

Pakistan, the Radicalization of the Jihadist Movement and the Challenge to China

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Abstract: *This paper gives a short comprehensive overview of Pakistan's historical role in the emergence, development and radicalization of jihadist movements since the 1980s. India, as well as faraway states like the US and the UK, has suffered from this jihadist phenomenon. Since the early 1990s, China, one of Pakistan's major neighbors and friends, has not been immune from a growing Uighur jihadist movement which has found sanctuary in Afghan and Pakistani territory and threatens the stability and security of its Xinjiang Province, and beyond. The challenge of this dangerous phenomenon risks carrying on if the Pakistani government and military will not put an end to it.*

Key Words: *Jihadist Phenomenon; Pakistan; China; Political Islam*

I. Ideological Roots and Strategic Circumstances

Political Islam has always been a reality in Pakistan since its birth in 1947. It is likely that political Islam exhibits a greater influence on the country's overall Muslim population than the myriad of extremist groups combined. The clearest manifestation of political Islam is within the creation of the *Jama'at al-Islami* (JI), Pakistan's first and largest political party founded by the late Maulana Mawdudi (1903-79), a Sunni Pakistani theologian, political philosopher, and influential 20th century Islamic revivalist whose work on Islamic resurgence and doctrine defines the group's activities and membership.²

When he speaks of "Islamic nationality," Mawdudi means allegiance to the *umma*, which he envisaged as a sort of Islamic super-nation uniting all Muslims in the world into a single, indivisible community. He asserted a bi-polar worldview that juxtaposed the Islamic sphere with all else and insisted that Muslims should completely isolate themselves from those he deemed not to be Muslims. The struggle to make this change is known as jihad.³

For Mawdudi, jihad was akin to a war of liberation for the establishment of politically independent Muslim states. He significantly changed the concept of

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² Farhana Ali, "U.S.-Pakistan Cooperation: The War on Terrorism and Beyond," *Strategic Insights*, Vol. VI, No. 4, June 2007.

³ Denis MacEoin, "The Hijacking of British Islam How Extremist Literature Is Subverting Mosques in the UK," *Policy Exchange*, 2007.

jihad in Islam and began its association with anti-colonialism and "national liberation movements."⁴

Mawdudi was certain that the Islamic state would be "the very antithesis of secular Western democracy." He had written about the need for a "revolution" to create an Islamic state, but he believed this revolution had to be prepared by a long campaign of persuasion. Mawdudi himself never had a sufficient following to make a concerted bid for power in Pakistan.⁵

Mawdudi's ideas set the agenda for Islamic movements from Morocco to Malaysia. From his revivalist efforts came the inspiration to re-achieve the glory that is Islam.⁶ His ideas were carried to their ultimate conclusion by an Egyptian Muslim Brother, Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), who borrowed heavily from Mawdudi's vision of an Islamic state, but was far more impatient and urged that a believing vanguard organize itself, retreat from impious society, denounce lax Muslims as no-believers, and battle to overturn the political order.⁷ Qutb thus transformed what had been a tendency toward violence into an explicit logic of revolution and thus became the spiritual father of al-Qaeda.⁸

Zia-ul-Haq, the military ruler who came to power in Pakistan through a *coup d'état* in 1977, strengthened the Islamic Ideology Council, revitalized the religious ministry, appointed the leaders of *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI) as his advisors and declared himself the "soldier of Islam."⁹ The legacy left by Zia-ul-Haq during the late 1970s further solidified the government's ties to extremist groups.¹⁰

II. Radical Madrasas in Pakistan

Madrasas are Islamic religious seminaries, usually established by a cleric of some importance. Madrasas owe their allegiance to various Sunni and Shia Islamic schools. Sunni madrasas adhere to different doctrines, such as those of the Deobandi, Ahle Hadith and Brelvi schools of thought.¹¹ Depending on their doctrinal leanings,

⁴ Michael G. Knapp, "The Concept and Practice of Jihad in Islam," *Parameters*, Spring 2003, pp. 82-94.

⁵ Martin Kramer, "Fundamentalist Islam at Large: The Drive for Power," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. III, No. 2, June 1996.

⁶ Abdul-Majid Jaffry, "Sayyid Maududi The Mujaddid of His Century," at <http://www.pakistanlink.com/Opinion/99/Sept/10/03.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Muqtedar Khan, "Radical Islam, Liberal Islam," *Current History*, Vol. 102, No. 668. December 2003, p. 417.

⁹ Ali Riaz, "Global Jihad, Sectarianism and the Madrassahs in Pakistan," *Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies Singapore Papers*, No. 85, August 2005.

¹⁰ "Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military," *International Crisis Group Asia Report*, No.36, 29 July, 2002.

