



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**‘Afghan Factor’ and the Challenge of Religious Militancy and Extremism in Pakistan: A Discursive Analysis**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study on ‘Afghan factor’ and Talibanization of Pakistani society has been an ever burning milieu since the days of Afghan Jihad and are still effectual due to the complexity of Pak-Afghan relations. In later years, the after-shocks of this issue resulted in the form of local militant organizations like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its offshoots. The study is both argumentative and reflexive one in the praxis of qualitative research. The Afghan episode which was started during Zia Regime (1977-1988) witnessed its pinnacles in Musharraf administration (1999-2008). Zia tackled it successfully due to the mastery over the situation it while Musharraf faced a number of problems due to direct US involvement into the battleground. The study in hand has been a serene effort to analyze this factor keeping in view a number of discourses in relation to extra terrestrial elements and leads to a sound scholarship of the issue.

**KEYWORDS** Afghan Factor, Afghan Jihad, Extremism, FATA, Kashmir Issue, Religious Militancy, Sectarianism, Taliban

**Introduction**

Afghanistan conflict had deeply impacted Pakistan’s polity and society until 11 September 2001 and the US military intervention. The phenomena of Talibanization and Taliban related militancy had been largely concentrated in war ravaged Afghanistan and were generally viewed in Pakistan as a product of the Afghan Jihad and subsequent warfare in Afghanistan. This element possesses an umbrella term called the ‘Afghan Factor’ which has convoluted and multifarious and repercussions for Pakistani state and society. This impact of the Afghan factor is the core theme of study in hand. Nonetheless; within Pakistan a number of radical militant groups emerged supporting the Afghan Jihad and the uprising in Indian held Kashmir that flared up in 1989. A combination of religious motivation, madrassa education, Afghan related and later Kashmir related rhetoric, and official patronage instigated and imparted momentum to religious militancy (Chandra, 2003).

The Zia years (1977-1988) had witnessed the growth of a culture of religious zeal in Pakistani society, especially among the middle and lower middle classes, the bureaucracy, and the armed forces. Under Zia, religious influences favoring Islamist orthodoxy became firmly entrenched in Pakistani politics (Muzaffar, et. al. 2017; Hussain, 2000). The sectarian dimension of religious militancy also became acute during this period, the result in part of the intense Arab-Iranian rivalry following the Khomeini Revolution in 1979 that also played out within the soft, open, and susceptible Pakistan society. However; it was the Pakistani Sunni militant groups that developed contacts with the Afghan Mujahedin groups and were later influenced by the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and by Al Qaeda, Sunni Span Islamist Militant Organization, (est. 1988). Members of these groups participated in the Taliban military campaigns (Haqqani, 2005, p.68). The official patronage enjoyed by groups like Lashkar e Tayaba during the 1990 was linked to the Kashmiri insurgency. Public sentiment, especially in urban areas, was sympathetic, shaped by self serving rhetoric. Forcing the Soviets out of Afghanistan inspired a sense of triumphalism, and the travails of Muslims in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Palestine, and Kashmir fostered a deep sense of

grievance. Religious groups and political parties openly collected funds to help jihad in Kashmir, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan. Nonetheless; the jihadi groups avoided violence within Pakistan even though they contributed to an increasingly intolerant environment within the country. The incidence of religious violence inside Pakistan, sometimes targeting Americans and Europeans, was largely related to sectarian tensions (Karamat, et. al, 2019; Cloughley, 2008)

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Afghanistan remained the storm center of conflict and militancy in the region, first because of the Soviet intervention and later as a result of the relentless internal power struggle, with its overlay of religious fanaticism associated with the Taliban. Afghanistan provided a haven and a breeding found for extremists and militants, with sectarian and jihadi motivations and links to groups and agendas beyond Afghanistan (Khan, 2005, p.43). The US military intervention altered the location of the militancy, pushing it to the border regions of Pakistan, but not before many Pakistani militants perished in the initial confrontation, especially in northern Afghanistan and Kabul. Those who survived returned to Pakistan along with elements of Al Qaeda and Afghan Taliban (appearance after 1996). Despite the rout, their ideological motivation and deep indoctrination remained intact. During debriefing sessions by Pakistani security authorities, many of those who had barely escaped death inside Afghanistan and whom the Red Cross repatriated to Pakistan wanted to go back to join their “fortunate” martyred brothers to enjoy blessings in paradise (Nawaz, 2008)

