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Occasional Paper Series

Shiism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan

Identity Politics, Iranian Influence, and Tit-for-Tat Violence

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Preface

As the first decade of the 21st century nears its end, issues surrounding militancy among the Shi'a community in the Shi'a heartland and beyond continue to occupy scholars and policymakers. During the past year, Iran has continued its efforts to extend its influence abroad by strengthening strategic ties with key players in international affairs, including Brazil and Turkey. Iran also continues to defy the international community through its tenacious pursuit of a nuclear program. The Lebanese Shi'a militant group Hizballah, meanwhile, persists in its efforts to expand its regional role while stockpiling ever more advanced weapons. Sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shi'a has escalated in places like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain, and not least, Pakistan.

As a hotbed of violent extremism, Pakistan, along with its Afghan neighbor, has lately received unprecedented amounts of attention among academics and policymakers alike. While the vast majority of contemporary analysis on Pakistan focuses on Sunni extremist groups such as the Pakistani Taliban or the Haqqani Network—arguably the main threat to domestic and regional security emanating from within Pakistan's border—sectarian tensions in this country have attracted relatively little scholarship to date. Mindful that activities involving Shi'i state and non-state actors have the potential to affect U.S. national security interests, the Combating Terrorism Center is therefore proud to release this latest installment of its Occasional Paper Series, *Shiism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: Identity Politics, Iranian Influence, and Tit-for-Tat Violence*, by Dr. Hassan Abbas.

This monograph is published as part of the CTC's Shi'a Militancy Program, established in 2008, which dedicates efforts toward investigating the real or potential emergence of Shi'a militancy, as well as its causes, nature, and potential implications for U.S. national security. *Shiism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan* is the fourth monograph published under the framework of the CTC's Shi'a Militancy Program. It follows the publication, in 2008, of *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and 'Other Means'* edited by Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman; *Sunni and Shia Terrorism: Differences that Matter* by Thomas F. Lynch III; and *Embattled in Arabia: Shiis and the Politics of Confrontation* by Toby Jones. This is the second of three

monographs to be published by the CTC that examine militancy among the Shia in a specific country. These three chapters are part of a forthcoming volume edited by Assaf Moghadam titled *Militancy in Shiism: Trends and Patterns in the Shia Heartland and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2011).

About the Author of *Shiism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan*

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Abbas' book Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror (M E Sharpe, 2004) remains on bestseller lists in Pakistan and India and was widely reviewed, including in the New York Times, Boston Globe, Far Eastern Economic Review, Hindu (India) and Dawn (Pakistan). Abbas' forthcoming book is titled Letters to Young Muslims on Science, Sovereignty and Sufis. He also runs WATANDOST, a blog that covers Pakistan and its neighbors as well as focusing on US relations with the Muslim world.

The opinions expressed in this report are the author's and do not reflect the official positions of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other U.S. government agency

Executive Summary

Since its founding in 1947, Pakistan has been accustomed to conflict, but in recent years the regime in Islamabad had to contend with new waves of militancy, including violence that directly challenges the country's leadership from within. Among groups involved in internal conflicts in Pakistan, Shia militant groups have received relatively scant attention, even though sectarian violence can have direct ramifications on the security of the country, and South Asia at large. This Occasional Paper examines the sectarian landscape in Pakistan, the growing potential for Shia-Sunni violence, and the implications of simmering sectarian tension for domestic Pakistani and regional security.

The Pakistani Shia community—the second largest in the world after that of Iran—has played an influential role in Muslim history and politics in the Indian sub-continent and in Pakistan in particular. Before the arrival of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq in 1977, the relationship between Pakistan's Shia and Sunni communities was mostly amicable. But Pakistan's fateful involvement in the Afghan-Soviet war of the 1980s, General Zia-ul-Haq's controversial 'Islamization' policies, and a sense of Shia empowerment in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 had the combined effect of limiting the Shia's freedom to practice their religion and challenging their loyalty to Pakistan. Those developments also contributed to the persecution of many Shia at the hands of a number of militant anti-Shia organizations. A minority of Shia groups turned to violence in order to defend the community, engaging in tit-for-tat terror attacks against militant Sunni groups. Henceforth, beginning in the late 1980s and continuing through the 1990s, Pakistan became the theater for a proxy Saudi-Iran war.

The September 11 attacks ameliorated the situation for the Shia, at least temporarily. In the aftermath of the attacks, Pakistan's then-President, General Pervez Musharraf, banned both Sunni and Shia sectarian militant groups. Since Musharraf's departure, some have expressed fears of a reemergence of anti-Shia militant groups, such as *Sipah-i-Sahaba* (SSP).

One of the most vulnerable elements of the Shia community are the Shia tribes of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where the Taliban and al-Qa'ida have been gaining ground in recent years, killing many Shia—especially in Parachinar (Kurram Agency). So far, the Shia response to these attacks has been relatively restrained, despite a number of Shia retaliatory strikes against local Taliban. Elsewhere, a banned Shia militant group called *Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan* (SMP) reportedly resurfaced in 2008 and 2009.

Pakistani Shia perceive the rising trend of sectarian attacks as a major threat to their identity—a vulnerability compounded by the failure of traditional Shia political movements to provide effective leadership. Whether the Shia will adopt a militant posture as a response to anti-Shia violence remains an open question. Though Shia have likely internalized lessons from the past regarding the futility of militancy, a resurgence of the SMP or other Shia militant groups cannot be altogether ruled out, especially if outside support should become available.

Western analysts can no longer afford to ignore the growing potential for sectarian violence in Pakistan, for uncontrolled sectarian violence can destabilize Pakistan and the region at large. Internally, sectarian groups prefer to conduct their attacks in the Punjab, the center of gravity of the country's military and political elite. Attacks against Pakistan's Shia are also bound to have regional implications, since they can further stoke tensions between Pakistan and its neighbor Iran, a Shia-majority state.

Introduction

Pakistan is home to the second-largest Shia community in the world. The only country with more Shia citizens is Pakistan's neighbor to the west, Iran. Consisting of approximately thirty million people, or about twenty percent of Pakistan's 170 million inhabitants, the Shia community has played an influential role in Muslim history and politics in the Indian sub-continent—and since 1947, especially in Pakistan.¹ Historically, South Asian Shias have been willing to embrace a distinct identity in order to defend their freedom to practice Shia religious rituals and traditions, even when this required occasional conflicts with other groups or state authorities. In the political arena, however, South Asian Shias have charted a cautious course more typical of a minority community: trying to remain in the mainstream, avoiding head-on collisions with other Islamic sects, and often aligning with liberal and democratic forces.

For decades, this approach worked fairly well. Before Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq—a conservative and religious Army general—took power in 1977, Shia-Sunni relations in the country were generally cordial and peaceful. Mixed marriages (among Muslim sects) were accepted openly, and it was considered normal for Sunnis to participate in Shia rituals, such as the *Muharram* processions and *majalis* gatherings that annually commemorate the death of the Prophet Mohammad's grandson Imam Hussain and his friends and family at the battle of Karbala in 680 AD.² However, Pakistan's fateful involvement in the Afghan-

¹ The term "Shia" in this essay refers primarily to the *Ithna Ashari*, or Twelver Shia. It should also be noted that the true percentage of Shia in Pakistan is a contentious issue and there exists a broad range of estimates. According to Vali Nasr, the Shia constitute between fifteen and twenty-five percent of the population. See 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* 34, no. 1 (February 2000), 139. Shahid Javed Burki, a renowned Pakistani economist, contends that twenty-five percent of Pakistan's population is Shia. See Shahid Javed Burki, *Pakistan: Fifty Years of Nationhood* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 208. Many Wahhabi sources in Pakistan, however, insist that the figure is closer to ten or fifteen percent. The anti-Shia militant group Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan once declared that the Shia constitute only 2.5 percent of the population of Pakistan; see *Zindagi Weekly Magazine* June 1991, 10.

² The processions are organized during Muharram – the first month on the Islamic calendar – because Imam Hussein and his seventy-two companions were martyred on the tenth day of that month.

Soviet war of the 1980s, General Zia-ul-Haq's controversial 'Islamization' policies, and a sense of Shia empowerment in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 all combined to transform that status quo. For the Shia, the results were disastrous: limits on their freedom to practice their religion, challenges to their loyalty to Pakistan, and persecution at the hands of a number of militant anti-Shia organizations. Consequently, according to the political scientist Mumtaz Ahmad, "Shiism in Pakistan became more centralized, more clericalist, more Iranianized, and more integrated with the international Shi'i community." At the same time, Ahmad suggests, Sunnis became "more Arabicized as a result of the mass migration of Pakistani labor to the Gulf states and the generous funding of Saudi Arabia to the Pakistani Sunni *madrasahs* and to the jihadi organizations."³

Depending upon their social and political status, different Shia groups responded to these difficult conditions in divergent ways. Many elite and politically-connected Shias opted to stay publicly silent in order to retain their access to the corridors of power, while their religious institutions started drifting towards financially beneficial relations with Iran. A minority of Shia groups took up arms to defend the community and engaged in tit-for-tat terror attacks against Sunni groups involved in the emerging sectarian conflict. In the process, Pakistan became a battleground for a proxy Saudi-Iran war in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan after 1994 provided a safe haven for anti-Shia militants while Islamabad watched as the country became enflamed in sectarianism.

The September 11 attacks temporarily led to an improvement of the situation for the Shia. In the aftermath of the attacks, Pakistan's then-President, General Pervez Musharraf, began his counterterrorism efforts by banning sectarian militant groups of both Shia and Sunni orientation. Although the results were mixed, it was the first time the government had effectively targeted local anti-Shia groups, and Musharraf's policy increased his popularity among the Shia of Pakistan. Since Musharraf's departure from the country's political scene in 2008,

³ Mumtaz Ahmad, "Shi'i Political Activism in Pakistan," *Studies in Contemporary Islam*, 5, no. 1-2 (Spring and Fall 2003), p. 64.

many Shia religious and community leaders have expressed fears of a reemergence of anti-Shia militant groups.⁴ Indeed, in recent years, the most notorious of anti-Shia groups, *Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP), which has also operated under the names *Millat-e-Islamia Pakistan* and *Ahl-i-Sunnat Wal Jamaat Pakistan*, has revived its anti-Shia propaganda through public events and publications.⁵ At the present time, perhaps the most vulnerable members of the Shia community are the Shia tribes of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where the Taliban and al-Qa'ida have been gaining ground in recent years. Surrounded on all sides by Taliban militants or their sympathizers, these tribes find themselves in a siege-like situation that has led to many killings of Shia, especially in the Parachinar area of the Kurram agency.⁶ So far, the Shia response to these attacks has been generally muted, although some Shia retaliatory strikes against local Taliban did take place.⁷ Elsewhere, a banned Shia militant group called *Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan* (SMP) reportedly resurfaced in 2008 and 2009, when its pamphlets and posters could be found in the two largest cities in the country, Lahore and Karachi.⁸

In order to understand the present situation and analyze the prospects of Shia activism and potential radicalization in Pakistan, a historical approach is of critical value. Part I of this monograph first looks at the history of the Shia in the Indian sub-continent to understand their political and social orientation. It then scrutinizes the Shia role in the creation of Pakistan. Part II analyzes Shia politics in the formative years of Pakistan and explores Shia participation in social and religious developments in the country from 1947 to 1977. Part III probes the post-1977 period, when the Shia-Sunni rivalry took on dangerous proportions and

⁴ Interviews with various Shia political and social leaders in Lahore and Islamabad (Pakistan) in June 2008.

