

American Foreign Policy Council

INDIA

QUICK FACTS

Population: 1,266,883,598 (July 2016)

Area: 3,287,263 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25%, Mongoloid and other 3%

Religions: Hindu 79.8%, Muslim 14.2%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.7%, other and unspecified 2%

Government Type: federal parliamentary republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$2.251 trillion (2015 est.)

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (January 12, 2017)

OVERVIEW

Few countries have felt the deadly consequences of Islamist extremism more than India. Situated next to Pakistan, a key sponsor and instigator of international Islamist terrorism, the South Asian region is host to a multiplicity of centers of Islamist militancy that have affected India, including Iran, the principal driver of Shia militancy; Afghanistan and Bangladesh where Sunni militancy has flourished, and the Arab world, where radical interpretations of Sunni Islam have affected the large community of expatriate Indian workers and their families.

However, the Indian Muslim community has in large part refused to yield to the call of militancy. A community of well over 172 million Muslims¹—the second largest in the world after that of Indonesia²—lives in relative harmony within India's multicultural, multi-religious, secular democracy. Such coexistence is not without its frictions: strife between the various religious communities has been a significant feature in India since (and, indeed, long before) the carnage of the partition of India in 1947. That conflict, in which the British Indian Empire was cleaved in

two, saw nearly half a million people killed. However, the Indian Muslim community has largely rejected broader attempts at radicalization and indoctrination, and remains integrated into the fabric of Indian society.

Arguably the greatest impact of Islamist terrorism in India has been felt in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where a separatist movement, inspired by Sunni extremism and sustained by Pakistani support, has plagued the region for over two-and-a-half decades.³ Islamist terrorist attacks on a smaller scale by both foreign and indigenous groups, meanwhile, have occurred in many other parts of the country.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Islamist terrorism in India, overwhelmingly generated and supported by Pakistan, has long found its principal concentration in the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Though J&K has often been the site of Islamist violence, the situation has improved in recent years, as the changes on the world stage since 9/11 and Pakistan's growing instability have led to a diminution in violence. At its peak, Islamist violence in J&K killed over 4,500 people through 2001. In 2015, J&K saw 174 fatalities caused by Islamist terrorism, though there was a spike in 2016, with annual fatalities rising to 267.⁴

India has been confronted with Pakistani-backed Islamist subversion virtually since the birth of both nations,⁵ but experienced an asymmetric escalation after 1988, when then-Pakistani dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, flush from the successful *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan (1980-1989), decided to extend his strategy to J&K. Successive governments in Islamabad have actively sustained this policy, leading to unrelenting terrorism in J&K for over two and a half decades and inflicting—as of 2016—a total of 44,145 fatalities.⁶

Gradually, as international pressure to curtail *jihad* in J&K mounted and as domestic circumstances in Pakistan worsened, terrorist groups largely controlled by Pakistan's notorious spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI),⁷ have increasingly found it necessary to base their cadres in areas outside of J&K. They have also had to rethink their approach within a wider pan-Islamist ideological framework that dovetails more seamlessly into the psyche of extremist groups and the logic of the “global *jihad*.” Ever growing levels of Islamist subversion and terrorism were sustained across India since the start of the new century,⁸ culminating in the Mumbai attacks of November 26, 2008,⁹ though there has been a dramatic fall in incidence and fatalities since.

The networks and support structures of the multiplicity of Islamist terrorist organizations operating in India have been painstakingly constructed by the ISI and backed by enormous flows of financial support from West Asia, as well as from affluent expatriate Muslim communities in the West, as part of a sustained strategy of “erosion, encirclement and penetration” that has been exhaustively documented elsewhere.¹⁰

Lashkar e-Taiba (LeT)

Under the command of Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, the ISI created *Lashkar e-Taiba* (LeT), in the Kunar province of Afghanistan. LeT is part of the “al-Qaeda compact”¹¹ and is a member of the “International Islamic Front for the struggle against the Jews and the Crusaders” (*Al-Jabhab al-Islamiyyah al-Alamiyyah li-Qital al-Yahudwal-Salibiyyin*) established by Osama bin Laden in February 1998. In 1993, LeT’s forces were diverted to the Pakistan-backed *jihad* in J&K, where it has operated continuously since. At the same time, LeT has extended its networks and strikes across the rest of India, crystallizing the strategy that Saeed first articulated publicly on February 18, 1996, in an address at the Lahore Press Club: “The *jihad* in Kashmir would soon spread to entire India. Our *mujahideen* would create three Pakistans in India.”¹²

