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Darul Uloom Deoband:
Stemming the Tide of Radical Islam in India

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Abstract

The growing menace of terrorism can be kept in check with the help of influential religious organisations and seminaries. The recent active involvement of Darul Uloom Deoband of India at the civil-society level to build up movement against terrorism has yielded positive results across religious and sectarian divides in India. It is a strategy that can be replicated in other parts of the world. By issuing the far-reaching *fatwa* and launching the campaign against terrorism, Deoband had not only disapproved of terrorism but also set an example how Muslims and *madrasahs* in other parts of the world can play a role in checking the radicalisation of Muslim youth. In fact, the Deoband approach has been practised by many Islamic groups and movements in the Muslim world such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Turkey.

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Darul Uloom Deoband: Stemming the Tide of Radical Islam in India

In the wake of terrorist attacks by Muslim militants on American and European interests in recent years, Western commentators and the mass media have questioned the claim by Muslim scholars and clergy that Islam does not support such attacks. *The New York Times* columnist, Thomas Friedman, asked "why is it that a million Muslims will pour into the streets to protest Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, but not one will take to the streets to protest the Muslim suicide bombers who blew up other Muslims." He said that Muslim leaders needed to tell the world what Islam is and show how its positive interpretations were being promoted in their schools and mosques.[1]

In recent times, violence has been frequently carried out in the name of Islam by different groups in various parts of the world, including South Asia. What was less visible in the media was the condemnation of such violence by important religious institutions. In India, the lead has been taken by Darul Uloom Deoband (House of Knowledge), situated in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). In February 2008, it denounced terrorism for the first time, announcing that "Darul Uloom Deoband condemns all kinds of violence and terrorism in the strongest possible terms." The reasoning behind this is that "Islam has given so much importance to human beings that it regards the killing of a single person [as that] of killing the entire humanity."[2] On 31 May 2008, the seminary also issued a *fatwa*[3] declaring "terrorism as un-Islamic."[4] Ever since, Deoband and its sister organisation Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind

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[1] Thomas Friedman, "America vs. The Narrative", *The New York Times*, 28 November 2009, available at www.nytimes.com/2009/11/29/opinion/29friedman.html.

[2] The declaration starts by saying: "Islam is the religion of mercy for all humanity. It is the fountainhead of eternal peace, tranquility and security. Islam has given so much importance to human beings that it regards the killing of a single person [as that] of killing the entire humanity, without differentiation based on creed and caste. Its teaching of peace encompasses all humanity. Islam has taught its followers to treat all mankind with equality, mercy, tolerance and justice. Islam sternly condemns all kinds of oppression, violence and terrorism. It has regarded oppression, mischief, rioting and murdering among severest sins and crimes." For details, see "Declaration: All India Anti-Terrorism Conference", 25 February 2008, available on the Darul Uloom website, www.darululoom-deoband.com/english/index.htm.

[3] *Fatwa* refers to religious opinion concerning Islamic law, often issued by Mufti (religious scholar). *Fatwa* is a non-binding opinion, and a Muslim can follow or disapprove depending upon his/her relationship with the Mufti and the status and respect of the Mufti in the Islamic world. The word *fatwa* gained wide attention in 1989 after the famous execution *fatwa* of Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Iran, against the novelist Salman Rushdie in the wake of the publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

[4] Zia Haq, "Darul's Global *Fatwa* on Terror", *The Hindustan Times*, 1 June 2008. Accessed on 22 December 2009, from www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/india/Darul-s-global-*fatwa*-on-

(JUH), a socio-religious organisation working for the betterment of Indian Muslims, have regularly organised meetings and conferences to denounce and to try to build a movement against terrorism.[5]

What is the impact of the proactive role of Deoband on civil society? Has it been able to persuade the Muslim community not to be swayed by militant ideology? How has the proactive role of Deoband been viewed by Muslims and non-Muslims in India? What are its implications for Indian democracy? These are some of the important questions that are addressed in this paper.

The main hypothesis of my current study is that the recent active involvement of Darul Uloom Deoband at the civil society level has helped in checking the spread of militant ideology among the Muslim community. This is because Deoband commands a high degree of respect among Sunni Muslims of India. The global standing of the seminary in the Muslim world is also significant, for it is considered to be next in standing to the Azhar University in Cairo.

After September 11, 2001, Deoband had come under scrutiny because of its alleged role in influencing the Taliban. Such perception existed because of the training of important Taliban leaders such as Mullah Omar and Jalaluddin Haqqani in supposedly Deobandi-style *madrasah* of Darul Uloom Haqqania located at Akora Khattak in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). This has also affected the image of Deoband in India. In a statement to the United Nation Security Council in December 2008, Pakistan accused Darul Uloom in Deoband of influencing terrorists in NWFP and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and urged the seminary to issue a specific *fatwa* asking the terrorists to stop the killings. Similarly, in an earlier report in August 2008, India's Second Administrative Reforms Commission headed by Congress leader M Veerappa Moily, said that in January 1994, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief, Mohammed Masood Azhar Alvi, had

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terror/Article1-314490.aspx. See also Mohammed Wajihuddin, "The Ulema Strike Back", *The Times of India*, 15 June 2008. The *fatwa* states: "Islam rejects all kinds of unwarranted violence, breach of peace, bloodshed, killing and plunder and does not allow it in any form. It is a basic principle of Islam that you assist one another in the pursuit of good and righteous causes and you DO NOT COOPERATE with ANYONE [emphasis original] for committing sin or oppression."

