
The Ideologies of South Asian Jihadi Groups

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ALTHOUGH AN OVERWHELMING majority of South Asian Muslims has practiced several variations of Sufi Islam over history, the region has been home to minority puritanical movements resisting “un-Islamic influences” or non-Muslim rule. Most jihadi movements in South Asia have grown out of these Islamic revivalist movements. In recent years, jihad has been used by the fragile Pakistani state to bolster its national identity against India. Pakistan’s crucial role as the staging ground for the anti-Soviet Jihad in Afghanistan created a nexus between Pakistan’s military and secret services, which was heightened by the state sponsorship of jihad against India in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Several jihadi groups have emerged over the last two decades in Pakistan and Kashmir, occasionally spreading operations into parts of India. Some offshoots of radical Islamist movements in Bangladesh have also embraced jihadi ideology and rhetoric in recent years, increasing the prospect of militancy and terrorism in Bangladesh.

Sources of Islamism in South Asia

Until the decline of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century, Muslim rulers presided over South Asian kingdoms in which the majority of their subjects were Hindus. The exigencies of Muslim ascendancy in a non-Muslim environment demanded religious tolerance by the rulers and resulted in syncretism in the religion as practiced by local Muslims. Unlike in the Middle East, enforcement of Shariah in historic India was never complete. But Muslim ulema, muftis and qadis as well as laymen enjoyed a position of relative prestige as co-religionists of the rulers.

The rise of British rule, culminating in the formal addition of India to the British Empire after 1857, marked the end of the privileged position of Muslims. The Muslim community’s response to the gradual decline in Muslim political power came in the form of revivalist movements seeking to sharpen an Islamic identity. South Asia’s Islamist political movements trace their in-

spiration back to Sheikh Ahmed Sirhandi's challenge in the sixteenth century to the ecumenism of Mughal emperor Akbar.

In the nineteenth century, the first jihadi group emerged in India and operated in the country's northwest frontier, including parts of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. This puritanical militant movement fought the region's Sikh rulers. The rise of British power simply changed the militants' target. The movement's founder, Sayyid Ahmed of Bareili, organized cells throughout India to supply the frontier movement with men and money. Calling themselves "mujahideen," the movement's followers interpreted the Islamic concept of jihad in its literal sense of holy war. Sayyid Ahmed of Bareili (not to be confused with Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, the reformer) had been influenced by the ideas of Muhammad ibn-Abdul Wahhab, to which he had been exposed during his pilgrimage to Mecca. He called for a return to early Islamic purity and the re-establishment of Muslim political power. Sayyid Ahmed's revival of the ideology of jihad became the prototype for subsequent Islamic militant movements in South and Central Asia and is also the main influence over the jihad network of Al Qaeda and its associated groups in the region.

The influence of Sayyid Ahmed's ideas and practices on South Asian Islamists is visible in recent jihad literature in Pakistan, which invariably draws parallels between British colonial rule in the nineteenth century and U.S. domination since the end of the twentieth. Unlike in Sayyid Ahmed's time, today's jihad battlefield is not limited to a single geographic area. Nor are the various mujahid cells dependent on handwritten messages delivered by couriers riding (and hiding) for thousands of miles. Modern communications facilitate jihad without frontiers. After all, the enemy is also global in reach. And despite the differences in technology, the nineteenth-century mujahideen remain the role model for today's jihadis, who make up an international network aimed at waging holy war at a time when the majority of Muslims seek to synthesize their faith with modern living.

But the revivalist ideas of Sheikh Ahmed Sirhandi and the jihadi ideology of Sayyid Ahmed of Bareili alone do not explain the rise of modern jihadis. Even the large number of South Asian Muslims who embraced western learning under British rule were influenced by revivalist ideas to the extent of seeking a separate identity from South Asia's Muslims, a process that was somewhat accelerated by the demand for and creation of Pakistan.

The emergence of Pakistan as an independent state in 1947 was the culmination of decades of debate and divisions among Muslims in British India about their collective future. The concept of a Muslim-majority Pakistan

rested on the notion that India's Muslims constituted a separate nation from non-Muslim Indians. Although the Islamists did not like the westernized leadership that sought Pakistan, and in some cases actively opposed the campaign for Pakistan, the lack of religious orthodoxy among Pakistan's founders did not prevent them from seeking the revival of Islam's lost glory in South Asia. In fact, the creation of a Muslim-majority state provided them with a better environment to pursue their ideas.

