



Extremist Islamist Terror and Subversion in South Asia

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In the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), 3,288 persons were killed in the year 2000, making this by far the bloodiest year since the beginning of the campaign of terror that seeks secession of the Muslim majority state from the Indian Union. Within India, Kashmir is perceived as a theater of a proxy war launched by Pakistan to secure the territories it has failed to seize through open warfare on three occasions in the past.¹ After the nuclear tests at Pokhran and Chagai in 1998, Western analysts saw it as a potential flashpoint for a nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan, and these fears were heightened during the “undeclared war” in the Kargil sector of J&K in 1999, when the Pakistani leadership issued veiled threats of an exercise of the “nuclear option.”² Increasingly, however, the international focus has been shifting to the burgeoning danger of extremist Islamic terrorism located in Pakistan and directed against India.

The tragic toll of life in Kashmir is certainly the most visible manifestation of the threat of extremist Islamist terrorism in the South Asian region at this juncture, but is far from an adequate

index of its magnitude. The danger is equally great, and perhaps more urgent within Pakistan itself, as it becomes increasingly uncertain whether its leadership is “master or victim”³ of the militant fundamentalism it fueled for its campaign against the Russian presence in Afghanistan through the 1980s, and continues to stoke in pursuit of its strategic ambitions in Kashmir. Ahmed Rashid notes the devastating potential of Pakistan’s flirtations with “fundamentalist” mass mobilization:

In the late 1990s the repercussions were much more pervasive, undermining all the institutions of the state . . . law and order broke down as Islamic militants enacted their own laws and a new breed of anti-Shia Islamic radicals, who were given sanctuary by the *Taliban*, killed hundreds of Pakistani Shias between 1996 and 1999. This sectarian bloodshed is now fueling a much wider rift between Pakistan’s *Sunni* majority and *Shi’a* minority and undermining relations between Pakistan and Iran. At the same time, over 80,000 Pakistani Islamic militants have trained and fought with the *Taliban* since 1994. They form a hard core of Islamic activists, ever ready to carry out a similar *Taliban*-style Islamic revolution in Pakistan.⁴

Out of this unstable vortex, the “warriors of (extremist) Islam,” the *mujahideen*, reach out into the fratricidal confrontations of the Balkans; into the new and volatile realities of Central Asia, and beyond, into the peripheries of China; from Pakistan, through Kashmir, into every theater of existing or emerging conflict across the Indian sub-continent; and far into southeast Asia — wherever “Muslim grievances” and “oppression” can be discovered or invented, and wherever there is violence to be exploited to further their encompassing vision of an all-conquering Islam.

Terror is at the heart of this vision, conceived by the ideologues of extremist Islam, not merely as a transient tactic, but as the essential objective of their “war to advance God’s purpose on earth.” Terror struck into the hearts of the enemies is not only a means; it is an end in itself. Once a condition of terror has been planted in the opponent’s heart, hardly anything is left to be achieved. It is the point where the means and the end meet and merge. Terror is not a

means of imposing decision upon the enemy [*sic*]; it is *the decision* we wish to impose upon him.⁵

Consequently, it is not surprising that the idea of a “geographical shift of the locus of terror from the Middle East to South Asia”⁶ is being increasingly and vigorously propounded, identifying Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir as the new loci and primary sources of extremist Islamic militancy. There are, however, some difficulties with this notion. The first and more obvious is the fact that there is no evidence of any sudden or abrupt “shift,” or a radical discontinuity in the situation at or around the time this thesis was propounded. Afghanistan’s spiral into chaos has been an inexorable fact for over a decade, as has Pakistan’s complicity and steady decline. Even a cursory glance at fatalities in Kashmir would confirm, moreover, that terrorism has been at comparable levels in this theater for over a decade.⁷

More significantly, however, it is dangerous to focus inordinately on the transient geographical location or concentrations of terrorist incidents, activities, and movements, to the exclusion of their ideological and material sources, their state sponsors, or their intended targets and proclaimed goals. The error here is the belief that the threat of Islamic terrorism is contained within the regions of its most visible manifestation. Extremist Islam must be recognized for its essential character as an ideology, and terrorism as a method that it accepts and justifies. A method will be adopted wherever it is perceived to have acceptable probabilities of success. An ideology extends wherever it has believers. These are the actual limits or foci of extremist Islamic terrorism.