[5] Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind was established in 1919 to fight against the British imperialism through non-violent means. After independence, Jamiat concentrated upon the religio-socio-economic as well as educational uplift of Indian Muslims. For details, see Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, www.jamiatulama.org/about_us.html

"interacted extensively with the leading figures of the Deoband Ulema."[6] The linking of Deoband with the Taliban has been widely criticised but so far, no evidence of a direct link between Deoband and the Taliban has been exposed.[7]

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part provides a brief historical background of Deoband and the system of education prevalent there. The second part analyses the recent activity of Deoband on various social and political issues including counter-terrorism and their efforts to build bridges with non-Muslims. Finally, the paper explores the reception and reaction of such an active role of Deoband in the Indian society in general and among the Muslim community in particular. In the process, the paper also analyses the role of the media in highlighting the ongoing struggle of Deoband against terrorism. Before looking at the history of Deoband, it would be pertinent to understand the background of the study.

Background of the Study

There is growing consensus not only in the West but also in India that some of the *madrasahs* are breeding grounds for terrorism and that the majority of them contribute to radicalisation. Some of the studies have lumped together all *madrasahs* as "dens of militant activities" or alleged that "*madrasahs* teach terrorism."[8] In an obvious reference to these *madrasahs*, D. Bandyopadhyay alleged that "these *madrasahs* not only imparted religious instructions of sorts, but also organised students into militant groups who would use force to make their point. Motivated fighters came out of these *deeni* [religious] *madrasahs.*"[9] This is based on an erroneous notion of *madrasahs* that was imported from Afghanistan and Pakistan where *madrasahs* were used for militant activities as a direct result of American and Pakistani government policies during and after the Afghan "jihad" (1980–1989) era.

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[6] Second Administrative Reforms Commission, Eighth Report, "Combating Terrorism: Combating by Righteousness", June 2008, Government of India, p. 27.

[7] Vishwa Mohan, "Jamiat Asks the Government to Clarify Report that JeM Chief had Met Deoband Ulemas", *The Times of India*, 6 January 2009.

[8] See D. Bandyopadhyay, "Madrasah Education and the Condition of Indian Muslims", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 16, 2002, pp. 1481–1484. For an analysis of negative portrayal of *madrasahs* in post-9/11, see Mareike Jule Winkelmann, "Muslims' Reaction to Post-9/11 Media Discourse on the Indian Madaris", in Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld (Eds.), *Islamic Education, Diversity and National Identity: Dīnī Madāris in India Post 9/11* (pp. 252–268). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2006. Also, Jamal Malik (Ed.), *Madrasas in South Asia: Teaching Terror?*, London, New York: Routledge, 2008.

[9] D. Bandyopadhyay, "Madrasah Education and the Condition of Indian Muslims", p. 1483.

Such developments have not taken place in India and there is no reason to believe that such developments may take place there in the future. Thus, the radicalisation of certain *madrasahs* in Pakistan has little to do with any inner logic of the *madrasah* system as such. Rather, it must be seen as a result of complex development in the larger political economy of the Pakistani state.[10] As Stephen Cohen points out, religious radicalism has only a limited support base in Pakistan. Militant Pakistani Islamic groups, he remarks, have tended to derive their minimal influence less from popular support than from active state patronage in order to counter secular opposition parties or to promote what are seen as Pakistani's external interests vis-à-vis India and Afghanistan.[11]

Despite the hype and headlines, there exists little empirical and serious works exploring the role of *madrasahs* in the civil society. Barbara Metcalf's seminal work on Deoband is mostly an historical analysis of the institution and its role in reviving Islamic consciousness in British India.[12] Yoginder Sikand has highlighted the ideological orientation and the belief that inform the *madrasah* students and the need for reforming the *madrasah* system.[13] Doing a micro level study of a Deobandi *madrasah*, Arshad Alam has analysed the various nuances and intricacies of a *madrasah* system. He writes that for the *madrasahs*, "the 'other' is not a Hindu, but a Muslim from another *maslak (sect)*."[14] Similarly, Barbara Metcalf argues that "*madrasahs* had not only become a centrally important site of cultural reproduction, but also one of denominational loyalties dividing Muslims."[15] This is an important analysis as very often *madrasahs* are dubbed as "monolithic" and "homogenous" in their character. By locating my study within the larger debates on the *madrasah*

[10] For a detailed discussion on developments of militancy in some Pakistani *madrasahs*, see Yoginder Sikand, "Militancy and Madrasahs: The Pakistani Case", *Muslim India*, Vol. 22, No. 1, January 2004, pp. 10–13.

[11] Stephen Philip Cohen, "The Jihadist Threat to Pakistan", *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2003, pp. 17–18.

[12] Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982.

[13] Yoginder Sikand, *Madrasa Reforms: Indian Muslim Voices*, Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2008. Yoginder Sikand, *Bastions of the Believers: Madrasas and Islamic Education in India*, New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005.

[14] Arshad Alam, "The Enemy Within: Madrasah and Muslim Identity in North India", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2/3, pp. 605–627, 2008.

[15] Barbara D. Metcalf, "Madrasahs and Minorities in Secular India", in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Eds.), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 94.

system, I intend to identify the factors responsible for the sudden proactive role of Deoband and whether it has been able to influence and shape the moderate voices within the Muslim community. This study can help the policymakers determine whether religious institutions can be utilised by the state to contain the rise of extremism.

A Brief History of Deoband

Darul Uloom Deoband was established on 30 May 1866. Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi were the principal founders of the seminary.[16] The evolution of Deoband has to be understood in the larger context of *madrasah* system existing in India. Before the establishment of Deoband, *madrasahs* used to be the centre of both religious and secular education. Along with the teaching of religion, *madrasahs* also taught rational sciences and mathematics.