References to Pakistani jihadi groups and extremist militant groups require clarification. Jihadi groups are those motivated by the Afghan Jihad of the 1980s and the Kashmiri uprising that began in the late 1980s. Following the Soviet troop withdrawal, jihad lost its full meaning in Afghanistan, though the conflict persisted. The Afghan Taliban attracted to their ranks religious militants from Pakistan, including elements of the Kashmiri jihadi groups. They often described their military campaigns as jihad, but that was a perversion of the concept, because the Afghan Taliban campaigns were part of a struggle for power and political control in Afghanistan (Burki & Baxter, 1991, p.56). Altruism, if it had ever underpinned the Taliban’s original motivation, was drained over the years in the internecine Afghan conflict, which also became a training ground for elements from Pakistani jihadi and militant groups. After the 2001 US military intervention, the Pakistani militants and also the Al Qaeda and Afghan Taliban elements feeling Afghanistan gravitated to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). There they joined forces with local insurgents and began to see in their coercive power and capacity for violence a means for wresting political power and control. Whatever their early motivations, these groups became the perpetrators of extremist militancy and violence in Pakistan, which is the focus of this study (Yaseen, et. al 2018; Ali, 2003).

The Afghan Taliban had once again invoked jihad against the foreign military presence in Afghanistan. The call resonates among some conservative religious circles. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the rise of Al Qaeda and an assortment of similar groups with extremist ideology and violent disposition had influenced debate and mainstream religious thinking within Muslim societies to veer away from careless usage of the term “jihad” and to reject the right of individuals and disparate groups to proclaim jihad (Coughley, 2008, p.36)

### **Religious Militancy in Pakistan: Main Strands**

The shock and scale of 9/11 obliged the Musharraf government to reverse policy on the Taliban, although it made an effort to convince Mullah Omar (1960-2013) to be responsive to the UN demand on Osama bin Laden (1957-2011). Pakistan also hunted Al Qaeda members who had taken refuge in Pakistani cities where they had contacts; subsequently they retreated to the safety of the ungoverned border regions. Initially, the Taliban forces appeared to be fatally damaged. Slowly, they started recovering; militancy spread and intensified in the bordering FATA regions (Nawaz, 2008, p.183).

Meanwhile, by 2004-2005, Pakistan- India relations started to improve, and Musharraf saw in the process an opportunity to address the longstanding Kashmir dispute. The pursuit of this objective required, down the road, measures to restrain the Pakistan based militant elements that aided the Kashmir insurgency across the line of control inside Indian administered Kashmir. The new policy had its skeptics, critics, and opponents, including some within the government and army establishment. More important, the policy provoked militant groups committed to the Kashmir Jihad, who then turned against the government (Haider, 2004, pp.34-38).

The three board domestic strands of religious militancy were represented by those elements who later styled themselves as local, Pakistani Taliban; those supporting the Kashmiri insurgency; and those with a domestic sectarian agenda. The loose alliance among these groupings and with Al Qaeda and insurgents in the FATA posed a grave and increasing challenge to the writ of Islamabad. The violence by these militant groups preoccupied the Musharraf government throughout most of its tenure after 2001. Accordingly, under the vaguely defined rubric of the war on terror, the policy addressed three main areas; first, countering Al Qaeda and other foreign and homegrown militant groups; second, handling the situation in the FATA border regions; and third, addressing the growing extremism in the country (Waseem, 2007, p.12)

