

## **The Pakistani Madrassah and Terrorism: Made and Unmade Conclusions from the Literature**

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### *Abstract:*

*This paper revisits the relationship between Pakistani religious schools and terrorism. While much of the literature informs the enduring perception that madrassahs breed terror, some recent studies have begun to question the extent to which religious schools drive militancy. The analysis below balances these ostensibly incompatible positions – alarm and skepticism are equally misplaced. With a focus on evidence, and warranted and unwarranted conclusions provided by the literature, this paper seeks to establish what we do and do not know about the madrassah-terrorism relationship. In the process, it renders a preliminary mechanism linking the madrassah to the terroristic incident.*

### **Introduction**

Since 9/11, analysts have desperately combined estimates and educated guesses to maneuver the unknowns of Pakistan's madrassah landscape. For much of the last decade, the only certainty with regard to this elusive institution was its indisputable role in promoting terrorism. Yet recent scholarship questions the true threat posed by Pakistani madrassahs. Questions have evolved from how best to reform Pakistan's madrassahs to whether or not to do so. Concerns have shifted from the alarmist view that madrassahs are "weapons of mass instruction," to the skeptical position that the madrassah merely presents a "scapegoat" amidst other more worrying sources of radicalisation.

This paper reviews the literature on Pakistani madrassahs as discussed in the context of terrorism. Lest one get carried away by alarmist generalisation or skeptical vindication, it seeks to put in perspective the arguments housed by the literature. Towards this end, the paper is broken down into six sections:

- Section one uses counterfactual analysis to establish that madrassahs facilitating terrorism constitute important, yet far from exclusive, avenues of radicalisation.
- Section two addresses the prevalence of madrassahs in Pakistan and the proportion of Pakistani children enrolled in religious schools. It suggests that only a small minority of Pakistani youth is exposed to militant madrassahs. Keeping these findings in mind, sections three to six explore the why, when, and how of the militant madrassah's contribution to terrorism.

- Section three studies the impetus for Islam in Pakistani politics – is it primarily top-down, or does it also respond to demands from below?
- Examining the history of internal and external patronage of Pakistani madrassahs, section four proceeds to show that top-down engineering was essential in generating the militant amongst Pakistan’s madrassahs.
- Section five reconciles the alarmist’s stance that madrassahs are “incubators of terrorism” with empirical observations that few militants come from religious schools. It shows that madrassah graduates are recruited as terrorists when alternative sources of militant supply are either undesirable or unavailable.
- Section six presents the main non-educational functions of the militant madrassah – radicalising to-be terrorists, providing a transit point for pre-radicalised visitors, and generating public support for extremist violence.

For the purpose of this discussion, a madrassah is defined as a religious school attended on a full-time basis. This definition stresses the institution’s role as a substitute (not supplement) to Pakistan’s mainstream public and private schools, thus differentiating it from *maktabs* (part-time religious institutions).

### *Probing the Counterfactual*

The literature on Pakistani madrassahs suggests that the presence of a madrassah is an unnecessary and insufficient precondition for terrorism. With regard to necessity, the counterfactual – that the absence of a madrassah is accompanied by the absence of terrorism – fails to withstand empirical scrutiny. Ironically, the single event that most successfully brought madrassahs to the forefront of international attention – 9/11 – was executed by 19 men, none of whom graduated from a madrassah.[1] Instead, they were educated in “Western-style institutions.” [2] Such evidence of “high quality” terrorists is not uncommon.[3] In examining the profiles of 79 terrorists involved in “five of the worst anti-Western terrorist strikes in recent memory” (the 1993 World Trade Center bombings, the 1998 Africa embassy bombings, September 11, the 2002 Bali nightclub bombings, and the 2005 London bombings), Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey find the average terrorist to be well educated. While 54 per cent of their sample had attended college, the authors point out that “only 52 per cent of Americans can claim similar academic credentials.”[4] Marc Sageman similarly observes a relatively strong correlation between educational achievement and terrorism. He samples 172 terrorists to find that a majority exhibit above-average educational qualifications with respect to the societies to which they belong.[5] Surely the literature abounds with pairings of high-profile terrorists on one hand, and the respectability of their profession or alma mater, on the other: Omar Sheikh attended the London School of Economics, Ayman al Zawahiri was a pediatric surgeon, Mohammad Atta studied architecture, so on and so forth. Thus, as Christopher Candland notes,

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“there is no evidence that an education in the sciences [or any other non-religious subject] ensures students will not become militants.” [6]

