THE DYNAMICS OF ISLAMIST TERROR IN SOUTH ASIA

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South Asia is the quintessential "bad neighborhood." Overpopulated, poor and poorly governed, it has messy borders and a messier history of conflict, as well as an incendiary mix of strong ethnic identities and diverse religious communities, many of which are concentrated within exclusionary ghettoes. Islamist extremism has flourished in this intemperate soil, and it is here that the world's first *global* Islamist terrorist movement was bred and nurtured, and from where it was exported—first into the immediate neighbourhood, and then across the continents, until it finally struck the heart of "fortress America" on September 11, 2001.

The truth is that the terrorist threats confronting us today were sown decades ago—not just in the anti-Soviet *jihad* in Afghanistan of the 1980s, but in the radical Islamic ideologies that were revived in the early decades of the 20th Century. The history of these movements, and the ideologies that provoked them, is much too long to consider here. But it is useful to recall that, in undivided India in the mid-1920s, Maulana Sayyid Abu A'la Maududi, the founder and head of the Jamaat-e-Islami in India (and, following Partition, in Pakistan), began to articulate an ideology of political Islam that gave primacy to *jihad* over and above all the other duties imposed by Islam. The four pillars of Islam (prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage), Maududi said, were "acts of worship… ordained to prepare us for a greater purpose and to train us for a greater

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duty": *jihad*.[1] Islam was, in this conception, in irreducible conflict with all nationalisms, as well as with every form of governance—whether authoritarian or democratic—other than *Sharia* (Islamic law).[2]

Over the intervening decades, this thesis has been further crystallized and radicalized, particularly by ideologues in Pakistan—a nation that, in the words of K.P.S. Gill, the man who led the campaign that comprehensively defeated Sikh extremist terrorism in the Indian province of Punjab, was "born out of an ideology of hatred (and that) has become the fountainhead of a universal ideology and movement of terrorism."[3]

The centrality of Pakistan

In and of themselves, these ideas are hardly unique to the sub-continent. Indeed, in 1920s Egypt, Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Ikhwan-al-Muslimoon (Muslim Brotherhood) was articulating a strikingly similar ideology. Al-Banna's vision was subsequently extended by his more extreme successor, Sayyid Qutb, who viewed *jihad* as the essential but "forgotten duty" of all Muslims. Similarly, fundamentalist and extremist interpretations of Islam and *jihad* have cropped up in many other Muslim countries, particularly in the Arab world. And they have yielded many movements of violence— at least some of which have translated this ideology into terrorist violence across international borders.

But the true mobilization of the ideology of global *jihad* occurred in South Asia. And one country—Pakistan—was the locus. From Muslim communities across the world, volunteers were actively and aggressively located, motivated and drawn into terror camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Once trained, these recruits were "blooded," first in the anti-Soviet campaigns in Afghanistan and later in the Pakistani campaigns to

secure "strategic depth" and to complete the unfinished agenda of Partition in Indian Jammu and Kashmir.[4]

By now, the thousands of *madrassahs* (religious seminaries) and *marakiz* (religious centers) that were set up or co-opted for mobilization and training for *jihad*—at first in Pakistan, but later in Bangladesh, Southeast Asia, and eventually across the West—have been well documented. So have the "assembly lines" of *jihad* that have emerged in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Mindanao region of the Philippines. Well after the end of the anti-Soviet *jihad* in Afghanistan, these camps continued to churn out legions of trained Islamist radicals with the active support of the Pakistani state, military and political establishment at the highest levels. Recent disclosures, for instance, have confirmed that the current Pakistani Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, personally ran a terrorist training camp at Fatehganj near Rawalpindi in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[5]

Ahmed was not alone. A long list of Pakistani luminaries from all walks of life has been found to be engaged in this "Holy duty." Indeed, the entire state apparatus of Pakistan, including its government-run educational system, has been harnessed to further the *jihadi* mission.[6] This infrastructure possesses three main components:

• The radicalized *madrassahs* themselves—tens of thousands of them in South and Southeast Asia, as well as in other parts of the Muslim world—with their curricula of rote learning of the *Quran* and their message of relentless hatred towards other communities and the West, have created the cannon fodder for local and regional *jihads*. The alumni of these institutions combine a fanatical mindset with

a lack of occupational skills for productive employment, and are consequently uniquely vulnerable to recruitment for criminal and extremist enterprises.

