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CHAPTER 13

POLITICAL ISLAM, PAKISTAN, AND THE GEO-POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

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Introduction

The Muslim share of the world's population is generally estimated to be in the neighborhood of 1.3 billion or about 22 percent of the total. Of this figure, Asia's share is substantial. Well over half of the world's Muslims, in fact, dwell—some of them as majorities, some as minorities—in the broad belt of Asian countries reaching from the eastern shore of the Mediterranean to the easternmost tip of the Indonesian archipelago. Of the 10 countries in the world housing the largest national Muslim populations, seven (Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Turkey, Iran, and China, in that order) are located in this belt; and the first four of them (Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India) hold as much as 40 percent of the Muslim world total. There is great variation, of course, in the Muslim share of Asian national populations, from virtually 100 percent in the Maldives to four percent or less in Thailand and less than three percent in China. The variation is just as great, moreover, in the socio-cultural *content* of these Muslim populations, whose histories and geographies display a dazzling variety. By any yardstick, however, the Muslim community or *ummah* as a whole is a formidable component of the Asian religious-cultural landscape. It cannot avoid affecting—and in turn being affected by—the governing capacities of Asian states, in particular their capacity to manage successfully their characteristic cultural heterogeneity.

Complicating this task is the persistent controversy that swirls around the contemporary development of Asian Muslim communities. Among the most controversial issues are those pertaining to contemporary political militancy or jihadism—to the way, for example, in which one characterizes radical, extremist, or "fundamentalist" trends and tendencies amongst Asian Muslim communities. Nowhere are these characterizations more contentious—or laced with greater policy

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consequences—than in Pakistan. This chapter will examine three issues. First: What drives political Islam in Pakistan? Second: How strong is political Islam in Pakistan? And third: What ought to be done about political Islam to bolster Pakistan's prospects for sustaining a pluralist political community? It will be argued that Islamic identity is unquestionably undergoing massive politicization virtually everywhere in Asia, and certainly in Pakistan, but less because of any inherent radical or jihadist—holy war-driven—tendencies that may be inherent to Islam itself than because of the particular geopolitical circumstances in which Asian, and Pakistani, Muslims currently find themselves. It will also be argued, accordingly, that the most effective antidote to religious extremism in Pakistan over the long run is likely to be found not in a frontal assault on Islamic militancy as such but in the altering of the geo-political circumstances that fuel it. Radical Islam is rising in Pakistan but there is nothing inevitable about its eventual triumph.

What Drives Political Islam in Pakistan?

What forces underlie its rise and propel the religious-political movements that are its vanguard? Are these forces primarily economic? Historical? Political? Strategic? Or do they reflect a deepening and lengthening of Islamic cultural (religious or civilizational) identity, as Samuel Huntington famously advised?

Various answers to these questions have been given—some of them global in their reach, others more specific to Pakistan. Of the global variety, Huntington's answer, initially articulated nearly a decade ago, has provoked the most criticism.[1] Challenging the prevailing wisdom that global politics was increasingly to be written in the language of market economics, Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis elevated religious identity itself to a commanding position among the most probable determinants of the emerging world order. According to his thesis, the fundamental source of conflict in the 21st century would be primarily neither ideological nor economic; it would be cultural, more specifically, civilizational. Nation-states would remain the most powerful actors in world politics; but the main conflicts would occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. Most of the eight or so extant civilizations he identified are primarily or at least importantly religion-based. Four of them—Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, and Sinic/Confucian—are dominant in Asia. Two of them—the Hindu and Islamic—have been in a state of full- or quasi-belligerence in South Asia for the last half-century. One of them, the Islamic, said Huntington, is the most conflict-prone on the planet. "Islam," he observed, "has bloody borders."[2]

Huntington's critics, as we all know, have bitterly assailed his thesis for having endowed religion-based civilizations with far greater vitality and cohesion than they deserved at the same time that it breezily understated both the hold on power retained by sovereign state entities as well as the tenacity and continuing appeal of modernity and secularism. Cropping up in critical assessments of his thesis with particular insistence, however, was the charge that he attached disproportionate importance to

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[1] Huntington's thesis appears to have survived, even flourished, in spite of the criticism. For a recent and relatively sympathetic critique, see Stanley Kurtz, "The Future of 'History'," *Policy Review* No. 113, online edition (June 2002).
[2] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (Summer 1993), p. 35.

the signs of imminent struggle emerging *between* civilizations to the neglect of immediate struggle already present *within* them—that in depicting acute regional conflicts as materializing along supranational and semi-mythic civilizational fault lines, in other words, that he grievously underplayed the tangible interests of physically-existent state and sub-state entities.