The counterfactual has also been probed in a Pakistan-specific context. To the extent that the 9/11 Commission Report is correct in terming madrassahs “incubators of violent extremism,” in Pakistan they do not operate alone. According to Andrew Coulson, “the presumption that Pakistan’s state schools promote tolerance is mistaken.”[7] Instead, suggests Pervez Hoodbhoy, “Pakistani schools – and not just [madrassahs] – are churning out fiery zealots, fuelled with a passion for jihad and martyrdom.”[8] The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) tells us that the public school curriculum exposes students to “material that is directly contrary to the goals and values of a progressive, moderate and democratic Pakistan.”[9] In a 2003 survey, Tariq Rahman compared “militancy and tolerance” among students of religious, Urdu-medium public, and English-medium private schools in Pakistan. Though based on a potentially unrepresentative sample, Rahman’s findings suggest that public school graduates are only moderately more tolerant than the madrassah student. Asked whether Pakistan should prioritise taking “Kashmir away from India by open war,” 40 per cent of public school respondents said “yes” compared to 60 per cent of madrassah students and 26 percent of private school students who shared this sentiment. Similarly, when asked whether they approved of taking “Kashmir away from India by supporting jihadi groups,” 33 per cent of public-schooled respondents said “yes” compared to 53 per cent of madrassah students and 22 per cent of those in private schools.[10] Another indication that non-religious schools conduce to militancy emerges from recent work on de-radicalisation. Project Sabawoon, aimed at “the de-radicalisation and de-indoctrination of captured young suicide bombers” in the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa houses 84 young radicals, a majority of whom studied in government schools (not madrassahs) prior to their recruitment by militants.[11] Coupled with the fact that only 54 per cent of Pakistanis are literate, such observations lead Rebecca Winthrop and Corinne Graff of the Brookings Institution to conclude that “Pakistan’s low attainment ratios and poor quality of schooling in and of themselves” propel militancy across the country.”[12]

As part of its ongoing effort to remedy this situation, the U.S. committed \$264.7 million for 2010 towards basic education in Pakistan. But some scholars express doubt in any reform programme targeted primarily at the public sector. They question the wisdom in promoting a public school system that has proven to be “sectarian, pro-jihad, and anti-minority.”[13] Even if their curricula were relatively neutral, a massive injection of funds alone may not be capable of reviving Pakistani public schools. Coulson warns that public schooling systems can fall short even in countries like the United States where the government spends “nearly \$10,000 per pupil per year.”[14] Coulson encourages donors to shift their attention towards fee-charging private schools where parental oversight and adequate incentive structures are in place.[15]

This discussion of proposed reform strategies is intended only to reinforce a central point of agreement that runs through the literature – one need not attend a madrassah to become a

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terrorist, neither in Pakistan nor anywhere else. If madrassahs constitute potentially useful ingredients in the manifestation of terrorism, they also exhibit some level of dispensability in its underlying (causal) mechanism. Their capacity to radicalise competes with other viable and arguably more prevalent avenues of indoctrination. It is important to note, however, that evidence towards dispensability by no means implies exoneration. While this section establishes only that madrassahs are not required for terrorism to take place, the following section considers the literature's treatment of an equally important fact – a minority of Pakistani madrassahs are involved in terrorism.

### *Counting Pakistan's Militant Madrassahs*

Disagreement persists with regard to the headcount of Pakistani madrassahs as with the total population of students enrolled therein. A number of factors make it difficult to determine Pakistan's true madrassah population. For one, a chain of madrassahs run by a single trust is often registered as one institution. Conversely, an institution of religious learning (such as a *maktab*) that assumes only a subset of the responsibilities of the madrassah is often considered a full-fledged madrassah.[16] Most importantly, however, the voluntary nature of registration makes it very likely that a significant proportion of madrassahs remains invisible. Struggling to accept one guess over another, most scholars agree to disagree within a particularly broad (and generally unhelpful) range of 10,000 to 45,000 madrassahs.[17]

Since the total tally of Pakistani madrassahs remains unknown, one cannot rely on "establishment surveys" (which add enrolment numbers for each individual institution) to determine total enrolment.[18] Consequently, a World Bank study by Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, Asim Ijaz Khwaja and Tristan Zajonc tries to achieve this task by relying on a combination of "household surveys" wherein each household is probed on the enrolment status of every child. Its assessment, which most scholars accept as fairly reliable, suggests that only about 0.3 per cent of Pakistanis aged five to 20 years attend madrassahs. Though districts bordering Afghanistan exhibit higher madrassah enrolment, Andrabi et al. argue, it never exceeds 7.5 per cent.[19] Allowing for an annual enrolment growth rate of five per cent for every year since their last survey and including a further 15 per cent for orphans who evade any household survey, Andrabi et al. "arrive at a liberal estimate" of 475,000 madrassah students.[20]

What do such estimates imply for the relationship between Pakistani madrassahs and militancy? Winthrop and Graff present the "fact that there are far fewer [madrassahs] in Pakistan as a share of all schools than previously thought" as partial refutation of "the argument that [madrassahs] are primarily responsible for the rise in militancy." [21] That madrassahs constitute the "primary" force behind militancy, however, is a claim few scholars make. A brief examination (in section four) of the institution's top-down manipulation towards political objectives sufficiently demonstrates that the madrassah, to the extent that it is involved in militancy, functions as a tool – no more than an intermediate variable in causal terms. Winthrop and Graff's argument also

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implies that madrassahs are able to promote militancy by virtue of their market share in Pakistan's larger educational landscape. Such an assumption, however, is misplaced.

