

Jihadism and instability in Pakistan: an analysis

DIDIER CHAUDET

Since 9/11, it seems that each year, the political tensions in Pakistan will break this fragile and geopolitically important country. Still, the gloomiest predictions did not materialize: Pakistan is maybe an unstable State politically and a weak one economically. But it is not a failed State, and it will not be one anytime soon¹. However, with the challenges this nation has to deal with in mind, the international community can only be uncomfortable with the apparent strength of the jihadist groups in Pakistan. Indeed, the very idea to stabilize Afghanistan is ludicrous with a strong extremist movement, connected to the Taliban in the ‘Country of the Pure’².

But in security studies and generally in the media, the jihadist threat is often overstated, or on the contrary disregarded as irrelevant. Those extremes, linked to an ideological attitude toward Islamist violence, are an obstacle to serious analysis, which could help win the famous War on terror. There is a need to properly analyze the jihadist groups in Pakistan, in order to know exactly how dangerous they can be for Islamabad. Of course, to know what those jihadist groups mean for regional security is also a matter of concern, but to focus on Pakistani stability is of primary importance for obvious reasons. Indeed, by its geographical position, its status of nuclear country, its human and economic links to Afghanistan, Islamabad could definitely create a regional instability if it falls apart in the years to come.

In order to fully comprehend the jihadist challenge in Pakistan, there is a need to focus on two main issues. First, of course, one needs to analyze the importance of the three main threats facing Pakistan on its own territory: the Pakistani Taliban, the other jihadists opposing Islamabad and sometimes called Punjabi Taliban, and the foreign extremists, Al Qaeda in particular. Their strengths but also their roots, need to be understood in order to see how important a threat they could be. Second, there is a need to focus in particular on one extremist group: Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the ‘Army of the Righteous’. Especially since the Mumbai attacks, it has been seen as a new Al Qaeda. Its means, its

¹ Christine Fair shows how unjustified this definition of Pakistan is in “Is Pakistan a failed State? No”, *AfPak Channel – Foreign Policy*, June 24, 2010, <http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com>.

² What «Pakistan» means in Urdu.

fighting experience, its importance on the country, make it potentially dangerous for Islamabad, as well as for the international community, if this definition as «Al Qaeda in South Asia» is accurate.

What will become clear from this analysis is how strong the links are between the Pakistani geopolitical fears, and political/military choices, in one hand, and the blowback³ it suffered as a consequence, in another hand. As long as this structural background is not taken into account, the jihadist issue will continue to grow and be an issue for this country as well as for South Asia.

From jihad to civil war: Pakistan vs. the Pakistani Taliban and their allies

Two images are in the minds of any analyst afraid by a hypothetical fall of Pakistan under the attacks of jihadists. First, there is the dangerous situation of the end of April 2009, when fighters opposed to the legal government of Islamabad moved from the Swat Valley, already under their control, to the Bruner district, being only 65 miles away from the capital. At this period, the *Time* was describing Pakistan as a nation «on the verge of inexorable collapse»⁴. The second image is linked to the terrorist attack against the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, leaving a 30-foot-deep crater, at least 60 dead, and 250 wounded⁵. Before 9/11, Pakistan had nearly never experienced a suicide attack on its soil, except one bombing against the Egyptian Embassy in 1995. But with the growing war against jihadists, it became common news. It explains why, between July 2007 and July 2009, more than 1000 policemen and military personnel has been targeted and killed by suicide bombings⁶.

Those attacks were supported and carried out by three movements working together: the Pakistani Taliban, fighting Islamabad from the Pashtun lands; their non-Pashtun allies, mostly coming from the Penjab jihadist scene; and, helping them in the fight against the legal government in the country, the transnational jihadists, Al Qaeda in particular⁷. The debates are still intense in the community of specialists of Pakistan, about the importance of the links between those three elements⁸. But what is sure already is that they are working, together for now, to destabilize Islamabad.

REVOLT IN THE PASHTUN LANDS: FOCUS ON THE PAKISTANI TALIBAN

It seems natural to focus, first and foremost, on the Pakistani Taliban. They are the only extremist movement that has clearly challenged the sovereignty of

³ Here, it is important to understand that the notion of 'blowback' is not used in a 'moral' sense. It has to be seen as a neutral term targeting a specific political action: to choose short term, or the importance to deal with a subject seen as essential to national security, without seeing the dangerous consequences of such a choice. Such an approach can explain many other problems elsewhere in the world: the US problems in the Middle East, the tensions in North Caucasus for Russia, the difficult Chinese situation in Xinjiang with the Uyghurs, etc.