The organization is headquartered at Muridke on a large plot of land widely acknowledged to have been gifted to it by the Pakistan government,¹³ and is known to have run terrorist camps in Muzaffarabad and Gilgit (in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir), Lahore, Peshawar, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Multan, Quetta, Gujranwala and Sialkot. The group operates at least 16 Islamic centers, 135 secondary schools, 2,200 offices and a vast network of *madrassas* (religious seminaries), orphanages, medical centers and charities across Pakistan.¹⁴ The U.S. State Department’s 2008 *Report on International Religious Freedom* noted that: “schools run by Jamat-ud-Dawa [LeT’s sister organization] continued... teaching and recruitment for Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization.”¹⁵

Until its designation as a terrorist group by the UN Security Council in December 2008, the LeT published a number of journals, papers and websites.¹⁶ Crucially, it remains loyal to Pakistan and, unlike many other organizations created by the ISI which have since turned against Islamabad or whose loyalties are now suspect, continues to coordinate its activities with Pakistani state agencies. Finances for the group—as for all Pakistan-backed Islamist terrorist groupings—are provided via tacit state support, including the transfer of large quantities of fake Indian currency that Indian Intelligence sources contend, on the basis of interrogations of arrested terrorists and couriers, is printed at Pakistani Security Presses at the Malir Cantonment in Karachi, and at Lahore, Quetta and Peshawar.

Significant in this regard is the Indian government’s August 2009 announcement that it intends to take up the issue of the importation of currency standard ink and paper by Pakistan from the UK, Sweden and Switzerland, with various international agencies, including Interpol.¹⁷ In addition to very substantial seizures of fake Indian

currency notes (FICN) from Pakistan-linked couriers, there have been instances of such currency also being recovered from Pakistan Embassy staff.¹⁸ India's Ministry of Home Affairs has reportedly found that "the ISI has managed to get access to the configuration, specifications and other secret codes of the genuine Indian currency notes from six European companies that supply Indian currency papers fitted with security features, and another company in Switzerland that supplies the security ink used in printing these currency notes in India."¹⁹ Neutralizing FICN in circulation was also one of the objectives of the demonitisation of INR 1000 and 500 notes in November 2016, and there were claims that this had led to the closure of printing presses in Pakistan where FICNs were printed.²⁰

LeT's financial sources also include "charitable" contributions that support both its vast social network across Pakistan and its terrorist activities. These sources can range from external contributions from diaspora communities to international Islamist charities, including several prominent ones from Saudi Arabia. The Pakistani state channeled a large proportion of international aid received in the wake of the earthquake in Kashmir in 2005 through the LeT, withholding state relief operations in order to facilitate the LeT's further consolidation in the affected areas.²¹

There is now no doubt that the massive terrorist attack on Mumbai November 26-29, 2008—in which Pakistan-backed militants went on a four-day shooting and bombing rampage in India's commercial capital, killing 164 and wounding over 300—was engineered by the LeT, which is now permitted to operate openly in Pakistan under a different name, *Jamaat-ud-Dawa* (JuD), after its supposed official ban (imposed as a result of U.S. pressure) in 2002. American involvement and pressure on Pakistan in the aftermath of that attack forced some apparent action against visible leaders of the LeT/JuD, though a long process of denial and obfuscation by Pakistan's top leadership and authorities suggests that the group will be allowed simply to reinvent itself under a new identity, as it has done previously.