¹¹ While Brelvis represent oral orthodoxy cushioned by devotional practices, Deobandis represent literate orthodoxy with a strict adherence to the classical texts of Islam. The Sunni subsect Jamiat Ahle Hadith (JAH) is the major Wahabi/Salafi party, very strict about Islamic teachings and disallowing liberal and modern interpretations of the Quran and Sunna. See Mohammad Waseem, "Origins and Growth Patterns of Islamic Organizations in Pakistan," in Satu P. Limaye, Mohan Malik & Robert G. Wirsing (eds.), *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia*(Honolulu, Hawaii: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), pp. 25-26.

individual madrasas are aligned with different federations, the most prominent of which are *Wafaq-ul-Madaris al-Arabia*, *Tanzeem-ul-Madaris Ahle Sunnat*, *Wafaq-ul-Madaris Shia*, and *Rabiat-ul-Madaris al-Islamia*. *Wafaq-ul-Madaris* represents the Deobandi school of thought, and has the largest number of followers.¹²

The vast majority of madrasas pursue highly political activities that set them apart from non-religious schools. The madrasas' role in issuing *Darul Iftas* – religious edicts for individuals and organizations seeking legal opinion or Islamic legitimacy for their actions – also fuels sectarian tension. The poisonous books, pamphlets, audio and videocassettes published by sectarian organizations are widely distributed in madrasas.¹³

Pakistan has seen a phenomenal 2745 % increase in Islamic madrasas since its independence in 1947 until 2001. In 2002 some 10,000 private madrasas with 1.5 million students representing 33 percent of total enrolment in Pakistan operated with very little monitoring by the government.¹⁴

The convergence of the Iranian revolution, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the CIA-ISI (the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence) nexus to create a band of militant Islamists, the Islamisation program of the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq and the unremitting flow of external funding for ideology-based religious education, mainly from Saudi Arabia, have accelerated the process.¹⁵

The message of jihad in the madrasas was originally targeted against communism, to ensure a continued supply of recruits for the Afghan holy war against the former Soviet Union. International patrons supplied arms and religious literature that flooded Pakistani madrasas, including special textbooks in Dari and Pashtu designed by the Center for Afghanistan Studies at the University of Nebraska-Omaha under a USAID grant.¹⁶

The end of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan "removed the *cause célèbre*," but by then the Pakistani political system "had become hostage to this tendency."¹⁷

The Taliban were the products of this type of Islamic education during the civil war in Afghanistan. By 1996, when the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, the Islamist Pakistani organizations with the active support of the Pakistani government became the warehouse of militant supplies for the Kashmir conflict.¹⁸

¹² Tufail Ahmad, "The Role of Pakistan's Madrassas," *MEMRI Urdu-Pashtu Media Project*, No. 462, August 21, 2008. As many as 200,246 students are getting education from the seminaries representing the Deobandi school of thought, 199,733 students are associated with the seminaries belonging to the Brelvi school of thought, while 34,253 students are affiliated with the seminaries representing the Ahl-e-Hadith school of thought. See Sajjad Shafiq Butt, "441,565 students are enrolled in Punjab Madaris," Lahore *The News*, January 2, 2006.

¹³ *Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ The Inter-Services Intelligence or ISI is the largest and most powerful Pakistani intelligence service.

¹⁶ *Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military*.

¹⁷ Riaz, *Global Jihad, Sectarianism and the Madrassahs in Pakistan*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

In 2000, the Khudamudeen madrasa trained students from Burma, Nepal, Chechnya, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mongolia, and Kuwait. Out of the 700 students at the madrasa, 127 were foreigners. Darul Uloom Haqqania, the madrasa that created the Taliban, also trained students from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Russia, and Turkey. Pakistani groups and individuals help finance and train the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a terrorist organization that aims to overthrow secular governments in Central Asia.¹⁹

More than five years after Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf declared his intention to crack down on violent sectarian and jihadi groups and to regulate the network of madrasas, banned sectarian and jihadi groups, supported by networks of mosques and madrasas, continue to operate openly.²⁰ The new Pakistani government elected democratically in February 2008 does not seem to have changed this trend.

The madrasas' role was highlighted in July 2007, after the female students of *Jamia Hafsa* and male students of *Jamia Faridia* madrasas – both controlled by Islamabad's Red Mosque clerics Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi—occupied a government building for several months in Islamabad, challenging the authority of the Pakistani government. The stand-off led to a military operation in which Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi and dozens of madrasa students were killed.²¹

The madrasas in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and in the federally administered tribal areas (FATAs) have been blamed also for the growth of Taliban-led militancy and a series of suicide attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the last year.²²

The government of the Punjab province declared in July 2008 that 80 madrasas in the province are dangerous and ordered regular monitoring of their extremist activities. In the NWFP's Swat district, at least 26 madrasa students disappeared recently, and are believed to have been taken by the Taliban to train as suicide bombers.²³

III. Taliban – Creature of Pakistan

During the 1980s, the United States and Saudi Arabia poured \$7.2 billion of covert aid into the jihad against the Soviets, the vast majority of which was channeled by the ISI to the most radical religious elements. After the Soviets

¹⁹ Jessica Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2000.

