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The Fluttering Flag of Jihad

Amir Mir

Foreword by *Khaled Ahmed*



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Amir Mir

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*I dedicate this book to my beloved
parents*

***Prof. Waris Mir (late)
&
Mrs. Mumtaz Mir (late)***

*whose intellectual inspiration and
affection is the moving spirit behind all
my journalistic and literary pursuits*

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FOREWORD

Three ‘Terminal’ Narratives of Pakistan

As Pakistan moves into the turbulence of a global economic downturn, three invasive discourses cause diversions and distortions. The world outside thinks Pakistan has become a centre of international terrorism. It is ground zero for the West in the hunt for al-Qaeda and its fugitive leader, Osama bin Laden. Inside Pakistan, there is an opposed people’s narrative, starting with a protest against the definition of terrorism and ending with a pledge of confrontation with the West. The third narrative is an India-driven narrative which serves to delay any reconciliation between the other two clashing narratives.

The External Narrative

The External Narrative is typically information-based. Its knowledge of al-Qaeda is comprehensive enough to enlist the support of the masses of America and the European Union. Information gathered from the Arab secret services, journalistic inquiry and confessional material from al-Qaeda agents caught by America, enables the West to know more about the penetration of Pakistan by al-Qaeda than Pakistanis do. Western observers at times find it quite shocking that Pakistanis don’t even know the names of their own jihadi organisations active in the region.

The states affected by al-Qaeda’s activities are not only America and the member states of EU. Others who contribute to the external narrative are located in the region. They are Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Russia and India, all of them affected by terrorism purveyed through men trained by al-Qaeda in Pakistan. Although Turkey has always sympathised with the “fellow-Turk” Uzbeks, and supported the Uzbek warlord Abdur

Rashid Dostam of the Northern Alliance, recent terrorist attacks have forced it to focus on the training grounds of Pakistan where the rebellious expat Turks have taken their training.

Iran was one of the neighbouring countries that opposed the Taliban regime in Kabul and then developed the strategy of supporting the Northern Alliance even though Northern Alliance was also supported by the United States. It declared cultural affinity with the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance and opposed the Pakistan and Saudi Arab-supported Taliban. Since Iran is fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq it is also in a state of unspoken challenge against Pakistan as a hiding place of al-Qaeda.

Because of the training of Chechens in South Waziristan and their subsequent move into Dagestan, a disturbed part of the Russian Federation, Russia too backs the grand coalition of forces against al-Qaeda. India has been the target of mujahideen trained in Afghanistan in al-Qaeda camps. It was made to take its embassy out of Kabul in 1996 by the incoming Taliban, but now it is back in Afghanistan with the Northern Alliance, primed with the strategy of staving off Pakistan's mischief behind an al-Qaeda foil. Its flanking move in Afghanistan is geared to interdicting any move by Pakistan into the Indian-administered Kashmir.

The Internal Narrative

The second narrative of Pakistan is the Civil Society Narrative based on people's perception of al-Qaeda and America. It is typically based on ideology rather than facts. It denies the way the non-Muslim world has defined terrorism and activities of al-Qaeda. It is a counter-version of what transpired on 9/11 and has no knowledge about the origins and development of al-Qaeda as an organisation. At times it denies that there is such a thing as al-Qaeda. On its fringes, people rely on such extravagant theories as the one that has Osama bin Laden in a jail in America, while the US invents pretexts for attacking Muslim states.

The Civil Society Narrative reflects the general people's trend in the Muslim world of abandoning the state. There is a widening of the gap between the nation and the state in the Muslim world, followed by a demonisation of even elected

governments as “slaves” of America. The alienation of the people consists of a feeling of betrayal against the state on the basis of its “interest”; and of “sell-out” by the government on the basis of its “opportunism”. Muslim civil society often talks of solidarity with “*umma*” at the global level but quickly supersedes this concept with disavowal of Muslim governments.

The civil society doesn’t conceptually separate the invasion of Afghanistan, under the mandate of the UN Security Council, from the invasion of Iraq later without the approval of the UN Security Council. It sees America’s war against al-Qaeda as war against the Muslims and doesn’t take into account the global consensus behind this war. It sees Pakistan’s participation in this war as fighting “not its own” war. Examined closely, the narrative seems to be recommending a war against America rather than against terrorism “whose real causes the West is not willing to address”.

This narrative is not a little influenced by the strategy of al-Qaeda of moulding opinion in Pakistan through expertly deployed suicide-bombing. Civil society and most of its institutions are exposed to this strategy because of the dwindling writ of the state and retreat of its institutions in the face of the foot soldiers of al-Qaeda who call themselves Taliban. Anger about being weak is allowed to take the identity of an anti-American passion because of the pan-Islamic civil society trend to mistrust and reject the state as an “un-sovereign” entity.

The Nationalist Narrative

The third narrative is the Nationalist Narrative that is purely India-driven and is supported by the Pakistan army. It diverts the West-induced threat to the security of Pakistan from al-Qaeda to the traditional threat from India. It is here that a meeting of the minds between at least one institution of the state and civil society at large comes into being. It sees the presence of India and its intelligence services in Afghanistan as a threat to the security of Pakistan. It points to India’s interference in Balochistan as an example. The moment the state of Pakistan puts abroad this new angle of threat, it unconsciously destroys the justification for looking at al-Qaeda as a threat.

The state institutions under this narrative seem to become divided in their approach. They are pulled in the direction of confrontation with al-Qaeda because of Western persuasion and the challenged writ of the state. They see that the army cannot alone defeat al-Qaeda without the help of the US and the EU, but when it unleashes the Nationalist Narrative it begins to point at an external threat emanating from the very West, with whom it was cooperating, as a collaborator of India. This narrative modifies the Civil Society Narrative too.

Civil society today sees the state and its institutions as “slaves” of America, but it retains yet a memory of the Nationalist Narrative when civil society used to be an ally of the state pointing to India as the only significant external source of threat. It revives that memory because reviving it waters down the focus on al-Qaeda as the main threat to Pakistan and vitalises the new intense perception of America as the most significant threat by joining India with America as an ally in Afghanistan.

If the civil-military enclave in Islamabad was inclined to agree with the External Narrative, because it was threatened by al-Qaeda and its destruction of the writ of the state, it is now inclined to half-believe the narrative while half-hating the West in Afghanistan as an ally of India. This tends, not so much to divide the establishment, as to make it acquire a split personality. It begins to act in line with the directions of the West and acting against the West at the same time. From here rises the impression that the state and its institutions are complicit with al-Qaeda.

The most dangerous aspect of this narrative is that at some point it designates two enemies that Pakistan must fight at the same time: the United States and India. This brings the narrative close to the cause of al-Qaeda which wants to fight an entire array of global entities associated one way or another with America. It also subliminally supports the al-Qaeda concept of jihad as a normal condition of life because otherwise “rational choice” would prevent it from choosing a regional superpower and a global power as its enemies at the same time.

Three clashing and merging narratives cause upheaval in Pakistan today. They are like the end-of-the-world theorems, and Pakistan must choose one of them to perform the act of dying as a state. There are secondary diversionary sources of disorder too,

like the lawyers' movement, which simply tend to exacerbate the conflict. Hurt by the steep economic downturn, the people of Pakistan are hardly able to accept the state as a benign entity. The state and al-Qaeda rival each other for the status of enemy. And the state seems to be losing out all the time.

The Schizoid State

The account given by Amir Mir in this book is about the split nature of the state of Pakistan as it lives under the sway of these three narratives. Did the state in Islamabad kill Ms Benazir Bhutto or did the al-Qaeda warlord Baitullah Mehsud located in South Waziristan? If the answer is "both" then we are on to a very uncertain base of inquiry. Increasingly, this is what people point to when they ask: is Baitullah a genuine rebel from the state or is he functioning fully or partially in concert with the state? There is so much past jurisprudence which points to a possible area of collaboration that it is possible to talk persuasively about it. There are however some problems that must be sorted out first.

If Ms Bhutto was killed by Musharraf then how does one explain all the al-Qaeda signatures on the scene of the crime, like the use of suicide-bombers and the deployment of a particular kind of explosive material? If Baitullah Mehsud and his men are trying to kill President Musharraf and if his allies and al-Qaeda's Pakistani jihadi militias have tried to kill Musharraf in 2003, how can they bring themselves to do his bidding? *"The Fluttering Flag of Jihad"* brings together a lot of material which points mysteriously and not so mysteriously – "if I am killed hold Musharraf responsible" – to the possibility of a "split" state acting under a schizoid pathology.

Ms Bhutto was overwhelmed by so much "inside" information from the state institutions under Musharraf that she could not ignore it. She does not indicate the status of her informants but it is clear that she had reason to believe them. She had been on the receiving end of mischief from the secret agencies when she was in power. Her sense of loneliness in power was complete, as she wrote later. Always, there were the loyal functionaries of the state and the Islamist "spies" who were ideologically opposed to see her ruling Pakistan. Under

Musharraf, however, there were probably elements within the regime that sympathised with her. There is therefore a stream of evidence against him from these quarters. She was understandably greatly drawn to the stream of revelations about Musharraf from his own establishment. But despite the fact that her sources were genuine, they were unable to prevent her killing.

Musharraf has frequently assured his critics that his establishment is not internally fragmented. In particular, he has claimed that he has purged the intelligence agencies of elements opposed to his "liberal" reforms and his policy of "reconciliation" with India in the post-Kargil era. Again and again, evidence to the contrary has emerged and has undermined President Musharraf's trust with his allies and supporters. The writer puts together ample evidence in *"The Fluttering Flag of Jihad"* to point to this phenomenon. Was Musharraf sincere in his commitment to the First Narrative of combating extremism and terrorism or was he mixing it with the Second Narrative, that of siding with the anti-American trend within the army and civil society?

There is clearer evidence that he was mixing his commitment to the First Narrative with his persistent adherence to the Third Narrative which placed Pakistan in a relationship of permanent antagonism with India. The pursuit of the Third Narrative was of course not articulated by him at the diplomatic level but it was asserted through the permitted paranoia of the intelligence agencies and a secret validation of the power of the non-state actors masquerading as jihadi organisations. In his communication with the army as an institution this adherence to the Third Narrative was his signalling of loyalty too. It was also a bargain. His sloughing off of the Islamist identity as a military leader was in a way balanced by his swearing of allegiance on the altar of the army's fundamental mission statement. For those in the West puzzled by his ambivalence of policy on Afghanistan, the thread through the labyrinth could lie in the subtext of his India policy.

What appears as the untrustworthy "bicameral" mind of Musharraf translates institutionally in the shape of opposed factions. There is evidence that ministries and agencies have pulled in opposed directions at times, totally divorced from the

announced policy of the Musharraf regime. Musharraf persistently denies internal fissures but, with the passage of time, his denials have faded in their conviction. Incidents explained by Amir Mir again and again point to his duplicitous leadership, but they could actually be signalling a divided state that thinks in a split fashion. Once this pattern is established, the trajectory of state behaviour under Musharraf begins to lend itself to a consistent interpretation.

Musharraf and Four Types of Legitimacy

Because of the regular alternation between military and civilian rule in Pakistan, people often refer to legitimacy, or lack thereof, on the part of the rulers. Although the yardstick of legitimacy should be applied to all rulers, it is usually applied to the military rulers. In this case, it commonly means constitutional legitimacy; and it becomes a dominant strain in public discourse towards the end of a military interregnum. Yet, at the existential level, there is a variety of legitimacies that a ruler in Pakistan must acquire if he wants to remain in power.

There is no doubt that a military ruler has to *seek* legitimacy while a civilian ruler has to *maintain* legitimacy. In contrast to the civilian ruler, who arises to power through the legitimising process of elections, a military ruler has to acquire legitimacy piecemeal through showing allegiance to the text of the Constitution. However, when he draws near to the point of acquiring permanent power, the civilian ruler has lost much of his legitimacy through political conduct. This prepares the public mind for the transition from civilian to military rule.

This means that there are several types of legitimacies that are clearly or tacitly accepted as expressions of norm in Pakistan. Before we examine Musharraf's quest for legitimacy let us look at an approximate cluster of these legitimacies. This of course presumes that, on the basis of existential practice, constitution is not the only source of legitimacy. 1) The first condition is of course constitutional which becomes available through the interpretive agency of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and its legitimising verdicts. 2) The second condition is political support which becomes available through a political party which legitimises a military ruler indirectly by contesting elections and

winning them. 3) The third condition is support of the army. Unfortunately, this has acquired the status of a category because of Pakistan's revisionist nationalism and the status of the army as an arbiter when the civilian system challenges the "security of the state". Political leaders lean on this legitimising factor for coming to power and for maintaining themselves in power. 4) The fourth condition is derived from economic management. This applies to all states big and small, but in the case of Pakistan it means breaking out of international isolation and avoiding the consequences of economic mismanagement by courting the support of the United States.

Musharraf gained legitimacy by acquiring the cluster of all the four legitimacies after coming to power in 1999. This is proved by the barometer of his personal popularity among the people and within the aggregate of Pakistan's vested interests. He approached the Supreme Court of Pakistan for an initial tenure of legitimisation. The same Court had been physically attacked by an elected government in an act of self-delegitimisation. Musharraf himself later described the same trajectory of self-delegitimisation by brutalising the Supreme Court in 2007 when he dismissed its chief justice.

The process of legitimisation fades into delegitimisation at the end of a tenure of public acceptance. The universal rule of atrophy of incumbency applies to democratic and non-democratic governance equally and crucially determines the downturn in the popularity of the ruler. Musharraf adhered to the rules of second legitimacy, that of being loyal to the army, to maintain its support. Apart from using administrative mechanisms within the army, which he controlled by allowing himself two offices at the same time, he kept the assent of the army behind his rule by inducting a large number of military personnel in the civilian administrative structure.

Musharraf used the paradigmatic event of 9/11 to reclaim American support as a legitimising factor in his government. This gave Pakistan an unprecedented period of economic growth lauded by such international organisations as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The two organisations are routinely used by states as politically legitimising factors in domestic politics. The army was rewarded

through the revamping of its equipment and through incentives of better employment among the officers' class. But there was a built-in contradiction in Musharraf's courting of the army and the Americans. The two legitimacies were contradictory.

By overstaying his self-prescribed tenure in 2004, General Musharraf invited the inevitable unveiling of the Pakistan Army-US contradiction in Afghanistan and the war against terrorism. His ambivalence always worried his supporters, but the clashing legitimacies of the army, that wanted retention of a position of dominance in Afghanistan, and America that wanted the Taliban isolated in Pakistan, undermined his governance. In part, his adherence to American policy, which he posited as "enlightenment and moderation", also struck at the base of the legitimacy acquired through the 2002 elections. His party - the Pakistan Muslim League (Q) - was reluctant to accept the policy as its mission statement.

After 2004, the process of legitimisation was clearly unfolding against Musharraf. All the four legitimacies that buoyed him up were now coming unstuck. His liberal reform which required the loosening of the laws affecting the minorities' and women's rights were filibustered by the PMLQ, his party in power. The *madrassa* reforms, which would have caused a serious dent in the policy of dominating Afghanistan, were allowed to run aground. He refused to see the contradiction in promoting a liberal vision for international legitimisation while harnessed to the legitimising factor of a conservative party in government.

In 2007, Musharraf lost all the four grounds of legitimacy. General Ziaul Haq had gained legitimacy through Islamisation and had to be killed after he lost it through an extension of rule beyond permissible incumbency. Musharraf had gained legitimacy through the reverse process of liberalisation and doesn't have to be killed after an extension of rule beyond permissible incumbency because the process of liberalisation had allowed more democratic space in Pakistan than General Zia's Islamisation did. "*The Fluttering Flag of Jihad*" by Amir Mir gives us evidence of how a "liberal" General has de-legitimised himself by following "strategic ambivalence" for nine years in power, baffling his supporters both at home and abroad.

Khaled Ahmed

August 16, 2008

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Pakistan's Jehadi Theatre: House Full, Show Goes On

Seven years after the 9/11 terror attacks in the US that shook the entire world, Pakistan, despite being a key American ally in the war on terror during all those chaotic years, continues to be plagued with the menace of Talibanisation and thus reverberates with a persistent call of jehad, as the flag of militant Islam keeps fluttering high more alarmingly than ever.

As the Bush era is coming to a fag end amidst an unending war against terror, the threat of Islamic militancy keeps spreading its tentacles across the globe; the rigid ideology of Taliban claiming new grounds and the al-Qaeda network thriving in the tribal areas of Pakistan by establishing an effective modus operandi that increasingly exploits its local affiliates to carry on the global jehadi agenda of the Osama-led terror outfit. Despite the deployment of over 80,000 Pakistani troops along the rugged Pak-Afghan border to counter al-Qaeda and Taliban linked Islamic militancy, the situation is far from stable in the trouble-stricken tribal region which is crucial to three world capitals - Washington, Kabul and Islamabad.

The swelling forces of the Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters in the country's border region not only pose a grave threat to the NATO troops in Afghanistan, but also to the people of Pakistan where Taliban militias, like their Afghan counterparts, are trying to impose their harsh medieval version of Islamic law. Although the Musharraf regime had decided to align with the US soon after the 9/11 attacks, the harsh reality is that the infrastructure of Islamic terrorism built during the last two decades by the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment was not dismantled. This happened mainly due to the fact that Pakistan, since 9/11, had been ruled by a military dictator who deemed it fit to employ terrorism as an instrument of the state policy both in Afghanistan and Jammu & Kashmir.

Subsequently, with the Islamic militancy gaining new grounds in the country and the fanatic jihadis literally marching on the state; the Taliban nowhere near defeated either in Afghanistan or in the border areas of Pakistan and the al-Qaeda still unbroken on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border, senior American government officials as well as the commanders of the NATO and the ISAF troops stationed in Afghanistan are openly accusing the Pakistani establishment of pursuing a policy of running with the hare and hunting with the hound. And rightly so!

Resultantly, a Pakistan-based Taliban movement, inspired by the past Taliban rulers of Afghanistan, is growing in Waziristan Agency along the Pak-Afghan border, challenging the efforts of the coalition forces to stamp out insurgents in Afghanistan and hunt down Osama bin Laden, Mullah Mohammad Omar and other al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders. The Waziristan Agency, making headlines in the international media since 2002 due to frequent clashes between Pakistani security forces and the al-Qaeda and Taliban linked militants, is virtually under the control of the local Taliban who have established their grip in the North and South Waziristan areas, besides gaining a significant base from which they wage their resistance against the Allied Forces in Afghanistan.

The extent to which the danger of Islamic militancy has swelled in the country after the 9/11 terror attacks can be well gauged from the fact that it is now spreading from the border areas to the settled areas like Peshawar and might eventually reach into the heart of Pakistan, the federal capital Islamabad. The risk of Talibanisation is escalating rapidly primarily because a new generation of highly charged and committed militants is emerging in the Pak-Afghan tribal areas. New militant leaders, new militant cadres and new militant groups are coming up in the Pak-Afghan tribal belt quite often while the old jihadi leadership of the 1980 Afghan war vintage no longer enjoys the kind of hold and sway which they used to command in the past, especially before the 9/11 terror attacks.

Generally referred to as the Pakistani Taliban, the new militant leadership is in fact a recent phenomenon. The original Taliban led by their *ameerul momineen* Mullah Mohammad Omar,

who ruled Afghanistan till 2001, were mostly Afghan fighters and a product of the Soviet occupation of their homeland. They were essentially created and cultivated by the all-powerful Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence. However, the new-fangled generation of Islamic militants is all Pakistani which emerged after the American invasion of Afghanistan and represents a rebellion against the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment's joining hands with the United States in the war against terror. While these extremist elements might be representing a minority view, their threat seems real.

The new breed of the Pakistani Taliban is led by young militants who, unlike the original Taliban, are technology and media-savvy and are influenced by various indigenous tribal nationalisms, honouring the tribal codes that govern social life in Pakistani rural areas. Though they are called Taliban because they share the same ideology with the Taliban in Afghanistan, they are totally Pakistani, who have a much better understanding of how the present day world works. Their holy war is aimed not just at infidels occupying Afghanistan, but also the infidels who they believe are ruling and running their homeland and maintaining the secular values of the Pakistani society. They aim at nothing less than cleansing Pakistan of all such elements to turn it into a pure Islamic state by enforcing Islamic *Shariat* (Islamic Laws).

Since the 9/11 terror attacks, the Bush administration had described former Pakistani President General Musharraf as the most trusted American ally in the war on terror. However, the seriousness with which the Musharraf regime might have taken part in the terror war could be adjudged from the fact that today's FATA is not much different to the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan before the 9/11 attacks. As a matter of fact, most of the leading militant commanders who are now ruling the roost in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan, largely because of their military might, are the products of the Musharraf period and had mushroomed in the past few years. This could not have been possible without the blessings of the Pakistani intelligence establishment which continues to nurture

and support these militant groups while treating them as the civilian face of the Pakistan army.

The opening sentence of a June 30, 2008 *Time* magazine report by Ms. Aryn Baker titled 'Pakistan: Negligent on Terror', states: "It's almost like a bad joke. A bus driver, a ski lift operator and a gym rat have turned the Islamic world's only nuclear-armed nation upside down".

Baitullah Mehsud, a former trainer at a small time fitness centre in Waziristan and now the fugitive *ameer* of the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP), Maulana Fazlullah, a former ski lift operator in Swat and now the renegade *ameer* of the *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi* (TNSM) and Mangal Bagh, a former truck conductor and now the rebel *ameer* of the *Lashkar-e-Islami* (LI) are regarded by their followers as the uncrowned kings of Waziristan Agency, Swat Valley and Khyber Agency respectively. Aged between 30 and 33, all the three Taliban linked jihadi commanders are young and have created ripples not only in the Pak-Afghan border areas owing to their militant power and substantially large following but have also caused alarm bells across the border in Afghanistan which is gradually coming under their growing influence.

The authority of these militant leaders and the clout they presently enjoy can be ascertained from the fact that despite being declared most wanted criminals by the Pakistani law enforcement agencies for their involvement in several deadly incidents of terrorism, including suicide bombings directed against the security forces, neither the Musharraf regime nor the new government in Islamabad had the guts to challenge their power. Both these governments had first launched military operations against the forces of Baitullah, Fazlullah and Mangal Bagh, but eventually decided to hold talks with them as a last resort to strike peace deals in Waziristan, Swat and Khyber.

Logically speaking, the age span for these jihadis would not have been beyond the circumference of 23-27 years at the time of the 9/11 terror attacks. As a matter of fact, hardly four years ago, no one had even heard of these commanders who were leading unknown lives. What actually happened then? It is largely believed that they were groomed by none other than the Pakistani establishment to secure the border with Afghanistan

which it thought had become vulnerable after the fall of the Taliban regime and the subsequent assumption of power in Kabul by the pro-India and anti-Pakistan Northern Alliance. Since it had become harder for the Pakistani establishment in the aftermath of the 9/11 to make use of the already established and known jihadi organisations in Afghanistan to protect its so-called geo-strategic agenda in the region, the *khaki* decision makers deemed it fit to create and nurture a new breed of jihadis along the Pak-Afghan tribal belt, which now challenges the writ of the state by presenting themselves as the Pakistani Taliban.

Troubled by the astonishing resurgence of the Taliban militia in Afghanistan, ties between three strategic partners - the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan are going through a critical phase seven years after the 9/11. The international community as well as the media continues to portray Pakistan as a breeding ground for the Taliban militia and a sanctuary for the fugitive al-Qaeda leadership. Despite repeated denials by Islamabad, the media keeps reporting that having established significant bases in Quetta and Peshawar, the provincial capitals of the North West Frontier Province and Balochistan, Taliban linked militants are carrying out cross border ambushes against their targets in Afghanistan, while al-Qaeda suicide bombing teams keep hitting at the US-led coalition troops after being launched from their camps in the mountainous region.

According to the June 30, 2008 *Time* magazine report by Aryn Baker, the Taliban in Afghanistan have regrouped after their fall from power and coalesced into a resilient rebellion which has a lot to do with their ability to find sanctuary in the largely lawless tribal areas of Pakistan along the border. The day before the report was released US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Pakistan is contributing to Afghanistan's instability by failing to prevent militants from crossing into Afghanistan to carry out attacks on the coalition forces which have gone up 40% since the beginning of 2008. Earlier, on June 10, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen had declared that any future terrorist attack against US interests would most likely be carried out by militants based in FATA. "The tribal groups

with ties to al-Qaeda in the FATA represent the worst security threat to the US", he had observed.

While Pakistan has been considered a key American ally in the war on terror for years, receiving at least \$10 billion since 9/11 for its support in hunting down top al-Qaeda and Taliban operatives, this partnership has become dramatically more complex of late, and the decision makers in Washington are now facing difficult dilemmas in the region. The American military assistance to the Pakistan army in combating the menace of terrorism has remained largely indirect. However, as militant activity has multiplied in recent times with a string of deadly suicide bombings all over Pakistan as well as in Afghanistan, the Bush administration is becoming increasingly skeptical about the ability of the Pakistan army and the will of its leadership to fight out the Taliban and al-Qaeda linked jihadi groups operating in the Pak-Afghan tribal region.

The dismal performance of the Pakistani security forces in combating the rising Taliban power in the Pak-Afghan border belt has raised eyebrows elsewhere in the region. Coalition-force officials in Afghanistan have noticed a distinct pattern with recent cross-border strikes, saying the point of origin of the attacks [from Pakistan into Afghanistan] is routinely next to border posts of Pakistani Frontier Corps. "Either they are ignoring the fact that the Taliban are fighting within their areas or they are complicit", said a senior NATO commander in Kabul on June 10, 2008 while defending the death of several Pakistani soldiers in an American drone attack on a Pakistani military post in the Mohmand Agency. The Pakistani soldiers were apparently fighting alongside Taliban forces against the Afghan army and the US units in the border area. "People are kidding themselves in Pakistan if they think they can solve their insurgency problem by sending it across the border", the NATO commander added.

Indeed history seems to be repeating itself with the United States experiencing at the hands of the 'Islamic terrorists' what the Soviet Union had experienced way back in the 1980s while fighting with the 'Islamic mujahideen' of those times. Today's "terrorists" on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border, giving sleepless nights to President Bush, are in fact the "mujahideen" of the past who had been raised by the decision makers in the

White House to fight out the Russian forces from Afghanistan. The “Islamic terrorists” of today are the same rebels who had been sustained by the same intelligence network that served as paymaster, quartermaster and taskmaster to the “mujahideen” during the Afghan jihad - a conduit largely supervised by the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment during the Zia era.

Historically speaking, it was with the end of the cold war era that the militant Islam, popularly known as jihad, emerged as a global security issue in the West, posing serious challenges to the state authority in several Muslim countries particularly Pakistan and Afghanistan that became a breeding ground for Islamic militants with the beginning of the so-called Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation forces in 1979. As the Russian occupation angered the US, its Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) decided to use the Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) to organize, finance and train Islamic resistance groups against the Soviet troops. Under the supervision of the CIA, thousands of Muslim volunteers from various parts of the world were trained in Pakistan and sent across the Afghan border to fight out the Soviet troops.

Besides the United States, China, Saudi Arabia and many other Muslim countries poured in huge resources in men, material and money to organise resistance to the Soviet forces. Thousands of Afghan refugees who had taken shelter in Pakistan were subsequently converted into well trained and equally motivated Afghan mujahideen. With the advent of 1980s, a sophisticated, well-equipped infrastructure to train militant Islamists was fully available to the military regime of General Zia in Pakistan. The CIA then tasked the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), to regulate the mujahideen operations and provide advice and support to them. The Zia regime was so much committed with the Afghan jihad that it even used commandos from the Pakistan Army’s Special Services Group to guide the guerilla operations in Afghanistan.

International media reports say the ISI trained about 85,000 Afghan mujahideen during the Afghan jihad, which also resulted in the enhancement of ISI’s covert action capabilities. Officers from the Covert Action Division of the ISI received

training in the US and many covert action experts of the CIA were attached to the ISI for guidance in its guerilla operations against the Soviet troops by using the Afghan mujahideen and the Islamic fundamentalists from Pakistan. The Afghan war soon brought together militants from all over the Muslim world and Afghanistan was turned into a training ground for Islamic fighters drawn from various parts of the world.

However, following the withdrawal of the Soviet Occupation forces from Kabul in 1989, the CIA was also withdrawn from the scene, leaving it to Pakistan alone to deal with the menace of Islamic militancy, actually created by the Americans. What remained after the Soviet troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan was a huge force of highly motivated, militarily trained Islamic militants, who were looking for new pastures. Since there was no dearth of funds coming from domestic as well as foreign sources, Pakistan had at its disposal all the means required for the pursuit of promoting and sustaining Islamic militancy and utilising the same to become one of the leading lights of the Islamic world. The veterans of the Afghan jihad, therefore, moved on to other embattled lands and dispersed to Jammu & Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia, Tajikistan, Egypt and Algeria etc.

During the Afghan jihad, the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment openly favoured the *Hizb-e-Islami* led by Pushtun leader Gulbaddin Hekmatyar, hoping that once in power, he would protect and promote Islamabad's strategic interests. But following the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and even after the fall of Dr. Najibullah government in 1992, Hekmatyar could not attain power in Kabul. The ISI then devised a plan to raise a militia of the Taliban as an alternative to Hekmatyar's *Hizb-e-Islami*. Initially most of the Afghan youth constituting the Taliban militia were the product of Maulana Fazlur Rahman's *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam*-run religious *madrassas* in the Frontier and the Baluchistan provinces of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan.

The major chunk of the former Taliban regime and soldiers actually came from two religious schools – *Darul Uloom* at Akora Khattak in Peshawar and the Binori *madrassa* chain, the centre of which is situated in Binori Town, Karachi. *Sunni* fundamentalists

to the core and highly motivated, many of these Taliban had taken part in the Afghan jihad who, after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces, had returned to their schools. It was from among those that the ISI eventually recruited and raised the Taliban militia in the Spin Baldak area of the Kandahar city inside Afghanistan. Six months before the emergence of the Taliban, camps were set up by Pakistan's Frontier Corps to train the Taliban militia, before they were sent to fight against local Afghan warlords.

In 1994, the Taliban forces captured Kandahar and Herat regions, culminating in the September 1996 occupation of Kabul after making Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani's government and his supporters flee, and thus bringing two-thirds of Afghanistan under their control. Thus was catapulted to power in Afghanistan the infamous Taliban militia of hardliner *Sunni* Muslims of *Deobandi* sect and highly motivated young Afghan fighters, trained, armed, funded, equipped and guided by the Inter Services Intelligence. In the process, however, Pakistan became home, a base and transit point for outside operations for many militant groups active in various parts of the world.

Subsequently, the fallout of the Pakistani military establishment's policy of nursing, promoting and sponsoring Islamic militancy is very much there for everyone to see. Even after a lapse of 18 years since the end of the Afghan war, the world's only super power is struggling hard to overpower the jihadi monster which its intelligence establishment had created with the help of its Pakistani counterpart and which was held responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Outraged by the US invasion of Afghanistan, it now seems that the Frankenstein of jihad on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border has taken to wreaking vengeance against its very creators. The American leadership is, therefore, keen on evolving some kind of safeguards against the growing threat of Islamic terrorism emanating from the neighbouring states of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Seven years after the 9/11 attacks, the US that granted the status of a non-NATO ally to Pakistan due to its key role as a frontline state in the war on terror, has intensified pressure on Islamabad to do more, saying if there is one country that matters most to the future of al-Qaeda, it is none other than Pakistan.

Talking on the NBC's news programme 'Meet the Press', CIA Director Michael Hayden said on March 31, 2008 that the situation on the Pak-Afghan border poses a clear threat to the US: "It is very clear to us that al-Qaeda has been able to establish a safe haven along the Afghan-Pakistan border area that they have not enjoyed before." The CIA director cited the belief by US intelligence agencies that Osama was hiding there, in arguing that the United States had an interest in targeting the Pak-Afghan border region. If there was another terrorist attack against the Americans, he said, it would most certainly originate from the Pak-Afghan tribal region.

A couple of weeks later, on April 13, 2008, President Bush said in an interview to an American television channel: "If another 9/11 type attack is being planned, it probably is being plotted in Pakistan and not Afghanistan". He was of the view if the plotters had been located in Afghanistan they would have been "routed out" by the US-NATO forces by now. He described the tribal region (FATA) along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border as one of the most dangerous areas in the world today where al-Qaeda has established safe havens and is plotting attacks against the US. He added that Pakistan's incapacity to prosecute the war on terror in the FATA and NWFP due to disastrous peace deals with the militants has further augmented the already gigantic terrorist problem in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Though there has been a regime change in Islamabad after the February 2008 elections, the basic misunderstanding between the United States and Pakistan on how to conduct the war on terror not only persists but keeps growing. This is evident from the Bush administration's decision to allow its forces stationed in Afghanistan to launch a series of deadly aerial strikes inside the Pakistani tribal areas in September 2008, in a bid to stop the supply of militants who are allegedly fuelling the rising Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. The US forces are literally operating in the Pakistani territory now in hot pursuit of Taliban militias, an act liable to be interpreted as war.

The extreme step taken by the Americans forces show that the US is now finding it really difficult to sustain its own agenda in Pakistan, especially after the ouster of Musharraf and in the

absence of a flattering government in Islamabad. Musharraf's removal from the Pakistani political horizons has reset equations between the country's military and the political class, holding out the promise of rethinking and revising numerous policies the establishment had been pursuing since the 9/11 attacks. This transformation of institutional relationship was most evident in the army's decision to support and encourage the newly elected PPP government in Islamabad to negotiate peace deals with the militants who had been on the rampage in the Pak-Afghan tribal belt of FATA and the NWFP.

The peace deals instantly invited the wrath of the Bush administration which decided to launch military raids inside the Pakistani territory. While the international media described the American raids as a wake-up call for the Pakistani political and military leadership to get serious about the Taliban insurgency, Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani reportedly ordered his troops to retaliate against any action by foreign troops inside Pakistan's territory.

With militancy on the rise and American patience running out, Pakistan's already-frayed relationship with the US seems to have reached a turning point. As things stand, Pakistan faces a complex security situation in the region — and one that can have adverse spill-over effects for other areas of the country as well as Afghanistan. Given the prevailing dynamics, the American raids would only multiply violence on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border even as any effort to hammer out a negotiated peace agreement with the Islamic extremists offers no relief. Therefore, Pakistan presently seems caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, with almost no avenues of escape.

2

The Bhutto Murder: 'You Can Name Musharraf If I Am Killed'

The tragic assassination of Pakistan's twice elected former Prime Minister and the Chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Ms. Benazir Bhutto on the evening of December 27, 2007 in the garrison town of Rawalpindi, hardly a few kilometers from the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Pakistan Army and the head office of the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), raised two important questions. Who actually orchestrated her murder and why? Having spent eight years in involuntary exile, Benazir Bhutto had returned to Pakistan on October 18, 2007 to campaign for a third term in power, only to be assassinated barely ten weeks later.

The untimely death of Benazir Bhutto, who fought for the restoration of democracy in the country till her last breath, being the last bearer of her father's political legacy, marked the tragic end of long political legacy of the Bhutto family. A cursory glance at the checkered history of Pakistan shows that political killings are woven through like a bright red thread, although the weaver's hand usually is obscure. Benazir was the fourth member of the Bhutto family to have died an un-natural death. While she was killed under the rule of the country's fourth military dictator President General Musharraf, her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, also a popular Prime Minister was sent to

the gallows by Pakistan's third military dictator General Ziaul Haq. One of her brothers, Shahnawaz Bhutto, died in 1986 after being poisoned in Paris while the other one, Murtaza Bhutto, was shot dead by unknown persons in 1996 in Karachi while she herself was the Prime Minister.

Benazir Bhutto was well aware of the threat to her life and she had been saying so publicly, even before she decided to end her self-exile in October 2007. That is probably why she did not bring her immediate family, husband and three children, back to Pakistan. But she was a determined woman and a brave one too. As things stand, the ghost of Benazir Bhutto continues to haunt distraught Pakistanis amid allegations and counter allegations about her possible assassins, prompting them to weave a web of conspiracy theories to explain the assassination of the country's first lady prime minister. The people of Pakistan may never know who killed her, yet there is no dearth of probable culprits to choose from - al-Qaeda and Taliban linked Islamic extremists, some rogue elements within the all-powerful Pakistani military intelligence establishment or some contract killers hired by her political rivals, including Musharraf?

A few moments before being assassinated, Benazir Bhutto, wearing a white head scarf, addressed a rally in the *Liaquat Bagh* ground; then got into her bulletproof white Toyota Land Cruiser. She was being driven to her Islamabad residence when her vehicle was stopped by a group of cheerful PPP supporters, making her to ask that the vehicle's sunroof be opened so she could bid farewell to her workers. While a smiling Bhutto was waving to the crowd amidst loud slogans of "*Jiye Bhutto*" (long live Bhutto), three gunshots were heard. Bhutto sank back into her seat, just as a suicide bomber detonated explosives to the left of her vehicle.

Seconds later, those inside the vehicle with her noticed that her face and neck were badly bloodied, apparently from the bullets. As blood poured from her wounds and pooled in the back seat, she lost consciousness, and never regained it. The vehicle raced towards Rawalpindi General Hospital, but it was too badly damaged from the blast to complete the journey. Those accompanying Bhutto had to hoist their beloved leader into another vehicle as they desperately sought to get her

medical care. At the hospital, a surgeon worked to save her, and even resorted to open heart massage but she was declared dead on the operating table at round 6:30 p.m. According to a seven-member team of doctors which examined her, Ms Bhutto had open wounds on her left temporal region from which the brain matter was exuding. The team did not say what caused the wound, because no autopsy had been performed on the body.

Despite official claims by the Musharraf regime soon after the tragedy that some Islamic extremists might be involved in her murder, Bhutto's close circles were reported by the Pakistani media as having said that some rogue elements in the Pakistani establishment persuaded religious extremist groups to pool their resources and even rehearse the fatal attack on her outside the *Liaquat Bagh*, where she was finally gunned down, followed by a suicide bomb attack that killed over 20 people. A subsequent press conference by the Chief of the Rawalpindi chapter of the Central Investigation Department Abdul Majeed reinforced this view when he confirmed that the assailants had visited the site of the incident a night before in a taxi to carry out a rehearsal. He said they visited the *Liaquat Bagh* and reviewed the location, and decided to hit her from different directions during or after the public meeting.

The PPP leadership thus called for a wider inquiry by the United Nations to establish the identity and motives of the assassins, similar to the one involving the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri who was killed in a car bombing in Beirut on February 14, 2005. Musharraf, however, ruled out any UN involvement in investigating what he described as a 'simple' murder and which he insisted could be handled internally with the help of Scotland Yard. A five member Scotland Yard team was subsequently hired.

On January 11, 2008, the British High Commission in Islamabad made public the terms of the reference agreed between the Scotland Yard team and the Pakistan government, as per which the Pakistani authorities were the principal investigators while the British squad was only mandated to assist the Pakistani authorities in providing clarity about the precise cause of Bhutto's death.

A subsequent murder investigation report, made public by the Scotland Yard on February 8, 2008 concluded that Bhutto had died after hitting her head against a hard object (possibly the lever of the sunroof of her vehicle) as a result of the suicide bombing and the gunman and the suicide bomber were one and the same person. Most importantly, the report said nothing as to who might have sent the killers, thus raising more questions than it attempted to answer and was subsequently rejected by the PPP, maintaining that the report only corroborated the account of events provided by the Musharraf administration immediately after the killing.

In fact, the Scotland Yard did not carry out an independent investigation of its own but restricted its role to assisting the Pakistani investigators. The Scotland Yard investigators were only allowed to examine the evidence that has already been collected, interview police officials who were on duty on the day of the tragedy and doctors who attended to Benazir Bhutto at the Rawalpindi General Hospital. The PPP leaders also questioned the Scotland Yard's conclusion that only one killer was involved, particularly given that a taped conversation of militant leader Baitullah, which was released to the media by the Ministry of Interior on December 28, 2007, had spoken of at least two killers being involved.

The implication of the Scotland Yard findings was that if they were correct, the taped conversation was inaccurate, and its authenticity suspect. Questions were also asked as to how the Yard reached its conclusions in the absence of an autopsy and the washing away of crucial forensic evidence by the Pakistani authorities. According to Bhutto's political secretary Naheed Khan, who was sitting beside her leader at the time of the attack, Bhutto apparently died of a bullet wound as she had fallen down inside the vehicle a few seconds before the suicide bomber exploded himself.

According to eye-witnesses, when the vehicle ferrying Bhutto was about 69 feet from the VIP gate of the *Liaquat Bagh*, the shooter opened fire. Minutes earlier, Bhutto had the sunroof of her bulletproof vehicle removed to stand and become visible to hundreds of her jubilant supporters. She subsequently became an easy target, the shooter fired at her thrice, as shown in several

video footages, fatally injuring her on the third attempt. Bhutto's skull cracked instantly after receiving the bullet shot, apparently from a 7.63mm pistol which was found from the crime scene by the investigators. She instantly collapsed into the vehicle; seconds later a powerful bomb exploded.

The conspiracy theorists have dug in further. There are those in the PPP circles who say Bhutto was attacked by sharp shooters from various directions with the help of a laser based pin pointed weapon system that can pierce through the skull and the bones and cause death instantaneously. When Bhutto was taken to the Rawalpindi General Hospital shortly after the fatal attack, Doctor Musaddiq Khan, who treated her, told a PPP leader, Babar Awan, that he had seen such a case for the first time in his life. Those accompanying at the time of the attack maintain that the skull fracture is impossible from sunroof, saying that had Bhutto not been killed by the gunshot, the sheer intensity of the suicide blast would have blown off her head or at least inflicted severe wounds on her as had happened to dozens of those surrounding her vehicle at the time of the blast, most of whom died on the spot.

The theory effectively belies the official claim that Bhutto died because the intensity of the explosion smashed her head against the lever used to open the sunshade of the armored vehicle. Some senior police officials involved in the investigations believe the suicide bomber was sent to eliminate the shooter and obliterate evidence of his crime. They believed it wasn't the suicide bomber who triggered the explosion, adding that a powerful bomb was planted at the venue and a remote device was used to trigger it.

They insist that the Rawalpindi attack on December 27, 2007 and the Karachi carnage on October 18, 2007 had one important common feature – the legs of purported suicide bombers in both the cases remain missing – giving broad hints that neither of the two attacks against Bhutto was suicidal. "Had her vehicles not been targeted with time bomb devices on both the occasions, the legs of the suicide bombers would have been recovered from the crime scenes", they argue. In suicide attacks, they add, the bomber is either decapitated or his head is destroyed because he

wraps explosive materials around from belly button up to the upper chest.

In her posthumous book "Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy, and the West", which was finished just two days before she was killed, Bhutto recalls in these words her landing at Karachi Airport and her subsequent journey towards the mausoleum of Mohammad Ali Jinnah where she was scheduled to address a public meeting: "As the sky darkened and my armoured campaign truck progressed almost by inches through the growing masses, I noticed that street lights began to dim and then go off as we approached. The jamming equipment that was supposed to be blocking cell phone signals (that could detonate suicide bombs, or even remote-controlled toy planes filled with explosives) for 200 meters around my truck did not seem to be working.

"Sometime after 11:00 p.m, I saw a man holding up a baby dressed in the colours of my party, the PPP. He gesticulated repeatedly to me to take the baby, which was about one or two years old. I gesticulated to the crowd to make way for him. But when the crowd parted, the man would not come forward. Instead he tried to hand the baby to someone in the crowd. Worried that the baby would fall and be trampled upon or be lost, I gesticulated no, you bring the baby to me. Finally he pointed to the security guard. I asked the security guard to let him up on the truck. However, by the time he reached the truck, I was going down to my compartment in the vehicle's interior because my feet hurt. We now suspect the baby's clothes were lined with plastic explosives.

"My feet had swollen up after standing in one place for 10 hours, and my sandals were hurting. Downstairs I unstrapped and loosened them. A little while later my political secretary, Naheed Khan, and I went over the speech that I would be delivering later at the tomb – one of the most important of my life. I was saying that perhaps we should mention my petitioning the Supreme Court to allow political parties in the tribal areas to organise as part of our plan to counter extremists politically. As I said the word "extremist", a terrible explosion rocked the truck. First the sound, then the light, then the glass

smashing, then the deadly silence followed by horrible screams. My first thought was: "Oh, God, no."

"A piercing pain tore my ear from the force of the blast. An eerie silence descended. Then a second explosion – much louder, larger and more damaging – went off. Almost simultaneously, something hit the truck, which rolled from side to side. (Later I saw two dents clearly visible on the left side of the truck, where I had been.) I looked outside. The dark night was bathed in an orange light, and under it crumpled bodies lay scattered in the most horrific scene. I now know what happened to the baby. Agha Siraj Durrani, a PPP parliamentarian, was watching the access to my truck. When the man tried to hand the baby up, Agha Siraj told him to get lost. The man then went to a police vehicle to the left of the truck, which also refused to take the baby. The man moved to the police vehicle in front of the first.

"As the man tried to hand the baby to the second police vehicle, the first police vehicle warned: 'Don't take the baby, don't take the baby, don't let the baby up on the truck'. Both these police vehicles were exactly parallel to where I was sitting inside the truck. As the man scuffled with the police to hand the baby over, the first explosion took place. Everyone in that police van was killed, as were those around it. Within 50 seconds, a 15-kilogram car bomb was detonated, scattering pellets, shrapnel and burning pieces of metal".

Nonetheless, suicide bomber or baby bomb, the intent of those who wanted to kill Bhutto was to ensure the role of the shooter in the crime was concealed. All explosions yield a variety of clues to the type of explosives used and the trigger devices employed which are usually considered vital to establish the possible identity of groups involved in the crime. But inexplicably, hours after Bhutto was assassinated, the administration pressed in fire brigades to wash the Rawalpindi spot where the suicide bomber had wreaked havoc, consequently spawning theories about the possible role of the establishment in the assassination. One might what was the great hurry in hosing down the crime scene the same evening instead of preserving it in accordance with the standard procedure of international criminal investigations?

Therefore, the allegations of official complicity in the Bhutto murder keep haunting the Musharraf regime since December 27. That the Musharraf regime had been tying itself in knots over the assassination case is beyond any doubt. First, on December 28, barely 24 hours after the murder, Interior Ministry spokesman Brig (retd) Javed Iqbal Cheema claimed that Benazir Bhutto died because her head had been smashed against the lever of her vehicle's sunshade. This could as well have become the official version of the murder. However, much to the Musharraf regime's discomfiture, several privately-run television channels released on December 29 chilling images of a sharp shooter firing at Bhutto a few seconds before the deadly explosion took place. It was only then that the Musharraf administration sought the Scotland Yard's assistance in the investigation which eventually endorsed the official government version.

The contradictory voices in which the Musharraf regime spoke after the assassination, prompted the PPP to press ahead with its demand for a United Nations probe into the assassination. The party then approached the United Nations, seeking the setting up of a high level International Commission to thoroughly investigate the Bhutto murder and to bring the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of the murder plot to justice. The demand raised in a letter signed by Co-Chairman of the PPP Asif Zardari was sent directly to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon on January 16, 2008 as the Musharraf regime refused to forward it to the United Nations despite repeated pleas. The Party Co-Chairman's letter made out a case for undertaking investigations by the UN Commission recalling the concern shown by the Security Council soon after the first bomb attack on Bhutto's welcome procession in Karachi on October 18, killing over 140 people.

On January 19, 2008, only two days after the PPP had approached the UN for the Bhutto murder probe, the Pakistani authorities arrested a teenager, allegedly part of a five-man terrorist squad which had been assigned to kill Bhutto at *Liaquat Bagh*. Arrested from the Dera Ismail Khan district of the North Western Frontier Province, the 15-year-old Aitzaz Shah confessed his involvement in the murder plot the very next day,

on February 20, 2008. However, these claims were rejected by PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar as a “cock and bull story” intended to reduce pressure on Musharraf, adding that the so-called confession was obtained under coercion amidst repeated calls for an independent investigation by the United Nations. The arrested youth, who has already been declared a juvenile by the court, said exactly the kind of things the Pakistani authorities would like to hear, backing up conclusions that seem to have been reached within hours of the killing.

Since her assassination, Bhutto’s old e-mails and interviews are circulating wherein she points the finger at some high and mighty in the establishment as her would-be killers. Addressing his first press conference after the murder, Bhutto’s widower, Asif Zardari, made public her October 26, 2007 email to Wolf Blitzer of the CNN which mentioned the name of her would-be assassin. “The said e-mail should be treated as Bhutto’s dying declaration. She talks about her murderers from her grave and it is up to the world to listen to the echoes”, he said. Bhutto wrote to Wolf Blitzer in her e-mail: “If it is God’s will, nothing will happen to me. But if anything happened to me, I would hold Pervez Musharraf responsible”. Blitzer received the email on October 26 from Mark Siegel, a friend and long-time Washington spokesman for Benazir. That was eight days after she narrowly escaped an attempt on her life on October 18, 2007 when her welcome rally in Karachi was attacked by suicide bombers. Bhutto wrote to Wolf: “I have been made to feel insecure by Musharraf’s minions”.

She pointed out in her mail that she has not received the requested improvements to her security and was being prevented from using private cars or vehicles equipped with tinted windows. Bhutto added that she had also not been provided with signal jammers to prevent remote controlled bombs or with police mobile outriders to cover her vehicle on all sides. According to Mark Siegel, Benazir Bhutto had asked permission to bring in trained security personnel from abroad. In fact, she and her husband repeatedly tried to get visas for such protection but the government of Pakistan denied them again and again. American Blackwater operation and London-based firm Armor Group, which guards UK diplomats in the Middle

East, were not allowed to protect Bhutto. She urged Musharraf to improve her security after the Karachi suicide bomb attack, besides requesting American and British diplomats to pressurize Musharraf in providing adequate security to her. But Musharraf never listened.

Benazir Bhutto's security concerns and Musharraf's refusal to address them have also been highlighted by a Pulitzer Prize winning US journalist Ron Suskind, in his book titled "The Way of the World: A Story of Truth and Hope in an Age of Extremism". Published in August 2008, the book is full of disclosures, with its fair portion about Musharraf-Benazir conversation including General Musharraf's quote "You should understand something, your security is based on the state of our relationship". The writer disclosed that the US intelligence agencies had taped Bhutto's phone calls, prior to her arrival in Pakistan, in a bid to play under-the-table, cut-throat games more effectively. About those bugging Bhutto, Suskind writes on Page 293 of the book: "What they'll overlook is the context and her tone in the many calls they eavesdrop on – overlook the fact that she's scared and preparing for the possibility of imminent death".

The book disclosed details of Bhutto's meeting with US Senator John Kerry requesting for her security and his reply that "United States is generally hesitant to ensure the protection of anyone who is not a designated leader". In a subsequent interview on August 15, 2008, Suskind quoted Bhutto as having told him: "I've got two enemies who have been in an unholy alliance for many years now - dictatorial power and messianic radicalism, and I have no protection. Why? Because Dick Cheney won't make the phone call! Why? Explain it to me, the idea that they assured me Cheney would make the call to Musharraf simply to say, 'You're the dictator, make sure she is protected. She has to make it to election-day. If she doesn't, we're going to hold you responsible.' Narrating Musharraf's message to Bhutto that her safety "is based on the state of our relationship", Suskind said: "It was all but like a Mafia threat. And this is something that the US, frankly, deep down understands, too. They let this process unfold. And ultimately, folks around Bhutto now are saying that she was abandoned by America".

On his part, when asked at a media briefing Islamabad on January 1, 2008, if he had blood on his hands, Musharraf said the question was "below my dignity" but he wanted to give a public answer in any case. "I am not a feudal and I am not a tribal. I have been brought up in a very educated and civilized family with beliefs and values and which believes in character. My family is not a family which believes in killing people, assassinating, intriguing. That is all that I want to say." A day later, on January 3, 2008, Musharraf admitted for the first time that Bhutto may have been shot by a gunman, but said she alone bore responsibility for her death. Musharraf told an American television network CBS in an interview that Bhutto should not have stood up in her car as she left a rally. "For standing up outside the car, I think it was she to blame alone - nobody else. Responsibility is hers".

Musharraf's logic apart, the fact remains that Benazir Bhutto must have many powerful enemies in the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment as well as the militant organisations, who first wanted to stop her homecoming and her subsequent political comeback, and later wished her to be eliminated physically. By her own estimate, no fewer than four different jihadi groups backed by certain powerful elements in the Pakistani military and intelligence establishments wanted her dead within hours of her homecoming. However, Bhutto herself was convinced that the most serious attempt on her life, carried out on October 18, 2007 on her welcome rally in Karachi could not have been possible without the consent of President Pervez Musharraf.

On November 13, 2007, hardly a few weeks before her murder, Benazir told this writer (Amir Mir) in a one-on-one meeting in Lahore that the Karachi attack could not have been possible without the blessing of Musharraf. In her off-the-record conversation with the writer at the Lahore residence of Senator Latif Khosa [a few hours before being put under house arrest by the Musharraf regime in a bid to prevent her from leading a long March on Islamabad], Bhutto said she knew fully even before returning home that an attempt would be made on her life.

"I have come to know following investigations by my own sources that the October 18 attack was masterminded by some

highly placed officials in the Pakistani security and intelligence establishments. My enemies in the establishment had first engaged an al-Qaeda linked militant leader who in turn hired one Maulvi Abdul Rehman Otho alias Abdul Rehman Sindhi - to execute the Karachi attack", Bhutto disclosed. She said the information she acquired showed that some local militants were hired by the high and mighty in Pakistani intelligence establishment to carry out the Karachi attack. "I have come to know that three local militants were hired to carry out the bombing and one Maulvi Abdul Rehman Otho alias Abdul Rehman Sindhi [an al-Qaeda linked *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ) militant from Dadu district of the Sindh province] was entrusted with the task of executing the entire operation".

Bhutto said according to her sources, Abdul Rehman had been engaged by some highly placed officials in the Pakistani establishment to carry out the October 18 attack which she thought was impossible otherwise keeping in view the assurances given to her about the high level security being provided to her. Giving more details, Bhutto said that Abdul Rehman Sindhi [who was reportedly arrested on June 2004 from Khuda Ki Basti in Kotri near Hyderabad district of Sindh for involvement in the February 2002 twin car blasts in front of the US Cultural Centre located close to the Karachi residence of the US Consul-General] was mysteriously released by the Pakistan authorities before her home coming, citing lack of evidence to prosecute him and thus keep him behind bars any further.

Benazir Bhutto said while realizing her mistake after the Karachi attack, she had already written another letter to someone important, naming her would be assassins. Asked if she had named Musharraf in that letter and to whom, the letter was addressed, Bhutto smiled and said: "Mind one thing, all those elements in the Pakistani establishment who stand to lose power and influence in the post-election set up are after me, including the General. I can't give you more details at this stage. However, you can name Musharraf as my assassin if I am killed".

The PPP leader said she was in London when she first came to know of a conspiracy to assassinate her upon her return. "Having come to know of the plot, I instantly wrote a letter to

General Musharraf, naming three persons in the establishment possibly conspiring to kill me, seeking appropriate action against them. However, it could not occur to me at that time that I was actually committing a blunder and in a way signing my own death warrant by not naming my number one enemy as one of my possible assassins. It later dawned upon me that Musharraf could have possibly exploited the said letter to his advantage and orchestrated my physical elimination". Bhutto further told the writer that the inquest into the deadly Karachi bombing has already been wrapped up under instructions from the Musharraf administration since she had accused one of the General's close aides of involvement in the Karachi attack.

A week before the November 13, 2007 conversation with Benazir Bhutto, a high-level meeting presided by Musharraf in Islamabad had already dismissed her accusations as childish. According to Pakistani media reports, the participants of the meeting were informed that the suicide attack on Bhutto bore the hallmarks of al-Qaeda, arguing that she had incurred the wrath of militants because of her support for the military operation against the Red Mosque fanatics in Islamabad in July 2007 and for declaring that she would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to question the father of the Pakistani nuclear programme Dr A Q Khan pertaining to his proliferation activities. Days before her return to Pakistan, Bhutto told *The Guardian* [on October 15, 2007] she felt the real danger to her life came from well placed fundamentalist elements in Pakistan military and intelligence establishment, who are opposed to her return.

On October 19, 2007, a day after Bhutto narrowly escaped the Karachi suicide attack, she disclosed at a press conference that she had informed Musharraf in a confidential letter, written on October 16, 2007 that three senior government officials were planning to assassinate her upon her return. "However, I had further made it clear to Musharraf that I won't blame Taliban or al-Qaeda if I am attacked, but I will name my enemies in the Pakistani establishment", she told journalists. In an interview with French magazine, *Paris-Match* the same day, Bhutto said: "I know exactly who wants to kill me. They are dignitaries of General Zia who are behind extremism and fanaticism."

Although Benazir did not name the three persons, but the PPP circles informed the media that they were Director General Intelligence Bureau, Brig (retd) Ejaz Shah, Chief Minister Punjab Pervez Elahi and Sindh Chief Minister Arbab Ghulam Rahim. However, while concluding the letter, she asserted that her life was in danger, particularly from Ejaz Shah. Incidentally, it was Ejaz Shah who had arranged the surrender of Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed, the killer of Daniel Pearl, on February 5, 2005, in Lahore. Then, Shah was the home secretary of Punjab. Shah knew Omar's family well as both of them belong to the Nankana Sahib area of the Punjab province. However, the actual relationship between Ejaz and Omar was one of a handler and his agent – both coming from the ISI.

In an interview with *Daily Times*, August 13, 2007, Benazir said, "Brigadier Shah and the ISI recruited Sheikh Omar Saeed, 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." On November 3, 2007, two weeks after she returned home, Bhutto, in an interview with Sir David Frost on the TV program "*Frost over the World*", referred to "three individuals who wanted to kill her, one of them a very key figure in security who she claimed had dealings with Omar Saeed Sheikh".

Asked in an interview on NBC television a day later [on October 20] whether it was not risky to name a close friend of Musharraf as being someone who's plotting against her, Bhutto said: "Well, at that time I did not know whether there would be an assassination attempt that I would survive. And I wanted to leave on record the suspects. I also didn't know that he was a friend of Musharraf. But I asked myself that even if I knew that he was a friend and I thought of him as a suspect, would I have not written? No, I would have written."

On December 28, twenty-four hours after Benazir was killed, *Asia Times Online*, a Hong Kong-based web newspaper, reported that al-Qaeda has claimed responsibility for her killing, further adding that the death squad consisted of Punjabi associates of the underground anti-Shia Sunni militant group *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ), operating under al-Qaeda orders. "We terminated the

most precious American asset who had vowed to defeat the mujahideen." These were the words of Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, an important al-Qaeda commander for Afghanistan operations as well as an al-Qaeda spokesperson. "This is our first major victory against those (Benazir and Musharraf) who have been siding with infidels (the West) in the fight against al-Qaeda..."

Interestingly, the responsibility claim by al-Qaeda confirmed Bhutto's own findings that the October 18, 2007 assassination bid on her welcome procession was executed by an al-Qaeda linked LeJ operative Abdul Rehman Sindhi - whom Benazir had named in our November 13, 2007 conversation. Bhutto said at that time that she has been informed by her sources after the bombing that Abdul Rehman is called Sindhi because of his being linked to the al-Qaeda and those in the intelligence establishment running the terror group's infrastructure in Pakistan generally code-name people with their language or nationality a la Al-Arabi or Al-Iraqi. She was further told that most of the Sindhis who are associated with al-Qaeda are given the pseudonym Sindhi etc. According to her information, Sindhi had sought asylum in Afghanistan during Taliban rule and was trained in terrorism before returning to Pakistan after the fall of the Taliban regime.

Just hours before she was killed – December 27 - Benazir Bhutto was trying to expose a suspected ISI operation to rig the general elections which were actually scheduled for January 8. The day she was assassinated, Bhutto was in the process of collecting information about a rigging cell allegedly established at a safe house of the Inter Services Intelligence in Islamabad which was tasked to change the election results in favour of the Musharraf-backed Pakistan Muslim League (PML-Q) on the day of the election. Bhutto was informed by one of her close confidants on December 25, 2007 in an e-mail message sent on her e-mail address -- *sazdubai@emirates.net.ae* - that the Musharraf regime has set up a cell to engineer the 2008 elections. Bhutto was further informed that the cell headed by one Brigadier (retd) Riazullah Khan Chhib was working in tandem with the Intelligence Bureau (IB) Director General Brig (retd) Ejaz Hussain Shah and had been tasked with changing the election results.

The information she received said the so called "Election Monitoring Cell" would ensure that stamped ballot papers in over one hundred constituencies of Punjab and Sindh are all set to be polled on January 8 in favour of the "Queue" League candidates. The information further said that the provincial headquarters of the ISI and IB would ensure that the ballots are polled in a smooth manner at the ghost polling stations in the district headquarters of Punjab and Sindh and counted in the final count before the official election result is handed over to the successful candidates by the presiding officers. "All this is being done because of the fact that Musharraf simply can't afford a hostile parliament as a result of the 2008 polls", the information passed on to Bhutto said.

In her reply which Bhutto sent from her blackberry the same day – December 25 – she wrote: "I was told that the ISI and the MI have been asked not to meddle. But I will double check". In her second message to the same confidant a day later on December 27 at 1:12 pm – five hours before her assassination – Bhutto wrote: "I need the address of the safe house [in Islamabad] as well as the phone numbers of the concerned. Pl (please) try and obtain ASAP (as soon as possible). Mbb, Sent from my BlackBerry® wireless device".

The confidant wrote back at 3:06pm the same day: "I have re-checked the information with the same source which earlier said the ISI and the MI have been asked not to meddle. The source claims Brig Riazullah Khan Chhib retired from the ISI a few months ago but was re-employed, since he belongs to the arm of the Artillery and is considered close to Musharraf who too comes from the same wing of the army. The source says Chhib's cover job is somewhere else but he is actually supervising a special election cell which is working in tandem with the chief of the Intelligence Bureau. I have further been told that Brigadiers Ejaz Hussain Shah and Riazullah Chhib are close friends because of their having served Punjab as the provincial heads of the ISI and the Punjab Regional Director of the Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) respectively in the past. Both are considered to be loyalists of Shujaat Hussain, the president of the PML-Q".

Information passed on to Benazir Bhutto further stated: "The rigging cell/safe house in question is located on *Shahra-e-Dastoor*, close to the Pakistan House Bus Stop in Sector G-5 of Islamabad. It is a double storey building, without inscribing any address as is the case with most safe houses. The cell consists of some retired and serving military and intelligence officers, which will show its magic on the election-day. Let me further tell you that Musharraf had granted *Sitara-e-Imtiaz military* to Brig (Retd) Riaz Chhib on December 17, 2007 for his meritorious services in operational field. Before his retirement, Chhib was in charge of the ISI-led Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB) which used to deal with the internal security matters, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit and Baltistan", read the message sent to Bhutto hardly three hours before her assassination.

Another important thing is that the day she was killed, Bhutto was due to meet two senior American politicians to show them a confidential report, compiled on the basis of information ascertained by her own contacts within the Pakistani security and intelligence services, and alleging that the Musharraf regime was using some of the \$10 billion (£5 billion) in US military aid that Pakistan has received since 2001 to rig the 2006 elections. Patrick Kennedy, a Democratic congressman, and Arlen Specter, a Republican member of the Senate sub-committee on foreign operations, were scheduled to have a dinner meeting with Benazir Bhutto on December 27 during which they were to be provided this report.

However, almost a year after Bhutto's murder and despite the installation of a PPP-led government in Islamabad, the rulers are reluctant to pursue the case by initiating proceedings against any of the murder suspects, including General (ret'd) Musharraf who had been named as her would-be assassin by none other than Bhutto herself. Asif Zardari, the new president of Pakistan, keeps insisting that only the United Nations (UN) can carry out a credible inquiry, despite the fact that the Bhutto party now rules the roost in Islamabad.

According to a *Los Angeles Times* report published on July 4, 2008, the Bhutto murder investigation appears to have ground to a near-halt, with the trail growing colder. Pakistan has a long history of unsolved killings of political leaders, including the

1951 assassination of its first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, in the same park where Bhutto held her last rally. Neither has the mysterious plane crash that killed General Ziaul Haq in 1988 been explained. Does this mean like all infamous assassination cases, the mastermind of Bhutto murder mystery will remain a shadowy figure on whose role people will only speculate about in whispers?

3

Baitullah Mehsud: A Scapegoat To Hush Up Bhutto Murder?

While the slain chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party Ms Benazir Bhutto blamed jehadi kingpin Qari Saifullah Akhtar as a key suspect in the failed suicide attempt to kill her at Karachi on October 18, 2007, and she wanted President Pervez Musharraf to be named as her assassin in case of her murder, the Musharraf regime was quick to name Commander Baitullah Mehsud, the *ameer* of the *Tehrik-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan* (TTP) or the Movement of Pakistani Taliban and the most important pro-Taliban militant commander in the Waziristan region, as the mastermind of the December 27, 2007 attack in Rawalpindi that killed Ms Bhutto.

Baitullah Mehsud, who prefers being called a Pakistani Talib, virtually controls much of South Waziristan Agency on the restive Pak-Afghan border where Islamic militancy has given birth to a new generation of leadership in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the US-led forces. Baitullah Mehsud was first accused of masterminding the Bhutto assassination by Interior Ministry Spokesman, Brig (retd) Javed Iqbal Cheema and subsequently by Musharraf. In his emergent press conference [on December 28] a day after the assassination, Cheema claimed that the suicide bomber, who blew himself up near Benazir Bhutto's bullet proof vehicle, was an al-Qaeda operative hailing from the Baitullah group. In his televised address five days after the murder [on January 2, 2007], President Musharraf requested the Scotland

Yard to help the Pakistani investigators in identifying the culprits but at the same time accused Baitullah of masterminding the assassination. While naming Baitullah as the prime suspect, Musharraf, in a complete departure from the internationally accepted approach of finding the criminal from the crime scene, was actually identifying the criminal first and then asking the investigator to establish his link to the crime.

During his December 28, 2007 news conference, Brig (retd) Javed Iqbal Cheema said: "We just have an intelligence intercept that was recorded this morning in which Baitullah Mehsud congratulated his people for carrying out this cowardly act." He was quick to share with the media people the English and Urdu transcriptions of the audio-recorded conversation between two persons claiming to be Baitullah Mehsud and some Maulvi Sahib. The following is the English transcription of the conversation which actually took place in Pushto:

Baitullah Mehsud congratulates Maulvi Sahib, who explains that the attack was carried out by three of their own operatives.

Maulvi Sahib: Congratulations, I just got back during the night.

Baitullah Mehsud: Congratulations to you, were they our men?

Maulvi Sahib: Yes they were ours.

Baitullah Mehsud: Who were they?

Maulvi Sahib: There was Saeed, there was Bilal from Badar and Ikramullah.

Baitullah Mehsud: The three of them did it?

Maulvi Sahib: Ikramullah and Bilal did it.

Baitullah Mehsud: Then congratulations.

However, despite repeated demands by the newsmen attending the press conference, the original tape was not shown and nor it could be proved that the recorded voice was that of Commander Baitullah. On December 30, 2007, a day after his press conference, the PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar refuted the Musharraf regime's claim that Baitullah was involved in Bhutto's assassination. He told newsmen that after the October 18 suicide attack on her welcome procession in Karachi, Benazir had received a message from Baitullah: "Identify your enemy, I am not your enemy, I have nothing to do with you or against

you or with the assassination attempt on you on October 18". The top PPP leadership trusted the message, Babar said, adding that the message was conveyed by Mehsud through two different reliable emissaries. He said Mehsud had conveyed to Benazir Bhutto that his activities were limited to Waziristan and were of a defensive nature. "I have neither the resources to fight outside Waziristan nor I have any plans to target you", Baitullah had conveyed to Bhutto.