⁵ For instance, see "SSP Vows to Establish Caliphate Worldwide," *Daily Times*, 8 April 2006; Fareed Farooqui, "SSP Holds First Major Public Rally in 8 years," *Daily Times*, 1 March 2008; Fareed Farooqui, "Thousands Turn Up for Sipah-e-Sahaba Gathering," *Daily Times*, 28 June 2008.

⁶ Jane Perlez and Pir Zubair Shah, "Power Rising, Taliban Besiege Pakistani Shiites," *New York Times*, 26 July 2008; see also Suba Chandran, *Sectarian Violence in Pakistan's Kurram Agency*, Pakistan Security Research Unit, Brief No. 40, 22 September 2008.

⁷ For instance, see Nirupama Subramanian, "100 die in Shia-Sunni clashes," *The Hindu*, 2 September 2008.

⁸ Khan, "Banned Outfits Resurface in City;" and Khan, "Threat of sectarian violence looms over city," *Daily Times*, 27 April 2009.

became complicated by foreign influences. Profiles of the leading religious, political and militant Shia organizations are also included in this segment. Finally, Part IV examines contemporary Shia trends in the country and evaluates the impact of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq on the Shia of Pakistan.

Part I: The Historical Roots of South Asian Shia

Islam came to the Indian sub-continent in numerous waves beginning in the late seventh century. Muslim traders and Sufi saints introduced Islam to various parts of the region even before Muslim conquerors from Central Asia established their power base in northern India. Islam's early proponents in South Asia were quite tolerant of local cultural traditions like poetry and music, and encouraged assimilation and co-existence.⁹ Sufi saints also stood above sectarian identity. They neither proselytized nor confronted others on matters of religious discourse. Love for humanity was their message and inclusivity was their method. That said, in a number of important ways Sufis were closer to Shia views than Sunni, considering their reverence for *Ahle-Bayt* (family of the Prophet) in general and their association with Ali ibn Abi Talib, who represents, for Shia, the central figure of Islam after the Prophet Muhammad. Indeed, almost all Sufi orders trace their spiritual lineage to the Prophet Muhammad through Ali. Sufis believe that Ali inherited from Muhammad the saintly power known as *wilayah*, which makes possible the spiritual journey to God. In Sufi teachings, Ali is often referred to as the 'patron saint.'

The first Shia in the Indian sub-continent were of Arab origin and settled in the Sind region in the ninth century.¹⁰ According to Annemarie Schimmel, a renowned German scholar of Islam, from roughly the 13th to the 15th century, Shia influence was strong in many independent small states and regions within the larger Indian sub-continent, including Delhi, Malwa, Jaunpur, Kashmir, Bengal, Deccan (Bijapur and Golkanda), Carnatic, and Gujrat.¹¹ By the early 16th-century, at the beginning of the era of Mughal rule of the Indian sub-continent, Muslim elites in the region were generally either Shia Persian nobles or Sunni Afghans, along with less influential Indian Muslim converts.¹² As a result of the

⁹ For a detailed study on the subject, see Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

¹⁰ For details, see, K. R. Malkani, *The Sindh Story* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1984).

¹¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Sub-continent* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1980), 36-74. See especially chapter 2 ("The Time of Independent States – The Growth of Shia Islam").

¹² John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (The New Cambridge History of India) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 53.

generally liberal attitude of various Mughal kings, Shia institutions strengthened during the Mughal period, which lasted from 1526 until 1857.¹³ However, Shia-Sunni tensions became pronounced during the reign of the conservative Sunni Mughal emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir (1659-1707).¹⁴ According to the historian Syed Athar Abbas Rizvi, by the turn of the 19th century, these divisions “developed into full-scale polemical warfare, each side accusing the other of being heretics and infidels.”¹⁵

This rivalry was also fueled, in part, by the puritanical Wahhabi movement in Arabia led by Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792). An influential Islamic scholar named Shah Waliullah led a branch of this movement in Mughal India. He wrote letters addressing many Muslim rulers and notables of the Indian sub-continent, calling for harsh measures against Hindus as well as Shia, including a ban on the Hindu festival *holi* and the Shia *Muharram* events.¹⁶ Shah Waliullah believed that Shias were the real power behind the Mughal throne, and he was also very critical of the Mughal practice of appointing Hindus to important administrative positions. In his view, the only effective prescription for restoring the supremacy of Islam in India was to break the power of Hindus and curb Shia influences.¹⁷ He was not the first influential proponent of such ideas. Earlier in the Mughal period, Shaykh Ahmed Sirhindi (1564-1624), popularly known as Mujaddid Alf Sani, a leading Muslim scholar at the time, had proposed that Sunnis cut off relations with Shia, but Mughal rulers had frustrated such designs.¹⁸ Today, the writings of these two scholars are often quoted by conservative theologians associated with Sunni extremist groups in Pakistan.

¹³ For details, see Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India*, Vol. 1, 199 – 221.

¹⁴ Aurangzeb became the king after killing his elder brother Shah Shuja, a Shia, and his eldest brother and heir apparent, Dara Shikoh, a mystic with Shia inclinations. He also fought against the Shia states of Golkonda and Bijapur in the South in the later part of his reign. See, Schimmel, *Islam in Indian Sub-continent*, 104.

¹⁵ Rizvi, *Shah abd'l Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihad* (Canberra: Marefat Publications, 1982), 3.

¹⁶ Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁸ Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India*, Vol. 1, 399.

Nevertheless, Shia political strength continued to grow in the empire. During the 18th century, the Shia-ruled provinces of Bengal and Awadh in the Mughal Kingdom emerged as centers of Shia learning and activism. They also financed many development projects and mosques in Iraq thus strengthening links between Shia in South Asia and those in the Middle East.¹⁹ Owing to the prominence of the Shia community in Awadh, many of its practices and traditions became popular among Shia communities in different parts of the empire. Some of these practices were inspired by local Hindu rituals and were deemed controversial, even by Shia religious scholars. According to the historian Sandria Freitag, Hindu influence “helped create a Shi’i tinged traditional culture” that was trans-communal.²⁰ Other important ritualistic influences came from Iran. For instance, the Iranian practice of chest beating during the *Muharram* commemoration was introduced in India by the Shia religious scholar Syed Dildar Ali Nasirabadi in the late 18th century, while the Iranian practice of holding *Zuljinah* processions²¹ was introduced in Lahore by Shia politician and philanthropist Nawab Ali Raza Khan Qizilbash as late as the 19th century.

The Urdu-speaking Shia immigrants who moved from the north of India to West Pakistan in 1947 brought these traditions with them, and even today these religio-cultural practices distinguish immigrant Shia in urban areas of Sindh and parts of Punjab from those living in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP, which in April 2010 was renamed Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province) and Baluchistan.²² These immigrants mostly settled in Karachi, Hyderabad, and in the vicinity of Lahore, leading to a significant increase in the Shia population in these

¹⁹ Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shiite Islam* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 63, 80-81.

²⁰ Sandria B. Freitag, *From Community to Communalism* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1989), 115-117.

²¹ According to the historical narratives, *Zuljinah* was the name of the faithful horse of Imam Hussain, whose return to the Imam’s family quarters from the battleground of Karbala – with blood stains on its forehead – informed the family members about Imam’s death. During every Muharram commemoration, Shia mourners in South Asia recreate that scene in their Ashura procession by adorning a horse with colorful garments and swords. See Mariam Abou Zahab, “‘*Yeh matam kayse ruk jae*’ (How could this *matam* ever cease?): Muharram processions in Pakistani Punjab,” in Kurt A. Jacobsen, *South Asian Religions on Display* (London: Routledge, 2008), 104-114.

²² Interview with Maulana Tilmiz Hussain, a leading Shia scholar from Pakistan, New York, August 2008.

areas. In Karachi alone, a city of roughly 12 million, at present over 20,000 Shia processions and 45,000 *majalis*—religious gatherings mourning the tragedy of Karbala—are arranged during the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharram.²³ These Shia immigrants are generally more educated than the local Karachiites – a contrast with Shia communities in the rest of the country, especially in rural areas of Punjab, which have lower literacy rates than the national average. Notwithstanding, many acclaimed poets of the 18th and 19th centuries, including Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, Mir Anis, Meer Taqi Meer, Mirza Rafi Sauda, and Khawaja Mir Dard, were all Shia.²⁴

The collapse of the Mughal Empire in the nineteenth century and the corresponding rise of British imperial power in India profoundly altered the political dynamics of the region.²⁵ In this changing scenario, the Shia elite developed working relations with the new British rulers. British forces had conquered the Shia-ruled Bengal province in 1757 and defeated the Shia governor of Awadh in 1764. Nevertheless, Shia leaders were able to win important concessions from the British. For instance, the British government allowed endowment transactions between Awadh and Shia scholars (*mujtahids*) of Iraq.²⁶ Consequently, by the end of the 18th century, the British agent in Baghdad became a distributor of Awadh's largesse to the *mujtahids* in Najaf and Karbala.

An important development of the British imperial era was the founding of the Aligarh Muslim University in Lucknow. One of its key founders was Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), a leading Muslim reformist. The university produced a new class of Muslim scholars and political activists who played a crucial role in the creation of Pakistan. Among Syed Ahmed's Shia supporters and colleagues

²³ Faraz Khan, "Muharram Arrangements: List of 5,000 Terror Suspects Prepared," *Daily Times*, 22 December 2008.

²⁴ Their collective role in the growth of Urdu as a lingua franca of Indian Muslims is well recorded – but, significantly, most of them wrote poetry in Persian, as well."

²⁵ The British-owned East India Company had gradually established its control in parts of Mughal India beginning in 1757 and took over completely in 1857, after deposing the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar.

²⁶ For details, see Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shiite Islam* (London: I.B Tauris, 2002), 94-98.

were renowned educationists and reformers like Sayyid Husayn Bilgrami, Major Sayyid Hasan Bilgrami, Maulvi Chiragh Ali, Mohsin ul Mulk (who later became Sunni), Justice Sayyid Ameer Ali (author of the famous book *The Spirit of Islam*), and Maulana Karamat Husayn.²⁷

Many teachers and alumni of Aligarh University were central participants in the All India Muslim League, which was founded in 1906 in Dhaka, which is now the capital of Bangladesh. The League was the first political party exclusively representing the interests of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent. Despite the fact that many prominent Shia were among the founders of the League, a Shia-Sunni political split of sorts occurred when a number of Shia political activists and religious scholars established the All India Shia Conference in 1907, in response to the creation of the League.²⁸ According to the British scholar Francis Robinson, secular participants took the lead in setting the agenda of the initial meetings of the Shia Conference. Within a few years, however, conservative Shia *ulema* (scholars) took charge and began emphasizing the need for religious education in government schools. This turn of events discouraged the secular Shia members of the conference, who started leaving the organization and later joined the Muslim League.²⁹ As the sociologist Hamza Alavi wrote, “given the fact that leading Shias...were active in the Muslim League instead, the Shia Conference did not make any headway.”³⁰ Hence, by the early twentieth century, Shia participation in the national political process was linked with mainstream Muslim groups and sectarian agendas were secondary at best. During the *Khilafat* movement, which aimed to prevent the British from dismantling the Ottoman caliphate in 1920s, Shia and Sunni religious leaders worked together despite theological differences over the concept of the caliphate.³¹

²⁷ Ibid., 404-428.

²⁸ Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Sub-continent*, 217.

²⁹ For details, see Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 277-278.

³⁰ Fred Halliday and Hamza Alavi (eds.), *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan* (London: Monthly Press Review, 1988).

³¹ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 106.

