

CHAPTER 8

Islam, WMDs and Al Qaeda's Final Goals

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This article is a broad enquiry into the possibility of radical Salafi groups like Al Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) subverting Pakistan's nuclear assets through rogue state or non-state actors by invoking religious rationalisation for such an act. Such invocations would justify the surreptitious acquisition of nuclear materials, or weapons, to defend Muslims, or to take revenge for a similar attack, if it were to happen, against Muslims. There have been various debates, discussions and commentaries, including *fatwas*, issued by ideologues associated with Salafi groups, to justify the acquisition of nuclear weapons and their use.

The article is broadly divided into three parts: the ideological underpinnings of radical Salafi group's quest to acquire and use nuclear and other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD); previous attempts to acquire such weapons and material, and the capability of the group to assemble, store and use such weapons and; third, the probability of local proxies or agents in Pakistan facilitating such an acquisition. Given the nature of the enquiry, the article will discard any review or assessment of the technical literature on WMDs, and confine itself to a broad matrix in which radical Islam, nuclear weapons, terrorism and rogue state elements can project the worst nightmare the world has come to fear since 9/11.

IDEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

War and conflict have been an intrinsic part of Islam's growth as the world's second largest, and fastest growing religion. The early battles were fought by the Prophet and his companions and successive generations creating, as a consequence, a fairly well-defined and documented concept of war. Quran has defined the parameters of war fighting clearly. The world, according to the Quran, is divided into two camps – *Darus Salam* (which follows the path of God to achieve peace, order and other conditions essential for human welfare) and *Darul Harb* (those who oppose God's ways). The believers, therefore, were duty bound to fight those who come in the way of God, or obstruct them from following the Holy path. To quote, Sura Infa'al chapter 8, verse 39, '. . . And fight on until there remains no more tumult or oppression and they remain submissive. . . .' In short, a war for Islamic ideology can only be defensive – in the defence of God and his ways – and every believer, Muslim, was duty bound to retaliate, or take action.

Since the doctrine has been situated in such a controlled matrix, a strict code of conduct during war has been articulated. Chapter 11 verse 190 calls upon Muslims to 'fight in the cause of God those who fight you and be not aggressors. God loveth not those who are aggressors'. Force should not be used unless necessary. The doctrine clearly forbids slaughtering of children, women and the aged, and those who were praying, irrespective of their religion. The first Caliph of Islam, Hazrat Abu Bakr¹ said:

“Remember that you are always under the gaze of God and on the eve of your death; that you will have to reckon on the Last Day. . . . When you fight for the glory of God behave like men, without turning your back, but let not the blood of women or that of children or the aged tarnish your victory. Do not destroy palm trees; do not burn dwellings or wheat fields; never cut down fruit trees; only kill cattle when you need them for food; When you agree upon a treaty take care to respect its clauses. As your advance progresses you will meet religious men who live in monasteries and who serve God in prayer: leave them alone, do not kill them or destroy their monasteries.”

The reason for reproducing the code is to understand how various scholars, terrorist leaders and ideologues like Osama bin Laden have justified the acquisition and use of WMD (*asliha al-damar al-shamil*), particularly in the context of the high amount of casualties the use of such weapons and materials would cause. Some scholars, for instance, have used Quranic references to 'catapults, fire and poison' to argue that it indicated a justification for Muslim nations to possess WMD capability so that they do not lose their ability to fight the enemy. Referring to the Quranic call to take all possible measures to confront the enemy, scholars have argued that it was obligatory on the part of all Muslim countries not only to possess, but also to manufacture nuclear weapons.

Similarly, there are interpretations supportive of WMD acquisition that draw from Quran's reference to the battle of Khandaq in Sura 'Ahzab'. It says²: 'Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts) of the enemies of Allah, and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know.' The phrase 'strike terror into the hearts of the enemies of Allah', in fact, crops up frequently in various commentaries written by ideologues and supporters of Al Qaeda and other extremist entities, to justify the use of WMD.

