

CHAPTER 15

Radical Islam's Long War in Pakistan

An Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

Any attempt to understand the developments taking place in Pakistan and Afghanistan by viewing them solely through a security prism is bound to fail. This is because there is a very complex interplay of competing and contradictory processes active in the Af-Pak region.

There is, therefore, an imperative need to understand the historical, ideological, strategic as well as cultural compulsions of different groupings, or communities, that inhabit this region, to find the tools for arresting the process threatening to break up this vast, densely populated region.

To make things at least seem simpler – but avoiding oversimplification – it would be useful to confine our exploration (within the earlier context) to two distinct Radical Islamic processes with innumerable strands of evolution that have chosen Pakistan as a testing ground. These complex problems evolving in the socio-cultural space of the country have a deeply insidious relationship with the march of Radical Islam across a region littered with weak or weakening

Muslim states and Al Qaeda's growing network of surrogates and brotherhood.

Of these two parallel tracts of radicalised Islam, one is spurred essentially by external entities, Al Qaeda and its various surrogates, including the Taliban. These view the battle for Pakistan as a critical stepping-stone towards establishing *ummah al-Islam*, or Islamic dominion. Its parallel tract is a mixed bag of religious extremist groups. Almost all of them are supported by the state in various measures on the premise that Pakistan is, and should be, the homeland of Muslims of the subcontinent, which was split into two entities by the 1947 Partition.

Another notable distinction are the icons or ideologues from which these groups, or processes draw inspiration. Let us, for the sake of convenience, call the second tract the Mughal group simply because the provocation to think of a concept called *jihad* was born of the desire to restore Islam to the glory it enjoyed during the Mughal period. This group grew up and was nourished and nurtured by the thoughts and sermons of Maulana Maududi and his 17th Century precursor, Shah Waliullah of Delhi.

Maududi, founding father of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) in pre-Partition India, believed that the ultimate aim of reviving Islam was '*to enable Islam to become a predominant cultural force in the world and capture the moral, intellectual and political leadership of mankind*'.¹ Although Partition undermined his global vision – which was one of the provocations for his revulsion for India till his death – Maududi's political party, JI became a strong proponent of the notion of converting '*religious ideals into political power*' as a way to push forward Islamic revivalism within Pakistan.²

The ideological moorings of the Al Qaeda group, at least during the initial years, were the teachings of two Muslim Brotherhood members, Syed Qutb, an avid follower of Maulana Maududi and Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahabbi of Saudi Arabia, besides the Palestinian Arab, Abdullah Azzam. Azzam taught at King Abdul Aziz University in Saudi Arabia, where he and Qutb inspired an ardent student, Osama bin Laden. It was Azzam's call to rid Muslim lands of its invaders, which prompted Laden in 1991 to protest against the presence of the US troops in Saudi Arabia. Azzam believed in global *jihad*, and did

not believe in wasting time settling scores with local or regional opponents, but others close to bin Laden, like the Egyptian doctor Ayman al Zawahari differed, insisting that first things came first.

Another immediate distinction that can be drawn from this discussion is that while the second group is led by local Islamic groups to safeguard and propagate their country's interest, the Al Qaeda group makes no such claims. On the contrary, the latter group views Pakistan, with 150 million people, as a 'fortress of Islam' (after failing to make Iraq into one) that needed to be taken over and used as a base for reviving the Global *Jihad* Project. The Taliban's stronghold in southern Afghanistan and Al Qaeda's domination in Pakistan's western borders, bring such a reality two steps closer.

In this simple, linear equation, the confrontation between these processes seems inevitable in Pakistan, at any given point of time. There is, however, one factor that makes the situation a bit more complex and grave. It is the associations and affiliations these two groups from different spectrums of radicalisation of Islam have shared, since the Afghan *Jihad* days.

For instance, the Taliban (students or seekers), who came from the Deobandi *madrassa* of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Sindh (Karachi) in Pakistan, had a clear agenda of converting Afghanistan into an Islamic state. But since 9/11, the group got fragmented at the ideological as well as operational levels and now, its various surrogates have no qualms about collaborating even with criminals and gangsters.³

Likewise, Deobandi groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), a rabid anti-Shia group spawned during the religious churnings of the Zia days, are grist to the mill for Al Qaeda and the Taliban, considering that the bulk of these malcontents are petty criminals and unemployed men and certainly no religious zealots. These alliances, it can thus be safely assumed, have certainly not been driven by ideology, but by operational compulsions, encouraged by mercenary persuasions and primarily spurred by kinships developed in the terrorist camps of Khost, Kunar and Paktia in Afghanistan.⁴

These developments raise the possibility, frightening to say the least, of the trajectory of the two distinct processes of Radical Islam converging

in Pakistan, and effecting a virtual coup, leaving the state powerless and the people hostage to an alien and radical form of radicalism. Besides, it would have an immediate and disastrous impact on neighbourhood countries with large Muslim populations and, shortly thereafter, on the rest of the world.

Before we look at some of these possibilities, it is important to find out whether such an eventuality – let us say of an Al Qaeda takeover for want of a more easily comprehensible term – can arise in Pakistan today. A question of this complex nature can only be reasonably responded to, only after understanding whether there are factors that have historically made Pakistan vulnerable to extremist ideologies and attitudes. Three of these factors are relevant to our enquiry and are identified here as:

1. The influence of Islamic parties like JI on civil society and their utility to state agencies.
2. The growth of extremist and terrorist groups and the wide public acceptance of their presence and activities.
3. The extent of radicalisation within the armed forces and the use of these two entities, often called the non-state actors, as strategic and tactical tools for offensive.

