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NBR SPECIAL REPORT #22 | FEBRUARY 2010

WHO SPEAKS FOR ISLAM?

Muslim Grassroots Leaders and Popular Preachers in South Asia

By Mumtaz Ahmad, Dietrich Reetz, and Thomas H. Johnson

THE NATIONAL BUREAU *of* ASIAN RESEARCH

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FOREWORD

Despite considerable chatter in recent years about the globalization of religious authority in the Muslim world and the importance of transnational networks, public opinion polls conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project in 2006 suggest that the vast majority of Muslims worldwide, including 46% in Pakistan, turn first and foremost to local religious leaders for guidance in matters relating to Islam. This would suggest that in trying to understand "who speaks for Islam" in any particular setting, we would do well to pay close attention to the voices shaping the immediate environments inhabited by Muslims. This NBR Special Report, "Who Speaks for Islam? Muslim Grassroots Leaders and Popular Preachers in South Asia," explores the changing dynamics of religious order in three key national settings: Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. The authors of the three studies that comprise this report are all noted experts on their respective countries, having spent considerable time on the ground observing first hand the production and circulation of religious knowledge at the popular level.

Reading across the three cases, several key themes of crosscutting significance seem to emerge. First is the fact that because the nations in question are all ethnically and religiously heterogeneous, deeply embedded sectarian differences and social segmentation has ensued, as Dietrich Reetz points out, such that effective national religious leaderships or state-controlled religion have never emerged (despite the best efforts of certain countries, such as Pakistan). Second, as in much of the Muslim world today, in South Asia the emergence of a wide range of new, nontraditional voices of religious authority is occurring. Where the production of religious knowledge was once the sole preserve of classically trained religious scholars (*ulema)*, there is now a new generation of lay preachers—whose educational backgrounds are often in the medical and scientific fields—rising to the fore. The Mumbai-based preacher Zakir Naik, phenomenally popular in recent years, is a clear case in point. Third, and related to this last point, has been the important role played by new media. The Internet is certainly important here, but in the context of South Asia, satellite television and mobile phone messaging (SMS) have been the main drivers. This use of new media, it is important to note, is by no means confined to the new class of religious voices. More traditional religious scholars have also been quick to seize on the potential of the new tools to reach ever wider audiences. Finally, and here we come squarely to the realm of politics, it is clear that local or provincial religious leaders—and especially some of the traditional *pirs*, or classical scholars, of the Sufi orders—serve as important interlocutors between society and the state. Here they can have an impact on both formal politics, as in the case of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), the Pakistani political party affiliated with Deobandi scholars, and informally as regional kingmakers or in alliance with tribal leaders, as in the case of some of the madrasah-based networks in Pakistan's tribal areas.

Unique in coverage, this Special Report represents the first systematic inventorying of contemporary religious leadership in South Asia. This report is essential reading for anyone wanting to understand how religious opinion and world-views are shaped in the region today.

Peter Mandaville

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Media-Based Preachers and the Creation of New Muslim Publics in Pakistan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay examines four emerging popular Muslim religious leaders in Pakistan, their use of new media, and their impact on traditional religious authority.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Pakistan's emerging religious authorities use their familiarity with modern disciplines, in addition to their knowledge of traditional sources of Islamic scholarship, to reach a wider audience and to distinguish themselves from the traditionally educated *ulema*.
- The so-called media revolution in Pakistan has enabled nontraditional Islamic religious leaders to reach audiences throughout Pakistan and abroad, especially in the major urban centers.
- Though Pakistan's emerging religious leaders are non-political in their television broadcasts, they are trying to create a Muslim public of their own and to influence Pakistani Muslims' perspective on Islam.
- Nontraditional Islamic religious leaders have been quite successful in establishing a considerable following among the Pakistani communities abroad, especially in Europe and North America, due to the transmission of broadcasts through satellite and cable channels and frequent visits abroad.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- As the Pakistani government and other powerful social institutions have formally renounced jihad as a principal instrument of foreign policy, nontraditional Islamic religious leaders have been tolerated, and also in many ways promoted, by the state.
- In some instances, the emergence of new Islamic religious authorities and the use of new electronic media have allowed Pakistanis to engage in free and uninhibited debate on sensitive religious and socio-political issues.
- Pakistan's new popular Islamic religious leaders have been able to spread their influence to groups previously alienated by more traditional religious authorities, particularly the middle classes and educated women.

This essay will examine the ideas of four Pakistani Islamic scholars who have extensively used the electronic media to disseminate their ideas during the past two decades: Javed Ahmad Ghamidi of Al-Mawarid, Farhat Hashmi of Al-Huda, Israr Ahmad of Tanzim-e-Islami, and Tahirul Qadri of Tehrik Minhaj-ul-Quran. It is difficult to describe these scholars in conventional categories of modern Muslim religio-intellectual thought, given the nuances and interpenetrative dimensions of their ideas and their tendencies to frequently cross ideological boundaries. Generally speaking, however, one can describe Ghamidi as a neo-Islamic liberal, Hashmi as a Salafi, Ahmad as an Islamist-revivalist, and Qadri as a populist-revivalist.[1]

Although all four of these scholars started their *dawa* (call to Islam) activities by traditional means—writing pamphlets and books, organizing groups of followers and disciples, addressing small and large gatherings, conducting study circles around the country, and establishing schools, *madaris* (Islamic schools, plural of *madrasah*), and Islamic study centers—during the past two decades, their primary medium for propagating their messages and ideas at the popular level has been electronic technology (cassettes, videos, CDs, DVDs, and television channels).

Israr Ahmad, Farhat Hashmi, and Tahirul Qadri have their own sophisticated audio and video recording, production, and marketing facilities and are regularly aired on religious channels. Javed Ahmad Ghamidi appears both on regular government and on independent channels, especially on the religious programs of the GEO and ARY channels. Since moving to Canada, Hashmi has been less visible on religious channels, although her cassettes, CDs, and DVDs are widely available in Pakistan and are most popular in the religious gatherings of upper- and middle-class urban women. Qadri has also moved to Canada from where his lectures and sermons are daily broadcast on QTV, a channel that is available on cable and satellite in most Muslim countries and the West.

With the exception of Qadri, none of these scholars have received traditional Islamic education in the madrasah system: Ghamidi received a BA (Honors) degree in English from Government College in Lahore, Ahmad is a graduate of King Edward Medical College in Lahore (although he practiced medicine only for a short while), and Farhat Hashmi received her PhD in Islamic Studies from Glasgow University in Scotland. Qadri, after pursuing madrasah education and having served as a *khatib* (preacher) in a mosque in Lahore, obtained MA, LLB, and PhD degrees in Islamic Studies from the University of Punjab.

In addition to claims of religious authority based on their knowledge of traditional sources of Islamic scholarship, all four of these scholars highlight, directly or indirectly, their access to and familiarity with modern disciplines to reach a wider audience and to distinguish themselves from the traditionally educated *ulema*. With the exception of Ghamidi, all others possess considerable facility with the English language and deliver their lectures in English before mixed audiences. Qadri is the only one among them who speaks Urdu, English, and Arabic with equal facility.

In addition to their regular and extensive audience in Pakistan, Ahmad, Qadri, and Hashmi have all been quite successful in establishing a considerable following among Pakistani communities abroad, especially in Europe and North America, owing to the transmission of their broadcasts through satellite and cable channels and their frequent visits abroad. Ahmad has been a pioneer in this regard: he has been visiting North America since the mid-1970s and was the first to establish the North American branches of his three organizations (Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Quran, Tanzeem-e-Islami, and Tahreek-e-Khilafat Pakistan). Ahmad also has a large number of admirers and followers among the Pakistani communities in the Gulf region.

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[1] These categories will be defined later in the sections devoted to individual scholars-preachers.

Qadri, a scholar of Brelvi persuasion, has a "natural" constituency among the Pakistanis in Britain who have migrated mostly from the rural areas of Punjab and Azad Kashmir. Qadri's more than 70 lectures in English on the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government's television channel during 1992–93 on different aspects of Islam, the basic teachings of the Quran, and the life and mission of the Prophet have earned him a great deal of popularity in the Gulf region as well. He also has a sizeable following among Pakistanis in Scandinavian countries.[2]

Hashmi reached Pakistani and Indian Muslim women in the West first through her cassettes and CDs during the 1990s and then through her Quran study circles organized around her lectures and videos. She has recently built a huge Al-Huda complex near Toronto to teach Muslim women from all over North America courses of various durations in Quranic and Islamic Studies.

Ghamidi has rarely, if ever, traveled to the West, although his television appearances on different Islamic programs on the GEO, PTV, and AAJ channels are watched with interest by educated Pakistanis in Western countries. A few of his young followers who came to the United States for higher Islamic studies in recent years seem to have moved away from their mentor's ideas.

Javed Ahmad Ghamidi

Ghamidi's understanding of the message of the Quran is heavily influenced by Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi, Maulana Hamiduddin Farahi, and Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, in that order. Ghamidi is arguably one of the most prominent nontraditionalist Islamic scholars today in Pakistan. In the broader categories of contemporary Islamic intellectual-ideological thought, he can be described as a "neo-Islamic liberal."

Neo-Islamic liberalism is meant here as an intellectual trend that seeks to interpret Islamic texts in their historical context, and makes a clear distinction between the eternal/universal theological-moral teachings of the Quran, on the one hand, and the historically specific socio-institutional and legal injunctions that are amenable to changes in accordance with the new circumstances, on the other. Neo-Islamic liberalism also differentiates between the literal *hadith* (narrative) and the *sunnah* (teachings and way of living) of the Prophet, looks with askance at the historical institutional forms of Islam, does not regard the theological and legal formulations of early and medieval Islamic scholars as sacrosanct, and opens the "doors of ijtihad" (independent reasoning). Where neo-Islamic liberalism differs from earlier Islamic liberalism/modernism is in its primary reliance on, and inspiration from, the Quran and the sunnah, rather than on modern Western intellectual and social thought.

Religious Education and Influence

Born in 1951 in a rural Punjab family, Ghamidi initially pursued a modern education, obtaining a BA (Honors) degree in English from the elite Government College in Lahore in 1972.[3] Alongside his modern education, Ghamidi received private tutoring in Arabic, Persian, and the Quranic exegesis in his hometown. After acquiring some degree of proficiency in Arabic, Ghamidi embarked, single-mindedly, on a path of carefully structured reading of the classical and medieval Islamic exegetical hadith and juristic texts on his own.

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[2] In 2008 an affiliate group of Qadri's Tehrik Minhaj-ul-Quran in Norway was awarded the prestigious "Oslo Award" both for its efforts toward building bridges between different religious and ethnic communities and for serving the cause of peace in the world.

[3] This author first met Ghamidi in 1974 in Lahore. Even at this young age of 23, Ghamidi had acquired considerable reputation as an enlightened and thoughtful Islamic scholar among a sizeable group of college students in Lahore and had started mentoring them in Islamic sciences. Interestingly, by 1974 his young disciples had already started calling him as "Allama" (the great scholar), an honorific title usually reserved for very senior scholars, such as Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the great poet-philosopher of the subcontinent.

An extremely disciplined and avid reader with a well-conceived plan to educate himself in Islamic religious literature, Ghamidi soon came under the influence of Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami and one of the most important systematic thinkers and ideologues of Islamic revivalism in the twentieth century. At the same time, Ghamidi started attending *dars-e-Quran* (Quranic studies) sessions conducted by Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi. Islahi was one of the few prominent ulema who had joined the Jamaat-e-Islami in the early 1940s but left in 1957 due to differences with Maulana Maududi over Jamaat's decision to participate in electoral politics. Through Maulana Islahi, Ghamidi was introduced to the Quranic exegesis methodology of Maulana Hamiduddin Farahi, one of the most original commentators of the Quran in the early decades of the twentieth century, who based his commentary on the idea of a structural and textual coherence in the Quran.

By the time Ghamidi came under the influence of Maulana Maududi in the early 1970s, he had already acquired a reputation as an Islamic scholar in his own right in Lahore. Although he had joined the Jamaat in 1974 as a *rukn* (full member), for all practical purposes he remained an outsider as far as the Jamaat's party discipline and strict adherence to its ideological positions were concerned.[4] Throughout his association with the Jamaat as a member, the rank and file of the party continued to harbor serious doubts about his loyalty to the ideas and programs of the Jamaat and generally considered him as an Islamic snob.

Nevertheless, Ghamidi's association with the Jamaat and Maulana Maududi for about eight or nine years during the 1970s left an important mark in the formative phase of his religio-intellectual career. He learned from Maududi—as well as from Islahi—to take a more systematic view of the Quranic message, identifying coherent thematic structures in individual *suras* (chapters of the Quran) and interpreting individual *ayats* (verses) of the Quran not in isolation but within the totality of the Quranic message and world-view. Although Ghamidi and his associates have long repudiated the core ideas of Maulana Maududi, especially the idea of the establishment of an Islamic state as the primary objective of Islamic dawa, the way these scholars articulate their arguments, build internally coherent and systematic structures of thought, and use instrumental rationality is clearly evocative of Maududi's writings.

Modern Media and Religious Authority

Ghamdi's audience and readership consists mainly of educated, urban-based middle-class men between the ages of 20–35. Many of his close associates and disciples as well as followers have come to him through some previous religious experiences or affiliations. Like Ghamidi, many of his associates were initially influenced by the writings of Maulana Maududi and, in some cases, were regular members (*rukn*) of the Jamaat. Farooq Khan of Mardan (North-West Frontier Province, NWFP), for example, who is one of Ghamidi's most prominent disciples and popular interpreters, was a member of the *shura* (consultative council) of the NWFP Jamaat.

Ghamidi's television audience, however, is more diverse: it includes not only modern educated youth but also lay Islamic intellectuals and professionals who are aware of the contemporary Islamic controversies as well as the issues related to the relevance of Islamic laws in the modern context. Dissatisfied with the ideas and positions of both the traditional ulema and the Western-educated secular-liberal elite, this religiously oriented audience finds Ghamidi's interventions and ideas fresh, creative, sensible, moderate, and relevant.

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[4] Many senior Jamaat members resented both Ghamidi's occasional disagreements with Maulana Maududi on some religious interpretations as well as claims attributed to Ghamidi that Maududi sought his opinion when faced with some difficult issues of theology and law.

Ghamidi is extremely articulate in presenting his point of view. When making an argument, he relies not only on the Quran and the sunnah of the Prophet, but also on rational reasoning, although one has to accept some of his fundamental premises about human nature and social relations in order to agree with his argument. He is a media personality par excellence: sharp, to the point, succinct, confident, very comfortable in front of the camera, and clearly exuding religious authority. He is usually very persuasive when interviewed by one of his followers or disciples—Khurshid Ahmad Nadeem, for example. Ghamidi is also very convincing when he is delivering straight lectures on television. However, when confronted with critical questioning and alternative views, Ghamidi's response usually becomes polemical and falls back on an "if you believe this then you will also have to believe that …" type of reasoning. In recent debates and panel discussions on television, Ghamidi has displayed a tendency to compensate reasoned argument with rhetorical and pedantic flourish. His chaste and rather Persianized Urdu limits his accessibility to an educated audience and readership only.

In many ways, Ghamidi represents a liberal or neo-traditionalist response to both the traditionalist ulema as well as the politicized Islamist elements of the Jamaat-e-Islami. His television persona grew rapidly during the Musharraf years in Pakistan, when the state apparatus and allied media channels were pushing forcefully a project of "liberal Islam" and "enlightened moderation."[5] Ghamidi made his appearance on a number of television channels espousing a more liberal interpretation of the Quran and sunnah. He has clearly become the leading "critical traditionalist" scholar in Pakistan who is keen on promoting a middle or moderate path toward religion—one that engages seriously with the Quran and sunnah but clearly is dismissive of much of the Islamic discursive tradition, particularly medieval Islamic interpretive tradition and jurisprudence.

Ghamidi has been on various Pakistani television channels on numerous occasions and has a program named after him on the most popular private channel GEO. He provides his views on a variety of religious topics as well as on what Islam says (according to him) on a variety of social, cultural, and political issues. His eloquence in Urdu (he refuses to speak in English) and mastery of Urdu and Arabic have captured the admiration of a section of the upper- and middle-classes inclined toward their Islamic heritage but alienated from extremist interpretations of the religion.

Socio-Political Influence of Ghamidi's Religious Authority

Ghamidi gained particular prominence through his views about the *hudood* laws (Islamic criminal punishments) and jihad during the Musharraf government. With regard to hudood punishments, and in particular with regard to the punishment for rape and adultery (*zina*), Ghamidi's perspective marked a noted challenge to the conventional-traditionalist approach to such questions and gave him a unique voice in the seemingly never-ending "hudood debate" in the country.

The controversy reignited during 2006 when the Musharraf government, pressured by women's rights groups, presented the Protection of Women Bill in the parliament to amend certain provisions of the Hudood Ordinance issued during Zia-ul-Haq's regime that were seen as particularly discriminatory and unfair. The incessant discussions and debates that followed the introduction of the bill brought Ghamidi into the electronic limelight as never before. The ulema and the Jamaat-e-Islami, both inside parliament and on the streets, vehemently opposed the proposed amendments, contending that they would open the floodgates to licentiousness and adultery in the country. In fact, these groups referred to the bill as "the protection of zina bill." For several months during the period the controversial bill was under parliament's advisement, all major television channels devoted considerable air time to the discussion of the issue and it appeared that, for the first time, the electronic media was willing to engage in a free and uninhibited Islamic debate on a sensitive issue.

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[5] It should be pointed out that even before appearing on different television programs, Ghamidi had been able to attract a sizeable following among the educated people through his publications and lectures.

Ghamidi's was one of the few voices from the religious sector on television to support the amendments proposed in the bill. In the face of the fierce opposition from the ulema and the Jamaat, Ghamidi was intrepid, very articulate in exposing the discriminatory aspects of the original legislation, and quite persuasive in arguing that these provisions have no basis in the teachings of the Quran and sunnah. In a few televised debates and panel discussions, Ghamidi's performance was far superior to that of his antagonists among the ulema.

Ghamidi argued that the Hudood Ordinance was not the *shariah* (Islamic law) per se but a man-made law that misinterpreted the shariah intent on the basis of certain opinions of some medieval Muslim jurists, and that the views of these jurists should not be considered sacrosanct. His easy access to and facility with the two basic sources of Islamic law (the Quran and sunnah) afforded him the ability to challenge the ulema on their own turf. Most of these televised debates were quite heated and lively. A few, in fact, turned ugly: in one program Ghamidi was subjected to quite rude and somewhat threatening remarks by one of the panelists associated with the Jamaat. The ulema openly accused him of serving the whims of the Musharraf regime and the regime's cause of "enlightened moderation." At the end, Ghamidi played a very significant role in educating public opinion on the hudood issue and prepared the popular ground for the passage of the bill.

Another critical issue on which Ghamidi has leaned toward a more liberal position is that of the penal code of Islam as understood by the traditional ulema and the Islamists. The question of punishments for theft, murder, adultery, apostasy, and blasphemy according to shariah assumed especially new significance after the introduction of the Hudood Ordinance by the government of General Zia. The ulema and the Islamists enthusiastically endorsed the new legislation while the secularists, liberals, and women's groups vehemently opposed it, both on humanitarian and Islamic religious grounds.

Ghamidi was of the opinion that the penal code as formulated by the traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence does not reflect the true intent of the Quran and the sunnah of the Prophet. He categorically rejected the idea of capital punishment for either apostasy or blasphemy, and said that the death penalty in Islam is allowed only for murder and for "spreading *fitna* [mischief]."[6] His main contention is that the specific punishments mentioned in the Quran for adultery, *qazaf* (false accusation of adultery), and theft are "the maximum punishments" that are to be administered only in exceptional cases of extreme severity of crimes and definitive culpability of the criminal. In most other cases, an Islamic state is free to propose less severe punishments and in no way is obliged to literally apply the specified Quranic punishments.

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[6] Ghamidi defines *fitna* as encompassing a wide range of criminal activities in an Islamic state, such as creating disorder in society, rebellion against the state, treason, terrorism, and so forth.

As expected, in the wake of the blasphemy laws introduced by the Zia regime, the death fatwa against Salman Rushdie, and later the Danish cartoon controversy, Ghamidi's views on Islamic punishments were received with utmost scorn by the ulema and the Islamists, especially when he shared these views with a wider audience on his television programs.

On jihad and militancy in general, Ghamidi has also taken a position that has pitted him against the ulema, in particular, the more politicized among them. His perspectives on the illegitimacy of Muslim jihads in Kashmir, Palestine, Chechnya, and so forth have caused uproar in religious circles. His views on jihad also angered many in the general public who had come to believe, under the influence of the militant ulema and the jihadi groups, that a perpetual jihad against the traditional "enemies of Muslims," notably Indian Hindus, Israeli Jews, and more recently, the Christian West, was a religious obligation.

Ghamidi began with the typical traditional jurists' position—one taken by Maulana Maududi during the first uprising in Kashmir in 1948—that there was no such thing as "private jihad" and that only a legitimate Islamic government is authorized to declare jihad. Hence, the declaration of jihad by private individuals and by the so-called jihadi groups against the Indian forces in Kashmir or against the NATO and U.S. troops in Afghanistan was not legitimate from an Islamic standpoint. He was also emphatic on the notion of defensive jihad—that jihad is obligatory only when an Islamic state is unjustly attacked by a foreign country.

Lately, Ghamidi and his disciples have taken a more "consequentionalist" position in this regard, arguing in effect that the consequences of the armed struggle by jihadi groups—Kashmiri separatists against India, Hamas against the Israel,[7] the Taliban against the U.S. and NATO forces, Sunni insurgents in Iraq, and Chechen Muslim separatists against Russia—have been devastating for Muslims all over the world. These jihadi groups have caused more death and destruction for Muslims and, given the current power configuration, have no reasonable prospects of success. Ghamidi's views on war and peace parallel those of the Indian Muslim scholar Maulana Wahiuddin Khan, who rejects the idea of jihad as fighting and believes in the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence.

Public opinion since early 2009 has clearly turned against private jihadi groups, especially those groups who are engaged in suicide attacks in urban centers and are fighting against Pakistani forces. The success of the Pakistan military operations in Swat and Dir in the NWFP against the Pakistani Taliban led by Maulana Sufi Muhammad and Maulana Fazlullah was a clear indication of a significant shift in public opinion about the militants. This was not the case, however, even as recently as the end of 2008. There was still a great deal of popular sympathy for jihadi groups and the Taliban, especially among those in the religious sector, who were motivated more by anti-American sentiments than by any endorsement of Taliban ideology. That Ghamidi took the position that he did on opposing the so-called jihadi activism, militancy, and the Taliban, and that he did so at a time when such an action was not popular, speaks of his willingness to take risks for his views.[8]

It is easy to discern, however, why the state and media apparatus in Pakistan found the views of Ghamidi highly useful in attempting to curtail the jihadi culture that the state itself had encouraged up until September 11 and in supporting the subsequent turnaround in Pakistan foreign policy vis-à-vis the Taliban and anti-Indian militancy in Kashmir. In order to discredit the ideology of jihad and extremism, the media and state institutions deployed Ghamidi very strategically to counter so-called extremist Islam. Ghamidi clearly has a strong command of the traditional sciences of the Quran (as well as of hermeneutics) and of hadith, and these have clearly been useful in confronting the traditionally trained ulema in Pakistan.

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[7] Interestingly, one of Ghamidi's close associates, and a member of the editorial board of his monthly Urdu-language journal *Ishraq*, published an article arguing that Jews have a stronger moral and religious claim over the custody of Jerusalem than Muslims and the Palestinians. Maulana Waheeduddin of India, a fellow traveler with Ghamidi, has also expressed similar views on Jerusalem on several occasions.