In mounting this thesis, Huntington undeniably slighted more than one rule of social science research; and we will be returning to his thesis a bit later on to highlight one particularly unfortunate instance of terminological recklessness in it. Wholesale dismissal of his thesis, however, is clearly not warranted by what we know of political Islam in Asia. Contrary to what some of his critics have asserted, this thesis does not rest upon a simple-minded assumption of civilizational solidarity—that the world was grouping itself literally, in other words, into fixed, tightly-knit, and uniformly hostile civilizational or religious camps. Huntington was as aware as any of us that Muslim states and Muslim sects-within-states warred at least as often with one another as with representatives of the world's other great religions. Among his many arguments, moreover, some have impressive empirical support. One of these is the notion of civilization- or kin-country rallying—the provision by state, interstate, or non-state agents of direct or indirect cross-border material aid to embattled co-religionists. It is no accident that the 158 allegedly Al Qaeda- or Taliban-linked "unlawful combatants" being held at Guantanamo Bay by the U.S. government at the end of January 2002 reportedly came from 25 different countries.[3] If nothing else, Al Qaeda was rallying the faithful from all over the world. Speaking of the then still-ruling Taliban leadership in Afghanistan, the French sociologist Olivier Roy observed that they "do not care about the state—they even downgraded Afghanistan by changing the official denomination from an "Islamic State" to an "Emirate." Mollah Omar does not care to attend the council of ministers, nor to go to the Capital." Roy conceded that "this new brand of supranational neo-fundamentalism," as he termed it, "is more a product of contemporary globalization than of the Islamic past." Nevertheless, the supranational character of the phenomenon he was describing, in which "the state level is bypassed and ignored,"[4] suggests that the Huntington model *has* application not only to the global war on terrorism but to the broader discussion of political Islam.

Obviously, we cannot reduce the "world war" of sorts launched in Afghanistan in October 2001 simply to a war of religions—or even confidently describe it as an incipient "fault line war" in a coming "clash of civilizations." Nevertheless, visible to all but the most obstinate of Huntington's critics (and in spite of strenuous official insistence by President George W. Bush and other American leaders that the war was one against "terrorists with global reach" and "the states that harbor them," not against Islam itself) was the hefty element of religious identity—and clash—that has cropped up insistently in public discussion, especially in America, of the post-September 11 war on terrorism. As Swarthmore College's James Kurth points out in a

[3] Katharine Q. Seelye and David E. Sanger, "Bush Reconsiders Stand on Treating Captives of War," *The New York Times*, 29 January 2002, p. 1.

[4] Olivier Roy, *The Changing Patterns of Radical Islamic Movements*, CSNS Policy Paper 2 (Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, November 2001, p. 15.

recent sobering article, the relationship between the war and Islam cannot be arbitrarily dismissed. "The war is indeed a war against terrorists and the states that harbor them as Bush stated," he says,

> but all of these terrorists and states are Islamic. The war is also a war between the West and Islam as bin Laden stated, but the Western peoples and their governments do not habitually use the term "Western" to identify themselves, nor do the Islamic peoples and their governments routinely engage in terrorism. The war is actually one between Western nations and Islamic terrorists. Because it involves nations that are Western both in fact and in the minds of the Islamic terrorists, it engages the West. The way that the leading nation of the West, the U.S., wages this war will be greatly shaped by the nature of both Western civilization and Islam.[5]

The matter of Islam's complicity with terrorism was given an equally blunt interpretation fairly recently with publication by the New York-based Institute for American Values of an open letter, signed by sixty leading academics and intellectuals (including Samuel Huntington), defending America's war on terrorism as morally necessary and just. Entitled "What We're Fighting For: A Letter From America," its signatories sought to sharpen the definition of the adversary by drawing a distinction between Islam as a great religious tradition and Islam as an element in a contemporary political movement. "We use the terms 'Islam' and 'Islamic,'" the letter said,

> to refer to one of the world's great religions, with about 1.2 billion adherents, including several million U.S. citizens, some of whom were murdered on September 11. It ought to go without saying—but we say it here once, clearly—that the great majority of the world's Muslims, guided in large measure by the teachings of the Qur'an, are decent, faithful, and peaceful. We use the terms "Islamicism" and "radical Islamicist" to refer to the violent, extremist, and radically intolerant religious-political movement that now threatens the world, including the Muslim world.[6]

While the signatories' seeming intention in drafting the letter was to underscore their belief in the war's fundamentally principled and defensive character, perhaps the letter's most powerful message was the implicit suggestion that the world's Muslims, having given birth to the "radical Islamicist" offshoot of Islam, had in doing so revealed their own alarming cultural failure to appreciate the moral universality and inescapable appeal of American values. The attackers, the letter stated, "despise not

