

Islamism and the Pakistani State

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UNLIKE MOST MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES, THE STATE OF PAKISTAN has consistently tolerated and even maintained positive relations with Islamist groups. Pakistan's approach to Islamism differed greatly from the policies of other Muslim countries, which were led to independence in the twentieth century by secular elites. Islamists were deemed by these elites as an obstruction to their modernizing aspirations. The state apparatus was used either to suppress Islamism (Iran under the Shah, Turkey, and Tunisia) or to coopt it within a secular framework (Indonesia and Malaysia). Although Pakistan's founding elites were also secular, their call for partition of British India along religious lines made it necessary for them to adopt Islamist ideas as part of their nation-building effort.

At a time when the newly-written constitutions of other Muslim countries emphasized the secular character of their states, Pakistan's first Constituent Assembly adopted the 'Objectives Resolution' in 1949, declaring the purpose of the state to be to enable Muslims "to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and the Sunna."

Although the functionaries of the Pakistani state remained largely secular until the 1980s, the state helped create a Pakistani sense of self as the citadel of Islam, which in turn enabled Islamists greater freedom of organization and movement than in other countries.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Pakistan remained the center of Pan-Islamist activity. Leaders of the Arab Muslim Brotherhood, including Said Ramadan, travelled

to Pakistan for conferences proclaiming the unity of the Muslim Ummah. The Grand Mufti of Palestine, Amin al-Husseini, led the Motamar al-Alam al-Islami (World Muslim Congress), which maintained its headquarters in the then-Pakistani capital, Karachi. Abul Ala Maududi's Jamaat-e-Islami evolved as a cadre-based organization that proclaimed itself the vanguard of the global Islamic revolution.

By the time General Zia ul-Haq seized power in a military coup in 1977, Pakistan's constitution and laws already had elements of Islamic law grafted on to the British institutions of Westminster-style parliamentary democracy and an Anglo-Saxon legal system. Zia went farther than other Pakistani leaders in flaunting his own piety and initiated deeper Islamization of the educational, the legal and even the financial systems. The Islamists, who had repeatedly failed to win votes from Pakistan's masses, were able to influence the state without fully controlling it.

Relatively weak efforts, by Pakistan's secular politicians elected to office after Zia's death in 1988, to modify or roll-back Zia's Islamization have not succeeded partly because of the rise in militant Islamism resulting from Pakistan's role as the staging ground for the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan (1979-1989). In addition to the political Islamists using agit-prop to advance their cause, Pakistan has now become home to tens of thousands of armed men, initially trained as guerilla fighters to face the Soviets. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) continued Pakistan's own jihad in Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir as well as in Afghanistan.

The jihadis have, since 1989, been an instrument of Pakistani policy for regional influence. Pakistan, under the leadership of military dictator General Pervez Musharraf, joined the U.S.-led global war against terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11, complicating the Pakistani state's relationship with the jihadis. At least some jihadi groups declared war on the Pakistani state because of its selective cooperation with the United States.

Pakistan's status as an ideological state has resulted in the proliferation of Islamic political groups of all kinds. Several of them have received state patronage or at least tolerance at one time or another. Others have operated independently or with the support of fellow Islamist groups outside the country. Now, Pakistan's Islamists are divided not only by their varied theological approaches but also by their views of and attitudes toward the Pakistani state.

Pakistan's Islamists can now be categorized into three broad groupings: 1) Islamist groups working with the Pakistani state; 2) Islamist groups trying to take over the state through political means; and 3) Islamist groups fighting the state.

Working with the State

EVEN AFTER PAKISTAN'S POST-9/11 PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES, SEVERAL Islamist groups continue to enjoy close ties with the state apparatus. This includes Deobandi Ulema of the Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI) who participate in electoral politics while also describing jihad as a sacred right and obligation. The Deobandis have encouraged students of madrasas toward militancy. The Afghan Taliban, students of Deobandi madrasas in Pakistan who held power in Afghanistan before 9/11, are still seen as allies by Pakistan's military and the ISI. But a new generation of the Taliban has emerged that is not willing to work within the complex confines of Pakistani realpolitik, which requires modification of the jihadist ideology with occasional compromise.