²⁰ Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism, *International Crisis Group Asia Report*, No. 130, 29 March, 2007.

²¹ Ahmad, *The Role of Pakistan's Madrassas*.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

withdrew, returning commanders, mujahideen groups and common criminals fought over the carcass of Afghanistan.²⁴

When it became evident to Islamabad and the ISI that the anarchy in Afghanistan was counter-productive to a policy of strategic depth as well as potentially destabilizing for Pakistan, they formed the Taliban. Beginning from a minor local movement in Kandahar Province in 1994 with few weapons and money, with massive covert Pakistani financial and military support, the Taliban rose to power and took over Kabul in 1996.²⁵

The Taliban, by hosting bin Laden's al-Qaeda, became an integral part of Sunni fundamentalist mythology and its international networks, and Afghanistan became a place where extremists from around the world could meet safely, share ideas, develop strategies, and receive training - a physical base of terror.²⁶ Moreover, Pakistani extremist groups have functioned as umbrella organizations for other international terror groups that sought shelter in Afghanistan.²⁷

Ehsan Ahrari called this phenomenon the "Taliban syndrome" - the movement to create an Islamic order in Afghanistan based on a blend of strict observance of Islam from Saudi Arabia's *salafiyya* (puritanical) tradition. Islamic forces of Pakistan have created and nurtured this syndrome in the *madrasas* where the Taliban ("students" in Farsi) from Afghanistan received their education. Since the chief thrust of this education is on Islam and the need for *jihad* (holy war) to establish an Islamic government, the Taliban members become firm believers and fervent practitioners of this training.²⁸

The "Taliban syndrome" also refers to the role of radical Islamists in the domestic and foreign policy of Pakistan and other contiguous states. Since this syndrome recognizes no borders it zealously seeks to establish an Islamic form of government anywhere in the region.

In July 2001, the Bush administration decided to isolate the Taliban leadership, eliminate the threat of their guest, Osama bin Laden, and put pressure on Pakistan to stop military and financial support.²⁹

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, the American forces occupied Afghanistan. After the demise of the Taliban the world

²⁴ Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire. Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 4, Spring 2008, pp. 41-77.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Douglas Frantz with David Rohde, "2 Pakistanis Linked to Papers on Anthrax Weapons," *New York Times*, November 28, 2001.

²⁷ Statement of Charles Santos, Former Special Assistant to the Undersecretary for Political Military Affairs, United Nations, *Al-Qaeda and the Global Reach of Terrorism, Hearing Before The Committee On International Relations House of Representatives One Hundred Seventh Congress First Session*, October 3, 2001.

²⁸ Ehsan Ahrari, "China, Pakistan, and the 'Taliban Syndrom'", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2000, pp. 658-671.

²⁹ Ahmed Rashid, "US Reviews Policy Option on the Taliban & International Terrorism", *Eurasia Insight*, July 31, 2001, at http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav073001_pr.shtml.

was made to believe that the movement ceased to exist. In fact, an accommodative approach towards the Taliban was adopted soon after US victory in Afghanistan. President Musharraf, addressing a news conference in October 2001 in Islamabad, said that "moderate Taliban" should be part of any coalition government in Afghanistan in order to achieve "national integration." Addressing the same press conference, US Secretary of State Colin Powell echoed the same opinion.³⁰

IV. Terrorist Activities

A. The Jammu & Kashmir conflict

This paper will not look at the 60 years old conflict between Pakistan and India. There is already a huge amount of information and analysis by Indian, Pakistani and Western researchers, on this subject.

However, it should be stressed that various Pakistani governments have used the Kashmir issue for populist ends. General Zia-ul-Haq's efforts to Islamize the Pakistani state in the 1980s, by providing a religious basis for opposition to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and for his personal rule in the country, later found his expression in support for the Islamist insurgency against Indian rule in Kashmir.³¹

B. The al-Qaeda pre-9/11 terrorist activities

It should be stressed that contrary to the impression given by the media and some analysts in the West concerning its so called diffuse independent networking character, al-Qaeda began life and continued its operations with the support of states³²:

During the 1980s it began its activity against the Soviets in Afghanistan as the Mujahedeen movement with support from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the US.

From 1990 to 1996 it worked alongside the Islamist revolutionary regime in Sudan to export revolution to Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Eritrea.

During the last phase of state support, 1996-2001, it was allied with the Taliban, and Afghanistan and Pakistan were used as an operational base.