[8] In mid-November 2009, Ghamidi received death threats—believed to be from the Pakistani Taliban—and had to leave the country with his family at a short notice.

Tahirul Qadri

It is rare these days not to see Tahirul Qadri on any of the three religious channels during one of their 24-hour broadcasts. His live and recorded lectures and sermons have become a permanent feature of QTV and are widely watched throughout Pakistan and by Pakistani communities abroad. Ideologically, Qadri can be placed in what we have called "Islamic populist revivalism."

Islamic populist revivalism is a new phenomenon that borrows heavily from the Islamists' terminology and rhetoric—*tehreek* (movement), dawa (call), *nizam-e-hayat* (system of life), *Islami inqilab* (Islamic revolution)—but without the arduous burden of their ideas. Unlike the "original" Islamist-revivalism of Maulana Maududi, for example, Islamic populist revivalism is less concerned with the socio-economic and political aspects of Islam and, instead, relies heavily on Barelvi devotionalism for its appeal. Because of its organic links with popular Islamic beliefs and practices, the appeal of Islamic populist revivalism, unlike that of Islamists, is not confined to the educated urban classes of Pakistani society and is more widespread among the vernacular educated classes of small market towns.

Religious Education and Influence

Qadri (born in 1951) comes from a modest family background in Jhang (Southern Punjab), where he also completed his secondary school education from a private school. In 1963 he went to Saudi Arabia and studied the Arabic language and hadith with Maulana Zia-ud-Din Madani and Alawi al-Malik. Upon his return from Saudi Arabia, he completed his *dars-e-nizami* (the curriculum taught in madaris) from Jamia Qutbia Madrasa, Jhang, and continued his advanced religious education at Madrasa Anwar-ul-Uloom in Multan, a renowned Barelvi madrasah in Southern Punjab. In 1972 he completed his MA in Islamic Studies at the University of Punjab and later obtained his PhD from the same university, writing his dissertation on "Punishments in Islam: Their Classification and Philosophy." Earlier, he also earned a law degree from Law College, Lahore.

Qadri's religious ideas owe a great deal to the work of Burhan Ahmad Farooqi, an Aligarh-trained philosopher and a rarely acknowledged genius in the history of modern Muslim intellectual thought. Dr. Farooqi, probably the only Muslim follower of American pragmatism, was an ardent critic of the idealism of Islamic revivalists, such as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Maududi, and argued that the ultimate test of the veracity of an idea should be its positive results in practical life. Qadri quotes Farooqi extensively in his writings and acknowledges the intellectual debt that he owes to the latter's ideas. Another unacknowledged influence on Dr. Qadri has been Fazlur Rahman Ansari, a Barelvi preacher and founder of Al-Markaz al-Islami Karachi, who was able to cultivate a large following in several African countries and the West Indies islands as a result of his frequent dawa trips abroad.

For a while after completing his PhD, Qadri served as a lecturer in Islamic Studies at Law College, Lahore. It was during this time that he was introduced to the family of Nawaz Sharif, the twice former prime minister of Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif was so impressed with Qadri's oratorical skills and Islamic scholarship that he persuaded him to leave the Law College and accept the position of *khatib* (the person who delivers the sermon during Friday prayers) at the Jamia Mosque in Model Town, Lahore. At the request of Qadri, Sharif, who was at that time the chief minister of Punjab, allotted him a substantial tract of prized land in Lahore to build an institution of higher Islamic learning that would integrate the teaching of traditional Islamic sciences with modern disciplines. Qadri soon developed some differences with the Sharif family, but by that time he had become a well-known Islamic scholar and preacher in his own right and no longer required the family's patronage.[9]

Modern Media and Religious Authority

Qadri's religious career received an unexpected boost in the mid-1980s when a popular PTV program *Fahm-e-Quran* (Understanding the Quran) by Israr Ahmad was taken off the air by the government of Zia-ul-Haq as a result of certain disrespectful remarks Ahmad made concerning the national anthem, national flag, and the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The PTV program on the Quran was so popular, however, that the government wanted to re-start it soon after Ahmad was fired. This time it was Qadri who was brought in by the Zia government to give nationally televised lectures on the understanding of the Quran.

Qadri's *Fahm-e-Quran* program on the national television network was even more popular than that of Ahmad. Qadri, unlike Ahmad, was young, charming, more lucid and articulate, and spoke in popular idioms, illustrating his points through analogies from everyday life. In addition, having gone through both traditional and modern Islamic education, Qadri was able to attract a wider audience than any other contemporary Islamic scholar. Since then, Qadri's media career has been unprecedented in the modern religious history of Pakistan. His publication business, Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications based in Lahore, in September 2008 listed 1,034 VCDs and DVDs of his lectures, sermons, and interviews in Urdu, Punjabi, English, and Arabic and recorded in Pakistan, India, Kuwait, the UAE, Oman, Syria, South Korea, Taiwan, Denmark, Norway, Greece, South Africa, Holland, the UK, Italy, France, Germany, the United States, and Canada.[10] Most of these lectures are repeatedly broadcast on popular Islamic channels such as QTV, ARY, PTV Prime, Roshni, Labbaik, and Indus. QTV has been broadcasting Qadri's talks regularly on an almost daily basis since the channel's inception. There are more than 150 outlets in Pakistan where the cassettes, VCDs, and DVDs of Qadri's lectures are available for sale and rent. Most of them are also available on the Minhajul Quran website. Besides these electronic products, Qadri has written more than 350 pamphlets and books in Urdu, English, and Arabic on various aspects of Islam.

Qadri, a Barelvi *alim* (singular of ulema) by training and family background is, unlike most of his fellow Barelvis, quite tolerant and accommodative of other school's doctrines and practices. He is one of the few Barelvis who allows his followers to pray behind a Deobandi imam. His relatively tolerant views on Deobandis have caused a great deal of resentment against him by his fellow Barelvi ulema, who are also critical of his liberal views on the role and status of women. Also, among the Sunni ulema, he enjoys the closest relationship with the Shia community.[11] In fact, the vice-chairman of Qadri's (now almost defunct) political party, Pakistan Awami Tehreek, is a prominent Shia leader Agha Murtaza Poya.

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[9] There are conflicting reports as to how and why the close relationship between Qadri and the Sharif family fell apart; it is generally believed that Qadri asked Sharif for a huge amount of government funds to build his Minhaj University, which Sharif declined.

[10] This list only includes the lectures and sermons that are available on CDs and DVDs; other lectures that were recoded on cassettes or were transcribed from notes number around 6,000.

Qadri is also a practicing Sufi and many of his broadcasts and lectures emphasize the central role of Sufism in cultivating true Islamic spirituality. Qadri rejects, nonetheless, the Sufi practices that conflict with shariah norms. His detractors, however, have recently taken him to task for his alleged claims that he talks to the Prophet Muhammad and receives direct instructions from the Prophet as to how to conduct his religious and political activities.[12]

Socio-Political Influence of Qadri's Religious Authority

Qadri has been quite vocal in his criticism of the Wahhabi doctrines and has delivered a series of lectures highlighting their extremist nature. He considers the Wahhabis and their fellow travelers (Salafis) as the prototypes of Khawarij (Kharajites) who "are willing to engage in senseless violence" in the name of their "fanatical" beliefs and ideas.[13] It is in this context that his views on militancy and terrorism should be seen.

Qadri regards militant groups such as al Qaeda and the Taliban as an outgrowth of the type of religious extremism propounded by the Wahhabi doctrines. Qadri was one of the few religious leaders in Pakistan who unequivocally condemned the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States and challenged the Islamic legitimacy of those who approved the use of violence for advancing religious or political goals. In several of his lectures and sermons in Pakistan as well as in Western countries, he condemned terrorism in "all its forms," declared al Qaeda a "lethal threat to Islam and Muslims," and denounced the use of violence as antithetical to the message of peace in Islam.[14] Qadri was also quite vocal about his opposition to the religious policies of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, although he was equally critical of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Qadri's clearest statement against terrorism and suicide bombing came on December 5, 2009, during a televised press conference from Canada in which he explained his position on the basis of extensive references from the Quran, hadith, and juristic literature.[15] Qadri stated that "Islam does not permit, under any circumstances, the massacre of innocent citizens, terrorist explosions and suicide bombings." Elaborating on his *fatwa* (religious edict), Qadri said:

> The continuous carnage and slaughtering of people, suicide bombings against innocent and peaceful communities, explosions at mosques, shrines, educational institutions and businesses; the destruction of government institutions, buildings, trade centers; attacks on defense training centers, embassies, transports systems and other institutions of civil society; all these

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[11] Qadri's recent series of lectures on QTV extolling the virtues and religious and spiritual status of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet and the most revered figure in Shia eschatology, was unprecedented in the recent history of Sunni Islam.

[12] Qadri is reported to have once claimed that he could write the name of Prophet Muhammad with his pointer fingers on the surface of the moon. It is also reported on his website that while he was giving a lecture on the life of the Prophet, the clouds formed the shape of the Arabic letters spelling the name of the Prophet Muhammad.

[13] *Pakistan Awami Tehreek* (Lahore: Minhajul Quran, 2008), 7–9.

[14] Ibid., 7–9.

[15] See Tahir-ul-Qadri, "'Terrorism and Suicide Attacks' the Video Press Conference of Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri," Press Conference, December 5, 2009, available from the Minhaj-ul-Quran International website, http://www.minhaj.org/english/tid/9385/'Terrorism-and-Suicide-Attacks'-the-Press-Conference-of-Dr.-Tahir-ul-Qadri.htm. The press conference was carried live on some channels. Qadri stated that a detailed version of his position will be available in a soon-to-be-published book of about 200 pages.

> acts are grave violations of human rights and constitute kufr, disbelief, under Islamic law.[16]

Describing the background of his edict, he said "a terrible wave of terrorism" has maligned Pakistan in particular and Muslim and non-Muslim nations in general for several years now. To remain silent on the issue on the part of Islamic scholars, he stated, is tantamount to "a tacit approval of such atrocities." Qadri appealed to all Muslim scholars, intellectuals, and opinion-makers not to concentrate on who these terrorists are, who is behind them, and why they are committing these acts. "Whatever justifications they may give for their actions, they act against the teachings of Islam…They are in clear contravention of what Islam stands for. Their each action is premised on bringing harm to Islam and to the whole of humankind."[17] He said that the Pakistani nation is in a "state of war" and that the entire nation should stand behind the armed forces that are fighting a war for the protection of the innocent citizens and securing national defense by eradicating terrorism.

Qadri denounced those who commit these atrocities in the name of jihad, and claimed that "perpetrating terrorism against innocent citizens, massacres of humankind, suicide bombings, the destruction of national assets and property can, in no way, be considered jihad according to Islamic law; it amounts to an 'act of kufr.'"[18] Qadri argued that Islamic teachings do not allow any group of people to take up arms to wage war against the state and challenge its writ: "This is sheer mischief-mongering and civil war. Islamic law regards it rebellion and insurgency." He said that even if Muslims are persecuted at the hands of foreign (non-Muslim powers), and the Muslim government take no action over such persecution, "even then no individual or group of individuals is allowed to take the law into their own hands." Instead, only democratic means of protest and peaceful ways of conflict resolution should be adopted.

Another unique contribution to contemporary Islamic discourse has been Qadri's efforts to promote inter-sectarian and inter-faith understanding and harmony. In the current Pakistani religio-political context wherein sectarian violence, especially between Shias and Sunnis, has been quite widespread and rampant, and non-Muslim minorities have often been subjected to discrimination and hostility, Qadri has been incessantly trying to build bridges between different sects and faiths. His outreach efforts to the Deobandis and goodwill gestures toward Shias have been viewed as welcome developments in a usually charged sectarian environment of Pakistan.

Equally important have been Qadri's goodwill gestures toward Pakistan's Christian minority. Qadri is the only religious leader in Pakistan who has initiated serious efforts toward reaching out to the Christian community and sharing its concerns. He is a founding chairman of a Muslim-Christian dialogue forum that facilitates regular contacts between the two communities and organizes discussions on matters of mutual concerns.[19] Qadri's Minhajul Quran is the only Islamic group in Pakistan that organizes Christmas celebrations, inviting Pakistani Christians of various denominations to a grand Christmas party.[20]

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[16] Qadri, "Terrorism and Suicide Attacks."

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] During the 2002 general elections, Qadri was elected a member of the National Assembly from a constituency in Lahore where a large number of voters are Christian.

[20] During Christmas 2008, for example, Minhajul Quran, Lahore, arranged an ostentatious Christmas party for the Christian community. The only problem was that the chief guest, a senior U.S. Consulate official in Lahore, turned out to be Jewish.

Israr Ahmad

In terms of religious and political ideas, Israr Ahmad is arguably the most radical among the media-based preachers included in this study. An articulate and forceful speaker and polemicist, Ahmad has influenced a sizable number of educated Muslims in Pakistan as well as Pakistani Muslim communities in the Gulf and the West. Ahmad represents what can be described as "Islamist-revivalism."

Islamist-revivalism refers to a broad spectrum of movements launched in the twentieth century—Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East and the Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia—that regard Islam as "a complete way of life" and seek to capture political power, either through the democratic process or through revolutionary means in order to implement Islam in its entirety through state power. What differentiates Dr. Ahmad's revivalist movement from that of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, for example, is his categorical rejection of democratic and electoral means to create an ideal Islamic society and state. In addition, while mainstream Islamists are focused primarily on the efforts to establish Islamic states in Muslim societies, Ahmad considers Islam's world dominance—not only as a faith but also as a political power—as the *sine qua non* of Islamic obligation.

Religious Education and Influence

Born in Eastern Punjab, British India, in 1932 in a middle-class family, Ahmad was active even during his high school years in the student wing of the Muslim League movement for the establishment of Pakistan. His family migrated to Pakistan after the Partition in 1947, where Ahmad came under the influence of Maulana Maududi and his mission of establishing an Islamic state in Pakistan. During his student days at King Edward Medical College in Lahore, Ahmad joined the Islami Jamiyat-e-Talaba, the student organization primarily inspired and encouraged by the Jamaat-e-Islami, and was elected as its *nazim-e-ala* (president) in 1952. Upon graduation from medical college in 1954, he joined the Jamaat as a *rukun* (full member) and was later elected as an *amir* (president) of the Jamaat of Sahiwal district as well as a member of its central consultative council (*majlis-e-shura*).

Ahmad, although fully committed to the Jamaat's mission of transforming Pakistani society and the state along the prophetic model, nevertheless developed serious differences with the Jamaat leadership on the issue of participating in electoral politics. Ahmad's position was that there was no Islamic justification for participating in a system of politics that was corrupt, degenerate, and un-Islamic to its roots, and that by contesting elections under these conditions the Jamaat could not escape the evils associated with modern politics.[21]

In 1957, Ahmad resigned from membership of the Jamaat-e-Islami and launched his own Quranic studies circle in his hometown of Sahiwal in Punjab. In 1965 he obtained an MA degree in Islamic Studies from Karachi University, thus strengthening his formal credentials as an Islamic scholar. He discontinued his medical practice in 1971 to devote himself full time to Islamic work, focusing exclusively on the teachings and exegesis of the Quran. In 1972 he established Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Quran (Central Association of the Servants of the Quran) in Lahore to promote the teachings of the Quran through courses offered by its two affiliated institutions, the Quran Academy and the Quran College, as well as through lectures, study circles, and publications.

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[21] Ahmad later described his differences with the leadership of the Jamaat-e-Islami in his book. See Israr Ahmad, *Tehreek-e-Jamaat-e-Islami: Eik Tehqiqi Mutalia* [The Jamaat-e-Islami Movement: A Critical Study] (Lahore: Darul Ashaatul Islamia, 1966).

In 1975, Israr Ahmad assembled a group of his followers, mainly cultivated through the work of the association, and announced the launch of Tanzeem-e-Islami (Islamic Organization) to establish "an Islamic order" and to "work toward the implementation of the Quranic teachings in all walks of life." Tanzeem-e-Islami was followed by the launch of Tehreek-e-Khilafat (the Caliphate Movement) in 1991 with the objective of bringing about an Islamic revolution by a "disciplined force" that will culminate in the establishment of global caliphate.[22]

In his formative years, Ahmad was profoundly influenced by the inspirational poetry of Muhammad Iqbal and his strong emotional longing for Islamic renaissance. It was also during this period that he started reading Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's early writings, especially those published during 1910–20, calling upon Indian Muslims to join his short-lived organization Hizbullah (Party of God) and to work toward the establishment of a caliphate or *hakumat-e-illahiya* (divine government). Azad's impact on Ahmad is evident not only in the latter's rhetorical style in his writings and speeches but also in his close textual reading of the Quran. Much of Ahmad's understanding of the Quran seems to have been influenced by Azad's celebrated exegesis of the opening chapter (*al fateha*) of the Quran. Ahmad was also greatly influenced by Maulana Hamiduddin Farahi and Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi's methodology of Quranic exegesis, which emphasizes the internal coherence of the Quran.

The most important influence in terms of Ahmad's religious and ideological thinking, however, has been that of Maulana Abul Ala Maududi. Notwithstanding his later differences with Maulana Maududi and his disassociation with the Jamaat-e-Islami in 1957, Ahmad continues to echo Maulana Maududi's ideas and his signature phrases—"*ihya-e-deen*" (revival of religion), "*dawat-e-deen*" (call to religion), "*iqamat-e-deen*" (establishment of religion), "*ghalba-e-deen*" (domination of religion), and "*Islami inqilab*" (Islamic revolution). Such ambivalence testifies to a common refrain among the former Jamaat-e-Islami members: "While I have got out of the Jamaat, the Jamaat has not got out of me." Long after leaving the Jamaat and denouncing Maulana Maududi's "acquiescence" with "degenerate modern politics," Ahmad continued to pay tribute to Maududi as "the greatest political thinker among the Muslims of our times." It was from Maulana Maududi that Ahmad received so much of his ideological energy and stimulus for Islamic revolution that formed the *raison d'etre* of his Tanzeem-e-Islami and Tehreek-e-Khilafat. It is no wonder that many of his critics dismiss him as an offshoot of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Modern Media and Religious Authority

Ahmad's religious work until the late 1970s remained mostly confined to the traditional methods of Islamic preaching, that is, Friday prayer sermons, lecture tours, study circles, and pamphleteering. It was only after the 1977 military coup that Ahmad found an opening in public television in the wake of Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization program. The popular protest movement organized in 1977 by the religious and centrist political parties under the name of Nizam-e-Mustafa (the system of Prophet Muhammad) against the secular-oriented government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had already created a groundswell for Islamization that the military regime found convenient for its own legitimacy.

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[22] Ahmad relinquished the leadership of Tanzeem-e-Islami in 2002 and handed it over to his son, Hafiz Akif Saeed.

Ahmad, on the special instructions of General Zia, was thus given a prominent spot on the Pakistan Television (PTV) network to deliver lectures on the teachings of the Quran. His program "Al-Kitab" (the book) was followed by several other programs such as "Alif Lam Meem," "Rasool-e-Kamil," "Ummul Kitab," and "the most popular of all religious programs in the history of Pakistan Television, 'Al-Huda' (the guidance)." His television lectures focused mainly on the need for the revitalization of faith through the study of, and reflections on, the Quran. More significantly, however, Ahmad's political message, especially his criticism of modern democracy and the electoral system, and his view that the head of an Islamic state can reject the majority decisions of an elected assembly (majlis-e-shura) and make decisions based on his own judgment, was precisely what the military doctors had ordered.

Ahmad soon developed a devoted audience among a section of the educated middle-classes, especially in Punjab and urban Sindh, but his stint with the PTV was cut short, reportedly due to his controversial remarks about the role of women in Islamic society. However, the preexisting network of Quranic studies centers that he had organized during the 1970s continued to sustain Ahmad in the public religious sphere. Denied access to national television, Ahmad now disseminated his message through the mass production of tapes and video cassettes. The "cassette revolution" launched by Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran in 1979 was also taking root in Pakistan, where pre-recorded religious sermons and lectures were becoming as popular as *qawwalis* (devotional songs) and film songs.

The cassettes of Ahmad's Friday sermons and lectures organized by the Tanzeem-e-Islami were aggressively promoted by his followers and were widely available in Pakistan and other countries with sizeable Pakistani immigrant populations. During the 1980s, Ahmad spent most of his time in organizing his dawa work in North America and elsewhere among expatriate Pakistani communities. But the real boom in Ahmad's career as a media-based preacher came after the privatization of the electronic media at the end of the 1990s, with the introduction of cable, dish, and satellite-based communication facilities, and the subsequent proliferation of private television channels, including those exclusively devoted to religious programming. Ahmad was one of the earliest among the Pakistani religious figures to take advantage of these new avenues of Islamic dawa. New in the field of religious broadcasting and short of material to fill in a full day of air time, both the QTV and Peace TV were glad to give Ahmad considerable air time, broadcasting his pre-recorded sermons and lectures sometimes in three different time slots a day.

Unlike Qadri, Ghamidi, and Hashmi, Ahmad's reputation as a competent Quranic scholar did not originate with his media exposure. Long before his television programs, he had been able to develop a constituency of devoted followers among a section of the educated middle-class through his organizations, publications, and Quranic studies circles throughout the country. His religious influence and authority undoubtedly received a considerable boost from his daily appearance on the television screen but was not entirely dependent on the media. What television did give him, however, was a wider audience, name and face recognition, and the kind of credibility that, in a cultural context such as that of Pakistani society, comes with media endorsement.

Socio-Political Influence of Ahmad's Religious Authority

Ahmad's ideas about Islamic revolution, the methodology of Islamic change, and the Islamic obligation to establish a world-wide caliphate as the ultimate goal of the prophetic mission were quite well-known even before his regular appearance on religious channels. The electronic media, however, helped him greatly in disseminating his ideas to a wider circle of audience accessible through cable networks.

Surprisingly, despite his more than two decades of media exposure his constituency has remained largely amorphous and has not helped him in recruiting new members for his two organizations, Tanzeem-e-Islami and Tehreek-e-Khilafat. Both groups have remained largely confined to the original disciples and followers that he assembled in the 1970s from among the disgruntled elements of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Ahmad seemed to be making some headway in the 1980s among the business community in Karachi, especially among the Delhi-Punjabi Saudagran (a merchant community of migrants from Delhi), but this too has reached a stalemate since the 1990s. He has gained some new admirers in the urban areas of Punjab who are impressed mainly with the way he explains the teachings of the Quran but are not necessarily interested in his views about Islamic revolution and a caliphate.

Ahmad begins with the fundamental premises that constitute the core of Maulana Maududi's ideology: Islam is a complete way of life that must be implemented in all aspects of human activities; Islam does not recognize the separation of state and religion; and it is the fundamental obligation of all Muslims to strive toward the establishment of an Islamic state in the form of a caliphate and then try to spread the religious and political domination of Islam throughout the world.

