

No. 133

The *Ulama* in Pakistani Politics

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**S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
Singapore**

20 July 2007

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ABSTRACT

Since the introduction of Islam to the Indian sub-continent, the *ulama* have played a major role both in society and in the exercise of authority. Due to the primacy of Islam in the life of Muslims, the *ulama* have always been an important source of legitimization for many of the ruling elite in the region. Today, the *ulama* continue to play an important role in the political, social and economic realms of the Muslim world, especially in the South Asian region. In fact, the *ulama* have emerged with more enthusiasm and vigour to claim the political leadership of several Muslim societies, a role they rarely played previously. This paper is an attempt to assess the position of the *ulama* in Muslim societies. It will make the case that, in recent times, the *ulama* have attempted to carve a larger sphere of influence for themselves in the realm of Muslim politics. And more importantly this paper will argue that they have been successful in doing so. This paper would use the case study of the *ulama* in Pakistani to highlight on the success of such an attempt. This paper will argue that the *ulama's* political role, was initially aimed at restoring the Mughal rule, but these aims shifted when the Mughals began to lose their political power. Over time, this aim was replaced by the desire to establish an Islamic state helmed by the *ulama*. The first section of this paper defines the term “*ulama*” and seeks to highlight their historical role and function in Islamic societies. The second part of the paper examines the political position of the *ulama* before and after Pakistan’s independence. The third section focuses on the impact of the *ulama's* growing political assertiveness. Lastly, the paper assesses the future prospects of the *ulama* in Pakistani politics.

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The *Ulama* in Pakistani Politics

Defining the *Ulama*

As scholars of Islamic law and the *hadith*, and exegetes of the Quran and religious guides, the *ulama* have shaped the dominant religious discourse in Muslim societies throughout most of history.¹ Despite their important role, there is no consensus among Muslims over the basic definition of *ulama*. In the widest sense, the term is not limited to those with religious education but includes anyone who is knowledgeable.² For most of Muslim history, an *alim* refers to one who is knowledgeable in the Islamic intellectual disciplines and, more specifically, to one who is familiar with Islamic jurisprudence. The *ulama* are not thought to represent God nor are they treated as divine. The authority that a particular jurist may enjoy is a function of his formal and informal education, as well as his social and scholastic networking and influence. In classical Islamic political-legal theory, jurists are supposed to play an advisory and consultative role, and to assume judicial positions in the administration of justice.³ In Islamic history, the authority of the *ulama* was recognized by the state (whether the caliph, sultan or amir) in return for the scholars granting legitimization for the ruler. The trade-off was that the state employed the scholars in the legal courts and educational institutions, and ceded to them control and regulation of *sharia* law, as well as authority on defining orthodox doctrine versus what is deemed as heresy. In return, the scholars generally tolerated the irreligious and lax conduct of the ruling class. This was the pattern set under the Umayyads and consolidated by the

¹ It must be noted here that the term “*ulama*” is plural while its singular form is “*alim*”.

² In this sense, a grammarian, linguist, mathematician or literary poetic expert is also an *alim*, even though they are not knowledgeable in Islamic jurisprudence.

³ Muhammad Kamali Abdul Majid, “*Ulama Dan Perubahan Social Dalam Islam*”, *Jurnal Usuluddin*, 10 July 1999, p. 87.

Abbasids.⁴ However, the potential for the *ulama* to withdraw their support or legitimization has always existed.⁵ This, however, has rarely occurred and most *ulama* are “*ulama* of the sultan” and remain loyal to the rulers.

A Brief History of the *Ulama* in the Indian Sub-continent (later Pakistan)

Kalim Bahadur noted that the *ulama* in the Indian sub-continent have usually been content with an exalted position in the power structure as consultants on religious matters.⁶ A quick study into the history of Islam in the sub-continent will give credence to this argument. The *ulama* in India were often subservient to Muslim rulers but remained influential in issues related to *sharia*, a crucial part of the legal system for most of the Mughal period.⁷ Ira Lapidus observes that the role of the Muslim ruler in India is always seen in accordance to how he implements *sharia*.⁸ As such, Mughal emperors, with the exception of Akbar, were sensitive to the *ulama* and often allowed them to control matters of religion. The *ulama* consequently exercised considerable influence over the running of religious affairs and on the Mughals’ policies. *Ulama* such as Shaykh Ahmad Sarhindi (1564–1624) and Shaykh Abdul Haqq (1571–1642) were influential in the courts of Emperor Jahangir (1569–1627), encouraging him to limit the rights of non-Muslims.⁹ Serving the state structure meant

⁴ See G. E. Von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam: A History, 600 A.D. to 1258 A.D.* (pp. 64–99), New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005.

⁵ Some of the *ulama* did withdraw their support for the caliphs and openly challenged the system. For instance, Imam Abu Hanifa (699–767 CE) criticize the Abbasid rulers for their brutal suppression of the opposition to their rule.

⁶ Kalim Bahadur, “The Rise of the MMA in Pakistan”, in Ajay Darshan Behera and Joseph C. Mathew (Eds.), *Pakistan in a Changing Strategic Context* (p. 193), New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2004.

⁷ Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and Punjab, 1707–48* (p. 114), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986.

⁸ Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (p. 442), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁹ During the Jahangir reign, the Rajput nobility, who were important during the reign of Akbar, were slowly supplanted by the Persian nobility. See M. L. Roy Choudhury, *The State and Religion in Mughal India* (pp. 108–109), Calcutta: Indian Publicity Society, 1951. For the life and works of Syakh Abdul Haqq, see Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Hawat-I-Shaikh Abdul Haqq Muhaddith Dehlawi*, Delhi, 1953.

that the *ulama* were able to maintain a certain degree of power and status while at the same time promote the ideals of Islam.

However, the relationship between the *ulama* and the rulers was a symbiotic one in which both groups gained legitimacy through the support of the other. The example of Shaykh Abdur Rashid, the foremost *alim* under the Mughals, points to this symbiotic relationship. He defended Jahangir's penchant for drinking by arguing that as long as the emperor did not reject Islam and was a major force of strength to the Muslims of his empire, he would make the drinking of liquor lawful for the emperor, even accepting the consequences of such an act on the Day of Judgment.¹⁰ The *ulama* were thus very closely aligned with the Mughal emperors and the decline of the Mughal period had a terrible impact on them. Many of the *ulama* suddenly found themselves in a defensive position as the British began to usurp power and authority from the Mughals. *Ulama* such as Shah Abdul Aziz (1703–1762), son of the prominent scholar, Shah Waliullah (1746–1824), and a *fuqaha* (jurist) issued a *fatwa* (religious edict) that India was no longer *dar-ul-Islam* (an abode of peace) but was in fact *dar-ul-harb* (abode of war), obligating a *jihad* or a struggle to free the lands.¹¹ This historic *fatwa* of Shah Abdul Aziz was endorsed by many prominent *ulama* of the period, including Mufti Ilahi Bakhsh (1748–1831).¹²

Shah Abdul Aziz did not just stop at issuing the edict but went on to encourage one of his students, Sayyid Ahmed Bareilvi (1784–1831), to initiate an

¹⁰ Shaykh Abdur Rashid was strongly influenced by an Indian Muslim scholar of the twelfth century, Diya Al-Din Barani, who professed similar ideas to Al-Ghazali on Islam and politics. See P. Hardy, "Unity and Variety in Indo-Islamic and Persio-Islamic Civilization; Some Ethical and Political Ideas of Diya al-Din Barani of Delhi, of al-Ghazali and Nasir al-Din Tusi Compared", *Iran*, 16, 1978, pp. 127–145. Sayyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India Vol. 2: From the Sixteenth Century to Modern Century* (p. 367), Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1991.

¹¹ Shah Abdul Aziz, *Fatawa* (pp. 16–17), Delhi: Fada'il-Sihabah wa Ahl-I-Bait, 1962.

¹² Zafarul Islam Islahi, "Role of Fatawa in the Freedom Movement", *The Milli Gazette*, 1–15 November 2006, p. 16.

armed struggle against the British.¹³ A campaign of *jihad* aimed at bringing about an Islamic revival and revolution throughout the country was initiated, resulting in the catastrophic defeat of the movement during the Battle of Balakot in 1831. Sayyid Ahmad died in the battle. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Mughal rulers were not involved in the struggle, Sayyid Ahmad stated that his aim was to free Muslim lands from infidels and return them to the Mughals, the rightful rulers of India.¹⁴ Such a gesture is an example of the loyalty and reverence the *ulama* held for the Muslim rulers of their time. The spirit and vision of Sayyid Ahmad did not die with him. Subsequently, in 1857, a *fatwa* was issued with the signature of 31 *ulama* of Delhi, many ideologically linked to Sayyid Ahmad, declaring that it was obligatory for Muslims in Delhi to fight the British.¹⁵ The actions of the *ulama* played a significant part in the freedom movement against the British. Those *ulama* then started an important educational seminary in Deoband, India, and subsequently formed the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Hind (JUH), aimed at driving the British out of India.¹⁶ The struggle of the *ulama* was attached to the notion of reviving Muslim rule in India, with the Mughals as the leaders of the country. The Deobands were to become an important group that shaped the political thinking of Indian Muslims, especially in getting them involved with the anti-colonial movement.