Soon after independence, Pakistan's Constituent Assembly declared in 1949 that South Asian Muslims had created Pakistan for the principal objective of "ordering their lives in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam." Prominent individuals within the government mooted proposals for adopting Arabic as the national language, and of changing the script of the Bengali language from its Sanskrit base to an Arabic-Persian one. The president of the ruling Muslim League announced that Pakistan would bring all Muslim countries together into "Islamistan"—a pan-Islamic entity. In 1949, the Pakistani government also sponsored the World Muslim Conference presided over by the Grand Mufti of Palestine, Amin al-Husseini, to promote Pan-Islamism. This conference led to the formation of the Motamar al-Alam al-Islami (Muslim World Congress), which has since played a crucial role in building up the feeling of Muslim victimization that has subsequently fed the global Islamist movement.

Since the creation of Pakistan, Islamist groups have been sponsored and supported by Pakistan's state machinery at different times to influence domestic politics and shore up Pakistani national identity, which is periodically threatened by sub-national ethnic challenges. The Islamists have also helped support the Pakistani military's political dominance. Islamists have been allies in the Pakistan military's efforts to seek "strategic depth" in Afghanistan—a euphemism for Pakistan's efforts to make Afghanistan a client state of Pakistan—and to put pressure on India for negotiations over the future of Kashmir, the Muslim majority Himalayan region that has been disputed by India and Pakistan since their partition.

Pakistan's state institutions, notably national security institutions such as the military and the intelligence services, have played a leading role in building Pakistani national identity on the basis of religion since Pakistan's emergence. This political commitment to an "ideological state" gradually evolved into a strategic commitment to the jihadi ideology, especially during and after the Bangladesh war of 1971. Then, the Pakistani military used the Islamist's idiom and the help of Islamist groups to keep elected secular leaders supported by the majority Bengali-speaking population out of power. A

Bengali rebellion and brutal suppression of the Bengalis by the military followed. In the 1971 war the country was bifurcated, leading to the birth of an independent Bangladesh.

In the original country's western wing, the effort to create national cohesion between Pakistan's disparate ethnic and linguistic groups through religion took on greater significance and its manifestations became more militant. Religious groups, both armed and unarmed, have become gradually more powerful as a result of this alliance between the mosque and the military. Radical and violent manifestations of Islamist ideology, which sometimes appear to threaten Pakistan's stability, are in some ways a state project gone wrong.

Given Pakistan's status as an ideological state, Islamic political groups of all kinds have proliferated in the country and several of them have received state patronage at one time or another. Others have operated independently or with the support of fellow Islamist groups outside the country. The organized jihadi movements that have been militarily active since the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad can be classified into three groups. The first of these groups is centered on the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Islamic Society) founded by Islamist scholar Maulana Abul Ala Maududi in 1941. The second group includes the *Deobandi* movements that arose from the austere interpretations of Islam emanating from the Deoband madrasa of Northern India, which was founded in 1867 to protect Muslims from being seduced by Western materialism. The third group of South Asian jihadis is *Wahhabi*, which is influenced by the doctrine of Muhammad ibn-Abdul Wahhab and almost invariably funded by Saudi Arabia.

Jamaat-e-Islami and its Jihadi Offshoots

The *Jamaat-e-Islami* is an Islamist party similar to the Arab Muslim Brotherhood, with which it has both ideological and organizational links. It has operated over the decades as a political party, a social welfare organization, a pan-Islamic network and the sponsor of militant groups fighting in Afghanistan and Kashmir. For years, *Jamaat-e-Islami* was the major recipient of Saudi assistance in Pakistan, until its current leadership failed to support the Kingdom in the 1991 Gulf War. Although relations between the Saudi government and *Jamaat-e-Islami* have since been repaired, the disagreement between them in the early 1990s led the Saudis to divert support from *Jamaat-e-Islami* to *Deobandi* and *Wahhabi* groups for a period, somewhat diminishing *Jamaat-e-Islami*'s status as the dominant Islamist group in South Asia.

