

Radical Influences in Institutional Structures and Armed Forces in the Region: An Assessment

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This paper is an examination of the complex challenges posed by the presence of radicalised elements in the state institutions that are, otherwise, expected to play a critical role in any effective, long-term counter-terrorism strategy.

The primary reason for such an inquiry is that the existence, even if miniscule, of radicalised elements or sympathisers of extremist groups in the civilian and military institutions in South Asia (arguably the epicentre of transnational terrorism) could seriously undermine any counter-terrorism (CT) strategy which is based, largely, on the presumption that the state's interests would be contiguous to the interest of the larger international community, and that it is both willing and capable of addressing the challenges.

There are a few additional provocations for this inquiry which must be stated beforehand. Although it is quite well known that terrorist groups cannot either exist or grow without the tacit or open support of the state or its people, the policy-makers in the West have so far remained largely shy of addressing the possibility that they are working with just such a duplicitous ally. This has quite often resulted in forfeiting long-term gains for short-term victories as even a cursory scrutiny of the Global War on Terror would reveal.

Another factor, often quite critical but least understood, is the support the terrorist groups have in the civil society, either by way of ideological affinity or through social welfare organisations like schools and charity. In most cases, both these factors play a major role in helping extremist and terrorist groups grow deep roots within the society which offer an extraordinary level of immunity from punitive actions.

Complexities of State Support

The state can be broadly categorised as the civilian institutions of governance and the armed forces. The civilian institutions can be further sub-divided as the legislature, bureaucracy and non-combatant security forces. The support for terrorist groups, their ideologies and objectives among these constituents of a sovereign state could take the form of a sponsor, enabler and cooperator. Whatever might be the size and shape of support, the partnership is almost always driven by a strategic impulse. The madness is not without a method.

What really undermines any attempt, regional or global, to cut this umbilical cord of terrorism is often the blurred distinction between overt and covert support, particularly in the case of Pakistan, where it has created a parallel security and intelligence structure to initiate proxy wars to achieve certain openly stated strategic objectives, even as it maintains an overall cloak of deniability. Such a configuration of non-state actors is not in the real sense ‘non-state’; they are actually ‘para-state’ actors who do not exist legally and, hence, require an altogether different approach to counter their influence and activities.

What muddies the water further in this context is a set of new actors on the scene – ‘lone wolves’ like Faisal Shahzad¹ or individual terrorist leaders who operate more like ‘*jihadis* for hire’. These individuals are quite different from groups like Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT), which have a clear pecking order, agenda and operational principles and strategies and, of course, fairly well endowed training and recruitment infrastructures. These ‘freelancers’, Illyas Kashmiri for instance, have had a state connection at some point of time, but had broken away

to operate autonomously, switching their loyalties and ideologies back and forth.²

Having laid out the overall context in which we can discuss the issue of radicalisation among the constituents of a legitimate state, a deeper probe of the individual constituents of the state would offer a better understanding of the problem itself.

Extremist Persuasions

Religion has always played a critical role in the region, shaping cultures and attitudes over centuries. Religion even today is a fundamental *raison d'être* for the countries in South Asia. Although there is considerable space given to secularism, like in India, by and large, such discourses have so far been confined to the select elite groups. Although the founding fathers of independent India and Pakistan – Muhammad Ali Jinnah, M. K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru *et al* – were not exactly religious fundamentalists, they were acutely aware of the religious proclivities of the divided people. Despite the presence of such enlightened leadership, the assassination of Gandhi by a Hindu radical in 1948 and the anti-Ahmeddiya riots of 1953 in Lahore and other parts of Punjab in Pakistan brought to the fore the presence and influence of radical elements in the polity of both the newly independent nations.

In Pakistan, the radical elements had considerable success in the formative years largely because of the early death of Jinnah (1948) and the failure of successive political leaders to bring together a sense of coherence and commitment to nation-building. Although religious parties like Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), with an overt radical agenda, struggled to usurp the political space, it was the overweening ambition of the Pakistan Army which propelled the radicalisation process. The failure of the civilian government to quell the anti-Ahmeddiya riots in 1953 brought the Army to the centre-stage of politics, with General Ayub Khan taking over the reins of Pakistan through a coup in 1958. The event also marked the beginning of radicalisation of the society in Pakistan.³

Since then, both the Army and the religious parties have had an abiding influence on the political life of Pakistan, encouraging radicalism in state structures with certain common as well as divergent objectives. The growth and wider acceptance of religious parties like the JI and its offshoots in Pakistan could provide important clues about this phenomenon in the region.

Jamaat-e-Islami and its Influence

Of the 58 religious political parties in existence since Pakistan's birth, the two most powerful ones are Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), led by Qazi Hussain Ahmed (till recently) and its splinter group, Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman (JUI-F).