¹³ Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi was born in 1786 to a family of religious scholars who traced their lineage to the Prophet. Sayyid Ahmad studied with Shah Abdul Aziz and was noted for his strength of character and piety. For more on Sayyid Ahmad, see Ghulam Rasul Mihr, *Sayyid Ahmad Shahid*, Lahore: n.p., n.d.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

¹⁵ The *fatwa* was issued just before the Indian Mutiny began in 1857. However, the mutiny had occurred due to many other factors and religion was one of the least important factors. For more on the mutiny, see Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny*, London: Penguin Books, 2002. See also William Dalrymple's article on the mutiny, which discussed the religious factors for the mutiny at www.chapatimystery.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/biblio-1857-article-as-printed.pdf, accessed on 5 July 2007.

¹⁶ One of the best works on the Deoband movement is Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1982.

The *Ulama* and the Pakistan movement

The struggle for the independence of India proved to be a turning point for the *ulama*. By the early twentieth century, they began to assert their independence and advocate for a leadership position rather than simply latching onto a political authority. Part of the reason the *ulama* decided to play a more active role in politics is due to the secular nature of the Muslim leadership in India. Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), leader of the Indian Muslim League, was the man who embodied the idea of an Indian Muslim identity and advanced the cause of Pakistan with vigour. Jinnah was initially sceptical that the scheme would work for Pakistan, believing that the future of India required the unity of Hindus and Muslims.¹⁷ Jinnah was hailed as the ambassador of Muslim-Hindu unity.¹⁸ However, he grew disillusioned with the leadership of the Congress Party, which he felt was too sympathetic towards the Hindus. In the Lahore session of the annual All-India Muslim League meeting in 1940, Jinnah declared that “Hindus and the Muslims belong to two different religions, philosophies, social customs and literature”.¹⁹ Although Islam was used as a motivating force to rally Muslims to the cause of Pakistan politically, the state they aimed to create would be secular, not theocratic. Islam as interpreted by Jinnah was a social order, a basis of solidarity for common men and a principle of a dynamic social action. This could be noted in Jinnah’s appeal, which was not exclusively confined to the Muslim segment of the Pakistani society. Indeed, he was a great champion of all religious groups, including Hindus and Christians in Pakistan. In one of his speeches, he stated, “Pakistan is not a theocracy or anything like it. Islam demands from us the tolerance

¹⁷ For more on Jinnah’s political ideas, see Akbar Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan, and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin*, New York: Routledge, 1997.

¹⁸ This title was first used by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, leader of the Congress Party, to describe Jinnah. A recently published book about Jinnah also used the same title. See Ian Bryant Well, *Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity: Jinnah’s Early Politics*, Oxford: Seagull Books, 2006.

¹⁹ Sailesh Kumar Bandopadhaya, *Quaid-I-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Creation of Pakistan* (p. 177), New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1991.

of other creeds and we welcome in closest association with us all those who of whatever creed are themselves willing to play their part as true and loyal citizen of Pakistan.”²⁰

Jinnah and his closest lieutenants were determined to make Pakistan a constitutional democracy. To them there was no contradiction between an Islamic state and a polity governed according to modern democratic principles. According to this body of opinion, fairness, justice, compassion and honesty were all tenets of Islam. Therefore, Islam made it simpler and not more difficult to build democratic structures. With this in mind, Pakistan's Muslim League leaders sought to fit Islam into their contemporary constitutional design. Many *ulama* were opposed to Jinnah and felt that he aimed to secularize the Muslims of India. The most fervent among them were the *ulama* of the JUH. The JUH's ultimate objective was the formation of an Islamic state modelled after the Mughal sultanate. Led by Mawlana Husain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957), the JUH opposed the two-nation theory, arguing that all Indians, Muslims or Hindus, were one nation.²¹ Madani argued that faith was universal and could not be contained within national boundaries but that nationality was a matter of geography, and Muslims were obliged to be loyal to the nation of their birth, along with their non-Muslim fellow citizens.²² He cited the example of the Covenant of Medina, arguing that the Prophet was for Muslims and non-Muslims living alongside each other in a peaceful manner. As such, Madani opposed the idea of a separate state for India's Muslims. A majority of JUH leaders and workers

²⁰ Javed Iqbal, *Ideology of Pakistan* (pp. 3–4), Lahore: Ferozsons Ltd, 1973.

²¹ Mawlana Madani was one of the foremost scholars of India and a fervent supporter of Indian nationalism. For more on his life, ideas and works, see Syed Mohammad Mian, *The Prisoners of Malta*, Delhi: Manak, 2005.

²² Abdus Sattar Ghazali, *Islamic Pakistan: Illusions and Reality*, Islamabad: National Book Club, 1996. See also discussion on nationhood and *qawmiyyat*, equated by the *ulama* with the modern concept of the territorial nation, in Hussein Ahmad Madani, *Composite Nationalism and Islam* (pp. 55–100), New Delhi: Manohar, 2005.

opposed Jinnah and the Muslim League and considered the demand for Pakistan a British conspiracy to divide India.²³

The position of the JUH *ulama* triggered off major criticism from other Indian Muslim leaders such as Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) and Mawlana Mawdudi (1903–1979).²⁴ The writings of Mawdudi played a decisive role in refuting the idea of “composite nationalism” and in promoting a separate and ideological Muslim nationhood.²⁵ As suggested earlier, Madani had published a treatise to verify his position on Indian nationalism following various criticisms he had drawn from Muslims. In his critique of Madani, Mawdudi argued that Madani was carried away by his hatred for the British and had twisted history and facts. He refuted Madani’s assertion that Muslims and Jews were a single nation due to the Covenant of Medina. Mawdudi expounded the view that the covenant brought an alliance between Jews and Muslims for a period of time, but that immunity for the Jews and other non-Muslims was revoked upon the Prophet’s conquest of Mecca.²⁶ Mawdudi also felt that the ways of the Hindu and Muslim communities were parallel. As such, they could never be united completely.²⁷

However, Mawdudi himself was opposed to the leadership of the Pakistan movement. While he did not explicitly oppose the formation of a separate nation for

²³ Sayyid Pirzada, *The Politics of the Jamiat-e-ulama-e-Islam (JUI)* (p. 4), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

²⁴ Muhammad Iqbal is one of the most celebrated Muslim thinker, poet and philosopher of the Indian sub-continent. He was one of the first Muslim politicians to call for the formation of a separate Muslim state in the Indian sub-continent. Perhaps the best biographical account of Muhammad Iqbal is Javed Iqbal’s complete biography of his life. See Javed Iqbal, *Zinda Rood*, Lahore: Sang-E-Maal, 1992. Mawlana Mawdudi was one of the most influential Muslim thinkers and scholars of India. He was the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami and became its first leader. After the establishment of Pakistan, he demanded an Islamic state in Pakistan. Mawdudi has authored a number of works and journals. Among the most authoritative biographies of Mawdudi are Syed Asad Gilani, *Mawdudi: Thought and Movement*, Lahore: Farooq Hassan Gilani, 1978; and Syed Reza Vali Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

²⁵ Abdus Sattar, *Islamic Pakistan*.

²⁶ Abul A’la Mawdudi, *Tahrir-i-Azadi-I-Hind awr Musalaman* (pp. 304–325), Lahore, 1964.

²⁷ Safia Amir, *Muslim Nationhood in India: Perceptions of Seven Eminent Thinkers* (p. 225), New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2000.

the Muslims in India or the Indian Muslim League, Mawdudi felt that the heterogeneous nature of a league that included many Muslims who were secular, communists and socialists would hinder efforts in forming a true Islamic state.²⁸ A small but significant number of Deobandi *ulama* decided to support the Muslim League. Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (1863–1943), one of the most prominent leaders of the JUH, lent his support to the league. Disappointed with the attitudes of the Madani-led Deoband *ulama* in supporting what he perceived as a Hindu-led Congress Party, Mawlana Thanwi argued that supporting and joining the league was the only lawful course for Muslims in India.²⁹ This also led to the formation of the All-India Jamiat-e-*ulama*-e-Islam (AIJUI) under the leadership of Mawlana Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani (1887–1949) after a four-day conference held in Calcutta.³⁰ The JUI's political agenda was the establishment of a state approximating that of the grand caliphs of the seventh century. The *ulama* of the Barelvi orientation were also supportive of the Pakistan movement.³¹ The Barelvi *ulama* had formed an organization, the Jamhuriyah-i-Islamiyah, in 1945 to urge Indian Muslims to support the demand for the formation of Pakistan.³² The *ulama*'s politics during this period was defined by their position on Pakistan. Interestingly, *ulama* who opposed and *ulama* who supported the Pakistan movement both defined their positions as defending the position of Islam in the Indian subcontinent. While some *ulama* who had earlier supported the Congress Party became disillusioned with the state of Islam in India, the *ulama* in Pakistan quickly found themselves in a precarious position.