Islamic Parties and *Jihad*

Of the 58 religious political parties in existence since Pakistan's birth, the two most powerful ones, are Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) led by Qazi Hussain Ahmed (till recently), and its splinter group, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman. Ahmed, a keen follower of Maududi's ideologies, was part of a delegation sent by Benazir Bhutto to meet Osama bin Laden in Khartoum, Sudan, at the instance of the then Saudi intelligence chief Prince Turki bin Faisal. During the meeting, Ahmed was tasked to create a network of support for Al Qaeda's operations in Pakistan with Karachi as the headquarters.

After the party led by Qazi Hussain Ahmed failed to win favours with other mainstream political parties or the army, it adopted a more devious method to impose its will on the people through violent means. The most notable of such activities was the spree of killing and violence against the Ahmeddijas in Punjab during 1951-52. JI wanted the

Ahmeddiyas, followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmeddiya who claimed to be a Prophet, to be categorised as non-believers. Over 2000 people, mostly Ahmeddiyas, were killed in the violence forcing the government to impose martial law in Punjab and, in the crackdown that followed, the Army was forced to storm the Wazir Khan Mosque in Lahore, quite like what happened in Islamabad's Lal Masjid in July 2007. This episode marked the beginning of the radicalisation of Muslim society in Pakistan.⁵

Ji next came into prominence during the events leading up to the 1971 war with India, when it joined Pakistan Army's brutal campaign against the Bengali intellectual and political leadership. It created two of its initial militant organisations, al Badr and al Shams, to confront Mukti Bahini, a secessionist group which campaigned to free the eastern wing of Pakistan.⁶ It was a significant change for Ji, which had preferred *dawa* to violence till then. Ironically, Ji's initial two violent campaigns were against Muslims of different sectarian and ethnic identities. Ji's active role in East Pakistan also brought it closer to the Army which found in the party, with its substantial support base and cadre, an effective instrument for military campaigns.

This new-found role of high utility for the Islamabad establishment made Ji the chosen instrument for outsourcing terror, when the US and its allies sought out President Zia-ul Haq to throw out the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Recruits to the 'holy war' came from Ji-run *madrassa* in Punjab and across Pakistan. One of the prominent *madrassa* that took part in the *jihad* was Dar-ul Uloom Haqqania at Akhora Khattak in NWFP, headed by Maulana Samiul-Haq, chief of a Ji splinter group, as also friend and teacher to a large number of the Taliban leadership. Throughout the eighties, when the clarion call for *jihad* in Afghan was sounded far and wide, terrorist recruits of various nationalities – Palestine, Bangladesh, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Africa – reached Ji safe-houses in Karachi, en route to the training camps of Khost and Khaldan in Afghanistan, run by Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyr.

The first Pakistani *jihadi* martyr in Afghanistan was Imran Shaheed, an undergraduate at a government college in Karachi and an active member of Ji's student wing, Islami Jamiat Talaba (IJT). In fact, outside the IJT office in Lahore, a large billboard once listed the names of

hundreds of 'martyrs'. JI's close relations with the Pakistan Army and intelligence agencies facilitated its enormous growth during the Afghan *jihad*.⁷

JI was able to expand its infrastructure and activities with generous contributions from the government and private individuals in the Gulf states, in return for hosting Arab and other '*mujahideens*' in Pakistan. JI cadres, including those in IJT, benefited from training alongside foreign and Afghan fighters. This association helped JI, with over 100 *madrassa* in Punjab and other provinces, to establish ties with Islamist groups throughout the world.

JI has also been actively participating in the Kashmir *jihad* through Hizb-ul *Mujahideen* (HM) 'with the full backing' of ISI and the Pakistan Army. Incidentally, one of the generals who has been promoting *jihad* in recent times is Lt. General Aziz Khan, a radicalist and a close ally of General Pervez Musharraf Khan. He ran the proxy war in Kashmir for several years, and was an IJT member in his college days.

IJT, in fact, was a regular recruitment ground for the foot soldiers of *jihad* from campuses, including Lahore's Punjab University. The volunteers, an English daily published from Peshawar, *Frontier Post*, said, '*include young college and university students with aggressive tendencies who are responding to what they regard to be a religious call*'.⁸ Many of these students were involved in campus violence, and '*bloody fights, involving kidnappings and murders*' of students from rival unions.

These students were, therefore, just right and ripe for brainwashing the JI and IJT style – through stories of '*torture, rape and killing of Kashmiri Muslims perpetrated by the Indian law-enforcement agencies*'.⁹ They were sent to the military training facilities set up by JI called Markaz-e-Islami in Afghanistan. The exploits of *jihadis* in Kashmir were published in JI's fortnightly *Jihad-e-Kashmir*, monthlies *Ham Qadam* and *Bedar Digest*. The group ran a systematic campaign to mobilise public opinion for the Afghan *jihad*, and took part in militant activities with full zeal, producing 72 'martyrs' between 1980 and 1990.

Although JI had launched HM to steer the Kashmir *jihad*, a significant number of IJT recruits preferred to join al Badr, a terrorist

group set up in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) with the objective of forcibly annexing Kashmir. An important reason why al Badr drew recruits from colleges and universities across Pakistan, was that the educated ones preferred to work with people from similar backgrounds and inclinations, and not with *madrassa* products that, in any case, were bound for Afghanistan. They were 'at ease in the company of engineers, doctors, computer scientists and social scientists which made up the al Badr *Mujahideen*'.¹⁰ The group also adopted a more lenient view about offering regular prayers, or growing beards, or wearing a particular dress (they often wore shirts and trousers), although rigorous military training was always preceded by an equally strong religious indoctrination in the camps set up in PoK.