Thus, Pakistan was involved directly or indirectly for two decades in the emergence and spread of global jihadist terrorism, including during the critical years for the preparation and execution of the 9/11 attacks on US soil.

Pakistan has been host since the 1980s to thousands of foreign jihadis who feared persecution if they returned to Egypt, Jordan, Yemen or Algeria. Some

³⁰ Happymon Jacob, "US-Pakistan Deal on the Taliban", *Issue Brief, Observer Research Foundation*. Vol. 1, No, 2 March, 2004.

³¹ Paul Bowers, "Kashmir," *International Affairs and Defence House of Commons Library Research Paper*, No. 04/28, March 30, 2004.

³² Fred Halliday, "A Transnational Umma: Reality or Myth?" *Open Democracy Ltd*, 7 October, 2005.

moved to Pakistan and others fought alongside the Taliban. The inflow of Arabs continued even during the 1990s with an estimated 35,000 foreign students in Pakistani seminaries or working with Islamic charities or NGOs. Half were Arabs, 16,000 were Afghans and the rest came from Central Asia, Burma, Bangladesh and elsewhere.³³

Under pressure from Egypt, Algeria, and others, Pakistan deported the Arab mujahedeen from Peshawar in 1991. Osama bin Laden financed the travel and false passports of 300 of them and shifted them to Sudan to continue their guerrilla training.³⁴

During the FBI investigation of the February 26, 1993 bomb beneath the two towers of the World Trade Center (WTC), evidence was put forward showing that the plot was hatched at a terrorist training camp on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The mastermind of the attack, Ramzi Yousef, had resided in the bin-Laden-funded Bayt al-Shuhada hostel in Peshawar for the majority of the three years before his arrest. and was captured in Pakistan in 1995.³⁵

On 22 February, 1998 Osama bin Laden announced in Pakistan the creation of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders (WIF), in association with radical groups from Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Two main signatories of the statement were Mir Hamza, Secretary-General of Pakistan's Ulema Society (Jamaat-ul-Ulema-i-Pakistan) and Fazlur Rahman Khalil, Chief of Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA) in Pakistan. The establishment of WIF was accompanied by two Islamic decrees (*fatwas*) by bin Laden and The Association of Islamic Clerics in Afghanistan (Ittihad al-Ulama' fi Afghanistan), declaring a religious war against the US.³⁶ Critical to the formation of the coalition and its subsequent terrorist activity was the moral, political and logistical support provided by the Taliban in Afghanistan as well as Islamist movements in Pakistan.

The simultaneous truck bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania on August 7, 1998, which killed some 250 people and injured thousands, the great majority of them Africans, was the first attack by al-Qaeda after the formation of the WIF and the major one before 9/11.

Bin Laden and terrorism proliferation issues had become an important benchmark in US-Pakistan relations. Pakistan strengthened its co-operation with the US through the arrest and extradition to the US of Ramzi Yousef, and an Arab

³³ *Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military.*

³⁴ "Report Notes US Attempt To Arrest UBL," *Lahore The Friday Times*, 30 Jul-5 Aug, 1999.

³⁵ Statement of Vincent Cannistraro, Former Chief of Counterterrorism Operations, Central Intelligence Agency, *Al-Qaeda and the Global Reach of Terrorism, Hearing Before The Committee On International Relations House Of Representatives One Hundred Seventh Congress First Session*, October 3, 2001.

³⁶ The *fatwa* was published in the London *Al-Quds al-'Arabi* on 23 February 1998.

follower of Osama bin Laden allegedly involved in the Nairobi blasts of 1998.³⁷ However, this cooperation came quite late and under serious American pressure.

In October 1999, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was deposed by General Pervez Musharraf. The Clinton administration hoped that Musharraf's coup might create an opening for action on bin Laden and influence the Pakistani military intelligence service, which supported the Taliban. By late 1999 diplomacy with Pakistan, like the efforts with the Taliban, had, according to Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering, "borne little fruit."³⁸

C. Terrorism in Pakistan after 9/11

Osama bin Laden and "his crew" are most likely today in the FATA, in what is called the Bajaur agency.³⁹

In 2003, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, al-Qaeda's chief of operations, was arrested at the home of Ahmed Abdul Quboos, a member of *Jammat-e-Islami*. In August 2003, three Pakistani army officers, including Lt. Col. Khalid Abbassi and one Major Atta, were arrested on charges of helping Khalid Mohammed.