²⁸ Mawdudi, *Tahrir*, pp. 22–23.

²⁹ Pirzada, *Jamiat*, p. 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 10.

³¹ The Barelvi *ulama* believe in a Sufistic form of Islam. The name “Barelvi” that is used to describe the group originates from the group’s place of origin in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India. For more on the discourse of the Barelvi *ulama*'s views of the Pakistan movement, see Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and His Movement, 1870–1920* (pp. 302–328), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

³² Ishtiaq Hussein Quireshi, *Ulama in Politics* (p. 366), Karachi: Ma'aref Limited, 1974.

Despite their belief that Pakistan was created for Islam, Jinnah and the Muslim League leadership decided on a secular model of governance for the new nation.

The *Ulama* in Post-Independence Pakistani Politics, 1947–1978

Upon the inception of Pakistan in 1947, many *ulama* who were initially based in India, such as Mawdudi and Uthmani, left for Pakistan. Even some JUH leaders who were opposed to the idea of Pakistan moved to Pakistan. The *ulama* of different factions, including the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) the Jamiat-e-ulama-e-Islam (JUI) and even those who had become members of the Muslim League, were active in trying to push for the newly established state to adopt an Islamic constitution.³³ The JUI, in particular, was also active in promoting Islamic education at the social level. A new Bareilvi Islamic party, the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Pakistan (JUP), was formed shortly after partition to ensure that the Bareilvi were represented politically but focused most of its attention on Islamic education.³⁴ While these parties were initially willing to work together towards their common goal of an Islamic constitution, sectarian and political differences began to emerge and dominate religio-political discussions once the constitution had been achieved.

³³ The All-India Jamiat-e-ulama-e-Islam (APJUI) was renamed Jamiat-e-ulama-e-Islam after the formation of Pakistan. The party split to three factions in the 1990s and was renamed according to the name of its three leaders, Mawlana Fazul Rehman (JUI (F)), Mawlana Sami-ul-Haq (JUI (S)) and Mawlana Ajmal Qadri (JUI (A)).

³⁴ Similar to the JUI, the JUP was to split into five different factions. These included the Sunni Tehreek, Dawat-e-Islami, Punjab Sunni Tehreek, Jamaat-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat and Tehreek-e-Tahaffuz-e-Namoos-e-Risalat. The main focus of discussion for this section will be that of the JI and the JUI (F), the two most important *ulama* groups in Pakistan.

Establishing an Islamic constitution

The Jamaat-e-Islami-led *ulama* initiated a concerted public campaign for an Islamic constitution.³⁵ The JI believed that Pakistan was formed due to its Islamic nature and thus should be governed by the rules of Islam, which meant that an Islamic constitution must be established and *sharia* implemented.³⁶ Due to the agitation of JI leaders, the Pakistani government decided to clamp down on the JI. JI newspapers and journals such as *Tarjumanul Qur'an* and *Tasnim* were closed and several leaders of the JI, including Mawdudi, were apprehended.³⁷ To counter the government reprisal, efforts were made to build an alliance of all *ulama* groups, including the *ulama* within the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML), to demand that the cabinet accept the idea of an Islamic constitution. The move was extremely successful as Mawlana Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani lent his support to the idea.

The Pakistani government was put in a fix as it could not be seen to object to a demand made by the *ulama*, as such an objection would then be seen as an objection to Islam itself. The JI was quick to claim victory over the government, and the issue of the Islamic constitution catapulted the JI and Mawdudi to prominence as they were seen as the prime movers of the idea. Armed with the victory of the Islamic constitution, Mawdudi and the JI once again clamoured for the formation of an Islamic state. Together with prominent leaders of the Jamiat-e-*ulama*-e-Islam, Mawlana Zafar Ahmad Thanwi and the eminent scholar of Islam, Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi, the *ulama* organized a gathering of 31 prominent *ulama* and urged the

³⁵ Jamaat-e-Islami is an Islamic party formed by Mawlana Mawdudi. It is currently a political party that aims to establish an Islamic state in Pakistan. See Seyyed Reza Vali Nasr, *The Vanguard of Islamic Revolution: The Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan*, (p. 123), Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.

³⁶ Syed Munawwar Hassan, Secretary-General Jamaat-e-Islami, interview by author, tape recording. Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Mansoorah, Multan Road, Lahore, 25 December 2004.

³⁷ Jamaat-e-Islami, *Rudaad-I- Jamaat-e-Islami [Proceedings of the Jamaat-e-Islami]*, Vol. 6, (pp. 133–134), Lahore: Jamaat-E-Islami, 1992.

government to establish an Islamic state. They also submitted to the government 22 principles by which the state should abide.³⁸ The *ulama's* Islamization drive bore fruit when the final constitution, which was established in 1956, named the state the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and declared that no law repugnant to the teachings of the Quran and the Hadith could be passed.³⁹ The *ulama's* strategy of collaboration and dissent against the government successfully foiled any attempt by the government to manipulate Islam for its own ends. Instead, the *ulama* set the terms of debate for Islamization and defined the role of Islam in the state. Such a position improved their political standing considerably in the eyes of the Pakistani masses and increased their support base.

Promoting democracy

Another façade of the *ulama's* political position during this period was their strong rejection of military rule and the promotion of democracy. While Mawdudi and many *ulama* rejected democracy as a Western practice, they believed that democracy allowed humans complete freedom to augment and change laws even if those laws were based on *sharia*, which they saw as God's laws.⁴⁰ However, Mawdudi saw in democracy a convenient means to achieve his Islamic state. In 1958, the Pakistani military under General Ayub Khan staged a coup that overthrew the PML government. To undermine the military, the JI joined the Combined Opposition Parties, a political grouping that comprised various secular parties supportive of Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Mohamed Ali Jinnah, and opposed to Ayub Khan in the

³⁸ Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan* (pp. 216–217), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961.

³⁹ For more on the Islamic provisions in the Pakistani constitution, see G. W. Choudhary, *Constitutional Development in Pakistan* (pp. 102–103), London: Longman Group, 1969.

⁴⁰ Mawdudi, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, p. 260.

1963 presidential elections.⁴¹ Mawdudi led an alliance of opposition parties under the banner of the Democratic Action Committee formed in 1967. The committee held several mass meetings and gatherings calling for Ayub Khan's resignation, culminating in a roundtable conference convened in March 1969. At the end of the conference, Ayub Khan resigned from office, leading the JI to claim victory for its efforts.

The JI's opposition to military rule and its call for a return to democracy strongly improved its position. Many Pakistanis, including those who were secular in their thinking, sympathized and were even willing to lend a helping hand to the JI's campaign against the government. The JI revealed their pragmatic side by focusing on issues of commonality, such as democracy, and talking less on divisive issues, including Islamization and the Islamic state. After Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took power following the elections of 1970 and Pakistan's civil war, the *ulama* in the JI continued to oppose the government, accusing it of not being sufficiently Islamic. During this period, the *ulama* in the JUI were more focused on issues that tended to be Islamic in nature. While they were opposed to military rule, they had remained neutral during the presidential elections as they felt that both Ayub Khan and Fatima Jinnah did not sympathize with the Islamists' agenda of Islamizing the state.

The 1970 election marked an important development for the *ulama* in the JUI. The JUI *ulama* won seven seats in the provincial assembly of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and successfully formed a coalition government with the nationalist National Awami Party (NAP). JUI chief Mufti Mahmud became the chief minister of the NWFP. Although brief, JUI rule in the NWFP was significant. After becoming Chief Minister, Mahmud launched a programme of Islamization. A board of *ulama*

⁴¹ Vali Nasr, *Vanguard*, p. 155.

was established to implement laws in accordance with the Quran and Sunnah. The initial phase of Islamization included the passing of various Islamic laws. However, that government did not last long and was soon dismissed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.⁴² Later, the *ulama* of various orientations successfully cooperated with the military under the banner of the Pakistan National Alliance to overthrow Bhutto's government.⁴³

The turning point for the *ulama*

The main turning point for the *ulama* came when General Zia-ul-Haq staged a coup against Bhutto in 1978. The JI during this period had worked with the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq, despite its initial rhetoric of promoting democracy. The relationship was established due to JI cooperation with Zia in his Islamization drive and formulation of the country's Afghan policy during the Afghan War. The JI was to lose much of the support and legitimacy that it had initially gained among the Pakistani populace.