Three strands of persuasion are inherent in the conventional interpretation of Quranic verses in support of WMD use. First, that there is religious sanction for the acquisition of WMD. Second, WMD can be used in defensive mode, i.e. if the enemy is in possession of such weapons and intends to use them against Muslims. Third, WMD can be used as a last option to achieve victory in a battlefield. Some scholars have added a caveat that the victims should not be Muslims.

But groups like Al Qaeda and LeT may not (and have not) followed these mainstream explanations in letter and spirit and may, from time to time, alter the shades of meaning to suit their tactical and strategic goals in their 'long war'. The concept of 'long war' in the context of Al Qaeda is useful to study, as it shows the group's determination and persistence to achieve its goals of consolidating and protecting the *ummah*. The group has the luxury of time in achieving their intended goals. Not surprisingly, this 'long war' concept is reflected in the long

term planning that has characterised the group's terrorist attacks. This concept is drawn from the teachings of Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian ideologue who, along with Dr Abdullah Azzam, had great influence on Osama bin Laden. To quote Qutb³ on the subject:

“. . . How to initiate the revival of Islam? A vanguard must set out with this determination and then keep going, marching through the vast ocean of jahiliyyah (ignorer of the faith) which encompasses the entire world. . . . The Muslims in this vanguard must know the landmarks and the milestones on the road to this goal so that they would know the starting point as well as the nature, the responsibilities, and the ultimate purpose of this long journey.”

Osama bin Laden's justification for the 9/11 attack encapsulates Al Qaeda's defensive strategy, and the concept of long war against the enemy, in this case the United States of America. In a broadcast on the Arabic channel, *al Jazeera*, Laden, on October 7, 2001, said,⁴

“our Islamic nation has been tasting . . . more than 80 years, of humiliation and disgrace, its sons killed and their blood spilled, its sanctities desecrated. . . . God has blessed a group of vanguard Muslims, the forefront of Islam, to destroy America.”

Laden⁵ also invoked the distinction made in Quran between *Darus Salam* and *Darul Harb* – ‘these events have divided the world into two camps, the camp of the faithful and the camp of infidels’ – to drive the point that the act of killing thousands of innocents was in defence of the faith, and was therefore justified.

DESIRE AND CAPABILITY

The first specific reference to Al Qaeda's interest in acquiring WMD can be found in the contentious debate within the Majlis-e-Shura (the governing council) of the group in the late 1990s. An Al Qaeda insider, Mustafa Hamid alias Abu Walid al-Masri,⁶ in his book –*The Story of the Arab Afghans from the Time of Arrival in Afghanistan until their departure with the Taliban* – made the debate public. The ‘hawks’ wanted the group to acquire WMD as they feared that the US was planning to attack Afghanistan with such weapons. They said it was imperative to have such a capability as a deterrent so as to retaliate,

if attacked. Those who opposed the proposal were equally strong in their arguments and warned that WMDs would attract a strong reprisal from the US and loss of public support, among other fallouts. There was, however, consensus among the discussants that WMD was a dangerous capability, and could attract punitive action from the West. They also agreed that the acquisition of WMD was more for deterrence and not for first-strike use. Though Laden was convinced that his plans could do with conventional weapons, he did not oppose others pursuing the WMD route.

Two of his media interviews are relevant. To *al Jazeera*, in December 1998, he said Jews and Christians had nuclear capability and so did Muslims, in clear reference to Pakistan, which has a critical bearing on the central hypothesis of this article. A month later, in January 1999, speaking to the *Time* magazine,⁷ Laden said it was the 'religious duty' of Muslims to acquire chemical and nuclear weapons to defend Muslims. '*It would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the weapons that would prevent the infidels inflicting harm on Muslims*', he said.