The al-Qaeda strategist Mustafa bin Abd al-Qadir Setmariam Nasar (aka. Abu Mus'Ab Al-Suri), who played an important role in international jihadist terrorism providing practical training, and theoretical foundation for the violent campaigns was reportedly arrested in Quetta in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan in late autumn 2005.⁴⁰

The Pakistan government has handed over to the US al-Qaeda leaders like Abu Zabaydah (March 2002), Ramzi Binalahibh (September 2002), Khalid Sheikh Mohammad (March 2003) and Walid B'Attash (April 2003).⁴¹

The Taliban leadership (the "Kandahari clique") who are directing the attacks against the NATO coalition forces in southern Afghanistan resides in the city of Quetta, Pakistan. It is almost certain that the Pakistani intelligence agencies know the location of these individuals and actually have some kind of a liaison with them.⁴²

Lately, the creation of the so-called Pakistani Taliban, the radicalized tribal groups in the FATA have created new alliances under the name Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) and target the Pakistani state often using suicide attacks. Their best known

³⁷ B. Raman, "US Attitude to Pakistan: The Bin Laden Factor," *The SAPRA INDIA Foundation*, 11 August 1999.

³⁸ *The 9-11 Commission Report*, p.143, at <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>.

³⁹ "Pakistan's Mixed Record on Anti-Terrorism" Interviewee: Ashley J. Tellis, *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 6, 2008.

⁴⁰ Brynjar Lia, "The Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'Ab Al-Suri: A Profile," *Paths to Global Jihad: Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terror Networks*. Proceedings from a Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) Seminar, Oslo, 15 March, 2006, FFI Rapport - 006/00935, pp. 39-53.

⁴¹ Jacob, US-Pakistan Deal on the Taliban.

⁴² *Pakistan's Mixed Record on Anti-Terrorism*.

leader is Baitullah Mehsud who was probably responsible for the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on 27 December 2007.⁴³

Pakistan's counterterrorism effort thus remained intense but selective - with significant consequences for the overall success of the war on terror. The core members of the Taliban and al-Qaeda leadership have survived and remain active antagonists in the war against Afghanistan and the United States. Also surviving is the terrorist infrastructure supporting violence in Kashmir, which increasingly assists the Taliban and al-Qaeda.⁴⁴

The greatest challenge to Pakistan is arguably the rise of local militant Islam, both as an ideology and political force. The number of organized and ad hoc groups in Pakistan today that represent a radical form of "political Islam" is unknown, but arguably have a mass following from various quarters of society, including some elites, members of the armed forces, a booming madrasa population, and women members of right-wing women groups.⁴⁵

Pakistan's Taliban made outstanding progress in 2008 by controlling the tribal areas and undermining America's strongest ally in the region, former President Pervez Musharraf. Al-Qaeda expected improved relations with Pakistani authorities as the military command has been separated from the presidency.⁴⁶

The November 2008 Islamist attacks in Mumbai, India, highlighted the possible involvement in this major terrorist operation of Pakistani based terrorists with support from rogue Pakistani intelligence or military elements. The extremists behind the strikes "planned, trained and launched their attacks from Pakistan, and the organizers were and remain clients and creations of the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence)," Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon said.⁴⁷

Pakistani-born Ajmal Amir Kasab, 21, is the only gunman captured alive during the terrifying three days in Mumbai where 10 sites were attacked, including two five-star hotels and a Jewish center, killing more than 170 people. His trial, on charges of terrorism, criminal conspiracy and waging war against the state, began in May 2009.

Pakistan has outlawed Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET), the organization behind the Mumbai attacks and arrested five conspirators who, according to Indian investigators, were involved in planning the terrorist strike and having it carried out, but they have not yet been prosecuted. However, Hafeez Mohammad Sayeed, the Amir of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) a front organization for the outlawed LET,

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ali, *U.S.-Pakistan Cooperation: The War on Terrorism and Beyond*.

⁴⁶ Abdul Hameed Bakier, "Al-Qaeda Outlines its Strategy Seven Years after 9/11," *The Terrorism Focus*, The Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 5, No. 35, October 1, 2008.

⁴⁷ "Pakistani Intelligence Service Assisted Mumbai Attackers, India Says," *Global Security Newswire*, February 6, 2009.

has been released by the Lahore High Court before which he had challenged the legality of his detention.

V. The Challenge to China - ETIM and Other Jihadists

The special strategic defense, political and economic relationships between the People's Republic of China and Pakistan did not make it immune from growing Uighur terrorist and political Islamist and separatist activities based in Pakistan and Afghanistan under Taliban rule.⁴⁸

A. The Afghanistan/Taliban period

During the 1980s, Hizbul Islam Li-Turkistan, the first Islamist separatist movement in Xinjiang, was founded by Abdul Hakeem. One of his pupils was Hasan Mahsum, who left China in the early 1990s and settled in Afghanistan, where he established the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). From 1995 to 1997, the struggle in Xinjiang reached its peak, with increasingly frequent attacks by militants in Xinjiang. Until the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, ETIM focused on recruiting and training Uighur militants at a camp run by Mahsum.⁴⁹