A closer analysis would indicate that it is more accurate to speak of the *spread or expansion of the sphere of terrorism*, rather than any dramatic “shift.” Indeed, as terrorists and their state sponsors secure even limited successes in one region, their methods are adopted in others, threatening an ever-widening spectrum of nations and cultures. It is now increasingly clear that no nation in the world is entirely free of the threat from extremist Islamist terrorism — and this includes not only the affluent, or “decadent,” as the Islamist

would have it, West, but also Muslim majority “Islamic” nations that do not conform to the extremist Islamist’s notion of his faith and its practices. The extremist Islamist vision is not limited to its current sphere of militancy, or to the economic and political jockeying for control of Central Asia that some “Great Game” theorists believe, but to God’s “universal empire.” “The world is divided into opposing forces,”⁸ Altaf Gauhar insists, adding that, “there is no common ground between secularism and Islam.” Allah Buksh Brohi is even more explicit:

Many Western scholars have pointed their accusing fingers at some of the . . . verses in the *Qur’an* in order to contend that the world of Islam is in a state of perpetual struggle against the non-Muslims. As to them, it is sufficient answer to make, if one were to point out, that the defiance of God’s authority by one who is His slave exposes that slave to the risk of being held guilty of treason and such a one, in the perspective of Islamic law, is indeed to be treated as a sort of that cancerous growth on that organism of humanity, which has been created “Kanafsin Wahidatin” that is, like one, single, indivisible self. It thus becomes necessary to remove the cancerous mal-formation even if it be by surgical means (if it would not respond to other treatment), in order to save the rest of Humanity. . . . The idea of Ummah of Mohammad, the prophet of Islam, is incapable of being realized within the framework of territorial states, much less made an enduring basis of *viewing* the world as having been polarized between the *world of Islam* and *the world of war*. Islam, in my understanding, does not subscribe to the concept of the territorial state.⁹

The “surgical” removal of the “cancerous malformation” that is the non-Islamic world, is what the Islamist terrorists believe they are engaged in.

ISLAM IN SOUTH ASIA

South Asia comprises the largest concentration of Muslims in the world, with over 395 million people professing Islam as their

faith. Indeed, India has the second largest population of Muslims — after Indonesia — for any country: nearly 142 million.

| Countries | Population | Muslims | |
|------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | | Absolute Number | % of Population |
| Bangladesh | 129,194,224 | 114,078,499 | 88.3% |
| Bhutan | 2,005,222 | 100,261 | 5% |
| India | 1,014,003,817 | 141,960,534 | 14% |
| Nepal | 24,702,119 | 741,064 | 3% |
| Pakistan | 141,553,775 | 137,307,162 | 97% |
| Sri Lanka | 19,238,575 | 1,346,700 | 7% |
| Total | 1,330,697,732 | 395,534,220 | 29.72% |

*Total and Muslim populations of South Asian countries*¹⁰

As a region, South Asia has a long history, both of communal confrontation and violence, on the one hand, and of co-existence within an eclectic culture that has accepted differences, on the other. This dualism is ingrained in the unique and diverse set of practices and beliefs that comprise Indian Islam. There is, consequently, a clear note of caution that must be sounded here. There has been a long and widely acknowledged process of the demonization of Islam over the years — indeed, perhaps over the centuries. John Esposito rightly warns against “the temptation to view Islam through the prism of religious extremism and terrorism,” and identifies the “demonization of a great religious tradition due to the perverted actions of a minority of dissident and distorted voices” as “the real threat.”¹¹

The total strength of extremist Islamic terrorists in India would number a few thousand in a population of 142 million. The number of those who sympathize with their cause would certainly be many times greater, and those who are ambivalent in their responses could be a significant proportion of the total population. The fact, however, remains that even the sum of all these would only be a very small fraction of those who seek to live in peace, within the

culture of coexistence that has become the essence of the Indian *Weltanschauung*.

This is not the case with India alone. Even in Pakistan, the country marked by the most rabid and widespread extremism in this region, the constituency of militant Islam is small in proportion to the total population, and this has repeatedly been borne out in the occasional elections that have been held in that country between its extended periods of military rule. Despite decades of military patronage, a continuous flow of governmental and international funding, and a political discourse dominated by Islam, the electoral performance of religious “fundamentalist” political parties, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JEI), the *Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI) and the *Jamaat-e-Ulema Pakistan* (JUP), has been dismal. In 1988, they won 11 seats out of 207 in the National Assembly, claiming a mere 6.6 percent of the vote. In 1990, they slipped down to 10 seats, with 5.4 percent of the vote. In 1993, the Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF), headed by the JEI, bagged 3 seats, and electoral support for all religious parties was a bleak 3 percent. *The JEI and the JUP boycotted the 1997 elections, and two seats were returned in the National Assembly to the JUI (Fazlur Rahman faction) that participated.*