IJT's involvement in various *jihadi* activities, including active participation in terrorist activities, has greater relevance in the present context, when 'local' *jihad* has morphed into a far larger and complex religious game – a game for supremacy and revenge fuelled by real or perceived injustice perpetrated on Muslims across the world. A typical IJT Sunni recruit is, more often than not, from a low-middle class, or middle-class background. He is the one who took part in campus violence, including the beating up of students (especially girls), holding forced prayer meetings and taking out violent protest marches on religious issues. And, he is the one who had been fed a cocktail of falsehood and religious half-truths to prime him for 'martyrdom'.

The role of JI and other religious and extremist groups in fostering terrorist groups has been extensively documented and needs no repetition. What is needed here is a brief narration of its transformation from a *dawa* to a 'mothership of *jihad*', so as to underscore the group's potential role in a long, ideological battle, that has come to grip Pakistan more than ever before.

The JUI, led by Fazlur Rahman remained on the fringe of Afghan *Jihad* since its rival, JI, was playing handmaiden to the Pakistan Army and ISI. It remained content with extending its network of *madrassa* and influence into Afghanistan, particularly in areas dominated by Durrani Pakhtun tribes living across the Durand Line, which divides Pakistan from Afghanistan. JUI found itself in positions of influence during Benazir Bhutto's second tenure (1993 to 1996) as the Prime Minister, when she sought out Fazlur Rahman to counter JI which had

aligned with her bitter rival, Nawaz Sharif, when he formed his first government in 1990.

Rahman was made the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a position which he utilised to travel across the Muslim world seeking support for the Taliban. In 1996, he began organising bustard hunting expeditions for Saudi royals to enlist their support for the Taliban. Many of the top Taliban leadership were either Rahman's classmates, or had studied in *madrassa*. These were some of the reasons why Rahman was often called one of the founding fathers of the Taliban. It is therefore not surprising that Jul, as part of the provincial government in NWFP and Balochistan between 2002 and 2007, facilitated the revival of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, after the US bombing of its strongholds in Afghanistan.¹¹

Four conclusions can be drawn from this narrative. First, religious parties, with their extensive network of *madrassa*, mosques and charitable organisations which give them legitimacy and influence in civil society, have been stirring up forces of violence for over two decades. They are therefore prone to be used, willingly or otherwise, by global terrorist entities like Al Qaeda. Second, both these groups have been used as instruments of state policy by the Army and ISI, first during the Afghan *jihad*, and then for Kashmir *jihad*. Third, they have had considerable public support in their terrorist campaigns in Afghanistan and India.

The fourth observation is what raises real anxieties about the role of these groups in a geo-political order where Al Qaeda, a non-state actor, has become a factor. Both these groups run hundreds of *madrassa* and schools, and have great influence among the student and teaching community in urban areas. This is particularly true in Punjab and Sindh where JI's student wing, IJT, retains enormous clout. Jul has already shown a marked propensity to align with the Taliban and Al Qaeda, but, if JI too were to make another turnabout in its character, and adopt a global view of its Revival of Islam Project, Al Qaeda's influence in Pakistan could turn out to be more enduring than expected.

Extremist and Terrorist Groups

No other country in the world today has more men trained in terrorist activities than Pakistan. A 2001 account said there were five million

men who have had some semblance of training at terror facilities, or had been through the indoctrination process in countless *madrassa* that dot the Pakistani landscape. At least 500,000 of them have had some level of military training, a fifth of them being from Punjab where global *Jihad* confronts local *Jihad*, the proponents of both streams sharing common training alumni in Khost and Paktia. A large number of them who trained in Afghan camps, have retained linkages which go beyond ideological, ethnic and state affiliations. These associations have facilitated the creation of networks of *jihad* in Pakistan and elsewhere, transcending different schools of Islamic thought and practice, raising the probability of their coming up with an extreme school of thought to usurp the leadership role (of reviving Islam) from the hands of groups like JL.¹²

Of the 244 religious organisations active in Pakistan: 25 are political in nature and participate in elections; 145 are sectarian; 12 believe in establishing Khilafah or Caliphate and; 104 are terrorist groups. The Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT), or the Army of Medinah, is from the last group, retaining an unique identity of its own by its ideological links with the global Salafi movement, and an autonomous mode of functioning. Hence, it would be worthwhile to identity the LeT-Al Qaeda linkage so as to find out if the group could prove to be a Trojan Horse for Pakistan.¹³

No other terrorist group in Pakistan is closer to Al Qaeda than LeT. One of its founding fathers was Abdullah Azzam, the teacher of Osama bin Laden whose ideas and teachings gave rise to Al Qaeda. In the initial years of struggle, the group got generous help of Rs 10,000,000 from Abu Abdur Rahman Sareehi, a close aide of bin Laden. The chief trainer in the first two LeT camps for Afghan *Jihad* in Paktia and Kunar was Sareehi's brother-in-law Zaki-ur Rahman Lakhvi, who trained and commanded the 26/11 attack on Mumbai¹⁴.

These are not the only reasons why LeT could emerge as a serious threat to peace in Asia, and other parts of the world. There is a distinct possibility of the group, in the next few years, emerging as part of the religious-political alliance in Pakistan, a step closer to the group's objective in creating a pan-Islamic front against those who are opposed to Islam, especially Western nations, and to establish the Caliphate.