According to historian William Dalrymple, "it is not madrassahs per se that are the problem so much as the militant atmosphere and indoctrination taking place in a handful of notorious centers of ultra-radicalism." [22] Lending a number to this problematic "handful," the literature presents us with the (admittedly unsubstantiated) suggestion that 10 to 15 per cent of Pakistan's madrassahs have militant affiliations. [23] Working with Andrabi et al.'s "liberal" figure of 475,000 madrassah students, and assuming a uniform distribution of students across militant and non-militant madrassahs, a 10 percent "militancy rate" tells us that some 47,500 students attend Pakistan's militant madrassahs at any given time. Though Andrabi et al.'s estimate deflates by as much as 200 per cent, the pool of potential militant recruits, it is difficult to conclude, as Winthrop and Graff do, that 47,500 individuals "are too few to have a major impact on militancy across the country." [24]

What can be deduced from the low market share of religious schools is that as a proportion of the population Pakistani madrassah students are fewer than initially thought and that as a consequence those exhibiting militant affiliations are still fewer. Evidence provided by the literature does not justify claims to the effect that this reduced prevalence coincides with a diminished motivation or capacity to influence militancy. The literature is certain that: 1) madrassahs are not required for terrorism to occur; and, 2) graduates of a majority of madrassahs will likely remain uninvolved in terrorism. With these points in mind, the remainder of this paper narrows its focus to discuss more strictly the minority of militant madrassahs that do help in promoting terrorism, and the manner in which they do so.

### *Islam in Pakistan – Instrumental or Primordial?*

Reliance on Islam as a political tool has been a hallmark of Pakistan's leadership, whether civilian or military. The extent of this reliance has ranged from ad hoc "Islamic" postures to pervasive religious institutionalisation. Ayub Khan placed himself on the spontaneous end of the spectrum when he sought the support of the *ulema* (clergy) to discredit Fatima Jinnah in her presidential bid. Similarly, Yahya Khan backed Islamist parties in East and West Pakistan when challenged by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Mujibur Rahman. Bhutto continued in this tradition of insincere religiosity when faced with pressure from the Jamat-e-Islami (JI, Islamic Party), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI, Islamic Party of Religious Leaders), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP, Party of Religious Leaders of Pakistan) [25]. He declared Pakistan an Islamic state, banned liquor shops, declared Friday a weekly holiday, embarked on his pet projects of "Islamic socialism" and the "Islamic bomb," and declared Ahmadis non-Muslims. If these leaders used Islam in an ad hoc and blatantly instrumental manner, Gen Zia-ul Haq gave people more reason to trust his sincerity. A practicing Muslim, Zia sought to establish an Islamic society and

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economy. Concrete steps in this direction included the Zakat and Ushr Ordinance,[26] the Hudood Ordinance,[27] and instructions towards regular observance of prayers.

But underlying Zia's religiosity was a well-calculated political logic. In surveying the nature and content of Islamisation measures, Hina Jilani finds that Zia implemented Islam only in those areas where he sought to curtail rights.[28] Omar Noman tells us that in the political domain Zia's Islamisation measures were intended to legitimise military supremacy while in the social realm they were aimed at extending state control to individuals' personal lives – an effort manifest in his instructions on daily prayer.[29] Hassan Gardezi also agrees that Zia's version of *Sharia* (set of rules derived from the Quran and the Sunnah, or compilation of Prophetic traditions) was limited to those aspects that extended the coercive apparatus to the individual's private domain.[30] These observations give David Taylor reason to believe that Islamisation under Zia was “concerned only with the husk and not the core of Islam.”[31] Thus even at its most pervasive, Islam was not implemented in its totality, but only to the extent that it served to consolidate and sustain political power.

How then does Islam relate to Pakistani politics? Paul Brass draws a distinction between two ways of viewing Islamic ideology: the instrumentalist approach and the primordial approach. The instrumentalist approach sees Islamic ideology as a convenient means employed towards political objectives. The primordialist approach, on the other hand, “stresses the innate mobilizing and inspiring strength of the appeal of Islamic values and norms.”[32] Mustapha Kamal Pasha describes the same pair in terms of “official Islam” on one hand, and “popular Islam” on the other.[33] An instrumentalist reading would suggest that the apparent prominence of Islamic political parties exaggerates their real popularity. This distortion, according to Mohammad Waseem, arises as the military makes it possible for religious parties to remain visible in the public realm, while disallowing other sections of society the same extent of participation.[34] Agreeing with this analysis, Stephen Cohen believes that the power of religious parties lies primarily in their underlying state patronage and in their nuisance value.[35] This view of religious party as spoiler lends credence to the instrumentalist position, as it resolves the apparent paradox between the visible extent of Islamisation in Pakistani society and the continued failure of religious parties to perform at the polls.

The literature in turn provides a relatively weaker case against Islam as a purely instrumentalist force. According to Pasha, an instrumentalist reading overlooks the fact that leaders have often used religion in response to the religious consciousness of a particular constituency. In Zia's case, for instance, he was aware that his policies would appeal to a large section of the *petite bourgeoisie*. Pasha believes the entire project of Islamisation to be driven by an element of duality: Zia's hypocrisy (supply of religious ideology) was accompanied by the presence of willing consumers (demand for religious ideology).[36] This position is consistent with Taylor's observation that both Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Bhutto perceived a general Islamic consciousness amongst Pakistan's masses.[37] But what lies behind this consciousness?