This said, it must also be emphasized in the strongest terms possible that moderate Islam is, today, under deep, penetrating, and sustained attack in every concentration of Muslim populations throughout south Asia, and there is a “hardening” of beliefs that may lend itself to the extremist *jihād* in an uncertain future. The demonization of Islam is loudly protested, both by neutral scholars and by the apologists for extremist Islam. But there is a neglect of an even more vicious process of the demonization of all other faiths and nations among the people of Islam — and this goes beyond the “Great Satan,” America, or the “Brahminical conspiracy” of “Hindustan,” or the visceral anti-Semitism of the Arabs, to embrace all *Kafirs* or non-Muslims, and also all Muslims who do not conform to the perverse vision of extremist Islam. There is a profound ideology of hatred that is being fervently propagated through the institutions of Islam, particularly the *madrassas* or religious schools and seminaries that are proliferating rapidly across South Asia, and it is winning many ardent converts. As stated before, these are still a minority among south Asia’s Muslims; but this is a vocal,

armed, well supported, extremely violent and growing minority. The majority, by contrast, has tended to passivity and conciliation, and there is little present evidence of the courage of conviction or the will for any moderate Islamic resistance to the rampage of extremist Islam.

THE WEB OF TERROR: EROSION AND ENCIRCLEMENT

The primary focus and target of the armies of *mujahideen*, and their suicidal hard core, the *fidayeen*, who pour out of the *madrassas* and Pakistani terrorist training camps, at present, is the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The leadership of the terrorist movement in J&K passed out of the hands of local militants, and to groups created by and based in Pakistan as far back as in 1993, when the most powerful terrorist group indigenous to the state, the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) led by Yasin Malik, chose to give up arms and seek a “political solution” to its grievances. The JKLF still demands Kashmiri “independence,” and is strongly opposed to any amalgamation with Pakistan. The Pakistan-based groups, quite naturally, are far more amenable to a merger with that country.

Terrorist groupings enjoyed substantial mass support, particularly in the Kashmir Valley,¹² as long as the movement for secession remained indigenous. Progressively, however, a process of disillusionment with the activities of Pakistan-sponsored militants has combined with exhaustion to diminish this base, and terrorism is now sustained purely on inputs — ideologies, material, and increasing numbers of men — from across the border. Currently, the most active terrorist groups in the state maintain headquarters in Pakistan, and include the *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen* (HuM),¹³ linked to the JEI in Pakistan; *Lashkar-e-Toiba* (LeT), the armed wing of the *Markaz-ad-Da`awa-wal-Irshad*; the *Harkat-ul-Jehad-e-Islami* (HuJI) and the *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen* (formerly the *Harkat-ul-Ansar*), linked to the JUI, the Pakistan *Tablighi Jamaat* and to the *Hizb-e-Islami* of Afghanistan; *al Badr*; and the recently formed *Jaish-e-Muhammad* (JeM). There are another score of minor and dormant groupings, also located in Pakistan. The umbrella *Mut-tahida Jihād* Council coordinates the activities of 13 of the most

prominent terrorist factions (14 till the HuM was expelled for declaring a brief unilateral cease-fire in July 2000).¹⁴

The years 1997, 1998, and the first half of 1999 had seen a gradual decline in violence and fatalities in J&K, but there was a radical escalation after the Kargil War of May–July 1999. The trends underwent a further deterioration after two cease-fires. The first was announced unilaterally by the Hizb-ul-Mujahiddeen in July 2000, and the second, again unilaterally, by the Indian Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, in November 2000. Also, the possibility of an emerging peace process threatened the entrenched interests and ideological ambitions of the extremist Islamist groups in Pakistan, and of their official sponsors there. A total of 26,226 persons have died in this conflict between 1988 and 2000. These include 10,285 civilians, 12,375 terrorists, and 2,566 security force (SF) personnel. Among the civilian fatalities, 8,712 (nearly 85 percent) have been Muslims.¹⁵

Significantly, the proportion of foreign mercenaries and *mu-jahideen* involved in the military activities in the state has been steadily rising, from a mere 6 percent in 1992 to an estimated 55 percent today.¹⁶ A majority of these are drawn from Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Also, some “Afghan Alumni”¹⁷ and terrorists from Afghanistan and at least 11 other countries have been identified in Kashmir. The number of foreign terrorists killed in J&K has risen steadily since 1991, when their activities were first noticed in the state, and particularly after 1993, when the main indigenous militant group, the JKLF, came overground.

The conflict in Kashmir has been substantially documented in the context of Pakistan’s strategy and “overriding interest . . . to achieve internal security by provoking instability among its neighbors.”¹⁸ There is, however, comparatively little understanding of the extremist or pan-Islamic agenda in the rest of South Asia, and of its integral links to the strategies and tactics that prepared the ground for terrorism in Kashmir.

