Pakistan’s Jihad Culture

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FREE AGENTS

This spring the U.S. State Department reported that South Asia has replaced the Middle East as the leading locus of terrorism in the world. Although much has been written about religious militants in the Middle East and Afghanistan, little is known in the West about those in Pakistan—perhaps because they operate mainly in Kashmir and, for now at least, do not threaten security outside South Asia. General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan’s military ruler, calls them “freedom fighters” and admonishes the West not to confuse jihad with terrorism. Musharraf is right about the distinction—the jihad doctrine delineates acceptable war behavior and explicitly outlaws terrorism—but he is wrong about the militant groups’ activities. Both sides of the war in Kashmir—the Indian army and the Pakistani “mujahideen”—are targeting and killing thousands of civilians, violating both the Islamic “just war” tradition and international law.

Pakistan has two reasons to support the so-called mujahideen. First, the Pakistani military is determined to pay India back for allegedly fomenting separatism in what was once East Pakistan and in 1971 became Bangladesh. Second, India dwarfs Pakistan in population, economic strength, and military might. In 1998 India spent about two percent of its $469 billion GDP on defense, including an active armed force of more than 1.1 million personnel. In the same year, Pakistan spent about five percent of its $61 billion GDP on defense, yielding an active armed force only half the size of India’s. The U.S. government

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estimates that India has 400,000 troops in Indian-held Kashmir—a force more than two-thirds as large as Pakistan’s entire active army. The Pakistani government thus supports the irregulars as a relatively cheap way to keep Indian forces tied down.

What does such support entail? It includes, at a minimum, assisting the militants’ passage into Indian-held Kashmir. This much Pakistani officials will admit, at least privately. The U.S. government believes that Pakistan also funds, trains, and equips the irregulars. Meanwhile, the Indian government claims that Pakistan uses them as an unofficial guerrilla force to carry out “dirty tricks,” murders, and terrorism in India. Pakistan, in turn, accuses India’s intelligence service of committing terrorism and killing hundreds of civilians in Pakistan.

Pakistan now faces a typical principal-agent problem: the interests of Pakistan (the principal) and those of the militant groups (the agent) are not fully aligned. Although the irregulars may serve Pakistan’s interests in Kashmir when they target the Indian army, they also kill civilians and perform terrorism in violation of international norms and law. These crimes damage Pakistan’s already fragile international reputation. Finally, and most important for Pakistanis, the militant groups that Pakistan supports and the Sunni sectarian killers that Pakistan claims it wants to wipe out overlap significantly. By facilitating the activities of the irregulars in Kashmir, the Pakistani government is inadvertently promoting internal sectarianism, supporting International terrorists, weakening the prospect for peace in Kashmir, damaging Pakistan’s international image, spreading a narrow and violent version of Islam throughout the region, and increasing tensions with India—all against the interests of Pakistan as a whole.

The war between India and Pakistan over the fate of Kashmir is as old as both states. When Pakistan was formally created in 1947, the rulers of Muslim-majority states that had existed within British India were given the option of joining India or Pakistan. The Hindu monarch of the predominantly Muslim state of Jammu and Kashmir chose India, prompted partly by a tribal rebellion in the state. Pakistan responded by sending in troops. The resultant fighting ended with a
1949 cease-fire, but the Pakistani government continued covertly to support volunteer guerrilla fighters in Kashmir. Islamabad argued then, as it does now, that it could not control the volunteers, who as individuals were not bound by the cease-fire agreement. (On the other hand, Maulana Abul A’la Maududi, the late founder of the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami, argued that as individuals, these “mujahideen” could not legitimately declare jihad, either.)

Pakistani officials admit to having tried repeatedly to foment separatism in Kashmir in the decades following the 1948 cease-fire. These attempts were largely unsuccessful; when separatist violence broke out in the late 1980s, the movement was largely indigenous. For their part, Indian officials admit their own culpability in creating an intolerable situation in the region. They ignored Kashmir’s significant economic troubles, rampant corruption, and rigged elections, and they intervened in Kashmiri politics in ways that contradicted India’s own constitution. As American scholar Sumit Ganguly explains, the rigged 1987 state-assembly elections were the final straw in a series of insults, igniting, by 1989, widespread violent opposition. By 1992,
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Pakistani nationals and other graduates of the Afghan war were joining the fight in Kashmir.