The unsuccessful revolt of 1857 against the British in India, in which many *ulamas* participated and even led the fighting, resulted in slipping of power from Muslim hands. Prior to the intrusion of the British, Muslims were ruling in most parts of India. After the revolt, the British started cracking down on the Muslim elites, who were considered as primarily responsible for the uprising. In August 1858, India was formally incorporated into the British Empire. This also meant that the *madrasahs*, which enjoyed privileged positions and patronage by Muslim elites, now had to function under a different political regime. The British rule was seen as a threat to Islamic identity and tradition of Islamic learning. In order to deal with the situation, the main Indian Muslim movement worked out strategies to reclaim their identity within the existing political framework, based on their faith and their specific beliefs which would have serious political ramifications for Indian Muslims in the long run. According to Gilles Kepel;

…In this period, two main paths—religious and political—were mapped out. The first reinforced the religious singularity of Islam and its radical separation from the non-Muslim world; the second reasserted Islam through the elaboration of a political

[16] Darul Uloom Deoband is managed by *Majlis-e-Shoora* or Body of Councellors. The first Body of Counsellors included: Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi, Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi, Haji Abid Hussain, Zulfequar Sahab and Munshi Fazal Haq.

strategy of communalism, involving the establishment of separate electoral colleges for Muslims and Hindus and leading eventually to the secession of Pakistan.[17]

The religious path resulted in the emergence of many revivalist movements to purify Islam.[18] The Deoband movement, which started with the establishment of Darul Uloom at Deoband in 1866, was one of them. The Deoband seminary spread rapidly. By 1880, there were over a dozen Deobandi schools, and three times that number at the end of the century.[19] When Deoband celebrated its centenary, it claimed to have nearly 9,000 *madrasahs*.[20]

An important challenge for the founders of Deoband was how to get financial support to run the institution. The decline of Mughal rule had deprived the Muslim educational institutions of the patronage they had previously enjoyed. Maulana Nanautavi devised the method of public donation, to overcome the problem of financing of Muslim institutions. This was also to ensure the non-interference of the state, which was seen as anti-Muslim, in the running of *madrasahs*. This new method of public donation, according to Maulana Nanautavi, is "neither contaminated by financial grants from the government nor from the feudal landlords, so as to keep this institution unencumbered from the meddlesome influences of the state."[21] It has been mentioned that "no particular amount of donation has been fixed nor is there any peculiarity of religion and community."[22] The seminary continues to be funded by public donation to this day.

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[17] Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West: Islamic Movements in America and Europe*. London: Polity Press, 1997, p. 89.

[18] Other important revivalist and educational movements were: Aligarh, Barelwi, Ahle Hadith, School of Nadwat-ul-Ulama, Tabligh Jamaat and the Jamaat-i-Islami movement. For details, see David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation Muslim Solidarity in British India*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978; Barbara D. Metcalf*, Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982; Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994; Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India, Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and his Movement*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996; Jan-Peter Hartung, "The Nadwat al-'ulama': Chief Patron of *Madrasah* Education in India and a Turntable to the Arab World" in Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld (Eds.), *Islamic Education, Diversity and National Identity: Dini Madaris in India Post 9/11*, pp. 135–157, New Delhi: Sage, 2006.

[19] Barbara D. Metcalf, "The Madrasah at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1978, pp. 111–134.

[20] Francis Robinson, *The Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2001, p. 37.

[21] Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi, *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband, Vol. 1*, Deoband: Idara-e Ihtemam, 1980, p. 114.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 115.

The System of Education

The purpose of Deoband was to create and train a community of believers who would serve the spiritual needs of the community and defend the scriptural Islam. The system of education aimed to create prayer leaders, writers, preachers and teachers who in turn could disseminate their knowledge. In their approach to education, Deoband not only aimed to achieve academic excellence but also to build the moral character of the students. The religious orientation of Deoband is in accordance with *Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaat* (People of the Sunnah and Jamaat), which signifies an approach towards life based on the practices and teachings of Prophet Mohammad. It also sought all guidance and interpretations in the matter of religion in accordance with the Quran and *Sunnah*.[23] Deoband is an orthodox institution, which strongly believes in theological puritanism. They are against the shrine-based sufi Islam and oppose Western ideas and values.

The syllabus taught in Deoband was heavily influenced by *Dars-i Nizami*, which was developed in the famous school of Farangi Mahall in eighteenth-century Lucknow. Yet there were differences in the purpose of education of both these schools. While the *ulama* of Farangi Mahall trained students to get government jobs, Deoband aimed at creating a body of religious leaders that could serve the spiritual and legal needs of the Muslim community.[24] Thus, the major emphasis of Farangi Mahall syllabus was *maqulat* (the rational sciences), in contrast to the Deobandi school, which emphasised *manuqulat* (revealed sciences).[25]

Currently, there are 3,500 students studying in Deoband. There are no facilities for girl's and women's education. Students are admitted on the basis of their performance in an all-India entrance examination. Every year, nearly 5,000 to 6,000 students take the examination, out of which 1,000 students are selected. Students can take this entrance examination after completing five years of primary education either in a secular school or in Deoband or in any other *madrasah*. These numbers also reflect the continued importance of the seminary among the Indian Muslim.

After gaining admission, students have to undergo eight years of education during which they are taught *manuqulat*, the revealed studies of *hadith* or tradition

[23] Sunnah refers to living habits and sayings of Prophet Mohammad.

[24] Francis Robinson, *op cit*., p. 23.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

and Quran, *maqulat*, the rational studies of *fiqh* or jurisprudence, logic and philosophy, *shariah* or Islamic law, *tafseer* or the interpretation of holy scriptures and Arabic. After completing eight years of education, students get *sanad-e-faraghat* (graduate degree) or the certificate of *Fazil*, which is equivalent to a bachelor's degree. Many students discontinue their education after becoming *Fazil*. There are some students who choose to go for *takmilat* or post-graduate courses in the areas of *fiqh*, *tafseer* or *adab* (literature) and other specialised courses.