Even otherwise, Bhutto herself had stated on October 19, 2007 at a press conference in Karachi a day after the October 18, 2007 suicide attempt on her life that people like Baitullah Mehsud are mere pawns and what worried her was the threat from within the Musharraf regime. On his part, Baitullah too was quick to issue denials. His spokesman, Maulvi Omar, said on December 29, a day after the Interior Minister spokesman's press conference: "Why on earth would we kill her? We had no enmity with her and more importantly she had done no wrong to us... By blaming us for the murder of Benazir Bhutto, Musharraf is attempting to portray the tribal areas as centers of terrorism so as to earn dollars from his Western masters. We are equally grieved by the tragic death of Benazir Bhutto and extend our sympathies to her family as well as the Pakistan People's Party workers..."

Maulvi Omar further said that Commander Baitullah Mehsud, after learning about the allegations against him and sensing gravity of those charges, convened an emergency meeting of the *Tehreek-e-Taliban's Shura* (council) comprising senior militant commanders at a secret location somewhere between the South and North Waziristan tribal region. "Addressing the participants, he made it clear that harming a woman was against the teachings of Islamic *Shariah* as well as the centuries old rich traditions of the Pakhtun tribal people. Commander Baitullah accused the intelligence agencies for the murder of Benazir Bhutto and said the modus operandi and precision of the Rawalpindi strike clearly indicated that the gruesome murder, carried out by using a skilled sniper first followed by a bomber, was committed by some highly trained professional hands", Maulvi Omar said.

But the government circles were adamant to prove that the murder was masterminded by none other than Baitullah. While reacting to Baitullah's statement, Interior Ministry spokesman reminded on December 30 that Baitullah had threatened to kill Bhutto upon her return in October 2007, and was behind the first attempt on her life in Karachi that killed over 140 and wounded 500. Brig Cheema quoted Baitullah as having threatened on October 6, 2007 launching suicide attacks against Bhutto, saying his bombers are waiting in the wings to welcome her when she returns. "My men will welcome Bhutto on her return. We don't accept Musharraf and Benazir because they only protect the American and see things through US glasses. They are only acceptable if they wear the Pakistani glasses", Cheema quoted Baitullah as having stated before Bhutto's homecoming.

Nevertheless, on December 31, Baitullah Mehsud strongly reacted to Cheema's accusations and rejected any type of involvement in the October 18 suicide attack, saying he neither issued any such statement nor can he think of ordering an attack that would kill innocent civilians in such a large number. Two months later, [on March 1, 2008] Baitullah was declared a proclaimed offender with a warrant of arrest issued for him by an anti-terrorist court in Rawalpindi. The haste with which the Musharraf regime proceeded against Baitullah to establish him as the Bhutto killer, and that too without anything solid, gave an impression as if he was being made a scapegoat to hush up one of the most high profile murder cases in the recent history of South Asia. In the shadowy world of the numerous jihadi groups, rebel elements of the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment and rival politicians who hated Benazir Bhutto, Baitullah Mehsud registered more clearly in the public eye. Therefore, the Musharraf regime deemed it convenient to lay the blame squarely on Baitullah, especially when he has already grown in strength and stature and become such a public figure in the global war on terrorism.

As far as his background is concerned, 35 year old Baitullah Mehsud is a Pashtun from the Shabikhel sub-tribe of the Mehsud tribe who was born in Landidog, a small tribal village situated on the fringes of the South Waziristan Agency. The Mehsuds are one of the four sub-tribes of the Waziri which is a tribe whose

home spans the Pak-Afghan border. He has four brothers and is the son of the late Mohamad Haroon. Unlike local Taliban leaders in North Waziristan who are recognized religious scholars and run their own seminaries, Baitullah Mehsud and some other local Taliban leaders in South Waziristan are not as well educated. However, even then, Baitullah is famous for his political acumen and military skills and his colleagues describe him as a natural leader who has great ability to infuse vitality among his followers.

Fifteen years ago, being a young *madrassa* student, Baitullah was greatly inspired by Taliban ideology and frequently went to Afghanistan as a volunteer to join in the Taliban's drive for enforcement of Islamic *Shariah* in the Waziristan region. Today, he himself controls a critical battle ground in the war on terror, South Waziristan, a tribal agency in Pakistan on the Afghanistan border. American intelligence sleuths stationed in Pakistani say the Taliban currently thrive in the tribal region and fugitive al-Qaeda leaders are always welcome there. The US intelligence agents even believe that there is an even better chance that Osama is living somewhere in the Waziristan region under Baitullah's protection. With a reputation based on his record as a fearless fighter commanding a force of 35,000 to 40,000 fighters, willing to die for the cause of Islam, Baitullah's lack of a religious title has not held him back.

Although Baitullah is the most powerful militant commander in the tribal areas of Pakistan, he remains a shadowy figure with perhaps a larger-than-life reputation. While his supporters say Baitullah has brought peace to the Waziristan region, his detractors argue that the peace came at a price - literally. Like a Mafia boss, they say, he and his lieutenants shake down the populace for protection money. Being Pakistan's most influential Taliban leader, Baitullah has trained and lined up a whole new bunch of diehard commanders, all set and ready to take on the security forces in case of any major offensive. Intelligence reports from the tribal areas suggest that there is a large group of little known but diehard commanders who could launch attacks on security forces when they feel it is necessary for the survival of Taliban movement.

Those who know Baitullah Mehsud well draw a number of analogies between Mullah Mohammad Omar and him. Since both the Islamic commanders shun the media, they are not pictured in photographs. This makes it difficult for the security forces and the outside world to recognize them. Mullah Omar and Baitullah vow jihad, and they are constantly on the move from one hideout to the next in order to avoid arrest. Like the Taliban, his followers too enforce an extreme form of *Shariah* (Islamic Laws) in his territory. Women must observe a strict form of *purdah*, and men are forbidden to shave their beards. Playing music and watching videos are against the law. Baitullah too is known to have ordered the murder of adulterers by stoning. There are few Pakistani government courts in the region, and the Waziristanis seldom use them. Instead, they go to Baitullah to settle their disputes and differences. To tell the truth, Baitullah is the law in South Waziristan and parts of North Waziristan. Interestingly, he has a signature method of dealing with people he deems disloyal. He first sends the offender 1,000 rupees, a reel of thread, a needle, and a note instructing the person to have a *kafan* (burial shroud) made within 24 hours. When the time is up, the person is murdered.

Baitullah Mehsud had pledged himself to Mullah Omar in March 2005 in the presence of five leading Taliban commanders including Mullah Dadullah who was killed in Afghanistan. Like Mullah Omar's Taliban militia, the private army of Baitullah too, has hundreds of foreigners, mostly Uzbeks, imposes *Shariah* with a view to prevent 'vice' and promotes 'virtue'. Music, videos, female education are sacrilege in South Waziristan and barbers are ordered to display notices outside their shops saying they don't shave beards, as it is against the *Shariah*. Baitullah has used local clerics and illegal FM radio channels to enforce his writ. The Pakistani authorities accuse Baitullah of receiving money from al-Qaeda and the Taliban to run the affairs of his parallel state in South Waziristan. He has been in the limelight for almost four years due to his well-known role in spearheading with the help of his suicide bombers a bloody insurgency against the Pakistani security forces, which are hunting fugitive al-Qaeda and Taliban militants in the trouble stricken tribal areas.

However, many in the Pakistani intelligence establishment believe it was the peace-making policies of the Musharraf regime that actually led to the rise of Baitullah as a powerful Taliban leader to reckon with. As a matter of fact, Baitullah is the same person with whom the Pakistan Army had signed a peace agreement on February 7, 2005 despite his being a wanted terrorist even at that time. The pressure to negotiate with Mehsud instead of proceeding against him came from the then provincial government of the North Western Frontier Province, a coalition of right-wing religious parties (*Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* or MMA) which had been sympathetic to the Taliban and opposed to the presence of the US troops in Afghanistan. Musharraf, whose rule was being challenged by the opposition at that time, both as the president as well as the army chief, agreed to hold peace talks with Taliban fighters in the Waziristan region and sign a peace agreement with them in exchange for the support of the MMA in the Parliament to pass the 17th Constitutional Amendment that allowed him to continue as a president in military uniform for next three years.

Subsequently, about 1,000 people, including the locals as well as the government and the military officials, including then Corps Commander Peshawar Lt Gen Safdar Hussain, attended the signing ceremony of the peace agreement near the Sararogha Fort some 80 kilometers from the town of Wana in South Waziristan. The ceremony, held in February 2005, ended with the Corps Commander declaring Baitullah a soldier of peace, and the militants raising slogans of *Allah-o-Akbar* (God is great) and *Death to America*. As part of the Sararogha peace deal, Baitullah had pledged not to provide any assistance to al-Qaeda and Taliban militants and not to launch operations against the security forces. He also gave his word that his tribe would not protect Commander Abdullah Mehsud (a former Guantanamo Bay inmate and an anti-US rebel commander who was wanted by the authorities and eventually killed on July 24, 2007 at his Zhob hideout in Baluchistan). As the deal between the military and the militants gave Baitullah a free hand to recruit and motivate more youngsters, the strength of his private army in South Waziristan went up from around 1000 to about 20,000 within weeks, enabling him to virtually establish an independent

zone in parts of the South Waziristan, now widely believed to be a sanctuary for al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

The Mehsud forces kept moving aggressively and within a year of the peace deal, gunned down over 120 pro-government tribal leaders on spying charges. However, Baitullah's biggest successes came on August 30, 2007 when his forces captured 200 soldiers of the Pakistan Army in the South Waziristan Agency. While demanding the withdrawal of the security forces personnel and the release of his comrades in exchange for freeing the soldiers, Baitullah threatened to put the men in khaki on trial for violating the peace agreement the army had signed with him in February 2005 by launching a military operation in his area. "Just as the government side has put my people on trial and sentenced them to imprisonments I will put the Pakistani soldiers on trial. I have my own courts which will try the soldiers for violating the peace pact," Baitullah Mehsud was quoted by his spokesman as saying on September 5, 2007. As the Mehsud men beheaded three soldiers in next three days, Musharraf ordered the release of 25 hardcore militants, who were already under trial on terrorism charges, thus paving the way for the release of the abducted soldiers in the first week of November 2007, when General Musharraf had already invoked the state of emergency in Pakistan.

Interestingly, in his proclamation of emergency order through which he had sacked almost 50 judges of the superior courts including the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Musharraf alleged that many of the hard core militants, extremists, terrorists and suicide bombers, arrested and being interrogated by the security agencies, were ordered to be released by the superior judiciary, who were subsequently found involved in some heinous terrorist activities, resulting in loss of human life and property. "Militants across the country have, thus, been encouraged while the law enforcement agencies were subdued", he had stated in his proclamation order. However, it later transpired that it was actually the refusal of the military authorities to release five of the 25 Mehsud associates that prompted a series of suicide attacks against the Pakistani security forces, compelling the government to launch a military action in South Waziristan. As things stand, Baitullah Mehsud is not only defying Islamabad,

but has emerged as a major irritant in the global war on terror. Besides becoming the public face of militancy in the Pak-Afghan tribal areas, he is posing a serious threat to the American efforts to dismantle the al-Qaeda network on the Pak-Afghan border and bring stability to the war-torn Afghanistan.

Baitullah Mehsud's military might further multiplied on December 12, 2007 when a *shura* or council of 40 senior militant leaders commanding an army of 40,000 gathered in Peshawar and decided to unite under a single banner, *Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan*. Baitullah was appointed the *ameer*, Maulana Hafiz Gul Bahadur of North Waziristan was made the senior *naib ameer* (senior vice chief) and Maulana Faqir Muhammad of the Bajaur Agency as the third in command. The *shura* not only had representation from all the seven tribal agencies of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, but also from the settled districts of the North Western Frontier Province including the districts of Swat, Bannu, Tank, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohistan, Buner and Malakand. A subsequent statement by Baitullah's spokesman Maulvi Omar on December 13, 2007 stated that the sole objective behind the launching of the *Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan* is to unite the Pakistani Taliban and set up a centralized organization against the NATO forces in Afghanistan, besides waging a 'defensive jehad' against the Pakistani forces, carrying out military operations against innocent civilians in the FATA and the NWFP.

The consolidation of the disparate 'local Taliban' movement was seen as a logical step in the Pakistani Taliban's ongoing insurgency campaign in northwestern Pakistan. Before that, the Pakistani Taliban, while allied with al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, had been operating as local groups. However, the creation of a unified Taliban movement on the Pakistani side of Pak-Afghan border allowed them to better coordinate both military and political operations with the Pakistani as well as with the Afghan Taliban and al Qaeda. The launching of the *Tehreek-e-Taliban* also showed Baitullah's Mehsud's ability to organize and command large numbers of Islamic fighters, fend off the Pakistani military in South Waziristan, take the fight to neighboring agencies and districts of the Pak-Afghan border areas, and organize a nationwide suicide bombing campaign

against the Pakistan army. The Pakistani intelligence agencies have already concluded that the personnel of the security and intelligence agencies across Pakistan are mostly being targeted by the suicide bombers being trained and launched by Baitullah Mehsud.

In his first ever television interview conducted by *Al Jazeera* at an unknown location and aired on January 28, 2008, Baitullah said: "The main objective of the coalition of militants is waging a defensive jihad. The Pakistan army is deploying its soldiers under orders from Bush. The army is bombarding our houses and fighting with us. Therefore we have formed this coalition to guarantee the safety of civilians and this war which the army launched in the tribal areas is an American war. We never feel sad about the Pakistani soldiers' deaths. They are actually implementing the orders of the West and the United States and they are destroying our houses. And I do pray that Allah will guide them back to the right path because they are Muslims and this is an Islamic country. But when the army soldiers come to this area to kill us, we will definitely be killing them".

During a 25-minute sit-down with *Al Jazeera* correspondent Ahmed Zaidan, the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* ameer declared: "Our main aim is to finish Britain and United States and to crush the pride of the non-Muslims. We pray to God to give us the ability to destroy the White House, New York and London. And we have trust in God. Very soon, we will be witnessing jihad's miracles". While talking on President Musharraf, Baitullah said: "Musharraf is no more than a slave to Bush and the non-believers. Musharraf is no more than a follower to his masters. He started attacking mosques, killing women, children, and the elderly inside the mosques. What was pushing him to do all this was his will to satisfy George Bush. But now we are saying Musharraf has committed crimes against Muslims and he has destroyed mosques - and our response will be much harder than his acts. We will be teaching him a lesson which history will write in gold and God willing, Musharraf will be in severe pain. And all those who assisted him will also be in pain".

Almost three years after the signing of the Sararogha peace deal between the military and the militants led by Baitullah Mehsud, the latter's private army captured the British-era

Srarogha fort in South Waziristan on January 16, 2008. The Fort, which was manned by the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) personnel, was demolished by Baitullah's men and the Pakistan army soldiers present inside were either killed or taken prisoners. Skirmishes continued between the Pakistani security forces and the Baitullah militants for next few weeks till the holding of the February 18, 2008 general elections. However, soon after taking oath as Prime Minister, Yousaf Raza Gillani announced that his government was ready to talk to all those people who give up arms and are ready to embrace peace. "Let me make it clear that our government will prefer negotiating with the militants as a strategy to counter the rising terrorism and extremism and to ensure peace."

Subsequent peace talks between the military and the militants led by Baitullah Mehsud eventually led to an understanding between the two on May 15, 2008 to sign another peace agreement. According to the proposed draft of the peace pact, in return for withdrawal of army troops from three strategic positions in the border area under Baitullah Mehsud's sway, the *Tehrik-e-Taliban* Pakistan would refrain from violence and other provocative acts. The withdrawal of the Pakistani troops from the troubled areas was a key demand of the militants which was accepted by the military and ultimately paved the way for the two sides to exchange prisoners – 25 suspected militants and 12 security personnel – on May 15. The 15-point proposed draft of the agreement contained clauses under which the Mehsud tribe gave an undertaking that government and security forces would not be targeted at all; their equipment and property would not be damaged; no military or government functionary would be kidnapped; all roads would be opened to the Frontier Corps in accordance with the old procedure and there would be no restriction on their movement. Mehsud tribes were also required to ensure that no terrorist activity takes place anywhere in Pakistan, including the tribal regions.

As the two sides were giving final touches to the peace deal, Baitullah Mehsud directed his militants to stop violence in the tribal areas of Waziristan to bring peace to the region. A pamphlet titled "*Eilan-e- Umoomi*" (general announcement)

issued to the activists of the *Tehrik-e-Taliban*, said: "Directives are hereby issued to all the workers of the *Tehrik* from their ameer Baitullah Mehsud that a strict ban has been imposed on provocative activities in Waziristan for the sake of peace. Obeying this order is compulsory for all his followers and its violators would be hanged upside down and punished publicly".

As the two sides were contemplating to sign the peace deal, Baitullah Mehsud decided to address a press conference on May 24, 2008 wherein he admitted that he was sending fighters to battle the US troops in Afghanistan. Addressing reporters invited to a hideout in the mountainous Waziristan region, Mehsud said the holy war would continue until the US forces are made to withdraw from Afghanistan. "Yes, we are helping the Taliban in the jihad against America", the bearded militant leader said, holding an AK-47 as he sat in a disused school building in a Waziristan village - Kotkai. "We send our people to fight against America, and God willing, we will evict these Americans from Afghanistan the same way the Russian were driven out from there" he said. Mehsud denied that militants were sheltering al-Qaeda chief Osama, but said he would like to meet him. "If Osama needs protection in our areas, we will feel proud to shelter him", he responded to a query.

Baitullah Mehsud's admission of sending Taliban fighters to Afghanistan created enormous US pressure on Pakistan not to ink the proposed peace deal with him. A NATO spokesman even threatened retaliatory strikes if the Taliban militants kept entering Afghanistan from Pakistan to launch attacks against its forces. This compelled the military to abandon the realization of the proposed accord, especially the withdrawal of the troops from the tribal area under Baitullah's control.

This prompted Baitullah Mehsud to announce on June 1, 2008 the suspension of further talks with the government, saying the government, instead of withdrawing troops from his areas in accordance with the proposed peace deal, has launched military operations against the Taliban. While giving a 15 days deadline to the Pakistani authorities to stop the military operation in the Bajaur district of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and in the Swat district of the North West Frontier Province, Baitullah

threatened on August 6, 2008 to launch a wave of countrywide suicide attacks. "If the military operations continue, people will see Sindh and Punjab turn into furnaces".

The threat was clear and specific, naming the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi as targets. The Baitullah ultimatum was followed by a declaration from the Swat-based TNSM chief Maulana Fazlullah on August 7, 2008 that the dialogue with the government is now off and suicide-bombers are ready to attack the Pakistani security forces if they do not stop the Swat operation. Exactly 15 days later, on August 21, 2008, Baitullah translated into reality his threat of launching suicide attacks when two suicide bombers exploded themselves outside Pakistan's main arms production factory at Taxila near Rawalpindi, killing 80 people and injuring more than 150. The *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* spokesman Maulvi Omar was quick to claim responsibility for the twin attacks at the main gate of the Wah Ordnance Factory, saying they were in revenge for the ongoing military operations in Bajaur and Swat. On August 25, 2008, the Pakistan government banned the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Baitullah is now a marked man. According to a July 26, 2008 Asia Times report, the Pakistani security agencies and coalition leaders from Afghanistan are sharing intelligence in an attempt to hunt down Baitullah. "While using his differences with some regional commanders - Baitullah comes from the Mehsud, one of the four sub-tribes of the Waziri - the Pakistani authorities tried to erect a web of opposition around him, but none survived. The ISI also tried to sow seeds of enmity against Baitullah, without success. Haji Omar, once a powerful chief of the Taliban in South Waziristan and also a Wazir, tried to challenge Baitullah's command, but failed and now lives in exile in North Waziristan, without forces or resources. Haji Nazceer, another Wazir, also tried to confront Baitullah, at the behest of the security forces, but he failed. Baitullah eventually drove out all tribes related to Haji Nazeer from South Waziristan.

Now that Baitullah is unchallenged in South Waziristan, he aims to broaden his network by raising his presence in North Waziristan and the biggest Taliban network in Afghanistan, the

Haqqani faction, has no choice but to side with Baitullah. With each consolidation of Baitullah's power, Islamabad, along with its Western allies, becomes all the more convinced that he has to be eliminated because only his demise could lead to the dismantling of the Taliban and al-Qaeda networks in the Pak-Afghan tribal areas".

4

Saifullah Akhtar: Intelligence Tool Who Tried To Kill Bhutto?

The mysterious murder of Benazir Bhutto took a new turn in the second week of February 2008 when the *ameer* of the pro-Taliban jehadi organisation, *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* (HUJI) or the Movement of Islamic Holy War, led by Qari Saifullah Akhtar was named by the slain leader of the PPP [in her posthumous book] as a principal suspect in the failed attempt to kill her in Karachi on October 18, 2007 a few hours after her return home from exile.

Shortly before her assassination, Benazir Bhutto was putting the final touches to her hard-hitting memoirs titled, "Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West", which were eventually published by Simon & Schuster, six weeks after her death. In her posthumous book, marketed on February 12, 2008, she made some shocking allegations from the grave, stating that Qari Saifullah had been involved in the October 18, 2007 suicide bombing in Karachi during the welcome procession of Bhutto that killed 140 people besides injuring over 500 others, mostly the PPP workers.

For almost 10 hours on October 18, the people of Karachi choked the streets, cheering Benazir Bhutto in a mass catharsis on her return home from exile. As her cavalcade threaded through an enraptured throng towards the mausoleum of Mohammad Ali Jinnah where she was to address a public rally, Bhutto stood atop an especially fortified, bullet-proof truck, waving proudly at her followers and occasionally wiping eyes

brimming with tears of joy. At 12:09 a.m. on October 19, the cavalcade had reached the Karsaz Bridge, still 10 km away from the destination. But Bhutto Benazir was not to be seen – 19 minutes earlier she had gone down to use the makeshift washroom built in the lower deck of the truck.

It was then that someone apparently tossed a hand grenade on the right side of Benazir's truck, hoping the explosion would break the three rings of security cordon around it. The outer ring was of policemen, the inner two of the Janisar Force of the PPP. Her personal guards valiantly held their ground. In the ensuing confusion, a suicide bomber tried to break the security cordon to get closer to the truck from the left side. Challenged by the security men, he detonated himself. The carnivalesque mood soon turned funereal—human flesh and limbs flew around, people wailed in agony and grief, with the death toll touching a chilling figure of 140.

What saved Benazir was that she wasn't atop the truck at that fatal moment; the explosion was powerful enough to rip off a door of her truck. Subsequent investigations revealed prior knowledge of the security architecture around Benazir. Not only was the attack three-pronged, the masterminds chose a suicide bomber in order to evade the jamming devices fitted into two vehicles immediately in front and behind her truck. The jammers could have prevented any explosion triggered by a remote-controlled device, as had happened during one of the two attempts on Musharraf's life in December 2003 in Rawalpindi.

The nature of the explosives used in the Bhutto assassination attempt indicated highly intricate planning. Subsequent investigations revealed that the suicide bomber, a 21-year old bearded youth, whose head was also recovered from the scene of the carnage, had strapped himself with 15-20 kg of an explosive mix of C4 and Trinitrotoluene explosives. The C4 explosive is rated as the best quality military plastic explosive that detonates with tremendous velocity, and is not readily available. The other ingredient - Trinitrotoluene or TNT - has the capacity to shatter concrete structures and hillocks. Investigators were of the view that the TNT explosive was meant to pierce through the bullet-proof casing of the PPP leader's vehicle, with the C4 inflicting damage over a wide area. However, fortunately for Benazir, two

police jeeps accompanying her welcome procession bore the brunt of the explosion.

So, who were these people who could access such devastating and rarely available explosives and who were aware of the obstacles they would encounter in targeting Benazir Bhutto? She believed Qari Saifullah Akhtar was involved in the suicide attack on her homecoming rally. In her book, 'Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West', Benazir Bhutto had stated, "It was Qari to whom the intelligence officials in Lahore had turned for help before my homecoming on October 18, 2007". Although no one is sure if there was a link between the release of Qari and the murder of Bhutto, the PPP circles ask as to how and why an al-Qaeda linked dreaded terrorist having known links with the Taliban militia as well was set free by the Musharraf regime after three years, before Benazir's homecoming. Qari's clandestine release from prison, months before Bhutto's return, therefore, arose suspicions among the PPP circles that he was tasked by his spy masters with organizing the October 18 bombing.

Benazir Bhutto writes in her book: "I was informed of a meeting that had taken place in Lahore where the bomb blasts were planned. However, a bomb maker was needed for the bombs. Enter Qari Saifullah [Akhtar], a wanted jihadi terrorist who had tried to overthrow my second government in the 1990s. He had been extradited by the United Arab Emirates and was languishing in the Karachi central jail. According to my sources, the officials in Lahore had turned to Qari for help. His liaison with elements in the government was a radical who was asked to make the bombs and he himself asked for a *fatwa* making it legitimate to oblige. He got one", she added.

On February 26, 2008, exactly two weeks after Bhutto's revelations pertaining to the alleged involvement of the *HUJI ameer* in the Karachi suicide bombing and the subsequent pressure created by the international community, the Musharraf administration arrested Qari Saifullah Akhtar for the purpose of interrogations, although there were many in the establishment circles who believed that the Qari has actually been taken into protective custody by his spy masters which had set him free despite his being a dreaded terrorist. As a matter of fact, the

HUJI *ameer* is generally considered to be a handy tool of the Pakistani intelligence establishment who is used and dumped whenever required by the all-powerful spy master. The Qari was seized by the security agencies along with his three sons in Ferozwala, near Lahore. During interrogation, the Qari reportedly claimed that he had already adopted the path of Sufism since his release in May 2007 and was living for the past few months in the secluded shrine of Syed Ahmad Shaheed, a known Sufi cum militant of the 18th century, at Ferozwala from where he was arrested.

His arrest actually established the fact for the first time that despite all the charges leveled against him, Qari Saifullah was no more behind bars and had been released much before Benazir Bhutto's return home. Qari is a graduate of the *Jamia Binoria* in Karachi, the infamous religious seminary of the sub-continent which has the privilege of having produced several known pro-Taliban *Deobandi* kingpins like the *Harkatul Mujahideen* chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil and the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* chief Maulana Masood Azhar. He had been arrested and extradited from United Arab Emirates on August 7, 2004 on charges of plotting twin suicide attacks on Musharraf in Rawalpindi in December 2003. However, instead of trying to prosecute and convict him after his arrest, the Pakistani intelligence agencies chose to keep him under detention for the next two years and nine months, without even filing any criminal charges against him in any court of law.

His "unprovoked" arrest was challenged in the Supreme Court of Pakistan in the first week of January 2005. On January 18, 2005 the Supreme Court dismissed the petition against Qari's arrest and directed the petitioner to first move the High Court by filing a habeas corpus writ petition. A Supreme Court bench of Justice Hamid Ali Mirza and Justice Falak Sher ruled that the arrest in this case was not a matter of public importance and hence a constitutional petition could not be filed directly in the Supreme Court under Article 184(3) of the Constitution. However, following Benazir Bhutto's murder, it emerged that Qari Saifullah Akhtar was quietly released by the intelligence establishment as one of the missing persons being sought by a

Supreme Court bench under the now deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry.

Before that, on May 5, 2007, the federal government told the Supreme Court that the Qari was not in the custody of the state agencies. The concise report presented by the National Crisis Management Cell to the Court, revealed, "He is engaged in jihadi activities somewhere in Punjab", thus denying that he was under detention. Two weeks later, on May 21, 2007, the Qari suddenly reached his hometown in Mandi Bahauddin. *Daily Times* reported on May 22, 2007 that Saifullah was actually released by an intelligence agency earlier that morning when he was thrown out of a car in a deserted area near the Chakwal district of Punjab.

The release was subsequently brought into the notice of the apex court on May 26, 2007, by the Ministry of Interior. Hashmat Habib, the counsel for Qari Saifullah Akhtar, having confirmed the release of his client, told the Court that while setting him free, the intelligence officials told Qari that had they not picked him up, there was a strong possibility of the American Federal Bureau of Investigation taking him away for interrogations because of his alleged al-Qaeda and Taliban links. Hashmat's statement gives credibility to Bhutto's claim that Qari was involved with those in the intelligence establishment who were plotting to assassinate her upon her homecoming.

At the time of his August 2004 dramatic arrest and subsequent extradition from the United Arab Emirates, the Pakistani authorities described the development as a major blow to the al-Qaeda sponsored terrorist network and its local affiliates in Pakistan. The then information minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed even went to the extent of painting him as a close aide of Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, the latter being the operational head of al-Qaeda in Pakistan. "We confirm that we have arrested Qari Saifullah Akhtar. He was on our wanted list for a very long time before, but he was not available. We did not know his location. And now from UAE, we got the information, and they delivered him to us and now he is in our custody. We are trying our best. We have arrested the most valuable people. We have gone for the planners. And the best planners, we have arrested. And I think these arrests will make a big change in their activity. They will not be in a position to attack their targets. Or

if there is something that they want to do, it is not going to be easy to do for them", he had stated during a news conference.

Even otherwise, the timing of Qari Saifullah's arrest and repatriation to Pakistan was significant given the fact that it only happened after the arrest of a Pakistani computer engineer Naeem Noor Khan alias Abu Talha from Gujrat on July 12, 2004, along with Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, a key suspect in the August 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Naeem had been creating websites and secret email codes for al-Qaeda operatives to communicate with each other. International media reports after Naeem Noor's arrest said that the Pakistani agencies recruited him as a double agent and were thus able to communicate with al-Qaeda through him. Because of a premature disclosure of Khan as a double agent in the United States, the slowly tightening noose around al-Qaeda in the United Kingdom had to be quickly sprung. The homecoming of Qari Saifullah Akhtar was, therefore, connected with the revelations made by Ahmed Khalfan in Gujrat.

On March 4, 2008, hardly a few days after the Qari was nabbed from Ferozwala, two suicide bombers blew themselves up at the Navy War College building on the Mall Road in Lahore, killing eight Navy employees. A war-related course was in progress in a lecture room adjacent to the parking lot of the college when the human bombs forcibly made their way into the building and blew themselves up. Six days later, on March 11, terrorists once again struck Lahore by using suicide bombers - the first batch targeted the headquarters of the Federal Investigations Agency (FIA) on the busy Temple Road, Lahore while the second batch targeted a safe house of the FIA in the Model Town area a few minutes later, killing 36 people, mostly FIA officials. Subsequent investigations by Pakistani agencies indicated that all the three attacks were carried out by the *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* as a reaction to the arrest of Qari Saifullah Akhtar. As a matter of fact, six of the HUJI activists, arrested after the March 4 Naval War College suicide attack, were being kept at the FIA headquarters and being grilled by a Joint Interrogation Team.

On March 20, 2008, almost three weeks after his February 26 arrest, Saifullah was produced before an Anti Terrorism Court in

Karachi for his involvement in the October 18, 2007 suicide attacks on Benazir Bhutto's welcome procession. Justice Khawaja Naveed subsequently granted his 12 days remand to the police till March 29, 2008 so that Qari could be grilled thoroughly. On March 20, 2008, Hashmat Habib, the counsel of Saifullah told the media in Karachi that he has sued the printer, publisher and beneficiaries of Benazir Bhutto's book for 'falsely accusing' his client of being involved in Karachi bombing and thus damaging his reputation. "I have moved the suit under Section 8 of Defamation Ordinance 2002 on behalf of his client Qari seeking damages of \$200 million. M/s Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, M/s Mackays of Chatham Ltd, Asif Zardari, proprietor Mr Books Super Market Islamabad and ARY Shopping Channel have been named as respondents in the libel warranting them to halt the distribution and sale of publication forthwith", he said.

Five days later, on March 26, 2008, Justice Khawaja Naveed Ahmed ordered the release of Qari Saifullah on bail after the investigation officer reported to the court that no evidence had been found to link him with any of the terrorist activities. Investigation officer Nawaz Ranjha submitted a report to the court stating that during initial investigations he did not get enough evidence to file a charge-sheet against Qari. "The suspect was interrogated during the 12-day period given by the court but he denied involvement in the blasts. Under Section 497 of the Criminal Procedure Code, when a person accused of a non-bailable offence is arrested without warrant by an officer-in-charge of a police station, he may be released on bail when he is brought before a court, but he shall not be so released if there are reasonable grounds to believe that he is guilty of an offence punishable with death or imprisonment for life or imprisonment for 10 years", the report submitted to the court stated.

Although the judge accepted the report of the investigation officer and ordered Qari Saifullah's release on bail, he was rearrested under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) and shifted to a Karachi safe house. Two months later, on June 8, 2008, Qari Saifullah was released by the Sindh Home Department when the term for his detention expired. "He is a free person. There is no case against him anywhere in Pakistan", Qari Saifullah's lawyer Hashmat Habib told the media people.

However, there were many in the establishment who were of the view that the release was actually facilitated by the intelligence agencies in an apparent bid to stop the deadly wave of suicide bombings, let loose by the followers of Saifullah.

Though Qari Saifullah's role in the October 18 Karachi suicide attack could not be explored for one reason or the other, his previous involvement in a failed coup plot of 1995 had projected him as one of the most deadly militants who, from the intelligence establishment's viewpoint, had gone astray. The group of the potential coup makers busted by the Military Intelligence at that time included four serving army officers, including a major-general, who were accused of plotting to first takeover the General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army in Rawalpindi during the Corps Commanders Conference by assassinating the corps military commanders, and later overthrow the Benazir government to eventually enforce their own brand of Islamic *Shariah* in Pakistan. And Saifullah was among the five top members of the group headed by Major General Zahirul Islam Abbassi, with Brig Mustansir Billa having been described as the ideologue of the religiously motivated would be coup makers.

Having been arrested, they were formerly charged by the field court martial with conspiring to assassinate military commanders with the help of a group of Kashmiri militants belonging to a jehadi group called the *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* (HUJI) who were to be provided by Qari Saifullah, with military uniforms, arms and ammunition needed for the covert operation. However, once the field general court martial formerly started, Qari Saifullah's name was dropped from the list of accused as he had decided to turn approver against his khaki co-conspirators. Those conducting the court martial proceedings had admitted at one stage that without the testimony of Saifullah, it would have been extremely difficult to convict the khaki accused. However, after the dismissal of the second Bhutto government in 1996, the Qari was released; he went to Afghanistan and was inducted into the cabinet of Taliban *ameer* Mullah Mohammad Omar as his adviser on political affairs.

Once in Afghanistan, the militants of Qari's *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* were called 'Punjabi' Taliban and offered employment, something that other jihadi organisations could not get out of Mullah Mohammad Omar. Interestingly, the HUJI had membership among the Taliban too as three Taliban ministers and 22 judges belonged to it. The *Harkat* militants stood together with Mullah Omar in difficult times under the command of Qari Saifullah. According to international media reports, at least 300 HUJI militants lost their lives while fighting the Northern Alliance troops, prompting Mullah Omar to give *Harkat* the permission to build six more training camps in Kandahar, Kabul and Khost, where the Taliban army also used to receive military training. Before the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, the HUJI had branch offices in 40 districts across Pakistan. While funds were collected from these grass root offices as well as from foreign sources, the *Harkat* had accounts in two branches of the Allied Bank in Islamabad.

Qari Saifullah was one of the few jihadi leaders who had escaped with Mullah Mohammad Omar after the US-led Allied Forces invaded Afghanistan in October 2001. He first took shelter in the South Waziristan Agency; then moved to Peshawar and eventually fled to Saudi Arabia, from where he decided to move to the UAE. Three years later, on August 6, 2004, he was arrested by the UAE authorities and handed over to the Pakistani agencies, only to be deported. He was arrested after revelations during investigations of the December 2003 twin suicide attacks on Pervez Musharraf that he had been executing terrorist operations in Pakistan with the help of his right hand man, Amjad Hussain Farooqi. The agencies had concluded that Rawalpindi attacks were masterminded by Farooqi, a key operative of the HUJI, who was later killed in Nawab Shah, Sindh on September 26, 2004, almost 50 days after his mentor's arrest and the subsequent information he had reportedly provided to his interrogators.

Investigations revealed that one of the suicide bombers, Khaliq Ahmed alias Hazir Sultan, belonged to the *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* while the other, Mohammad Jameel Suddhan, belonged to the Jaish-e-Mohammad. Khaliq Ahmed, 42, a resident of the Panjsher valley in Afghanistan, was camped in

South Waziristan Agency before being moved to the garrison city of Rawalpindi to carry out the 2003 suicide attack. It further transpired that the Harkat and the Jaish were components of a five-member "Brigade 313", which was launched in 2001 after the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Three other components of the "Brigade 313" were Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Toiba. The Brigade leaders had pledged to target some key Pakistani leaders who in their opinion were damaging the cause of jihad and protecting the US interests in Pakistan. The arrest of Qari Saifullah marked a serious blow to the al-Qaeda sponsored terrorist network and its local affiliates in Pakistan, which had been making desperate attempts to physically eliminate President General Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, which they believed were acting as American agents.

According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), the *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* (HUJI) is a Pakistan-based jihadi group with affiliates in India and Bangladesh. An SATP report claims that the HUJI is closely linked to the Inter Services Intelligence, the Taliban and al Qaeda. "The group receives patronage and support from Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence and is also linked with several Islamist groups operating in India, including the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* and the *Jaish-e-Mohammad*. While the exact formation date of the group is not known, its origin is traced to the Soviet-Afghan war. Qari Saifullah Akhtar along with two of his associates, Maulana Irshad Ahmed and Maulana Abdus Samad Sial, all seminary students from Karachi in Pakistan, were instrumental in laying the foundation of a group, *Jamiat Ansarul Afghaneen* (the Party of the Friends of Afghan People), sometime in 1980.

"Towards the end of its Afghanistan engagement, the *Jamiat* rechristened itself as HUJI and reoriented its strategy to fight for the cause of fellow Muslims in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir. The *Harkat* continued to exist after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 by merging with another Pakistani militant group known as the *Harkatul Mujahideen*, to form the *Harkatul Ansar* which subsequently began terrorist operations in Kashmir. In order to avoid the ramifications of the

US designation of *Harkatul Ansar* as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997, it renamed itself as *Harkatul Mujahideen*".

Following the May 8, 2002 suicide bomb attack outside Karachi Sharaton Hotel that killed 11 French engineers working in the port city on a submarine project, Khaled Ahmed, a well-known intellectual and writer, wrote in *The Friday Times* an article about the birth and the growth of the *Harkatul Jehadul Islami*. The article titled 'The Biggest Militia We Know Nothing About' stated: "The *Harkat* is the only militia which boasts international linkages. It calls itself 'the second line of defence of all Muslim states' and is active in Arakan in Burma, and Bangladesh, with well organised seminaries in Karachi, and Chechnya, Sinkiang, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The latest trend is to recall Pakistani fighters stationed abroad and encourage the local fighters to take over the operations. Its fund-raising is largely from Pakistan, but an additional source is its activity of selling weapons to other militias. Its acceptance among the Taliban was owed to its early allegiance to a leader of the Afghan war, Maulvi Nabi Muhammadi and his *Harkat Inqilab Islami* whose fighters became a part of the Taliban forces in large numbers.

"According to *Al-Irshad*, the journal of the *Harkatul Jehadul Islami*, which is published from Islamabad, a *Deobandi* group led by Maulana Irshad Ahmad was established in 1979. Looking for the right Afghan outfit in exile to join in Peshawar, Maulana Irshad Ahmad adjudged Maulvi Nabi Muhammadi as the true *Deobandi* and decided to join him in 1980. *Harkat Inqilab Islami* was set up by Maulana Nasrullah Mansoor Shaheed and was taken over by Nabi Muhammadi after his martyrdom. Eclipsed in Pakistan, Maulana Irshad Ahmad fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets till he was killed in battle in Shirana in 1985. His place was taken by Qari Saifullah Akhtar, which was not liked by some of the *Harkat* leaders, including Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil who then set up his own *Harkatul Mujahideen*.

"According to some sources, the *Harkatul Mujahideen* was a new name given to *Harkatul Ansar* after it was declared terrorist by the United States. Other sources claim it was *Harkatul Jehadul Islami* that had earlier merged with the *Harkatul Ansar*. The HUJI relations with Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil remained good,

but as Maulana Masood Azhar separated from *Harkatul Mujahideen* and set up his own *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* opposed the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* in its journal *Sada-e-Mujahid* or the Voice of the Soldier (May 2000) and hinted that 'you-know-who' had showered *Jaish* with funds. The *Jaish* was supported by Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai of Binori Mosque in Karachi and was given a brand new camp in the Balakot city Azad Kashmir by the ISI.

"The sub-militia (of the HUJI) fighting in Kashmir is semi-autonomous and is led by chief commander Muhammad Ilyas Kashmiri. Its training camp is 20 km from Kotli in Azad Kashmir, with a capacity for training 800 warriors, and is run by one Haji Khan. *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* went into Kashmir in 1991 but was at first opposed by the *Wahabi* elements there because of its refusal to criticize the grand *Deobandi* congregation of *Tableeghi Jamaat* and its quietist posture. But as days passed, its warriors were recognised as Afghans. It finally had more martyrs in the jihad of Jammu & Kashmir than any other militia. Its resolve and organisation were recognised when foreigners were seen fighting side by side with its Punjabi warriors.

"Because of its allegiance to the spiritual legacy of *Deobandism*, *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* did not attack the *Tableeghi Jamaat* (the Party of Preachers), which stood it in good stead because it became the only militia whose literature was allowed to be distributed during the congregations of the *Tableeghi Jamaat*, and those in the Pakistani establishment attending the congregation were greatly impressed by the organizational excellence of the militia. It contained more graduates of the religious seminaries than any other militia, thus emphasising its religious character as envisaged by its founder and by Maulvi Nabi Muhammadi. The HUJI kept away from the sectarian conflict unlike the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* but its men were at times put off by the populist Kashmiri Islam and reacted violently to local practices".

Following the August 2004 arrest of Saifullah, *Daily Times* wrote an editorial on August 9, 2004, titled "Significance of Qari Saifullah Akhtar's arrest": "Qari Saifullah Akhtar - born in 1958 in South Waziristan - is a graduate of the Binori Masjid (*Jamia Binoria*) in Karachi. He was a crucial figure in Mufti Nizamuddin

Shamzai's efforts to get Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar together as partners-in-jihad... From its base in Afghanistan, the *Harkat* launched its campaigns inside Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Chechnya. It finally became the biggest jihadi militia based in Kandahar located in the middle of the Taliban-al Qaeda strategic merger. The *Harkat* called itself 'the second line of defence for all Muslim states and was active in Burma, Bangladesh and Sinkiang. Because of their common origin in the *Binori* seminary, *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* and *Harkatul Mujahideen* were merged in 1993 for the sake of "better performance" in Kashmir. The new outfit was called *Harkatul Ansar*....."

5

The Echoing Truth Behind Lal Masjid Operation Silence

It was in July 2007 that hundreds of highly trained Special Services Group (SSG) commandos of the Pakistan Army carried out the bloody Operation Silence to eliminate what had come to be known as the *Lal Masjid* Brigade, led by Maulana Abdul Rasheed Ghazi, the pro-Taliban fanatic cleric of the Red Mosque in the heart of Islamabad, killing hundreds of people, including scores of army men. Yet, sounds from the gory ending keep reverberating across Pakistan in more ways than one.

As the six-month long stand off between the state and a handful of religiously motivated extremist clerics trying to enforce their own version of Islam on the people of Pakistan finally came to an end on July 10 in the wake of the ruthless military operation, there are many in the Pakistani establishment circles who believe the whole episode was stage-managed to boost Musharraf's sagging global image as the most trusted ally of the United States in its war on terror. Although President Musharraf had been advocating enlightened moderation in words since 9/11, the fact is that he himself had been responsible for systematically expanding the sphere and influence of radical Islamist elements in national politics, and that too at the cost of mainstream democratic political parties.

Many believe the *Lal Masjid* movement was an extension of the growing religious extremism creeping into the urban cities of Pakistan from the NWFP unchecked. For some time now, the more extreme elements within the radical Islamist fold have no

longer been satisfied with the status of obedient instrumentalities of the Pakistan Army as well as the Inter Services Intelligence and renegade groups have repeatedly challenged the limits that Pakistani establishment set for them. Since January 2007, however, a more profound shift was sought to be engineered through the *Lal Masjid* standoff, as the moderate Islamist element – hitherto firmly faithful to their patrons in the establishment – made a bid to violently renegotiate their worth and influence within Pakistan's equations of power. That eventually came to a bloody denouement on July 11 as the Musharraf regime decided to launch Operation Silence.

For six long months, the people of Pakistan watched with enormous concern the clerics of the *Lal Masjid* engaging the government in a veritable war of attrition. The conflict had actually started with the demolition of a couple of illegally constructed mosques in Islamabad [by the Capital Development Authority]. The demands of the *Lal Masjid* clerics started from the rebuilding of razed mosques, and when the government conceded, new demands were made such as the imposition of *Shariah* all over the country. Backed by the male and female students of the *Jamia Hafsa* and the *Jamia Fareedia*, the two clerics then indulged in acts of grave provocations: occupying a public library, abducting policemen and issuing scandalous religious decrees. Every time Maulana Aziz and Maulana Ghazi mocked at the majesty of the state or took the law in their hands, angry voices all around demanded to know, why isn't the regime taking action against them?

The question doing the rounds in the diplomatic circles of Islamabad at that time was - why should an enlightened commando president tolerate people who are the face of the militant Islam in Pakistan and sheltering foreign militants. Before the bloodshed, the Mosque had a reputation for radicalism, mostly attracting Islamic hardline students from North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and tribal areas where support for the Taliban and al-Qaeda is quite strong. The Mosque is located near the headquarters of the Inter Services Intelligence, which helped train and fund the holy warriors to wage jihad in Kashmir and Afghanistan. Much before the

military action code named "Operation Silence" was launched, the *Lal Masjid* had become known to the outer world as a centre of radical Islamic learning, housing several thousand male and female students in adjacent seminaries.

Set in the leafy suburbs of Islamabad close to foreign embassies, nobody knew the extent to which the Mosque had become infested with hardcore militants. The Mosque was built in 1965 by the government of General Ayub Khan and is named for its red walls and interiors. Throughout its existence, the Mosque used to enjoy official patronage from influential members of successive governments, prime ministers, army chiefs, as well as presidents, especially Ziaul Haq who had very close relationship with Maulana Muhammad Abdullah, the late founder of the Mosque. During the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), the Red Mosque played a major role in recruiting and training militants to fight with the Russian occupation forces. The Maulana had been an ardent supporter of the Taliban and Osama with whom he had developed special ties. Since his assassination in the late 1990s, the entire complex was being run by the sons of Abdullah – Maulana Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid Ghazi who had literally converted it into a centre for hard line *Sunni Deobandi* teaching.

After the 9/11 terror attacks, Maulana Aziz delivered some of the most biting sermons from the platform of the *Lal Masjid* while Maulana Ghazi led many anti-government and anti-US processions in Islamabad. Rasheed Ghazi was one of the signatories to a religious decree, issued by prominent clergymen in which the Pakistan Army soldiers dying in US-backed military operations against fellow Pakistanis and Muslims in Waziristan tribal region were omitted from the list of martyrs. The clerics were forbidden from leading funeral prayers for them. But no action was taken against the radical clerics and they were never reprimanded because of their close proximity with the intelligence establishment, especially the ISI which used to patronize them.

It was at the *Lal Masjid* that students were indoctrinated and recruited as foot soldiers of several militant groups that had been harnessed to push Pakistan's geo-strategic objectives in Jammu Kashmir and Afghanistan. However, the two cleric

brothers eventually lost the backing of their spy masters for having pushed the country's enlightened military dictator – Musharraf – too far with their much-publicized bizarre drive to enforce strict Islamic laws in Islamabad and establish their own trial courts. The Musharraf administration had been exercising restraint since January 2007 despite repeated challenges posed to the state authority by the two cleric brothers. The ambitious manner in which they sought cheap publicity had already set alarm bells ringing among the general public as well as sections of the security establishment.

It was actually the June 22, 2007 move of the *Lal Masjid*-linked militants to abduct some Chinese nationals from an acupuncture clinic in Islamabad masquerading as massage parlour, and the ensuing stern message from Beijing to take strict action against the kidnappers, that eventually goaded General Musharraf and his commanders to lay a siege to the complex. However, a smart commando action that was expected to be a quick operation to subdue Islamic radicals holed up in the huge complex of the *Lal Masjid* and the *Jamia Hafsa* actually turned into a marathon battle, with the elite military forces sweeping through underground bunkers in over 30 hours of intense combat. It was the first time that Islamabad had ever seen such a pitched battle being fought in the heart of the city.

Heavy smoke drifted over the mosque complex, only a few miles from the presidential palace and the parliament building. Gunfire and explosions thundered across the city as Operation Silence unfolded. The military and the militants had their first major clash on July 3, leaving 10 people dead and more than 150 injured. An indefinite curfew was imposed in G-6 sector where the *Lal Masjid* and the *Jamia Hafsa* are located, following which troops from the Pakistan army's 111 Brigade and units of Special Services Group (SSG) commandos took positions to launch a major crackdown. The trouble started when some militants tried to occupy a nearby government building and, during the scuffle, snatched a number of assault rifles from the police men posted there. Within no time a fierce clash broke out between the armed seminary students and the Pakistani security forces.

Sporadic clashes had continued throughout the day and by the time night fell on Islamabad, a paramilitary soldier,

photojournalist, four students of Islamic seminary and a number of passers-by were dead, almost all of them being victim of high velocity bullets. On the very next day, July 4, Maulana Abdul Aziz was arrested by the security forces while trying to escape clad in a *burqa*. Known for his firebrand speeches, calls for jihad and open threats in Friday sermons about having a brigade of suicide bombers inside *Lal Masjid*, Maulana Aziz tried to slip away by posing as one of the 50-odd women students who had offered to surrender. However, the security officials spotted his unusual demeanour as the rest of the girls appeared to be girls, but he was taller and had a pot belly. On the operational front, the government side continued its strategy of massive display of military might with machine-gun mounted armoured personnel laying siege to the militant-infested *Lal Masjid* and security official's warning of ruthless crackdown.

The strategy worked well and more than 1,100 men and women members and supporters of the radical brigade capitulated and surrendered unconditionally. The public specter of the surrender continued throughout the day, during which every one who came out of *Lal Masjid* and the adjoining *Jamia Hafsa* was made to walk through metal detectors and was frisked by security officials and police-women. The next day, on July 5, the Operation Silence was officially launched, with the commandos scaling up its offensive on the *Lal Masjid* through selective bombardment using helicopter gunships to flush out holed up militants. An intense gun battle erupted on July 6 between the military and the militants. On July 7, in a blunt warning to hundreds of radical students and militants holed up in the *Lal Masjid*, Musharraf said they must surrender failing as a result of which they would all be killed. The gun battle continued for the next two days before the military authorities announced that Maulana Rasheed Ghazi has finally been killed.

In the aftermath of the operation, the administration was accused of suppressing the total number of casualties. A military spokesperson had claimed that nearly 80 people, including 10 commandos, died in the fighting, excluding the 21 who were killed on July 3. However, this figure appears patently false, considering that thousands of male and female students were present in the complex on July 3 and only 1250 of them had

surrendered before the operation begun. The actual casualty is, therefore, expected to soar beyond the official count given by the military spokesman. The death toll became a contentious issue especially after a private television channel reported on July 11 that a mass grave was being dug in the Sector H-11 Graveyard of Islamabad at midnight and hundreds of dead bodies, being kept at the Sarhad-Balochistan Cold Storage in Sector I-10/3 of Islamabad, were being taken to the graveyard for a mass burial.

A day after the Operation officially came to an end, Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri, the right hand man of Osama, released a message on July 11, saying: "This crime can only be washed by repentance or blood... If you do not retaliate....Musharraf will not spare any of you. Your salvation is only through jihad". Speaking at a televised address to the nation a day after the operation, Musharraf said he was determined that extremism and terrorism would be eradicated in Pakistan. "Unfortunately we have been up against our own people.....they had strayed from the right path and become susceptible to terrorism.....What do want as a nation? What kind of Islam do these people represent? In the garb of Islamic teaching they have been training for terrorism.....they prepared the *madrassa* as a fortress for war and housed other terrorists in there.... I will not allow any *madrassa* to be used for extremism".

Musharraf's rhetoric apart, his critics say he will have to answer some important questions: How could such a crisis occur in the middle of the federal capital, about half a mile from the ISI headquarters? How did so many foreign and other hardened militants find sanctuary in a mosque that is situated at a stone's throw from the seat of government? How was the *Lal Masjid* administration able to build tunnels under the complex, without being noticed by an otherwise ever-prying intelligence apparatus? Why did the *Lal Masjid* problem expand right after the judicial crisis following the sacking of the Pakistani chief justice by Musharraf? Why did it take so long for the Musharraf regime to react? More importantly, will the Pakistani establishment now seriously re-examine and review the whole gamut of ties between its intelligence apparatus and the militant network? Or will it wait for another *Lal Masjid* and Operation Silence before it does that?

Whatever the answers, Musharraf is likely to appear at best incompetent and at worst complicit of attempting to divert public opinion from the real political issue of the moment. Since Musharraf had often been accused of tolerating elements in the military and the intelligence services which are known to maintain ideological and strategic links with Islamic militants, his critics doubt the *Lal Masjid* operation was meant to uproot or dismantle the jihadi network from the Pakistani soil, adding that it was yet another attempt to secure his rule for the time being, both internally and externally. Hardly two weeks after the Operation Silence came to an end, the Musharraf regime decided to reopen the Mosque on July 27 under Maulana Ashfaq as the new Imam.

Even a year after the bloody operation, the *Lal Masjid* is today symbolic of the jihad the Pakistan is combating, not just in the violence-torn North West Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, but in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad as well, which houses the GHQ as well as the Parliament respectively. Ask analysts and Pakistan watchers to identify the turning point that led to Musharraf's downfall and they will point to the Operation Silence. Ask them why Pakistan continues to be in the grip of escalating violence and they will again point to the *Lal Masjid* episode. The siege and subsequent storming of a holy place of worship eventually snowballed into a crisis which even saw senior military officers turn against Musharraf, leaving him in the lurch when he needed them the most.

The fall of Red Mosque episode certainly heralded a new era in Pakistan marked by conflict between moderate and fundamentalist forces. The bloody operation also brought the most dreaded fallout, an unprecedented increase in suicide bombings all over Pakistan, especially targeting the security forces. The first anniversary of the *Lal Masjid* Operation Silence proved bloodier on July 6, 2008 as 20 people were killed, mostly policemen, and 50 others injured when a suicide bomber exploded himself near Melody Market close to the Red Mosque in the federal capital. The bomber exploded himself at the culmination of the *Lal Masjid Shuhada* (martyrs) Conference, attended by thousands of the *madrassa* students.

The *Lal Masjid* backlash proved that despite his oft-repeated claims of being the most trusted US ally in the war on terror, his regime had failed to contain al-Qaeda and Taliban-linked Pakistani militant groups even under his very nose in the federal capital. Analysts, therefore, say the *Lal Masjid* was just a symptom of what the creeping Talibanisation in the country, which, if not handled with full might and determination, may take over the settled regions beyond the NWFP and start to swallow the traditional political forces, including the mainstream Islamic groups that still believe in a democratic order.

6

Abdul Rasheed Ghazi: The Once Blue Eyed Boy of the ISI

Maulana Abdul Rasheed Ghazi, the firebrand fanatic cleric of the *Lal Masjid* who died in a shoot out with the Pakistani security forces on July 10, 2007 during Operation Silence after refusing to surrender, had once been the blue-eyed boy of the all-powerful Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). However, Ghazi finally lost the backing of his powerful spy masters once he attempted to step out of his shoes by pushing the so-called enlightened military dictator in Islamabad too far with his much-publicised bizarre drive to enforce strict Islamic laws in the federal capital.

The steadfast resolve of Maulana Abdul Rasheed Ghazi to fight until his last breath against the Pakistani security forces was among the most astonishing aspects of the Operation Silence that eventually led to his assassination along with hundreds of other casualties. Ghazi's bloody death, after his refusal to surrender, was in sharp contrast to the abortive attempt of his elder brother and chief cleric of the *Lal Masjid*, Maulana Abdul Aziz, to flee the besieged complex wearing a veil. The two brothers' contrasting responses to the fiercest challenge of their lives symbolize two lives ostensibly united in their passion for Islam and yet remarkably different from each other in finer details. Maulana Abdul Rasheed Ghazi lived a life different from his elder brother, Maulana Abdul Aziz, and met a different end as well. Unlike Aziz, Ghazi stood defiant till last and died fighting. Known to his acquaintances as just Ghazi

(survivor from a battle), he ended a *Shaheed* (martyr) to his admirers.

Maulana Rasheed Ghazi's life was full of ironies - and one sudden change. His father, Maulana Abdullah, came from a poor and religious family in Rajanpur district in southern Punjab. The family belongs to the Baloch Mazari, a warrior tribe from southern Punjab and north-eastern Balochistan. Abdullah's circle of influence included senior government officials and politicians and he was said to be very close to several top officers of the Inter Services Intelligence. Abdullah was an ardent supporter of the Taliban and Osama bin Laden with whom he had developed special ties. During a 2002 interview, Maulana Abdul Rasheed Ghazi had confessed that his father had special ties with Osama bin Laden and the two had met on several occasions.

Maulana Abdullah was very popular among *Deobandis* because of his anti-Shiites speeches and due to his close links with two Sunni sectarian outfits - *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* and *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP)*. The *Shia* community had serious reservations against him and when he was assassinated in 2001, it was declared a sectarian-related killing. During the time of the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan, the *Lal Masjid* became an important recruitment centre of the *Harkatul Mujahideen* for sending mujahideen to fight out the occupation troops. Primarily due to this very reason, Maulana Abdullah had been one of those *Deobandi* religious scholars, who had campaigned for the release of the then HuM secretary general Maulana Masood Azhar from the Indian prison when he was arrested in Indian-administered Kashmir in 1994.

In 1998, Maulana Abdullah was assassinated in the courtyard of the Red Mosque and was subsequently laid to rest at the courtyard of the *Jamia Fareedia* for boys. According to his will, his elder son, Maulana Abdul Aziz, replaced him as the mosque's prayer leader as well as the head of Islamabad's biggest *Jamia Fareedia* *madrassa* for boys, which is located in the woods near the elite E-7 sector on land allotted by General Ziaul Haq. After his father's murder, Ghazi started to take an interest in the affairs of the mosque and the *madrassa* attached to it and also grew a beard. But he continued his job with the Ministry of Education. His elder brother, meanwhile, encouraged his Islamic

re-education, and made him his deputy in the mosque and heir apparent.

In the aftermath of 9/11 terror attacks in the United States and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the US-led Allied Forces in October 2001, Ghazi became a central leader of the religious alliance opposed to the US invasion of Afghanistan, making passionate speeches and holding demonstrations in the federal capital, urging the Muslims to rise against the Americans to defend the neighbouring Islamic state of Afghanistan. Interestingly, such passion for Islamic revolution was not there in Ghazi's youth. He rebelled against the religious worldview of his father and studied at a religious seminary under duress. As soon as the *Madrassa* education was over, he opted for a secular education at the Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, where he got a master's degree in history in 1987-88, and a photo of him and his colleagues still hangs on the department's wall. He joined the ministry of education in 1989, and even served as an officer in a UNESCO project.

His quest for a life outside the mosque convinced his father Maulana Abdullah to nominate Aziz as his sole heir. But then came a traumatic turn in events—the father was assassinated in the *Lal Masjid* in 1998 by Shia militants, and like Michael Corleone in the film *Godfather*, Ghazi turned religious overnight and even began to espouse the cause of militant Islam that his father had endorsed through his support of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The change in Ghazi's attitude prompted his elder brother Maulana Abdul Aziz to nominate him as his deputy in the *Lal Masjid*. The brothers came into limelight during public protests against Musharraf's support to the US-led war on terror. Their criticism acquired tones of treason when they convened a conference of clerics at the *Lal Masjid* and issued a fatwa ordering people not to attend the funeral prayers of soldiers being killed in the tribal belt of the Waziristan region while fighting with their fellow Muslims at the behest of the Americans. A spate of arrests followed the fatwa but Maulana Abdul Rasheed Ghazi and his brother went into hiding.

Before resorting to the *Lal Masjid* bloodbath, the Musharraf regime accused Maulana Ghazi of planning a terrorist attack on important government buildings in Islamabad, although his

name was later removed from a list of suspects. The government agencies alleged at that time having arrested an al-Qaeda linked local operative while transporting arms and ammunition that was to be used by the followers of Ghazi to blow several government buildings in Islamabad including that of the General Head Quarters (GHQ) of the Pakistan Army. The security agencies then presented to the media an explosive-filled truck allegedly owned by Ghazi as evidence of his involvement in the terror plot. Further investigations by the agencies transpired that Ghazi had close contacts with key militant leaders in the tribal area of Waziristan.

Miraculously, however, the 'misunderstanding' between the two fanatic clerics of the *Lal Masjid* and the government was ironed out after Federal Religious Affairs Minister Ejazul Haq persuaded the authorities to withdraw the terrorism charges against them and allow them to keep running the *Lal Masjid* and its adjacent *Jamia Hafsa* for girls and *Jamia Fareedia* for boys. Ejaz, the elder son of General Ziaul Haq then held a press conference in Islamabad, saying that Abdul Rasheed Ghazi and his brother had not been involved in the plot and the real culprits had been arrested and charged. The duo subsequently returned to the *Lal Masjid* and started ruling the roost. Some say the establishment granted a reprieve to Ghazi and his elder brother because they had been dancing to the tunes of the all-powerful intelligence establishment in the past. However, they had to face the wrath of their masters for stepping out of their shoes and challenging their mentors.

Thus, many question the collapse of the negotiations that the President of the then ruling Pakistan Muslim League Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and Maulana Taqi Usmani were brokering between Musharraf and Ghazi. Following a stand-off between the two sides, reportedly sparked by Ghazi's refusal to come out of the *Lal Masjid* and negotiate with the government-sponsored delegation of ministers and clerics, the regime decided to rope in Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil, the former chief of the *Harkatul Mujahideen* who was authorised to negotiate with the authorities on Ghazi's behalf. Maulana Khalil held crucial talks with a top aide of Musharraf and Shujaat Hussain in Islamabad shortly

after the July 9-10 midnight and then to went to the *Lal Masjid* to seek Rasheed Ghazi's consent to a "compromise formula".

A draft agreement was subsequently prepared, allowing the defiant cleric and his family members a safe passage to his family home in the Dera Ghazi Khan, where he was to be placed under house arrest. It was further agreed that those holed up in the *Lal Masjid* would be screened, and an amnesty would be granted to all other than individuals involved in criminal cases. Television channels even began running a scroll around 3:00 a.m. saying a compromise between the two sides was imminent. The draft agreement was then shown to General Musharraf who wanted it to clearly state that foreign fighters hiding in the *Lal Masjid* were not to be given free passage and would have to face proceedings. Musharraf's demand was conveyed to Ghazi; even Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain talked to the cleric over the mobile phone given to him by the government side for negotiations.

However, according to the official version, Maulana Ghazi refused to show flexibility and promptly switched off his mobile phone. This made Chaudhry Shujaat to declare the failure of the talks at 3:45 p.m. after which Musharraf ordered the army to fire its first salvo. Ghazi, however, gave his own version to TV channels minutes before the operation began. He said he had agreed to all the terms of the agreement, but the talks broke down when he insisted that he and his associates would surrender before the media people and a delegation of clerics, led by Maulana Taqi Usmani. But his demand, claimed Ghazi, was shot down by Musharraf who was only looking for a pretext to scupper negotiations and kill all those in the *Lal Masjid*. Ghazi accused Musharraf of wrecking the ceasefire agreement by withdrawing the offer of safe passage at the eleventh hour which subsequently led to the withdrawal of the delegation of clerics in protest, leading to a breakdown in talks. This resulted in the final assault on the *Lal Masjid*.

However, it was the Western pressure as well as Ghazi's hardline stand that the government blamed for the deadlock in the final negotiations and the inevitable crackdown on the extremists holed up in the *Lal Masjid* and its adjoining seminary. In reality, however, he was not even half an extremist than his elder brother, Maulana Abdul Aziz, the big-talking head of the

Lal Masjid, who claimed to derive his mandate from Prophet Muhammad appearing in his dreams and who had repeatedly exhorted his militant followers to embrace *Shahada* (martyrdom), but was caught in humiliating circumstances, trying to slink out of the military cordon in a full body veil. Even otherwise, the entire government interlocutor used to find Maulana Ghazi a reasonable person before the siege of the complex. And they were skeptical of the hard-line of Maulana Abdul Aziz and his wife, Umbel Hessian.

People like Ejazul Haq used to say that Maulana Rasheed Ghazi was hostage to his brother's hard-line. However, when the time came, it was Ghazi who went down fighting with the security forces and remained defiant and rebellious till the last moment. For one, the title of Ghazi translates to 'survivor from a battlefield'. It was as if he wanted to defy the meaning of his name. Hours before he was killed, he told ARY television channel in a live telephonic conversation, "I know I am about to be martyred. But I do believe my blood will bring about an Islamic revolution. My last message to those fighting for the glory of Islam is that they should avenge my murder besides waging jihad against General Musharraf to get rid of this illegitimate American stooge who has taken hostage the entire Pakistani nation on gun point. I know I am about to be martyred, but I will fight till the last drop of my blood. I have chosen to sacrifice my life for the sake of Islam and I do believe my blood will bring about an Islamic revolution in the country".

7

The Human Bombs: Monsters Haunting Their Creators

In the aftermath of the bloody Operation Silence carried out against the fanatic clerics of the *Lal Masjid* (July 3-10, 2007), the Pakistani security forces, especially the Army, has repeatedly been targeted by deadly suicide bombings, ambushes and abductions across Pakistan, killing hundreds. Look at the figures since then: over 600 Army personnel were killed and over 800 injured in 60 incidents of suicide bombings all over Pakistan between July 10, 2007 and July, 1, 2008.

The year 2007 was considered to be the bloodiest year since Pakistan joined the war against the al-Qaeda, Taliban and other militant groups. During the year, a series of deadly suicide attacks and roadside bombings rocked the four provinces of the country as well as the federal capital, Islamabad, claiming the lives of more than 1,100 people. The dangerous trend of suicide strikes, targeting the Pakistani security forces touched alarming heights in 2007, averaging more than one suicide attack a week as the country's military and intelligence establishment gradually lost control of the extremist militants' networks and their leaders it had nurtured to advance its geo-strategic agenda in neighbouring states of India and Afghanistan.

While the PPP chairperson Ms. Benazir Bhutto's December 27, 2007 assassination in Rawalpindi was the most high-profile suicide attack of the year 2007, there were total 56 incidents of suicide bombings across Pakistan, mostly targeting the security forces. The tragic assassination of Benazir Bhutto by a sharp

shooter, followed by a suicide bombing, represented the peak of the assault going on in Pakistan for almost a year now. The previous attempt to kill the moderate chairperson of the PPP on October 18, 2007, was also carried out by a suicide bomber who blew himself up near her welcome procession which she was leading from the airport upon her return to Pakistan after spending eight years in self-exile. The suicide bomber failed in his primary mission but did kill over 140 other people, mostly the PPP supporters. However, it was rare for an individual suicide bomber to kill over 140 people, as had happened in Karachi. Before the October 18 attack, the deadliest suicide attack carried out anywhere in the world was the one that killed 133 people in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad on February 3, 2007 when a bomber had detonated an explosive-laden truck at a busy market place.

As things stand, Pakistan tops the list of those countries which are suffering from the menace of suicide bombings, leaving Afghanistan and Iraq behind during the first three months of 2008. During this period, Pakistan suffered eighteen suicide attacks, killing over 250 people. On the other hand, the war-ridden countries of Afghanistan and Iraq had a fewer number of suicide attacks as Iraq experienced thirteen suicide bombings which claimed 274 lives while 15 people died in three suicide attacks in Afghanistan during the first three months of 2008. Iraq was on the top in 2007 as far as the incidents of suicide bombings are concerned among these three countries with over 150 suicide attacks during the same period while Afghanistan ranked number two with over 100 suicide attacks whereas Pakistan stood third with 56 attacks. However, Pakistan had more fatalities than that of Afghanistan as a result of these suicide attacks.