Al Qaeda had its origin among the Arab youth attracted or brought to Afghanistan. They had developed a Middle East oriented internationalist agenda to target Western interests as well as governments in their home countries that were generally viewed as pro-West. A Qaeda needed a new base once Afghanistan had been virtually denied to it by the American in vision. The other foreign elements who descended in the thousands into the FATA from Afghanistan were the Central Asian and Chechen fighters. During the 1990s, they had been forced to flee their countries and found refuge in Afghanistan. Without any clear agenda, these angry men were driven by desperation to become ruthless fighters on behalf of their new paymaster. Ease as Afghan refugees had done after every convulsion in their country were more focused on wresting back their lost authority inside Afghanistan and fighting the new intruder, the United States and its allies in NATO / ISAF (International Security Assistance Force 2001-2014)). (Rizvi, 2000, pp.27-31)

The Arabs had been operating in the area for almost two decades. They had developed relationships and support both in the FATA staging grounds for the Afghan Jihad and in urban centers of Pakistan, where jihadi outfits had enjoyed official patronage in the context of Afghanistan and Kashmir, Until 1992, Peshawar had attracted a large number of Arabs wanting to help the Afghan Jihad, especially with funds. In late 1993, because of increasing problems with the locals, the provincial authorities evicted several hundred Arabs from Peshawar. Most shifted to Afghanistan, as they could not return to their own countries (Mahmood, 2003, p.73)

Prominent among the Pakistani based militants were Kashmiri jihadi groups, since they had the backing of the Pakistani military, who regarded them as an important instrument of the strategy to compel India to negotiate a reasonable Kashmir settlement. The Kashmiri uprising in the late 1980s was seen as an opportunity. The prevalent view within the Pakistani establishment was that, absent outside support, the 'indigenous movement' would not be able to withstand Indian coercion. India maintained close to half a million military and paramilitary forces in Indian administered Kashmir (Amin, 2003, p.76). To reinforce the argument for support, Pakistani military analysts would draw historical parallels with national liberation struggles, such as in Vietnam and Zimbabwe, which had succeeded with material support from outside power. This thinking was essentially an analysis designed to fit a strategy. It ignored the necessity for a powerful political leadership in control of its militant wings to achieve success in any indigenous freedom movement. In Afghanistan the schismatic Mujahedin leadership, with autonomous Mujahedin commanders, had only led to turmoil and torment (Ibid, pp.81-86)

Another motive often ascribed to the Pakistani military was that by supporting militancy, Pakistan would have succeeded in tying down a large part of the Indian Army in the Indian held Kashmir. Such an assumption, besides knocking out the moral basis of the Pakistani position on Kashmir, did not make sense in view of the conventional and nuclear deterrence that had existed between the two countries since the late 1980s. Such a tactical consideration could be part of a short term wartime strategy, but it cannot be the basis for a long term policy, which in the case Pakistan had to be based on the premise of a reasonable settlement of the Kashmir dispute rather than prolongation of the conflict and suffering in that territory (Ziring, 2004, p.181).

In late 1987, after a long hiatus of relative calm, the Kashmiri discontent had erupted in reaction to repressive measures taken by the Indian authorities to subdue Kashmiri protests following controversial elections in Kashmir. The Kashmiri agitation gained marked momentum after the assassination of the well respected Kashmiri leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq (b.1973) in Srinagar in May 1990. The indigenous militancy grew under the umbrella of Hizbul Mujahideen which first emerged in 1989. The group had close links to Jamat e Islami in the Indian administered Kashmir (founded: 1953) and enjoyed the support of anti India political groups the pro independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation front (JKLF, founded 1976) and pro-Pakistan All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC, group of 26 organizations and parties of different agendas, founded 1993). Violence increased in 1993 after the Indian military action against militants who had sought refuge in the Hazrat Bal and Cherar Sharif mosques. During the siege, the Cherar Sharif mosque, an old wooden structure, was completely gutted (Amin, 2003, p.154)