As with much of South Asia, the culture and religious practices of the Muslims of Kashmir had little in common with the rigid and distorted version of *Wahabi* Islam emanating from Saudi Arabia that dominates contemporary extremist Islamists. Kashmiri Islam was steeped in the mysticism and values of the devotional *Sufi* order, and

the Kashmir Valley was viewed as a unique and inspirational example of secular values at the time of partition and independence, and in the decades that followed. The emergence of terrorism in the state was preceded by decades of religious mobilization and reorientation centered primarily in the mosques in the valley. When terror broke out in the late 1980s, it was the mosques and the *madrassas* that provided the motivation, the moral sanction, and the initial impetus, not only to the violence, but to the near complete ethnic cleansing of the valley of its Kashmiri *Pandit* minority.¹⁹ It is interesting that, among the priority targets of the terrorists was the network of secular schools, most of which were shut down under threats, especially in rural areas, progressively forcing the children into the only surviving “educational” institution, the *madrassa* or “schools of hate”²⁰ that created new “supply lines” for *jihad*.

There is, today, a sustained effort to replicate these processes of religious mobilization and an extremist Islamist reorientation throughout South Asia, albeit with mixed results. In India there have been several political factors and events contributing to higher levels of communal polarization. Nevertheless, general communal conflict as expressed in the incidence of communal riots has declined. Political parties are yet to abandon the electoral strategy of exploiting religious sentiments and insecurities, but the mass base and credibility of those who seek to do so has suffered steady erosion. Nevertheless, the intent and strategy of Pakistan’s covert agencies and extremist religious groupings is increasingly apparent in a wide range of activities intended to provoke communal confrontations, engineer terrorist incidents, and recruit soldiers for a pan-Islamic *jihad* in pockets of Muslim populations across India. This is compounded by a process of “encirclement” and massive demographic shifts that deepen the danger, particularly along India’s eastern borders.

During a three-day annual congregation of the members of the *Markaz-ad-Da’awa-wal-Irshad* at Muridke near Lahore on February 6, 2000, the *Amir* (head) of the *Markaz*, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, declared that Kashmir was a “gateway to capture India” and that it was the aim of the *Markaz* and its military wing, the *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, to engineer India’s disintegration. Saeed added that his organization’s campaign in Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)

and Junagadh (Gujarat) were among the highest priorities. Abdul Rahman Makki, the LeT's ideologue, expanded on this theme, proclaiming that the group had opened a new unit in Hyderabad to liberate the Indian city from "un-Islamic Indian rule."²¹ These declarations are, at once, an expression of the pan-Islamic ambitions shared by all extremist Islamist groups operating in the region, and a reiteration of Pakistan's larger strategy of destabilizing India beyond the scope of the supposed "core issue" of Kashmir.

Within this larger design was a series of 13 bomb blasts in various churches in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Goa between May and July 2000,²² executed by an obscure Islamic sect created in 1924, the *Deendar Anjuman*. The *Anjuman* is headed by Zia-ul-Hassan, the son of its founder, who is based in Peshawar, Pakistan, where the sect goes by the name *Anjuman Hizbullah*. Hassan is also said to have floated a militant organization, the *Jamat-e-Hizb-ul-Mujahideen* in Pakistan, in order to "capture India and spread Islam." Intelligence sources indicate that Hassan is bankrolled by the ISI, and the Indian Union Home Minister stated in Parliament that investigation had established the fact that linkages existed between the *Deendar Anjuman* and Pakistan's covert intelligence agency.²³ Investigations have exposed a network of the *Anjuman's* subversive activities extending across several small towns and urban centers, including Nuzvid, Atmakur, Kurukunda, Palem, Vijayawada, Khammam, and Nandyal in Andhra Pradesh; and Batakurki, Ramdurg, and Hubli in Karnataka.

On February 14, 1998, a series of 19 explosions left over 50 dead and more than 200 injured in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu.²⁴ While the *Al Umma* group, founded by S.A. Basha, investigations and subsequent arrests exposed the involvement of a wide network of extremist Islamist organization across South India, including the Indian Muslim, Mohammadi Mujahideen, the Tanzim, Islahul Muslimeen, the *Jihad* Committee in Tamil Nadu and the Islamic Sevak Sangh, subsequently banned and revived as the People's Democratic Party (PDP), headed by Abdul Nasser Madani. ISI agents, including Azam Ghauri (who was subsequently shot dead in an encounter with the police at Jagityal, Karimnagar District, Andhra Pradesh, on April 6, 2000), Saleem Junaid, Farooq Ahmed, and Mohammad Mansoor.