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[5] James Kurth, "The War and the West," *Orbis*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (February 2002). For an intriguing argument along the same lines, see Stanley Fish, "Postmodern Warfare: The Ignorance of Our Warrior Intellectuals," *Harpers* (July 2002), pp. 33-40.
[6] "What We're Fighting For: A Letter From America," *Propositions Online*, Institute for American Values, 12 February 2002.

just our government, but our overall society, our entire way of living. Fundamentally, their grievance concerns not only what our leaders do, but also who we are." The letter explicitly excluded from consideration the doctrines of holy war and crusade, which it labeled unjust and immoral. Yet, in more than one way—in its emphatic linking of the American war effort with cultural values, in its invocation of "just war" precepts in defense of the war against terrorism, in its espousal of moral universalism, as well as in the conscious choice made by its drafters to address the letter to "our Muslim brethren around the world"[7]—it perhaps unwittingly left the door ajar for the tacit inclusion of these doctrines among the motivations for the war on terrorism.

Now one might object to all this with the argument that, after all, it is socio-economic distress and not identity that drives Muslims to extremism. To be candid, this "militant Islam-from-poverty thesis," as Daniel Pipes has pointed out, has more disciples, and not only in the West, than any other. "Islam is the religion of bad times," said an Egyptian sheikh. "It is enough to see the poverty-stricken outskirts of Algiers or the refugee camps in Gaza to understand the factors that nurture the strength of the Islamic Resistance Movement," said a Hamas leader in Gaza. "Fundamentalism grows at the same pace as economic problems," said Prime Minister Eddie Fenech of Malta. "Fundamentalism's basis is poverty," said Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. "These forces of reaction feed on disillusionment, poverty and despair.... [The remedy is to] spread prosperity and security to all," said former President Bill Clinton.[8]

Unfortunately, as Pipes observed, the correlation between economics and militant Islam is not that neat. Militant Islam, he argues, "attracts highly competent, motivated, and ambitious individuals. Far from being the laggards of society, they are its leaders." It is the rising middle classes of Muslim Asia, he says, not its impoverished masses, who are attracted to radical Islam. In some way, political Islam is all about God, not Mammon, Pipes urges. After all, "suicide bombers who hurl themselves against foreign enemies offer their lives not to protest financial deprivation but to change the world."[9]

It is not only suicide bombers, it seems, who want to "change the world." On the contrary, hostility for the contemporary—Western- and American-dominated—world order seems quite widespread throughout the Muslim world. Indeed, according to a comprehensive Gallup Organization poll taken in February 2002 of nearly 10,000 residents of nine Muslim countries (Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey), the depth of anti-U.S. sentiment is—as an American journalist expressed it—"breathtaking."[10] Respondents described the United States as ruthless, aggressive, conceited, arrogant, easily provoked, and biased. The poll seemed to indicate sweeping Muslim disapproval of President Bush, his country, and its military intervention in Afghanistan.[11]

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[7] Alan Cooperman, "Academics Defend U.S. War On Terrorism," *The Washington Post*, 12 February 2002, p. 16.
[8] Quotations are taken from Daniel Pipes, "God and Mammon: Does Poverty Cause Militant Islam?" *National Interest* No. 66 (Winter 2001/02), pp. 14-15.
[9] Pipes, "God and Mammon," pp. 16-17.
[10] Andrea Stone, "In Poll, Islamic World Says Arabs Not Involved In 9/11," *USA Today*, 27 February 2002, p. 1.
[11] Andrea Stone, "'We've Got Work To Do' On Image With Muslims, Bush Says," *USA Today*, 28 February 2002, p. 4.

What accounts for all the resentment? Some part of the answer to this question, according to Princeton historian Bernard W. Lewis, has to be sought in the Islamic world's modern history. In his most recent book, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact & Middle Eastern Response*,[12] Lewis claims that just about everything has gone wrong in recent centuries for much of the Islamic world. From a position a few centuries ago in the forefront of human achievement, including economic and military achievement, the world of Islam has today fallen unequivocally upon bad times. Once able itself to deride the Western World as an area of darkness and barbarism, the Islamic world anguishes today over the stunning reversal in its global role. Powerful contemporary forces of economic, social, cultural, and political globalization, most of them Western-driven, inevitably deepen the anguish.

Not all—not even the larger part—of the answer, however, is likely to be found in the historical record. Neither is all of it likely to be found in socio-economic distress. In this regard, there is validity to Pipes' observation that "the factors that cause militant Islam to decline or flourish appear to have more to do with issues of identity than with economics."[13] It is not necessary to concede that there is a full-fledged "clash of civilizations" in progress to acknowledge the huge importance of religion in contemporary world politics. This goes equally for the Christian as well as the Muslim world. Since the Muslim world is today nearly everywhere on the political, military, and cultural defensive, it should not surprise us that pragmatic political militants in the Muslim world, in seeking to mobilize support, naturally fall back upon the powerful, ubiquitous, and easily mined cultural resource of Islamic identity.