The founder of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, Abul Ala Maududi (1903-1979), was a

prolific writer. In his books and pamphlets, running into over one hundred in number including a six-volume commentary on the Quran, Maududi laid out an elaborate ideological vision. He argued that Islam was as much a political ideology as it is a religion and that the basic division in the world was between “Islam and un-Islam.” Maududi critiqued all un-Islamic ideologies, including socialism, communism, secularism and capitalism. He described the political system of Islam as “theo-democracy”—a system in which officials would be elected but would be subject to divine laws interpreted by the theologically learned.

The Islamic ideology, according to Maududi, carried forward the mission of the Prophets, which he described as follows:

1. To revolutionize the intellectual and mental outlook of humanity and to instill the Islamic attitude towards life and morality to such an extent that their way of thinking, ideal of life, and standards of values and behavior become Islamic;
2. To regiment all such people who have accepted Islamic ideals and molded their lives after the Islamic pattern with a view to struggling for power and seizing it by the use of all available means and equipment;
3. To establish Islamic rule and organize the various aspect of social life on Islamic bases, to adopt such means as will widen the sphere of Islamic influence in the world, and to arrange for the moral and intellectual training, by contact and example, of all those people who enter the fold of Islam from time to time.¹

Maududi also laid out a stage-by-stage strategy for Islamic revolution in his many speeches and writings. His first major book, *Al-Jihad fil-Islam (Jihad in Islam)*, defined the various ways and means of struggle for the perfect Islamic state. In other books, Maududi described the social, economic and political principles of Islam.

The Jamaat-e-Islami adopted a cadre-based structure similar to that of communist parties. It built alliances with Islamist parties in other countries, recruited members through a network of schools and hoped to serve as the vanguard of a gradual Islamic revolution. Though the party’s call for Islamic revolution did not have mass appeal, its social service infrastructure helped create a well-knit, nation-wide organization within a few years of partition in 1947. After the creation of Pakistan, Jamaat-e-Islami divided its organization into two entities—one based in India, the other in Pakistan. The Indian branch refrained from directly participating in electoral politics, and focused instead on developing pious cadres for the eventual transformation

of the region into an Islamic state. In Pakistan, Jamaat-e-Islami participated in elections with poor results until 2002, when it formed an alliance with other Islamist groups and won a significant share of seats in parliament and two provincial legislatures.

The Jamaat-e-Islami's real opportunity in Pakistan lay in working with the new state's elite, gradually expanding the Islamic agenda while providing the theological rationale for the Pakistani elite's plans for nation building on the basis of religion. Jamaat-e-Islami's cadres among students, trade unions and professional organizations, as well as its focus on building its own media, made it a natural ally for those within the government who thought that Pakistan's survival as a state required a religious anchor.

The Jamaat-e-Islami's first foray into military jihad came in 1971, when its cadres sided with the Pakistan army in opposing independence for Bangladesh. Jamaat-e-Islami members were organized in two militant groups, *Al-Badr* and *Al-Shams*, and were trained by the Pakistani army to carry out operations against Bangladesh nationalists seeking separation from Pakistan. In the initial years after Bangladesh's independence, this role of the Jamaat-e-Islami prevented the movement from assuming an overt political role in Bangladesh, but the organization has since revived and is now part of the ruling coalition in Bangladesh. Although the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami is occasionally accused of using its muscle against political opponents, it operates within the country's political system and appears to have opted against direct participation in military jihad. Other Bangladeshi Islamist groups including some offshoots of the Jamaat-e-Islami have been alleged to have developed links with global terrorist networks such as al-Qaeda.

The collaboration with the Pakistan army in what turned out to be a lost battle in what was then Eastern Pakistan helped Jamaat-e-Islami forge closer links with the Pakistani military and intelligence services. These links led to the organization's close identification with the Islamizing military regime of General Ziaul Haq (1977-1988). Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan was directly involved in supporting the Afghan mujahideen operating out of Pakistan, maintaining close ties with Gulbeddin Hikmatyar's Hizbe Islami (Islamic Party) and Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jamiat-e-Islami (Islamic Society). Both of these Afghan Jihadi groups adopted the ideological precepts of Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami, which influenced Hikmatyar's anti-Western bent during and after the anti-Soviet struggle.