The establishment of Department of Computer Training and Internet in 1996, and the Department of English language and literature in 2002 is important landmark in the history of Deoband. The opening of Departments of Computer and English marks the symbolic adoption of modern technology and value. Ironically, modernity has always been pitched against the orthodoxy. Deoband's approach reflects the combination of modernity with orthodox values. However, only a few students take admission in these departments, as people doubt the worth of these degrees from an institution meant for producing religious teachers and scholars. Those who are really interested in English language and computer courses chose to go to secular institutions.[26]

However, the service of the Departments of Computer and English are utilised to maintain the Deoband's website, which is in four languages; Arabic, English, Hindi and Urdu. Another interesting feature is the issuance of online *fatwa* by great Muftis (Muslim scholar) of Deoband and answering questions using the internet. Because of this, Muslims living in any parts of the world can get instant answers in their religious and social matters. They receive more than 50 emails on a daily basis, which also shows the popularity of Deoband.

Education is free for children who are admitted to Deoband. There are mostly two kinds of students who come to Deoband. The first category of students includes those who come from pious families and their parents want them to obtain religious education and serve the community. The second category of students, who form the majority, includes children from poor Muslim families. These poor Muslims do not have any option, but to send their children to Deoband or any *madrasah* as they cannot afford formal education in secular schools. In a study of *madrasahs* across different countries, Jan-Peter Hartung also found that "despite a formally guaranteed

[26] Interview with a Deoband student, Deoband, 29 December 2009.

primary education for all by the respective governments in most of the countries … enrolment in a *madrasah* is often considered the only affordable means for even basic education by large parts of the Muslim population."[27] Students coming to study in Deoband also receive pocket money of a hundred rupees each month. Praising the honesty of the students, Maulana Khaliq Madrasi, Deputy Vice-chancellor of Darul Uloom Deoband, told the author that students coming from wealthy families usually decline to accept pocket money which goes to the needy students.[28]

Deoband has attracted students from different parts of the world. It has students from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, South Africa and others.[29] Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, spiritual leader of Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, also studied in Deoband. This also reflects the transnational linkage of Deoband and its global influence. However, the flow of foreign students has almost stopped since the 1990s when the Indian government tightened visa rules.[30] Despite this, Deobandi school of thought is widely respected in the Islamic world.

The Changing Role of Deoband

It must be noted that during the colonial period, the Deobandi leadership under the banner of Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind opposed the two-nation theory of Muslim League and aligned with the Indian National Congress to fight against the British.[31] In independent India, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind has mostly played a moderate role by participating in ongoing political regimes. The nationalist role of Deoband is an established fact. At the same time, Deoband mostly confined their activities to

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[27] Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld (Eds.), *Islamic Education, Diversity and National Identity: Dīnī Madāris in India Post 9/11* (p. 16), Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2006. Contrary to the dominant perception that Muslim parents in India have preference for religious education, the Sachar Committee found that only three per cent Muslim children of school-going age go to *madrasahs*. For details, see Justice Rajender Sachar, *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India: A Report* (pp.76–79), New Delhi: Government of India, 2006.

[28] Interview with Maulana Khaliq Madrasi, Deoband, 2 January 2010.

[29] For a detailed list of countries and the number of students graduated from Darul Uloom, see Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi, *op cit*., pp. 339–341. Also, see Dietrich Reetz, "The Deoband Universe: What Makes a Transcultural and Transnational Educational Movement of Islam?", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol.27, No.1, 2007, pp.139-159.

[30] Interview with Maulana Khaliq Madrasi, Deoband, 2 January 2010.

[31] Farhat Tabassum, *Deoband Ulema's Movement for the Freedom of India*, New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2006. See also Yohanan Friedmann, "The Attitude of the Jam'iyyat-I 'Ulama'-I Hind to the Indian National Movement and the Establishment of Pakistan", in Gabriel Baer (Ed.), *The Ulama in Modern History*, Jerusalem: Israeli Oriental Society, Asian and African Studies, VII, 1971, pp. 157–183.

imparting religious education and providing spiritual guidance to their followers. Even during the time of the demolition of Babri mosque or the Gujarat riots of 2002, Deoband remained confined to their religious sphere. It is only since the beginning of 2008 that the institution has become very active in the civil society, organising meetings and conferences to castigate terrorism and reaffirm their loyalty to the country.

The need for the active role of Deoband has arisen because of many factors. Islamic militancy, which was so far confined to Kashmir, has in recent times shown itself in other parts of India. Earlier on, the acts of terrorism orchestrated on Indian soil were mostly carried out by Pakistan-based terrorist organisations. Recently, there is evidence of involvement of Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), which is a largely homegrown Indian Muslim organisation, in acts of militancy. Investigations into recent bomb blasts in Bangalore and Ahmedabad have revealed evidence of the complicity of SIMI and "Indian Mujahideen".[32] This has become a cause of concern for the Indian government, which has hitherto boasted about the loyalty of the Indian Muslims towards the Indian state.

