a physical distance for the retreat but a friendly ideological space on the western flank (Haqqani, 2005). The ideological fence projected outwards in this article can be understood as Pakistan's sponsorship of Mujahideen in the 1980s and of the Taliban in the 1990s (Rashid, 2000) – a fence constructed with the ideologies of belief but not with ground, placed at the borders of another country.

The comparison also includes a warning as the buffer has burnt its builder. The ideology that Pakistan exported to the west came back to the east in the form of Tehreek-e-Taliban — the same ideology and targeting the same line. A fenced fence constructed from borrowed bricks in a neighbour's garden does not follow the mason, or the map. The British buffer has been overcome, as have been the ideological buffer, by the simple fact that in 1907 Russia and Britain worked out a deal in which the Afghans were forgotten (Hopkirk, 1992) that has now trickled back into the fencer's own house. This is the rule of the whole theory: defensive ideological fencing is by nature. When it is put into use in an offensive way, as a tool for moving into another player's territory, it generates "blowback" instead of cover (Johnson, 2000). As Gramsci (1971, p. 10) wrote:

One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer “ideologically” the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals.

No place is a neutral space without its own ideology, its organic intellectuals. It's an open frontier, waiting for fencing by another. Which leads to Pakistan!

Pakistan: A Fenced Border, An Unfenced Mind

The twenty first century comes with the most acute irony in Pakistan! It is one of the few states in modern history that was not based on ethnicity, geography, and dynasty but on an idea — the Two-Nation Theory. Devji (2013) has named it a “Muslim Zion”: a state that is to be like Israel, to be created from a concept, before it had a territory. It would seem that a country that was created on an ideology ought to have been the world's master of ideological fencing. But today, almost 80 years after it was first conceived, the initial vision is still not cemented — and the Pakistani mind is still open to the frontier.

It is a record that is more one of borrowing than of native building. It is not possible to resolve the conflict between the Quaid's 11 August 1947 speech and Objectives Resolution 1949 in an intellectual way, it was inherited. The importation of developmental modernism came from Ayub Khan, the Islamic socialism from Bhutto, and the Islamization from Zia-ul-Haq, which was the biggest fence project in our history, constructed with other people's bricks: Saudi-financed Salafi material in curricula and seminaries, unrelated to the Islamic traditions of our sub-continent (Haqqani, 2005). The 1980s saw Pakistan not being a fencer any longer, but rather the fencing-ground: Saudi Salafism and Iranian revolutionary Shiism waged their war of position inside Pakistani mosques and madrassas, while the sectarian shedding of blood was the direct crop (Nasr, 2006).

Today's outcome is revealed in just one almost poetic image. In the period of 2017 to 2023, Pakistan has fenced approximately 98 per cent of the 2,611 km Durand Line, one of the largest physical border fence protection projects in the world. But the ideology of the Tehreek-e-Taliban saunters and saunters past that fence each day, uninhibitedly, on the Telegram channels and YouTube sermons. The physical fence is finished, but there's never ever been an ideological fence. This is the best quote that could be found to encapsulate the thesis of this article.

As the larger battle continues to heat up. Almost two-thirds of Pakistanis are below 30 (United Nations Development Programme, 2018), and they are getting their information about themselves from foreign feeds: Liberal culture-war frames, imported from abroad, and Transnational Jihadist frames, imported from abroad. The fifth-generation warfare stories feed on any and every unguarded fault line—sect, ethnicity, province, gender. If a nation is not able to tell its story in a convincing way, others will do so, and the other versions are not benign.

To Construct Pakistan's Ideological Fence

So what are we to do? When the diagnosis is an unfenced mind, the prescription is construction, and construction is specifiable. I propose 5 pillars.

1. **Recover Indigenous Intellectual Resources:** This ideology has already been available as a raw material and has just been left to the wayside by Pakistan. The model of the method is Iqbal's (1930/2013) Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam in which he neither disregarded modernity nor copied it, but disarticulated it and rearticulated it from within Islamic thought. This is nothing but Gramsci's “disarticulation-rearticulation” (Ramos, 1982, “War of Position” section), which was done 20 years before the publication of his notebooks in

Lahore. To this must be added the Sufi background of this subcontinent, the civilisational depth of the Indus and the literature of our regional languages, which have much more fencing material than most of the states that fence successfully.

2. **Produce Organic Intellectuals:** The key to Gramsci's insight is the way that a group that is moving toward the dominant position elaborates upon their own "organic intellectuals," rather than borrowing traditional ones (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10). Pakistan's universities do the opposite; they import theory without any modifications and have students use imported lenses to local realities. It is not ban on foreign theory but to create thinkers, who can theorise Pakistan from Pakistan. This is a responsibility which is first to be shouldered by the universities and colleges, not the State.
3. **Have the Classroom be the Fence-Post:** The fence that can be constructed out of censorship is brittle; the fence that can be constructed out of citizens is not. The 12 key competencies that are central to critical thinking and media literacy – trained observation of a narrative operation when it appears – ought to be at the heart of the curricula from schools to universities. Each student who is able to ask “who benefits from this story?” is a fence-post that no firewall can replace.
4. **Create Structures to Support Narratives, Not Declarations.** The state has the capability of making counter-narrative: Paigham-e-Pakistan (2018) was a well achieved unity declaration against extremism, endorsed by more than 1,800 religious scholars (Islamic Research Institute, 2018). A fatwa is a brick, not a fence, however. Culture following declarations has to make the indigenous narrative 'liveable and attractive' — in the form of film, fiction, drama, music, digital content, particularly to the youth. The key to hegemony is consent, not decree, teaches Gramsci (1971).
5. **Fence (Do not Wall).** The aim is NOT isolation. Walls crumble when it comes to isolation in North Korea. The intention is to be confident, selective, to import the technology, the science and the best of foreign thought through the gate, the fence keeping the narratives that seek to dissolve us out. A nation that has a good story to tell has nothing to fear from talking to other stories; only when it has no story to tell.

Conclusion

I started with a question that I still don't have the answer to: Are countries for people or people for countries? Or maybe the truthful answer is that nations are created for people — and only ideas are created to sustain nations. Land is passed on by inheritance - a story must be constructed, lived through, and reworked in each generation.

The one immediate, pressing use of this is for terrorism. To check terrorism at its source, Pakistan has to start at its source, in the tribal areas of the former FATA as well as unnoticed peripheral areas. Radical ideas don't catch on if they're convincing; they catch on if they reach the places where no other ideas have been allowed a chance: lowest literacy areas of the country, regions that are fenced off by the Durand fence, but where no investment has been made in minds or markets. The prescription comes from nowhere else than from the whole of the argument of this article: Schools before checkpoints, economic stake before military operation. The militant recruiters have nothing that can out-compete the potential of a young tribesman who has education, a job and a future in this world. The space that education and economic uplift create make possible tolerant, rational and even secular currents of thought to grow alongside religious ones, and it is this plurality of ideas that would turn a population against the single, totalising idea of the radical. No one can hold a mind but education and prosperity, and military operations can only clear the land. As with any fence, a fence of ideas is raised one post at a time — and the first posts should be located in the tribal areas.

Each of the trench, the wall, the mapped line and the curtain has had its 100 years. This is our fenced off thought garden. The wars of the modern world are ideological, and Pakistan, a nation that has been created out of an idea and is being attacked by the ideas of others, should learn the art of war that its very birth advocated. A country that does not construct its own ideological fence, cannot remain unfenced. It will just be in someone else's!

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