The JI-Pakistan Army alliance began in the late 60s when Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan raised the banner of revolt. The Army leadership sought the help of JI in launching a brutal campaign against the Bengali intellectual and political leadership. The religious party created two of its first militant organisations, Al Badr and Al Shams, to confront the Mukti Bahini, an armed secessionist group which campaigned to free the eastern wing of Pakistan.⁴ It was a significant change for JI, which had preferred *dawa* to violence till then. The JI's active role in East Pakistan made it the Army's preferred choice as an effective instrument for covert military campaigns.

This new-found role, and utility, made JI the preferred choice of outsourcing terror when the US and its allies sought out President Zia-ul Haq to evict the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The recruits to the holy war came from JI-run *madrassas* across the country. One of the prominent *madrassas* that took part in the *jihad* was Dar-ul Uloom Haqqania at Akhora Khattak, in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), headed by Maulana Samiul-Haq, chief of another JI splinter group, and friend and teacher of a large number of the Taliban leadership. Throughout the 1980s, when the call for *jihad* in Afghan went far and wide, terrorist recruits of various nationalities – Palestine, Bangladesh, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Africa – reached JI safe-houses in Karachi en route to the training camps of

Khost and Khaldan in Afghanistan run by Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.⁵

The first Pakistani *jihadi* martyr in Afghanistan was Imran Shaheed, an undergraduate at a government college in Karachi and an active member of the JI's student wing, Islami Jamiat Tulaba (IJT).⁶ The group ran a systematic campaign to mobilise public opinion for the Afghan *jihad* and took part in militant activities with full zeal, producing 72 'martyrs' between 1980 and 1990. In fact, outside the IJT office in Lahore, a large billboard once listed the names of hundreds of 'martyrs'.

The JI's close relations with the Pakistan Army and intelligence agencies facilitated its enormous growth during the Afghan *jihad*.⁷ It was able to expand its infrastructure and activities with generous contributions from the government and private individuals in the Gulf states in return for hosting Arab and other Mujahideen in Pakistan. JI cadres, including those in IJT, benefited from training with foreign fighters. This association helped JI, with over 100 *madrassas* in Punjab and other provinces, to establish ties with Islamist groups throughout the world.

Institutional Subversion

A matter of greater concern has been the radical group's infiltration of the civilian and military institutions of the country. For half-a-century, the JI and its student wing have been active in Sindh and Punjab, particularly in the universities, from where the majority of the civilian and military officers and cadres were recruited. The possibility of JI and its radical ideologies gaining some level of acceptance among the civilian leadership, therefore, cannot be entirely discounted. Scholars like Syed Vali Nasr have pointed out that JI members and sympathisers recruited into government service have managed to find their way to key Ministries like Finance and Foreign Affairs.⁸

This 'radical infiltration' has been prompted by the systematic weakening of the bureaucracy by both the civilian and military leadership over the years, as well as through the lateral induction of an increasing number of military officials to key bureaucratic positions in

the government. In fact, President Zia-ul Haq's administrative reforms attempted to redefine the ideological orientation of the civil servant by introducing measures like a uniform dress code and prayer breaks during office hours.⁹ So successful had been JI in infiltrating the policy-makers that General Zia-ul Haq's Islamisation programme was based on the blueprint drafted by JI founder, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi¹⁰ (*The Islamic Law and Constitution*, Islamic Publication, Lahore, 1954).

Several JI members today occupy high positions in other mainstream political parties like the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). For instance, a senior leader of PML-N, Javed Hashmi, was elected as the president of the Punjab University Students Union on an IJT ticket.¹¹ Interestingly, one of the main campaign leaders for Hashmi was LeT chief Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, who was then an IJT *nazim* or director. The JI's tie-up with PML-N in 1988 to form the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI)¹² to defeat Benazir Bhutto, at the instance of the Pakistan Army, further strengthened the party's hold over the political space.

Although JI on its own has not been able to capture political power, it has been quite successful in influencing policies and attitudes of not only military rulers like Zia-ul Haq and Pervez Musharraf, but also those of PML-N and Pakistan People's Party (PPP). For instance, PPP founder Zulfikar Ali Bhutto chose religious symbols and themes like "Islam our Faith, Democracy our Polity and Socialism our Economy" to strengthen his hold over the electorate.¹³ Bhutto championed Islamisation of the military in many ways – he allowed officers to keep beards, banned alcohol from military messes and changed the weekly holiday from Sunday to Friday.¹⁴ It was Bhutto who picked up an obscure and obscurantist General, Zia-ul Haq, to become his Chief of Army Staff. Nawaz Sharif, once he came to power for the first time in 1990, decided to follow the JI-line of transforming Pakistan into an Islamic state and introduced the *Shariah* Bill or the 15th Amendment in May 1991 which sought to make the *Shariah* the supreme law in Pakistan.¹⁵ Sharif's reported meeting with Osama bin Laden only strengthened his radical leanings. Although Benazir Bhutto projected a more liberal image in comparison to Sharif, she

could not remain free of the influences of the JI-Army combine in promoting the Kashmir *jihad*.