Maulana Fazlur Rahman, head of the JUI, has tried to manage a balancing act by remaining active in parliamentary politics, alternately aligning himself with various political factions and claiming that he is the only one capable of dealing with the Taliban. According to American journalist Nicholas Schmidle, who interviewed him for the *New York Times*, "Rehman doesn't pretend to be a liberal; he wants to see Pakistan become a truly Islamic state. But the moral vigilantism and the proliferation of Taliban-inspired militias along the border with Afghanistan is not how he saw it happening."¹

Rehman claims that the Taliban have been driven to extremism "because of America's policies" and insists that he is trying to bring them back into the mainstream. Thus, he and others in the JUI do not see as inherently wrong the Taliban's policies against women and religious minorities or Shia Muslims. Their objection seems to be to their decision to continue fighting while the Pakistani state needs to protect itself by working with the world's sole superpower, the United States.

As a result, the JUI has become an influential political player with only a handful of seats in Pakistan's parliament. It was a coalition partner of the Islamist Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), which ruled Pakistan's northwest Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province from 2002-2008 and of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), which governed from 2008-2013. It contested the 2013 elections on the promise of "stabilizing the Islamic system in the country in accordance with the constitution."² After the election, it opted to join the government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif even though Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) has a clear majority in parliament and does not require coalition partners.³

A trickier ally of the Pakistani state among Islamist groups is the Wahhabi 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 (LeT)

became the military wing of Markaz al-Dawa wal-Irshad (Center for the Call to Righteousness) and has been officially banned for several years. The United States froze the organization's assets, saying that it had been involved in several acts of international terrorism. The November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India were also attributed to LeT.

Saeed now heads his organization with the name Jamaat-ud-Dawa (the Society for Preaching) from a large campus and training facility at Muridke, outside the Pakistan city of Lahore. Pakistani authorities have repeatedly refused to move against either Lashkar, which continues to operate in Kashmir, or Jamaat-ud-Dawa, which operates freely in Pakistan. In return, Saeed has urged Islamists to defend the Pakistani state and to spare it from terrorist attacks even if the state's policies appear to contradict the global Islamist agenda. LeT and Jamaat-ud-Dawa's policy seems to be to secure the support of the Pakistani state for organizational survival while limiting criticism of Pakistan.

The result is calibrated support for armed jihad, focused on fighting battles outside Pakistan first. In a recent speech, Saeed said that, "the Muslim Ummah is in a big problem right now with India, Israel and America using all their technological advancements against us and they are attacking Pakistan. The Muslim Ummah needs to reduce all the conspiracies of the disbelievers to dust. The problems in Burma, Kashmir, Palestine, and Afghanistan can only be resolved by making sacrifices in the battlefield."⁴

In January 2012, Jamaat-ud-Dawa joined several Islamist formations in the Difa-e-Pakistan Council (DPC, or the Defense of Pakistan Council), which was also joined by former ISI chief, Lt. General (ret.) Hamid Gul. The Council described its purpose as defending Pakistan against "Zionist" conspiracies. "It's the US desire to leave India in a position where it can dominate the region and serve the interests of Zionist Controlled world,"⁵ the DPC declared. It expressed support for Pakistan's armed forces and its hardline stance against India mirrored the views of the Pakistan deep state and the ISI.