In Pakistan, the main supporters of the Kashmiri militancy at the early stages were Harkatul Mujahidin (founded 1998) led by Fazalur Rahman Khalil (b. 1963) who had broken away from the precursor group, Harkatul Jihad al Islami, formed in 1985 to support the Afghan Jihad. Two other groups that emerged in 1990-1991 with Pakistani encouragement were Harkatul Ansar, an offshoot of Harkatul Mujahidin with Maulana Masood Azhar as its secretary general and Lashkar e Tayaba, led by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed. All three leaders shared strong pan Islamist views and were committed to the cause of Jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir; two were alumni of the Binori Masjid Darul Uloom. In January 2000, immediately after the Indians released him to end the hijacking of the Air India flight 814 that had been taken to Qandahar, Masood Azhar (b. 1968) formed a new militant group, Jaish e Muhammad which sent its recruits both to Afghanistan and Kashmir and maintained close ties with Al Qaeda (Haqqani, 2005, pp.113-119)

Following a split in Hizbul Mujahidin, its leader, Syed Salahuddin, based himself in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, the Pakistani administered part of the state. Later in 1994, he became the head of an umbrella organization for the Kashmiri jihad, the Muttahida Jihad Council (United Jihad Council) based in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The Council acted as an important interface with the Pakistani authorities, loosely representing the mainstream of Kashmiri jihadi element. Hizbul Mujahidin administered Kashmir, Abdul Majeed Dar, offered the Indians a conditional within one month, allegedly under pressure from Pakistan's ISI, and retracted his support of Dar. The cease fire offer might have resulted from debate and confusion within the Kashmiri Mujahedin leadership, first, over the positive turn in Pakistan's relations with India evident in the February 1999 Lahore summit and, then, over its reversal as a result of the Kargil crisis (Ahmad, 2005, pp.32-37)

These militant groups did not have a rigid discipline or firm outside control; the violent dynamics of militancy gave rise to internal dissensions and virulent autonomous splinter factions. This degeneration of the Kashmiri jihadi groups became evident when Al Faran, a splinter group of Harkat ul Ansar, abducted five European tourists and beheaded one of them in Jul 1995. The incident changed the perception in the West of the Kashmiri uprising, which had previously evoked some international sympathy. Al Faran's act, allegedly committed to bargain for the release of Masood Azhar was condemned by Harkatul

Mujahidin but it revealed the breakaway tendency of militant groups not controlled by strong political leadership (Joshi, 2003, p.12)

The Kashmiri militant groups began posing a direct problem for Pakistan in 2004 when Musharraf opted to initiate a peace process with India, something that was becoming an imperative. Changing global circumstances and pressures for development necessitated a certain modicum of normalcy in Pakistan-India relations which had come under stress following the December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament. India had accused Pakistan based jihadi organizations for the attack, in particular Lashkar e Taiba (est. 1987) which the Indians described as an “infrastructure of terror” that threatened India. For over one year, tension between the two countries remained high and over one million troops, from both sides combined, faced each other in a virtual “eyeball to eyeball confrontation” The countries came close to the brink but avoided a conflict, thanks to international concern and more important, keen awareness that they both possessed nuclear weapons. Strategic deterrence had worked to prevent a clash. Meanwhile, the Musharraf government kept insisting on de-escalation, reduction of tension and dialogue (Ziring, 2004, p.206).

The situation began to thaw by late 2002. In mid-2003, Musharraf offered a cease fire along the line of control dividing the Pakistan administered and Indian administered parts of Kashmir. This was significant, because the Indian side had consistently alleged that Pakistan provided fire cover to enable Kashmiri militants to cross the line of control. In early 2004, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1924-2018) attended the much delayed summit conference of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit conference held in Islamabad. During the course of summit, Musharraf and Vajpayee signed the 4 January 2004 Declaration that committed the two countries to restarting the peace process to resolve Kashmir, and Pakistan stated that it would not allow “territories under its control” to be used for acts of terrorism inside India (Nawaz, 2008, p.144)