Figures compiled by the Ministry of Interior show that Pakistan witnessed a ten-fold increase in the incidents of suicide bombings in 2007 as compared to 2006. The year 2007 witnessed 56 suicide attacks, killing 472 law enforcement agencies' personnel and injuring 230 civilians. The year 2007 also saw an increase of 100 percent in attacks targeting law enforcement personnel, as 234 of them lost their lives in 465 attacks across Pakistan besides killing 262 civilians. In comparison, 224 attacks

targeted law enforcement personnel in 2006, resulting in 82 personnel and 159 civilians being killed. The year 2007 also witnessed over a 100 percent increase in bomb blasts, as 42 law enforcement personnel and 164 civilians lost their lives in 477 explosions targeted at them compared to the killings of only ten law enforcement personnel (LEP) and 110 civilians in 2006 in similar incidents of terrorism.

The year 2007 also topped in total casualties, as 2,116 people, including 558 LEP, were killed and 3,962 injured in 1,825 attacks compared to 1,482 attacks in 2006 in which 967 people, including 263 LEP, were killed and 1,895 injured. As a matter of fact, there had been only 12 such attacks all over Pakistan between January 1 and July 3, 2007, killing 75 people. Yet the turning point came with the Pakistan Army's blood-spattered military action [Operation Silence] on *Islamabad's Lal Masjid* in July 2007, killing hundreds, including dozens of the male and female students of the *Jamia Fareedia* for boys and the *Jamia Hafsa* for girls, being run by the fanatic Ghazi brothers.

The remaining 44 suicide attacks took place after the *Lal Masjid* action, between July 4 and December 27, 2007, spreading to Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad and other urban centres, killing 567 people, mostly the members of the military and para-military forces, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and the police. As soon as the Operation Silence was launched on July 3 by the SSG commandos of the Pakistan Army, the first suicide bombing took place on July 4, killing at least 11 people, including six security forces personnel in a suicide attack on a military convoy in North Waziristan.

Pakistan, which had been used or misused by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) during the tyrannical rule of President General Ziaul Haq to wage the so-called Afghan jihad against the Russian occupation troops, was itself spared by any suicide hit until 2001. While suicide terrorism remains a global phenomenon for decades, it came to Pakistan in 2002 in the aftermath of the US-led war on terror in neighbouring Afghanistan. There were two major suicide attacks in Pakistan in 2002 - the first on March 17 when an attacker died while throwing grenades inside an Islamabad church during a Sunday service in the diplomatic enclave, killing five people, including

an American diplomat's wife and his daughter. The May 8 car bombing outside Karachi's Sheraton Hotel, which killed 14 people including 11 French engineers, was the second such attack, placing Pakistan on the world map of countries marred by suicide bombings.

A careful study of the life history of 25 human bombs who exploded themselves across Pakistan between 2002 and 2006 [after the deadly phenomenon of suicide bombings hit Pakistan in the backdrop of the 9/11 terror attacks] showed that the US atrocities against Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq were the foremost motivation for a majority of the bombers. The study showed that none of the 25 human bombs came from the elite class: 16 of them belonged to the lower middle class while the remaining nine belonged to the middle class families. Apart from their jehadi mindset, their anti-US sentiments and their poor family background, another thing they had in common was illiteracy.

The study conducted by the country's elite intelligence agencies showed most of the attackers belonged to the splinter groups of jehadi or sectarian organisations launched in the wake of the crackdown on militants after the 9/11 terror attacks. The study showed nearly every bomber was poor, illiterate and unemployed. Of the 25 attackers, 15 were aged 15-25, seven 25-30, and the remaining three above 30. And not even one of them was a matriculate. Most of the human bombers were affiliated with several sectarian and militant organizations like *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ), *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM), *Harkatul Mujahideen* (HuM) and *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* (HUJI).

After 9/11, Pakistan became a key player in the US-led alliance and reversed the previous decade's policy of trying to influence the Afghan politics through the Taliban. The policy reversal immediately brought the state into conflict with the jehadi groups active in Afghanistan and Jammu & Kashmir. These groups had for years been mobilized, ideologically motivated and trained in Pakistan, mainly for export in the neighbourhood - particularly to Jammu and Kashmir and to Afghanistan. Thus, the emerging phenomenon of suicide bombings in Pakistan needs to be viewed within the context of

Islamabad's alliance with the US and al-Qaeda's reach within Pakistan after the 9/11 terror attacks.

Several major suicide attacks were carried out in Pakistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the US-led Allied Forces. Most of these strikes were aimed at high ranking government officials including General Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz. Two suicide bombers rammed their explosive-laden cars into the presidential convoy of Musharraf on 25th December, 2003 at a petrol station two kilometers from his army residence in Rawalpindi, adjoining Islamabad, killing 16 people and injuring 54 others.

The General, however, had a narrow escape. Investigations into the December 25 twin suicide attacks on Pervez Musharraf showed the involvement of the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* and the *Harkatul Jihadul Islami*. The next aim of the human bombs was Shaukat Aziz who was targeted in June 2004, weeks before he took office as the prime minister, when he was getting into his car to return to Islamabad after an election campaign meeting in the rural district of Attock. Shaukat Aziz survived although his driver was among those killed.

Within 24 hours of the attack, a statement was posted on a website known for carrying propaganda material from several Islamic militant groups. "One of our blessed battalions tried to hunt the head of one of America's infidels in Pakistan while he was returning from Fateh Jang, but God wanted him to survive," said the statement that was sent to the website in Arabic. The hitherto unknown group identified itself as the "Islambouli Brigade of al-Qaeda", an apparent reference to Lt. Khalid Islambouli, who had led the group of soldiers in the 1981 assassination of the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat.

Initial reaction from senior Pakistani security officials was one of skepticism and not without reason. Even if Osama or Zawahiri had directly issued instructions, it was highly unusual for the terror network to use the name of al-Qaeda. But then, it was no ordinary incident and clearly indicated that the group involved in the attack comprised of highly motivated Islamic militants. In some ways, the attack was no different from those carried out against Musharraf in December 2003. Yet the

frequency of suicide bombings increased visibly in late 2006 and early 2007 as the suicide bombers, failing to hit high profile targets, decided to go for softer ones, including religious congregations of rival sects as well as security personnel, who have limitations while operating in the civilian areas of their own country.

However, in the aftermath of the bloody *Lal Masjid* operation, it appeared as if the lot of Islamic warriors groomed by the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment had literally declared a war against their former khaki handlers. This was evident from the fact that suicide bombers twice attacked buses in the highly sensitive garrison city of Rawalpindi ferrying the ISI employees, killing 20 of them in the first incident on September 4, 2007 and 15 more in the second attack on November 24, 2007. The suicide strikes targeting the elite intelligence agency – the ISI – which is often described as a state within the state, was unique for the reason that those responsible for tracking down and swooping down on terror networks themselves became the victims of saboteurs.

The intensity of the deadly suicide bombings in the aftermath of the *Lal Masjid* operation could be gauged from the fact that the then commander in chief of the Pakistani armed forces President General Musharraf had to publicly direct his troops on July 13, 2007 not to wear their uniforms in public, especially in the North Western Frontier Province for fear of a backlash from extremists. Pakistani Intelligence circles say the *Lal Masjid* operation was exploited by pro-al-Qaeda tribal leaders to provoke attacks against the army and demoralise its soldiers in the fight against terror. And the idea was to make the intensively Islamised military rank and file realize that the army was erring in following the orders of the US under the leadership of a “faithless” Musharraf and his fellow generals.

If the brutal trend of suicide strikes recorded in the first six months of year 2008 is anything to go by, the absence of good intelligence, effective security measures and a collective will to fight the scourge of terrorism, even after the installation of a democratically elected government, may make it the worst year ever, given the fact that 322 people have already been killed and over 600 wounded in 26 incidents of bombings all over Pakistan

between January 1 and June 21, 2008. The targets of the human bombs during the said period ranged from the military bases in NWFP and FATA to the Surgeon General of Pakistan Army and from the headquarters of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in the Punjab capital to the Navy War College in Lahore.

The surge in such planned and somewhat diversified suicide attacks from Swat in the North Western Frontier Province to the garrison town of Rawalpindi and Darra Adam Khel in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas to Lahore shook the entire country. These attacks not only exposed limitations of the intelligence network in identifying and busting the groups and individuals involved in recruitment and training of suicide bombers, but also of the Pakistani security establishment in its ability to protect its own assets, not to talk of providing protection to members of the public. More than anything else, these attacks signify the revival of al-Qaeda and the Taliban networks which had been forced to give up their bases of power in Afghanistan and Pakistan and flee to the Pak-Afghan border area as a result of the war on terror launched by the US-led coalition of forces in October 2001.

The February 25 killing of Lt-Gen Mushtaq Baig, the director general of Army's Medical Services in a suicide attack in Rawalpindi, the March 4 twin suicide attacks on the Naval War College in Lahore [that killed ten people] and the March 11 attack on the provincial headquarters of the Federal Investigation Agency in Lahore [that killed 30 people] point to the simple fact that the war has now reached the heart of the country. The killing of Mushtaq Beg, who was a serving Lieutenant General, in the garrison town of Rawalpindi, hardly a few yards from the General Headquarters and the suicide attacks on the Naval War College and the FIA buildings in Lahore soon after the February general elections came as a rude shock to the Pakistani nation, already shaken by the rising tide of militancy in the country.

The message from the human bombs is clear - we can hit you anywhere we want. As a matter of fact, the security situation in Pakistan has been in utter turmoil for the past few years, and it went from bad to worse after the *Lal Masjid* episode. Since then, it appears that the extremist forces had not only gained strength

in the tribal areas but also got a foothold in the country's settled areas. This can be gauged from the fact that the country's federal capital - Islamabad - is not spared by the human bombs.

On March 15, terrorists targeted an Islamabad restaurant - a popular hang-out of foreign nationals, by hitting the place with a powerful explosive device, killing a Turkish woman and injuring over a dozen American nationals including three FBI agents who had come to Pakistan to investigate the FIA building attack which had also destroyed its Special Investigation Unit. On June 2, a suicide car-bomber exploded his explosive laden vehicle some 30 feet from the main gate of the Denmark embassy in Islamabad, killing eight people and injuring 20 others. And last but not the least, 20 people were killed, mostly policemen, and 50 others injured on July 6, 2008, as a suicide bomber exploded himself near Melody Market close to the Red Mosque in the federal capital, at the culmination of the *Lal Masjid* Martyrs Conference, held in connection with the first anniversary of the Operation Silence. On August 22, 2008, two human bombs exploded themselves outside Pakistan's main army munitions factory near Rawalpindi - Wah Ordnance Factory - killing 80 workers in the deadliest attack on a military installation in the country's history.

As things stand now, from the rugged, lawless terrain of the tribal areas out west to the spiffy environs of Islamabad, the suicide bombers across Pakistan have made the whole swathe of land their laboratory, devastating lives, ruining families, imparting a murderous edge to humdrum existences. And the target of these grisly human bombs is just about anyone, anywhere, particularly if he somehow represents the symbol of the state. Investigations by the Pakistani intelligence agencies show the involvement of several kinds of extremist groups in the ongoing spate of suicide strikes.

The first of the kind are those who had either been linked with the fanatic clerics of the *Lal Masjid* or had sympathies with them because of their ideological affinity. Investigations show some of the suicide bombers had been the students of the Ghazi brothers and some were the relatives of those killed during the Operation Silence. Pakistani investigation agencies probing the ongoing spate of suicide bombings that took place after the *Lal*

Masjid operation have concluded that most of these attacks were carried out by young men in their 20s coming from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of South Waziristan and North Waziristan.

As soon as the Operation Silence came to an end, the intelligence agencies had warned the government that the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad were to suffer from suicide attacks as over 500 potential suicide bombers who had been studying at the *Lal Masjid* run *Jamia Hafsa* and *Jamia Fareedia* have not returned to their homes after the operation. The agencies further warned that the prospective bombers were hiding in several *madrassas* and mosques in and around the twin cities and are determined to blow themselves up any time, anywhere to avenge the killing of their near and dear ones. These fears proved true after the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad witnessed a series of bloody suicide attacks, targeting those in khakis.

An 18 year old suicide bomber killed 22 highly trained commandos of the Special Services Group (SSG) of Pakistan Army by targeting their Tarbela Ghazi mess, 100 km south of Islamabad on September 13, 2007. He was the brother of a girl who was killed during the Operation Silence, carried out by the Karar Company of the SSG Brigade. The SSG is the same elite unit of the Army to which General Musharraf himself belonged, and which was specially trained by the US Special Forces for carrying out covert operations and counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations across Pakistan, especially in the trouble-ridden tribal belt of Pakistan. Two months before suffering 22 casualties in the Tarbela Ghazi suicide bombing, the elite SSG had lost 10 of its commandos, including a colonel, during the week-long gun battle with the fanatic clerics and students of the *Lal Masjid Jamia Hafsa* religious seminary. The Tarbela Ghazi suicide attack caused the biggest single human loss suffered by the SSG during peace and war time since Pakistan came into being.

The second kind of the groups involved in suicide attacks are those linked to the al-Qaeda and Taliban network based in the Waziristan region on the Pakistan-Afghan tribal belt. In the rocky and far-flung region of Waziristan, Islamic rebels allied to

the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda have literally taken control of virtually all of the entire North Waziristan tribal area on the Pak-Afghan border, thereby gaining a significant base from which to wage their resistance against the US-led forces in Afghanistan as well as the Pakistani security forces, especially through their highly motivated and lethal suicide bombers. Intelligence agencies say the security agencies are mostly being targeted by the suicide bombers being trained and launched by one Baitullah Mehsud -- an al-Qaeda-linked tribal chief of the Mehsud tribe who is ruling the roost in South Waziristan, who has already been named as the prime accused in the former Pakistani Prime Minister Ms. Benazir Bhutto's assassination.

According to officials of intelligence agencies involved in the investigations, Abu Ali Tunisi, an al-Qaeda-linked jihadi hailing from Tunis, has managed to bring the rebels of four militant groups -- *Harkatul Jihadul Islami*, *Harkatul Mujahideen*, *Jaish-e-Mohammad* and *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* -- under the folds of al-Qaeda. Their main aim is to launch a string of terrorist activities, targeting the Pakistan Army and all those government personalities who are supporting the US. Intelligence circles say besides the Abu Ali Tunisi network based in the Waziristan region, there is another group led by one Abu Adil, a militant of the Arab origin, which is working under the name of *Al-Jehad*, and was involved in the November 2006 incident of suicide bombing that killed 42 soldiers in Dargai, NWFP. *Al-Jehad* is further accused of carrying out four more suicide strike in Islamabad, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank and Mir Ali -- all in 2007.

The last kind of the groups involved in suicide attacks are sectarian, primarily the banned militant *Sunni* group, the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ). Launched in 1996 as a splinter group of the *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP), a *Sunni* Deobandi offshoot of the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam*, the LeJ is infamous for its secrecy, lethal nature and unrelenting pursuit of its aim of targeting Western interests in Pakistan, the *Shias* and the eventual transformation of the country into a Taliban-style Islamic state. Most of the major terrorist operations carried out in Pakistan since the 9/11 attacks, appear to have a common grandmother -- the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ).

Intelligence sources say all these groups, identified and classified under three different categories of terrorist groups, follow their own techniques for achieving their objectives and use different mechanisms to attack their targets. The group comprising the toughest motivation category is to hit the military installations with the help of suicide bombers. They include trained, skillful and equally motivated terrorists. The second category of bombers attack personnel of law-enforcement agencies and government personalities while the third one is deputed to kill the enemy through car bombings or blasts through remote-controlled devices.

For years, the Pakistani intelligence agencies used to indoctrinate, motivate and train the jehadi cadres for export in the neighbourhood - to Jammu Kashmir and Afghanistan. Indian-held Kashmir had witnessed the first suicide attacks in 1999 and since then there had been a steady stream of deadly suicide operations. These human bombs had, however, excluded their home ground in Pakistan from the scope of their holy war. But as things stand, there has been a sharp decline in deadly suicide attacks in Jammu Kashmir, with Pakistan apparently emerging as a favoured target of these attacks. Therefore, the human bombs originally designed and nurtured by the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment to rip apart the enemies of Islam and Pakistan are exploding themselves inside their own country and killing their fellow Muslims. Pakistan's chickens have come home to roost.

8

Religious Seminaries or Recruitment Centers

Pakistan's *madrassa* sector has been at the centre of debates on extremism and radicalization of society ever since the Musharraf regime had joined the US-led war on terror in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks. However, seven years after these attacks, it was the *Lal Masjid* operation in the heart of Islamabad that reinforced the Western notion that the Pakistani religious seminaries are the breeding nurseries for terrorists and suicide bombers.

The much trumpeted claims by the Musharraf regime of having introduced drastic *madrassa* reforms to halt the flow of recruits into militant groups and to bring the seminaries into the mainstream for ensuring that they are not used as recruitment centres for jihad, came to a standstill after the *Lal Masjid* episode. The Red Mosque bloodbath proved that the traditional religious school system in Pakistan is now rotten to the core and it continues to operate as the breeding factory for the radical Islamist ideology as well as the recruitment centre for terrorist networks. Having cleared the *Lal Masjid* compound after the ruthless battle, the army reportedly recovered piles of highly sophisticated weapons, ranging from RPG-6 and phosphorous grenades to suicide jackets and high-tech gas masks.

The *Lal Masjid* Operation Silence was followed by a spate of suicide bombings across Pakistan, killing hundreds, a majority of who were security officials, only to reveal later that many of the suicide bombers had been the students of the *Lal Masjid's*

fanatic clerics. As the dust settles on the July 2007 Operation Silence, the direct link between *madrassas* and militancy has already become apparent. If clerics running religious seminaries in Islamabad can stockpile weapons, turn their mosques into hideouts for hard-core militants and engage the highly trained and equally equipped security forces in a fight to the finish for a full week, the activities of their counterparts in more remote areas can only be imagined.

In his address to the nation after the *Lal Masjid* operation on July 11, 2007, President General Pervez Musharraf declared that establishing the government's writ had become "inevitable". Critics, however, ask as to why this was not the priority of his regime from day one despite repeated lofty claims being made by the most trusted American ally in the war on terror. Allowing the *Lal Masjid* clerics and the students of its affiliated religious seminaries – *Jamia Hafsa* for girls and *Jamia Fareediah* for boys – for six long months only emboldened the clerics and furthered the delusion that militants wrapped in the garb of religious seminaries are above the law.

The *Lal Masjid* episode further proved that even after a lapse of five years from the time Musharraf promised sweeping *madrassa* reforms, the transformation campaign has largely failed as only a few cosmetic changes could be introduced in the existing *madrassa* system. When Musharraf had made public his much-touted plans to reform the religious seminaries in Pakistan on January 2002 in a televised address to the nation, he said the move was necessary because some of the private Islamic schools had become breeding grounds for intolerance and hatred. He had unveiled a new strategy, which would see *deeni madrassas* teach Computer Studies, Mathematics, Science, English alongside their traditional Islamic programmed.

Musharraf said: "The day of reckoning has come. Do we want Pakistan to become a theocratic state? Do we believe that religious education alone is enough for governance or do we want Pakistan to emerge as a progressive and dynamic Islamic welfare state? My only aim is to help these institutions in overcoming their weaknesses and to provide them with better facilities and more avenues to the poor children at these institutions. These schools are excellent welfare set-ups where

the poor get free board and lodge. And let me make it clear that very few *deeni madrassas* run by hard-line parties promote negative thinking and propagate hatred and violence instead of inculcating tolerance, patience and fraternity”.

It was presumed to be a thoroughly considered and well-thought-out speech signaling an end to the decades-old strategy of Pakistani intelligence establishments to use jihad as an instrument of foreign and defense policy. The speech was supposed to be a response to the September 11, 2001, attack in the US and the December 13, 2001 attack on the Parliament building in India, and spelt out the short and long-term measures envisaged by an enlightened military ruler to tackle the menace of extremism and fundamentalism afflicting the Pakistani society. Yet, his reform campaign was soon exposed due to his one-step forward two-steps backwards approach. His oratory to modernize the religious schools met with little success mainly due to a lack of political will to enforce any of the much-trumpeted policy decisions that were supposed to be taken by his administration to reform the *madrassas* by bringing them into the educational mainstream. Subsequently, signs of Talibanisation are quite evident in all parts of Pakistan, including the federal capital.

Five years later, however, the Musharraf regime decided to wrap up the *madrassa* reforms project, after having targeted only a small fraction of some 8,000 *madrassas* in the country. The Education Ministry was forthright in admitting its failure. “In the last five years, we could reach out to only 507 religious schools”, the *madrassa* reform project director, Dr Mohammad Hanif conceded in July 2008. The five year *madrassa* reforms program was launched in the four provinces of Pakistan besides Azad Kashmir (AJK), Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA) under the banner of “*Madaris Reforms Project*” (MRP) in 2002-03 whose period expired on June 30, 2007. The aim of the reform project was to teach formal subjects like English, Mathematics, Pakistan Studies, Social Studies and General Science along with the religious education.

The reform program was launched by both the federal as well as the provincial education departments and two separate

Project Management Units were set up at federal and provincial levels. The cost of the said project for five years was estimated at Rs5.76 billion to be spent by the government on providing formal subjects, computer, printers, syllabus, library, books, sports items and salaries of teachers of about 8,000 seminaries in the country. Out of 8,000 religious schools, 4,000 were of primary level, 3,000 of secondary level and 1,000 of higher secondary level. In Sindh alone 1,536 *madrassas* came under the category of religious seminaries. Out of this number, the Sindh government had chosen 768 for primary levels, 576 for secondary levels and 192 for higher secondary level for reformation program in five years.

However, the Project Management Unit did not show any on ground progress when its tenure expired in year 2006-07, saying there was a lack of coordination and collaboration between the federal government and the provinces on the implementation of the ambitious project. The Management further conceded in its final report to the Pakistani ministry of education that the project was a big failure because hardly Rs 223 million out of the total Rs 5.76 billion funds that the project began with, could be spent in five years. "We failed to develop the capacity to utilize all the funds which were allocated for the *madrassa* reform project: the total expenditure in five years was less than 2.8 per cent of the total allocation", the *madrassa* reform project director, Dr Mohammad Hanif conceded in July 2008 while talking to Monthly Herald.

The project failed despite repeated warnings by many including the International Crisis Group (ICG) that Musharraf should show political will to make the reform project a success. Two years after the *madrassa* reform campaign was launched, the International Crisis Group (ICG) had stated in its January 2004 report titled, *Unfulfilled Promises: Pakistan's Failure to Tackle Extremism*: "General Musharraf's promise to drive extremism away from *madrassas* remains unfulfilled. Today, two years after he had promised his sweeping reforms, the jehadi *madrassas* remain the key breeding ground for radical Islamist ideology and the recruitment centre for terrorist jehadi networks".

The report referred that in January 2002, Musharraf publicly promised a list of measures to tackle extremism, including

bringing the *madrassas* into the mainstream. "The government pledged to firstly register all *madrassas* so that they adopt a government-approved curriculum by the end of 2002 and secondly to stop their misuse for preaching political and religious intolerance. The international community welcomed Musharraf's promise to stem jihadi ideology, but two years on, the lack of results is clear. To date, no presidential ordinance to regulate the *madrassas* has been promulgated. In fact, the government openly assures the religious leaders that it will not interfere in the *madrassas* affairs. Most *madrassas* in Pakistan remain unregistered and their sources of funding remain unregulated. The pledge to have government-prescribed curricula at all *madrassas* similarly remains unfulfilled as no national curriculum has so far been developed.

The ICG report added: "The government inaction continues to pose a serious threat to domestic, regional and international security. General Musharraf's priority has never been eradicating Islamic extremism but rather the legitimisation and consolidation of his dictatorial rule. And for that, he depends on the religious right. The failure to curb rising extremism in Pakistan stems directly from the military government's own unwillingness to act against its political allies among the religious groups. Having co-opted the religious parties to gain constitutional cover for his military rule, Musharraf is highly reliant on the religious right for his regime's survival. If the US and others continue to restrict their pressure on Musharraf to verbal warnings, the rise of extremism in Pakistan will continue unchecked", the ICG report concluded.

Three years later, the International Crisis Group released its 2007 annual report titled "Religious Pakistan: Karachi's Madrassas and Violent Extremism". Released on March 28, 2007, the report stated: "More than five years after Musharraf declared his intention to crack down on violent sectarian and jihadi groups and to regulate the network of *madrassas* on which they depend, his government's reform programme seems in shambles. Banned sectarian and jihadi groups, being supported by networks of mosques and *madrassas*, continue to operate openly in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, and elsewhere. The international community needs to press Musharraf to fulfill his

commitments, in particular to enforce genuine controls on *madrassas*. It should also shift the focus of its donor aid from helping the government's ineffectual efforts to reform the religious schools to improving the very weak public school sector".

According to the ICG report, Karachi's *madrassas* which have trained and dispatched jihadi fighters to Afghanistan and held Kashmir, offer a valuable case study of the government failures and consequences for internal stability and regional and international security. "In 2006, the city was rocked by some high-profile acts of political violence. Not all, *madrassas* in the city are active centres of jihadis, but even those without direct links to violence promote an ideology that provides religious justification for such barbaric attacks. Given the government's half-hearted reform efforts, these unregulated *madrassas* contribute to a climate of lawlessness in numerous ways – from land encroachment and criminality to violent clashes between rival militant groups and the use of the pulpit to spread calls for sectarian and jihadi violence. The Pakistan government has not yet taken any of the overdue steps to control religious extremism in the country. Musharraf's periodic declarations of tough action, given in response to international events and pressure, are invariably followed by retreat. Plans are announced [by the regime] with much fanfare and then abandoned", the ICG report concluded.

The findings of International Crisis Group established one thing – that like his predecessors, the priority of Pakistan's fourth military dictator too wasn't reforming *madrassas* and eradicating Islamic extremism, but the legitimization and consolidation of his despotic rule, for which he had made himself dependent upon the religious clergy.

The 7/7 attacks and the Pakistani *madrassa* connection

Evidence coming to light in the wake of the July 2005 London suicide attacks that killed dozens in the heart of Britain – that three of the four suicide bombers were British-born youth of Pakistani origin who had traveled to Pakistan in November 2004 and visited some of the religious seminaries there – firmly established the Western notion that many of Pakistani *madrassas*

keep functioning as training centers for radical Islamists, despite negating claims by the Musharraf regime.

The 7/7 came as another 9/11 for Pakistan as it was once again standing at crossroads between the military and the mosque. After leaving its footprints in the United States, Afghanistan and India, the Pakistani terror trail had moved to the United Kingdom. As news of the inevitable Pakistan connection flooded the international media after the 7/7, a somewhat embarrassed and equally nervous Pakistani military ruler convened an emergent meeting of the four provincial police chiefs and ordered them to crackdown on extremist elements. Musharraf was definitely puzzled and confused because whatever was happening on the international terror front was negating his oft-repeated claims of having taken effective measures to reform the *madrassa* system. The General then appeared on the state-run television on July 21, addressed the nation and gave December 2005 deadline to all religious schools to get them registered with the Federal *Madaris* Board.

Sharing vital administrative decisions to contain extremists, he declared that banned organizations would not be allowed to re-emerge with other names, and if some try so would be dealt with an iron hand. In a subsequent crackdown across Pakistan, the police force arrested hundreds of third and fourth grade suspected militants from various parts of the country. But the question remained – was the crackdown for real? Apparently not a similar crackdown was carried out by the law enforcement agencies after the 9/11 terror attacks and also after Musharraf's January 2002 speech in which he announced his plans to uproot the extremist mafia and to dismantle its jehadi infrastructure from the country. Indeed, if the number of the jihadis arrested in all these crackdowns is tallied, there should be no extremist left in the country.

Investigations into the 7/7 London suicide attacks revealed that two of the bombers, Shehzad Tanweer and Siddique Khan, met one Osama Nazir, a leader of the outlawed militant organisation, *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, in Faisalabad during their Pakistan visit. Osama had masterminded the March 2002 attack on a Church in Islamabad's high security diplomatic enclave, killing five people including a US diplomat's wife and step-

daughter. Osama was also involved in the August 5, 2002 attack on the Murree Christian School, close to Islamabad, in which six Pakistani guards were killed, and the August 9, 2002 attack on the Christian Hospital chapel in Taxila, West of Islamabad. Four Pakistani nurses and one of the attackers were killed, while 26 people were wounded in the Taxila attack.

Osama Nazir's meeting with Shehzad Tanweer and Siddique Khan was held at a small *madrassa* in Faisalabad -- *Jamia Fatahul Raheem*, being run by Qari Ahlullah Raheemi, an extremist Muslim cleric considered close to *Jaish-e-Mohammad*. During their stay at the *Jamia*, the sources speculate, Siddique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer might have been trained in the handling of explosives by Osama Nazir, who headed a group of trained suicide bombers at that time. They added that following the arrest of Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed in Daniel Pearl's murder case, Osama Nazir had become the right hand man of the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* chief, Masood Azhar and had helped Amjad Hussain Farooqi, the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* linked al-Qaeda lynchpin in Pakistan, in masterminding two suicide attempts on in December 2003.

According to the intelligence findings, following the killing of Farooqi, Osama Nazir had assumed his position and was working with the two most wanted al-Qaeda external operatives Abu Faraj al-Libbi, the chief operational commander of the al-Qaeda in Pakistan. As the Americans had offered five million dollars for the arrest of either man, Islamabad also announced two million rupees reward for the arrest of Osama Nazir, who had visited Afghanistan several times during the Taliban regime, and Kashmir. Osama Nazir was finally nabbed from *Jamia Fatahul Raheem* in Faisalabad in November 2004. Osama Nazir disclosed during interrogations that he was hiding at the *Jamia Fatahul Raheem* because his elder brother, Abdul Shakoor, used to be a teacher there. He further admitted having met Shehzad Tanweer at the *Jamia* in 2004, before finally leaving for England in February 2005.

Osama further disclosed that Shehzad Tanweer stayed at the religious seminary for a few weeks to get religious and spiritual inspiration from Qari Ahlullah Raheemi. According to him, over 300 Muslims of the Pakistani origin living in the United

Kingdom had visited Pakistan so far since the 9/11 terror attacks, received training in several *Jaish-e-Mohammad* and *Harkatul Mujahideen*-run training camps, and joined the al-Qaeda suicide squad. Osama revealed that Shehzad had stayed at another extremist *Sunni Deobandi* *madrassa* - *Jamia Manzurul Islami* situated in the Cantonment area of Lahore, and being run by its principal, Pir Saifullah Khalid. While the Pir insisted the school was being run by *Ahl-e-Sunnah Wal Jamaat*, there were clear indications that it was being managed and financed by a violent *Sunni* sectarian outfit -- *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan*, considered close to *Jaish-e-Mohammad* and led by Maulana Masood Azhar.

According to the information provided to the Pakistani agencies by their British counterparts, having landed in Karachi in November 2004, Shehzad Tanweer first went to Faisalabad and then reached Lahore where he got himself enrolled with a local *madrassa*, *Jamia Manzurul Islami*, situated in the cantonment area of the Punjab's capital. Though Pir Saifullah Khalid, the principal of the religious school simply denies that Shehzad Tanweer had ever visited the *madrassa*, the British intelligence agencies insist that he even got himself enrolled with the *Jamia* in mid-December 2004. However, he could not acclimatise himself with the *madrassa* atmosphere and subsequently abandoned the *madrassa* after a couple of weeks.

The intelligence agencies further came to know during investigations that it was Mohammad Siddique Khan, the ring leader of the London suicide bombers, who had made Shehzad Tanweer to get himself enrolled with *Jamia Manzurul Islami*. He also took him to another *madrassa* in Faisalabad called *Jamia Fatahul Raheem* where they had a meeting with Osama Nazir. Siddique, the eldest of the four London bombers, was the likely leader of the attacks. A Briton of Pakistani descent, the British agencies believe, Mohammad Siddique Khan had drawn two of the other attackers, Shehzad Tanweer, 22, and Hasib Hussain, 18, deeper into extremism -- through his work as a volunteer in community centres in the Leeds area.

Investigations showed that the September 1, 2005 video message of Siddique Khan had been recorded in Pakistan during the latter's visit to his homeland in November 2004. The Siddique

video was broadcast on September 1, 2005 by *Al-Jazeera* television, through which al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the July 7 attacks in London and threatened more attacks in Europe. It was the first explicit claim of responsibility for the blasts by the terrorist group headed by Osama bin Laden. The broadcast showed pictures of Dr Ayman al-Zawahri and the bomber, Sidique, speaking in English and saying that he would take part in the attacks. In what appeared to be a defence of attacks on civilians, he warned westerners that they would not be safe because of electing governments that commit crimes against humanity.

9

The Meteoric Rise of the Black Turbans in the Swat Valley

Generally referred to as the Pakistani Taliban, primarily to distinguish itself from the Afghan Taliban led by Mullah Mohammad Omar, the *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi* or the Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws is a militant *Wahabi* organization which has fast emerged in the Malaknd Division of the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) and in the Bajuar Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) as a private army to reckon with.

In his televised address to the Pakistani nation on January 2, 2008, five days after the December 27, 2007 assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in Rawalpindi, President Pervez Musharraf named Maulana Fazlullah, the *ameer* of the Swat-based militant group *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi* (TNSM) or the Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws, as one of the prime suspects in the Bhutto murder along with Commander Baitullah Mehsud.

Known as a pro-Taliban jehadi organisation having sympathies with al-Qaeda leader Osama, the TNSM in the trouble stricken Swat district of the NWFP is headed by Maulana Fazlullah, the son-in-law of Maulana Sufi Mohammad, who had actually formed the group in 1992 after discarding the umbrella of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan. While quitting the *Jamaat*, he had issued a decree, declaring the religious political parties and electoral politics were unlawful and contrary to the Islamic principles. "There is no room for vote in Islam and the concept of

democracy, which some religio-political parties are demanding, is wrong", he added.

The Maulana had been associated with a religious seminary in *Lal Qila* in Dir before coming into lime light. In terms of sectarian linkages, he was an ardent believer in the *Wahabi* school of thought and had remained associated with Saudi-sponsored groups from the Afghan theater of 1980-88. The TNSM motto is '*Shariah ya Shahadat*' (Islamic laws or martyrdom) which rejects all political and religio-political parties for they follow the western style of democracy and openly condones the use of force in *jehad*. The members of the group are identified by their shoulder-length hair and camouflage vests over traditional *shalwar kameez* clothing, being the trade mark of Maulana Sufi Mohammad, which has become their identity and are now referred to as the black turbans.

Ideologically, the TNSM is dedicated to transform Pakistan into a Taliban style Islamic state. In the words of Sufi: "Those opposing the imposition of *Shariah* in Pakistan are *Sanibel Salt* (worthy of death). The TNSM rejects democracy as un-Islamic: "We want enforcement of Islamic judicial system in totality: judicial, political, economic, *jehad*, *fi sabilallah* (*holy war in the name of Allah*), education and health. In my opinion the life of the faithful will automatically be moulded according to the Islamic system when the Islamic judicial system is enforced", Sufi had declared in November 2001 shortly before being jailed in Pakistan on terrorism charges.

Almost six years later, on May 16, 2008, as Sufi was released by the government as the result of a peace deal, he had reiterated his stance that he was struggling for the enforcement of the Islamic laws that ensure harmony and justice in the Pakistani society. The Musharraf regime banned the TNSM, along with several other militant Islamic organisations, under the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2000. However, the TNSM activists secretly continued their political activities while campaigning for Sufi Mohammad's release.

Who is Maulana Sufi Mohammad?

The TSNM founder Maulana Sufi Mohammad, a cleric from *Lal Qila*, district Dir, first rose to prominence in 1994 when he

staged a sit-in at Malakand by blocking the Mingora-Peshawar road for seven days, cutting off the Swat valley from rest of Pakistan, demanding enforcement of the Islamic Laws. Subsequently, armed clashes between the law enforcing agencies and the TNSM activists took place at different places after which a sitting member of NWFP Assembly, Badiuzaman Khan, was taken hostage by the TNSM supporters and eventually killed. The law enforcement agencies thus moved in to crush the insurgents who clashed with the local administration and effectively brought the whole administrative structure of Swat to a standstill.

While succumbing to the TNSM pressure, the then PPP government led by Benazir Bhutto agreed to introduce *Shariah* laws in the Malakand Division in November 1994. Two sets of *Shariah* had been enforced in Malakand since 1994 – one by the PPP government and the other by the Sharif-led Muslim League government in 1997. The result was obvious. The TNSM succeeded in extending its writ outside Malakand to the adjacent districts of Hazara and Swat and in the Bajaur Agency. By that time, the Taliban movement led by Mullah Omar had already surfaced in Afghanistan after capturing Kandahar. Since the Taliban and the TNSM had the same religious vision and ideals, Sufi Mohammad used to enjoy cordial relations with the Taliban rulers who funded him in a big way to make him extend the TNSM organisational set up in other parts of the NWFP and in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

The despotic Taliban rule in Afghanistan provided the TNSM with an instant reference to argue and justify its rigid social policies. The group leaders not only support and glorify the Taliban model of governance even today, they still advocate its enforcement all over the NWFP. They favour segregation in educational institutes, besides putting restrictions on female mobility and banning the television. The TNSM brands income tax, custom duty and General Sales Tax as un-Islamic and has time and again resisted government moves to enforce the Customs Act, launch de-weaponisation drive or introduce the devolution of power plan.

When the American forces invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks, Sufi Mohammad

had exhorted his followers to join the Taliban in Afghanistan in their armed struggle against the US-led allied forces. Sufi had self-admittedly led over 10,000 youngsters to fight the US-led forces in Afghanistan in November 2001. According to media reports of October 27, 2001, armed with Kalashnikovs, rocket launchers, missiles, anti-aircraft guns, hand grenades and swords, thousands of the TNSM cadres led by Sufi crossed the Pak-Afghan border. Thousands of the youngsters he had taken to Afghanistan in the aftermath of the US invasion were killed by the Northern Alliance troops and hundreds others were trapped by various Afghan warlords, who literally sold them back to their relatives in Pakistan for huge sums of money.

Upon his return home, Sufi was tried by the assistant political agent of Kurram Agency on March 30, 2002, in his capacity as additional district and sessions' judge and charged and sentenced to life imprisonment on three counts: for carrying explosive substances and lethal weapons, displaying heavy weaponry and illegally entering into Pakistan from Afghanistan. He was then sent to a Dera Ismail Khan jail. Interestingly, he had refused to contest his case in the court of law, as he does not believe in the existing laws because he thinks they were un-Islamic. In the aftermath of his jehadi misadventure, Sufi Mohammad lost much of his support in Malakand. A majority of his supporters went underground after the TNSM was banned on January 15, 2002 by the Musharraf regime along with four other jehadi and sectarian organisations.

The TNSM had become almost dormant till the October 8, 2005 devastating earthquake struck the region, thus making the followers of Sufi capitalise on the great human tragedy and use it to revive their organisation. Since the volunteers of the TNSM were in the forefront of the humanitarian relief work, especially in the devastated areas of NWFP, the popularity of the group once again shot up. In the process of helping out the quake-affected people, the TNSM re-established its stronghold in Malakand, Swat and Bajaur like other banned jehadi groups and started mobilising its activists. However, contrary to many other proscribed militant organisation that deemed it fit to resurface under new identities by renaming themselves, the TNSM activists decided not to abandon its previous identity.

Since the TNSM volunteers were in the forefront of the humanitarian relief work, especially in the devastated areas of NWFP, the popularity of the jihadi group once again shot up. In the process of helping out the quake affected people, the TNSM now led by Maulana Fazlullah re-established its stronghold in Malakand and Swat areas of the NWFP and in the Bajaur area of FATA like other banned jihadi groups and started mobilizing its activists. Almost a year later, in the early hours of October 31, 2006, 82 people were killed in a missile attack on a religious *madrassa* located at Chenagai village in the Bajaur Agency. The strike also killed Maulana Liaquat, who ran the religious seminary and was a key leader of the TNSM. Although the tribal elders had alleged the missile attack was launched by the coalition troops stationed in Afghanistan, the Pakistani authorities decided to claim responsibility for the attack, saying it was carried out by the Pakistani forces in view of some intelligence reports that the *madrassa* was being used to train suicide bombers to be eventually sent to Afghanistan.

A few hours after the October 30 missile attack, Maulana Faqir Mohammed, a senior leader of the TNSM and the elder brother of Maulana Liaquat, announced to avenge the killings of the innocent *madrassa* students by carrying out suicide bombings against the Pakistani troops. A week later, 45 Pakistan army recruits undergoing training at a Punjab Regimental Centre training school at Dargai, 100 kilometres north of Peshawar, were killed and dozens injured on the morning of November 8, 2006, when a suspected suicide bomber ran towards them and blew himself up. The investigators were convinced that the suicide attack was carried out by none other than the TNSM to avenge the *madrassa* attack. Since then, there had been a significant resurgence in the activities of the TNSM, mostly targeting the security forces, eventually prompting the newly elected government to sign a peace agreement with Maulana Sufi Mohammad on April 20, 2008 and release him from jail after six years of imprisonment.

Under the six-point agreement, the TNSM founder renounced the use of force to achieve its goal of enforcement of Islamic laws in Swat and other parts of the Malakand region. He pledged to respect the institutions of the state and accept the

government's right to establish its writ besides distancing from the elements involved in suicide attacks on security forces in Swat and elsewhere. In return, the government withdrew all pending cases against Sufi Mohammad, commuted his remaining prison term of four years and set him free unconditionally. However, interestingly enough, in an interview on the 30th March, 2008, almost a week after his release, Sufi disowned his son-in-law, saying he would not talk to Maulana Fazlullah for showing disobedience to him.

Sufi Mohammad knew that he had to work hard to take back the initiative from his son-in-law, who has established himself as the functional commander of the TNSM and strengthened his position by joining forces with the *Tehrik-e-Taliban*, an umbrella organisation of all militant groups of the Pakistani Taliban operating in South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Bajaur, Darra Adamkhel and other tribal areas and districts of the NWFP. Therefore, Sufi deemed it fit to simply disown Maulana Fazlullah, although some say it was all planned. This prompted the military authorities and the government to pursue Fazlullah independently, only to strike yet another peace deal [in Swat] with him almost a month later in May 2008.

Who is Maulana Fazlullah alias Mullah Radio?

The Pakistani intelligence sleuths believe Maulana Fazlullah, who has thousands of armed followers ready to challenge the security forces on his command, has growing links with the Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives, which could eventually turn the NWFP and the FATA regions of the country into havens of extremist elements. Popularly known as Maulana Radio for the illegal FM radio stations he operates to instigate people to prepare for jihad, Fazlullah has become a house hold name in the Swat district of the NWFP, in the wake of the fierce resistance given by his privately raised army to the Pakistan army when it had launched a major military operation in the area on October 22, 2007 to dismantle the militant network and demolish the infrastructure of the TNSM headquarters and its privately run FM Radio station.

It was on July 13, 2007, hardly two days after the *Lal Masjid* operation came to an end, that General Musharraf approved a

plan for immediate deployment of the paramilitary forces in Swat to crush the growing extremism and militancy. He further directed armed forces personnel not to wear their uniforms in public in the NWFP for fear of a backlash from the *Lal Masjid* operation. However, the Fazlullah's forces soon proved to be the nemesis for the Army whose personnel were either beheaded publicly or killed in suicide attacks within the first two weeks after the operation was launched. Hardly two days after the start of the Swat operation, 33 soldiers of Pakistan Army were killed and 22 others injured in the Mangora town of the Swat district on October 25 as two suicide bombers rammed their explosive-laden Suzuki car into a truck carrying the paramilitary Frontier Constabulary personnel. The attack was carried out by a TNSM suicide bomber following a warning by Fazlullah against the deployment of the security forces in the area a day earlier.

The Maulana told his followers on his FM radio that troops had been deployed to kill innocent people in a ruthless military operation and they should be resisted with full force. This led to an intense series of gun battle between the well-armed militants led by Fazlullah and security forces in four subdivisions - Matta, Kabal, Charbagh and Khwaza Khela - of Swat district. The situation took an ominous turn when the Fazlullah-led militants decided to join hands with the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan*, led by Baitullah Mehsud, in a bid to provide an umbrella to all insurgent movements operating in several tribal agencies and settle areas of the NWFP. Since then, Maulana Fazlullah and his followers are toeing Baitullah's line, whether they are signing a peace deal with the authorities or scrapping the same.

The gun battle between the military and the militants in Swat that started with the launching of the military operation in Swat lasted for next six months, before the new government assumed power in Islamabad as a result of the 2008 general elections and signed a peace deal with Maulana Fazlullah on May 21, 2008. It took the coalition government comprising the secular Awami National Party and the Pakistan People's Party and the Fazlullah-led militants hardly three rounds of talks spread over 13 days to reach their peace accord for Swat. The 16-point handwritten accord in Urdu was described by analysts as a comprehensive document of give-and-take by the two sides. The

TNSM militants renounced militancy in return for acceptance of their long-standing demand that *Shariah*, or Islamic law, be enforced in Swat and the rest of Malakand region by amending the two similar ordinances promulgated in response to the earlier militant uprisings in the 1990s.

The TNSM leader promised not to challenge the writ of the state, refrain from attacking security forces and government installations and stop opposing girls' education and immunisation of children. He also denounced suicide bombings and agreed to disband his private militia called Shaheen Force. Though it was not yet announced, a general amnesty for the militants was to cover Fazlullah and his top lieutenants. The government also gave in to the militants' demand to retain control of the TNSM sprawling *madrassa* complex in Fazlullah's village, Mamdheray, and establish an Islamic university there besides allowing them continued use of their FM radio. An 11-member joint committee of government officials, NWFP assembly members and militants' representatives was formed to monitor and implement the accord, because of the worries that problems could arise with regard to the still undecided timeframe for eventual withdrawal of over 20,000 Army troops from Swat valley, which is home to over 1.6 million, with a vast majority living below the poverty line.

Maulana Fazlullah's ascend to prominence has been like a roller-coaster ride. He is a resident of the Mamdheray area in Swat who was born on March 1, 1975 at the house of Biladar Khan, a Pukhtun of Babukarkhel clan of the Yusufzai tribe of the Swat district. The Maulana passed his secondary school certificate from the village school and then took admission at the Government Degree College Saidu Sharif in Swat from where he passed his intermediate examination. Later he went to Maidan town in Lower Dir district and was given admission at the religious seminary run by Maulana Sufi Mohammad, *Jamia Mazahir-ul-Uloom*. During his stay at the *madrassa*, Fazlullah developed good contacts with the administrator of the seminary, Maulana Sufi, eventually becoming his son in law.

It was Sufi who renamed his student from Fazl Hayat to Maulana Fazlullah. After completing his religious education, he returned to Mamdheray near Fiza Gat and started imparting

religious education at a mosque-cum-madrassa. The Maulana, however, admits he is not a *mufti* and has no *madrassa* certificate and has only received some religious education from his father-in-law. While tracking his rise to prominence, one comes to know that like thousands of others TNSM activists, Fazlullah too went to Afghanistan in November 2001 along with his father-in-law, Sufi Mohammad, to fight alongside the Taliban there. Upon their return home, he was taken into custody by Pakistani security forces along with Sufi Mohammad and few of his comrades and was sent to the central prison in the Dera Ismail Khan district of the NWFP.

While Sufi was sentenced for ten years, Fazlullah was luckier - he was released after 17 months in prison, on charges of inciting youngsters to illegally cross the Pak-Afghan border to wage jihad against the Allied Forces. While his father in law was behind bars, Fazlullah made his native village Mamdheray headquarter of the TNSM, thus got it shifted from Kumbhar, Dir to Mamdheray, Swat. As far as the TNSM organizational structure is concerned, Fazlullah is assisted by the two *shuras*, or councils. One is the *Ulema Shura* with several Swati clerics who advise him about the religious policies of the group. Another *shura*, which is also called the executive body, is the highest policy making organ of the TNSM which has a large number of ex-servicemen, including retired Commissioned Officers, as its members.

Always sporting a black turban, the followers of Fazlullah, 33, are actually called Black Turbans. He has never had his photograph taken, believing Islam forbids taking pictures of human beings lest it becomes the first step to idol worship. The essence of his agenda is in the motto: "*Shariah ya Shahadat* (Islamic laws or martyrdom)". Fazlullah runs his own FM radio channel to preach his version of Islam and has a big circle of listeners. Strange to say most of his listeners are the women folk. On his FM channel, he warns parents against sending girls to school unless they observe full *purdah*. Barbers in the area are under standing instructions not to shave beards, while shops proscribed from selling CDs and music cassettes. Interestingly, he is known to have ordered his followers not to administer

polio drops to their children. Reason: the polio drop is part of an American-Zionist plot to render them sterile.

For Friday prayers, a vast tract of land has been leveled close to the Mamdheray headquarters of the TNSM to accommodate a large number of people from almost all villages of Swat, praise worthy to see. After the Friday prayers, the Maulana, who is fond of riding a black steed, makes a riding show (with himself on a black horse) in the same ground, so that the people can have a glimpse of him. His rantings are typical of those subscribing to the intellectual tradition of the Taliban. But Maulana Radio's pronouncements have a sinister edge because he commands thousands of followers armed to their teeth. His private army - 'Shaheen Commando Force' - has literally established a parallel administration in Swat and dispenses summary justice besides regulating traffic and patrolling villages and towns.

However, in an interview conducted before the army operation began in October 2003, Maulana Fazlullah denied the charge. He admitted some criminals in his custody were lashed publicly, but justified it, saying they had dressed themselves as Taliban to rob people. Fazlullah denied that his private army or Shaheen Force was involved in the attempted destruction of the Bamiyan-like Buddha carved in the rocks of Jehanabad in Manglawar village of Swat, saying an Islamic state should protect non-Muslim religious sites. However, he said he wanted *Shariah* not only in Swat district and the rest of the Malakand division but in the whole of Pakistan. He conceded that he had thrice crossed over to Afghanistan in order to fight alongside the Taliban.

As things stand, Fazlullah has a fighting strength of 4600 in Swat, with an added 400-member Shaheen Commando Force that patrol the streets of Swat with guns placed on their vehicles. His army is in control of six *tehsils* (revenue divisions), including Kabal, Matta, Khawazakhela, Charbagh, Madyan and Kalam, out of the eight *tehsils* in the Swat District. During the July 2007 *Lal Masjid* operation in Islamabad, Fazlullah came into action against the government forces to avenge the military operation. A large number of people armed with rifles, Kalashnikovs and small arms started gathering at his *madrassa* as he announced it

was time to go to war. His announcement that thousands of militants were ready to avenge the attack was followed by a series of suicide attacks targeting the security forces. As many students belonging to the Red Mosque linked seminaries were from this area, the army action generated sympathy for Fazlullah's cause. Most of the anti-government demonstrations and rallies to protest the operation against the extremists were held in this region.

Soon after the bloody *Lal Masjid* Operation Silence, Maulana Fazlullah announced that he wanted to construct a big *madrassa* and appealed to the people through his FM Radio to provide financial assistance. The people in Swat and its surrounding localities subsequently donated over Rs 38,00,000 within the first 24 hours of the appeal. Still under construction over nine kanals of land on the bank of River Swat, Fazlullah received a huge donation of Rs 35 million from the TNSM followers for the *madrassa* till October 2007 when the army decided to launch an operation there. However, as a result of the military-militants peace deal in Swat, inked in May 2008, Fazlullah is effectively spreading his rigid vision of militant Islam in the Swat valley.

The Swat district is crucial from the point of view of a larger front that al Qaeda is in the process of creating in Pakistan. The valley spread out over 1,772 sq. kms with a population of 1.5 million, is just 160 kms from Islamabad. *Daily Times* reported on November 27, 2007 that some Punjabi veterans of the Kashmir jihad now fighting on the side of al Qaeda, when interviewed recently, spoke of the fighting in Swat as a part of the grand strategy of establishing small independent emirates to be administered by them and their Islamist colleagues in Waziristan, Swat, Bajaur and in Afghanistan. And it is Swat that many in the intelligence agencies of the West have identified as the likely location of al Qaeda's fugitive top leadership.

10

The Movement of Holy Warriors: With Known Osama Links

Known as the only jehadi linchpin from Pakistan with a record of closeness to al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil is a founding member of the *Harkatul Ansar* (HUA), which was subsequently renamed as the *Harkatul Mujahideen* (HUM or the Movement of the Holy Warriors) after the US designated the HUA as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation in October 1997 and then re-named as the *Jamiatul Ansar* (JUA) after the Musharraf regime banned the HUM in January 2002, under American pressure.

Believed to be a *Wahabi* member of Osama bin Laden's International Islamic Front (IIF) for "Jihad Against the Crusaders and the Jewish People" and a co-signatory of bin Laden's first fatwa issued in 1998 calling for attacks against the United States, Maulana Khalil was reportedly in the al-Qaeda training camps struck by the US cruise missiles in Khost and Jalalabad in August 1998. The leadership of the *Jamiatul Ansar*, formerly *Harkatul Mujahideen*, represents *Deobandi* School of Islamic thought whose members are fanatic Sunni Muslims who distinguish themselves from other Sunni Muslims by describing themselves as *Ansar*, the term given to actual Muslim residents of Madina in Saudi Arabia by Prophet Mohammad. With a pan-Islamic ideology, the jehadi organization struggles to achieve secession of Jammu & Kashmir from India through militant means and its eventual merger with Pakistan.

The *Harkatul Mujahideen* (Holy Warriors Movement) has enjoyed a long career in the ISI-sponsored Afghan and Kashmir jihads. Besides being wanted by the Indian Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) for his alleged involvement in terrorist activities in Jammu Kashmir, the defunct leader of the proscribed jihadi group Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil is also being sought by the American Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for his alleged links with al-Qaeda. Following the August 20, 1998 American missile attacks on al-Qaeda training camps in eastern Afghanistan, Khalil had vowed at a press conference in Islamabad that the harm done to the members of his jihadi group by the American strikes, would not go unanswered. And the Americans still take seriously his 1998 public warning at the news conference: "For each of us killed or wounded in the cowardly US attack, at least 100 Americans will be killed. I may not be alive, but you will remember my words", Khalil had stated.

Hardly a year after these strikes, Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil was chosen by one of the architects of the Kargil operation, Lt Gen Mohammad Aziz Khan to take part in the daring raid into the Indian Territory. After Commander Bakht Zameen Khan of *Al-Badr* captured some Kargil peaks, Khalil fought side-by-side with the Pakistan army and the *Badr* fighters and remained part and parcel of the entire military strategies. And mind one thing, Commander Khalil was not fighting side-by-side with the Pakistan Army for the first time. He was a veteran of the Afghan war against the Soviets and acclaimed by his Afghan colleagues for his heroic role in the conquest of the Khost city by defeating the communist forces there in 1991. Khost was the first Afghan city to fall to the Afghan Mujahideen after the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1989, following which the central communist government fell like a house of cards. After the 9/11 terror attacks in the US, Khalil sent several thousand fighters to Afghanistan well in advance of the US-led attack on the country, and personally commanded the forces.

As a matter of fact, the *Harkatul Mujahideen* (HuM) was born out of the *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* (HUJI) that was launched in 1980 as a part of the Pakistani jihadi network, involved in

fighting out the Russian troops in Afghanistan. Two Pakistani Deobandi religious bodies – *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI) and the *Tableeghi Jamaat* (TJ) – established the HUJI in 1980, at the outset of the Afghan jihad, primarily to run relief camps for the Afghan mujahideen. As the war intensified, the Pakistani ISI, contracted by the American CIA, approached the HUJI leadership, especially its founding *ameer*, Maulana Irshad Ahmed, offering their services for recruitment and training of the militants who wanted to take part in the Afghan jihad against the Russian occupation forces.

The HUJI then developed links with an Afghan resistance group, the *Hizb-e-Islami* (Yunus Khalis faction). The jihadi activities of HUJI finally began when its *ameer* Maulana Irshad Ahmed, Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil, Qari Saifullah Akhtar and Maulana Abdus Samad Siyal went to Afghanistan on February 25, 1980, to participate in the Afghan jihad along with Ahmed Shah Masood and Prof Burhanuddin Rabbani's forces. A power-struggle erupted in the group after the June 25, 1985 death of Maulana Irshad Ahmed, during the Afghan jihad. Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil, the group's commander-in-chief split with the new *ameer*, Qari Saifullah Akhtar and decided to form the *Harkatul Mujahideen* (HuM) while retaining its links with the *Hizb-e-Islami* (Yunus Khalis faction).

Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil, a resident of Dera Ismail Khan and a staunch follower of Maulana Mufti Mahmood, the founder of the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam*, became the first *ameer* of the *Harkatul Mujahideen* while Maulana Masood Alvi was appointed its central commander. Though Qari Saifullah Akhtar stayed on to lead the *Harkatul Jihadul Islami*, it soon split once again, with Maulana Masood Kashmiri launching a third splinter group, the *Jamiatul Mujahideen* which is different from the *Jamiatul Mujahideen*, a splinter group of the *Hizbul Mujahideen* (HuM).

Having parted ways with the *Harkatul Jihadul Islami*, the *Harkatul Mujahideen* entered the Afghan jihad and started sending volunteers into Afghanistan on its own to assist Afghan mujahideen. The money largely came from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia which helped recruit and train over 6,000 volunteers from Pakistan, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and the

Philippines. The initial batch of the *Harkatul Mujahideen* volunteers was trained in the use of arms, ammunition and explosives, at the training camps in the Pakhtia province of Afghanistan being run by Afghan leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani, who belonged to the *Hizb-e-Islami* (Maulvi Yunus Khalis group) but later joined hands with the Taliban.

Soon, however, the HuM set up its own training camps in Afghan territory just across the Miran Shah in the Pak-Afghan tribal belt of Waziristan. Some of the best fighters of the Afghan war came from the HuM training camps. Impressed by their motivation and prowess, the US Central Intelligence Agency supplied them with stinger missiles and trained them in their use to bring down the Soviet planes and helicopters. After the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, *Harkatul Mujahideen* focused on the Kashmir jihad and worked in competition with *Harkatul Jehadul Islami*, led by Qari Saifullah Akhtar. The first batch of the *Harkatul Mujahideen* volunteers entered Jammu & Kashmir in 1991 under Sajjad Shahid's leadership, who was the first military commander of the outfit in Kashmir. The *Harkat* started its operations soon afterwards in the Bara Maula, Poonch and Anantnag areas of J&K to promote its radical pan-Islamic agenda which it has maintained since then by striking alliances with different jihadi groups.

In 1993, two leading *Deobandi* ulemas of Pakistan - Maulana Samiul Haq, the *ameer* of the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* and Hafiz Yusuf Ludhianvi, the *ameer* of the *Sunni Tehrik*, asked the leadership of the three splinter factions of the *Harkatul Jehadul Islami* to reunite in the larger interest of the Kashmir jihad. The three groups - the *Harkatul Jehadul Islami*, the *Harkatul Mujahideen* and the *Jamiatul Mujahideen* - finally merged on October 13, 1993, to form what came to be known as *Harkatul Ansar* (HuA). Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil was appointed the *ameer* while Maulana Shahadat Ullah was made the chief commander of the *Harkatul Ansar*. The reunion led to intensification of jihad in Jammu and Kashmir and the group soon carved a place for itself on the Kashmiri landscape through some major operations in the Valley.

While the HuA was formally launched in Pakistan, the merger of three factions in Jammu & Kashmir was to be achieved

by the then HuA general secretary Maulana Masood Azhar who had gone to Srinagar for the purpose of reunification in February 1994. On February 10, 1994, Azhar had convened a meeting of 20 leaders of the HUJI, the HuM and the JuM at Matigund, Anantnag district, Srinagar to finalise the merger. While returning from the meeting, Masood Azhar and Sajjad Afghani, respectively the secretary general and the military chief of the *Harkatul Ansar* were arrested in Srinagar, thus fizzling out the move to reunite the three HUJI factions into the HuA.

A few months later in April 1994, an unknown jihadi outfit, *Al-Faran*, kidnapped two British tourists from the Kashmir valley to use them as bargaining chip for the release of Maulana Masood Azhar and Sajjad Afghani. It later transpired that *Al-Faran* was actually launched by two *Harkatul Ansar* commanders, Abdul Hameed Turki and Mohammad Sikandar. The kidnappings drew so much international criticism that for the first time in the American history, two Kashmiri militant outfits – *Harkatul Ansar* and *Al-Faran* – were placed on the US State Department's list of terrorist outfits.

On October 1, 1997, the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright notified to the American Congress, a list of 30 international terrorist organisations which the US government had decided to bring under the purview of the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, 1996, that made it an offence for any citizen or resident of the US to provide funds or other assistance to such organisations. The Act also empowered the American administration to deny visas to members of such outfits and prohibited their representatives from operating from the US territory. The *Harkatul Ansar* was one such organisation so notified. The US terror tag split the *Harkatul Ansar* into two factions.

The *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* faction blamed Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil of the *Harkatul Mujahideen* faction for masterminding the kidnapping since the two commanders who set up *Al-Faran* belonged to his group. Groaning under tremendous pressure, Khalil simply disowned *Al-Faran* and dubbed it as a creation of the Indian Research & Analysis Wing (RAW). Dissident commanders Sikandar and Hameed were killed soon afterwards, making it easy for Khalil to detach

himself from *Al-Faran*. But the issue kept hanging fire and finally led to a split in the *Harkatul Ansar*, with both the groups reverting to their previous identities. Quite interestingly, however, both the jihadi outfits kept enjoying exemplary relations with the Taliban regime that had allowed them to run their respective training camps in Afghanistan.

That the *Harkatul Mujahideen* had been associated with Osama bin Laden was proven on August 20, 1998, when America bombed the al-Qaeda training camps near Khost and Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan in retaliation to the bombings of their embassies in three African countries. The bombing destroyed two *Harkat* training camps and killed 21 of its activists. Two days later, speaking at a news conference in Islamabad on August 22, 1998, Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil denied that Osama was indulging in terrorism and accused the US of killing 50 innocent civilians in Afghanistan, including 15 Arabs. He said the camps bombed by the US in the Afghan territory were actually set up by the CIA during Afghan war to fight out the Russian occupation forces that were now being used by the *Harkatul Mujahideen* for imparting education to Afghan students.

At yet another press conference on August 25, 1998 at Peshawar, Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil said that nine HUM members died in the US attack on its camps in the Khost area, of whom five were killed on the spot and the remaining succumbed to their injuries in Pakistani hospitals. In addition, two Tajiks and four Arabs, two of them physically handicapped, were also killed. According to him, the US Cruise missiles destroyed four mosques, partially damaged another and burnt 200 copies of the Holy Quran kept in the camps. He then warned: "The United States has proved itself to be the world's biggest terrorist by carrying out terrorist attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan. I want to convey to the American leadership that we will take revenge for these attacks." In another warning to the US on September 1, 1998, Maulana Khalil said: "The Americans have struck us with Tomahawk Cruise missiles at only two places, but we will hit back at them everywhere in the world, wherever we find them. We have started a holy war against the US and they will hardly find a tree to take shelter beneath it."

According to international media reports, the US had attacked the following HuM camps in Afghanistan as a reaction to the August 1998 bombing of its embassies in three African countries: (a) The Salman Farsi camp situated in Jawah, two kms inside Afghan territory from the Pakistani border post of Saidgai. This camp was initially started in the 1980s by the *Hizbul Mujahideen* of Kashmir with the help of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan. Angered over the *Jamaat-e-Islami's* support to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Taliban militia expelled the *Hizbul Mujahideen* from the Afghan territory and handed over the training camp to the *Harkatul Mujahideen*, which re-named it as the Hazrat Amir Mawia camp. (b) The Khalid bin Waleed camp in the Zhavar area near the Pakistan border. (c) The Liza camp at Tanai in the Khost area, 40 kms to the West of the Mawia camp which was being run by another HuM splinter group called the *Harkatul Jehadul Islami* under Qari Saifullah Akhtar. (d) This camp was located close to the Darwanta hydel power station in Jalalabad and originally belonged to Hekmatyar's *Hizb-e-Islami*. The Taliban captured it in September 1996, and handed it over to the HuM.

On September 29, 2001, weeks after the 9/11 terror attacks, the Pakistan government banned the *Harkat*, following the Bush administration's September 24, 2001 decision to freeze all its assets along with those of 26 other organisations and individuals in connection with a worldwide campaign against the possible sources of terrorism. Although the ban compelled the *Harkatul Mujahideen* leadership to rename the group as the *Jamiatul Ansar*, it went on to use the cover up name of the *Harkatul Mujahideen Al-alam* in a bid to keep functioning uninterrupted. The *Al-alam* came in the limelight in June 2002 when the Karachi Rangers had arrested five extremists in connection with the suicide bomb blast outside the American Consulate in Karachi on June 14, 2002. On July 8, 2002, then Director General Sindh Rangers Major General Salahuddin Satti addressed a press conference in Karachi and made public the arrest of three persons involved in the June 14, 2002 bombing outside the American Consulate in Karachi.

The three accused confessed their involvement in the bombing that had left twelve persons dead. The accused further

confessed having planned to blow up General Musharraf's car in Karachi on April 26, 2002 by exploding a Suzuki car loaded with deadly explosives. They told their interrogators they had parked a Suzuki high-roof vehicle full of explosives near the Falak Naz Centre on *Shahrah-e-Faisal*. But the remote controlled device developed a technical fault at the eleventh hour and did not work. The Suzuki vehicle was later used for the suicide bombing attack on the American Consulate in Karachi on June 14, 2002. Two of the three persons arrested were produced at the press conference DG Sindh Rangers addressed on July 8, 2002 at his Karachi headquarters. They included Muhammad Imran, *ameer* of *Harkatul Mujahideen Al-alam*i and Mohammad Hanif, *naib ameer* of the group and in charge of its *askari* (military) wing.

As Muhammad Imran Bhai, a bearded resident of Karachi, was produced before a Karachi court a few days later, he told reporters present inside the courtroom: "I am a member of the *Harkatul Mujahideen*. The *Harkatul Mujahideen Al-alam*i is the product of the rangers and the security agencies. I am working for the *Harkatul Mujahideen* and let me tell you that there is no split in the *Harkatul Mujahideen*". Despite identifying Imran and Hanif as *Al-alam*i leaders, the Pakistani authorities had nothing to produce on the outfit in terms of literature or any propaganda material. Therefore, the conclusion drawn by the Pakistani intelligence community was that the *Harkatul Mujahideen Al-alam*i is nothing more than a cover up name for the *Harkatul Mujahideen*.

On May 19, 2004, the Karachi police arrested *Al-alam*i's No. 3 after a shootout in the Buffer Zone and seized huge quantity of arms and ammunition. Carrying a Rs. 3 million head money, Kamran alias Atif alias Khalid alias Uncle alias Bhaijan, was wanted in the June 2002 US Consulate bombing in Karachi and in a failed attempt on Musharraf's life near Karachi airport on April 26, 2002. Before that, on April 12, 2004, the Karachi police had arrested six activists of the *Al-alam*i from Manzoor Colony area and recovered large quantity of the automatic weapons. Subsequent investigations revealed that 50 highly trained operatives of the *Harkatul Mujahideen*, using the cover up name of the *Al-alam*i, are bent upon targeting Musharraf, the American interests in Pakistan and the law enforcement officials.

As of today, the US intelligence agencies believe that the *Harkatul Mujahideen* still retains links, like most of other jihadi groups, with the Taliban remnants and al-Qaeda operatives hiding on the Pak-Afghan border. They recall that Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil took hundreds of his men to Afghanistan after the US-led Allied Forces had attacked Afghanistan in 2001. The *Harkat* chief returned home safely in January 2002 and lived for next six months in an Islamabad sanctuary, with no constraints until August 2002 when he was placed under house arrest. However, the Pakistani intelligence circles say he was taken into protective custody after American intelligence sleuths stationed in Islamabad had sought his custody to debrief him. The Pakistani authorities, however, had refused to oblige. Maulana Khalil was released a few months later.