The Role of the Shia in Pakistan's Creation

The Pakistan movement, spearheaded by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, started gaining momentum in 1940. According to credible historical records, Jinnah was a Shia, though quite secular and non-sectarian in his worldview.³² This fact was known among his peers but it had little or no impact on his political standing. As Phillips Talbot, a U.S. naval officer who worked in British India as a journalist, wrote in 1948: "Intense political zeal was more characteristic of Jinnah's career than personal religious practice. A member of a small Shiite sect in a country whose Muslims are predominantly Sunnis, he once described himself to the author as a 'rational' believer in Islam."³³ Interestingly, many of Jinnah's close political associates and a number of major financiers of the Muslim League were Shia.³⁴ According to Vali Nasr, other important leaders, such as Khawaja Nazimuddin (who became Governor General of Pakistan after Jinnah's death) and Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan (Pakistan's first prime minister) were also Shia.³⁵ However, in a 1940 letter to a prominent member of the Shia community, Jinnah rejected the idea of making particular accommodations to Shia to encourage their participation in the League: "We must so organize the Muslim League that justice is done to every sect and section inside it. Then as regards the liberty of religious observances and beliefs for Shias, surely it is quite elementary that, if the Muslim League organization is worth anything, it must see that no infringement of that liberty is allowed..."³⁶

³² Ibid., 88. For further evidence, see Mohammad Wasi Khan, *Tashkeel-e-Pakistan Main Shiian-e-Ali Ka Kirdar Vol. II* [The Role of Shias in the Creation of Pakistan] (Karachi: Idara-e-Mehfil-e-Haideri, 1983), 436-488.

³³ Phillips Talbot, "The Rise of Pakistan," *Middle East Journal* 2, no. 4 (October 1948), 384.

³⁴ These included Raja Mohammad Ameer Khan of Mahmudabad, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Mirza Abol Hassan Ispahani, Seth Mohammad Ali Habib (founder of Habib Bank), Price Kareem Agha Khan (leader of Ismaili Shias) and Lady Nusrat Haroon (wife of Abdullah Haroon).

³⁵ Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 88.

³⁶ Quoted in Andreas Rieck, "The Struggle for Equal Rights As a Minority: Shia Communal Organizations in Pakistan, 1948-1968," in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (eds.), *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political Culture* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 269-270.

The complete text of the letter was not made public until decades later, but some of its parts were published in 1946 in *Razakar*, a pro-Shia magazine. In those passages, Jinnah expressed regret that the Shia leader to whom he was writing “was still working in the direction which is not likely to benefit the Shia,” and insisted that the “proper policy for the Shia is to join the League wholeheartedly.”³⁷ Those Shia who differed with Jinnah became members of the All Parties Shia Conference (APSC), which in 1945 passed a resolution rejecting the idea of Pakistan and decided to cooperate with the Indian National Congress.³⁸ These leaders argued that major Shia centers were located in Hindu-dominated parts of India—for example, Lucknow—that were highly unlikely to become part of Pakistan, and therefore opted to join mainstream Indian politics.³⁹

Although most of the conservative Islamic parties of British India were very critical of Jinnah and the demand for the creation of Pakistan, none of their leaders publicly raised sectarian objections against Jinnah. Clearly, Jinnah’s rallying cry for an independent Pakistan was attractive to members of every Muslim sect in British India. This is not to say that the Shia lacked a distinct identity in the pre-partition political scenario. In fact, they were quite conscious of it. The Shia-Sunni rivalry, however, was passive and largely limited to very conservative religious circles. In a majority-Hindu region, this was perhaps a natural development.

However, linkages between Shia scholars of the area with clergy in Iran and Iraq were well established due to centuries of regular interaction. According to David Pinault, a leading scholar of Islam in South Asia, for Shias, “India from early on represented...a place of refuge from Sunni caliphal persecution.”⁴⁰ In contrast, writing about Islam in India in 1947, the British historian W. C. Smith, pointedly

³⁷ Ibid., 270. Also see, *Razakar* (Lahore), 1 March 1946, 4.

³⁸ ‘Resolution adopted by the Council of Action of the All-Parties Shia Conference, held at Poona, 25 December 1945, in S.R. Bakshi, *The Making of India and Pakistan: Ideology of the Hindu Mahasabha and Other Political Parties*, Vol. 3 (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1997).

³⁹ Lucknow is popularly known as the “the City of Nawabs.” Nawab was a high title given to Muslim nobles. It is also known as Shiraz-i-Hind, a reference to the Iranian city of Shiraz, and as the “Constantinople of India,” a reference to its diversity.

⁴⁰ David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 59.

justified why he had little to say about the Shia in his study: "We have not given the Shi'ah group separate treatment in our study of the changes wrought in Islam by modern social processes, because there is nothing in the differences between Sunni and Shi'i fundamentally relevant to those processes. The two groups diverge over what answers are to be given to questions which today do not arise."⁴¹

⁴¹ W.C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India* (Lahore: Minerva, 1947), 399.

Part II: The Shia in Pakistan, 1947-1977

On the eve of Pakistan's emergence as an independent state on August 14, 1947, it was faced with many serious challenges, including a severe lack of resources, Indian hostility, and the limited availability of professionals who could establish and run state institutions. Constitutional democracy and religious pluralism were the professed goals of the leadership. In his first address to the country's constitutional assembly, Jinnah proclaimed: "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed; that has nothing to do with the business of the State... We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State."⁴²

At the outset, sectarian issues were minimal, even irrelevant, in the state building process. That changed within a few years, when some conservative elements in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, led by Maulana Shabbir Ahmed Usmani, the founder of the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, started demanding inclusion of certain Islamic provisions in the Objectives Resolution of 1949—a document meant to provide a framework for constitution-making in the country. This was predictable, as the secular leadership had played the religion card during the last stage of the independence struggle to mobilize the Muslim masses of British India. The religious leaders were well aware of that recent history. Nevertheless, the influence of religion as a factor in public-policy formulation still remained weak during Pakistan's early years, and sectarianism was not a major issue.

The Ahmediyya community, accepted as a minority sect of Islam at the time of the country's independence, became the first minority group to be targeted for sectarian violence when anti-Ahmediyya riots broke out in 1953 in Lahore, leading to the first imposition of martial law in the country's history, which was limited to Lahore. Shia-Sunni clashes were quite rare before the partition of

⁴² For full text of the speech, see

http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent_address_11aug1947.html

British India in the areas that now constitute Pakistan, and that remained the case in the early decades of the nascent state.⁴³

All Parties Shia Conference and Idara-e-Tahafuz-e-Haquq-e-Shia

During the early period of statehood in the 1950s, the size and number of Shia religious processions in Pakistan increased. This was one result of the influx of hundreds of thousands of Shia refugees from India, who strengthened small Shia communities all across Pakistan, especially in the urban centers of Sindh and Punjab.⁴⁴ To cater to Shia religious and political interests in Pakistan, a successor to the All Parties Shia Conference (APSC) was established soon after 1947. Another important organization with similar goals was *Idara-e-Tahafuz-e-Haquq-e-Shia* (ITHS), the Organization for Safeguarding the Rights of Shia, which was established in 1953. Both APSC and ITHS quickly grew to become nationwide organizations, often competing with each other to represent the demands and grievances of the Shia when dealing with the government. These organizations became more relevant as Shias faced resistance from increasingly vocal Sunni conservatives who objected to the Shia *azadari* (mourning ceremonies) and *Muharram* processions.⁴⁵

ITHS held its first annual gathering in 1953 to put forth a number of Shia demands, including changes to portions of public-school textbooks that dealt with Islam and requests for better license-granting processes for *Muharram* processions. The first serious incident of Sunni-Shia violence erupted in the Punjab province in 1956, when a number of Sunni religious leaders demanded a ban on *Muharram* processions, which Shia *ulema* declared to be their “lifeblood.”⁴⁶ The crisis—which remained local and resulted in no fatalities—was resolved amicably after political leaders and government functionaries acted swiftly to facilitate negotiations between the two groups. But the episode provoked great

⁴³ Frédéric Grare, “The Evolution of Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan and the Ever-Changing Face of Islamic Violence,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 30, no. 1 (2007).

⁴⁴ Rieck, “The Struggle for Equal Rights As a Minority,” 273.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.

anxiety among Shias and highlighted the need for more effective leadership within the community.

However, Shia political unity proved to be a challenge, as the two main groups representing the community—the ITHS and the APSC—had similar views about Shia interests, but differed on the question of methods. ITHS believed in street-level agitation to express its concerns, whereas APSC opted to seek consensual agreements with the government as well as mainstream Sunni groups.⁴⁷ Though the two approaches may appear complementary, the differences proved divisive and there was little cooperation between the two groups.

Both organizations were financed by Shia landlords in Sindh and Punjab, industrialists from Karachi, and wealthy trading families in Lahore. Many of these financiers were politically active at the national level and open to pragmatic compromises to ensure their presence in the power centers of the state. That accommodationist approach put them at odds with the *ulema* within the ITHS and APSC leadership, who sought more tangible political gains to advance their goal of expanding religious rights for Shia. In 1957, *ulema* in the two organizations jointly adopted a resolution to demand reserved seats for Shia in national and provincial legislatures. The proposal did not receive much support—indeed, its main effect was to further expose the divide between the *ulema* and the landed Shia aristocracy.

The Ayub Era and the Changing Dynamics of Shia-Sunni Relations

In 1958, General Mohammad Ayub Khan rose to power through a bloodless military coup after overthrowing civilian rulers who stood accused of delaying elections and failing to develop a constitutional consensus. Ayub Khan was progressive on issues relating to religious diversity and sought to avoid sectarian rivalries by suppressing religious political forces and supporting progressive Muslim scholars. Nevertheless, Khan's reign witnessed a number of significant instances of anti-Shia violence. In June 1963, Sunni extremists launched an attack on a *Muharram* procession in Theri, a small town near Khairpur in Sindh

⁴⁷ Ibid, 275-6.

province, leading to serious sectarian tensions.⁴⁸ According to an International Crisis Group research report on sectarianism in Pakistan, “It was an act of mass killings. The dead bodies were thrown into a well to cover the massacre. Had it not been for timely media exposure and strong intervention from police, the event might never have come to public knowledge.”⁴⁹

Later that year, a less intense attack in Lahore further roused sectarian antagonism. All told, around one hundred Shia were killed in the two attacks. The government persuaded the Shia to restrict their *Muharram* procession routes, and sectarian tensions remained confined to these two locations.⁵⁰ Official permission for more processions and the issuance of new licenses also became rare, creating a sense of frustration in the Shia community that continues today, when district-level administrators and law enforcement discourage processions in order to avoid the increased police manpower that would be necessary to secure such events from terrorist attacks.

The anti-Shia violence of 1963 had a major impact on Shia thinking and, consequently, on the community’s organizational politics. In the wake of the violence, ITHS and APSC lost significant support due to a perception that their activities had not produced more security for the community. An ‘All-Pakistan Shia Ulema Convention’ was organized in 1964 in Karachi to deliberate upon these issues. In a display of solidarity, hundreds of *ulema* from various Shia camps participated. By the end of the convention, Syed Muhammad Dihlawi had emerged as a consensus leadership figure. A migrant from India, Dihlawi was known for his effective oratory and religious scholarship. He was unanimously proclaimed *Quaid-e-Millat-e-Jaffaria* (Leader of the Nation of Shia). The Karachi convention demanded full freedom and security for *azadari* funeral processions, separate religious instruction for Shia in public schools, and self-administration of Shia trusts, shrines and property (*awqaf*).⁵¹ A similar convention was held the same year in Rawalpindi, providing further momentum to Shia demands. A

⁴⁸ For a Shia perspective of the attacks, see <http://www.shaheedfoundation.org/tragic.asp?Id=13>

⁴⁹ “The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan,” *International Crisis Group*, Asia Report No. 95, 18 April 2005.