⁴ Aryn Baker, *Taliban advance: is pakistan nearing collapse?*, «Time», April 23, 2009, www.time.com.

⁵ Shaiq Hussain and Pamela Constable, *Blast kills dozens in Pakistan*, «Washington Post», September 21, 2008.

⁶ Amir Mir, *Talibanization of Pakistan. From 9/11 to 26/11*, Pentagon Security International, 2009, pp. 211 and 213.

⁷ Kaustav Chakrabarti, *Taliban spreads into Pakistan's heart*, Rediff.com, February 13, 2009.

⁸ Katja Riikonen, *Punjabi Taliban and the sectarian groups in Pakistan*, Brief N° 55 – Pakistan Security Research Unit, February 12, 2010, p. 5.

Islamabad on part of its territory, fuelling the ideas of Pakistan as a weak, or even a failed State. The other radical and violent groups, as dangerous as they can be, never had physical control of part of the national space. Besides, as they are associated with the Pashtun territories of Pakistan, and as they are connected to a movement that was in power in Afghanistan before 2001 and that is at war with the Us and its local allies now, it is fair to say that they are the ones that make the situation in Pakistan look like a civil war. This is why one can see them as the main security threat for Pakistani stability.

To understand the phenomenon called Pakistani Taliban, one needs to think about the Pakistani-Afghan relationship. It began as a clearly unfriendly one: Afghanistan was the only nation to oppose Islamabad's candidacy to the Un in 1947. This radical position from Kabul is explained by the colonial legacy, which imposed an artificial border dividing the Pashtun people. As Afghan is nothing more than a synonymous of Pashtun and that Afghanistan has been built first and foremost by Pashtuns, such a situation was seen as unacceptable by Afghan nationalists. In the 1950s, Kabul supported pro-independence Pashtun groups on the other side of the border, proving that Afghanistan was a mortal enemy of a unified Pakistan, in the name of ethnic nationalism⁹. In front of such a threat, from the Pakistani point of view, to use ethnic nationalism was of course not an option. Created as the refuge of the South Asian Muslims, the only other ideological possibility was to use Islamist opponents to Kabul to oppose the Afghan pressure on Pashtun territories in Pakistan. Interestingly enough, a very secular Pakistani politician, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, has made this policy choice in the 1970s¹⁰. Another president much more influenced by Islamism himself, Muhamad Zia-ul-Haq (in power between 1978 and 1988) has only accentuated this policy during the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan, beginning in 1979. It had dangerous consequences for Pakistan as a whole: it reinforced radical Islamism in the country, and helped fuel sectarian violence, as Zia helped in particular the Deobandi version of Islam, as it has been the main theological approach in the Pashtun territories. For this part of Pakistan in particular, it meant to be particularly exposed to radical Islamism. Religious schools under the influence of extremist religious parties like Jamaat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (Jui) took control of the Nwfp, known nowadays as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Those institutions became soon nurseries for jihad without the capacity to diffuse something else than a sectarian and politicized vision of the Muslim faith. Their number grew rapidly, from 700 in 1980 to 7000 in 1986¹¹. In these schools were reunited Pashtuns from Afghanistan and from Pakistan, both eager to fight the jihad against the communists. When the Soviets troops pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989, it was lived as a personal victory by the Afghan and Pakistani jihadists,

⁹ Declan Walsh, *The Pak-Afghan conundrum*, «Dawn», February 23, 2009.

¹⁰ Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan. Between the mosque and military*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, pp. 103-4.

¹¹ Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah. Jihad in South Asia*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 277

in the Pashtun North-West included. It helped the emergence of local radical groups eager to impose against the laws of the State the Islamic laws in their localities. The best example of such groups is of course the Tnsm (Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-Mohammadi, Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws), created by a veteran of the Afghan War, Sufi Muhammad, on May 10th, 1989. Its goal was to impose Sharia law on the Malakand Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. After the creation of the Pakistani Taliban in 2007, the Tnsm will join them, and will be the one in control of the Swat Valley (part of the Malakand Division)¹². But even before that, in 1994, the Tnsm used violence and the help of Afghan jihadists to force the state to accept Sharia Law in Malakand. During the 1990s, in the Pashtun area broadly speaking, the influence of the Afghan Taliban has been strong.