There are statements from Al Qaeda's other leaders which reveal consensus among the top leadership on the subject. In June 2002, Suleiman abu Gheith, an Al Qaeda spokesman,⁸ said: '*It is our right to fight them (Americans) with chemical and biological weapons so as to afflict them with fatal maladies that have afflicted the Muslims because of (their) chemical and biological weapons*'. He argued that Al Qaeda had '*the right to kill four million Americans, including one million children, displace double that figure and injure and cripple hundreds and thousands*'.

The most significant statement from Al Qaeda about WMD was made on May 21, 2003 by Shaikh Naser al-Fahd.⁹ It was a 25-page *fatwa*, or religious decree, justifying the use of WMD against the enemies of Islam. In the document titled *A Treatise on the Legal Status of Using Weapons of Mass Destruction against Infidels*, the Saudi cleric said:

"The attack against it (the US) by weapons of mass destruction is accepted since Allah said, 'If you are attacked, you shall attack your aggressor by identical force. . . .' Anyone who considers the American aggression against Muslims and their lands during

the past decades . . . will conclude that striking her is permissible merely on the rule of treating as one has been treated. Some brothers have totalled the number of Muslims killed directly or indirectly by their weapons and come up with the figure of nearly 10 million. . . .”

Another forceful commentary on the use of WMD was made by Abu Mus’ab al-Suri in two documents published in December 2004. The first was a 9-page letter to the US State Department¹⁰ and the second, a 1600-page book on the strategy of global *Jihad* called *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*.¹¹ The letter to the State Department was in response to the US announcing a prize money of US \$5 million on his head and declaring him an international terrorist for his involvement in the 9/11 attack and the Madrid bombings of March 2004. Al-Suri wrote to the State Department that the only way Muslims could achieve parity with the US was to acquire and use WMD. He said if he had planned the 9/11 attack, he would have filled the planes with WMD material. He accepted that attacking the US with WMD material was not easy but it was ‘vital’.

His deposition marks a clear departure from the previous *fatwas* and commentaries on WMD. He, for instance, called upon North Korea and Iran to develop nuclear weapons, both qualified to be infidel regimes. Suri’s counter argument was that it was pragmatic to work with a devil to defeat a bigger devil. He said¹² ‘the ultimate choice is the destruction of the US by operations of strategic symmetry through weapons of mass destruction. if the *mujahideen* can achieve it with the help of those who possess them or through buying them’.

In his book, which came after the letter, Suri was less optimistic about acquiring WMDs from the mafia and even said, during a Kabul lecture in 1999, that it was possible. In the book, he laid out a detailed plan of creating special forces to deliver WMD to the enemy and argued that days of strictly hierarchical organisations were over. Suri, who drew inspiration from Dr Abdullah Azzam, advocated that the Islamic resistance movement should rely more on smaller, autonomous cells linked to the ‘base’ ideologically.

The most recent remarks on WMD from an extremist ideologue came on February 20, 2009. Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, President of

the Global Union of Muslim Religious Scholars, said¹³ Islam favoured peace from a position of strength and not weakness, and all 'Muslims are allowed to hold nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction for purposes of deterrence'.

It can therefore be fairly assumed that Al Qaeda ideologues have been working at finding Quranic justifications for acquiring and using WMDs, and side-stepping many of the caveats given in the Quran about fighting war. There was a general consensus among the leadership that acquisition of WMD was in the interest of Muslims, and hence justified in the eyes of Allah.

The question that begs a response is whether Al Qaeda was capable of acquiring, storing and using such weapons without bringing the world down.

There are several references, all highly doubtful, to Al Qaeda's active pursuit of WMD and materials. There was perhaps one instance of serious intent to negotiate the purchase of uranium in Sudan. A key witness in the 1998 bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, Jamal Ahmad al-Fadl made a mention about the deal during the trial in New York. He said Al Qaeda was willing to pay US \$1.5 million to acquire uranium from Sudan.