By far the most dramatic serial blasts engineered by the ISI took place in Bombay on March 12, 1993. They revealed a unique pattern of operation that has gradually consolidated itself over the years, namely, the use of organized criminal networks to execute terrorist strikes. Nearly 1,800 kilograms of RDX and a large number of detonators and small arms had been smuggled through the west coast of India prior to these blasts that killed over 300 persons and targeted critical commercial infrastructure, including the country's largest stock exchange at Dalal Street. The explosions were executed by the notorious D-Company headed by Dawood Ibrahim. Ibrahim now lives in Karachi, and runs India's largest criminal empire through aides located outside India, and primarily in the Middle East.²⁵

India's northeast is another interesting area of emerging Islamist militancy. In that area it has appeared along with major demographic shifts that hold significant dangers for the future. Illegal migration on a large scale across the border from Bangladesh is the most potent single factor in the destabilization of this region. In November 1998, the governor of Assam, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) S.K. Sinha, submitted a report to the Indian president in which this infiltration was estimated to encompass at least six million people. Most of this increase was concentrated in a few areas, thereby exerting a dramatic impact on local demography and, hence, on politics. According to the report, four districts of Assam — Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, and Hailakandi — had been transformed into Muslim majority districts by 1991 as a result of this mass infiltration. Another two districts — Nagaon and Karimganj — has had a Muslim majority since 1998 and yet another district, Morigaon, is fast approaching this position.²⁶ This demographic destabilization, combined with widespread violence and political instability in the region, has created a unique recruiting ground for the Islamists, and there has been a veritable efflorescence of Muslim terrorist groups operating along India's borders with Bangladesh in the northeast. In Assam alone, there are over 15 terrorist groups operating under an Islamic banner,²⁷ and the ISI's role in funding and arming these groups has now been fairly well documented.²⁸

Serial bombings and overt terrorist movements, however, cannot be a measure of the penetration that has been achieved by the extremist Islamists and their state sponsors. Large-scale acts of terror

represent the culmination of years of preparation that are reflected in motivation, mobilization, and organizational development. Evidence of these processes is mounting throughout India, and is reflected in the number of fundamentalist and of subversive groups that exist, and the geographical spread of their activities. The most prominent of these include the *Jamaat-e-Islami Hind* (JEI Hind), the All India *Milli* Council (AIMC), All India *Jihad* Committee (AIJC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP, formerly the Islamic *Sewak Sangh*), All India Muslim Federation (AIMF), Muslim United Front (MUF), *Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam* (TNMMK), National Development Front (*Kerala*), *Tabligh Jamaat*, Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), Students Islamic Organizations (SIO), *Al Umma*, *Al Jihad*, and the Muslim *Sena Sanghathan*, *Ikhwan-ul-Muslameen*, *Islami Inqalabi Mahaz*, *Tanzim Isla-ul-Muslameen*, and the Minorities United Front, among others.

Each of these organizations runs one or more non-governmental organization (NGO), many of which have offices abroad. Very substantial funds are received, and a range of interactions, including frequent “*Tablighi* conferences” with foreign delegations, are organized. The flow of funds is primarily through what is known as *hawala* (illegal) channels, and while Pakistan largely defines the patterns of use and the beneficiaries, the preponderance of such transfers originate in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman. Thus, very substantial transfers of foreign funds generated under the pretext of providing relief to the Coimbatore riot victims are believed to have been used for the Coimbatore blasts.

The range, volume, and persistence of such subversive activity throughout the country is a measure of Pakistan's tenacity and the intensity of the extremist Islamist vision more than it is of the impact these activities have had thus far on the larger Muslim community in India. The tragic loss of life, the wasted human and developmental resources, and the atmosphere of fear and suspicion that sporadic incidents of terrorism generate notwithstanding, India has the flexibility, the resilience, and the political space to absorb a significantly higher level of subversive and extremist Islamist activities than it has experienced thus far. Nevertheless, the sheer lethal quality of weaponry and explosives, the possibility of escalation to a new generation of chemical and biological weapons, and the

inherent uncertainty of the politics of a complex society characterized by immense religious and cultural diversity, make the existing risks and levels of activity unacceptable.

These risks are even greater and less acceptable in countries where such space is wanting, where political instability is at higher levels, and where the roots of democracy are yet to take firm hold of the soil. Islamist subversion is more of a threat to the peace and stability of the regime in neighboring Bangladesh, where religious extremism has emerged as a major threat to the prevailing political order and to internal security. There are grave and immediate dangers to peace and stability in Bangladesh: the revival of the activities of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, the return to Bangladesh and its politics of Pakistan-backed elements who collaborated closely with the genocidal campaign of 1971 in what was then East Pakistan,²⁹ the rising rhetoric of Islamic *Hukumat* (rule), and the deepening linkages between militant Bangladeshi groups and the extremist Islamists in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and West Asia. Here again, the pattern of funding, subversion, and mobilization through the mosque and the *madrassa* is clearly in evidence. Prior to independence, there were 1,467 *madrassas* in Bangladesh. Their number has currently risen to over 6,500, with more than 90,000 teachers and about 1.8 million students. A large number of these institutions have been established as a result of massive foreign aid, primarily from Gulf countries, and largely unmediated by official channels. Bangladesh's *madrassas* are the chief recruiting ground for Islamic militant groups, including several that are linked to Pakistan and also to Osama bin-Laden's *al-Qa'idah*. The latter category includes the *Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami*, which was established by Shawkat Osman, alias Sheikh Farid in 1992 with bin-Laden's backing, and which has an estimated strength of about 15,000. The *Harkat* maintains six camps in the hilly areas of Chittagong, where the cadres are given arms training. Several hundred recruits have also been trained in Afghanistan. The cadres, recruited mainly from among students of various *madrassas*, style themselves as the “Bangladeshi *Taliban*.” Reports suggest that religious fanatics supported by foreign aid are actively conspiring to establish “Islamic *hukumat*” by waging war and killing progressive intellectuals, as well as various minority groups and “heretical” sects, such as the *Ahmadiyahs*.³⁰