As a result of tremendous international focus and pressure, the LeT has not been able to execute many significant incidents of terrorist violence in India outside J&K since the Mumbai attacks of 2008. Yet the group nevertheless was reportedly involved in at least four prominent incidents since outside J&K, namely: the Pune German Bakery blast (February 13, 2010); the Mumbai serial blasts (July 13, 2011); the Delhi High Court Blast (September 7, 2011); and the Dinanagar Police Station attack in Gurdaspur, Punjab (July 27, 2015). Moreover, the group's involvement was confirmed in at least 91 incidents (36 of them violent) in J&K during 2011, 66 incidents (26 of them violent) in 2012, 51 incidents (12 of them violent) in 2013, 61 incidents (27 of them violent) in 2014, 66 incidents (33 of them violent) in 2015, and another 67 incidents (39 of them violent) in 2016.²²

The Harkat Triad

In addition to the LeT, the three most significant terrorist groups that operate in India comprise the “Harkat Triad”. These groups are the *Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami* (HuJI), the *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen* (HuM) and the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM), each of which is also linked to the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

HuJI came into existence in 1980 and fought the Soviets in Afghanistan. After the Afghan war, HuJI focused much of its resources on the fighting in Kashmir while also dispatching cadres to fight in other Islamist campaigns in a number of other countries, including Bosnia, Myanmar and Tajikistan. HuJI was one of the organizations that sent hundreds of its *mujahideen* into Afghanistan after 2001 during the campaigns against the Northern Alliance and the U.S.-led coalition’s Operation Enduring Freedom, and is also a member organization of bin Laden’s “International Islamic Front.” However, the emergence and consolidation of more effective terrorist organizations has marginalized HuJI in Pakistan. Consequently, the group is now strongest in Bangladesh, where HuJI Bangladesh (BD) was established as a distinct organization with direct aid from Osama bin Laden in 1992, and now seeks to establish Islamic *hukumat* (rule) there.²³ Since 2005, HuJI-BD has been involved in a number of major Islamist terrorist operations in India, executing joint operations with Pakistani terrorist groups including the LeT, the JeM and HuM, and coordinates closely with the ISI.

HuM is one of the original member organizations of bin Laden’s International Islamic Front. It was established in 1985 at Raiwind in Pakistani Punjab by Maulana Samiul Haq and Maulana Fazlur Rehman, leaders of factions of the *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI), to participate in the *jihad* against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Samiul Haq’s *madrassa*, the Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqania at Akora Khattak near Peshawar, later emerged as a primary training ground for the Taliban, and also came to dominate the HuM’s terrorist mobilization and training projects. Within months of its creation, the HuM was exporting recruits to Afghanistan, initially from Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, but subsequently from other countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Myanmar and the Philippines.²⁴ The primary area of HuM’s activities, after the Afghan campaigns, was J&K, though it has suffered a continuous erosion of its stature as a leading player, as the *Lashkar-e-Taiba* and HuM’s breakaway, *Jaish-e-Mohammed*, consolidated their role through a succession of dramatic attacks, both within and outside Pakistan.

JeM is one of the most virulent Pakistani groups operating in India. It was established in early 2000, following known terrorist Azhar Masood’s triumphant return to Pakistan upon his release from India as part of a hostage exchange. Masood, originally part of HuM, split with that organization as a result of differences over matters of “finance and influence.”²⁵ Bin Laden is believed to have extended generous funding to the JeM.²⁶ The JeM has also been extraordinarily successful in motivating second-

generation South Asian Muslims in the West to join the *jihad*. These include Ahmed Sayeed Omar Sheikh, one of the conspirators in the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. and journalist Daniel Pearl's killer, as well as "Abdullahbhai," a Birmingham (UK) resident who served as the first suicide bomber in Jammu & Kashmir in the Badami Bagh incident of December 2000. JeM has been very active in recent times, and was involved in two of the deadliest attacks in India in 2016. On January 2, 2016, JeM terrorists attacked an India Air Force base at Pathankot in Punjab, killing seven soldiers. All six attackers were also killed.²⁷ In September 2016, after infiltrating from across the Line of Control (the *de facto* border between Pakistan and India), JeM terrorists attacked the administrative base of a Brigade of the Indian Army in Uri, Baramulla District. The militants killed 18 soldiers and injured 19. Two of the injured soldiers died subsequently, raising the death toll to 20.²⁸

HM is the second-largest terrorist formation operating in J&K after LeT in terms of strength and capacity to carry out terror strikes.²⁹ India, the United States, and the European Union have declared HM a terrorist group. Overseas, HM is allegedly backed by Ghulam Nabi Fai's Kashmir American Council and Ayub Thakur's World Kashmir Freedom Movement in the U.S. Early in its history, the Hizb established contacts with Afghan *mujahideen* groups such as Hizb-e-Islami, as part of which some of its cadres allegedly received arms training. In January 2013, it was reported that HM had joined hands with HuJI to engage in operations to strike fear among Kashmiris.³⁰ The proscribed Students Islamic Movement of India is also believed to have links with the *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen*.³¹