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According to Gardezi, groups with an ambiguous position with respect to relations of production stand to benefit from extending their control over the religious sphere. Thus to the extent that Pakistan's rising middle classes have supported Islamic parties and policies, he suggests, they have done so to bolster their material interests.[38] Pasha explains Islamic consciousness differently. Capitalist expansion, according to Pasha, yields uneven development. While it causes some to embrace it fully and westernise, others are willing only to accept its material components. Disillusioned with its accompanying "cultural haemorrhage," these latter sections find solace in Islam.[39] Dalrymple would likely append to this list of theories his belief that religiosity in Pakistan cannot be divorced from American foreign policy and its impact on South Asia.[40]

This issue of primordialism is also informed, albeit indirectly, by Andrabi et al.'s aforementioned study of schooling choice. Amongst households sending a child to a madrassah, Andrabi et al. find that "less than 25 per cent send all their children to [madrassahs]." Instead, the authors suggest, "50 per cent send their children to both, madrassahs and public schools, and another 27 per cent use the private school option." [41] Based on this finding, they conclude that arguments citing religiosity as a determinant of madrassah enrolment cannot overcome this "substantial variation within households." [42] But this preference for mixed schooling options may confirm little more than Clifford Geertz's observation that the mosque and the market often coexist. [43] It could be that by sending one child to a madrassah and the other to a private school, parents retain their religiosity while simply complementing it with a rational desire to mitigate risk. [44] The continued symbiosis between instrumentalism and primordialism inevitably makes it difficult to assign either tendency independent weight as a determinant of developments in Pakistan. That being said, a closer look at the evolution of madrassahs since the late 1970s suggests that the machinations of willing patrons have been indispensable in making Pakistan, by some measures, the most dangerous place on Earth.

#### *Patronage, its Effects and their Persistence*

Pakistan's madrassah landscape provides a good showcase for the continued symbiosis between instrumentalist and primordial tendencies. In the late 1970s, a number of domestic and international factors combined to make the madrassah a hot commodity for internal and external patrons alike.

According to Coulson, "until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was unusual for a government to harness the schools of another sovereign nation to achieve its own ends." [45] All this changed with the onset of the Iranian Revolution and concurrent American concerns over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 had a tremendous impact on Pakistani madrassahs. Fearful that Shia ascendance might radiate outward, Sunni states, including Saudi Arabia and Iraq, sought to curtail Iran's influence. These geo-strategic concerns coincided with Zia's own home-grown troubles. As Vali Nasr explains, Pakistani Shias became increasingly disenchanted

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with Zia's Islamisation policies, which were based on a narrow Sunni interpretation of Islam, and dismissed by Shias as mere "Sunnification." [46] Eager to pre-empt an externally-inspired challenge to his authority, Zia was happy to join hands with his Arab friends. Before long, Nasr suggests, a "Sunni wall" was built along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan and Iran. [47] Thus, Pakistan's Sunni and Shia madaris became proxies in the larger "battlefield for Arab-Iran disputes." [48] Nasr views this external patronage, particularly from Saudi Arabia, as a necessary stimulus for the proliferation of madrassahs:

In order to have terrorists, in order to have supporters for terrorists, in order to have people who are willing to interpret religion in violent ways, [...] you need particular interpretations of Islam [that] are being propagated out of schools that receive organizational and financial funding from Saudi Arabia. In fact, I would push it further: that these schools would not have existed without Saudi funding. They would not have proliferated across Pakistan [...] without Saudi funding. They would not have had the kind of prowess that they have without Saudi funding, and they would not have trained as many people without Saudi funding. [49]

It is important to note that the madrassahs employed towards these ends were carefully selected. As one commentator points out, Zia's administration was unwilling to back just any Sunni madrassah – "the military government invariably favoured the Deobandis." [50] Such patterns may help explain why Barelvis, who make up a majority of the country's population, run only 25 per cent of its madrassahs while Deobandis, who account for around 15 per cent of the population, disproportionately operate over 60 per cent of the country's madrassahs. [51]

Around the time Sunni quarters became watchful of developments in Iran, the US grew increasingly pre-occupied with the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Recognising that any American plan to drive the Soviets out of Kabul required Pakistan's cooperation, Washington was eager to bring Zia on board. In 1980, Jimmy Carter sought to entice Zia with an offer of \$400 million over two years. Cognizant of his indispensability, Zia compelled Washington to revise its meager offer, calling it "peanuts". The following year, the Reagan administration more generously offered to supplement its covert funding with a five-year, \$3.2 billion package. [52] Having signed the deal, the US and Pakistan embraced "Operation Cyclone," to purge Afghanistan of its Soviet presence. The modus operandi: to promote a jihadi culture and its most "pliable" vehicles – an army of Mujahideen. [53] In this cause, says Coulson, "American taxpayers [underwrote] ... the publication of textbooks inciting holy war on Soviet troops." [54] USAID invested over \$51 million to publish and distribute "textbooks [13 million volumes] that gave religious sanction to armed struggle in defence of Islam." [55] These books ensured that students learned only as much as their (politically dictated) cause demanded of them. A fourth-grade mathematics text informs students that "the speed of a Kalashnikov bullet is 800 meters per second." Equipped with this cue, they are then asked to solve the rest of the problem:

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If a Russian is at a distance of 3,200 meters from a mujahid, and that mujahid aims at the Russian's head, calculate how many seconds it will take for the bullet to strike the Russian in the forehead?[56]

The benefit of hindsight prompts Coulson to conclude that "any US strategic gains from funding militant Islamist education during the 1980s were negligible compared to the long-term harm wrought by that policy." [57] When America pulled its money and interest out of Pakistan in the late 1980s, however, such a proposition seemed ridiculous. Consequently, Pakistani leaders chose to retain what they considered a high-yielding strategy:

The success of the mujahideen in driving out the Soviets and the Taliban in capturing the Afghan state created an illusion among a section of the Pakistani policy-makers that similar success could be achieved in Indian-held Kashmir.[58]

In fact, Pakistani leaders have seen in Islam a potent foreign policy instrument. As Veena Kukreja points out, the Pakistani establishment has consistently used jihad as a tool to check India and Afghanistan. In this effort, Pakistan's premier spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and political parties under its wing – including the JI – have extended support to militant outfits in Kashmir.[59] This point speaks to the state's geo-strategic calculus: weaken India and undermine disagreeable governments in Afghanistan. According to Oliver Roy, "while US policy-makers can indeed be credited as the mid-wife of this retrograde band of armed madrassah students, the Pakistani military and politicians deserve the distinct honour of being their guardian." [60] Cohen agrees that the Pakistani army has godfathered many a militant tendency:

Pakistan's radical groups are a mixed lot. Some are criminals trying to wrap themselves in the mantle of divine justice. Some have modest, Pakistan-related objectives. Some are seized with sectarian hatred. A few are internationalist apocalyptic terrorists in tune with the al Qaeda philosophy. The rise of all radical groups to prominence, however, can in large part be attributed to the patronage they have received from the Pakistan army.[61]

There is little indication that such patterns of patronage are history. Recent evidence suggests that military and non-military leaders continue to tolerate, and even actively support, known militant groups and their networks of militant madrassahs. As a number of scholars note, it is likely that Pakistani intelligence officials know which amongst Pakistan's madrassahs are militant.[62] Yet, strategic calculations and an incessant quest for political legitimacy keep Pakistan's leadership from lifting a finger against religious political parties, militant outfits, or madrassahs. As a result, Dalrymple points out, "not even one militant madrassah has yet been closed down." [63] More worrying still, Maulana Sami-ul Haq, director of the infamous Madrassah Haqqania, is confident that any official promise to crackdown on radical madrassahs

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“is for American consumption only.”[64] In fact, this madrassah has only been “forced” to shut down on one occasion – when in 1997 it deployed its entire student body to support a stalled Taliban offensive across the border.[65]

In September 2003, a number of Southeast Asian students were arrested from Karachi’s Jami’at al-Dirasat al-Islamiyya. Though “authorities swooped down on [the madrassah’s] Malaysian and Indonesian students,” they did little to address a more concerning aspect of their visit. On the day of the arrests, Hafeez Muhammad Saeed, leader of the Jamaat ud Dawa (an organisation known to be linked, if not synonymous, with the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba), was in attendance as the chief guest. His presence, however, was blatantly tolerated.[66] More recently, in April 2010, Rana Sanaullah, Punjab’s law minister, visited a madrassah run by the banned sectarian group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). He was later seen sharing a car with the madrassah’s leader.[67] Three months later, the PML-N government in Punjab, headed by Nawaz Sharif’s brother, Shahbaz Sharif, provided the Jamaat ud Dawa a \$950,000 grant for its educational activities.[68] In July 2010, Wikileaks belatedly revealed documents suggesting that in 2006 Lt-Gen Hamid Gul (retd) and other ISI operatives visited madrassahs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in an effort “to recruit new fodder for suicide bombings.”[69]

As Christopher Blanchard notes, “channels of responsibility between donors and recipients for curricular development and educational control are often unresolved or unclear.”[70] Consequently, it becomes difficult to corner either patrons or clients as bearers of greatest culpability. Nevertheless, in the context of the instrumentalism versus primordialism debate, it is important to recognise that “traditionally, jihadi texts are not a part of the normal curricula of [madrassahs].”[71] Though patronage cycles and their ephemeral goals are never long in vogue, the consequences of such manipulation have proven to be more enduring. “The absence of US support for [madrassahs] in the 1990s,” says Ali Riaz, “did not bring an end to the proliferation of madrassahs.”[72] As a 2002 International Crisis Group report suggests, even when patronage ceases, its propaganda persists “develop[ing] a dynamic independent of its original patrons.”[73] Left to primordial tendencies alone, however, Pakistan’s madrassahs would likely have evolved along a different trajectory. This brief account of Pakistan’s history since the late 1970s lends support to the verdict that instrumentalist tendencies (on the part of internal and external sponsors) were essential in generating and promoting the more “militant” amongst Pakistani madrassahs. By itself, the presence of a madrassah is an insufficient condition for terrorism to occur.