- The number of *madrassah* graduates involved in most of the major acts of international terrorism located in Western countries has been marginal, however. They lack the language and cultural skills, and the capacity to blend into alien (particularly Western) environments, and cannot, therefore, be the vehicles for exporting the *jihad* beyond the culturally familiar neighborhood. Rather, the majority of the terrorists responsible for the most dramatic acts of terrorism targeting the West—including 9/11—have a background in formal educational institutions, including universities, as well as significant exposure to Western culture, with many of them drawn from educated and expatriate Muslim communities. Many have a strong professional and occupational background. Their motivation, recruitment, training and deployment has been made possible by a global network of mobilizers, backed by well-supported *jihadi* and Islamist front organizations, covert Pakistani state agencies and elements drawn from an international coalition of other sympathetic states.

- The third layer of the terrorist infrastructure is the training camps—originally and overwhelmingly concentrated in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but gradually dispersed across other hospitable countries, including Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia. There, these recruits, *madrassah* graduates and Westernized militants

alike, were brought in to be taught the tools of the trade. While the Pakistani Army and Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) were directly involved in providing the technical support, resources, arms and supervision for running these training facilities, their day-to-day management was substantially "outsourced" to extremist groups and fundamentalist religious organizations—the same institutions that were being encouraged to run networks of *madrassahs* across the country. These same institutions were responsible for training trainers and teaching teachers, who then carried their extremist message and terrorist skills back to their home countries and communities. Control of these parent organizations was squarely located in the national power elite: the military-*mullah*-feudal combine that has ruled Pakistan from the first moment of its existence.

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The cumulative result was that the footprint of every major act of international Islamist terrorism, both before and after the events of September 11, 2001, invariably passed through Pakistan.[7] The 9/11 attacks themselves were a culmination of this process, and virtually all the perpetrators and conspirators had trained, resided or met in, coordinated with, or received funding from or through Pakistan. After 9/11, the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan, and the stark choice given to the Pakistani leadership, the dynamics of the Islamist terrorist enterprise in South Asia have

undergone dramatic adaptive readjustments and modifications. Essentially, however, this dynamic, its underlying ideologies, and its motivational and institutional structures, remain intact.

Tactical moderation

During the 1980s and 1990s, Pakistan was the most active and aggressive player in the South Asian region, defining for itself a role that substantially shaped the foreign policy priorities and security concerns of all its neighbours to an extent far in excess of its size and strategic strengths. And Islamist extremism and terror were the primary instruments of motivation, mobilization and execution of its policies. Afghanistan and Kashmir were the manifestations of these politics of violent disruption, and they remain central to the Pakistani vision.

After 9/11, transformations in the strategic environment forced Pakistan's president, General Pervez Musharraf, to join the Global War on Terror as a "frontline ally." But this decision was taken with the utmost reluctance. In his speech of September 19, 2001 justifying cooperation with the United States, President Musharraf cited the tactical Treaty of Hudaibiyya which the Prophet Mohammad entered into with the people of Mecca as his model, and explained his actions in terms of defending Pakistan's "strategic nuclear and missile assets."[8] Since then, moreover, this cooperation has been implemented both reluctantly and selectively.

General Musharraf has successfully beguiled much of the world—including some among the leadership of Pakistan's traditional antagonist, India—with his clever rhetoric about "enlightened moderation." And, as proof of this ideological transformation, he has touted the numerous al-Qaeda elements Pakistan has handed over to the U.S. The truth, however, is that only a series of coercive diplomatic initiatives, and enormous American pressure, eventually produced the succession of gradual and grudging concessions that are seen as signs of Pakistan's contribution to the War on Terror. Pakistan's root ideology of religious exclusion and hatred has not been abandoned. Indeed, this ideology *cannot* simply be discarded on a military dictator's fiat—whether voluntary or coerced. Pakistan remains a consensual dictatorship, backed by a triad of forces (military, religious and feudal) that has consistently pushed an extreme Islamist agenda.[9]