This objective was articulated by its *Amir* or leader, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, on one of the many websites which the group hosted, but pulled down, after the ban on the group's activities. '*Many Muslim organisations are preaching and working on the missionary level inside and outside Pakistan,*' it read, '*but they have given up the path of jihad altogether. The need for jihad has always existed and present conditions demand it more than ever*'.¹⁵

A brief examination of the group's evolution over the years has become essential to understand the potential threat to the world it poses. LeT was born as an armed wing of *Markaz Dawat-ul Irshad* (MDI), Centre for Proselytisation and Preaching, which was set up in 1987 by three Islamic scholars, Hafiz Saeed, Zafar Iqbal and Abdullah Azzam. Within a decade of its coming into existence, LeT expanded rapidly in Pakistan, setting up a sprawling headquarters in Muridke, and about 2200 offices across the country. Even after world-wide proscription, Muridke remains the nerve centre of the organisation where all its organisational, *jihadi* and educational activities are planned and carried out. The centre houses a *madrassa*, a hospital, a market, a large residential area for scholars and faculty members, a fish farm and agricultural tracts that are cultivated the year round. The centre is heavily guarded with gunmen patrolling entry points round the clock. The MDI runs 200 secondary schools called al Dawa Schools, 11 *madrassa* (seminaries), two science colleges, an ambulance service, besides a charity organisation called Idara Khidmat-e-Khalq which played an important role in funnelling funds for the group in the name of earthquake relief after the October 2005 quake, that destroyed large parts of PoK.¹⁶

The educational curriculum of these schools and colleges are guided by Hafiz Saeed's philosophy that to achieve *jihad*, his students must not only imbibe the great values of Islamic principles, but also should be adept in science and technology. These views are propagated, with great clarity and effect through scores of the group's publications. They include: a multi-lingual (Urdu, Persian and English) website-accessible at www.jamatuddawa.org and www.jamatdawa.org; an Urdu monthly journal, *Al dawa*, which has a circulation of 80,000; an Urdu weekly, *Gazwa*; a children's monthly, *Nanhe Mujahid* and, an English monthly, *Voice of Islam*.

LeT began training its cadres for terrorist activities in the training camps set up in the eastern Afghanistan provinces of Kunar and Paktia in 1987-88. But, since the so-called *jihad* in Afghanistan was on the wane by that time, the group turned its attention towards India in 1993. Saeed directed his group to concentrate first on Kashmir, before taking up the cause of liberating Junagarh (a tiny enclave in the Indian state of Gujarat) and Hyderabad (at present the capital of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, but was a Muslim-ruled princely state before Partition). This focus has now expanded beyond India. Inspired by Al Qaeda in large measure, LeT today sees itself as a saviour of Islam.¹⁷

Some conclusions and observations would be useful at this point. Three conclusions can be safely drawn from the earlier narration. First, Pakistan has allowed several terrorist groups to retain their identity, charter of objectives and training infrastructure, while at the same time, collaborating with the international community in the Global War on Terror. Second, these terrorist groups have, since 2001, managed to infiltrate civil society by carrying out charitable work and setting up educational facilities across Pakistan. Third, LeT and some of the other groups have affinity and affiliations with Al Qaeda, and could turn out to be its Trojan Horse in Pakistan.

Army as Saviour of Islam

But for the Pakistan Army's clandestine support, the *jihadi* ideology and groups would have died in their infancy. The army found in Islamic radicalism and its proponents a strategic instrument to keep disparate elements of the state united. Radical groups like JI became the army's willing trouble shooter for subjugating all manner of dissent within Pakistan and offered the Army – paranoid as it is about the 'India menace' – an indigenous weapon to shape events in its favour, on and across its eastern borders.

It was Colonel Akbar Khan, Military Secretary to Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, who first invoked the spirit of '*jihad*' and gathered tribesmen from Mehsud and the Waziri tribal stronghold in FATA (the same set of tribesmen now fighting the Pakistan Army) to launch a 'irregular war' to free Kashmir from India within months of Independence. Those Mehsuds and Waziris, who were stopped short

of Srinagar by the Indian armed forces, were the first set of non-state actors in Pakistan.¹⁸

The 1953 anti-Ahmaddiya riots (in which Sunni mobs led by the JI, attacked the minority Ahmaddiya community) majorly benefited the Army, as it culminated in the first coup, and the take-over of the government by General Ayub Khan. Though, Ayub kept groups like JI at arm's length, he was not shy of using religious symbols and clarion calls to encourage his officers and troops in the battlefield. During the 1965 war, when the Indian forces reached the doorsteps of Lahore, Ayub Khan, in a broadcast to the nation, declared 'we are at war', and went on to use Islamic invocations '*to project the war as a virtual jihad: a conflict between Islam and Kufr*'. This was, thus, a call for a religious war between Islam and the non-believers. In modern history, this was the first time that the *jihadi* theme found place in the soldier's vocabulary.¹⁹

As Ayub struggled with a litany of failures, first the war and then the economy, JI added to his woes by taking to the streets against his 'modernist religious policies.' It all finally forced him to hand over the reins to another officer, Yahya Khan. Yahya was not enamoured of JI and its ideological persuasions either. One of his senior officers, Major-General Sher Ali Khan, was of a different mould though, being a strong JI supporter.²⁰

So when Sher Ali Khan, after his retirement, was appointed by Yahya Khan as the Minister of Information and National Affairs, he took it upon himself to work for the glory of Islam. He persuaded the Army to recruit 'volunteers' from JI and its student wing, Islami Jamiat Talaba (IJT) to fight the Bengali insurgency in East Pakistan. A large number of these 'volunteers' were drawn from IJT cadres from Punjab University and were well-educated; these men were trained by the Army to crush secessionists – political leaders, journalists, artists, writers, activists and judicial officers – in East Pakistan. JI also formed peace committees in East Pakistan to facilitate intelligence gathering for the Army. In return, the Army rewarded JI with seats in the East Pakistan Assembly.²¹

The Army had also begun using Islamic slogans during the East Pakistan crisis.