Soon after the U.S. government posted a \$10 million reward in April 2012 for information leading to his successful prosecution, Saeed called on the people of Pakistan "to wage Jihad against America in order to save Pakistan and Islam. "Come to us. We will teach you the meaning of jihad... The time to fight has come." In a sermon ahead of Friday prayers in Lahore, he said that jihad had "caused the USSR to break and now America is failing because of it."⁶ But by June 2013, Saeed was focusing on his fatwa that described "extremist activities within Pakistan" as not being jihad. "Militant activities in Pakistan do not fall in the category of Jihad," he argued, appealing to "all jihadi organizations not to carry out attacks inside Pakistan." He claimed that America and India were benefiting from terrorist activities inside Pakistan. But he insisted that Muslims would have to "continue Jihad to maintain their freedom."⁷

These declarations of support for the Pakistani state have been accompanied by a hardline theological vision that rejects inter-faith dialogue and religious toleration and emphasizes Islamic exclusivity. In his speeches, Saeed continues to exhort Muslims to understand that Muslims must maintain a strict distinction from unbelievers. “It is the faith that distinguishes a Muslim from a Kafir [infidel],” he explains. “The real fault is that today’s Muslims, despite believing in Allah, commit the same errors that a Jew will commit, that a Christian will commit; the lacuna which exists in the faith of Hindus will be reflected among today’s Muslims too,” Saeed lamented.

The Jamaat-ud-Dawa leader recommends that Muslims “cut off from the Hindu, the Jew, the Crusader” so that “after the end of Jew-ism, after the end of Christianity, after the End of Obscenity... Islam will Rule the World.” Saeed reserves his greatest criticism for Hindus and advocates jihad against India. This makes him an ally of the Pakistani state, which for years has portrayed Hindu-majority India as an existential threat to Islamic Pakistan. According to Saeed, the Prophet Muhammad said those waging jihad in Hind (India) were “superior” to all other jihadists and “among the greatest martyrs.”

Like Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Afghan Taliban groups operating out of Pakistan have also been often at pains to draw distinctions between attacking Pakistan and targeting foreigners or unbelievers. The network of Afghan jihadis led by Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Siraj Haqqani are considered deadly enemies by the United States because of their frequent attacks on U.S. forces in Afghanistan. But the group maintains good ties with the Pakistani state. At one point, it went so far as to publicly demand that Pakistani Taliban should support peace deals in Pakistan’s tribal areas backed by Pakistani authorities.¹⁰

The main formation of Afghan Taliban, led by Mullah Mohammad Omar, also announced plans to oppose jihadi groups that attacked Pakistan’s military.¹¹ But the complex dynamic among jihadi groups resulted in multiple clarifications and denials that eventually led to the replacement of the Pakistani Taliban’s public face, spokesperson Ehsanullah Ehsan.¹² Pakistan’s government continues to work on arranging direct talks between the United States and the Afghan Taliban based in Pakistan.

Trying to Take Over the State

WHILE GROUPS SUCH AS JUI, JAMAAT-UD-DAWA/LASHKAR-E-TAIBA AND THE AFGHAN Taliban continue to work alongside the Pakistani state, other Islamists adhere to the original Islamist goal of incrementally capturing state power. Pakistan’s Jamaat-e-

Islami (Islamic Society) is closest in ideology and organizational methods to the Arab Muslim Brotherhood, with which it maintains ideological and cooperative links. Established by Abul Ala Maududi in 1947, it has operated over the decades as a political party, a social welfare organization, a pan-Islamic network and a sponsor of militant groups fighting in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

Jamaat-e-Islami received significant amounts of Saudi assistance until its leaders refused to support the Kingdom in the 1991 Gulf War. Jamaat-e-Islami leaders have since repaired their relations with the Saudis and support from private Saudi individuals continues to flow in to the group. But the Saudis have diverted support from Jamaat-e-Islami toward other Deobandi and Wahhabi groups since the 1990s, which reduced the Jamaat-e-Islami's standing as the dominant Islamist group in South Asia.