In addition to the JEI, the prominent fundamentalist Islamist political parties in Bangladesh include the Muslim League, *Tablighi Jamaat*, *Jamaat-e-Tulba*, and *Jamaat-ul-Muderessin*. One significant pro-Iranian group, the Islamic *Shasantantra Andolan* (Movement for Islamic Constitution), is also active. The subversive activities of the ISI and foreign extremist Islamist agencies in Bangladesh increased radically after Sheikh Hasina's broadly secular *Awami* League came to power in June 1996, and this has contributed to an upsurge in militant and fundamentalist political activity. Superimposed over a history of military coups, politics dominated by the rhetoric of Islam, and increasing international linkages, including networks with insurgent groups operating in India's northeast, extremist Islamic militancy constitutes the most serious existing internal security threat in Bangladesh.

The security agencies of the infant democracy of Nepal are also being challenged by rising extremist Islamist activity, despite the fact that Muslims constitute a bare three percent of the population. At the present time, these activities are aimed primarily against India, but they are linked with organized criminal operations. Moreover, the destabilization of pockets of Muslim concentrations in the Terai region bordering India are a cause of increasing concern for Kathmandu. A succession of recent reports has documented increased activities of the ISI and by the Pakistan embassy in Kathmandu. Again, these activities involve strong organized criminal networks and prominent political leaders who target India and reinforce the Islamist agenda within Nepal.³¹ The Muslim pockets of the Terai, especially Bardiya, Banke, Rupendehi, and the Parsa-Morang belt have seen increasing "*Tablighi*" activities, and the construction of mosques and *madrassas* with financial flows from Pakistan, often coming directly from the embassy in Kathmandu, from Saudi Arabia and from a range of pan-Islamic organizations. Over the past two decades, more than 275 mosques and *madrassas* have been built in the four districts of Rupandehi, Banke, Kapilvastu, and Bardiya alone. There are some 15 major *tablighi*/fundamentalist organizations in Nepal, and at least five of these are well within the ambit of Pakistan's influence and control. These include the *Jamaat-e-Millat-e-Islamia*; the Nepal Islamic *Yuba Sangh*; the Nepal Muslim League; the Nepal Muslim *Ekta Sangh*; and the Democratic

Muslim Welfare Association. Nepal is, consequently, emerging as an important "staging post" for Pakistan's strategy of erosion and encirclement against India, and is increasingly the preferred route for terrorist movements to various areas of low-intensity conflict in J&K and the northeast.

In Sri Lanka, the Muslim community and emerging fundamentalist forces have generally aligned themselves with the interests of the government. The island nation's Muslim population is mainly Tamil, but has been driven out of the ethnically cleansed northern areas controlled by the Liberation Tigers of *Tamil Eelam* (LTTE), and is now concentrated along the eastern coast, the northwest coast, Kandy, and suburban Colombo. Islamic fundamentalist mobilization in Sri Lanka began after a succession of attacks on the Muslims by the LTTE in the early 1990s, after which the government decided to arm the Muslim youth for self defense. The conflict between Hindu and Muslim *Tamils* resulted in the polarization of mindsets on the issue of religious identity. There are, today, nearly a dozen Muslim fundamentalist organizations in Sri Lanka which are funded by foreign countries, primarily Saudi Arabia, with at least two political parties drawing significant support from Iran.

THE EXTREMIST ISLAMIST *INTERNATIONALE*

The threat of extremist Islamist terror in south Asia must be estimated, not just in terms of visible violence and subversion, but the unique and lethal mix of a virulent and vigorously propagated ideology; international and state support and sponsorship; the movement of experienced cadres across theatres that span the entire world; and the access to and destructive potential of contemporary weapons and information technologies. Pakistan's experience and the Afghan war have given rise to "a kind of Islamic "*internationale*" through the recruitment of volunteers throughout the Muslim world" and "a global network of radical Muslim terrorists."³² Among these are the experienced and ideologically motivated Arab Afghans, with their roots in west Asia.³³ South Asia is, moreover, awash with small arms and lethal explosives.³⁴ The recovery of gas masks from bunkers held by Pakistani forces and irregulars during the Kargil War,³⁵ and recent reports regarding Osama bin-Laden's

intent to use chemical weapons,³⁶ suggest that extremist Islamic forces and their state sponsors are, at least, evaluating the possibility and impact of the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in their low-intensity wars in various countries.