The recent rise of neo-conservative Islamic scholars such as Zakir Naik, who have been using media, particularly the television, to propagate their message to the masses is said to have made some impact on the perception of the Indian Muslims. The popularity of QTV, a Pakistan-based Islamic channel among Indian Muslims, is a testimony to the fact that neo-conservative ideology has been growing rapidly. In a controversial speech about al-Qaeda chief, Osama bin-Ladin, Zakir Naik proclaimed, "If he is fighting the enemies of Islam, I am for him. If he is terrorising America the terrorist—the biggest terrorist—I am with him. Every Muslim should be a terrorist," Naik concluded. "The thing is, if he is terrorising a terrorist, he is following Islam."[33]

Such kinds of proclamation are providing the intellectual and ideological support for the rise of neo-conservative ideology among some sections of Indian Muslims. At the same time, there is ongoing effort by important Muslim religious

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[32] "Ahmedabad Blasts: Indian Mujahideen Caims Responsibility", accessed on 27 July 2008, available at specials.rediff.com/news/2008/jul/27video.htm. See also "India on High Alert after Ahmedabad Blasts", accessed on 27 July 2008, available online www.expressindia.com/latest-news/India-on-high-alert-after-Ahmedabad-blasts/341109/

[33] Quoted in Praveen Swami, "Ahmedabad Blasts: The Usual Suspects", *The Hindu*, 1 August 2008, accessed on 1 August 2008, available online at www.hindu.com/2008/08/01/stories/2008080155141000.htm.

organisations in India to fight back against the ideology of terrorism. The subsequent bomb blasts in India such as Delhi (2005, 2008) and Mumbai (2006, 2007, 2008) in which Muslims were involved, have forced Deoband to come out of its religious confines and to play a more proactive social and political role.

Moreover, after September 11, 2001, Deoband has been alleged to inspire and create terrorists in Afghanistan. Thus, Rahul Bedi wrote, "Deoband acts as a sort of religious factory, churning out students to build new schools, which in turn have inspired armed Islamic groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kashmir."[34] Such proclamations became common after the September 11 attacks. In its report on media coverage of the anti-terrorism campaign, Deoband has argued that "Since 9/11 Darul Uloom Deoband, U.P had also been branded as a harbinger of terrorism, therefore it became imperative to launch anti-terrorism movement from there."[35]

All these factors forced Deoband to come out and represent its progressive and moderate face. It must be noted that Deoband also condemned the September 11 attacks.[36]

Building Bridges with non-Muslims

Deoband and JUH have always been involved in promoting peace and social harmony in the society. This is evident from their legalistic and institutional approach in resolving Babri mosque dispute. Deoband clergies have adopted a moderate stance with regard to Babri mosque dispute and want it to be resolved in a court of law, rather than on the street.

Similarly, they have always condemned communal violence and tried to mitigate the tensions between Hindus and Muslims through various confidence-building measures between the two communities. One can also note that there has so far been no communal violence in the town of Deoband where the seminary is

[34] Rahul Bedi, "School that Inspired a Century of Extremists", *The Telegraph*, 6 December 2001, accessed on 18 January 2010 from www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/1364543/School-that-inspired-a-century-of-extremists.html

[35] Maulana Abdul Hameed Nomani and Azeemullah Siddiqi Qasmi, *Media Coverage of Anti-Terrorism Global Peace Conference Held by Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind*, New Delhi: Department of Publicity, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, 2009, p. 1.

[36] Jitesh Wadhawan, "Nation's Oldest Islamic School Condemns Attack on the United States", *Press Trust of India*, 25 September 2001. See also "Leading Islamic School Condemns the USA Attacks", *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 25 September 2001.

located. Yet, they have never felt the need of publicising their moderate ideology until the event of September 11. The progressive orientation of Deoband can be measured by their attempt over the years to create harmonious relationships with non-Muslims.

Darul Uloom Deoband with the help of JUH has been attempting to build bridges between Hindus and Muslims. In February 2004, Deoband requested the Muslims to respect the sentiments of Hindus by avoiding sacrificing cows on the eve of Eid ul-Zuha. It must be noted that cow is considered sacred for Hindus. Thus, Mufti Habibur Rahman, head of the Darul's *fatwa* bench, stated, "Though cow-slaughter is legitimate under Shariat, it is advised that sheep, goat and camel be sacrificed in states where there is a ban on cow-slaughter. The law of the land should not be violated and peace should be maintained in the states and the country."[37]

Deoband has not only opposed the idea of India as Darul Harb (Abode of War) but has also criticised the labelling of Hindus as *kafirs* or unbelievers, which has a derogatory connotation.[38] In March 2009, it issued a *fatwa* declaring India as Darul Aman (Abode of Peace) where jihad is meaningless. Jamiat spokesman and member of the Deoband faculty Abdul Hamid Naumani stated that though the term *kafir* does not have any "derogatory connotation", and it "only means someone not belonging to Islam, if its use hurts anyone the term should be avoided."[39]

Deoband has also endorsed the practice of yoga by Muslims and said that it is not un-Islamic. This is a remarkable step, considering that yoga has been banned in Indonesia by Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body, for eroding the Muslim faith. A similar edict was issued against yoga in Malaysia in 2008. Arguing in support of yoga, Akeel Siddiqui, the spokesperson for Darul Uloom Deoband remarked, "Why is faith being given the connotation of religion? The broad purpose of it is to create health. Islam has emphasised a lot on being healthy."[40]

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[37] "Darul Uloom Asks Muslims to Respect Hindu Sentiments", *The Times of India*, 3 February 2004, accessed on 12 January 2010 from timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/Darul-Uloom-asks-Muslims-to-respect-Hindu-sentiments/articleshow/469249.cms.

[38] "Islamic Seminary Terms India 'Land of Peace'", *The Times of India*, 3 March 2009. Fatwa declares India "Dar al-Aman", *Daily Times Monitor*, 3 March 2009, accessed on 10 January 2010 from www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\03\03\story_3-3-2009_ p. 75.

[39] "Hindus can't be Dubbed 'Kafir', says Jamiat", *The Times of India*, 24 February 2009, accessed on 10 January 2010 from timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Hindus-cant-be-called-kafir-Jamiat/articleshow/4179187.cms

[40] Raheel Khursheed, "Muslim Apex Body Deoband Says Yoga not Un-Islamic", CNN-IBN, 28 January 2009, accessed on 12 February 2010 from ibnlive.in.com/news/muslim-apex-body-deoband-says-yoga-not-unislamic/83892-17.html

Deoband has time and again shown its progressive stance on various social issues. It has supported the Women's Reservation Bill, which stipulates a 33 per cent quota for women in the Parliament and other elected bodies.[41] In November 2009, it urged the community to fight against global warming.[42] Such progressive ideology of Deoband complements its recent activism against terrorism.