On December 20, 2004, *Daily Times* reported that the Pakistani security agencies have released Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil who had been detained on May 20, 2004 for sending militants into Afghanistan. Hardly a few weeks later, Khalil resigned as the *ameer* of the *Jamiatul Ansar* (former *Harkatul Mujahideen*) because of the pressure coming from the intelligence quarters which too were under intense pressure from the Americans and wanted to save their skin. *Daily Times* report stated that Maulana Khalil submitted his resignation at a meeting of the executive committee of the organisation and asked the committee to elect a new chief. Maulana Badar Munir from Karachi was subsequently elected the new chief of the organisation.

However, Khalil's name once again hit the international media headlines following the June 5, 2005 arrest of a pair of Pakistani-Americans by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation from the sleepy little farming town of Lodi, California. Hamid Hayat, 23, and his father, Umer Hayat, 47, were later charged with lying to the authorities regarding their connection with jihadi training camps. But the formal FBI affidavit contained the bombshell piece of information that the training camps were in Pakistan, not in the notorious tribal areas, but right outside the city of Rawalpindi, which also hosts the Pakistan army headquarters. Hamid and Umer told the FBI they had received training in terrorism at military training camp being run by

Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil, who maintains a jihadi facility at Dhamial area in the garrison town of Rawalpindi. Hamid Hayat, the son, and his father Umar Hayat, told the FBI that the younger Hayat had been given a first-class tour of all the inner workings of terrorist camps and had seen hundreds of attendees from various parts of the world.

Assistant US Attorney R. Steven Lapham subsequently told a federal jury that Hamid Hayat, a US citizen, traveled repeatedly to Pakistan where he "learned to kill Americans" while attending a terrorist camp for six months in 2003 and 2004. The fresh disclosures revived the interest of the US intelligence sleuths to interview Khalil. But the Pakistani agencies again moved swiftly and took him into their custody. Yet he was once again released in the first week of July 2005. Maulana Khalil subsequently restricted himself to his Islamabad headquarters. However, almost eight months later, on March 29, 2006, he was abducted from Islamabad as soon as he left his *madrassa*-cum office headquarters, tortured and thrown onto the Fateh Jang road in the Rawalpindi city.

Khalil's name once again hit the newspapers in Pakistan at the time of the July 2007 stand off between the security forces and the fanatic clerics of the *Lal Masjid* in Islamabad as the Musharraf regime decided to rope in the defunct chief of the *Harkatul Mujahideen*. The fact that many hardcore militants belonging to several leading jihadi groups were holed up inside the Red Mosque along with Maulana Rasheed Ghazi prompted the Musharraf regime to engage Khalil as a mediator because he was considered close to Ghazi brother. After being authorised by Rasheed Ghazi to negotiate with the authorities on his behalf, Khalil conducted crucial parleys with some close aides of Musharraf, a few hours before the launch of the Operation Silence after midnight on July 9-10, 2007. However, the talks somehow broke down and Ghazi was killed in the subsequent military operation.

11

Daniel Pearl: An 'Over Intrusive' Victim of the ISI?

No other single factor had forced the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment to undo its decades-old pro-jehad policy in Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan than the gruesome murder of the American journalist Daniel Pearl, who was beheaded in Karachi in January 2002 after being abducted by a group of Islamic fanatics.

At the time of his kidnapping, Pearl served as the South Asia Bureau Chief of the Wall Street Journal, stationed in Bombay, India, and had been investigating the case of Richard Reid, the shoe bomber, and alleged links between al-Qaeda and the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), for which he came to Pakistan and lost his life subsequently. Investigations into the Pearl murder had unraveled for the first time the deadly cocktail of radical Islamic groups and intelligence operatives that Pakistan has been host to for a fairly long time. The involvement of an ISI agent in the Daniel Pearl murder generated enormous American pressure, forcing their most trusted ally at that time to ban several jihadi groups in Pakistan besides disbanding (for the time being) the Kashmir and Afghanistan desks of the ISI, long considered to be the invisible government of Pakistan which had known links with Islamic militant groups.

The American intelligence sleuths who had been involved in the Pearl murder investigations along with their Pakistani counterparts believe that the journalist was kidnapped and killed because he had uncovered some vital links between the

Pakistani intelligence establishment and al-Qaeda. At the same time, they are convinced that Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed, already convicted for the murder, was actually a double agent of the Pakistan intelligence establishment as well as al-Qaeda. The Pearl killer was a key operative of the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM) and a close confidant of its chief, Maulana Masood Azhar, who had to be released by the Indian government in 1999 following the hijacking of an Indian passenger plane.

The Wall Street Journal reporter came to Pakistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks to cover the US-led war on terror. But unlike most western journalists who after coming to Pakistan sought official help for reporting, and thus got hooked up with local journalists, Pearl decided to remain independent of any official patronage in uncovering the 'whole truth'. Besides visiting Islamabad and Karachi, he was spotted in many other cities - Bahawalpur, Peshawar and Quetta where no ordinary foreign journalist dared to tread, in view of the desperation of the extremist jihadis at that time who were fuming because of the US-led attack on Afghanistan and the subsequent killings there.

With this background in mind, the somewhat overexcited movements of a hyper Pearl made the Pakistani intelligence agencies suspicious of him and his agenda, making them to follow him and keep him under a close watch. Some say he was working on the Shoe Bomber - Richard Reid's story in the backdrop of the latter's alleged links with Pakistani jihadi groups. Some say he was desperately trying to explore any possible links between the Pakistani intelligence agencies and the Osama-led al-Qaeda network.

While Pearl had in general told people who came into contact with him in the days prior to his abduction and murder that he was completing a story on shoe-bomb terrorist Richard Reid, there is now increased evidence that he was also looking at far more sensitive matters. Some of those who had spoken to Pearl during his stay in Karachi believe that his main interest was in looking into the links between certain agencies in Pakistan with religious militancy. The ISI, the most powerful intelligence agency in the country, had also received Daniel Pearl's attention during this investigation.

For instance, on December 24, 2001, Pearl had filed a story about ties between the ISI and, *Ummah Tameer-e-Nau*, a Pakistani NGO that was allegedly working on giving bin Laden nuclear secrets before the 9/11 terror attacks. The intro of the story titled "Military elite is linked to activities of nuclear scientist", stated: "Pakistan has pledged to clamp down on a humanitarian organization headed by a nuclear scientist, but the nation's military government also has ties to the organization which is accused of sharing nuclear information with terrorists. The organization, *Ummah Tameer-e-Nau* (UTN), used an ex-military officer to pursue a large agricultural project near Kandahar, Afghanistan, according to three people involved in the venture".

Moreover, the story stated, a former head of Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence service, Lt Gen (retd) Hameed Gul, says he was *Ummah Tameer-e-Nau's* honorary patron and encouraged Pakistani businessmen to invest in UTN. "General Gul saw Pakistani nuclear scientist, Dr. Bashiruddin Mahmood, in Kabul, the Afghan capital, in August (2001) – the same month Dr. Mahmood is alleged to have discussed nuclear weapons with Osama bin Laden, whom the U.S. blames for the September 11 terror attacks.

A few days later, Pearl reported that the ISI-backed militant organization *Jaish-e-Mohammad* still has its office running and bank accounts working, even though President Musharraf claims to have banned the group which might have brought him on the ISI radarscope. He was also doing another story on the whereabouts of India's Most Wanted fugitive terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, who is considered to be a well-connected jihadi gangster allegedly hiding in Pakistan and enjoying the protection of the Pakistani intelligence establishment.

On March 22, 2002, General Musharraf said in Islamabad that Daniel Pearl had been over intrusive. Unfortunately, Pervez Musharraf said, "Daniel Pearl had come from Mumbai and made intrusion into the areas which are dangerous and he should have avoided it. Perhaps he was over-intrusive. A newsman should be aware of the dangers of getting into dangerous areas. Unfortunately, however, he got over-involved," Musharraf said. Yet the million dollar question remains: what exactly had Pearl got himself "over-involved" in?

Noted French writer Bernard-Henri Levy writes in his best seller book "Qui a Tue Daniel Pearl?" (Who killed Daniel Pearl?): "US journalist Daniel Pearl was kidnapped and then murdered by Islamist groups manipulated by a faction of the (Pakistani) intelligence services - the most radical, the most violent, the most anti-American ... This faction, from the beginning to the end of the affair, behaved itself as if it was very much at home in (General) Musharraf's Pakistan". Bernard started his book on January 31, 2002, when Daniel Pearl was tortured and decapitated in Karachi, after being kidnapped by a bunch of jihadis. On July 15, 2002, a special anti-terrorism court of Hyderabad, Sindh, had found guilty Ahmed Omar Sheikh, Syed Salman Saquib, Sheikh Muhammad Adil and Fahad Naseem of the kidnapping and murder of Pearl.

Bernard Levy, who describes his book as a romanquete - an investigative novel - fascinated by two main themes: the flower of evil (personified by Sheikh Ahmed Omar, the mastermind of Pearl's ordeal) and the double (Omar the killer as the double of the sacrificial lamb Daniel Pearl). Most of all, Bernard is fascinated by Pearl as his own double. Pearl was an American Jewish journalist trying to come to grips with radical Islam. Bernard had one year, plenty of time and resources and at least four trips to Pakistan to weave his plot. Bernard reconstitutes the last days and minutes of Pearl before being beheaded. Omar Sheikh was to arrange the interview Daniel Pearl was so obsessed with. The interviewee would be Sheikh Mubarak Gilani, head of a small extremist political faction named *Tanzeem-ul-Furqa*.

On January 23, 2002, Pearl left his Karachi home to meet British-born Islamic militant Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh at a local restaurant. Pearl hoped that Omar Sheikh would arrange a subsequent meeting with Pir Mubarak Shah Gilani. Having initially met Omar Sheikh along with his colleague and local journalist Asif Farooqui, Pearl chose to venture out alone. According to a taxi driver who drove Pearl to the restaurant, the US journalist met his man and stepped into a white car along with Omar Sheikh and three others, and he has not been seen since. In an e-mail to the US authorities four days later, an unknown group The National Movement for the Restoration of

Pakistani Sovereignty sent ransom demands along with pictures of the 38-year old reporter in chains.

On February 20, 2002, three men approached a Karachi-based journalist working for the Pakistani media group Online International News Network, offering to sell a compact disk depicting Pearl's death for USD 200,000 as well as a promise of global coverage. They were believed to have been seen previously distributing press releases for an unknown local political faction. Lacking the equipment needed to play the CD-ROM as proof, the three men returned the next day with the footage converted to videotape. With a camera purchased from a local video store, the journalist was able to view and confirm the tape's gruesome images.

In the video, Pearl's body is shown naked from the waist up with his throat slit at about 1 minute and 55 seconds into the video, by which time he would have bled to death. A man then cuts his head off. A few more images, such as captives held at Guantánamo Bay detention camp, are shown near the image of Pearl's head. The last 90 seconds of the video show the list of demands scrolling, super imposed on an image of Pearl's severed head being held by the hair.

The videotape titled "The Slaughter of the Spy-Journalist, the Jew Daniel Pearl", also showed Pearl stating his identity: My name is Daniel Pearl, I am a Jewish-American.

The English transcript of the text read:

"My name is Daniel Pearl. I am a Jewish American from Encino, California US."

"I come from, Uh, on my father's side the family is Zionist."

"My father's Jewish, my mother's Jewish, and I am a Jewish."

"My family follows Judaism. We've made numerous family visits to Israel."

"Back in the town of Bnei Brak there is a street named after my great grandfather Chayim Pearl who is one of the founders of the town."

The second part of the video shows Pearl stating his captors' demands. A caption in Urdu is shown along the way. Pictures of

dead Pakistanis and similar scenes are superimposed around the image of Pearl. Other images shown are those of United States President George Bush shaking hands with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and those of Palestinian boy Muhammad al-Dura, of whose death the Sharon regime had been accused.

The message read: "We give you one more day if America will not meet our demands we will kill Daniel. Then this cycle will continue and no American journalist could enter Pakistan". Photos of Pearl handcuffed with a gun at his head and holding up a newspaper were attached. There was no response to pleas from Pearl's editor, nor from his wife Mariane.

On May 17, 2002, three detained activists of the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ); a banned militant group, helped the Karachi police recover a chopped-up body of Daniel Pearl from a vacant plot in the Gadap Town off Super Highway, owned by *Al-Rasheed Trust*. Mufti Ahmed founded the Trust in the 1980s as one of several ostensibly humanitarian relief organisations, which used to finance some leading jihadi outfits like *Jaish-e-Mohammad* as well as the Taliban rulers in Afghanistan. The three detained suspects were among the six who are allegedly the associates of Omar Sheikh and had revealed during interrogation that the US journalist had been kept in a house in Orangi Town when he was alive. But after his murder his remains were buried in a desolate place in Gadap Town. Acting upon this vital piece of information, the police dug the plot and recovered Daniel Pearl's body parts.

In October 2003, fifteen months after Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed was convicted (July 15, 2002) for Pearl's murder by a special anti-terrorism court of Hyderabad, the case took a new turn. A senior White House official called Marianne Pearl and Paul Steiger, the managing editor of the Wall Street Journal, to report a new, key development in the investigation into the death of Marianne's husband, Daniel Pearl. "We have now established enough links and credible evidence to think that Khaled Sheikh Mohammad - the mastermind behind the September 11 attacks - was involved in your husband's murder", the official reportedly told Marianne. "What do you mean 'involved'?" Marianne asked. "We think he committed the actual murder". They told her that Khaled Sheikh Mohammed was one

of three Arab men known to have arrived with video equipment and knives at the location where Pearl was held after his abduction in Karachi that day.

On March 15, 2007, the American media reported that according to a Pentagon transcript, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, who has already claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks, has further confessed having slaughtered Daniel Pearl. "I decapitated with my blessed right hand the head of the American Jew Daniel Pearl," Mohammad said in a statement, according to the Pentagon transcript. "For those who would like to confirm, there are pictures of me on the Internet holding his head," said the statement read by an US military staffer assigned to assist the 9/11 mastermind.

12

Omar Sheikh: The Londoner Who Became A Militant

Convicted in American journalist Daniel Pearl's murder, Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed happens to be a British citizen of Pakistani descent who had served five years in prison in New Delhi in the 1990s in connection with the 1994 abduction of three British travellers. However, he was released from captivity in 1999 along with Maulana Masood Azhar, the chief of the defunct militant group *Jaish-e-Mohammad* and provided safe passage to Pakistan, with the alleged support of the Pakistani establishment and the then Taliban regime in Afghanistan after the Indian government acceded to the demands of the hijackers of Indian Airliner IC-814.

Omar was put on trial on April 22, 2002 for the kidnapping and murder of Pearl, the 38-year-old reporter who was abducted from Karachi on January 23, 2002 while working on an investigative story about Islamic extremists in Pakistan. Presently languishing in a Pakistan jail after being convicted to death sentence, Omar awaits the outcome of his appeal against the death penalty. It was the second time the British-born Omar had been charged with kidnapping of a US citizen. In November 2002, Omar was secretly indicted in the United States for the 1994 kidnapping of four Westerners in India, including Bela Nuss of California. Omar has been described by the Western media as no ordinary terrorist but a man who has connections that reach high into Pakistan's military and intelligence elite and into the innermost circles of Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda.

An April 21, 2002 in depth investigative report carried by *The Sunday Times* had detailed links between the ISI and Omar. The report said the Britain-born Omar knows too much about this connection to ever be allowed to leave Pakistan alive. One "bizarre clue" the report mentioned is the demand by Pearl's kidnappers to honour an agreement to sell F-16 fighter aircraft to Pakistan. "This hardly squared with the outlook of a militant Muslim organisation fighting a jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir," the report said. The next clue came with the revelation that Omar was in custody. On a visit to the US, Musharraf announced on February 12, 2002 that Omar had been captured by the police authorities in Lahore. Omar reportedly shouted out in court that he had turned himself over to the then Home Secretary Punjab Brigadier (retd) Ejaz Hussain Shah [who had earlier served the Musharraf regime as the director general of the ISI Punjab and eventually retired as the director general of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) in March 2008].

"It would appear that the ISI had its own reasons for holding Sheikh for a week before announcing to the world that he was in custody," the report said. "One thing it would have wanted to do was to make sure its protégé did not give more away than absolutely necessary about his relationship with Pakistani intelligence services... Omar Sheikh was their (the ISI's) man and he was brought in to deal with Pearl; the ISI knew everything", *The Sunday Times* report said and added that the Karachi police, who deeply distrust the ISI, leaked details of their interrogation of Omar Sheikh in which he talked about his ISI links.

The Sunday Times report quoted M.J. Gohel of the Asia-Pacific Foundation, a security and terrorism policy assessment group that has been researching Pearl's murder, as saying: "Sheikh is a vital key that can open all the doors to the al-Qaeda network, to the links between the Pakistani military intelligence establishment and the terror groups, and can destroy Musharraf's credibility with Washington."

The report said the full story of the kidnapping of Pearl would probably never come to light. Yet another report appearing in *Newsweek* in April 2000 said: "The ISI has been so powerful for so long that it seems to play by its own rules. In the

Pearl case, the ISI may have had mixed motives. According to well-informed sources, ISI agents were confident they could cut a deal for Pearl's release by offering to let Omar Sheikh go in return. The US authorities believe Omar himself was an ISI asset at one point, most likely an operative in Kashmir. The ISI would have had good reason not to burn one of its former contacts. That could send a message to other present and future intelligence assets that the ISI doesn't protect its agents. The ISI always wants to keep its options open."

Interestingly, journalist Daniel Pearl and jihadi Omar Sheikh were both highly educated individuals from privileged backgrounds who saw the world very differently. While Daniel Pearl was a humanist who became an accomplished journalist and spent most of his career reporting from the Muslim world as part of a quest to promote cross-cultural understanding, Omar Sheikh was radicalized by events that he regarded as the global persecution of Muslims, and became an Islamic militant who chose a deeply violent method to achieve what he believed in. After the 9/11 terror attacks, their paths crossed in Pakistan, with tragic consequences.

Omar Sheikh was born on December 23, 1973, six years after his father; a cloth merchant; moved to London from a village near Lahore, Pakistan. His father, Saeed Ahmed Sheikh, was born in Dhoka Mandi village near Lahore and lived there till his early 20s before migrating to London sometime in 1968 to pursue a Chartered Accountancy course. Having worked as an accountant with a record company for a short while, Saeed Sheikh started his own wholesale garment business under the name 'Perfect Fashions'. His family owns a house (bought in 1977) in London, some shops and land. Omar Sheikh is the eldest of the three children. His younger sister, Hajira Sheikh, was a medicine student at Oxford, while his younger brother, Awais Sheikh, was a student of 'A' level in Oxford. All the three children are known to be brilliant and are recipients of scholarships.

Omar Sheikh had his schooling at Nightingale Primary School and later at Forest School at Snaresbrook. Former English cricket team captain Nasser Hussain was his classmate at school. In 1987, Omar's father wound up his business and moved back

to Lahore because of his son's interest in older girls and his drinking and smoking. Once in Pakistan, Omar attended Aitchison College in Lahore for three years between the ages of 14 and 16. While his contemporaries used to concentrate on achieving a career in the Pakistani civil service, Sheikh began to develop an unhealthy interest in the idea of a jihad, a holy war in defense of Islam. Alarmed, his father again wound up his business and moved back to London in 1990. Omar went back to the Forest School and finished his Senior Cambridge in 1992.

By the time he returned to England to complete his sixth-year at Forest, his twin obsessions were Islam and body-building as he was obsessed about his physique.

During his Forest School days, Omar had a short-lived romance with an English girl, Sarah. He then became a chess champion and a keen arm wrestler who took part in the 1992 World Arm Wrestling Championships in Geneva. Omar then moved to the London School of Economics, yet the lure of the classroom was not as strong as his burgeoning interest in the fundamentalist Islamic groups that were dotted around London. He would regularly skip lectures to attend a variety of mosques and it was there that he was invited to join a Muslim charity, the Convoy of Mercy, which was working in Bosnia at the height of the conflict. Moved by a documentary on Bosnia (Destruction of a Nation) in 1992, Omar took to jihad and went to Bosnia on a trip with Convoy of Mercy.

Therefore, before he could complete his first year in, Omar suddenly dropped out in 1993, only to travel to Pakistan where he joined the *Harkatul Mujahideen*, a militant organisation fighting in Jammu & Kashmir. After being trained by the HuM in Afghanistan, Omar reportedly flew to New Delhi on his first mission and kidnapped six Western tourists in Kashmir (two Americans, two Britons, one German and one Norwegian). Posing as Sharma, a British student of the LSE who had inherited a village in his father's will, he talked his way in among a group of Western tourists and invited three of them, Myles Croston, 28, Paul Rideout, 26 and Rhys Partridge, 27 to accompany him to the village. When the party arrived they were greeted by armed terrorists. They spent the next few weeks chained to a stake and

tormented by Sheikh, until they were freed after an armed raid by Indian police.

While using the name of *Al Faran*, another militant group linked to HuM, Omar subsequently demanded the release of 22 Islamic terrorists jailed in India, many of whom were the most wanted and dangerous ones including Maulana Masood Azhar, who had been linked with the *Harkatul Mujahideen* at that time. As the Indian government refused to free them, one of the abducted Norwegian was beheaded by Omar and his accomplices, which prompted a grand commando operation by the Indian security forces near Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh on October 31, 1994. Sheikh and his accomplice, including a Pakistani national Abdul Rahim, were arrested after a brief shootout, in which an Indian police commando was killed. The four western hostages were brought out unharmed. The kidnapping episode was the second in a series of three kidnappings of foreign tourists to secure the release of Maulana Masood Azhar and several other Islamic militants.

A martial arts enthusiast, Omar Sheikh's prowess was seen by the Indian police officers, who nabbed him in mid 90s, when he was holding five foreigners captive outside New Delhi. While in a Ghaziabad hospital, after being arrested by New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh Police, he punched a deputy superintendent of police and threatened to track down and kill the constable who had slapped him back. Later at the Meerut jail, he kicked the jail superintendent, and was shifted to high security Tihar jail in New Delhi, after being categorised a 'dreaded' terrorist.

According to Western media reports, Omar Sheikh is also known as Mustafa Mohamed Ahmad aka Mustapha Ahmad Al-Hawsawi and was mentioned in a public transcript of the trial on the Kenyan Embassy Bombings of August 1998. Under his alias Al-Hawsawi, as mentioned in the indictment of Moussaoui, Habib Zacarias, he wired \$100,000 to the official ringleader of the September 11th attack, Mohammad Atta from a Saudi Arabian account of Standard Chartered Bank. On October 6, 2001, a senior-level US government official told CNN that American investigators had discovered that Omar Sheikh, while using the alias "Mustafa Muhammad Ahmad" had sent about \$100,000 from United Arab Emirates to Mohammed Atta.

"Investigators said Mohammad Atta then distributed the funds to conspirators in Florida in the weeks before the deadliest 9/11 acts of terrorism on US soil that destroyed the World Trade Center, heavily damaged the Pentagon and left thousands dead. In addition, the finding showed that Atta had sent thousands of dollars -- believed to be excess funds from the operation -- back to Omar Sheikh in the United Arab Emirates in the days before September 11. The 9/11 Commission's Final Report states that the source of the funds "remains unknown."

More than a month after the said money transfer was discovered, the ISI director general, General Mahmood Ahmad was made to resign from his position. It was later reported by the US media that the FBI was investigating the possibility that General Ahmed ordered Omar Sheikh to send the \$100,000 to Atta; there were also claims that Indian intelligence had already produced proof for Pakistani administration that this was so. The Wall Street Journal was the only Western newspapers to follow up on the story in these words: "The FBI's examination of the hard disk of the cell phone company Omar Sheikh had subscribed to led to the discovery of the link between him and the deposed chief of the ISI, General Mahmood Ahmed. US authorities sought General Mahmood Ahmad's removal after confirming the fact that \$100,000 was wired to WTC hijacker Mohammed Atta from Pakistan by Omar Sheikh at the instance of none other than General Mahmood."

A July 2002 Washington Post report quoted a senior US law-enforcement official as having said that Omar Saeed bragged to FBI agents during investigations that he would never be extradited to the United States, and in fact would serve only three or four years if convicted of Pearl's murder in Pakistan. The only remorse he expressed was over Daniel Pearl's unborn child: "He said he felt bad because he realized Pearl was going to be a father soon, and he had a 2-month-old son," the American official quoted the convicted militant as having said, according to the Washington Post report.

Interestingly, President Musharraf, in his book "In the Line of Fire" stated that Omar Sheikh was originally recruited by British intelligence agency, MI6, while studying at the London School of Economics. He alleges Omar Sheikh was sent to the

Balkans by MI6 to engage in jihadi operations. Musharraf later went on to state: "At some point, he probably became a rogue or double agent". Yet his complicity in the execution of Daniel Pearl and the reasons behind it are still disputed, despite the fact that he has been convicted in that case. At his initial court appearance, Sheikh Omar stated, "I don't want to defend this case. I did this...Right or wrong, I had my reasons. I think that our country shouldn't be catering to American needs". But he subsequently appealed his conviction and is awaiting further progress while in prison.

Despite being sentenced to death by a Pakistani court five years ago way back on July, 15, 2003, the alleged killers of Daniel, including the prime accused Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed, have so far managed to avoid being sent to the gallows as the Sindh High Court has yet to decide their appeals against the death sentence which has seen almost 100 adjournments since their conviction for inexplicable reasons. Even otherwise, the Daniel case has already taken a new twist with the lawyers of Sheikh Omar and his accomplices now planning to use a claim by the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 terror attacks, Khaled Sheikh Mohammad, that he had personally beheaded Daniel Pearl.

Khaled Sheikh Mohammad had made this confession in the custody of the FBI, the transcript of which was released by the US authorities in March 2007. Khaled said at a US military hearing at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, that he beheaded Pearl for allegedly being an Israeli intelligence agent. Rai Bashir, a lawyer for Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, said he will use Mohammad's testimony as evidence that his client did not kill Pearl. "What we were saying for so many years in our trial, in the appeal is that Omar was innocent and he has not committed that murder" Bashir said in an interview. "He has not abducted Pearl, and he, along with his co-accused, is innocent. We are happy that this version has been verified by the Pentagon after the arrest of Khaled Sheikh Mohammed".

Rai Bashir further said that he plans to use Musharraf's published memoirs in defense of Omar Sheikh. "President Pervez Musharraf's book, 'In the Line of Fire', will be mustered for an appeal against my client's conviction because it indicated

that alleged September 11 mastermind Khaled Sheikh Mohammed and another man had killed Pearl. I will move an application in the court and ask for Musharraf's personal appearance and use his account in the book as evidence," the lawyer said in Karachi following Khaled Sheikh's confession. However, another startling revelation in the same book by President Pervez Musharraf was that Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed was actually an agent of the British secret Agency MI6 who had executed certain missions at their behest before coming to Pakistan and visiting Afghanistan to meet the Taliban *ameer* Mullah Mohammad Omar and the al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

Face to face with Sheikh Omar

Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed had several brushes with the Indian news media in 1994. On one occasion he walked into the BBC offices in New Delhi to deliver a note about the kidnapping of four foreigners. Later that year (1994) - after being wounded in a gun battle with Indian police - he was visited by Zubair Ahmed, now of BBC World, who recounts the experience:

"We stumbled upon Sheikh Omar Saeed by chance. I was leading a three-man television crew from a private Indian news channel. He appeared repentant, but clearly not enough. While on the trail of a crime and kidnapping story in Ghaziabad, just outside the Indian capital, Delhi, we found Sheikh Omar. He had been involved in a fierce gunfight with Indian police in the northern Indian town of Saharanpur. Police said he was part of a group of Kashmiri militants who had kidnapped some Western tourists. A senior police officer died in the gunfight and some of the militants, including Sheikh Omar, were wounded. So that is where I found him, with a bad shoulder wound in a room in a swanky private hospital under heavily-armed guard.

I thought he had not even been interrogated. The authorities clearly had no idea who he was, as he was not on the list of wanted men. Though at first reluctant, the police finally allowed us in to speak to him, but he was not keen to play along. The camera was rolling anyway as we came face to face with the tall, bearded young man, propped up against hospital pillows but still belligerent. "Do you have the doctor's permission to speak

to me", he snapped. I confessed I did not, but I showed him my identity card. That seemed to do the trick and he started to talk".

Sheikh Omar looked extremely worried and he told me he would give anything to return to life in Britain. He was strikingly young and his accent was distinctly British. He said he was 20 years old and had spent two years taking part in jihad in Bosnia. But over an over, he repeated, he had made a mistake. "Please get me out of here", he pleaded. He said he had been fooled by the hard-luck stories he had heard about the plight of Muslims and Kashmiris in India. He said he had been part of a group charged with kidnapping some foreign tourists to barter for militants held in prison in India. He said he had been in Delhi for more than a month before the kidnapping and was struck by the religious freedom he saw. "I had been told that Muslims in India had no religious rights and Kashmiri Muslims were being subjected to torture and rape by the Hindu army", he said. I asked him, if he was released, would he go back and tell people in Britain that we Indian Muslims were free to build mosques, say our prayers and work in government offices. He said he would. He appeared repentant, but clearly not enough".

Presently detained in an isolated ward in Hyderabad Jail, Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed is being guarded round-the-clock by a special unit of the elite commandos, given the fact that the Londoner-turned-jehadi epitomizes the links between bin Laden, the Pakistani military and intelligence establishments, the 9/11 hijackers, British jihadis and Kashmiri militants. As a matter of fact, putting him on the death row and holding him in an isolation cell helps the Pakistani establishment keep a key witness out of the American, British and Indian hands. And probably that's why the Pakistani authorities have repeatedly turned down the British and American demands to either extradite Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed or allow their agents, interview him.

13

Did ISI Mastermind the 1999 Air India Hijacking?

After the post-Taliban era, the war-torn, impoverished landscape of Afghanistan turned out to be the new playground for India and Pakistan to score strategic points over each other. Having expanded its presence and influence in the post-Taliban Kabul, New Delhi has made substantial progress in its efforts to make the international community believe that Islamabad had been using terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy to pressurise its neighbour for initiating talks on the lingering dispute of Jammu & Kashmir.

Having established its consulates in the Afghan cities of Herat in the West, Kandahar in the South and Jalalabad in the East, the Indian government is busy making renewed attempts to get hold of any evidence that could prove the involvement of Pakistani intelligence agencies in the December 24, 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight IC-814. The Indian plane was on its way to Delhi from Kathmandu when five armed men hijacked it over Varansi. They first took it to Amritsar and from there to Lahore. After refueling in Lahore, the plane then took off for Dubai where the hijackers allowed 21 passengers to disembark before they took it to Kandahar. Although an Indian national, Rupin Katyal was murdered by the hijackers, the rest of the passengers returned home safely after spending a week [from 24th to 31st December] in captivity before they were released in exchange for the release of three top militants

including Maulana Masood Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar.

Both the Indian and the American authorities had subsequently registered separate criminal cases against the hijackers. It was in October 2003, almost three years after the hijacking episode, that the FBI and the CBI investigative agencies reached the epicenter - Kandahar. Two Deputy Inspectors General of the Indian Central Bureau of Investigation and a couple of Federal Bureau of Investigations officials had actually reached Kandahar to interrogate those Taliban masterminds of the operation that saw the Indian plane seized by hijackers immediately after it took off from the Kathmandu airport. Before proceeding to Kandahar, the Indian officials got permission from the Northern Alliance government to question several captured Taliban leaders, especially Mullah Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil, Afghanistan's last foreign minister in the Taliban government.

Muttawakil had served as spokesman and secretary to Mullah Mohammed Omar, leader of the Taliban. Being a key witness in the hijacking drama, he was interrogated by the FBI and the CBI officials and it is largely believed that he had furnished some vital information to his interrogators pertaining to the role of the Pakistani intelligence establishment in the hijacking incident. The BBC reported on October 8, 2003 that Muttawakil has finally been released from eighteen months of detention in Bagram and had returned to his family home in Kandahar. On October 21, 2003, hardly two weeks later, as he lost the confidence of his former associates, the Taliban disowned him.

It later transpired that after invading Afghanistan in October 2001, the FBI sleuths had seized exceptionally revealing tape-recorded conversations between the hijackers of IC-814 plane and the Air Traffic Control in Kandahar. Some of the information contained in those tapes was then shared with the Indian intelligence, pursuing which an FBI team as well as a CBI team visited Kandahar to follow up on those leads. The FBI had extended full cooperation to the CBI because a US national, Ms. Jeanne Moore (a psychotherapist from Bakersfield, California) was also amongst the passengers of the ill-fated flight. Subsequently, a criminal case was subsequently registered in the

US against the hijackers. Having recorded Moore's testimony, the FBI teams had visited New Delhi thrice to discuss her abduction and progress in the case. Determined to get to the bottom of the hijack in order to unmask the masterminds, the FBI then shared with the CBI the record of the incoming calls at the Air Traffic Control of the Kandahar airport.

French writer Bernard Henri-Levy writes in his famous book *"Who Killed Daniel Pearl"*: "Two high-ranking officers of the ISI were present on the tarmac in Kandahar when the Indian negotiating team landed there. They were later joined by colleagues, from the special operations wing of the ISI's Quetta station. Negotiations were being conducted over wireless sets. The five hijackers got careless and inadvertently allowed Indian negotiators to overhear them, taking instructions from Urdu-speaking men. Eventually, the episode had ended with the release of Maulana Masood Azhar, Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar and Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed, the man who was later convicted for the brutal murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl. The aircraft and its passengers were released in exchange".

During and after the hijack drama, Islamabad vehemently denied having any role in it and went to the extent of offering to negotiate on New Delhi's behalf. The fact, however, remains that Mufti Abdul Rauf (the younger brother of *Jaish-e-Mohammad* founder Masood Azhar who now looks after the JeM as its acting chief) and his brother-in-law, Yusuf Azhar were among the hijackers while the *Jaish* chief who was to be released by the Indian government from a Srinagar jail was shortly seen leading victory processions in Pakistan. The Indian authorities believe Muttawakil had played an adverse role during the plane hijack leaving the then Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh red-faced by going back on several commitments made during the negotiations with the hijackers.

According to several Indian media reports, Wakil, who acted as an interlocutor at Kandahar after the IC-814 plane landed there, was also hostile during the negotiations. When Jaswant Singh landed in Kandahar with the three terrorists (Maulana Masood Azhar, Omar Sheikh and Mushtaq Zargar) Wakil had made it a point to assure him that the hijackers and the terrorists would be held in Afghan custody until all the Indians left

Kandahar. However, as soon as the three Pakistani militants were handed over to the hijackers, they were provided with a jeep in which they victoriously drove away. The CBI believed that Muttawakil would be able to divulge more details about the intricacies of the hijack such as contacts that hijackers had with the outside world including instructions and logistical support they received from Pakistan.

Therefore, during the Indo-US Joint Working Group on Terrorism meeting held on July 11 and 12, 2003 in Washington, India requested the Bush administration to make the FBI give permission to the CBI to grill Muttawakil. After being denied access for almost two years, Indian investigators finally succeeded in debriefing Mullah Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil and a few other Taliban leaders as well. What is not known to the Pakistani intelligence establishment is whether Muttawakil was questioned for reconstructing the hijack drama or whether he had agreed for a statement to be recorded as a witness in the ongoing trial in a Patiala court in India.

The FBI investigators are convinced that on several occasions, Mullah Muttawakil had used the Air Traffic Control (ATC) channel to speak to the hijackers and to some Pakistani officials. Therefore, he, more than any other Taliban official, had the total picture of how the hijack was facilitated by Pakistan and where the five hijackers were headed after the scenario came to an end. The Indian authorities insist that Pakistan's role in the hijacking should be seen within the context of the Taliban's then official spokesman, Abdul Haji Mutmaen's January 1, 1999 statement that the hijackers and terrorists that had been released from Indian jails were left on the Pak-Afghan border near Quetta, Baluchistan.

From India's point of view, any evidence that could establish the role of Pakistani intelligence in the hijack could put enormous pressure on Islamabad for the custody of the IC-814 hijackers. Under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation convention on extradition and mutual assistance in tackling criminal activities, the Indian government had made two formal requests for the extradition of the five hijackers. But Pakistani government refused to oblige, maintaining that if any person suspected of being involved in the Air India hijacking

was to be found on its territory or in Pakistan-administered-Kashmir, Islamabad would undertake to apprehend and prosecute the suspect. The CBI Director R. K. Raghavan subsequently raised the issue with Interpol officials during the 69th annual conference of the international organisation in Athens.

Soon afterwards, the Interpol authorities issued a red corner alert (look-out notice) to Pakistan, Britain, the United Arab Emirates, Nepal and Bangladesh against the five hijackers and two accomplices who are believed to be the key conspirators in the hijacking. However, the Indian side is not very hopeful about getting their custody even after issuance of a red corner notice given the fact that several countries did not comply with the warrant from the international organisation. The CBI has already in addition filed a charge sheet against ten people in the hijacking case, including three Indians – Abdul Latif alias Patel, Bhupalmar Damai alias Yusuf Nepali and Dilip Kumar Bhujel.

The other seven accused, all Pakistani nationals, were Ibrahim Athar, Sunny Ahmed Qazi, Zahoor Ibrahim, Shahid Akhter Sayed and Shakir and accomplices Yusuf Azhar and Abdul Rauf. Yusuf Azhar and Abdul Rauf are believed to be the key conspirators. The CBI charge sheet alleges that the hijackers possessed a very sophisticated satellite telephone to communicate with their mastermind in the garrison town of Rawalpindi. "And when the Taliban authorities in Kabul refused to allow the hijacked aircraft to land, which was communicated by the hijackers to the authorities in Rawalpindi, they were asked to proceed to Kandahar", the charge sheet adds. Islamabad, however, has denied these charges time and again.

14

The Soldiers of Mohammad: Down But 'Not Out'

The *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM) or the Army of the Prophet Mohammad, one of the deadliest militant groups operating from Pakistan and waging 'jihad' against the Indian security forces in Jammu & Kashmir, was launched by Maulana Masood Azhar at the behest of the Inter Services Intelligence in February 2000, shortly after he was released from an Indian jail, in exchange for hostages on board an Indian Airlines plane which was hijacked by five armed Kashmiri militants and taken to Kandahar in December 1999.

While resuming his activities in Pakistan almost immediately after his release, Maulana Masood Azhar announced the formation of his own militant group, *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, with the prime objective of fighting out the Indian security forces in Kashmir. Along with Masood Azhar, the Indian government had to release two more militants who were arrested there on terrorism charges - Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar a young Srinagar youth, heading the *Al-Umar Mujahideen*. Before being released, Masood Azhar was the ideologue of another militant organization, the *Harkatul Ansar* (HuA) which was banned in 1997 by the US State Department, due to its alleged association with Osama. Therefore, the *Jaish* is ideologically an extension of the *Harkatul Ansar* which rechristened itself as *Harkatul Mujahideen* in 1998, a year after being banned.

While the *Harkatul Mujahideen* was never the same after the split, the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* grew rapidly as the more radical militant group because of its links with two major Sunni sectarian groups – the *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (SSP) and the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ). The formation of the *Jaish* was widely supported by the country's top Islamic Deobandi scholars, especially Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai of the *Jamia Binoria* in Karachi, who was known for his pro-Taliban leanings and Maulana Yusuf Ludhianvi who was the chief commander of the *Sipah-e-Sahaba* Pakistan at that time. Some other religious scholars who had supported the JeM formation included Maulana Mufti Rashid Ahmed of the *Darul Ifta-e-wal-Irshad*, and Maulana Sher Ali of the *Sheikh-ul-Hadith Darul Haqqania*.

While Mufti Shamzai became the chief ideologue of the *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, Maulana Ludhianvi was made its supreme leader and Masood Azhar became the chief commander. The dramatic emergence of the new jihadi group was seen by many in Pakistan as an ISI ploy to keep the network of jihadi organisations divided so that they could be managed easily for waging a controlled jihad in Jammu & Kashmir. The creation of the *Jaish* soon caused the first serious split within the *Harkatul Mujahideen*. Simply unable to comprehend Masood's decision to launch his own group, the leadership of the *Harkat* (with which Masood Azhar had been affiliated as the secretary general till his arrest in India) unanimously decided to distance itself from their ex-secretary general.

However, hostility developed between the two groups when a large number of the former *Harkat* activists managed to wrest control of over a dozen *Harkat* offices in Punjab. The *Harkat* leadership reacted sharply and accused Masood of being 'a greedy Indian agent who was out to damage the Kashmiri jihad'. On the other hand, the Maulana got an unprecedented response from the former *Harkat* cadres, primarily because of his oratorical skills, his recognition as a scholar and the four-year jail term in India. Masood's image was greatly enhanced by his spymasters in Punjab when he was allowed to travel to Lahore with scores of Kalashnikov-bearing guards. He was restrained only when his anti-Musharraf statements became too aggressive.

Strong *Deobandi* creed forms the primary religious and ideological base for the JeM as well as the Taliban. In fact, the Taliban movement was launched by the students of the very network of 9000 *madrassas* which the *Jaish's* (formerly *Harkat*) parent organisation – *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* – led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman runs across Pakistan. Masood only knit the ties stronger after his release as he toured Kandahar to secure the blessings of Taliban leadership after he had planned to launch *Jaish*. His former associates in *Harkat* are of the view that by launching the *Jaish*, Masood actually wanted to become the ultimate leader of the *Deobandi* pan-Islamist militants in Jammu & Kashmir. Delivering speeches at various cities and towns in Pakistan after the launch of the JeM, Masood Azhar threatened that his group would eliminate Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee who he termed as '*Abu Jahl*' (Father of Ignorance). In its fight against India, he added that the outfit would not only liberate Kashmir, but also take control of the *Babri Masjid*.

The *Jaish* carried out its first terrorist activity in Jammu & Kashmir on April 19, 2000, hardly two months after its formation when one of its members drove a hijacked car loaded with explosives into the main gate of the *Badami Bagh* Cantonment. The deadly strike marked the first suicide bomb attack in the 13-year-old history of Kashmir militancy. Since then, the *Jaish* has largely confined its operations within Jammu & Kashmir and the only recorded instance of its operations outside Kashmir had been the December 13, 2001 Parliament attack in New Delhi. Earlier, on October 10, 2001, a month after the 9/11 terror attacks struck the US, Masood had renamed the *Jaish* as *Tehrik-ul-Furqa* (TuF). The move was motivated by reports that the United States was contemplating to declare it a foreign terrorist outfit because of its involvement in the October 1, 2001 explosion outside the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly.

However, despite being renamed, the US State Department designated it as a foreign terrorist organisation in December 2001. General Musharraf too banned the outfit in January 2002. However, within no time, Masood Azhar got his outfit registered under the new name of *Khudam-ul-Islam* (KuI), although it is still better known as the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* before being arrested by the Pakistani authorities on December 29, 2001,

after pressure from India and other foreign countries following the militant on Indian parliament in New Delhi. However, a three-member Review Board of Lahore High Court ordered on December 14, 2002, that Azhar be released.

Pertinent to mention here is a significant statement by Lt. Gen. (retd) Javed Ashraf Qazi, a former Director General of the Inter Services Intelligence. He was quoted as saying on March 7, 2004 by the Lahore-based *Daily Times*: "We must not be afraid of admitting that the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* was involved in the deaths of thousands of innocent Kashmiris, in the bombing of the Indian parliament, in Daniel Pearl's murder and in attempts on Musharraf's life". Javed Qazi, further said that both the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* and *Lashkar-e-Toiba* had harmed the Kashmir cause the most. The startling statement came three months after the December 2003 suicide attacks on Musharraf in Rawalpindi, in which one of the bombers was later identified as Mohammad Jameel, an activist of the *Jaish*. Afterwards, there were many in the intelligence circles who started giving statements that Masood Azhar was actually a turncoat, who after spending time in Indian jails, was turned by the Indian intelligence and whose sole purpose upon his return to Pakistan was to defame the 'indigenous freedom movement' in Jammu and Kashmir.

In the aftermath of the Rawalpindi suicide bombings, Maulana Masood Azhar had to face the wrath of his spy masters, after it was found that Mohammad Jameel, one of the human bombs who tried to assassinate Musharraf, belonged to the *Jaish*. However, Masood Azhar tried to clear his position by maintaining that the bomber had already defected to the *Jaish's* dissident group – *Jamaatul Furqaan* (JuF), led by Maulana Abdul Jabbar alias Maulana Umer Farooq. However, the Maulana from Bahawalpur soon fell out of favour with the establishment and was made to go under ground in the wake of Washington's allegations about his al-Qaeda links and because of the American belief that he, along with some other jihadi leaders, had been providing logistical support to fugitive al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders.

Prior to that, Maulana Masood Azhar had been among the establishment's most trusted jihadi leaders, one of those who walked the credibility tightrope gingerly. One season he would

be mouthing impassioned anti-India rhetoric, sending his militants across the Line of Control (LoC) to wage jihad in Jammu & Kashmir; the next would see him lying low and smouldering. In return, the *Jaishi* chief used to receive patronage of the Pakistani intelligence apparatus, both financially and morally. But all this seemed to be changing towards the end of 2003 -- and not entirely because of the diplomatic pressure New Delhi and Washington have mounted over the years.

To begin with, a glimpse of the clout Masood Azhar used to enjoy: Nothing illustrates this more vividly than the Pakistani government's decision to decline a request by the Interpol (International Police) for taking Masood Azhar into custody. Interpol had been prompted to act at the behest of the US department of justice which wanted charges filed against the Maulana from Bahawalpur and Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed for their involvement in at least two crimes committed against American citizens -- the 2002 murder of journalist Daniel Pearl and the 1999 hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC-814 (with an American citizen Jeanne Moore aboard). The American authorities claimed that under the American law, they had the right to investigate crimes against their citizens committed anywhere in the world.

However, the Pakistani authorities turned down the requests of the Interpol as well as the Americans to interrogate Azhar for his alleged links with al-Qaeda, which was accused of involvement in Daniel Pearl's gruesome murder in Karachi in 2002. The Musharraf regime had argued that Maulana Masood Azhar did not have a role in the murder and the principal culprit, Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed and three accomplices had already been tried and sentenced to life imprisonment by a Pakistani court. Though the presence of US national Jeanne Moore aboard IC-814 could have created trouble for Masood Azhar, the government of Pakistan had rejected the Interpol request for his custody on the grounds that he was not a hijacker and his incarceration in India had been illegal. "Otherwise, he would have been tried and convicted by the Indian courts while he was behind the bars". In other words, Maulana Masood Azhar could not be accused of any crime.

Ordinarily, the reprieve should have emboldened Masood Azhar to brazenly espouse the jihadi cause. However, Masood Azhar had to suffer a major set back on November 15, 2003 when his *Jaish* was banned by the Musharraf regime for the second time since January 2002. While the government outlawed *Khudam-ul-Islam* (earlier called *Jaish-e-Mohammad*), *Jamaatul Daawa*, the political offshoot of the already banned militant outfit namely the *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, was only placed on the interior ministry's watch-list. Five days later [on November 20], the government banned three more jihadi outfits – *Jamiat-ul-Ansar* (formerly known as *Harkatul Mujahideen*), the *Jamaat-ul-Furqa* (a sister organisation of *Jaish-e-Mohammad*) and *Hizbul Tehrir*.

The leadership of the outlawed group maintained that the government action had emanated from the US. Significantly, the November 15, 2003 move came a day after the US ambassador to Pakistan, Nancy Powell said [on November 13 while speaking in Karachi on the Pak-US relations] that Washington was concerned about the re-emergence of several banned militant organisations in Pakistan. "These groups pose a serious threat to Pakistan, to the United States and to the region. We are particularly concerned that these groups are re-establishing themselves with new names," said Nancy. She noted that Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, founder of the outlawed *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, was also addressing rallies across the country as the leader of a new group, *Jamaatul Daawa*. "He is up to his old habits of urging holy war against Indian forces in the disputed Kashmir region", she said. *Jaish-e-Mohammad* renamed as *Jamaat-ul-Furqan*, Nancy had added, was one of the groups blamed for the December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament. The ambassador then urged Pakistan to enhance its efforts to stop these groups from infiltrating into the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir.

However, the intelligence circles claimed the banning of the *Jaish* twice within a short span of three months had more to do with the December 2003 suicide attacks on Musharraf rather than the American pressure. These attacks were followed by a major swoop in which hundreds of Azhar's followers were arrested and the *Jaish* offices sealed across Pakistan. Many other *Jaish* activists had been arrested earlier for carrying out suicide attacks on churches and missionary institutes in Islamabad,

Murree and Taxila in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the US-led Allied Forces. However, Maulana Masood Azhar's close circles insist that those involved in these attacks were in fact dissidents headed by Maulana Abdul Jabbar who had already been expelled from their outfit for violating the party discipline.

As Masood Azhar expelled Maulana Abdul Jabbar alias Maulana Umer Farooq – Nazim, Military Affairs and 12 more commanders including Abdullah Shah Mazhar, they launched their own faction, *Jamaat-ul-Furqan*, and started confronting their parent group. Abdul Jabbar became the chief of the *Furqan* while Mazhar was nominated as the *nazim-e-aala* (chief organiser) and secretary general of the splinter group. The dissidents were adamant to carry out suicide missions against the US interests in Pakistan to avenge the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. However, some militants say the *ameer* of the *Jaish's* Sindh chapter, Maulana Abdullah Shah Mazhar, was the first one to leave Masood Azhar in October 2001 to launch his own faction, *Tehrikul Furqan* who was later joined by Maulana Abdul Jabbar alias Maulana Umer Farooq and 12 more commanders.

Getting unnerved over the development, Masood Azhar informed his handlers in the ISI that the new group has nothing to do with his outfit and he was no more responsible for their future actions, adding that most of the expelled members are sectarian terrorists who should be arrested instead of being allowed to regroup. According to Abdullah Shah Mazhar, Masood Azhar was made the *Jaish* chief by religious scholars -- Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai, Maulana Shabbir Ali Shah and Maulana Waliullah who were the moving spirits behind the creation of *Jaish*. "And these scholars have already deprived Masood Azhar of that position. Seven out of ten members of the *Jaish* Supreme Council, which Maulana Azhar claimed to have favoured him, had dissociated from him. I am one of them. The other members of the *Jaish* supreme council who joined us included Maulana Ubaidullah Anwer, Qari Mansoor Ahmed, Maulana Ghulam Murtaza and Maulana Osama Rizwan", he was quoted [by *The Friday Times*] as saying in December 2003.

Abdullah further quoted as having said: "We are all united and running the party for the very cause for which it was

actually launched. Masood Azhar has nothing to do with the cause of jihad now. Our main difference with Azhar was that he deviated from the cause of jihad while the organisation was ostensibly created for waging jihad to liberate the Occupied Kashmir. Unlike Azhar and his masters in the Pakistani intelligence agencies, we are not ready to compromise jihad for the sake of funds". But on the other hand, Masood Azhar's younger brother and the Deputy Chief of *Khudam-ul-Islam*, Maulana Abdul Rauf, were of the view that Jabbar and Mazhar had no concern for jihad and they just wanted to grab the group assets. "We have taken up the grabbing of several Mosques owned by the *Jaish* at the higher level and will get their possession sooner or later," Rauf was quoted as saying [by *The Friday Times*] who had been released by the agencies after being questioned in connection with the 2003 Rawalpindi suicide bombings against Musharraf.

Both the *Jaish* factions – *Khudam-ul-Islam* and *Jamaat-ul-Furqa* – already banned by the government, are still in conflict, one led by Masood Azhar and the second by his former right hand man, Maulana Abdul Jabbar. Apart from these factions, the *Jaish* had broken into many splinter groups that had chosen to defy the military establishment's diktat of not attacking the US interests in Pakistan. The split in the *Jaish*, however, is also a story of bitter wrangling over the group's finances. Some of the *Jaish* insiders accuse Masood and his cohorts of misusing the *Jaish* resources to enrich themselves. According to them, besides developing difference over waging jihad against the western interests inside Pakistan, the distribution of finances was another major cause of conflict between Abdul Jabbar and Masood Azhar. Insiders tell a long story about the division of the *Jaish* and the vested interests, corruption, greed and deep conflict that eventually led to the split. *Jaish-e-Mohammad* and *Al Rasheed Trust*, both blacklisted by the US State Department are considered quite close.

When the *Jaish* was founded, the Karachi-based *Al-Rasheed Trust* donated Rs.20 million (\$360,000) as seed money. Later, thousands of people joined the *Jaish* and helped to raise funds, to the estimated tune of Rs1 million a day. A substantial amount of this money was spent on establishing training camps and paying

those families whose members had been killed in J&K. Yet simultaneously, the lifestyle of many of the *Jaish* leaders had become incredibly lavish. For instance, Masood, who hails from a lower-class family that resided in a slummy area of Bahawalpur, moved to the city's posh Model Colony. He and his cohorts began driving around in Land Cruisers and Land Rovers along with their retinues of gunmen. The Jabbar faction alleged that Masood also appointed his relatives and friends to supervise the *Jaish's* mushrooming assets—seminaries, publications, offices and bungalows. His blatant favouritism and lavish lifestyle irked those who had spent grim years in Afghanistan and Kashmir, eventually making them to part their ways.

Having gone through many ups and downs in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks, it was in 2007 that the slowing down of the Indo-Pak peace process by the decision makers in New Delhi made the Musharraf regime to reactivate the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* - apparently to re-launch cross border offensives in 'Occupied' Jammu & Kashmir. According to the Pakistani intelligence circles, the *Jaish* was reorganized under the command of Mufti Abdul Rauf, the younger brother of Masood Azhar who had proved his abilities by carrying out some successful militant operation inside Jammu & Kashmir. Mufti Rauf was allowed to establish a transit camp in Rawalpindi to recruit those coming from southern Punjab and traveling to Kohat, a medium sized town in the central North West Frontier Province (NWFP) where a training camp had been established. It was decided that the Mufti would supervise the *Jaish* training camps as the acting *ameer* of the group while his elder brother – Maulana Masood Azhar – would keep managing the organizational affairs while remaining under ground.

In July 2005, the British intelligence agencies investigating the 7/7 (2005) suicide bombings in London informed their Pakistan counterparts that two of the four suicide bombers Shehzad Tanweer and Siddique Khan, had met Osama Nazir, a *Jaish-e-Mohammad* suicide trainer, in Faisalabad, a few months before the 7/7 attacks when they had visited Pakistan. Information provided by Osama Nazir after his arrest revealed that Shehzad Tanweer had stayed at another extremist *Sunni*

religious school, *Jamia Manzurul Islami* situated in the Cantonment area of Lahore, and being run by its principal, Pir Saifullah Khalid, who is considered close to Masood Azhar.

A year later, the *Jaish* once again became the focus of world attention in August 2006 after it transpired that Rashid Rauf, an alleged al-Qaeda member named as the main plotter of a terrorist plan to blow up US-bound British airliners with the help of liquid explosives, was a close relative of to Maulana Masood Azhar. The Pakistani authorities too had named Rashid Rauf as a key person in the bomb plan, saying there were strong indications of an al-Qaeda connection. He was accused of helping train plotters in the use of explosives in readiness for their attempt to commit mass murder in the sky. Rashid Rauf was arrested on August 9, 2007 from a *Jaish*-run religious seminary - *Madrassa Madina* - situated in the Model Town area of Bahawalpur, a couple of days before the British crackdown and arrests of the main plotters in London.

Information provided by the British intelligence to their Pakistani counterparts showed that Rauf was born in Mirpur and he went to England in 1981 when he was hardly one year old. He returned to Pakistan in 2002 while carrying dual nationality of Pakistan and Britain. The frequent use of text messages to Britain by Rashid Rauf, who left England after the April 2002 murder of his uncle Mohammed Saeed, actually led to his arrest. Rashid is also the brother of Tayab Rauf, one of the 22 suspects arrested from London by the British agencies in their August 7, 2006 swoop. However, on August 12, the British authorities repeated their claim that Rashid Rauf had a key operational role in the alleged plot and he should be extradited to Britain for further interrogations.

On August 17, 2007, a senior Pakistani official conceded that the British airport terror plot was sanctioned by al-Qaeda's No.2, Dr Ayman al Zawahri and that Rashid was the planner of the attacks. Subsequent investigations proved Rashid was the brother-in-law of one of Masood Azhar's younger brother, Mohammad Tahir, who runs a religious seminary. Approached in the aftermath of the arrest of Rashid Rauf, the father of Masood Azhar and Abdul Rauf, told media people in Bahawalpur on August 16, 2006 that Rashid Rauf was a member

of the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* but left the group to join its rivals who were more interested in promoting al-Qaeda's anti-Western agenda.

"He was a member of our group but later he deserted us and joined the *Jamaatul Furqaan*, led by a *Jaish* dissident, Maulana Abdul Jabbar," Hafiz Allah Bukhsh was quoted by Dawn as on August 16, 2006 having said at the *Jaish* headquarters in Bahawalpur. "Our cause is liberation of the Occupied Jammu Kashmir, while their main cause is Afghanistan. They are anti-America but we are not," Bukhsh added. However, on December 13, 2006, the terrorism charges on Rashid Rauf were dropped as the court ruled that there was no evidence that he was involved in planning any terrorist activity.

Two days later, on December 15, 2007, as pressure mounted from the British authorities for his extradition, Rashid Rauf escaped from the police custody in Rawalpindi under mysterious circumstances. An inquiry report disputed the claims of the Islamabad police that Rashid Rauf had escaped while he was being taken to the Adiala jail Rawalpindi and termed his mysterious disappearance story totally fictional and baseless. Subsequent reports said the escape pointed to a deal between the authorities in Islamabad and the *Jaish* leadership. Mufti Abdul Rauf was also named as one of the suspects who might have masterminded and facilitated Rashid Rauf's escape.

Mufti Rauf's name then came up during the July 2007 *Lal Masjid* crisis. Following media reports that a large number of the *Jaish* militants were present inside the *Lal Masjid* and *Jamia Hafsa* to repel any military operation, Rauf clarified that they were the 'disgruntled elements' of their group and he has already disowned them. He further announced to distance his outfit from the Ghazi brothers of the Red Mosque, adding that they have only brought huge embarrassment to Islamists, a dramatic U-turn that *Jaish* took on the second day of the operation – July 5, 2007. Rauf described the top clerics of the Red Mosque as 'lackeys' of the government besides holding them responsible for the killings that took place during exchange of fire before the bloody operation was launched. He also accused the government of patronizing the *Lal Masjid* clerics and said they accumulated heavy weapons with the connivance of authorities.

Mufti Rauf alleged that the government has been patronizing the likes of Ghazi brothers in order to distort the image of Islam and condemned the cowardly act of *burqa*-worn Maulana Abdul Aziz, who tried to flee from the Mosque before the Operation Silence was about to be launched by the security forces. The fact, however remains that the *Jaish* decided to withdraw its support to the fanatic clerics of the *Lal Masjid* after the Musharraf regime turned all its guns towards the Ghazi brothers. Hardly a week before the operation was launched, the *Jaish* had been reiterating its firm support to *Lal Masjid* act of *Shariah's* enforcement and said it had all the best wishes for them. President Musharraf too had claimed in June 2007 that over 200 *Jaish-e-Mohammad* men had joined the ranks of *Lal Masjid*.

Musharraf's statement prompted Maulana Masood Azhar to clarify the position of the his jehadi group in an article published [a few days before the *Lal Masjid* Operation] in "*Al Qalam*", a publication of the JEM. He wrote: "Now, there are hundreds of jehadi organisations and hundreds of *ameers*, most of whom are computer operators, who have become jihadis by watching CDs of jihad. They have received jehadi training through websites. They think that via the internet, they have become *ameers*. If they come across a gullible youth, they tie a bomb around his body and send him to jehadi battlefields. Some of the jihadis are in the business of drugs, human smuggling and kidnapping for ransom. Therefore, Jihad has become everybody's business. It is, therefore, difficult to control these jihadis".

As things stand, Mufti Abdul Rauf is stationed in the federal capital running the JeM while his elder brother Masood Azhar is based in the Bahawalpur district of Punjab which also houses the *Jaish* headquarters. A June 23, 2008 article in The News titled "*Another Lal Masjid*", gives a clear idea of Masood's present activities. The writer had returned to Bahawalpur after spending many years abroad and narrates the state of the present state of the *Jaish* affairs there: "Bahawalpur was always a laidback small town where everyone knew everyone else. Masood Azhar was a neighbour of my cousins and used to have a small house which wasn't even visible from the road. I remember when he was released. The BBC wanted to film his return, from the terrace of

my cousins' house, but they refused due to privacy concerns. Since then we heard little about him, in the news or in local gossip. In general, people didn't give him much credibility...The walls were filled with anti-West hate slogans, with "*Al-Jihad al-Qital*" (holy war, bloody battle) written everywhere around the central mosque in the city. This was not the Bahawalpur I knew. As we got closer to the mosque, I saw the adjacent ground filled with bearded men in white robes, with more of them reaching there in buses, chanting the slogans written all over the city. A number of men were uniformed, and they had closed the road to facilitate the movement of the buses into the place".

"The purpose of the conference was to distribute a new book of Masood Azhar, which had supposedly substantiated that the jihad these men thought they were preparing for was actually sanctioned by the verses of the Holy Quran, based on their strict politically-motivated interpretation. We reached the house of our family friends with mixed thoughts. Disturbed by these developments, I asked them what was going on in the city. They said it had been silently going on for a long time. Over the years, Maulana Masood Azhar had converted his small house into a multi-storied concrete compound housing 700 armed men, who freely did target practice there. All this was located in a central part of the city, ironically called Model Town. The police dared not touch these men, and instead of putting pressure on them to stop their militant activities, local politicians actually hired these men as bodyguards during the general elections".

"After leaving their house, as we got closer to my cousins' house, a strange tall building with the same white flags on top was visible from a distance. This was Masood Azhar's compound. A few blocks away from my cousins' house our car got stuck in a crowd of the same bearded men in white robes who flocked outside the compound and watched us suspiciously as we drove through them. For a moment, I felt like a stranger in my own hometown. Everyone at my cousins' house thought of all this as something normal and didn't seem to be bothered. Talking to people about this, I had some interesting conversations with some of the people who were involved in local politics and the internal politics of Islamabad. Their

understanding was that Maulana Masood Azhar was like Maulana Abdur Rashid Ghazi of the *Lal Masjid*".

The above narration shows that Maulana Masood Azhar might be down, but it is a bit early to say that he is out. One wonders as to why the Pakistani authorities have allowed a deadly militant organisation like the JeM to keep pursuing its jihadi agenda despite knowing fully well that it happens to be the pioneer of the suicide bombings in the region.

The Slayer from the Binori Mosque

The Most Wanted, not only for the weapon he wields, but for his mind, the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* chief, Maulana Masood Azhar, received his Islamic education at the *Jamia Islamia* (*Darul Ulloom Islamia*, Binori Town in Karachi), considered to be one of the largest and the most influential centre of *Deobandi* Islam in the Indo-Pak subcontinent which has long been the nerve centre of the infamous Mullah-Military enterprise in Pakistan.

Like many other seminaries, *Jamia Islamia* too has been a key component in the Pakistani jihadi infrastructure which has been churning out religious extremists since 1951. The *Jamia* has the distinction of having produced several leading jihadi leaders including the chief of the *Harkatul Mujahideen*, Maulana Fazlur Rahman Khalil, the chief of the *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* Qari Saifullah Akhtar and the late chief of the *Sipah-e-Sahaba* Pakistan, Maulana Azam Tariq. The *Jamia* was promoted during the dictatorial rule of General Ziaul Haq, who deemed it fit to make Maulana Yusuf Binori, the founder of the *Binori Mosque*, the chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology (IIC) in 1979, in the beginning of the Afghan jihad.

The *Jamia*, which imparts religious education to some 5000 students at a time, has led the anti-*Ahmadiya* and anti-*Shia* movements in Pakistan for the last 50 years. Curiously, a bulk of the students is not drawn from the Sindh province, where it is located, or even Punjab, which provides the ballast to Pakistan. A majority of the Binori students are Afghans and Pushto-speaking Pushtuns from the North West Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Smaller numbers come from Bangladesh, Africa, the Philippines and Malaysia. The *Jamia* has a large number of smaller affiliated madrassas in

Karachi and outside and is funded largely by *Deobandis* in Saudi Arabia, the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland.

The *Jamia Islamia*, which is often referred to as *Jamia Binoria*, is also accused of advancing the political-Islamic and geo strategic aims of the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment represented by the ISI. The *Jamia* aim in Jammu Kashmir is also linked to the greater Kashmir idea which rode on extremist militant groups like the *Harkatul Ansar* and its two reincarnations, the *Harkatul Mujahideen* and the *Harkatul Jehadul Islami*, and finally, the *Jaish-e-Mohammad*. After completing his education, Maulana Masood Azhar became a teacher at the institute for several years. At the age of 20, when most youth were plotting their professional future, Masood Azhar, deeply influenced by his teachers at the *Jamia*, went to Afghanistan to take part in a military training course, after which he participated in the last stage of the Afghan jihad against the Russian forces in Afghanistan.

Maulana Masood Azhar returned to Pakistan in mid-1989 and started writing Islamic books, the most known of which is "The Virtues of Jihad". Religious indoctrination from a young age and the fact that Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil, the chief of the HuM, spotted him at the *Jamia Islamia* - from where the organisation was recruiting cadres for Pakistan - ensured Azhar's entry into the battlefield of jihad. A few years later, Masood was elevated as the secretary general of the *Harkat*, and was dispatched to India for an important mission - to ensure that the Mujahideen belonging to the two separate groups of the *Harkatul Jehadul Islami* and the *Harkatul Mujahideen* merge under the new name of *Harkatul Ansar* and work under one umbrella.

However, the mission failed as the Maulana was arrested from Srinagar on February 1, 1994 along with his right hand jihadi comrade Sajjad Afghani after their car broke down and they were trying to hail an auto rickshaw to reach a nearby mosque to deliver Friday sermon. The arrest came as a big blow to the Pakistani intelligence establishment that had embarked on the new strategy of pushing foreign mercenaries into Jammu & Kashmir to give the militants a cutting edge. By that time, Masood Azhar was a recognised leader of the *Harkatul*

Mujahideen and regarded as the most promising militant commander produced by the *Jamia Binoria*. It was at the *Jamia* that Masood announced the formation of the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* to fight India, Israel and the US since anti-Americanism has also been a guiding principle of the *Jamia Islamia* ideology.

15

The Army of the Pure: Still Alive and Kicking

Literally meaning “Army of the Pure”, the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* (LeT), founded by Prof Hafiz Mohammad Saeed in 1991 at the Kunar province of Afghanistan, dreaded for its guerrilla attacks in Jammu & Kashmir and known for the infamous suicide attack on the Red Fort in New Delhi, has proved to be one of the most dangerous jihadi groups operating out of Pakistan and fighting the Indian security forces in Jammu & Kashmir.

The lethal *Lashkar* happens to be an *Ahle Hadith* (Wahabi) jihadi group which was born as an armed wing of *Markaz Dawatul Irshad* (MDI) or Centre for Proselytisation and Preaching. The MDI was set up in 1988 by three Islamic scholars – Prof Hafiz Mohammad Saeed and Zafar Iqbal, who were professors of Islamic studies at the University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore, and Dr Abdullah Azzam, a professor of the International Islamic University, Islamabad. Dr Azzam was also the ideologue for the Palestinian militant group, Hamas, besides being the religio-political mentor of al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

The western media reports describe the *Markaz-e-Toiba* (Holy Centre) compound of *Markaz Dawatul Irshad* at Muridke, 35-kilometres north of Lahore, as a symbol of President General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf's unfinished business where the *Lashkar* recruits allegedly undergo initial indoctrination before being despatched for military training to its training camps spread

across Pakistan, especially in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Spread over 200 acres the *Markaz-e-Toiba* complex at Muridke houses both teaching as well as residential facilities, complete with its own farms, mosques, fish-breeding ponds and stables. Bearded men with Kalashnikovs and camouflage jackets guard the entrance to *Markaz-e-Toiba*, which is surrounded by barbed wire and protected from view by tall trees. Over 3,000 students are presently enrolled there and the teachers insist that all of them are Pakistani nationals.

