



# Asian Conflicts Reports

## Spotlight on the Arab Uprisings

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Council for Asian  
Transnational Threat Research

# Democracy, Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood

Carl Ungerer & Amparo Pamela H. Fabe

The recent events in Egypt and in other parts of the Arab world raise important questions for western foreign policy in the Middle East and the promotion of democracy as a central strategic goal.

Much of the commentary to date has focused on the broad-based and largely peaceful nature of the protests against President Hosni Mubarak's regime. Many see the public demonstrations as a soft-left, liberal uprising against Mubarak's three decades of authoritarian rule. Indeed, President Obama has praised the protesters, calling them an 'inspiration' for freedom loving peoples around the world.

But less attention has been given to the role that Islamists have played in this current drama and the potential consequences of a political revolution in Egypt and across the region which would elevate the status and power of organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

There is no doubt that the Muslim Brotherhood has had its hand in these events. As the largest and most influential Islamic organization in Egypt, it has participated directly in the rallies and has called for the immediate overthrow of the Mubarak government. The group's key message has been 'Islam is the solution'.

However, so far their involvement has been relatively low-key. They have tentatively sided with the former UN nuclear disarmament official Mohammed El-Baradei in what looks like a strange and probably temporary union of convenience.

But many Egyptians are worried that the longer the political confusion continues, the more likely it is that political events will play into the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood. Some have drawn parallels with the Iranian revolution in 1979. That too started as a popular uprising against an authoritarian regime seen as a puppet of the west. Although Egypt in 2011 is not the Iran of 1979, the implications for geopolitics could be just as severe.

From the early 1970s, the Muslim Brotherhood has joined forces with Islamic radicals in the Palestinian territories, disillusioned Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, and Islamists in North Africa to form a web of political organizations that now stretches from Algeria to Bahrain. Moreover, the Brotherhood continues to provide the intellectual foundations for Al-Qaeda and its various franchisees around the world through the influential writings of Said Qutb and the operational directions of Osama bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

It should also be remembered that one of Al-Qaeda's principal goals is to topple Arab regimes that are seen as supporters of the United States or Israel. The recent turmoil in Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt and elsewhere must be viewed in this broader political context.

The growing illegitimacy of nationalist regimes in the Middle East and across North Africa coupled with the Arab world's apparent impotency towards Israel's military and America's aid has reinforced the local appeal of the Brotherhood.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has said that it renounces violence and seeks political power through representation, the statement cannot be taken at face value. In 2007, the group's draft political manifesto included proposals for an Islamic Council that would vet laws and ban women and Christians from the Presidency.

A strengthened Muslim Brotherhood at the center of Egyptian politics would be bad news for the wider Middle East. Instinctively, and whatever their faults as political leaders, Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak all understood that the Brotherhood represented a direct threat to stability and democracy.

Some Middle East experts hope that giving power to moderate voices within the Muslim Brotherhood could be the perfect antidote to a more radical and violent Islamism in Egypt. Others suggest that a dose of Islamism would be good for democracy. But both suggestions are the triumph of hope over reality.

Commentary on the Middle East has proved largely unable to explain the growth and appeal of Islamism. The dominant perspective assumes that Islamism is potentially both capital friendly and supportive of political and economic development. A common assertion is that Islamism will ultimately find accommodation with secular modernity at some distant point in the future.

Despite such hopes, the reality is that democracy has been a poor cure for Islamist ambitions in the Middle East. Both Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon have managed to combine elections, social welfare and a campaign of terrorism without a great deal of fuss or apparent contradiction. Egypt ruled by the Muslim Brotherhood is potentially no different. •



**1** The Muslim Brotherhood has contributed to the February uprising and subsequently found its powerbase strengthened

**2** The group's 2007 draft political manifesto included proposals for an Islamic Council that would vet laws and ban women and Christians from the Presidency

**3** The Brotherhood continues to provide the intellectual foundations for Al-Qaeda through the influential writings of Said Qutb

# Echoes of Egypt in Burma and Pakistan

D. Suba Chandran

The people of Egypt, following the Tunisian uprising, have been successful in overthrowing Hosni Mubarak, their long standing President. Many in the Arab countries and the rest of the world consider this as a trend-setting uprising by the people to establish true democracy. Will this uprising in Egypt inspire people in South Asia? Is the situation in South Asia similar to that of Egypt and Tunisia? In short, are there 'Egyptys' in South Asia?