Many rallies and meetings have been organised by Deoband and Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind across India since February 2008 to condemn terrorism. In a meeting in Mumbai in February 2009, Deoband declared that "suicide attacks are un-Islamic." The *fatwa* against terrorism issued by Deoband in May 2008 was ratified by about 6,000 *ulema* and muftis (experts in Islamic jurisprudence) from different parts of India during the 29th national session of the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind in November 2009 in Hyderabad.[43] This also reflects the wide acceptance and endorsement of *fatwa* by different Muslim groups.

The impact of the *fatwa* against terrorism and its denouncement in various public forums and meetings is visible. Religious leaders from Hindu communities have been actively participating in such meetings. Yoga guru Baba Ramdev participated in one such meeting at Deoband in November 2009, which was attended by mostly a Muslim crowd of 500,000.[44] This has sent positive signals across all communities in India.

Similarly, Muslim communities of Mumbai refused to bury the dead bodies of nine terrorists responsible for November 2008 Mumbai attacks that left 166 people dead. The decision was endorsed by Darul Uloom Deoband.[45] Such extreme steps also reflect the deep resentment of mainstream Indian Muslims against the growing menace of terrorism, which has often been orchestrated in the name of Muslims and Islam.

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[41] Arpit Parashar, "Darul Uloom Throws its Weight Behind Women's Quota Bill", *The Indian Express*, 10 May 2008, accessed on 16 January 2010 from www.indianexpress.com/news/darul-uloom-throws-its-weight-behind-womens-quota-bill/307654/

[42] S. Raju, "Religious Leaders Join Hands for Green Mission", *Hindustan Times*, 20 November 2009, accessed on 16 January 2010 from www.hindustantimes.com/Religious-leaders-join-hands-for-green-mission/H1-Article3-478212.aspx

[43] "Ulema, Muftis Ratify Fatwa Against Terrorism", *The Hindu*, 9 November 2009, accessed on 10 January 2010 from www.hinduonnet.com/2008/11/09/stories/2008110959951100.htm

[44] "Give Up Arms, Muslim Clerics Tell Terrorists and Maoists", *Indo-Asian News Service*, 3 November 2009.

[45] Vishal Arora, "A Year Later, Muslims Refused to Bury Terrorists' Bodies," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 December 2009.

Media Coverage of Deoband's *Fatwa* against Terrorism

Media is an important institution in any democratic society and plays a vital role in shaping and formulating public opinion. Edward Said, in his influential work *Covering Islam*, has already shown how in various ways Islam has been represented negatively in the West.[46] It has also been reported in various studies that media have negatively stereotyped Muslims and Islam.[47] It was because of this fear of being stereotyped that the conference of Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind appealed to media organisations "to refrain from presenting terrorism synonymous to any religion and asked them not to interpret events with bias."[48]

The anti-terrorism conference organised in February 2008 received wide coverage in media and was appreciated by different sections of society. Thus, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Rajnath Singh welcomed the anti-terror *fatwa* while Panchjanya, organ of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), lauded it with some reservations.[49] Almost all English-language press as well as regional-language press provided coverage to the anti-terrorism campaign launched by Deoband and Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind. A report on the positive coverage of anti-terrorism campaign by the media was also published by Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind.[50]

What has helped to bring the campaign to the attention of the larger public is its coverage by mainstream media, beyond the Urdu press, which was the case till then.[51] No doubt, media has provided positive coverage to such public gatherings which were also praised by Maulana Abdul Hamid Noumani, Secretary, Press &

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[46] Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1981.

[47] See Lila Abu-Lughod, *Local Contexts of Islamism in Popular Media*, ISIM Paper 6, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006; Brigitte Lebens Nacos and Oscar Torres-Reyna, *Fuelling our Fears: Stereotyping, Media Coverage and Public Opinion of Muslim Americans*, London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006; Elizabeth Poole and John E. Richardson, *Muslims and the News Media*, London: I B Tauris, 2006; Saied R. Ameli, *The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonization* ,London: Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2004; Akbar S. Ahmed, *Living Islam, From Samarkand to Stornoway*, London: BBC Books, 1994.

[48] "Muslim Leaders Urge United Fight Against Terrorism", *The Hindu*, 2 March 2009, accessed on 9 January 2010 from www.thehindu.com/2009/03/02/stories/2009030255200800.htm

[49] Mohua Chatterjee, "BJP Hails *Fatwa* Against Terror", *Press Trust of India*, 5 June 2008. See also Mohammed Wajihuddin, "The Ulema Strike Back", *The Times of India*, 15 June 2008.

[50] Maulana Abdul Hameed Nomani and Azeemullah Siddiqi Qasmi, *Media Coverage of Anti-Terrorism Global Peace Conference Held by Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind*, *op. cit*.

[51] Mohammed Wajihuddin, "Scholars Hail Darul Declaration", *The Times of India*, 27 February 2008.

Publication of Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind.[52] The larger shift in media coverage from one of negatively stereotyping Muslims as terrorists and criminals to a more positive depiction of anti-terrorism campaign spearheaded by Deoband has helped in shedding a negative image of Islam and the Muslims.