The emergence of General Zia-ul-Haq posed a serious dilemma to the JI. The general, a long-time supporter of the party, was a devout Muslim and had a personal respect for Mawlana Mawdudi. Zia had even given copies of Mawdudi's *Tafhimul Qur'an* [*Understanding the Qur'an*] as prizes to soldiers who had won a debate organized by the Army Education School.⁴⁴ Zia had announced that one of the key aims of the coup was to embark on an Islamization drive. Although the praetorian military coup ran against the tenets of an Islamic political system as well as the

⁴² Pirzada, *Jamiat-e-ulama-e-Islam* (p. 67). See also "Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military", *International Crisis Group Asia Report* No. 49, 20 March 2003, pp. 6–15, for a comprehensive overview of the *ulama's* politics in post-independent Pakistan.

⁴³ For more on the Pakistan National Alliance, see Anwar H. Syed, "Pakistan in 1976. Business as Usual", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Feb 1977), pp. 181–190.

⁴⁴ Stanley Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His Life and Times* (p. 281), New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

democratic political order that Mawdudi had advocated in the past, the JI was prepared to work with Zia to Islamize Pakistan. In line with that goal, four JI leaders assumed ministerial positions and another JI leader was nominated as a judge of the federal *sharia* court, an appellate bench with the power of judicial review.⁴⁵ Additionally, two of its supporters were appointed as members of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), a constitutional body that formulated recommendations culminating in the introduction of the Islamic penal code and economic reform.

The Afghan War

The relationship between the JI and Zia was sealed when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. The JI had been privy to Pakistan's Afghan policy following the communist coup in 1977. Leading Afghan resistance leaders such as Burhanuddin Rabbani approached Qazi Hussein Ahmad, then the JI party chief in the NWFP, for assistance in fighting the communists. The JI leaders met the Pakistani generals to formulate a policy for Afghanistan.⁴⁶ When the Afghan War broke out, Zia brought the JI into his Afghan policy, using its religious status to legitimate the war as a *jihād*. The war also opened the inner sanctum of the government to the party, involving it in the flow of funds and arms to the Mujahidin and providing JI members and those of its student wing, the Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT), with military training.⁴⁷ The party was also able to strengthen its position and secure more support for its military operatives in Kashmir through its client groups such as the Harakat-ul-Mujahidin and the Jamaat-e-Islami Kashmir.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Vali Nasr, *Vanguard*, p. 45.

⁴⁶ Interview with Qazi Hussein Ahmad, Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami, interview by author, tape recording. House 130, St 14 Sector E 7 Islamabad, 31 December 2004.

⁴⁷ Vali Nasr, *Vanguard*, p. 195.

⁴⁸ Interview with Mansoor Jaafar, Jamaat-e-Islami worker, interview by author, tape recording. Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Mansoorah, Multan Road, Lahore, 2 January 2005.

The Afghan War also provided an opportunity for Zia to work closely with the other prominent *ulama* party, the JUI. For Zia, the JUI was useful as it had strong support among the Pathans of the NWFP and Baluchistan. Its chain of *madrasahs* in those regions also provided a fertile recruiting ground for the war in Afghanistan. With the exception of the *ulama* in the JUP, all other *ulama* groups were supportive of the Zia regime. However, towards the end of his rule, those *ulama* began to turn their back on Zia and joined the opposition in calling for his resignation.

The period between 1977 and 1985 can be seen as a mix of failure and success for the *ulama*. At an ideological level, the *ulama* successfully implemented many of their Islamic demands such as the promulgation of *sharia* law and greater state-initiated Islamization. In addition, the Afghan War exposed the Mujahidin to the *ulama's* religious and political influence. The war also boosted the *ulama's* image in Islamic revivalist circles and gave them a pan-Islamic image.⁴⁹ Perhaps the most important gain for the *ulama* during that period was the close relationship that developed between them and the Pakistani army. It was the mark of a more important relationship between the *ulama* and military. However, the *ulama* had lost much of their support from the Pakistani populace because of their close association with the Zia regime. Much of their support was lost to secular non-Islamist parties such as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) (N) and the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM). The *ulama* would continuously be in decline for the next two decades. The PPP, led by Benazir Bhutto, and PML (N), led by Nawaz Shariff, dominated the political scene.

⁴⁹ Seyyed Reza Vali Nasr, "Islamic Opposition to the Islamic State: The Jamaat-e-Islami, 1977–88", *International Middle East Studies*, Vol. 25 No. 2 (May 1993), p. 269.

The *Ulama* in Decline, 1985–1999

The *ulama*'s involvement with Zia-ul-Haq had several important impacts on their position in Pakistani politics. Their being co-opted by Zia had affected their position and legitimacy in the eyes of the Pakistani masses. As Esposito has argued, the co-opting of Islamist groups by governments has often handicapped the groups and led to them losing their political clout with the masses.⁵⁰ This could be seen from the 1985 legislative elections that the military regime permitted. The JI could garner only 10 out of the 68 seats that it contested in the National Assembly.⁵¹ Significantly, many of the JI leaders who were closely associated with Zia's regime were not elected. The *ulama* in the JUI (F) and the JUP boycotted the elections. Nevertheless, due to their earlier association with the Zia regime, their political support was also significantly affected.

Alliance politics

With Zia's death in 1988, the JI *ulama* realized that their only salvation is to join the Islami Jumhuri Ittihad (Islamic Democratic Alliance) or IDA, led by Zia's close aide, Nawaz Shariff.⁵² The outcome of the election was not favourable to the JI. The IDA lost the elections to the PPP and the JI once again saw itself in the opposition. It managed to win only eight out of the 26 seats allocated to them, which resulted in their loss of influence within the coalition. The JUI (F) too won only eight seats in the

⁵⁰ He said this in relation to the Muslim Youth Assembly of Malaysia (ABIM) and how it had suffered after its founding members such as Anwar Ibrahim and Siddiq Fadhil left the group to join the Malaysian government. See John Esposito and John Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (p. 190), London: Oxford University Press, 1987.

⁵¹ Report on the General Elections, 1985, Vol. 3, Islamabad: Election Commission of Pakistan, n.d..

⁵² Under the Zia regime, Nawaz Shariff was the chief minister of the state of Punjab from 1985. Following the death of Zia, his party, the Pakistan Muslim League, won the largest seat in the state of Punjab, allowing him to be appointed chief minister. He became prime minister in 1990 following the general elections called after the sacking of Benazir Bhutto. His government was thrown out of office in 1993 where he lost the prime minister post to Benazir once again. In 1997, following the elections, he became prime minister. He was deposed from power in 1999 by the military coup led by General Musharraf.

same elections. Even when Nawaz Shariff came to power in 1990—after Bhutto’s government was sacked and an election was held—the JI remained at the periphery of the government. The JI was not invited to join the government.⁵³ Shariff also disregarded the JI’s demands to have its chairman in parliament made chairman of the Accounts Committee. In the 1993 elections, the JI decided to contest on its own ticket but managed only to secure three seats. The JUI (F) also employed alliance politics in their pursuits to gain a larger political space for itself. Realizing that it would not obtain any real power on its own, the JUI (F) took advantage of the PPP’s desperation for political allies to form a government by securing several important positions, including that of Chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, which was held by Mawlana Fazlur Rehman. However, alliance politics did not work in the long term. By the 1993 elections, the JI had already decided to distance itself from all secular governments. It also boycotted the 1997 elections, focusing instead on building up their grassroots support. Similarly, the JUI (F) had also ended its alliance with the PPP by 1997 and focused on building up their support in the *madrasahs*.

Focusing on foreign affairs

The lack of electoral support for the *ulama* and their lack of political power led them to focus on developing other instruments of support. Both the JI and the JUI (F) had begun a process of establishing new Islamic schools. Between 1988 and 2002, the number of *madrasahs* linked to the JUI (F) and the JUI (S) increased from 1,840 to 7,000, while the *madrasahs* linked to the JI increased from 96 to 500.⁵⁴ Earlier, under

⁵³ Khurram Murad, “Defeat in the 1993 Elections: Reasons and Aspects”, *Jasarat*, 11 November 1993, p. 24.

⁵⁴ Ali Riaz, “Global *Jihad*, Sectarianisms and the *Madrasahs* in Pakistan”, *IDSS Working Paper* No. 85, p. 18.