The education being imparted there - Islamic and Western - is from the primary to the university level for both men and women. Students are indoctrinated towards propagating Islam. The *Markaz* also has a modern-looking, computerised religious university, which has five related institutions. At least two dozen thoroughbred horses are used for training the MDI students between the ages of eight to twenty. Literally dressed in military uniforms, these students are imparted compulsory training in shooting and swimming. In fact, they are not allowed to cross the barbed periphery wire on the Line of Control until they are 'mature'. Photography of all living things which is anathema to the LeT founder Hafiz Saeed is strictly prohibited.

The *Markaz Dawa Wal Irshad* describes photo cameras, television sets and films as un-Islamic and its students carry out periodic campaigns for the public destruction of cameras and TVs. Visitors are frisked for cigarettes and any other addictive substances, which are banned in the complex. The Muridke complex is also not just restricted to the *Markaz Dawa Wal Irshad*. Around the complex, the organisation has bought land for supporters, who have built houses, shops more mosques and centres of Islamic learning. 'We want like-minded people to get together', says a resident. Evidently that is happening. The organisation has transformed the land between Lahore and Gujranwala cities [at Muridke] into an Islamic state that has banned music, television and smoking on its heavily guarded premises. Not even passing vehicles are allowed to play music which, the Hafiz Saeed believes, is strictly forbidden in Islam.

The *Markaz Dawa Wal Irshad* runs a huge network of social services, including 20 Islamic institutions, 140 secondary schools,

eight *madrassas* and a \$300,000-plus medical mission that includes mobile clinics, ambulance service and blood banks. The *Markaz* complex also has a garment factory, an iron foundry, a wood-works factory, a swimming pool and three residential colonies. So far, Rs 50 million had been spent on the *Markaz* projects. Where has the money come from? Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, whisper rumours. It is alleged that the Most Wanted FBI Saudi billionaire, a figure who has grown from being demonised by the West to being mythologised, rolled out a thick wad - Rs 10 million - for the construction of the *Markaz* complex. Bin Laden is even said to have financed Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, his low-key, comrade-in-arms Prof Zafar Iqbal, and a short-lived founder, Abdullah Azzam, to launch the *Markaz Dawa Wal Irshad*.

Abdullah Azzam was killed in a powerful car explosion in Peshawar a year after the MDI was launched. Prof. Zafar Iqbal, who used to head the Islamic Studies Centre at the government-run University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore, the same one where Saeed served for 22 years as a teacher, now looks after the *Markaz* affairs, being its vice-chancellor. Saeed, however, will not speak of bin Laden, even though he is an ardent supporter of the Taliban. He denies that *Markaz Dawa Wal Irshad* is a foreign-funded project. He says the funds came from a group of affluent traders who had offered money to buy cheap farm land near a village, Nangal Saada (Muridke), about one km from the main Grand Trunk (GT) Road. A Saudi trader, Ahmed, contributed Rs 10 million (the same figure as Osama's) while another, Saudi Sheikh, donated more millions for the construction of *Dawa Model School* inside the *Markaz* premises. 'Generous donations' were also received to build an industrial home for female students inside the Centre.

With the launching of the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* in 1991, several military training camps were set up in eastern Afghanistan provinces of Kanton and Paktia, both of which had a sizable number of *Ahle Hadith (Wahabi)* followers of Islam, with the aim of participating in the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Because the LeT joined the Afghan jihad at a period when it was winding down (the Soviets invaded in 1979), the group did not play a major part in the fight against the Soviet

Occupation forces, which pulled out in 1989. However, the participation of the *Lashkar* cadres in the Afghan jihad helped its leadership gain the trust of the Inter Services Intelligence. Kashmir insurgency beginning in 1989 came at an appropriate time to provide an active battleground for the *Lashkar* soldiers when its leadership was made to turn its attention from the squabble in Afghanistan and devote itself to the jihad in the state Jammu & Kashmir, which is where it gained fame.

The fruits of that devotion were significant: since its launch in 1991, the *Lashkar* today is considered to be the most effective jihadi group operating in Kashmir, primarily because of its extraordinary growth in size, resources and popularity. The outfit has over 3,000 offices across Pakistan; and over two dozen launching camps for the militants along the Line of Control (LoC). The jihadi network of the *Lashkar* is one of the largest, the most efficient, and also has greater independence than other militant groups since the *Markaz Dawat-e-Islami* has a Wahabi orientation and does not have to follow any of the four Muslim religious leaders or imams. On the other hand, three other important Pakistan-based jihadi organisations - the *Harkatul Mujahideen*, the *Hizbul Mujahideen*, and the *Jaish-e-Mohammed* - are *Deobandis* and follow the Imams.

The Indian authorities attribute most of the major terrorist strikes in India to the *Lashkar* which first came into prominence with its much-trumpeted infiltration into Jammu and Kashmir in 1993 in collaboration with the *Islami Inqilabi Mahaz*, a militant outfit based in the Poonch district. Much before that, in the year the *Markaz* was founded (1986), a special training camp in the Kunar province of Afghanistan was set up, reportedly in collaboration with the Afghan leader, Professor Abdul Rasool Sayyaf. The training camp was named *Masdak* - the Lion's dwelling. The Kunar camp took students coming out of the *Markaz* and trained them in military tactics. It served as a base to push thousands of committed youths to wage 'jihad' in the state of Jammu & Kashmir.

The ongoing *Lashkar* operations in the Valley were reportedly given form at the annual convention of the *Markaz* in November 1993, when the Professor announced that Kashmir was the gateway to the liberation of Indian Muslims. The *Lashkar*

had supplied cadre to the militant group, *Al-Barq*, earlier, but it launched its first independent operation in Jammu Kashmir on 5 February 1993, with 12 insurgents attacking the headquarters of the 11 Jammu & Kashmir Light Infantry at Balnoi in the Poonch district. Two soldiers and three *Lashkar-e-Toiba* insurgents were killed in the attack. Since then, the LeT has been held responsible for hundreds of deaths and a large number of communal massacres in the State. The *Lashkar* later shifted its militant operations from the Kashmir Valley to the Jammu region in 1997. Concomitantly, after 1997, there was a rise in militant activities all along the border districts of Jammu Kashmir, particularly in the districts of Poonch and Doda.

The *Lashkar-e-Toiba* is believed to be the only jehadi group operating from Azad Kashmir that still keeps a comparatively large group of activists at its Khairati Bagh camp in the Lipa Valley. Another camp is said to be functional at Nala Shui in Muzaffarabad from where young militants are launched after being given initial training at the JuD's Muridke headquarters in Punjab. Unlike the past strategy of launching large groups comprising of 25 to 50 militants on a regular basis from the camps located on the LoC, the *Lashkar* leadership has decided to train militants in limited numbers to launch smaller groups of not more than five to ten people, that too, at intervals. Compared to other groups in Jammu & Kashmir, the *Lashkar* has commanded significant attention primarily due to two reasons. Firstly, for its well planned and executed attacks on the Indian security force targets in J&K and secondly, for the dramatic massacres of non-Muslim civilians.

After the Kargil War of 1999, when Pakistani troops and militants, including those of the *Lashkar*, were forced to withdraw from peaks on the Indian side of the Line of Control, the LeT launched its suicide attacks strategy whereby small groups (2-5 members) of *fidayeen* (suicide squads) would storm a security force camp or base. In another frequently used strategy, groups of *Lashkar* insurgents, dressed in the Indian security forces fatigues, would arrive at remote hill villages, round up several Hindu or Sikh civilians, and massacre them. These two strategies have been designed to achieve maximum publicity and extract public allegiance, mainly out of fear. On December 8,

2001, two *Lashkar fidayeen* managed to penetrate inside a security force convoy and opened fire killing one security personnel. They were able to generate adequate confusion to escape from the convoy after the attack but were later killed in an encounter with another security forces unit. In some *fidayeen* attacks launched by the LeT, the terrorists entrenched themselves inside the camp, killing as many security forces personnel as they could, before they were themselves killed.

While the primary area of operations of the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* is Jammu and Kashmir, the outfit has been accused of carrying out terrorist attacks in other parts of India, including in New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Varanasi, Kolkata and Gujarat. The *Lashkar* has been able to network with several Islamist extremist organizations across India, especially in Jammu & Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat. The Indian authorities allege that the *Lashkar* is actively engaged in subversive activities in the States of Maharashtra, West Bengal, Bihar, Hyderabad, Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh at the instance of Pakistani establishment to expand the frontier of violence outside J&K by subverting fringe elements.

The *Lashkar* once again hit the international media headlines following allegations by the Mumbai police chief that the July 11, 2006 deadly Mumbai serial blasts that killed 200 people were conceived by the Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and executed through the *Lashkar*, with local assistance from the Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). The Mumbai Police Commissioner A.N. Roy, alleged that 15 persons had been arrested in connection with this case of which 12 were directly involved in the blasts. "A top LeT cadre, Azam Cheema, who reportedly runs a training camp at Bahawalpur in Pakistan, has been identified as the principal conspirator on the Mumbai serial blasts. Many of those arrested in connection with the Mumbai bombings had received training in the use of arms and explosives at Bahawalpur in Pakistan on more than one occasion", he said.

The police Commissioner added that the interrogation of two *Lashkar* militants has brought to light direct links between the ISI and the terror outfit, which strengthens the Indian case

that Islamabad was actively supporting terrorist activities in the country. "One of the arrested militants Abu Anaz has revealed he was the body guard of the *Lashkar's* second-in-command Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi and given detailed description about functioning of the terror outfit and the monthly meetings that take place between Pakistan Army officials and LeT leaders. Zakirur Rehman and some others of LeT used to meet Pakistani Army's Major Wajahat, Brigadier Riaz and Brigadier Haji every month in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani Kashmir", he added while narrating his findings.

In August 2006, almost a month after the Mumbai serial blasts, the authorities in Pakistan placed restrictions on the movement of Saeed, following reports that the American and the British investigators were trying to determine whether the Britons suspected of plotting to blow commercial airliners may have received money raised by his charity for the victims of the October 2005 quake relief. On August 14, 2006, Hafiz Saeed was put under house arrest in Lahore for a period of one month and the Islamic charity he runs was banned from all public activities for the time being. Although denied by the JuD spokesman, Yahya Mujahid, the American and the British media reported that the JuD might have provided the money that was to be used to buy plane tickets for the British suspects to conduct a practice run as well as the attacks themselves. The US State Department subsequently added to the Specially Designated Global Terrorist list the *Jamaatul Daawa* and its subsidiary -- *Idara Khidmat-e-Khalq* in a bid to checkmate the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* from operating under disguises.

The *Lashkar's* jehadi has repeatedly been articulated by its Pakistan-based leadership in public speeches. Thus, Nasar Javed, a trainer of LeT suicide attackers, delivering a speech after the evening prayer at the Quba Mosque in Islamabad on February 5, 2008, stated: "India is also afraid of jehad. India fears that if the *Mujahideen* liberated Kashmir through jehad, then, it will be very difficult to keep rest of the India under control. Jihad will spread from Kashmir to other parts of India. The Muslims will be ruling India again." A year earlier, addressing a huge gathering at the *Al Qudsia* Mosque at Lahore on February 5, 2007, Hafiz Saeed had declared that the "jehad in Kashmir will end when all the

Hindus will be destroyed in India... jihad has been ordained by Allah. It is not an order of a general that can be started one day and stopped the other day." Much earlier, during a three-day annual congregation of the members of the *Markaz* at Muridke near Lahore on February 6, 2000, Hafiz Saeed had declared that Jammu Kashmir was a "gateway to capture India" and that it was the aim of the *Markaz* and its military wing, the LeT, to engineer India's disintegration.

The *Lashkar* also focuses on conducting a war of nerves. This, according to Saeed, has so demoralised the Indian Army that it has ended up using heavy fire, destroying its own buildings and causing the deaths of its own men in misguided attacks. Analysts point to another factor behind the *Lashkar-e-Toiba's* success: the Punjabi base of the outfit. The LeT operatives mix easily with the local population of Jammu, who are linguistically allied to Punjab. Also, the *Lashkar* militants, unlike others, prefer to die in an encounter with security forces rather than get caught. For instance, 1997, the largest group of militants killed in clashes with the security forces belonged to the *Lashkar*. However, the LeT claims it can sustain such losses. About a hundred militants join the corps every month and a fresh batch of 'freedom fighters' queues up. The *Lashkar-e-Toiba* prefers not to reveal the exact number of militants it has currently deployed in Jammu and Kashmir.

What is known, however, is that the *Lashkar* recruits and trains many more men than it actually requires for fighting in Jammu and Kashmir at any given time. Compared to other similar organisations, the *Lashkar* has proved to be a great success. Since its inception, it has managed to attract thousands of committed young men to its fold. The driving force behind its success in recruitment is deceptively single. It uses its impressive organisational network which includes schools, social service groups and religious publications, to create a passion for jihad. But its militants are not sent to the war just to die as martyrs; they are trained to kill: trained in the use of infantry tactics and small arms - from handguns to assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers; trained in shoulder-fired Surface to Air Missiles (SAMs) like the Stingers; trained through a 21-day basic course called *Daura Aaam*; and a three-month advanced

course called *Daura Khaas* geared towards guerrilla warfare which equips students for the use of arms and ammunition, and provided ambush and survival techniques. The last page in the international edition of the *Lashkar-e-Toiba's* Voice of Islam, even teaches readers how to use swords, spears and daggers; how to set up an ambush and lay siege to camps and cantonments; and the rudiments of attacking the forces of 'disbelievers'. 'Learn all these things through the Holy Quran,' says the Voice of Islam, in its recruitment pitch for jihad.

The *Markaz* and the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* are extremely secretive organisations and take great care to conceal the identities of their office-bearers. For this purpose, they emulate the Palestinian organisations in the use of '*Kuniat*', which are Arabic pseudonyms adopted from the '*Kuniat*' of the Companions of the Prophet and later Islamic heroes. The followers of the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* come from all walks of life, from defence and nuclear establishments to industrial labour. There are some distinguishing characteristics of the *Lashkar* militants. They neither shave, nor have a haircut, allowing their beards and hair to grow long. They are taught to employ extremely cruel methods such as beheading victims who owe allegiance to the security forces and are non-Muslim. Like fighters of many other jihadi groups, they generally wear *shalwars* that do not cover the ankles.

The *Lashkar* is never short of manpower or resources because its affluent patrons, both internal and external, fund it generously despite a so-called ban imposed on fund collections by the Musharraf regime after the 9/11 terror attacks. That is because the *Lashkar* has innovated quickly. 'It costs millions to make a tank but only a few rupees to defend against it,' says an advertisement for the *Lashkar*, asking Muslims to pay for the *mujahideen* fighting in 'Held Kashmir'. The advertisement concludes with a borrowed reminder: 'If you are not part of the solution,' it says, 'you are part of the problem.' Even by Pakistani standards, the advertisement is direct. While many readers may have simply turned the page, a sizable number have not. Funding to the *Lashkar* has increased, mostly from Pakistanis, largely businessmen and those settled abroad, especially after

the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, almost a month after the 9/11 attacks.

In December 2001, the US State Department designated the LeT a foreign terrorist organization, prompting its most trusted ally Musharraf to ban the group and freeze its assets. The Musharraf regime declared the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* a terrorist organisation on January 13, 2002 following the attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001. The *Lashkar* subsequently renamed itself *Jamaatul Daawa* (JuD) in a bid to separate its military actions in Indian Kashmir from its religious undertakings in Pakistan. A few months after the 9/11 terror attacks, while addressing a press conference in Lahore on December 24, 2001, Hafiz Saeed announced his resignation and the appointment of his right hand man, Maulana Abdul Wahid Kashmiri, as the new chief of the *Lashkar*. The new Council of the LeT comprised Maulana Abdul Wahid Kashmiri (the Supreme Leader) with Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi as the Supreme Commander of the Jammu & Kashmir operations.

During the same news briefing, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed said that his stepping down was aimed at countering strong Indian propaganda that Pakistan had been sponsoring the jihad in the Kashmir Valley, though he added, in the same breath, that his departure from the high office of *ameer* of the *Lashkar* was not due to any internal or external pressures, be it Islamabad or Washington. It may be recalled that Hafiz Saeed is one of the 20 most wanted men by India whose arrest and extradition request on terrorism charges is already pending with Islamabad. Having stepped down as the LeT chief, Hafiz Saeed announced that he would now lead an Islamic charity, *Jamaatul Daawa* (JuD, or Party of the Calling), which is thought to be a front for the now proscribed armed group.

A week later, however, [on December 31, 2001], Hafiz Saeed was detained, on flimsy charges of making inflammatory speeches and inciting people to violate law and order. But according to *Jehad Times*, "Hafiz Sahib knew that he was to be arrested and had reorganised outfit in anticipation". Subsequent news reports in the American media had alleged that Hafiz Saeed was closely associated with bin Laden's "International Islamic Front for Jihad against the United States and Israel". The

Pakistan government had strongly refuted these reports. The Lahore High Court finally let off Saeed, who remained in comfortable confinement, on November 19, 2002. Having stepped down as the *Lashkar* chief, Saeed had to look for such a role for *Jamaatul Dawa* that could be more acceptable for the world.

That was the time Saeed decided to launch the *Tulaba Jamaatul Daawa* (TJD), the student wing of the JuD, which is presently working aggressively across Pakistan to take its mission to youngsters. The educational curriculum of the JuD-run schools and colleges are guided by Saeed's philosophy that to achieve jehad, his students must not only imbibe the great values of Islamic principles but also should be adept in science and technology. These views are propagated, with no less clarity and effect, through scores of the group's publications, including a multi-lingual (Urdu, Persian and English) website - accessible at www.jamatuddawa.org and www.jamatdawa.org, an Urdu monthly journal, *Al Dawa*, which has a circulation of 80,000, an Urdu weekly, *Ghazwa*, a children's monthly, *Nanhe Mujahid* and an English monthly, *Voice of Islam*.

The JuD survived a number of restrictions and threats from the Pakistani authorities in the next couple of years mainly because of the fact that it had dissociated itself from the *Lashkar-e-Toiba*. In a bid to prove that the Kashmir insurgency was an indigenous freedom struggle - the *Lashkar* hierarchy had to announce in 2002 that it was formally shifting its base from Pakistan to 'Indian Held Kashmir.' The JuD further chose to camouflage its jehadi agenda by giving an impression that it was concentrating more on extending the invitation of Islam. According to Hafiz Saeed's close associates, the cautions exercised by him helped their group survive a fresh ban imposed by the Musharraf regime on several other extremist organisations in November 2003.

Elaborating on the establishment's continuous love for Hafiz Saeed, the intelligence sources say the JuD chief is more amenable to the Inter Services Intelligence's control than the leader of any other jehadi outfit as Hafiz Sahib could readily agree to wage a 'controlled jehad' in the Kashmir Valley whenever asked to do so. Even otherwise, its militant wing - the

Lashkar - was perceived to be more dedicated to the cause of Kashmir liberation and hence more useful, given the fact that it had the largest Pakistani component when compared to many other jihadi cadres. The rise of the *Lashkar* in the establishment's priorities is also attributed to its Punjabi base, which helps easy mixing of its militants with the local population of Jammu, linguistically allied to Punjab.

Interestingly, despite being declared a terrorist outfit by the US State Department and placed on the terror watch list of the Pakistani government, the *Jamaatul Daawa* has been enjoying considerable freedom to raise funds and recruit cadre. Despite a government interdiction, banners can easily be seen in the urban and rural areas of the Punjab, urging young boys to enroll themselves with *Jamaatul Daawa* and *Lashkar-e-Toiba* for waging jihad against infidels. The banners usually carry the telephone numbers of the area offices so that the young men interested in military training can contact the jihadi group. Similarly, the *Lashkar* and the *Dawa* activists can be seen outside mosques in the rural areas distributing pamphlets and periodicals preaching the virtues of jihad in Kashmir, Palestine, Chechnya, Kosovo and Eritrea besides vowing that it would plant the flag of Islam in Washington, Tel Aviv and New Delhi. The *Lashkar* leadership describes the Hindus and Jews as the main enemies of Islam while claiming India and Israel to be the main enemies of Pakistan.

The donation boxes of the *Lashkar* and the *Jamaat* that had disappeared soon after the 9/11 attacks and a subsequent government swoop against the militant outfits, have reappeared on public places as well as mosques across Pakistan. However, most of the JuD funds still come in the form of anonymous donations being sent directly to its bank accounts from various parts of the world. The rapidly growing *Jamaatul Dawa* and its leadership even raise funds on the internet. Some insiders believe that the *Jamaat* has raised so much money, mostly from sympathetic *Wahabis* in Saudi Arabia that it now plans to open its own bank. The insiders say the JuD top notches are snapping up properties across Pakistan. "Some recent real estate purchases by the *Jamaat* in the outskirts of Lahore amount to about Rs 300 million. Similarly, the JuD has bought four plots of land in

Hyderabad division [of Sindh] and six others in various Sindh districts. The total price tag is about Rs. 250 million," they added.

Meanwhile, the kid's glove approach of the Pakistani establishment towards Hafiz Saeed can be gauged from the freedom with which he leads Friday prayers at the Lahore mosque where he exhorts his followers to take up the path of jihad against India and the United States with renewed vigour. Not only that he is allowed to move freely, he is free to host parties for political leaders and hold conferences to promote the cause of jihad. For instance, on February 5, 2008, addressing thousands of youngsters at the 'Kashmir Solidarity Conference' in Lahore, Hafiz Saeed said the time was ripe to take the war onto the Indian soil for liberating Jammu & Kashmir. "Washington and New Delhi are already engaged in a proxy war against Pakistan and it is high time Islamabad declare jihad against them to protect the security and integrity of Pakistan."

In the first week of August 2008, international media reported that the July 7, 2008 suicide bombing outside the Indian embassy in Kabul [that killed 40 people including a serving Brigadier of the Indian Army] was masterminded by the Inter-Service Intelligence. These reports stated that the suicide bomber who carried out the deadly attack was 22-year-old Hamza Shakoor, a Punjabi activist of the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* who had been recruited by the Gujranwala chapter of the *Jamaat-ul Daawa* as a jihadi operative in 2006 and was then chosen for suicide training in February 2008.

International media reports suggest that the focus of the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* has now expanded beyond India. Inspired by al-Qaeda in large measure, the *Lashkar* today sees itself as a saviour of Islam. Western counter-terrorism investigators believe the LeT is evolving into a global exporter of terror. Once focused narrowly on the conflict in Kashmir, they say, it has opened its training camps to foreigners in the past few years. These investigators say Afghanistan may be off-limits to Western Muslims' yearning for jihad, but camps still operate in Pakistan and their graduates are proving troublesome for the West. Following the August 2006 unearthing of a plot to blow up US-bound trans-Atlantic airliners taking off from London, the US

and British intelligences agencies had expressed apprehensions that the Saeed-led *Jamaatul Daawa*, which is also active in the mosques of Britain's largest cities, might have provided the money that was to be used to buy plane tickets for militants to bomb several US-bound passenger jets from Britain.

After the October 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, the JuD raised funds in British Pakistani areas in London, Birmingham and Manchester. The group also urged British people of Pakistani origin to go to the region to help in the relief efforts, and hundreds did. The British and American intelligence agencies had claimed that five million British pounds or \$10 million was transferred to Pakistan for the earthquake victims, but that less than half was used for relief operations, adding that if they had failed to foil the trans-Atlantic terror plot, the world may have witnessed the worst terrorist attacks ever, causing even more carnage than 9/11 or the 7/7 events. They had pointed out the pertinent fact that from the July 7, 2005 bombings in London to the Virginia Jihad Network in the United States and an Australian cell broken up by police in 2007, a common denominator has been the *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, which has spread its wings from Pakistan to Jammu & Kashmir, India, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Chechnya, Algeria, Egypt and Iraq.

The tale of the lethal *Lashkar* expanding from a home-grown Pakistani jihadi group focused on waging 'jihad' in Jammu & Kashmir into a possible multinational terror network points out the danger in allowing authoritarian dictatorial regimes, like that of General Musharraf, to keep making distinctions between the freedom fighters in Jammu & Kashmir and the terrorists elsewhere.

The Professor's Crumbling Empire

Currently though, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed appears to be fighting for his political survival after a group of disgruntled *Jamaatul Dawa* leaders decided to revolt against his leadership. According to well-placed *Jamaat* insiders, some of the rebel members of the splinter group, largely consisting of *Lashkar-e-Toiba* had even taken an oath to assassinate Saeed, who they accuse of nepotism, diverting the party from its original objectives and misuse of resources.

The differences between the two groups are serious and are likely to become more so when the question of division of assets arises. This is why some press reports insist Saeed is fighting for more than just political survival. The Professor first came under fire from his close associates in December 2001, when he renamed *Markaz Dawa Wal Irshad* as *Jamaatul Daawa* and separated the LeT's infrastructure from the JuD. Many of his colleagues, including the chief operational commander of the *Lashkar* Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, disapproved of the decision, which was meant to put the *Jamaat* in control of all funds collected locally and abroad. According to a July 18, 2004 report of *Daily Times*, the dissenters within *Jamaatul Dawa* and LeT felt that as donations were collected in the name of jihad and the mujahideen, the leadership of *Jamaatul Dawa* had no right to the money as it was only a preaching organization.

As Saeed failed to satisfy Lakhvi and his associates, they subsequently decided to launch *Khairun Naas* (KuN), principally comprising *Lashkar* commanders and fighters. According to a close associate of Lakhvi, *Khairun Naas* and the LeT are basically the same, but as LeT has been banned in Pakistan, the new group was named *Khairun Naas*. He claimed that the *Jamaatul Dawa* headquarters in Muridke and the group's assets in Azad Kashmir were under the control of *Khairun Naas*. 'All the *Al-Dawa* model schools, seminaries, hospitals, health centres, and other such assets in the Sindh province are also under *Khairun Naas*' control because the heads of these institutions are siding with us,' he added. *Khairun Naas* leaders were also annoyed at Saeed's second marriage to a fallen comrade's 28-year old widow.

On the other hand, however, the Professor's close associates claim he still enjoys the support of some leading *Jamaatul Dawa* leaders including Maulana Abdul Rehman Makki and Maulana Saifullah Kasuri. They insist that the *Khairun Naas* had been established by the Pakistani intelligence agencies to weaken the jihadi elements in Kashmir. "Hafiz Saeed was under tremendous pressure from the agencies not to preach jihad any more and to limit his activities in Kashmir", said one of his close comrades. As things stand, in a bid to counter the newly launched *Khairun Naas*, Hafiz Saeed and a coterie of his trusted

aides are spending much of their time in Dewal Sharif near Muzaffarabad to recruit an increasing number of militants. The Professor's topmost priority is to form a new cadre of highly trained militants, not only for militancy in Kashmir, but also to counter the might of his former comrades from *Lashkar-e-Toiba*.

Professor Turned Aggressor

Professor Mohammad Saeed, who likes to give the impression of a scholarly man, is much more than that. Outwardly a simple Punjabi, who speaks in the tongue of the region, he has broken a 60 year-old tradition: before him, the Pashtuns always led the jihad against India. Now, the *Lashkar's* ranks have just a few Pashtuns and even fewer Kashmiris. At first sight, Saeed is an academician - jovial man who wears an easy smile on his face and, invariably, a Turkish cap on his head . . . a *shalwar kameez*-clad man, thoroughly Eastern in dress and habit, who is friendly and humble towards those who listen carefully to him . . . probably a person whose only introduction to cosmetics has been the *henna* that is regularly applied to his long beard - a regular feature on a regular face in this part of the world.

At first sight - it is a face that hardly begs for the camera. Look closer - it is a face that shies away from cameras as a rule. It has good reason to: Islam, the much un-photographed man says, forbids the capture of human images. Human lives, however, are another matter. The *Lashkar* is the Professor's brainchild, crafted through an interpretation of militant Islam. For him, killing infidels is a pious man's obligation: it is his duty 'to destroy the forces of evil and disbelief'. And the Professor is a very pious man. His kind of piety has also given him dubious distinctions.

The Professor's parents were religious-minded and his mother used to teach the Holy Quran to her seven children, five of whom are still alive. He was a good learner, and memorised the Quran. His favourite verse is: *Wajahidu Fee Sabilallah*: Wage a holy war in the name of God Almighty. In college, the Professor furthered his religious interests. After graduating from the Government College at Sargodha, he went to Saudi Arabia for a Masters in Islamic Studies and in Arabic Lexicon from King Saud University, Riyadh. He frequently met religious scholars and even received special religious instruction. Indeed, his first

job in Pakistan was as a research officer for the Islamic Ideological Council and his last job was with the University of Engineering and Technology in Lahore from where he got premature retirement as a professor of Islamic Studies at the age of 55, to fully devote himself to his organisation.

Though Hafiz Saeed cultivates simplicity, he always moves under tight security due to safety concerns. His preferred vehicle is the hardy Land Cruiser. The Professor comes from a close-knit family. He is married to the daughter of his maternal uncle, Hafiz Mohammad Abdullah Bahawalpuri, a known religious leader and renowned *Ahle Hadith* scholar. But he heads a very small family unit: one son and one daughter. Three members from among his widely dispersed family have been drawn into the organisation's ranks. His only son, the thirty-three-year-old Talha, looks after the affairs of the *Lashkar* at its base camp in Muzaffarabad, the capital of the Pakistan administered Kashmir. His brother-in-law, Abdul Rehman Makki, is his close partner and holds an important position in the *Markaz* at Muridke. Makki spent many years in Saudi Arabia before settling down in Pakistan. The Professor's son-in-law Khalid Waleed is also associated with the *Lashkar's* organisational set-up in Lahore.

Interestingly, three of the Saeed's real brothers – Hafiz Mohammad Hamid, Hafiz Mohammad Masood and Hafiz Mohammad Hannan – used to live in the United States till June 2007, running three separate Islamic centres in Massachusetts as prayer leaders. However, on June 4, 2007, Hafiz Mohammad Hamid, who was being tried by a US federal immigration court on charges of committing immigration irregularities, finally lost his case and was ordered to leave the US along with his family. The US immigration authorities had arrested on November 15, 2006 all the three Boston-based prayer leaders – Hafiz Hamid, Hafiz Masood and Hafiz Hannan as part of a wide swoop carried out by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in connection with an investigation into a specific visa fraud scheme that was designed to help large numbers of illegal aliens, primarily from Pakistan, fraudulently obtain religious worker visas to enter or remain in the United States.

Hafiz Masood was a prayer leader at the Islamic Centre of New England, Sharon, Massachusetts, Hafiz Hannan was an

Imam at the Islamic Society of Greater Lowell, Massachusetts while Hafiz Hamid was a prayer leader at the Islamic Society of Greater Worcester, Massachusetts. According to the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement findings, the three came to the United States in 1988 on a student exchange visa to Boston University and studied there till 1990, but stayed on, violating his visa status. Although the three were released on bail, they were facing legal proceedings especially after their family relations with the *Lashkar* chief Hafiz Saeed had been confirmed. Interestingly, Hafiz Hamid lost his case despite the fact that he had disowned his real brother Hafiz Saeed before the American court and sought asylum in the United States. His other brothers, Hafiz Masood and Hafiz Hannan, are also facing deportation proceedings. However, as far as Hafiz Mohammad Saeed is concerned, he has never traveled to the United States or set foot anywhere in the West. And unlike most fundamentalists, he does not express deep hatred for it.

16

Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar: The Most Wanted Militant Don

Few have heard of Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar, despite his status as a billionaire gangster, an alleged global terrorist and an Islamic extremist who is currently on the most wanted list of Interpol for organised crime and counterfeiting and ranks No. 4 on the Forbes' World's Top 10 most dreaded criminals list 2008. Accused of heading a vast and sprawling illegal empire, his name has become a byword in political, business and law enforcement circles. An impoverished street tough from Mumbai who grew up to possess international influence, Dawood Ibrahim formed the infamous "D-Company", one of the most feared international crime organisations in the world.

A colourful mobster with powerful friends ranging from Bollywood movie stars to members of Pakistan's intelligence establishment, his alleged crimes include murder, kidnapping, drug-smuggling as well as trafficking in nuclear secrets. The underworld don is also accused of having masterminded the March 12, 1993 Mumbai serial blasts, at the behest of the Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence, when twelve car-bombs killed almost 300 innocent people and injured over a thousand more. Until the 9/11 terror attacks, the Mumbai serial bombing was the single most destructive terrorist act committed in modern history. Dawood later absconded from India and now, according to the Indian government, is hiding in Pakistan, which Islamabad denies. The bombings were believed to be carried out

in revenge for the deaths of hundreds of Muslims in riots in 1992 blamed on the right-wing Hindu Shiv Senha party.

Dawood Ibrahim is also suspected to have connections with jihadi groups like the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* (LeT), and was linked to the financing of terrorist attacks in Gujarat in 2002. As the global consensus against terrorism grew post-9/11, in October 2003, the US State Department declared Dawood Ibrahim a specially designated global terrorist with al-Qaeda links. The US decision created ripples in the Pakistani intelligence circles which had cared little about the security implications of harbouring a mafia don wanted by an ever-hostile neighbour. Not only did the US action change the complexion of its relationship with India, but it also brought Washington into conflict with Islamabad, its ally in the war against terror, for the latter's alleged covert support to terrorists.

Much to Islamabad's embarrassment, the US Treasury Department in its reasons for naming Dawood in the list of the world's worst terrorists, cited intelligence reports of his connection with al-Qaeda and *Lashkar-e-Toiba*. The fact sheet on Dawood placed on the Treasury Department's website states: 'Dawood Ibrahim, son of a police constable, has financially supported Islamic militant groups working against India such as *Lashkar-e-Toiba*. Information as recent as Fall 2002 indicates that Ibrahim had been helping finance terrorist attacks in the Indian state of Gujarat by *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, the armed wing of *Markaz Dawa Wal Irshad* - an anti-US Sunni missionary organization, formed in 1989.'

According to media reports, soon after India's then deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani returned from his US visit in June 2003, New Delhi received information about Dawood Ibrahim's alleged links with LeT and the Taliban, and through the latter, to al-Qaeda. On his June 2003 trip to Washington, Advani had told US leaders that India needed a visible, non-reversible action from Pakistan to demonstrate its sincerity in curbing terrorism, and what could be a more visible action than handing over Dawood Ibrahim and others from the list of twenty most wanted terrorists who according to India, are based in Pakistan. This list was handed over to Pakistan after the December 2002 attack on the Indian parliament.

Advani told the American leaders, 'the name Dawood Ibrahim had the same kind of resonance in India as the name Osama bin Laden had in America.' US leaders were also told that any movement on the 'most wanted' list could completely change the dynamics in the region. In early 2002, Islamabad was repeatedly asked to hand over those named in the list, but it stonewalled, predictably rubbishing media and intelligence claims of Dawood Ibrahim residing in Pakistan. Among other things, India provided details of the 1993 Interpol red corner notice (A 135/4-1993) on Dawood and of the Pakistani passport issued to him on August 12, 1991.

Curiously, when the US Treasury Department terrorist listing was made public, it mentioned Dawood's passport number as G 869537; the number New Delhi had provided was G 866537. There was also a discrepancy in Dawood's telephone numbers: the American list said the number was 021-5892038; the numbers provided by India were 021-7278866 and 7272887. Though the US treasury did not list Dawood's address, his passport mentions his permanent residence as: 6/A *Khayaban Tanzeem*, Phase 5, Defence Housing Area, Karachi. It is a posh Karachi address where retired army officials live and it underscores the intimate links between Dawood and the establishment there. These discrepancies in the US Treasury Department listing perhaps enabled Islamabad to claim that it had checked out the details but that they did not tally with their records. Indian officials, however, say the discrepancies were an error and would presumably be rectified by the US.

Obviously, it was not just Advani's proddings that pushed the US into moving against Dawood Ibrahim. The latter had already crossed Washington's path during the investigations into the massive bomb blasts in Riyadh on the eve of the then Secretary of State Colin Powell's visit there in May 2004. American sleuths were tracking *hawala* or money laundering operations, so it is not surprising that Dawood's name cropped up, considering the control he exercises in the region.

American investigations in Riyadh, to begin with, focused the spotlight on one of Dawood's shadowy henchmen, Saud Memon. Otherwise known as a wealthy Karachi garment exporter, it was Memon who, in January 2002, drove Daniel

Pearl into a compound that he owned. It was here that Pearl was murdered. Memon subsequently disappeared from Karachi. Meanwhile, in June 2003, when Musharraf was in the US, the FBI nabbed eight suspected LeT operatives in the US. Charged with stockpiling weapons and waging war against India, these eight activists had apparently received arms training in Pakistan and some of them had even seen action in Kashmir. A set of official documents released by the FBI in June 2003 in Washington stated that some of those arrested had even fought against Indian troops in Kashmir and were being funded by the Dawood syndicate to conduct terrorist activity in the Indian state of Gujarat. The documents disclosed that one of the arrested men was a Pakistani citizen working as an electrical engineer in the US. FBI action subsequently led to more arrests in several other American states.

Several Pakistani and Western writers, including the slain American journalist Daniel Pearl, attempted to write about Dawood Ibrahim, but they were made to repent their decision. Author Gilbert King has attempted to reveal the secrets of Dawood's life in his book entitled '*The Most Dangerous Man In The World*.' After his expulsion from the UAE, says the book, no country other than Pakistan was willing to accord him asylum. 'But his power and capability in the underworld remain undiminished; he can still do what he wants,' the author claims.

The book also paints a disturbing picture of Pakistan's ISI and its involvement with Dawood Ibrahim. The author believes that Dawood Ibrahim is as dangerous as Osama bin Laden, though few in the West know of him. The book tries to connect the Karachi killing of US journalist Daniel Pearl to Dawood. According to King, the journalist was trying to ferret out information about Dawood and 'Mr Ibrahim was alarmed and had Mr Pearl kidnapped and killed.' However, no one had so far linked the Pearl murder to Dawood. As for the Mumbai don's future, the author says that for now he is safe in Pakistan but he could be affected on account of the close cooperation between the US and Pakistan in the war against terrorism.

According to the US Treasury Department's fact sheet: 'Ibrahim's syndicate is involved in large-scale shipment of narcotics in the United Kingdom and Western Europe. Its

smuggling routes from South Asia, the Middle East and Africa are shared with Osama bin Laden and his terror network. A financial arrangement was also brokered to facilitate bin Laden's use of these routes. In the 1990s, Ibrahim traveled to Afghanistan under the protection of the Taliban.' During his much trumpeted 2001 Agra visit, Musharraf had vehemently denied that Dawood had taken refuge in Pakistan, though the Vajpayee administration believed otherwise.

The truth is Pervez Musharraf was right in his claim because Dawood had left Pakistan in early July 2001, before Musharraf's trip to India. According to the FBI's investigations, the mafia don had left on a fake Pakistani passport for Singapore and then gone on to Hong Kong. He returned to Karachi from Dubai later in July, but only after getting clearance from Islamabad. Taking strong exception to the US observations that Dawood, holding a Pakistani passport, was hiding in Pakistan, the foreign office spokesman in Islamabad said the US had been asked to rectify its mistake. 'Dawood Ibrahim is not in Pakistan. I would like to point out here that we do not have any Indian suspects on our soil. Second, India has not provided any evidence or proof of their presence on Pakistani soil', the spokesman added.

The Don in the Dock

From Mumbai to Dubai to Kuala Lumpur to Karachi, the stories associated with Dawood Ibrahim and his war with his underworld rivals can beat the best Bollywood thrillers. It is the nature of the crimes attributed to Dawood that place him at the top of India's most wanted wish list. Dawood figures in a list of twenty fugitives that India wants Pakistan to hand over and is suspected to be the prime player used by the Pakistani intelligence to foment cross-border terrorism in India.

Since Dawood Ibrahim's branding as a global terrorist by the United Nations, the Pakistani intelligence establishment has been under intense pressure and feels extremely uneasy at persistent media reports about his presence in Pakistan. It was in September 2000, that *Monthly Newsline* ran for the first time a detailed story claiming that Dawood was, indeed in Karachi and under the protection of the ISI. The cover story drew an extremely harsh reaction from the Pakistani authorities. During a

meeting with the editors of several Pakistani newspapers after the story was published, Musharraf himself described it as an 'indiscretion that had seriously hurt Pakistan's national interest'.

The *Newsline* report was followed by yet another cover story a few months later carried by Indian Weekly Outlook in its Nov 20, 2002 issue and titled "Donning a Monarchy". The report stated: "Dawood Ibrahim has a passion for beautiful girls, designer clothes, expensive watches, *nehari* (hoof soup), *biryani* and spicy food like *aaloo chana* and *pani puri*. He is a moderate drinker. Favourite poison - Johnny Walker Black Label. Though said to keep his cool, his colleagues (who always address him as *Bhai* and *Je Bhai*) never question his decisions. But they avoid him when he is in a bad mood. In such a mood, he can simply ask to kill some person or the other. It is after his evening round of meetings which end at 8 pm that Dawood and associates, under heavy armed escort, head for his old house in the Defence Officers Housing Authority in Karachi. Dawood's vehicle, often a Mercedes, is usually in the middle of the cavalcade and is escorted by at least 15 armed guards in two four-wheel-drive vehicles".

According to one story doing the rounds in the Pakistani intelligence circles, Dawood was drawn into the communal infighting that swept India after Hindu zealots pulled down the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992. Mumbai was badly hit by communal rioting and hundreds of Muslims were butchered in the city. It is not clear why Dawood chose to retaliate on behalf of the Mumbai Muslims (the Indians allege he followed instructions from the ISI while the Pakistanis feel his motivation was primarily religious) but the CBI regards him as the mastermind behind the subsequent Mumbai bombings.

The story the Indian intelligence circles has spun regarding Dawood's alleged connections with the Pakistani intelligence has all the elements of a thriller. The CBI claims it learnt of Dawood's alleged involvement in anti-India espionage while investigating the Mumbai blasts. According to the CBI, the perpetrators went to Dubai using their Indian passports where Dawood allegedly provided them with Pakistani visas on plain pieces of paper so that their passports would not carry any records of their entry into Pakistan. They landed in Karachi and

were taken to a training camp in the NWFP. The CBI concludes that they were sent back to Mumbai after being trained in the use of explosives by the now defunct *Harkatul Ansar*.

According to the Indian government's claim, shortly after Dawood left Dubai for Karachi in the wake of the 1993 Mumbai bombings, he was issued a Pakistani passport backdated to 12 August 1991. Soon afterwards, he moved into a 6,000 square yard house in Karachi. He later smuggled his family, comprising his wife, four daughters and a son, certain close associates, and their family members out of Mumbai. While in Karachi, Dawood, then known as David or Bhai (brother), came in contact with members of the former Mumbai community (Memons, Kathiawaris, Gujratis and Kokanis) who had settled in the port city before and after the partition of India in 1947. They introduced him to some business-cum-religious-cum-political figures, such as Haji Hanif Tayyab, a religious leader of the *Sunni* sect, known for his *Barelvi* leanings.

The *Barelvi* sect is diametrically different from the *Wahabi* (*Salafi*) and *Deobandi* schools of thought that characterize religious militancy. The *Barelvi* school places emphasis on paying respect to tombs and shrines, and it believes that the bodies in shrines can bestow blessings on those who visit them. The *Barelvi* school does not deal much with the issues of vice and virtue, and *jihad* has never been a part of this sect. Conversely, the *Wahabi* and *Deobandi* schools do not believe in shrines, indeed, they would like to see them all demolished, and they preach that only Allah can bestow blessings if one prays to him. They are also very strict on matters of vice and virtue, and *jihad* is one of the most emphasized chapters of their teachings.

Interestingly, it is said that when Maulana Masood Azhar, the founder *ameer* of the banned pro-Taliban militant *Sunni Deobandi* *jehadi* group *Jaish-e-Mohammad* was detained in India, the ISI people asked Dawood Ibrahim to use his contacts to have him released. However, his straight response had been: 'Impossible, he is a *Deobandi*'. Being a *Barelvi*, Dawood buried one of his daughters [who had died of malaria while in Karachi] in the premises of the Abdullah Shah Ghazi's shrine in the port city, which is situated close to the Moin Palace, where Dawood used to live before 9/11. However, the strange thing is that he

the D-Company boss is considered close to the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* leadership, which is even more extremist compared to the *Deobandis*. It does not even accept clean-shaven people into its organization. However, as a matter of fact, the *Lashkar*-Dawood nexus is purely a tactical thing, orchestrated by the intelligence agencies, which has nothing to do with the sectarian leanings.

Born on December 31, 1955, Dawood Ibrahim is the son of a former criminal investigation department *havaladar*, Ibrahim Kaskar. The collapse of the Mumbai textile industry in the 1980s and the urban despair that it caused provided the backdrop for Dawood Ibrahim's spectacular rise to riches. After falling out with Amirzada Pathan and his brother Alamzeb Pathan, two major figures in Mumbai's underworld associated with the Karim Lala gang, Dawood set out on his own. In 1981, his elder brother Sabir was shot dead by the Pathan brothers. Dawood Ibrahim promptly had Amirzada assassinated to avenge the murder of his brother. In 1984, under pressure from both the police and Karim Lala's gang, Dawood moved to Dubai. However, his right hand man Chhota Shakeel stayed on in India to manage Dawood's interests, which had already become substantial by the late 1980s.

By 1987, however, Mumbai had become too hot for Chhota Shakeel as well. First arrested in 1983 on charges of kidnapping and illegal possession of weapons, Shakeel was arrested again on December 1, 1988, at Dongri in Mumbai under the Indian national security laws. He was awarded bail by the Mumbai High Court on March 28, 1989 and immediately moved to Dubai. Dawood's enterprises in Mumbai continued to flourish meanwhile with the help of other key figures in his gang including Chhota Rajan. However, soon after the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts, Rajan broke away from Dawood and moved to Dubai, from where he was forced to flee to Kuala Lumpur by 1994.

Chhota Rajan's departure from Mumbai triggered one of the bloodiest gang wars in Mumbai's history. Significantly, the war that began with the serial blasts seems to have led to a transformation of the Mumbai-centred underworld alliances. Rajan's efforts to project himself as an enemy of the ISI, determined to avenge terrorism in India, are clearly aimed at

winning support of both the Indian state and the politicians who believe that a 'Hindu' underworld is somehow better than a 'Muslim' underworld. While the stories connected to Dawood Ibrahim and his likes may read like Bollywood fiction, their impact is far from imaginary.

Dawood further strengthened his Pakistani connection in August 2005 when he got his eldest daughter Mahrukh Ibrahim married to Junaid Miandad, the eldest son of former Pakistani cricket captain Javed Miandad. Dawood and Miandad's becoming in-laws gave credence to the Indian government's allegations that the most wanted CBI fugitive hides in Pakistan despite claims to the contrary by the Pakistani authorities. The engagement ceremony in Karachi in January 2005 was a hush-hush affair as the 'globally designated terrorist' is not supposed to be residing in Pakistan.

In a major blow to the D-Company network on November 21, 2006, ten members of the Dawood gang were arrested from the United Arab Emirates and deported to Mumbai. All Muslims, they were identified as Anjum Phajlani, Jameel, Sabir Shaikh, Salim Fruit, Sayyed Mehandi, Mustafa Ghulam, Chhota Shakeel, Aziz Chaipani, Arif Bhaijaan and Shahid Qureshi. They are being tried on various charges, including terrorism, by the Mumbai Crime Branch.

Eight months later, the Indian print and electronic media reported in the first week of August, 2007 that Dawood has escaped an assassination attempt in the vicinity of his Kawish Crown Plaza Hotel in the port city of Karachi where he had gone on a secret visit. The story went that Dawood had moved to Karachi from Islamabad following the June 2007 release of his younger brother Iqbal Kaskar in India, with a view to inject fresh blood into the dwindling network of his D-Company and get it through to Iqbal Kaskar so that he could re-establish the D-Company's lost control over real estate business in the commercial capital of Pakistan.

On August 7, 2007, following media reports of Dawood's arrest in Pakistan, the interior ministry spokesman Brig (retd) Javed Iqbal Cheema had stated: "Nobody with that name has been arrested in Pakistan. We have reason to believe he is not in Pakistan," he said, adding that Indian authorities were advised

to scour their own territory for the wanted men. He said Dawood's arrest on the Pakistani soil was out of question and such reports are meant to create problems for Pakistan. "On one hand, the Indian establishment continues to claim Dawood Ibrahim was hiding in Pakistan with the blessings of the ISI while on the other, the Indian media has come up with an astonishing claim that the Most Wanted CBI fugitive has been arrested by the ISI. Does that make sense?" asked the Pakistani interior ministry spokesman.

A few weeks later, on October 18, 2007, the Pakistan government was once again compelled to deny media reports about the presence of Dawood on its soil and his detention by the ISI. "Apprehension of Dawood Ibrahim (subject of Interpol Red Corner Notice A-135/4/93) and his presence in Pakistan has not been substantiated", a Pakistan Interpol communication to the Central Bureau of Investigations said. Extensive reports were carried in the media about Ibrahim being detained in Pakistan, following which, the CBI, which represents Interpol in India, sent a request to its Pakistani counterpart to verify them. The Interpol-Pakistan responded to the CBI's request, denying reports that Dawood along with his aides Chhota Shakeel and Tiger Memon were arrested by the ISI from their hideout near the Pak-Afghan border.

On March 31, 2008, the Indian print media was splashed with news reports that the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* has taken over D-Company. One such report carried by the Times of India stated: "D-Company is now officially part of the *Lashkar-e-Toiba's* network, with the Inter Services Intelligence getting Dawood to merge his gang with the fundamentalist terror group as part of a game plan to crank up its anti-India campaign. The underworld gang and the LeT jihadis have been knocked into a single entity, posing serious challenges to the Indian internal security. ISI's links with D-Company are old, going back to 1993 when the Pakistani external intelligence agency used Dawood and his henchmen to execute the March 12 1993 terror attack on Mumbai in what marked the first instance anywhere of serial bombings".

The news report added: "There has been a shift in the dynamics of ISI-Dawood equations, reducing D-Company from a useful ally to a group of individuals dependent on ISI to escape

international law agencies, especially after Dawood's having been branded a global terrorist by the US. But the hospitality has a tag attached to it: complete dependence for survival on the ISI, which does not mind displaying its leverage vis-a-vis the once ruthless gang... The joining of ranks with *Lashkar*, one of the most dangerous terrorist outfits which treat liberation of large tracts of India from Hindu domination as its religious obligation, can help the ISI to further its subversive agenda. Stints with *Lashkar* camps can morph Dawood's band of urban gangsters into well-armed and jihad-driven terrorists. On the other hand, the *Lashkar* benefits immensely from collaboration with D-Company which continues to attract recruits and has acquired financial muscle by venturing into mainstream commercial enterprises without letting go of its original money spinner, smuggling".

While New Delhi hopes that the end could be in sight for Dawood after the US tagging him as a global terrorist, there are indications that the going may not be so tough for the man who still has friends in high places. But the million-dollar question is: Can the Pakistani intelligence community afford harbouring the don anymore, especially after the unprecedented US action?

17

The Party of Freedom Fighters: No More Master of Its Destiny

The *Hizbul Mujahideen* (HM) or the Party of Freedom Fighters, is considered to be the mother of ongoing militancy in the Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir. Led by a militant *Sunni* Muslim Mohammad Yusuf Shah alias Pir Syed Salahuddin, the *Hizb* is politically mentored by the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan (JI) which describes Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of Pakistan and stands for its integration with Pakistan.

Of the jihadi groups currently operating in Jammu & Kashmir, the *Hizbul Mujahideen* is the brand name of the Kashmir militancy because of being the largest and the most important in terms of its effectiveness in perpetrating violence across Kashmir. With a cadre base drawn from indigenous and foreign sources, the *Hizb* leadership had established contacts with many Afghan Mujahideen groups such as the *Hizb-e-Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, under which some of its cadre received arms training at camps in Afghanistan. Yet, its leadership has never identified itself with either al-Qaeda or the Taliban. The Rawalpindi based Commander of the *Hizb* Syed Salahuddin has repeatedly denied any sort of links between his group and al-Qaeda or Taliban.

Unlike the other Kashmiri militant groups fighting in the Indian controlled state, the HM exclusively operates in Jammu & Kashmir and has been held responsible for regular attacks against the Indian security forces since its inception in 1989. Many say the *Hizbul* was actually formed to keep a check on the

growing influence of the pro-Independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). The birth of the *Hizbul* marked the first ideological division of the militancy in Kashmir - the JKLF advocated complete independence of the State while the *Hizbul* favoured a merger with Pakistan, in line with the stated policy of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*.

Muhammad Yusuf Shah, a well-known preacher with three Masters Degrees, contested the K&K Assembly polls from Amira Kadal constituency of Srinagar in the infamous 1987 general elections. He was among the candidates of Muslim United Front who had been tipped as 'sure winners' but were declared defeated in the largely rigged elections and sent to jails. Soon after his release from jail, he picked up the gun to fight the Indian rule and the nom de guerre of Syed Salahuddin after the famous *mujahid* of 12th century who fought the Crusaders. Syed Salahuddin crossed the Line of Control into Pakistan-administered Kashmir immediately after taking over from Master Ahsan Dar as the supreme commander of *Hizbul Mujahideen* in 1991.

Salahuddin's strength lies in the fact that he heads a militant group that is largely indigenous and not one dominated by foreign mercenaries. As the supreme commander, the *Hizb* chief, who ranks No. 8 on India's 'Most Wanted' list, controls a 20,000-strong jihadi cadre from Muzaffarabad, the capital of the Pakistan-administered Azad Kashmir. The Indian government has repeatedly demanded his extradition from Islamabad. However the *Hizb* chief has publicly stated time and again that the Pakistani government would never hand him over to India because it considers him a freedom fighter and not a terrorist. "As far as I know, the Pakistan government has already rejected Indian authorities' demand for handing him over", he told Geo Television in 2007.

The American State Department added the *Hizbul Mujahideen* to its "Foreign Terrorist Organizations" list on May 1, 2003, a few days before the US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage's visit to the subcontinent. The move came after its leadership owned up to having acquired shoulder-firing Estrela surface-to-air missiles being used against the Indian security forces in Jammu & Kashmir. This prompted the Musharraf

regime to proscribe it under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002.

Four other militant groups active in J&K and banned by the US authorities included *Al-Badr Mujahideen*, the *Harkatul Jehadul Islami* and the *Jamiatul Mujahideen*. The US State Department's annual 2003 report on the patterns of global terrorism commended on the *Hizbul Mujahideen* in the following words: "The group is the militant wing of Pakistan's largest Islamic political party, the *Jamaat-e-Islami*. The *Hizbul* is currently focused on Indian security forces and politicians in Kashmir and has conducted operations jointly with other Kashmiri groups. The group operated in Afghanistan through the mid-1990s and trained alongside the Afghan *Hizb-e-Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in Afghanistan until the Taliban takeover. The group, led by Syed Salahuddin, is made up primarily of ethnic Kashmiris." Interestingly, the report highlighted the visible splits between Pakistan-based commanders and several commanders in the Kashmir valley. The *Al-Badr*, it said was a splinter group of the *Hizbul Mujahideen*. The HUJI mainly consisted of Pakistanis and foreign Islamists, who were fighting in Kashmir and the group had been linked to mysterious disappearance of five foreigners kidnapped by *Al-Faran* from Srinagar in 1995. The *Jamiatul Mujahideen*, it said, comprised mainly Kashmiris and Pakistanis.

As far as the present command structure of the *Hizbul* is concerned, Ghulam Nabi Nausheri happens to be its patron in Pakistan administered Kashmir while Ghazi Nasiruddin is the chief operational commander in the Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir. Currently, the *Hizbul* is divided into five divisions: central division for Srinagar, northern division for Kupwara, Bandipora and Baramulla, southern division for Anantnag and Pulwama districts, Chenab division for Doda district, Gool in Udhampur district, and Pir Panjal Division for the Rajouri and Poonch districts. The *Hizbul Mujahideen* has a substantial support base in the Kashmir Valley and in the Doda, Rajouri, Poonch districts and parts of Udhampur district in the Jammu region. A 20-member council and a 5-member *Shura* run the *Hizb* which has its own news agency, Kashmir Press International (KPI) and a women's wing: *Banat-ul-Islam*. Overseas, Ghulam Nabi Fai's

Kashmir American Council and Ayub Thakur's World Kashmir Freedom Movement back it. Interestingly, besides being held responsible for the massacre of Hindus in the valley, the HM is also accused of liquidating several Muslim religious leaders in Jammu & Kashmir who were opposed to the *Jamaat-e-Islami* world-view.

The *Hizbul* has essentially three factions: The first of these was set up in Jammu Kashmir in 1990 with the blessings of *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI) and is commanded by Syed Salahuddin. The Pakistani faction of the HM was founded by the Pakistan chapter of the *Jamaat* and Usman Bhai was appointed its commander. The *ameer* of the Azad Kashmir *Jamaat-e-Islami* Allama Rashid Turrabi launched the third *Hizb* faction under the command of Masood Sarfraz. This faction later came to be called Pir Panjal Regiment. The *Hizbul* story begins in 1983 when *ameer Jamaat-e-Islami*, Jammu & Kashmir, Maulana Saad-ud-Din, returned to Pakistan from Saudi Arabia. In Pakistan, he met the then military ruler General Ziaul Haq and leaders of *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan, including the then JI *Ameer* Mian Tufail Mohammad, to work out a detailed strategy for armed resistance in Jammu & Kashmir. On the basis of this strategy, in 1984, *Jamaat-e-Islami* Occupied Kashmir (JIOK), as it is called, began preparing for militancy. Cadres were asked to migrate to Azad Kashmir and other areas, including Afghanistan, and to get military training. Syed Ali Gillani, the JIOK *ameer*, led the movement. Scores of JIOK cadres came to Azad Kashmir and went to Afghanistan to train and fight with the Afghan mujahideen.

This process continued until 1987. This period also saw the rise of many organizations such as Zia Tigers, *Al-Hamza* and *Al-Badr*. The leaders of these organizations, invariably *Jamaat-e-Islami* affiliates, sought guidance from the ISI-linked *Jamaat* Pakistan and its branches in Azad Kashmir and Jammu & Kashmir. These organizations began operating against the Indian forces in Jammu & Kashmir from August 1988 onwards. However, until then, there was no concerted effort at armed resistance. This continued till mid-1989. At that point, leaders of the *Jamaat* in Pakistan, Azad Kashmir and Jammu & Kashmir thought it was important to set up a single organization that could coordinate the resistance effort. In a September 1989

session, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* leaders formally moved to set up such an organization. This session gave birth to the *Hizbul Mujahideen* by merging two groups, *Tehrikul Mujahideen* and *Hizb-e-Islami*. The organizational structure of the *Hizbul* was finally put in place in October 1989. In November 1989, its formation was formally announced in the press and its constitution was promulgated in June 1990. Indian authorities, however, allege that the Pakistani ISI was actively involved in coordinating all these efforts to launch the organization.

Master Ahsan Dar, a militant leader from Pattan, North Kashmir, became its first commander-in-chief. Incidentally Ahsan Dar used to teach in a *Jamaat*-run school before his foray into militancy. Master Ahsan Dar, who first went to Pakistan in 1988 to be trained by the ISI in militancy, returned to the Valley in 1990 and was appointed the first HM chief. By 1991, major groups, such as *Tehreek-e-Jehad-e-Islami* led by Abdul Majid Dar, had merged with the new outfit. In Srinagar, another veteran, Mohammed Abdullah Bangroo, was appointed Ahsan's chief military adviser. Soon the *Hizbul* initiated a massive recruitment drive across the Kashmir Valley. For this, it first established a network of trained guides, generally residents of border villages who were engaged in cross-border smuggling before the emergence of militancy. Unlike the JKLF, the *Hizbul* leadership conducted unchecked mass recruitment drives to send the Kashmiri youths across the border to Azad Kashmir for arms training. The youths were ferried in passenger buses from Srinagar to Kupwara, from where they crossed the border. Militancy, which till then was a covert hush-hush affair, came above the ground.

Within a year, the *Hizbul* had over 10,000 armed cadres, mostly trained in Pakistan or Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, thus becoming the largest militant group in the Valley. By now, the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) had been completely marginalised as the Pakistani intelligence establishment had embargoed all supply of arms and money to it. Two military training camps, Jhal and Dhani, were established in Pakistan-administered Kashmir for training the *Hizbul* fighters. Over the militancy-hit years, although over 100 pro-Pakistan jihadi groups mushroomed in the Valley, the *Hizbul* was perhaps the

only group with a large network. In fact, many of the groups existed only on paper and did little else than issue press releases. In the meantime, the group's supreme advisory council met for two days and in November 1991 asked chief commander Master Ahsan Dar to step down, as the *Jamaat-e-Islami* leadership had turned against him.

Mohammad Yusuf Shah alias Syed Salahuddin was made the new patron and the supreme commander of the *Hizbul Mujahideen*, under whose leadership the group quite adopted aggressive and often communal postures. In early 1992, the HM became a member of the Popular International Organization under the leadership of Sudan's Dr Hassan Al Turabi, which made it eligible for guidance, training, funds and arms from abroad. Since then, the *Hizbul* has been under the scrutiny of the Indian security and intelligence agencies. Indian government had on September 19, 1996 declared it an unlawful association, and banned it under the J&K Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983.

By that time, the hardliners in the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and the *Hizbul* leadership had already developed serious differences on the issue of the means to achieve their objective. The *Hizbul* leadership was very critical of all those who stood for the independence of the State as the third option. A year later, in November 1997, Syed Salahuddin announced the disassociation of his group from the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan. 'Our outfit is not affiliated with any particular group. Ours is an armed resistance movement of all the people of Jammu & Kashmir. We have a network from Srinagar to every important capital of the world and our supporters are all Kashmiris and expatriate Kashmiris,' he had declared.

In April 1998, in the Samani village, some 300 meters on the other side of the Line of Control, in Bhimber district of Azad Kashmir, 21 villagers were killed. The Pakistan authorities were quick to blame Indian Research and Analysis Wing for the carnage. Subsequent information, however, confirmed that it was the result of the intense rivalry between two HM groups -- one loyal to Salahuddin and the other headed by Masood Sarfraz. In February 1998, media reports hinted at the possibility of Salahuddin being displaced as HM chief for dissociating his

group from the *Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan* which had been a vocal proponent of the *Jehad-e-Kashmir*. Salahuddin's move infuriated the Pakistani intelligence establishment, leading to an intense rivalry between two HM groups, one loyal to Syed Salahuddin, a Kashmiri, and the other headed by a Pakistani, Masood Sarfraz, who was tasked by the ISI to replace Salahuddin.

However, efforts to displace Salahuddin as *Hizbul* chief received a serious blow in the wake of complaints against Masood Sarfraz which ranged from arbitrary use of the funds to mismanagement in the training camps to a high-handed attitude towards the party leadership. All this prompted Azad Kashmir's *Jamaat-e-Islami* chief, Allama Rashid Turrabi, to replace Masood Sarfraz, who in turn refused to accept the orders and started confronting the *Jamaat* leadership by openly accusing them of harbouring sinister designs and plans to compromise the Kashmir cause under American pressure. Following Sarfraz's refusal to step down, Turrabi himself took control of the *Hizbul* headquarters in Kotli district of Azad Kashmir, thereby leading to a fierce battle between the two groups. This not only resulted in dozens of casualties within the cadres of the two *Hizbul* factions but also claimed the lives of several innocent citizens. The fighting also pointed towards a disturbing trend.

The armed groups fighting in Kashmir were increasingly showing signs of indiscipline, a phenomenon that had already been witnessed in Afghanistan at one stage of its resistance movement against the Soviets. The next split in the *Hizbul* came in July 2000 when Abdul Majid Dar, the chief operational commander of the HM had made a conditional ceasefire offer to the Indian government at a press conference in Srinagar. Interestingly, the endorsement of this offer by the group's supremo Syed Salahuddin was followed by a press conference in Islamabad. Majid Dar put forward three conditions for observance of the cease-fire: '... no use of force against mujahideen, human rights violations on the Kashmiris will end and people even with different political convictions will be allowed free expression.' The ceasefire offer created a divide among the component parties of the United Jihad Council (UJC), the collective body of leading militant groups fighting in

Kashmir, eventually leading to the removal of Salahuddin from the chairmanship of the UJC).

The *Hizbul* chief was quick to dissociate himself from the ceasefire offer, although there are those in the jihadi circles who say Dar had made the offer at the behest of his leader Salahuddin. The United Jihad Council subsequently restored the *Hizbul* membership in October 2000 and reappointed Salahuddin as its chairman. This about-turn on the part of Salahuddin infuriated Dar and generated a lot of tension between the two. Signs of the divisions within the HM top leadership became more evident in late November 2001 when Salahuddin, alarmed by Dar's efforts to initiate a dialogue with the Indian government, bypassing Pakistan, decided to replace many of his field commanders besides ordering Dar and his associates to return to Pakistan. However, matters spiraled out of hand as Dar's subordinates reiterated their loyalty to him and made it clear to Salahuddin that they had no intention of leaving Jammu & Kashmir until their replacements were in place.

Eventually, at the May 2, 2002 supreme council meeting of the *Hizbul Mujahideen*, Majid Dar was removed as the chief operational commander with a majority vote. Soon after his expulsion, fissures showed up in the HM field commands, although the sacking of Dar was not sudden and quite predictable. By early 2003, Dar and many of his supporters within HM had decided to launch their own groups to take part in the upcoming Jammu & Kashmir state assembly elections. As he was preparing to come to Pakistan and announce the formation of his political group, the Jammu & Kashmir Salvation Movement, he was shot dead in the north of Kashmir on March 23, 2003 when two unidentified gun-wielding youth barged into his ancestral house and fired indiscriminately. Two terrorist groups claimed responsibility for Dar's killing: the hitherto little-known, 'Save Kashmir Movement', believed to be a front of the *Al Umar Mujahideen*, while claiming responsibility, labeled Majid Dar as "an informant of Indian agencies" and "an enemy of the Kashmiri people".

Separately, a person describing himself as the spokesperson of *Al Nasireen*, another obscure group, in a message to a local news agency, said that activists of his group killed Majid Dar for

his “anti-movement activities”. Another person claiming to be a spokesperson for the HM called up the news agency and condemned Dar’s killing. However, there are those in the jihadi circles who maintain that Dar’s killing was the culmination of an almost three-year old battle for supremacy being waged by his followers against the *Hizbul* faction led by Salahuddin and that the hit-squad that killed Dar was sent by none other than the HM chief. Dar’s assassination provoked a serious split within the *Hizbul* cadre in Pakistan, though Salahuddin survived and remained firmly in control of the organization, primarily because of ISI’s support.

While all the top commanders of the Majid Dar group and a majority of its mujahideen decided to join the *Hizb-e-Islami*, some of them, refusing to work under the new flag and leadership, returned to the HM led by Salahuddin. However, he announced that HM would not welcome back to its fold any commander from the Dar group, but mujahideen seeking to rejoin were more than welcome to do so. For their part, Majid Dar’s followers had a simple response to charges, maintaining that Salahuddin had betrayed the cause of jihad in J&K. They pointed to his five sons, not one of whom has had joined the ranks of the hundreds of young cadre that the HM leadership sends to their death each year. His five sons and two daughters live with their mother in their ancestral house in Soibugh, Budgam. Even today, Salahuddin’s detractors say he is open to criticism for having made deals of his own with the Indian authorities to protect his personal interests.