The Kashmiri jihadi organizations resented the declaration and the policy direction it had set out. For the credibility of the peace process and to make any progress, these organizations had to be effectively demobilized and restrained from continuing militant activity inside India and Indian administered Kashmir. This effort proved more difficult than anticipated First, the militants of the Jihadi organizations were highly motivated, making it difficult to change their mind set. Second, many of them had known no vocation other than “the Jihad” As the Kashmir front cooled down, many of them drifted to the FATA and Afghanistan, joining the Afghan Taliban and even turning their guns against the state of Pakistan (Khan, 2005, p.78)

The sectarian militancy became active in Pakistan, after the Iranian revolution. Until then, Pakistan had witnessed ethnic violence but virtually no sustained sectarian militancy based on Shia - Sunni divisions Sectarian tensions, normally confined to the *Ashura* days, were managed by local administrations. The other source of sectarian problems was the Qadiani (Ahmadiya) issue that had simmered in the Punjab since the turn of the twentieth century. The Qadiani sect was widely regarded as heretical, because of its founder’s claim of Prophet-hood which provoked common Muslim sentiment. Tehrik Tahafuz e Khatam e Nabuwat (Movement for Protection of the finality of Prophet-hood, sway: 1953 and 1974), joined by activists from several political and nonpolitical religious parties, pushed for excommunication of the Qadianis. The movement turned to violence in 1953, which the government suppressed by imposing martial law in many cities of Punjab. In 1974, when the tension erupted once again, the government of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1928-1979) deferred to the Parliament, which declared the Qadianis as non- Muslim. The decision averted violence by the Tehrik activists but gave rise to a host of human rights issues and excesses that the state had been unable to address. The declaration gave a boost to orthodox and fringe religious elements in the forefront of the Tehrik. These elements were able to make the ruling Pakistan People’s Party, a self-proclaimed secular political party, concede to their demand for ex-communication of the Qadianis (Ghazali, 1996, p.103)

The virulent form of sectarian violence witnessed since the 1980s owed its origin partly to the Iranian revolution and the impact of Pakistan of the Arab reaction to it and partly to the policy of "Islamization" pursued by Zia ul Haq (1924-1988), which had an orthodox Sunni stamp. The Iranian revolution activated Shia clergy inside Pakistan, where the Shias, roughly 15 to 20 percent of the population, lived in relative, but at times precarious, peace with the majority Sunni population. Shia sentiment had become strained because of Zia ul Haq's military takeover and the subsequent hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was generally known to be of the Shia persuasion. Shias were wary of Zia's attempt, beginning in 1979, at Islamization based on the Sunni Hanafi Fiqh, especially the introduction of the compulsory deduction of Zakat (Islamic charity tax, a religious obligation to help the poor), although the government revised the regulation to exempt the Shias from its application. The same year also saw the Soviet military intervention and the subsequent forging of an alliance between Pakistan and the United States. The Iranian theocrats openly and harshly accused Zia ul Haq of being a lackey of the Americans and hung his caricature, along with those of Anwar Sadat (served as President and PM of Egypt many times) and Menachem Begin, former PM of Israel (1977-1983), on the gate of the US embassy in Tehran, where the US diplomats were held hostage (Hussain, 2000, pp.56-58)

Zia ul Haq was generally indifferent to and dismissive of the Iranian diatribes and did not show any personal bias against the Shias. Several of his close advisors and confidants were Shia. However; within the country, sectarian sentiment began to intensify. Shia activism and latent Shia- Sunni tensions took a sinister turn with the emergence of hostile sectarian groups, in particular the Tehrik e Nifaz e Fiqah e Jafaria (TNFJ), movement for the enforcement of Jafaria (Shia) jurisprudence, and Sipah e Sahaba Pakistan (SSP, est. 1985) a breakaway group of Jamiat Ulema e Islam (JUI, est. 1945), a mainstream Sunni political coalition with Deobandi inclination. The two sectarian groups spawned other, more violent offshoots, Sipah-e- Muhammad Pakistan (of Shia faction, founded in 1994) and Lashkar-e- Jhangavi (of Sunni faction). In addition, a number of sectarian groups that had splintered from the original SSP and TNFJ and operated under new adopted names continued to wreak havoc in the country after the parent organizations and their well known offshoots had been officially proscribed in January 2002 (*Dawn*, 3 February 2002)