East Turkistan terrorist forces were responsible for over 200 terrorist incidents in Xinjiang between 1990 and 2001 that claimed the lives of 162 people and injured 440. These terrorist activities included explosions, assassinations, attacks on police and government officials, crimes of poison and arson, and establishing secret training bases in order to create an atmosphere of terror in Xinjiang.⁵⁰

In February and December 1998, dozens of members of ETIM who had received special training in Afghanistan sneaked into Xinjiang and inland provinces and cities, and established 15 secret cells to offer technical training in explosives to 150 terrorists from various regions. The Xinjiang police uncovered many of these underground training stations and confiscated large numbers of antitank grenades, hand-grenades, detonators, guns and ammunition.⁵¹

In early 1999, bin Laden met with the leader of the ETIM, asking him to coordinate every move with the Uzbekistan Islamic Liberation Movement (IMU) and the Taliban, while promising financial aid. In February 2001, bin Laden and Taliban leaders decided to allocate an important sum of money for training the ETIM terrorists and offered them weapons and ammunition. After the training,

⁴⁸ See Tariq Mahmud Ashraf, "Sino-Pakistani Defense Relations and the War on Terrorism," *Terrorism Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 6, No. 8, April 17, 2008.

⁴⁹ Rodger Baker, "China and the Enduring Uighurs," *STRATFOR Intelligence Report*, August 6, 2008, at http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/china_and_enduring_uighurs.

⁵⁰ "'East Turkistan' Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity (2002-01-21)," *The Information Office of China's State Council*, October 24, 2003, at <http://www.chinaembassycanada.org/eng/xwdt/t37348.htm>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

some of the key ETIM members were secretly sent back to China to set up terrorist organizations and carry out terrorist activities and some joined the Taliban armed forces in Afghanistan.⁵²

Just several weeks before the 9/11 attacks, Ahrari made an interesting evaluation: "even if the Taliban are defeated in Afghanistan the attempted Islamization of Pakistan and its neighboring areas would only slow down or be postponed. Islamization is a politico-religious phenomenon that is based on Islamic internationalism. Whether a moderate or a hard-line version of Islamization materializes in Pakistan and elsewhere in Central Asia will depend on how the existing governments treat political dissent within their borders."⁵³

He noted that the People's Republic of China has special reasons for concern over the potential effects of the "Taliban syndrome" and the growing radicalization of Islamic parties in the region on the political stability of its Xinjiang Province, where the Uighur Muslims are seeking to win independence.

B. The effects of 9/11 and the demise of the Taliban

With the U.S. attack on Afghanistan in October 2001, ETIM was routed and its remnants fled to Central Asia and Pakistan. In September 2002, the United States declared ETIM a terrorist organization.⁵⁴ Twenty-two Uighurs were captured in Afghanistan and Pakistan late in 2001 and transferred by US military authorities at the Guantanamo prison.

ETIM's leader, Hasan Mahsum was among eight persons killed when Pakistan Army commandoes raided a suspected al-Qaeda hideout at Angoor Adda in the tribal area of South Waziristan on October 2, 2003.⁵⁵

Following Mahsum's death, a leaderless ETIM continued to interact with the Taliban and various Central Asian militants, particularly Uzbeks, and slowly reformed into a more coherent core in the Pakistan/Afghanistan frontier. In 2005, there were stirrings of this new Uighur Islamist militant group, the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), which established a robust presence on the Internet. In 2006 a new video surfaced calling for jihad in Xinjiang, and later that year there were reports that remnants of ETIM had begun re-forming and moving back into Xinjiang.⁵⁶

C. The growth of the Pakistani Taliban and the links to ETIM

According to police sources in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan in the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan is under the effective control of the Islamic Movement of

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ahrari, *China, Pakistan, and the Taliban*.

⁵⁴ Baker, *China and the Enduring Uighurs*.

⁵⁵ Lahore, *Daily Times*, December 24, 2003.

⁵⁶ Baker, *China and the Enduring Uighurs*.

Uzbekistan (IMU). Small groups of Chechens and Uighurs are also present in the area. They work under the over-all command of Qari Tahir and are helped by Maulana Sadiq Noor, a local tribal leader close to the Neo Taliban.⁵⁷

On November 17, 2008, Mohammad Uyghuri, speaking from his base in the tribal areas of Pakistan, announced that Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden issued a directive appointing Abdul Haq Turkestani, a resident of Xinjiang, as the organization's leader in China. Uyghuri added that some 300 Chinese Muslims were currently living in the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and that these Chinese Muslims have training camps in the tribal areas from which they are sent to China to join the armed resistance.⁵⁸

A man named Abu Suleiman, who claims to be a member of Al-Qaeda's media team in the region, said that the Islamic militant group in China is called Hizb-e-Islami Turkestan (Turkistan Islamic Party - TIP) and is funded by al-Qaeda. Chinese Muslims in the tribal areas are also publishing a magazine called *Al-Turkestan ul Islamia* (The Islamic Turkestan).⁵⁹

The three issues of this magazine published until May 2009 are similar to other jihadist journals such as *Sawt al-Jihad* (Voice of Jihad), published by al-Qaeda. They show that either the TIP is trying to associate itself with al-Qaeda and allied Salafi-Jihadi groups or al-Qaeda is aiming to attract "Turkistanis" to their global jihadi movement.