For instance, of the five sons Syed Salahuddin has fathered, Wahid Yusuf Shah studies at the Government Medical College in Srinagar, to which he was controversially granted an almost-unprecedented transfer from a privately run institution in Jammu and Kashmir. His oldest son, Shahid Yusuf, 35, works as a teacher, while Javed Yusuf, 30, is an agricultural technologist, who was trained at the *Sher-e-Kashmir* University of Agricultural Science and Technology. Shah’s third son Shakeel Yusuf, 26, works as a medical assistant at Srinagar’s *Sher-e-Kashmir* Institute of Medical Sciences. Wahid Yusuf, 23, studies in Sri Maharaja Hari Singh Government Medical College, after the family’s affluent contacts helped him obtain a seat through a quota

controlled by the Jammu & Kashmir Governor. Momin Yusuf, 19, the youngest of Shah's sons, studies Engineering in the Pattan town.

And far from his home in the garrison town of Rawalpindi, Syed Salahuddin commands the *Hizbul*, the numerically strongest jihadi group in Jammu Kashmir which has undergone four splits since its inception, all of them aimed at removing Pir Sahib Alias Shah Jee. However, he has survived till now and seems to be in total control of the group. The *Jamiatul Mujahideen* of Commander Abdullah, *Muslim Mujahideen* of Ahsan Dar, *Hizb-e-Islami* of Masood Sarfraz and *Al-Badr* of Bakhat Zameen, all broke away from the HM. In the words of an ex-intelligence official: 'One of the oldest tricks in the book is to not allow any individual jihadi group to become too strong. This is a tried and tested mode of keeping overall control on such groups. Whenever one group is seen as getting too strong or influential, the agencies try to split it and sometimes pit one against the other. And the *Hizbul Mujahideen* is no exception.'

With militancy going out of fashion and the Pakistani establishment apparently withdrawing its support to the Kashmiri militants in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent U-turn on *Jihad-e-Kashmir*, Salahuddin plans to assume a new role by converting the *Hizbul* into a political party. A spate of recent media pronouncements fuelled speculation that he might be preparing the ground for a political future. Having already got clearance from the leadership of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan, many say Salahuddin has started groundwork to take over the mantle of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the ailing chief of *Jamaat-e-Islami* Jammu Kashmir. However, his close associates say, being a hardcore *Jamaat-e-Islami* man, Salahuddin cannot take decisions independently and he might have been asked by the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan leadership to assume a political role in the emerging regional geo-strategic atmosphere.

The central leadership of the two *Jamaat-e-Islamis* believes that Syed Ali Shah Geelani, who is in his mid-70s and not in good state of health, will leave a big vacuum when he passes away. Therefore, it wants to prepare somebody who can easily take over the mantle of Ali Shah Geelani. It was against this backdrop that Salahuddin turned diplomatic and announced his

support for the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service in March 2005. On August 17, 2006, Salahuddin told the Srinagar-based Kashmir News Service that his group was willing to initiate a dialogue with New Delhi even as the conflict continued, mirroring experiments in Afghanistan and Vietnam. A ceasefire, he added, could come about if India brought troop levels in Jammu & Kashmir to the 1989 position, adding that it should release detainees, it should stop all military operations, and it should acknowledge before the world community that there are three parties to the dispute.

Two years later, with the installation of an elected government in Pakistan, Syed Salahuddin once again hinted at reviewing the group's armed struggle on the condition that India changes its stance and agrees to meaningful tripartite talks for the solution of the Kashmir issue. "The armed struggle, which the people of Jammu & Kashmir initiated in 1989, is not a terrorist movement. Instead, it is a recognised movement for freedom and for the right to self-determination for the Kashmiri people. We are peaceful people and want a political solution to the problem," he told a crowded news conference in Karachi on April 01, 2008. To a query, he warned that Kashmiris will not accept any other solution to the issue except for self-determination as enshrined in the UN resolutions. "Kashmiris will never accept autonomy, the freezing of the issue or recognising the LoC as a permanent border," he maintained. To another query, he said though *Hizbul Mujahideen* wants Kashmir to accede to Pakistan, it was up to people of Kashmir whether they wanted to join Pakistan, remain independent or continue to live with India.

Salahuddin's overtures apart, the fact remains that while operating from Rawalpindi, he is at the mercy of the Pakistani establishment; for there is little that he can do as long as he is on their soil. In the aftermath of the ongoing peace talks between Islamabad and New Delhi, Salahuddin has already been asked to lie low and wait and see. At the same time, there are reports that in a move that signaled its effort to address New Delhi's concern over cross-border terrorism, Islamabad had begun disarming the *Hizbul* cadres at militant training camps at Tarbela and Haripur in Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir and have asked

the militants to deposit their weapons. An investigative report by the Karachi-based Herald found a mood of lethargy and disorientation in jihadi training camps in the wake of funding cut-backs by the Inter Services Intelligence.

Then there are media reports saying the Indian and Pakistani intelligence agencies have already resorted to intelligence sharing to put an end to cross border infiltration on the Line of Control (LoC) following which the Hizbul had to suffer major setbacks in 2007 with the killing of 34 senior commanders including the chief operations commander Ejaz Ahmed Chopan and over 300 cadres in encounters with J&K security forces. At the same time, large-scale surrenders in the Kashmir Valley by the *Hizbul* cadres have weakened the largest militant group. As a matter of fact, a generation of the *Hizbul Mujahideen* operatives who founded the organisation have either died in combat or served time in prison - and those who remain are now in their 40s and 50s, with little inclination for active field service.

Salahuddin's present state of mind can well be gauged from a June 10, 2008 news analysis in The Hindu. The very first paragraph of the report quotes the *Hizbul* chief as having said: "Perhaps we should start calling ourselves the *Hizbul Muhajireen* (Party of Refugees)", Salahuddin joked to a confidante recently. "His playful use of words didn't conceal the bitterness behind his remark: the feared army of Islamist guerrillas he had once commanded has now degenerated into a 'party of exiles', unwanted in both India and Pakistan", the report added. Under these circumstances, Syed Salahuddin seems to be a virtual prisoner. Though still in communication with his jihadi cadre in Jammu & Kashmir, he is no more master of his destiny and can best be described as an ageing and battered beast that has lost its bite.

18

The Rise and the Fall of the Mullah Raj in Pakistan

The results of the Feb 2008 general elections in Pakistan came as a rude shock to the extremist religio-political parties of the country which were all but wiped out in their earlier stronghold – the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) bordering Afghanistan after suffering a crushing defeat at the hands of two liberal and moderate political parties – the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Awami National Party (ANP).

The October 2002 Pakistani elections resulted in a new power dynamic with the pro-Taliban alliance of the religio-political parties namely the *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA), successfully moving from the periphery to the center stage of politics by winning over 60 seats in the National Assembly, absolute majority in the North West Frontier Province and becoming the second largest party in Baluchistan. The religious right had been struggling to establish a foothold in the mainstream politics ever since it came into being in 1947 in the name of Islam. The liberal lobby always boasted that the religious groups had never been able to muster double-digit figures in terms of seats or vote share in the five general elections held in Pakistan between 1977 and 1997.

But the October 2002 elections changed it all. Even optimists in the religious alliance had not dreamt that they would actually rule NWFP and Baluchistan bordering Afghanistan, which together account for 60 per cent of Pakistan in geographical terms. The voters in the Pashtun NWFP province – many of them

from the same ethnic group as the Afghan Taliban - set off alarm bells by electing a provincial government dominated by the MMA. As the hard-line clerics took control of the NWFP, the provincial authorities looked away as al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters fled into the province to escape the US-led Allied Forces in Afghanistan, thus expanding their influence throughout the region - even to the gates of Peshawar, the provincial capital of the NWFP. Vast areas of the NWFP were subsequently transformed into a war zone, where over 80,000 Pakistani soldiers had to be deployed to crush a burgeoning Islamic insurgency being aided by the Taliban.

The MMA had contested the 2002 general elections on a mainly anti-US plank. The American invasion of Afghanistan was barely a few months old and both the NWFP and Balochistan provinces share more than just geographic borders with the neighbouring Afghanistan. Therefore, the electorate in the NWFP had voted in record numbers for the MMA, comprised of six political parties: the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan* (JUP), the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl* (JUI-F), the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Sami* (JUI-S), *Jamiat-e-Ahle Hadith* (JAH), *Islami Tehrik Pakistan* (ITP) (formerly *Tehrik-e-Jaafria* (TeJ)) and the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI). All the groups are Islamist in nature, but had emerged from different Islamic backgrounds. The three largest and most influential are the JUI-F, the JUI-S and the JI.

These three groups all stem from the *Deobandi* School and are *Sunni* Muslim. In practice this means that they lay great emphasis on Islamic morals and principles in every day life. They preach a hard-line and traditional Islamist way of thinking that is shared by the Pashtuns living along the Pakistani-Afghan border, including the Taliban. These political groups all have historical and ethnic links with the Taliban, as they are all Pashtun, which is Afghanistan's largest and Pakistan's second largest ethnic group. The JUP, on the other hand, supports the *Barelvi* School. Despite it also being *Sunni*, it is more inclusive than the *Deobandi* School, hence less traditional. The ITP is, on the other hand, a *Shia* Muslim group and the JAH follows the *Wahabi* sect, which stems from the Saudi *Shariah* system. What was striking about the MMA was that it was a coalition of

Islamist political groups that had constantly been at odds with each other historically, but are now cooperating.

The most interesting aspect of the MMA's unprecedented success had been that the MMA was born hardly a few weeks before the 2002 elections and its main leadership was in the forefront of the anti-US demonstrations in different parts of Pakistan following the invasion of Afghanistan and the ensuing fall of the Taliban regime. The abrupt rise of the religious right was attributed to several factors. Foremost among these surely was the manner in which the Musharraf regime had persistently and systematically de-legitimised the liberal mainstream parties. The credibility of parties such as the Pakistan Peoples Party of Benazir Bhutto and the faction of the Pakistan Muslim League led by Nawaz Sharif were eroded systematically by the regime by evoking portrayals of these as corrupt and incompetent to run the affairs of the country. Hence, the Pakistani voter was left to pick between the second or third rung leaders of the PPP or PML-N or the largely colourless leaders of the Musharraf backed Pakistan Muslim League (Q) as his choice for Prime Minister.

No doubt anti-Americanism had played a vital role in the political ascendancy of the MMA, but to ignore other pertinent factors projects a wrong picture. For, despite the hype, the MMA's strong showing was limited to the NWFP and Baluchistan and not spread over all. Of the 45 National Assembly seats it won, 35 were from the NWFP and Baluchistan. Of the 3.19 million votes in favour of the MMA, 2.8 million were from these two provinces. Though the MMA won six seats in Sindh and three in Punjab, the margin was very narrow — with two seats in Karachi and one in Hyderabad it was only around 500 votes. Even in the provincial assemblies, the MMA got enough seats to form the provincial government only in the NWFP (52 out of 99). In Baluchistan, it won only 14 seats out of 51, whereas the PML-Q, in fact, won 15. In Sindh, the MMA won only 8 seats out of 130 and in Punjab a mere 9 out of the 297.

Certainly, the electoral performance of the religious parties improved a lot when compared to previous elections. Though the religious parties never contested under a joint banner in previous elections, in 1993 all the religious parties put together won 1.4 million votes. Since the *Jamaat-e-Islami* did not take part

in the 1997 general elections, a comparison is possible only with the election 10 years ago (1993 general polls). What led to the political growth of Islamic parties in the last ten years, especially in the NWFP and Baluchistan? Linking their growth only to anti-Americanism is simplistic. If there is an anti-American feeling all over whole of Pakistan, then why did the MMA fail to win many seats in Punjab and Sindh? How did the MMA manage to gain support only in the NWFP and Baluchistan?

From the time of the Afghan war against the Soviets, these two provinces have been steadily coming under the influence of radical Islam. The political use of religion in terms of jihad to fight the Soviets was a primary factor in militarising the society. Jihad became a household term in these two provinces with the steady inflow and outflow of mujahideen. However, all this changed in the 2008 general elections. Fed up with rising terrorism and economic hardship, voters in the deeply conservative NWFP simply dislodged the Islamist parties, which is a clear sign that Pakistanis are no more backing religious extremism in a region where al-Qaeda and the Taliban have sought refuge after the October 2001 invasion of Afghanistan by the US-led Allied Forces.

The voters in turbulent NWFP province gave their support to secular parties that promised to pave the streets, create jobs and bring peace through dialogue and economic incentives to the extremists. The rejection of the extremist parties' alliance and the victory of the liberal ones have exploded the myths regarding the creeping Talibanization of Pakistan and the jihadi threat to the Pakistani state. For several decades the NWFP, especially the districts in the north and south, has remained a flashpoint of religious radicalism, terrorist activities and extremist tendencies. Yet, the secular and liberal Awami National Party (ANP) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) staged a strong comeback in the NWFP in the 2008 general elections as the disunited six-party religious alliance -- *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA) was literally wiped out.

The electoral gains made by the two liberal and moderate parties were almost entirely at the expense of the MMA whose electoral success in the 2002 polls had led to considerable international apprehension about a rising power of hard-line

Islam in the Pakistani politics. However, the propaganda will no longer sell that Pakistan is on the abyss of anarchy. The six parties' religious alliance that formed the government in the NWFP by winning 71 of the 99 Provincial Assembly seats in the 2002 elections, hardly managed to win 10 provincial seats in the 2008 polls. Similarly, as far as the National Assembly results were concerned, the MMA could not clinch more than six seats as compared to their 68 seats in the 2002 elections. However, one should bear in mind that the 2002 polls were engineered in favor of the MMA by the Musharraf administration.

The vote share of the Mullahs decreased from approximately 11 percent in the rigged elections of 2002 to around three percent in 2008. The scale of the MMA's 2002 win was unprecedented as it obtained 45% of the votes in the NWFP and, in certain districts its share was more than 55%. The MMA's spectacular victory can be judged by the fact that as runner-up, the Musharraf backed Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) was way behind, with only 13% of the votes in the NWFP. This was the first time since 1946 that a party or an alliance contesting with one election symbol had won enough seats in the NWFP to form the provincial government.

However, the outcome of the 2008 elections reflected the urge of the electorate for a drastic change. The MMA, after five years in power, lost its popularity because it had failed to deliver on its lofty promises. Its religious-minded supporters were unhappy due to the MMA's inability to enforce *Shariah* (Islamic Laws) in the province. This was a promise made by the MMA in the 2002 election campaign, getting it most of its votes. Though a *Shariah* Bill was adopted by the NWFP assembly after facing much controversy, the people didn't see any change in their lives. The common people were dissatisfied due to insecurity and on account of the MMA's failure to bring improvements in their socio-economic conditions.

As the voters in the NWFP wanted to punish the allies of Musharraf, the MMA received drubbing at the 2008 polls for siding with the dictator and facilitating several crucial constitutional amendments that bailed him out and indemnified all his illegal actions. The MMA had played a crucial role in providing Musharraf with the constitutional legitimacy he so

desperately sought in December 2003 through the every controversial 17th constitutional amendment which would not have received the requisite two-thirds majority in parliament without the MMA's support.

Even otherwise, the rout of the MMA in NWFP had increasingly become evident in the run-up to the elections after one of its main components, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI), had boycotted the polls. The MMA's defeat is also attributed to inability to stop military operations against the jihadis in NWFP and the MMA secretary general Maulana Fazlur Rehman's vacillation against adopting a tough line vis-à-vis Musharraf. The JI hadn't formally quit the MMA even after formally joining the rival, pro-boycott alliance, All Parties Democratic Alliance (APDM), which was mostly made up of Baloch and Pashtun nationalist parties.

To vindicate itself, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* not only actively campaigned for boycott of the elections but also tried overtly and covertly to ensure the defeat of candidates fielded by its former MMA ally, the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islami* (JUI-F) of Maulana Fazlur Rehman. The success of the JUI-F nominees, who were contesting on the MMA ticket and symbol - book - at the 2008 elections would have embarrassed the *Jamaat* and exposed its claim of having a vote bank not only in NWFP but also in Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. As it turned out, the MMA that contested the polls comprised the JUI-F only as the remaining four small Islamic parties didn't have any real support in NWFP, Balochistan and Punjab. With the *Jamaat-e-Islami* in the opposite camp, it was left to the JUI-F to seek votes from an indifferent electorate.

The party leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman was unable to help his candidates as he couldn't tour their constituencies after being advised by the government's security agencies that he was on the hit-list of the militants. Three of his brothers, Maulana Ataur Rehman, Maulana Lutfur Rehman and Maulana Obaidur Rehman, who were contesting for National and Provincial Assembly seats, lost their elections. Fazl lost to the young PPP candidate, Faisal Karim Kundi, who was backed by all parties including PML-Q and ANP, in Dera Ismail Khan by a big margin of votes and was barely able to win his seat from the Bannu

district against former Pakistan hockey player, Malik Nasir Khan.

The MMA, or JUI-F to be precise, also lost its electoral dominance in the 2008 polls in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). In 2002, it won seven out of the 12 National Assembly seats from FATA. Six of those seats were won by JUI-F candidates and the seventh by *Jamaat-e-Islami's* Haroon Rasheed from the Bajaur Agency. This time the JUI-F won only one seat through Maulana Abdul Malik in South Waziristan out of the 10 for which elections were held on February 18. A JUI-F dissident, Kamran Khan, emerged victorious from North Waziristan and one of the losers was the official party nominee and former MNA, Maulana Nek Zaman.

The MMA's downfall brought a windfall for the secular Awami National Party (ANP) led by Asfandiyar Wali Khan and to a lesser extent for the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). The ANP, a secular and liberal party that has historically advocated ethnic Pashtun interests, won 10 seats in the National Assembly compared to none in the 2002 polls. It grabbed 32 seats in the provincial assembly and the tally eventually moved above 40 once the reserved seats for women and minorities were filled up. This was ANP's best performance in elections considering the fact that it contested on its own without becoming part of any political or electoral alliance.

Buoyed up by its impressive electoral gains after a disastrous performance in 2002, the ANP demanded maximum provincial autonomy, renaming the NWFP as Pakhtunkhwa and the right to nominate the chief minister. It also backed the war on terror, though the ANP method to fight extremism was to find a political solution to the problem and formulate an economic package to put the under-developed and militancy-hit areas on the path of progress. The PPP won nine National Assembly and 17 provincial assembly seats in the NWFP in the 2008 polls. It was a far better electoral performance than the one it gave in 2002, when the Bhutto party failed to win a single seat in the National Assembly and only 10 including reserved seats for women in NWFP Assembly.

With the rout of the extremist and fanatic MMA, the jihadis have lost significant over-ground space. Consequently, they

could now be driven deeper into the underground. In fact, the MMA's fall is likely to have a far-reaching impact on the socio-political landscape of at least three regions – NWFP, Balochistan and FATA, where the pro-Taliban/al-Qaeda militancy has been entrenched over the last six years. The 2008 election results further made it clear that it was the Military-Mullah nexus that was principally responsible for the rise of the radical forces like the MMA in the NWFP. Nevertheless, there are apprehensions that with their control over religious seminaries and mosques, the jihadi armies and their street power untouched, the Islamist parties, consequent to their electoral defeat, could seek refuge in aggressive mobilization, and political and extremist action, which could lead to widespread violence. In the proximate future, there could also be a consolidation of the over-ground Islamist formations which could add to the complexities arising out of the ongoing mobilisation of the extremist cadres across Pakistan.

19

The Hidden Agenda of the Party of Preachers

The *Tableeghi Jamaat* (TJ) or the Party of Preachers, a non-militant organization of practicing Muslims that claims to have never indulged in any militant or political activity as a matter of principle, is an Islamic missionary and revival movement initially founded in British India, as a response to Christian evangelists working among the poor and poorly educated Muslims in British India. However, in recent years, concerns have risen about how much the organization has been infiltrated by jihadi elements belonging to the banned militant and sectarian organizations which might be involved in using the TJ platform as a cover to promote their extremist agenda.

The *Tableeghi Jamaat* that can also be translated as the Society for Spreading Faith, came into existence to spread the message of the Holy Quran with two main objectives: to ensure that Muslims strengthen their faith and to carry out humanitarian work. It was founded in the British India in the late 1920s by a *Deobandi* cleric Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi (1885-1944) in Mewat province of India. '*Tableegh*' in Arabic means 'to deliver (the message)' and the *Tableeghi Jamaat* (or the Proselytizing Group) claims to revive this duty, which they consider as a primary responsibility of the Muslims. Maulana Mohammad Ilyas Kandhalawi put forward the slogan, *Aye Musalmano! Musalman bano* (O Muslims! Be Muslims) to spread the message of the Holy Quran to ensure that Muslims strengthen their faith.

The *Tableeghi Jamaat* grew out the *Deobandi* School of Islamic thought which emerged under British rule in the Delhi region of northern India. In pre-colonial India, Islamic scholars learned informally, by traveling with their teachers. But in the 19th century, inspired by European educational practices, Muslim clerics in India established geographically fixed institutions, known as *madrassas*, with sequential curriculum, organized classes, and paid faculty. The *madrassas* were actually founded by specialists in the “*Hadith*” – the narratives that constitute the Prophet Mohammad’s sayings and practices, which guide all aspects of moral behavior in Islam. These specialists or *Ulemas* issued advisory opinions to guide followers on how to adhere to the *hadith*. The *Deobandi* Muslims emerged from the *madrassas* as a movement centered on the *Ulema*.

Deobandis considered themselves reformists, proscribing adherence to a pristine text (the Quran) as a solution to worldly powerlessness. They opposed various contemporary Islamic practices, including excessive rituals at tombs, elaborate lifestyle celebrations and *Shia*-influenced practices. Following British repression of North Indian Muslims during the Mutiny of 1857, the *Deobandi* leadership adopted an avowedly apolitical stance. But as the Indian nationalist movement rose after World War I, the movement grew political, supporting the Indian National Congress against the British. *Deobandi* scholar Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi formed *Tableeghi Jamaat* in Mewat, India in 1927. He intended the group to be an antidote to the Hindu conversion efforts that targeted Muslim peasants. The *Tableeghis* took the dissemination of Islamic teachings out of the *madrassa*, deemphasizing the importance of clerics and encouraging lay Muslims to undertake proselytizing missions. Maulana Ilyas believed this practice would enhance the faith of both the proselytizers and those they approached. *Tableeghis* also clung to the original *Deobandi* rejection of any explicit political program and to remaining apolitical.

After Maulana Mohammad Ilyas died in 1944, his son, Maulana Muhammad Yusuf (1917-1995) took over the TJ and expanded its reach. The movement grew after the partition of India, gaining importance when during the 11 year military rule of Pakistan’s fourth dictator President General Ziaul Haq.

Maulana Yusuf and his successor Maulana Inamul Hassan began the movement's targeting of non-Muslims, rather than just lapsed believers. In the 1970s, the *Tableeghi Jamaat* missions moved into non-Muslim regions, coinciding with the establishment of a synergistic relationship between Saudi *Wahabis* and South Asian *Deobandis*, which eventually led to the Saudi financing of the *Jamaat*." The TJ's lack of formal bureaucratic structure makes its growth hard to quantify, but in recent years, millions of adherents have congregated annually at three-day TJ congregations in Raiwind in Pakistan.

Every year, over a million Muslims from around the world descend on the small town of Raiwind near Lahore, the capital of the Punjab province for a three-day celebration of faith, comprising perhaps the second largest gathering of Muslims anywhere in the world after the *Hajj* in Saudi Arabia. Similar gatherings also take place annually outside Dhaka in Bangladesh and Bhopal in India. The *Tableeghi* pilgrims are trained missionaries who have dedicated much of their lives to spread Islam across the globe. The largest group of religious proselytizers of any faith, they are part of the reason for the explosive growth of Islamic religious fervor and conversion. Despite its huge size and tremendous value, the *Tableeghi Jamaat* remains largely unknown outside the Muslim community, even to many scholars of Islam. This is no coincidence. The TJ officials work to remain outside of both media and governmental notice. They usually limit its activities to within the Muslim community itself, since its main aim is to bring spiritual awakening to the world's Muslims.

However, it does not solicit or receive donations; rather it is self-funded by its members and operates on a very efficient model where administrative expenses are almost absent or taken care of by donations from senior members. The TJ movement, which has spread to 150 countries, has over a million members worldwide and its headquarters for South Asia are located in India. They were originally set up for humanitarian work and have not thus far evidenced any extremist views. In sharp contrast, however, TJ's Pakistan branch has now for quite some time been found to be involved in making clandestine efforts to aid jihadi elements and to promote their agenda. And the ISI connection of the Pakistan

branch of *Tableeghi Jamaat* is already an open secret now. The 2007 three day annual congregation of the so-called party of preachers was attended by at least four former heads of the all powerful Inter Services Intelligence including Lt. Gen. (retd) Hameed Gul, Lt. Gen. (retd) Javed Nasir, Lt. Gen. (retd) Naseem Rana and Lt Gen Mahmood Ahmed.

As the media highlighted their presence at the Raiwind annual congregation, the organisers of maintained that the participation of four ex ISI chiefs was an integral part of the congregation for years now, adding that all of them had been attending the event since the days they were in uniform. "Their presence in the *ijtema* and their speeches especially that of Lt Gen Hameed Gul helped motivate and inspire others to attend the congregation", a spokesman of the TJ had observed. However, there are those who maintain that the presence of ex ISI chiefs in the TJ congregation simply showed the exact picture of a well-designed, well-controlled and well-managed strategy to organize combatants who are ready to wage jihad in the name of Allah against infidels, who are painted at the congregation as enemies of Islam.

Since the Pakistani law treats the *Tableeghi Jamaat* as a humanitarian group and not as a religio-political party, there is no ban on the government servants, members of the armed forces and the nuclear and missile scientific community joining the party [even as members] to work for the same during the off-duty hours. Therefore, many Pakistani government servants, military officers and scientists devote at least part of their annual leave to do voluntary work for the *Tableeghi Jamaat*. Interestingly, after his appointment as the DG ISI by Prime Minister Sharif, Lt. Gen. Nasir continued to function simultaneously as adviser to the TJ and, after his removal from the ISI under US pressure in 1993, he took over as the full-time leader of the TJ.

It was during Lt. Gen. Javed Nasir's tenure as the DG ISI that the Mumbai serial blasts of 1993 were carried out and plans were chalked out for the revival of Islam in the Central Asian States, Chechnya and Dagestan in Russia and Xinjiang in China with the help of the TJ workers and funds from Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Lt Gen Hameed Gul and Lt Gen Mahmood Ahmed, who had served under the commands of two military dictators General Zia and General Musharraf, had been vocal supporters of the Afghan

mujahideen who later formed the Taliban militia in Afghanistan. Both Hameed and Mahmood were removed from their slots prematurely and sent home because of their extremist views and unblemished support for the jihadi elements.

Reputed to be the richest religious organization in Pakistan, it recruits hundreds of students in other countries and brings them to Pakistan at its own expense for studies in the religious seminaries. Growing out of the *Deobandi* school of Islam, the *Tableeghi Jamaat* stresses traditional Islamic practices linked to worship, dress and behavior as a path to personal improvement. Thus, it easily attracts troubled, impressionable young men and instills them with extreme religious conviction. While the *Tableeghi Jamaat* is nonviolent, the zealotry of its recruits might be proving easy for violent jihadi organizations to manipulate. Its missionary work, moreover, demands the TJ members to travel throughout the world, including Pakistan and Western countries. Therefore, there is every possibility of some militant groups using it as a cover to travel.

According to western media reports based on the findings of their agencies, the *Tableeghi Jamaat* advocates an extreme interpretation of the *Deobandi* Islam, just like the Taliban and that many militant groups have infiltrated the *Jamaat* to gain a cover for obtaining visas and traveling abroad. Because of its being a relatively relaxed organisation, it is not difficult for militant organisations to infiltrate the TJ. Therefore, the western agencies believe it has radicalized to the point where it has emerged as a driving force of Islamic extremism and a major recruiting agency for the jihadi causes world wide. Following the 9/11 attacks, the *Jamaat* has increasingly attracted the interest of the US intelligence agencies which even describe it as the mother of all the major Pakistan-based jihadi organisations active not only in Central Asian Republics, Chechnya and Dagestan, but also in other parts of the world.

According to the findings of the US agencies, as reported in the Western media, among the foreign nationals who fought in Afghanistan against the Northern Alliance troops and US-led forces as members of the Pakistan-based jihadi outfits were American Muslims (mostly Afro-Americans), nationals of the West European countries, Thai, Malaysians, Singaporeans who

projected themselves as Malays from Malaysia and Indonesians. These reports claim that *Harkatul Mujahideen*, *Lashkar-e-Toiba* and *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* teams that used to visit these countries as preachers had recruited them all. Before the 9/11 attacks, these jihadi groups used to bring hundreds of Muslim youth to Pakistan who were then educated at the religious seminaries before being eventually taken to Afghanistan for jihadi indoctrination and training.

According to intelligence findings, HuM, LeT and HUJI enjoy close links with the *Tableeghi Jamaat* and recruit their cadres in Pakistan as well as abroad through the TJ. Often, to avoid attracting the adverse notice of foreign intelligence agencies, recruiting teams of HuM, LeT and HJI go abroad under the guise of TJ preachers. According to American intelligence findings, reported in the international media, Osama bin Laden too had used HuM, LeT and HJI teams going abroad under the garb of TJ preachers to communicate instructions to his network of non-Arab organizations in different countries. In the 1990s, many members of the HuM traveled to the southern Philippines as preachers and trained the cadres of the Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and participated in their operations against the Philippine security forces.

An investigative report by Pakistan's *The News* on 13 February 1995, brought to light for the first time the nexus between TJ, the HuM and their clandestine role in supporting Islamic extremist movements in different countries. The report quoted unidentified office-bearers of the HuM as saying, 'Ours is basically a *Sunni* organization close to the *Deobandi* school of thought. Our people are mostly impressed by the TJ. Most of our workers do come from the *Tableeghi Jamaat*. We regularly go to its annual meeting at Raiwind. Ours is a truly international network of genuine jihadi Muslims.' The report quoted the HuM office-bearers as claiming that among the foreign volunteers trained by them in their training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan, were sixteen African-American Muslims from various cities of the US and that funds for their activities mostly came from Muslim businessmen of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UK.

It has already been reported in the US media that the Lackawanna Six, a group of six Yemeni-Americans arrested by the FBI in the US after the 9/11 attacks in its search for sleeper agents (an agent who can be used at any time but may not be tasked for up to a decade or more) were found to have links with TJ. They had all visited the TJ headquarters in Raiwind before the 9/11 attacks. The group gained notoriety in 2001, following the news that John Walker Lindh, the American Taliban, first entered Pakistan through the encouragement of a *Tableeghi Jamaat* missionary. Subsequently, a number of other alleged terrorists have been linked to the TJ.

The list includes Omar Padilla, currently held as an enemy combatant for planning to detonate a radiological device in the United States; Richard Reid, who attempted to ignite a shoe bomb on a flight from Paris to Miami in 2001; Lyman Faris, convicted of planning to bomb the Brooklyn Bridge, and a group of seven Muslims in Portland, Oregon accused of attempting to join the Taliban to fight against the US. Following the July 2005 London bombings, international media reported that Shehzad Tanweer, one of the human bombs who had been a British national of the Pakistani origin, used to attend the TJ meetings at a number of London mosques.

According to the US intelligence findings, the *Tableeghi Jamaat* attracts confused, impressionable young men in search of an identity. It provides that identity in the form of devout Islam and then sends many of these radicalized young Muslims to geographic locations where they are likely to encounter terrorists. That process, more than anything else, is what makes *Tableeghi Jamaat* dangerous. Bands of *Tableeghi* missionaries recruit mostly young men at mosques, Islamic centers and college campuses and then invite them to join the group for a few days or weeks on the road.

Jamaat has also been accused of recruiting in the United States through *Jamaat-ul-Fuqra*, a violent, isolationist organization led by Pakistani Sheikh Mubarik Ali Gilani, with whom American journalist Daniel Pearl had fixed a meeting in Karachi the day he was abducted and eventually beheaded in January 2002. Daniel was on his way to interview Sheikh Gilani when he was abducted. Pearl wanted to interview him regarding

a suspected connection between Gilani and the American Shoe Bomber Richard Reid. The Gilani-Pearl meeting was fixed by Sheikh Ahmed Omar Saeed, already convicted by a Pakistani court for the abduction and the subsequent murder of the American journalist. Gilani was questioned by the Pakistani authorities after the murder but subsequently released.

20

The Islamization of Pakistani Cricket

The Pakistani cricket team that was once known as a hot band of happy-go-lucky stars has gone through a total transformation during the last decade, gradually turning into a coterie of Islamist preachers who are more interested in preaching Islam than concentrating on the game.

Long before the Islamists discovered their frightening zeal, Pakistani cricketers were considered a paragon of modern Muslims: they played flamboyantly, partied hard and didn't flaunt their religion publicly. They were the playboys of their times -- polished, educated and dashing; they had their one-night stands, clubbed and tiddled; as great exponents of reverse swing as they were ardent admirers of fine legs. They had the lifestyle only stars have -- in any country, of any sport, of any religious persuasion. During the 70s and 80s, Islam and Pakistani cricket team were strangers to each other. The main hallmark of the cricket team at that time was professionalism as most of the cricketers used to play county cricket in England and because of their frequent interaction with the British society, their grooming would show off well in their behaviour. The 3-4 months in a year that the Pakistani cricket stars such as Imran Khan, Majid Khan, Asif Iqbal, Sarfraz Nawaz, Javed Miandad, Zaheer Abbas, Mohsin Khan, Rameez Raja, etc used to spend in England playing county cricket, would make them adopt the lifestyle of any other English cricketer: liquor, night clubs, girlfriends and every thing that comes with the package.

However, those days of cricketing casualness are now memory, as are so many aspects of the secular life Mohammad Ali in Jinnah's Pakistan. The Pakistani cricketers have never pursued their religious beliefs as devoutly as they do now-a-days. "*Bismillah*" (In the name of Allah) or "*Inshallah*" (God willing) stud their every utterance, no matter they are on the field or elsewhere. The team members huddle together to pray on the ground during pre-match preparations; 'Islamic beards' are sported as an advertisement of their faith; batsmen have known to cramp because they fast and play during the holy month of Ramadan. This religiosity has come about because a clutch of the Pakistani cricket star including – Inzimamul Haq, Mohammad Yousaf, Saqlain Mushtaq, Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Malik, Yasser Hameed and Mushtaq Ahmed (bowling coach) – had become members of the *Tableeghi Jamaat* (TJ), or the party of preachers, participating in public gatherings organised to propagate Islam and stressing upon the virtue of an 'authentic Islamic lifestyle'.

The extent to which the Pakistani cricket team had been Islamised at the time of the 2007 World Cup could be gauged from the fact that the *Tableeghi Jamaat* (TJ) had literally invaded the dressing room of the cricket team – the *tableeghis* with long beards and moustaches could be seen praying with players and reciting the holy Quran for the team's success (never mind that it has been performing poorly). As TJ membership makes it incumbent upon a person to preach, most of the *Tableeghi* cricketers, especially the team captain, Inzimamul Haq, often used to conduct preaching tours across Pakistan. Inzimam's penchant to mix religion with cricket had already sparked accusations by that time that he would favour *Tableeghi* players over those who are either secular or prefer to confine religion to their private lives. The non-*Tableeghi* secular group in the team at that time was led by Vice-Captain Younas Khan and included Shoaib Akhtar, Mohammad Asif, Danish Kaneria, Imran Nazir, Abdul Razzaq etc. This divide often shadowed differences between players.

Inzimam's religious passion could be gauged from the fact that on tours abroad, one of the hotel rooms was always declared a prayer room, where the *Tableeghi* players would offer

prayers and discuss religious issues. A former television personality and now a member of the *Tableeghi Jamaat*, Naeem Butt, was usually allowed to accompany the Pakistani team and stay in the same hotel, obviously on the insistence of skipper Inzimam. Naeem Butt used to arrange interacting sessions between the cricketers and officer bearers of the *Tableeghi Jamaat* chapter of the host country.

The conspicuous Islamisation of the Pakistani cricket team even prompted the patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) President Pervez Musharraf to advise the PCB chairman Dr Naseem Ashraf to ask the players to strike a balance between religion and cricket. The chairman subsequently warned the *Tableeghi* cricketers at a press conference, asking them to “stop exhibiting their religious beliefs in public”. In Naseem Ashraf’s own words: “I had discussed the matter in detail with Inzimam, making it clear to him that religion is purely a private affair and there should not be any pressure on those team players who don’t pray regularly. He assured me that there won’t be any pressure at all on any of the players to do anything they don’t want to do”.

After the team’s disastrous first round exit from the 2007 World Cup in the wake of a humiliating defeat at the hands of an immature Irish team, P J Mir, the then media manager of the PCB had confessed that it was an overkill of piety, the team’s over-indulgence in Islamic rituals, preaching and lack of focus on the game that actually failed the Pakistani cricket team and led to its fall from grace. He claimed that the Pakistani cricketers were more focused on preaching Islam than playing the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies. “The other teams were also present in the West Indies but the Pakistani players were more enthusiastic about converting non-Muslims than playing cricket. I was not in a position to disclose this fact before. But I have now informed the Performance Evaluation Committee that most of the players had no focus on cricket and their fixation was on preaching, which affected their preparations”, he told reporters at a press conference in Lahore after the World Cup.

“The boys were up against the most challenging task of proving their skills in the prestigious World Cup tournament, but I am sorry to say they had no drive for the game and were much more active in preaching and praying”, said the ex-media

manager. When reminded that Inzimam had dismissed such speculations, P J Mir said it would not have been an issue with him or anybody had it been done within reasonable limits? "I have video footage which will prove me right and I will hand over those tapes to the PCB", he said. Mir said the players, led by Inzimam, made a public show of their prayers instead of praying privately and in the process compromised with their primary duty of playing cricket. He cited incidents to highlight his point and added that some players even made it a point to pray in the gallery of the aircraft on flights rather than privately on their seats.

The Performance Evaluation Committee, headed by a former Test cricketer Ejaz Butt, the newly appointed chief selector Salahuddin Ahmad and Salim Altaf, was constituted by the PCB to look into the causes of the team's humiliating exit from the World Cup, which it had won twice in the past. Inzimam, who had to step down as captain and subsequently retired from international cricket after the World Cup, had been criticized for using the cricket team platform for religious activities. The team's foreign coach from South Africa, Coach Bob Woolmer, too had complained to the PCB that he found it frustrating to see many players taking part in religious activities after matches when he wanted to discuss cricket with them. He had attributed the decline in the performance of Pakistani cricket team in recent years to the growing influence of the *Tableeghi Jamaat* on players and their consequent indifference to training as they believed they could win by praying.

Imparting credibility to this perception was former PCB chief Shahryar Khan, who had revealed in an interview after the World Cup fiasco that Woolmer had been voicing his frustration at the religious obligations of his players. Shahryar claimed that Woolmer found it difficult to communicate with his team during match intervals because they would use the time to pray. "Bob told me before the World Cup that he was very frustrated because the team was always at prayer at lunchtime, tea and after play", he told *Sportsworld* on BBC Radio Five Live. He was not able to get through to them on cricketing issues. Bob felt frustrated about that and asked me what to do. I told him 'Please Bob, you are an outsider and foreigner. So do not interfere with

anything religiously-inclined because it will be counter-productive'. Eventually, he learned to live it with".

Amidst conflicting reports about the possible causes of Woolmer's mysterious death [during the 2007 World Cup in South Africa], the Western media had raised a pertinent question: "Did Woolmer's criticism of the growing influence of the *Tableeghi Jamaat* on many players of the cricket team contribute to his brutal murder after the Pakistani team lost to Ireland in the first round?" According to a BBC investigation, Bob Woolmer may have been murdered after angering radical Muslims. The Panorama Television Show aired on May 1, 2007 pointed out that some Pakistani cricket team players were committed members of the *Tableeghi Jamaat*.

And now the million dollar question -- how has the flamboyant cricket team of the past become a *Tableeghi Jamaat* redoubt? The Islamisation of the team, in a way, has been in tandem with the political and social transformation of the Pakistani society. The transformation began with the 1977 ouster of a moderate Z.A. Bhutto government and the confiscation of power by General Ziaul Haq, an Islamic fundamentalist, because of his being the son of a prayer leader. That was the time when the coterie of moderate cricket stars of the 70s started leaving the scene one by one, thus allowing the Islamic factor to gradually seep into the team. In the early days of the transformation, the Pakistani players didn't flaunt their religion. But the person who made religion hip in cricket was Imran Khan, as famous for his cricketing feat as he was for his romantic dalliances. His 'awakening' following retirement from cricket, and his public, even strident, endorsement of Islam provided a justification for those wanting to wear their religion on their faces -- if even Imran Khan could be unabashed about Islam, why shouldn't they, so went the logic.

It was just the boost for Islamists nurturing the hope of luring cricketers to their cause. Among these Islamists was Maulana Tariq Jameel, who, like Inzimam, is a Multani, and a close associate of Maulana Abdul Wahab, the *ameer* of the *Tableeghi Jamaat's* Pakistan chapter. He began to concertedly target the cricket team once he had converted opening batsman Saeed Anwar to the cause of the TJ. The stylish left-handed

opener, and a computer engineer by training, became a born-again Muslim in 2001 after the tragic death of his infant daughter. The traumatic experience prompted Saeed Anwar to find solace in religion; he joined the TJ. His primary task: work on present and former cricketers to join the TJ and spread the message of Islam. About his *Tableeghi Jamaat* experience, Anwar says: "There is only one aim in my life - follow Allah Almighty's path and prepare for the Day of Judgment. I am a different Saeed Anwar today; the material world to me is meaningless. I have turned to Allah for solace and am committed to spread the religion to all parts of the world... Islam is a moderate religion and I am not a fanatic or a jihadi".

Thereafter, religion became a badge the Pakistani cricketers were willing to wear publicly, particularly Inzimam, whose shy and retiring personality acquired an assertive edge under the influence of Maulana Tariq Jameel. Perhaps religion provided Inzimam an anchor in the glamorous and corporate world that cricket has become. With the skipper under its sway, *Tableeghi Jamaat* now had an open field, winning over players in a number that the team could be said to be divided between the TJ and non-TJ groups. However, Inzimamul Haq denies that the religious activities of the team members used to affect their performance, and insists that the preaching sessions of the cricketers with Islamic scholars used to develop unity in the team. But there are many who allege that most team members had grown beards as a show of allegiance to their captain and boosting their chances of being in the Pakistani squad.

There is the peculiar case of star batsman Mohammad Yousaf, who had converted from Christianity and seemingly never shaved thereafter. Despite repeated denials, many of the Pakistanis feel that Yousaf Youhana converted to boost his chance of becoming captain in the future. Yousaf, however, ascribes his conversion to the influence of the *Tableeghi Jamaat* preachers at their sessions in Raiwind, Lahore. "My conversion is because of a change of heart and not a calculated move. Danish Kaneria, another team player, is a Hindu and there is no problem. I have already played for Pakistan for ten long years and there has been no problem. I didn't do this to be captain. Islam is the true religion because it

says that life after death is the real life; the better you prepare for it, the better your present life will be".

Interestingly, however, his transformation was not only confined to his faith, but extended to a change in name, appearance, behaviour—and even performance on the field. A string of tall scores imparts credence to those who say Allah favours those who turn to Him. Residing in a posh Lahore locality, and having bought a Mercedes, Mohammad Yousaf credits the benediction from above for the change in his fortune. And he is going to repay his debts to Allah. How? "After I retire, I plan to serve God by devoting myself to preaching Islam to all those out there who have not been exposed to the real face of the religion".

However, the non-*Tableeghi* members of the cricket team poo-h-poo the notion of religiosity helping players perform better and point out the irony of Saeed Anwar, Mushtaq Ahmad, Saqlain Mushtaq and Shahid Afridi, all members of the *Tableeghi Jamaat*, who lost their form once they took to sporting beards. But Pakistan's English-speaking opening batsman Salman Butt pleads to the positive impact Islam has had on the team. As for religion-linked cricketing performance, Butt explains: "A lot of people work hard, but only those get to their destination who are lucky and have the help of God. We believe if we pray five times a day and go in the way of God, we will get help. That is our firm belief. It puts all of us in a very good spirit, and has made us disciplined -- a definite change in the Pakistan team".

The non-TJ group, though, has a litany of complaints: a stifling atmosphere, charges of bias, mutual suspicion; that mixing religion with cricket is no way of playing the game. Former cricketer-turned-*Tableeghi* Agha Zahid says his organisation recruits sporting stars, as also showbiz personalities, because "if they change their lifestyles, then others who idolise them would follow their examples". But at the same time, there are those who insist that the issue is not about being religious but the manner in which it is flaunted, thereby threatening some and pressuring others to follow suit. For a society driven by religious passions that often, consciously or otherwise, shrinks the secular space, cricketer-preachers could become the antithetical forces arrayed against General (retd) Musharraf's so-called agenda of enlightened moderation. This

shrinking of the secular space is perhaps already happening in the cricket team. But for those persevering in the way of Allah Almighty, these are minor matters.

21

Pakistan's Bloody Sectarian War

Celebrating liberal democracy during his speech to the Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947, the father of the nation and the founder of Pakistan Mohammed Ali Jinnah famously declared, "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed... that has nothing to do with the business of the state. You are free, free to go to your temples; you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan". However, six decades later, Jinnah's vision of a democratic Pakistan has been eclipsed by a rising spiral of sectarian violence that has assumed menacing dimensions and resulted in the killing of thousands of Pakistanis.

Pakistan, the country with the second largest Muslim population in the world, has seen serious bloody *Shia-Sunni* sectarian violence in recent times, although the conflict actually began to escalate 20 years ago, when Pakistanis watched two epic struggles take place in neighboring states of Afghanistan and Iran. Almost 77% of Pakistan's population is *Sunni*, while 20% is *Shia*, but the latter minority forms perhaps the second-largest *Shia* population of all Muslim countries, larger than the *Shia* majority in Iraq. Differences between the *Sunni* majority and *Shia* minority of Pakistan go back to a schism following the death of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

However, in the past two decades, those differences have been manifested in frequent violence wrought by *Sunni* and *Shia* extremists, making the sectarian war bloody and deadly. Officially released figures indicate that 1,962 people were killed and 5,633 injured in 1,152 incidents of sectarian hostility between

January 1998 and June 2008, with no end in sight. The gravity of sectarian problem can be further gauged from the fact that 153 people were killed and 317 injured in 64 incidents of bloody sectarian violence that took place in the first six months of 2008. Since the overall direction of the Pakistani military establishment is towards an Islamic ideological state, some of the militant groups whom the establishment used to support are often found involved in bloody acts of sectarian violence.

From the security perspective, sectarianism in Pakistan is rooted in a complex web of social, political and economic factors, local as well as external. The role of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and the United States in supporting and sustaining the sectarian networks and *madrassas* throughout the last three decades has been widely acknowledged and investigated. The wide mandate of these sectarian groups to fight their enemies and their involvement in many other illegal activities makes it difficult to separate sectarianism from the wider conflict typology in Pakistan. In most analyses, the blaming finger for creating conditions for sectarianism to flourish is, however, pointed towards the nexus of the state, the army and secret services and rightly so.

It is widely believed that the official support for the jihadi organisations fighting in the state of Jammu & Kashmir and Afghanistan has indirectly promoted sectarian violence in the country. Originally a product of the Pakistani military and intelligence to establishment to beef up its security vis-à-vis India, most of the Pakistan-based militant or jihadi organisations now evidently threaten the country's internal security. The linkages between the militants active in Jammu & Kashmir or Afghanistan and those within Pakistan are not surprising since the sectarians share the same *madrassas*, training camps, and operatives. Therefore, by facilitating the actions of irregulars in the Kashmir valley, Pakistan actually promotes sectarian jihad and terrorism back home.

The origins of sectarian violence in Pakistan can be traced back to the days of Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation troops. With dollars coming from the US Central Intelligence Agency, Islamabad sponsored a huge number of militant groups and religious seminaries inside Pakistan. At that time,

Washington needed Islamists to wage the so-called jihad against the Soviet occupation troops in Afghanistan, while Islamabad needed them to bring in billions of American dollars. Hence, both turned a blind eye to their radical ideology and methods. The drawbacks to this became obvious once the Soviet forces were defeated and made to leave Kabul. While radical Islamists in Afghanistan formed the Taliban, their brethren in Pakistan turned their attention towards Kashmir or to sectarian opponents inside Pakistan.

Each act of sectarian killing in the country began a cycle of revenge attacks, with the civilian governments failing to curb the menace, either because they wanted the militants to fight Pakistan's corner in Jammu & Kashmir or because they lacked the will and the strength to do so. However, a stage came when external factors other than Jammu & Kashmir started giving rise to the menace of sectarianism in Pakistan, with the *Sunni*-dominated Saudi Arabia and the *Shia*-dominated Iran started sponsoring rival *Sunni* and *Shia* groups. When Musharraf seized power in 1999, he faced a formidable foe: well-armed, well-trained and well-financed sectarian groups with a huge resource pool of recruits in thousands of Pakistani religious *madrassas*.

Dealing with such a foe was not going to be easy for an unelected military ruler. But his task was made somewhat easier by the 9/11 terror attacks in the US and the worldwide backlash against extremist Islam. Islamabad's decision to cut support for the Kashmiri militants also boosted its drive against sectarianism. Before that, many sectarian organisations had emerged in the country, which were being tolerated because of their links with groups fighting in Jammu Kashmir. Once Islamabad decided to put the Kashmir issue on the back burner under American pressure, for the sake of better ties with New Delhi, it no longer had to put up with the jihadi groups operating in J&K. The first clear sign of a shift in the Pakistani government's attitude came in a televised speech by President Pervez Musharraf to the nation on January 12. While announcing a massive campaign to eradicate the sectarian menace, Musharraf banned two major sectarian organisations, the *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP) and the *Tehreek-e-Jaafria Pakistan* (TJP), besides putting the *Sunni Tehrik* on notice. Six months later [on

August 14, 2002] he banned two other sectarian outfits – *Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan* (SMP) and *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ). However, the genie of sectarian violence refused to be bottled.

Although the *Sunni-Shia* conflict is centuries old, its more modern and virulent manifestation in Pakistan can be traced to Imam Khomeini's successful revolution in Iran and the subsequent setting up of a *Shia* state. In response, extremist *Sunni* groups began to espouse the transformation of Pakistan into a *Sunni* state where the *Shias* were to be deemed a non-Muslim minority. The military regime of Zia fostered the growth of sectarianism in a number of ways. It created among the *Shia* community a perception that his government was moving rapidly towards the establishment of a *Sunni Hanafi* state in which the Islamisation of laws was seen to reflect the Islam of the dominant community. The 1980 siege of the government Secretariat building in Islamabad by tens of thousands of *Shias* protesting against the *Zakat* and *Ushar* ordinance was a clear indication of their apprehensions about Zia's Islamisation project. The selective backing of the largely *Sunni-Deobandi* Afghan mujahideen groups resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan also corresponded to a sectarian pattern of preferences that reinforced perceptions on both sides of the divide.

By the end of the Zia rule, the consequences of his policies were fairly obvious. Over the last decade, there has been a major escalation in sectarian tension, the number of sectarian killings and armed sectarian groups. Among those groups that have gained particular prominence are the anti-*Sunni Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan* (SMP), which is an offshoot of the *Tehrik-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jaafria* (TNFJ), the main religio-political party of the *Shia* sect in Pakistan, which later renamed as *Tehrik-e-Jaafria Pakistan* (TFP); and the anti-*Shia Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba*, later to become the SSP, an offshoot of the *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI), a leading religio-political *Sunni Deobandi* party. The LeJ, considered to be the most violent sectarian organisation, is a further offshoot of the SSP. Pakistani agencies believe most of the JUI-linked *Sunni* sectarian organisations, especially the LeJ and the SSP, are also linked to al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

The pattern and scale of the ongoing bloody sectarian violence in Pakistan indicates some key features. The contending groups are well organised and well armed and their ability to maintain their effectiveness and to elude law enforcement agencies is due to an extensive support network that includes *madrassas*, political parties, bases in Afghanistan and financial support from foreign countries. With the Saudi-linked *Sunni* sectarian groups targeting their rival *Shia* groups in Pakistan and the Iran-backed *Shias* coordinating reprisals across Pakistan against their *Sunni* opponents, a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia is being fought on the Pakistani soil, with groups in Afghanistan weighing in as well.

Since the 9/11 terror attacks and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the pro-Taliban *Deobandi* extremists are targeting *Shias* in Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, Hazara and elsewhere. But one may ask why? The answer is very simple. The *Deobandis* believe that the Iran-backed *Shias* supported the US to invade Afghanistan in October 2001 which led to the fall of the Taliban regime there. They argue that Iran supported the Northern Alliance to capture Afghanistan and the Hazara *Shias* were instrumental in the killing of thousands of the Taliban in Afghanistan after its invasion by the US-led Allied Forces. The *Deobandis* further point out that the *Shias* supported the Americans to invade Iraq besides ditching the *Sunnis* in Faluja where Muqtada Sadar was neutralised by Iran.

To tell the truth, the present *Shia-Sunni* strife in Pakistan is strongly intertwined with that in Afghanistan. The anti-*Shia* Taliban regime in Afghanistan had helped anti-*Shia* Pakistani organisations and vice versa. Subsequently, the leadership of the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* and the *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan*, sent thousands of its volunteers to fight with the extreme *Deobandi* Taliban regime and in return the Taliban gave sanctuary to their leaders in the Afghan capital of Kabul. According to Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid, over 80,000 Pakistani militants have trained and fought with Taliban since 1994 that now form a hardcore militia of Islamic activists, ever ready to carry out a similar Taliban-style Islamic revolution in Pakistan. Therefore, the *Shia-Sunni* strife inside Afghanistan has mainly been a function of the puritanical *Sunni* Taliban's clashes with *Shia* Afghans, primarily the Hazara ethnic group.

Even though most of the violence branded as sectarian in Pakistan after 9/11 is violence between *Deobandis* and *Shias*, the sectarian terrain is much wider. The sectarian problem facing Pakistan is different from the many other Muslim societies with sectarian tendencies. Though sectarianism in the Pakistani context often refers to the conflict between the majority *Sunni* and minority *Shia* traditions, the definition is misleading given the fact that these two sects are not homogenous; they have their own sub-sects, local variants and different schools of thought which are rivals to each other. Not only different sects like *Sunni* and *Shia*, but also different schools of thought, like *Barelvis* and *Deobandis* and *Wahabis* are in opposition to each other. For instance, the country reeled under its biggest-ever sectarian blow in April 2006 when a grand *Barelvi* congregation of the *Sunni Tehrik*, celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was targeted by a suicide bomber, killing 57 and wounding over 100.

The bombing remains unsolved officially despite the fact that the country's intelligence agencies had then concluded that hard line *Sunni* sectarian outfit, the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, was responsible for the bombing that wiped out the entire leadership of the *Sunni Tehrik* on April 12, 2006 at the Nishtar Park in Karachi. The agencies were of the view that the worst suicide attack was actually the outcome of a growing intra-sectarian tussle between two major *Sunni* groups – the pro-Taliban *Deobandis* and the anti-Taliban *Barelvis*. The *Sunni Tehrik* is considered to be the only *Barelvi* outfit that departed from the sect's predominantly moderate posture and eventually became militant like most of the *Deobandi* and *Ahle Hadith* groups. The *Tehrik* was actually set up in 1990 to counter the growing *Deobandi* and *Ahle Hadith* dominance in Karachi, by Maulana Salim Qadri, a member of *Dawat-e-Islami* (Green Turbans) who was himself shot down on May 18, 2001 at Chandni Chowk in Karachi. A *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* activist Faisal alias Pehlwan was eventually sentenced to death by a Karachi Anti Terrorism Court for the murder. Therefore, one can say the divide between different *Sunni* sub-sects in Pakistan is equally large as the divide with *Shias* and looking at the problem of sectarianism only as a *Shia-Sunni* problem is too simplistic.

According to a well known Pakistani intellectual and writer Khaled Ahmed, Pakistanis are in a state of denial about the menace of sectarianism in their country, yet the reality is that thousands of Pakistani *Shias* have died in sectarian violence. Speaking at an Asia Program event cosponsored by the Middle East Program in Washington on May 02, 2007, Khaled argued that Pakistan is not a truly sectarian country; *Sunnis* and *Shia* largely don't hate each other and most of the internecine violence is restricted to portions of cities like Karachi and Quetta and in the provinces of Punjab and NWFP. Why, then, does a nonsectarian nation suffer sectarian strife? The answer, said Khaled, is that Pakistan has become a relocated battlefield for the *Sunni-Shia* violence of Middle East.

"Prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Pakistan's *Shia* minority was unresponsive to Iran's radical *Shia* ideology. Instead, many Pakistani *Shia* clerics studied in the Iraqi *Shia* city of Najaf and developed views at variance with those of Iran's revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Yet Iran's *Shia*-led revolution kindled a sectarian fervor that eventually spread to Pakistan. The Pakistani *Shias*, therefore, began training at the Iranian holy city of Qom. The Pakistani authorities used jihadi militias in their proxy wars and the seminaries that trained the jihadis began apostatizing through issuing of *fatwas* or edicts", said Khaled adding that sectarianism has increased in Pakistan under President Musharraf, because he was unable to control Pakistan's "ungovernable spaces," into which non-Pakistani sectarian-minded groups are entering and which may comprise as much as 60 percent of the total Pakistani territory.

As a matter of fact, Pakistan is the only country – now aside from Iraq – where most of the suicide bombings (66%) are based on sectarian hatred. The hate literature and cassettes from the two sides – easily available across the country – clearly violate the law of the land but seldom invite sanction. Offences such as murder and destruction of property do get a state response but it lacks the will to take the difficult steps necessary to deal with the phenomenon. A narrow law and order approach, with a police force unequipped to deal with highly motivated, well trained and well organised militants, has obviously not had much of an impact, particularly when the militants have state-of-the-art weapons. The increasing

militarisation and brutalisation of the conflict shows that there are virtually no sanctuaries left -- neither home, nor mosque or the hospital. And being innocent is not the issue. Just 'being' is enough -
- being *Shia* or *Sunni*, *Barelvi* or *Deobandi*.

22

The Corps of Mohammad's Companions

Earlier known as the *Anjuman-e-Sipah-e-Sahaba*, the *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP) or the Corps of the Prophet Muhammad's Companions, belongs to the *Deobandi* school of thought and is considered an extremist sectarian organisation claiming to fight for the rights of the *Sunni* sect in Pakistan, especially in the province of Punjab.

Allegedly involved in spreading sectarian violence across Pakistan, with the *Shia* community and Iranian interests in Pakistan as its prime targets the SSP is actually an offshoot of the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI), a *Sunni Deobandi* religio-political party, which had played an active role in the electoral politics of Pakistan since its inception. Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, Maulana Ziaur Rehman Farooqi, Maulana Esar-ul-Haq Qasmi and Maulana Azam Tariq established the SSP, initially as the *Anjuman-e-Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (ASSP), in September 1985 in an environment of increasing sectarian hostility in Punjab. The SSP founder Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, who was a prayer leader at a Jhang mosque, was a product of the *madrassa* education and was known for his anti-*Shia* oratory. Jhangvi was groomed during the 1974 anti-Ahmedi agitation like many other leaders of the SSP and later rose to become the vice chairman of the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* Punjab. Jhangvi remained associated with the JUI till 1989 when he finally discarded it because of a completely different line of struggle. Jhangvi was militant in

nature and had an anti-*Shia* hardline agenda, compared with the JUL, which was a religio-political party.

The *Anjuman-e-Sipah-e-Sahaba* was then renamed to *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan*, with Jhang city being made its base which has very high numbers of landholdings by the *Shia* landlords and the people working for them are primarily *Sunnis*. The SSP cadres soon resorted to violent means to achieve their goals and made public their intentions to make Pakistan a *Sunni* state. While fervently believing in hostility towards *Shias*, the SSP declared that the *Shias* were non-Muslims. While the *Shia* activists were following the developing trend closely and were making themselves ready to counter the SSP propaganda effectively, the *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqah-e-Jaafria* (TNFJ) chief Allama Arif Hussain Al Hussaini was assassinated in August 1988 serving a severe blow to *Shias*. Soon afterwards, it was Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi's turn who too was killed on February 23, 1990, within a year of Hussaini's murder. Maulana Ziaur Rehman Farooqi subsequently took over the command of the SSP but he too was killed in a powerful bomb explosion in Lahore on January 19, 1997. Maulana Azam Tariq succeeded Maulana Ziaur Rehman Farooqi before being killed in October 2003. The SSP was one of the five militant and sectarian outfits that were banned by Musharraf on January 12, 2002 for their alleged involvement in terrorist activities in Pakistan.

After being banned, the SSP chief, Maulana Azam Tariq, had renamed it as *Millat-e-Islamia Pakistan (MMP)*, saying his party believes in political struggle through parliament with the ultimate aim of constitutionally turning Pakistan into a *Sunni* state, just as Iran is constitutionally a *Shia* state. Soon afterwards, he was shot dead in Islamabad on October 6, 2003 while going to the Parliament to attend the National Assembly session. Considered to be pro-Taliban, Azam Tariq had won a National Assembly seat in the 2002 general elections from the *Sunni*-dominated Jhang district of Punjab while contesting as an independent candidate. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the US-led forces, Azam Tariq had joined hands with members of the Afghan Jihad Council to condemn the allied forces' bombing of the

neighbouring Muslim State. Under his leadership, the SSP was linked with the *Harkatul Mujahideen* (HuM) led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil and the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM) led by Maulana Masood Azhar. The gruesome murder of Azam Tariq remains a mystery despite the fact that he and his outfit had a cozy working relationship with the country's powerful intelligence and security agencies for more than a decade, especially before the 9/11.

The origin of the SSP actually lies in the feudal set-up of Punjab and the religio-political developments in the 1970s and 1980s. The political and economic power in Punjab was a privilege of large landowners, mostly *Shias*, a minority as compared to the *Sunni* sect. The urban Punjab in contrast, was a non-feudalised middle-class society, largely from the *Sunni* sect. The socio-economic rationale for the SSP's origin is explained largely from the economic profile of the Jhang district, the home town of Jhangvi and the home base of the SSP. Located in a region that divides Central from Southern Punjab province, Jhang still has a significantly high proportion of large land holdings, leaving feudalism fairly undisturbed. Most large landlords, who are *Shias*, dominate both society and politics in the region. But, over the years, the area has developed as a central market town, gradually increasing the power of traders, shopkeepers and transport operators in the region. Seeking a political voice and role, this class, largely from the *Sunni* sect, has been challenging the traditional feudal hold.

However, the most serious political challenge to the control of feudal interests had been articulated in the form of violent sectarianism, with the formation of the SSP. This has meant, however, that the contest for access to resources and status and the competition for domination over the state apparatus are not framed in terms of class divisions, or modernisation imperatives, but confrontationist sectarian identities. As in most areas affected by violence, a major contradiction has already risen. While a sizeable proportion of the Jhang traders and shopkeepers continue to fund the SSP, most do not believe in the violence associated with the party, rather it is now a matter of buying security from the SSP henchmen. Nevertheless, there is a

decline in their support for the SSP over recent years as a result of the economic consequences of sectarian strife.

However, writer Hassan Abbas maintains in his book titled "*Pakistan's drift into extremism, Allah, the Army and America's war on terror*", (published in 2004) that extremist among *Sunnis*, especially belonging to the *Deobandi* and *Ahle Hadith* group, had all along been uncomfortable with the *Shia* community for theological differences, but sectarian violence until then was rare. "However, the 1979 Iranian revolution changed the character and magnitude of sectarian politics in Pakistan. It emboldened Pakistani *Shias* who in turn became politicised and started asserting for their rights. The zealous emissaries of the Iranian revolutionary regime started financing their outfit *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jaafria* (TNFJ - Movement for implementation of *jaafria* religious law) and providing scholarships for Pakistani students to study in Iranian religious seminaries".

For the Zia regime though, he writes, the problematic issue was *Shia* activism leading to a strong reaction to his attempts to impose *Hanafi* Islam (a branch of the *Sunni* sect). "For this, he winked to the hardliners among the *Sunni* religious groups to establish a front to squeeze the *Shias*. It was in this context that Jhangvi was selected by the intelligence community to do the needful. The adherents of *Deobandi* school of thought were worried by *Shia* activism for religious reasons anyhow. The state patronage came as an additional incentive. Consequently, in a well-designed effort, *Shia* assertiveness was projected as their disloyalty to Pakistan and its Islamic ideology. It was only a matter of few months that Saudi funds started pouring in making the project feasible. For Saudi Arabia, Iranian revolution was quite scary for its ideals were conflicting with that of a *Wahabi* monarchy. More so, with an approximately ten percent *Shia* population, Saudi Arabia was concerned about the expansion of the *Shia* activism in any Muslim country. Hence, it was more than willing to curb such trends in Pakistan by making financial investment to bolster its *Wahabi* agenda".

As far as its organizational set up is concerned, the SSP reportedly maintains its headquarters in the two largest *Deobandi* *madrassas* of Punjab – *Jamiat-ul-Uloom Eidgah* in Bahawalnagar city, and *Darul Uloom Deoband Faqirwali* in the Fort Abbas

subdivision. However, all organizational controls are exercised from regional headquarters located in the *Jamia Faruqiya*, Jia Moosa, Shadara near Lahore while the international units are controlled by the *Madrassa Mahmoodiya* in Jhang. The SSP networks in Multan, Jhang, Quetta, Hyderabad and Peshawar have been under Maulana Abdul Ghafoor, Rana Ayub, Hafiz Qasim Siddique, Maulana Farooq Azad and Maulana Darwesh respectively. The tentacles of the organization are widespread, as the SSP has paid considerable attention to setting up district level units. The organization boasted 75 district-level and 225 *tehsil* (micro-level unit of administration) units before being banned by the government in 2002.

Although rooted in Punjab, the SSP is now considered to be a truly national and increasingly international phenomenon. With 20 branches in foreign countries including Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan etc, the SSP claims to be the largest and most pervasive Sunni supremacist organization in the world. The organization has tens of thousands of active supporters and boasts up to 6,000 trained and professional cadres; many of whom are actively involved in sectarian violence. The SSP extremists have so far operated in two ways: The first involves targeted killings of prominent opponent group activists. In the second, terrorists fire on worshippers in mosques operated by opposing sects. The SSP leadership holds Iran as the sponsor of *Shia* extremist organisations in Pakistan. Therefore, when any major *Sunni* leader is assassinated, Iranians in Pakistan are targeted for retribution. For instance, the Iranian Counsel General in Lahore, Sadiq Ganji, was killed in December 1990 in what was reported to be a retribution for the February 1990 killing of the SSP founder Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi.

As with other sectarian outfits, the SSP chose to lie low after the military coup of November 1999, lending credence to the hypothesis that the SSP, like other sectarian and ethnic groups, indulge in violence only when a passive state guarantees an environment of neutrality and even tacit support to this violence. As the Musharraf regime took a hard-line stance against internal violence in Pakistan, the SSP decided to keep a low profile for the time being. However, following the invasion of Afghanistan

by the Allied Forces, Azam Tariq warned to fight alongside the Taliban militia. In an interview with the BBC, he openly praised the Taliban leadership and endorsed attacks on *Shias* in Pakistan. He was locked up in October 2001 as the Allied Forces rained bombs on the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Pakistani authorities feared he would lead violent rallies against the attacks on the Taliban who also happen to be *Sunnis*. When Musharraf held a national election 12 months later, Azam campaigned from behind the bars and won a National Assembly seat from Jhang.

WTC bombing, Ramzi Yusuf and SSP

The *Sipah-e-Sahaba* Pakistan has often been linked to Ramzi Ahmed Yusuf, the main accused in the New York World Trade Centre bombing of February 1993. He was arrested from an Islamabad guesthouse on February 7, 1995 and was handed over to the United States.