And of course this influence did not disappear with the fall of the Afghan Emirate. The Taliban and their foreign jihadist allies easily found refuge in the Pashtun Federally Administered Tribal Areas or Fata. The locals were generally supportive of the Taliban, very respectful of the Pashtun social norms that give protection to the guests, and the foreigners were able to pay the protection of the local tribes, something that was appreciated in a particularly poor area¹³. Under pressure from the Us, Islamabad tried first to make deals with tribes in order to stop Taliban's and Al Qaeda's actions against the new regime in Afghanistan (even if it appeared more eager to capture foreign dignitaries from Al Qaeda than Afghan Taliban). But it did not work, quite a few locals being pro-Taliban. And from January 2002 to the spring of 2004, the Taliban have been able to have more and more control over South Waziristan¹⁴. From this period until May 2009, the tensions between the State and the local rebels have always followed the same vicious circle of fights, discussions, peace not really honored by the rebel side, and tensions again. To make things worse, at the end of 2007, the rebels in the Pashtun parts of Pakistan eager to oppose the government formed together the Tehrik-i-Taliban (Ttp) or Pakistani Taliban, under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud (killed in August 2009, and replaced by Hakimullah Mehsud). Not all the Pashtuns called Taliban in the Fata were necessarily anti-Islamabad, as some limited their actions only on the Afghan battlefield. Even so, the Ttp has appeared more and more as a serious threat. Things changed only in 2009, when in May Islamabad decided to fight back decisively against the Pakistani Taliban in the Swat Valley who clearly did not want any peace with the government¹⁵. Terrorist actions against the military or the Isi, like the assault on the Pakistani Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi in October 2009 proved that the Pakistani

¹² Hassan Abbas, *The black-turbaned brigade: the rise of Tnsm in Pakistan*, «Terrorism Monitor-Jamestown Foundation», Vol. 4, Issue 23, November 30, 2006.

¹³ Imtiaz Gul, *The most dangerous place. Pakistan's lawless frontier*, New York, Viking, 2010, p. 31.

¹⁴ Safdar Sial, "Patters of talibanization in Fata", in Muhammad Amir Rana, Safdar Sial, and Abdul Basit, *Dynamics of Taliban insurgency in Fata*, Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2010, p. 143.

¹⁵ Mir, *Op. cit.*, p. 408.

considered their fight against the army as without mercy¹⁶. But because of the border with India that is always mobilizing an important number of troops, and now because of the humanitarian help that needs to be given after the floods, the Pakistani Taliban are still very more a force to be reckoned with in the Pashtun areas of Pakistan.

Indeed, the persistence of the Ttp issue is linked to the geopolitical issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also between India and Pakistan. Because it is the case, a military option alone will never be enough to deal with those Pakistani Taliban, who benefit from these structural diplomatic tensions to survive.

BLOWBACK: FROM LOYAL JIHADISTS TO AUXILIARIES OF THE PAKISTANI TALIBAN

Indeed, the Ttp is a real issue for Pakistani security. Nevertheless, by itself, it would be, at best, a particularly strong Pashtun *jacquerie*. But the terrorist attacks everywhere in Pakistan those past few years are a proof that the problem is much more important than that. It is linked to the fact that the TTP is not alone, that other jihadists are fighting with it against the central government. Those other rebels are the best expression of a blowback linked to foreign policy choices made three to four decades ago and that promoted radical Islamists groups in order to deal with geopolitical and diplomatic issues.

These other jihadists have often been called Punjabi Taliban. They have been seen as the main perpetrators of the terrorist attacks outside the Pashtun areas, especially since 2007, where violence became more and more important in the Punjab region, even in Islamabad. The expression of Taliban is abusive here: there is not a unique leader of the Punjabi Taliban at the level of mullah Omar or Baitullah Mehsud in this case. It is not even remotely a hierarchical organization. It is better understood as a network, including in particular activists from the Jaysh-i-Muhammad (JeM), the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, and Sipah-i-Sahaba. What those three groups have in common is a strong Deobandi ideology, which is also the ideological choice of the Taliban, as seen before. This religious vision sees Shia Muslims as non-Muslims, and opposes any religious innovation¹⁷. If Deobandism is not necessarily supportive to violence, it is a fact that until recently the fatwas opposing the Taliban and suicide bombings have been criticized by Deobandi clerics, and that political extremism in Pakistan and Afghanistan has been able to use this theological approach to its advantage¹⁸. This radical religious link with the Taliban has been reinforced by the fact that the Punjabi Taliban have often fought side by side with those who became known as the Taliban during the Afghan wars. They also had the possibility to find a safe

¹⁶ Bill Roggio, *Terrorists assault Pakistani Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi*, «The Long War Journal», October 10, 2009.