Pakistan's actions, in fact, speak much louder than its peaceful rhetoric. For one thing, most of the arrests and counter-terrorism actions engaged in by Pakistani forces have occurred only after U.S. investigators effectively gathered overwhelming evidence; little of this evidence has come from the Pakistani agencies themselves, which have consistently sought to deny the presence of al-Qaeda elements in their country, and to mislead U.S. investigators to every extent possible. It is also notable that the arrests of several senior al-Qaeda operatives were made in some of the best quarters of Karachi and Islamabad—localities dominated by military officers and government servants.

There is, moreover, more than sufficient evidence of Pakistan's continued support for a wide range of *jihadi* groups in its covert war against India. Most prominently, no action whatsoever has been taken against the fifteen constituents of the United Jihad Council (UJC), which is responsible for a major proportion of terrorist crime in Jammu and Kashmir. The UJC continues to operate openly from Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and receives visible support from the state and intelligence structures there. With regard to other terrorist organiza-

tions, peripheral tactical readjustments have indeed been made; where most were previously operating openly out of various locations in Pakistan, the majority have now ostensibly shifted their camps and headquarters to Pakistani-occupied territory to exploit the apparent ambiguity of its "disputed" status. Nine of these Pakistani groups are currently on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) are listed as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. The al Badr Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Jehad-e-Islami (HuJI), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) are identified as Other Selected Terrorist Organizations. Five of these—the HuM, HuJI and JeM (collectively known as the Harkat Triad), the JeM and LeJ—are members of Osama Bin Laden's International Islamic Front.

Despite significant U.S. and international pressure, the Musharraf regime has taken no more than token action against these various groups, most of which continue to be allowed to function with complete freedom. When activity has been curtailed, as in the case of JeM, it has been because some of its cadres were involved in the failed assassination attempts against Musharraf in December 2003. Groups like the SSP and LeJ which are engaged in acts of sectarian terrorism within Pakistan, for their part, have been targeted by the regime in demonstrations of its counterterrorism capabilities intended for external consumption.

Of course, Pakistan's increasing internal contradictions are creating mounting stresses, as the Musharraf regime adopts ideologically incompatible objectives. Elements within a number of hitherto "captive" *jihadi* groups have begun to chart an independent course, and the assassination attempts on Musharraf in December 2003, as well as those on then-Prime Minister designate Shaukat Aziz in July 2004, and senior military officers, including the Karachi Corps Commander Ahsan Saleem Hayat, in June 2004, are a telling sign of blowback against the regime's policy priorities.

Nevertheless, the infrastructure of terrorism in Pakistan has not been dismantled, and the present regime continues to export terror. Even as Islamabad talks peace with India, in Jammu and Kashmir alone 1,810 persons were killed in 2004 in violence related to Pakistan-backed terrorism, and another 795 have lost their lives thus far in 2005 as of this writing. Pakistan also continues to extend support to terrorism by ideologically incompatible groups such as Khalistani (Sikh) terrorists, ethnic insurgents active in India's Northeast; and Left Wing extremists operating across a widening swath of territory along India's eastern border.

Islamabad's *lingua franca*

The arrests of Islamist cells across Europe, the Americas, South-, Southeast and Central Asia, and Africa have shed light on Pakistan's ongoing role as an incubator of global subversion. But a far more insidious danger also continues to be nurtured in, and exported from, Pakistan—the propagation of the ideology of *jihad*, of communal polarization and hatred, and of the demonization of all other faiths in the eyes of Muslims.

In the wake of 9/11, Musharraf was quick to seize upon the alibi of aberrant institutions within Pakistan—specifically, certain extremist *madrassahs* and *marakiz*—to excuse his country's practice of fanning terror and hatred. He promised *madrassah* reforms and closer supervision over such institutions. But, after an initial flurry of

apparent activity—richly rewarded by the U.S. and Western donors, which have provided millions of dollars for "educational reforms" to Pakistan—the entire process has been brushed under the carpet and forgotten. Behind this elaborate smokescreen, the *madrassahs* have continued their subversion of innocent minds, and a deeper, more sinister reality has been successfully concealed: that the doctrine of hatred is not simply the product of supposedly "renegade" *madrassahs*, but an integral component of Pakistan's state-administered public educational system.[10]

Pakistan has reaped enormous benefit from its supposed "cooperation" with the U.S. To do so, it has combined deception and blackmail (including nuclear blackmail) as a way of securing a continuous stream of concessions.