Yet, whereas Maududi for all practical purposes accepted, or indulged, the idea of Muslim nation-states—in some way tied to each other despite their diverse entities—Ahmad, in line with the ideology of Hizb-ut-Tehreer, considers the establishment of a single caliphate incorporating the entire Islamic world as a fundamental Islamic obligation. Also, unlike Ahmad who regards democracy, its philosophical underpinnings of popular sovereignty, and its institutional structures as "un-Islamic," "evil," and "degenerate," Maududi opted for the electoral process and democratic politics as "the only legitimate means" to bring about the desired Islamic change. Ahmad is even critical of the demand for the enforcement of shariah by the religious political parties and considers such demands as futile because the "the blessings of even the best of Shariah laws will not be evident" unless "the entire system is changed radically."[23] This radical change "can only be achieved by launching a mass movement and by staking and sacrificing all that the aspirants of Islamic revival have got at their disposal."[24]

Words such as "revolution," "resistance" and "radical change" were part of Ahmad's religious discourse in the 1970s, but they were used more as rhetorical devices than as core concepts of a coherent ideology. What transformed these concepts from their use as figures of speech to a more substantive commitment in a literal sense was the impact of the Iranian revolution in 1979, which demonstrated the efficacy of popular forces in overthrowing an oppressive regime. Although clearly not a fan of Ayatollah Khomeini's ideas and doctrines, Ahmad nevertheless admired the Iranian leader's methodology of revolution and ability to mobilize the masses for Islamic change. Another important factor that contributed considerably toward radicalizing Ahmad's religious discourse was his exposure to the ideas of Hizb-ut-Tehreer during frequent overseas travels in the late 1970s and 1980s. His launching of Tehreek-e-Khilafat in 1991 was the culmination of his extended discussions with the ideologues and activists of Hizb-ut-Tehreer in Britain and the United States, although he said he disapproved of the use of violence to bring about an Islamic revolution.

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[23] Israr Ahmad, *Khilafah in Pakistan: What, Why and How?* (Lahore: Maktaba Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Quran, 2001), 4.

[24] Ibid., 5.

It is not clear from Ahmad's writings and lectures, however, how this mass movement will transform itself into an established political power if the movement neither participates in electoral politics nor believes in violent revolution.[25] What Ahmad is quite clear about, however, is his vision of the caliphate system that will be established after the Islamic revolution. According to Ahmad, the caliph will be elected by the people but will be given "wide administrative powers." There will be a majlis-e-shura to advise him in legislative and administrative affairs but the caliph will have the veto power to override its decisions. Only Muslims men "whose character is above board" will be eligible to take part in the process of legislation; in other words, non-Muslims and women will have no voice in the affairs of the state. Neither will non-Muslims be permitted to "take part in the highest level of policy making" for the simple reason that the "topmost priority of an Islamic state, whenever it is established, will be to extend the Islamic Order to other countries," and since non-Muslims "do not share this vision with Muslims, they cannot be entrusted to devise, plan, and execute this policy."[26]

Interest will be abolished completely from financial transactions, and *zakat* (alms giving) will be collected compulsorily by the state. Non-Muslims will be required to pay a corresponding tax. "Intermixing of sexes will be prohibited and in principle separate areas of activity will be determined for men and women." In addition, "for the protection of chastity and honor" and for "the sake of purity of eyes and heart," Islamic restrictions regarding "concealment and veil will be strictly implemented."[27] The caliphate will also implement "harsh penal laws" as provided by shariah.

The most important task of the caliphate, however, will be to extend the religious and political boundaries of Islam, eventually encompassing the entire world. It is precisely this millennial idea of the prospective world domination of Islam that seems to capture the imagination of many among Ahmad's television audience and seems to reverberate with their views on the role of Islam in the current world politics.

Ahmad seems to enrapture his viewers and audience with references from the hadith literature that purportedly describe five phases of history from the time of the Prophet to doomsday. According to a tradition of the Prophet frequently quoted by Ahmad, these include the period of the life of the Prophet, followed by the caliphate of the "rightly guided caliphs," followed by the reign of oppressive monarchies, then the period of enslavement of Muslims, and finally once again the establishment of the caliphate on the pattern of the Prophet. Like some of the Christian end-of-time preachers, Ahmad firmly believes that the third world war will soon break out to pave the way for the fulfillment of the prophecies mentioned in the hadith literature. "The first Caliphate will be established in Pakistan and Afghanistan [at the end of this war] ….The [Muslim] armies will march from this [caliphate] under the leadership of [Imam] Mahdi. Then Hazrat Isa (Jesus) will appear, and that will be the end of the Christian religion." The beginning of the third Christian millennium, according to Ahmad, marks the beginning of Islamic revival and the end of Christianity. "The global domination of Islam is bound to come," Dr. Ahmad has declared, because it is in the "divine scheme for the ascendancy and revival of Islam."[28]

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[25] Although both Ahmad's Tehreek-e-Khilafat and Hizb-ut-Tehreer share the idea of the establishment of Khilafah as the ultimate political goal of Islam, there hasn't been any formal cooperation between the two movements. According to Ahmad, he does not endorse Hizb-ut-Tehreer's methods of armed struggle and coup d'etat.

[26] Ahmad, *Khilafah in Pakistan*, 6, 26.

[27] Ibid., 8.

[28] Ibid., 29–30.

It is not that Ahmad is stating something here that is not shared by mainstream and orthodox Islamic scholars. But what remains an essentially eschatological part of Islamic theology, however, has become, in the case of Ahmad, a political platform and has assumed a new significance in the current debate popularized by the late Harvard professor Samuel Huntington's notion of the inevitability of the "clash of civilizations."[29] Interestingly, Ahmad's views about the Christians and Jews are not significantly different from Huntington's views about Muslims—that is, both Christians and Jews are enemies of Islam, and the main goal of the West is to destroy Islamic civilization and to replace it with its "satanic civilization."[30]

The current domination of the Muslim world by the United States, according to Ahmad, is a "form of divine punishment" because Muslims have strayed away from the path of Islam and have become disunited. Both in his Friday sermons and in his television broadcasts, Ahmad lashes out heavily against Jews and calls them "agents of Satan" who have "gripped the gullible Christians in their hands (*mutthi mein*)." His weekly publication *Nida-e-Khilafat* (The Call of Caliphate) and his Friday sermons are the main outlets for his political views, although his television broadcasts are also full of oblique—and sometimes not so oblique—references to current world politics, especially the nefarious role of the West in the Muslim world.

Despite the fact that Ahmad's religio-political organizations have never been among the more popular religious groups in Pakistan, his impact on the nature and direction of Islamic discourse in contemporary Pakistan has been considerable—due largely to his access to electronic media over a period of more than two decades. There is no doubt that his popular programs such as Al-Kitab and Al-Huda on the national television network created a new interest among educated Muslims in studying the Quran, rather than merely reciting it, and in reflecting on its meaning. This direct contact of educated Muslims with the Quran—that is, contact independent of the ulema's guidance—has been a singular contribution of Ahmad. Unlike the madrasah-educated ulema whose Friday sermons do not usually follow a thematic sequence and jump from topic to topic, Ahmad introduced a more coherent and systematic study of the Quranic themes in his sermons and broadcasts.

Although Ahmad has never been associated with any of the so-called jihadi organizations, his impact on the radicalization of religio-political discourse in Pakistan in recent years has been enormous. Much of what is being discussed in the Pakistani media today in terms of conspiracy theories—especially those that employ religious idioms—owes to Ahmad's ideas on how the troika of Christian-Jewish-Hindu forces has been up in arms to destroy Islam and Muslims. He was an ardent supporter of the Taliban regime in Kabul and has wholeheartedly endorsed the resistance against the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan. Unlike many ulema and Islamic groups, however, Ahmad describes the Taliban resistance against the United States as a "war of national liberation" rather than "*jihad fi sabilillah*" (jihad for the sake of Allah). Consistent with his position on the current conflict in Afghanistan, Ahmad expressed similar views about the Palestinian, Chechen, and Kashmiri resistance movements, declaring them as legitimate movements of national liberation but not jihad in strictly Islamic legal terms.

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[29] In a two-day meeting held with Ahmad in Lahore in 2003 along with a group of American academicians, this author sought some clarifications from Ahmad as to how this world domination of Islam would be achieved. Ahmad's response was that the Islamic state, once it is established and has acquired the necessary material and military strength, will send an ultimatum to all the non-Muslim nations of the world either to accept the message of Islam or to get ready to be "exterminated."

[30] Israr Ahmad, sermon, June 25, 2009.

Farhat Hashmi

The rise to prominence of Farhat Hashmi as a religious scholar should be seen within the context of the larger trend toward Salafi religious orientation in Pakistani society since the early 1980s. Her singular contribution, however, has been to bring middle-class, urban-based Muslim women into the fold of traditional Islamic practices, rituals, and modes of dress. Salafi religious orientation derives inspiration from the puritanical ideas of the eighteenth century Saudi Arabian reformer Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, relies primarily on the literal meanings of Quranic and hadith texts, and emphasizes the legal-formal structures of religion.

Religious Education and Influence

Hashmi (born in 1952) comes from a middle-class family in Sargodha (Punjab). Her father, Hakim Abdur Rahman Hashmi, who practiced herbal medicine, was a prominent leader and amir of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Sargodha. Having been raised in a family wherein Maulana Maududi's political interpretation of Islam was considered the only valid ideology, Farhat Hashmi showed, quite early on, a considerable independence of mind. Although she was immensely impressed and influenced by Maulana Maududi's famous commentary of the Quran, *Tafhim-ul-Qur'an*, she soon embarked on her own path of Islamic dawa, emphasizing puritanical practices that focused on individual self-purification rather than on the reform of social and political institutions.

Hashmi received her MA in Arabic from Punjab University and was married shortly afterwards to Idrees Zubair, an Islamic studies teacher of Ahl-e-Hadith persuasion at the International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIU-I). Both husband and wife later went to the University of Glasgow in Scotland from where they received their PhD degrees with specialization in hadith literature.[31] Following their return to Pakistan, both taught at the IIU-I.

It was during this period that Hashmi started her Quranic studies sessions for women in Islamabad. Her interpretations of the Quranic teachings were interspersed with extensive references to the hadith literature and to examples from the lives of the Prophet and his companions, mostly emphasizing the proper observations of rituals for moral and spiritual enrichment, especially those relevant to the role of Muslim women in an ideal Islamic society. Soon, the cassettes of her lectures in these sessions became immensely popular among the educated upper- and middle-class women of Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi. Hashmi resigned from her teaching position at the IIU-I and devoted herself full-time to a lecturing circuit around the major cities of the country.

Hashmi's early and most devoted constituency consisted mainly of what is popularly known as "baigmaat" (literally, wives or ladies) of Islamabad, which refers to the wives of senior government bureaucrats living in posh sectors of Islamabad in large government-provided houses with government-paid support staff.[32] For most of these women, initially at least, Hashmi's Quranic studies sessions were more of a social pastime and a pious distraction from Islamabad's bureaucratic bickerings, cultural barrenness, and social boredom. These Islamic sessions soon picked up their own momentum, however, and Hashmi became an Islamic celebrity and the talk of the town in a city that had never accorded any recognition to a woman for her Islamic scholarship and piety.

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[31] Hashmi's feelings toward her Western education, and especially toward her PhD from Glasgow, however, remain ambivalent: sometimes she mentions her advanced degree in Islamic studies from a foreign university as evidence of her academic credentials; at other times, she refers to her doctorate degree merely as "kaghaz ka TukRa" (a piece of paper) that she was required to acquire as a formality. Interestingly, however, her advanced degree in Islamic studies from a Western university is one more reason for the ulema to reject the legitimacy of her Islamic credentials. In a publication compiled by an anonymous Deobandi scholar, Hashmi was chastised by several ulema for pursuing her higher Islamic education under the supervision of "Christian and Jewish teachers," whose sole aim is to "defame and distort" Islam. See Mufti Abu Sufwan, *Maghrabi Jiddat Pasandi aur Al-Huda International: Maqasid, Azaim, Andeshey* [Western Modernism and Al-Huda International: Objectives, Ambitions, Apprehensions] (Karachi: Jamhoor Ahl-e-Sunnat-wal-Jamaat, 2003), 41–42.

[32] The English-language *Daily Times* described Hashmi as "rich man's [sic] preacher" in an editorial. This observation may be true of her followers in Islamabad and Karachi but not necessarily in other cities and towns in Pakistan, where she has attracted a considerable following among middle- and lower-middle class educated women. See "Editorial—'Pakistani Factor' in Canada Terrorism," *Daily Times*, June 5, 2006, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006\06\05\story_5-6-2006_pg3_1.

What made Hashmi most acceptable to the upper- and middle-class women in the major urban centers in Pakistan was the fact that her Islamic message neither disturbed their high-class lifestyles in any way nor made any excessive demands that they could not accommodate in their existing routines. Among the early admirers of Hashmi's Islamic piety and scholarship was the wife of the then president of Pakistan Farroq Leghari, who invited Hashmi for regular weekly dars-e-Quran sessions in the President House to address an audience consisting of wives of cabinet ministers and senior bureaucrats. This official patronage at the highest level further boosted the Islamic credentials and popularity of Hashmi. In fact, it was President Leghari who granted Hashmi prized land in Islamabad to build a huge Islamic educational complex for women, Al-Huda.[33] These Al-Huda schools were later added in Lahore, Karachi, and other cities of Pakistan where hundreds of young school and college girls as well as professional women and housewives were taught courses on Islam of various durations based on the curriculum Hashmi prescribed.

In a typical lecture or *dars*, Hashmi selects a particular chapter or section of the Quran, explains the meanings of the Quranic verses, enunciates their relevance to the current un-Islamic practices, and guides her audience on how to apply these teachings of the Quran in everyday life. In view of the fact that her primary audience is women, she often talks about the role of the family in Islam, answers questions on how to raise children in an Islamic environment, discusses the rights of women guaranteed by Islam—and insists that women must demand and assert these rights—and tells inspiring stories from the life of the Prophet and his companions. In most of her lectures, the emphasis remains on how to live a life of piety, how to cultivate love and consciousness of God, how to be kind and charitable to others, and how to fulfill religious obligations with utmost devotion, sincerity, and solemnity.

Hashmi's appeal to her constituency is also based in the simplicity of her message as well as her excellent command of Urdu, English, and Arabic. She is a superb speaker with ready wit and an extraordinary ability to recall appropriate references from the Quran and hadith to substantiate her arguments. When her lectures are being video-recorded for television broadcasts, she is fully covered from the face downward, only showing her eyes, although many women attending her lectures do not observe traditional *hijab* (the Islamic practice of head-covering).

There is no doubt that Hashmi has single-handedly transformed the nature of middle-class Pakistani Muslim women's engagement with Islam. She has popularized the idea—initially among upper- and middle-class Pakistani women but later among other educated women as well—that there is a need for women to educate themselves directly and without male intermediaries on the Quran and hadith. Trained in Western academia in Islamic studies, Hashmi has combined typical Muslim religious authority figure pedagogy with a modern, Western educational approach to captivate large numbers of Pakistani Muslim women, both within Pakistan and abroad.

Hashmi's famous mode of transmitting her knowledge of the Quran and hadith is the dars format, a gathering of women to learn and gain greater understanding of Islam. Initially, beginning in the early 1990s, Hashmi's religious discourses took place in nothing less than five star hotels in the major cities, principally Karachi. Her lectures and instructional sessions were recorded and widely distributed, particularly overseas to expatriate Pakistani women in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Today, in an overwhelming majority of Pakistani Muslim women's religious gatherings in North America, Hashmi's recorded lectures and Quranic lessons have become a regular feature.

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[33] These Al-Huda institutions have become a permanent feature in many other cities in Pakistan where female Islamic teachers trained by Hashmi teach courses on Islam to women of diverse socio-economic backgrounds. According to a newspaper report, more than 10,000 students had graduated from these Al-Huda schools by 2006 (*Daily Times*, Lahore, June 5, 2006). Hashmi's recorded lectures and television broadcasts form an important part of instructional material in these courses. As a nonprofit charitable institution, Al-Huda enjoys a tax-exempt status from the government of Pakistan.

Hashmi's voice and standing as a female religious authority have earned her an unprecedented legitimacy and popularity among women in Pakistan and abroad. Within Pakistan, Hashmi presents a significant challenge to the hegemony of a more liberal disposition among middle- and upper-class women, as well as to the more conventional secular women's movements that emerged during Zia ul Haq's regime in the 1980s to oppose his Islamization measures. The stories of the "born again" Islamic experience of erstwhile liberal or secular women as a result of attending Hashmi's lectures are quite widespread in Islamabad. Her impact has been most visible on young college students who have started observing hijab—in many cases with *niqab* (covering of the face)—and have brought in strict Islamic religiosity to their families, often quarrelling with their parents and siblings for not offering their regular prayers and observing other Islamic rituals.[34]

Interestingly, although she represents a more orthodox and more puritanical Salafi view of Islam, the traditional ulema have also been displeased with her efforts to link Muslim women to the original sources of Islam. First, the very idea of a woman preacher without the "proper guidance" of a traditionally trained alim is an anathema to most ulema. Second, both the Deobandi and Barelvi ulema disapprove of her attempts to interpret shariah norms without the mediation of classical jurists. Third, even though Hashmi's efforts are devoted to the reawakening of Islamic consciousness among women, that these women are leaving their homes to attend lectures and participate in (and conduct) Islamic discourses independent of the supervision of the traditional male religious authorities, is something that the ulema cannot easily accept.

Hashmi's Islamic approach is a neo-traditionalist, semi-literalist one, but it is seemingly non-political. Her students are not encouraged to become involved in politics or to transform society either through the political process or through state institutions. Instead, the approach is similar to that of the Tablighi Jamaat. The objective is not simply to create more pious Muslim women but to create women who are more knowledgeable as well. The rigorous curriculum and unique pedagogical method of Hashmi has empowered numerous Pakistani Muslim women who, prior to their engagement with her ideas, had little knowledge of the traditional sources of their religion, namely, the Quran and the sunnah/hadith. The confidence that Hashmi's teachings have instilled in these women in asserting traditional Islamic values cannot be underestimated.

Hashmi's objective, therefore, is not to mobilize Muslim women's participation in politics in order to influence the political landscape of the society or to directly challenge the secular-liberal women activist groups; rather, her objective is to challenge the secular-liberal norms that characterize the upper-class society as a whole. Hashmi's "movement" is trying to shift the terrain of the culture to one that reflects traditional Islamic values, but with the cultural revolution being led by Muslim women asserting their Islamic identity. It is interesting to note here that in the case of Hashmi and hundreds of female teachers trained by her the task of preaching private morality and a private role for Muslim women, ironically, required a very visible, public role for them in television programs, seminars, study circles, and schools. That the apparent contradiction between the traditionally assigned private role of women, on the one hand, and the "public" engagement to display this private role on television and DVDs, on the other, is likely to produce a different kind of subjectivity that has not been appreciated by these protagonists.[35]

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[34] An interesting but anecdotal piece of evidence about the impact of Hashmi's Islamic training on these young girls is reported to be a relatively higher divorce rate among them. It is said that, having gone through a strict Salafi-type Islamic training, these girls become excessively religiously demanding toward their husbands and in-laws and, more importantly, tend to assert their Islam-sanctioned rights to the annoyance of their husbands.

Hashmi has often been described by her followers as totally non-political. It is true that she never discusses politics, either domestic or international, in her lectures and broadcasts. However, to the extent that preparing the cultural terrain for a renewed Islamic piety among an important segment of society is likely to produce some noticeable political consequences in the medium and long term, Hashmi's presence and teachings could be termed "political" in a broader sense. The very notion of Islamic public normativity couched in terms of personal piety and private morality—and not in terms of the establishment of an Islamic state—is a major political shift in Islamic discourse in Pakistan.[36] However, Hashmi's main task is to rigorously educate Muslim women in their religion, and to have them in turn educate others and shift the religious-ideological discursive landscape in a more conservative direction.

Conclusion

Despite important differences in their theological and ideological orientations and approaches to Islamic renewal, some common features can be identified in all four scholars discussed in this essay. First, all of these tele-preachers are non-political, at least in their television broadcasts. Although Qadri was active in Pakistani politics in the 1990s, founded a political party of his own (Pakistan Awami Tahreek), and participated in national elections, and Ahmad founded Tahreek-e-Khilafat, a political movement to re-establish the caliphate, both scholars never discuss politics or their political views during their television appearances. Both state-run and private channels that air Qadri's and Ahmad's broadcasts do not want to alienate their audiences by allowing political controversies in "religious" programs.

Second, with the exception of Qadri, none of these scholars is a traditionally trained alim; in fact, all tend to highlight their modern educational credentials to reach a wider audience. Third, none of them enjoy any goodwill or following among the traditional ulema. In general, the ulema regard them as rivals who are trying to subvert traditional sources of religious authority and create separate religious enclaves of their own. Fourth, with the exception of Ghamidi, all have a considerable following among Pakistani expatriate communities in the West and the Gulf region. Finally, only Ahmad among them has strong anti-West and anti-U.S. views, although he rarely expresses these views—at least not directly—in television lectures and broadcasts on QTV.

Both Hashmi and Ghamidi, in their own ways, illustrate the alienation of the middle-classes in Pakistan. Hashmi speaks to the female segment of these classes that not only seems to have become frustrated with the secularization that has accompanied the processes of modernization in Pakistan, and the concomitant secular-liberalism that has infected the middle- and upper-classes, but also feels a sense of guilt for having supposedly abandoned Islam in the process of acquiring material goods and middle-class comforts. Ghamidi, on the other hand, mainly speaks to those who are tired of the jihadi rhetoric and who have been searching for a moderate voice for Islam in Pakistan.

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[35] Karin Willeemse, "'In My Father's House'—Gender, Islam and the Construction of a Gendered Public Sphere in Darfur, Sudan," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 27 (2007): 73–115.

[36] Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007), 303.

The media revolution in Pakistan has enabled individuals like Ahmad, Ghamidi, Hashmi, and Qadri to reach audiences throughout Pakistan and abroad, especially in the major urban centers. Hashmi's lectures on CDs, DVDs, and television have attracted the attention of many women, and her influence has now spread beyond a certain elite strata of Pakistani society to the lower middle-classes as well. Her Quranic study circles and courses have produced qualified and competent students who are now running their own courses and training programs, mainly (though not exclusively) as part of Hashmi's Al-Huda International Foundation. Similarly,. Qadri's and Ahmad's religious programs are watched by hundreds of thousands of Muslims in Pakistan and abroad every day on QTV, Peace TV, and Noor TV, as well as on DVDs. Although Ghamidi's outreach is not as extensive as that of the other three, his frequent appearances on the state-run and other channels have enabled him to create a constituency of his own among the educated sectors of society.

All four scholars discussed here are trying to create a "Muslim public" of their own and to influence the perspectives of Pakistani Muslims on Islam, particularly those who have limited knowledge of the original Islamic sources. As Peter Mandeville has shown, the "circulation and inflections of Islamic authority" tend to create a range of "Muslim public spheres" in which multiple understandings of Islam are "advanced and debated by new audiences."[37] While the older forms of Muslim publics emphasized spatial and physical dimensions, the newer forms are creating communities of discourse with global connections through the use of the air waves and electronic devices.[38] These developments have two important consequences for the reconfiguration of both religious authority and religious discourse: the emergence of new Islamic voices in the media undermines the monopoly of the self-ascribed, traditional religious authorities (ulema and Sufis) as well as that of the Islamists on defining Islamic normativity;[39] and the fundamentally "contested" and "fractious" nature of the public sphere undercuts the hegemony of the dominant discourse.[40] As Schulz has noted, there is an obvious paradox here: the more the Islamic publics are created through media-based preachers, the more Islamic scholarly consensus is undermined. In other words, while the new processes for the production of Islamic normativity engendered by the electronic media tend to strengthen "Muslims' possibilities to speak *in* [emphasis added] public," they, at the same time, "weaken their capacities to speak as *the* [emphasis added] public."[41]

It will be interesting to examine here the interpretive techniques and ideological arguments used by the four scholars to create new Muslim publics. Ghamidi, as opposed to Ahmad, Qadri, and Hashmi, clearly employs a more nuanced contextual hermeneutical approach in his understanding of the Quran and sunnah and, therefore, offers a more liberal Islamic product to influential sections of Pakistanis, who either have been alienated from the orthodox, conservative, or extremist variants of Islam, or who have tended to gravitate toward a secular outlook. In that sense, both Hashmi and Ghamidi tend to speak to the same class of audience with similar ideological predicaments, Ghamidi steering them with his intellectualism toward a more historicized-liberal interpretation of Islam and Hashmi, through her Salafi-puritanical orientation, trying to relink them to Islam as it was practiced by the Prophet and his companions.