When we come to the particular case of Pakistan, a number of circumstances closer to home have to be added to the list of political Islam's propellants. These include *domestic* circumstances, foremost among them, perhaps, the country's enfeebled political and economic institutions and the all-powerful military's compulsion, witnessed most conspicuously during the eleven years of General Zia-ul-Haq's rule (1977-1988), to ground its legitimacy in the religious right. They also include obvious *external* circumstances, including the ideologically powerful Islamic Revolution in neighboring Iran, the massive recruitment of Arab and other co-religionist *mujahideen* (holy warriors) by Pakistan and its allies (including, of course, the United States) to the decade-long fight against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989), and the tempting opportunity to infiltrate Islamic militants in neighboring India that came with the uprising in Kashmir in 1989. To these latter circumstances must be added, of course, the more recent and catastrophic upheavals in Pakistan's vicinity—the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in late 2001 and the massive mobilization of Indian forces on Pakistan's borders beginning in late 2001.

Merely to list these circumstances is to argue, powerfully, that political Islam's emergence in Pakistan cannot be reduced simply to the country's domestic economic and political deficiencies, though they are many. Neither, they would also suggest, can its emergence be attributed exclusively, perhaps not even very importantly, to the

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[12] Bernard W. Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact & Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[13] Daniel Pipes, "God and Mammon," p. 14.

proliferation of *madrasahs* (religious schools or seminaries), the oft-cited breeding ground for Pakistan's alleged legions of religious bigots. Political Islam in Pakistan has had an amazing array of forces to feed it.

The issue of how far these forces have actually succeeded in bolstering political Islam in Pakistan brings us to our second question.

How Strong is Political Islam in Pakistan?

At the moment, how much political success—whether measured in terms of ideological appeal, electoral performance, or organizational expansion—can political Islam claim in Pakistan? How great is its mass popularity? What capacity does its government have, through regulations and controls, to encourage or discourage its spread? In general, how much of a threat does it pose to Pakistan's state stability and order?

Almost everywhere in Asia where there are significant numbers of Muslims, claims—often by government officials—have become commonplace that Islamic radicalism has grown in recent years. We have witnessed this, for example, in China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, most of the ex-Soviet states of Central Asia, and, of course, Pakistan, whose president warned his countrymen in an unusually candid televised address on 12 January 2002 that the greatest danger facing Pakistan came not from outside Pakistan, not from India, but from Pakistan's own homegrown religious radicals—"a danger," he said, "that is eating us from within."[14] In spite of such claims, however, there exists, in fact, considerable variance from state to state in the judgments reached about the actual magnitude of Islamic radicalism's growth. This was made plain to the author during the course of a week-long visit to Singapore in February 2002. In discussions with a score or more of bureaucratic officials, military officers, think-tank analysts, and academics, the so-called "green threat" of Islamic radicalism was given significantly disparate characterizations. The "greening," said one, is occurring on both sides of the Malacca Straits—in both Malaysia and Indonesia, in other words—but more in Malaysia than in Indonesia. "Political Islam is *not* a problem in Indonesia," said another, then added that "most Muslims in Indonesia, in fact, are moderates." "Indonesia," offered another, paradoxically, "is the largest Muslim country that isn't Muslim! [its government is secular]" "Most Muslims in Indonesia aren't radical," insisted yet another, "but the extremists exert disproportionate influence." "Don't write off political Islam" in Indonesia, another gravely observed.

Given Pakistan's enormous strategic importance in the war on terrorism, its own alleged religious radicalization warrants a little closer examination. Exactly what should we make of Pakistan's experience with Islamic radicalism? What lessons does it hold for our assessment of political Islam's progress in the rest of Asia?

First, governments are rarely mere innocent bystanders when it comes to the progress of religious radicalization. President Musharraf's address, which also announced a ban on five militant groups, including the two most powerful in

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[14] Craig Whitlock & Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Pakistan Bans Five Militant Islamic Groups," *The Washington Post*, 13 January 2002, p. A1.