⁵⁰ For details, see *Razakar* (Lahore), 1 January 1964.

⁵¹ Interview with Maulana Tilmiz Husain, New Jersey, 12 October 2008.

committee representing the Shia also met President Khan in 1964 and reached out to many other senior officials of the state. In the two years that followed, Dihlawi and his supporters successfully mobilized thousands of supporters to attend street protests intended to publicize Shia demands.

Another internal Shia rivalry also came to the fore during these years as a number of prominent Shia political leaders, including some leaders of ITHS and APSC, took issue with Dihlawi's approach and even used their influence with government authorities to discourage Dihlawi. Apparently, their leadership positions were threatened by this emerging group of religious scholars.⁵² Undeterred, Dihlawi's group began issuing ultimatums to the government to accept their demands. In 1966, a Shia Demands Committee (SMC, for *Shia Mutalabat Committee*) was established for the purpose by Dihlawi supporters.

The new activism forced the Ayub government to take the Shia seriously and led to the constitution of a government board to consider Shia demands and submit recommendations. The board was comprised of five Sunni and five Shia leaders, including Muzaffar Qazilbash and Syed Dihlawi. After meeting in June 1967, the board unanimously agreed to a set of proposals that incorporated most of the demands made by 1964 *ulema* convention. Only a few months later, a rival "Sunni Conference" surfaced to challenge the Shia demands.⁵³ Nevertheless, the government agreed to the board's recommendations, satisfying the Shia for the time being. (Tellingly, it took another five years for the recommendations to be translated into government policy.)

Another important development for the Shia community was the emergence in 1967 of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a Shia with secular credentials⁵⁴ whose father, Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto, was also a renowned Shia politician. The PPP was a progressive political party that attracted millions of poor Pakistanis with its social welfare policies and promise of *Roti, Kapra aur*

⁵² For details, see Rieck, "The Struggle for Equal Rights as a Minority," 278-279.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 280-281.

⁵⁴ Stanley Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His Life and Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 17, 158. See also Gilles Kepel, "Shia Power and the West," *The American Prospect*, 14 August 2006.

Makan (food, clothing, and housing) for all. ITHS, SMC, and many smaller Shia political groups enthusiastically joined the PPP in the late 1960s.⁵⁵ Owing in part to its pluralistic message and in part to the Shia identity of its founding members, the PPP ultimately gained the support of a majority of Shia. The PPP also made shrewd use of coded messages intended for Shia voters: its election symbol in the 1970 election was a sword, an image that Bhutto and other party leaders referred to as ‘Al-Zulfikar’ during the election campaign. ‘Al-Zulfikar’ was the title associated with Ali’s sword – a powerful emotional symbol for Shia.

As the political identity of Pakistan’s Shia community developed during this era, it increasingly came into conflict with the Shia religious establishment. Mumtaz Ahmad, in his study of Shia political activism, maintains that the “Shi’i religious establishment until the late 1970s was pro establishment – and staunchly pro monarchy in Iran – politically quietist, and ultraconservative in its socio cultural outlook.”⁵⁶ Ahmad argues that this essential conservatism drove Shia youth away from the religious establishment and toward the liberal and radical alternatives provided by left-wing ideologies. Consequently, modern-educated Shia intellectuals were disproportionately represented in the pro-Marxist Progressive Writers Movement, left-wing trade unions, progressive students’ unions, and the Pakistan Communist Party.⁵⁷ This leftward trend was also influenced by the fact that Bhutto had championed socialist causes, such as nationalization of industries, during his initial years in office. Moreover, it’s also important to note that the political left offered more opportunities for Shia participation, because the right-wing parties and groups were Sunni-dominated.

The Emergence of the Imamia Student’s Organization (ISO)

The most significant development relating to Shia activism and radicalization in this period was the emergence of the Imamia Students Organization (ISO) in May 1972, which marked a turning point for the mobilization of the Shia youth of Pakistan and ultimately led, in some instances, to militancy.

⁵⁵ Philip E. Jones, *The Pakistan People’s Party: Rise to Power* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 296.

⁵⁶ Mumtaz Ahmad, “Shia Political Activism in Pakistan,” 62.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

Until the late 1960s, Shia students did not engage in student politics as Shia *per se*.⁵⁸ However, *Islami Jamiat-e-Tulaba* (IJT, the Islamic Society of Students), the student wing of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, one of the leading religious political party of the country, had increased its presence and activities on college campuses by recruiting members for its parent organization. Inspired by the IJT's example, a handful of Shia medical and engineering students in Lahore, under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Naqvi, invited five smaller Shia groups to merge and establish the Imamia Students Organization. (The word *imamia* refers to the twelve Shia Imams.) Gaining traction would prove to be a difficult task for the ISO since, at that time, most Shia students were associated with left-leaning groups or the PPP's student wing. In addition, the leadership of the APSC and the ITHS strongly opposed the creation of ISO, fearing that it would be a socialist-leaning organization that would challenge IJT and create an unnecessary rift.

Slowly and gradually, ISO overcame this opposition by appealing to Shia who were disillusioned from the politics of the left and whose families were religiously-oriented. Naqvi's closeness to Shia *ulema* influenced the group's approach, and ISO was able to effectively reach out to Shia students in the major urban centers of the country—Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, Peshawar, and Karachi—by combining religious and social aims. The ISO organized *azadari* in college campuses during *Muharram*, helped poor students by providing free text books, facilitated lodging, and even provided scholarships for Shia students.⁵⁹ By 1975, many smaller Shia student groups had come under the umbrella of ISO and the group's influence and reach was substantial. ISO's profile was raised further when it actively started working for the implementation of the government's earlier decision to adopt changes in Islamic studies textbooks that amounted to the inclusion of a Shia syllabi for Shia students. The government finally introduced the changes in 1975. The following year, the group garnered

⁵⁸ Mariam Abou-Zahab, "The Politicization of the Shia Community in Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s," in Alessandro Monsutti, Silvia Naef and Farian Sabahi (eds.), *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 99.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 100. For further details, see the official website of ISO:
<http://www.isopakistan.net/home.htm>

significant attention with a highly visible campaign to publicize the mistreatment of Shia clergy by the Baathist regime in Iraq.

Part III: Heightening Sectarianism and the Politicization of the Shia, 1978-2010

Domestic politics and regional events in the late 1970s transformed Pakistan in significant ways. First and foremost among them was the fall of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and the rise of another military dictator, General Zia ul Haq, in July 1977. Earlier that year, Bhutto had won an election whose results were contested by an umbrella group of Sunni religious political parties that called themselves the *Pakistan Qaumi Ittehad* (PNA, the Pakistan National Alliance) and took to the streets in large numbers. Never before had religious political parties exerted so much influence in Pakistan. The protests led to riots and violence in major cities, creating chaos that was exploited by General Zia. After taking the reins of government, Zia tried to legitimize his unconstitutional coup in the name of *Nizam-e-Mustafa* (the system of the Prophet Mohammad) and promised Islamic reforms.⁶⁰ Zia's dubious leadership credentials and his attempts to justify controversial policy decisions by referencing Islam destroyed the sectarian harmony that the country enjoyed in the first thirty years of its existence. Not long after Zia's coup, the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet forces and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, both of which began in 1979, allowed him to cement his power and exacerbated sectarianism within Pakistan. Yet, almost overnight, Zia was transformed in the eyes of Western governments, from pariah to celebrity. His new admirers hoped that Zia could help halt the Soviet march in Afghanistan through 'jihad', while also helping to contain a Shia-led revolution in Iran.

Zia instructed Pakistan's army and intelligence organizations to begin supporting Afghan 'freedom fighters', with the United States and Saudi Arabia providing significant financial and military aid. The Soviets were their primary targets, but the 'jihadis' who were groomed by Pakistan turned out to be anti-Shia forces as well—a predictable consequence of the Saudi funding of *madaris* in Pakistan. The *Madrassa* network quickly expanded in order to produce new recruits for the Afghan battlefield. The children of Afghan refugees and Pashtuns of the North-West Frontier Province and the tribal belt in Pakistan became the

⁶⁰ For details on the Zia era, see Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), 89-132.

main recruits for these *madrassas*. According to Kamal Matinuddin, a retired Pakistani general, General Zia “established a chain of *deeni madaris* [religious schools] along the Afghan-Pakistan border... in order to create a belt of religiously oriented students who would assist the Afghan Mujahideen to evict the Soviets from Afghanistan.”⁶¹

In the Shia community, the link between *madrassas* and militancy is far less significant than in the Sunni community. The Shia madaris in Pakistan are organized through the *Wafaq-al-Madaris al-Shia* (WMS), an umbrella monitoring institute that manages a total of 415 *madaris*.⁶² (To put that number in perspective, consider that the most prolific Sunni institute, the *Wifaq ul Madaris Arabiya*, which is associated with the Deobandi school of thought, operates 8,191 *madaris*.⁶³). The *mujahideen* produced by the *madaris* in 1980s for the Afghan-Soviet war belonged predominantly to the Sunni sect. Although a handful of future Shia militant leaders were products of the Shia madaris of rural Punjab, most of the small number of Shia who fought the Soviets were middle-class urban youth who had little involvement with *madrassa* networks.

Iran's Influence

The Iranian revolution had a strong emotional and psychological influence on Pakistan's Shia, as it gave them a new visibility and a renewed impetus for identity assertion. The zealous emissaries of Tehran's revolutionary regime actively helped Pakistan's Shia to organize. In the religious sphere, many traditions took on Iranian characteristics, diluting the highly ritualistic South Asian imprint. On the other hand, religious symbolism was increasingly used to legitimize political action, and Iranian slogans against the United States and Israel were adopted verbatim and chanted after Friday prayers in many

⁶¹ Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon: Afghanistan, 1994-1997* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14.

⁶² Kees van den Bosch, Bilquis Tahira, and Tahseenullah Khan, “Islamic Education in Pakistan: Introducing Government Approved Subjects,” *LINS Report 2008-02*, Oslo University College, April 2008.

⁶³ Khaled Ahmed, “Second Opinion: ‘Ramay Sahib’: Punjabi with an Intellect – Khaled Ahmed’s Review of the Urdu Press,” *Daily Times*, 9 February 2006.

Pakistani Shia mosques, accompanied by the distribution of large, colorful posters of Ayatollah Khomeini.⁶⁴

Muhammad Qasim Zaman, a leading scholar on the role of the *ulema* in South Asia, maintains that many Arab regimes “felt much threatened by the revolutionary rhetoric of the Iranian regime and by its professed (or perceived) desire to ‘export’ the revolution,” and “at least some of their patronage of the Sunni *ulama* seems to have been motivated by the effort to garner the latter’s support against Shia Iran.”⁶⁵ Pakistani Deobandi and *Ahle Hadith ulema* (which are ideologically close to Saudi Wahhabism) and their *madrassas* were the major recipients of this patronage—which, in many instances, funded anti-Shia teachings and literature and consequently fueled a cycle of sectarian violence in Pakistan.⁶⁶ At the same time, Saudi Arabia also spent millions of dollars to fund mainstream religious activities in Pakistan to reach average Pakistani Muslims. These included paying for new mosques, free hajj trips, and access to religious educational facilities in Saudi Arabia.

The fall of the Shah of Iran and the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini galvanized Pakistan’s Shia, with ISO becoming the first Shia organization to publicly accept Khomeini as *marja-e-taqlid*—the source of emulation for Shia—in 1979. At the time, a great majority of the Shia in Pakistan followed Iraqi Ayatollah Al Khoi as their *marja*. This was the beginning of a significant shift, abetted by the assertiveness with which the new Iranian leadership supported Shia groups in South Asia, the Gulf, and the Middle East.