It is not necessary to belabor the obvious point that there are “many Islams,” and that the adherents of the murderous mix of religion and terror are only a small fraction of Muslims in the world. There is, however, a difficulty that needs to be confronted, namely, the separation of legitimate religious, educational, and charitable activity by Islamic religious institutions, including the *madrassas*, from overt or covert support to terrorism and a militant Islamist agenda. This difficulty is enormously compounded by the ideological continuity among those who currently propagate the dogmas of Islamist extremism from the fringes of Europe through Asia and Africa, as well as by the continuity of sources of finance and support through every theatre of Islamist terrorism and “fundamentalist” subversion in the world. The continued absence of intense cooperation in documentation and sharing of intelligence, and the containment of terrorist funds, movement, and activities among nations who have a stake in defeating terrorism across all existing barriers of suspicion and narrow “interests of state,” it is not clear how this challenge can be met.

Endnotes

- 1 1947–48, 1965, and 1971.
- 2 On May 31, 1999, for instance, the Pakistani foreign secretary, Shamshad Ahmad warned, “We will not hesitate to use any weapon in our arsenal to defend our territorial integrity.” Given the overt nuclearization of Pakistan in May 1998, this threat had obvious connotations. “Any Weapon Will Be Used, Threatens Pak,” *Hindu*, June 1, 1999, citing an interview in *News/Jang* newspapers.
- 3 Also see “Master or Victim: Pakistan’s Afghan War,” in Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), p. 183–195. Jessica Stern refers to this as a typical “principal-agent” problem, observing that the interests of the state (principal) and those of the militant groups (the agent) are not fully aligned. See “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture,” *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 2000, at <<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/issues/0011/stern.html>>.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 194.
- 5 Brig. S.K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War* (New Delhi: Himalayan Books, 1986), p. 59.

- 6 Ambassador Michael A. Sheehan, Coordinator for Counter-terrorism, U.S. Department of State, Statement for the Record Before the House International Relations Committee, July 12, 2000, <<http://www.usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/00071702.htm>>. Ambassador Sheehan was echoing Secretary of State Madeline Albright’s earlier statement (of May 1, 2000) that there had been an “eastward shift in terrorism’s center of gravity” toward south Asia.
- 7 Total Fatalities: 1990 – 1177; 1991 – 1393; 1992 – 1909; 1993 – 2567; 1994 – 2899; 1995 – 2795; 1996 – 2903; 1997 – 2372; 1998 – 2261; 1999 – 2538; 2000 – 3288. Source: <www.satp.org>.
- 8 Altaf Gauhar, *The Challenge of Islam* (London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1978), p. 309.
- 9 Allah Buksh K. Brohi, Preface, in Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War*, p. xix–xx
- 10 Estimated figures in the *CIA World Factbook 2000*, <<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/indexgeo.html#t>>.
- 11 John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 12 The state of J&K comprises a total area of 152,298 square kilometers, with a population of 6,815,000. It is divided into three regions: the Muslim majority Kashmir region (HQ Srinagar), with an area of 15,898 square kilometers and a population of 3,977,000; the Hindu majority Jammu region (HQ Jammu), with an area of 26,293 square kilometers and a population of 2,538,000; and the Buddhist majority Ladakh region (HQ Leh), with a population of 300,000, <www.jammukashmir.nic.in>.
- 13 The Hizb has recently reduced its operation, first after its own unilateral cease-fire of July 2000, and subsequently after the Indian prime minister’s declaration of cease-fire. The Hizb is the largest terrorist group in J&K, and is dominated by “local” cadres. The other groups are primarily drawn from Pakistani and other foreign elements.
- 14 Data about, and analysis of, Kashmir are primarily based on research and documentation at the Institute for Conflict Management and the South Asia Terrorism Portal, <www.satp.org>.
- 15 Up to December 31, 2000. The data are based on the South Asia Terrorism Portal’s compilations from official and media sources in India, <www.satp.org>.
- 16 The proportion of foreigners among the *active* militants would be higher, as much as 75 percent, since the Hizb reduced its operations.
- 17 Shaul Shay and Yoram Schweitzer, “The ‘Afghan Alumni’ Terrorism: Islamic Militants Against the Rest of the World,” *ICT Papers*, The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, Herzilya, September 2000, Volume 6.
- 18 Mark Husband, *Warriors of the Prophet: The Struggle for Islam* (Colorado & Oxford: Westview Press, 1999), p. 9. Also see Manoj Joshi, *The Lost Rebellion: Kashmir in the Nineties* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999); Tavleen Singh, *Kashmir: A Tragedy of Errors* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996).