The Bangladesh Case

The JI had a far more impressive gain in Bangladesh where it managed to usurp considerable political space despite the initial loss of face and influence, following the secession of East Pakistan. It is today the third largest political party, with enormous clout in rural Bangladesh. In fact, like in the case of Pakistan, the radicalisation of politics and bureaucracy in Bangladesh can be studied by tracing JI's fortunes.

JI began asserting itself as a political force after the assassination of the first Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, and his family in 1975. General Zia-ur Rahman, who came to power in the first coup actively promoted Islamisation of the political institutions.¹⁶ A little more than a decade later, President H.M. Ershad, another General who took over power through a coup in 1982, made Islam the state religion, strengthening the hold of radical groups like JI on the political life of Bangladesh.

These groups also gained considerably from the bitter feud between the two main political parties, Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Both the parties have been courting JI to settle political scores. The BNP even partnered with JI to run a government between 2001 and 2006.¹⁷ The Awami League, which claims to be more secular of the two, had, in 2006, allied with a radical group, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish (BKM), which sought ministerial berths for five of its nominees, two of them members of Harkat-ul Jihad al Islami (HuJI). The alliance, however, fell apart because of strong opposition from within the Awami League.

The JI-BNP combine had its own set of *jihadis* in the stable – Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), who called themselves “soldiers of Allah.” The two leaders of the group, Shaykh Abdur Rahman and Sidiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai, who were executed in 2007,¹⁸ were active JI members and had the support of some senior BNP Ministers. In fact, a BNP parliamentarian, Abu Hena, accused Telecommunication Minister

Aminul Haque and two other Ministers of patronising the terrorist group. Hena was expelled from the party for raising the allegations. HuJI leader Mufi Hannan told a Dhaka court in October 2005 that former Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury had assured him of safe shelter in the country. In fact, Hannan's mercy petition was recommended by the State Minister for Water, Gautam Chakraborty.

Investigations into a conspiracy to assassinate the Awami League chief and the present Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, in 2004, revealed the deep alliances the political parties like BNP and JI had developed with militant and terrorist groups in Bangladesh.¹⁹ Among those who took part in the planning of the attack were State Minister for Home Lutfozaman Babar, Deputy Minister Abdul Salam Pintu, Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury, a top JI leader, two HuJI founders and one leader of Al Markajul Islami. Pintu's brother Moulana Tajuddin²⁰ was a member of LeT's Bangladesh chapter.

The conspiracy also laid bare the extent to which not only the political leadership was influenced by radical groups, but also the police and bureaucracy. Senior Home Ministry, intelligence and police officials, working under Babar, went about destroying evidence and blaming the attack on a criminal gang. In fact, more than 20 people were arrested for the attack that killed 23 on August 21, 2004. Even the one-man inquiry commission by a serving judge blamed the attack on a "foreign country". So blatant was the manipulation that an alleged confession by a criminal, Joj Miah, was made public to press home the point that the attack was the handiwork of a criminal gang. One of the police officers, it was later discovered, paid Taka 2,000 a month to Joj Miah's family during his detention. Some of the senior police officers, including a Deputy Inspector General and an Inspector General of Police involved in manipulating the investigations, are currently under investigation.²¹

Another intriguing militant-politician link in Bangladesh can be traced to a senior BNP leader, Tarique Rehman, whose links with JMB leaders were well-known. Rahman is former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's son. In 2005, Rahman visited the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) headquarters and the Pentagon along with National Security

Intelligence Chief Major General Rezzaqul Haider Chowdhury.²² The details of the meeting are still secret. What is public knowledge is that Chowdhury and Rahman had also visited Dubai to meet with the criminal don, Dawood Ibrahim, in March 2006. General Chowdhury is today under detention for his involvement in another case which has left no doubt about the nexus between the civilian and military leadership with criminal and terrorist groups – the Chittagong arms case.²³

In April 2004, weapons worth \$6 million,²⁴ including rocket launchers, grenade launchers, rockets and ammunition, were seized from 10 trucks. The weapons, loaded on to the trucks under the command of BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury from two fishing trawlers, were meant for militant groups like the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) operating in the northeastern parts of India. The arms transfer was facilitated by the Directorate General of Field Intelligence and National Security Intelligence.