In the case of Pakistan, *Khana-e-Farhang* (Iranian cultural centers) began actively distributing works of leading Iranian *ulema* among Pakistan Shias and offered hundreds of scholarships to Pakistanis interested in pursuing religious studies in Qom and other religious centers in Iran. According to one estimate, about 4,000

⁶⁴ Zahab, “‘*Yeh matam kayse ruk jae’* (How could this *matam* ever cease?),” 104-114; author’s personal observation during 1980s in Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

⁶⁵ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 177.

⁶⁶ Stephen Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Saud From Tradition to Terror* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 184 -186.

Pakistani Shia students received these scholarships and in turn were introduced to *Vilayat-e-Faqih*, Khomeini's revolutionary concept of the rule of the jurist.⁶⁷ Upon their return, these enthusiastic students traveled to Shia centers all across Pakistan and narrated their experience of witnessing a major transformation of Iran guided by Shia clergy. This effort inspired many Shia but simultaneously created a dilemma for those traditional Shia clergy in Pakistan who largely remained allied with Iraqi *marja* as a result of their training and education in Iraqi *Madrassas*. Senior Pakistani Shia clerics were certainly happy to see the overthrow of the secular Shah of Iran, but they were inclined to remain apolitical and preferred a quietist approach.

Consequently, a struggle ensued between pro-Iranian students and the traditional Shia clergy of Pakistan. These students also began to challenge some cultural aspects of Shia rituals and suggested a number of reforms to the way that the Shia observed religious events, especially relating to *matam* (self-flagellation). For instance, the students wanted to discourage and even ban certain forms of *matam*, especially ones involving the use of knives, chains and razors. The clergy felt threatened by this challenge. The Shia mosques and *Imam Bargahs* (Houses of the Imam) remained largely under the control and influence of the clergy, but *Muharram* processions were increasingly controlled and managed by ISO and young graduates of Iranian *Madrassas*, who proved to be better organized and more effective.⁶⁸

The Formation of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-fiqh-e-Jaafria (TNFJ)

The Shia clergy reemerged as an assertive group in 1979, when General Zia started making concerted efforts to introduce Hanafi Sunni laws in the country in order to justify his military takeover and appease his supporters in the Sunni political parties.⁶⁹ The Shia clergy reacted strongly to this effort, arguing that it

⁶⁷ Mariam Abou-Zahab, "The Politicization of the Shia Community in Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s," 101.

⁶⁸ Interview with Maulana Hasan Gardezi, Lahore, July 2008.

⁶⁹ On the Zia regime's Islamization policies, see Afzal Iqbal, *Islamisation in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1986); Shahid Javed Burki and Craig Baxter, *Pakistan Under the Military: Eleven*

amounted to the imposition of Sunni laws over Shia. This was problematic as the Shia *fiqh* (school of thought) differs on certain points from Sunni *fiqh*, as it does, for example, on laws governing inheritance. Mufti Jafar Hussain, a leading Shia cleric, resigned in protest from the official Council of Islamic Ideology.⁷⁰ A graduate of Shia religious institutions in Lucknow and Najaf, he was among the most influential Shia religious figures in Pakistan. In response to such gestures, a number of Sunni political parties, including *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam* (JUI), began employing aggressively anti-Shia rhetoric, declaring many Shia practices to be in violation of the Islamic belief system.⁷¹ Another Sunni party, *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Ahle Hadith* (JUAH), organized demonstrations against the 1979 revolution in Iran, at which protesters shouted anti-Khomeini slogans.⁷²

Mufti Jafar Hussain called for a national Shia convention to discuss Zia's controversial Islamization policies. The meeting was held in the Punjab city of Bhakkar in April 1979 and led to the founding of *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-fiqh-e-Jafaria* (TNFJ, the Movement for the Implementation of Jafaria Law).⁷³ The convention threatened the Zia government with a national protest movement if the following demands were not met:⁷⁴

- A) Recognition of Shia law by the courts and the appointment of Shia *ulema* to judicial positions
- B) Formation of a Shia *Waqf* (endowment) Board
- C) Lifting of restrictions on *azadari*
- D) Shia representation in education-policy committees

years of Zia ul-Haq (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991); and Charles Kennedy, "Islamization and Legal Reform in Pakistan, 1979-89," *Pacific Affairs* 63, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 62-77.

⁷⁰ For a profile of Mufti Jafar Hussain, see <http://www.islam-laws.com/marja/muftijafar.htm>

⁷¹ Mumtaz Ahmad, "Revivalism, Islamization, Sectarianism, and Violence in Pakistan" in Craig Baxter and Charles

H. Kennedy (eds.), *Pakistan, 1997* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 108-109.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷³ *Fiqh-e-Jafaria* is a school of Islamic jurisprudence which is traced back to Imam Jafar-as-Sadiq, the sixth Imam in the Twelver Shia tradition, who lived in the 8th century. It is also known as *Ithna Ashari* school.

⁷⁴ See "Allama Mufti Jafar Hussain," <http://www.islam-laws.com/marja/muftijafar.htm>. See also V.J. Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

E) Official invitations to Shia *ulema* from Iran and Najaf to teach in Pakistan, just as Wahhabi clergy from Saudi Arabia were encouraged to do

According to Hussain Haqqani, the TNFJ also reportedly discussed the creation of a popular Islamic army, a proposal viewed as dangerous by the army-run Pakistani state.⁷⁵

Zia was unmoved and continued with his agenda. In June 1980, he introduced an ordinance requiring the payment of *Ushr* (a religious tax on farm produce) and *Zakat* (religious charity). Shias responded negatively, as they believe in giving charity privately, especially in cases where they do not recognize the Islamic credentials of a government. *Wifaq-i-Ulema-i-Shia* (the Federation of Shia Clerics), a small group of Shia *ulema*, and TNFJ organized a march on Islamabad. The march became an instance of major Shia mobilization when ISO also joined hands with these groups to show solidarity with a common cause. In July 1980, the groups led 100,000 Shias in a three-day siege of the federal secretariat in Islamabad. The demonstration was as unexpected as it was unprecedented.⁷⁶ According to a senior officer of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the Shia leadership requested Ayatollah Khomeini to intervene during the protests. Khomeini reportedly responded by sending a private message to General Zia, urging him to be fair in dealing with Shia concerns.⁷⁷ Zia reluctantly caved in and signed an agreement with the Shia leadership, exempting Shia from mandatory deduction of *Zakat* from their bank accounts. For the Shia groups, this represented a major victory.

According to Vali Nasr, however, the protests over the *Zakat* ordinance also had some negative repercussions for the Shia, since it revealed the community's

⁷⁵ Hussain Haqqani, "Weeding out the Heretics: Sectarianism in Pakistan," *Current Trends in Islamic Ideology* 4, no. 1 (2006).

⁷⁶ Mariam Abou-Zahab, "The Politicization of the Shia Community in Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s," 103. According to Vali Nasr, the figure was closer to 25,000. See Vali Nasr, "The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulama in Society and Politics," *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (February 2000), 155. Pakistani Shia, however, routinely quote figures closer to 100,000.

⁷⁷ Brigadier Syed A. I. Tirmazi, *Profiles of Intelligence* (Lahore: Fiction House, 1995), 272-283.

increasing reliance on Tehran to organize and assert its demands. That relationship created a certain degree of uneasiness within the Pakistani military—one that would eventually create many problems for the Shia.⁷⁸

Pakistan's Shia leadership felt empowered after their encounter with Zia. Conservative Sunni groups were appalled at the Shia assertiveness, however, and resorted to severe criticism of Shia on the grounds that *Zakat* is a major pillar of Islam and that refusal to pay this charity tax constituted a failure to abide by Islamic principles. Soon, some extremist Sunnis started denouncing the Shia as heretics, justifying their claim by referring to 19th century *fatwas* issued by a few Deobandi *ulema*. An extremist Wahhabi group, *Sawad-e- Azam Ahle-e-Sunnat* (Greater Sunni Unity), funded by Saddam Hussein's Iraq, formed in Pakistan around 1980, advocating that the Shia officially be classified as non-Muslims and that Pakistan declare itself a Sunni state.⁷⁹ In pursuance of similar goals, Ehsan Elahi Zaheer, who led a Saudi-funded religious organization, published a booklet titled *Shias and Shiism*, in which he denounced the Shia as infidels and Zionist agents.⁸⁰ The booklet was translated into English and Arabic and was distributed around the world by Saudi embassies.⁸¹ The anti-Shia backlash culminated in violent attacks on Shia in Karachi in 1983, pushing some Shia groups to seek financial and security assistance from Iran.

The Rise of Allama Arif Hussain Al-Hussaini

In the midst of this wave of anti-Shiism, the Shia community lost its most prominent leader, Mufti Jafar Hussain, who died in 1983. Hussain had served as a unifying figure, and his death provoked a split within Shia ranks between traditional clergy and modernists (or reformists). The reformists were represented by the politically-ascendant ISO, along with a new band of Qom-educated clerics led by an Iran-educated, charismatic cleric named Allama Arif

⁷⁸ Vali Nasr, "The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulama in Society and Politics," 155.

⁷⁹ Mehtab Ali Shah, "Sectarianism – A Threat to Human Security: A Case Study of Pakistan," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Relations* 94, no. 382 (October 2005), 617.

⁸⁰ Mariam Abou-Zahab, "The Politicization of the Shia Community in Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s," 104.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

Hussain al-Hussaini. This alliance was opposed by the pro-establishment traditionalists, led by Syed Hamid Ali Moosavi, who opposed ISO's radical views and disapproved of its links to Iran. At a TNFJ convention in February 1984, Allama Arif Hussaini was elected the *Quaid-e-Millat-e-Jafaria* (leader of Shia). A group of traditional clerics refused to accept the results and broke away from TNFJ to establish their own organization, led by Syed Moosavi.⁸² Moosavi was acceptable to Zia and received a congratulatory message from the embassy of Iraq in Pakistan. Meanwhile, Hussaini received the blessings of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Allama Hussaini was a Turi Pashtun from Parachinar, the capital of the Kurram agency in the FATA. The Turi tribe of Pashtuns, with its Turkic origins, is the only tribe in Pakistan that is almost completely Shia. The Turis, who dominate the Kurram agency, are known for their well-developed social and customary legal traditions, known as *Turizoona*. Hussaini was the first Pashtun to attain a national leadership role among the Shia, as most of the leading Shia *ulema* in Pakistan were either from Punjab or the immigrant community in Karachi (the *muhajirs*) and had obtained their religious degrees from Lucknow and Najaf. Hussaini, in contrast, had studied in Najaf and Qom, and was known to be close to Ayatollah Khomeini.⁸³ In 1985, he was appointed the *Wakil* (representative or attorney) of Ayatollah Khomeini in Pakistan. Historically, the absence of local *marja-e-taqlid* (sources of emulation) in Pakistan meant closer links with religious authorities in Najaf. That changed in the early 1980s when Qom replaced Najaf as the more influential Shia center of learning. Around the same time, Iran also became a major recipient of Pakistani *khums*, a form of charity given by affluent Shia equal to one-fifth of their net savings, which is used to promote Shia education, ceremonies and welfare projects.⁸⁴

⁸² For details, see Afak Haydar, "The Politicization of the Shias and the Development of the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafaria in Pakistan," in Charles H. Kennedy (ed.), *Pakistan* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 75-93.