Exploring Ramzi Yusuf's links with a Pakistani sectarian outfit, *Sipah-e-Sahaba*, a March 27, 1995 news report in Pakistan's English daily, *The News* stated: "The Pakistani investigators are sure of Ramzi Yusuf's ties with the *Sipah-e-Sahaba*, which flourished mostly in the military training camps inside Afghanistan designated for Arabs and Pakistanis. Orthodox Sunni religious schools in Pakistan serve as feeders for these military training camps". The report stated: "Pakistani investigators have identified a 24-year-old religious fanatic Abdul Shakoor residing in Lyari in Karachi, as an important Pakistani associate of Ramzi Yusuf. Abdul Shakoor had intimate contacts with Ramzi and was responsible for the June 20, 1994 massive bomb explosion at the shrine of Imam Ali Reza in Mashhad. The Iranian government had earlier held the rebel *Mujahideen Khalaf* group responsible for the explosion. Analysts suspect Ramzi Yusuf's connection with *Mujahideen Khalaf* because of his Iraqi background".

The report added: "Independent reports suggested that in *Moharram* (first month of Islamic calendar) last year (1994), Ramzi traveled to Iran via Turbat in Baluchistan. Abdul Muqeem, another long-time resident of Karachi and identified as a brother of Ramzi, had also spoken about Ramzi's involvement in the bomb blast at Mashhad. Ramzi is understood to have

strong connections in the Pakistani and Iranian side of Baluchistan. Last year (1994), Ramzi's associates in Karachi were given the task to murder Maulana Salim Qadri, the chief of the *Sunni Tehrik*, an organisation of moderate Sunnis from the *Barelvi* school of thought. Besides Abdul Shakoor, investigators believed that Abdul Wahab, owner of Junaid Bakery in the Lyari area of Karachi and the unit in charge of the *Sipah-e-Sahaba* in Chakiwarah, neighbourhood of Karachi, was another close associate of Ramzi."

The report said Ramzi also ran a network of Saudi nationals committed to destabilising the royal family in that country. "There is no evidence available to suggest that the *Sipah-e-Sahaba* was in any way aware of Ramzi's anti-kingdom operations inside Saudi Arabia. A nationwide hunt is currently on to trace Munir Madni, a suspected Saudi national and a resident of Bahadurabad in Karachi. Evidence confirmed that Ramzi, through Munir Madni, had established a front import-export company that used to get a gift of *Aabe Zam Zam* (holy water) from Saudi Arabia worth many millions of rupees. At one point last year (1994), the same front company generated about Rs.7 million by selling the holy water. The money was later used by Ramzi to finance Saudi extremist groups. Investigations have revealed dozens of Saudis committed to jihad all over the world are visiting the military training camps inside Afghanistan which are ideal places to rub shoulders with persons like Ramzi whose colleagues in Pakistan and Afghanistan were still busy in fuelling unrest in the kingdom".

A July 2002 report by South Asia Analysis Group stated, "In 1996, cadres of the *Sipah-e-Sahaba*, *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, *Lashkar-e-Toiba* and *Harkatul Mujahideen* encouraged by the Inter Services Intelligence, entered Afghanistan in numbers of thousands to help the Taliban in its successful assault on Jalalabad and Kabul. After the capture of Kabul by the Taliban in September 1996, they stayed behind in Afghanistan to help the Taliban in its fight against the Northern Alliance. It was the SSP/LeJ elements, which had joined the Taliban and later carried out the brutal massacre of the Shias in the Hazara belt. When bin Laden moved over to Afghanistan from Sudan in 1996, he did not have to create a new terrorist infrastructure to help him in his operations

against the United States and Israel. A well-motivated and well-trained infrastructure already existed on the ground consisting of trained Arabs as well as Pakistanis and he took over their leadership. After he formed his International Islamic Front for Jihad against the US and Israel in 1998, the Pakistani organisations --- the HuM, the LeT, the JeM and the SSP/LJ -- joined it and fought against the Northern Alliance and then against the international coalition led by the United States. Subsequently, after the collapse of the Taliban, this infrastructure moved over to Pakistan, along with the surviving leaders and cadres", the report concluded.

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The Dreaded Militia of the Jhangvi

Most of the major terrorist operations carried out against the Western targets in Pakistan since 9/11 appear to have a common grandmother – the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ) – a *Sunni Deobandi* organization which is the group of choice today for hard-core militants who are adamant to pursue their ambitious jehadi agenda in Pakistan.

Launched in 1996 as a militant sectarian *Sunni* group, the *Lashkar* today is the most violent terrorist group operating in Pakistan with the help of its lethal suicide squad. As with most of the *Sunni* sectarian and militant groups, almost the entire LeJ leadership is made up of people who have fought in Afghanistan and most of its cadre strength has been drawn from the numerous *Sunni* *madrassas* in Pakistan. The *Lashkar* was formed by a break away faction of the *Sunni* extremists of the *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP), which walked out of the outfit, accusing its parent organisation of deviating from the ideals of its co-founder, Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, who was allegedly assassinated by his *Shia* rivals in February 1990. After Jhangvi's assassination, those of his followers especially Riaz Basra, who wanted to continue his mission started leaving the *Sipah-e-Sahaba*, forming their own groups under different names.

In the process, at least six splinter groups came into being including *Jhangvi Tigers*, *Al Haq Tigers*, *Tanzeemul Haq*, *Al-Farooq*, *Al-Badr Foundation* and *Allah-O-Akbar*. While *Al-Badr Federation* was created in Karachi, the other five groups were established in

Jhang, Faisalabad, Sargodha, Sumandari and Chiniot. As the central secretary information of the SSP, Riaz Basra finally decided to launch the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* in 1996, the leaders of the already existing *Jhangvi Tigers*, *Al-Haq Tigers* and *Allah Akbar*, decided to merge their groups into his LeJ. While parting ways, Basra, who believed in the use of force to further Jhangvi's mission, alleged that the SSP leadership has abandoned the path of Jhangvi. However, there are those who insist that the LeJ was launched with the consent of the SSP leadership, giving it the militant role. Riaz Basra was appointed the '*Salar-e-Aala*' (Chief Commander) of the LeJ, with 12 *salars* (sub-commanders) under his command.

A well-entrenched network was established for an uninterrupted supply of arms and ammunition from Afghanistan to Punjab and from there to Karachi in Sindh. Although the trained LeJ operatives never crossed the figure of 500, yet they proved themselves to be the deadliest of all. In January 1997, a deadly bomb blast at the Sessions Court in Lahore left 30 people dead, including the SSP chief Ziaur Rehman Farooqi along with 22 policemen and a journalist. As a swift reaction, the Iranian Cultural Centre in Lahore was attacked and set on fire, while seven people were shot dead in the Multan district of Punjab including the Iranian diplomat Muhammad Ali Rahimi in the same month. In September 1997, five personnel of the Iranian armed forces who were in Pakistan for training purpose were killed.

Subsequent intelligence reports revealed that both the SSP and the LeJ enjoy an easy access to sophisticated arms and their henchmen have the ability to use them even against law enforcement agencies. It was during the second tenure of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that his younger brother Shahbaz Sharif's government in Punjab moved against the SSP and the LeJ and killed 36 of its leading militants in fake police encounters, and that too within a short span of one year. During his last days as Prime Minister, Sharif, whose own life was under threat from the SSP and the LeJ and who had already survived an assassination attempt from these elements, went public in naming Afghanistan as the country providing shelter and training to the SSP and LeJ hit men.

Before that, on January 3, 1999, Riaz Basra-led LeJ had attempted to blow up a bridge on the Lahore-Raiwind road, close to Nawaz Sharif's farm house, shortly before he was due to pass by. Hardly few minutes before Prime Minister's convoy was to pass, two policemen on a routine patrol stopped their van under the bridge. The policemen got out to pee. Their driver pressed the button to talk on his radio. As the van was parked only a few yards from the bridge, the rudimentary device switched on prematurely and detonated the explosives. The blast was so powerful that the two-span bridge went awry. Before this incident, the LeJ in a press release had offered a reward of Rs.135 million for anyone who would undertake the killing of Nawaz Sharif and his younger brother who was then Chief Minister of Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif.

The *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* uses terror tactics as a part of its grand strategy to force the state into accepting its narrow interpretations of the *Sunni* sectarian doctrines as official doctrines. Besides targeting the US interests in Pakistan, the victims of its terror tactics have been leaders and workers of rival *Shia* outfits, bureaucrats, policemen and worshippers. As the *Lashkar* hit men indulged in terrorism, they used to shoot their targets from moving motorbikes. Later on, they started using timed devices and graduated to throwing hand grenades and mowing down targets with machine guns. However, the latest innovation of the *Lashkar* hit men is a combination of hand grenades to kill and create panic, automatic fire to strike those stampeding to safety and suicide detonations to finish off themselves and the rest.

According to law enforcement officials, a *Lashkar* cell is made up of two or three young men while the number can exceed up to seven in exceptional cases. The cell often disbands after an operation and regroups at another location. The cells are drawn from a pool of young men trained in Afghanistan who are scattered all over Pakistan. The Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), with long-standing and murky links to jehadi groups, planted informers in the camps who reported back on consignments dispatched from Afghanistan. But fresh boys without criminal records were difficult to trace once they crossed back into Pakistan. Terrorist attacks carried out by the fresh LeJ batches

simply left the security agencies helpless to investigate or prevent further attacks.

After the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the LeJ militants preferred to take their chances with the Pakistani authorities - even risk liquidation - instead of falling into the hands of Northern Alliance commanders. And the ISI lost what little control it had over the LeJ when new internationalist militants took over. The *Lashkar* leadership recruits hit men and operatives with care, looking for strong religious conviction and steady nerves. The trained martyrs, called the armoured corps of jihad, return to their homes and jobs to live normally until summoned. While they wait, they are under strict orders to shun beards and traditional clothes to maintain a neat, inconspicuous appearance to have their documents (real ones issued under fake names) in order and to carry them at all times and to do nothing illegal or out of the ordinary.

Terrorism experts say the Lashkar has become media-savvy by timing daylight attacks to catch the evening news. They believe the planners of the terror attacks watch Hollywood films for ideas. And that is how they thought of disguising the late LeJ chief, Riaz Basra, putting his leg in a cast and wheeling him into former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Lahore residence in 1998 as part of a scheme to show that they could infiltrate anywhere. Another idea came from a local movie: the Lashkar organised a fake wedding procession in Multan city in 1997, with a bridegroom on a white horse accompanied by musicians, singers and dancers. A cameraman recorded the event. As the noisy procession passed the heavily guarded Iranian Cultural Center, hit men climbed over the back wall and shot dead the center's Shia Iranian director and six others. Fireworks set off by the wedding guests camouflaged the gunfire.

In October 2000, the LeJ split into two factions with one faction headed by Riaz Basra and the other by the chief of the group's *Majlis-e-Shoora* (Supreme Council), Qari Abdul Hai alias Qari Asadullah alias Talha. Qari Hai was Basra's lieutenant and ran his training camp in Sarobi, Afghanistan, until the two leaders fell out and formed their own respective factions. While the majority of Hai's supporters were Karachi-based, Basra's

cadres had their roots in Punjab. The issue leading to the split was serious difference between the two over resumption of the ethnic strife, which had receded into a relative lull after Musharraf's October 1999 military coup. While Basra wanted to resume attacks against *Shia* targets, Hai opposed the plan terming it suicidal for the organisation, maintaining that with a military regime in power, any armed activity would invite stern action against the *Lashkar*.

On August 14, 2001, General Musharraf, in the face of growing public criticism of his failure to control anti-*Shia* violence, announced the banning of the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*. Five months later, on January 15, 2002, Musharraf banned the *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP). Soon afterwards, the regime rounded up a large number of the two activists of the sectarian outfits. However, despite being outlawed almost six years ago, both the groups continue to carry out terrorist activities across Pakistan. Since 2002, the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* has provided services for large-scale suicide attacks. A suicide operation in March 2002 in an Islamabad church in the well-guarded sensitive diplomatic enclave killed five Christians, including two American nationals.

In May 2002, eleven Frenchmen, who were mistaken for being Americans, were blown up in Karachi and on June 14, 2002, twelve Pakistanis were killed in a suicide attack on US diplomats. At least five of the 10 terrorists identified belonged to the LeJ cadres. It was also the first occasion that police identified LeJ as being involved in all the three incidents. One of the photographed men, Asif Ramzi, was already wanted in the Daniel Pearl murder case, with a three million rupees-reward offered for his capture. According to investigators, the al-Qaeda network worked in close coordination with the LeJ cadres to plan both the car bomb attacks in Karachi.

On January 30, 2003, the US State Department added the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* to its List of Foreign Terrorist Organisations and to those outfits covered under an Executive Order. Making the announcement on his boss Collin Powell's behalf, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher had said that the terrorist group has already claimed responsibility for the 1997 killing of four American oil workers in Karachi. "They have ties to the al-Qaeda, ties to the Taliban, in addition to receiving

sanctuary in Afghanistan for their activities in Pakistan. Moreover, the group was involved in the kidnapping and subsequent murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl", Boucher added.

As far as *Lashkar*'s leadership and command structure is concerned, Muhammad Ajmal alias Akram Lahori is its last known *Salar-e-Aala* (Commander-in-Chief). Lahori was originally with *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP), which he had joined in 1990. Subsequently, in 1996, he along with Malik Ishaq and Riaz Basra founded the LeJ and launched terrorist activities in Punjab. Lahori, who had established a training camp in Sarobi, Afghanistan after securing support from the erstwhile Taliban regime there, succeeded Basra, who was killed on May 14, 2002. Lahori is himself in police custody after his arrest in Orangi Town, Karachi, on June 17, 2004. Before being arrested, he was carrying Rs 5 million head-money announced by the Sindh government and another Rs 5 million announced by the Punjab government. So far, it is not clear if Lahori has passed on the mantle to any one else, or continues to head the outfit from his prison cell.

The newspaper files of July 2, 2002, quoting senior police officials say Lahori was involved in 38 cases of sectarian killings in Sindh. These included the killing of Ehteshamuddin Haider (brother of former Federal Interior Minister Lt. Gen. Moinuddin Haider) and Pakistan State Oil Managing Director Shoukat Raza Mirza. Besides, he was also involved in the massacre at *Imambargah Mehmoodabad* and in the murder of Iranian cadets in Rawalpindi. Lahori confessed during interrogation that he was involved in 30 cases of sectarian killings in Punjab, including those of 24 persons who were attending a *Majlis* in Mominpura, Lahore. He also revealed that his group had planned to kill Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider, but due to tight security measures, murdered his brother instead. Consequent to the death of Riaz Basra, Akram Lahori was acting as the LeJ chief.

Akram Lahori's predecessor, Riaz Basra was involved in over 300 incidents of terrorism including attacks on Iranian missions, killing of an Iranian diplomat Sadiq Ganji and targeting government officials. Basra was arrested and tried by a special court for Iranian diplomat Sadiq Ganji's killing, but

escaped during trial in 1994 from police custody while being produced in court. He was chief of the Khalid bin Walled unit of the Afghan militants training camps in Afghanistan. Riaz Basra, along with three of his accomplices, was killed in an encounter at Mailsi, Multan, on May 14, 2002. However, there are those in the LeJ circles who say Basra was in police custody since January 2002 and was being interrogated by intelligence agencies about the activities of his group.

Pakistani intelligence sources even claim that the *Lashkar* has prepared women suicide bombers to attack several *Shia* places of worship in Karachi. A suspected mastermind of bomb blasts at two *Shia* mosques in Quetta is reported to have disclosed to the Karachi police during interrogation that the *Lashkar* had brainwashed a few girls aged between 16 and 20 years to carry out suicide missions. Daily *Dawn* of July 1, 2004 quoted a Karachi police officer Manzoor Mughal as saying that Gul Hasan, an arrested accused, had disclosed the girls persuaded by *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* to explode themselves in the women section of the Karachi mosques, would be wearing veils or school uniform and carrying handbags.

According to intelligence reports, Aziza, a citizen of Uzbekistan and widow of Ubaidullah, who was an active member of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, is imparting training to female suicide bombers at a base in Pakistan's tribal area. Ubaidullah was reportedly killed in January 2004 during an operation in South Waziristan Agency conducted by the armed forces of Pakistan. In late March 2004, says a news report, Aziza told her relatives that she intended to avenge her husband's death by committing terrorist acts in Pakistan. But the Karachi police thinks it can bust the group once they capture two real sisters who are hiding somewhere in Karachi and waiting for an opportunity to explode themselves. These girls are related to Gul Hasan who is a central leader of the Asif Chhotoo faction of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

The sources said the two arrested al-Qaeda accused - Dawood Badini and Mosabir Aruchi - are related to Ramzi Ahmed Yusuf, who has already been convicted in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. Dawood

Badini is a brother-in-law of Ramzi Yusuf and is wanted in a 2003 Quetta mosque bomb attack that killed more than 40 people. Badini's sister is married to Ramzi Yusuf. The other man arrested, Mosabir Aruchi, is a nephew of the al-Qaeda's chief operational commander, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, who was nabbed from Rawalpindi in March 2003 and subsequently sentenced in the United States in 2008. Khalid Sheikh is an uncle of Ramzi Ahmed Yusuf, which makes Aruchi and Yusuf cousins.

Those involved in tracking down *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's* terror network in Karachi, believe that the group might be working in the Sindh capital as the delta force of al-Qaeda. Elaborating, they said the delta force is a special al-Qaeda unit that was trained under Khalid Sheikh Mohammad before his arrest and is tasked with specific high profile targets, including Musharraf. Investigations into the attack on the Karachi Corps Commander in June 2006 gave broad hints that it was an operation jointly planned and carried out by the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* and their al-Qaeda associates -- Dawood Badini and Mosabir Aruchi. The intelligence sources did not rule out the possibility of Badini and Aruchi's involvement in the abduction and murder planning of an American journalist Daniel Pearl who was beheaded in Karachi in 2002. The FBI has already identified Khalid Sheikh as the person who slaughtered Pearl with his own hands.

Sharing their findings with their Pakistani counterparts, US intelligence sleuths stationed in Pakistan had once warned that another leading al-Qaeda operative - Abu Musab al-Zarqawi might also be working in close coordination with the LeJ network in Pakistan to carry out some major terrorist operation. According to intelligence findings, Zarqawi shared the LeJ's anti-Shia bias and its ultra violent techniques, right down to the May 2004 videotaped beheading of an American businessman, Nicholas Berg, in Iraq. The FBI claims to have got evidence to prove that Zarqawi and Ramzi, who are known to each other since the 1990, had carried out the June 20, 1994 powerful bomb explosion at the shrine of Imam Ali Raza in Mashhad, Iran.

While the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* obviously takes some direction from the al-Qaeda, the group stays admirably focused on its home turf and its stated goal of radicalising Pakistan. The stakes in that battle are far from parochial. In addition to its nuclear

arsenal, Pakistan is a key strategic ally of the US in its War on Terror. Most of the terrorism experts agree that the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* operatives are the most highly trained and equally vicious killers the world of terror has to offer. Media reports quoting intelligence sources say the *Lashkar* has finally moved to centre stage and the past claims by the Pakistani agencies of its demise after the capture of the LeJ chief Akram Lahori have proved to be wide of the mark. These reports say the LeJ has already started a recruitment drive and is forming new cells at the district and provincial levels.

These reports say a Most Wanted terrorist Matiur Rehman had been tasked with reorganising the *Lashkar* cells across Pakistan. An expert in bomb making, Matiur is believed to have links with al-Qaeda and is one of the prime suspects in the London airline plot. These reports say drug money "from the Taliban" was being used to fund the recruitment drive and reorganisation. The 33-year-old Matiur comes from Bahawalpur and his head carries a bounty of Rs 10 million. As the evidence of the Pakistani link in the August 2006 transatlantic bombing plot mounted, several British media reports indicated that al-Qaeda linked Matiur Rehman is one of the prime suspects in the London Airline Plot. ABC News' Alexis Debat has done the lion's share of the investigation of Matiur. Just one day prior to the uncovering of the London Airline Plot, Debat described Matiur as "The Man Who Is Planning the Next Attack on America".

In March 2006, Debat explained Rehman's role as the liaisons between al-Qaeda and the Pakistani jihadi community, saying he was the new chief of al-Qaeda's military committee. American intelligence sleuths stationed in Pakistan describe Matiur as an emerging al-Qaeda figure, who had helped train thousands of fellow Pakistani militants at training camps during the late 1990s. They further describe Matiur as extremely dangerous because of his role as a crucial interface between the brains of al-Qaeda and its muscle, which is mainly composed these days of militants belonging to several Pakistani jihadi groups. Matiur Rehman is still at large.

A January 6, 2007 editorial by *Daily Times* explored the al-Qaeda links of the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* in these words: "According

to Pakistani security, three incidents of terrorism in Karachi in 2006 - the blast at the US Consulate [on March 3 killing diplomat David Foy], the Nishtar Park massacre [on April 11 which eliminated the entire leadership of *Sunni Tehrik*] and the murder of *Shia* leader Allama Hasan Turabi [on July 14] - were all carried out by the sectarian militia *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* and were planned in South Waziristan under the tutelage of al-Qaeda. The new combination is *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, Wana and al-Qaeda and the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* is the blanket term now used for all manner of jihad in which all the *Deobandi-Ahle Hadith* militants have made common cause. All three incidents were staged through the device of suicide-bombings which is clearly the Arab signature in the violence spreading in Pakistan....

"All three incidents had been traced to Wana by the investigators: one ostensibly committed for al-Qaeda and two for the local sectarians.... In fact the entire conglomerate of jihadi militias has accepted a common sectarian banner now, and this has come in the wake of al-Qaeda's own transformation from an intellectually fashioned anti-American organisation into an intra-Islamic exterminator of the *Shia*. Analysts in Pakistan believe this has been done through the mental somersault of equating the *Shia* - the government in Iraq plus, strangely, Iran - as allies of the United States!

"To understand what is going on we have to go back to the late 1980s when al-Qaeda was formed in Peshawar in the midst of a gathering sectarian storm in Pakistan. Because this wave was orchestrated by Saudi Arabia, al-Qaeda tried to keep away from it. But later, starting with the return of Osama Bin Laden and other al-Qaeda elements to Jalalabad from Sudan after 1996, the terror group had to accept a kind of coexistence with the sectarian militias which were taking training in its camps. That is why whenever Pakistan demanded the return of the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* killers from the 'friendly' Taliban government, a deaf ear was turned to it, and the *Lashkar* terrorists continued to live in al-Qaeda camps outside Kabul.

"There were times when al-Qaeda was actually helped by Iran, especially during the tenure of Abu Musab Zarqawi as head of a training camp in Herat from where he infiltrated into Kurdistan through Iranian territory. However, after 2003, there

was a cleavage of opinion inside al-Qaeda. Zarqawi spearheaded the new trend of viewing the *Shia* of Iraq — and Iran itself — as the beneficiaries of the American invasion. At first Zawahiri resisted this trend and al-Qaeda officially advised him in Iraq to stay away from *Shia*-killing, but later the prospect of a grand *Sunni* Arab consensus against Iran became irresistible and Zarqawi was hailed as a martyr when he finally died in Iraq.

“Now *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* is supposed to have planned a fresh targeting of the *Shia* community in the cities where they are found in large numbers: Lahore, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Multan, Khanewal, Layya, Bhakkar, Jhang, Sargodha, Rahimyar Khan, Karachi, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, Parachinar, Hangu, Hyderabad, Nawabshah, Mirpur Khas and Quetta. This is certainly a new challenge for the government in charge of facing up to sectarian violence in the country. Both the mainstream parties — the PPP and the PMLN — faced it when they were in government but failed because of the exclusive handling of jihad by the intelligence agencies.

“It is very important that Pakistan nips the new al-Qaeda direction in the bud even if that means coming to grips with the religious parties that lionise Osama bin Laden. Pakistan may be about to enter into a most dangerous phase of its history. One always knew that an Arab-Iranian war was being waged in Pakistan, but no one really believed that al-Qaeda too was involved in it. More dangerously, a very large population of followers of the Taliban in Pakistan will be challenged to say where they stand in the matter”, the thought provoking *Daily Times* Editorial concluded.

24

Al-Qaeda Still Thriving in Pakistan

Seven years after being accused of carrying out the deadly 9/11 terror attacks in the United States, al-Qaeda remains a potent threat as it keeps thriving in the Pak-Afghan tribal belt where it has established an effective network that increasingly exploits its Pakistani affiliates to carry on the global jihadi agenda of the Osama-led terror outfit.

The Osama-led terror organisation has evolved significantly over the years from a close-knit group of Arab Afghans to a trans-national Islamic global insurgency. This insurgency seeks to overthrow the US dominated global order and restore the former prominence of the Islamic caliphate. Most of the Americans were unfamiliar with the al-Qaeda until the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. According to the CIA claims, using the group's trademark style of tightly coordinated and high-profile violence, the al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four US airliners and successfully crashed two of them into the World Trade Center towers in New York, with a third hitting the Pentagon head office in Washington and a fourth crashing in rural Pennsylvania after the passengers attempted to regain control of the plane. In an exclusive interview with the Geo television on July 23, 2008, the third senior-most al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, Mustafa Abu Yazid alias Sheikh Saeed, confessed for the first time that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by 19 men of al-Qaeda.

The al-Qaeda, which means “The Base” in Arabic, was founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden who continues to be the organisation’s undisputed leader and driving force. The religious inspiration of the outfit has its roots in the *Wahabi* sect, the creed embraced by the current rulers of Saudi Arabia. The ultimate goal of the al-Qaeda is to establish a *Wahabi* Caliphate across the Islamic world, by working with allied Islamic extremist groups to overthrow regimes it deems non-Islamic (i.e. non-*Wahabi* Islamists). It sees western governments, especially that of the US, as those, which are interfering in the affairs of Islamic nations in the interests of western corporations. Having fought the US-sponsored jihad against the Soviet Occupation troops in Afghanistan, Osama had apparently developed a taste for jihad, which was originally the concept of a holy war designed to liberate occupied Muslim lands. He left Saudi Arabia to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1979 where he sponsored and led a number of Arabs fighting against the Soviet troops in the 1980s.

In the mid-1980s, bin Laden co-founded with the Palestinian leader Abdullah Azzam the *Maktab-al-Khidmat* or Services Office, to help funnel fighters and money to the Peshawar-based Afghan resistance groups. The *Maktab* ultimately established several recruitment centers around the world -- including the US, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan -- that enlisted, sheltered and transported thousands of individuals from over 50 countries to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets. It also organised and funded paramilitary training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Osama bin Laden imported heavy equipment to cut roads and tunnels and to build hospitals and storage depots in Afghanistan. However, Laden split from Abdullah Azzam in the late 1980s to extend his campaign to all corners of the globe while the latter focused his concerns on the support to Muslims waging military campaigns across the world.

Osama’s final break with Abdullah Azzam came in a dispute over the scope of jihad. While Laden wished to extend the conflict to non-military operations in other parts of the world while Azzam wanted to remain focused on military campaigns. Laden envisioned an all-Arab legion, which eventually could be used to wage jihad in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. On the other

hand, Abdullah strongly opposed making war against fellow-Muslims. That was the time bin Laden's followers started undermining Azzam's position by spreading rumours that he was an American spy. On November 24, 1989, Azzam and two of his sons were blown up by a car bomb as they were driving to a mosque in Peshawar. Although no one claimed responsibility for the killings, many were blamed, including bin Laden.

Towards the end of the Soviet occupation, many mujahideen wanted to expand their operations to include Islamist struggles in other parts of the world. A number of overlapping and interrelated organisations were formed to further those aspirations. One of these was al-Qaeda, which was formed by Osama. The name "al-Qaeda" was not self-chosen. It was rather coined by the United States' government, based on the name of a computer file of bin Laden that listed the names of contacts he had made at the *Maktab-al-Khidmat*. After the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Osama-led al-Qaeda decided to lie low for a couple of years, quietly building a financial and operational infrastructure while bin Laden returned to his native Saudi Arabia as a war hero. He raised money for the cause from among his wealthy Saudi peers.

When the Gulf War broke out in 1991, Osama bin Laden offered to raise an army of mujahideen in defence of Saudi Arabia, but he was spurned in favour of the US assistance. He considered the US presence in the Persian Gulf offensive and beginning around 1992, he led the al-Qaeda into a new role with the stated purpose of driving the US forces out of the Gulf. The al-Qaeda launched a series of terrorist attacks against the US interests in the Saudi kingdom, starting with a failed attempt to target US troops in Yemen in 1992. Subsequent attacks include numerous embassy bombings, a boat attack on the U.S.S. Cole, bombings of airplanes etc. As Osama tried to exploit the general public sentiments against deployment of the American troops in Saudi Arabia, he was compelled to leave the Holy Kingdom.

In 1991 he moved to Sudan, whose Islamic government was fighting a civil war at that time. Money poured in from false charitable funds such as Benevolence International and several groups that bin Laden's brother-in-law Mohammed Jamal Khalifa started. Laden sent his men to Southeast Asia, Africa,

Europe and the United States. Money and arms reportedly flowed through cities like Chicago, Illinois, Houston, Texas, Kansas City, Missouri, Santa Clara, California and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. In 1996, however, Osama bin Laden was expelled from Sudan after possible participation in the 1994 attempted assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak when his motorcade was attacked in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Bin Laden subsequently returned to Afghanistan with some of his Sudanese operatives.

In February 1998, Osama and Dr. Zawahiri issued a joint statement under the banner of "the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders" saying it was the duty of all Muslims to kill the US citizens, either civilian or military, and their allies everywhere. From January 5, to January 8, 2000, the al-Qaeda held its annual summit in a condominium in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Malaysian authorities found out about the summit beforehand and provided videotapes to the US intelligence agencies after the summit concluded. The US agencies believe that several of the 9/11 hijackers had attended the Malaysian summit.

Since President Bush's declaration of war against global terrorism, the United States and its allies have claimed to have killed or captured around 75 percent of al-Qaeda's senior leaders. Yet, the frequency of terror attacks worldwide being attributed to the terrorist network has increased, as compared to the pre-9/11 period. As things stand, al-Qaeda not only remains in business in its traditional stronghold on the Pak-Afghan tribal belt border, but continues to project its ideology and terrorism worldwide. The most worrying aspect of the prevailing situation remains the growing American belief that if there is one country that matters most to the future of al-Qaeda, it is none other than Pakistan.

The American intelligence agencies believe that with a gush of motivated youth flooding towards the realm of jihad and joining the al-Qaeda cadres, Pakistan continues to be a potential site for the recruitment and training of al-Qaeda militants and the fugitive leadership of the terror outfit keep hiring local recruits with the help of their local affiliates to bolster the manpower of al-Qaeda that has grown from strength to strength

despite the capture of over 700 of its operatives from within Pakistan. International media reports based on the information provided to the Bush administration by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) claim that senior al-Qaeda leaders operating from Pakistan have re-established significant control over their once-battered worldwide terror network and over the past year have set up a band of training camps in the Waziristan tribal region on its border with Afghanistan.

Intelligence information states that there is mounting evidence that Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, are steadily building an operational hub in the mountainous tribal areas of North and South Waziristan where they had established dozens of military bases. The Americans had even identified several al-Qaeda compounds in the Waziristan region, which are operated by a network of Arab, Uzbek, Pakistani and Afghan militants who receive guidance from Zawahiri. Reports submitted to the Bush administration by high-ranking US intelligence and counterterrorism agencies on the state of al-Qaeda network operating from the tribal areas of Pakistan, described its resurgence as a major setback to the war against terror.

The reports, which were also presented before the American Congress in 2008 claimed that al-Qaeda's core elements are resilient and the organization is cultivating stronger operational connections and relationships that radiate outward from their fugitive leaders' secure hideout in Pakistan to affiliates scattered throughout the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. These reports said the North Waziristan tribal agency on the Pak-Afghan border has become a hub of militant activity since September 2006 when the Musharraf regime signed a peace treaty with the al-Qaeda-linked tribal leaders there.

That al-Qaeda is getting stronger despite the ongoing seven year long war on terror, can be gauged from the findings of the annual study report for 2007 of the London-based think tank -- International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). The report states: "Six years after the 9/11 attacks, al-Qaeda seems to have regrouped and retained its ability to inflict catastrophic damage in the West. The bottom line is that for six years the United States and its allies have been struggling to eliminate this threat

and it is becoming increasingly clear that they have not succeeded in doing so". The report concluded that Osama's terror network poses nearly as potent a threat today as it did on September 11, 2001.

The release of the IISS report was followed by the National Intelligence Estimate report, submitted to the White House by 16 US intelligence agencies on the 6th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The report pointed to a possible al-Qaeda attack on the US. Claiming that al-Qaeda has established a safe haven in the tribal areas of Pakistan, the report noted that the peace agreement the Musharraf regime had signed with tribal elders in North Waziristan has failed. It further added that al-Qaeda remains the most serious threat to the United States: "We assess the group has protected or regenerated key elements of its homeland attack capability, including a safe haven in the Pakistani Federally Administrated Tribal Areas, operational lieutenants and its top leadership."

On July 12, 2007, a report by the Washington post titled "US warns of stronger al-Qaeda" said: "Six years after the Bush administration declared war on al-Qaeda, the terrorist network is gaining strength and has established a safe haven in the remote tribal areas of western Pakistan for training and planning attacks". The report, actually based on a five-page threat assessment compiled by the National Counterterrorism Center, titled "Al-Qaeda better positioned to strike the West," said al-Qaeda has significantly rebuilt itself despite concerted US attempts to smash the network. While quoting the CIA's deputy director for intelligence, John Kringen, the report said al-Qaeda appears to be fairly well settled into the safe haven in the ungoverned spaces of Pakistan. "We see more training. We see more money. We see more communications," Mr. Kringen was quoted as having said.

On July 17, 2007, another report by the New York Times titled "Six Years After 9/11, the same threat", stated: "Nearly six years after the Sept. 11 attacks, the hundreds of billions of dollars and thousands of lives expended in the name of the war on terror pose a single, insistent question: Are we safer? After years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq and targeted killings in Yemen, Pakistan and elsewhere, the major threat to the United States has

the same name and the same basic look as in 2001: Al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, plotting attacks from mountain hide-outs near the Afghan-Pakistani border. And if there had been progress after 9/11 in isolating and immobilizing al-Qaeda's leaders in the tribal areas of Pakistan, some of it has come apart in the past year, with the Pakistani troops abandoning patrols in North Waziristan and allowing greater freedom of movement to al-Qaeda's core."

Shortly afterwards, the CNN reported that the US has provided some crucial intelligence to Pakistan about senior al-Qaeda leaders allegedly hiding in its tribal region. The information was provided to Pakistan despite warnings by US intelligence officials not to rely on the help of Pakistani intelligence agencies, which still have elements sympathetic towards al-Qaeda and the Taliban because of their ideological proximity with each other. Yet some powerful elements in the Bush administration were of the view that eliminating al-Qaeda's influence in the Pak-Afghan tribal region required a long-term, multimillion-dollar, hearts-and-minds campaign to erode growing support for militants among a tribal populace known for its hostility to outside authority. But within a fortnight of the release of an American dossier detailing the location of the al-Qaeda bases as advance information on likely US targets, 29 alleged militant camps in North and South Waziristan abruptly went empty and fell off the radar. "Human intelligence on both the sides suggests the militant bases have been dismantled," reported Asia Times Online, a web newspaper, on August 11, 2007.

On February 5, 2008, top American intelligence officers publicly confirmed for the first time that three al-Qaeda terrorists were water boarded besides warning that the terrorist group was establishing cells in other countries, particularly Pakistan, to plan attacks within the US. In his testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, CIA Director Michael Hayden said that the interrogation technique known as water boarding was used on Khalid Sheikh Mohammed -- the purported mastermind of the 9/11 terrorist attacks -- and suspected terrorists Abu Zubaydah and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri. "We used it against these three detainees because of the

circumstances at the time”, Hayden said, adding that there was the belief that additional catastrophic attacks against the homeland were inevitable and we had limited knowledge about al-Qaeda and its workings”.

At the same hearing, Director of National Intelligence Admiral Mike McConnell said: “With key improvements in the security situation in Iraq during 2007, al-Qaeda and particularly its central leadership based in border regions of Pakistan continues to pose the most significant threats to the United States, both at home and abroad. US military actions have increasingly forced al-Qaeda out of Iraq and into a safe haven in Pakistani tribal region to train for attacks in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Africa and the United States. Terrorists in Pakistan maintain a cadre of skilled lieutenants capable of directing the organization’s operations around the world. While the group has suffered major setbacks, particularly in Iraq, it has successfully maintained its unity and is improving its ability to attack the US itself, in part by identifying, training and positioning westerners capable of carrying out such an attack”.

In April 2008, a damning report by the European Police Office once again put Pakistan in the spotlight, pointing an accusing finger at the tribal areas as the command and control centre for al-Qaeda’s remaining core leadership planning attacks in the EU. The annual “Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2008” released by Europol on April 28 is an important awareness tool for decision-makers at the European level. Emphasising the need for policy focus on troubled spots, the report said that Afghanistan and Pakistan in general and the Pashtun areas in particular are of utmost importance to EU counter-terrorism. The European Police Office report added that in the past, terrorist links between Pakistan and the EU were almost exclusively focused on the UK, but now the terrorism expanding in the EU, adding a number of EU nationals who attended training in Pakistan were later involved in terrorist offences in the EU.

Almost two months later, on June 20, 2008, the ABC News reported the fears of American intelligence officials that a new breed of al-Qaeda-linked terrorists, all white Europeans, may have been trained at camps in Pakistani tribal areas to carry out terrorist operations in Europe and elsewhere. The report claimed

that dozens of potential European terrorists have been dispatched to plan attacks against Europe and possibly the United States. "The men are said to come from Britain, Denmark, Germany, Romania, the Netherlands, and Estonia. Some European recruits may have already gone operational. Two of the suspects arrested in a September 2007 plot to kill American soldiers in Germany were native Germans, and it is being investigated to discover whether they were Pakistan-trained", the ABC News report added.

According to the US intelligence sleuths stationed in Pakistan, arrests of several al-Qaeda operatives had provided them with considerable information about the structure as well as operations of the terrorist network. The information, that reveals an immense resilience of al-Qaeda and its remarkable ability to reconstitute itself, clearly negates Musharraf's claims that the Osama network in Pakistan has been smashed. The US intelligence agencies attribute al-Qaeda's unusual capacity to withstand sustained human losses and material wastage to its unique structure and ideology.

According to them, five characteristics enhance both its survivability and force multiplication. The terror outfit is neither one single group nor a coalition of two-dozen large, medium and small groups. It is a conglomerate of groups spread throughout the world, operating as a network. Its affiliates include the *Egyptian Islamic Jihad* (EIJ), *Al Jamaya-al Islamia* (IJ: *Islamic Group of Egypt*), *Armed Islamic Group of Algeria* (GIA), *Islamic Party of Turkestan* (IPT: *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*), *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM: *Army of Mohammad*) and the *Abu Sayyaf Group* of the Philippines (ASG). The constituent groups of the network have their own command, control and communication structures. But whenever there is the need, these groups interact or merge ideologically, financially as well as operationally.

According to a 2002 Jane's Intelligence Review report, al-Qaeda happens to be a conglomerate of quasi-independent Islamic terrorist cells in countries spread across at least 26 countries, including Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Burma, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania, Azerbaijan, Dagestan,

Uganda, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Bosnia as well as the West Bank. "Other countries where al-Qaeda is known to have covert operational cells, include Pakistan, the Philippines, Malaysia, the United States, Britain, France and Canada", added the Jane's Intelligence Review.

The al-Qaeda provides leadership at both the international and national levels. Although Osama bin Laden has identified the US as its prime enemy, he is an internationalist. As such, Osama is likely to target not only Western targets, but also regimes that identify with the West: from Israel to Pakistan. However, the leaders of the other groups that work with Osama also have crucial domestic agendas. For instance, while deputising for Osama, Dr. Zawahiri, also leads the EIJ in Egypt. The broad ideological disposition of the organisation advocates pan-Islamism and not pan-Arabism. As a result, Osama's ideology cuts across divisions and appeals to both West Asian and non-West Asian groups, including Asian Islamic groups.

Terrorism experts point out that a significant characteristic of Osama is his ability to absorb ideas and operationalise them. International media reports say the idea of airborne suicide operations actually grew from a plan conceived by the Oxford and Swansea (Wales) graduate Ramzi Ahmed Yusuf in the Philippines and another al-Qaeda pilot to crash-dive a plane full of chemicals on to the Pentagon in 1994. However, an accidental fire in Manila reportedly disrupted Ramzi's plans, which included the simultaneous bombing of 11 planes over the Pacific and the assassination of the visiting US President Bill Clinton and the Pope. After testing one of the bombs over an aircraft flying over Japan, Ramzi fled to Pakistan, from where he was arrested and extradited to the United States. Although he is serving a jail term in the US for bombing the World Trade Centre in 1993, Osama decided to go ahead and finally operationalised Ramzi's unique terror plan.

Following the 9/11 terror attacks, the operational headquarters of the al-Qaeda in Afghanistan were disrupted by the US air strikes. Several of the top leaders of the terror group were captured in Pakistan and several more are suspected to be hiding in the region. However, the al-Qaeda chief Osama and his second-in-command, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, a former surgeon

and lifelong jihadi, are still at large. If bin Laden is the heart of the al-Qaeda, Zawahiri is considered to be the brain. The regional and international manhunts have damaged al-Qaeda's ability to execute major attacks. However, evidence suggests the terror network still has thousands of operatives at large across the globe, especially in Pakistan, and that its international affiliates are actually stronger now than they were before the 9/11 terror attacks.

25

Of Osama bin Laden Whereabouts

Seven years after the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the US-led Allied Forces, the echoing question that continues to haunt the world remains: Where is the Most Wanted al-Qaeda chief -- Osama bin Laden hiding?

Osama bin Laden, named by the FBI as the prime suspect in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, was the villain on the cover of almost every American and European magazine after the US-led attack on Afghanistan. As the hunt for the fugitive al-Qaeda chief entered its sixth year on September 12, 2007, US President George Bush vowed to Osama bin Laden: "America will find you". Portrayed by the American intelligence agencies as one of the most significant financial sponsors of Islamic extremist activities in the world, Osama is a man on the run since a US-led attack in October 2001 drove out Afghanistan's ruling Taliban regime led by Mullah Mohammad Omar who had refused the custody of the al-Qaeda chief to the United States. The hunt for the Most Wanted man on earth continues with the help of 25,000 US-led coalition soldiers in Afghanistan and over 80,000 soldiers in Pakistan.

The American intelligence agencies are sure of one thing: Osama is not dead, he is very much alive, hiding somewhere on the Pak-Afghan border. As long as he remains at large - despite desperate efforts by the world's most powerful army - he will continue to be the subject of intense debate. As a matter of fact, bin Laden himself, the al-Qaeda leadership and thousands of

Arab fighters managed to escape from the Tora Bora area of Afghanistan despite Allied Forces' Operation Anaconda and Operation Snipe to hunt them down. Operation Anaconda - employing 2,000 GIs, 2,000 Afghans, loads of B-52s and Apache helicopters, supposedly cleared out the Chah-e-Kot valley in the Paktia province of Afghanistan. However, most Arabs and Taliban eventually managed to escape to the East. Operation Snipe - employing 1,000 Royal Marines, intervened in Khost and just managed to push the al-Qaeda fighters further inside the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan where they blended in everywhere: in South Waziristan and North Waziristan and deep in the tribal areas.

It was on November 10, 2001, almost a month after the 9/11 attacks, that Osama bin Laden made his last public appearance and delivered his last public speech at the Jalalabad Islamic studies center, after the northern cities had begun to fall to the anti-Taliban alliance. Osama painted the battle lines black and white: "The Americans had a plan to invade, but if we are united and believe in Allah, we will teach them a lesson, the same one we taught to the Russian military forces. Your Arab brothers will lead the way and we will win the war against the US, *Inshaallah*. We have the weapons and the technology. What we need most is your moral support. And may God grant me the opportunity to see you again and meet you again on the front lines". Osama then stepped away from the podium, only to disappear into the mountain fastness of Tora Bora, never to be seen again.

Seven years later, the nerve-racking fact for the Americans remains: despite conducting an intense, costly and equally complex manhunt in the US history, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation high ups have failed to capture Osama and can merely give guesstimates about his likely whereabouts. Investigations by top most American intelligence agencies indicate that Osama is alive; few people know his location; he has only a few bodyguards; he never uses any communication device be it a satellite or a mobile phone or internet; he communicates only through handwritten notes carried by trusted couriers; he is hiding in a friendly area and if at all he travels, he travels at night, possibly in disguise.

Frequent claims as to the location of the fugitive al-Qaeda chief have been made by the Americans since December 2001, although none have been definitively proven and some have placed Osama in different locations during overlapping time periods. For the US intelligence sleuths, which are still groping in the dark, Osama's friendship zone stretches nearly 2,000 miles along the Pakistani Pashtun belt -- from Chitral in the Northern Areas near the Chinese border, south through the troubled tribal agencies including Waziristan, down to the Zhob district on the Balochistan border, then to the provincial capital Quetta and southwest to the Iranian border. The thinly-populated region includes every landscape from desert to snow-capped mountains and thus provides an ideal refuge to Osama. The Americans even do not rule out the possibility of his hiding in some urban locality, possibly a major city as had been the case with many of the key al-Qaeda leaders arrested from Pakistan.

The US intelligence sleuths stationed in Pakistan concede that finding one person in a big populated urban city is much more difficult as compared with tracking down someone in the less populated Northern Areas or the border areas of Pakistan. However, there are many other factors pointed out by the Americans that have combined in the five years since the 9/11 to make the hunt for the Most Wanted more difficult -- Musharraf's unwillingness to cooperate as he had fears of being abandoned by the Americans once Osama is captured; the re-emergence of the Taliban militia in Afghanistan and Pakistan and last but not the least, the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq that has exhausted the US military and intelligence resources etc.

However, the mountainous Valley of Chitral in the Northern Areas of Pakistan has lately become infested with the American intelligence sleuths looking for the al-Qaeda chief. Intelligence circles in Islamabad say the US sleuths believe Laden might be hiding in the Chitral area, possibly with a family and may have only a couple of trusted bodyguards, likely to be armed with surface-to-air missiles. The intelligence information points out the pertinent fact that usually off the jihadi radar screen, Chitral and its neighbor Dir area have emerged in recent times as key staging grounds for jihadis fighting in the neighboring Afghan provinces of Nuristan and Kunar. These insurgent jihadi groups,

which are bolstered by foreign funding and logistical support from al-Qaeda, are mostly dominated by fighters loyal to former Prime minister of Afghanistan Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who is also the chief of the anti-US *Hizb-e-Islami* (HeI).

According to well-placed intelligence sources, much before the March 2003 arrest of al-Qaeda's chief operational commander Khalid Sheikh Mohammad from the Rawalpindi residence of a *Jamaat-e-Islami* Pakistan office bearer, the US sleuths stationed in Pakistan conducted an intelligence-gathering exercise in northern Pakistani areas of Gilgit and Chitral to track down Osama bin Laden and Mullah Mohammad Omar in these areas, which remained futile. The American agents had then got a wind that a secret meeting had been scheduled between Osama bin Laden and Chief Gulbuddin Hekmatyar somewhere in the Chitral district. Subsequently, a two-member advance team of the FBI arrived in Chitral from Peshawar, along with the Pakistan intelligence ISI sleuths and went ahead to locate the place of the suspected meeting.

According to the sources, the American intelligence sleuths were convinced that both the men had been scheduled to meet there to chalk out modalities for a joint attack against the US-led forces in Afghanistan. Soon after touching the soil of Chitral, the FBI team, comprising a male and a female operative, conducted a ground inspection drive to ascertain the suitability of the area for a commando operation to get hold of their prized catch at the time of their scheduled meeting. The visiting FBI operators, attired in traditional Afghan dresses, had combed various areas in Chitral in a double-cabin vehicle. But after remaining in Chitral for a week, the operation had to be abandoned owing to the failure of the US agencies to trace the venue of the meeting. It was concluded at that time by the American intelligence operatives that both the men might have crossed over to Afghanistan through Nuristan.

Though the operation had been called off, the FBI was still convinced that both of its wanted men, or at least Hekmatyar, had been holed up somewhere in Chitral. Subsequently, in March 2003, yet another FBI team, acting on fresh information, conducted a thorough search, though their Pakistani counterparts had never been convinced that either of the two

men was hiding somewhere in Chitral. Later, on the eve of the US presidential elections, there was a series of reports in the American press, stating that Osama had been spotted in the Chitral area.

Asked about the Osama whereabouts, the visiting US Secretary of State Collin Powell said in an interview to the Geo TV in Islamabad in March 2004: "He is working hard not to be found. We don't know exactly where he is. No one has seen him in a long time, but there is certainly evidence that he is alive. If he is alive, then he is hiding in the area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is very difficult to find someone in that area. We are looking for him and we have been encouraging our Pakistani friends to search in their tribal areas. Our troops are also present on the border because free movement of the Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists is not in the interests of neighbouring Pakistan and Afghanistan. These terrorists want to destabilise the region".

In a November 26, 2004 interview with an American newspaper, Major Gen Eric Olson, Deputy Commander of the American forces in Afghanistan observed: "I think somewhere up in the mountains in Chitral, bin Laden lives in a house and lives with a family, and probably one bodyguard. And once every month, or probably once every two months, he walks 15 miles to another ruin somewhere where he meets with somebody, and then he walks back 15 miles. He doesn't have an HF modem, he doesn't have a satellite television and DVD, and he probably doesn't have any kind of radio. And that's probably the life Osama leads".

Almost three weeks later, on December 13, 2004, the *New York Times* reported in the Chitral area of Pakistan the presence of a Central Intelligence Agency search mission for bin Laden. Almost a year later, the Washington Post reported a December 11, 2005 letter, sent from a Pakistan-based al-Qaeda leader Atiyah Abd al-Rahman to another al-Qaeda leader based in Iraq -- Abu Musab al-Zarqawi -- indicating that Osama and the al-Qaeda leadership were based in the Waziristan region of Pakistan at the time. In the letter, translated by the US military's Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, "Atiyah instructs Zarqawi to send messengers from your end to Waziristan so that they meet with the brothers of the leadership ... I am now on a

visit to them and I am writing you this letter as I am with them....". The letter was deemed authentic by the American military and counterterrorism officials.

Appearing in a videotaped message for the first time in three years on September 8, 2007, Osama bin Laden told the American people to reject their capitalist way of life and embrace Islam or his followers will escalate the killing and fighting against them. "This is our duty, and our brothers are carrying it out, and I ask Allah to grant them resolve and victory", the al-Qaeda leader said. The tape was apparently made by al-Qaeda's media arm, *As-Sahab*, and released on the heels of the sixth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Laden appeared healthy in the video, sporting a black beard, a sharp contrast to the gray and white facial hair he has had in most public sightings and photographs over the past decade or so. Initially, some US counterterrorism officials said they were not convinced the video was of Laden, particularly because his beard looked so different. However, US intelligence officials finally declared that the voice was indeed that of Osama bin Laden.

In yet another message released on September 20, 2007, Osama bin Laden called on Pakistanis to rebel against Musharraf, saying his military's siege of a militant mosque stronghold makes him an infidel. The storming of the Red Mosque in Islamabad in July demonstrated Musharraf's insistence on continuing his loyalty, submissiveness and aid to America against the Muslims ... and makes armed rebellion against him and removing him obligatory", Laden said in the message. "So when the capability is there, it is obligatory to rebel against the apostate ruler, as is the case now", he said, according to a transcript released by Laura Mansfield, a US terrorism expert who monitors militant message traffic. The new message came as al-Qaeda released a video in which his deputy, Dr Ayman al-Zawahri, boasted that the US was being defeated in Afghanistan, Iraq and other fronts. The messages were actually part of a stepped-up propaganda campaign by al-Qaeda around the anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks and believed to have been recorded somewhere in Pakistan.

However, Musharraf kept insisting that bin Laden was not hiding in Pakistan. In an interview with the CBS television on

January 7, 2008, he said Pakistan was not specifically looking for Osama bin Laden, as there was no proof that Osama is in Pakistan. "We are not particularly looking for him, but we are operating against terrorists and al-Qaeda and militant Taliban. And in the process, obviously, combined, maybe we are looking for him also". Asked what Pakistan was doing to find the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Musharraf said it was fighting extremism and terrorism. "We are fighting first of all al-Qaeda. Let's take al-Qaeda. We have arrested or eliminated 700 al-Qaeda leaders...which other country has done this?" "Well, which other country has bin Laden?" his CBS interviewer replied, inciting a sharp retort from the Pakistani leader. "No, I challenge – I don't accept that at all. There is no proof whatsoever that he is in Pakistan."

By mid-June 2008, US intelligence sleuths stationed in Pakistan launched a fresh hunt to capture Osama after intelligence reports that he has been spotted in the Karakoram section of the Himalayan range along Pakistan's borders with Afghanistan and China. The Americans stepped up surveillance operations through newly built bases in the region, with added flights of Predator drones combing the Pak-Afghan tribal area that borders Afghanistan to the West, in particular the chain of mountains in the province of Nuristan, and China to the north. Pamphlets and matchboxes featuring Osama's photograph and offering a reward of five million US dollars for information leading to his capture were circulated in the FATA and the NWFP areas.

"Contact the nearest US embassy or consulate if you have any information about Osama bin Laden", read the text in Urdu on one side of the matchboxes which were circulated from Waziristan in FATA to Peshawar in the NWFP. Postal and email addresses for sending information on the al Qaeda chief were printed on the matchboxes. A leaflet within the matchboxes containing 30 match sticks said: "Osama bin Laden is wanted by the United States government on charges of killing 220 innocent citizens in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998 and the American government will pay up to five million dollars for information that helps prove the charges leveled against bin Laden or leads to his arrest in any country".

The fresh operation was followed by media reports quoting CIA sources, saying that the al-Qaeda chief was hiding in the K-2 mountain range in Pakistan's Northern Areas. The report said the US secret services were intending to drive him out in a major military operation encompassing the northern Pakistani tribal areas. On July 03, 2008, two CIA officials claimed that Osama was on death bed as he was suffering from a terminal kidney disease, and may live only for a few months. According to a *Time* magazine report, the intelligence agency also managed to get the names of some of the medications Osama was taking.

One of the two CIA officials familiar with the report that came out six to nine months ago quoted it as saying, "based on his current pharmaceutical intake we would expect that he has no more than 6-18 months to live and impending kidney failure". The magazine, however, was skeptical, saying close watchers of al-Qaeda terror network find such reports inherently unreliable. "It's trying to make a diagnosis from thousands of miles away with only fragments of the medical chart," *Time* quoted Paul Pillar, the former deputy director of the CIA's counter-terrorism centre.

As far as Osama's chances of arrest are concerned, there are international media reports stating that soon after the US-led Allied Forces attacked Afghanistan in October 2001, the al-Qaeda chief had made his seven bodyguards take an oath to assassinate him if he is in any danger of being arrested by the enemy troops. Otherwise, he will try to blow himself up. But the real worry for the Americans must be that even if Osama is captured or killed, the movement he leads will be harder than ever to crush.

Osama bin Laden: A CIA creation?

In its endeavor to assert the primacy of American national interests and strategic objectives through any means, the United States has over the years, through covert CIA operations, made heroes out of surrogates, whose only qualification was that they were prepared to do its bidding. Ultimately, it ended up with the mortification of seeing those heroes of yesterday becoming

terrorists of today and endangering those very US national interests which they were originally created to protect.

Similar appears to be the case with the Saudi billionaire and the FBI's most wanted terrorist, Osama bin Laden. Be it Laden or the former Taliban Supreme Commander Mullah Mohammad Omar, they all were originally the CIA creation, which was ably assisted by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the FBI is making frantic efforts to track down a warrior, who had actually been created by the CIA during the so-called Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation troops- a cause that the United States funded, pouring \$3 billion via the CIA.

Born in 1958, Osama bin Laden is the seventeenth of 52 sons of a Yemeni peasant (Mohammed bin Laden) who migrated to Saudi Arabia and became one of the richest construction magnates with assets worth five billion US dollars of which, according to the *Time* magazine of May 6, 1996, Osama bin Laden personally controlled assets worth US \$ 300 million. His father was the favourite construction magnate of the Saudi royal family, who gave bin Laden's family huge contracts to renovate the holy cities of Makkah and Medina and build palaces for Saudi princes.

In 1980, at 22, hardly a year after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Osama, who had just then graduated from the King Abdul Aziz University, left the family business and moved over to Pakistan to organise a jihad against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, with the help of his money and with over 6,000 Muslim volunteers recruited from the Arab and other Islamic countries. The Central Intelligence Agency of the US and other Western intelligence agencies welcomed the assistance from Laden and his volunteers and helped them with guidance, training, arms and ammunition for fighting against the Soviet troops and those of the then Afghan President, the late Najibullah.

Osama used his money and machines to help the Afghan rebels fight the Soviet Army invaders. Legend has it that Osama fought bravely against Soviet troops. But former CIA officers say he was a financier, not a warrior - a philanthropist supporting a number of health care, widows-and-orphans charity operations

in Peshawar for Afghan refugees. Osama personally participated in the fighting, constructed tunnels and other defensive structures along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and distinguished himself in the battles against Soviet troops at Jaji and Shaban. He became a legendary figure for his religious intensity and courage. While recruiting volunteers for Afghanistan, he used to say: "One day of jihad in Afghanistan is equivalent to 1,000 days of *namaz* (prayer) in a mosque".

During his stay in Afghanistan, Osama met a veteran of the Afghan war, Mullah Mohammad Omar. Laden was the one who financed the Taliban's capture of Kabul under the leadership of the reclusive, one-eyed Mullah Mohammad Omar and became one of his most trusted advisers. Since then, Osama has developed a personal friendship with Omar. Later, in 1994, Mullah Omar emerged as the ruler of three-fourths of Afghanistan, being the leader of the Taliban. In the meantime, Osama established the headquarters of al-Qaeda in Peshawar where Egyptian and Saudi volunteers rested before setting off for battle in Afghanistan. Its name became a kind of flag uniting bin Laden's followers. American officials call it a global terrorist network.

When the Soviet forces left Afghanistan in 1989, bin Laden went home to Saudi Arabia. He soon set his sights on the last remaining superpower. He himself was very much wary about America. He found a new enemy on August 7, 1990, when the United States began sending half a million soldiers to Saudi Arabia, preparing for war against Iraq. King Fahd shocked Osama bin Laden by the stationing of the American troops in Saudi Arabia, despite earlier assurances that he would never do so. His criticism of the Saudi ruling family and particularly of King Fahd increased after the Gulf war of 1991. He described the King's action in allowing US and other Western troops into Saudi territory for fighting against Iraq as desecration of the holy land by armed infidels. He allegedly fell out with the officers of the CIA and demanded the withdrawal of the US troops from Saudi territory.

Osama subsequently declared the Saudi ruling family 'insufficiently Islamic'. He was made to stay there by the Saudi authorities till 1991 by impounding his passport. Being a friend

of Osama, Prince Turki, the then chief of Saudi intelligence, once again sent him to Peshawar and insisted that he should remain there. One of the stories put out by bin Laden is that he went to King Fahd and promised that he would raise holy warriors who would protect Saudi Arabia. However, his violent opposition to the Saudi royal family began when King Fahd rejected that offer. To Osama, the deployment of the American troops in the land of Makkah and Medina smacked of the Crusades, the Christian religious wars against Islam that began nine centuries ago. His rage transformed him into a stateless outlaw.

In November 1991, Saudi intelligence officers caught Osama smuggling weapons from Yemen, his father's homeland. They withdrew his passport. Laden's family, worried that his activities might jeopardise their close relations with the ruling clan, tried to bring him back into the fold but were forced eventually to effectively disown him. The pressure mounted. In late 1990 an escape route appeared. Osama received an offer of refuge from Hassan al-Turabi, the Islamist scholar of Sudan, which Osama decided to accept. And in Sudan he had been able to start the serious work of building al-Qaeda - a global umbrella group of Muslim extremists dedicated to overturning un-Islamic governments throughout the Middle East and in other parts of the world. Turabi believed that the total defeat of Iraq and the discrediting of secular Arab regimes would lead to an opportunity to set up a pure Islamic government across the Muslim world. It was a seductive message. And bin Laden cracked. He fled Saudi Arabia for Sudan, from where he eventually proceeded to Afghanistan, never to return to his holy homeland.

The great escape

"Immediately after 9/11, dozens of Saudi royals and members of the bin Laden family had fled the US in a secret airlift authorised by the White House. And one passenger was an alleged al-Qaeda go-between, who may have known about the terror attacks in advance", claims American writer Craig Unger in his book titled *"House of Bush, House of Saud: The Secret Relationship Between the World's Two Most Powerful Dynasties"*.

In his book, which has already been featured in Michael Moore's controversial documentary "Fahrenheit 9/11", Craig Unger lays out a compelling case that the Bush family was so inextricably bound up with the Saudi royal family that it could not hold them responsible for the alleged role that many Saudi Arabians might have played in the 9/11 terror attacks. The shell game Bush allegedly played meant diverting the American public's attention to Iraq, which had no apparent role in 9/11. "Although 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi, bin Laden is a member of one of the wealthiest families in Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis financed bin Laden, Bush managed to convince most Americans that the majority of 9/11 hijackers were Iraqi and that Saddam Hussein played a key role in the attack. That's how a political shell game works. Only in this case, thousands of lives were lost in a con job in which the American people were played for suckers by their own leadership", writes Unger.

House of Bush, House of Saud begins with a single question: How is it that two days after September 11, 2001, even as American air traffic was tightly restricted, a Saudi billionaire socialised in the White House with President George W. Bush as 140 Saudi citizens, many immediate kin to Osama bin Laden, were permitted to return to their country? "A potential treasure trove of intelligence was allowed to flee the country-- including an alleged al-Qaeda intermediary who was said to have foreknowledge of the 9/11 attacks. Why did the FBI facilitate this evacuation, and why didn't the agency question the people on the planes? Why did Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of most of the hijackers, receive exclusive and preferential treatment from the White House even as the World Trade Center continued to burn?"

According to the writer, the answers to these questions, and ones far more troubling, lie in the largely hidden relationship that began in the mid-1970s, when the oil-rich House of Saud struck out for America in the wake of the OPEC oil embargo and soaring oil prices. "Saudi Arabia needed US military protection, access to American political power, and a place to invest its staggering cash flow, which within 5 years reached \$16 million an hour. Like wildcatting oil drillers, the Saudis began prospecting among promising American politicians, including

the Bush family. And with the Bushes, the Saudis hit a gusher—direct access to Presidents Ronald Reagan, George Bush Senior and George Bush Junior as well as to Secretary of State James Baker, Vice-President Dick Cheney and the entire US intelligence apparatus”.

The writer adds what followed was an amazing weave of influence, strategic investment, socialising and secret policy between the House of Bush and the House of Saud that arcs from the 1980s into the present day. “The two parties conferred on war, oil, funding for Osama bin Laden’s Afghan Arabs supporting the mujahideen in the Afghanistan War, illegal arms deals, banking, private matters and much more. By the time George Bush was elected, the House of Saud had transferred an astonishing sum of money to the House of Bush in deals involving dozens of companies. The total? At least \$1.4 billion in investments and contracts went to companies in which the Bushes and their allies held prominent positions. But the importance of the relationship goes far beyond money. More than any other country in the world, Saudi Arabia is responsible for the rise of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism that threatens the US. Horrifying as it may seem, the secret liaison between these two great families helped trigger the Age of Terror and give rise to the tragedy of 9/11”.

26

The Return of the Taliban Militia

Eighty-four months down the road since the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan, the American military might, from daisy-cutter bombs to high-tech weaponry, has apparently failed to smoke out the Taliban militia which is gradually increasing its influence and extending its area of control in most parts of Afghanistan.

The Taliban militants, backed by a new breed of volunteers from Pakistan, are reuniting and expanding their area of operations in southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan, which were their former stronghold. Despite the fall of the Taliban regime in October 2001, the Allied Forces have apparently failed to uproot the Taliban fighters in Afghanistan who are gaining strength with every passing day are regrouping and reorganizing their resistance movement. The resurgence of the Taliban fighters, who had melted into the countryside after the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, has surprised the US military strategists as the insurgency is getting bloodier and deadly and costing the Allied Forces heavily, mainly in terms of human lives. Suicide attacks, ambushes, roadside bombs and brazen assaults on the NATO and ISAF troops in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan have almost become a daily norm by the Taliban militia which has already fixed the 2010 summer deadline for a complete takeover of the war torn country. The command and control structure of the Taliban militia is also intact, even though they had lost some top military commanders like Mullah Dadullah Akhund and Mullah Akhtar Osmani. The fugitive Taliban *ameer* Mullah Mohammad Omar is

alive and fully functional and has been sending instructions to his field commanders from his hideout through audio-tapes, letters and verbal messages.

While attacking Afghanistan in October 2001, the Bush administration's objective was to eliminate the Taliban militia, get hold of Osama bin Laden-led al-Qaeda members and establish a regime in Kabul that would be protected by the Northern Alliance in particular. However, the Bush administration has failed to achieve any of these targets, especially the uprooting of the Taliban. Before the invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan actively supported the Taliban regime, mainly because many of its members were products of the Pakistani *madrassas* and had close links with the Inter Services Intelligence. Even though Musharraf formally renounced support of the Taliban when he threw in his lot with Washington, the action against the Taliban and their supporters has been half-hearted at best, partly because many within the Pakistan security apparatus remain close to the Taliban. Even today, the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment pleads drawing moderate Taliban into the mainstream political process in Afghanistan to defuse the escalating Taliban-led unrest in the country.

Since the fall of the Taliban regime, the US military operations in Afghanistan have passed through three phases. In the first phase, the government set up of the Taliban, having its administrative headquarters in Kabul and its religious headquarters in Kandahar, was replaced by a provisional government headed by Hamid Karzai, an educated Pashtun enjoying confidence of the American and other Western countries. In the second phase, the training and other terrorist infrastructure of al-Qaeda and Taliban in southern and eastern Afghanistan were destroyed through aerial and ground military action. In the third phase, efforts were made to restore law and order and governance in the rural areas liberated from the control of the jihadi forces and to build the infrastructure of a liberal democracy in the country in the form of a constitution paving the way for free and fair elections.

However, seven years later, it appears that the Taliban militia has once again regrouped itself in Afghanistan, mostly along the Pak-Afghan border areas. The social, geographical and

political characteristics of the whole of this tribal belt favour the Taliban fighters, and it is almost impossible for the Pakistani, US and Afghan authorities to counter the Taliban in this specific region. The guerilla war in Afghanistan has actually taken shape since October 2002. Before that, between October 7, 2001 and December 2001, heavy US precision bombing had coerced the Taliban to leave their controlling positions and disperse to places where they could find a shelter. Taliban *ameer* Mullah Omar's decision of retreat from Kabul and Kandahar forced most of his commanders to hide themselves in the Pakistani tribal areas. Ordinary Taliban foot soldiers easily melted into the civilian Afghan population. Several disposed of their black turbans and joined the new Afghan administration. Many chose to go back to their tribes and resumed a routine life as ordinary citizens.

However, the situation in Afghanistan keeps deteriorating since the beginning of 2005, with the Karzai administration losing control even on Kabul. Increasing numbers of better trained, better equipped and better-led Taliban cadres operating from sanctuaries in Pakistan have stepped up their hit-and-run raids into southern and eastern Afghanistan in order to demoralise the newly-raised army and police of the Karzai government in the hope of thereby inducing large-scale desertions. Their deadly attacks have been focused on members of the Afghan army, police, government departments and the foreign aid workers. They have avoided direct confrontations with the US-led Allied Forces, lest they pursue them into Pakistani territory. The Taliban fighters appear to be better organized and their fighting skills have improved, a fact conceded by the NATO forces during briefings to their high command. Their Taliban military tactics have undergone changes in keeping with the times. Now they make frequent use of suicide bombers to breach the tougher security measures adopted by the US-led coalition forces based in Afghanistan. The improvised explosive devices the Taliban use have become more lethal and sophisticated following the moves by the NATO forces to upgrade and fortify their vehicles to withstand such roadside bomb explosions.