The latest report of the Peace Fund, which publishes an annual index of failing states, places the South Asian countries, excluding India, the Maldives and Bhutan, in the top 25. While Afghanistan, Pakistan and Myanmar, not surprisingly, rank high in terms of potential failure, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are not far behind in this list. Against this backdrop, what implications will the Jasmine revolution in Tunisia and its echo in Egypt, have in Pakistan and Myanmar? Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani's recent bold statement that Pakistan is not Egypt seems to come more out of fear than confidence. Consider the following five similarities that Pakistan and Myanmar have with the Arab world.

First, in Tunisia and Egypt, and across the non-democratic and autocratic Arab world, democracy has existed more on paper than in practice. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the recently deposed President of Tunisia, ruled for more than two decades. Muammar Gaddafi, has ruled Libya since the 1970s.

Likewise, in Pakistan and Burma long periods of non-democratic regimes, manipulated referendums and rigged elections, have been the norm rather than the exception. Many Pakistanis consider their democracy and elected government something of a sham. For more than half the span of its existence Pakistan has been under military rule and political life during the remaining periods has played out under the strong shadow of the armed forces. Pakistan's Prime Ministers, Presidents and even Chief Justices of the Supreme Court have to repeatedly look over their shoulder to glean the perception in the GHQ. Even democratically elected leaders have generally behaved like despots. Nawaz Sharif was the perfect example; many Pakistanis characterized his last term as President as little more than a democratic dictatorship.

Myanmar has been under military rule since the coup in 1962. Though there was an uprising leading to the Parliamentary election in which Aung San Su Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) won a majority of the seats, both the election and its results ultimately failed to bring change. Myanmar remained under military rule through the 1990s and the last decade. Pro-democracy elements, led by Aung San Su Kyi, considered the 2010 elections a sham, rigged and manipulated by the military dictatorship.

A second similarity is that in Pakistan and Myanmar, as in the Arab world today, dissatisfaction with the form of government is coupled with a large power distance between the rulers and the ruled in terms of governance. All these countries are extremely corrupt, with the result that a select group of elites benefit from the country's wealth, while the vast majority of the population remains poor and ill-served by their government.

In Pakistan and Myanmar the rich and the influential (whether they are a part of the government or outside) live in comfort and luxury while the poor struggle to survive on meager income. Except for occasional voting, the poor in Pakistan and Myanmar have no voice in the governance process. From education to justice, even basic government services are too distant and dear for ordinary men and women, which is the primary reason for the middle and lower classes to look towards religious parties and organizations as an alternative source of basic services.

A third problem in the Arab world is the generation gap between the rulers and the ruled. A cursory look at the leaders of the Arab world from Ben Ali to Hosni Mubarak will highlight this problem; while the leaders are in their 70s and 80s, the majority of their populations are in their 20s and 30s or younger. This youth bulge across the Arab world is more aware of their human rights and better connected with the rest of the world. Today, television, You Tube and Facebook, along with other tools of modern communication connect the people, especially youth, provide a constant stream of new information, multiple pictures, documentaries, and short films.