¹⁷ See on this subject Audun Kolstad Wiig, *Islamist opposition in the Islamic Republic. Jundullah and the spread of extremist Deobandism in Iran*, «Norwegian Defense Research Establishment», July 2, 2009, p. 17.

¹⁸ Tayyab Ali Shah, *The Deobandi debate terrorist tactics in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, «Terrorism Monitor-Jamestown Foundation», Vol. 8, issue 21, May 28, 2010.

haven in Afghanistan, and to have their own training camps there, during the rule of mullah Omar¹⁹. Hence those non-Pashtun extremists are companion-in-arms of the Taliban, a situation that made them particularly sensitive to the fate of the 'Afghan Emirate'. And they represented a significant number in the Pakistani jihadist movement: no less than 10,000 Pakistani militants, fighting a sectarian battle against Pakistani religious minorities or the struggle to liberate Kashmir, have been trained in the 'Afghan Emirate' of the Taliban until 2001²⁰. When Islamabad decided to turn against the Afghan Taliban and to follow the American War on terror after 9/11, those Punjabi Taliban naturally turned against the State.

The Jem is particularly interesting here, as it represents the part of the Pakistani militancy that has primarily focused on the fight for Kashmir²¹. Such militants had been seen as freedom fighters by the Pakistani military establishment and public. As a South Asian province with a Muslim majority and neighboring Pakistan, it has always been seen as a territory robbed by India during the partition in 1947. The fact that the Indian leadership has always contested the validity of Pakistani independence, and helped Bangladesh breaking free from Islamabad in 1971²², made the Pakistani desire to defeat New Delhi in Kashmir even more essential. Indeed, it was seen as a way to get revenge from the Bengali secession, but also to force India to accept Pakistan's right to exist, as well as to weaken the multicultural and secular Indian model²³. For people used to be seen as the good jihadists fighting for the Pakistani interests, it has been very difficult to accept the new post-9/11 policy of Musharraf. Following the American pressures, not only the Pakistani leader had to abandon the Afghan Taliban, but he also had to stop Pakistan's policy of supporting cross-border infiltrations. More importantly, Islamabad has been unable to obtain any American political support about an internationalization of the Kashmiri issue in return. It pushed experimented pro-Kashmir fighters like the ones from the Jem to revolt. It explains the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament December 13th, 2001, that nearly provoked a war²⁴.

Here again, what is called Punjabi Taliban is in fact the expression of deep-rooted Pakistani issues, linked to the way it dealt with two important geopolitical issues, i.e. Afghanistan and Kashmir. Even more than with the Pakistani Taliban, hence, the problem will not go away thanks to military confrontation. Especially the nationalist desire to oppose India for Kashmir will not disappear, and will continue to nurture jihadists able to use this issue.

¹⁹ Ayesha Siddiqi, *Brothers in arms*, «Newline», September 9, 2009.

²⁰ Maryam Abu Zahab, "The regional dimension of sectarian conflict", in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *Pakistan: nationalism without a nation*, London, Zed Books, 2002, p. 120.

²¹ Hassan Abbas, *Defining the Punjabi Taliban network*, «CTC Sentinel», April 2009, Vol. 2, Issue 4, p. 3.

²² Until 1971 it was part of Pakistan, as Eastern Pakistan.

²³ Indeed, the Indian project as thought by Nehru was totally opposed to the idea of a specific nation for the South Asian Muslims, i.e. the Pakistani project. See Haqqani, *Op. cit.*, p. 265.

²⁴ Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan. The struggle with militant Islam*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 106.

THE FOREIGN ENEMY: FOCUS ON AL QAEDA AND THE UZBEK JIHADISTS

Last, but not least, one needs to take into account the impact of foreign jihadists in Pakistan. They are, of course, much less important, from a numerical point of view, than the Pakistani or the Punjabi Taliban. But numbers are not the only things that matter in security issues. The fighting experience, the ideological strength, the organizational skills, are also of importance for terrorist groups and guerilla movements. And it appears that Al Qaeda has been able to offer all of these essential assets to the anti-Islamabad militants. As for the Uzbek jihadists, the main other foreign threat, even if they have been less efficient, they also have become a security issue for Pakistan.