During the period of the war against the Soviets, Jamaat-e-Islami was able to build a significant infrastructure, including madrasas, businesses and charities with the help of generous financial contributions from the gov-

ernments and private individuals in the Gulf States. Jamaat-e-Islami played host to many of the foreign, mainly Arab, mujahideen that came to Pakistan to participate in Afghanistan's jihad. Jamaat-e-Islami's own cadres also received training alongside the foreign and Afghan fighters and several Pakistani young men fought the Soviets inside Afghanistan. By the time of the Soviet withdrawal, Jamaat-e-Islami had developed ties with Islamist groups throughout the world. Islamist liberation movements seeking redress of perceived and real grievances in places remote from Pakistan, such as Chechnya, Bosnia and Southern Philippines congregated in Pakistan. The Jamaat-e-Islami raised funds for these groups and provided military training for their members, in addition to allowing its own younger members to participate in Jihad around the world.

From 1989, Jamaat-e-Islami has actively participated in the militancy in Jammu and Kashmir with the full backing of Pakistan's inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Pakistan military. To maintain a distinction between Jamaat-e-Islami, the ideological-political group, and militant or terrorist outfits, several jihad-specific organizations were created. The most prominent of these is the Hizbul Mujahideen (The Party of Holy Warriors). For years, Hizbul Mujahideen avoided the terrorist label by taking care that its target in Kashmir could be identified as military, as opposed to civilian, targets. Even the United States acknowledged this distinction and spared Hizbul Mujahideen from designation as a terrorist group. Post 9/11 developments have diminished such distinctions. Under pressure from the United States, the Pakistan government has restricted Hizbul Mujahideen's freedom of operation in planning and executing attacks against India. There is no doubt, however, that Hizbul Mujahideen retains the capacity to attack targets in Indian-controlled Kashmir and Jamaat-e-Islami's trained militant cadre remains intact.

Although Jamaat-e-Islami can be described as being sympathetic to the aims of various Jihadi movements, it has taken care not to cross the line from being primarily an ideological-political movement—"the vanguard of the Islamic revolution," in Maududi's words. The party's ideological journal, *Tarjuman al-Quran*, explained the need for caution in approaching the issue of military jihad, implying that there was no sense in attracting massive military retaliation when political options were available. According to one editorial in the journal:

Muslim rulers sheepishly follow the steps of their Western masters. They fulfill their political and economic interests. In retaliation if some people resort to force, they are branded as terrorists. These rulers are promoting non-Islamic culture and crushing Islamic forces

in their own as well as their masters' interests. How to work for the supremacy of [faith] is then a problem of universal extent. There has been an element of disunity in some movements on this issue, due to which some extremist-armed groups have sprung up in small niches. Excesses by such groups have sometimes been reported from some places. Using the excuse of these groups' violations, the hostile rulers are crushing Islamic movements. At places where these movements are cautious and not providing any such opportunity, the antagonists are trying to create [an] atmosphere so as to crush them, e.g. in Pakistan....Confused thinking, particularly when it is based on despair instead of reasoning and thinking, diffuses strength for action. This can lead to disastrous consequences... for so long as doors are open for peaceful preaching of Islam's message and the required result to bring change is satisfactory, and for so long as the public opinion for an Islamic revolution is not mobilized, one [does] not qualify to pick up arms for *Jihad*.²

Aside from its involvement in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Kashmir, Jamaat-e-Islami appears unwilling to acknowledge any direct involvement in jihadi activities. But like the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world, the movement serves as an ideological inspiration for polarizing Muslims between "true believers" and "camp followers of the West." The Jamaat-e-Islami has built a coherent ideological case for global Islamic revivalism—a revivalism that includes the defense of violent jihad, but without identifying Jamaat-e-Islami clearly with militant struggle.

The Jamaat-e-Islami's leading ideologue, Professor Khurshid Ahmad, recently published a collection of essays in Urdu, *Amrika: Muslim Dunya ki Bey-Itminani (America and the Unrest in the Muslim World)*.³ In this book, Ahmad argues that the United States "dreams of world domination, resolves to control the resources of other nations, wants to shape the world according to its ideas, and seeks to impose its values and ideology on others by force." Only the Islamists, he says, offer a political force capable of resisting this Pax Americana.

