

Institutionalization of Terrorism in Pakistan as A Factor In Militarization of South Asia

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The institutionalization of terrorism in Pakistan was possible because a melange of Islam and Jihad contributed to the making of Pakistan's polity. After the military coup in 1977, the Zia regime opted to legitimize its power by deploying Islam and Jihad as the twin instruments of its domestic and foreign policy. Islam and Jihad together provided a breeding ground for terrorist because the former gave religious sanctity to their activities and latter motivated them to unite Muslims of all hues wherever the existence of Islam was perceived to be threatened. As Zia embarked on his project to build a virtual theoretic state in Pakistan, Mullahs and other religious authorities became a part of the establishment and began to enjoy special status in society and a hold over the polity in Pakistan. The Zia regime financed madarsas, religious schools, through Zakat, a tax collected by the state. The madarsas have also been getting funds from private sources, especially from wealthy businessmen and industrialists, within Pakistan and from the countries of the Persian Gulf, including Iran and Saudi Arabia. Over the years, the madarsas have registered rapid growth in Pakistan. However, till 2000 only 4350 out of roughly 40,000 to 50,000 madarsas were registered officially. By and large, madarsas impart education in areas concerning religion and shy away from offering secular subjects like mathematics and science. The state in Pakistan has not been able to regulate the curriculum in madarsas despite efforts made by ministry of interior. Out of the existing madarsas at least 10 to 15 percent have been turning their pupils into religious zealots by offering them a narrow sectarian training. Most of them eventually join loose networks of groups motivated by religious ideologies, including terrorist organizations. Drug trafficking, crime and illegal trade in biological and chemical weapons finance such groups.²

Promoting Jihad has become a thriving business in Pakistan. It is run on the basis of labour supplied by the poorer families and capital provided by private sources including the Pakistani diaspora.³ In the midst of the dismal economic conditions of Pakistan, teenagers who are tempted to be Mujahideen enjoy lucrative job prospects. According to an estimate an ordinary Mujahideen is paid Rs. 15,000 a month. This is, of course, much higher than what an average Pakistani earns.⁴ Pakistani militant groups have also been exporting their version of jihad to other parts of Asia and world. The Khudamudeenmadarsa has been training students from diverse areas such as Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mangolia, Kuwait and Chechenya. The Darul Uloom Haqqania, the madarsa that contributed to the making of Taliban, had a substantial proportion of students from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Russia and Turkey. Besides, many of the militant groups associated with radical madarsas unequivocally declare their plans to bring jihad to India, Russia, the central Asian countries and the Western world. Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET) has announced its plans to "plant Islamic flags in Delhi, Tel Aviv, and Washington."⁵ The terrorist organizations and ISI have no qualms about hiring criminal gangs to transact weapons or drop explosives while perpetrating violence. For instance, the members of a Dubai-based criminal gang were allegedly trained by irregulars to handle explosives and arms in Pakistan before the chain of explosions in Mumbai in 1993.⁶ In view of the institutionalization, rapid growth and impact of terrorism as a factors in militarisation of South Asia, it would be worth taking a look at the nature of the Pakistani state and the leadership of Parvez Musharraf.

The state in Pakistan is highly militarized in a two fold way. First, irrespective of the nature of the political regime, the top echelons of the army have been playing a major role in decision-making process. Second, since 1990 Pakistan has roughly spent \$ 30.4 billion on purchasing sophisticated weapons and military technologies from countries as varied as China, North Korea, France, the U.S. and Australia. Indeed the purchases of weapons and overall military build up have been possible due to the parallel economy built around heroin. Pakistan has been able to finance its purchase of weapons to a significant extent through illegally generated finances from the sale of heroin. Even though these are no precise figures about the heroin dollars, according to an estimate they contribute roughly \$ 15 billion annually to Pakistan's economy.⁷