⁸³ For Hussaini's life story, see his biography, T.R. Khan, *Safir-e-Noor* (Lahore: Al Arif Academy, 1994).

⁸⁴ Mariam Abou-Zahab, "The Regional Dimension of Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan," in Christophe Jeffreot (ed.), *Pakistan: Nationalism Without a Nation* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 115-128.

Hussaini can be considered the architect of Shia radicalism in Pakistan. His ability to mobilize the Shia community transformed its political orientation, ending the dominance of quietism.⁸⁵ Hussaini's defiance of the Zia regime, anti-imperialist rhetoric, and opposition to elders in the tribal areas added to his popularity among ordinary Shia and won him the loyalty of the ISO cadres. His leadership of TNFJ transformed the Pakistani Shia community in many ways. However, Hussaini also tried to attract the attention of Sunnis by advocating unity among Muslims in order to fight tyranny and establish a just Islamic order. Such efforts failed to bear fruit, as sectarian rifts deepened with the passage of time. Continued outbreaks of anti-Shia violence, including attacks in Quetta in 1985, were a sign that Shia activism would not go unchallenged.

Indeed, President Zia himself began looking for ways to curb Shia assertiveness. In 1985, his intelligence agencies authorized and sponsored Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, Vice President of JUI in Punjab, to establish a new anti-Shia outfit called *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (SSP, the Army of the Friends of the Prophet). Jhangvi launched a virulent anti-Shia campaign in Jhang city, his hometown in Punjab, where Shia landlords were in a strong political position. The small traders and poor farmers of the area joined the campaign, largely motivated by economic concerns.⁸⁶ This constituency was already ripe for an anti-feudal movement and Jhangvi took advantage of this opportunity by providing a sectarian dimension to the existing class conflict. Conservative Deobandi and *Ahle-Hadith* madrasahs in the area provided many activists and leaders for this cause.⁸⁷ Anti-Shia graffiti and the distribution of pamphlets by SSP throughout the country spread sectarian hostility and created an environment conducive to violence.

In the wake of these developments, Hussaini decided to convert TNFJ into a religious political party in 1987. This move resulted in intra-Shia tensions, since many Shia wanted TNFJ to remain limited to the religious sphere. Apparently, Saudi Arabia was alarmed by this development, as reflected by the deportation

⁸⁵ Mumtaz Ahmad, "Shi'i Political Activism in Pakistan," 66.

⁸⁶ Mukhtar Ahmed, *Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang* (Colombo: Regional Center for Strategic Studies, 2001).

⁸⁷ Nasr, "The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulama in Society and Politics," 142-143.

of ISO leader Dr. Muhammad Naqvi and several other Pakistani Shia leaders from Saudi Arabia during the hajj in 1988. Shia-Sunni clashes in Hussaini's hometown of Parachinar in 1987 put further pressure on him, as well as on TNFJ. In an interview with Maleeha Lodhi, Hussaini blamed both the Zia government and the United States for inciting and encouraging Shia-Sunni clashes.⁸⁸ Indeed, the Zia government was seriously concerned about the direction the TNFJ took under Hussaini, for political as well as security reasons.

On August 5, 1988, Hussaini was assassinated in Peshawar. Allegedly, a retired army officer named Captain Majid Gilani orchestrated the murder at the behest of President Zia. (Gilani had once served on Zia's personal staff).⁸⁹ Gilani was arrested and prosecuted in the case but was acquitted in court. Many in the Shia community also openly accused the governor of the NWFP, Lt. Gen. Fazle Haq, of also being involved in the murder of Hussaini. Haq was killed by unknown gunmen in 1991.

Twelve days after Hussaini's death, President Zia's plane crashed as a result of sabotage, killing him and dozens of senior army officers, along with the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan and the U.S. Defense Attaché, who were also on board. Many observers, including some officials of the ISI, initially attributed the crash to Shia groups who longed for revenge, a theory based on the fact that two pilots of Zia's plane were Shia.⁹⁰ This interpretation, however, was largely discarded and the episode continues to be shrouded in mystery.⁹¹

The Birth of Sipah-e-Mohammad

After Hussaini's assassination, Allama Sajid Naqvi took over the reins of TNFJ and lowered the profile of the group. Less ambitious and more realistic than his

⁸⁸ Maleeha Lodhi, "Pakistan's Shia Movement: An Interview with Arif Hussaini," *Third World Quarterly* [Vol. #10], [issue #2], (1988), 806-17.

⁸⁹ Khaled Ahmed, "The Death of Zia-ul-Haq," *Criterion Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (April-June 2007), http://www.criterionpk.com/Vol2_No2/printer/article4.html.

⁹⁰ See Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism*, 125-126.

⁹¹ For different theories on the subject, see Edward Jay Epstein, "Who Killed Zia?," *Vanity Fair*, September 1989; Mohammad Hanif, *The Case of Exploding Mangoes* (New York: Knopf, 2008); and Barbara Crossette, "Who Killed Zia?," *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 3, (Fall 2005)

predecessor, Naqvi entered into an alliance with the PPP for the 1988 national elections. In 1993, he also changed the name of the party to *Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan* (TJP, the Jafri Movement of Pakistan) deftly removing from its name the word *nifaz*, which in Urdu means ‘implementation.’

The new approach and name were intended to make the party appear less provocative to Sunnis, but this strategy attracted controversy and led to further splits in the party. In 1993, a number of Shia hardliners who believed in responding to Sunni militant groups in tit-for-tat actions established a militant group called Sipah-e-Mohammad (SMP, the Army of Mohammad). Under the leadership of Ghulam Raza Naqvi and Murid Abbas Yazdani, SMP members believed that TJP was too moderate and failed to provide security to the community.⁹² Many radical elements from within the ISO also joined the ranks of SMP and Iranian financing was made available.⁹³

SMP justified its use of violence by arguing, in the words of its leadership that “We are tired of picking up corpses. Now, God willing, we will clear all accounts. We will erase the name of Sipah-e-Sahaba from the annals of history”.⁹⁴ SMP soon launched a full-fledged retaliatory battle against SSP and its militant faction, *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LEJ, the Army of Jhangvi), assassinating many top SSP leaders in the process.⁹⁵

Iranian support was crucial to the SMP’s activities, in part out of a retaliatory strategy: in December 1990, members of SSP had assassinated Iran’s Counsel General in Lahore and mounted an attack on the Iranian cultural center in that city. Some SMP militants moved to Iran once Pakistan’s law enforcement and intelligence agencies started targeting the group more aggressively in the early 1990s.⁹⁶ The Punjab Police believes that over the years, Iran hosted many Pakistani Shia militants on the pretext of providing political asylum. Some of

⁹² Abou-Zahab, “The Politicization of the Shia Community in Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s,” 109.

⁹³ Amir Rana, *A to Z of Jihadi Organizations in Pakistan* (Lahore: Mashal Press, 2004), 414-417.

⁹⁴ Quoted by Amir Rana, *Ibid.*, 414.

⁹⁵ Some analysts believe that SMP served as the military branch of TJP. That is unlikely, given that TJP condemned SMP’s violent activities.

⁹⁶ Interview with S.M. Ali, a former activist of SMP, Lahore, July 2008.

these were placed on Pakistan's 'most wanted' terrorist lists.⁹⁷ Still, Iranian support was not enough to change the fact that, in comparative terms, the SMP's Sunni rivals in the SSP and LEJ were more resourceful and better organized. Indeed, while the Sunni groups enjoyed support in many different regions of Pakistan, the SMP—headquartered in a suburban area of Lahore—drew most of its strength from the Punjab province.

In an effort to stem the growing sectarian violence, a number of religious leaders from various sects established an organization called *Milli Yekjehti Council* (MYC, the National Unity Council) in March 1995. The MYC aimed to resolve the conflict between Sunni and Shia militants in part by framing a 17-point code of conduct, which included highly idealistic goals such as a commitment to shun violence, the withdrawal of sectarian legal cases, and cooperative work towards sectarian harmony.⁹⁸ SMP chief Maulana Yazdani agreed to abide by the code, but he was opposed by a faction within the group—a disagreement that cost him his life in 1996. He was reportedly assassinated on the instructions of his main rival within SMP, Ghulam Raza Naqvi, who was arrested for the crime by police, which seriously diminished SMP's effectiveness.⁹⁹ Naqvi, though never convicted of the said crime, is still in prison facing pending charges of his alleged involvement in 30 murder cases and dacoity.¹⁰⁰ That year also witnessed an intensive security-service crackdown on SMP that led to the destruction of the group's headquarters at Thokar Niaz Beg in the suburbs of the city of Lahore. According to a 2005 report in the *Herald*, a prominent and credible Pakistani magazine, the final blow to the organization came when "the Punjab's Crime Investigation Department (CID) infiltrated or bought off the core circle of SMP leader Allama Ghulam Raza Naqvi, completely decimating the SMP."¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Interview with a retired Pakistani police officer who profiled Shia militants in 1990s, Lahore, 18 July 2009. For details of official most-wanted lists, see http://www.punjabpolice.gov.pk/most_wanted/?id=155

⁹⁸ Mahmood Zaman, "Blood, Sweat and Tears", *Dawn*, 11 September 1997.

⁹⁹ "Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan, Terrorist Group of Pakistan," South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/terroristoutfits/SMP.htm>

¹⁰⁰ "Pakistan Bans 25 Militant Organization", *Dawn*, 6 August 2009.

¹⁰¹ A.A. "Mixed Signals," *Herald*, January 2005.

A retired army officer, Major Ashraf Ali Shah, continued to operate a few cells of the group independently. But by the mid-1990s, the SMP had already lost most of its Iranian support. According to French scholar Mariam Abou Zahab, a leading expert on Pakistan's Shia, "Iran stopped financing Pakistani Shias in 1996 because it was counter-productive and perhaps also because it feared a backlash of Sunni militancy fuelled by Pakistani Sunni extremists in Iranian Baluchistan."¹⁰² (Some of the Iranian funds were diverted to Shia religious institutions.) Iran may also have decided to scale back its support after LEJ led a devastating attack in 1997 on the Iranian cultural center in the Pakistani city of Multan. By that point, the Iranian-backed Northern Alliance was battling the Pakistan-supported Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and Iranian officials might have calculated that one anti-Pakistan front was enough.

Despite the SMP's neutralization, SSP and LEJ activities continued, and the groups began to enjoy some level of official recognition. In 1995, a prominent SSP leader, Sheikh Hakim Ali, was named Minister of Fisheries in the Punjab because the PPP needed the SSP's support to achieve a majority in the provincial government.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the Sunni militant groups hardly renounced violence. In the late 1990s, around one hundred Shia professionals in Karachi were gunned down as part of a targeted killing campaign carried out by SSP and LEJ.¹⁰⁴ As a result of these kinds of attacks, many Shia professionals began moving to the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada.

A number of small Shia militant outfits emerged during the 1990s, partly to fill the gap left by SMP's disintegration. Kashmir-based *Hizb-ul-Momineen* (Party of the Pious); Punjab-based *Pasban-e-Islam* (Defenders of Islam), a splinter of SMP; Voice of Shia; and *Sipah-e-Imam-e-Zamana* (Army of the Awaited Imam) are the most prominent in this category. They responded to the attacks on Shia citizens as forcefully as they could, conducting retaliatory attacks against the SSP leadership. Yet the membership of these groups is estimated to have been only

¹⁰² Mariam Abou-Zahab, "The Regional Dimension of Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan," 117.

¹⁰³ Grare, "The Evolution of Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan," 127-143.