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[37] Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, 303.

[38] Abdulkader Tayob, "Muslim Publics: Contents and Discontents," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 27 (2007): 6.

[39] Amanmdo Salvator and Dale E. Eickelman, eds., *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[40] D.E. Schulz, "Evoking Moral Community, Fragmenting Muslim Discourse," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 27 (2007): 39–53.

[41] Ibid., 39.

Qadri is a popular preacher and his audience is more diverse and his appeal is more widespread than that of the others. Ahmad mostly preaches to those who are already his followers and who want to learn more from their "amir." His audience, outside the circle of the members and sympathizers of his own organization, Tanzeem-e-Islami, is quite limited. In part, this is because he is usually monotonous, tense, tedious, painfully repetitive, and eerily frightening. In addition, the latent political undertones of his sermons with extremist implications also tend to alienate a good number of TV audiences.

Ghamidi is a powerful voice in making a convincing case for the illegitimacy of militant and the so-called jihadi groups; however, the reach of his message still remains limited to a certain small class of the Pakistani intelligentsia. Hashmi has had far more success simply because her message has resonated with traditional understandings of Islam and because of her unique and eloquent pedagogical style. She has also facilitated access to Islamic knowledge to an audience hitherto not targeted by religious scholars: women. This is her main innovation, and the reason why her teachings have spread so rapidly. The female alim in Pakistan is an anomaly, and the importance of women finally having another woman, rather than a man, to listen to on matters of religion cannot be overemphasized. Whereas women in Pakistan had already become quite active in various spheres of life (education, medicine, civil service, professions, and entrepreneurship) in recent years, there was still a vacuum for a women's leadership in the religious sector that Hashmi seems to have filled successfully.

Preachers such as Hashmi and Ghamidi, and the media mechanisms through which their voices reach the Pakistani public, continue the trend toward the displacement of religious authority away from the traditional ulema. Ghamidi, in particular, makes it a point to involve himself in incessant debates with such ulema to prove their inadequacy in providing proper Islamic guidance. Both Qadri and Ahmad are careful in their references to the ulema and generally refrain from directly challenging the latter's religious authority. Nevertheless, the very fact that their religious discourse is independent of the mediating role of the ulema and that they have built religiously based constituencies of their own—a new Muslim public—that pays scant respect to the views of the madrasah-trained ulema is not an insignificant development for traditional Islamic authorities. Hashmi, in contrast, does not shy away from directly challenging the monopoly of the ulema on religious discourse and criticizing them for "making religion a hardship rather than a blessing for the people."[42]

What is more interesting to note with regard to the electronic media and religious preaching is the systematic linkage between economics, technology, and ideology. The neo-liberal economic policies of the Musharraf regime initiated a process of deregulation and privatization of all major sectors of the economy in Pakistan, including the communication media, which for the first time in the country's history brought forth a number of privately owned television channels and radio stations. The opening of the airways to the private sector in the framework of a broader privatization drive helped both the modern and traditional sectors.

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[42] It is not surprising, therefore, that the ulema, especially of Deobandi persuasion, have lashed out heavily against Hashmi for (1) daring (*jurat*) to interpret the Quran without the guidance of the ulema, (2) creating doubts (*shak-o-shubhat*) about the Islamic scholarship of the ulema, and (3) rejecting—or at least evidencing skepticism about—the juristic literature and edicts. See Sufwan, *Jiddat Pasandi*, 47, 101.

Thus, along with the channels dedicated exclusively to news, entertainment, movies, music, and soap operas, there also emerged private channels (QTV, Peace TV, Noor TV, and Labbaik TV) that broadcast religious programs continuously. This was precisely the same period that witnessed the widespread use of satellite-based communication, dish networks, and cable-relayed transmission technologies throughout Pakistan. The neo-liberal economic policies, imposed by the World Bank and the IMF as part of the conditionality for economic assistance, that called for a free market of goods (and ideas) thus created an environment conducive to the multiplicity of political and ideological voices in the privatized media.

There was a market for religious broadcasts, the technology was available, and religious leaders were waiting in the wings to take full advantage in order to advance their ideological objectives. It is important to note here that televised and CD- or DVD-based speeches are not only a form of religious preaching but a commercial enterprise as well. Hundreds of thousands of cassettes, CDs, and DVDs of these and other popular preachers (for example, Zakir Naik of India, Murtaza Malik of Pakistan, Maulana Dilawar Saeedi of Bangladesh, and Maulana Tariq Jamil of Tablighi Jamaat) are being mass-produced, marketed, and sold in stores and online throughout the subcontinent and abroad. Benedict Anderson describes the critical role of what he calls "print-capitalism" in the construction of the idea of nation as an imagined community in the early modern period.[43] One can argue, following Anderson, that the onset of "media-capitalism" is similarly playing a critical role in creating new religious communities, imagined or palpable.

The privatization wave under the neo-liberal economic policies has opened the door to the possibility of a fundamental change in the way radio and television have become a vehicle not only for the Islamization of society but also for the accommodation of diverse voices within the Islamic religious discourse. In the past, one had to travel to special religious gatherings to listen to the lectures and sermons of prominent religious scholars. Today, people can listen to—and watch—most religious scholars through television and recorded devices right in the comfort of their homes and in the company of their entire families. This has been an especially unique experience for women, who rarely had the opportunity of attending religious gatherings held in public places. Thus, much of the newly visible religiosity among women in Pakistan, as elsewhere in Muslim societies, can be attributed to this easy accessibility that television, CDs, and DVDs provide to religious education.

One is tempted also to point out here that only about three decades ago, an overwhelming majority of religious scholars considered the modern communication technology, especially cinema and television, as one of the worst effects of Western inroads in Islamic societies.[44] Some Deobandi ulema were even against using loudspeakers for purposes of saying *adhan* (call for prayer) and delivering the Friday *khutba* (sermon).

The impact of the medium itself on the message is difficult to determine in the case of the tele-preachers discussed in this essay, especially in light of Marshall McLuhan's famous epithet that "the medium is the message"—that is, the communication technology of the electronic media per se determines the nature and the content of the message. Robert McChesney has applied the Marxist notion of "relative autonomy" in this respect, arguing that communication technologies have important social effects of their own that are not "reducible to political and economic analysis."[45] As we have shown in our analyses in previous pages, theoretical insights from both Anderson and McChesney are quite significant in understanding the dynamics between the rise of communication technology and the nature of Islamic discourse.

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[43] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 37–46.

[44] In a survey of the ulema and religious leaders conducted by the present author in the fall of 1975, almost 100% of the respondents disapproved of watching television and went as far as to say that "one should not even watch religious programs that are broadcast on TV for a short time since these programs are then followed by songs and dance by the Benjamin Sisters [a popular duo on Pakistan Television network in the 1970s]."

Lastly, it is important to examine the role of the state in not only spearheading the media-based careers of some of these actors but also determining the particular brand of Islamic discourse to be propagated, depending on the political and ideological needs of the state at a given time. Interestingly, it was General Zia who had brought in Ahmad for regular religious broadcasts on national television in the early 1980s, and it was Zia again who replaced him with a Barelvi scholar, Qadri. There are two important points to note here: first, the role of the state in launching the religious careers of both scholars on the national television network; and, second, the timing and the choice of a religious scholar of a particular doctrinal persuasion.

In the earlier phase of the Zia regime, Ahmad was deemed more useful given the prevailing popular religious mood that resonated with the revivalist slogan of *nizam-e-Mustafa* popularized by the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) against the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977. Later, in the mid-1980s, when General Zia was trying to consolidate his political power by cultivating a popular religious constituency, and no longer needed the support of the revivalists—who were increasingly seen by the military regime as a threat to its power and legitimacy—Qadri, a populist Barelvi scholar and preacher, came to be viewed as a better choice. His non-political, devotional, and Sufi-oriented Islam was seen as a potent antidote to the Jamaat-e-Islami's Islam that was heavily laden with difficult political demands.

The same can be said about Ghamidi, who was given extensive air time by the state-run television network and by other channels to help the government of General Musharraf in promoting "enlightened moderation" and challenging the Islamic legitimacy of militancy and jihadi ideology. As the Pakistani state and other powerful social institutions (such as the media) have formally renounced jihad as a principal instrument of foreign policy since at least 2002, Ghamidi, Qadri, and Hashmi have not only been tolerated but have also been promoted. A voice such as Ghamidi's, for example, would have been intolerable during the 1980s and 1990s, which were the prime years of jihadi ideology.[46] Ghamidi's views have been meant to legitimate the turnaround in Pakistan's foreign policy vis-à-vis foreign and domestic jihadis the Pakistani state has nurtured for the past two decades. It is clear, therefore, that the state in Pakistan, constrained in its ideological options in the context of a semi-hegemonic discourse of political and jihadi Islam, was able to use the neo-liberal economy of privatization of media and free market of ideas to create space for alternative Islamic discourses to challenge the dominance of political Islam.

This is not to suggest, however, that these scholars modified their original religious views to suit the demand of the state but, rather, that the state found their views commensurate with its own ideological and political imperatives and was ingenious enough to obtain their services. Obvious in all three cases is that the role of the state was crucial in disseminating a particular version of Islam—through carefully selected religious scholars—that suited the government's ideological interests at a given time. The rising or falling of stars among popular religious preachers in Pakistan during any given period is not, therefore, necessarily due to the given proclivities of their ideas, or societal trends, but to the exigencies of the policy shifts of the state in one direction or the other.

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[45] Robert McChesney, "The Political Economy of Global Communication," in *Capitalism and the Information Age: The Political Economy of Global Communication Revolution*, ed. Robert W. McChesney, Ellen Meiksins Wood, and John Bellamy Foster (Landon: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 7.

[46] In fact, according to Salim Safi, a prominent Pakistani journalist, Ghamidi received threats not only from the jihadi groups in the 1980s and 1990s for his criticism of the jihadi culture as against the teachings of Islam but also from the "government agencies" that were promoting this culture. See, Salim Safi, *Afghanistan: Amrika, Taliban, Usama aur Pakistan ki Deeni Jamaaton ka Kirdar* [Afghanistan: America, Taliban, Usama and the Role of Pakistan's Religious Parties] (Lahore: Danish Sara, 2002), 340.

Muslim Grassroots Leaders in India: National Issues and Local Leadership

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay examines recent trends in the evolution of traditional and nontraditional forms of Muslim leadership and association in India marked by wide diversity and a notable absence of national leaders.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Traditional and historical Muslim networks in India, such as the Sunni *madrasah* traditions of the Deobandis and Barelwis, some reforming sects (Ahmadiyya), Shia groups, and modern Muslim schools, have adopted new leadership formats. These include utilizing new forms of communication, pursing non-religious agendas focused on education and development, and networking traditional religious schools with secular and female education.
- Religious mobilization follows the north-south divide in Indian society. Although the historical Muslim networks are centered in north India, many groups in the south and east Indian states pursue their own local agendas.
- The modernization of Muslim leadership has led to new bodies and institutions that are separate from established sectarian religious associations. These modern organizations can be divided into those related to religious issues and those related to the welfare of the community. Caste and class factors continue to exert an important impact here.
- Religious activism among Indian Muslims is focused on two major sets of issues: (1) securing religious lifestyles in matters of law, family, and gender segregation and (2) raising the social, economic, and educational standards of the Indian Muslim community, which is perceived as backward and neglected.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- India needs to address the issues of social and political marginalization that Muslims face in Indian society. Social and political rights, primarily the affordable access to quality education and employment, are key.
- Muslim leaders in India should be given a full chance to participate in public life. They should be encouraged to become part of mainstream society and invited to assume social and political responsibilities, as well as act in a transparent and public manner.
- Indian public institutions need to reverse the trend of viewing Muslims as a potential threat and security risk. Occasional discrimination of Muslim citizens must be checked more resolutely. State attempts to regulate religious institutions (e.g., *madaris*, law boards, and shrines) have produced little result apart from a growing sense of alienation among Muslim activists.

Although media-savvy preachers of Islam such as Zakir Naik (born in 1965) from Mumbai have attracted the attention of the mainstream media in India and in the West, their growing popularity is no immediate reflection of current Muslim grassroots leadership in India. Because India's Muslim population remains strongly divided along social, cultural, linguistic, sectarian, and geographic lines, Muslim activists in India cannot easily speak for the Indian Muslim community at large.

This essay will begin with an introduction to the historical context of Muslim India from which current popular leaders emerged. Three subsequent sections will discuss traditional, local, and modern leadership, which are three categories into which Islam in India can be conditionally divided, keeping in mind that these areas also overlap. A final section on Zakir Naik examines important new trends in media and social and political activism that are emerging across India's Muslim leadership

Historical Formation of Popular Muslim Leadership

After the Indian subcontinent was divided in 1947 as a result of the Pakistani independence movement, Islamic groups and Muslim leaders who remained in India faced a fundamental dilemma. In order to gain legitimacy with the Indian government and their major ally, the Indian National Congress, the remaining Indian Muslim groups and leaders needed to renounce politics. They wanted to distance themselves from the nightmare legacy of partition that had rendered millions victim to communal rioting in the process of the population transfers between the young states of India and Pakistan. Yet partition had created a paradox for Muslim leadership in South Asia: the centers of Islamic learning, theological guidance, and culture and tradition remained in India and were largely absent from the new Muslim state of Pakistan.

This inherent contradiction shaped the emergence of Muslim leadership in India and also affected the emergence of new popular Muslim leaders and their grassroots politics today in several ways. First, although no national Muslim political party has established itself in the electoral system of India, the Muslim vote as a potential constituency continues to influence a substantial number of seats in parliament.[1] Second, Muslim religious leaders remained devoted to the traditional conditions and forms of the practice of Islam while demonstrating little to no political ambition of their own. Third, national issues of Muslim politics have been taken up more by mainstream political parties than by religious organizations. The Congress Party and regional parties became prime movers in the public arena to articulate the concerns of Indian Muslims, joined by a number of clerics and public Muslim intellectuals, many of whom claimed the newly emerging constituency of "secular Muslims."

The emergence of Muslim leadership in independent India can be roughly divided into three phases. During the first phase, immediately after partition, Indian Muslims had to grapple with the fact that despite the emergence of Pakistan as a state of Muslim majority provinces, in the independent state of India the issue of Muslim minority rights remained unresolved politically, socially, and culturally. Muslims retained a significant share in India's population (13.4% in 2001),[2] and exerted influence in a number of regions. At approximately 150 million people, India's Muslim population is on par with that of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Yet, the Indian Muslim community also remained deeply divided, with the vast majority living in the Gangetic plains of north India, the historical areas of Muslim civilization in the subcontinent, and a small but very active and much more developed minority residing in the southern states, where Dravidian languages and cultures dominated. During this first phase, Indian Muslim leaders deliberately renounced political ambitions and focused on rebuilding the religious and cultural identity of the community.

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[1] According to a 1993 study, Muslims constitute more than 50% in ten constituencies for the federal parliament and a decisive 30%–40% in another ten. Omar Khalidi, "Muslims in Indian Political Process: Group Goals and Alternative Strategies," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 1/2 (January 2–9, 1993): 43–47, 49–54.

[2] For the population figures, see the official website of the Census of India, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2001, http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/religion.aspx.

A second phase was introduced by socio-economic and political changes that arrived with the modernization processes of the 1970s, triggering the emergence of radical politics and regional, cultural, and ethnic conflict. Religious actors and groups with Hindu, Sikh, and also Muslim backgrounds became part of the identity politics of a new generation of mainly student activists. In the 1980s and 1990s, Muslim groups in India shared in the rising religious consciousness across the Muslim world and expanded religious institutions at a significant pace, not lagging much behind Pakistan or Bangladesh, albeit with very little political drive.

Globalization and development marked the third phase of the leaders' evolving emergence. In this phase, Muslim activism in India intensely refocused on the status and development of the Indian Muslim community, especially general education, the schooling of girls, and professional, technical, and computer education. At the same time, leadership initiatives largely remained in the hands of upper-class and upper-caste Ashraf Muslims. The Muslim community was seen as lagging behind other communities in India and as not equally sharing in the fruits of the continuous development upsurge since the 1990s. This was most recently confirmed by the 2006 Sachar Committee formed by the Indian government.[3] Muslim groups and leaders felt the need and desire to network globally much more intensely than before. Using the new opportunities their global cooperation related not only to religious issues but also reflected social, cultural, and political concerns. As demonstrated by the Deobandis or Tablighis, the historical centers of religious Muslim networks in India regained some of their significance in the process. Their followers were joined by diverse activists from across India, some of whom followed a more local orientation while others were more modernist.

Traditional Muslim Networks and New Leadership Formats

With the absence of a recognized national Muslim leadership, most religious-minded Indian Muslims continue to look for guidance to their local *imams*. Those include their elders in mosques, *madaris* (plural of *madrasah*, or Islamic school), and religious associations. These activists should be considered when looking for new trends in Muslim grassroots politics. Though still strongly divided by old sectarian differences, these local leaders adapt their modes of operation to new trends of communication. And they pay much more attention than previously to non-religious issues such as general education and development aimed at the social status of the Muslim community. They thus encourage networks of interrelated institutions that link the traditional religious associations with madaris, modern Muslim schools with a secular curriculum, and madaris for girls with other modern girls' schools. These schools are operated through Muslim NGOs that have expanded all over India. Often these institutions are cross-linked and coordinated by activists who bridge the religious and the secular realms effortlessly, as they are also engaged in business with, invest in, or direct some of the new Muslim media.

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[3] Rajindar Sachar et al., "Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India: A Report," Government of India, New Delhi, November 2006, http://minorityaffairs.gov.in/newsite/sachar/sachar_comm.pdf; and "Summarised Sachar Report on Status of Indian Muslims," *Milli Gazette*, December 14, 2006, http://www.milligazette.com/dailyupdate/2006/200612141_Sachar_Report_Status_Indian_Muslims.htm. The committee studied quota demands for Muslims in general and for *Dalit* (low-class) Muslims in particular, on which no agreement could be achieved. The committee confirmed a less than average performance of Muslims in literacy and educational achievements; lower Muslim representation among the professional and managerial classes; less availability of loans; less educational, rural, and urban civic infrastructure; and fewer income and state service opportunities for Muslims.

Over the years many centers of religious learning have built impressive websites containing a large amount of information. A prominent example is the traditional seminary of Deoband featuring information regarding curriculum, the history of the seminary, magazines in Urdu (Darul Ulum) and Arabic (al-Dai), ordering information for their books in Urdu and English, an online service for religious verdicts (*fatawa*), and a photo gallery.[4] The other orthodox seminary of North India, Nadwatul Ulama, has taken a similar approach in its website, which also provides easy connections with the seminary's many Indian branches.[5] The Deobandi-dominated association of Islamic clerics, Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind (JUH), has modernized its web presentation, which introduces the association's social and religious projects.[6]

Adherents of the Barelwi tradition of Sufi-oriented Islam, although their institutions and associations are less organized, use modern media to connect to each other. Internet blogs such as Sunni News not only help to circulate news and theological concepts but also promote sectarian debate.[7] The youthful missionary movement of this tradition, Sunni Dawat-e Islami,[8] which formed after the model of the Tablighi Jamaat, also possesses a modern web presence, offering podcasts, an e-journal, and e-books.

In the Indian context, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (founded in 1973) acquired importance as a reference institution, and more so with a freshly renovated website.[9] Run by religious scholars (*ulema*), the board's decisions have a fatwa-like status, as it tries to reconcile different Sunni legal opinions. The board's members also intervene in the making and reformation of Muslim Personal Law (MPL) on issues of marriage or divorce, sometimes causing much public controversy. MPL evolved under British rule when the courts started to make a selective reference to Islamic law while hearing civil cases involving Muslims and promoting legistlation on its partial application. Today, the board is an interface of religious scholars with the Indian state and public Muslim intellectuals in legal matters arising from the dictates of Islam. The group's chairman has often been vocal in public Indian discourse. Repeatedly the chairman has come from the Nadwa school; the previous chair was the famous Sayyid Ali Hasan Nadwi. The current chairman is Syed Mohammad Rabe Hasani.[10] But the board's authority is not unchallenged, as dissenting scholars with a Shia background and women activists formed rival boards.

In addition, individual scholars attract public attention through their participation in religious and political debates. Among the Deobandis, Maulana Nadeem ul-Wajidi is a typical example. A graduate of the Darul Ulum Deoband, he is a member of the working committee of the seminary's alumni association. He is also president of the provincial organization of Deobandi ulema for the province of Uttar Pradesh. Additionally, Maulana Nadeem ul-Wajidi runs his own online Deobandi madrasah, Darul Ulum Online[11] and takes part in public debate through articles in Urdu language newspapers.

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[4] For information on the Deoband, see the Deoband seminary's website at http://www.darululoom-deoband.com/.

[5] For information on Nadwatul Ulama and its branches, see the seminary's official website at http://nadwatululama.org/.

[6] For the official website of the Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind, see http://jamiatulama.org/.

[7] See, for example, the internet blog Sunni News at http://sunninews.wordpress.com/.

[8] For the official website of the Sunni Dawat-e Islami movement, see http://www.sunnidawateislami.net.

[9] For the official website of the All India Muslim Law Board, see http://www.aimplboard.org/.

[10] "Presidents," All India Muslim Personal Law Board, http://www.aimplboard.org/president4.html.

On the Barelwi side he is matched by scholars such as Maulana Muhammad Nasir Misbahi[12] and Allama Yasin Akhtar Nisbahi, owner of the Barelwi publishing house Darul Qalam.[13] A vocal spokesman for religious Shia believers is Maulana Kalbe Sadiq, India's best-known Shia Muslim scholar and vice president of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board.[14]

The Madani family represents another prominent example of individual activism in the Islamic field. It is closely associated with the Deoband seminary, and the JUH. The family operates at the intersection of Muslim religious scholarship and party politics. Its members have struck various alliances with the Congress Party, the Samajwadi Party of Uttar Pradesh, the competing Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD).[15]

Local Muslim Initiatives and Leadership in the South and East Indian States

Historically the structure of religious debate and activism among Indian Muslims is dominated by the traditional sects of the Deobandis, Barelwis, Ahl-i Hadith (Salafi), Shia, and dissenting groups such as the Ahmadiyya. Yet recently, a growing number of local initiatives have transcended the demarcations of sectarian affiliations in India. This development is often connected with education and development projects to benefit local Muslim communities. More typically those projects are found in the southern Indian states (Kerala and Tamil Nadu) or on the east coast (Assam), outside the historical heartlands of Indian Islam in the North Indian United Provinces and Bihar.

Assam

A typical example of this locally rooted activism is Badruddin Ajmal (born in 1955), a merchant of Arabian scents, hailing from Assam. He is a graduate of the Deoband seminary and helped modernize some of the seminary's departments; for example, he was instrumental in introducing and expanding the teaching of English-language and computer skills there. In Hojai, Assam, Ajmal runs a welfare foundation and trust locally known for a state of the art charitable hospital (the Haji Abdul Majid Memorial Hospital and Research Center).[16] He also established and directed Markaz-ul-Maarif (Center of Knowledge) in 1982,[17] a successful NGO in the education sector operating in Assam, and a training institute for madrasah graduates, Markazul Maarif Education and Research Centre (MMERC), in 1994, which was founded in New Delhi and later shifted to Mumbai.[18] In

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[11] For the official website of Darul Ulum Online, see http://darululum.org/.