- 19 Over 400,000 Kashmiri Pandits, out of an original population in the Kashmir Valley of 425,000 prior to 1989, continue to be displaced. Official records indicate that some 216,820 of them live as migrants in makeshift camps in Jammu, another 143,000 in Delhi, and thousands of others are now dispersed across the country. Many of those registered at the camps have also been dispersed according to the exigencies of employment and opportunities for education, trade, or business. There has been little effort to facilitate their return to the valley in recent years. Earlier attempts were neutralized by brutal campaigns of selective murder, including the killing of seven Pandits at Sangrama in Budgam district in March 1997, three at Gul in Udhampur district in June 1997, 26 in the massacre at Wandhama in Srinagar district in January 1998, and 26 at Prankote in Udhampur district in April 1998. The possibility of reversing the terrorists' ethnic cleansing of the valley remains remote, and there are now reports of a hidden migration from some of the border areas in the Jammu region where the Hindus are a minority, <www.satp.org>.
- 20 Jessica Stern, op. cit. ????????
- 21 Praveen Swami, "The 'Liberation' of Hyderabad," *Frontline*, vol. 17, issue 10, May 13–26, 2000, <www.frontline.com/fl/1710/17100390.htm>.
- 22 "Church Blast Cases Busted; 15 Arrested," <indiainfo.com>, July 17, 2000, <http://news.indiainfo.com/2000/07/17/blast.html>.
- 23 "Centre May Consider Ban on ISI-Backed Deendar Anjuman," New Delhi, *Indian Express*, August 4, 2000.
- 24 "30 Killed as Serial Blasts Rock Coimbatore," <http://www.indiaserver.com/thehindu/1998/02/15/front.htm#Story1>; "Panic Following Blasts," <http://www.indiaserver.com/thehindu/1998/02/15/thb02.htm#Story2>; "Union Home Ministry Reviews Situation," <http://www.indiaserver.com/thehindu/1998/02/16/thb01.htm#Story5>; "Six Extremists Die in Coimbatore Blasts, Toll 44," <http://www.indiaserver.com/thehindu/1998/02/16/thb02.htm#Story1>; "Arrests Throughout the State," <http://www.indiaserver.com/thehindu/1998/02/16/thb02.htm#Story2>.
- 25 See Ghulam Hasnain, "At Home in Exile," *Outlook*, New Delhi, November 20, 2000, also available at <www.outlookindia.com>, p. 30–38.
- 26 "Report on Illegal Migration into Assam Submitted to the President of India by the Governor of Assam, November 8, 1998," <http://www.satp.org/India/Documents/Assam_Illegal Migration into Assam.htm>.
- 27 <http://www.satp.org/India/Assam/Terrorist Outfits/Terrorist Groups_Assam.htm>.
- 28 "ISI Activities in Assam: Statement Laid on the Table of the House of Assam Legislative Assembly Under Item No. 12, Dated April 6, 2000, by Shri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Chief Minister, Assam," <http://www.satp.org/India/Documents/Assam_ISI Activities in Assam.htm>.
- 29 In July 2000, for instance, the Bangladesh president, Sheikh Hasina, spoke out strongly against the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and its leader, Prof. Gholam Azam, after the murder of seven student leaders by the student wing of the JEI, the

- Islami Chattra Shibir*. Haroon Habib, "Hasina Declares War on Jamaat," New Delhi, *Hindu*, July 25, 2000.
- 30 "Bangladesh Assessment 2000," South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/Bangladesh/Assessment Bangladesh.htm>.
- 31 "ISI in Nepal: Guest of Dishonour," <http://www.india-today.com/today/20000117/nation4.html>; "Nepal was one of the most important hubs for the ISI as far back as 1990," <http://india-today.com/ntoday/extra/isi_rep/interview1.html>; "Terrorism: The Kathmandu Nexus," <http://www.india-today.com/itoday/20000612/nation2.html>.
- 32 Schweitzer and Shay, "The 'Afghan Alumni' Terrorism: Islamic Militants Against the Rest of the World," *ICT Papers*, p. 19.
- 33 Rashid, Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia, p. 128–140.
- 34 According to estimates, some 3.5 million small arms are currently available for various conflicts in this region. Thousands of kilos of sophisticated explosives, mainly RDX and PETN, are routinely recovered each year from terrorist and criminal groups, and thousands of kilos of these explosives are actually used in the unnumbered incidents that take place across south Asia. Recoveries by state forces now include ballistic missiles.
- 35 Brahma Chellaney, "Sign and Violate," *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, September 8, 1999.
- 36 "Bin-Laden Seeking Chemical, N-Arms: CIA," *Times of India*, New Delhi, February 3, 2000.