Ahmad's book comprises nine essays, four written before September 11, and five after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. In the book, he condemns the attacks but argues that the perpetrators are still unknown. "A glance at the history of Israel and [the] Zionist movement," he suggests, "gives credence to the suspicion of Mossad's role in the terrorist acts." Like all Islamists, however, Ahmad was suspicious of Western intentions long before September 11. Two of his essays on the "new world order" that emerged following the end of the Cold War, originally published in 1991 and 1993, exten-

sively cite influential U.S. conservatives such as Samuel Huntington, Francis Fukuyama, and Eliot Cohen as proof of an insidious plan to create a century of U.S. dominance at the expense of other nations.

The framework of this U.S.-led new world order, according to Ahmad, rests on “four pillars”: globalization, Western democracy, technological supremacy, and political alliances. Ahmad’s suspicions of U.S. intentions during the 1990s, even as the United States was leading a military campaign on behalf of Bosnia’s Muslims, can best be understood in the context of the U.S. abandonment of Afghanistan and Pakistan after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Ahmad saw the end of U.S. support for the Afghan Mujahideen as a betrayal motivated by the United States’ need for a new enemy—an Islamic green menace to replace the defunct Soviet red threat. The U.S. ruling elite, he argues, in collusion with Zionist Israel and Hindu India (the Islamist “axis of evil”) is bent on plundering the Islamic world of its oil and denying Muslims their rightful place in the contemporary world.

Ahmad’s prescription for resisting U.S. subjugation is similar to such prescriptions from other Islamist groups: The Muslim *Ummah*—(the global community of believers)—must purify its ranks and become a homogenous community that can mobilize against the American-Zionist-Hindu plot. Ahmad also emphasizes Pakistan’s special role in this Islamic revival. As the only Muslim country with a nuclear capability, Pakistan must expand cooperation with Iran, China, and other nations that wish to oppose the U.S. hegemon. The Americans have let Pakistan down before, he says, because their interests converge with those of India. The Chinese, however, have been among Pakistan’s most reliable allies.

In effect, Ahmad advises the Islamists to reverse the mistake they made during the Cold War, when they sided with the West against godless communism in Afghanistan. The arrogance and triumphalism of the “American imperialists” require a closing of ranks among all those who oppose them. Ironically, Ahmad’s arguments for a proposed alliance between the Islamic world and China parallel Huntington’s prediction in his clash of civilizations thesis of an eventual “Sino-Islamic alliance” against the West.

The Deobandis

Unlike the Jamaat-e-Islami, South Asia’s Deobandi groups did not originate as a political movement. The movement takes its name from a traditional madrasa established in 1867 in the North Indian town of Deoband. The school’s founder, Maulana Qasim Nanotvi, was concerned with the prospect of India’s Muslims adopting and accepting western ways. His

madrassa, therefore, marked the beginning of a movement to adhere to a traditional religious way of life. The Deobandis explain the decline of Islamic societies in terms of their having been seduced by the amoral and materialist accoutrements of Westernization. According to them, Muslims have lost Allah's blessings because they have deviated from the original teachings of Prophet Muhammad and the pristine ways of his earliest followers.

The tradition of Deoband was extremely hostile to British rule and committed to a literal and austere interpretation of Islam. Instead of organizing for political action, the Deobandis originally focused on establishing madrasas. During the struggle for independence from British rule, Deobandis were divided between those who supported Gandhi's Indian National Congress because of their hostility to the British and those supporting the creation of an independent Pakistan.

After Pakistan's creation, the Deobandis expanded control over the traditional religious education system and argued that a Muslim's first loyalty is to his religion and only then to the country of which he is a citizen or a resident. Over the years, Pakistan's Deobandis have insisted that Muslims must recognize only the religious frontiers of their Ummah and not the national frontiers. Jihad has always been central to Deobandi thinking and Deobandi scholars inspired and participated in militant campaigns against British rule throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In recent years, Deobandi Ulema have articulated jihad as a sacred right and obligation, encouraging their followers to go to any country to wage jihad to protect the Muslims of that country.