¹⁰⁴ For details, see "Pakistan: No Protection Against Targeted Killings," Amnesty International (2002), available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA33/030/2002/en/dom-ASA330302002en.html>

in the hundreds, so their impact was rather limited. Very little public information is available about the present status of these outfits.

In August 2001, General Pervez Musharraf officially banned SMP along with LEJ, in an attempt to put a stop to sectarian violence. In 2002, Musharraf also banned the Shia party TJP along with the Sunni party *Sipah-e-Sahaba*.¹⁰⁵ Previous governments failed to take such steps, partly out of a fear of losing support from key political constituencies. Nevertheless, militants remained engaged in sectarian killings as late as 2004, when a notorious SSP leader, Azam Tariq, and an important Sunni religious figure, Mufti Shamzai, were assassinated. SMP's Hammad Naqvi, who was allegedly involved in these killings, was arrested by police in 2007 in Karachi.¹⁰⁶ He was granted bail in 2009 but was again arrested in early 2010 and is currently awaiting trial.¹⁰⁷

In 2004, a credible media report suggested that there had been a resurgence of SMP in Punjab.¹⁰⁸ A few media reports also indicate that Shia militants belonging to SMP might be involved in some recent killings, including those of SSP leader Sher Ali Haideri in August 2009 and LEJ leader Mazharul Hassan in April 2009.¹⁰⁹ (In the case of Sher Ali Haideri, police investigations later concluded that his killing was the result of personal enmity, and no SMP members were named as suspects.¹¹⁰) It is worth pointing out, however, that almost all the latest reports of SMP resurgence and reactivation were published by a single newspaper, the *Daily Times*. The *Daily Times* is one of the reputable English-language dailies in Pakistan. But the credibility of this assessment is reduced by the fact that no other major newspaper—for example, *Dawn*, *The News*, or *The Nation*—reported

¹⁰⁵ Both parties quickly changed their names and continued to operate openly as Tehrik-e-Islami Pakistan (TIP, the Movement of Islam) and Millat-e-Islamia Pakistan (MIP, the Nation of Islam), respectively.

¹⁰⁶ Hasan Mansoor, "Suspect in High Profile Murder Cases Held," *Dawn*, 5 March 2007.

¹⁰⁷ "Accused sent on remand for 3 days", *The Nation*, 23 February 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Amir Rana, "Vengeance, Frictions Reviving LJ and Sipah-e-Mohammad," *Daily Times*, 7 April 2004.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, see Faraz Khan, "Sectarian Violence Threatens Karachi as Banned Outfit Resurfaces," *Daily Times*, 27 April 2009; Faraz Khan, "Banned Militant Outfits Said Reopening Offices in Karachi," *Daily Times*, 29 June 2008; Faraz Khan, "Mastermind of Banned Religious Outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Gunned Down," *Daily Times*, 16 April 2009.

¹¹⁰ For details, see "Ali Hyderi, aide dead in Khairpur firing," *The News*, 19 August 2009.

such a development. It cannot be ruled out, of course, that some members of the original SMP are active underground. Yet, officials in Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) believe that SMP—even if functional at some level—currently has very limited involvement in terrorist activities in Pakistan, at least in comparison to other terrorist organizations.¹¹¹ Anti-Shia groups, on the other hand, have been much more lethal and active, as is evident from a series of bombings targeting Shia *Imam Bargahs* and leaders in Quetta, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Dera Ismail Khan, and Peshawar throughout the Musharraf years.¹¹²

In a remarkable development, the Shia party TIP became a member of the *Muttihada Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA, the United Action Front), an alliance of six religious political parties that ruled the North-West Frontier Province from 2002 to 2007 and acted as a strong opposition alliance in the federal legislature during the same years. The alliance also included both of the factions of the Sunni Deobandi group JUI. Although forged as a matter of political expediency, this multi-sect alliance was an effort to confront sectarianism and strengthen the vote of the right wing in the country.

The TNFJ faction led by Syed Moosavi, which split from the Hussaini-led group in 1983, continues to function separately. But its activism is largely apolitical and confined to religious issues.¹¹³ Other, small activist groups—such as Jafferia Alliance, the All Pakistan Shia Action Committee, and the Shia Ulema Council—also exist, but have a more limited support base. Media reports have also mentioned an organization called the *Baqiyatullah* (Islamic Institute) Group, an offshoot of TJP formed by Jawad Naqvi and Muzaffar Kirmani in 1990s to counter SSP—but it appears to be a small group that fizzled out.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ E-mail interview with an official of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), 22 December 2009.

¹¹² For an updated and detailed chronology of anti-Shia attacks, see "Incidents Involving Sipah-e-Sahaba," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/terroristoutfits/SSP_tl.htm. Details about some of these anti-Shia terror attacks are available at a website maintained by website of the pro-Shia Shaheed Foundation: <http://www.shaheedfoundation.org/Eventlists.asp>

¹¹³ The TNFJ website is located at <http://www.tnfj.org/>

¹¹⁴ "Pakistan's Militant Islamic Groups," *Sindtimes.com*, 29 March 2007.

Part IV: Prevailing Scenario and Rising Tensions

Many Pakistani Shia considered Musharraf's nine years in government (1999 to 2008) as a positive period. Despite the fact that Shia centers and individuals continued to be targeted by militant groups throughout these years, the Shia appreciated Musharraf's crackdown on anti-Shia militant organizations and his counterterrorist operations against al-Qa'ida.¹¹⁵ The consensus belief among Shia appears to be that, under Musharraf, sectarian groups were no longer supported by Pakistan's intelligence organizations, which is possibly true. Musharraf's closeness to the Sindh-based, Urdu-speaking immigrants' party *Muttihada Qaumi Movement* (MQM) was also a factor, as this party has significant support from the Shia community in Karachi and Hyderabad.

The Shia did, however, have one serious complaint against Musharraf. Azam Tariq, the leader of the anti-Shia SSP, was permitted to run for the 2002 national elections, even though he was in detention at the time for involvement in various terrorist acts. Having won a seat in the National Assembly, he was released from prison. Following his release, he supported the government, which desperately needed his vote to form a ruling coalition. To retain Tariq's critical support, Islamabad even ignored warrants for his arrest, including those issued under anti-terrorism laws in July 2000.¹¹⁶ (Tariq was assassinated, most likely by Shia militants, in October 2003.) Over time, such political compromises, engaged in by political and military rulers alike, continue to be very damaging for sectarian harmony and security in the country.

The killing of scores of Shia in the Kurram agency and the NWFP by Taliban and al-Qa'ida forces tentatively shifted Shia support towards the security forces involved in counter-terrorism operations in the Pakistani-Afghan border areas.¹¹⁷ The army's massive operation in 2007 against Red Mosque militants, known for their anti-Shia activities, was also comforting to the Shia, although they remained

¹¹⁵ Interviews with many Pakistani Shias in Lahore and Islamabad, June 2008.

¹¹⁶ *Unfulfilled Promises : Pakistan's Failure to Tackle Extremism*, International Crisis Group, 16 January 2004, 12.

¹¹⁷ Fareed Farooqui, "Shias Protest against Taliban," *Daily Times*, 2 September 2008.

silent on this subject out of fear of reprisals.¹¹⁸ Various Shia groups across the country also supported the anti-Taliban military operations in Swat Valley in June 2009 and in South Waziristan in October 2009—operations which also produced a significant increase in Sunni support for the anti-Taliban campaign.

One of the potential factors contributing to ongoing anti-Shia violence in Pakistan is the growing operational guidance provided by al-Qa'ida and the Taliban to Pakistan's Sunni sectarian groups, especially SSP and LEJ.¹¹⁹ Taliban propaganda materials distributed in the FATA and the NWFP routinely contain anti-Shia slogans. Increased linkages between the so-called Punjabi Taliban (with significant SSP and LEJ participation) and the Pakistani Taliban based in the FATA area also encouraged such discourse.¹²⁰

Pakistani Shia have been especially angered in recent years over a series of killings of Shia in the Kurram agency of the FATA and their economic blockade at the hands of the Taliban.¹²¹ As mentioned earlier, the Turi tribe of Kurram is Shia and has significant presence in the agency and in surrounding areas. (The Orakzai and Bangash tribes in the FATA region also include a significant number of Shias.) Even some of the Sunni families of the area, who had often helped Shia in conflicts, were attacked by pro-Taliban elements.¹²² According to the *New York Times*, the Shia of the Kurram agency maintain that "because they are stopping the militants from entering Afghanistan, the Taliban are attacking them," whereas Sunni groups allege that Iran provided weapons to Shias in the area.¹²³ Two small Shia militant groups in the Kurram agency, Kurram Hezbollah and Mahdi Militia, are also active. According to analyst Mansur Khan Mehsud, however, "they focus exclusively on defending Shia interests, not on attacking

¹¹⁸ See, "Editorial: Lal Masjid and Fazlullah," *Daily Times*, 27 October 2007.

¹¹⁹ B. Raman, "Al-Qaeda's New Trojan Horse," *Outlook India*, 10 November 2007.

¹²⁰ For details, see Hassan Abbas, "Defining the Punjabi Taliban Network.," *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 4 (April 2009), 1-4.

¹²¹ Jane Perlez and Zubair Shah, "Power Rising, Taliban Besiege Pakistani Shiites," *New York Times*, 26 July 2008.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

the Pakistani state or U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.”¹²⁴ The crisis in Kurram agency also provoked the Shia in Karachi, some of whom threatened the government in September 2008. Unless the government cleared the area of Taliban, a number of Karachi-based Shia warned, they would march towards Kurram agency to help the besieged Shia there.¹²⁵ The government acted belatedly, as always, improving the situation only marginally. Consequently and alarmingly, in August-September 2010, even Taliban from North Waziristan tried to get involved in tribal cum sectarian dispute resolution in the Kurram area, with the aim to secure a safe passage for their movement into Afghanistan.¹²⁶

With attacks also targeting Shia in Orakzai agency of FATA and in the NWFP districts of Dera Ismail Khan, Hangu, and Kohat, the nature of the Shia response is also changing. For instance, after a suicide bomber killed at least 30 Shia and injured another 157 during the funeral of a murdered Shia leader in Dera Ismail Khan in February 2009, the Shia community staged protests all across Pakistan, in major urban centers as well as small towns. The *Daily Times* analyzed the situation as follows:

For some years now, the ISO has been lying low after realising that avenging Sunni violence is counterproductive... In due course, the Shia religious leadership adopted a new strategy of moving closer to the Sunni clergy in the hope of persuading the sectarian extremists to exempt them... The latest Shia protest all across Pakistan may be signaling a change of policy through sheer desperation. If this happens, Pakistan will see more bloodshed than it can take and survive.¹²⁷

Around the same time as the protests, some important militants associated with the banned SSP and LEJ were gunned down, presumably by Shia militants. Chaudhry Muhammad Yousuf, one of the founding members and a former

¹²⁴ Mansur Khan Mehsud, “The Battle for Pakistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kurram,” New America Foundation, April 2010.

¹²⁵ Farid Farooqui, “Shias Protest Against Taliban,” *Daily Times*, 8 September 2008.

¹²⁶ Zulfikar Ali, “Taliban are trying to end tribal clashes in Kurram,” *Dawn*, 16 September 2010.