For instance, during the fight for East Pakistan, the local commander, Lt. General Tikka Khan, quoted freely from Islamic texts in his talks to the beleaguered West Pakistani garrison reminding his forces of the great battles against infidels, a proof of what Muslims could do.

One of the strongest influences on these officers and those who followed them in the period between 1978 and 1988 was the feverish pace of Islamisation that General Zia-ul Haq, a Mohajir General, had set in motion. Nicknamed *maulvi* (preacher) among his peers, it was Zia, son of an overtly religious clerk, who systematically and radically changed what was, till then, essentially a professional army in the tradition of British days. He invoked the triple motto of *Taqva* (piety), *Iman* (Islamic faith) and *Jihad-fi-Sabil-Allah* (Fight in the name of Allah).

To encourage faster Islamic transformation of the army, Zia saw to it that new mosques were built within cantonments and training areas; Islamic texts were introduced into training courses; staff college libraries were stocked with books on Islam, Islamic military ideology and practices and, middle-level officers were made to study and give examinations on Islam and Islamic military doctrine. Islamic teachings were introduced in the Pakistan Military Academy, Kakul.²²

Changes were made in the curriculum at staff colleges where new officers began studying and researching Islamic military practices, doctrine and strategy. A lecture series run by officer-scholar, Col. Abdul Qayyum, at the Command and Staff College formed the intellectual basis for the Islamic drive. Qayyum lectured on Islamic theology and doctrine, but adopted a more open and rationalist approach that made him a much sought after ideologue. The post of army '*mullahs*' was created to act as a bridge between profession and faith. The *mullahs* accompanied units into combat zones. A Directorate of Religious Instruction was established at GHQ and religious handouts were published occasionally for the troops.

Zia was the first army chief and head of state to attend the annual meeting of the Tablighi Jamaat at Raiwind in Punjab. Zia believed that '*nobody but Allah made him the Chief of Army Staff, and that he was on a divine mission to impose Islam in Pakistan.*' He encouraged

officers and troops to frequent Tablighi meetings more openly. Tablighi Jamaat, an organisation engaged in preaching and practicing Islam, has since been accused of encouraging radicalisation of Islam. A known Tablighi officer was Lt. General Javed Nasir, the first in this rank with a full beard, who took over as the Director General of ISI in 1992. Nasir extended patronage to Deobandi *jihadi* groups to launch a proxy war in Kashmir and '*authorised ISI collaboration with Dawood Ibrahim, a Muslim leader of the Bombay underworld, who organised the attack on the Bombay Stock Exchange on March 12, 1993.*'²³

Zia openly encouraged his men and officers to pray, fast and distribute Islamic literature within the force. Those who prayed five times a day, though it was not mandatory, found themselves in the shortlist for promotions more easily than others. Religious fervour became a passport to higher ranks and membership of JI and IJT proved to be useful. In selection boards for officers, religious knowledge and habits received positive marks.

Recruits during this phase were made to take oath on the Quran, and were taught Islamic subjects. They were also tested regularly for their grasp of religious knowledge to 'raise the level of religious awareness among Pakistani troops', and ensure that they were properly indoctrinated. Many officers in the Army became attracted to JI's ideology and Maududi's teachings. Zia in fact used to reward men and officers with a copy of Maududi's books.

Zia even wanted to redesign the national flag by inserting Arabic inscriptions and shift the Independence Day from August 14 (according to the conventional calendar) to its equivalent in the Islamic calendar. The proposals met with such strong opposition from within the Army, that he had to drop the idea.

Zia also incorporated religious groups like JI as part of Pakistan Army's broader strategic objectives, both at home and abroad; at home to control ethnic and sectarian separatists who challenged the Army's writ and outside (specifically India), to initiate a proxy war to annex Kashmir as part of an 'unfinished agenda'. In 1977, after Taraki's coup in Afghanistan, Zia met with the JI leaders and discussed the party's possible role in Pakistan's Afghan policy. JI utilised its links with Afghan warlords like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and helped Zia in

crafting a policy that benefited the party's Islamic cause, and fulfilled part of its objective of influencing, if not entirely controlling, the policies of the state.

The Afghan *jihad* to evict Soviet troops saw the Army openly use Islamic concepts and symbols to raise a force of *mujahideen* mercenaries with funds and weapons generously supplied by the US and its Western allies. Middle-rank officers (General Pervez Musharraf was one of them) took charge of the covert operations in Afghanistan; new recruits in large numbers joined the Army as well as the ISI. A number of men were recruited from *madrassa* for the ISI. Saudi Arabia stepped in with enormous funding for the operations and, packaged in this generosity was the Wahabbi ideology, an extremely radical school of thought. The *jihad* saw the birth of terrorist groups within Pakistan, with links to global terrorist networks, and the emergence of a more radical set of officers and men in both the Army and the ISI.

The Generals that followed did not actively pursue Zia's *jihadi* agenda. But, at the same time, very few of them made any serious attempt to undo the fundamentalist strain which he had infused into the forces. In any case, none of them refrained from using terrorist groups to pursue the Army's agenda in Kashmir, and other parts of India. These terrorist groups acted as 'non-state' frontline troops who infiltrated into Kashmir and other parts of India to set up terrorist cells, create a wide network of supporters and carry out sabotage, espionage and terrorist activities.