### *The Madrassah and its Latent Utility to Terrorist Organisations*

To understand the relationship between militant madrassahs and terrorism, some scholars suggest it may be useful to work backwards in the causal mechanism. Rather than treat “terrorism” as a uniform concept, they disaggregate it into discrete categories, asking how each type relies on madrassahs differently. The main lesson gleaned from this section of the literature survey is that

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a madrassah's capacity to contribute to terrorism depends heavily on the type of terrorism in question.

Qandeel Siddique divides violent extremism in Pakistan into four categories or types of jihad on the basis of target choice: Type I jihad, representing "global jihad" targeted primarily at the West; Type II jihad, involving cross-border terrorism executed against India and Afghanistan; Type III jihad, involving violence directed at Pakistan's government and security forces; and, Type IV jihad, representing sectarian violence. Though he discerns "weak to strong bonds" between madrassahs and type II, III and IV jihad, Siddique suggests that "there is little evidence supporting a connection between" madrassahs and type I terrorism.[74] This finding reaffirms Dalrymple's opinion that "militant [madrassahs] are [...] likely to create more problems for Pakistan's internal security than for the safety of Western capitals." [75] In fact, Bergen and Pandey contend that with regard to the security of Western interests, the madrassah merely presents a "scapegoat." [76] They consider "misguided" a "national security policy focused on [madrassahs] as a principal source of terrorism." [77]

Such conclusions build on the assumption that "perpetrating large-scale attacks requires ... a facility with technology" that "is simply not available at the vast majority of [madrassahs]." [78] The logic here is that madrassahs fail to supply the human material required to successfully execute a terrorist attack. In other words, the supply of motivation is unaccompanied by an equally important supply of capacity. But in their disproportionate focus on "militants who successfully executed an attack or who were caught in the act," Bergen and Pandey fail to consider that the capacity of madrassah graduates to execute type I jihad may only be veiled by a ready supply of more capable alternatives. [79]

Christine Fair's work on militant recruitment posits that the low representation of madrassah students "in the ranks of the observed militants" is likely attributable "to the efforts of *tanzeems* [militant groups] to select for quality among their operatives." [80] "Even if [madrassah] students are more inclined towards jihad," says Fair, "a given militant group may not select [madrassah] students if the group has other, more desirable candidates to recruit." [81] To understand what engines such a quality-driven demand for recruits – what makes one recruit more "desirable" than the other, Fair looks at "the objectives, tactics, theatres, and 'quality of terror' produced" for each particular *tanzeem*. [82] Thus shifting the unit of analysis from the individual recruit to the recruiting entity, Fair makes her case by comparing the operations of two Pakistani *tanzeems* – Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ).

LeT concerns itself primarily with type II jihad, a commitment most evidently displayed through a host of high-profile anti-India terrorist operations – the 2001 attack on the Red Fort in New Delhi, the 2006 express train bombings in Mumbai, and the 2008 terrorist assault on Mumbai commonly known as 26/11. In order to successfully "engage hard targets in demanding high-risk missions," LeT inevitably demands that its recruits meet a minimal standard of quality. As Fair

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points out, carrying out “operations deep within India” requires not only that cadres be able to navigate the “high-altitude Line of Control” separating Pakistan from Indian-administered Kashmir, but also that they possess the linguistic talent to “carefully evade the extensive Indian counter-insurgency grid.”[83] Moreover, LeT prefers recruits who are “literate, numerate, and capable of working out mathematical proportions,” prerequisite skills for competently “building improvised explosive devices.”[84]

Unlike LeT, LeJ devotes most of its activities to type IV jihad, targeted domestically at sectarian (in this case Shia) foes. “In general,” says Fair, “LeJ attacks soft or low-value targets and conducts operations for which opportunity costs of failure are low.”[85] Furthermore, unlike LeT, LeJ faces few difficulties in “getting to the theatre.”[86] A preference for “low-end tactics such as grenade tosses” also ensures that LeJ is easily contented with low quality recruits. Thus, given the “kinds of operations” for which LeT and LeJ are known, one can assess the utility of the madrassah student for each group. While knowledge of current target preference and operational sophistication “suggests that few LeT operatives are [madrassah] products,” the opposite is true for LeJ. In Fair’s assessment, “given LeJ’s sectarian mission, students with some [madrassah] background may be preferred to those without [madrassah] experience, all things being equal.”[87]