¹²⁷ “Editorial: A Shia Backlash in the Offing?” *Daily Times*, 22 February 2009.

secretary-general of SSP, was killed in Jhang in early February 2009.¹²⁸ In mid April 2009, a leader of the banned LEJ was assassinated in Karachi. Law enforcement officials suspected that a resurgent SMP faction was involved in this attack.¹²⁹ In the early months of 2009, a series of attacks on Shia in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan, also provoked violent reactions from the Hazara Shia community residing there. Shia mobs destroyed public and private property following the killing of the Chairman of the Hazara Democratic Party in January 2009.¹³⁰ An attack by LEJ on Shia Ashura processions in late December 2009 in Karachi led to significant violence, as furious Shia participants in the procession burned official vehicles and destroyed government and private property.¹³¹ However, no sectarian clashes were reported in the aftermath of the attack. Still, the retaliatory actions did indicate growing anger and frustration among the Shia, especially in the wake of the failure of law enforcement agencies to provide security to this community. In a laudable move, in March 2010, Federal Interior Minister Rehman Malik, terming the acts of sectarian violence a conspiracy, issued warnings to ISO, SSP and SMP.¹³²

Most Pakistani Shia continue to harbor goodwill towards Iran, but many of Iran's efforts to influence and reform the practice of South Asian Shia rituals have nevertheless failed. For instance, Pakistani Shias have ignored *fatwas* issued by Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei that called for an end to some forms of *matam* during *Muharram* processions, despite campaigns run by ISO in support of the *fatwas*.¹³³ Many educated Shia in Pakistan have come to the conclusion that Iran has been using Pakistan's Shia for its own political interests and that Iran's assistance did not protect Shia when Sunnis became more militant.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ "Ex-SSP Leader Gunned Down," *Daily Times*, 3 February 2009.

¹²⁹ Faraz Khan, "LJ Mastermind Gunned Down," *Daily Times*, 9 April 2009.

¹³⁰ Muhammad Ejaz Khan, "Hazara leader's killing sparks violence in Quetta," *The News*, 27 January 2009.

¹³¹ Amir Mir, "Lashkare Jhangvi and Tehrike Taliban involved in Karachi blasts," *ME Transparent*, 6 February 2010.

¹³² "ISO, Sipah Sahaba, Sipah Muhammad issued warning," *The News*, 12 March 2010.

¹³³ For details, see David Pinault, "The Shi'ah as a Minority Community in Pakistan and India," *Studies in Contemporary Islam* 5 (2003), 1-2: 49-56.

¹³⁴ Personal assessment based on interviews with Shia community leaders in Lahore and Islamabad, June 2009.

Anti-U.S. and anti-Israeli feelings are also common in some Shia communities in the country, but such views have not translated into any major acts of violence.¹³⁵ In fact, like other Shia communities worldwide, Pakistani Shia welcomed Saddam's overthrow in Iraq, as it led to a Shia revival in the Middle East. However, very few are sympathetic to the prolonged U.S. presence in Iraq. Perhaps a crucial development in this context is the growing recognition of Iraq's Ayatollah Sistani among Pakistani Shia. This recognition has encouraged a shift away from Qom and towards Najaf as the center of guidance. An important player in this development is Ayatollah Bashir Hussain Najafi, a Pakistani cleric based in Najaf, who has risen to a very senior level among the Shia hierarchy in Iraq. He is the only Pakistani to have reached the status of a *marja*.¹³⁶

Pakistani Shia are also suffering from the generalized backlash against the Shia revival in the Middle East and from the fallout of Iraq's sectarian war. Since 2004, Shia processions have regularly been the target of suicide attacks all across the country, but recently Shia have participated in these activities in greater numbers in an effort to demonstrate their readiness to die for their beliefs while strongly asserting their identity.¹³⁷ At the same time, the ethnic, provincial, and linguistic heterogeneity of Pakistan's Shia remain defining features of the community. A Shia of Hazara ethnic background living in Quetta has different political interests and considerations than a Shia living in urban centers of Sindh or Punjab. These differences pose a challenge to efforts at increasing intra-communal unity.

Khaled Ahmed, a leading Pakistan journalist who has studied the dynamics of Shia-Sunni violence in Pakistan, argues that Sunnis and Shia largely "don't hate each other," and points out that most of the sectarian violence is restricted to portions of some cities like Karachi and Quetta and to the provinces of Punjab and NWFP. In Ahmed's view, this lingering strife is the result of Pakistan becoming a "relocated battlefield" for the Sunni-Shia violence of the Middle

¹³⁵ "Karachi : Imam Hussain's Chehlum observed," *Dawn*, 11 March 2007.

¹³⁶ For details, see Ayatollah Najafi's official website: <http://www.alnajafy.org/english/>

¹³⁷ See Abou Zahab, "'Yeh matam kayse ruk jae' (How could this *matam* ever cease?)."

East.¹³⁸ Hence, in terms of possible solutions, as aptly framed by Katja Riikonen, there is a need to recognize that

the phenomenon of sectarianism goes beyond the different “armies” as the competing militant groups call themselves and the efforts to curb sectarianism needs to reach further than controlling those groups.... Equally significant is the need to look at the regional stakeholders when dealing with sectarianism, especially when sectarianism has acquired wider regional function in the area after the US invasion in Iraq.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ “Sectarian War: Pakistan’s Sunni-Shia violence and Its Links to the Middle East,” *Event Summary*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2 May 2007. See also Khalid Hasan, “Sectarian Conflict Looms over Pakistan, Says Study,” *Daily Times*, 14 May 2007.

¹³⁹ Katja Riikonen, “Sectarianism in Pakistan: A Destructive Way of Dealing with Difference,” Brief No. 2, *Pakistan Security Research Unit*, University of Bradford, 1 March 2007.

Conclusion

Pakistan's sectarian rifts are unlikely to heal in the near future. The results of the February 2008 elections showed that even though the support base of religious political parties—both Shia and Sunni—is shrinking, instances of sectarian violence, which are perpetrated by a minority on both sides, have increased in recent years. The PPP-led coalition that took power in Pakistan in 2008 is considered sympathetic to Shia Muslims and other minority groups. Still, the Shia perceive Sunni radicalism as a major threat, especially the prevalent anti-Shiism of Deobandi groups and the Ahle-Hadith sub-sect. The targeting of major Shia gatherings in 2008, 2009, and 2010, which began in the NWFP and gradually expanded into Quetta, Karachi, Southern Punjab, and Lahore indicates a rising trend of sectarian attacks. For instance, out of 944 sectarian attacks since 2001, over 50 percent of the attacks took place in the last three years.¹⁴⁰ Unprecedented attacks on Sufi shrines in Peshawar (Rahman Baba), Islamabad (Bari Imam), and Lahore (Data Ganj Bakhsh), which are revered by Shia and Bareilvi Sunnis alike, further underline the gravity of the problem.¹⁴¹

The vulnerability of Shia communities across Pakistan is also compounded by the failure of TNFJ and TIP to provide effective leadership. The rise of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, the Pakistani Taliban) whose leadership includes ardent anti-Shia militants, could mean that conditions for the Shia in the FATA may deteriorate further.¹⁴² That said, the majority of Shia continue to be associated with the major political forces in the country and are well represented in parliament and government. The return of democracy has further strengthened this trend. The decrease in Shia retaliatory attacks against anti-Shia militant groups is a positive development in this context. A reversal of this trend would serve as an important indicator of resurgence of Shia militancy.

¹⁴⁰ For detailed yearly statistics, see:

<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/sect-killing.htm>.

¹⁴¹ Sabrina Tavernise and Waqar Gillani, "Suicide Bombers Strike Sufi Shrine in Pakistan," *New York Times*, 2 July 2010.

¹⁴² Mukhtar A. Khan, "A Profile of the TTP's New Leader: Hakimullah Mehsud," *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 10 (October 2009), 1-4.

In an interview with the author, Mariam Abou Zahab argued that although Pakistan's Shia are largely directionless and leaderless at the moment, they are unlikely to adopt a militant posture as a response to anti-Shia violence because they have learned the lesson that militancy is counterproductive and compromises their security interests in Pakistan.¹⁴³ Still, a resurgence of SMP or the rise of similar militant groups is entirely conceivable, especially if Iranian or other external support becomes available. Renewed targeted killings of Shia in Karachi in June and July 2010 further intensified pressure on the Shia to respond to aggression in kind.¹⁴⁴

There are a variety of reasons why the state of Pakistan has failed to tackle the menace of sectarianism since the 1980s, when it emerged as a serious issue. First, military dictatorships institutionalized authoritarianism and discouraged the role of mainstream progressive and centrist political forces, with the result that religious extremist forces expanded their space and influence in the country. Sectarianism is a by-product of religious activism and bigotry. Second, gradually the sectarian outfits developed organizational linkages with regional and global terrorist groups, rendering them more lethal as a result. Third, Pakistan's convoluted and misdirected regional policy, especially towards India and Afghanistan during the 1990s, provided a cover to sectarian militants. As in many previous instances, such groups supplied warriors for sabotage operations in Indian-controlled Kashmir, in turn earning the gratitude of the country's security establishment. In some instances, this phenomenon remained active until recent years. Last, but not least, Pakistan's poor law enforcement capacity continues to seriously undermine its ability to confront sectarian militancy in the country. Even when police apprehend sectarian terrorists, they evade justice because of a failing criminal justice system.¹⁴⁵ The combination of these factors has made this bad problem worse.

It is important to mention that the Shia are not the only sect facing violence at the hands of extremists and terrorists in Pakistan. The Ahmaddiya community,

¹⁴³ Interview with Mariam Abou Zahab, Paris, 11 November 2009.

¹⁴⁴ "Five More Dead in Karachi Target Killings," *Daily Times*, 29 June 2010.

¹⁴⁵ See, for instance, Sabrina Tavernise and Waqar Gilani, "70 Murders, Yet Close to Going Free in Pakistan," *New York Times*, 5 August 2009.

Hindus, Christians and even Bareilvi Sunnis are all at the receiving end of this onslaught—evidence that over the years, Pakistan has become an epicenter in a war of ideas that is taking place within the larger Muslim world.

There is a widespread realization in Pakistan that this state of affairs is eating into the vital organs of the state. The political leadership seems to recognize this view, often expressing its commitment to defeat sectarianism. Solving this problem, however, is easier said than done. In terms of tactics and tools, sectarian terror groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba are now increasingly indistinguishable from terrorist organizations like Tehrik-i-Taliban and even Al-Qaeda. Recent developments show that these sectarian groups are also being targeted as part of the anti-terrorism drive in the country.¹⁴⁶ Despite these efforts, it is unlikely that Pakistan will be able to sustain this counterterrorism strategy in the absence of major structural changes in its law enforcement system and of a major overhaul of prosecution proceedings. Although in recent years a movement for the rule of law in Pakistan has emerged and strengthened, more time is needed for this movement to gain momentum and dividends, and become part of the solution to this problem.

The sectarian fault lines in Pakistan are deep and dangerous. But the threats posed by sectarian tensions compete with a number of other problems, ranging from rehabilitation and reconstruction work after the massive 2010 flood devastation, deepening economic crisis, rampant corruption, and an exploding population growth rate to violent ethnic tensions. In terms of immediacy, chances of nationwide Shia-Sunni sectarian riots are rather low when compared with prospects for food riots or the specter of widening street riots to protest recurring breakdowns of electricity.

Pakistan's political and military leadership must promote sectarian harmony—the *sine qua non* for peace in South Asia, and a goal that can still be attained. To achieve this end, however, the country's leaders will need to tackle the abysmal education sector in a revolutionary manner, with the goal to promote pluralism and tolerance; introduce deradicalization programs with the help of modernist

¹⁴⁶ News Desk, "22 SSP Offices Sealed, 170 Activists Held," *News*, 12 July 2010.

religious scholars to eliminate sectarian hatred promoted by many madrassas; and stabilize Pakistan by waging an effective, balanced, and sustained campaign against terrorists in the Pakistan-Afghan border belt, Karachi, and in South Punjab.