The most obvious inferences that can be drawn from these news stories is that Al Qaeda might have been (and still is) pursuing such deals, but has not so far succeeded. This may betray the group's inability to strike such deals, but clearly establishes its intent to possess such a capability.

This is amplified many times over on the internet, where Al Qaeda and its surrogate groups run a virtual university of *jihad* with enormous amounts of data, instructions, videos and audios on acquiring and manufacturing WMDs. The power of the internet to invite and disseminate sensitive information, to act as a platform for anonymous sympathisers and possible recruits or facilitators, and to strike terror is immeasurable.

There is no dearth of manuals, books, references, videos and encyclopaedias on manufacturing WMD available on various blogs, chatrooms, discussion forums and websites. These resources have generated debate, information and continuity in Al Qaeda's quest for

‘nuclear parity’ with the US. There have been terrorist attacks which were carried out with the help of information available on such websites or forums. An 80-page manual – *The Nuclear Bomb of Jihad and the Way to Enrich Uranium* – on a *jihadi* forum (al-Firdaus), in 2005, for instance, attracted 57,000 visitors¹⁴ within the first month of its posting. The manual explained how to make nuclear weapons and, more important, ways and means to build explosives and bombs from readily available material.

At about the same time, *jihadi* forums published a manual detailing steps and materials to produce a crude hydrogen cyanide dispersal device, *al-Mubtakkar*. The device was similar to the one which was to be used in the aborted 2003 New York subway bombing plot. The liquid explosives used in the 2005 London bombings were manufactured with the help of information available on one such forum. A series of terrorist attacks that were carried out in Bangalore, Ahmedabad and Delhi in 2008 saw the use of explosives put together from locally available materials; the technology and guidance gleaned from the internet.

There were also intelligence reports that Al Qaeda had set up a separate group to oversee the acquisition or development of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, which included Khalid Sheikh Mohammad and Ramzi bin al Shibh, both arrested from different safe houses in Pakistan. But those who have studied the technical details available on the internet, point out that the greater threat would come not from the terrorist groups, but professional scientists and technicians radicalised by the Al Qaeda or *jihadi* call.

Despite the existence of *fatwas* and a collection of internet based documents related to WMD, there is no concrete evidence of Al Qaeda or its surrogates actually possessing any WMD or material. There is also no evidence, for instance, of the presence of scientists and other personnel in Al Qaeda strongholds – Somalia, Afghanistan, Waziristan – required for utilising the materials or weapons when – if ever – they come into the possession of Al Qaeda. There is, of course, the case of two or three Pakistani nuclear scientists discussing nuclear weapons with bin Laden, which will be dealt with later. These contacts between nuclear scientists and Al Qaeda apart, there is nothing in the public domain to suggest that the group has put together an A-Team for the

so-called nuclear *jihad*. Laden and Al Zawahari might be useful and effective ideologues and mentors, but are hardly capable of handling nuclear or other WMD materials.

This leaves us with the possibility of Al Qaeda acquiring such weapons or materials, illicitly, from a friendly Muslim country.

AL QAEDA'S BEACHHEAD

Four reasons could be cited for stating that Pakistan is Al Qaeda's beachhead. First, it is the only Muslim country with nuclear weapons co-existing with terrorist groups and rogue, extremist elements in the army and intelligence services. Second, at least one of the terrorist groups, closely aligned to Al Qaeda, has called for the use of nuclear weapons against *kafirs* or non-believers. Third, one of the most extensive and audacious nuclear proliferation networks was anchored in Pakistan till 2004, run by AQ Khan, a nuclear scientist whose alignments with LeT has been well-documented, and who has been a strong votary of sharing nuclear weapons and technology with other Muslim nations. Fourth, these factors give Al Qaeda an opportunity to acquire WMD from a Muslim nation which, incidentally, accords it religious sanction.