The links between Al Qaeda and local jihadists, the Pakistani Taliban in particular, are strong, and it should be no surprise. After all, this is the consequence of the common fight against the Soviets, and of multiple links created between the Arab veterans of the war and the Afghan and Pakistani societies. Indeed, during the jihad against the Ussr, Arabs and locals were comrades-in-arms, shared the same training camps, and became able to communicate in each other's language. Besides, the Arab foreigners had organized charities to help victims of the war, and widows of martyrs. For example, before 2001, mostly Arab welfare institutions supported 12 orphanages, taking care of 17,352 children. Last, but not least, Arab jihadists who had come before 9/11 married with local Pashtun women, making their links to local tribes particularly strong. Quite a few decided to continue to live in Afghanistan or Pakistan, in the Pashtun areas. For example, at least 2,830 Arabs were living in Nwfp (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) in 2000²⁵.

Hence Al Qaeda has been able to be connected with jihadist movements in Afghanistan and Pakistan mostly because the Islamist fighters coming from the Arab world never really left the area. As hosts and allies of the 'Afghan Emirate' of mullah Omar, they were naturally connected to those who became known as the Pakistani Taliban after 2001. It appears that Al Qaeda has been quickly able to gain some influence on Baitullah Mehsud, who appreciated their help in terms of training. The use of suicide bombing by the Ttp can be directly linked to this Al Qaedan influence. With time, the ideology of Ben Laden's group seems to have been adopted by Baitullah Mehsud, at least rhetorically. It explains why, in March 2009, it threatened to organize terrorist actions outside Pakistan, even in Washington D.C. itself²⁶. On the battlefield, Al Qaeda has also been useful. It used the approach it already had in the second half of the 1990s, to please mullah Omar, i.e. to put at the disposal of their host an *élite* force used as shock troops. Before 2002, it was the famous 055 Brigade, nearly 2000 well-trained soldiers. After being wiped out by the American campaign of 2001, the 055 Brigade has

²⁵ See Muhammad Amir Rana, "Role of Arab militants and charities during and after Soviet-Afghan War", in Muhammad Amir Rana, Safdar Sial, and Abdul Basit, *Dynamics of Taliban insurgency in Fata*, Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2010, pp. 14, 21, 24.

²⁶ Ron Moreau, *The end of Al Qaeda?*, «Newsweek», August 7, 2009.

been reborn, but it is only a third or a quarter of the total new *élite* force, called the 'Shadow Army'²⁷. More importantly, it appears that Al Qaeda has been the main force able to promote better coordination and ideological unification between the different anti-Islamabad factions, making the jihadist threat more lethal for Pakistan²⁸. It is the concrete expression of the new strategy of Al Qaeda, that became very clear after the army's attack against the Taliban in Swat in May 2009: Ben Laden's group is now focused first and foremost on a fight against Pakistan specifically, as it wants to assure that this country continue to be a safe haven for the movement's leadership. It explains the ideological attacks from al-Zawahiri and other Arab jihadists on the very legitimacy of the Pakistani State²⁹. Its goal is to exacerbate social, religious and political tensions already present in Pakistan, and to eliminate any other religious/intellectual groups that could oppose the Al Qaedan ideology, already adopted by the Ttp. It explains why the terrorist attacks are not only against the police and the army, but also against moderate/anti-terrorism religious scholars, and minorities (Shia Muslims and Ahmadis in particular)³⁰.

Hence people who have been attracted by Zia's jihad against the Soviets have now turned against Pakistan, making of jihadism coming originally from the Arab world an important threat for the stability of Pakistan. Indeed, with the Us, the 'Country of the Pure' is now the first nation that has an interest to eliminate Al Qaeda. The notion of blowback is confirmed here, and it continues to be so when one looks at the issue related to Uzbek jihadism.

In the 1990s, the Isi and its Deobandi allies supported one of the two leaders of the most extreme jihadist movement in Central Asia, the one that would become known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Imu). Moreover, Uzbeks, like other Central Asian Islamists, have been able to find a refuge in Pakistani madaris³¹. The desire for a jihadist connection in the North was linked to the Pakistani interest in gaining more influence on post-Soviet Central Asia. Unfortunately for Islamabad, this policy choice has been counter-productive to say the least: Central Asia governments have seen Pakistan as a support for terrorism in the region, and a decade later, the Uzbek jihadists became a problem for the Pakistani State itself. Indeed, the Pakistani jihadists, as well as the Taliban, have supported only the most extreme Central Asian Islamists, in particular the Imu. The Uzbek jihadists became an auxiliary force of mullah Omar's military apparatus, and after 2001, those same jihadists, divided between the Imu and a splinter cell called Iju (Islamic Jihad Union), have fought for the Haqqani network and the Pakistani Taliban. The Imu has followed Baitullah Mehsud in his

²⁷ On this subject, see Bill Roggio, *Al Qaeda's paramilitary 'Shadow Army'*, «The Long War Journal», February 9th, 2009.