[12] See, for example, the Urdu-language newspaper articles documented on New Age Islam, a U.S.-based Internet portal devoted to Islam in South Asia, available at http://newageislam.org/NewAgeIslamArticleDetail.aspx?ArticleID=1653.

[13] Yoginder Sikand, "Dar ul-Qalam: A Barelvi Publishing House with a Difference," February 19, 2009, available at Sunni News blog, http://sunninews.wordpress.com/2009/02/19/darul-qalam-of-allama-yasin-akhtar-misbahi-sb/.

[14] Yoginder Sikand, "Interview with Maulana Kalbe Sadiq," September 21, 2006, available at Muslim Unity blog, http://smma59.wordpress.com/2006/09/21/659/.

[15] Alka Pande, "Muslims on Mind, SP Takes in Madani Son, Kalyan's Waits," *Indian Express*, March 3, 2009, http://www.indianexpress.com/news/muslims-on-mind-sp-takes-in-madani-son-kal/430086/.

[16] For the official website of the Ajmal Foundation, see http://ajmalfoundation.org/.

[17] For the official website of Markaz-ul-Maarif, see http://www.markazulmaarif.org/.

[18] For an introduction to Markazul Maarif Education and Research Centre, see http://www.markazulmaarif.org/mmerc.asp.

2006, Ajmal founded a local Muslim party, the Assam United Democratic Front, which surprised observers by immediately winning eight seats. According to Ajmal, his party was placed second in an additional twelve seats and third in another eleven.[19]

Kerala

Similar local initiatives have been established in Kerala. This southwestern state is known for its high literacy, an influential but moderate Communist movement, and a strong Christian minority influence. It also has a close-knit Muslim community of the so-called Moplahs who can be traced all the way back to the advent of Islam on Indian soil. In Kerala, local branches of all-India associations have gone their own way by resolutely introducing quality education not only on Islam but also on general subjects. These groups are active in interfaith dialogue and social rehabilitation. In the 1980s, factions of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) took turns in participating in alternating coalition politics of the state. They later reunited and two candidates from the Kerala IUML were elected in the 2009 federal elections.[20]

Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh

The IUML also has influence in the southeastern state of Tamil Nadu.[21] In this state, Muslim groups and institutions have revived in a major way that is strongly marked by local Tamil culture and ethno-nationalism. Another distinct local center of Islamic tradition and activism is Hyderabad, once the capital of the famed principality of the Nizam of Hyderabad and today part of Andhra Pradesh.[22] In both Tamil Nadu and Hyderabad a number of small militant groups emerged in the past that either were quickly dispersed or were suppressed by the state security forces. In both states, Muslim NGOs significantly increased their involvement in the education of local Muslims. In the local politics of Hyderabad, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen continues to play an important role for Muslim mobilization.[23] The articulate barrister Asaduddin Owaisi retained the party seat in the Federal Parliament (Lok Sabha) in 2009. Although sometimes dubbed Islamist, this party is more moderate and locally oriented in character.[24]

Jammu and Kashmir

The northern state of Jammu and Kashmir presents a special case as it has been contested between India and Pakistan since the time of partition. Since 1990 particularly, the Kashmir valley has been marked by an insurgency that has been fuelled partly by Pakistan-based groups and government agencies. The Indian-controlled part of the state has a Muslim majority of 67% that has tended to favor either the Congress Party or one of the local Muslim parties.[25]

Despite the many years of conflict, Muslim politics have developed in full diversity. The most well-known party is the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference—currently led by Omar

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[19] Kashif ul-Huda, “AUDF Is for Hindu-Muslim Unity: Badruddin Ajmal,” Indian Muslims blog, May 14, 2006, http://www.indianmuslims.info/news/2006/may/14/indian_muslim/audf_is_for_hindu_muslim_unity_badruddin_ajmal.html.

[20] For the detailed election results, see Kerala Watch News Portal website, http://www.keralawatch.com/election2009/?p=12099.

[21] For the official website of the Tamil Nadu State Indian Union Muslim League, see http://www.muslimleaguetn.com/history.asp.

[22] For information on Islamic influence in Hyderabad, see “Hyderabad Muslims,” *Hindu*, April 27, 2003, reproduced on the Left~Write blog, http://leftwrite.wordpress.com/2007/02/11/hyderabad-muslims/.

[23] For the official website of the All India Majlis-e-Iteehadul Muslimeen, see http://www.aimim.in/.

[24] “Hyderabad Muslims.”

[25] This percentage is calculated on the basis of the 2001 district census for India. See Census of India, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/Basic_Data_Sheet.aspx.

Abdullah, who is also the present chief minister—which is leading a coalition government with the Congress Party.[26] The main ideological and political support for the insurgency came from the state unit of the Jamaat-i Islami (Islamic Party), which, although autonomous, is greatly influenced by its Pakistan-based sister party. The JI is a member of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference that unites 26 organizations favoring either independence or at least strong autonomy for the state. Although Muslim leaders from Kashmir have little impact on politics elsewhere in India, the conflict in itself has often served to polarize Muslim activists across the country and to motivate militant and radical elements. Currently the conflict level seems low, partly because the present leadership in Pakistan is carefully trying to disengage from it.

Modernizing Muslim Leadership

The modernization of Muslim leadership was primarily driven by lay Muslims and the demands of development. It was also fuelled by public discontent with a continuing concentration of leadership in the hands of "Ashraf" Muslims representing upper class and caste strata. Changes took shape through the formation of new bodies and institutions. They were different in maintaining a separate identity from both the established sectarian religious associations and the mainstream political parties that had previously been the main outlets for Muslim public opinion. In practice, however, a number of links exist. Broadly speaking, these modern organizations can be divided in two categories: those related to religious issues and those related to community welfare and social rights.

Most of these new institutions are NGOs—part of the sprawling civil society market in India. Nowadays it is an important career opportunity for Indian Muslims to become involved in Muslim NGOs. Many Muslim graduates, not only of religious schools but also of secular schools, opt to start new NGOs only to create jobs for themselves.

Modern Muslim Religious Institutions

In the area of religious institutions, there are a number of Muslim think-tanks and NGOs that currently exert a significant influence on religious debate and mobilization. A representative example is the Institute of Objective Studies (IOS) in Delhi, directed by Mohammed Manzoor Alam.[27] The institute appears close to the Jamaat-i Islami-i Hind (JIH) and its modernizing aspirations. In religious matters, the IOS follows the orthodoxy of Deoband and the JIH. The IOS has also become a recognized player in the academic field, attracting professors from public universities[28] and circulating its own academic journals.[29] Through a variety of interlinked institutions, IOS exerts a wide influence on religious-minded Muslim intellectuals. The group's chairman, Manzoor Alam, is also the general secretary of the All India Milli Council (Delhi), which promotes public initiatives in the area of Muslim personal law and tries also to reconcile different sectarian approaches.[30] Ideologically these institutions follow the Islamization of knowledge initiative. The IOS is listed as the Indian affiliation of the International Institutes of Islamic Thought, which are part of the same network as the Islamic Universities of Pakistan and Malaysia.[31] The Milli Council, in turn, is in close contact with the All India Muslim Personal Law Board.

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[26] "Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir," Jammu and Kashmir: Government and Administration webpage, http://jammukashmir.nic.in/govt/welcome.html.

[27] For the official website of the Institute of Objective Studies, see http://www.iosworld.org/.

[28] For information on the structure of Institute of Objective Studies, see http://www.iosworld.org/str.htm#Governing%20Structure.

[29] See, for example, the *Journal of Objective Studies* and the *Religion and Law Review* at http://www.iosworld.org/journalpage3.htm.

[30] For the website of the All India Milli Council, see http://www.aimcnd.org.

Modern Muslim Community Welfare Institutions

Those institutions related to the welfare of the community are typically training centers or private schools with government-recognized degree courses in all levels of education: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Lately many religious associations and madaris have created such educational facilities. According to inquiries in Deoband town, out of one thousand girls attending a girls' madrasah—a new rising phenomenon in itself—"at least 40 per cent want to work….Many girls from madrasas go on to join colleges and institutes run by madrasa alumni in cities such as Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Aligarh."[32] Another interesting example is the secular school established at the Jamia Mosque in Bangalore.[33] The so-called high tech madrasah Jamiatul Hidaya,[34] which is named after its founder Maulana Shah Hidayat Ali Mojaddidi, established full-fledged public education courses for secondary and technical education in addition to religious courses.[35]

The All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (AIMMM) must also be mentioned here. The AIMMM is a coordination council where public intellectuals and Muslim clerics sit together to discuss Muslim issues. Although in itself the council does not have a great impact on the Muslim masses, the AIMMM has nevertheless helped coordinate and articulate public Muslim aspirations in India to a notable degree. The council's national president is currently Zafarul-Islam Khan,[36] a Muslim intellectual who combines his activities in the media business through the community newspaper *Milli Gazette*[37] with public activism and charity toward the Muslim community through his registered trust, the Charity Alliance.[38] Being the son of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (discussed below), Khan passed through traditional madrasah education (Nadwa) and secular schooling (he possesses a PhD from Manchester University).

Muslim Secularism in India

Over the years Muslim activists who would identify themselves as secular or secularists have also been significantly articulate in the public arena. This approach is based on the Indian interpretation of secularism in the tradition of Gandhi. It is based on the separation of state and religion while showing each religion equal respect and protection. For secular Muslims, matters of faith are private. A prime example of such an activist is Asghar Ali Engineer (born in 1939), founder and director of the Mumbai Center for the Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS). He is a Bohra Ismaili and received religious training from his father who was a cleric. As a public intellectual, Engineer writes extensively on the civil, economic, and social rights of the Muslim community from a center-left perspective.[39] An equally well-known and vocal representative of this group is Mushirul Hasan (born in 1949),[40] an outstanding, widely published historian and former vice chancellor of Jamia Millia University. Politically Hasan is associated with the Muslim voice in the Congress Party.

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[31] For the website of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, see http://iiit.org/AboutUs/OfficesAffiliates/India/tabid/100/Default.aspx.

[32] "Students at Seminary Set a New Course," *Indian Express*, May 13, 2008, http://www.indianexpress.com/news/students-at-seminary-set-a-new-course/308737/2.

[33] Azmathulla Shariff, "Bangalore Jama Masjid: In a Dynamic Mode," *Islamic Voice*, April 2001, http://www.islamicvoice.com/april.2001/initiative.htm.

[34] For more information on Jamiatul Hidaya, see http://www.jameatulhidaya.org/.

[35] "Jameatull Hidaya, Jaipur Creates a History in the Madrasa Reform," Skull Caps: On Mauzis, Madrasas and Mindsets blog, March 10, 2007, http://madrasa.wordpress.com/2007/03/10/jameatul-hidaya-jaipur-creates-a-history-in-the-madrasa-reform/.

[36] For a list of office bearers of the Majlis, see http://www.mushawarat.com/officeBearers.asp.

[37] For more information on the *Milli Gazette*, see http://www.milligazette.com/.

[38] For more information on the Charity Alliance, see http://www.charityalliance.in/.

The social concerns of mainly low-class Muslims are championed by the secular and left-leaning group All India Backward Muslim Morcha (AIBMM). This organization aspires to represent Muslims who are descended from Hindu converts standing outside the caste system as so-called outcasts or Dalits.[41]

Zakir Naik: A New Trend in India's Muslim Leadership

The rising fame of Zakir Naik, mentioned in the beginning of this essay, exemplifies several elements of the new trends in popular Muslim leadership. Naik draws largely on the newfound religiosity among the rising middle classes of urban India, indicating both the potential but also the limits of his appeal. Though this phenomenon of religious resurgence may be of recent origin among Muslims, it is not confined to them. Similar middle-class religiosity helped the ascent of the Hindu-nationalist forces of the BJP in the 1990s. Naik's success points to the importance of new formats and media in pursuing religious propagation. His organization, the Islamic Research Foundation (IRF), represents the type of missionary (*dawa*) activism that reflects the growing importance of competition and of market forces in the religious field.[42] His theological trajectory is prototypical for other new Islamic preachers: He went from being a former follower of popular Islam with Sufi roots when he was a student of Ahmed Deedat, who hailed from a Barelwi background, to a very activist reformist position that some described as Islamist and others as Salafi.

Naik's project in many ways is a media ministry. The new media formats are very much connected with the global communication revolution in the wake of globalization. He has refined media techniques such as the production and dissemination of CDs, video courses, and in 2006 a television channel, Peace TV, in addition to conventional print propaganda.

Zakir Naik's project is also a personal ministry, however, where his own religious persona becomes the main focus of his preaching. This format was also adopted by Wahiduddin Khan (born in 1925) who preaches a non-sectarian combination of Islamic scholarship, Sufi traditions, and New Age influences, especially by networking through his journal *Al Risala*.[43] Khan enthusiastically embraced the new media and lectures live on Internet TV in English and Urdu.[44] Several clerics and preachers—Sufi and reformist alike—have followed this model, for instance the school and Sufi order of Hazrat Inam Hasan Gudri Shah Baba V in Ajmer.[45]

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[39] For more information on the Mumbai Center for the Study of Society and Secularism, see http://www.csss-isla.com/.

[40] For biographical information about Mushirul Hasan, see http://jmi.nic.in/mushirulhasan.htm.

[41] Yoginder Sikand, *Islam, Caste, and Dalit-Muslim Relations in India* (New Delhi: Global Media, 2007).

[42] For more information about the Islamic Research Foundation, see http://www.irf.net/.

[43] For more information on the journal *Al Risala*, see http://www.alrisala.org/.

[44] See, for example, the lectures by Wahiduddin Khan on August 22, 2009, on the "Principle of Islam," *UStream TV*, http://www.ustream.tv/channel/22nd-august-09--saturday, and on August 23, 2009, on "Ramadan—Month of Study of Quran," *UStream TV*, http://www.ustream.tv/channel/23rd-august-09--sunday-urdu.

[45] For more details on this Sufi order, see the Sufi-Mystic.net website, http://www.sufi-mystic.net/index2.htm.

Naik's project is also a global ministry. Like Naik, many Indian Muslim groups and leaders develop expanding networks through diaspora connections and websites. This particularly applies to the United Kingdom and the United States but also to other parts of the world where the Indian Muslim diaspora is strong, such as South Africa and Mauritius.[46]

Yet Naik's impact is inflated and distorted by the same media that has helped him to rise. Naik's authority is hotly contested in India, to the extent that traditional groups have released fatwas targeting his arguments and technique of debate as un-Islamic. The unanimity with which this critique was voiced from the Deobandi, Barelwi, and Ahl-i Hadith perspectives reflects not only the aspect of competition between Naik and the more traditional groups. It also demonstrates the limits of Naik's religious authority, which remains confined to particular sections of Muslim society with a modernist educational background.[47]

Although Zakir Naik brought the use of these formats to certain perfection, he was by no means the first or only one in South Asian Islam going in this direction. The sect of the Ahmadiyya, seen as heretical by most mainstream Muslims, first started a television channel for its followers in 1994.[48] Relayed over the Internet, the channel allowed the sect's followers to receive messages irrespective of repressions and restrictions it faced in many countries.

Many groups have established dedicated channels at YouTube, introducing video activism as a tool for Muslim mobilization. Ahl-i Hadith scholars from India established a missionary center in Saudi Arabia, the Jeddah Dawah Center (JDC),[49] which runs an Internet television channel on YouTube, Noor TV.[50] Among the Tablighi Jamaat, the Deobandi-dominated missionary movement that originally was hostile to media coverage, young lay preachers have became enthusiastic video activists, though less in India and more often in Great Britain and Pakistan.[51] Barelwi activists also have started a dedicated Sunni channel on YouTube devoted to refuting sectarian opponents.[52]

Competition in the faith market has become tough and tight. But as with all media revolutions, the resulting impact is not uniform. In some cases new media has exacerbated ideological and sectarian tension—for example, when Ahl-i Hadith preachers use their YouTube channel to vehemently attack the Tablighi Jamaat and its literature. In other cases, however, as with grassroots video activists of the Tablighi Jamaat, new media has increased knowledge and transparency and has led to some form of democratization. The same applies to the website revolution among Islamic groups. For some groups, greater use of the Internet has increased the potential to attack adversaries, while others feel compelled to take a more pragmatic and open approach.

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[46] See, for example, the U.S.-based Internet portals Indian Muslims, http://www.indianmuslims.info/, and New Age Islam, http://newageislam.net. The latter started in the United States but has now transferred to India. New Age Islam's organizers describe themselves as "a group of Muslims, South Asian, but based mostly in the Middle East and North America, concerned at the present state of affairs in which the very word Muslim has become synonymous with terrorism, backwardness and ignorance." For more information, see "About Us in a Nutshell," New Age Islam website, http://newageislam.net/NewAgeIslamAboutUs.aspx.

[47] Maulana Dr. Yasin Ali Usmani, "Dr. Zakir Nayak's Peace TV Spreading Disaffection Towards the Prophet (pbuh)," New Age Islam blog, August 14, 2009, http://newageislam.org/NewAgeIslamArticleDetail.aspx?ArticleID=1643; "Storm over Fatwa Against Scholar Zakir Naik," Hasnain's Life blog, December 8, 2008, http://hasnain.wordpress.com/2008/12/04/storm-over-fatwa-against-scholar-zakir-naik/; "Debate between Jamshed Iqbal and Ali Sina" Sunni News blog, April 14, 2009, http://sunninews.wordpress.com/category/zakir-naik/; and "Surah Al-Faathihah - Revealed To Our Prophet? Or Composed By Hindu Priests?" SalafiTalk.net, July 14, 2007, http://www.salafitalk.net/st/viewmessages.cfm?Forum=8&Topic=5130.

[48] The Ahmadi television channel is available at MTA International, http://www.mta.tv/.

[49] For more information on the Jeddah Dawah Center, see http://www.jdci.org.

[50] For the dedicated channel of the Jeddah Dawah Center on YouTube, see http://www.youtube.com/user/NNoorTV. YouTube blocked the earlier version of NoorTV.

[51] See, for example, the channel of YouTube user Munimmiah786, who apparently is a Tabligh activist, at http://www.youtube.com/user/munimmiah786.

[52] For the Barelwi channel, see "Exposing Nifaq (hypocracy)," available at http://www.youtube.com/user/ExposingNifaq.

Implications for the Intersection of Religion and Politics

Currently no charismatic national Muslim leaders on a popular level are visible in India. Despite the media-based fame of preachers such as Zakir Naik, Muslim leadership and religious authority in India are still essentially local, whether conservative or progressive, reformist or Sufi, political or social and cultural. Given the diversity and fragmentation of Indian Muslims, this is not likely to change anytime soon.

At the same time, the choice of ministries has dramatically increased. Traditional Muslim networks have used the opportunities provided by the media and globalization age to revive their hold on their adherents. But so too have new activists managed to establish themselves successfully in the Islamic field.

More than anything else, Islamic action and debate in India are framed by the social and economic condition of the Muslim community. Muslim clerics and intellectuals increasingly go public with their positions and demands. The lines of distinction between religious, social, and political activism have grown more blurred than before. Muslims are availing of the public and democratic space in India not only to secure and defend their rights but also to propagate their views in all their diversity.

Although the main national political parties will not likely be replaced in the representation of Muslim interests, on a local and regional level Muslim leaders will increasingly act independently. They will thus strengthen communal politics but also contribute to empowering marginalized sections of society. It will depend on the major political parties how well this potential for mobilization is successfully integrated into the mainstream.

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Religious Figures, Insurgency, and Jihad in Southern Afghanistan

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NOTE The views expressed in this essay should not be construed as an official position or policy of the U.S. government, Department of Defense, or Naval Postgraduate School. This article would have been virtually impossible to complete had it not been for the generous data supplied to the author by a colleague and Kandahar City resident under the pseudonym Conrad Jennings. His data, based on observations and interviews conducted over the last three years in Loy Kandahar, complemented much of the author's own data gathered in Kandahar and Helmand in August–September 2008 and May–June 2009. The author would also like to thank Matthew Dearing, Matthew Dupee, M. Chris Mason, Wali Ahmed Shaaker, Ahmad Waheed, and two anonymous reviewers for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay examines the social and political roles of religious figures in southern Afghanistan in an attempt to develop a more nuanced understanding of the present insurgency.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Islamic groups and Afghan *mullahs* play a critical role in politics in southern Afghanistan. The Taliban, Deobandis, Sufis, and Tablighi Jamaat are the most important religious groups and influences in southern Afghanistan.
- Religion and politics are blurred as religious authorities frequently shift between religious and political roles. The West has had a tendency to misunderstand the relevance and implications of these roles.
- Jihad is an important feature of Islamic life in southern Afghanistan. Large numbers of southern insurgents are waging jihad for the implementation of *sharia* (Islamic law). Several predominant religious figures and influences tend to advocate jihad. The West has underestimated the role of jihad in the present Taliban movement.
- The *ulema* council in southern Afghanistan represents a sector of the clergy that has remained relatively un-radicalized by war. Insurgents and jihadists have frequently assassinated members of this council because it offers legitimate opposition to the Taliban's radicalization of young madrasah students and unemployed villagers.
- The political activities of two Islamic groups that represent a large number of rural and poor Afghans are misunderstood. Some Sufi groups in Kandahar have allied with insurgents since 2003 and have promoted rural resistance to secular authority. The Tablighi Jamaat, though avowedly apolitical and detached from the insurgency, has a relationship with the *mujahedeen* who regularly attend this group's meetings.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Political and military strategies aimed at countering the Taliban insurgency while ignoring the Taliban jihad are ill-founded and will probably not succeed.
- Currently there is very little contact between NATO or ISAF and the ulema of southern Afghanistan. Rather than stereotype all religious leaders and institutions as militant fundamentalist, policies that incorporate certain religious groups into civil society should be considered.
- There is a critical need to fix the corrupt justice system in Afghanistan. A central component of the Taliban's strategy to win the trust and confidence of the Afghan population is based on the role of Taliban mullahs as arbitrators of individual and community disputes. This "shadow" justice system is proving very popular.

> *The more we stress Islam as a unit of analysis, the more we face the dangers of abstraction and unwarranted generalization. Islam keeps us mired in debates about normativity, where an emphasis on Muslims allows us to appreciate the dynamic nature of Islam as a lived experience.*[1]

Religious authorities play a critical role in the present conflict in Afghanistan.[2] Consider, for example, the fact that virtually all Taliban leaders, from the senior regional leadership down to subcommanders at the district level, are mullahs[3] (religious leaders).[4] Indeed it is reasonable to argue that the present conflict in Afghanistan represents a classic insurgency wrapped in the religious narratives of jihad.[5] Although a broad majority of the foot soldiers in this insurgency might be "accidental guerrillas,"[6] the leaders are for the most part committed Afghan religious figures.[7] Hence, to understand this conflict and its nuances, it is important to attempt to understand the religious figures and phenomena in Afghanistan as well as their societal roles.[8]

The role of religious figures in insurgencies and jihads has been a mainstay of Afghanistan's history. David Edwards argues that Afghan religious personalities are central to the moral authority as well as to the "contradictions" of Afghan society. These contradictions together with the "artificiality of the Afghan nation-state" reflect critical, historical components of the "deep structure" of Afghan conflict.[9] Regimes ranging from Hamid Karzai's to the era of Amanullah Khan (1919–29) have been existentially threatened by, and have had difficulties in subduing, rural religious conservative insurgencies. This has especially been the case when Afghan state authority has been perceived to challenge or offend traditional Islamic values. The national political dominance in Afghan politics of organized religious groups compared to dynastic monarchical groups, however, is a rather new phenomenon.[10] Historically, the degree of regime success in subduing an Afghan insurgency has largely been a function of the extent to which the regime is viewed as legitimate in the eyes of the population. Critical here is the fact that since the time of the Achaemenids and the Parthians history has demonstrated that the legitimacy of Afghan governance is derived from two immutable sources: dynastic sources, usually in the form of monarchies and tribal patriarchies, and religious sources.[11] This problem of legitimacy is especially acute at the local and village level of rural Pashtun society, for whom dynastic and religious authority has been paramount for over a thousand years.[12]

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[1] Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007), 20.