Zia-ul-Haq, the *ulama* were given free rein to expand Islamic education in Pakistan.⁵⁵ The focus on proliferating *madrasahs* has its roots in the desire of the *ulama* to support two of their key projects, Afghanistan and Kashmir. As mentioned earlier, many *madrasahs* were vital recruiting grounds for the Afghan War. However, with the end of the war in 1988, the *ulama* began to focus their energy on ensuring that the faction which they supported in Afghanistan would control the government. In 1992, the Afghanistan government led by Dr. Najibullah finally collapsed. The JI had insisted that the proposed new government in Afghanistan must include leaders of the Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan and the Hizb-e-Islami, two of the JI's client groups in Afghanistan.⁵⁶ The Nawaz Shariff government refused to accommodate the JI and decided instead to recognize the government headed by Sibghatullah Mojadedi of the Afghanistan National Liberation Front.⁵⁷ The *ulama* from the JUI (F) achieved more success in Afghanistan as the group that it supported was the Taliban. Many of the Taliban members had their education in *madrasahs* run by the JUI (F).⁵⁸ The JUI (F) was, at this point, part of a coalition government led by Benazir Bhutto. The ISI, the government and the JUI (F) formulated a plan that resulted in the rise of the Taliban. Their plan was to ensure that oil pipelines could be built between the oil-rich Central Asian Muslim countries and Pakistan, which would lead to increased trade and revenue for the country. The *madrasahs* were also attracting students from other parts of the Muslim world, including Central Asia and the Caucasus. In addition, Central

⁵⁵ For more on the expansion of Islamic education under Zia, see "Pakistan: *Madrasahs*, Extremism and the Military", *International Crisis Group Asia Report*, No. 36, 29 July 2002, pp. 10–11.

⁵⁶ Murad, Jasarat, p. 27.

⁵⁷ For more on Mojadedi, visit his official website at www.mojadedi.org/index.html.

⁵⁸ In fact, the word "Taliban" comes from the root word "*talib*" or "student" in Urdu.

Asian students who had earlier studied in its *madrasahs* became important cadres of Islamist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.⁵⁹

Partly due to their grassroots work and their involvement in formulating Pakistan's foreign policy, the *ulama* were able to gain access to the government and segments of the military. Their subsequent distancing of themselves from the various Pakistani governments as well as the various international developments led to their growing popularity among the Pakistani populace. By the time of the 1999 military coup that General Musharraf staged against Nawaz Shariff's government, the *ulama* had become too important to be ignored.

The Rise of the *Ulama*, 1999–2007

The period between 1999 and the present marked the resurgence of the *ulama* to prominence. They once again gained legitimacy in the eyes of many Pakistanis for opposing the military rule and the struggle for democracy. In addition, through a grand alliance of *ulama* groups and parties, as well as their skilful manipulation of global events, the *ulama* have become more powerful than they had ever been in Pakistani history.

September 11 and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan

The events of 9/11 brought about far-reaching consequences for Pakistan. The JI was quick to blame the Jews for the attack.⁶⁰ The U.S. government had blamed Osama bin Laden and the Taliban for the attacks. The JI seized the opportunity to launch a massive campaign against the United States and the Pakistani government, accusing the latter of being a U.S. stooge. Many of the *ulama* had close ties to Osama bin

⁵⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (p. 140), London: Penguin Books, 2002.

⁶⁰ Interview with Syed Munawwar Hassan.

Laden and the Taliban leadership.⁶¹ When the United States decided to launch its military operations in Afghanistan, the government of Pakistan was asked to provide logistical support for U.S. forces inside Afghanistan and seal its borders with Afghanistan. The JI took the opportunity to escalate its campaign against the government. The U.S. decision created a huge wave of anti-American feeling in Pakistan, especially in the NWFP and Baluchistan. The *ulama* also started coordinating the actions of the various religious parties and groups in their efforts to help the Afghans through the formation of a common body named the “Afghan Defense Council” (ADC).⁶² After its formation, the ADC launched a protest campaign against U.S. action in Afghanistan. After the Taliban surrendered, the ADC was renamed the “Pak-Afghan Defense Council” (PADC).⁶³ This movement has greatly enhanced the *ulama*’s image in the eyes of many Pakistanis.

The Muttahida Majlisi Amal (Joint Action Organization)

The success of the PADC led the JI leadership to initiate an electoral alliance known as the Muttahida Majlisi Amal (MMA) among the religious parties to prepare for the 2002 general elections. The JI had been instrumental in the formation of the alliance. The fact that the JI had been open to people of Muslim sectarian beliefs meant that members of different sectarian groups such as Barelvis, Deobandis and Shi’ites could become members of the JI.⁶⁴ This gave the different sectarian religious parties a neutral ground to discuss various issues. The different Islamic parties in Pakistan often represented a particular sectarian tendency. The Deobandis were represented by the JUI (F) and the JUI (S), the Barelvis by the JUP, the Wahhabis (or Ahlul Hadith,

⁶¹ *ibid.* For links between the JUI and the Taliban, see Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (pp. 1–31), London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000.

⁶² S. Warriach, “Election 2002, Facts and Figures”, *The Daily Jang*, 10 October 2002.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Interview with Qazi Hussein Ahmed.

as they are known in the sub-continent) by Jamiat-e-Ahlul-Hadith, and the Shi'ites by Tehreek-e-Jafari.⁶⁵ The JI offices became the unofficial secretariat of the alliance, reflected by the position held by Qazi Hussein Ahmad as Secretary-General. The formation of the alliance was also announced at the JI's office in Islamabad.⁶⁶ The MMA launched a nationwide election campaign resulting in its electoral victory in 46 national assembly seats and 80 seats in the provincial assemblies, emerging as the third largest group in the national assembly.⁶⁷ The Pakistan Muslim League (Q), a party cobbled together by Musharraf from the remnants of Nawaz Shariff's PML (N), won 77 seats and the Pakistan People's Party won 63 seats. In order for the PML (Q) to win a majority in the house of 272 seats and form the government, they were dependent on the *ulama's* support, which meant that the *ulama* hold a key position in Pakistani politics. In addition, the MMA formed the government in the NWFP and is a key partner in a coalition government in Baluchistan. Another important implication of the MMA's victory is its major influence in the senate. All the four provinces have equal representation in the senate at the national level. Due to its huge majority in the NWFP assembly, the MMA held more than one-third of the seats in the senate, providing it with a decisive role in the law-making process of the country.⁶⁸ For the first time in the history of Pakistan, the *ulama* had won substantial political power. With their electoral victory, the MMA continued to press for democratization in Pakistan by demanding that Musharraf step down as Pakistani president.

⁶⁵ The Ahlul Hadith accepts the austere Wahhabi practices of Saudi Arabia. The Ahle-Hadith movement, stressing "pure" Wahhabi Islam, found support among some of the *ulama* in Pakistan in the 1970s and decided to form an Islamic party. The Shi'ites in Pakistan belonged mostly to the Ithna Asharite (Twelver) branch of the sect. Although other Shi'ite sects such as the Ismailis exist in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, they are less organized than the Twelver Shi'ites, who are more politically active and formed organizations and parties to secure political influence. For more on the Shi'ites, see Zaman, *Sectarianism in Pakistan* (pp. 694–699).

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ District Reporter, "Musharaf and the Religious Parties", *Dawn*, 11 April 2002.

⁶⁸ Farooq Tanwir, "Religious Parties and Politics in Pakistan", *International Journal for Comparative Sociology*, Vol. 43 No. 3 (December 2002), pp. 254–255.

Opposing and working with Musharraf

The rise of the *ulama* in Pakistani politics a year after the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 validates the perception that Islamism is a force to reckon with in Pakistan and that the military is the ultimate institution able to prevent the country from going down the path of a Taliban-style Islamic “revolution”.⁶⁹ Some observers note that it was the military that successfully cobbled together the religious alliance and substantiated their stand, citing the MMA’s votes in parliament in 2003 that gave General Musharraf the two-thirds majority he needed to change the constitution, thereby legitimizing his coup and the scores of ordinances he has issued since seizing power.⁷⁰ The *ulama* initially welcomed the military’s decision to depose the Nawaz Shariff government. However, cautious of the military’s tendencies to hang on to power, the JI-led *ulama* asked the army to implement a democratic constitution, based on *sharia*.⁷¹ When the Musharraf regime backtracked on its promise to hold elections, the *ulama* started a campaign calling for the military’s return to the barracks.

The *ulama* ascent to power

The MMA’s rise to power means that the *ulama* could implement many of the Islamization programmes that have been formulated by its ideologues. The MMA runs the government in the NWFP under Akram Khan Durrani, a member of the JUI. While differences exist between the different component parties in the MMA, the

⁶⁹ Frederick Grare, Islam, *Militarism and the 2007–2008 Elections in Pakistan*, Carnegie Papers, South Asia Project, No. 70 (August 2006), p. 3.