Besides the National Security Intelligence Chief Major General Rezzaqul Haider Chowdhury, his Director General (DG) Brigadier General Abdur Rahim and National Security Intelligence Director, Wing Commander Shahbuddin Ahmed, were arrested in the case. Shahbuddin later said the arms consignment was funded by a Dubai-based firm, the Abdul Razzaq Yaqoob (ARY) Group. He said Rahim had a meeting with ARY Managing Director, Salman Yousuf Rahman, at a safe house in Dhaka in 2003 where ULFA leader Paresh Barua, along with a staffer from the Pakistan High Commission, was present. Another person who attended the meeting was senior BNP leader Tariq Rahman. The BNP government's role in the arms transfer could be gauged from the fact that it asked Brigadier Rezzaqul Haider Chowdhury to investigate the case who, a year after the case, was promoted as Major General.

Both Chowdhury and Shahbuddin said the arms were funded by the ARY Group as well as the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka. They said they were in touch with two Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officers in the High Commission, Brigadier Mogisuddin and Colonel Shahed Mahmud. Wing Commander Shahbuddin said he had met ISI officials²⁵ in London to discuss a payment of 2.5 crore Takas to buy mobile phone bugging devices.

Among the ISI officials was one Colonel Abdus Salam, who happened to be a relative of National Security Intelligence DG Rahim.

The Chittagong arms investigation has also exposed the role of the top civilian leadership in Bangladesh. Besides the Minister of State for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar, Home Secretary Omar Faruque, Industry Secretary Nurul Amin, Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited Managing Director Mohsin Talukdar, General Manager Enamul Haq, Deputy Police Commissioner of Chittagong Port Abdullah Hel Baki²⁶ are being questioned for their involvement.

To complete the incestuous nexus, which both the Chittagong arms haul and the August 2004 bomb blasts clearly underlined, was the involvement of JI *Ameer* or Chief Matiur Rahman Nizami in the arms case. Nizami was the Industry Minister in the BNP-JI government and was aware of the arms consignment. In fact, the weapons were released by the local police on the directions of the Industry Minister.

Pakistan Army and Terrorism

One of the most powerful institutions in the region, the Pakistan Army also happens to be perhaps the most radicalised of them all. In fact, it would not be wrong to believe that the birth and rise of *jihadi* ideology and groups would have been stillborn but for the Pakistan Army, which found in Islam a strategic instrument to unite disparate elements of the state during the early years of Pakistan's history.

It was Colonel Akbar Khan, Military Secretary to Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan, who first invoked the spirit of *jihad* and gathered tribesmen from the Mehsud and Waziri tribal strongholds in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) (the same set of tribesmen now fighting the Pakistan Army) to launch an 'irregular war' to free Kashmir from India within months of independence.²⁷ Those Mehsuds and Waziris, who were stopped short of Srinagar by the Indian armed forces, could be, perhaps, called the first set of non-state actors created by the Pakistan Army.

The 1953 anti-Ahmeddiya riots benefited the Army more than JI as it culminated in the first coup and takeover of the government by

General Ayub Khan.²⁸ Though Ayub kept groups like JI at arm's length, he was not shy of using religious symbols and clarion calls to encourage his officers and troops in the battlefield. During the 1965 War, (Field Marshal) Ayub Khan, in a broadcast to the nation, invoked the *Kalima-e-Tayyeba* "to project the war as a virtual *jihad*: a conflict between Islam and *Kufr*".²⁹ This was the first time that the *jihadi* theme found a place in a soldier's vocabulary.

As Ayub struggled with a litany of failures, first the war and then the economy, JI took to the streets against his "modernist religious policies", adding to his woes and finally forcing him to hand over the reins to another Pathan officer, Yahya Khan. Like his predecessor, Yahya was also not enamoured of JI and its ideological persuasions either. One of his senior officers, Major General Sher Ali Khan, was of a different mould though; he was a strong JI supporter.³⁰

So when Sher Ali Khan, after his retirement, was appointed by Yahya Khan as the Minister of Information and National Affairs, he took it upon himself to work for the glory of Islam. He persuaded the Army to recruit 'volunteers' from JI and its student wing, IJT to fight the Bengali insurgency in East Pakistan.³¹ A large number of these 'volunteers' were drawn from IJT cadres from Punjab University and were well-educated; these men were trained by the Army to crush secessionists – political leaders, journalists, artists, writers, activists and judicial officers – in East Pakistan. JI also formed peace committees in East Pakistan to facilitate intelligence gathering for the Army. In return, the Army rewarded JI with seats in the East Pakistan Assembly.