Kashmir, was in some measure an explicit indictment of Pakistan itself. At least in part, it echoed the analysis of Pakistan that had been presented to the Bush administration in its first weeks in office by The Rand Corporation. Its report had warned then that "the most disturbing of [unhealthy political, economic, and strategic trends in Pakistan] has been the growth of Islamic extremism. Extremist groups thrive because of Pakistan's continuing state failures and because they are intentionally supported by the Pakistan military and secret services in the pursuit of the latter's goals in Kashmir and Afghanistan."[15] More pointedly than President Musharraf had acknowledged, the Rand report declared that Pakistan's current admitted surplus of Islamic radicalism was to no small extent the direct and premeditated spawn of the Pakistan Army. The Army had over the years found a natural ally in the radicals not only in domestic politics, where militarist regimes had to contend with the problem of political legitimacy, but also in pursuit of foreign policy goals in Kashmir and Afghanistan.

Of the Army's sponsorship of the Taliban as well as of armed insurgent groups in Kashmir, enough is already known and we need not dwell upon it here. We should take further note, however, of additional ways in which the Pakistan state actively facilitated the rise of Islamic radicalism. General Zia ul-Haq, for instance, relaxed *zakat* (a traditional Islamic charitable tithe) restrictions in the late 1970s, allowing direct public contributions to local *masjid* (mosques) and *madrasahs*. It was no surprise, in the face of this unexpected windfall, that both the numbers and the local importance of these institutions expanded appreciably thereafter. *Madrasahs* of the fundamentalist *Deobandi* movement alone grew nearly fivefold between 1979 and 1983-84.[16] From a total of 137 *madrasahs* in all of Pakistan at the time of partition in 1947, their number in Pakistan's most populous province, the Punjab, had grown by 1996 to 2,463—an eighteenfold increase. And their proliferation, according to the careful assessment of one scholar, "has continued at a phenomenal pace since."[17]

There are additional reasons for the exponential growth of Islamic schools, of course; but there are at the same time persuasive reasons to think that government rules and regulations have themselves had a lot to do with the creation of these so-called "prep schools for the Islamic jihad"—and, thus, also with the expansion and contraction of Islamic extremism. Needless to say, the government of Pakistan also has itself to blame for the country's notorious failure to provide its citizens with adequate social services, public education in particular.

Second, for all the talk of Islamic extremism in Pakistan, the fact is that its popular base seems fairly superficial. Pakistan's three major religious parties have never secured greater than 6 percent or so of the popular vote in national elections; and their highly touted capacity for mobilizing "street power," when confronted with the emotionally provocative American bombing of Afghanistan in late 2001, apparently failed the test. Skepticism is also warranted in regard to frequent claims by American observers in recent years of "creeping talibanization" in the Pakistan Army itself—

[15] *Transition 2001* (Washington, D.C.: The Rand Corporation, January 2001), p. 45.

[16] J. Malik, *Colonization of Islam: Dissolutions of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1996), p. 196.

[17] S. V. R. Nasr, "The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulama in Society and Politics," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 34, No. 1 (2000), p. 142.

into its officer corps, in particular. Sumit Ganguly, an Indian-born South Asia specialist at the University of Texas, says such talibanization has progressed quite far indeed. According to him, "many midlevel officers raised under Zia [ul-Haq] share the religious zeal of the fundamentalists."[18] Samina Ahmed, a Pakistan-based analyst with the International Crisis Group, a transnational NGO headquartered in Brussels, disagrees. According to an account in the *Los Angeles Times,* she considers the notion of a powerful Islamic element within the army to be misplaced, arguing instead that the army's long-standing support for jihad groups had generally been tactical rather than philosophical.[19] Settling the issue empirically, admittedly, is likely to be daunting. After all, the Pakistan Army, with over 500,000 troops, has an officer corps numbering in the tens of thousands. One may safely assume, in view of recent history, that many of them harbor some resentment towards the West, the United States in particular. But how would one go about securing credible evidence of the quantum of "religious zeal" among them that approximated that of the "fundamentalists"? Citing the outrageous and deliberately inflammatory remarks of one or two retired and allegedly "Islamist-minded" generals, a practice especially common among Western media commentators, does not equate to convincing evidence.

Third, even in those places in South Asia where political oppression of Muslims has been commonplace, their conversion to radicalized Islam—and corresponding greater susceptibility to Pakistan's overt or covert machinations—has been extremely slow in coming. In the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir, where the Kashmiri Muslims—following decades of heavy-handed state repression—might seem to have ample reasons to turn *en masse* to Islamic extremism for their salvation, they have mainly not done so. Pressed to the wall by Indian security forces, they have by necessity welcomed the military assistance of Pakistan together with its foreign and radically minded militant allies; however, according to the thoughtful assessment of Yoginder Sikand, the discourse of radical Islam has never found fertile soil among them. The Islamists, he says, "have received little support from the Kashmiri masses themselves, who seem to favor a considerably more liberal version of their faith.... It would seem, then, that the Kashmiri nationalist forces, with their dream of a free, democratic, independent Kashmir, still do command the loyalties of most Kashmiris, the efforts of the Islamists and of both the Indian as well as Pakistani establishments notwithstanding."[20]