The Taliban insurgency at present is largely restricted to seven provinces, all straddling Pakistan's north-western

frontiers which explain why Pakistan gets the blame for the heightened level of Taliban insurgency along its borders. There are several factors for the resurgence of the Taliban. One, the Taliban had ample time since their overthrow seven years ago to regroup, reorganize and re-establish themselves. Every year they have got stronger and every spring they start with a renewed vigour. Over the years, the Taliban have also been able to improve on their tactics and strategy on how to deal with an adversary that is high-tech and is equipped with air-power. As al-Qaeda's experience in Iraq has proven handy and lethal, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of casualties among the foreign troops and the Afghan National Army.

Compared with 2001, the Taliban militia is obviously better financed and better-trained as its chief patron, al-Qaeda, continues to get a major part of its funding from private donors in the Gulf and the Middle East, although some reports say a proportion of that funding comes from private Pakistani and Afghan sources. The reinvigorated insurgency is also linked to the Taliban's strategy of unsettling the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) even before their full deployment in the strife-torn South. There is an argument that the Americans repeated the mistake in Iraq they made in Afghanistan – not securing potential trouble spots. They should have been aware that the stretch from the south to the east of Afghanistan had been a Taliban stronghold and could re-emerge as a sanctuary.

To top it all, many analysts believe that the US moved its assets to Iraq just when they needed them the most in Afghanistan, with the result that the insurgency has not only created a sense of insecurity among the people, who now look up to the Taliban. It is also believed that the Taliban owe their resurgence to the lack of government presence and writ in the Afghan areas they operate in. At the same time, the Afghan National Police is believed to be under-equipped and poorly paid and its presence is thin in most parts of Afghanistan. More than anything else, this has emboldened the Taliban and given them the freedom to operate and hit targets at will. Under these circumstances, Kabul keeps urging Islamabad to do more to help overcome the rising insurgency in Afghanistan. And many of the

western analysts believe that the anxiety of the Karzai administration is not entirely misplaced since much of what is happening along Afghanistan's border area with Pakistan is seen as a result of the Pakistani militants' crossing over from this side of the border.

Though the United States has already lost over 800 soldiers since launching the Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime, there is a growing concern among the NATO-member countries with troops in Afghanistan as part of NATO force about the renaissance of the Taliban militia. The human losses suffered by these mostly western nations are not very high except those sustained by the UK, Canada and the Netherlands, which have sent troops to the dangerous, Taliban-infested Helmand, Kandahar and Urozgan provinces. However, the reluctance of the NATO-member states to send more troops to Afghanistan to meet the minimum requirements highlighted by the US and NATO military commanders and the refusal of some countries such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain to deploy their soldiers in the volatile southern provinces, shows their anxiety over the unpopularity of any move that would put their soldiers at risk.

Currently, there are over 50,000 foreign troops stationed in Afghanistan and half of them are from the US and from other NATO-member countries. The fact that the Taliban-led challenge to the US-led coalition forces has increased manifold is evident from the number of foreign troops deployed in Afghanistan in 2001 and those currently fighting there. Until 2003, the strength of the Allied troops was around 5,000 only which has now gone up to 50,000. The Taliban insurgency was initially confined to southwestern Afghanistan where the Taliban had their traditional strongholds in Kandahar, Helmand, Urozgan, Zabul and Nimruz. However, it later spread to the southern provinces of Khost, Paktia and Paktika. It then engulfed Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar. Soon afterwards, Ghazni and Farah were affected. As things stand, western Afghanistan's Herat, Badghis and Ghor provinces are facing upsurge of attacks by Taliban fighters and the fighting has reached Wardak and Kapisa, which are close to Kabul.

The Taliban have intermittently also launched attacks in Faryab, Balkh, Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar, which are in northern Afghanistan and they control several districts in Helmand, Farah, Kandahar, Zabul and Ghazni provinces at present. And they are still advancing. International media reports say the Taliban's three-pronged plan for their spring offensive for 2008 comprises cutting off NATO's supply lines running from Pakistan to Afghanistan, recruiting fresh volunteers and, most importantly, the creation of a strategic corridor running from Pakistan all the way to the capital Kabul. Since being ousted in 2001 and waging annual spring offensives, this is the first time the Taliban have come up with the idea of creating such a corridor. As things stand, the Taliban militants have successfully established pockets of resistance all around Kabul, in addition to more settled pockets across the country.

According to a June 2008 *Asia Time* report, the Taliban roam around freely in the eastern Afghan province of Wardak, which is hardly 30 kilometers from Kabul. "And they now want to connect the dots as it were, to ensure a quick and steady supply of arms and men to reinforce the pockets sufficiently for attacks on the capital. It is envisaged that the corridor initially starts in Mohmand Agency and Bajaur Agency in the tribal areas of Pakistan and then passes through Kunar and Nuristan provinces all the way to the Taghab Valley in Kapisa province in the northeast about 100 kilometers from the capital. In 2006, the Taliban seized the strategic Taghab Valley - as well as the Musayab Valley to the south of Kabul - with the goal of an assault on the capital, but because of limited supply lines they were only able to maintain their positions for a few months".

However, the report added, with the beginning of 2008, the Taliban aim to retake these positions, while having in place secure supply lines starting in Pakistani tribal areas to maintain a steady stream of men and resources. "For that matter, over the past year, the Taliban leadership has increased the number of fighters in Mohmand Agency to 18,000 and between 20,000 and 25,000 in Bajaur Agency. The Afghan Taliban circles believe this will provide sufficient strength to ensure operation, which is due to run from April to September 2008. This year, Taliban are believed to have decided to convert the non-Pashtun northern

part of Afghanistan into a new battlefield in the US-led war on terror. They have made a shift in their anti-US war strategy to accelerate attacks from these areas of Afghanistan which were so far peaceful, calm and secure since the US-led NATO forces stepped into Kabul”.

The Taliban are now stated to have been creeping into Dari, the Persian speaking northern areas from Pashtun areas to move ahead with their fierce operations including suicide attacks, bomb explosions and target killings. Taliban had so far concentrated on their own Pashtun areas to make the US-led forces unable to consolidate their position in the southern parts of Afghanistan. It took Taliban over six years to advance in the northern areas of Afghanistan which are being controlled by the Northern Alliance to whom they take as their enemy No 2 after the United States. Since Pashtuns were the major target of the war on terror, the fighting has mainly been revolving around the southern parts of Afghanistan. Taliban gave tough time to the NATO Forces mainly because they succeeded in winning over the support of the people due to oft repeated US bombing in civil populated areas. This also weakened the US installed Afghan President Hamid Karzai who had to lodge protest against certain American operations to solicit support of the Afghans.

With the Taliban proving increasingly difficult to defeat militarily, and with the Western coalition reluctant to negotiate with any Taliban or al-Qaeda radicals, the Karzai administration is fast losing control and authority in Afghanistan. The calculation of the pro-Taliban elements is that the United States and Western powers will eventually lose patience in Afghanistan and return, in desperation, to the earlier franchise arrangement, restoring Pakistan and its Taliban proxies to influence over Afghanistan. And their calculations have not proved wrong so far.

27

Is Mullah Omar Hiding in Quetta?

It has been seven years since the supreme commander of the Taliban, Mullah Mohammad Omar, vanished into the trackless terrain outside Kandahar, with the American intelligence agencies repeatedly claiming that one of the Most Wanted fugitive, who has a \$10 million FBI bounty on his head, is guiding his forces while hiding somewhere in Quetta, the capital of the Baluchistan province in Pakistan.

The American intelligence agencies strongly believe that Mullah Omar, whose friendship with the world's most wanted man - Osama bin Laden - brought his country almost complete isolation, continues to supply high-level guidance to his fighters, but is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the Taliban militia, a role largely played by his several military commanders. Despite being a former ruler of Afghanistan and his current high status as one of the Most Wanted FBI terrorists, not much is publicly known about this man. Few photos, none of them official, exist of him, as the Taliban forbid portrait photography.

"Mullah Omar and other Taliban leaders are directing operations against the US-led forces in Afghanistan from Quetta while Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Dr. Ayman Zawahiri, are hiding in the tribal area", a spokesman for the American State Department Tom Casey said on February 10, 2008 in Washington at a press conference. "We believe the Taliban's *shura* (council) leaders led by Mullah Omar reside in Quetta in Pakistan," he said, adding "they run their *shura*, the strategic

command and the control out of the city of Quetta. We also know that there are very clear Pakhtun tribal links up through the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, especially in North and South Waziristan, where Pakhtuns who live in Pakistan, are supporting Pakhtuns who are fighting in Afghanistan. In some cases, they are one and same - they live in Pakistan, they commute to the fight, fight for a while in Afghanistan and retreat back into safe haven inside Waziristan. Just as Mullah Omar is giving strategic direction to the Taliban from Quetta, al-Qaeda's senior leadership in the FATA is doing its planning," the American official said, without giving the source of the intelligence. "The iconic leaders of al-Qaeda -- Zawahiri, Osama and people like Abu Laith al-Libbi are in the tribal areas of Pakistan," the US official added.

Almost four years earlier, on July 8, 2004, international media widely reported that Afghan intelligence agents have talked to Mullah Mohammad Omar after commandeering a satellite phone being used by his top aide. According to the Kandahar intelligence Chief Abdullah Laghmanai, a man believed to be Mullah Omar's close aide, Mullah Sakhi Dad Mujahid, was captured in July 2004 while he was carrying a satellite telephone containing the phone numbers of top members of the ousted government. "We contacted Mullah Omar by Mullah Mujahid's phone", he said, adding that at first Mullah Mujahid was forced to talk to his boss on the phone. "But when he (Omar) realised the situation ... he cut off the phone".

"Assallam-o-Aleikum, where are you?" Mullah Omar asked Mullah Mujahid, according to Laghmanai. Mullah Mujahid, as he is known locally, was arrested during a raid in Dara-e-Noor, some 70kms north of Kandahar. The area is in the rugged border region between Uruzgan and Kandahar and known to American military officials as the Taliban heartland. Mullah Mujahid served as Mullah Omar's secretary under the Taliban's 1996-2001 rule. Before being arrested, he was serving as Mullah Omar's military assistant. Laghmanai said subsequent efforts to contact Mullah Omar had been unsuccessful as the one-eyed Taliban boss refuses to answer phone calls from strange numbers. "Maybe Omar has found out that his friend is under our

control", he said. "He doesn't answer his phone". Laghmanai alleged that information received from Mujahid suggested that Mullah Omar was hiding in Pakistan's tribal areas close to Quetta. "The information Mujahid provided, as well as our intelligence, suggests that Mullah Omar is in Pakistan's tribal areas", he said.

One really has to wonder how many times the Pakistan government has to deny that the Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, is living under government protection in Quetta. The Pakistani authorities have been denying for years now that Mullah Mohammad Omar has been hiding in Pakistan. On the other hand, the Karzai administration keeps insisting that the Taliban *ameer* is hiding in Pakistan. On January 17, 2007, Afghan intelligence authority released a video in which a captured Taliban spokesman confessed that Mullah Omar was hiding in Pakistan under the protection of the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). The Afghan intelligence agents arrested Abul Haq Haqi, who was known to the media as Doctor Mohammad Hanif, in the eastern province of Nangarhar. The 26-year-old subsequently confirmed he was picked up as he entered Afghanistan from Pakistan and that he had come to the country on a mission, which was not specified. Asked by an unseen interrogator about the whereabouts of Omar, the calm-looking and soft-spoken man says: "He is under the protection of the ISI in Quetta."

On February 25, 2006, Kabul handed over intelligence information to Islamabad, indicating that Mullah Omar and key Taliban associates are hiding in Pakistan. The intelligence information was shared during a visit by Karzai to Islamabad after a wave of suicide attacks that fueled suspicions of the Karzai administration that militants are operating out of Pakistan. The alleged presence of the Taliban militants in Pakistan has become a constant source of tension in relations with Afghanistan. Afghan Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah told The Associated Press in March 2006 that Afghanistan had shared with Islamabad "whatever we considered was credible intelligence. They promised they would look into it." He said the information included the presence of Taliban leaders, the presence of training camps and other security-related issues.

As the Pakistani authorities first denied having received the intelligence and then said most of it was outdated, including the possible whereabouts of Omar, Abdullah said Afghanistan would not have handed over information it did not believe in. Abdullah said most of the Taliban leaders that are actively instigating terror in Afghanistan are operating from Pakistan, with Mullah Omar known to have spent time in the border city of Peshawar and in Baluchistan. "We have provided evidence of him being outside of Afghanistan, in Quetta in Baluchistan to our Pakistani friends." This was not for "one day, not one hour but time and again in Quetta", he said.

Almost six months later, on September 23, 2006 Karzai said that Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden were both in Pakistan, charging that Islamabad's support for militants had made Afghanistan unstable. Addressing the US-based Council on Foreign Relations, Karzai said the Taliban leader was for sure in Pakistan, adding that "Pakistani President General Musharraf knows it and I know it . . . He is truly there". On the whereabouts of bin Laden, Karzai said: "If I told you he was in Pakistan, President Pervez Musharraf, my friend, would be mad at me. But if I said he was in Afghanistan that would not be true." In a veiled reference to Musharraf and his alleged support of militants, Karzai said some in the region are definitely using extremism as an instrument of policy to maintain political power.

On September 9, 2006, CNN's Peter Bergen filed an exclusive report about the possible whereabouts of Mullah Omar, stating that the one-eyed Taliban leader is living in Pakistan, though not in the same area where al Qaeda leader Osama is thought to be. Quoting American intelligence source, the report said: "The elusive Taliban leader is believed to be hiding in Quetta or its environs, a city of one million that is the capital of Baluchistan province in southwestern Pakistan. The intelligence source says that Mullah Omar continues to supply high level guidance to his movement of religious warriors, although he is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the movement, a role largely played by military commander Mullah Dadullah".

On January 3, 2007, almost four months after the CNN report was published, Mullah Omar said in his first interview with a Pakistani newspaper since the puritanical militia were driven from power in 2001, that he would never hold negotiations with the US-backed Karzai government and warned that the war will be escalated to such an extent that foreign troops are compelled to leave Afghanistan and institutions established by them are dismantled. "The foreign troops should at once leave Afghanistan and then the institutions they created should be dismantled. Unless this happens, war will heat up further. It will not recede", the Taliban supreme leader said in response to written questions sent to him by a Pakistani journalist through his media spokesperson.

Mullah Omar also responded to criticism of the hard-line Taliban rule, his stated aversion to negotiations with the Karzai government, provision of shelter to – and subsequent refusal to hand over – Osama bin Laden to the United States, a clampdown on girls' education, his whereabouts and alleged support from Pakistan. Careful not to criticize the Musharraf regime's policy vis-a-vis Taliban, Omar also denied that the Taliban resurgence was a Pashtun uprising, making a distinction between the ultimate goals of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. According to him, "jihad is the goal of al-Qaeda while the Taliban were determined to drive American troops out of Afghanistan".

Six months later, on August 4, 2008, the *New York Times* once again claimed while quoting Afghan and Western intelligence officials, that Mullah Omar is based in the Quetta district of

Baluchistan and is running a shadow government from there, complete with military, religious and cultural councils. The report said the Taliban *ameer* has appointed officials and commanders to virtually every Afghan province and district, just as he did when he ruled Afghanistan. "He oversees his movement through a grand council of ten members", Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told the NYT in a telephone interview, adding that Mullah Bradar, a senior Taliban commander, serves as his first deputy who passes down Mullah Omar's commands and makes all military decisions. The report said that the Taliban even produce their own magazine, *Al Somood*, published online in Arabic, where details of their leadership structure can be found.

The one-eyed commander

Mullah Mohammad Omar, the self-styled 'Commander of the Faithful', used to head the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which once controlled approximately 90 percent of the country's territory. Very little is known about the personal life of the Taliban's supreme commander, because he was a reclusive figure even before his militant Taliban government was overthrown by the Americans and he was forced into hiding. His refusal to give up Osama bin Laden was the main motivation for the US-led strike on Afghanistan in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Born to a poor agricultural family in Mewand district of southwestern Afghanistan in 1960, little is known of Mullah Omar until the early 1980s, when he appeared as a guerrilla leader fighting against the Soviet Armed Forces in Afghanistan. During the fight against the Soviets, he was reportedly injured several times including an attack in which his right eye was injured by shrapnel. It was then that he came into contact with his best friend and fishing companion, Osama, a friendship which transcended the responsibilities of a leader of his country, if not all of his people, resulting in the current situation of chaos in which the country is emerged. Mullah Omar and bin Laden go back to their time as resistance fighters against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Osama at least partially financed the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, from

which Mullah Omar emerged as 'Commander of the Faithful', a title with great resonance in Islamic history.

Shortly before he launched the Taliban movement in the spring of 1994, Mullah Mohammad Omar was called by the humble people of his village, Singesar, who complained that two local girls had been tied up, shaved and gang-raped by the mujahideen militia. Mohammad Omar gathered together 30 former guerrillas, found the girls, freed them and hanged the mujahideen leaders publicly. It was acts of savagery like this committed by the mujahideen, which may have led to the austere regime of strict discipline that Mullah Mohammad Omar imposed on his country. The Taliban movement was thus launched in, more by accident than design, to control the growing anarchy within the country after the US-backed mujahideen had ousted the communist government of Dr. Najibullah from Kabul in April 1992. The people of Afghanistan greeted the Taliban with enthusiasm as they systematically clamped down on the mujahideen warlords and drug barons who had taken over the country. They were seen as a movement, which restored at least miniscule order over total chaos. A large number of the religious schools along the Pakistan-Afghan border provided a significant number of recruits to the Taliban.

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Dr Zawahiri: Playing Hide and Seek

Osama bin Laden's second in command Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri, presently hiding somewhere on the Pak-Afghan border, is believed to have seized control of al-Qaeda and rebuilt the terror network into an organization capable of launching complex terror attacks in Britain and America.

An eye surgeon by profession, Dr. Zawahiri is Osama's right hand man and the chief ideologue of al-Qaeda who is considered to be the moving spirit behind the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The American intelligence agencies accuse Ayman to be the operational brain behind the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States. He is number two - behind only bin Laden - in the 22 Most Wanted Terrorists' List announced by the US government in 2001. Zawahiri is under indictment in the United States for this role in the 1998 US embassy bombings in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya. The Rewards for Justice Program of the US Department of State is offering a reward of up to US\$25 million for information about his location.

Going by credible international media reports, Osama bin Laden has not chaired any meeting of al-Qaeda's ruling *shura* or the decision making council during 2006 and 2007. Instead, Zawahiri is credited with rebuilding the terror network since the Allied Forces invaded Afghanistan in 2001. According to a September 15, 2007 investigative story titled "Zawahiri replaces Laden as al-Qaeda chief" that appeared in *Sunday Telegraph*,

British and American intelligence agencies believe that a network of terrorist cells, funded, controlled and supported by al-Qaeda's central command, based in the lawless tribal areas of Pakistan, is in place again. The newspaper quoted Bruce Hoffman, a member of the US Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Centre, as saying: "Osama is the brand name but Zawahiri is the grand strategist. He has taken control of al-Qaeda. Despite the release of his videos in September 2007, Laden has ceased to be a major force in decision-making and propaganda effort".

A window on the changing outlook on al-Qaeda came in July 2007 when a US government National Intelligence Estimate concluded that the organisation had regrouped. States Prof Hoffman: "The idea that they were just a franchise for ideology was simply not true. While we were saying that al-Qaeda had been diminished and degraded, it was just our wishful thinking." What forced the re-evaluation was the terror plot in August 2006 to blow up 10 aircraft en route from Britain to the United States. "That sent shock waves through the intelligence agencies of both countries. It was incontrovertible evidence that al-Qaeda was back, and that it was prepared to go after hard targets." *The Sunday Telegraph* report added: "Al-Qaeda under Dr Ayman al Zawahiri's direction had promoted a new generation of leaders to the highest echelons of the *shura*, a group of about 20 to 30 leaders who govern operations, finance and religious decrees".

Yet another *Sunday Telegraph* story titled "Al-Qaeda divided over drive to oust Musharraf", appearing on July 29, 2007, reported that a deep split has emerged within al-Qaeda over the wisdom of the terror network's drive to overthrow and kill Musharraf. Quoting radical Pakistani Islamists allied to the terror network, the report said Zawahiri has ordered the series of retaliatory attacks on Pakistani targets that followed the storming of the Red Mosque in Islamabad by General Musharraf's troops. "A rival so-called Libyan faction [of al-Qaeda] led by Abu Yahya al-Libbi, who escaped from the US Bagram base near Kabul in 2005, apparently suspects that Zawahiri is trying to position himself as Laden's heir

presumptive with his personal crusade. And Laden himself is believed to be in hiding, fearful of his whereabouts being discovered", the report added.

US intelligence operatives closely involved in the hunt for bin Laden told *The Sunday Telegraph* that they had received reports of al-Qaeda rifts from senior sources within the Pakistani jihadi community. The US officials believe that al-Zawahiri is running anti-Musharraf operations without consulting other leaders, hoping to foment a revolt that will result in an Islamic regime taking control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. "US intelligence believes the feud has developed in a power vacuum in al-Qaeda's high command. Laden rarely holds face-to-face meetings with senior lieutenants for security reasons, has only issued occasional instructions to his followers, and may be seriously ill."

Al-Zawahiri, by contrast, has fired off a flurry of video and audio messages. In once such audios he had issued two days after the Red Mosque Operation Silence against the fanatic clerics of the *Lal Masjid* in Islamabad in July 2007, he exhorted Pakistanis to revolt, warning that otherwise "Musharraf will annihilate you". On April 23, 2008, in yet another audio message, Dr Zawahiri claimed that Taliban took over 95 per cent of Afghanistan and was sweeping Pakistan as well. "Residents of the provinces and various regions welcome the Taliban and urge them to come to purify their regions of corruption; this is the secret of Taliban quick deployment and gripping control of 95 per cent of Afghanistan. The Crusaders and their agents in Pakistan and Afghanistan are starting to fall," Zawahiri said.

The US intelligence sleuths stationed in Pakistan believe that Zawahiri is hiding somewhere in the seven agencies of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Their findings are based on the January 30, 2006 video tape of Zawahiri, aired by *al-Jazeera* television and claiming that he had escaped a January 13, 2006 US air strike on a village in northwestern Pakistan that killed as many as 18 people. "US planes launched the assault under the pretext of wanting to kill my frail self and four of my companions", Zawahiri said in his message. The American air strike in the Damadola village of the Bajaur Agency in Pakistan

was carried out on the basis of human intelligence provided by Pakistani intelligence sleuths believed to be on the CIA payroll and working as informers in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan.

According to Pakistani intelligence sources, the deadly air strikes would not have happened without the involvement of the Pakistani intelligence agents. They said the three attacks that fired nine missiles were the outcome of a closely coordinated operation planned and executed by a combination of US and the Pakistani intelligence officials. "The air attacks could not have been possible without having precise information that the right target was at that location, though Dr. Zawahiri got out of the building much before it was hit," the sources added.

Talking about the January 13 raid in the Bajaur Agency, a well placed ISI official said the CIA had been receiving reports through its informers in the Pakistani intelligence establishment that the Egyptian surgeon and al Qaeda's No. 2 had been visiting the Bajaur Agency for about a year and thus they had been trying to keep an eye on his movement over the past few months. Another reason for Zawahiri's visit to the remote Bajaur village was to meet his family members because it had been quite some time since Zawahiri last visited his family or met his in-laws. Zawahiri is reportedly married to a woman from the Mohmand tribe who, with her children, lives with her father in the border area between Bajaur Agency and Mohmand tribal regions.

The ISI official said that the human intelligence for the Bajaur raid was actually provided by a local informer in the Bajaur Agency who was working for a hired ISI official who further passed it on to the Americans. The CIA sleuths had information that a grand meeting was going to take place across the border in the Damadola village of the Bajaur Agency between fugitive Taliban and al Qaeda leaders. The CIA subsequently flew three Predator drones over the area shortly before the meeting to take intelligence videos and mark the location of the target before the strike. The local informers were to confirm the death of Zawahiri to the Americans in case of a successful hit.

The intelligence sources say Zawahiri did visit the Damadola village of Bajaur Agency on January 10, and not on January 13 when the American missiles struck three adjoining houses in the area and killed 18 civilians. The American missiles were deadly accurate as they not only located the three targeted houses on the outskirts of the village of Damadola, but squarely struck their *hujra*, the large room traditionally used by Pashtun tribesmen to accommodate their guests. However, the information provided by the Pakistani informers that Dr. Zawahiri had been staying there for the last two days was simply faulty, because the al-Qaeda leaders had visited the place a couple of days ago and had stayed there for not more than an hour.

Who is Dr Zawahiri?

Born in 1953 in Egypt, Dr Ayman al Zawahiri's family was quite prominent and religiously conservative. He is remembered as a quiet and well-read student, but that may have changed in 1967, when Israel defeated the combined armies of several Arab nations. Zawahiri graduated from medical school in 1974; then spent three years as a surgeon in the Egyptian Army, posted at a base outside Cairo. This was a watershed time for many Muslims in the Middle East, and al-Zawahiri was no different. He joined the Muslim Brotherhood at the mere age of fourteen. In 1979, he joined the even more radical Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Eventually Zawahiri became one of the group's principle leaders who actively worked for recruiting new members into its underground, anti-government operations.

In April 1979, Egyptians voted to approve President Anwer Sadat's peace treaty with Israel. In response to a series of demonstrations orchestrated by Zawahiri's organisation and other Islamists against President Sadat's pro-US and anti-jihad policies, the Egyptian leader banned all religious outfits. Onwards, Zawahiri envisioned not only the removal of the Egyptian head of state but a complete overthrow of the existing order. Stealthily, he began recruiting officers from the Egyptian military, waiting for the moment when Islamic Jihad had accumulated enough strength in men and weapons to act. Zawahiri's chief strategist, Al-Zumar, was a colonel in the

intelligence branch of the Egyptian Army and a military hero of the 1973 war with Israel. Zumar's plan was to kill the most powerful leaders of the country and capture the headquarters of the Army and the state security, the telephone-exchange building, and the radio-and-television building. From there, news of the Islamic revolution would be broadcast, unleashing - he expected - a popular uprising against secular authority all over the country.

On the morning of October 6, 1981, surrounded by dignitaries, including several American diplomats, President Sadat was saluting the Army troops at a military parade when a military vehicle veered toward the reviewing stand. Four Army *jawans* leapt out and tossed grenades into the stand besides emptying their cartridge of machine guns into President Sadat, killing him on the spot. After the assassination of President Sadat, the Egyptian government cracked down even harder on religious extremists. Zawahiri was arrested while trying to escape and taken into custody. At the Maadi police station, the police chief slapped him in the face and Ayman slapped him back. Subsequently, Zawahiri became known as the man who struck back.

However, he could not be directly linked to Anwer Sadat's assassination, though he was convicted on charges of keeping weapons and was sentenced to three years in prison. During that time he was beaten and tortured, experiences, which only further radicalised him. Once released, Dr. Zawahiri decided to leave Egypt. He reached Jeddah in 1985. At thirty-four, he was a formidable figure. He had been a committed revolutionary and a member of an Islamist underground cell for more than half his life. His political skills had been honed by prison debates, and he had discovered in himself a capacity and hunger for leadership. He was pious, determined and embittered.

Once in Saudi Arabia, Dr. Zawahiri returned to medicine and eventually reached Afghanistan, which had by that point become a gathering point for radical Muslims from all over the world. There, he discovered Osama bin Laden among thousands of other radical Islamists who were drawn to Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion in 1979. For one thing, both were very modern men. Laden, who was in his early twenties, was already

an international businessman; Zawahiri, six years older, was a surgeon from a notable Egyptian family. Both played an important role during the Afghan jihad to fight out the Russian occupation troops from Afghanistan.

After the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989, Zawahiri returned to Egypt - now more radical than ever and like other Arab fighters, having learnt how to use force and violence to create an Islamic state. Throughout the 1990s he was responsible for organising and bringing former mujahideen into the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Because of governmental pressure, he had to move to Sudan in 1992 to join hands with Osama there. But in 1996, Zawahiri and Osama were compelled to leave Sudan, making them to return to Afghanistan. Before that, Zawahiri had already been sentenced to death in absentia by an Egyptian court in 1999 for his role in organising deadly terrorist attacks, but in particular the massacre of fifty-eight tourists in Luxor in 1997.

By the time they returned to Afghanistan, Osama and Zawahiri had apparently realised that each man filled a need in the other. They were both members of the educated classes, intensely pious, quiet and politically stifled by the regimes in their own countries. Osama, an idealist with vague political ideas sought direction, and Zawahiri, a seasoned propagandist, supplied it. Osama had a good number of followers, but they were not organised. On the other hand, those with Zawahiri had extraordinary capabilities – doctors, engineers and soldiers. They had experience in secret work and they knew how to organise themselves and create cells.

In June 2001, two jihadi outfits, Osama-led al-Qaeda and Zawahiri-led Egyptian Islamic Jihad, formally merged into one and launched Qaeda al-Jihad. Although Osama eventually became the public face of al-Qaeda's Islamic terrorism, the fact remains that it was Zawahiri and his team members who actually provided the backbone of the larger organisation's leadership. Western media reports say, as a man of science, Zawahiri was interested in the use of biological and chemical warfare since he believed that the destructive power of these weapons was no less than that of nuclear weapons. According to US intelligence claims, Zawahiri pored over medical journals to research on the usage of chemical and biological weapons.

In the process, he met with an Egyptian scientist in Afghanistan, Medhat Mursi al-Sayed, whose jihadi name was Abu Khabab. The US intelligence officials believe that Khabab prepared the deadly explosives for the truck bomb that hit the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad in August 1998. Later, during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the US forces reportedly claimed to have discovered a factory under construction, near Kandahar, to be used for the production of anthrax. A sample of anthrax powder was reportedly found in Zawahiri's house in Afghanistan.

On September 11, 2001, Zawahiri, bin Laden and their followers evacuated their quarters in Kandahar and fled into the mountains, where they listened to an Arabic radio station's news flashes about the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. According to a CIA report about the events of that morning, at 9:53 a.m. between the crash of American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon and the downing of United Airlines Flight 93 in Pennsylvania, a member of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan was overheard saying that the attackers were following through on "the doctor's programme".

On December 3, 2001, American bombers struck a heavily fortified complex of caves near Jalalabad. When the ground troops arrived, they discovered more than a hundred bodies and they were able to identify eighteen of them as top al-Qaeda lieutenants. Zawahiri's wife, Azza, and their children were also killed. However, according to the FBI sleuths in Afghanistan, there was no confirming evidence of this. After the attacks, a Northern Alliance commander announced that Dr. Zawahiri, too, had been killed in the American bombing. However, the claim was belied by the release of a videotape showing Osama and Zawahiri sitting on a blanket beside a mountain stream, talking about the jihad operations of September 11.

29

Of Al-Qaeda, Taliban and ISI Links

Once upon a time, long before 9/11 occurred, that prompted the United States to launch its war against terror, India used to be the only country accusing the Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of fomenting terrorism and hatching diabolic plots of death and destruction in its neighbourhood. These allegations Islamabad would dismiss outright, arguing that New Delhi saw in the ISI a convenient, external bogey for its own inability to address its domestic discontent.

The world accepted this logic. Or, it ignored the ISI chicanery, as the problem was confined to the Indo-Pak subcontinent. However, this perception has changed drastically, considering the fusillade of charges from around the world against the ISI since the 9/11 terror attacks. Forget New Delhi's claim about the ISI masterminding the Mumbai bomb blasts; that's old hat. What should worry the ISI is Afghan President Hamid Karzai's accusation that Pakistan's premier intelligence agency was bolstering the Taliban and providing sanctuary to Osama bin Laden and Mullah Mohammad Omar. Add to this the demand of the Afghanistan based commanders of the NATO forces from five nations operating that their governments get tough with Pakistan over the ISI's support for the Taliban. There has been a growing flurry of reports appearing in Western media since 9/11, exploring the hidden links of the Pakistani military/intelligence establishment with al-Qaeda and the

Taliban. Despite being a crucial US ally in the war on terrorism since 2001, the ISI remains in the eye of a worldwide media storm following the detection of a series of deadly international terror plots in America, England, Afghanistan and India, with their foot prints traced back to Pakistan.

The moments during which ISI has not been the focus of attention in the past quarter of a century have been very rare indeed. Often described by critics as a state within the Pakistani state, the ISI was set up by the country's military establishment as the intelligence wing of the army a year after Pakistan came into being. With the passage of time, however, it has become the classic overgrown covert operations security agency that has a specific world view and has got a role in foreign policy as well as in domestic politics and is accountable to none. The goings on behind ISI's nondescript headquarters, located behind high walls on *Khayban-e-Suharwady* avenue in the heart of the federal capital Islamabad and its operational offices in the adjoining garrison town of Rawalpindi, have dominated Pakistan's domestic and foreign policies – especially those related to Afghanistan – for over two decades.

Hours after the 9/11 attacks, the Musharraf regime agreed to share desperately needed information about Taliban network with the Central Intelligence Agency. Since then, the ISI has been working as the 'eyes and ears' of the US-led covert action to seize bin Laden from the Taliban, with hundreds of its agents and their Pathan 'assets' continuing to operate across Afghanistan. Having joined the US-led war on terror as an ally, Musharraf keeps claiming that Pakistan is playing a key role in nipping the evils of al-Qaeda and Taliban in the bud. However, the international community remains skeptical of his claims and continues to show concerns that the ISI has not abandoned its strategic objective of rebuilding its lost influence in Afghanistan.

As the gravity of the conflict in Afghanistan has risen in recent times, the ISI is again at the centre of the controversy, amid allegations by the United States, Britain and Afghanistan that it was helping the revival of Taliban-led resistance movement in Afghanistan. While intense international counter-terrorism efforts strive to track down and stop plots originating out of Pakistan, the sheer number of such conspiracies continues to pose a serious

threat. Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked Pakistani militant groups, intertwined with Islamic elements in state institutions like the ISI, are playing a dangerous double game, amid allegations by Western intelligence agencies that the ISI keeps pursuing its pre-9/11 agenda despite claims to the contrary.

The Pakistani denials apart the fact remains that the ISI has expanded into a state within a state under President General Zia to run the anti-Soviet insurgency in Afghanistan. The policy-makers who conceived and helped set up the secret service would not have even imagined how this organization would, one day, go beyond its mandated functions and literally become autonomous in its decisions and activities, prejudicial to the interests of the country. The ISI's mandate is to provide strategic intelligence, including external threat perceptions and covert operations, to the prime minister, the three armed forces and to the Joint Services Headquarters. However, its internal security wing does cover internal security matters, including providing security clearance for armed forces personnel work on counter-intelligence to undermine intelligence assets of adversarial countries deployed within Pakistan. There is the extremely notorious section of the internal security wing which has actively contributed to the mutilation of Pakistan's political evolution.

Constitutionally, the ISI is accountable to the prime minister, yet most officers in the ISI are from the army, so that is where their loyalties and interests lie. Experts say until the end of 2007, as the army chief and the president, Pervez Musharraf exercised firm control over the intelligence agency. But now, he is the third player in the game. With a new army chief and a new prime minister in Pakistan gaining increasing control of the agency, Musharraf has no direct control over it. But he still wields influence in the form of a close former associate, Lt Gen Nadeem Taj, who heads the intelligence agency.

While Musharraf was still holding both the coveted slots of the president as well as the army chief, New Delhi accused Pakistan of planning the July 2006 Mumbai train bombings, claiming to have solid proof that could link the ISI to the carnage. In August 2006, Afghan President Karzai held the ISI responsible for backing the resurgent Taliban in his country besides providing sanctuary to al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden

and the Taliban *ameer* Mullah Mohammad Omar. In September 2006, the NATO commanders stationed in Afghanistan demanded that their governments get tough with Pakistan over the ISI's covert support for the Taliban. By the time, Musharraf had reached London after concluding his unofficial visit to the US which was meant for the launching of his book – *In the Line of Fire*. As he landed in England, Musharraf had to confront a hostile British media in the wake of a leaked British Ministry of Defense think-tank report, saying the ISI was indirectly supporting extremism in Afghanistan, Iraq and Britain.

"The Army's dual role in combating terrorism and promoting six-party religious alliance – the *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* at the same time, besides supporting the Taliban through the ISI is coming under closer and closer international scrutiny. Indirectly, Pakistan has been supporting terrorism and extremism through the ISI, whether in London on 7/7 (the July 7, 2005 suicide bombings on London's transport network) or in Afghanistan or Iraq," the report read. The BBC report, which was written by a senior military official linked to Britain's foreign intelligence service, MI6, and part of a fact-finding mission to Pakistan in June 2006, proposed using military links between British and Pakistani armed forces to persuade Musharraf to step down as leader of the country, which is on the edge of chaos, accept fair elections, withdraw the Army from civilian life and dismantle the ISI.

Stunned, Musharraf's riposte was typical: "I would like to tell this Ministry of Defense spokesman that the Ministry itself should be dismantled before the ISI is dismantled. You will be brought down to your knees if Pakistan doesn't co-operate with you. That is all I would like to say. If we were not with you, you would not manage anything. Let that be clear. And if the ISI is not with you, you will fail. Let that be very clear also. Remember my words: if the ISI is not with you and Pakistan is not with you, you will lose in Afghanistan. From 1979 to 1989, we fought the Soviet Union for you. We won the Cold War for you. The Pakistan Army and the ISI had played a part in training tens of thousands of mujahideen fighters to resist the Soviets. But it was the West's decision to leave Pakistan high and dry after Soviet

withdrawal that had paved the way for the creation of radicalized Taliban and al-Qaeda from remnants of Afghan mujahideen", said Musharraf in a subsequent interview.

Yet, the fact remains that Pakistan's close links with the Taliban and ISI's past role as the key sponsor of the Islamist hardliners prior to Islamabad's decision to join hands with the US in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks is a matter of record. "Pakistan, not Iraq, was a patron of terrorism and had closer ties with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda leading up to the September 11 attacks. The Taliban's ability to provide al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden a haven in the face of international pressure and UN sanctions was significantly facilitated by Pakistani support. Pakistan broke with the Taliban only after September 11, even though it knew the Afghan militia was hiding al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden", the June 2004 interim report by the US National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States had stated.

The report said that Pakistan benefited from the Taliban- al-Qaeda relationship, as Osama bin Laden's camps trained and equipped fighters for Pakistan's ongoing struggle in Kashmir. The Taliban faction that seized Kabul was itself supported by Pakistan, said the 12-page report, and added that even when headquartered in Sudan, al-Qaeda had used Pakistan and Afghanistan as regional bases and training centers, supporting Islamic insurgencies in Tajikistan, Kashmir and Chechnya. The training at al-Qaeda and associated camps was multi-faceted in nature, it said.

"A worldwide jihad needed terrorists who could bomb embassies or hijack airliners, but it also needed foot soldiers for the Taliban in its war against the Northern Alliance, and guerrillas who could shoot down Russian helicopters in Chechnya or ambush Indian units in Kashmir. Thus, most recruits received training that was primarily geared towards conventional warfare. Terrorist training was provided mostly to the best and most ardent recruits. The quality of the training provided at al-Qaeda and other jihadi camps was apparently quite good. There was coordination with regard to curriculum and great emphasis on ideological and religious indoctrination.

Instruction underscored that the US and Israel were evil, and that the rulers of Arab countries were illegitimate", the National Commission report stated.

In his April 4, 2004 investigative report titled "*9-11 and the smoking gun*", carried by Asia Times Online, a well known journalist and analyst Pepe Escobar wrote: "If the 9-11 Commission is really looking for a smoking gun, it should look no further than at Lt Gen Mahmood Ahmad, the then director of the Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence who was in Washington when the 9/11 attacks occurred. He arrived in the US on the September 4, 2001, a whole week before the attacks. He had meetings at the State Department after the 9/11 attacks. But he also had a regular visit of consultations with his US counterparts at the CIA and the Pentagon during the week prior to the 9/11 attacks. What was the nature of these routine pre-9/11 consultations? Were they in any way related to the subsequent post-9/11 consultations pertaining to Pakistan's decision to cooperate with US? Was the planning of war being discussed between Pakistani and US officials?"

The report added: "On September 9, 2001, while Lt Gen Mahmood was in the US, Commander Ahmad Shah Masood was assassinated. The Northern Alliance had informed the Bush Administration that the ISI was allegedly implicated in the assassination. The Bush Administration consciously took the decision in the post September 11 consultations with Lt. Gen. Mahmood Ahmad to directly cooperate with the ISI despite its links to Osama bin Laden and the Taliban and its alleged role in the assassination of Commander Masood, which coincidentally occurred two days before the terrorist attacks. Meanwhile, senior Pentagon and US State Department officials had been rushed to Islamabad to put the finishing touches on America's war plans. On the Sunday prior to the onslaught of the bombing of major cities in Afghanistan (October 7th), Lt Gen Mahmood was sacked from his position as head of the ISI".

Interestingly, a few days before being sacked, Lt Gen Mahmood, in his talks with the CIA chief in Washington, had defended the Taliban *ameer* Mullah Omar describing him as a pious humanitarian, not a man of violence. Just a few months before surrendering to American arm-twisting, the Musharraf

regime had been vehemently defending its support for the Taliban regime, for it was providing Pakistan strategic depth. It was the same Mahmood who tried to convince the American administration positively about the Taliban when Thomas Pickering, Deputy Secretary of State in the Clinton administration, had warned Pakistan against the consequences of being in bed with the Taliban. Astonishingly, within the course of a week after the 9/11, the Musharraf regime took an about-turn and the notorious spy agency that had been deeply involved with the Taliban, was guiding the US-led Allied Forces into Afghanistan.

According to a January 24, 2008 research paper by Shaun Gregory of the Pakistan Security Research Unit titled "The ISI and the War on Terrorism", "At present, there is arguably no more important intelligence organization than Pakistan's Directorate of Inter Service Intelligence (ISI), which remains an enigma after decades of close co-operation. Is it the indispensable ally of the West as the Pakistani President insists? Or is it something else: an organisation that fomenters terrorism, that operates against Western interests, and that functions as an obstacle to, rather than the means for, progress in the War on Terrorism? Of course, this is to pose a slightly false dichotomy: the ISI need not be a trusted ally to remain important to the West. The real question is whether there is sufficient overlap between Western interests and the activities of the ISI to merit the trust and the investment of the West, primarily the US, makes in the ISI indirectly through the support of the military government of Pakistan and directly to the organisation itself?"

Shaun Gregory writes that the closeness of relations between the ISI and the Taliban, and the closeness of relations between the Taliban and al-Qaeda necessarily raises the issue of the nature of relations between the ISI and al-Qaeda. "The link between the ISI and Osama bin Laden goes back more than 25 years. The wealthy Saudi Laden with strong links to the Saudi royal family and Saudi intelligence almost inevitably had good contacts with the ISI. Laden had emerged as a significant, if marginal, foreign fighter for the ISI during the Afghan war, more because his wealth could be used deniably by the ISI than because of his military prowess on the battlefield. By most

accounts al-Qaeda was formed sometime between May and August 1988 with many of the foundational meetings taking place in Pakistan as the Soviets began their withdrawal from Afghanistan, as a means of continuing the jihad against the global enemies of Islam. It is clear at this time that Osama enjoyed the protection of the ISI and that the latter sought to co-opt him for two projects: the overthrow of Najibullah in Kabul and the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto in Islamabad, both of whom were seen as the enemies of Islam by Laden and by the ISI".

Shaun Gregory maintains that Laden's absence from Afghanistan for the four years between 1992 and 1996 meant he had no direct role in the rise of the Taliban militia, and indeed was unfamiliar with them when he returned to Afghanistan in May 1996. "It was the ISI that facilitated Laden's initial meetings with the Taliban which were successful enough to see him move to Kandahar as the winter of 1996 closed in. Under the protection of the ISI and the Taliban, Laden began to expand the activities of al-Qaeda for global jihad. Focused on its regional agenda - Kashmir, the support of the Taliban, and a growing determination to stake a strong hand in the oil-rich southern Caucasus - the ISI colluded with Laden to establish further training camps inside Afghanistan, and to facilitate the spread of Laden's influence in existing camps on both sides of the border, in order to host, indoctrinate and train foreign fighters for waging jihad in both Jammu & Kashmir and Afghanistan".

For Pakistan and the ISI, the Western researcher believes, the consequences of the 9/11 attacks were almost incalculable. "Pakistan was co-opted by the United States as a necessary if uncertain partner for the War on Terrorism and as an indispensable forward base for the overthrow of the Taliban which - once the Taliban refused to hand the al-Qaeda leadership over - became a sine qua none for the destruction of al-Qaeda. The military government of Pervez Musharraf was given no choice other than to assist the United States and was offered lavish rewards of aid, debt write-off and the lifting of the Pressler sanctions and the additional sanctions imposed after the Pakistan nuclear weapons tests in 1998. In almost all other respects the consequences of the 9/11 attacks have been catastrophic for Pakistan. The ISI and the Pakistan Army were

asked to hunt down al-Qaeda operatives in Pakistan and help hunt them down in Afghanistan. The way the ISI has responded has been shaped by two sets of tensions: the first the tensions between the need for Musharraf to demonstrate fidelity to the United States in the pursuit of al-Qaeda and Musharraf's sensitivity to the widespread support for al-Qaeda and the Taliban across Pakistan, a support evinced by a large proportion of the people, by Islamist political parties, and by elements within Pakistan's Army and ISI. The second, the tensions between US objectives in relation to al-Qaeda and in terms of the region more broadly, and Pakistan's objectives in the region as a whole. These tensions explain the ambiguity of the ISI actions since 9/11".

Shaun Gregory maintains that notwithstanding these complexities there is no question that the ISI was essential to the US and the West in the early phase of the War on Terrorism. "The ISI helped the US to arrest many hundreds of suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban members, amongst them many leading al-Qaeda figures. The ISI has also been of some help to the West in unraveling some of the details of international terrorist operations or in helping foil international terrorist operations, a large number of which actually have had their roots in Pakistan. Of particular importance in this respect have been the investigations into the 9/11 attacks, and into the 7/7 London bombings, and the ISI's role in foiling the alleged summer 2006 plot to simultaneously blow up airliners leaving London's Heathrow airport for the United States. Law enforcement and intelligence service critics in the US and UK, however, point to systematic problems with the ISI's role in these operations, in particular that: the ISI tends to act on US and/or UK intelligence but not to be proactive in bringing its own intelligence to the West; the ISI is unhelpful in relation to specific investigations – most notably of 7/7 – where the trail in Pakistan seems to have gone cold; the ISI has restricted or denied the US/UK access to many alleged terrorists as well as to many of its own operatives and assets; the ISI manipulates intelligence for its own internal and geopolitical reasons, and misdirects American and British intelligence services".

The researcher believes that the crucial point is not that the ISI is aiding al-Qaeda directly – though some of its operatives may be – but rather Pakistan’s geopolitical interests, and in particular the ISI’s promotion of pan-Islamist jihad makes it an unreliable ally for the West and plays into al-Qaeda’s hands. In addition, he adds, the ISI’s support for *Sunni* Islamism in Pakistan adds another layer of complexity to the West’s problems in Pakistan. Concluding his thesis, Shaun Gregory writes that as ISI successes against al-Qaeda have declined since 2003 and the hunt for the al-Qaeda leadership has petered out and as the number of al-Qaeda directed or aided operations emanating from Pakistan continues to rise, the ambiguous role of the ISI in the War on Terrorism has become a mounting problem for the West. “So too has the role of the ISI in subverting democracy and civil society in Pakistan, as this denies the people of Pakistan a legitimate outlet for their grievances, stifles the development of democracy, and leaves much of the political space open to colonisation by Islamists. Reflecting these major setbacks for the war on terrorism, a western rethink of its intelligence strategy in Pakistan is now urgently overdue.”

Hussain Haqqani, Pakistan’s Ambassador to Washington, wrote in one of his articles in 2007, instead of just protecting Pakistan from enemies identified by a lawful government, which is what an intelligence or security service is supposed to do, the ISI defines what is or is not good for Pakistan. “The ISI is convinced that India is Pakistan’s eternal enemy, Kashmir can be won by weakening Indian resolve to hold on to it through unconventional warfare and Afghanistan should be the backyard of Pakistan in every way. Instead of implementing the state policy, the ISI virtually makes its own policies for the state. Historically, intelligence agencies that have grown so large, so powerful and so unaccountable, as the ISI, eventually cause problems for the state they control. Instead of the ISI controlling Pakistan, the Pakistanis should be controlling the ISI. Otherwise, covert terrorist operations abroad will continue to undermine the Pakistani democracy and keep the country engaged in conflicts with Afghanistan and India”.

However, President Pervez Musharraf denies that the ISI was anyway involved in spreading terrorism and thus undermining the Pakistani democracy. "Some dissidents, some rogue elements, retired people who were in the forefront in ISI during the period of Afghan jihad between 1979-1989, might have links somewhere here and there. But we are monitoring them closely and will get hold of them if at all that happens", he said in a 2006 interview with NBC television. Nevertheless, independent analysts are not ready to buy his thesis. "It is dishonest to argue that the ISI is run by rogue elements, and its boss, Director General ISI, and his boss, the Army Chief [Gen Musharraf], don't know what is going on at the lower level. While this can't be ruled out in particular instances here or there, there is no way that some rogue elements can actually make or break ISI policy which is made by the national security establishment headed by none other than Musharraf himself", so read an October 2006 *Daily Times* editorial.

It was on July 27, 2008 that ahead of his official trip to the United States, Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani attempted to place the shadowy Inter Services Intelligence under civilian control, in a bid to deflect mounting criticism over its role in the failed war on terror in the neighbouring Afghanistan. As Premier Gilani left Islamabad for Washington, the Cabinet Division issued a notification to clip the ISI wings by placing it under the administrative control of the Interior Ministry. A subsequent statement by the Pakistan Peoples Party Co-chairman Asif Zardari said the move was aimed at establishing civilian rule in the country besides saving both the army and the ISI from getting a bad name. The attempt to bring the ISI under the government control was apparently motivated by intense pressure from Washington to rein in the so-called rogue elements in the intelligence agency. However, the bid was short-lived. Hardly a few hours after the issuance of the notification, the military leadership forced the prime minister to instantly withdraw the orders.

During his meeting with Prime Minister Gilani on July 29, 2008 in Washington, President Bush expressed his concern and annoyance over the role of the Inter Services Intelligence, saying it has established deep ties with the al-Qaeda and Taliban

militants operating in the Pakistani tribal areas. The national media reported that although Bush was in a good mood when he met the Pakistani prime minister, he was blunt about expressing American reluctance to share intelligence information with Pakistan. Quoting Defense Minister Chaudhry Ahmed Mukhtar, *The News* reported on July 31 that President Bush expressed grave concern that certain elements in the ISI were leaking information to the terrorists before they could be hit by the American or Pakistani forces. "President Bush also asked who is controlling the ISI," the minister said, indicating that Bush was probably aware of the fiasco created by the failed attempt on the part of the civilian government to take control of the ISI.

The day the Pakistani Prime Minister was meeting with the American President, the *New York Times* reported on July 29 that a senior Central Intelligence Agency official visited Pakistan in July and confronted Pakistani officials with evidence of ties between the country's intelligence service and militants in the Tribal Areas. Citing defense and intelligence sources, the paper said the trip by CIA Deputy Director Stephen Kappes demonstrated a harder line being taken against Pakistani ties to those responsible for the surge of violence in Afghanistan, including a fugitive Taliban leader Jalaluddin Haqqani. "It was a very pointed message saying, 'Look, we know there's a connection, not just with Jalaluddin Haqqani but also with the other bad guys and ISI, and we think you could do more and we want you to do more about it,'" the *New York Times* quoted a senior US official as having said.

Reacting sharply to the American accusation against the ISI, President Musharraf again came to its rescue, saying any attempt to target the spy agency will weaken Pakistan as it is the first line of defense. Addressing businessmen in Karachi on August 3, 2008, the former military strongman said that conspiracies against the ISI were actually aimed at defaming Pakistan. "ISI is a patriotic institution, which is working for the stability of the country", *The News* quoted the president as saying.

However, whatever people like Musharraf say, critics insist that time has come to bring the ISI squarely under the civilian government's control, mainly to ensure that the activities of the notorious spy agency are brought within the framework of the

overall strategy adopted by the democratically elected government. The country cannot afford a situation where the premier intelligence agency keeps operating at cross purposes with the aims and objectives of the elected government.

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The Radical Face of a Liberal Musharraf

Seven years after the 9/11 terror attacks, Pakistan's cooperation in the US-led war on terrorism continues to be questioned by the international community, primarily because of the fact that the country's military ruler General Musharraf kept performing a balancing act on international and domestic fronts during all those years: cooperating with the West on one hand while on the other going soft on the al-Qaeda and the Taliban-linked militants back home.

Despite repeated public statements by Musharraf to have changed the country's direction by uprooting its network of extremists, even a cursory glance at the activities of outlawed militant groups and their leaders reveals that most of them are back in business under changed names and identities and are operating freely in the country. After the initial crackdown against the militant groups in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, all the five major jihadi groups - *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, *Harkatul Mujahideen*, *Harkatul Jihadul Islami* and *Hizbul Mujahideen* - have resurfaced and regrouped. The leaders of these groups - Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, Maulana Masood Azhar, Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil, Qari Saifullah Akhtar and Pir Syed Salahuddin - remain at large to carry on their militant agenda. For those who need a ready reckoning on Musharraf regime's performance in the war on terror, one look at his record on handling jihadi kingpins will suffice; not even a single *ameer* of any of the major militant group was either

arrested or prosecuted on terrorism charges, despite the fact that all of them are wanted either by the Indian Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) or the American Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

While banning six top jihadi and sectarian organisations of Pakistan on terrorism charges in two phases – on January 5, 2002 and November 14, 2003, General Musharraf had declared that no militant organization or jihadi leader would be allowed to indulge in terrorism to further its cause. However, after the initial crackdown, all the five major jihadi groups resurfaced and regrouped to run their respective networks as openly as before, though with different names and identities. As things stand today, Hafiz Saeed, Masood Azhar, Fazlur Rehman Khalil, Qari Saifullah Akhtar and Syed Salahuddin are on the loose and publicly do whatever they want to either themselves or through their front men. The pattern of treatment being meted out to them by the Pakistani establishment shows they are being kept on the leash, apparently to keep the neighbouring states of India and Afghanistan under pressure.

That these militant groups could not have survived and achieved their present size without the backing of the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment is beyond any iota of doubt. While the all powerful establishment keeps making overt noises about clamping down these militant organisations, the fact remains that it cannot afford to do so in practical terms if it hopes to achieve its so-called strategic goals in the region. Although Islamabad's support has been critical in the arrest of over 700 al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives, the lack of political stability in the country under Musharraf's autocratic rule bolstered the religious parties and their like-minded extremist elements in the country's military and intelligence establishments to continue their covert support for the Taliban in Afghanistan and the jihadi groups active in Indian administered Jammu & Kashmir.

Was that Pervez Musharraf's typical military mindset; being a part of the Islamist Pakistan Army which still maintains *Jihad Fi Sabilallah* (Holy war in the name of Allah) as its motto or the fear of becoming irrelevant for Washington which stopped him from dismantling the jihadi groups and their infrastructure from

the Pakistani soil despite repeated sloganeering on the contrary? Many in Pakistan believe it was a cross between the two. In September 2006, Musharraf himself conceded what many in Pakistan already knew - that he was not at all a willing US ally in the war on terror but was compelled to join hands with Washington after the 9/11 terror attacks after being threatened by a high ranking American official that Pakistan could be bombed back to the Stone Age unless it cooperated with the United States against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

"My intelligence director (then ISI Chief Lt Gen Mahmood Ahmed) told me that Richard Armitage (then US Deputy Secretary of State) has warned, 'Be prepared to be bombed. Be prepared to go back to the Stone Age', Musharraf disclosed in an interview with an American television channel on September 22, 2006. "I think it was a very rude remark. One has to think and take actions in the interests of the nation, and that was what I did," President General Musharraf said in an interview a couple of days before the New York launch of his much-trumpeted autobiography - *In the Line of Fire - A Memoir*. Musharraf, who had been a diehard supporter of Afghanistan's Taliban regime till 9/11, elaborates in his autobiography on how he had first weighed the option of fighting the US before finally taking a foreign policy U-turn and dumping support for the Taliban.

"I war-gamed the United States as an adversary," he writes, saying he assessed whether Pakistan could withstand the onslaught. "The answer was no, we could not, on three counts: the Pakistani military would have been wiped out, its economy couldn't be sustained and the nation lacked the unity needed for such a confrontation," Musharraf writes in his book. Musharraf further writes that he was worried if Pakistan did not accede to Washington's demands, the Bush administration would take up an Indian offer to provide bases. He foresaw India using the opportunity to either launch a limited offensive in the disputed Jammu & Kashmir region, or more probably New Delhi would work with the US and the United Nations to turn the present disputed ceasefire line dividing Kashmir into a permanent border. He further feared that the US would seek to destroy Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Finally, Musharraf writes, he had to

answer whether it was worth Pakistan destroying itself for the sake of the Taliban.

Musharraf's confession that he was not a willing ally in the American war on terror did help understand the international community why Pakistan's policy in Afghanistan since 9/11 has been an ambiguous one of playing both sides of the fence, saying one thing but doing another, closing the militant training camps in one area of Pakistan and reopening them in another. Even otherwise, a detailed examination of the international media reports pertaining to Musharraf's army career before his 1999 takeover and his post-coup policies on domestic and foreign fronts sketches an extremely conflicting and contradictory picture of the first commando president of Pakistan who claimed to have a liberal worldview and painted himself as a vocal proponent of enlightened moderation.

In the aftermath of 9/11 terror attacks in the United States, Musharraf affected a complete shift in Pakistan's Afghan policy that was actually devised by the mighty military establishment. Musharraf publicly ditched the Taliban and instantly became a 'trusted ally' of the United States in its global war against the Osama-led al-Qaeda terrorists. However, the western media's response to the General's U-turn on its Taliban policy was full of suspicion.

In its October 5, 2001 editorial titled "Pakistan's Double Game", London-based newspaper *Guardian* stated: "The 180-degree turnabout in the Pakistani military regime's Afghan policy since September 11 appears almost complete as Musharraf has withdrawn his diplomats from Kabul and is on the point of formally cutting ties with his former Taliban protégés. Islamabad says the evidence provided by the US implicating Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda gangsters now convince it. In point of fact, matters are somewhat more complicated. Far from admitting that his pro-Taliban policy was terribly misconceived, Musharraf (who vetoed a covert CIA-run operation to capture Osama bin Laden in 1999) still opposes western backing for the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan..... He is still playing a double game".

In its March 31, 2002 *Guardian* report titled "The myth of the good General Musharraf", John Norris wrote that the Pakistani

military ruler is telling the western leaders exactly what they want to hear. He, however, pointed out that the West's new engagement with Pakistan was based on some dangerous misconceptions.

In fact, said the *Guardian* report, Musharraf's image as a moderate leader fighting off a rogue ISI contrasts sharply with his past... "As Director General of Military Operations at Army Headquarters, Musharraf oversaw ISI assistance to the Taliban. After 9/11, he had no choice in the face of the western pressure but to reverse course on Afghanistan and to put a temporary halt to the jihad in Kashmir" ...

In its September 21, 2003 editorial titled "Pakistan, a Troubled Ally", the *New York Times* stated: "General Musharraf managed to lift Pakistan's status in Washington from pariah to strategic partner by abruptly switching sides in Afghanistan and letting Washington use Pakistani bases to fight the Taliban. Yet, beneath the surface of Washington's new closeness with Islamabad, mutual suspicions continue to fester. Musharraf has failed to sever all links with international terrorism. Pakistan's behaviour has fallen well short of what Americans are entitled to expect from an ally in the war on terrorism. Although it has cooperated in the arrest of some leaders of al-Qaeda, Pakistan has never adequately sealed the Afghan border. That made it possible for key al-Qaeda fugitives to escape and now allows Pakistani recruits to join a reviving Taliban.... Fighting terrorism effectively requires allies untainted by terror", the editorial concluded.

In its July 9, 2004 editorial titled "Pakistan Without Illusions", the *New York Times* wrote: "General Musharraf is neither a convinced nor a convincing ally of the US in the struggle against radical Islamic terrorism, nuclear weapons proliferation and destructive dictatorship.... Musharraf has done such a good job of repackaging himself as a vital American ally against radical Islamic terrorism that it is easy to forget how alarming Washington rightly found so many of his policies not very long ago. He crushed Pakistani democracy, he was, at the least, recklessly indifferent to safeguards against the proliferation of nuclear weapons and supported the Taliban and the terrorist groups active in Indian-ruled areas of Kashmir.

Musharraf publicly broke with the Taliban almost three years ago, but there has been inadequate progress on many of the other issues, and Pakistan has recently appeared to be backsliding on the Taliban”.

According to Musharraf’s close circles, he is always conscious to project himself as being very liberal and modern. However, his critics say he is a conservative in his approach and liberal in his attitude only. His personal life to some extent bears this out. Unlike orthodox Muslims who consider dogs to be ‘unclean’, and therefore do not keep them as pets, Musharraf has several dogs. He is quoted to have said in an interview, “My dogs love me. And I love my dogs”. In a 2005 article in the *Washington Post*, prominent journalist Pamela Constable wrote: “Musharraf’s personal life is distinctive in a number of ways. He is a *mohajir*, one whose family migrated from India in the 1940s, in an army dominated by clannish natives of what is now Pakistan. He enjoys Western music and occasionally drinks alcohol, even in his Islamic country. He speaks precise English, his son and one brother live in the US and his parents are naturalised American citizens – all of which augurs well for his stated desire to develop friendly relations with the US”.

By 2006, the many layers of an enlightened Musharraf had gradually unfolded to a great extent, making the policy makers in Washington get to know the real face of their once most-trusted ally. Reacting sharply to allegations coming from Washington, London, Kabul and Delhi, that he was not a willing ally in the war on terror, a visibly perturbed Musharraf told in a harsh tone a gathering of over 200 senior military officers from 22 countries [who gathered in Islamabad in October 2006 to discuss new tactics and strategy in their joint mission to combat rising terrorism]: “Our commitment and sincerity must not be doubted. We have suffered the maximum and we have contributed the maximum. Therefore, we will not accept that Pakistan is not doing enough in the war against terror. If anyone thinks I am bluffing or the ISI is bluffing, we should be out of the coalition. If the NATO forces think that the ISI is lying about its war against terrorism, Pakistan would rather disassociate itself from the alliance”.

A subsequent November 11, 2007 report in *San Francisco Chronicle*, titled "Friend or foe?" and filed by Adrian Levy and Catherine Scott-Clark, the authors of a book: "Deception: Pakistan, United States and Global Nuclear Weapons Conspiracy", actually showed an extremely conflicting and contradictory picture of Musharraf. The story said while Washington hails Musharraf as an ally in the war on terror, critics make a case that Pakistani leader is a terrorist, adding that the General had long-standing links with Islamic militant groups in Pakistan given the fact that he had been involved in the job of preparing mujahideen for anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. The report said extremist Islamist groups share a synergistic relationship with the dictatorship of Musharraf due to which he is unwilling to do anything to disturb that bond despite pressures coming from the West.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* report added: "In Musharraf, the West has got the leader it has unreservedly championed for the last nine years, someone it fears it cannot do without, a weakness that Musharraf has manipulated since he signed up to the war on terror in the days after 9/11. It is an increasingly cantankerous and one-way pact that has enabled the growth in power of the most destabilizing factor behind Pakistan's implosion - the one Musharraf never referred to: the Pakistan military itself. Musharraf likes to be seen as a firefighter, and has portrayed himself as a bridgehead between the West and the badlands of Islamic South Asia, where our own spooks and soldiers are rarely able to tread. He has worked hard to finesse his special relationship with Washington, familiarly known inside Pakistan as "Mush and Bush", and it has paid off with Pakistan receiving billions of dollars in US aid".

On December 4, 2007, a few weeks after the publication of the *San Francisco Chronicle* report, a research paper by the Observer Research Foundation titled "Musharraf: Curtain Call", written by Wilson John stated: "Before President Musharraf is forgotten as another footnote in history, he would be remembered as a military dictator in South Asia who promoted terrorist groups with religious pretext, scripted some of the worst human rights horror stories in the recent past, deepened chasms between communities not only in his country but in the

neighbourhood and turned the region over to Western powers to play their own strategic games. For the people of Pakistan, it will be difficult to forgive a ruler like Musharraf...The General's worst legacy would be the band of religious extremists and terrorists who have been allowed to run riots across Pakistan, threatening not only life and property inside the country but also in Afghanistan, India and other parts of the world. If the General had meant what he said, it would have been possible to rein in the jihadis, most of whom have been operating from Waziristan which was allowed to become a sanctuary as part of a strategy. It is naïve to believe that the General and his advisers were not aware of the pitfalls of allowing al-Qaeda and the Taliban to regroup and recoup in Waziristan, a stretch of tribal land bordering Afghanistan where a see-saw battle is on between the Taliban (supported by al-Qaeda) and the NATO forces".

Wilson added: "The Pakistan Army views and uses the Taliban as a weapon to destabilise any regime in Kabul which is not friendly to Pakistan. In fact, India's considerable stake in the region is a bone of contention with Musharraf's troops who consider Afghanistan as Pakistan's 'strategic depth'. In simpler terms, a strong foothold in Afghanistan is critical for Pakistan which considers itself a part of West Asia rather than South Asia dominated by India. What the General failed to factor in was that terrorist groups have a mind of their own.... He should have learnt some lessons from recent history that terrorism often devours its creator or creators. The US is a case in point. It was the very set of jihadis created to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan in the early 1980s which executed a kamikaze attack on WTC. The flip flop in Waziristan has the potential of turning the area into an al-Qaeda state. It has already become a staging ground for global terrorists, spawning countless offshoots of extremist elements across the world. Pakistan is today home to several of them".

While pointing out Musharraf's duplicity in dealing with the menace of terrorism even after the 9/11, his policy of keeping the jihadi option alive as a strategic tool and exploiting the presence of jihadi terrorists in Pakistan to project himself as a saviour of the country, a book titled "*The General and Jihad*", published by the Observer Research Foundation in September

2007, stated: "Musharraf's projection of himself as a saviour of Pakistan is grossly misleading as terrorist and extremist groups have become more lethal and better networked in Pakistan and Afghanistan during the last eight years of his rule. No other country in the world has spawned and supported as many extremist and terrorist groups as Pakistan". The book says that President Musharraf had claimed time and again he had been trying to put these jihadi groups in check and had launched several campaigns to rid Pakistan of Islamic terrorists. "Nothing can be more misleading", says the book. Documenting the Musharraf regime's role in the US-led global war on terror, the book points out that the so-called anti-militancy campaigns launched by the Musharraf regime had only created more Islamic terrorist groups in Pakistan that were more lethal, better armed and networked than they were before September 11, 2001.

Eight years after his military take over, President Musharraf, politically isolated, hated by his own people and no longer in command of the Pakistan Army, had to quit as Chief of Army Staff [on November 28, 2007], hardly 24 hours before he was to swear in for a much controversial third term as the president. His stepping down as the army chief brought an end to his 46-year-long military career. "I will no longer command... but my heart and my mind will always be with you", he told his officers, trying to hold back his tears. He was certainly unhappy to hang up his uniform under tremendous international pressure, which he had often described as his second skin. On August 18, 2008, almost eight months after he shed his uniform, Musharraf had to quit the Presidency in a bid to avoid an imminent impeachment by the Parliament.

Musharraf's unceremonious exit from the political scene is certainly a watershed that brings to an end a long period of personalised military rule. However, the mess he left behind is one that will not only haunt Pakistan in the time to come but the world as well besides making the international community even more nervous about the future of Pakistan where al-Qaeda and Taliban-linked extremist jihadis become stronger and audacious. Musharraf's name, therefore, would figure prominently in the long list of lost opportunities, which has kept Pakistan from growing out a troubled infancy.

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