The Army had also begun using Islamic slogans during the East Pakistan crisis. For instance, during the fight for East Pakistan, the local commander, Lt. General Tikka Khan,³² quoted freely from Islamic texts in his talks to the beleaguered West Pakistani garrison, reminding his forces of "the great battles against infidels [are] a proof of what Muslims could do."

Nicknamed *maulvi* (preacher) among his peers, it was Zia-ul-Haq, son of an overtly religious Army clerk, who systematically and radically changed what was, till then, essentially a professional Army in

the tradition of the British days. He invoked the triple motto of *Taqva* (piety), *Iman* (Islamic faith) and *Jihad-fi-Sabil-Allah* (Fight in the name of Allah). To encourage a faster Islamic transformation of the Army, Zia saw to it that new mosques were built within cantonments and training areas; Islamic texts were introduced into training courses; staff college libraries stocked with books on Islam, Islamic military ideology and practices; and middle-level officers were made to study and give examinations on Islam and Islamic military doctrine. Islamic teachings were introduced in the Pakistan Military Academy, Kakul.³³

Changes were made in the curriculum at Staff Colleges where new officers began studying and researching Islamic military practices, doctrine and strategy. A lecture series run by officer-scholar Colonel Abdul Qayyum, at the Command and Staff College formed the intellectual basis for the Islamic drive. Qayyum lectured on Islamic theology and doctrine but adopted a more open and rationalist approach that made him a much sought after ideologue. The post of Army 'mullah' was created to act as a bridge between the profession and faith. The *mullahs* accompanied units into combat zones. A Directorate of Religious Instruction was established at the General Headquarters (GHQ) and religious handouts were published occasionally for the troops.³⁴

Zia was the first Army Chief and head of state to attend the annual meeting of the Tablighi Jamaat at Raiwind in Punjab. Zia believed that "nobody but Allah made him the Chief of Army Staff and that he was on a divine mission to impose Islam in Pakistan."³⁵ He encouraged officers and troops to frequent Tablighi meetings more openly. Zia encouraged his men and officers to pray, fast and distribute Islamic literature within the force.³⁶ Those who prayed five times a day, though it was not mandatory, found themselves in the shortlist for promotions more easily than others. Religious fervour became a passport to higher ranks and membership of JI and IJT proved to be useful. In selection boards for officers, religious knowledge and habits received positive marks.

Recruits during this phase were made to take an oath on the Quran and were taught Islamic subjects. They were also tested regularly for their grasp of religious knowledge to raise the level of religious

awareness among Pakistani troops and ensure indoctrination. Many officers in the Army became attracted to JI's ideology and Maududi's teachings. Zia, in fact, used to reward men and officers with a copy of Maududi's books. Zia even wanted to redesign the national flag by inserting Arabic inscriptions and shift the Independence Day from August 14 to its equivalent in the Islamic calendar.

Zia also incorporated religious groups like JI as part of the Pakistan Army's broader strategic objectives, both at home and abroad – at home to control ethnic and sectarian separatists who challenged the Army's writ and outside (specifically India) to initiate a proxy war to annex Kashmir as part of an “unfinished agenda”. In 1977, Zia met with the JI leaders and discussed the party's possible role in Pakistan's Afghan policy. JI utilised its links with Afghan warlords like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and helped Zia in crafting a policy that benefited the party's Islamic cause and fulfilled part of its objective of influencing, if not entirely controlling, the policies of the state.

Post-Afghan *Jihad*

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

Though Zia's successors were not obsessed with the radicalisation project, they continued with the policy of using terrorist groups to pursue the Army's agenda in Kashmir and other parts of India. These

terrorist groups acted as frontline troops who infiltrated into Kashmir and other parts of India to set up terrorist cells, create a wide network of supporters and carry out sabotage, espionage and terrorist activities.

As a result, over the years, the Army and the ISI became, if not entirely radicalised, “culturally sympathetic to the extremists.” There are numerous instances of regular officers and men from the Army involved in terrorist activities either directly or indirectly as facilitators and trainers for groups like Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM). Tanzeem-ul Ikhwan, for instance, is a radical group of retired Army men and officers which has been advocating a “one-per cent” formula to convert Pakistan into an Islamic country.³⁷ Ikhwan has often trained and sent cadres to train with LeT. The fact that its leaders were all retired senior Army officers drew hundreds of serving officers and soldiers to the group’s ideological training sessions. Among its cadre were Major General Zaheerul Islam Abbasi, Brigadier Muntazar Billa, Colonel Mohammad Azad Minhas and Colonel Inayatullah Khan, all jailed for taking part in the 1995 coup attempt. Lt. General Hamid Gul, a former chief of the ISI who was involved in the Afghan *jihad*, called it a “soft Islamic revolution.”³⁸ He argued that “Pakistani Army soldiers have always been religious, but now a growing number of officers have turned Islamist.”