1

South Asian failing states such as Pakistan and Burma are vulnerable to popular uprisings in the mould of those in North Africa

2

A demographic bulge consisting of disenfranchised but globally aware youth mirrors the situation in much of the Arab world

3

Rising middle classes in Pakistan and Burma face limited political and economic aspirations and aging autocratic leaderships



Youth consciousness today is not based merely on reading the accounts and opinions of others, say in newspapers, but increasingly on viewing actual events, often in real time. This has important implications in creating a psychological connection between the actual victims of repression and those who identify with them and share their pain. The self immolation of a Tunisian youth could not have started the Jasmine revolution had the internet not enabled the event to be viewed and shared over multiple networks around the globe. Today, You Tube alone has hundreds of stories on the Tunisian unrest – from unemployment protests to military responses.

Fortunately for Pakistan, the generation gap between the rulers and the ruled is less dramatic. With President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Gilani, and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the average difference between the rulers and the ruled is not more than one generation. The youth in Pakistan are well aware of their rights, or the lack thereof, of their political and economic surroundings, and of what is happening in the rest of the world. More importantly, Pakistani youth are well connected among themselves and extremely angry about the fact that their leadership continues to fail to provide them even the most basic requirements for happiness and pride. Beyond cricket, young Pakistanis have little to feel proud about. This explains the anger directed against the cricketers and the Pakistan Cricket Board whenever their cricket team fails to deliver.

In terms of media freedom, the situation is much worse in Myanmar than in Pakistan. While Pakistan's print and electronic media enjoy considerable freedom and access to the internet is relatively open, in Myanmar there is no such space. The effect is to bind the youth of Myanmar closer together. While the media is totally controlled by the regime and the reach of internet very limited, there is a strong Burmese diaspora – composed primarily of youth – in India, Southeast Asia and the rest of the world. This diaspora is energetic, vibrant and connected, and is likely to find ways to exploit and manipulate media tools to turn the situation against the regime in Myanmar.

Fourth, there is not only a youth bulge in these countries, but also the emergence of a vibrant, educated middle class, with certain expectations, dreams and a willingness to take their grievances to the street. The middle class today, whether in the Arab world, or in the rest of the Third World, have had the same expectations, awareness and aspirations for decades. What is new in the last few years has been their willingness to exploit new modes of communication and organization to express their dissatisfaction in public and in mass action.

In Pakistan, there has been a slow but steady growth of the middle class, which is actively taking interest in what is happening in their country. Many consider the 2007 lawyers movement, which ousted General Musharraf, as a middle class movement in Pakistan. There is a vibrant electronic media, with numerous news channels and TV serials. The sudden growth of the mobile phone and automobile industries of Pakistan during the last decade is primarily because of this expanding middle class with moderate purchasing power. Unfortunately, this powerful class feels that its aspirations are unrepresented in the corridors of political power and influence.

Finally, in most of the Arab world, a parallel and competing leadership has emerged centered on religious figures, who advocate their interpretation and expression of what constitutes righteous society and seek to achieve an Islamic Ummah. From Tunisia to Indonesia, cutting across Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia, there is an alarming growth of religious parties, with their own sectarian beliefs. These religious parties are not only fighting to overthrow the existing regimes, but also engaged in a violent interaction with other Islamic groups, with different sectarian interpretations of what constitutes Islam. Pakistan sits clearly in the midst of this trend. For several decades, the religious parties have been working hard to build political support. In the last year, the radical groups numerous sectarian organizations such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, have also been trying to mobilize the middle class.

Pakistan may be the most obvious case, but there are other countries in South Asia that are also un-democratic, also with youth bulges and growing middle classes who's expectations remain unmet. More importantly, the growing divide between the rulers and the ruled is repeated across South Asia.

Beware South Asia; Egypt is not too far.

Sections of this paper have been published in a local news paper (*Daily Excelsior*) and magazine (*Salute*) in India •

# Tunisia and Egypt: An Opportunity for Introspection

Md. Jawaid Akhtar



Events in the Tunisia and Egypt are being watched very closely by the international community, as mass uprisings in these two countries have not only alarmed their immediate neighbors but also thrown many challenges before rest of the world. It still remains to be seen whether these events will actually translate into a meaningful political settlement which can fulfill the aspiration of the masses. A look at the political dynamics of Egypt and its connection to the international system reveals that it is one of the countries whose internal politics matter to more than its own citizens. Both have the potential to have global implications.