The Deobandis gained considerable strength during the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad, especially because General Ziaul Haq encouraged the establishment of madrasas for Afghan refugees as well as Pakistanis. Most of the new madrasas followed the Deoband model and had Deobandi teachers. The movement's influence reached its peak when the Taliban, themselves students of Deobandi madrasas in Pakistan, assumed power in Afghanistan. The Afghan Jihad ended the previous isolation of Deobandi traditionalists, linking them with global Islamist movements. Groups such as the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Movement for Islamic Jihad) that were born during the Afghan war to assist in the recruitment and ideological motivation of Afghan peasant refugees created a wider presence in Pakistan, and later in Kashmir. Once jihad was expanded to Kashmir, several Deobandi militant groups appeared on the scene with initial assistance from Pakistani intelligence.

In addition to Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, prominent Deobandi groups include Harkat-ul-Ansar (Movements of Supporters of the Faith), which

changed its name to Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (Movement of Holy Warriors) after being a declared terrorist group by the United States for its involvement in kidnapping of western tourists in Kashmir. The founder of Harkat-ul-Ansar and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Fazlur Rehman Khalil, was one of the signatories of Osama bin Laden's fatwa declaring war against the United States. Khalil worked closely with Pakistani intelligence, and until recently continued to lead jihadi groups after changing their names once the previous name appeared on the list of global terrorist organizations. He announced his 'retirement' in January 2005, passing the baton of leadership to less well-known followers.

Harkat-ul-Mujahideen was involved in hijacking an Indian Airlines aircraft in 1999 and secured the release of one of its principal ideologues and organizers, Maulana Masood Azhar, from an Indian prison. Upon his release Azhar formed the Jaish-e-Muhammad (Army of Muhammad), which was involved in the killing of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl and high profile suicide attacks on the Kashmir legislative assembly and the Indian parliament in 2001—a few days after the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Jaish-e-Muhammad was involved in several attacks on churches in Pakistan as well as in assassination attempts on Pakistan's military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf. Although temporarily detained by Pakistani authorities under U.S. pressure, Azhar was subsequently released and is now at large, surfacing occasionally to make speeches exhorting global jihad.

The ideology of the various Deobandi jihadi groups is explained, among others, by Masood Azhar in three books: *Ma'araka (The Struggle)*, *Faza'il Jihad (The Virtue of Jihad)* and *Tuhfa-e-Saadat (The Gift of Virtue)*.⁴ *Faza'il Jihad* is Azhar's translation of the thirteenth century classical text on jihad by Ibn Nahhas, believed to be a disciple of Ibn Taimiyah. The book romanticizes jihad and paints a somewhat sensuous portrait of the worldly and other-worldly benefits that await the Mujahid. The fact that different versions of the Ibn Nahhas book have been found in circulation among jihadi groups—from Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan to Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia—seems to indicate that this is the favored text of Al-Qaeda-related jihadi movements.

Most contemporary Deobandi literature on jihad traces the history of Muslim grievances. According to this view, the world as shaped over the last two centuries is unfavorable to Muslims. Palestine has been taken over by the Zionists, Kashmir occupied by India, Chechnya devoured by Russia, and the Muslim sultanates in southern Philippines subjugated by Catholic Manila. The battle in each case, irrespective of the political issues involved, is one of Muslim against non-Muslim. And the Muslims' disadvantage comes from their lack of effective military power vested in the hands of the righteous.

“Every Muslim must just turn to God” is the remedy for this imbalance, according to Maulana Masood Azhar, in the foreword of his third book, *The Gift of Virtue*. As a tribute to the nineteenth-century Wahhabis and Sayyid Ahmed of Bareili, Azhar penned the preface of *The Struggle* in the mountainous redoubt where Ahmed died in battle. The fundamental argument of each one of Azhar’s books, and many published speeches, appears to be that puritanical Islam faces extinction at the hands of an ascendant secular culture, just as the fledgling religion was challenged by unbelievers in its earliest days during the seventh century A.D. *The Struggle* is written as an invitation to young Muslims to join Jaish-e-Muhammad, complete with motivational anecdotes from the early history of Islam. For example, Azhar reminds readers of how the Battle of Badr, in A.D. 623, was won by the earliest Muslims with an ill-equipped army of 313 fighters facing Arabia’s pagan tribes numbering in the thousands.