Reactions to Deoband's *Fatwa* against Terrorism

Indian Muslims, however, are divided over the need of *fatwa* against terrorism. "It (the *fatwa*) just shows that the community is suffering from inferiority complex. There is no need for such a *fatwa*, as all Muslims know that our religion is against terrorism. What is the need for reassurance? And who are we reassuring?" questions Mufti Mohammed Mukaram, Shahi Imam of the Fatehpuri Masjid, Delhi.[53] However, instead of viewing this as apologetic behaviour of the Muslims, Maulana Shaukat Qasmi Bastavi, general secretary of Rabta Madarise Islamia, regards this as imperative in the light of defamation of Muslims and Islam across the world.[54] Syed Shakil Ahmad, who is a senior advocate in the Supreme Court and a member of Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, praises such an active role of Deoband by stating: "They (Muslim organisations) will be failing in their duty, if they do not come out to denounce terrorism. The need has arisen to stand up when the whole community was being branded as terrorists. It is the job of the religious teacher and Ulema to tell what Islam is."[55]

One can certainly agree with Syed Shakil Ahmad's statement given the nature of Indian society where religion has come to occupy an important place. Religious organisations and religious leaders can be used to promote social causes in a society that is deeply religious. When asked why it took such a long time after 11 September 2001 to declare a *fatwa* against terrorism, Maulana Arsad Madani of Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind said that "September 11 was a global event but it didn't affect India directly. When terrorism reached Indian soil, we had to come out in public and issue *fatwa* against terrorism."

[52] Interview with Maulana Abdul Hamid Noumani, New Delhi, 2 January 2010.

[53] "Muslims Divided Over *fatwa* on Terror", *The Times of India*, 11 November 2008.

[54] Interview with Maulana Shaukat Qasmi Bastavi, Deoband, 29 December 2009.

[55] Interview with Syed Shakil Ahmad, New Delhi, 31 December 2009.

Challenges before Deoband

The impact of the anti-terrorism campaign launched by Deoband can be affected by various factors. There are critical differences within the Muslim community, which inherits a hierarchy of assertive plural identities defined along linguistic, cultural, geographical, racial, tribal and occupational lines. In this context, this author has argued that "given their divisions and diversities, Indian Muslims in general, can neither harness their inner resources to evolve a common vision nor work as a collective group in the pursuit of shared goals."[56] The supposedly monolithic structure of the Muslim leadership and organisation does not exist either at the national or local level. Such divisions have hindered the Muslim community to come on a single platform.

The conservative approach of Deoband on some issues might also hamper the influence of its campaign. In 2005, Deoband issued a *fatwa* asking the Muslim women to observe purdah or veil while participating in politics. Maulana Marghoobur Rehman, vice-chancellor of Darul Uloom Deoband, said, "Women can contest elections. But they must also observe purdah."[57] This was vehemently criticised by various groups as *fatwa* can only be issued on religious matters. Asserting their rights of issuing *fatwa* on various issues, Maulana Rehman contended, "If a Muslim woman contests an election, it becomes a matter of our society and religion." Deoband subsequently realised that they are overstepping their boundary by issuing *fatwas* on political matters. After the incident, an eight-member jury was constituted and assigned the task of examining and releasing religious and political *fatwas*.[58] This incident brings to light the conservative ideology that still informs Deoband.

Similarly, the 30th general session of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind on 3 November 2009 endorsed a *fatwa* of 2006 by the Deoband that calls on Muslims not to sing Vande Mataram, the national song of India, as it is in violation of Islam's faith in monotheism. This was also criticised by various Muslim groups. Criticising the resolution, Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid said, "It (the resolution) is unacceptable. It is counter-productive. It is not good for our society and our country.

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[56] Taberez Ahmed Neyazi, "Global Myth vs. Local Reality: Towards Understanding "Islamic" Militancy in India", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 165.

[57] Avijit Ghosh, "Women in Polls a Religious Issue: Deoband V-C", *The Times of India*, 24 August 2005.

[58] "Deoband Forms Panel for *Fatwas*", *The Hindustan Times*, 26 August 2005.

It is not good for Muslims."[59] Many Muslim intellectuals also opposed Deoband for such a regressive stance.[60]

In a recent controversial *fatwa* against the working Muslim women stating that "It is unlawful for Muslim women to do job in government or private institutions where men and women work together and women have to talk with men frankly and without veil." This *fatwa* was issued on 4 April 2010, but was covered by the media only after a month when NDTV broadcast it on 11 May 2010.[61] The *fatwa* was vehemently criticised across all sections of Muslim communities. Such outrage against the fatwa resulted in a statement by the seminary that the response was only in relation to a question and it's not a fatwa against the "Muslim working women."[62] This shows the continued media bias against the Muslims. But at the same time, it confirms the orthodox orientation of Deoband.

Deoband has also opposed the establishment of the Central Madrasah Board by the government to regulate and modernise *madrasahs* in the country. The opposition to the proposal is largely due to the fear of undue interference by the government in the running of *madrasahs*.[63] Criticising the move of the government, Maulana Riyasat Ali Bijnori who teaches in Darul Uloom Deoband said, "The purpose of *madrasah* is to provide religious education. We are not concerned with other system of education. How fair would it be, if we ask the government to introduce religious education in secular institutions. The government needs to understand this."[64] One cannot disagree with Maulana Bijnori. But the stand of Deoband has also been criticised by other Muslim organisations such as All India

[59] "Jamiat Resolution on Vande Mataram is Unacceptable: Khurshid", *The Indian Express*, 15 November 2009, accessed on 10 January 2010 from www.indianexpress.com/story_mobile.php?storyid=541715

[60] "Muslim Intellectuals Oppose Deoband on Vande Mataram", *Plus News Pakistan,* 23 November 2009.

[61] "Fatwa to Working Muslim Women: Don't Talk to Male Colleagues", *NDTV*, 11 May 2010, retrieved on 22 September 2010, http://www.ndtv.com/news/india/fatwa-to-working-muslim-women-dont-talk-to-male-colleagues-24731.php

[62] "No 'Fatwa' Against Muslim Working Women, says Deoband", *The Times of India*, 12 May 2010.