The uprising in Egypt is generally being attributed to a complex mix of economic, political and social dynamics. The demonstrations that erupted on January 25 were driven by Egyptian's aspirations for greater dignity in their lives. Trouble had been simmering in Egypt for at least a decade because of combination of factors, including a rapidly growing population and rising number of youths with weak economic future, increasing unemployment and deepening poverty, all under a corrupt and autocratic regime.

Since many other countries in the region share some or all of these conditions, many analysts feel these events could lead to similar uprisings across the region, which is home to numerous monarchies, Sheikdoms and autocratic regimes. To begin with, in an apparent reaction to protests inspired by Tunisian revolt and Egyptian turmoil, Yemeni President Ali Abdllah Saleh announced that he would neither seek another term in office nor hand over power to his son. Similarly, in Algeria which borders Tunisia the birthplace of the current revolutionary fervor, thousands came out in protest against lack of jobs, inflation and corruption. The government quickly responded with reduction in the prices of sugar and oil, but the chances of anger exploding again cannot be ruled out. In Jordan, too, opposition groups are demanding more political and economic rights. King Abdullah II has been a popular ruler, but faces trouble over rising food and rising prices. Following protests in Tunisia and Egypt, he had to sack Prime Minister Samir Raifi and his cabinet. Though Bahrain's crown prince Al Khalifa rejected the theories of domino effect in the Arab world, he however, said people want respect, freedom, the right to participate in decision making mechanisms and justice, and that the job of Arab leaders like him to heed these fundamental demands. Tunisian and Egyptian turmoil might not directly encourage people in other neighboring nations to go for similar uprisings, but it definitely has given alarming signals to the rulers in the region who have not granted the citizens all rights, freedom and dignity.

In the case that these countries face any instability then the threat of Islamic fundamentalism looms large. Tunisia, for example, has no history of Islamic fundamentalism, however group such as the Muslim Brotherhood are hoping to exploit the current instability. Yemen is known to the training ground for Al-Qaeda militants. Any upheaval in the country could provide an opportunity for the Al-Qaeda to regroup and intensify its activities. Similarly, in the case of Algeria, after decades of posturing as a third world anti-western champion, the threat of home grown Muslim fundamentalism has drawn the government closer to America. Analysts say if the grip of the secret police is weakened, a radical fundamentalist regime could take power. In Egypt, which is currently in the midst of it all, the Muslim Brotherhood, which neither initiated the agitations nor was it in the scene for the initial days, is taking a centre stage and is being predicted as the group which could win the maximum number of seats if elections are held in the country.

Apart from the direct or indirect impacts on the neighboring countries of the Middle East there are other countries which are particularly concerned. America, Egypt's closest ally, is trying to gauge how its interests are at stake. It is faced with a double-edged sword scenario. The democratic process, if allowed to run its course, could bring to power, a new government unsupportive of US priorities. But if the democratic process in Egypt is blocked, the outcome could be equally damaging to US interests. US interests in Egypt are quite clear: maintaining peace with Israel, keeping the Suez Canal open and supporting the US and allied efforts against Al-Qaeda and other militant groups. Washington has always kept these interests above the promotion of human rights and democracy, and that is why President Hosni Mubarak, despite his political autocracy, has been one of the closest allies to a long series of US administrations.