Over the years, the Army and the ISI, became, if not entirely radicalised, 'culturally sympathetic to the extremists'. There are numerous instances of regular officers and men from the Army involved in terrorist activities either directly or indirectly as facilitators and trainers for groups like LeT and JeM. Tanzeem-ul Ikhwan, for instance, is a radical group of retired Army men and officers which has been advocating a 'one-per cent' formula to convert Pakistan into an Islamic country.²⁴ It contends that if one per cent of Pakistan's population supported its cause, Pakistan could easily be converted to an Islamic country. Ikhwan has often trained and sent cadres to train with LeT. All its leaders being retired senior Army officers, it drew 'hundreds of serving officers and soldiers' to the group's ideological training sessions.

Among its cadre were Major General Zaheerul Islam Abbasi, Brigadier Muntazar Billa, Colonel Mohammad Azad Minhas and Colonel Inayatullah Khan, all jailed for taking part in the 1995 coup attempt. Lt. General Hamid Gul, a former chief of ISI who was involved in the Afghan *jihad*, called it a 'soft Islamic revolution'. He argued that '*Pakistani Army soldiers have always been religious, but now a growing number of officers have turned Islamist*'.

These factors become relevant in the present context, as serious doubts have arisen about Pakistan's ability to exist as a stable nation and, as a result, there is a rising tide of belief that only the Army could bring about any semblance of order and control in a country trapped in multiple layers of conflicts. No argument could be more fallacious.

At this point, it would be useful to make an assessment, based on relatively few studies carried out on this subject: how radicalised is the present set of middle-ranking as well as senior officer cadre in the Pakistan Army?

First, let us layout some facts. The present Corps Commanders (2009) and the Army Chief (General Ashfaq Kayani) were commissioned during, or after 1971 – the year that the erstwhile East Pakistan broke away from Pakistan and became an independent nation, Bangladesh. It can, therefore, be surmised that today's top brass comprises those who had either participated in the war with India, or those who were deeply impacted by the trauma of the surrender at Dhaka. Quite naturally, therefore, they carry a certain attitude – a particular deportment – where India is concerned. Most of them are certain to have passed through Zia's Islamic pipeline, although it will be difficult to plumb the depth of influence the fundamentalist General's brainwashing and training had on individual officers. It would be fair to believe that not all officers were taken in by Zia's *jihadi* preachings, though hardly anyone dared to speak out. Zia's Military Secretary, Lt. Gen. Chisti claimed to have opposed his senior's plans on occasions, but one cannot help but doubt it, considering that those who dared to do so were swiftly shown the door.²⁵

There were, as subsequent events showed, quite a few officers who were radicalised during Zia's obsessive drive. The 1995 Rawalpindi Conspiracy involving senior Army officials, the sacking of several

Generals during Musharraf's regime (including some who were quite close to him), and the arrest of several middle-ranking officers for their links with Al Qaeda are scattered but clear pointers to the Zia effect on the officer corps. Zia's Military Secretary, Brigadier Mahmud Ali Durrani, admitted (in 2009) that there were radicalised officers in the Army.

Of particular interest would be those who were commissioned during Zia's tenure – 1977-1988. Most of them would be in the rank of Colonels and above, and therefore in key positions at the Brigade, Division and Corps levels. A simple calculation would show that for the next decade or so, one Zia recruit or another would lead the Army, unless there is a coup, or a spree of supercessions in the years ahead.

In an authoritative estimate, Shuja Nawaz, brother of a former Army Chief and a avid historian of the armed forces, picks up a two-year period, 1978-1979, to calculate the impact of the Zia years. Out of 804 officers granted commission during the period, 29 were recommended for promotion to the rank of Major General in 2006. A select number of them would, in the next few years, take over, or have already taken over as Lt. Generals. These officers, known as Zia *bharti*, or Zia recruits, are certainly a more conservative and ritualistic lot than their predecessors. Many of them had been part of Zia's experiments with Islamic ideology in the staff colleges and academies, and have witnessed the *jihad* in Afghanistan and Kashmir. They also suffered at the hands of the US and Western European embargo of aid to Pakistan. Not only (were they) deprived of advanced overseas training during its formative years, (they) were denied exposure to the world outside till late in their careers, by which time their worldview had been formed and in many cases, become entrenched.²⁶

It is obvious that these shifting alliances and loyalties have had some impact on the officers, but whether these factors made them more radical, less professional, or both, can at best be a guess. Some stray clues, however, could be located in a study carried out by a Malaysian Air Force officer as part of his doctoral thesis. He analysed the extent of religious influence in the militaries of three Muslim nations, Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan. His findings can be useful in studying the trajectories of religious influence on the Pakistan Army.²⁷ Employing

random observations of military personnel and supported by the opinions of interviewers, the dissertation said the Pakistan military was split between being 'orthodox' and 'moderate'. It quoted serving officers as stating that, despite Musharraf's 'enlightened moderation', 'the institution is still [as] strong [an] Islamised institution as [before] and nothing has changed'.