There are indications that Al Qaeda has been nursing such an idea and, more recently, expressing it. Till 9/11, Pakistan was regarded as an ally; back in 1999, Osama had mentioned it with pride to the Western media that Pakistan, a Muslim country, possessed nuclear weapons to counter the Christian and Jewish bombs. Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability, facilitated of course in substantial measure by billions that poured in from all sides for the so-called Afghan *Jihad*, was hailed in the Muslim world as the Islamic Bomb. AQ Khan, often wrongly called the Father of the Islamic bomb, has justified his proliferation activities on the ground that it was his religious duty as a Muslim.

The Global War on Terror and Pakistan's decision to join the US after 9/11 changed this friendly equation dramatically. As Pakistan launched military offensives (even if many of them were half-hearted and gross failures) in the tribal areas, surrogates of Al Qaeda in the Taliban constellation turned against the army, and launched a series of

spectacular suicide bombings across Pakistan. Even though Pakistan allowed Al Qaeda and the Taliban elements to find shelter in the tribal areas and, arguably, facilitated the creation of a sanctuary in the Waziristan area, the State resisted the expansion of this 'Islamic Emirate of Waziristan' beyond a certain 'red' line.

The Lal Masjid operation of July 2007, in which over 300 men (mostly Pashtun *madarsa* products) were killed, firmly turned the Al Qaeda leadership against the Pakistani state with Ayman al Zawahari calling upon the people to overthrow President Musharraf, time and gain. The group has kept up with the tirade against the Army even after Musharraf left his position in August 2008. In the recent times, Al Qaeda has sharpened its attacks on the Pakistan establishment including the Army. Zawahari has even called up on the armed forces to mutiny and establish Islamic law, or *Sharia*, in Pakistan which, he and others argued, was created as a nation of Muslims and should remain so.

A recent debate on the internet forums dealing with Pakistan and nuclear weapons, offer a glimpse into the debates within *jihadi* circles. In March 2009, al-Fajr Media Centre, a *jihadi* media outlet, published a 29-page book – *Sharpening the Blades in the Battle against the Government and Army of Pakistan* – written by a senior Al Qaeda leader, Abu Yahya al-Libi.¹⁵ Libi argues that since the Government of Pakistan and the Army has prevented the implementation of *Sharia*, it was a religious duty to take over the country. He quoted Hadith and Quranic verses to buttress his argument.

The book provoked considerable chatter on the *jihadi* internet forums with many arguing the imperative need to control Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Some forum members contended that time was ripe to convert Pakistan into a base for establishing an Islamic Emirate, and it was therefore important to seize its nuclear weapons before it fell into the hands of the US. There are references to getting hold of secret documents and maps pertaining to the location of these nuclear weapons – apart from nuclear installations in India – with the objective of keeping the 'enemies of Islam, the Hindus' at bay. A key argument was that it was more pragmatic to plan the take over of nuclear weapons in Pakistan than pursue a '30-year *jihad*'.

One of the important strains of the discussion involved the co-opting of nuclear, military and civilian officials in Pakistan, sympathetic to their cause. A.Q. Khan was singled out as one who should be persuaded to align with their cause, along with other nuclear scientists. One forum member said Khan and other scientists should be protected, if a conflict broke out in Pakistan.

There is a still more recent reference to Pakistan's nuclear weapons made by a senior Al Qaeda leader from Afghanistan. In June 2009, Mustafa Abu al-Yazid told the *al Jazeera* channel¹⁶ that 'God willing, the nuclear weapons will not fall into the hands of the Americans and the *mujahideen* would take them and use them against the Americans'.

Such declarations and invitations might seem rhetorical, and therefore not so serious in intent. But, it would be a grave error to ignore them, for two simple reasons. First, these statements do show a heightened interest in *jihadi* circles about Pakistan and its nuclear weapons. Ideologues like al-Libi have quoted verse and chapter, to prove that it was the religious duty of a Muslim to acquire such weapons. The argument is that these weapons must not fall into the hands of the enemy, the US, thereby making the forcible, or illicit acquisition of these weapons an obligation on the part of Muslims, to defend, or protect themselves, all of which have explicit sanctions in Quran. Second, there are enough people within Pakistan, both in and outside the establishment, who might not be immune to such exhortations, particularly when their idea of 'enemy' coincides with the 'enemy' of Al Qaeda, the Zionist-Christians represented by the US and Israel, and the Hindus, by India.

