

# Terror in the Name of God

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*"Never forget that the life of this world is only a game and a passing delight, a show ...the life of this world is nothing but means of deception.: (The Quran, Al-Hadid : 20)  
"There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim " (Baba Guru Nanak Sahib)*

According to media reports, it is possible that the recent deadly assault on Mumbai was masterminded by the Lashkar-e Tayyeba, a Pakistan-based self-styled Islamist terrorist outfit. Whether the attacks were indeed the handiwork of the Lashkar, as is being alleged, or of some other agency, such as the CIA and the Israeli Mossad, as others believe, remains to be fully investigated, but there can be no doubt that radical Islamism, like radical Hindutva, poses a major threat to peace and security in both India and Pakistan. What makes such terror-driven self-styled Islamist groups thrive in Pakistan? It would appear that the very foundational myth of Pakistan, the so-called 'two nation theory' on which the country was founded, is itself conducive to militaristic interpretations of Islam.

The very basis of the Pakistan movement was the myth of undying hatred and hostility between Hindus and Muslims. This so-called 'two-nation theory' remains the official ideology of the state of Pakistan, and is taught to every Pakistani child in school through carefully doctored textbooks. To question the theory, as many Pakistanis privately do, is considered a punishable crime and as akin to sedition. Accordingly, the Pakistani state has, since its inception, seen its survival as being crucially dependent on actively promoting as well as indirectly abetting anti-Indian and anti-Hindu sentiments. As movements for autonomy in provinces increasingly restive of Punjabi domination mounted, first in the erstwhile East Bengal, and then in Baluchistan and Sindh, the Pakistani state came to increasingly rely on an instrumental use and cynical manipulation of Islam and on the bogey of Hindu or Indian domination to ensure its survival and increasingly threatened legitimacy. Naturally, this expanded the space and scope for groups, not just the Lashkar, but scores of others as well, who claimed to speak in the name of Islam to whip up anti-Indian and anti-Hindu sentiments. For them hatred of India and the Hindus were considered as among the defining features of *Pakistani nationalism*.

The rise of the Lashkar and similar self-styled jihadist groups thus cannot be understood in isolation from these broader political processes. These groups received a major impetus under the American-backed and hugely unpopular military dictator, General Zia ul-Haq, who cynically backed radical Islamist groups to win public support as well as to pursue the CIA-funded war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. It was at around this time that self-styled Islamist groups began entering the political arena in a major way, setting up political parties and fighting elections. This led to all sorts of compromises, to widespread corruption and to rapidly escalating militancy by different Islamist groups competing with each other to prove to the electorate their purported claims of representing and speaking for Islam. The more obscurantist a group's approach was with regard to a whole host of issues—women's rights, the Kashmir question, relations with India and so on—the more ardently 'Islamic' it considered itself to be and it presented itself so to the public whose support it sought to win.

Under Zia, several dozen radical Islamist groups were liberally funded by the Saudis and the Americans in the war in Afghanistan, but soon these went out of control. They turned against their American patrons and started dreaming of exporting their self-styled jihad to the rest of the world. Some of them, including the Lashkar, even went to the

extent of calling for the establishment of a global so-called Islamic Caliphate and for conquering the entire world under the 'Islamic flag'.

These groups went on to serve what were seen as the strategic interests of the Pakistani state, as for instance in Kashmir, where they were sent to battle Indian forces as well as Kashmiri nationalist groups struggling for a sovereign Jammu and Kashmir, which would be independent of both India and Pakistan. Since Pakistan was a crucial ally of the West, America chose to remain mute in the face of these developments. Likewise, these groups were solidly backed by the Pakistani state in its desperate effort to install the pro-Pakistan Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and this also received American support. The Lashkar set up several training camps in Afghanistan and gave the Taliban considerable military and moral support.

It is thus the consistent assistance given by the Pakistani state to self-styled Islamist groups that has allowed them to flourish in the country, so much so that now, when the Pakistani state has itself begun to face an immense threat from these very groups, it finds itself helpless. It is an indicator of how powerful these groups have become in Pakistan that even though the present government might want to clamp down on them it cannot do so. Large parts of Pakistan are today characterized by extreme lawlessness where the writ of the state does not run. Decades of cynical manipulation of Islam by the Pakistani state for the narrowly construed ends of Pakistan's elites have now led to a situation where even if the state wants to curb these self-styled Islamist groups it finds itself caught in a vicious circle. Powerful sections within the Pakistani state apparatus, including in the ISI and the Army, are fiercely averse to taking any action against these groups, and are said to be consistently providing support to them.