More important for our analysis, is another of his observations: there was a possibility that officers who were either secular or moderate in their outlook, could come to adopt extremist attitudes 'depending on the degree of indoctrination'.²⁸

Such a probability might sound a bit far-fetched, but shades of such a transformation among the officer cadre are not entirely invisible. '*One thing can be safely concluded through experience*', wrote a Pakistan Army officer in a thesis submitted to the US Army College, '*Islamic practices are much more common and regular in the present army as compared to what they were after Independence*'.²⁹

Two conclusions are, by default, apparent. One is the presence of radicalised officers in the Army and the ISI. Second is the use of radical groups as instruments of offensive operations from the days of the Bangladesh war of independence, to the Kargil conflict. This leads us to the probability of a coterie of officers, or men, amenable to aligning with Al Qaeda for tactical or strategic reasons. These officers may, or may not be radicalised personally, but could be willing to work with radical Islamic groups. The November 2008 Mumbai attack, which could not have been carried out without the covert or overt assistance from the Army and ISI (most likely the cabal, or secret society of former officers and men), show that discounting such a probability altogether would be erroneous, with grave consequences.³⁰

CONTEMPORARY REALITIES

It would be fair to say that there are visible shifts in the attitudes and practices taking place in the three groups – Islamic parties, terrorist groups and the Army – mentioned earlier. Islamic parties, for instance, are not on the streets of Pakistan to protest against the American Drone attacks, or the Pakistan Army's military offensive against Pashtun

tribes within the country. The same groups had launched ‘a million marches’ across Pakistan after the US began bombing the Taliban strongholds in Afghanistan following 9/11. By default, they accept, if not openly support, the decision of the Army to launch a military offensive against the Taliban offshoots in NWFP and the tribal areas, a traditional support and operational base for these groups since the Afghan *jihad*. Many of the terrorist groups, including LeT, have shrunk in size and capability. The Army has not exactly given up on the *jihadi* option, which it believes has given it some of the most spectacular strategic successes (that they had failed to achieve conventionally), in influencing events in the neighbourhood. But, there is a significant and visible change in the thinking of the Army leadership that terrorist groups targeting Pakistan were today a priority higher than India.³¹

The August-October 2009, military operations in Swat and nearby areas that met with partial success, raised the possibility that the Army might be turning a new leaf regarding its traditional ‘strategic assets’.³² The fact that the Army and paramilitary forces lost over 1500 men and officers in the ‘war against Taliban’ since 2007, is evidence enough that it has turned against at least those so-called Taliban groups which are targeting the Army. Two points are worth underscoring. One, at least some of the Taliban and other militant *jihadi* groups are not fully under the control of the Pakistan Army or ISI, and are therefore capable of turning against the Pakistani state itself. Two, the Army’s core interests – the overarching sense of control and dominance – were challenged by the Taliban groups which not only carried a series of suicide bombings and attacks against the security forces, but audaciously stepped beyond the red line drawn by the Army.

There is, however, little comfort in this whiff of change. The counter-insurgency operations against the Taliban controlling Swat was done half-heartedly or sloppily, allowing the top leadership, including Fazlullah, who dared the Army to challenge his position, to find shelter in the upper reaches of Dir and Upper Dir. Though Baitullah Mehsud, Fazlullah’s leader and chief of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was killed by a Drone in August 2009, other Taliban-Al Qaeda chieftains remain free and are fighting the Army.³³

There is no sign of the Army moving against terrorist groups anchored in Punjab and other provinces either. Terrorist groups like

LeT remain strong in southern Punjab, ironically in cantonment cities like Lahore and Jhelum. JeM retains its headquarters in Bhawalpur, a garrison town in Punjab, with colonies sporting grand bungalows and farmhouses of the top brass. Harkat-ul Mujahideen commander, Fazlur Rahman Khalil runs a mosque and *madrassa* near Rawalpindi, another military cantonment.³⁴

And, incidentally, the Army's traditional recruitment ground for its men and officers have shifted from north and central Punjab (Rawalpindi, Abbottabad and Jhelum) to the south (Multan, Jhang, Bhawalpur, etc.) which happens to be the core zone of *jihadi* recruitment since the Afghan days. It can be safely assumed, that a large number of these recruits have had direct or indirect experience, of participating in either the Afghan or Kashmir *jihad*. If such a possibility were to be seen in parallel to the streak of radicalism among the officer cadre mentioned earlier, the vulnerability of Pakistan to extremist ideologies and movements like Al Qaeda can be more clearly discerned.

There are other twists in the tale which merit equal attention. Many of the extremist groups have taken to carrying out their outreach into civil society, by establishing schools, colleges, women and student organisations, hospitals, dispensaries, ambulance services, free Quran coaching classes and charitable organisations. JI has been taking such civil society initiatives as part of its Islamic Revival Project. A critical key to the project was the student wing, IJT, which has nurtured terrorist leaders like Hafiz Saeed, Army top brass like Lt. General Mohammad Aziz (a radicalised officer who was instrumental in facilitating Musharraf's coup in October 1999) and senior political leaders like Javed Hashmi of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

More relevant to our area of enquiry would be the extent to which LeT's parent organisation, Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD) has expanded its base in society, particularly in Punjab, by setting up universities, *madrassa*, schools, hospitals and welfare centres. These social linkages make any attempt to neutralise its strength, capability and influence extraordinarily difficult. At the same time, these linkages give the group almost complete immunity from prosecution and enables it to retain its primary objective of re-establishing domination over Muslim-dominated areas which, it believes, were wrongly ceded to India during Partition.³⁵

JuD and its armed wing, LeT, which is behind the Mumbai attacks and several other terrorist attacks in India and Afghanistan in the past, present a complex challenge to the traditional notion of a terrorist group, and its stated alliances with state as well as non-state actors. JuD, for instance, today teaches some 20,000 students in Pakistan in schools which are 'normal', and adhere to the norms set up by the federal board of education, and certainly cannot be certified as conventional radical *madrassa*. It runs three fairly big hospitals, scores of dispensaries, health centres and over 1,000 ambulances, employing a large number of doctors, nurses and paramedics. Its charity organisations run soup kitchens, vocational centres, Islamic learning classes and a fairly well-established media house publishing and distributing magazines, books, running a FM radio station, and at least one web site (two were closed after the Mumbai attack) in English. So, on any given day, it teaches a large number of students, treats a fairly large number of patients, helps hundreds of women particularly in learning skills to survive, and influences several thousand more through sermons and *dawa* classes.