In sum, political Islam appears to be far less powerful than often argued. It has achieved a solid and permanent mass following in no society—certainly not in Pakistan, but neither in Iran or even Afghanistan. If the assessments expressed in Singapore were on target, then nowhere in Southeast Asia either has political Islam so far acquired a mass following. Far from posing an insuperable challenge—an "Islamic Threat"—to Asian governments, political Islam has actually proven quite susceptible to regulation and control. Where it has gotten "out of hand," as in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the blame is largely that of failed or failing governments, not of wildly

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[18] Sumit Ganguly, "Pakistan's Never-Ending Story," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 79, No. 2 (March/April 2000), p 6.

[19] Kim Murphy, "Political Shift Stifles Islamic Anger At U.S.," *Los Angeles Times* web-service, 10 December 2001.

[20] Yoginder Sikand, "Changing Course of Kashmiri Struggle: From National Liberation to Islamist Jihad?" *Economic & Political Weekly*, 20 January 2001, p. 227.

popular movements. Political Islam is, in a few Asian societies, a serious aggravation; but it is an insuperable threat to the stability of none of them, Pakistan included.

What Ought to be Done about Political Islam to Bolster Pakistan's Prospects first for Achieving and then for Sustaining a Pluralist Political Community?

In spite of its manifest weaknesses and failures, political Islam is indisputably a powerful and potentially destabilizing phenomenon in Pakistan—a country whose surface appearance of Islamic homogeneity masks a profoundly diverse society. How political Islam evolves in coming years will inevitably impact upon the political evolution of Pakistan itself—whether, in other words, it will proceed in the direction of greater respect for cultural diversity, religious tolerance in particular, or whether it will move in the direction of increased religious exclusiveness, extremism, and orthodoxy. Movement in the latter direction will obviously impact adversely on whatever prospects now exist for building a Pakistani national identity reasonably matched to the country's ethnic and religious diversity. What is the best advice, when all is said and done, that one can offer Pakistan (and states friendly to it) about "containing" political Islam?

Pakistan is presently confronted with a host of unusually painful and—in more than a few instances—extraordinarily portentous public policy choices. These range all the way from how to go about reforming the country's admittedly malfunctioning political system to how far to go in accommodating India's (and Washington's) demand for the complete dismantling of the "terrorist infrastructure" that serves Pakistan's Kashmir policy. Most of these choices are intimately related to—and interdependent with—one another: What Islamabad ultimately chooses to do about its thousands of *madrasahs*, for example, cannot be decided apart from decisions about both domestic political reforms, since these are impossible without widespread popular support, *and* about Pakistan's desired future political relationship with India, which cannot be decided in isolation from the Kashmir cause's institutionalized support base in Pakistan.

Another way to put this is to say that Pakistan's decisional matrix is about as confused and confusing as one can imagine. Three "rules of thumb" might help unravel it.

First, It seems far more plausible that the problem of political Islam in most Asian countries, including Pakistan, is one of too much government control, especially of the wrong—repressive—sort, rather than too little. Observe, for instance, that a number of Asia's radicalized Muslim minority movements (as in India, the Philippines, and China) are in part byproducts of frustrated separatist movements within predominantly *non-Muslim* societies. Observe also, however, that in more than a few of Asia's *Muslim-majority* societies can be found abundant instances of severe government repression of Muslim groups (be they of the Sunni, Shi'a, Ahmadi, or other sects) contributing to the political radicalization of Islam. From all reports, the governments of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan fit comfortably in this category. About President Islam Karimov's regime in Uzbekistan, for instance, a recent Human Rights Watch report states: "There are no political parties, no independent media, no civil society of any sort. Efforts by Muslims to pray outside

the state-controlled mosque are met harshly, with torture and long prison sentences frequent."[21]

The post-September 11 war on terrorism itself may well turn out to have far greater and longer-lasting effects on domestic than on international politics. Ironically, these effects, as pointed out by Amitav Acharya, Deputy Director of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies in Singapore, may be overwhelmingly negative. "Who," he asks, "is to prevent governments from using national security as a camouflage for regime survival? By creating a sense of national unity and purpose, however brief and superficial, the war against terrorism, like any war, presents governments with an opportunity to outmaneuver their political opponents.... The war against terrorism thus easily translates into a war against freedom." "Who," he also asks, "tells the nations belonging to the global anti-terror alliance that their fight against a tactic (terrorism) must not come at the expense of a willingness to address the cause (demands for self-determination)?" "The post-September 11 world order," he concludes, "has suddenly become less hospitable for human rights around the world."[22]