²⁸ Jayshree Bajoria, *Pakistan's new generation of terrorists*, Backgrounder – Council on Foreign Relations, October 7, 2010.

²⁹ Michael W.S. Ryan, *Al Qaeda on Pakistan: Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's morning and the lamp*, «Terrorism Monitor-Jamestown foundation», Volume 8, Issue 11, March 19, 2010.

³⁰ Zafar Imran, *Al Qaeda's ambitions in Pakistan: changing goals, changing strategies*, «Terrorism Monitor – Jamestown Foundation», Volume 8, Issue 31, August 5, 2010.

³¹ Plural of madrasa, or religious school.

jihad against the Pakistani army, and their military experience made them difficult enemies to fight. Last, but not least, from North Waziristan, where it is based, the Iju planned a terrorist attack against Germany that was stopped in September 2007. Its goal was to pressure Berlin in order for its troops to quit Afghanistan. So, not only did Uzbek jihadism become a security threat for Pakistan, it made this country appear again as a safe haven of terror. Hence, the short-term policy of using foreign jihadists seems to have been particularly disastrous for Islamabad³².

The most important fact one can learn from this succinct presentation of the main jihadist groups opposing Islamabad today is that they find their roots in Pakistani geopolitical fears: fear of an aggressive Afghanistan, fear of the eternal enemy, India, fear to have lost Kashmir forever, fear of foreign influence on a State feeling weak. Directly or indirectly linked to these fears, policy choices have been made, like the support to jihadist groups inside and outside Pakistan used as political tools. From a short term point of view, it seemed efficient enough. But it helped creating a situation that went out of control and has put Pakistan in a classical situation of blowback.

New Al Qaeda in South Asia, or tool of Pakistani geopolitics? Focus on Lashkar-e-Taiba

The analysis of the jihadist landscape in Pakistan would not be complete without a focus of Lashkar-e-Taiba. After all, LeT is seen as one of the most dangerous radical group in South Asia. For some, it is no less that the 'next Al Qaeda'³³. Since 9/11, it has been a kind of international sport for Western journalists and analysts to try to find a threat at least at the level of Al Qaeda³⁴. But to disregard the potential threat that such an important group represents would be as prejudicial as those alarmist characterizations. Hence the goal here will be to see if indeed LeT can be seen as a 'new Al Qaeda', and if not, how it can be analyzed, and what does it mean for Pakistani stability.

LeT: PRIMUS INTER PARES IN THE JIHADIST UNDERWORLD

The LeT has to be seen as the military wing of the Markaz-Dawa-ul-Irshad (Mdi), the Center for Preaching. Interestingly enough, it has been founded in 1987 to assist the Afghan fight against the Soviets, but also to protect the purity of Pakistani Islam against the influence of Hinduism. So its focus was partly, at the very beginning, the Afghan issue, like other jihadist groups now part of the Penjabi Taliban. Nevertheless, its situation was radically different. Indeed, the

³² For more information on Uzbek jihadism, see Didier Chaudet, *Islamist terrorism in Greater Central Asia: the "Al Qaedaization" of Uzbek Jihadism*, «Russie.Nei.Visions», n° 35, December 2008, 29 pp., www.ifri.org.

³³ See for example an article often criticized by Pakistani analysts: Jeremy Kahn, *The next Al Qaeda?*, «Newsweek», February 26, 2010, www.newsweek.com.

³⁴ For example, the last decade has seen a curious desire to see Hizb ut-Tahrir as the new global threat, able to replace Al Qaeda. For a critical analysis of such an approach, see Didier Chaudet, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: an Islamist threat to Central Asia?*, «Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs», Vol. 26, N° 1, April 2006, pp. 113-125.

LeT was not a Deobandi group. It was part of another theological approach, called Ahl-e-Hadith (People of Hadith). They are basically following an ideological path very similar to the Salafi/Wahhabi vision. It represents only a tiny minority in Pakistan, as this religious approach means a very specific way to pray, dress, etc. Besides, it refuses syncretism and incorporation of local practices, something that is normally quite common in South Asian Islam, but also the points of view coming from Deobandism or from a larger Islamist group like Jamaat-Islami³⁵. It means that they never had the kind of support and infrastructure the Deobandis had. It made them much more dependant of State support, something that the ISI soon decided to use to its advantage. Clearly, the Pakistani secret services are responsible for the easy implantation of the LeT in Kashmir. Only the State could give to this group the capacity to establish the Islami Inqalbi Mahaz camp near the Line of Control³⁶ and to smuggle their fighters on Indian soil. It permitted the LeT to organize its first spectacular attack in Kashmir in October 1994, targeting through a quasi-military attack an Indian army convoy. This attack was a success; five Indians were taken hostage and executed. From this period, the LeT has been able to become New Delhi's worst nightmare. It is said to be responsible for 60% of the terrorist killings in India³⁷.