**1** Key US interests in Egypt include maintaining peace with Israel, keeping the Suez Canal open and supporting efforts against Al-Qaeda

**2** The abrogation of Egypt's peace treaty with Israel would likely lead to a re-emergence of hostilities between the two countries

**3** Iran supported the Egyptian revolution and finds itself in a win-win situation as regional politics shifts in its favor



Israel, too, has much at stake in Egypt. Israel's peace treaty with Egypt has been one of the main pillars of Israel's national security doctrine. It has proved to be a great support for Israel's stability in the region. Analysts believe if Egypt were to abrogate the Camp David Accords and over time reconstruct its military into an effective force, the existential threat to Israel that existed before the treaty was signed would re-emerge.

Among outside powers, Iran seems to be in a win-win situation as the regional equations have shifted in its favor during the last fortnight. It has recently signed a US \$30 billion trade agreement with Turkey. Iran is also the head of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) which gives it a big say in oil market in the current volatile situation. And, at least for some time, the nuclear issue takes a back seat at the international level. Given Iran's troubled equations with Cairo since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran has nothing to lose and much to gain from regime change in Egypt. Probably this is why Tehran has clearly taken a position that Mubarak must give up power and leave.

In South Asia, Pakistan's economy is far worse than that of Egypt, Tunisia or Jordan, raising fears of a possibility of a similar popular uprising in not-so-distant future. Although Pakistan might not face an Egypt-like revolution it will certainly be affected by the rise of radical Islamist forces in the Middle East. Pakistan is the world's second largest country in terms of Muslim population and has many religious organizations working both within the political system and outside. The Prime Minister of Pakistan Yusuf Reza Gilani has rejected the views that Pakistan could face any Egypt like turmoil saying that the country has a functional democracy and strong government and civil institutions. However, his coalition partner MQM leader Altaf Hussain in a rally in Karachi raised slogan of revolution with reference to Egypt and Tunisia. Even leaders of the newly formed Muttahida Muslim League, in a press conference, urged the government to mend its ways or be ready to face the wrath of the people.

For India, the impact will probably be felt more in terms of trade and the economy. A period of prolonged turmoil in the Middle East could result in rising oil prices and interruption to India's trade with the region, valued at US \$120 billion a year. The Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council Chairman, C Rangarajan, in a recent statement said to the extent to which the entire Middle East is affected, it could result in a temporary increase in oil prices. Apart from this, the turmoil could also affect the remittances from some three million Indian workers in the region, which in turn could negatively affect the economy. •



# Evolving Threats from Lashkar-e-Taiba

Saroj Kumar Rath

With the intent to unite Pakistanis participating in the Afghan *jihad*, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) came into existence in 1986 in the trenches of Afghanistan under the collective leadership of Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, Zafar Iqbal and Hafiz Saeed. In 1987, the LeT established two training camps, Muaskar-e-Taiba at Jaji in Paktia province and Muaskar-e-Aqsa in Kunar province in Afghanistan. An estimated 1600 jihadis who participated in the Afghan *jihad* were trained from these two camps. Initially the LeT was a fringe organization and not one of the seven Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) recognized parties waging *jihad* in Afghanistan. Most of the LeT cadres, including its commander Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, were fighting under Abdur Rab Rasul Sayyaf's Ittehad-e-Islami, which was recognized and funded by the ISI. The gradual success of the LeT fighters encouraged its leaders to establish Camp Tango training facility in Kunar province, the third such training centre in Afghanistan.

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the LeT turned its arms against India. The LeT's principal training centres are now Umm-al-Qura, Muaskar-e-Taiba, Muaskar-e-Aqsa and Muaskar Abdullah bin Masood all in Pakistan occupied Kashmir; Mansera Markaz Aksa training camp in Mansera, Model Town training camp in Okara district, the Markas Taiba training camp in Muridke all in Punjab; and the Markaz Mohammed bin Qasim training camp in the Sanghar District of Sindh. On December 7, 2008, the Pakistani army raided a LeT training camp at Shewai Nullah, known as 'Betul Mujahideen' in the Chehelabandi mountain of Muzaffarabad in Pakistan occupied Kashmir and arrested Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi and Zarrar Shah, the masterminds of the Mumbai attacks. The confession of the surviving Mumbai attacker Ajmal Kasab made clear that the LeT has the capacity to quickly and inexpensively train young men from villages into intensely driven and proficient killers.