In the early 1980s, the Pakistani sectarian groups started receiving overseas funds. There is evidence of early support by Iran to firebrand TNFJ leader, Allama Arif Al Hussaini (1946-1988) who was murdered in 1988. A cache of arms discovered at the Iraqi embassy in Islamabad was reportedly meant to be handed over to anti-Shia SSP, whose leader, Haq Nawaz Janghavi, met a violent death in 1990. Saudi funds became available to leaders of Sunni political and religious movements that were close to Wahabism, in particular the Ahl-e-Hadith and Deobandi schools. The same period saw the growth of madrassas with Saudi Salafi orientation, which further accentuated sectarian tensions in society. Sectarian violence and murders had begun in the mid 1980s. The violent Sunni groups had organic linkages with political and religious parties demanding that Pakistan be declared a Sunni state, and with Jihadi groups active in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Most of these groups had Deobandi and Saudi Salafi inspiration, which permeated the madrassas mushrooming in Pakistan during the 1980s and 1990s, with large donations raised locally and from the Gulf, especially from Saudi Arabia. Since the late 1980s, numerous efforts to bring about sectarian harmony through calls by the mainstream sectarian parties had helped reduce sectarian violence, but these efforts had fallen short of eliminating sectarian hatred and militancy. They had not prevailed upon the extremist sectarian groups that had wreaked violence on several areas in Pakistan, especially the Kurram Agency in the FATA, southern and central Punjab, and Karachi (Rizvi, 2000, pp.41-42)

The sectarian tensions in The Kurram Agency continue to erupt intermittently, because first the Afghanistan conflict and later the Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda interests impacted the sectarian dimension of the local demographics, Kurram had a significant Shia population with a history of friction with the Afghan Mujahedin groups, and subsequently, the Afghan Taliban. The Shia population resented the rise of the radical Sunni influence and

activities in the area in the 1980s, when the agency had become one of the important staging bases for the Afghan Jihad and a conduit for the supply of arms to the Afghan Mujahedin.

The main body of results arising from the above discussion revolves around the Severity and Serenity of 'Afghan Factor'

The homegrown militancy, both sectarian (Sunni) and jihadi, developed informal but close linkages and cooperation with Al Qaeda. Harkatul Mujahidin and Jaish e Muhammad recruited volunteers to help the Taliban in Afghanistan, had a declared agenda to fight in Kashmir, and enjoyed close linkages with Al Qaeda. Harkat leader Fazalur Rahman Khalil was one of the first to condemn the August 1998 US missile attack targeting Osama bin Laden among other Harkat militants being trained at the Al Qaeda base. Harkat was the first to be banned after 9/11 for its linkages with Al Qaeda. Investigations into various incidents of bombings, including the attempts to assassinate Pervez Musharraf, revealed that extremist militant groups often had multiple affiliations with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jaish-e-Muhammad and Al Qaeda and contacts with members of religious parties, mosques and madrassas. Such linkages and collaboration also come to light in the confession by Omar Saeed Sheikh (b. 1973) who was associated with Masood Azhar and found to be an accomplice in the kidnapping of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl in late January 2002 (Jang, 22 January 2002). According to Omar Saeed while Jaish members carried out kidnapping, Daniel Pearl was murdered by Khalid Sheikh Muhammad one of the alleged masterminds of 9/11 and a strategist for Al Qaeda (Pirzada, 2000, p.13)

The Sunni firing group responsible for sectarian violence at times intermingled with Jihadi organization. Religious militancy thus acquires a dual person, complicating Pakistan's tasks or rooting it out. Pakistan government in the 1990s as well as the early Musharraf government saw the problems but addressed it in a largely selective and compartmentalized fashion. For example, throughout the 1990s, while sectarian violence was seen as a bane and steps were taken to counter it, the jihadi groups, regardless of their Sunni sectarian affiliation, were cosseted by the military in support of the uprising in Kashmir (Mahmood, 2003, p.102). Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Muhammad were known not to enjoy such backing. Generally, until the later 1990s, the government and military establishment remained complacent about the extremist threat and oblivious of its potential to destabilize and challenge the government's writ. They thought that militant groups, especially those linked to Kashmir would do their bidding and would not cross the line turn against the state. Hizb-ut-Tahrir's experience with the hard-line Afghan Tanzeemat either had not registered or was unlearned (Dawn, 9 December 2006)