How Radical is the Army Today?

At this point, it would be useful to make an assessment, based on relatively few studies carried out on this subject, on the extent of radicalism in the Army’s officer cadre.

The present Corps Commanders (2009) and the Army Chief (General Ashfaq Kayani) were commissioned during or after 1971 and, therefore, are those who had either participated in the war with India or those who were deeply impacted by the trauma of the surrender at Dhaka. Quite naturally, therefore, they carry a certain attitude – a particular deportment – where India is concerned. All of them are certain to have passed through Zia’s Islamic pipeline, although it will be difficult to plumb the depth of influence the fundamentalist General’s

indoctrination and training had on the individual officers. It would be fair to believe that not all officers were taken in by Zia's *jihad* project.

However, there were, as subsequent events showed, quite a few officers who were influenced by Zia's Islamic drive. The 1995 Rawalpindi Conspiracy involving senior Army officials, the sacking of several Generals during Musharraf's regime (including some who were quite close to him) and the arrest of several middle-ranking officers for their links with Al Qaeda could be taken as an indicator of the Zia effect on the officer corps.³⁹

Of particular interest would be those who were commissioned during Zia's tenure – 1977-88. Most of them would be in the rank of Colonels and above and, therefore, in key positions at the Brigade, Division and Corps levels. A simple calculation would show that for the next decade or so, one Zia recruit or another would lead the Army, unless a coup or a major round of supersession were to take place in the years ahead.

According to Shuja Nawaz, out of 804 officers granted commission in 1978-79 period, 29 were recommended for promotion to the rank of Major General in 2006. A select number of them would, in all probability, take over as Lt. Generals (or have already). These officers, known as Zia *bhartis* or Zia recruits are certainly a more conservative and ritualistic lot than their predecessors. Many of them had been part of Zia's experiments with Islamic ideology in the Staff Colleges and academies, and been witness to *jihad* in Afghanistan and Kashmir.⁴⁰ They also, according to Nawaz, "suffered at the hands of the US and western European embargo of aid to Pakistan. Not only (were they) deprived of advanced overseas training during their formative years, (they) were denied exposure to the world outside till late in their careers, by which time their worldview had been formed and in many cases, become entrenched."⁴¹

It is obvious that these shifting alliances and loyalties have had some impact on the officers, but whether these factors made them more radical, less professional, or both, can at best be a guess. Some stray clues, however, could be located in a study carried out by a Malaysian Air Force officer as part of his doctoral thesis. He analysed the extent of

religious influence in the militaries of three Muslim nations, Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan.⁴² His findings can be useful in studying the possible trajectories of the influence of religion on the Pakistan Army. “Employing random observations of military personnel and supported by the opinions of interviewers,” the dissertation said the Pakistan military was split between the ‘orthodox’ and the ‘moderate’. It quoted serving officers as stating that, despite Musharraf’s ‘enlightened moderation’, “the institution is still a strong Islamised institution as [before] and nothing has changed.”

More significant for our analysis is the observation made by him that there was a possibility that officers who were either secular or moderate in their outlook could adopt extremist attitudes “depending on the degree of indoctrination.” Such a probability might be unlikely, but shades of such a transformation among the officer cadre cannot be discounted altogether. “One thing can be safely concluded through experience,” wrote a Pakistan Army officer in a thesis submitted to the US Army College, “that Islamic practices are much more common and regular in the present Army as compared to what they were after independence.”⁴³

Mumbai, November 2008

One of the most visible signs of radical influences in the Army is its covert alliances with terrorist groups like LeT. Since there has been considerable documentation of the history of such partnerships, a more contemporary examination is being attempted here.

The involvement of LeT in the Mumbai attacks⁴⁴ has been admitted even by the Pakistan government. What has not been acknowledged by Islamabad, so far, is the embryonic relationship which exists between LeT and the Pakistan Army. In 1999, it was the LeT cadres, along with others, who formed the first line of intrusion into the Indian territory in Jammu and Kashmir as part of the Pakistan Army’s plans to capture key heights along the Srinagar-Leh Highway.⁴⁵ These terrorists were armed, trained and pushed into the high mountains along Kargil to act as cover for the regular troops to hold ground, largely through the 62

Brigade Headquarters in Skardu. The officer in charge of the Brigade was Brigadier Tahir Mahmood. He is today a Lt General and heads the Rawalpindi Corps Command. Interestingly, in September 2009, little less than a year after the Mumbai attack, General Mahmood invited LeT *Ameer* Hafiz Saeed to his *iftar* party in Islamabad.⁴⁶

It would not be fair to point a finger at General Mahmood alone. There are quite few others in the present Army leadership who too require equal attention. For instance, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani. Three months before the Mumbai attack, LeT was involved in an attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.⁴⁷ The July 2008 bombing was carried out by a suicide bomber who was subsequently identified as an LeT member. The conspiracy was masterminded by the ISI⁴⁸ and there were reports (*The New York Times*, September 12, 2008) which indicated that Army Chief General Kayani may not have been ignorant about the attack plan.