[63] Interview with Maulana Shaukat Ali Qasmi, Professor Darul Uloom Deoband and General Secretary Rabta Madrasah Islamia Arabia (All India), Deoband, 29 December 2009.

[64] Interview with Maulana Riyasat Ali Bijnori, Deoband, 28 December 2009.

Muslim Personal Law Board (Jadid) and All India Ulma Mashaikh Board.[65] Both of these are Sunni Muslim organisations.

Such oppositions also pose a challenge to the dominance of Deoband and their campaign against terrorism. However, Maulana Shaukat Ali Qasmi argued, "The Muslim community, no doubt, is divided over various issues. But when we launched the campaign against terrorism, it was unanimously supported by all groups including Shia Muslim groups," Similarly, Arsad Madani debunks the significance of sectarian divisions within the Muslim community and argues, "Terrorism is not a *maslak* (sect) question, but the Muslim question. It has affected all Muslim sects equally worldwide. It is because of this that an anti-terrorism campaign launched by Darul Uloom Deoband has been welcomed by all Muslims." One cannot disagree with Arsad Madani and Maulana Qasmi. We have noted that the attempt of Deoband to build a movement against terrorism has been welcomed by wide sections of society.

Global Influence of Deoband's *Fatwa*

Many religious organisations and scholars in different parts of the world have also been following the footsteps of Deoband and have denounced terrorism publicly. A similar step has been taken in Pakistan recently. On 2 March 2010, Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri, an influential religious leader and prominent scholar in Pakistan, issued a 600-page *fatwa* declaring that terrorists and suicide bombers are unbelievers. The *fatwa* further states that "terrorism is terrorism, violence is violence and it has no place in Islamic teaching and no justification can be provided for it, or any kind of excuses or ifs or buts."[66] Qadri has effectively used electronic technology such as cassettes, videos, CDs, DVDs and television channels to reach out to the large public. Through his influential organisation, Minhaj-ul-Quran International (MQI), with a presence in 90 countries including Canada, United Kingdom and the United States, Qadri has been attempting to present the moderate Islam before the world.

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[65] M. Hasan, "Row Among Clerics Over Central Madrasah Board", *The Hindustan Times*, 27 November 2009, accessed on 16 January 2010 from http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/480371.aspx

[66] John Esposito, "Influential Pakistani Cleric Issues *Fatwa* Against Terrorism", *Washington Post*, 5 March 2010. Accessed on 9 March 2010 from newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/john_esposito/2010/03/influential_pakistani_cleric_issues_*fatwa*_against_terrorism.html

The *fatwa* issued by Qadri was endorsed by the British government and the event was attended by members of Parliament and representatives of London's Metropolitan Police. In the United States, the State Department's spokesman, P.J. Crowley, welcomed the *fatwa*, stating it is important that "Muslims themselves make their own judgement about the vision that al Qaeda and [Osama] bin Laden have propagated." It might be premature to predict the impact of the *fatwa*, but given the respect commanded by Qadri and his ability to effectively use the media, the *fatwa* might have an impact not only in Pakistan but also in the West where there are many Muslims of Pakistani origin.

In yet another attempt to fight extremism, prominent Muslim scholars from different parts of the world gathered in the city of Mardin in Turkey in March 2010 to recast the *fatwa* by fourteenth century scholar Ibn Taymiyyah that is invariably used by militants to justify killings. The medieval division of the world into a "house of Islam" and "house of unbelief" was discarded by acknowledging the prevalence of respect for faith and civil rights in the current globalised world.[67] The organisation of the conference in Mardin was symbolic as Ibn Taymiyyah issued his famous *fatwa* from there.[68]

Similarly, the two largest religious organisations of Indonesia—the Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, with the help of other religious organisations such as Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal – JIL) have also been fighting against the attempted process of Islamisation, which the right wing Islamist groups are trying to impose in an otherwise secular society. Such attempts to fight radical Islamist ideology across different parts of the world, even though not directly influenced by Deoband's approach, reflect the existence of moderate Islam that has often been ignored by mainstream media.

Conclusion

The growing menace of terrorism can be checked with the help of influential religious organisations and seminaries. The recent active involvement of Darul Uloom Deoband of India at the civil society level to build up movement against terrorism has

[67] "Muslim Scholars Tell Osama He's Got It All Wrong", *The Times of India*, 1 April 2010, accessed on 2 April 2010 from timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/Muslim-scholars-tell-Osama-hes-got-it-all-wrong/articleshow/5748591.cms

[68] It must be noted that the famous *fatwa* of Ibn Taymiyyah to wage jihad was largely directed against the Mongol, whom he considered as not "true Muslims" because they were following "man-made laws" rather than shariah or Islamic law.

yielded positive results. It is a strategy that can be replicated in other parts of the world. The attempts of Deoband to build bridges with non-Muslims by declaring India as Darul Aman or the Land of Peace, issuing *fatwa* against the use of the term *kafir* in reference to Hindus, are commendable.

There are, however, apparent contradictions in their approach on some social issues. While Deoband has supported a 33 per cent reservation for women in the elected bodies, it asked the Muslim women to wear *burqa* or veil when entering into politics. At the same time, it has issued a *fatwa* against the national anthem. Such a conservative approach of Deoband might inhibit their influence beyond a certain minority section of the society.

Despite all these challenges, by issuing the far-reaching *fatwa* and launching the campaign against terrorism, Deoband had not only disapproved of terrorism but also set an example how Muslims and *madrasahs* in other parts of the world can play a role in checking the radicalisation of Muslim youth. The pertinent question raised by Friedman has already been answered by Darul Uloom Deoband. In fact, the new Deoband approach has been practised by many other Islamic groups and movement in other parts of the Muslim world such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Turkey.

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