[2] Unless otherwise specified, the term "religious figures of authority" extends to include the Taliban as well as other figures who would not necessarily identify themselves as such or who work together with the government.

[3] Author's interview with senior State Department and Department of Defense analysts and officials, Washington, D.C., March 2009. It should be noted, however, that there are many cases where a Taliban commander will adopt (or be given) the title "mullah"—still implicitly suggesting the importance of religious figures in this insurgency/jihad.

[4] Traditionally mullahs have served as village spiritual advisors as well as elementary teachers and are paid by donations from the community, often supplementing their income through farming or a trade. Mullahs vary considerably by educational background from being illiterate to having some *madrassah* (Islamic school) education.

[5] For a discussion of Taliban narratives, see Thomas H. Johnson, "The Taliban Insurgency and an Analysis of *Shabnamah* (Night Letters)," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18, no. 3 (September 2007): 317–44.

[6] On "accidental guerrillas," see David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Kilcullen argues that an accidental guerrilla is an individual motivated to fight due to an encroachment on the local social network or way of life.

[7] Some observers argue that the social changes made during the 1980s Soviet-Afghan war are what gave power to religious leaders and village mullahs. See, for example, Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 70. It is also important to note that millions of Afghan refugees settled in Pakistan during the anti-Soviet jihad and were indoctrinated by Islamist mullahs in these camps. Many of these refugees eventually returned to Afghanistan as committed Islamists.

[8] See generally, Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[9] David Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 1–32.

[10] William Maley, "Introduction: Interpreting the Taliban," in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. William Maley (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 8. Until the rise of the Taliban mullahs, overt religious figures never held political power nationally in Afghanistan.

The objective of this essay is to briefly address issues of Islam, politics, and the dynamics of religious authority in southern Afghanistan—the traditional spiritual center of the country and a significant focus of Taliban insurgent activity.[13] In doing so, this essay will examine the following topics: the cultural and religious mores and tropes of Loy Kandahar, the *ulema shura*[14] of southern Afghanistan, the role that the Afghan media plays in legitimizing figures of religious authority and how certain religious figures manipulate this media attention, the Taliban's strategic use of symbols and the media to gain legitimacy, and the Tablighi Jamaat and Sufis in southern Afghanistan. These extremely complex topics will be addressed using anecdotal experience and evidence, interviews conducted in the region over the last few years, and other data gathered, in part, in greater southern Afghanistan.

The fundamental question that this paper seeks to address is that of Islam's public persona: who speaks for Islam in Afghanistan? The extent of the historical and cultural tradition of these religious figures' political involvement is then examined, for where there is religious influence there is also bound to be some element of power play. Subsidiary questions look into what the sources of these religious figures' influence are, how these sources are changing, and what the fundamental factors of this influence are—i.e. the base societal conditions in southern Afghanistan and how they shape the way religious figures can operate.

Southern Afghanistan is an interesting case study in part because so little has been written on the exact dynamics of the interaction between religion and politics, even for a group as prominent as the Taliban. The area of "greater Kandahar" remains the spiritual and strategic heart of the present conflict, and as such an increased understanding of the religious dimension can help prevent mistakes borne of ignorance and impoverished assumptions. There is no doubt that religious figures have, are, and will continue to play a central role in militant mobilizations in Afghanistan. Understanding such mobilizations is ultimately the goal of this essay.

Cultural and Religious Influences in Southern Afghanistan

Nearly all Afghans are Muslim, with Islam serving as a common frame of reference and key cognitive driver for the vast majority of the population. Undoubtedly, Islam is the only characteristic that nearly all Afghans have in common. Yet popular Islamic ideas and beliefs are rooted in a mix of culture, self-interpreted religious views, tribal values, money, influence, and personal connections. Although religion has clearly helped to shape Afghan values systems and codes of behavior for generations, it would nevertheless be wrong to infer that this fact results in unanimity of opinion concerning all things Muslim. Islam is not a monolithic entity in Afghanistan just as

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[11] On Afghan governance during this period, see Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[12] See Thomas H. Johnson and W. Chris Mason, "Refighting the Last War: Afghanistan and the Vietnam Template," *Military Review* (November–December 2009): 4–5; and Dupree, *Afghanistan*. For an excellent review of political legitimacy in Afghanistan, see Thomas Barfield, "Problems of Establishing Legitimacy in Afghanistan," *Iranian Studies* 37 (2004): 263–69; and Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics) (forthcoming, 2010).

[13] It is important to note that the terms "Taliban" and "Talib" are not used here as a blanket term for anyone opposed to the Afghan government but rather as a term meaning religious students educated in *madaris* (Islamic schools, plural of madrasah).

[14] *Ulema* is a collective term for doctors of Islamic sciences and graduates of Islamic studies or private studies with an *alim* (one who possesses the quality of *lim* or knowledge of Islamic law, theology, and traditions). A *shura* is a council or consultative body.

Christianity is not a monolithic entity in the United States or Europe. Afghan Islam encompasses a wide range of opinions—including reformists, foreign-educated progressives, ascetics, radicals, Salafists, Deobandis, Talibs, and conservative judicial scholars, among others. All of these can be pro-government or anti-government (and sometimes both), West-loving or West-hating; there is no uniformity of opinion. Moreover, it would be a mistake to assume that all southern political, economic, and social behavior is driven merely by religious dynamics. A variety of intervening variables such as the urban-rural divide, geography, culture, and *quams*[15] and affinity groups are also important influences that must be recognized.[16] These intervening variables of influence will be the next topic of assessment and discussion.

Rural Population Distribution

The most important and relevant division within southern Afghan society, the divide between urban and rural populations, is often glossed over by Western analysts. Cleavages between the urban and rural populations of Loy (Greater) Kandahar[17] have long been a driving force of southern politics, social interactions, and conflicts as well as aspects of Islamic practice.

Population statistics dating back to 2004 (the best and most recent data available) demonstrate that only 12% of southern Afghans belong to urban communities in Loy Kandahar; rural society makes up 88% of the population (see **Figure 1**). When you look outside Kandahar Province, the figures become even starker with only 5%, 2%, and 4% for the residents of Helmand, Uruzgan, and Zabul provinces respectively living in urban environments. The south is primarily a rural environ and this fact is important when we consider the role religious figures play in southern Afghanistan. There is no question that urban and rural Afghanistan have distinct cultures.[18] These cultures in turn play a significant role in determining how a particular person or group of people will behave and respond to certain types of authority figures—be they religious or political, or conservative, moderate, or radical.

Attempts to modernize the south (and the never-ending conflict between the traditional and the modern) are central concerns of the area's ideological battleground. Attempts to institute modern political or social agendas have not necessarily been met with enthusiasm in Loy Kandahar. Consider, for example, how the south responded to the recent "democratic" elections held in Afghanistan. While the vast majority of Afghan provinces had registered voter turnout rates for the 2005 provincial elections of 60%–70%, the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, and Zabul had rates of 25.3%, 36.8%, 23.4%, and 20% respectively.[19] Interviews conducted this past summer among village elders and leaders in Kandahari districts suggest that there was little interest in the 2009 presidential election or local provincial and district elections in the south.[20] In fact, it was further posited during these interviews that the Taliban were not overly interested in attempting to disrupt these elections because of the apparent apathy of the Kandaharis toward

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[15] *Quams* refers to a communal group whose sociological basis may vary; it may be a clan—in tribal zones—a village, an ethnic group, an extended family, or a professional group.

[16] Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, 242.

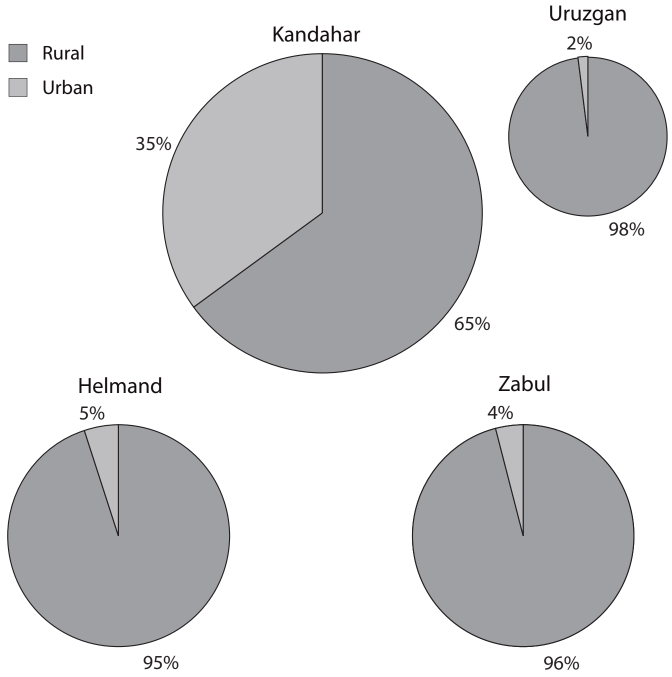
[17] Loy Kandahar refers to the geographical area encompassing Uruzgan, Helmand, Kandahar, and Zabul provinces.

[18] Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, 10–29.

[19] Sean M. Maloney, "A Violent Impediment: The Evolution of Insurgent Operations in Kandahar Province 2003–07," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 19, no. 2 (June 2008): 205.

[20] Personal interviews of district and village elders, Kandahar City, May–June 2009.

FIGURE 1 Population distribution in Southern Afghanistan



SOURCE Afghanistan Central Statistics Office, 2004.

them.[21] Though the day of what would ultimately turn out to be a blatantly corrupt election did see a spike in insurgent activities, it was not as intense as the Americans or International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) expected.

The village continues to be a pivotal and defining institution of life in southern Afghanistan, and many villagers view Kandahar City with suspicion and disdain. For a society that—at least on one level—is as traditional as Afghanistan, the concern of much of the southern rural population is that Kandahar City is a source of corruption and iniquity. Indeed, the Taliban regularly play on this belief and consider the city as the area where infidels live. Further, the Taliban use this justification to legitimize their attacks in the city.[22]

Geography

The effect of Afghanistan's geography is often underestimated as a factor that influences social behavior. In southern Afghanistan, the distances involved, high levels of insecurity, and the sometimes difficult terrain between villages have helped give rise to the "one-family-one-mosque" phenomenon, which is discussed below. In addition, isolated and fairly inaccessible locations are prevalent in the south, helping to create a culture of "traveling mullahs" who satisfy the need for figures of authority—sometimes simply to mediate local disputes. Many of these mullahs also help to solidify the Taliban narrative through preaching and, indeed, encouraging and prompting individuals to join the insurgency against Kabul and the "infidels."

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[21] Personal interviews with district and village elders, Kandahar City, May–June 2009.

[22] Personal interview with Kandahari citizen, Kandahar City, September 2008. This same interviewee told the story of a friend who was apprehended by Taliban. This person told his abductors that he was a nurse—not a government employee or official—and served all people. The Taliban replied that they had "permission" and a duty to kill all "Muslim infidels" (but not their women and children) who live in Kandahar City.

The geography of irrigated lands of southern Afghanistan especially around Kandahar City has also played a role in defining certain social norms and influences. As Thomas Barfield has suggested "these rich irrigated lands…[supported] a hierarchical political system that required large agricultural surpluses to sustain them. It supported an elite of landowners whose tribal followers had in many cases been reduced to their economic clients."[23] This factor has significantly influenced the agrarian economy of southern Afghanistan as well as the development of important landowner families in the politics and social structure of the region, such as the Durrani Mohammadzais and Popalzais.

Kandahar's typography also influences the security situation in the province. The southern half of Kandahar is dominated by sparsely inhabited deserts and a porous border with Pakistan, accented by the large border-crossing at Spin Boldak, where both licit and illicit goods transit through every day. The northern portion of Kandahar consists of *wadis* (dry riverbeds) and hilly terrain and lacks reliable roadways, making the region ideal for guerilla activity and the use of improvised explosive devices. Furthermore, the rocky, inhospitable terrain of western Uruzgan Province, which borders northern Kandahar, has provided a necessary refuge for the training, resting, and cycling of Taliban foot soldiers into the southern Afghanistan provinces.

Pashtun Society and Culture

Pashtun society and culture is the dominant influence in southern Afghanistan, not least because Pashtuns make up the vast majority of the population and because the south has been historically the heartland of Pashtun influence in Afghanistan as a whole. Exact demographic statistics are impossible to come by, and the last accurate census was conducted decades ago, but it is safe to assume that at least 85% of the population in southern Afghanistan is ethnically Pashtun.

At the expense of overgeneralizing, Pashtuns tend to be pragmatic individuals who usually come to recognize early in their lives the core importance of their religion and relations with religious authorities.[24] Village mullahs, whose role in rural communities has evolved over the centuries, are complemented by religious figures such as *sayyeds*. The family lineage of sayyeds is traced to the lineage of the Prophet, *qazis*, or religious law experts/shariah judges—either *mawlawi*, who teach at a higher level in religious schools (madaris) or *pirs*, who teach at Sufi madaris or at collective prayer sites where Sufis congregate.

Depending on a particular situation, people will be more or less tempered by their interactions with and the roles of local religious figures, resulting in one of the reasons that the religious make-up and identity of many southern Pashtuns is so difficult to define. For a traditional religious elder—a mullah or mawlawi, for instance—mediation and conflict resolution is an essential part of his mandate and identity, but this role also forms part of the basis of that same identity and authority. Both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan as well as in the border areas, religious elders have played this role since the early nineteenth century. Sana Haroon, for example, explores the little-understood traditional role of the rural mullah as the Pashtun equivalent of the circuit-riding judge in nineteenth century America, serving as an impartial arbiter of disputes between clans (*khels*).[25] Even in a *jirga* (a village council that has legislative and judicial authority for the tribal community) the authority of the elder mullah in convoking religious legitimacy over the proceedings is greater than many appreciate, especially in the form of mediation. The implications of this authority for the present insurgency in Afghanistan are significant, and the Taliban are well aware of this and use it to their advantage.[26] Nevertheless, in deference to the implicit implications of the role of the rural mullah, religious authority only extends as far as the people let it. The idea of near-total subservience to figures of religious authority has little basis in fact in Afghanistan. A good example of this that is little understood in the West is the obscure phenomenon of "one-family-one-mosque" that is especially prominent in southern rural areas.

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[23] Thomas J. Barfield, "Weapons of the Not So Weak in Afghanistan: Pashtun Agrarian Structure and Tribal Organizations for Times of War and Peace" (paper presented as part of the Agrarian Studies Colloquium Series entitled "Hinterlands, Frontiers, Cities and States: Transactions and Identities," Yale University, New Haven, February 2007), 3.

[24] Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 70–97.

Family Culture

Loy Kandahari villages will often consist entirely of members of a single extended family (*kahol*) or clan (khel). Where different families or groups coexist in one area, there will often be one mosque for each of the individual families. Though particularly prominent in the south, this has been observed in communities from Khost Province in eastern Afghanistan to Farah Province in the southwest.[27]

Although this phenomenon is also witnessed in the Afghan environs of rich or wealthy landowners who are known to construct mosques to help improve their public standing, one would expect it to be rarer in poverty-stricken rural areas. The one-mosque-one-family concept promotes religious dynamics that are highly personal and relatively immune to rhetoric and manipulation by outside forces, and it is often difficult for mass movements and popular uprisings to significantly penetrate these mosques. For example, a prominent family will not only be responsible for physically building the mosque but also for the selection of the mosque's mullah. During a recent research trip in southern Afghanistan, the author inquired to a prominent landowner, who had built a new mosque for his family in the village of Deh-e Bagh in the Dand District of Kandahar Province, as to what would happen if the mullah of the mosque started preaching in a way inconsistent with his family's beliefs or political orientations. The elder responded that "this would never happen because I hired the mullah and I would fire him if such preaching occurred. He works for me and will follow my instructions concerning such matters."

While the one-family-one-mosque concept has a tendency to insulate people from certain aspects of political Islam, the concept of jihad has the opposite effect.[28] Historically, the connection between Islam and jihad has been extremely important for Kandahar with disenfranchised Afghans responding to the unifying call of jihad as a reaction to perceived corruption, government failure, and outside interference.[29] In fact, jihad has traditionally represented a kind of public sphere of Kandahari Islam, where religious authority figures can command more immediate support and obedience of the public. The call of "Islam under threat" is an extremely powerful incentive for public and communal action and historically has been a consistent motivator and force for Kandaharis to stand behind.

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[25] Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (London: C. Hurst and Co. Publishers, 2007).

[26] The author is indebted to M. Chris Mason for bringing this interesting point to his attention.

[27] Based on the author's discussions with and empirical observations of Conrad Jennings. The author also observed this phenomena first-hand in villages in Kandahar's Dand District in June 2009.

[28] It seems reasonable to assume that "privatizing" mosques significantly dampens the collective Islam, where the mosque serves as the meeting place for social events or for the rallying of its members to combat an injustice or perceived threat. See Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, 31.

[29] See Barbara D. Metcalf, "'Traditionalist' Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs," Social Science Research Council, http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/metcalf.htm, 1–8.

Everyday Islamic Traditions

Islam, of course, is not just about following rules. The core of Islam—as with most religions—is the provision of principles for living a moral life, and the regular daily cycle of prayers can remind the faithful of these values. It is for this reason that Kandaharis will often make reference to the idea of living a more moral life, even if they do not necessarily always follow it to its conclusion. A sampling of the key dimensions of southern Afghanistan's Islamic traditions is presented below.

Namaz. Islam affects the everyday life of a southern Afghan in a variety of ways. The five daily prayers, *namaz*,[30] for the most part, are integrated into the rhythm of the Afghan day. It is not seen as an interruption to stop what one is doing to pray. A corollary example of this is the use of a *patu* (*patkai*) on which to pray. A woolen blanket used during the day (especially during the winter) as a wrap-around cloak is taken off, put on the floor, and prayers are made there. The patu is a good indication and reflective of the effortless ubiquity of Islam in the daily life of Afghans.

Zakat. Another Islamic concept that demands mention is zakat (alms for the poor). *Zakat* is followed and often employed by the Taliban as a motivating force to encourage villagers to contribute funds or assets to their cause.

Sharia courts. Yet another extremely important dynamic are *sharia* (Islamic law) courts that represent a popular alternative to government legal institutions, which have been marred by years of corruption and inefficient legal processes. In numerous areas, especially in the rural southern Pashtun hinterlands, the Taliban are perceived as not only doing a better job of governance—via "shadow" provincial and district governments—and providing justice than Kabul; the Taliban are also seen as more legitimate than the distant and unpopular leadership in Kabul.[31] Throughout southern Afghanistan, the Taliban have established parallel government systems including provincial and district level administrators, police chiefs, and judges; just how effective or widespread these informal power structures are is difficult to assess.[32] But one element of the Taliban's shadow government that has been particularly popular throughout Loy Kandahar is the alternative judicial system. Today, faced with a choice between a protracted case before an inscrutable system of state justice, in which he who can pay the highest bribes to the most people over the longest period of time invariably wins, the Pashtuns are instead turning in droves to the rapid, transparent justice of the mullahs of the Taliban. Justice and, particularly, mediation are indeed a traditional part of the mullahs' role in the community and the Taliban have masterfully played on this reality.[33]

Madrasah. The institution of the madrasah, too, is an important feature of the day-to-day landscape of southern Afghanistan. The role that madaris have played in the political life of southern Afghanistan has fluctuated over the years and, since the 1980s, permanently changed in character—endowing the religious clergy with political power and influence. This culminated in the "clerical revolution" (with popular backing) of the Taliban in 1994. According to Olivier Roy, the Afghan Taliban is the only contemporary Islamic movement whose basis is a network of rural madaris, effectively tapping the well of rural southern Afghan conservatism and puritanism.[34] The full history of this change is beyond the scope of this short essay, but the profound effect this had on communities should not be underestimated.

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[30] At dawn (*fajr*), at noon (*dhuhr*), in the afternoon (*asr*), at sunset (*maghrib*), and at nightfall (*ishaa*).

[31] This was a common theme among the 60 or so village elders, tribal leaders, and even some Afghan government leaders interviewed by the author in various locations in Afghanistan, August–September, 2008 and May–June 2009. It is important to note, however, that the desire of locals for Taliban court systems because of corruption and inefficiency of the government's system. In rural communities most of the legal matters relating to land and crime would never have been legislated by the government (even in the 1970s) and as such that people go to the Taliban courts is not so surprising. For a recent discussion of the Taliban court systems, see "Afghanistan: In Search of Justice," National Public Radio, webpage, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=98121740.

[32] "Taliban Shadow Gov't Pervades Afghanistan," *CBS News*, December 27, 2008, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/12/27/world/main4687823_page2.shtml.

[33] For an important scholarly statement and analysis of the impact of culture on Afghan law, see Thomas Barfield, "Culture and Custom in Nation-Building: Law in Afghanistan," *Maine Law Review* 60, no. 2 (2008): 358–73.

Jihad and a History of Conflict

As suggested above, jihad is another important feature of Islamic life in southern Afghanistan. In many respects waging jihad has become a cornerstone of Islamic identity for many southern Afghans, as they have assumed the struggle for the predominance of God's will, both within oneself and between other people. Though this will be explored more fully in later sections of this paper, it is very important to understand that a large number of southern insurgents are fighting in support of jihad and the implementation of sharia among other religious and ideological positions.

In contrast with the sheer numbers who volunteered for jihad in the 1980s, however, the calls of mullah networks are perhaps a less important influence in the present conflict than the chronic unemployment and social stagnation as of 2009. In the 1980s social structures were more active and influential, creating a framework for recruitment. And while this is not necessarily the case today, it would nevertheless be imprudent to discount the importance of jihad in southern religious life. This is especially true when assessing the motivations of the local as well as regional leaders of the Taliban.

There are a variety of other factors that influence the politics and relations of Afghans in the south. Conflict itself is an important factor that since the early 1970s has had a preeminent influence on southern society. Over 30 years of conflict have given the people of the south a somewhat unpredictable nature—in part stemming from a desire for self-preservation—that sometimes can work in opposition to core cultural and societal values of Islam or *Pashtunwali* (the unwritten Pashtun tribal code). In the wartime atmosphere of Kandahar, Helmand, or Zabul, there is a strong feeling of polarization, that others "are either with us or against us." This applies across the spectrum of the population's relations with the government, tribal elders, businessmen, and the Taliban, as well as to the foreign forces operating in the south.[35]

One of the very significant consequences of the Afghan's anti-Soviet jihad of the late 1970s and 1980s was the destruction of the Pashtun temporal *maliks*[36] and *khans* and their replacement by Islamist mullahs as power brokers. This became even more important when Pakistan helped push the Taliban into Afghanistan in the 1990s.[37] Pakistan purposefully deconstructed the traditional tribal order in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in an effort to promote radical Islamist mullahs who could recruit for the Afghan mujahideen in their conflict against the Soviet occupiers.[38]

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[34] Olivier Roy, "Has Islamism a Future in Afghanistan?" in Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn*, 204.

[35] Personal interviews with district and village elders, Kandahar City, May–June 2009.

[36] The British first introduced the *maliki* system, which Pakistan retained. This system was aimed at creating reliable local elite whose loyalty could be rewarded by the state through special status, financial benefits, and official recognition of influence over the tribes. It was intended to provide a single spokesman for a khel with whom the British administration could deal in an attempt to replicate the Sandeman system among the egalitarian Pashtun.