It would not be out of place to probe a little deeper into General Kayani's career to understand his commitments and attitudes under the camouflage of a "golf playing, chain smoking professional soldier" – a line played up repeatedly by the Pakistani and Western media. As DG ISI, Kayani was responsible for the release of Harkat-ul Mujahideen chief Fazlur Rehman Kahlil (December 2004) and Harkat-ul Jihad al Islami chief Qari Saifullah Akhtar (May 2007), two of the Afghan *jihād* veterans who were instrumental in reorganising terrorist strategies and operations on behalf of the ISI and the Army⁴⁹. Akhtar was an adviser to Taliban chief Mullah Omar till October 2001.⁵⁰ No less important is the fact that a close confidante of Akhtar was Ilyas Kashmiri, whose role in several recent terrorist incidents is no secret.

In 2006, Ahmed Rashid quoted a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) report on Operation Medusa (September 4-17, 2006) in Panjwal district, Afghanistan, which accused the ISI of shoring up the Taliban's military capability. So intense was the firefight that the Taliban, according to NATO, used 400,000 rounds of ammunition, 2000 rocket-propelled grenades and 1,000 mortar shells.⁵¹ The ammunition dumps discovered by the NATO

and Afghan forces revealed that the Taliban had over two million rounds of ammunition in Panjwal alone. The NATO force captured 160 Taliban, most of them Pakistanis who detailed the ISI's support for the Taliban, including setting up two training camps outside Quetta. It was also revealed that the Taliban recruits were housed and indoctrinated in *madrassas* run by JUI-F.⁵²

Kayani was also aware of several ISI officials, forcibly retired in a purge carried out by his predecessor, Lt. General Ehsan-ul Haq, returning to work for the agency as contractual employees to aid the Taliban network in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁵³ These reemployed ISI officials were part of the clandestine group or division created to pursue the Pakistan Army's two-track policy. According to Ahmed Rashid, several offices were established in private homes in Peshawar, Quetta and other cities. The group did not maintain any contact with ISI HQ in Aabpura in Islamabad or the Rawalpindi GHQ. This organisation worked more like a non-governmental organisation (NGO) with minimum hierarchy and casual working hours and an untraceable system of command and control. One such officer, whom the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) tracked down was 'General Yusef,' who recruited and trained men to fight in Nuristan and Kunar provinces. He reported to an ISI office in Chitral and received a monthly stipend.⁵⁴ The training camp was run by LeT.

Kayani, as the ISI chief, could not have been uninformed about the new training camps set up by his agency in NWFP for terrorists leaving for Kashmir and Afghanistan. The *Herald* (English monthly published by the Dawn group of publications), reported in June 2006 about the fresh recruitment drive launched by the terrorist groups and the sprouting of training camps.⁵⁵ Dozens of aspiring recruits from the Frontier and FATA towns were sent each month to training camps in Wana in South Waziristan. According to the report, at least three major terrorist groups maintained their liaison and recruitment offices in the Timergara area of Lower Dir District. These included the Hizb-ul Mujahideen (HM), Al Badr Mujahideen, renamed as Al Suffa Foundation, and LeT, renamed as Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD).

Was it a mere coincidence that it was during Kayani's tenure as the ISI chief that India witnessed three major terrorist attacks? On October 29, 2005, three powerful serial blasts killed over 70 people in New Delhi. Four months later, on March 7, 2006, three synchronised terrorist attacks killed over 20 people in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. The biggest attack, which the Indian authorities accused the ISI of plotting, was the July 11, 2006 serial train bombing in Mumbai which killed over 200 persons.⁵⁶

The officer who succeeded Kayani as the ISI chief was Lt. General Nadeem Taj, a close confidant of General Pervez Musharraf. Taj was instrumental in implementing Musharraf's duplicitous game of supporting the Taliban elements in Afghanistan and Pakistan while claiming to be a strategic ally in the US-led Global War on Terrorism. Taj, for instance, "allowed Kashmiri terrorist groups like Harkat ul Mujahideen, al Badr and JeM to set up new offices, changing their names, putting up flags and posters, holding large rallies, and delivering sermons in mosques to publicise the groups' activities."⁵⁷ *Stratfor* said these developments implied "ISI returning to commissioning attacks in Kashmir."⁵⁸ Taj was removed under pressure from the Bush Administration as it became clear that the ISI was sharing the intelligence with the terrorist groups. The US government, in fact, presented a dossier to Prime Minister Yousuf Reza Gilani containing information about contacts between the ISI and the Taliban through the Haqqani network. Taj today heads the Gujranwala (XXX) Corps Command, quite close to the Indian border.⁵⁹