The TIP was unknown before it emerged in 2008 to make claims of responsibility for various terrorist attacks across China and also issued threats of attacks on the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

According to a reliable Pakistani newspaper, 172 of the 917 foreign students in the International Islamic University in Islamabad are from China. The most popular faculty among foreign students is Usuluddin (principles of Islam).⁶⁰

W.O., a French recruit of al-Qaeda, stated that the Arab camp was the smallest grouping of foreign fighters in FATA with about 300 to 400 recruits, mostly from Saudi Arabia but some from other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. According to him the largest group of foreign fighters in FATA was from East Turkestan.⁶¹

D. Pakistan - China relations and the Uighur problem

⁵⁷ B.Raman, Mir Ali In North Waziristan - Under Uzbek Control-International Terrorism Monitor- Paper No. 262, 29 July, 2007.

⁵⁸ *Pajhwok Afghan News (PAN)*, Nov. 17, 2008, at <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=pas&id=65438>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Lahore, *Daily Times*, June 15, 2006.

⁶¹ W.O. also stated that there were two Uzbek groups operating in FATA numbering a total of around 3,000 fighters, and two Kurdish groups. See Cruickshank, *The 2008 Belgium Cell and FATA's Terrorist Pipeline*, Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel, April 2009, Vol. 2, No. 4.

In September 2003, Lequan Wang, Communist Party secretary for Xinjiang Autonomous Region, and member of the party's top-level Politburo, stated that the Islamist separatists in China are trained and are securing assistance from international terrorists, including instruction in "several training camps in Pakistan." He also said that the Taliban had helped train many of the Xinjiang separatists.⁶²

In May 2004, Chinese Deputy Director of Public Security, Ma Mingyue, stated that some terrorists from Xinjiang are hiding in Lahore and Rawalpindi and have mixed up with the Chinese community in the two Pakistani cities.⁶³

In June 2006, Chinese diplomats in Pakistan declared that members of ETIM were planning to kidnap senior Chinese diplomats in the country.⁶⁴

In May 2007, the Chinese government requested Pakistan to hand over more than 20 Chinese activists of ETIM hiding in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.⁶⁵

The Chinese concern is due to three reasons: first, the threats to the lives of Chinese nationals. There have already been five attacks with four fatalities on Chinese nationals between 2003-2007 in Balochistan, in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Two of these incidents took place after the commando action in the Lal Masjid in Islamabad between July 10 and 13, 2007.⁶⁶ Secondly, the failure of the Pakistani police to make any progress in the investigation into these incidents and arrest and prosecute those responsible. Thirdly, the failure of the Pakistani intelligence agencies to locate and neutralize about 20 Uighur terrorists belonging to ETIM who, according to the Chinese authorities, have taken sanctuary in Pakistan. The Chinese authorities were greatly worried that these Uighurs might organize a major terrorist strike in Xinjiang coinciding with the Beijing Olympics.

Hu Shisheng, a Chinese specialist in South Asian politics at the China Institute for Contemporary International Relations in Beijing, sums up the Chinese-Pakistani common strategic interests by stressing that a stable Pakistan is essential for building a stable Xinjiang. A disintegrated or dismantled Pakistan will be a disaster for China. Without close cooperation with Pakistan, how can China ensure stability in the huge tribal areas where Uygurs are active, he asks? Therefore China will contribute to its stabilization.⁶⁷

⁶² *Daily Times*, September 12, 2003.

⁶³ *Daily Times*, May 28, 2004.

⁶⁴ *Pakistan Timeline - Year 2006*, June 25, 2006, at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/timeline/2006.htm>.

⁶⁵ *Pakistan Timeline*, May 16, 2007, <http://satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/timeline/2007.htm>.

⁶⁶ B.Raman, "Security of Chinese Nationals in Pakistan," *International Terrorism Monitor Paper*, No. 266, 11-Aug-2007.

⁶⁷ Cited in Willem van Kemenade, "China and Pakistan: New Friends Can't Compare," *YaleGlobal*, 12 March 2008, at <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=10490>.