What began as an indigenous, secular movement for independence has become an increasingly Islamist crusade to bring all of Kashmir under Pakistani control. Pakistan-based Islamist groups (along with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, a Kashmir-based group created by Jamaat-e-Islami and partly funded by Pakistan) are now significantly more important than the secular Kashmir-based ones. The Indian government estimates that about 40 percent of the militants in Kashmir today are Pakistani or Afghan, and some 80 percent are teenagers. Although the exact size of the movement is unknown, the Indian government estimates that 3,000 to 4,000 “mujahideen” are in Kashmir at any given time.

Whatever their exact numbers, these Pakistani militant groups—among them, Lashkar-i-Taiba and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen—pose a long-term danger to international security, regional stability, and especially Pakistan itself. Although their current agenda is limited to “liberating” Kashmir, which they believe was annexed by India illegally, their next objective is to turn Pakistan into a truly Islamic state. Islamabad supports these volunteers as a cheap way to keep India off balance. In the process, however, it is creating a monster that threatens to devour Pakistani society.

SCHOOLS OF HATE

In Pakistan, as in many developing countries, education is not mandatory. The World Bank estimates that only 40 percent of Pakistanis are literate, and many rural areas lack public schools. Islamic religious schools—madrasahs—on the other hand, are located all over the country and provide not only free education, but also free food, housing, and clothing. In the poor areas of southern Punjab, madrasahs funded by the Sunni sectarian political party Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (ssp) reportedly even pay parents for sending them their children.

In the 1980s, Pakistani dictator General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq promoted the madrasahs as a way to garner the religious parties’ support for his rule and to recruit troops for the anti-Soviet war in
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Afghanistan. At the time, many madrasahs were financed by the *zakat* (the Islamic tithe collected by the state), giving the government at least a modicum of control. But now, more and more religious schools are funded privately—by wealthy Pakistani industrialists at home or abroad, by private and government-funded nongovernmental organizations in the Persian Gulf states and Saudi Arabia, and by Iran. Without state supervision, these madrasahs are free to preach a narrow and violent version of Islam.

Most madrasahs offer only religious instruction, ignoring math, science, and other secular subjects important for functioning in modern society. As Maududi warned in his 1960 book, *First Principles of the Islamic State*, “those who choose the theological branch of learning generally keep themselves utterly ignorant of [secular subjects, thereby remaining] incapable of giving any lead to the people regarding modern political problems.”

Even worse, some extremist madrasahs preach jihad without understanding the concept: They equate jihad—which most Islamic scholars interpret as the striving for justice (and principally an inner striving to purify the self)—with guerrilla warfare. These schools encourage their graduates, who often cannot find work because of their lack of practical education, to fulfill their “spiritual obligations” by fighting against Hindus in Kashmir or against Muslims of other sects in Pakistan. Pakistani officials estimate that 10 to 15 percent of the country’s tens of thousands of madrasahs espouse such extremist ideologies.

Pakistan’s interior minister Moinuddin Haider, for one, recognizes these problems. “The brand of Islam they are teaching is not good for Pakistan,” he says. “Some, in the garb of religious training, are busy fanning sectarian violence, poisoning people’s minds.” In June, Haider announced a reform plan that would require all madrasahs to register with the government, expand their curricula, disclose their financial resources, seek permission for admitting foreign students, and stop sending students to militant training camps.

This is not the first time the Pakistani government has announced such plans. And Haider’s reforms so far seem to have failed, whether because of the regime’s negligence or the madrasahs’ refusal to be regulated, or both. Only about 4,350 of the estimated 40,000 to 50,000 madrasahs in Pakistan have registered with the government. Some are
still sending students to training camps despite parents’ instructions not to do so. Moreover, some chancellors are unwilling to expand their curricula, arguing that madrasahs are older than Pakistan itself—having been “designed 1,200 years ago in Iraq,” according to the chancellor of the Khudamudeen madrasah. The chancellor of Darul Uloom Haqqania objects to what he calls the government’s attempt to “destroy the spirit of the madrasahs under the cover of broadening their curriculum.”