[37] Ahmed Rashid delves into the evolution of Pakistan's support for radical Islamists and the Taliban as part of a comprehensive Afghan strategy. See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Pres, 2001), 183–89.

[38] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 67.

Political and Economic Elites

Islam should not be seen as the only influence on the lives of southern Afghans. In Kandahar City the top class of businessmen or political leadership are not necessarily the most principled group, nor are they especially religious. Money, narcotics, and influence are important factors for this group, and religion has a more limited impact on their lives as compared to other segments of society. In fact, to understand Kandahari society one needs to understand the three secular layers of influence in Kandahar: family, khel, and tribal interests; licit business relationships; and illicit business relationships. For example, today Kandahari political, economic, and social dynamics cannot be fully understood without considering the tribal relations and competitions between, for example, the Popolzai, Barakzai, Noorzai, Alikozai, and Achakzai tribal entities and respective leaders such as Ahmed Wali Karzai, Mohammad Shah, Amir Lalai, Gul Agha Sherzai, Khalid Pashtun, Tor Jan, Aref Noorzai, Haji Safullah, Haji Mirwais Noorzai, Karimullah Naqib, Haji Agha Lalai Dastageri, Khan Mohammad, Talih Agha Karimullah, Haji Kareem Khan, and Abdul Razziq. In addition, the explicit business enterprises of leading Kandahari powerbrokers such as Ahmed Wali Karzai and Razia Agha Sherzai, as well as his brother Gul Agha Sherzai, who is a former governor of Kandahar and powerbroker extraordinaire, and their patrons are of similar importance. Finally, the milieu of contracts emanating from the ISAF's presence in southern Afghanistan and who gets what from whom are critical in mapping the Kandahari power elite.

These political and financial elites of course do not hesitate to seem more or less religious as the situation demands. Religious figures thus may not have specific temporal power; however, they often prove instrumental in certain transactions that would otherwise be problematic.

Religion and Authority in Southern Afghanistan

> *[We should regard] as political all actors and activities involved in the establishment, maintenance or contestation of particular visions of public morality ("the good") and of social order.*[39]

Both mullahs and formally trained Islamic legal scholars, *alim* (singular of ulema), are significant and influential religious figures in southern Afghanistan. While village mullahs have ideally studied Islamic traditions (*hadith*) and Islamic law (*fiqh*), their actual formal education will vary from basically none to significant madrasah training. All mullahs, however, will lead mosque prayer sessions and conduct religious rituals such as birth rites, marriage, and funeral services at the village level. They are basically "ritual practitioners," in the words of Oliver Roy.[40]

Mullahs have traditionally served as spiritual advisors to village elders, jurgas, and shuras and, for the most part, have been inconsequential to village politics. It has also been suggested that mullahs serve as the custodians of the principals of pashtunwali and "use their religious authority to pass binding judgments rooted in [*pashtunwali*] in the area of the tribal *jirga*."[41] This is an important social dynamic in southern Pashtun Afghanistan.

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[39] Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, 6.

[40] Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 28.

[41] Haroon, *Frontier of Faith*, 68.

Historically the vast majority of mullahs have rarely been militant. A mullah's basic legitimacy customarily has come from his application of sharia and defense of the Islamic community.[42] The role of the mullah has changed drastically with the rise of the Taliban, however. Though they were once primarily apolitical, serving the role of a glorified notary public, mullahs are now the leading political and ideological figures and voices of the Afghan insurgency. The present role of many mullahs in providing narratives and information to the village population has become a critical source of their influence and is the subject of the next section of this paper.

The Roles and Authority of Mullahs in Southern Afghanistan

Who controls the flow of information is vitally important in southern Afghanistan, and the control of religious information is intimately influenced by language and the relative lack of education realized in the southern Pashtun areas. Most of the population does not understand Arabic. This results in the Muslim faithful being almost entirely dependent on the local mullah to teach and interpret the words and lessons of the Koran. In many instances, especially in the rural southern hinterland, the mullah himself has no in-depth knowledge of Arabic and thus will rely on local traditions and oral narratives in his religious teachings and lessons. This interpretive duty results in considerable power for the mullahs.

The control of information also has an impact on the role of religious figures as mediators; they are seen as being both impartial and possessing a broader perspective as well as possessing pertinent legal expertise that allows them to pass judgment on certain issues. For example, the institution of the "Friday sermon," a speech to the gathered faithful, which often touches on political issues (remember that there is considerably less distinction between politics and religion when compared with much Western religious thought). In many respects this sermon is an extension of their authority. Mullahs now regularly pass judgment on local political or governmental personalities as well as critique political and social situations.

Mullahs gain some of this authority through the receipt of foreign aid, much in the form of zakat, particularly from Middle Eastern and South Asian sources. Some of this aid, distributed through mosques, is most certainly aimed at strengthening the authority of the religious figures. Mullahs have become a focal point of resource distribution, and as such their authority has been strengthened.

Ulema Council

> *This religious interpretation of the rebellion was promoted by the* ulema *and the* mullahs*, a group strongly united in their struggle against the communist authorities, who had proclaimed a* jihad *against the regime. Represented everywhere in the country, they constituted an informal but efficient network for the transmission of information, as the rebellion of 1929 had already shown. In instances where the uprising was coordinated, for example in Logar [sic] or in Ghazni, the* ulema *played the leading role. In most insurrections the sermons of the* mullahs *were crucial: the people often assembled at the mosque before marching on the government command post. In the mosques, the habitual scene for discussion among the villagers, the* mullah *would use his influence to put forward a religious exegesis of resistance to authority, and his intervention often served to convince the hesitant by removing their doubts as*

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[42] Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 3, 29.

> *to the illegitimacy of the authorities.…With the proclamation of* jihad *by the ulema the rebellion took on a universal nature.*[43]

The social and political role of mullahs and ulema has been crucial throughout the past 40 years of Afghan history. Looking back even further to the past two centuries, and including the Pakistani border areas, a trend of increased influence is evident, legitimized by a wide variety of dynamics. In Kandahar, mullah networks and the ulema council[44] operate side by side as of 2009, but broadly speaking they are ideologically opposed to each other. The legitimacy of both these groups is drawn from a variety of sources, but three factors are worth considering here: tribes, age, and wealth.

Regardless of what members of ulema may say in interviews, the tribe that someone comes from is an important factor in the level of respect for that person—even before graduating from a madrasah.[45] Similarly, age is important only in that it takes time for an alim to mature as a figure and gain respect in society. Shia ulema tend to be younger, and a younger, more active member of the Shia clergy can advance and make a name for himself—within reason. It is doubtful, however, that Afghanistan, outside of the Hazarajat, will ever be fertile ground for the Shia.[46] Thus, ulema in Afghanistan tend to be older members of society.

Wealth—of paramount importance to the non-religious or tribal oligarchy—is relatively unimportant for the ulema and mullah network. Popular opinion, as well as a whole host of folklore and proverbs, considers mullahs as de facto poor. The image of the mullah asking for money from the rich man is a common stereotype in Kandahari society. In many respects, however, this is a self-created narrative. In fact, grants of land and financial contributions to the mosques, and the establishment of madaris connected to the mosques, have served to make the mullahs among the wealthiest men in some rural areas in terms of total assets.[47]

In Kandahar, aside from the significant role that the religious clergy took post-1994, there was no ulema council in the form that currently exists. The traditional role of the religious clergy was to assist in religious administrative duties (all the traditional aspects that we commonly associate with the clergy), to serve as part of the Haj and Awqaf ministry, and to serve in the Ministry of Justice. The ulema council in the south (with Kandahar as the focal point) represents a sector of the religious clergy that has remained relatively unradicalized by war. For example, consider Haji Mahmoud (originally from the Khakrez District of Kandahar Province).[48] He is a writer, poet, and member of the ulema council and views his role as being quite simple: encouraging those who wish for a continuation of the conflict to start interacting with society in a more peaceful manner.[49]

Members of the ulema council claim a salary of around $200 each month. Aside from their general duties, one of their main activities seems to be producing a government-funded magazine—*Islami Diwa*—each month. The current head of Kandahar's ulema council is Mawlawi Sayyed Mohammad Hanafi (Alizai by tribe and originally from Helmand Province). He was selected and appointed to that position by Asadullah Khaled, the former governor of Kandahar—a fact that helps illustrate one aspect of the relatively unclear relationship between the Afghan government and the ulema in Kandahar.

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[43] Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 106–7.

[44] See the appendix for the text of the Ulema Shura Declaration, Kabul, March 19, 2009. One of the author's interviewees suggested that a number of the members in the ulema council were only elders. Author's interview, Kandahar City, September 2008.

[45] Based on numerous personal interviews, Kandahar City, August and September 2008.

[46] This is not to suggest that Shia do not exist in the south. There are important pockets of Shia Pashtuns in the Loy Kandahar, but their societal and political importance is slight.

[47] The author is indebted to M. Chris Mason for this point.

[48] Haji Mahmoud served as a minister of parliament in Kabul during the reign of Zahir Shah.

[49] Interview of Haji Mahmoud by Conrad Jennings.

The council consists of approximately 60 or 70 clerics from within the city and 5 or 6 from every district in the province, leading to a total of 140 or 150 mullahs and mawlawis who participate in the council. Some of the clergy in the city occasionally offer advice or counsel to the Afghan government (to the governor, for example), and there is even the possibility of outreach to Kabul via the central ulema council there and its head, Shinwari Saheb (Borhanullah Shinwari, former Afghan attorney general). The council's political "face" also extends as far as appearances in the local media: members write articles for newspapers and magazines, speak regularly on radio programs, and are quite frequently invited as guests onto local television stations.

Interactions of the Afghan domestic security apparatus—for example, Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS)—with the ulema in Kandahar are clouded in secrecy, and it is difficult to determine the nature of explicit relationships with any degree of certainty. It is relatively clear though that government agencies are at the very least attempting to use the ulema as their eyes and ears in the districts. With tens of thousands of agents around the country, the ulema and mullah networks around the province would be a ripe resource for domestic security services, but it is highly likely that there are a significant number of paid informants among the ulema.

Some members of the religious clergy—certain prominent families within the city, for example—use religious legitimacy as a way to enhance their personal status and business interests. This can be purely an issue of status (for example, being called into advise the governor on a regular basis) or can be financial (i.e., receiving more contracts from foreign militaries for construction projects or private and convoy security duties). There is, however, very little contact between NATO/ISAF and the ulema of southern Afghanistan. In some ways, this is regrettable:

> Lack of familiarity, not knowing how to engage, and political sensitivities in donor home countries can partly explain the lack of engagement from the side of the international community. Further, stereotyping of religious leaders and institutions as militant fundamentalists—often equated with the Taliban and radical madrasas—makes it difficult politically to include religious actors and institutions as partners in civil society. Within the Afghan government and the international community, many seem to be having concerns about making religious actors more powerful by granting them formal authority and recognition.[50]

Assassinations and the Impact of Conflict

Afghan ulema in southern Afghanistan have been targeted by members of the insurgency on a regular basis since 2001. Approximately 24 members of the official ulema council have been killed since 2001, along with dozens of mullahs and other religious figures, including Mawlawi Mohammad Rasoul (killed outside the Qadiri Mosque in Kandahar City), Qari Ahmadullah (killed in his home on March 1, 2009), Mawlawi Abdul Qayyum (shot outside the Red Mosque in Kandahar City), and most well-known Mawlawi Fayyaz, the first president of the ulema council and son of Mawlawi Darab Akhundzada.[51] Mawlawi Fayyaz famously stripped Mullah Omar of his legendary *Amir ul-Mumineen* (commander of the believers or faithful) status during a public sermon (although it is debatable whether Fayyaz actually had the religious authority to do so) and survived numerous attempts against his life before insurgent gunmen eventually succeeded in murdering him.

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[50] Mirwais Wardak, Idrees Zaman, and Kanishka Nawabi, "The Role and Functions of Religious Civil Society in Afghanistan: Case Studies from Sayedabad and Kunduz," *Cooperation for Peace and Unity*, July 2007, 8, http://www.cmi.no/pdf/?file=/afghanistan/doc/Kunduz%20and%20Sayedabad%20Report%20-%20Final.pdf.

Afghan ulema are probably targeted because they offer a legitimate opposition to the radical mobilizations and motivations offered by the Taliban to young madrasah students and the unemployed. This is not to suggest that the insurgency is only primarily motivated by ideology or religion. Many ulema council members are actively and deliberately provocative. They write articles, make pronouncements, and issue statements arguing, for example, that suicide bombing is an illegitimate form of jihad.

It is important to recognize that Afghanistan, and especially southern Afghanistan, is a region where conflict and war have been staples of daily life for over 30 years. This changes a society. Money (and the resultant status it brings) becomes one of the most important assets—people have less opportunity to exercise the luxury of having principles. It is clear that Islam throughout Afghanistan is radicalized and further politicized by conflict.[52] This has resulted in less room for nuance in argumentation or for an intellectually formulated opinion, and this ultimately works against the members of the ulema council. At the same time, conflict also has a tendency to reinforce the need for figures of authority like the mullahs within society.

Media and Religious Authority

> *While new arenas of religious discourse have certainly been created, this does not necessarily mean that the messages, values and norms communicated within these spaces are also new. It can be argued that in many cases traditional forms of authority and articulation work very well in new media spaces, and indeed, have used these spaces to reach out to an expanded audience base.*[53]

Southern Afghanistan is commonly viewed as a provincial backwater, a place where new trends are rare and where ancient and fixed ideas hold sway. The Taliban are supposedly a symptom of this alleged cultural and social malaise; frequently, however, the Taliban are portrayed as being the innovators and consumers of techniques and technologies of the mass media and communication.[54] In fact, this apparent paradox does not exist outside Western analyses of structures of religious authority and their means of communication. The religious clergy are probably the leading authority and experts on nuanced communications in southern Afghanistan. For example, the clergy utilizes locally effective media, from radio to print, to transmit culturally appropriate and resonant messages to a local audience. Likewise, the Taliban in general are extremely effective communicators and run a viable, influential information campaign through the south of the country. Nothing that NATO or ISAF produces approaches this level of effectiveness or sophistication.[55] This effective use of the media in turn strengthens the authority of the communicator. As suggested above, information is one of the most important currencies in southern Afghanistan, and a prominent voice is crucial to establishing oneself as someone who possesses such information, which is exactly the reason why the ulema shura devotes so much time to communication work. The Taliban rightly see the continuation of this work as threatening to the transmission of their messages and thus attempt to stop the work of the ulema through a strategy of assassinations.

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[51] Bashir Ahmad Nadem , "Religious Scholar Shot Dead in Kandahar," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, January 6, 2009, http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=67799; Bashir Ahmad Nazim, "Religious Scholar, Four Guards Killed in Kandahar," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, March 1, 2009, http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=70485; and A. Jamali, "Taliban Forces Are Now Attacking Sunni Leaders in Afghanistan," Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, June 2, 2005, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=30481.

[52] For general information about the influence of conflict on Islam in Afghanistan, see Roy, *Islam and Resistance*.

[53] Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, 323.

[54] "Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?" International Crisis Group, Asia Report, no. 158, July 24, 2008.

The use of media by religious figures of authority is simultaneously targeted and diffuse.[56] Television is one such method, with mullahs and mawlawis frequently being interviewed in the studio or via telephone and consulted as experts. The Taliban manufacture DVDs and video clips suitable for viewing on mobile phones that are distributed to the target audience as well as to Afghan and foreign media outlets.[57] The author, for example, witnessed Taliban videos and musical propaganda being downloaded from one person's cell phone to another through the use of Bluetooth technologies in Kandahar City in June 2009. Radio is employed to similar effect. Newspapers (or publications of a similar style with similar means of distribution) are published by most religious figures of authority. Indeed, newspapers have traditionally been used by political parties and religiously inclined groupings to publically express their views; this practice continues to this day, in Kandahar, Kabul, and throughout the country. As suggested above, the ulema in Kandahar publish a monthly magazine.

The Internet is also used by various groups, although with a higher variance of success. Websites in Afghanistan tend to be less sophisticated than those set up by religious groups in other countries, such as Pakistan and Iran. It is perhaps understandable that Afghanistan should be somewhat behind on this, but the form is not particularly important, as the target audience, for the most part, is not Afghan. This is particularly true of the websites of the Afghan Taliban, which are not used as tools of radicalization for an Afghan target audience. Instead, these websites primarily target an international audience.

Asif Mohseni and Religious Media

The former mujahedeen commander and highly respected Shia religious scholar Asif Mohseni (his name is usually prefixed by either Ayatollah or Sheikh) is a good example of a highly engaged and sometimes pioneering member of Afghanistan's religious clergy who is presently proactively influencing various segments of the Afghan population through the innovative use of religious media. It is instructive to identify and compare the strategies he employs "for Afghanistan's future" with those employed to supposedly similar effect by the Taliban. This case study is not cited with specific reference to southern Afghanistan but, rather, to compare and contrast the use of media employed by the Taliban, and possibly to illustrate a model for a different kind of engagement with figures of religious authority. That is, Mohseni's vision of influence through the media offers an example that other religious figures will probably emulate in the future.

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[55] NATO has the technological capabilities but does not have the requisite linguistic and communicative expertise the Taliban have, which reaches more than just the urban areas. Although NATO can reach an urban audience, it has much more difficulty reaching the majority rural population, over which the Taliban have a virtual monopoly of influence.

[56] The use of mass media by South Asian religious figures is not a new phenomenon. Haroon, *Frontier of Faith*, 68, for example, describes how Pashtun religious figures in what was then India (now the tribal areas of Pakistan) were impressed in the early years of the twentieth century by techniques employed by the Jamaat-i Mujahidin: "Association with the Jamaat-i Mujahidin also heightened the profile of the *mullas* who had hitherto never used sophisticated methods of self-projection like printing presses. Impressed by the methods…such as posting proclamations of *jihad* on trees through Mardan, the Haji Turangzai acquired his own printing press in 1916."

[57] The methods the various groups employ often overlap. Media outlets nominally aligned with the Afghan government and the broad goals of the United States and international administration often rebroadcast these propaganda clips because they are not able to generate enough original content and are thus forced to dance to the Taliban's tune.

The 76-year old Mohseni, originally from Kandahar, led the Shia party Harakat-i-Islami during the 1980s against the Soviets, although he did not take a position in the mujahedeen government that formed in 1992 after the fall of Najibullah. He participated at the Bonn conference in 2001 and was a strong advocate for Shia interests to be reflected in the Afghan constitution. Mohseni receives extensive funding directly from Iran, although the exact amounts are disputed. This funding has been instrumental in the two projects that he has been busy with over the past two years—a new mega-madrasah in Kabul and a television station of his own entitled *Tamadon* (civilization).[58]

Mohseni's madrasah, reportedly built at a cost of at least $5 million and half-funded by Iran, is located in west Kabul and the campus would not look out of place in a considerably more technologically developed and modernized city such as Islamabad or Tehran:

> It's a sweeping co-ed campus, with lecture halls, science labs, and internet cafés. When the madrassa opens fully this year, the curriculum will consist of half Islamic study, half science, math and computer classes. This is, Mohseini [sic] says with a certain gruffness, "a radical break" from traditional syllabi.[59]

Tamadon, launched in 2007, was marketed as an Islamic television channel that could function in opposition to some of the more liberal stations operating out of Kabul (such as *Tolo* or *Aina*).

> We are backward in all aspects. Economically, we are in the 16th or 17th century, but our televisions air ten times sexier films (than Western countries)," said Mohseini [sic]. "This is a scandal and shame for us. We have a thousand calamities and should not be diverted," Mohseini told Reuters.[60]

Tamadon is staffed by competent graduates of a training program partially conducted in Iran (either independently or on secondment to Iranian media outlets). With good equipment and training, Mohseni and his staff are well on their way to achieving a level of influence across Afghanistan that would not otherwise have been possible.

Prominent Islamic Groups and Influences in Southern Afghanistan

Just as the distinctions between the religious and the political[61] are blurred in Pashtun and Afghan culture, so do the spheres and figures of authority frequently shift from the religious to the political (and back again). These dynamics are influenced by the respective experiences and historical roles that these figures played during the 1980s anti-Soviet jihad and the ensuing civil war. Yet it is important to recognize that certain sectors of the population and influence groups prominent in other parts of the country were entirely absent in the major southern Afghan politico-religious debates of the past 30 years. For example, the Afghan Islamists of the 1970s and their ideological discussions at Kabul University[62] (and later in Peshawar during the 1980s)—Burhanuddin Rabbani, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Ahmad Shah Massoud—were not very important or influential for the Talibs of the south.[63] Ultimately, many of these key players and parties of the anti-Soviet jihad had little influence in critical events of the region. It was the polarization of the parties along ethnic, tribal, and geographic lines that would eventually help shape the politics and narratives of the rest of the country.[64]

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[58] Nushin Arbabzadah, "Afghanistan's Turbulent Cleric," *Guardian*, April 18, 2009, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/apr/18/afghanistan-shia-law-women. Mohseni also spreads his messages through a program on the Afghan television channel *Ariana*, which is even accessible to (and popular with) Afghans living in the United States and the West.

[59] Jack Fairweather, "Modernizing Madrassas," *Washington Pos*t, web log, http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/postglobal/islamsadvance/2008/02/modernizing_madrassas.html.

[60] "Afghan Cleric Launching New TV Station," Reuters, February 8, 2007, http://blogs.rnw.nl/medianetwork/afghan-cleric-launching-new-tv-station.

[61] For more on this distinction, see Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Deobandism

Deobandism is one of the principal Islamic philosophical influences in southern Afghanistan and a prominent force in Afghan political Islam. In theory, the Deobandi school of Islam shares many of the same beliefs as Sufism[65]; however, the two schools are not in concert on the means of achieving their similar objectives to remove corruption and materialism from Islam. Whereas Sufism was a reaction to conditions under the Umayyad Caliphate—the second of the four Islamic caliphates after the death of Mohammad—Deobandism arose as a reaction to the British colonialism in India. The two key founders of Deobandism were Hazrat Maulana Mohammad Qasim Nanautavi and Hazrat Maulana Rasheed Ahmed Gangohi, who founded the Dar ul-Ulum madrasah in Deoband, India, in the mid-nineteenth century that has shaped resistance tropes in the subcontinent ever since. There are thousands of Deoband madaris in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A paradox between Deobandism and Sufism is that many Deobandis are also members of Sufi brotherhoods.

The teachings of Deobandism focus on strict adherence to Islamic ethical codes and the independence of Muslim lands. Attacks on Muslim lands are considered attacks on Islam and worthy of jihad.[66] According to Deobandism, a Muslim's first obligation is to his faith and then to his country. Yet Deobandism does not recognize national boundaries per se but rather holds the boundaries of the greater Islamic community (or *ummah*) paramount. Muslims have an obligation and duty to wage jihad in defense of Muslims anywhere they are threatened.

Deobandism falls under the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam and shares much in common with the teachings of many great Islamic reformers, such as Mawdudi in Pakistan, Sayyed Qutb in Egypt, and Ibn Taymiyyah, who all advocated Islamic statehood following the principles of sharia, though they differed on the means acceptable to bring this about.[67] Deobandism does not focus on mysticism and asceticism in the way that Sufism does but does encourage pious practice and is a major faith throughout South Asia. Rather than representing discrete and opposing religious world-views, however, it is perhaps more accurate to say that these schools represent different modalities for gaining and engaging religious knowledge: one more scriptural, the other more emotive.

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[62] Much of this movement owed its organization and ideology to the influence of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimin) and had as its chief ideologues Ghulam Muhammad Niazi, Rabbani, Sayyid Musa Tawana, and others who studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo and later taught on the faculty of theology at Kabul University.