But is the Pakistani state serious in its claims of being determined to take on Islamist terror groups that have mushroomed across the country? It appears not, just as the Indian state has not taken any serious steps against Hindutva terror groups in India. The Pakistani government claims to have banned the Lashkar, to have frozen all its assets and to have put its leaders under arrest. But ample indications exist to suggest that, in actual fact, the Lashkar is being permitted to operate freely after being conveniently allowed to change its name and re-christen itself as the Jamaat ud-Dawa. The Jamaat ud-Dawa's websites are freely accessible on the Internet, relaying incendiary, hate-driven speeches of its senior leaders, who seem to be under no control whatsoever. The Markaz's magazines in English, Arabic and Urdu continue to be published, with a reported circulation of several hundred thousand. On a visit to Lahore three years ago this writer chanced upon a bookshop in the very heart of the sprawling Urdu Bazaar that specializes in Lashkar literature that spews venom and hatred against India and the Hindus, but also against a whole host of Muslim groups that the Lashkar does not consider genuinely Islamic—including the followers of the Sufis, the Barelvis, the quietistic Deobandi-related Tablighi Jamaat and the Shias, all of which it brands as 'enemies of Islam' or their 'agents'. And, despite the fact that the Lashkar was officially 'banned', it still operated from its headquarters in Muridke, not far from Lahore, and also managed several dozens of centres across the country under various names.

In this context, the question arises as to why Pakistani civil society has been unable to effectively challenge the venomous version of Islam that is propelled by self-styled Islamist groups such as the Lashkar. This issue is particularly intriguing given the fact that radical Islamist groups have consistently received only a relatively small share of the vote in successive elections, indicating that their hate-driven vision of Islam does not appeal to the majority of Pakistani people.

There are several reasons for this, among the most salient being the fact that the liberal, progressive middle class in Pakistan is very miniscule, the country still remaining largely feudal, tribalistic and extremely patriarchal in its set-up and ethos. Efforts by the few liberal Islamic scholars that exist in Pakistan to articulate progressive interpretations of Islam on a range of issues-including women's rights, relations with non-Muslims and relations between India and Pakistan-have generally met with stern opposition and even violence from Islamist outfits, with some of these scholars being forced to flee for safety to the West. The sheer fear of being killed for publicly opposing radicals and their perverted brand of Islam keeps numerous progressive thinkers in Pakistan silent, thus perpetuating a vicious circle in which the radicals are allowed to go unchallenged. Furthermore, the state has consistently denied space to progressive Islamic scholars, fearing their potential for dissent from the official view, seeing the radicals as more pliable and amenable to manipulation. This explains, for instance, the fact that despite its bombastic 'Islamic' credentials, Pakistan is yet to produce any well-known Islamic intellectual who has sought to deal creatively with the manifold demands and challenges that modernity poses. The fact that Pakistan spends less than 2 percent of its budget on education and that numerous Vice-Chancellors of Pakistani universities are retired army generals are indicators of this mind-set.

Terrorism-and this includes terror resorted to by non-state actors as well as by the state-today poses a grave threat to the peoples of both India and Pakistan. Islamist and Hindutva terrorism feed on each other, while posing to be each other's most inveterate foes. Syed Maududi, the chief ideologue of the Jamaat-e Islami, who can be considered the major architect of modern-day Islamism, is on record as having declared that he would prefer India to be an officially Hindu country to being secular because that would further his case for the 'Islamic state' that he dreamed of establishing in Pakistan. Islamist outfits in Pakistan find ready fodder for whipping up anti-Indian and anti-Hindu passions by pouncing on acts of terror and anti-Muslim violence spearheaded by Hindutva groups in India, often abetted by the state. Likewise, gruesome acts of terror committed by Pakistan-based Islamist groups are quickly seized upon by Hindutva forces in India to further demonise Muslims and to build their Hindu vote-bank. Hindu and Islamist terror thus enjoy a symbiotic or mutually beneficial relationship while claiming to oppose each other. This obvious fact must be recognized when conceiving responses to the challenge of terrorism in this region. □□□