A closer scrutiny of the 'sympathisers' in Pakistan is therefore imperative. These are the people who could become the 'vanguards of Islam' as Qutb and Laden have argued, and facilitate Al Qaeda's quest for WMD parity with the US. They are the game changers at the civilisational level, as former CIA Director George Tenet had argued in his autobiography.

For the sake of brevity and comprehension, it would be useful to divide these people into three groups: *jihadi* groups aligned to Al Qaeda; radicalised elements in the nuclear establishment and, sympathisers within the Pakistan Army, or other wings of the armed

forces, including the ISI. Without such a coterie of sympathisers, Al Qaeda's plans to breach Pakistan's nuclear weapons infrastructure would be impossible. Any such attempt would be fiercely opposed and repelled.

First, the jihadi groups sympathetic to Al Qaeda. There are a quite few that have a shared history with Al Qaeda, but it is Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) which is ideologically, as well as operationally, linked to the radical Salafi movement. Both Al Qaeda and LeT were inspired by the Arab Palestinian ideologue, Dr Abdullah Azzam, a close ally and teacher of Osama bin Laden, and Hafiz Saeed. The seed money for setting up LeT headquarters at Muridke, Lahore, was given by bin Laden, or one of his close associates. Such linkages are further strengthened by the commonality of objectives, attitudes and operational doctrines. LeT was created as a Trojan Horse for Al Qaeda and others in the movement, to infiltrate Pakistan and its society, an 'attack from within' as opposed, notably, from that of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) which has been advocating the theory of 'attack from above' to transform Pakistan into a fully Islamic State.

LeT's presence in Pakistan indicates a far more serious threat to the state as well as its nuclear infrastructure simply because it has, largely due to the complicity of the state as well as society, created over the years, a subterranean as well as over ground network of schools, hospitals and charity organisations, besides political, economic and social alliances. These networks offer LeT a virtual invincibility from the state and a platform for a grand strategic alliance with its ideological hub, Al Qaeda.

Three other reasons could be cited for the LeT's insidious threat in the overall context of this article's central thesis.

First, there are references which show that the group was not averse to the use of nuclear weapons to achieve its goals. A relevant reference can be found in an English daily published from Lahore, *Daily Times*, (February 6, 2004) which quoted Hafiz Saeed¹⁷ as saying that 'atomic weapons, traditional weapons, a strong army and voluntary *mujahideen* are obligatory for *jihad* and the Jamaat-ud-Dawa will continue protecting and arranging these resources for *jihad* against Hindus.' More notable was how he contextualised the call more broadly – 'Muslims throughout the world have a bond of *kalma*. From Lahore

to Srinagar, Kabul to Baghdad, Basra to Chechnya, they are fighting under this *kalma*, but the infidel world doesn't like it and describes it as terrorism . . . only *jihad* could guarantee the security of Pakistan and the whole Islamic world.' Hafiz Saeed has been advocating in his statements. Also, there are at least two instances where LeT's role in training cadres in chemical and radiological weapons have been detected in the past. A French-born terrorist named Willie Brigitte arrested in Australia admitted being a member of LeT, and disclosed that his targets were the electrical grid, Lucas Heights nuclear research centre outside Sydney, and other military facilities and natural-gas pipelines. Investigations revealed that Brigitte and his associate, Faheem Lodhi, were funded and controlled by a LeT commander by name, Sheikh Sajid. A piece of evidence which Brigitte disclosed to the investigators was that he had seen a 'Chechen' terrorist Abu Salah experimenting with chemical weapons in a LeT camp.