At one time, HM was the most important militant group of the Harkat Triad in terms of its effectiveness in perpetrating terrorist violence, but has been progressively marginalized by LeT and JeM, as those groups have become more central to Pakistan's strategic objectives in India. More recently, with the LeT and JeM bases and networks in Pakistan coming under increasing international scrutiny, there has been some effort to restore HM's operational ascendancy in J&K. It has, however, met with limited success in this endeavor, as the group's operational leadership was systematically decimated in the 2008-2010 timeframe.³² Nevertheless, the group continues to operate openly from its headquarters at Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, under the leadership of Yusuf Shah (a.k.a. Syed Salahuddin), who also serves as the chairman of the United Jihad Council—a conglomerate of India-directed *jihadi* organizations supported by the Pakistani state and also headquartered at Muzaffarabad.

Other factions

There are a number of other Pakistan-based groups operating in India, playing roles of varying significance in the machinery of Islamist terror that has been assembled over the years, including some that boast substantial Indian membership.³³ The most important among them in recent years has been the Student's Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). SIMI has been involved in terrorist activities, principally as a facilita-

tor to various Pakistan-based groups, since the 1990s, providing a range of services, such as couriers, safe havens and communications posts, for specific terrorist operations or terrorist cells. Since 9/11, however, SIMI's significance in Pakistan's strategic perspective has grown, as Islamabad came under increasing international pressure to dismantle the terrorist networks it had constructed and deployed. Pakistan has sought, consequently, to project an increasing proportion of its operations in India as "indigenous terrorism" purportedly sparked by "discontented Muslims," and the role of "indigenous terrorists" has seen an abrupt spike. SIMI's role in these operations has gradually increased. Initially, its cadres joined with the various Pakistani groups to participate in collaborative operations, and eventually, in the Ahmedabad and Delhi bombings of July and September 2008, respectively, operating "independently" under the identity of the "Indian Mujahideen." Crucially, however, the top leadership and cadres of SIMI receive safe haven, training and resources from, Pakistan, and it is there that their operational command centers are located.³⁴

The Indian Mujahideen (IM) is believed by intelligence agencies to be a shadow amalgam of the SIMI. As the pressure of arrests built up on the top SIMI leadership, the most radical elements within the organization went on to form IM, with SIMI continuing as the "feeder agency" for IM recruits, engaging in continuing political mobilization and ideological subversion. IM leaders like Mohammad SadiqueIssar Sheikh, Riyaz Bhatkal, Iqbal Bhatkal, Amir Reza Khan and Tariq Ismail, have all graduated from SIMI. On February 23, 2012, IM's ideologue and principal recruiter, Mohammad Kafeel Ahmed, confirmed that SIMI's vast networks were now being used by the IM. Intelligence sources indicate that money raised through arms smuggling, circulation of fake currency, *hawala* transactions, extortion and the diversion of political funds had, by late 2012, made the IM worth an estimated INR 450 million (about USD 8.5 million),³⁵ with a large chunk of this money coming from Saudi Arabia. IM is the first India-based terrorist group to be designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) by the U.S., according to a September 19, 2011 notification.³⁶ The group has reportedly been found to be involved in ISI-LeT-led attacks, prominently including the Pune German Bakery blast (February 13, 2010), Mumbai serial blasts (July 13, 2011), the Delhi High Court Blast (September 7, 2011), and the twin blasts in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh (February 21, 2013).

Global *jihad's* apparent appearance in India, evidenced by the formation of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (*Jamā'at Qā'idat al-Jihād fi Shībh al-Qārrah al-Hindīyah* or *Organization of the Base of Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent*, AQIS), and the Islamic State announcements regarding Khorasan Province (which includes the Indian Subcontinent), has attracted enormous interest. In reality, the impact of AQIS has been non-existent, and the impact of the Islamic State, negligible.