In the case of Pakistan, political Islam has clearly flourished most in periods of direct military rule; conversely, it has performed most dismally in periods of democratic rule. Unfortunately, this doesn't translate axiomatically into any sort of guarantee that civilian rule will produce stability and preclude radicalization. There are too many variables in the mix to allow for that. But if anything has grown clearer in Pakistan in recent months, it is that substantive restoration of political democracy is a *necessary*, even if far from sufficient, antidote to continued radicalization of the Pakistani polity. This is definitely not because elected rulers are necessarily more effective battlers against extremists. They may, in fact, be less effective. It is because Pakistan's military rulers, by virtue of their inescapably dubious claim to power, are sooner or later driven to embrace Pakistan's relatively unpopular but well organized political right wing—to garb themselves in Islam, so to speak, since secular ideologies and programs have already been preempted by the democratic parties. The price of this embrace, as we have witnessed again and again in Pakistan, is tolerance of the right wing's less savory activities.

A second rule of thumb: Pakistan's present geo-political circumstances leave no doubt that what its Indian and other detractors are fond of calling its "adventurism" in Kashmir has got to be drastically scaled back—if not entirely foresworn. The encouragement and material cross-border support of Kashmiri separatism, regardless of the justice of the cause, is presently greatly out of favor with practically the entire international community, most conspicuously the United States. On pragmatic grounds, therefore, Islamabad has got to move deliberately towards a new Kashmir policy—one as strongly supportive as ever, perhaps, of the moral righteousness of the Kashmiri desire for self-determination, but one that methodically weeds out those

[21] "Introduction" to *Human Rights Watch World Report 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Human Rights Watch, February 2002).
[22] Amitav Acharya, "States, Societies and Civilizations: Interpreting September 11 for Asia and the World," in *Worlds in Collision: Terror and Global Order* (London & New York: Palgrave, forthcoming 2002). Quotations are from a draft copy of the article supplied by its author.

aspects of the old policy that fed the taste for violence of the militant outfits and that at the same time lent themselves to allegations of state-sponsored terrorism.

The third and final rule of thumb is that neither of the first two rules have a ghost of a chance of being implemented successfully by Pakistan without a massive change in international, especially American, attitudes about the Subcontinent. Specifically, there would need to be some sort of American guarantee to buffer Pakistan from the old-fashioned geopolitical rivalries that are still potent in the region despite being overshadowed recently by the war on terrorism.

The September 11 terrorist attack was undoubtedly the worst single terrorist incident in history. It was a monstrous crime and a terrible tragedy for many individuals. Americans had good reason to feel outraged. As American historian Paul W. Schroeder put it, however, "it was not a *national* tragedy, much less a national disaster or catastrophe. On the scale of real national disasters and catastrophes in the world over the last fifty years it would not rank in the top hundred."[23]

The magnitude, scope, and intensity of the American response to the attack have been surprising, but even more surprising has been the Asian response. Some of it, as when Pakistan's former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, in a Reuters interview, accused President Musharraf of remaining part of an establishment riddled with radical Islamists, can be written off as political opportunism.[24] And some of it, as when India and Pakistan engaged in a "war of lists"—each side demanding the extradition of "known terrorists" harbored by the other—represents diplomatic gamesmanship.[25] But the nearly solid wall of initial support from all the Great and Near-Great Powers for Washington's summons to the war on terrorism is puzzling.

Undeniably, countering the "Islamic jihad" stands today implicitly or explicitly at or near the top of innumerable national and international political agendas. Is it clear, however, that all the members of the global coalition against terrorism—a list that includes the likes of China, India, Russia, the United States, and Japan, not to mention Pakistan—are genuinely united in the belief that religion-inspired terrorism is the gravest of world evils and reason enough to set aside all differences in the cause of a "global war" against it? In the aftermath of-September 11, are the venerable stand-bys of philosophical realism—the "national interest," "power politics," and "power balancing"—*out* and moral crusading against evil *in*?