Mujibur Rehman Inqalabi, the ssp’s second in command, told me that Haider’s reform plan is “against Islam” and complains that where states have taken control of madrasahs, such as in Jordan and Egypt, “the engine of jihad is extinguished.” America is right, he said: “Madrasahs are the supply line for jihad.”

**JIHAD INTERNATIONAL, INC.**

If madrasahs supply the labor for “jihad,” then wealthy Pakistanis and Arabs around the world supply the capital. On Eid-ul-Azha, the second most important Muslim holiday of the year, anyone who can afford to sacrifices an animal and gives the hide to charity. Pakistani militant groups solicit such hide donations, which they describe as a significant source of funding for their activities in Kashmir.

Most of the militant groups’ funding, however, comes in the form of anonymous donations sent directly to their bank accounts. Lashkar-i-Taiba (“Army of the Pure”), a rapidly growing Ahle Hadith (Wahhabi) group, raises funds on the Internet. Lashkar and its parent organization, Markaz ad-Da’wa Wal Irshad (Center for Islamic Invitation and Guidance), have raised so much money, mostly from sympathetic Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, that they are reportedly planning to open their own bank.

Individual “mujahideen” also benefit financially from this generous funding. They are in this for the loot, explains Ahmed Rashid, a prominent Pakistani journalist. One mid-level manager of Lashkar told me he earns 15,000 rupees a month—more than seven times what the average Pakistani makes, according to the World Bank. Top leaders of militant groups earn much more; one leader took me to see his mansion, which was staffed by servants and filled with expensive furniture. Operatives receive smaller salaries but win bonuses for successful missions. Such
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earnings are particularly attractive in a country with a 40 percent official poverty rate, according to Pakistani government statistics.

The United States and Saudi Arabia funneled some $3.5 billion into Afghanistan and Pakistan during the Afghan war, according to Milt Bearden, CIA station chief in Pakistan from 1986 to 1989. "Jihad," along with guns and drugs, became the most important business in the region. The business of "jihad"—what the late scholar Eqbal Ahmad dubbed "Jihad International, Inc."—continues to attract foreign investors, mostly wealthy Arabs in the Persian Gulf region and members of the Pakistani diaspora. (As World Bank economist Paul Collier observes, diaspora populations often prolong ethnic and religious conflicts by contributing not only capital but also extremist rhetoric, since the fervor of the locals is undoubtedly held in check by the prospect of losing their own sons.)

As the so-called jihad movement continues to acquire its own financial momentum, it will become increasingly difficult for Pakistan to shut down, if and when it tries. As long as "Jihad International, Inc." is profitable, those with financial interests in the war will work to prolong it. And the longer the war in Kashmir lasts, the more entrenched these interests will become.

ADDED TO JIHAD

As some irregulars are financially dependent on what they consider jihad, others are spiritually and psychologically so. Many irregulars who fought in Afghanistan are now fighting in Kashmir and are likely to continue looking for new "jihad's" to fight—even against Pakistan itself. Khalil, who has been a "mujahid" for 19 years and can no longer imagine another life, told me, "A person addicted to heroin can get off it if he really tries, but a mujahid cannot leave the jihad. I am spiritually addicted to jihad." Another Harkat operative told me,

We won't stop—even if India gave us Kashmir. ... We'll [also] bring jihad here. There is already a movement here to make Pakistan a pure Islamic state. Many preach Islam, but most of them don't know what it means. We want to see a Taliban-style regime here.

Aspirations like these are common among the irregulars I have interviewed over the last couple of years.
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The “jihad” movement is also developing a spiritual momentum linked to its financial one. Madrasahs often teach their students that jihad—or, in the extremist schools, terrorism under the guise of jihad—is a spiritual duty. Whereas wealthy Pakistanis would rather donate their money than their sons to the cause, families in poor, rural areas are likely to send their sons to “jihad” under the belief that doing so is the only way to fulfill this spiritual duty. One mother whose son recently died fighting in Kashmir told me she would be happy if her six remaining sons were martyred. “They will help me in the next life, which is the real life,” she said.

