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A new face for militants emerges

By Syed Saleem Shahzad

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In the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terror attacks on the United States, Washington forced Pakistan to make a major policy reversal and break its alliance with its natural allies, Islamic forces.

Pakistan provided logistical support for the US forces that invaded Afghanistan to oust the Taliban and hunt for al-Qaeda, and Islamabad assisted in the apprehension of al-Qaeda members.

Yet Pakistan, the only Muslim country in the world to have come into being on the basis of Islamic ideology, managed to maintain its alliance with the Islamic parties, militants and the jihadi establishment and orchestrated a war theater in which Islamic forces were largely under its control.

The Pakistani military establishment nurtured an anti-Western opposition religious alliance of six parties - the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal - which was in fact friendly to the government of president General Pervez Musharraf. This allowed Musharraf to have the constitution amended to give him maximum powers. Peace agreements were also signed with militants and the leaders of the jihadi organizations, many of whom were convinced to sit back in comfortable villas until their next orders came.

Everything was under control and by 2007 the situation was heading towards the alienation of al-Qaeda elements.

A dialogue process was initiated in Kabul through a grand *jirga* (council) after which *jirgagais* (small *jirgas*) were to have started a dialogue process leading to an "honorable"

exit for coalition troops from Afghanistan.

However, ultra-radical forces, which were slowly nurturing a new generation of the Taliban, grew in strength, which led to Pakistan's security forces cracking down on the radical Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad in July 2007.

Following this operation, the radicals gained more and more ground in the tribal areas, to the point that today Pakistan has virtually lost control of North-West Frontier Province. And the Islamists, the once natural allies, have become sworn enemies.

However, in the largest province of Punjab and in urban centers such as Karachi, Rawalpindi and Lahore, the situation is still under control.

The largest jihadi network in Punjab, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), was infiltrated by [army officers](#) after their retirement which led to an immoral relationship between the LET and the military establishment.

The premier Islamic party, the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JI), was set up by its ideologue Syed Abul Ala Maududi in such a way that it could not deviate from the [democratic](#) path and it had to work within the confines of the laws of the land.

However, as the war theater in the Pakistani tribal areas and Afghanistan heated up under the influence of ultra-radical ideologues, many [veteran](#) LET commanders left the organization and joined forces with al-Qaeda. A very small number of JI members also joined forces with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

That small group then started an effective campaign within the rank and file of the JI against the status-quo policies of the party, which in essence stress loyalty towards Pakistan and its security forces.

Unprecedented pressure was mounted on the JI leadership to be vocal in favor of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and this could have a vital influence on the selection of a new party president next month.

This is happening at a time that Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kiani is visiting Washington on an extraordinary [trip](#) that could lead either to Kiani being sidelined or his empowerment and a major political change in the country.

The reason for the uncertain outcome is that the American establishment is confused over who is actually pulling the strings. In this context, the JI's elections are being closely monitored by all quarters as they could turn this powerful pro-establishment party in the other direction, eventually leading it down the path of radical Islam.

Jamaat-e-Islami at the crossroads The Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan is the country's only party to hold genuine elections for its president, every four years. All other parties, whether religious or secular, are the personal fiefdoms of family [politics](#).

The chief of the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) Fazlur Rahman is the son of the previous party chief, Mufti Mehmood. The JUI's another faction is led by Maulana Samiul Haq, who is the son of the previous chief of the faction, Maulana Abdul Haq.

The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz group is led by the Sharif family (brothers and now sons and sons-in-law). The Pakistan People's Party was led by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, then his wife Nusrat Bhutto, then his daughter Benazir Bhutto and it is now co-chaired by Benazir's son Bilawal and her widower Asif Zardari.

The Awami National Party (ANP) has been led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's family members - his son Wali Khan, then his wife Naseem Wali Khan and now his grandson, Asfandyar Wali Khan.

The incumbent president of the JI, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, has indicated that due to his age - 71 - and deteriorating health, he will not stand for [re-election](#). Three candidates have now been nominated - no one is allowed to nominate themselves.

The three are all former student leaders: the party's secretary general Syed Munawar Hasan, central vice president Liaquat Baloch and the president of North-West Frontier province Sirajul Haq.

Despite its current pro-establishment stance, the JI has a history of confrontation with the state. Its founder, Syed Abul Ala Maududi, was arrested only a year after Pakistan came into being, in 1948, for demanding Islamization in Pakistan.

In 1953 he was arrested again for writing an article which declared Qadyanis as non-Muslims. (Qadyanis - a movement that harbors some controversial Muslim beliefs - were declared non-Muslims in 1973 by the Pakistani parliament.) Maududi was sentenced to death, but due to nation-wide protests and extraordinary pressure from Saudi Arabia he was released.

The JI was banned by then-president General Ayub Khan in the early 1960s and its entire leadership was arrested. The party filed a case against the ban and eventually had it reversed. However, being the main opposition leader, Maududi was kept behind bars.

The JI was the main engine behind the movement of combined opposition parties in late 1960 which laid the foundation for Ayub Khan's departure from the power. But the movement was later hijacked by a young Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and his newly founded Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and its slogan of socialist revolution.

In 1969, Maududi stepped down as party president and Mian Tufail Mohammad was elected. This was the beginning of the JI's alliance with the Pakistani military establishment.

In 1970 elections, the Awami League emerged as the majority party, drawing all its

support from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The second-largest party, by a long way, was the PPP, scoring well in West Pakistan (now Pakistan).

Neither the PPP nor the military establishment was in favor of transferring power to the Awami League, which was demanding complete provincial autonomy. This resulted in an insurgency in East Pakistan, where the Bengali population was hostile towards the state of Pakistan.