⁷⁰ Musharraf needed to change the constitution so that he could hold the position army chief and president of the country. The 1973 Pakistani Constitution did not allow for this. Twenty-nine other amendments were also made, leading to an expansion of Musharraf’s power. See Hussein Haqqani, *Pakistan between Mosque and Military* (pp. 259–260), Washington: Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 2006.

⁷¹ Moten, *Revolution to Revolution* (p. 169).

implementation of *sharia* figures prominently in the programmes of all the parties in the alliance. Since the MMA is in absolute majority, it has started implementing its agenda in the NWFP province. The NWFP assembly passed a resolution with a large majority asking the provincial government to ban bank interest and revert to Friday as the weekly holiday. The MMA's top priority is the implementation of all recommendations made by the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII). The CII was first formulated under the rule of General Ayub Khan in the 1960s. However, the *ulama* were then poorly represented as Ayub Khan's primary objective was the "reinterpretation of Islam according to modernist parameter to legitimize national policies in Islamic terms".⁷² However, the CII grew significantly under the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. The influence of the *ulama* in the CII was dominant in the CII during that period. As the Chief Advisory Council to the president, the *ulama* were asked to review the country's political system to ensure its compatibility with Islam. Its 1983 report suggested that a presidential system was closer to Islam than a parliamentary democracy and political parties were inconsistent with Islam—conclusions that suited the military's agenda. The council's 1996 report set the priorities for Islamic reform.

Furthermore, the NWFP government set up a committee to recommend the enforcement of Islamic *hudud* punishment, including stoning and the amputation of limbs, as well as the death penalty for blasphemy and the consumption of liquor.⁷³ The NWFP provincial assembly also passed a bill on 2 June 2003 to implement *sharia* in the province. Directives were given to bureaucrats to pray five times a day and follow *sharia* law. The provincial government also ordered curbs on the sale of music

⁷² Jamal Malik, *Colonialization of Islam: Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan*, Lahore, 1996, p. 35.

⁷³ N. A, "Back to Friday as Holiday", *Friday Times*, 3 March 2003. Accessed on 12 May 2005 from www.thefridaytimes.com/nuggets.htm.

and videos, the destruction of posters featuring women and advertising Western products, and the imposition of a complete ban on alcohol.⁷⁴ The religious zeal of the MMA's *madrasah*-educated cadres is, however, often expressed in vigilantism and violence. Soon after the formation of the provincial government, religious leaders in the Bajaur agency threatened that if the political administration did not remove dish antennas from houses and business centres and close video shops within a week, they would raise a "*lashkar* [soldier] to wipe out elements spreading obscenity and un-Islamic culture".⁷⁵ The MMA has urged the government to strengthen the *sharia* court through constitutional amendments and by appointing *ulama* aligned to the party to run the court. While the threat has yet to be carried out, the MMA government has used law-enforcement agencies to clamp down on public musical performances and to force cinema and video-shop owners into obeying its directives throughout the province.

Assessing the *Ulama's* Political Role in Pakistan

In assessing the role of the *ulama* in Pakistani politics, the common assumption held by most scholars is that the *ulama* are beholden to the military.⁷⁶ A close examination of the Pakistani military will reveal that the *ulama* are able to hold their own when dealing with military regimes. The *ulama* have successfully infiltrated the army, especially in the lower rungs. It is this group of army officers that are being used against the Musharraf regime. In addition, they are able to mobilize peripheral Islamists groups and exercise their influence in issues of foreign policy to keep pressure on Musharraf's regime.

⁷⁴ Interview with Syed Munawwar Hassan.

⁷⁵ Anwarullah Khan, "Video Shops Given a Week to Close", *Dawn* (Karachi), 29 December 2002.

⁷⁶ See Grare, *Militarism*; Bahadur, *Rise of MMA*; and Abdul Rashid Moten, *Revolution to Revolution: Jamaat-e-Islami in the Politics of Pakistan*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002.

Islamization of the military

Since the late 1970s, both the JI and the JUI (F) have built strong links to the military. Under the regime of Zia-ul-Haq, the Pakistani government built up links with the *ulama* to support the directorate for the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), the Pakistani intelligence service, its anti-India cause and coordinate the global *jihad* in Afghanistan.⁷⁷ For the *ulama*, the religious indoctrination of the army is part of their long-term strategy to gain control of the country through a soft Islamic revolution.⁷⁸ Hassan Askari-Rizvi notes that the JI successfully penetrated the military during this period. Many officers within the army began to express their fascination for the JI's ideology and the teachings of Mawlana Mawdudi.⁷⁹ The Islamization of the military is especially evident in the ISI. Officers such as Hamid Gul and Javed Nasir, both of whom headed the ISI, supported the Islamization of the army.⁸⁰ New recruits swear an oath on the Quran and were made to study Islamic subjects during their military training. Pakistani army personnel are also regularly subjected to religious tests based on the tenets of Islam. These tests are intended to raise the level of religious awareness among Pakistani troops and ensure indoctrination.⁸¹ Such steady indoctrination also provides a fertile ground for the *ulama* to extend their influence over the armed forces personnel.

Despite the fact that General Musharraf has successfully cleansed the upper echelon of religious officers, he still faces a potential threat from extremists in the

⁷⁷ Dietrich Reetz, "National Consolidation of Fragmentation of Pakistan: The Dilemma of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988)", in Diethelm Weidemann, *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Political Development: South Asian Perspectives* (p. 139), Delhi: Manohar, 1991.

⁷⁸ The more prominent Jamaat leaders did not state explicitly their strategy of trying to gain control of the army but maintained that their efforts at *da'wah* within the army had given birth to an army that is closer to God. The Jamaat leaders I spoke to in Peshawar and Mardan indicated this strategy openly. Interviews with Jamaat leaders in January 2005.

⁷⁹ Hassan-Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan* (p. 246), Lahore: Sang-e-Maal Publications, 2002.

⁸⁰ Interview with Qazi Hussein Ahmed.

⁸¹ Conversation with an ISI officer in Lahore.

military angered by his close cooperation with the United States in its war on terrorism. Several cases in point could be noted to indicate this threat. Two air force technicians were arrested in connection with the nearly successful suicide bombing against Musharraf's limousine in Rawalpindi on 25 December 2004.⁸² An army major is facing court martial for allegedly providing shelter to Khalid Sheik Mohammed, a top Al-Qaeda figure captured in Rawalpindi in March 2003 while his colonel and two other officers have been arrested for failing to report the major even though they allegedly knew of his activities. In October 2002, Sufi Mohammad, the leader of the Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (The Movement for the Enforcement of Muhammad's Laws) or TNSM, crossed the Pakistani-Afghan border with 10,000 volunteers to wage *jihad* against the United States. It was later revealed that Sufi had the backing from junior military officers in his stronghold of Swat in the NWFP.⁸³ Sami ul-Haq, the chancellor of Darul Uloom Haqqani *madrasah* and a former leader of one of the MMA's component party, noted in an interview that the United States had assessed Pakistan's army wrongly and that the army is now Islamic.⁸⁴ It is obvious that the rank and file of the Pakistani military have become radicalized due to the indoctrination process they have undergone over the years. Many of these officers will continue to do the mullahs' bidding, which can prove to be problematic if the military regime decides to sever its ties with the *ulama*. In a way, the linkages between the lower ranks of the army and the *ulama* are giving the latter leverage against the Musharraf regime.

⁸² John Lancaster, "Pakistan Struggles to Put Army on Moderate Course", *Washington Post*, 4 April 2004.

⁸³ Mawlana Sufi Mohammad, one of the active leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, in the 1980s. He left the JI in 1992 and formed the TNSM. One of the main objectives of the TNSM was to enforce Islamic laws, by force if necessary. However, he still maintains relations with some of the Jamaat leaders. Interview with a Jamaat source in Islamabad.

⁸⁴ See Jessica Stern. "Meeting with the Muj", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 57 No. 1, (January/February 2001), p. 43. Mawlana Ilyas Khan from the Lashkar-e-Toiba also alludes to this during my interview with him. Interview with Mawlana Ilyas Khan, member of Lashkar-e-Toiba, interview by author, tape recording, Muridke.