The relationship between the LeT and the Pakistani secret services did not disappear after 9/11. Contrary to other jihadist groups, and like the Afghan Taliban under the control of mullah Omar, the Lashkar refused to target Islamabad for its post-2001 pro-American position. Indeed, its leadership has been pretty clear on this issue, and never changed its policy. Hafiz Saeed himself, historical leader of the LeT, has given a proof of that during his first interview on camera, for the well-known Pakistani network Geo TV, the 6th of July, 2010. He denounced the suicide attacks on the country as illegal and called for the public execution of the perpetrators of such acts³⁸. Under pressure after the December 13 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, Musharraf had to ban the LeT, like other jihadist groups, in 2002. But in reality, it was the less targeted of all. It has been able to protect its financial assets, but also its training camps, and to operate relatively freely in the country. In 2003 it avoided a second round of official bans³⁹, another proof of its particular good relations inside the military establishment. After the first ban, LeT and the Mdi dissolved themselves, and have been replaced by Jamaat-ud-Dawa (Jud). This group is focused on charity and missionary actions. It has had the means to have a true impact on the Pakistani population, through its infrastructures, like its 173 educational institutions. In fact, even if the Jud became famous internationally only from

³⁵ See Stephen Tinkel, *Lashkar-e-Taiba: from 9/11 to Mumbai*, «Developments in radicalisation of political violence», April/May 2009, p. 7, www.icsr.info. And Jalal, *Op.cit.*, p. 271.

³⁶ Name of the border between India and Pakistan.

³⁷ Ryan Clarke, *Lashkar-e-Taiba: the fallacy of subservient proxies and the future of Islamist terrorism in India*, «The Letort Papers – Strategic Studies Institute», March 2010, pp. 9 and 32.

³⁸ It is possible to see an extract, in Urdu, of this interview, on the website <http://videos.desishock.net>, or on YouTube, on www.youtube.com/user/drhanifmati.

³⁹ Tinkel, *Op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

2002, it has been working in Pakistan from the beginning of the 1990s. Its welfare department has been very active, and has under its control hospitals, medical camps, ambulances, etc⁴⁰. It has been a great tool for LeT⁴¹ in order to conquer hearts and minds in Pakistan, even if its perceived important impact is part propaganda. Indeed, the humanitarian wing of the LeT has been able to help when necessary, for example during the earthquake in Pakistani Kashmir in October 2005, or during the floods of August 2010. But its importance has never been as strong as the propaganda of its spokespersons and the *naïveté* of numerous foreign journalists and analysts could suggest. The few serious and fact-based analyses of the earthquake in 2005 prove that the impact of Islamist relief help in general, and from the LeT/Jud in particular, has been minimal⁴². The same can be said about the floods, as the LeT has been able to help only in areas near its main infrastructures, and at a limited level. It was at best an auxiliary of the army, which did not hesitate to close 16 aid camps associated to Jud to answer to the international fear of a too strong Islamist influence on the refugees⁴³. Hence, if the LeT/Jud was one of the main Islamist groups, with the Jamaat Islami, to be able to help the refugees with the benediction of the State, it appears still submitted to the army.

Still, what is remembered by numerous Pakistanis and also by the international community is the fact that the LeT/Jud seemed at least as efficient as the State itself in terms of relief help. Such a situation means the possibility to attract funds that made it more independent from the ISI. To benefit from the favors of Islamabad when others were targeted made it possible for the group to grow in popularity and influence. So it explains why, when Islamabad was forced to target the Jud after the 2008 Mumbai attack, the ban against it has not been strongly enforced. And the LeT is sure, for now, that it will continue to diffuse its Islamist rhetoric without being attacked by the State. Indeed, for the army, to use the words of the Pakistani analyst Hasan Askari Rizvi, the LeT is part of the 'gray area' of Pakistan's foreign policy towards India and the Kashmiri issue. As long as it does not receive concrete proofs that New Delhi is eager to negotiate, Islamabad will not desire to destroy a weapon that it could use to pressure its neighbour⁴⁴.

IS LET REALLY A NEW AL QAEDA?