The Jamaat-e-Islami states its objective to be the establishment of "a Divine Government," which it defines as "that universal revolution in the individual and collective life of man which Islam calls for."¹³ Although it engages in politics it refuses to be identified solely as a political party. Jamaat-e-Islami's manifesto insists that it will "try to bring revolution and reformation through constitutional ways." It emphasizes molding of public opinion and categorically declares that it "will not implement its manifesto through underground movements; instead, it will do everything openly."¹⁴

The Jamaat-e-Islami has not always lived up to its claim of engaging in an open, constitutional struggle for an Islamic government replicating the Rashidun caliphate. It was accused in the Pakistani Supreme Court of receiving money from the ISI for its campaign for the 1990 elections, which the Court said had been influenced by the intelligence agency to block the PPP from winning. The Jamaat-e-Islami denied the charge even though former ISI officials confirmed the allegation.¹⁵ The covert funding did not improve the Jamaat-e-Islami's electoral performance significantly. The party's vote bank has remained consistently stagnant and it has never been able to win more than a handful of seats in parliament.

In recent years, Jamaat-e-Islami has aligned itself with other religious and political parties to secure a share in power in the northwest Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. It has taken a staunchly anti-American stance even though it was one of the major conduits of CIA funding for the Afghan Mujahideen during the 1980s. The group's strategy seems to be to increase its influence within Pakistani society by aligning with hyper-nationalists. Some of its members have gained influential positions within Sharif's PML-N and the Pakistan Tehrike-Insaf (Movement for Justice, PTI) of cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan.

Jamaat-e-Islami now acts as the unofficial arbiter of Pakistan's status as a nation founded on the grounds of its Islamic identity. The party's current Amir or President, Syed Munawwar Hasan, represents the second generation of Jamaat-e-Islamic cadres,

having joined it in the 1960s through its student wing, Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba. Hasan was once a communist and his early training is reflected in his “United Front” approach that characterizes the movement’s recent strategies. Jamaat-e-Islami leaders now speak of threats to Pakistan from the United States, Israel and India and call for the unity of “patriotic and religious parties.”¹⁶

Jamaat-e-Islami contested the May 2013 election with the scales of justice as its election symbol and with calls for re-establishing a state similar to the one led by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina.¹⁷ Its slogan, “Change of System is the hope of the nation,” was remarkably similar to that of Khan’s PTI. Jamaat-e-Islami’s manifesto claimed that it would end “US slavery to restore Pakistan’s independence and sovereignty,”¹⁸ and promised self-reliance against western-led globalization.

Jamaat-e-Islami’s tie-up with Khan has enabled it to translate its organizational capability into serious political influence, without actually having to win votes. Although Khan is portrayed in the west as an Oxford-educated former cricketer, in Pakistan he articulates views clearly influenced by Jamaat-e-Islami. During the election campaign, he spoke of jihad as “war for my freedom” and said that “Sharia is what makes us human.”¹⁹ According to Khan, “Sharia brings justice and humanity in society” and “it is the name of a welfare state.”²⁰ Khan’s PTI and Jamaat-e-Islami formed a coalition government in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa after the elections, enabling the Jamaat-e-Islami to put its “United Front” strategy into practice in government.

While the Jamaat-e-Islami seeks to take over the state through constitutional means and political stratagems, Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Islamic Liberation, HT) has an exactly opposite approach for establishing the caliphate. The movement, founded in 1953 by Palestinian Taqi-ud-Din Nabhani is legally banned in Pakistan but its members have been active in their covert struggle to transform Pakistan into the starting point for a global caliphate.²¹

According to HT’s ideology, “The Islamic countries are Muslim Lands that were divided by the agents of Kafir colonialists, as part of their plan to abolish the Khilafah. According to Sharia unifying them into one state is obligatory.”²² The movement targets Pakistan as a country that is particularly ripe for its vision of global Islamic revival. Its anti-western rhetoric and calls for abrogation of military cooperation with western powers have resonated with the harder-line anti-western sections within Pakistan’s military and intelligence services.