But Fair recognises that changed conditions and “repurposed” *tanzeems* are not unheard of.[88] Consequently, she contends that is problematic to “conclude that madrassahs are exculpated because their students fail to be accepted by *tanzeems* under current recruitment conditions.”[89] Surely, scholars and policymakers are increasingly cognisant of the overlap between different types of terrorism. According to Ashley Tellis, coordination between *tanzeems* “through the entire spectrum of jihadi groups” makes them “much more flexible in their cooperation now than they ever were historically.”[90] Though Hafeez Mohammad Saeed and the Jamat ud Dawa (JuD) are primarily associated with type II jihad, evidence suggests that Saeed’s purpose is less restricted. In 2007, Saeed emphasised the virtues of jihad against the “US and its agents.”[91] He also harbours an expressed desire to extend the writ of Islam to New Delhi, Tel Aviv, and Washington.[92] Lending credibility to his rhetoric, the LeT was behind a foiled 2009 plot to attack the American, British, and Indian embassies in Dhaka.[93] According to Stephen Tankel, “fighting the West remains a secondary concern for Lashkar, but one to which it has committed increasing resources during the past several years.”[94] Thus, accompanying Saeed’s primarily type II jihadist mindset and activities is a proven readiness to contribute to type I jihad. Masood Azhar is known to be the prime beneficiary of the 1999 hijacking of flight IC 814 (Indian authorities released him in exchange for all passengers), and as the leader of JeM, a militant group avowedly committed to type II jihad. Nevertheless, Azhar advocates a jihad that involves breaking both Indian and American legs.[95] The Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) is a sectarian group best known for its type IV sectarian activity against Pakistan’s Shia minority. Yet, the organisation’s former leader, Azam Tariq, ardently supported type II jihad in Kashmir, resolving to send “500,000 militants to Jammu and Kashmir to fight Indian security forces.”[96] The LeJ,

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also a group committed to type IV jihad, has supplemented its anti-Shia activities by sending suicide terrorists nearer to the Durand Line to fight Pakistani security forces in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) – a symptom of type III jihad.[97] Thus one does well to heed Cohen’s advice that “an American policy designed to curb existing terrorism in Pakistan should deal with all [forms of terrorism].”

More importantly in the context of this paper, all militant groups in Pakistan – LeT and JeM (primarily tied to type II jihad), SSP and LeJ (at the forefront of anti-Shia type IV jihad), the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, an emergent leader in type III jihad against the Pakistani state), and more immediately anti-American entities (such as the Haqqani network) – inevitably enjoy close associations with madrassahs. Though Fair succeeds in explaining why different types of terrorism (and *tanzeems* thereto devoted) should rely differently on madrassahs, she does not tell us why all *tanzeems* tirelessly continue to promote madrassahs. The persistent proximity between *tanzeems* and madrassahs beckons the question: do the aforementioned arguments adequately consider the full range of functions madrassahs provide to *tanzeems* and their operations? Do madrassahs present more than a reserve recruit base? Might they less visibly (though no less significantly) contribute to the execution of a terrorist attack?

#### *The Madrassah and Its Contributory Roles*

The previous section shed light on the diversity of purpose exhibited by Pakistani madrassahs. But madrassahs can also assume different contributory roles in the build-up and execution of a particular terrorist event. A few such functions alluded to in the literature include: 1) radicalising to-be terrorists, 2) providing transit and hospitality to pre-radicalised individuals, and 3) generating support for terrorism. While supply-side explanations profile the individual militant, and the *tanzeem* approach focuses on the needs of a particular militant group, this section treats the madrassah as its unit of analysis.

#### *Radicalisation*

According to Kalsoom Lakhani, the madrassah is able to indoctrinate by severing and replacing connections with home. A young and malleable child is pulled away from his parents, detached from his origins, this child finds a new surrogate in the shape of the madrassah. Insulation from opportunities of critical thought, plus reverence for an acquired parent prompt the child to accept sermons without question or doubt.[98] This process speaks to the grassroots component of militant madrassahs. The madrassah radicalises young entrants into aspiring terrorists who graduate into *tanzeems* before making a more tangible contribution to terrorism. A number of JI madrassahs – including Markaz Uloom-e-Deeniya’s Alfalah Academy, Jamiatul Ikhwan, and Jamia Darul Islam – have adopted this formula by directing students towards martyrdom via militant outfits like Hizbul Mujahideen.[99] According to Siddique, such collusion between madrassahs and *tanzeems* is widespread. When the JeM organised a conference in the Pakistani

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city of Bahawalpur in 2008, he points out, “some madrassah managers to figure prominently” in the audience included Maulana Sher Bahadur of Darul Uloom Hijra Attock, Mohammad Shah Saleem of Darul Bannu, and Maulana Qari Khalil Ahmad Bandhani of Jamia Ashrafia Karachi. [100] Also present (as guest speaker) was Maulana Jalandhry who heads the Wafaq-al Madaris – the umbrella of Deobandi madrassahs in Pakistan – in addition to his own madrassah (Khair-i-Madaris in Multan).[101] The close affiliation of these madrassah managers to an overtly militant group all but ensures that the students enrolled in their madrassahs are exposed to ideas that converge with their own. Qari Hussain, a Taliban commander commonly referred to as “Trainer of Suicide Bombers,” justifies the radicalisation taking place at many madrassahs: “Children are tools to achieve God’s will. And whatever comes your way, you sacrifice it.”[102] Thus, treating all children as sacrificial lambs, the militant madrassah is able to radicalise innocent children towards their own violent ends. But to the extent that a militant madrassah contributes to terrorism, it does not always constitute a (lone) site of radicalisation.