After the fall of Mosul, Iraq in June 2014 and the Islamic State's declaration of a Caliphate soon thereafter, there was a flurry of interest in the Islamic State in India. Some 23 Indians were confirmed to have joined the Islamic State in 2014³⁷ and, af-

ter a protracted lull, 21 Indians from the southern state of Kerala are reported to have subsequently travelled to Syria.³⁸ The latter group included six women and three children.³⁹ Six of the first group were confirmed to have been killed, and two have returned to India. Another 30-odd individuals, interdicted in their attempts to travel to Syria to join Daesh, have also been detained, counseled and returned to their families. In addition, there have been 66 arrests of individuals plotting terrorist activities in the name of the Islamic State in India, particularly in a network mobilized by Muhammad Shafi Armar, the surviving leader of the *Ansar ul Tawhid fi bilad al Hind* (AuT), a group that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in August 2014.⁴⁰

There have also been a few incidents of flag waving, provocative posters and occasional symbolism (such as wearing Islamic State T-shirts in one incident in Tamil Nadu in August 2014). However, to date, the Islamic State has not been linked in any way to any attack on Indian soil.

Likewise, though AQIS exists in India, its impact has been minimal. On September 3, 2014, Ayman al Zawahiri announced the formation of AQIS with Maulana Asim Umar, a leader of a breakaway faction of the Indian Mujahiddeen based in Pakistan, as its chief. Significantly, India has been unsuccessfully targeted by al-Qaeda at least since 1996, when Osama bin Laden referred to India as being among the lands where the Muslims were living under “oppression,” and thus a legitimate theater of *jihad*.⁴¹ There has, as of this writing, been no incident of terrorist violence related to AQIS, and no significant recruitment on Indian soil.

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Islamism in Indian society occupies a continuous ideological spectrum. Indeed, many of the root ideologies that have fed terrorism in South Asia find their sources on Indian soil—though, as already stated, at least some of these sources have sought to distance themselves from the interpretations and activities of terrorists.

Four broad sources can be identified on the landscape of revivalist, fundamentalist and extremist Islamism in South Asia: the Deobandi school; the Barelvi school; the modernist-revivalist streams, such as the influential *Jamaat-e-Islami*; and the *Ahl-e Hadith*, which finds its inspiration in *Wahhabi* doctrines and support and funding from Saudi Arabia.

The Deobandi, the oldest of these four groups, dates back to 1867 and the establishment of the Dar-ul-Uloom seminary at Deoband, a small town in western Uttar Pradesh in India. Founded by Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi, the seminary developed a structured curriculum with an overwhelming emphasis on religious education based on original Arabic texts, rather than on later and “corrupted” interpretations. The impetus for these developments was the marginalization of the Muslim community in British India, and concerns

about the growth of Western and other non-Islamic influences. The Deobandis formally subscribe to the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence, and emphasize a puritanical interpretation of the faith.

In 1919, Deobandi leaders created a political front, the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* (JUH). Later, the demand for a separate state of Pakistan for Muslims of the subcontinent split the JUH, and the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* (JUI) came into being in 1945, uniting the votaries of Partition. This group lent its support to the dominant political formation favoring the communal division of British India, the Muslim League (ML). The JUI and a variety of Deobandi formations have been immensely influential, both socially and politically, in Pakistan, shaping the course of sectarianism, extremism and militancy. The Taliban in Afghanistan and the Harkat Triad in India also claim Deobandi affiliation. Significantly, however, the *ulema* of the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband have repeatedly and explicitly condemned all aspects of terrorism, stating that “there is no place for terrorism in Islam” and declaring it to be an “unpardonable sin.”⁴² In February 2008, for instance, the Deoband Ulema organized an anti-terrorism conference at the Dar-ul-Uloom, which was attended by “tens of thousands of clerics and students from around India.”⁴³

The Barelvi order, established by Ahmed Raza Khan toward the end of the 19th century in Uttar Pradesh state, also adheres to an interpretation of the Hanafi School, but one that is at wide variance with the Deobandi reading. The Barelvi School, in fact, seeks to emphasize the very syncretic elements of South Asian Islam that were explicitly rejected by the Deobandis. Deeply influenced by mystical Sufi practices and beliefs, it attributes many extraordinary perhaps even divine qualities to the Prophet, conceiving of him more as a holy presence than a mortal man. They likewise believe strongly in the power of intercession by holy personages and saints, and give greater import to the personal (rather than social and political) aspects of religion. Unsurprisingly, the Barelvi philosophy is anathema to the puritan reformist movements and schools of Islam, which condemn the Barelvis as shrine- and grave-worshipping deviationists. The Barelvis have not been significantly associated with terrorism in India, and have been systematically targeted by Deobandi terrorist groups in Pakistan.⁴⁴