The Prophet Mohammed was forced to fight those who sought to eliminate Islam, as were his early companions. To follow their example, the Deobandi jihadis argue that Muslims must define the contemporary detractors of Islam in similar terms and fight them in a similar manner. Azhar’s argument for fighting India in Kashmir is rooted in the same theological arguments that Osama bin Laden has cited in his declarations of war against the United States. The Indian military’s presence in Kashmir compromises the sovereignty of Muslims in a territory over which they should actually rule, Azhar argues. Bin Laden resents the United States because its troops defile the holy land of Saudi Arabia. Azhar expresses respect for bin Laden partly because of shared beliefs and partly because bin Laden has financed jihad with his inherited wealth. For Azhar, the struggle for sovereignty is also an existential struggle for Muslims. “Submission and slavery damage our faith and religion,” he writes in *The Struggle*. In his view, Islam risks being diluted as a system of belief unless it is politically ascendant. “The decline of Muslims,” one of his colleagues argues, “started with the fading of the spirit of jihad and sacrifice.”

The Wahhabis or Ahle-Hadith

Although Sayyid Ahmed’s nineteenth century efforts influenced the jihadi thinking of Deobandis and the Jamaat-e-Islami, his own Wahhabi movement did not gain a large following in South Asia until recently. The Wahhabis in South Asia described themselves as “Ahle-Hadith” (People of the Prophet’s Tradition). Their adoption of Hanbali religious rites and their strict condemnation of many rituals widely practiced by South Asian Muslims did not sit well with the vast Hanafi Sunni population.

In recent years, especially during and after the Afghan Jihad, the existing Ahle-Hadith groups were able to better organize themselves, increasing their numbers as well as their influence. A large number of Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi Muslims worked in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries and subsequently returned home with Wahhabi views. Wahhabi funding from the Gulf Arab region has also enabled Wahhabi missionaries to convert Sunni Muslims to their interpretation of Islam. More significantly, Sunni Muslims have cast aside their aversion to Wahhabi groups, creating a large number of traditional Sunnis who embrace Wahhabi political and jihadi ideas without necessarily giving up their rites and rituals.

The most significant jihadi group of Wahhabi persuasion is Lashkar-e-Taiba (The Army of the Pure) founded in 1989 by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed. Backed by Saudi money and protected by Pakistani intelligence services, Lashkar-e-Taiba became the military wing of Markaz al-Dawa wal-Irshad (Center for the Call to Righteousness). Saeed created a large campus and training facility at Muridke, outside the Pakistani metropolis of Lahore. After the U.S. froze Lashkar-e-Taiba's assets and called for it to be banned, Saeed changed his organization's name in Pakistan to Jamaat-ul-Dawa (the Society for Preaching). Pakistani authorities have been reluctant to move against either Lashkar, which continues to operate in Kashmir, or Jamaat-ul-Dawa, which operates freely in Pakistan. Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jamaat-ul-Dawa scaled down their military operations against India to help Pakistan honor its commitments to the U.S. and India. But Saeed remains free and continues to expand membership of his organization despite divisions in its leadership.

Under U.S. pressure, General Musharraf placed Jamaat-ul-Dawa on a watch list in November 2003.

Lashkar-e-Taiba has adopted a maximalist agenda for global jihad though its operations so far have been limited to Kashmir. The group justifies its ideology on the basis of the Quranic verse that says, "You are obligated to fight even though it is something you do not like" (2:216). Extrapolating from this verse, the group asserts that military jihad is a religious obligation for all Muslims. The group then defines the many circumstances in which that obligation must be carried out.

For example, a Markaz al-Dawa wal-Irshad publication titled *Hum Jihad kyun Kar rahe hain?* (*Why Are We Waging Jihad?*), declares the United States, Israel and India as existential enemies of Islam. It lists eight reasons for Jihad: 1) to eliminate evil and facilitate conversion to and practice of Islam; 2) to ensure the ascendancy of Islam; 3) to force non-Muslims to pay *jizya* (poll tax, paid by non-Muslims for protection from a Muslim ruler); 4) to assist

the weak and powerless; 5) to avenge the blood of Muslims killed by unbelievers; 6) to punish enemies for breaking promises and treaties; 7) to defend a Muslim state; and 8) to liberate Muslim territories under non-Muslim occupation.