Pakistan has been canalizing its illegally earned money through the sale of heroin to fund the activities of terrorist outfits in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) as well as Jammu and Kashmir (J & K). Pakistan has sought to legitimize the existence of as well as its support to terrorist groups operating in J & K by calling them freedom fighters. Among these outfits, the activities of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET) are worth noting. The JEM has been aligned with the radical pro-Taliban political party Jamait-I-Ulema-I-Islam (JUI), in Pakistan. It was able to manage the release of Maulana Masood Azhar, a prominent JEM leader, from India by hijacking an Indian Airlines aircraft along with passengers in December 1999. It also claimed the responsibility for the bomb blast of October 1, 2001 near the state legislative assembly in J & K which killed 50 people.⁸ Similarly, LET has inflicted severe damage on India through suicide attacks since 1998. Owing to its well-knit linkages with Osama bin Laden's International Islamic Front (IIF), LET is capable of mobilizing the networks of multilateral terrorist organizations to achieve its goals. After the attack on Indian Parliament on December, 13, 2001, the US-banned organizations like LET and JEM associated with AI Qaida in the IIF, under a 1996 law dealing with foreign terrorist organizations.⁹ In response to the US pressure president Musharraf baned the LET, JEM and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LEJ) in January 2002. However, other organizations including Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM), declared by US as a terrorist organization in October, 1997 and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI) have continued to operate with substantial numbers of trained cadres in J & K, Chechnya, the Arakan area of Myanmar, Southern Philippines and Bangladesh. Since the HUM and HUJI have had support from the lower and middle ranks of the army, the Musharraf regime has been reluctant to enforce a rigorous ban on their functioning. The Jihad related terrorist organizations, have often been closely associated with the senior officials of ISI.

President Musharraf himself has had long standing close links with fundamentalist organizations.¹⁰ During Afghan war he had been assigned the job of training mercenary Mujahideen groups. His contact with Osama bin Laden dates back to the Afghan war. Subsequently Musharraf worked as a brigadier in the Special Services Group in Siachin under the Zia regime in 1987. He was also responsible for suppressing revolt of the Shia population in Gilgit with support from Pakistan tribesmen. His close links with Javed Nasir, the then director-general of ISI and other top army officials who were Deobandis, brought him in close contact with several fundamentalist groups linked to bin Laden. He was among those who plotted Pakistan's Kargil misadventure along with regular / irregular army forces and terrorist groups in 1999.¹¹ Considering this background, can Musharraf sever his links with terrorist organizations abruptly?

Musharraf is committed to cracking down on terrorist camps and their infrastructure in POK. Pakistan's symbolic gesture of preventing Maulana Masood Azhar of JEM from addressing Friday congregations in Islamabad is a case in point. Besides the process of detente between India and Pakistan is slowly getting crystallized through trade and economic ties and promotion of people-to-people contacts with the resumption of Delhi-Lahore bus service.

However, are these positive developments, at times, marking the significance of terrorist outfits and the role of terrorism in Pakistan's polity and economy? Otherwise how does one explain continued terrorist attacks?

Indeed, after becoming president of Pakistan, Musharraf has been trying to fuse two divergent and certainly contradictory trends in Pakistan's policy. On the one hand, his regime, at least, outwardly, has been trying to curb the influence of religious zealots in Pakistan. On the other, it also supported the Taliban regime and has encouraged fundamentalist groups by calling them freedom fighters in Kashmir. The anti-terrorist stance of Musharraf, which has essentially emerged as a response to international pressure to end terrorism, is primarily serving the purpose of projecting the moderate credentials of his regime before international community.¹² In fact, for the past two decades the interests of the political regimes in Pakistan and those of various fundamentalist/terrorist groups have had an overlap and it was not inconvenient for Pakistan to work in coordination with such groups. In the ultimate analysis, the Indo-Pak peace initiatives and the resolution of the Kashmir question hinge on the Musharraf regime's capacity to disengage from the terrorist groups and even act against them.

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