Encouraged by Pakistani civilian, military and intelligence authorities, the LeT has fashioned itself as a strategic asset for the Pakistan military's strategy to tie up a vast number of Indian forces who would otherwise be deployed at the Indo-Pak border. However, the global threat from the LeT and its affiliates is growing, and the organization is now involved in the planning of a series of complex terror attacks on worldwide targets. After the Mumbai attacks, western intelligence agencies acquired the computer hard disc and email account of the LeT's communication chief, Zarrar Shah. These contained a list of 320 worldwide locations identified as potential targets for the LeT's upcoming terror attacks. Surprisingly out of the 320 worldwide targets, only 20 were located in India.

In recent years the LeT's mode of operation has changed significantly. Prominent members of the organization are aligning with other militant groups to orchestrate spectacular attacks. David Headley, the LeT's American cadre, revealed to his Indian interrogators that Abdur Rehman Hashim, alias Pasha, left the LeT in 2008 because of difference of opinion, and aligned with Illyas Kashmiri, the chief of the 313 Brigade, an off-shoot of Al-Qaeda. Subsequently, Pasha as well as a retired Major of 6<sup>th</sup> Baloach Regiment, Major Haroon alias Haroon-ul-Islam, and an ex-army officer of 10<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment and Captain Khurram, also an ex-army officer of 6<sup>th</sup> Baloach Regiment, who were responsible for the training of the LeT recruits, distanced themselves from the LeT and formed an outfit known as Jund-ul-Fida. Yet this split has not hindered the rise of the LeT. The commitment of its alumnae, whether working under the LeT banner or under that of another organization, has increased the fame and spread of the LeT. For instance, Abdur Rehman Pasha is acting as the bridge between the 313 Brigade and his former organization. Pasha has been using his contacts with the cadres of the LeT and his own network to recruit terrorist for the purpose of attacking worldwide targets.

The headquarters of *Jyllands-Posten*, the Denmark daily which published the cartoons of Prophet Mohammed, is one such prime target. Headley informed that the attack on Denmark is a matter of concern for both the LeT and Pasha. For the purpose of attacking the target in Denmark, Pasha sought funding and support from Illyas Kashmiri and hired LeT cadres like Tawahhur Hussain Rana, the LeT cadre from Canada, and David Headley. After the spectacular Mumbai attacks, the LeT was keen to orchestrate a similar attack on the *Jyllands-Posten*. But as the Mumbai investigation intensified, the LeT was forced to postpone the plan. The Denmark attack hit another roadblock when Pasha was arrested in Pakistan in July 2009. The Denmark attack plan surfaced after the arrest of David Headley in Chicago in October 2009. It was subsequently foiled by the Danish police after a tipoff from the counter terrorism division of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

1

The global threat from the Lashkar-e-Taiba is growing, and the organization is involved in planning terror attacks on worldwide targets

2

The headquarters of *Jyllands-Posten*, the Denmark daily which published the cartoons of Prophet Mohammed, is a prime target

3

In September 2010, intelligence agencies from the US, UK, France and Germany intercepted a plot to launch Mumbai style attacks in Britain, France and Germany



The fear of impending LeT attacks looming over many countries is evident from the failed attempt in Denmark and a successful attack in Pune, India. Before and after the Mumbai attacks, the LeT in association with the ISI employed Headley to conduct surveillance of a number of targets in India under the 'Karachi Project', and a couple of targets in Denmark under the 'Northern Project'. The February 2009 bombing of Pune was one such target scouted by Headley. Indian intelligence agencies received inputs that LeT attacks on at least ten Indian cities were imminent. The 'Karachi Project' has been described as part of an overall strategy adopted by the Pakistani army to use terror outfits as a crucial part of a strategic arsenal to weaken India's military and economic might. Similarly, the 'Northern Project' is the joint effort of the LeT, the 313 Brigade and Al-Qaeda to take revenge on the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*.