The *ulama*'s political strategy

In his book on the *ulama*, Muhammad Qassim Zaman identifies the emergence of two groups of *ulama* in the Pakistani state: the higher-ranking *ulama* and the peripheral *ulama*.⁸⁵ The higher-ranking *ulama* refer to *ulama* in mainstream legitimate political parties or organizations such as the JI, whereas peripheral *ulama* are those from violent, peripheral groups such as the Lashkar-e Taiba, Jaish-e Muhammad and other similar groups. He argues that despite their seemingly different religious positions, there are important ties that connect these two groups. Contrary to common perception, the MMA is not just an alliance of different Islamic political parties but includes many of the peripheral Islamic groups mentioned above.⁸⁶

The bases and expressions of the *ulama*'s position in the public sphere are complex, multifaceted and contradictory. The *ulama* in Pakistan have been able to advance their position by both siding with the Pakistani government, exemplified by their support for Musharraf's amendments to the constitution in 2003, and with the peripheral groups against the government. The mainstream *ulama* in the JI and the JUI (F) have allowed the peripheral *ulama* within their ranks to launch violent attacks against government leaders and establishments.⁸⁷ A case in point is the attempt by members of Jaish-e Muhammad to kill Shaukat Aziz, the prime minister of Pakistan. It was discovered that the operation was spearheaded by a peripheral *alim*, Maulvi Intiaz Ahmed.⁸⁸ The fact that the Jaish and Maulvi are known to have close links with the JUI (F) means that it is likely that the JUI (F) is aware and may have even

⁸⁵ Muhammad Qassim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, c2002.

⁸⁶ During my field trip to Pakistan in December 2004, I chanced upon leaders of the Lashkar-e-Taiba in Mansoor, the headquarters of the JI.

⁸⁷ Seyyed Vali Nasr, in his book, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future*, identifies a similar trend between Shi'ite *ulama*. He cites the example of Moqteda As-Sadr and Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, who have been playing what he described as a "Bad Guy, Good Guy" game. See Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future*, New York: Norton, 2006.

⁸⁸ Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (p. 236), New York: Free Press, 2006.

initiated the attempted killings. Such attempts are part of the *ulama*'s strategy of sending a clear message to the Musharraf regime that if their Islamization attempts are blocked, they will resort to violence to remove Musharraf and cause disruption in Pakistan.⁸⁹ While the *ulama* have served the military's interest over the last two decades well, they are now beginning to stake claims to this earlier support in the form of increased Islamization in Pakistan. The Pakistani government has increasingly found that they are doing the MMA's bidding. For instance, despite promoting his idea of enlightened moderation, Musharraf has failed to change the legislation on Islamic laws first introduced by the regime of Zia-ul-Haq on the advice of the JI *ulama*.⁹⁰

Undermining Pakistan's foreign policy objectives

Since the late 1980s, the *ulama* have been playing an important role in Pakistani foreign policy. This is especially true in the country's relations with Afghanistan and India. In particular, the JI was heavily involved in the formulation of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan and Kashmir. The JI, together with its allies Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami and Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jamaat-e-Islami Afghanistan, led the resistance against the Soviets and was effective at bringing the Afghan issue to various international Islamic forums.⁹¹ Following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan and the collapse of the communist regime of President Najibullah, the JI brokered a peace agreement between the two main warring groups in Afghanistan, the Hizb-I-Islami and the Afghan Jamaat-E-Islami. Part of the reason for its success is the good relations that the JI had with both groups. Qazi Hussein Ahmed

⁸⁹ Interview with Khalid Rahman, Director-General, Institute of Policy Studies, Nasr Chambers, Block 19, Markaz F-7, Islamabad, Pakistan, 31 December 2004.

⁹⁰ *Pakistan Daily*, 27 October 2006.

⁹¹ For more on the role of the JI during the Afghan conflict, see Frederick Grare, *Political Islam in the Indian Subcontinent: The Jamaat-I-Islami* (pp. 68–72), New Delhi: Manohar, 2001.

of the JI was invited by both Hekmatyar and Rabbani to broker the peace agreement.⁹²

The collapse of the Mujahidin government in 1994 led to the rise of the Taliban, supported by the Pakistani *ulama* from the JUI (F). The involvement of the JUI (F) in Afghanistan began when the JUI (F) entered into an alliance with the government of Benazir Bhutto. The JUI (F) had been quietly building up a support base in Baluchistan and the NWFP by opening up numerous *madrasahs* to carry out relief work in the various refugee camps. Indirectly, it influenced the Durrani Pukhtoons, living in Baluchistan and around Kandahar, who have a great deal in common with the Afghan Taliban. Virtually all of the Afghan Taliban leadership have been refugees in Pakistan and have studied in *madrasahs* run by one faction of the JUI (F) or the other.⁹³ The Taliban recruited hundreds of Pakistani students who belonged to the JUI (F) to fight for their cause in Afghanistan. Mawlana Sami-ul-Haq also claimed that most of his students joined the Taliban after the latter's defeat at Mazar-e-Sharif in 1997.⁹⁴ The rise of the JUI (F) in Afghanistan eclipsed the influence of the JI in the area.

There is no doubt that the Pakistani *ulama* became closely linked to the army due to their involvement in both Afghanistan and Kashmir. In Kashmir, the JI was also initially in the forefront of the Kashmiri resistance against Indian rule. Through the Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu Kashmir and its armed wing, the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, the JI Pakistan was able to exert its influence over the Pakistani state. The JI is invaluable to the Pakistani state here because it is the only separatist outfit in Kashmir that

⁹² Interview with Qazi Hussein Ahmad.

⁹³ William Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn: Afghan and the Taliban* (p. 74), London: Hurst & Co, 1988.

⁹⁴ Barnett R. Rubin, "Afghanistan under the Taliban", *Current History*, Vol. 625, p. 85.

demands unification of the valley with Pakistan.⁹⁵ The JI's main tactic is to increase unrest in Indian Kashmir and then convince international public opinion through its offshoots in Europe and North America that Delhi is engaged in the violation of human rights.⁹⁶ Once again, by the late 1990s, the influence of JI-supported groups had begun to wane and other groups linked to the JUI (F), such as Harakat ul-Ansar (HUA) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), emerged as key players in Kashmir. These groups became popular both in Pakistan and Kashmir due to the various high-profile acts of terror they had carried out. The HUA hijacked an Indian Airline plane and successfully secured the release of Massod Azhar, leader of the HUA, and two other militants held by India. The fact that the plane landed in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and that the Taliban gave the terrorists time to leave the country meant that it is likely that the HUA, the Taliban and the JUI (F) were in cahoots to ensure the release of Azhar. After Azhar was released from an Indian jail in a prisoner exchange in December 2000, he was permitted to stage a huge rally in Karachi attended by his gun-toting followers.

For many years, the *ulama* had been doing the bidding of the military by stirring trouble in disputed areas and enhancing Pakistan's strategic position in both India and Afghanistan. At the same time, rivalry between the different Islamist parties and their clients in Kashmir and Afghanistan meant that it was easier for the military to control them. However, the *ulamas's* partnership with the government was tested after 9/11.

This occurred after Musharraf allied himself with the Bush Administration in its campaign against Islamic militancy. Musharraf had not only pulled back all

⁹⁵ Since 1947, a branch of Jamaat-E-Islami has been formed in Kashmir. It is independent from the Jamaat in Pakistan but is linked to the Pakistani JI ideologically. It came under greater influence of the JI Pakistan after the Kashmiri uprising in 1989. Frederick Grare, p. 83.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

support for the Taliban, he also turned his back on the Kashmiri separatists and traded support for the separatists for peace with India.⁹⁷ In response to Musharraf's actions, the *ulama* had consistently played the role of the spoiler for the Pakistani government by launching mass-scale terrorist attacks, mobilizing their partners among the peripheral *ulama*. A case in point is the series of train bombings allegedly perpetrated by the Lashkar-e-Toiba in Mumbai in 2006. Bombs were planted in seven packed commuter trains and stations during rush hour, killing 163 passengers and injuring about 600. The attack was aimed at derailing the ongoing peace process between India and Pakistan. Despite various Indian accusations that Pakistan was involved in the bombings, it is unlikely that General Musharraf would want to compromise the peace process with India after having invested an enormous amount of time and energy to push it forward.⁹⁸ The *ulama* have also mobilized their partners in India, including the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), to further their cause. These links were discovered in late 2002 when Maharashtra police seized 30 compact discs containing speeches of Mawlana Masood Azhar, chief of Jaish-e Muhammad, along with clippings of communal riots in Gujarat from the SIMI offices in Aurangabad.⁹⁹ The arrest of Sayeed Shah Hasseb Raza and Amil Pervez, senior members of the SIMI, has revealed links between the SIMI and Pakistani Islamist groups.¹⁰⁰ Investigation officers believed that the duo were in Kolkata to carry out subversive activities and recruit youth for *jihadi* activities.¹⁰¹ After the formation of the MMA, rivalry between the JI and the JUI (F) ceased, meaning that the military cannot use one group of

⁹⁷ These actions were documented in Musharraf's biography. For his decision to turn against the Taliban, see Musharraf, *Line*, pp. 203–217. For relations with India, see pp. 299–306.