Another movement is *Ahl-e Hadith*, a relatively small movement that has benefited enormously from Saudi support in recent times. It represents one of the most radicalized elements within the Sunni fundamentalist factions of South Asia. Inspired by Sayyed Ahmed ‘Shaheed’ (The Martyr) of Rae Bareilly (in the present Indian State of Uttar Pradesh), who fought the Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1826-31 in the Peshawar region, the *Ahl-e Hadith* has sought to restore Islam to the purity of the original faith, as articulated in the Koran and the *Hadith*. It formally claims to be distinct from the Wahhabis, but the movement’s beliefs and practices have much in common with the dominant creed of Saudi Arabia. While the *Ahl-e Hadith* insists that it does not follow any one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, its practitioners have moved progressively closer to the Hanbali interpretation that is also the basis of

Wahhabi practices. Their interpretation of Islam is puritanical and legalistic, and they reject all manner of perceived deviations and “idolatrous” practices that they claim have crept into the other major traditions. While its numbers are believed to be small and the movement no longer has more than a trace presence in India, it has remained vibrant in Pakistan, from where it has exercised disproportionate influence and demonstrated a great capacity for violence in recent years. *Lashkar-e-Taiba* proclaims adherence to the *Ahl-e Hadith* ideology.

The *Jamaat-e-Islami* is one of the most influential revivalist movements in South Asia, and has had tremendous political influence, both in pre-Partition India and, subsequent to its creation, in Pakistan. It is the most explicitly political of the various movements and categorically denies the very possibility of a distinction between the religious and the political or, indeed, even between the religious and the personal, within a genuinely Islamic order. Abu Ala Maududi, the ideologue and founder of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, declared that in an Islamic state—the ideal and objective of the organization—“no one can regard his affairs as personal and private... An Islamic state is a totalitarian state.”⁴⁵ Maududi sought to “enunciate an all-inclusive school of Islamic thought,” one that was “not bound by any school of law.”⁴⁶ To a large extent, *Jamaat* practice follows upon interpretations of Maududi’s vision.

Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and the Students’ Islamic Movement of India trace their roots to *Jamaat* ideology. Nevertheless, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Hind rejects all linkages with these groups, including SIMI—which it created as its student wing in 1977, but which was “expelled” in 1981 due to its increasing radicalization. The *Hizb* remains intimately connected with the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Jammu & Kashmir.

Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) is a radical Muslim revivalist movement, founded by Muhammad Ilyas in 1926 in Mewat (in the present Indian State of Haryana), which reaches out to Muslims of all social and economic classes and seeks to purify the Islamic faith of all “idolatrous deviations.” One of the most rapidly growing Islamist organizations, TJ primarily operates in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but has extended its network in other parts of the world as well. It is “a loosely controlled mass movement, not a rigidly controlled organization” and “has no fixed membership and the leaders of the movement do not exercise a total control on its activists.”⁴⁷ TJ’s founder, Mohammad Ilyas, emphasized the *jihad-bin-nafs*, or the internal *jihad* of the spirit, over the *jihad-bin-saif*, jihad by the sword, and the organization has long been criticized by other Islamists for its apolitical orientation. In recent years, however, linkages between TJ followers and Islamist terrorism have surfaced with increasing frequency.⁴⁸

Today, some of the Indian Muslim community’s disadvantages are structural, and relate to accidents of history and of geography. The partition divested the community of its leadership and its elites across North India, and Muslims have remained largely directionless and socially, politically and economically underdeveloped over the intervening decades. On virtually all social indicators, Muslims are worse off than