In September 2010, intelligence agencies from the US, UK, France and Germany intercepted a plot to launch Mumbai style attacks in Britain, France and Germany. British intelligence agencies confirmed that the plot was being hatched from Pakistan. The capture in Afghanistan in July 2010 of Ahmed Sidiqi, a militant of German origin, helped western intelligence uncover the conspiracy. It was found that Ilyas Kashmiri, a senior Al-Qaeda operative and leader of the 313 Brigade, had planned the plot. Considering the LeT's expertise in similar attacks and the close proximity of Abdur Rehman Pasha and David Headley with Kashmiri makes it difficult to discount the involvement of LeT in the planning of the attacks. Although European security agencies denied any imminent attacks on Europe, either from the LeT or Al-Qaeda, during September 2010 the Eiffel Tower in Paris was evacuated twice due to bomb scares. Hard intelligence data forced the CIA to coordinate drone strikes in Afghanistan to pre-empt possible terror plots.

State support and protection from Pakistani law has been encouraging the LeT to become more militant. The LeT wield a combination of military and political power, which makes the organization practically untouchable by Pakistani law. The threat from LeT is more apparent because of Pakistan's strategic policy decision and constant support to the organization. The former Foreign Secretary of India Shiv Shankar Menon, who later became the National Security Advisor, told the US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher that 'Pakistan had so far taken no irrevocable steps toward eliminating LeT as a threat to India and the world'. The civilian government in Pakistan is incapable of taking action against the LeT and the military has not yet made the strategic shift required to do so. It is important to remember that the terror organization Jaish-e-Mohammad was behind the assassination attempt on former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in 2003. But despite this, the Pakistani army has refused to crack down on the group, which remains operational and has grown more lethal. The relation in between the militants and military is so deep that *the Pakistan army paid wages to the LeT and sustained the organization. Political leaders are also helping nurture the LeT. For instance, Pakistani Muslim League Chief Minister Shabbaz Sharif tipped off the Jamat-ul Dawa, one new incarnation of LeT, about the UNSCR 1267 mandated asset freeze.*

The public appearance and free movement of the LeT chief in Pakistan is also unsettling. After his July 2010 anti-India rally in Lahore, in December the LeT chief Hafiz Saeed made his first public appearance in Islamabad since he was released from house arrest after the Mumbai attacks. The LeT chief shared a desk with hard line religious party Jamait Ulema-e-Islami leader Fazlur Rehman to oppose the Pakistani Government's move to repeal the country's controversial blasphemy law. As the LeT leader is the over-ground advocate of underground LeT cadres, and the ISI and military appear keen to help the LeT, it is very difficult to restrict impending LeT attacks. Closer international cooperation and intelligence sharing along with pro-active, if not pre-emptive, measures are needed to halt the evolving global LeT threat. •

# Growing Islamic Fundamentalism in Kerala

P. Rajamohan



1

Since the 1998 bombing in Coimbatore Kerala has witnessed a rapid increase in Islamic fundamentalist activities

2

Bombings, the seizure of explosives and hate propaganda, counterfeiting, communal violence and forced conversion are all on the rise

3

Fundamentalist groups like the Popular Front of India (PFI) have established links with other pan-Indian Islamic extremists groups and are forming a political consensus across South India

The Indian state of Kerala has been witnessing rampant Islamist fundamentalist activities. In recent years people hailing from Kerala have been involved in terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir, bomb blast incidents in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Hyderabad, Ahmadabad and Mumbai, the networking of sleeper cells for terrorist groups across India, and fashioning different forms of *Jihad* and funding for the propagation of fundamentalist ideas. As recent reports indicate that Islamists are running *Jihad* training camps inside Kerala and neighboring states, it is important to understand the growing trends in this region.