This seems unlikely when one considers that traditional geopolitical interests and rivalries are, indeed, alive and well in Asia—perhaps momentarily set aside in a tactical retreat brought on by overwhelming American pressures, but alive and well just the same. Afghanistan may or may not have been the site of a "fault-line war" in a "clash of civilizations;" but it was—and is—unquestionably the site of a clash of interests. In fact, political Islam is important not solely or even mainly by virtue of its intrinsic qualities, its fanaticism or lack thereof, for instance, but because of its location—its political geography. It is where it is, not what it is, that commands the world's

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[23] Paul W. Schroeder, "The Risks of Victory: An Historian's Provocation," *The National Interest* No. 66 (Winter 2001/02), p. 34.
[24] "South Asia," Asianint Weekly Alert, 28 January 2002.
[25] Sudha Ramachandran, "Pakistan In a Twist in War of Lists," *Asia Times Online*, 5 February 2002.

attention.[26] "Islam," said Huntington, as we noted above, "has bloody borders." It would have been more precise and a lot less misleading had he instead said: "The geographic space in which Islam is the preponderant faith has bloody borders." Putting it that way would obviously have been less striking, too cumbersome as a one-liner. But Huntington would have been highlighting an important fact: that in that geographic domain in which Islam happens to find itself there are ongoing and keenly competitive inter-state strategic contests springing from multiple rival interests. Virtually all of these interests were in place long before Osama bin Laden—a few of them possibly even before Islam itself—arrived in Afghanistan. They include acute rivalries over oil and natural gas resources, of course, but also over such mundane things as water, territorial boundaries, access routes, weapons acquisitions, strategic alliances, political ideology, and so on, the highlighting of which, had Huntington chosen a different set of words, would have attached an old-fashioned geopolitical and only partially cultural meaning—something more akin to the Great Game—to the contemporary clash of civilizations. These rivalries are intense and bloody, no doubt. Highlighting *them* rather than Islam, however, would have avoided the implication that Islam itself was somehow the agent of death. As Paul Schroeder suggests:

> In retrospect, it might have been wiser [for Washington] to treat the attack [on the WTC and Pentagon] as a horrible criminal action (which it also was) that had to be answered by a major international police action against the criminals (which the current operation also is), but without declaring war on terrorism and thereby giving an inflated importance to both the threat and the perpetrators. Many countries have had to combat long-term terrorist threats and campaigns more dangerous to their security than this one is to ours without declaring a general war on terrorism as a phenomenon and on all terrorists in general.[27]

In choosing to maximize the importance both of the threat and the perpetrators, the Bush administration has inadvertently reinforced an interpretation of political Islam I think it does not deserve. Worse, it leads to an interpretation of the way out of Pakistan's particular dilemmas that simply cannot succeed. Islamabad would be most ill-advised to accept the first two rules of thumb outlined above unless given an ironclad guarantee that the security of Pakistan against external threat (meaning essentially India) would be granted simultaneously—by the United States—to compensate Pakistan for its agreement to move ahead on those two rules. Any such step by the United States would, of course, represent a major departure from its past practice; but anything less than this, given the magnitude of the shifts in policy being sought from Islamabad, would be an invitation to failure.

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[26] For this useful way to phrase the issue, I am indebted to Chris Jasparro, my colleague at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu.
[27] Schroeder, "The Risks of Victory," p. 26.

APPENDIX 13.1

Muslim Populations in Asia-Pacific[1]

Region/country	No. of adherents	% total population	Year
World	1,300,000,000	22.00%	2000
Asia	812,000,000	22.63%	1998
Asia-South	375,000,000	-	1998
Australia	101,000	0.50%	2000
Bangladesh	127,628,304	88.40%	2000
Bhutan	108,000	5.00%	2000
Brunei	146,900	68.00%	2000
Canada	464,000	1.50%	2000
China-Xinjiang[1]	8,200,000	63.00%	1993
Comoros	396,550	99.60%	2000
Fiji	66,000	7.80%	2000
India	127,131,000	12.00%	2000
Indonesia	182,503,504	87.00%	1997
Japan	150,000	-	1996
Korea, South	6,000	0.01%	2000
Laos	57,000	1.00%	2000
Madagascar	356,000	2.00%	2000
Malaysia	10,806,000	49.00%	2000
Maldives	204,660	99.90%	2000
Mauritius	213,700	17.00%	2000
Mongolia	29,000	1.00%	2000
Myanmar	1,976,000	3.60%	2000
Nepal	652,000	2.80%	2000
New Zealand	2,000	0.05%	2000
Oceania	248,000	0.84%	1998
Pakistan	142,272,000	96.80%	2000
Papua New Guinea	500	-	1996
Philippines	3,857,000	4.30%	2000
Russia	7,000,000	8.50%	1995
Singapore	506,400	16.20%	2000
Solomon Islands	70	-	1996
Sri Lanka	1,622,000	7.60%	2000
Taiwan	150,000	0.60%	2000
Thailand	3,300,000	3.90%	2000
Tonga	80	-	1996
United States of America	5,730,000	2.10%	2000
Vanuatu	40	-	1996
Vietnam	**531,000**	**0.70%**	**2000**

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[1] All population figures as drawn from www.adherents.com
[2] One all-China estimate of Muslim population in this source is 37,108,000.