compared to the other major religious communities in India. Higher poverty and illiteracy levels in the community limit capacities for productive employment, especially at higher levels. 26.5 percent of Muslim Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and 19.3 percent of other Muslims were below the poverty line in urban areas and 30.8 percent of Muslim OBCs and 25 percent of other Muslims were below the poverty line in rural areas in 2011-2012, as compared to an Indian average of 13.7 and 25.7 percent, respectively.⁴⁹ Literacy among Muslims stands at 57.3 percent as against a national average of 63.1 percent.⁵⁰ The distribution of Muslim populations has a crucial impact on these factors: The community is disproportionately located in some of the poorest, most backward and ill-governed States of India. In 2011, for instance, just four of India's 28 States and seven Union Territories—Uttar Pradesh (38.4 million), Bihar (17.5 million), West Bengal (24.6 million), and Assam (10.6 million)—with some of the poorest human-development profiles in the country, accounted for 53.04 percent of India's Muslim population.⁵¹ Relatively higher Muslim population growth, disproportionately concentrated in the most backward regions and among the most disadvantaged population segments, only serves to exacerbate existing ills. Higher poverty and illiteracy levels are directly related to higher reproduction rates among the Muslims, though rates have declined proportionately among segments of the Muslim population that have escaped these blights.⁵² Significantly, in many of the better-administered and more prosperous States, the gap between the general population profile and the Muslim population profile tends to diminish on a number of variables. In Kerala, for instance, Muslim literacy in 2011 stood at 93.29 percent⁵³ compared to a State average of 94 percent.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Muslim poverty remains higher than the average in most States in the country.

In terms of Muslim education, it is crucial to understand that the Indian *madrassa* has little in common with the “*jihad* factories” that have been established in a large proportion of Islamic educational institutions in Pakistan and, to some extent, in Bangladesh as well. There are no authoritative estimates of the number of *madrassas* in India, but recent approximations put the figure at between 30,000 and 45,000.⁵⁵ Divergent estimates put the proportion of Muslim children going to *madrassas* variously at 2.3 and 4 percent of the 7-19 years age group. The proportion is higher in rural areas and among males.⁵⁶ The government runs programs supporting modern curricula in *madrassas*, and a significant number of such institutions have accepted such curricula.⁵⁷ Crucially, *madrassas* are often found to be providing the only option for schooling in areas where the state's education system has failed. However, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has developed a “multipronged” policy focusing on counter-radicalization, involving several ministries and state governments, and including a program for skill development for *madrassa* students.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, a fraction of *madrassas* have been found to have at least some linkages with the Islamist extremist enterprise, and there has been a pronounced growth of such institutions—funded from outside the country—along the most porous stretches of India's borders. In February and March 2006, for instance, officers of a border

security agency disclosed that 2,365 mosques and *madrassas* had sprung up on the Indian side of the Indo-Nepal border, and some 700 had done so on the Nepal side, over the preceding decade—of which some 50 or 60 were considered “sensitive.”⁵⁹ A significant rise in the number of *madrassas* along the Indo-Bangladesh border also has been reported.⁶⁰ At least some terrorist incidents have been linked backward to networks established among elements within the mosque-*madrassa* complex in the country.⁶¹

There has also been a proliferation of Wahabi *madrassas* and mosques in troubled Jammu & Kashmir, with the *Ahl-e-Hadith* leading the pack. These have reportedly been funded overwhelmingly through *hawala* channels and through physical transfer of currencies across the Line of Control with Pakistan. While intelligence and enforcement agencies are well aware of the problem, they remain mute bystanders in the absence of a political mandate to act, and because of the ‘sensitive’ nature of the issue.⁶² Similar patterns are visible in several other states across the country.⁶³

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

“India’s secular democratic constitution,” scholar and diplomat Husain Haqqani observes, “empowers the country’s Muslims more than their co-religionists in Muslim majority states.”⁶⁴ India’s constitutional and legal order is rigorously secular⁶⁵ and goes out of its way to protect minorities or to accommodate them through “reverse discrimination” provisions.

Nevertheless, Muslims—along with other disadvantaged groups—do endure significant discrimination in a deeply inequitable social, economic and political order. Weak governance and a crumbling justice system across vast areas of the country have meant that injustice, neglect and injury are often disregarded, and their victims have little practical recourse, despite the elaborate framework of statutory provisions. While the broad trajectory of trends in “communal violence” is not discouraging,⁶⁶ periodic bloodbaths—the worst of these in the new millennium in Gujarat in 2002, where some 2,000 persons were killed, primarily Muslims—continue to poison relationships between communities, and undermine the confidence of the country’s minorities in the institutions of the state. 62 persons were killed, 98 injured and over 55,000 displaced in the most recent of major cycles of communal rioting, in Uttar Pradesh in 2013.⁶⁷ Crucially, such violence often “bears the imprimatur of the state,”⁶⁸ as parties in power abandon constitutional values and subvert the agencies of the state.