It also has a fairly well-oiled terrorist assembly line – recruitment and training centres, fund raisers, weapon buyers, communication experts and experienced trainers from the Army and commando forces. It networks with the political leadership (at least one of them acknowledged publicly that he was a member once, and there are many more in the closet) and bureaucrats (its magazines sell the maximum in government offices) and liaisons with the Army and ISI officers. It is also tied to Al Qaeda through ideology and historical links. One of the three founding fathers of LeT, Abdullah Azzam was the inspiration behind Al Qaeda. Subsequently, Osama bin Laden was one of the main speakers (he never attended, but sent a recorded speech, or spoke on the phone) at the annual three-day congregation which the group organised at Muridke.³⁶

Another fact which makes LeT different from other terrorist groups in Pakistan, is its presence in 21 countries, and its vigorous outreach campaign to attract recruits from different parts of the world. A local group with local or regional objectives would have no need to expand its network beyond the subcontinent, but LeT has exhibited such a propensity openly, raising suspicion about its real goals. Perhaps, a

clue could be discovered in what Hafiz Saeed said in an article he wrote for his website in 1999 laying down his vision for *jihad*. *Jihad* was imperative, he argued, until '*the way of life prescribed by Allah dominates and overwhelms the whole of the world. . . . Fighting is also obligatory until the disbelieving powers and states are subdued and they pay Jazya (capitulation tax) with willing submission.*'³⁷

The conclusions drawn from the previous discussion are as follows. One, the Army has shown a significant shift in its attitude towards the Taliban groups by launching a military offensive against some of them, but has shown no inclination to take on other terrorist groups, which pose a bigger threat to the region, if not the entire Pakistan for the moment. The second conclusion flows from the previous one, and is that the Army has not given up its policy of using terrorist groups as proxies. Third, LeT has exhibited hidden agendas which are global in nature, and therefore more akin to what Al Qaeda has been propagating. Four, LeT and its surrogate groups cannot be contained, or neutralised, by the police or military means alone. It would require wide-ranging social reforms, particularly in the areas of education and land distribution, to go hand in hand with decisive police action. Five, such a concerted and coordinated action would require strong political leadership and a commitment from the Army top brass, both of which have so far been found wanting.³⁸

PAKISTAN AND AL QAEDA

So, returning to the primary question which we were seeking to find an answer to: Would Pakistan go the Al Qaeda way? The answer is a touch-and-go between 'yes' and 'no'.

Let us take the reasons for the negative response. People, by and large, have no love lost for Al Qaeda. There might be sympathy for Osama bin Laden, and anger against the Americans, for what their security forces are doing in Muslim countries, but people do not want Al Qaeda or Taliban ruling them.

This is clear from two recent instances. In Swat, when Fazlullah and his men wrought havoc by publicly hanging his opponents and dissenters, people made attempts to take on the militia, but failed because the state refused to come to their aid. The wide support for

the idea of creating a people's lashkar (*army*) to take on the Taliban in some areas in the tribal region could be taken as an indication that the Taliban did not enjoy as wide a popular support it once claimed it had. Similarly, when the Army launched its military offensive against its own citizens who had joined the Taliban-Al Qaeda combine in the tribal areas, it received widespread public support. In the run-up to the Lal Masjid confrontation, when militant brigades of men and women from the *madrassa* operating within the mosque complex, indulged in a series of violent protests in Islamabad, there was both fear and anger among the residents of the capital city. Although the operation killed over 300 men and women, mostly students, there was hardly any protest in Islamabad, or elsewhere in Punjab.

There are indications that, within the Army too, there is hardly any support for the notion of a Taliban or Al Qaeda take-over. In fact, there is strong opposition to such a possibility and hence the decision to launch military offensives and persist with it despite high casualty rates. The Army views the Taliban and other medley of terrorist and extremist groups, as tools and not masters.

Despite such strong, contra-undercurrents, the possibility of Pakistan ceding territory to Al Qaeda and its surrogate groups cannot be wished away. Early 2009, several independent estimates showed that the state had ceded about 11 per cent of its territory to the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and a large part of this lost territory remains within the Taliban domain (as of October 1, 2009)³⁹ despite a year-long military offensive at heavy cost to lives and property.

A heavy rate of attrition in the armed forces in the future could force a halt to military operations, or trigger a mutiny or a coup, all of which spells only trouble for the State of Pakistan. Equally distressing and destabilising would be the weakening of the political structure, which is already under severe strain from the ever-looming economic crisis, ethnic, sectarian and provincial fault-lines, and Al Qaeda knocking at the door.

It is quite clear that the struggle for Pakistan's soul will not be over any time soon. The two Radical Islamic processes will continue to battle, ceding and capturing spaces, waiting for an opportune time to make the decisive strike. The Al Qaeda group has time on its side –

it can wait till the state of Pakistan withered away. As it is, it has already lost control over some 20,000 sq kms.⁴⁰ Besides, Al Qaeda has ideological and operational allies like Harkat-ul Jihad al Islami (HuJI) and LeT on its side. The Mughal group has only two choices: defend their country's interest, or the faith – a resonating echo of the existential dilemma JI and its allies faced in the summer of 1947.

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