This list of itself is sufficient to justify a virtual state of permanent jihad. "Have all the obstacles to observing the faith in the world been removed?" the unnamed author asks rhetorically, adding that non-Muslim dominance of the global system makes jihad necessary. "Is the current world order that of *kafirs* (unbelievers) or of Muslims? Is the global economic system according to the wishes of Allah, which requires the end of interest and usury?" Jihad is described as essential to ensure ascendancy of Islam and to create circumstances whereby non-Muslims would either convert to Islam or pay *jizya*. Furthermore, all major powers have broken their pledges to Muslims made at one time or another, for which they must be punished, runs the argument. "Are Muslims not being mistreated all over the world? Are not weak Muslim men, women and children calling for help against oppression from India, Kashmir, Philippines, Chechnya, Russia, China, Bosnia and several other parts of the world?...Burma's Muslims are under attack from Buddhists, who expel them from their homes... Israel has pierced the dagger of its existence in the heart of the Arabs."

The Markaz/Lashkar/Jamaat-ul-Dawa movement construes Muslim territories under non-Muslim occupation in the broadest sense. "Muslims ruled Andalusia (Spain) for 800 years but they were finished to the last man. Christians now rule (Spain) and we must wrest it back from them. All of India, including Kashmir, Hyderabad, Assam, Nepal, Burma, Bihar and Junagadh were part of the Muslim empire that was lost because Muslims gave up jihad. Palestine is occupied by the Jews. The Holy Qibla-e-Awwal (First Center of Prayer) in Jerusalem is under Jewish control. Several countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Cyprus, Sicily, Ethiopia, Russian Turkistan and Chinese Turkistan...were Muslim lands and it is our duty to get these back from unbelievers. Even parts of France reaching 90 kilometers outside Paris and some of the forests and mountains of Switzerland were home to Muslim mujahideen but are now under the occupation of unbelievers."

Some of the arguments and claims might appear historically incorrect or practically impossible but this does and will not deter a closely-knit jihadi group from raising funds, organizing cadres and fielding militants or terrorists in pursuit of a broadly defined global jihad aimed at the revival of Islam's global ascendancy and eventual domination.

NOTES

¹ S. Abul A'la Maududi, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*, (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1963), p. 26.

² Khurram Jah Murad, "Revolution Through Bullet or Ballot," *Tarjuman-al-Quran*, January 1996. <http://jamaat.org/Isharat/archive/0196.html>

³ Khurshid Ahmad, *Amrika: Muslim Dunya ki Bey-Itminani (America and Unrest in the Muslim World)*, (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 2002), 308 pages (in Urdu).

⁴ Maulana Masood Azhar, *Ma'arka (The Struggle)*; *Faza'il Jihad (The Virtue of Jihad)*; *Tuhfa-e-Saadat (The Gift of Virtue)*, (Karachi: Idara AI-Khair, 2001) (in Urdu).

⁵ *'Hum Jihad kyun Kar rahe hain?' (Why Are We Waging Jihad?)*, (Muridke: Markaz al-dawa wal-Irshad, undated), (in Urdu).

South Asia also will face continuing challenges from political turmoil—particularly Pakistan’s struggle to maintain stability—as well as violent extremism, sectarian divisions, governance shortfalls, terrorism, identity politics, mounting environmental concerns, weak health systems, gender inequality, and demographic pressures. Much of South Asia will see a massive increase in youth population, escalating demands for education and employment. Jihadi groups, nuclear Pakistan, and the new great game. M. Ehsan Ahrari. August 2001. For the United States and other nations concerned with security in South and Central Asia, one of the most ominous trends has been the growing influence of Jihadist groups in Pakistan which feel obligated to wage “holy war” against everything that they perceive as “non-Islamic.” Their objective would be a Pakistani government similar to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The danger this would pose to regional stability and U.S. interests is clear. In this monograph, Dr. Ehsan Ahrari, of the Armed Forces Staff College, assesses Jihadi groups from the framework of a new “Great Game” for influence.