As a state, Kerala has the highest concentration of Muslims in the country – 24.7 per cent, according to census of 2001. Islam is the predominant religion in the northern districts of Malappuram, Kannur, Kozhikode, Palakkad, Waynad and Kasargode, which adjoin the neighboring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The Muslim population in Kerala grew 1.70 per cent in 2001 compared to the previous 1991 census, whereas the Hindu and Christian populations declined by 1.48 per cent and 0.32 per cent respectively.

Apart from instances of communal clashing, particularly in coastal areas, religiously motivated violence was minimal in Kerala until the 1998 Coimbatore bomb blast. Abdul Nazer Madani, the prominent leader of the Kerala-based Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS) - now defunct and reformed as the Peoples Democratic Party, connived with Tamil Nadu based Al-Ummah to orchestrate the Coimbatore blast. Since that attack, a number of events in Kerala have indicated that the state has been falling increasingly into the hands of Islamist fundamentalism. These include the arrest of major Kerala terror kingpins linked with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and other fundamentalist groups, the rise of indoctrination and terror training camps in Muslim dominant areas for *Jihad* against India, and increased violence against other communities and moderates.

Initially, Muslims in Kerala organized to safeguard their interests – particularly after the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition – and to counter the growing influence of Hindutva groups. But in the wake of the rise of consciousness over the internal and international challenges posed to Islam, particularly among the younger generation, numerous groups have emerged with an ideology that proclaims unity among Muslims and collective action to safeguard Islam, even through resort to *Jihad*. After the Indian Government's ban of earlier groups like the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and the Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS), new incarnations like National Development Front (NDF), People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Popular Front of India (PFI) have established linkages with other pan-Indian Islamist extremist groups.

So far, Kerala has only witnessed a series of low intensity bomb blasts, the seizure of gelatin sticks, detonators and other materials for making explosives, *hawala* money and production of counterfeit notes. But it is noteworthy that the investigations into the July 2010 chopping of the palm of a professor by PFI activists for framing a 'provocative' question about Prophet Mohammed has unearthed a mine of information regarding the growing tentacles of fundamentalism in the state. Pamphlets inducing hate, documents showing transactions of huge quantities of money, an Al-Qaeda CD showing the brutal maiming of westerners and Taliban style executions, have all recently been seized from the houses of PFI activists.

In fact the PFI, and its precursor the NDF, have been involved in many incidences of violence, instances of threatening police officials, and campaigns for imposing dress codes for Muslim women. The PFI vows to fight for the rights of Muslims, Dalits and other minorities. Politically this represents the confederation of three organizations: the Karnataka Forum for Dignity (KDF), the National Development Front in Kerala, and the Manitha Neethi Pasarai (MNP) in Tamil Nadu.

The latest concept of 'Love *Jihad*' to make the Muslim community more dominant in the state brings a new dimension to Islamist fundamentalism. Muslim youths belonging to various Islamist organizations have been luring Hindu and Christian girls and boys in the guise of romance and pressuring them to convert to Islam after forcing them to marry. The Kerala High Court observed that around 4,000 such marriages took place between 2006-2010 and ordered to probe on funding sources by Islamist organizations like the Muslim Youth Front, Popular Front, Campus Front, Smart Front and Muslim women's groups like Tasrin Millath, Shahal Falls.

But such events have failed to move either the police or the political establishment, which are seemingly wary of disturbing minority votes and communal equations through proactive action. Further, these organizations and their leaders have been evading strict actions because of their alliance with major political parties. These organizations have been growing stronger with the passage of funds from Pakistan and Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Dubai for their 'religious activities'. These indirect threats have become common occurrences in Kerala, and if the state mechanism continues to act as a silent spectator, the coalescence of sporadic eruptions into a major terrorist event in the near future is a distinct possibility. •

# Asian Conflicts Reports

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