The second, but no less significant link in the chain of evidence against LeT's interest and involvement in procuring and using nuclear or radio-active materials, was Joe Padilla (an American citizen of Puerto Rican descent) alias Abdullah Al Muhajir, who was planning to detonate a radioactive bomb in the US on the orders of Al Qaeda. Padilla had trained how to wire explosive devices and researching radiological dispersion devices at LeT safe houses in Pakistan. His handler was Abu Zubaida, a key Al Qaeda operative, arrested in 2002 from a LeT safe house in Faisalabad, Pakistan.

More critical to our enquiry is the group's link with Abdul Qadir Khan. In the article mentioned earlier, Saeed made it a point to praise Khan: 'He shared the technology for the supremacy of Islam and he acted on the Allah's command. He is our hero, will remain our hero, and the Government can't undermine his honour under American pressure.' This was not an isolated comment. Khan has been a frequent visitor to LeT's annual congregations in the past. Interestingly, Khan attended these meetings not alone, but along with his other colleagues in the nuclear establishment, including Sultan Bashiruddin Mehmoud, former Director of Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission and the man who enriched uranium at Khushab. Another key nuclear scientist who had been a regular visitor to LeT rallies was Abdul Majid, a close

associate of Khan. Both Bashiruddin and Majid, and of course Khan, believed that Pakistan should generously help other Muslim nations with nuclear technology and materials.

Since Khan's proliferation activities have been documented in extensive detail by several authors since 2004 (when the network was busted by the CIA), it would suffice to limit this enquiry to the Al Qaeda connections these scientists have had. Most notable was the association Mahmoud and Majid had with bin Laden. After the bombing of Kabul in October-November 2001, the US troops discovered documents in a safe house that indicated Majid and Mahmoud had met Laden, raising fears in Washington that these scientists might have transferred their knowledge, and perhaps materials, to Laden. Bashiruddin, who spent 20 years of his career at Kahuta enriching uranium, was an ideal source for such knowledge transfer.

Mahmoud first denied discussing nuclear matters with Laden and al-Zawahari, but CIA's search of his charity organisation, Umma Tameer-e-Nau (UTN), in Kabul disclosed documents relating to the construction of nuclear weapons. There were maps and diagrams. The investigators also found letters exchanged between UTN and LeT. Both the scientists subsequently admitted that they had a theoretical discussion on nuclear weapons with Laden and his deputy, al-Zawahri. Mahmoud also admitted telling Laden that 'the most difficult part of the process is obtaining the necessary fissile material'. At least, Mahmoud had advocated in the past (1999) that it was obligatory on the part of Pakistan to share nuclear technology and materials with other Muslim nations, a belief which AQ Khan shared. Notably, there are references to such an acquisition of WMD within Al Qaeda's debate on the subject.

Although both the scientists were let off after detailed interrogations and investigations, the case of two other nuclear scientists in Pakistan, Suleman Asad and Muhammad Ali Mukhtar, raised further suspicion about the influence of radical groups within Pakistan's nuclear establishment. Both Asad and Mukhtar were spirited out of Pakistan and given asylum in Myanmar. It was reported that President Musharraf had personally called up his counterparts in Myanmar to ensure their

safe passage and housing. Their whereabouts and involvement with extremist groups remain a mystery till date.

The third reason to suspect LeT's role in furthering the Al Qaeda cause is its expanding network of schools, particularly science colleges, and its insistence on imparting science education to its students. Saeed has advocated promotion of scientific temperament along with *jihad* as part of his campaign to indoctrinate young Pakistanis. LeT is part of Al Qaeda's Long War and is following JI's path of 'revolution from the top'. Although it is hard to document how many graduates from these institutions have joined the government, the army or the nuclear establishment, it can be safely assumed that at least some of the recruits to these institutions in future will have affiliations with LeT-run educational institutions. It is hard not to, since LeT runs more than 175 English-medium schools in Punjab, a province from which the maximum number of candidates are recruited in the Army, government and the nuclear establishment.