Before 9/11, the army viewed religious militancy in the narrow context of sectarian violence and primarily as a law-and-order issue that ought to be addressed by the civilian political administrative authorities, who remained equally smug about the phenomenon. Local civilian authorities, including the police, sometimes hesitated to take action against Sunni militants because of the popular notion that they had links with intelligence agencies operating under the army or the federal interior ministry. The police mainly focused on the sectarian problems, which the leadership of the main Jihadi groups tried by and large to avoid. In the early 1990s, the government of Benazir Bhutto remained focused on the ethnic violence in Karachi, which at that time had overshadowed even the sectarian problem (Haqqani, 2005, p.121)

Beside ambivalence and lack of attention on the part of successive governments in the 1990s, at a different level the spread of religious militancy in Pakistan was aided by depressed socioeconomic conditions, growing poverty, unemployment, and demographic pressure and the increasingly volatile religious environment that together kept feeding militant groups with new recruits. The religious parties provide a powerful source of political support. They were generally sympathetic to the professed goals of the Jihadi groups, even when disagreeing with their violent methods and tactics. These groups also often blended a jihadi agenda with a commitment to public service. The Muslim League under Nawaz Sharif, which was part of Pakistan's mainstream politics, carried with it strong

influence inherited from the days of Zia ul Haq. The party strongly opposed sectarianism but viewed the Jihadi groups with equanimity. (Rizvi, 2000, pp.69-73)

The 9/11 shocks and the Pakistan-India standoff following the attack on the Indian Parliament, allegedly carried out by Lashkar-e-Tayyaba activities, affected the outlook of the Pakistan's top army echelon. These came on the heels of the changes Musharraf had engineered in forcing the exits of generals known of pro-Mujahidin views. The military leadership sensitive to rising religious and extremist militancy and the danger posed to the country by the Jihadi groups. However; by this time problems was growing partly concealed and partly with nebulous official connivance and began to emerge with vengeance. The danger had already assumed monstrous proportions that could not be contained simply by proscribing extremist groups and pursuing individuals responsible for acts of terrorism. The Jihadi and other militant extremist group, riled up over the perceived U- turn in policy over the Afghan Taliban and the hunt for Al Qaeda, targeted Musharraf. His moves towards normalization with India initiated in early 2004 further accentuated their vitriolic attack against the Musharraf government (Dawn, 29 January, 2007)

### **Conclusion**

As the extremist threat to the state gradually unfolded, the Musharraf government failed to deal with firmly. Instead, the government took piecemeal actions such as proscribing the militant group, partly in compliance with Security Council requirement, and pursuing those involved in acts of violence. The intermittent military operations focused on the FATA, in the context of the peculiar conditions in the area and development next door in Afghanistan. Many within the government believed that the ideological fervor and zealotry of Jihadi Militant, especially those weaned away from involvement in Kashmir, would fade away with time. However; developments contained to exacerbate the problems. These militants gravitated towards the FATA and joined with tribal insurgents, local religious and extremist group and foreign and Al Qaeda elements to undertake militant activity inside the FATA and across the border in support of the Afghan Taliban. Their agendas often depended on their affiliation with various tribal insurgencies. Many of those hailing from various parts of the Punjab had been part of Afghan Taliban military campaigns before 2001 and were known as "Punjabi Taliban". Later in 2007, many of these disparate elements and tribal insurgent rallied under the umbrella of the Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP) led by Baitullah Mehsud (2007-2009). They claimed allegiance with but were distinct from the Afghan Taliban, who, after the collapse of their rule, remained mainly focused on refraining influence inside Afghanistan.



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