When a boy becomes a martyr, thousands of people attend his funeral. Poor families become celebrities. Everyone treats them with more respect after they lose a son, a martyr’s father said. “And when there is a martyr in the village, it encourages more children to join the jihad. It raises the spirit of the entire village,” he continued. In poor families with large numbers of children, a mother can assume that some of her children will die of disease if not in war. This apparently makes it easier to donate a son to what she feels is a just and holy cause.

Many of these families receive financial assistance from the militant groups. The Shuhda-e-Islam Foundation, founded in 1995 by Jamaat-e-Islami, claims to have dispensed 13 million rupees to the families of martyrs. It also claims to provide financial support to some 364 families by paying off loans, setting them up in businesses, or helping them with housing. Moreover, the foundation provides emotional and spiritual support by constantly reminding the families that they did the right thing by donating their children to assist their Muslim brethren in Kashmir. Both Lashkar-i-Taiba and Harkat have also established charitable organizations that reward the families of martyrs—a practice common to gangs in inner-city Los Angeles and terrorist groups such as al Qaeda and Hamas. Although these foundations provide a service to families in need, they also perpetuate a culture of violence.

BAD BOYS

The comparison to gangs and terrorist groups is particularly apt because the irregulars often hire criminals to do their dirty work—and sometimes turn to petty or organized crime themselves.
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Criminals are typically hired to “drop” weapons and explosives or to carry out extreme acts of violence that a typical irregular is reluctant or unable to perform. For example, members of the Dubai-based crime ring that bombed the Bombay stock exchange in March 1993 later confessed that they had been in Islamabad the previous month, where Pakistani irregulars had allegedly trained them to throw hand grenades and fire Kalashnikov assault rifles. Law-enforcement authorities noted that the operatives’ passports contained no Pakistani stamps, suggesting the complicity of the Pakistani government.

Criminals joining supposed jihad movements tend to be less committed to the group’s purported goals and more committed to violence for its own sake—or for the money. When criminals join private armies, therefore, the political and moral constraints that often inhibit mass-casualty, random attacks are likely to break down. Criminal involvement in the movement also worsens the principal-agent problem for Pakistan: pure mercenaries are even harder to control than individuals whose goals are at least partly aligned with those of the state.

EXPORTING HOLY WAR

Exacerbating the principal-agent problem, Pakistani militant groups are now exporting their version of jihad all over the world. The Khudamudeen madrasah, according to its chancellor, is training students from Burma, Nepal, Chechnya, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mongolia, and Kuwait. Out of the 700 students at the madrasah, 127 are foreigners. Nearly half the student body at Darul Uloom Haqqania, the madrasah that created the Taliban, is from Afghanistan. It also trains students from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Russia, and Turkey, and is currently expanding its capacity to house foreign students from 100 to 500, its chancellor said. A Chechen student at the school told me his goal when he returned home was to fight Russians. And according to the U.S. State Department, Pakistani groups and individuals also help finance and train the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a terrorist organization that aims to overthrow secular governments in Central Asia.
Many of the militant groups associated with radical madrasahs regularly proclaim their plans to bring “jihad” to India proper as well as to the West, which they believe is run by Jews. Lashkar-i-Taiba has announced its plans to “plant Islamic flags in Delhi, Tel Aviv, and Washington.” One of Lashkar’s Web sites includes a list of purported Jews working for the Clinton administration, including director of presidential personnel Robert Nash (an African American from Arkansas) and CIA director George Tenet (a Greek American). The group also accuses Israel of assisting India in Kashmir. Asked for a list of his favorite books, a leader of Harkat recommended the history of Hitler, who he said understood that “Jews and peace are incompatible.” Several militant groups boast pictures of burning American flags on their calendars and posters.

**Internal Jihad**

The “jihad” against the West may be rhetorical (at least for now), but the ten-year-old sectarian war between Pakistan’s Shi’a and Sunni is real and deadly. The Tehrik-e-Jafariya-e-Pakistan (TJP) was formed to protect the interests of Pakistan’s Shi’a Muslims, who felt discriminated against by Zia’s implementation of Sunni laws governing the inheritance and collection of zakat. Iran helped fund the TJP, probably in hopes of using it as a vehicle for an Iranian-style revolution in Pakistan. Five years later, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, a Jamaat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) cleric, established the SSP to offset the TJP and to promote the interests of Sunni Muslims. The SSP was funded by both Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Since then, violent gangs have formed on both sides.

After Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Sunni sectarian gang, attempted to assassinate then Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif in early 1999, Sharif proposed to expand the special military courts that try terrorist crimes from Karachi to the rest of the country. Pakistan’s Supreme Court later deemed the special courts unconstitutional. Musharraf has continued Sharif’s attempt to rein in the terrorist groups by implementing, among other things, a “dewaponization” plan to reduce the availability of guns to sectarian gangs and criminals.

The problem for Musharraf is that it is difficult to promote the “jihad” in Kashmir and the Taliban in Afghanistan without inadvertently...
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promoting sectarianism in Pakistan. The movements share madrasahs, camps, bureaucracies, and operatives. The JUI, the SSP’s founding party, also helped create both the Taliban and Harkat. Deobandi madrasahs issue anti-Shi’a fatwas (edicts), and boys trained to fight in Kashmir are also trained to call Shi’a kafirs (infidels). Jaesh-e-Mohammad, an offshoot of Harkat and the newest Pakistani militant group in Kashmir, reportedly used SSP personnel during a fundraising drive in early 2000. And the SSP’s Inqalabi, who was recently released after four years in jail for his alleged involvement in sectarian killings, told me that whenever “one of our youngsters wants to do jihad,” they join up with the Taliban, Harkat, or Jaesh-e-Mohammad—all Deobandi groups that he claims are “close” to the SSP.

Sectarian clashes have killed or injured thousands of Pakistanis since 1990. As the American scholar Vali Nasr explains, the largely theological differences between Shi’a and Sunni Muslims have been transformed into full-fledged political conflict, with broad ramifications for law and order, social cohesion, and government authority. The impotent Pakistani government has essentially allowed Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi’a Iran to fight a proxy war on Pakistani soil, with devastating consequences for the Pakistani people.

WHITHER PAKISTAN?
Pakistan is a weak state, and government policies are making it weaker still. Its disastrous economy, exacerbated by a series of corrupt leaders, is at the root of many of its problems. Yet despite its poverty, Pakistan is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on weapons instead of schools and public health. Ironically, the government’s “cost-saving” measures are even more troubling. In trying to save money in the short run by using irregulars in Kashmir and relying on madrasahs to educate its youth, Pakistan is pursuing a path that is likely to be disastrous in the long run, allowing a culture of violence to take root.

The United States has asked Pakistan to crack down on the militant groups and to close certain madrasahs, but America must do more than just scold. After all, the United States, along with Saudi Arabia, helped create the first international “jihad” to fight the Soviet Union during the Afghan war. “Does America expect us to send in the
troops and shut the madrasahs down?” one official asks. “Jihad is a mindset. It developed over many years during the Afghan war. You can’t change a mindset in 24 hours.”

The most important contribution the United States can make, then, is to help strengthen Pakistan’s secular education system. Because so much international aid to Pakistan has been diverted through corruption, both public and private assistance should come in the form of relatively nonfungible goods and services: books, buildings, teachers, and training, rather than money. Urdu-speaking teachers from around the world should be sent to Pakistan to help. And educational exchanges among students, scholars, journalists, and military officials should be encouraged and facilitated. Helping Pakistan educate its youth will not only cut off the culture of violence by reducing ignorance and poverty, it will also promote long-term economic development.

Moreover, assisting Pakistan will make the world a safer place. As observers frequently note, conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is one of the most likely routes to nuclear war in the world today. The Pakistani militants’ continued incursions into Indian-held Kashmir escalate the conflict, greatly increasing the risk of nuclear war between the two countries.

Although the United States can help, Pakistan must make its own changes. It must stamp out corruption, strengthen democratic institutions, and make education a much higher priority. But none of this can happen if Pakistan continues to devote an estimated 30 percent of its national budget to defense.

Most important, Pakistan must recognize the militant groups for what they are: dangerous gangs whose resources and reach continue to grow, threatening to destabilize the entire region. Pakistan’s continued support of religious militant groups suggests that it does not recognize its own susceptibility to the culture of violence it has helped create. It should think again. 

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