[63] Other anti-Soviet jihadi Peshawar party political leaders such as Yunus Khalis and Mohammad Nabi Mohammdi had considerable influence over the Taliban in the south, particularly in Kandahar, during this time period. Many of the Taliban core from Kandahar fought under the command of Nabi Mohammdi's local factions, including Mullah Omar. Khalis even helped radical elements in the eastern Afghanistan rise to power, including Jalaluddin Haqqani who single handedly destroyed the Zadran's malik system after he ran Mohammad Omar Babrakzai out of Paktia, the most powerful Zadran malik during the 1980s. Mohammadi's faction helped spread the rise of madaris in southern Afghanistan and attracted many Talibs from Kandahar such as Mullah Omar.

[64] For more on the polarization, see Roy, "Has Islamism a Future in Afghanistan?" 206.

[65] "The Deoband School drew heavily on the Sufi tradition of Afghanistan and was highly orthodox in its interpretation of Islam." Peter Marsden, *Taliban: War, Religion, and the New Order in Afghanistan* (London: Zed Books, 1998), 79.

[66] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 50–51.

[67] Ibid. 51.

Deobandis are comfortable with Sufism as expressed through pious and devotional practices but take issue with the social structure of Sufism as manifested by the *tariqat* (brotherhoods).

The Afghan constitution of 1931 guaranteed the right of the ulema to attend private religious schools, most of which were Deobandi, and until the Soviet invasion in 1979 the majority of the Afghan ulema were educated in these madaris.[68]

Tablighi Jamaat

> *Faizani probably enjoyed his greatest support among military officers. He used the traditional* Zikr *circle as an avenue not just for spiritual enlightenment but also for political organizing. In tapping into the officer corps in this way, Faizani was following a longstanding tradition of Sufi association with the military, a tradition that went back at least to the turn of the century and that had periodically generated considerable paranoia within the government.*[69]

The involvement of religious groups in political activities is probably one of the most misunderstood and yet crucial elements in recent Afghan history. In light of this, it is instructive to briefly examine the activities of groups like the Tablighi Jamaat and Sufis. Secretive by nature, these groups represent large numbers of Afghans, yet they remain relatively less understood (and almost completely undocumented), and their role in Afghan society underappreciated. Part of the explanation for this relates to the urban-rural divide in Afghan society. Most of the members of Sufi societies as well as the Tablighi Jamaat are rural and poor and not members of the urban elite.[70] This is an important reason why these groups are misunderstood by both outsiders and fellow Afghans.

Tablighi Jamaat was founded in the late 1920s by Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi, himself a prominent member and advocate of the revivalist conservative Deoband tradition. Present members are committed to *dawa* or "the call." Many of their activities are dedicated to persuading and proselytizing others to join them in either conversion, or simply just reforming and becoming a "proper Muslim." To pursue this goal, the Tablighi Jamaat has established missionaries throughout the world.[71]

The organization holds meetings throughout Pakistan and Afghanistan and has a proclivity for meeting in large regional centers. The annual Lahore meeting seems to be the biggest in the two countries, with hundreds of thousands of attendees. At these events the discussion revolves around religious subjects, with members of the Tablighi Jamaat projecting an avowedly apolitical stance, refusing even to talk about the situation in either Afghanistan or Pakistan. At a meeting in Kabul, however, a colleague witnessed a full lineup of almost every single significant mid-level mujahedeen commander from Nangarhar Province sitting in a circle together and discussing different interpretations of a certain hadith.[72] So although politics is apparently absent from the surface of such meetings, there is—in Afghanistan at least—some amount of networking happening at Tablighi Jamaat meetings and events.

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[68] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 50.

[69] David B. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 230.

[70] Much of the Afghan urban elite identify with the more ideologically purist Hizb-e Islami.

[71] For an introduction to the Tablighi Jamaat and some of the suspicion this group has generated in the West, see Susan Sachs, "A Muslim Missionary Group Draws New Scrutiny in U.S.," *New York Times*, July 14, 2003, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/14/national/14ISLA.html?pagewanted=1.

[72] Observation of Conrad Jennings, summer 2007.

The Tablighi Jamaat's explicit relationship with members of the insurgency is distant and seemingly detached, and despite certain ideological similarities by virtue of their shared idolization of the culture of the village, there are no strong ties with the Taliban. A number of Kandaharis have suggested to the author that they do not like the Tablighi because "many come from Pakistan" or because they are not Kandahari and they project themselves as knowing Islam better than Kandaharis do. In fact, it was suggested that Tablighi were not welcomed in local mosques and had been even asked to leave.[73] Some Western scholars have argued that the Tablighi Jamaat networks are used by al Qaeda to radicalize vulnerable sectors of society,[74] and U.S., British, Pakistani, and Afghan governments have monitored these networks closely.[75]

Sufis

The role of Sufism (Islamic mysticism, *tasawwuf*) in Afghanistan is similarly misunderstood.[76] The so-called mystical side of Islam, Sufism, focuses on the personal relationship between the believer and God, with the believer seeking to individualize that connection through prayer, training, and discipline (*marifa*). The modalities of the transmission of religious knowledge and the nature of the *piri-muridi* (master-student relationship) tradition in Sufism are little understood but seemingly have important implications for the Afghan insurgency. Mullah-led militant mobilizations connected closely to Pashtun cultural mores and fraternity have a long history on the Afghan-Pakistan frontier. The piri-murdi system represents a basic reformist ideology and a mode of knowledge transmission where a teacher is inherent in the knowledge. Thus, mullahs who learn from the same teacher, or from teachers who had a common master, share the same ideology. This system has served as a kind of social institution and network that past jihadist movements in South Asia, such as the Hindustani fanatics Akhund Ghaffur, Mullah Najmuddin of Hadda, and the Faqir of Ipi, have exploited.[77]

The Sufi mullahs and their *murids* (committed) and talibs operate a complex and mutually supportive network of insurgent religious authority. Their information operations—carried out through mosque, madrasah, and *langarkhana* (a place where food is prepared and distributed to the poor) via pedagogy[78]—have, as suggested above, underpinned past insurgencies and jihads and presumably have helped to frame the discourse of the present Taliban jihad and insurgency. An understanding of this process is a vital starting point for any campaign to combat it.

Sufism and the majority of Afghan ulema look at Islam from two different perspectives. The ulema focus primarily on the orderly interpretation of Islamic law and doctrine, whereas the Sufis focus on the love of God through asceticism and ritual practice.[79] This division in the interpretation of Islam through the eyes of the ulema and the Sufis became increasingly important again during the twentieth century, particularly during the formation of the Afghan state and during the anti-Soviet jihad. John Esposito describes the rise of Sufism in this way:

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[73] Personal interviews, Kandahar City, August 2008.

[74] John Walker Lindh of "American Taliban" fame was allegedly indoctrinated by Tablighi Jamaat before joining the Afghan Taliban. The UK cricket team coach murdered by assassins is thought to have been killed by Tablighi Jamaat operatives.

[75] Paul Lewis, "Inside the Islamic Group Accused by MI5 and FBI," *Guardian*, August 19, 2006, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/aug/19/religion.terrorism.

[76] For overviews of Sufi history and philosophy, see Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (New York: New York University Press, 1989); Annnemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); and J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders of Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

[77] For more history on this topic, see Haroon, *Frontier of Faith*, 33–64.

[78] *Tariaq* is the Sufi method of instruction.

[79] For general information on this distinction, see Haroon, *Frontier of Faith*.

> Reacting with disdain and dismay to the worldly seductions of imperial Islam, they were motivated by a desire to return to what they regarded as the purity and simplicity of the Prophet's time and driven by a deep devotional love of God that culminated in a quest for a direct, personal experience of the presence of God in this life.[80]

Sufism affects rural Muslims in southern Afghanistan in a variety of ways. For example, the prevalence of *ziarats* (shrines) built over the graves of alleged holy men and women can be found throughout the south, and many venerate them. In the absence of real medicine or doctors, villagers place their faith in a culture of miracles and signs instead—here Sufi mysticism plays a role. A nuanced understanding of the interplay between the religious and the political phenomena in southern Afghanistan should include an appreciation of the importance of these beliefs to the vast majority of people.[81] This also has implications for understanding aspects of the Taliban. A recent article published on the *BBC*'s news with the headline "Can Sufi Islam Counter the Taliban?" described the experiences of visiting a Sufi shrine in Pakistan and talking to various experts and locals about the alleged relationship between the Taliban and Sufism.[82] After the explosion at the tomb of Rahman Baba, the much-loved Pashtu Sufi poet, there were many more articles to this effect.[83] Is Sufism a force, these articles asked, which can stand up against radicalism and so-called Talibanism? In the West, this has been a seductive idea for scholars and think-tanks, many of whom are familiar only with the tamer variants of Sufism. The increasing number of attacks targeting Sufi shrines throughout South Asia is of particular concern. Groups operating in the Khyber Agency of the FATA, as well as in the Swat Valley, have repeatedly attacked Sufi shrines and targeted Sufi pirs for assassination over the last two years. The shrine of Bahadur Baba, located in hills near Nowshera, east of Peshawar, was rocketed by militants in March—almost exactly one year after militants destroyed the 400-year-old shrine of Abu Saeed Baba, also near Peshawar.[84] The attacks have been attributed to Lashkar-i-Islam, a militant group based in Khyber and led by their charismatic and vehemently anti-Sufi commander, Mangal Bagh. Demonstrations protesting the destruction of Sufi shrines have created widespread distaste for local militant factions such as Lashkar-i-Islam, prompting some Sufi elders such as Pir Samiullah to form tribal militias. Samiullah's militia attacked Pakistani Taliban forces in the Swat Valley last year, killing approximately one hundred militants. Samiullah was killed by militants linked to the Taliban last December, who later exhumed and hanged his corpse in Mingora, the provincial capital. The bloody clashes between Samiullah's forces and Mullah Fazlullah's Taliban fighters in the Matta area of Swat have left hundreds dead since December.[85]

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[80] William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004), 101.

[81] Many rural Pashtuns, particularly in the Katawaz, are very superstitious. The Islam of swaths of rural Afghanistan has more in common with mysticism than is commonly supposed. The role of djins, for example, is akin to that of evil spirits. This aspect of Sufism—the fear of rural peasants of the frightening mystical powers of the Sufis—is much more powerful than the adherence to Sufi beliefs, which is negligible.

[82] Barbara Plett, "Can Sufi Islam Counter the Taleban?" *BBC News*, February 24, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7896943.stm.

[83] Ghulam Dastageer, "Militants Blow Up Rehman Baba's Shrine," *International News*, March 26, 2009, http://thenews.jang.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=20760.

[84] Tom Hussain, "Pakistani Taliban Target Sufi Shrines," *National*, March 10, 2009, http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090310/FOREIGN/157439541/1002.

[85] The author would like to thank Matthew Dupee for contributing to this analysis.

The RAND Corporation published a study in 2003 that advocated encouraging "the elements within the Islamic mix that are most compatible with global peace and the international community and that are friendly to democracy and modernity."[86] This study was widely rumored to be the public face of a U.S. intelligence community plan to "engage with Sufis" around the world as a strategy against Islamic radicalism. Such discussions fail to properly assess the realities of Sufism as experienced on the ground in southern Afghanistan and approach the matter as if religious practices in Afghanistan are similar to those in Pakistan. The two most important Sufi orders in Afghanistan—the Qadiri and Naqshbandi—are organized into brotherhoods. Pir Sayyid Ahmad Gailani heads the Qadiri order, which consists primarily of Pashtuns of southern and eastern Afghanistan.[87] The Naqshbandi order of southern and northern Afghanistan is lead by the Mujaddidi family (Sebghatullah Mujaddidi).[88] Additionally, the analysis of Sufism's main ideas and practices in these discussions is derived from a reading of classical texts (mainly poetry), which, while important, fails to give a proper picture of the way Sufism interacts and has created religious networks.

Recognizing the importance of Sufism in Afghanistan, the Taliban have attempted to manipulate certain Sufi customs and traditions. Some Taliban have even sought to identify themselves as part of the Sufi tradition.[89] This is similar to the dynamic that Bernt Glatzer describes of the "southern Pashtun tribesman seeking political leadership beyond his village" through the manipulation of "networks based on locality, economy, sectarianism, Sufi orders, religious schools, political and religious parties and so on."[90]

Pir Sayyid Ahmad Gailani has stated that "a majority of Taliban are Sufis, mostly followers of the Qadiri and Naqshbandi movements."[91] Some analysts have even alleged that Mullah Mohammad Omar, the nominal leader of the movement, is a member and local leader of the Naqshbandi order. Although many experts intensely dispute this contentious claim, Gailani states "Mullah Omar was raised as a Sufi before later embracing the more sever Wahhabi-inspired Islam."[92] Even a brief examination of the Taliban's current propaganda output on its website, *Al-Emarah*, emphasizes that Taliban poetry and songs published in Pashtu rely strongly on the imagery, style, and forms used by the well-known classical Pashtun Sufi poets. Further, the biographies of jihadi "martyrs" posted on the website and in Taliban magazines call to mind the Sufi hagiographic traditions. Similarly, the authority of Mullah Omar's leadership rests in part on his risky but brilliant propaganda move in 1996 of taking the *khirqa* (a garment that Afghans believe to be the Prophet Mohammed's cloak) out of Kandahar's royal mausoleum for the first time in 60 years and displaying it in a public rally as a way to identify himself with the Prophet.[93] Mysticism similar to that practiced by Sufis has long surrounded Mullah Omar. Omar reportedly started the Taliban after a dream in which Allah came to him in the shape of a man, asking him to lead the faithful. The khirqa, for example, is believed by many Pashtuns to contain supernatural and mystical powers. This action in part represented Omar's absolute faith in his perceived divine right to rule and gave him legitimacy in his role as leader of the Afghan people ordained by Allah. After Omar showed the cloak of the Prophet Mohammad to those present and received general acceptance by public, he invited the people to accept him as their leader by raising hands.[94] Whereas Omar had been a relative nonentity before this piece of religious theater, the audacious stunt catapulted him to a level of mystical power. Soon afterward, Omar was named Amir ul-Mumineen, "commander of the faithful"—not just of the Afghans but of all Muslims. He was given this title by almost 1,500 mullahs and religious scholars who were present in Kandahar.

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[86] Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2003).

[87] Gailani ancestor Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani founded the Qadiri order.

[88] The Naqshbandi order formed the base of the Jebhe-yi Nejat party at the time of the Soviet invasion. The Qadiri brotherhood formed the base of the Mahaz-i Melli party. The Naqasbandi order originated in Bukhara during the fourteenth century.

[89] Interviews by Conrad Jennings in Kandahar City in 2007–08, however, suggested that the Taliban banned some Sufi activities in Kandahar during their rule (1996–2001). These interviewees suggested that the Taliban opposed Sufi groups. They argued that there was a huge contradiction between Taliban and the Sufis and that they did not like each other. These interviewees also mentioned that the Taliban did not respect the Sufi shrines and mistrusted the pirs as well.

[90] Bernt Glatzer, "Is Afghanistan on the Brink of Ethnic and Tribal Disintegration?" in Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn*, 177–78.

[91] Farangis Najibullah, "Can Sufis Bring Peace to Afghanistan?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 5, 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Can_Sufis_Bring_Peace_to_Afghanistan/1503303.html. This article goes on to state that "One prominent Taliban figure, Abdul Hakim Mujahed … says that the Taliban 'consist of people from various backgrounds,' and that while some 'oppose' Sufis, others have 'great respect' for them and are even followers."

[92] Najibullah, "Can Sufis Bring Peace to Afghanistan?"

As in Iraq, Sufi groups in Kandahar have allied themselves with the insurgency since 2003. A significant proportion of the rank-and-file members of the Taliban in southern Afghanistan (and increasingly in Pakistan) believe in the local traditions and customs that are identified as Sufi.[95] Analyses of who the Taliban are and what they stand for have yet to convincingly offer an account of the movement's popular appeal, and fail to account for apparent Sufi aspects of the movement. It seems clear that the tradition of Sufism, rather than the practice (as associated with dervishes, for example), has been important in shaping the structure of rural resistance to secular authority. The full extent of Sufi contributions, however, to the networks that make up the insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan has not been properly explored, and there is not place here for a full discussion. It should be noted, though, that this is an important cultural feature that should not be underestimated.

Conclusion

> *The lack of strategic innovation on the side of the international coalition is striking, and the difficulties in Afghanistan are in large part due to an intellectual failure to understand the country's social and political dynamics.*[96]

The international community and, in particular, the U.S. and NATO forces have failed to thoroughly or systematically understand the religious foundations of the Taliban insurgency and jihad. Indeed, a rigorous and methodical examination of the Islamic realities of southern Afghanistan is potentially the most important arrow missing in the foreign forces' quiver. Although this lack of understanding has direct implications for U.S. and NATO kinetic military operations, it is even more important to the information operations. A counterinsurgency is first and foremost an information war. One critical reason why the U.S. and NATO forces are not winning in Afghanistan is because they misunderstand certain components of the information battlespace—most importantly those that involve religious dynamics. How can the United States and NATO protect the people of Afghanistan—the central tenet of successful counterinsurgency—if they do not understand the fundamental religious and societal drivers of the Afghan people?

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[93] The cloak had been folded and padlocked in a series of chests in a crypt in the royal mausoleum at Kandahar; "myth had it that the padlocks to the crypt could be opened only when touched by a true *Amir ul-Mumineen*, a king of the Muslims." Joseph A. Raelin, "The Myth of Charismatic Leaders," *BNET*, March 2003, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0MNT/is_3_57/ai_98901483. For a discussion of this incident, see Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism*, 20.

[94] Author's interview of an eyewitness to Mullah Omar's donning of the khirqa, Kandahar City, September 2008.

[95] Based on numerous interviews of Kandaharis by Conrad Jennings, 2006–09.

[96] Giles Dorronsoro, "Running Out of Time: Arguments for a New Strategy in Afghanistan," Centre for International Policy Studies (CIPS), University of Ottawa, CIPS Working Paper, no. 3, July 2009.

Although this essay has merely scratched the surface of these extremely complex issues, it leaves no question that Islam and Islamic religious figures continue to play a critical role in the everyday life and politics of southern Afghanistan. Today, Sufism and Deobandism work together with traditional tribal mores in shaping the cognitive structures of southern Afghans. These beliefs, for the most part, influence the populations' social, political, and economic interactions. Both government and Taliban insurgent leadership have attempted to both shape and act in accordance with these normative structures, as well as to develop narratives to achieve the support and acquiescence of the southern, mostly rural Pashtun population. Ultimately, however, the ongoing conditions of the conflict environment that grips Afghanistan will most certainly influence and mix with these beliefs and narratives to alter the fabric of Afghan society and thus will be the final determinant as to the future path of Afghanistan.

APPENDIX: TEXT OF ULEMA SHURA DECLARATION, KABUL, MARCH 19, 2009[97]

The National Council of Ulema in its regular session held from March 15–19, 2009, participated in by religious scholars from across Afghanistan passed the following Resolution after a thorough discussion of the current situation:

- The Council denounces any action that further aggravates the pains and the sufferings of the people and funnels disunity among the people of Afghanistan.

Thus, the Council calls upon all those involved to prefer the national interests and Islamic values over their personal interests.

- To ensure a full security as a key element in the country's progress, the Council unanimously decided that the traditional Loy Jirga (Grand Assembly) be convened, where people from all circles including religious scholars, intellectuals, tribal leaders, Jihadi and political figures and representatives from both Houses of the Parliament, the Taliban and Hiz e Islami (Hekmatyar's Islamic Party) and from the OIC and the United Nations are represented.
- The Council finds as "reasonable" to obtain the agreement and endorsement of the neighboring countries and other relevant authorities on convening the Loy Jirga. We appreciate the interest already expressed by the new U.S. administration, Canada and France. For the anti-government forces to participate with confidence in the Loy Jirga, we suggest that their names be removed from the blacklist and that the United Nations guarantee their safety.
- The Council unanimously decided that the lead role in negotiating with the Taliban be given to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the King of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. Saudi Arabia is where the Holy Kabbah is located and is where the great Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH) is laid; it is where Quran was revealed by Allah and where angels have moved in and out. We are proud of the holy land and therefore, call upon the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques to kindly accept our request of helping relieve our pains.
- The Council calls upon the Taliban to allow the closed madrassas and schools to reopen for the Muslim children of Afghanistan. Children are involved neither in war nor in politics. Let them learn to move out of obscurity into the light. Closing down schools is a grave hostility against the Muslim people of Afghanistan. It is against the Holy Quran order that has allowed education. We are hoping for a positive response as this is the voice of the Council of Ulema, Ministry of Education and the entire nation.
- The Council calls upon all the *Ulema* (religious scholars) to remain vigilant as they have always been against malign intentions and actions by those who seek to take advantage of an opportunity.

As several times reminded in the past, the Council once again urges the media to avoid preaching and airing prohibited and hypocrite anti-Islam programs and immoral scenes and movies. This is the duty of the government to urgently avoid if such programs are aired.

With respect,
Afghanistan National Council of Ulema

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[97] Obtained by the author from Conrad Jennings, who received this document from Kandahari religious elders in March 2009, Kandahar City.

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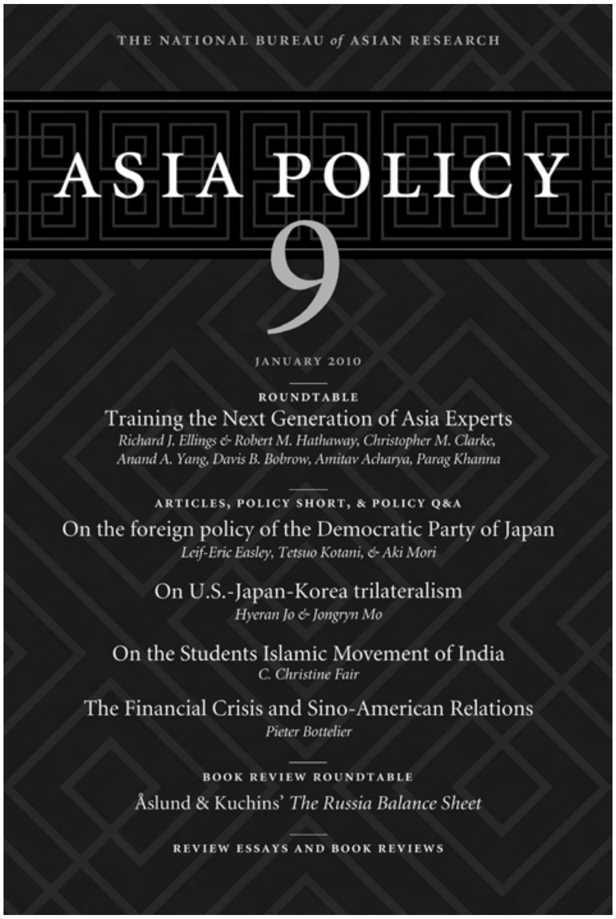

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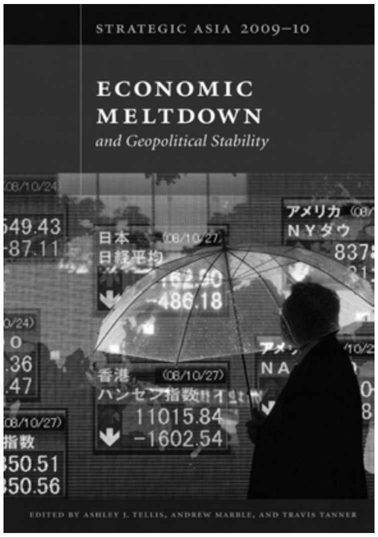

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