In this context, the moves of the Pakistani government in recent years to clamp down on Uighur settlements and on religious schools used as training grounds for militant Islamists are relevant. When tensions over Islamic extremism developed between China and Pakistan after Islamic vigilantes kidnapped several Chinese citizens, President Musharraf responded quickly and many believe that his decision to use military force against the extremists at the Red Mosque in Islamabad stemmed largely from the incident with the Chinese citizens, which had greatly embarrassed his regime.⁶⁸

In June 2009, Pakistan has extradited to China 10 of the over two-dozen arrested Chinese terrorists belonging to ETIM. The ETIM militants had actually been arrested after they attacked Pakistani Security Forces in the tribal areas. All those extradited to Beijing were involved in terrorist activities both in China and in Pakistan and had also developed links with al-Qaeda network in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Moreover, ETIM threatened to kidnap Chinese diplomats in the Pakistani federal capital with a view to highlighting their cause.⁶⁹

The July 2009 sectarian riots between Muslims and Han Chinese in the city of Urumqi, Xiniang's capital, the worst ethnic violence in decades, when an Uighur mob took to the streets burning cars and buses, smashing shops and provoking tit-for-tat reprisals by the government, have left 183 dead, 137 Han Chinese and 46 minority Uighurs.⁷⁰ Calm has been superficially restored to the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, but the internal and regional consequences of these grave events are not yet clear.

However, it can be already noted an escalation in the threats from jihadist circles and militants in Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa. On the jihadi Internet forums surfers remind readers that Xinjiang has a border with Pakistan, and call the Taliban and al-Qaeda to take revenge. Others threaten the thousands of Chinese workers in Mecca building train tracks, or suggest that al-Qaeda members in the Maghreb kidnap Chinese people and execute them.⁷¹ The most extreme responses were of surfers who demanded global Jihad leaders to put China in the Jihadi equation and to start supporting the "Turkistan Islamic Party" financially and morally.⁷²

VI. Conclusion

According to a senior Pakistani nuclear scientist, "[ten years after the bomb], Pakistan has turned out to be a country that is badly insecure and frightened of its

⁶⁸ Ashraf, *Sino-Pakistani Defense Relations and the War on Terrorism*.

⁶⁹ Amir Mir, "10 terror suspects extradited to China," Karachi *The News*, June 6, 2009.

⁷⁰ London *The Times*, July 11, 2009.

⁷¹ <http://al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=72900>.

⁷² <http://hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=112824>.

future... The most significant reality was that the bomb promoted a culture of violence which, in those circumstances, acquired the form of a monster with innumerable heads of terror; and today Pakistan is badly in its grip... In the near future, Pakistan faces real danger, not from India but from terrorism and fundamentalism.⁷³

The near-term policy consequences of the ongoing radicalization in Pakistan, and the failure of the Pakistani government to prohibit refuge for the Taliban as well as foreign jihadis in the FATA, are the continued destabilization of southern Afghanistan, the spread of the Taliban insurgency, and the further subversion of democracy in Pakistan.⁷⁴

Globally, there are fears that the collapse of the current Pakistani regime could lead to an implosion of the state itself, with grave repercussions on regional and international security. Pakistanis themselves are very much concerned about a disaster of national proportions.

On this background, less than a month after the newly elected democratic Pakistan government approved a military-devised accord with the Swat-based extremists on 13 April, 2009, the *sharia* (Islamic law) was established in this territory, and Taliban militants advanced to within 100km. of the capital, Islamabad, raising concerns about increased terrorist threats. Ahmed Rashid, the well known Pakistani journalist called it "galloping Talibanization."⁷⁵

As the tribal militants openly defied the writ of the state and under significant international pressure, the Pakistani military at last launched a campaign to eradicate Pakistani Taliban groups from their strong-holds in the Malakand region, including Swat. After the Swat military offensive, Pakistan's army launched a military operation into South Waziristan – the stronghold of Baitullah Mahsud and the TTP network, potentially the toughest battle Pakistan's military has fought against the Taliban.⁷⁶ The military's mandate, according to Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, was "to eliminate the Taliban once and for all".⁷⁷

It's hoped that the new resolute and tough strategy of the Pakistani government and army will eradicate or at least weaken significantly the radical Islamist movements, militias and terrorist groups and thus bring security and economic and social development to this beleaguered country and defuse threats of terrorism and subversion against its neighbors.

⁷³ "10th Anniversary of 'Islamic Bomb': Pakistani Nuclear Scientist on How to Make Pakistan Normal and Secure," MEMRI Urdu-Pashtu Media Project, Special Dispatch No. 1953, June 9, 2008.

⁷⁴ Johnson and Mason, *Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier*.

⁷⁵ *The Dawn Blog* (dawn.com), Pakistan, May 4, 2009.

⁷⁶ Mukhtar A. Khan, "Pakistani Government Offensive in Swat Heading for the Taliban of Waziristan," *Terrorism Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 7 Iss. 17, June 18, 2009.

⁷⁷ Zulfiqar Ghuman and Irfan Ghauri, "Enough is enough!" *Daily Times*, 8 May, 2009.