One of the key officers who worked under both Taj and Kayani was retired Brigadier Ijaz Shah, a close confidante of Musharraf. He was the head of the ISI bureau in Lahore in 1999 when Musharraf overthrew Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Shah was closely associated with the ISI's networking with anti-India terrorist groups like HuJI and JeM. He had, in fact, persuaded the Taliban to hand over two of its training camps in Khost to Al Qaeda to train Kashmiri groups.⁶⁰ Ijaz Shah had worked closely with Lt. General Mahmoud Ahmad, the ISI chief at the time of the 9/11 attack. Mahmoud was under a cloud for his suspected links

with Al Qaeda and the Taliban and was retired by Musharraf, only to be reappointed, in 2003, as the head of the Fauji Fertiliser Company, a cash rich organisation run by the Army's welfare organisation, the Fauji Foundation.⁶¹

Shah, who could not become the Chief Secretary of Punjab, was also rehabilitated as the chief of the Intelligence Bureau in 2004. Musharraf, in fact, had tried his best to appoint him as the Ambassador to Australia but failed as the Australian government refused to accept the nomination because of his links with LeT and JeM.⁶² Despite the rejection, Musharraf took him along on his 2005 official visit to Australia.

Shah's active involvement in Kashmir is well documented. He was handling Syed Omar Sheikh, the JeM mastermind behind several terrorist attacks in India besides the brutal assassination of American journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002.⁶³ Omar Sheikh had surrendered to Shah at his home and remained with him for five days before his arrest was made public by Musharraf in Washington.

A telling pointer to Shah's nexus with terrorist groups was made by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in an interview to *Daily Times* on August 13, 2007: "Brigadier Shah and the ISI recruited Omar Sheikh, who killed Danny Pearl. So I would feel very uncomfortable making the Intelligence Bureau, which has more than 100,000 people underneath it, run by a man who worked so closely with militants and extremists."⁶⁴

Another retired ISI officer named by Bhutto was Brigadier Riazullah Khan Chibb. She had accused Chibb along with his friend Ijaz Shah, of setting up a rigging cell in Islamabad. Chibb and Shah had become close when the former headed the Anti-Narcotics Force at a time when Shah was the chief of ISI Punjab. Benazir was to hand over a confidential report on the cell and its activities to US Senator Patrick Kennedy, a Democratic Congressman, and Arlen Specter, a Republican member of the Senate Sub-committee on Foreign Operations, at a dinner on December 27, 2007, the day she was assassinated.⁶⁵

Chibb, before his retirement, was a senior officer in the ISI's Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB) which dealt with the internal security matters, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Before being renamed Directorate S, JIB was one of the most powerful divisions of the ISI and its primary agenda was to target India. Brigadier Chibb, reemployed after his retirement early 2007, was awarded with a *Sitara-i-Imtiaz* (military) on December 17, 2007 for meritorious services in the operational field.

Chibb's name surfaced in India in August 2006 when Delhi Police arrested one Abu Anas in August 2006⁶⁶ who said he was the Personal Security Officer (PSO) of Zaki-ur Rahman Lakhvi, the key conspirator in the Mumbai attacks. Anas disclosed that LeT commanders, Army and ISI officers met every month to share information. ISI officials briefed LeT commanders about regular updates on the Indian security forces and discussed plans to counter the Indian strategy. The US agencies have documented regular meetings between ISI and LeT leaders in the past to share intelligence on Indian counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir.⁶⁷ One of the officers Abu Anas named was Brigadier Riaz Chibb. Chibb's boss in the ISI was Major General Sikander Afzal, head of JIB and Director-General for Strategic Analysis, who reported to Lt. General Kayani, the ISI Director General. Lt. General Afzal today heads the Multan Corps Command (July 2010)⁶⁸.

Conclusions

An overwhelming conclusion which comes across with clarity is the entrenched, and growing, relationship between the state agencies and various types of violent non-state actors in South Asia who pose a unique challenge to counter-terrorism strategies. What makes the situation more complex, and grave, is the tacit and overt alliance that exists between the constituents of policy-making institutions and these violent non-state actors. This incestuous nexus deeply erodes the viability of any conventional counter-terrorism strategy in the region. It is, therefore, imperative to review the current strategies and policies to evolve a more comprehensive set of actions to stem this cancerous liaison that is likely to drag the region deeper into a morass of violence and instability in the years ahead.

Notes

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