The third entity that can be influenced by Al Qaeda and bin Laden is the Army, which controls the nuclear establishment. The Army's Al Qaeda and Taliban links have been well-documented and need no repetition. What, however, must be emphasised is that the Army's strategic relationship with extremist groups like the LeT and the Taliban have influenced at least some of the young and middle-ranking officers who cherish visions of leading an Army of Islam. In 2003, more than 20 officers, many of them of the rank of Lt. Colonels, were arrested for their linkages with the Taliban. The arrests were made on basis of US intelligence reports. Six of them were held after an Al Qaeda operational commander Khaled Mohammad Sheikh, arrested from Rawalpindi, snitched on them. Although the Army refused to identify the officers, one of the officers was identified as Lieutenant-Colonel Khalid Abbassi from the Corps of Signals, posted at Kohat. He was known to be well respected among his peers and delivered daily lessons from the Holy Quran to his troops. Several junior Pakistan Air Force officers were arrested a few years ago for taking part in the conspiracy to assassinate President Musharraf. These officers had aligned with terrorist groups close to Al Qaeda for this task.

RADICAL MILITARY

It is today accepted by scholars studying the Pakistan armed forces, that men and officers are more conservative than in the past, and exhibit the influence of radicalisation that swept through the armed forces during President Zia-ul Haq's 11 years of rule. Many of the officers recruited during Zia's tenure, are now in higher leadership positions in the Army.

What complicates the situation many times over, is the fact that the Pakistan Army, over the years, has become more radicalised and 'culturally sympathetic to the extremists'. Not only have the armed forces and its intelligence wing, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), been exploiting religion for years as an instrument of covert war, but there is also evidence of their officer cadre and its rank and file increasingly becoming ideologically aligned with terrorist groups like the LeT and Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM, the Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law). Ahmed Rashid has argued that the FC, a paramilitary force led by officers deputed from the Pakistan Army, is 'imbued with *jihadist* ideas and motivations'. 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 LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammad.

Although it can be argued that the percentage of radicalised elements in the officer cadre is quite negligible, a handful of officers, even one individual, can do the unthinkable – allow Al Qaeda to get its hands on radioactive materials, if not a nuclear weapon itself. What adds credence to such a possibility is the fact that the army had allowed the A.Q. Khan network to proliferate so openly and extensively for several years, before his network was capped. It was also aware of nuclear scientists Mahmoud and Majid's contacts with bin Laden and al-Zawahari, but did not stop them till the Americans came up with evidence.

Such an event need not necessarily happen at the heavily secured nuclear laboratories or installations, but at storage sites and in transit. There have been fears expressed by experts about the possibility of diverting radioactive nuclear waste while in transit. For instance, there are about 140 firms that handle radioactive wastes in Pakistan, of

which one-third were found to be lax in security. There have been fears about 'orphaned' radioactive materials in Pakistan. Since there is no specific information about the transportation of materials used in nuclear power stations and weapons laboratories, the issue of transit security remains open to question. These gaps and deficiencies make Al Qaeda's work easier; the terrorist group or its proxies need not possess a complete weapon to pose any meaningful deterrence to the US, but even parts of a warhead, or a canister of radioactive material, can create a wave of panic and terror across the world.

ENDNOTES

1. Humra Quraishi, "Armed Conflicts and Turbulence Around", The Tribune, March 26, 2006.
2. Verse 60 of Sura Al-Anfal "The Spoils of War".
3. Syed Qutb Shaheed, Milestones. <http://www.bandung2.co.uk/books/Files/Politics/Milestones.pdf>
4. R Scott Appleby, "History in the Fundamentalist Imagination", The Journal of American History, Vol. 89, No. 2, History and September 11: A Special Issue (Sep., 2002), pp. 498-511.
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