Among the most visible indicators of systemic discrimination against Muslims in India is their share in government employment, which relatively recently stood nationwide at 4.9 percent of the total number of such employees, when Muslims constituted 13.4 percent of the country’s population.⁶⁹ When tallied in 2016, Muslims made up just 3.3 percent of the Indian Administrative Service and 3.2 percent of the

Indian Police Service.⁷⁰ Much of this is, however, a consequence of poor education and the relative paucity of qualified aspirants to these posts. Thus, “the success rate of Muslims is about the same as other candidates,” though “the small number of Muslim candidates appearing in the written examination of the Civil Services is a cause of concern.”⁷¹

Despite the popular narrative, however, the successes of Islamist radicalism demonstrate no coherent correlation to specific grievances, atrocities or deprivations among the Muslim community.⁷² Islamist extremism is, in fact, rooted in a powerful, sustained process of ideological mobilization that has its roots in Pakistan. Indian Muslims have overwhelmingly resisted these efforts at subversion and radicalization. Nevertheless, fringe elements within the community remain vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by terrorist and anti-state forces. Clearly, areas with heavy Muslim concentrations would be more susceptible to such extremist mobilization, and these vulnerabilities are compounded where these areas lie along borders with hostile neighbors—particularly Pakistan and, at least until recently, Bangladesh. The growth of *madrassas*, particularly where these are substantially foreign-funded, along and on both sides of India’s borders, is, in this context, a matter of deep concern, though only a small minority of all *madrassas* in the country have proven to be susceptible to radicalization.

The critical element of India’s abiding success against radical Islamist mobilization is the constitutional and civilizational underpinnings of secularism within the country. Of course, Indian society and politics have yet to become “socially and emotionally secular,”⁷³ despite Constitutional secularism and a long history of confessional co-existence. The periodic recurrence of communal conflagrations and manifestations of religious extremism are evidence of this. Nevertheless, structural and cultural factors constrain even radical players from their greatest excesses. For instance, electoral considerations have repeatedly forced the Hindu right to accommodate Muslim concerns. Similarly, even where some state agencies have colluded with extremist elements—as, for instance, in the Gujarat riots of 2002—constitutional checks and balances have, eventually, reasserted themselves to bring offenders to some measure of justice.

While the threat of Islamist radicalization and terrorism has endured for decades, and Pakistan gives every sign of being intent upon an asymmetric war of attrition, Indian responses have remained largely fitful, event-led and *ad hoc*. Indeed, India has no clearly articulated counterterrorism policy.⁷⁴ This deficiency is compounded by endemic deficits of capacity in the security, intelligence and justice systems,⁷⁵ which make any planned and comprehensive response impossible. As noted elsewhere,

The absence of strategy and the incoherence of tactics have long afflicted India, as the country finds itself responding continuously and insufficiently to provocations by its neighbors, and to a rising tide of subversion and ter-

rorism. Worse, the pattern of responses has, with rare exception, reflected a quality of desperation and directionless-ness that, after decades of contending with these problems, is impossible to fathom. With over 25 years of Pakistan-sponsored Islamist terrorist activity on Indian soil, the country is still to correctly define the problem that confronts it, or to craft an appropriate 'strategic architecture' and to derive policies and practices that are in conformity with such an overarching design.⁷⁶

If Islamist terrorism, nevertheless, gains little traction, and if the state is still able to achieve significant successes against both terrorists and against extremist ideologies, the credit must go to small handfuls of exceptionally dedicated individuals in the intelligence and security community, on the one hand, and an enveloping culture that rejects terrorism on the other. India's democracy, which has gone great lengths to accommodate minority sentiments, is a part of this culture, and it is through the instruments and dynamics of democracy that extremism is constrained.

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[4] Violence in J&K peaked in 2001, with 4,507 fatalities in that year, and remained continuously at the high intensity conflict level between 1990 and 2006. For the first time since insurgency started, it came down to three figures in 2007. All data from the Institute for Conflict Management, South Asia Terrorism Portal, "Fatalities in Terrorist Violence 1988 – 2016,"

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