Worse, Islamist extremism remains the central mechanism for political mobilization and management in the country. After the Musharraf regime intentionally rigged the elections of October 2002 to create a far greater role for the fundamentalist Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) than would have been possible through any transparent or fair process, this group has continued to expand its activities and support base, further marginalizing democratic forces and institutions.

This strategy of political management, however, has failed manifestly, as evidenced by widening areas of instability and violence in Pakistan (including the North West Frontier Province, Balochistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) which have long been loosely controlled by the state). In addition, Sindh, while currently rela-

tively calm, has a history of political violence that could, in situations of rising political uncertainty in Islamabad, see a resurgence. The Northern Areas, meanwhile, are denied basic political and human rights, and the Shia population, which constitutes a majority in the region, has been subjected to repeated campaigns of repression—at least one of which was led by General (then Brigadier) Pervez Musharraf.

More disturbing still is the increasing supply and lethality of *fidayeen* (suicide) terrorists in the region. The first *fidayeen* attack in Jammu and Kashmir was recorded in 1999, and there have been 82 incidents since. The suicide bomber came to Pakistan as late as 2002, and there have been fifteen such attacks over the last three years. While these numbers, at first blush, may not appear particularly alarming, they reflect a much wider social and political reality. While it is easy to dismiss the suicide bomber as cowardly, desperate, or deranged, each is in point of fact the product of an extraordinary institutional support structure which has been exported from Pakistan in a series of stages:

1. A distortion of the relatively pluralistic practices of South Asian Muslims through a process of "religious mobilization and reorientation." This involves a triad of ideological concepts: the transnational Islamic *ummah*, *khilafat* and *jihad*. The transfer of populations and demographic destabilization—both externally induced and natural—have been powerful complements to this process.

2. The mobilization of motivated Islamist cadres for political action, and for support roles in existing terrorist operations, both in present areas of operation and in potential areas of expansion.

3. The exfiltration and training of such cadres for terrorist operations—in the past, primarily in Afghanistan and Pakistan. These processes now continue in camps in Pakistan, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and Bangladesh.

4. The infiltration of these cadres back into target communities, either for immediate terrorist operation in active theaters or to create cells that engage in consolidation activities, further recruitment, the build-up of arms and ammunition caches, financial mobilization, propaganda, and the establishment of front organizations, or as "sleepers," awaiting instructions for deployment and terrorist action.

The actual scope of penetration is immense, encompassing elements—either large or small—within virtually every major pocket of Muslim population in South Asia (and particularly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal). Most of the major groups involved in Islamist terrorist activities in India have a transnational presence, with bases, training facilities, headquarters and supply lines located in Pakistan, with Bangladesh as a secondary player, and with operational linkages with the larger pan-Islamist enterprise of terrorism. More specifically, the major Islamist terrorist actors in the region are either directly connected, or have had mediated linkages, with al-Qaeda.

The case for structural change

To date, Pakistan has reaped enormous benefit from its supposed "cooperation" with the U.S. To do so, it has combined deception and blackmail (including nuclear blackmail) as a way of securing a continuous stream of concessions. Pakistan's case for incremental aid has been that, if it does not receive the extraordinary dispensations that it seeks, it will in effect "implode," and in the process do extraordinary harm to others. Part of the threat of this implosion is the spectre of a transfer of its nuclear arsenal and capabilities to more intransigent and irrational elements of the Islamist far right, who would not be amenable to the logic that the country's present rulers are willing to heed. The fact that Pakistan possesses nuclear weapons invariably pushes the world's tolerance for this sort of behavior much higher than would be the case in dealing with a non-nuclear entity. Its leadership is aware of this power, and has not hesitated to use it to maximal advantage.