### *Transit and hospitality*

According to terrorism analyst B. Raman, Western Muslim youth “of Pakistani origin studying in the [madrassahs] of Pakistan fall into two categories – those who are sent by their parents in order to dilute the Western cultural influence on them and those who come on their own in order to contribute to the cause of their religion.”[103] In 2004, 21-year old Shehzad Tanweer, one amongst the four men who carried out the 2005 London bombings, spent four months in a madrassah in Lahore.[104] As Bergen and Pandey see it, Tanweer “made a conscious decision to travel halfway around the globe to attend [a] radical Pakistani [madrassah] after [he] had already been radicalised in [his] hometown of Leeds in the United Kingdom.”[105] In Raman’s terms, Tanweer corresponds to that category of individuals who “are already strongly anti-West before joining the [madrassah].”[106] But why bother to visit a madrassah when the task of radicalisation is a fait accompli? Unable to do more, suggests Siddique, militant madrassahs supportive of type I jihad might “allow their [madrassahs] to be used as transit points, brief visitations or as safe havens.”[107] A madrassah in Rawalpindi served as a transit point to Hamid Hayat (the teenager from Lodi, California, arrested in 2005 for his affiliation with Al Qaeda) before directing him towards a jihadi training camp.[108] Similarly, a madrassah in Peshawar hosted Bryant Neil Vinas “on his way to join Al Qaeda in waging holy war against US troops.”[109] Insofar as it serves as a transit point, the madrassah thus presents a promising destination for a small population of pre-radicalised elements with lofty goals but minimal connections.

### *Generating support*

Radicalisation of the “sacrificial lamb” and hospitality towards the pre-radicalised tourist are roles reserved for the militant madrassah. With regard to both functions, one can employ binary terms to qualitatively distinguish Pakistan’s militant from its non-militant madrassahs. Either a

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madrassah deliberately radicalises young boys towards violent ends or it does not. Either a madrassah is willing to act as a transit point for the budding terrorist or it is not. Insofar as the generation of support for terrorism goes, however, it is more difficult to locate a clear divisor between militant and non-militant contributions. Any differences will inevitably be quantitative in nature. While the capacity of militant madrassahs to generate support for extremism requires little elaboration, the literature suggests that most Pakistani madrassahs (militant and non-militant alike) “sow the seeds of extremism in the minds of [...] students.”[110] As mentioned earlier, Rahman’s survey of attitudes towards extremism and militancy reveals that madrassah students are more intolerant than students from public and private schools. In addition to their strong support for militancy against India, sampled madrassah students also exhibit greatest resistance to equal rights for Hindus, Ahmadis, and women.[111] Dalrymple tells us that while “only a small proportion of [madrassahs] are militant,” the rest also “tend to be ultra-conservative.”[112] Such evidence prompts Fair to conclude that “even if they may not contribute significantly to the pool of observed militants, Pakistan’s [madrassahs] may foster support for terrorism within families and communities.”[113] Thus in the marketplace of ideas, both militant and non-militant madrassahs make quantitatively different contributions towards the legitimacy and viability of violent groups and their activities.

### *Conclusion*

This article has focused on the literature’s role in illuminating the relationship between militant madrassahs and terrorism (See Figure 1). In addition to its obvious merits, however, the literature also exhibits room for further research. The literature effectively employs different units of analysis: terrorists in supply side studies; militant groups in Fair’s *tanzeem* approach; and, the madrassah, or its lead representative, in analyses of the madrassah’s varied roles and functions. In addition to these approaches, it might be useful to study more closely the larger family to which madrassahs belong. In other words, as a unit of analysis, one may consider treating as one, admittedly amorphous, entity the cumulative interactions between madrassahs, *tanzeems*, and patrons in search for identifiable patterns. Does this family possess borders? Are they permeable? What causal mechanisms are at work within such families of interaction? What provisions are there for sustenance in absence of continued patronage? At present, evidence of the nexus between madrassahs and militant groups is isolated. The literature tells us that particular patrons prefer particular madrassahs, and that particular madrassahs associate with particular *tanzeems*. But the nature of interaction between these parties remains insufficiently understood.

In its treatment of the madrassah as a variable, the literature commits some level of conceptual stretching. Clearly, madrassahs serve different roles, to different extents, towards different ends, and with varying levels and sources of inducement. Yet, most studies are content with the binary distinction between madrassahs and militant madrassahs. If militant groups constitute a heterogeneous lot, and scholars accept that terrorism has its sub-types, one can likely do better than assume homogeneity within the category of militant madrassahs. The same goes for

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Pakistan's non-militant madrassahs. Rather than sanctify boundaries of categorisation, it might be useful to employ means of analysis that reflect differentiation within extant categories. As an elementary example, a madrassah that has "no" role in terrorism could more usefully be described as one where most students exhibit little, if any, support for the most benign form of involvement in terrorism – e.g. impersonal sympathy for terrorist groups and their associated inclinations. Conversely, a madrassah that is heavily involved in the operations of a terrorist organisation could be described as one where most students manifest a strong desire to engage personally in the execution of a terrorist attack. The Figure below tries to capture some of the influences at work.

The changing interests and fluid patterns of patronage influencing Pakistani madrassahs are better accommodated by a rubric that captures subtlety – future scholarship ought to deepen current categorisations.



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- [25] The JI, JUI, and JUP constitute the primary religious parties in Pakistan. The JI is a non-sectarian organization founded by Maulana Maududi in 1941. The JUI and JUP are political entities with Deobandi and Barelvi affiliations, respectively.
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- [42] Ibid.
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