⁹⁸ *Dawn*, 5 August 2006.

⁹⁹ For more on the SIMI, visit www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/simi.htm.

¹⁰⁰ *Times of India*, 4 March 2002, Animesh Roul, "Students Islamic Movement of India: A Profile", *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 4, No. 7, (6 April 2006), pp. 9–10.

¹⁰¹ Hassan Abbas, "Profiles of Pakistan's Seven Tribal Agencies", *Terrorism Monitor* Vol. 4 No. 20 (19 October 2006) and the official FATA website, fata.gov.pk/, accessed on 13 May 2007.

ulama against another. This has given the *ulama* credence and more political leverage vis-à-vis the army.

Controlling the tribal areas

The *ulama* are also extremely influential and powerful in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan.¹⁰² In particular, the JUI (F) has significant support in the region. Unlike the moderate parties, the JUI (F) has been allowed to operate freely, using its predominantly Pashtun leadership to gain support for its Deobandi agenda.¹⁰³ Its influence can be clearly seen from the various deals struck between the Pakistani government and local tribesmen. The two sides had earlier clashed when tensions rooted in the Pakistani army's search for Al-Qaeda members in the area escalated into armed resistance by local tribesmen supported by the Taliban. A deal was offered to the local militant, which included amnesty and financial incentives in return for pledges to renounce violence. They were also asked to surrender Al-Qaeda and other foreign militants and ensure that foreign militants would not use Pakistani territory for cross-border attacks.¹⁰⁴ The ceasefire between the military and the organization of the militants, Mujahideen Shura, was brokered by the JUI (F) in South Waziristan.¹⁰⁵ The government has sought the assistance of JUI (F) parliamentarian Mawlana Merajuddin Qureshi in the negotiations. Interestingly, even as Mawlana arranged the deal with local commanders like Nek Mohammad, the JUI (F) interlocutors publicly backed their local allies.¹⁰⁶ In North Waziristan, a similar

¹⁰² Hassan Abbas, "Profiles of Pakistan's Seven Tribal Agencies", *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 4 No. 20 (19 October 2006) and the official FATA website, fata.gov.pk/, accessed on 13 May 2007.

¹⁰³ Seyyed Reza Vali Nasr, "Military Rule, Islamism and Democracy in Pakistan", *Middle East Journal*, Spring 2004, pp. 195–209.

¹⁰⁴ "Amnesty Offer Renewed for Foreigners in Tribal Areas", *Dawn*, 21 June 2004. For more on the crisis, see "Pakistan's Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants", *International Crisis Group Asia Report*, No. 125, 11 December 2006.

¹⁰⁵ *Dawn*, 30 September 2006.

¹⁰⁶ *ICG Asia Report* 125, p. 16.

agreement was again signed with the assistance of the JUI (F). Mawlana Fazlur Rehman's mediation produced a month-long ceasefire by the Mujahidin Shura of North Waziristan on 25 June 2006.¹⁰⁷

Having been at the forefront of brokering the peace deal between the government and Islamic militants in tribal areas, the JUI (F) and the MMA leaderships are now growing stronger by the day. The reality is that these militants are aligned with the Taliban, of whom Fazlur Rehman is the ideologue. In a way, these agreements have further led to the Talibanization of the Northern Areas. However, this Talibanization has not limited itself to the FATA region. It is, in fact, extending itself to the urban centres now, as is evident from the recent tension created by the Red Mosque clerics in Islamabad. Since March 2007, these clerics have launched an anti-vice campaign, demanding that the government impose *sharia* law and Islamic rule in Islamabad. As part of their strategy in this anti-vice campaign, the mosque's students have launched anti-vice squads, taking upon themselves the responsibility of vandalizing music and CD stores and also threatening the owners to switch to alternative businesses. The government has inadvertently empowered a new generation of Pakistani militants linked to the Taliban and strengthened their patrons, the Pakistani *ulama*.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 18.

Future Prospects for the *Ulama* in Pakistani Politics

In Pakistani politics, the *ulama* have become powerful and wield tremendous influence within different branches of the government, including the military. They have benefited greatly from the patronage of the military and civil bureaucracy, beginning with the regime of Zia-ul-Haq. The MMA soon discovered that, by criticizing the government and then bargaining for compromises, it has been able to pursue its objectives of implementing stricter Islamic laws in the country. Its ability to upset Pakistan's relations with both India and Afghanistan and the tremendous influence it wields among the tribesmen in FATA are further examples of its influence. However, despite its influence and real popular support it commands at the street level, it is not likely that the MMA will fare as well in the coming elections, projected to take place in 2007 or 2008. As Frederick Grare has argued, the MMA is unable to get substantial results without the firm hand of the military.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the MMA has proven to be more of an irritation than a reliable partner since the last elections for the Musharraf regime. Its support for militants and push for Islamization and various anti-government campaigns—the latest one involving the sacking of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry—have upset the Musharraf regime.¹⁰⁹ As such, it is likely that Musharraf may replace his partnership with the *ulama* with Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) instead. In the event that Musharraf is forced to resign and a democratic election is held, the MMA is also unlikely to make any significant gains in the elections and may end up with a similar or smaller number of seats in parliament.

¹⁰⁸ Grare, *Islamism*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ For more on the sacking of the chief justice and its impact on Musharraf, see Mohamad Nawab Mohd Osman, "Will General Musharraf Survive Current Political Discontent?", *RSIS Commentaries*, No. 28, 9 April 2007.

Beyond the elections and democratic system, the *ulama* will remain an important group in Pakistani politics. Similar to their engagement with the Musharraf regime, the *ulama* will continue to wield influence in the military, in tribal areas and among the militants in India and Afghanistan, and they will mobilize the various groups to undermine any Pakistani government unwilling to accede to their Islamization agenda. They have in this sense emerged as the true victor of the Pakistani political system. Due to their importance, the *ulama* will remain successful at pressuring any government in power to allow for more Islamization. A quick study of the Islamic policies of the various Pakistani governments in the last two decades reveals an increasing emphasis on Islam and the introduction of rigid Islamic laws that will have a detrimental long-term impact on Pakistan.¹¹⁰ These laws and policies were often initiated by the *ulama*.

Conclusion

This paper begins by looking at the historical role of the *ulama* in the Indian sub-continent. It argues that the *ulama* have played a secondary role to Muslim rulers in the Indian sub-continent. The paper then proceeds to make a case that the collapse of the Mughal Empire and the fight for Indian independence led to the *ulama* playing a more active role by aligning themselves to the Congress Party or the Indian Muslim League. At Pakistan's independence, the *ulama* played a marginal role in Pakistani politics, mainly clamouring for the imposition of *sharia* law in the country. It was the rise of General Zia-ul-Haq to power and the Afghan War of 1979 that emboldened the *ulama* to start seriously contesting for power and Zia provided them with resources and power they never had before. Zia also allowed the *ulama* to infiltrate and Islamize

¹¹⁰ For a comprehensive scan of these policies, see Ghazali, *Islamic Pakistan*.

the army. After going through a brief period of decline between 1988 and 1999, the *ulama* were again empowered by another military regime under General Musharraf. Musharraf encouraged the *ulama* to put aside their differences to form a coalition of *ulama*, the MMA. Since then, the *ulama* have become a major political force, controlling the tribal areas and segments of the military, while influencing the foreign policy of Pakistan. This paper concludes that the Pakistani *ulama* will remain an important political force likely to be capable of forcing stricter Islamic laws into Pakistani society. This trend is likely to grow with time as the *ulama* in the MMA consolidate their grip on power and politics in the country. Looking beyond the Pakistani case, the *ulama* in Muslim societies are today playing a more important role in the realm of Muslim politics.¹¹¹ They are today able to control various Muslim governments, either within the system or outside the system that, in general, has led to their greater political involvement. In the long run, this trend can prove problematic to the Muslim world in general and may lead to a greater schism between the Muslim world and the rest of the world.

¹¹¹ For other works on the *ulama*'s increasing political role in Muslim societies in Singapore, Malaysia, Egypt, Iraq and Bahrain, see Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "Activism of *Ulama* in Singapore", unpublished academic thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2004, for Singapore; Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "Towards a History of Malaysian *Ulama*", *RSIS Working Paper No. 122*, 22 February 2007, for Malaysia; Chris Eccel, *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change: Al-Azhar in Conflict and Accommodation*, Berlin: K. Schwartz, 1984, for Egypt; and Vali Nasr, *Shia Revival*, for Iraq and Bahrain.

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