The province's administration, comprising Bengalis, rebelled and openly supported the insurgents. The Pakistan army was desperate for local support and hit on the JI, which which believed in the state of Pakistan.

The military armed the JI's student wing (which had won student union elections at Dhaka University and Rajshahi University) and pitched it against the insurgents. Pakistan lost the war and Bangladesh was born in 1971, but the JI was by now reckoned as the most trusted ally of the military establishment.

In 1977, the JI's dedicated workers changed the dynamics of street agitation and crippled Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's government, which had just swept elections. The military intervened and General Zia ul-Haq imposed martial law.

The new cabinet comprised JI leaders such as Professor Ghaffour Ahmad (minister of Railways), Professor Khurshid Ahmad (minister for the Planning Commission) and former student leader of the JI, Javed Hashmi (minister for Youth Affairs). The latter is now the central leader of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz group.

The then-leader of the PPP, Kausar Niazi, has documented that Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto went to the residence of JI founder Maududi and asked him to fight against the martial law and save him (Bhutto) from court trails. Maududi did issue statements against martial law, but JI president Mian Tufail strongly supported Haq and the decision to execute Bhutto over charges of the murder of a political opponent. (Bhutto was hanged on April 4, 1979 - aged 51- in Rawalpindi jail.)

These experiences helped the military establishment understand the value of the JI, which is why it takes a special interest in its president.

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 an Afghan Islamic resistance sprung up. This proved to be another major turning point in relations between the Pakistan military and the JI, which at that time was the only political and religious party which supported the Afghan resistance.

All the big parties, including the PPP and the National Awami Party (NAP - now the Awami National Party), claimed to be Marxists and therefore supported the invasion. The NAP openly supported a "red revolution" in Pakistan and even wanted to welcome Soviet tanks into Pakistan.

Half of the NAP leadership fled to Russia and Afghanistan, including Afrasiab Khattak (now the provincial president of the ANP in North-West Frontier Province) and Ajmal Khattack. Two other major religious parties, the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam led by Fazlur Rahman (now pro-Taliban) and the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Pakistan, were close to pro-Russian Muslim countries like Iraq and [Libya](#), therefore they declared the Afghan resistance merely a civil war.

Pakistan was concerned of a Soviet threat on its western borders, while the Soviet presence emboldened pro-Russian [India](#) against Pakistan.

The JI supported the Afghan resistance as some of its leaders, such as Ahmad Shah Massoud, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Professor Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf and Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, were ideologically close to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood.

JI leader Qazi (now the president) was sent by party founder Maududi in the mid-1960s to Kabul University to lay the foundations of an Islamist student union, which further strengthened the JI's ties to the resistance leaders.

Washington was sponsoring the Afghan resistance through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and the JI was its field force. When Mian Tufail stepped down as chief of the JI, the ISI for the first time exerted influence over the JI's elections and helped have Qazi elected as president in 1986.

The ISI wanted to use the JI not only in Afghanistan but also for newly planned operations in disputed Kashmir, which started in 1988-89. The JI had to fuel these operations with supplies and human resources.

After 2001, a personality clash between Qazi and Musharraf created some distance between the JI and the military establishment, but the JI did not turn hostile, rather remained neutral and inactive.

Qazi has written articles critical of the Taliban's policies, their vision and their brand of Islam - he was inspired by the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 and is against the Taliban.

When the administration of US president Bill [Clinton](#) adopted a policy of engagement with democratic forces in the Muslim world and encouraged engagement with the Muslim Brotherhood, the US State Department invited Qazi to the US under its International Visitor's leadership program. Qazi became a regular guest at an influential think-tank close to the [Democrats](#).

However, some JI workers who had fought against the Soviets became active and hosted some of their old Arab friends, including Khalid Shiekh Mohammad of September 11 infamy and others.

At least four important al-Qaeda members were arrested from the houses of JI workers, including Khalid. [Washington](#) put intense pressure on Pakistan to ban the JI and Interior minister Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat issued a statement on the possibility of doing this.

Within days, the ISI sprang into action and Hayat was removed and the government clarified the JI's position - it would not be banned. Qazi sent out instructions for JI members to stay away from the Taliban and al-Qaeda and made it clear that any person found harboring such people would be disowned.

At this point, party secretary general Syed Munawar Hasan publicly adopted a separate line and proclaimed that the JI did not have any problem with the "Arab mujahideen".

"We don't know what al-Qaeda is all about. We heard this name from the Americans only. We know our Arab mujahideen who fought with our people against the Soviets. If today a world superpower is after them and they ask their Muslim brothers to support them, we don't have any problem helping them," Hasan said.

"Nevertheless, we would never support any sort of terrorism, neither would we allow them any operations from Pakistan."

These words stunned everybody, including the JI's leadership, but Hasan immediately became a hero figure within militant circles disgruntled with the behavior of Islamic parties. Hasan was approached by the military establishment for negotiations, but his refusal in bitter language caused alarm.

Hasan was a student leader at Karachi University and did his masters in sociology in the late 1960s, then emerging as a popular English- and Urdu-language orator.

The socialist-turned-Islamist known for his criticism of the military establishment gradually climbed up the ladder of the JI to become its powerful secretary general. The establishment is clearly concerned that he will become the JI's next president - a landslide victory is predicted.

The timing is not good for Pakistan for this to happen. The military has been forced to back off from operations against militants in the Swat Valley following the government negotiating a ceasefire and the Islamists aim to gain from this in urban centers.

Militants sitting in the mountains are convinced that Hasan will provide them with a political front to fight for their cause - something they have not had before.