

# جہاد فی سبیل اللہ



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JAMMU & KASHMIR

GREAT HIMALAYA

PESHAWAR

KHYBER PASS

ISLAMABAD

RAWALPINDI

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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