Today, the idea that the Pakistan problem can be "solved" by liberal developmental financing from the international community dominates international responses. This, however, is a myth. For one thing, each dollar of development aid or financial relief provided to Pakistan releases a dollar of domestic resources for further militarization, radicalization and extremist religious mobilization.

For another, structural elements within the country have conspired to ensure the failure of this enterprise, notwithstanding superficial evidence of some economic growth as a result of the massive infusion of international resources over the past four years. There is today little by way of existing wealth, structures to sustain new wealth, or social, political and institutional strengths to underpin Pakistan's overweening delusions of military grandeur and strategic over-extension.

By 2050, populations are expected to nearly double in both Pakistan and Bangladesh—both regions where the current Islamist extremist enterprise

in South Asia is concentrated. Already by 2020, Pakistan's population will rise to 242 million (almost 100 million over 2002 figures), and Bangladesh's to 180.66 million (upwards of 50 million more than 2002). As population pressures increase, political turmoil and resource demand will compound current instability, and at least some of this will be directed outward. Given the dynamic of political mobilization in these countries, the dominance of an ideology of a permanent and relentless *jihad*, the chronic paucity of productive employment, and the deficiencies of current developmental institutions, merely cosmetic changes in small sectors of the economy, particularly those engineered through massive external aid, will not serve to constrain the basic structure of South Asian radical Islam.

Moreover, the effort to orchestrate a transition to democracy through a controlled military regime is fundamentally flawed, and has, in fact, immensely weakened democratic and secular forces in Pakistan even as it has further entrenched revanchist elements within the country. The problem lies at the very foundation of the Pakistani state and the ideology of political Islam that led to its creation: the theory that people of different religious communities cannot coexist. This has become the central element of the military-feudal-fundamentalist bloc that has ruled Pakistan for the last 58 years, and which has gradually come to dominate Bangladesh as well.

Given these realities, the problem of religious extremism and terrorism in South Asia can only be resolved through the delegitimization of the Islamist extremist state and the marginalization of these forces through a fundamental regime change that goes well beyond a change of leadership to encompass a change of ideology, collec-

tive beliefs and systems of governance. Only then will South Asia cease to serve as a breeding ground for the radical, anti-Western Islamism that threatens the United States and the world. *e*

1. Khurram Murad, ed., *Fundamentals of Islam* (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, 2002), 285.
2. Ibid., 296-302.
3. K.P.S. Gill, "Jinnah's Harvest of Hatred," *The Pioneer* (New Delhi), June 11, 2005.
4. *Jihadis* of at least nineteen identifiable nationalities were pushed into the terrorist campaign in Jammu and Kashmir, along with a significant number of other foreign terrorists whose nationalities remained unknown. Their countries of origin included Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Nigeria, Iran, Bangladesh, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Nepal, Iraq, and the CIS (particularly the breakaway Russian republic of Chechnya).
5. See, for instance, "Shiekh's Terror Camps No Secret," *Times of India* (New Delhi), June 15, 2005; See also Syed Saleem Shehzad, "The Pawns Who Pay as Powers Play," *Asia Times* (Hong Kong), June 22, 2005, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/GF22Df04.html.
6. For details, see Ajai Sahni, "Pakistan: Why Do They Hate Us?" *South Asia Intelligence Review* 2, no. 38 (2004), http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/2_38.htm; See also *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan*, (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, nd), http://www.sdpi.org.
7. For an exhaustive and updated listing, see K.P.S. Gill, "Pakistan: The Footprints of Terror," in *Islamist Extremism and Terrorism in South Asia* (New Delhi: South Asia Terrorism Portal, January 2004), http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/kpsgill/2003/chapter2.htm.
8. General Pervez Musharraf, Address to the Nation, September 19, 2001, http://www.infopak.gov.pk/President_Addresses/president-address-19-09-01.htm.
9. Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Purging Pakistan's *Jihadi* Legacy," *Asia Times* (Hong Kong), December 22, 2004, www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/FL22Df03.html.
10. Sahni, "Pakistan: Why Do They Hate Us?"