Hizb ut-Tahrir operates clandestinely and has been involved in several coup plots in other Muslim countries. In 2011, Pakistani authorities arrested Brigadier Ali Khan and four other officers for working with HT to establish an Islamic caliphate in Pakistan. Pakistani officials believe that HT is “often overlooked because it is not always visible and does not conform to stereotypes” and were surprised by its ability

to attract senior officers within the military.²³ HT was once linked to a plot to assassinate Pakistan's then-President, General Pervez Musharraf, and "has been persistently targeting Pakistan Army officials for enlisting" as members. It has made at least three known attempts to penetrate the Pakistani army.²⁴

Fighting the Pakistani State

JUST AS THE PAKISTANI STATE'S DICHOTOMOUS STANCE TOWARDS ISLAMIST GROUPS has resulted in its sponsorship and support of some groups, there are other Islamists who consider Pakistan's state apparatus as their principal target. While Americans see Pakistan's efforts against jihadi groups as inadequate, Al-Qaeda in Pakistan sees them as too much. According to Al-Qaeda's spokesperson for Pakistan, Ustad Ahmad Farooq, "If [there is] a force that is fundamentally responsible for throwing this entire region into bloodshed and war, it is the Pakistani army."²⁵

In an interview released by Al-Qaeda's media wing Al-Sahab, Farooq argued that the wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan were "inseparable." According to him, the division between Afghanistan and Pakistan was not natural and those who can understand jihad in Afghanistan against the Americans "should also be able to understand the jihad in Pakistan."

Al-Qaeda and its associated groups, including Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the virulently anti-Shia Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) have been responsible for several terrorist attacks inside Pakistan, including those on Pakistani army headquarters, several ISI buildings, the Mehran naval air station in Karachi and the Kamra Air Force base. It has been reported that former ISI functionary, Ilyas Kashmiri, leads what he calls the 313 Brigade as the operational arm of al-Qaeda.²⁶ He is often able to tap into Islamist sentiments within Pakistan's military and intelligence services for information that enables him to plan and conduct attacks on well-protected military facilities.

After the killing of Osama bin Laden by U.S. Navy SEALs in the Pakistani garrison city of Abbottabad, Al-Qaeda issued a video urging rebellion in the Pakistani army.²⁷

The video showed four TTP members recording their statements before their suicide attack in May 2011 on the Mehran Naval base in Karachi and described it as revenge for the killing of Osama bin Laden. One of the militants in the video said, "Everyone knows that the Pakistani Army was alongside the American army in the operation in which Sheikh Osama was martyred."

Although Al-Qaeda and its associated groups have been unequivocal in their opposition to the Pakistani state, the state has responded to their threat with equivocation. Pakistan's media often plays down attacks by these groups, especially the LeJ, as "sectarian terrorism," and every attack is followed by conspiracy theories linking attacks within Pakistan to Pakistan's external enemies. "Pakistan has been seemingly trying not to fight the terrorists attached to al Qaeda for various reasons and has been relying on other national hate objects like the US, India and Israel, to deflect attention,"²⁸ observed an editorial in the liberal *Express-Tribune* newspaper.

The Pakistani state's embrace of some extremist Islamists makes it difficult to create national consensus or even discipline within the military and intelligence services about fighting the terrorists. It is difficult for many Pakistanis to understand why Hafiz Saeed, who advocates terrorist attacks in the name of Islam, is a hero, while Osama bin Laden or Hakeemullah Mehsud, leader of the TTP, is not. Pakistan's national discourse encourages Islamists to wield influence disproportionate to their numbers. It also allows militant groups to organize, recruit, train and fight from Pakistani soil.

The Pakistani state lacks clarity in its approach to militant Islamism; Pakistan's politicians are often part of expedient political alignments with Islamist groups; and Pakistan's media allows Islamist views, including conspiracy theories, to prevail without allowing arguments against their beliefs to be amplified. As a result, Islamists with different strategies for acquiring political power continue to flourish in Pakistan while the writ of the state continues to weaken.

NOTES

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