Hence, it is clear that the LeT is here to stay, and that it is by far one of the most important radical groups in Pakistan. But is it dangerous enough to be seen as the 'next Al Qaeda'? This question is in fact a way to ask several ones. The

⁴⁰ Qandeel Siddique, "What is Lashkar-e-Taiba?", *FFI (Norwegian Defense Establishment)*, p. 4.

⁴¹ As the Jud and the LeT are pretty much the same institution, hence, in this article, we will continue to use «LeT» and «Jud» as synonymous.

⁴² See Tahir Andrabi and Jishnu Das, *In aid we trust: hearts and minds and the Pakistan earthquake of 2005*, September 2010, downloadable at www.cdgeev.org.

⁴³ Rob Crilly and Ashfaq Yusufzai, *Pakistan closes militant-run aid camps*, «The Telegraph», August 24, 2010.

⁴⁴ Quoted in the newspaper «Dawn», *Jamaat-ud-Dawa easily evades ban*, February 24, 2010.

most obvious interrogation is, of course, about the possible evolution of the LeT from an islamo-nationalist group, i.e. a group with a nationalist agenda and an Islamist ideology, to a transnational group, eager to strike at the 'Far enemy'⁴⁵, i.e. the West, in particular the Us. It would be a problem for Islamabad, as the LeT is seen as under the influence of the ISI. In the particular South Asian context, it would also mean to fight at the side of the Afghan Taliban and the TTP. Moreover, this question asks about the level of cooperation between Al Qaeda and the Pakistani group. Last, but not least, the 'Al Qaedisation' of the LeT would mean a radical opposition to Islamabad, as Ben Laden's group sees Pakistan as a legitimate target.

Anyone who is looking for sensationalist answers to these questions will only find disappointment. Indeed, it seems that there have been indisputable proofs of LeT helping Al Qaeda once it escaped Afghanistan at the end of 2001, and being indirectly helpful to transnational jihadism. For example, jihadist leaders related to Al Qaeda, like Abu Zubaydah, have found refuge in safe houses under the control of the Lashkar. But to use those facts to put at the same level Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and LeT, like the US ambassador to India Tim Roemer⁴⁶, or to say, like French former anti-terrorist magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière, that it is «part of Al Qaeda»⁴⁷, is way too simplistic.

Indeed, it is well known that the LeT does not turn down foreigners or Pakistanis eager to train in their camps. As a missionary group, they seem to accept anybody. Besides, it is possible to be trained by LeT for a price⁴⁸. It explains why it became an important gateway for would-be jihadists coming from the West and eager to be trained⁴⁹. By doing so, it is indeed an indirect threat to the international community. But it is acting like a clandestine network making money, not as a transnational institution eager to strike Rome, Paris or New York. It is, indeed, a great difference, as with its international links overseas, the LeT could be particularly dangerous if it truly decided to turn to international terrorism.

And it seems that the Lashkar has clearly made its choice. Between international jihad and its focus on the fight of liberation of Kashmir, it chooses the latter. As incredibly as it sounds, on January 19, 2009, the spokesman for Jud, Abdullah Gaznavi, went as far as to say that this liberation could be obtained by other ways than force⁵⁰. More broadly speaking, rather than following the

⁴⁵ See Fawaz Gerges, *The far enemy: why Jihad went global*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005. In jihadist literature, there are two main adversaries: the classical one, the 'Near enemy', i.e. the local, most of the time dictatorial regimes, of their countries, and the 'Far enemy'. Historically, the focus has always been on the Near enemy first, and only rhetorically on the Far enemy. Al Qaeda, and the impact of the War on terror have changed that.

⁴⁶ Myra MacDonald, *Lashkar-e-Taiba: assessing the threat*, July 9th, 2009.

⁴⁷ Myra MacDonald, *Pakistan and Afghanistan: "the bad guys do not stay on their lanes"*, «Reuters», November 9th, 2009.

⁴⁸ Tankel, *Op.cit.*, p. 12. Hence, it is possible to imagine that the use of one of LeT's safe houses by somebody like Abu Zubaydah could also have been possible thanks to payments from Al Qaeda.

⁴⁹ Sunsan Schmidt and Siobhan Gorman, *Lashkar-e-Taiba served as gateway for Western converts turning to jihad*, «Wall Street Journal», December 4, 2008.

⁵⁰ See Animesh Roul, *Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba chooses between Kashmir and the global jihad*, «Terrorism Focus-Jamestown Foundation», Vol. 6, Issue n° 3, January 28, 2009.

jihadists eager to strike the Us or any other great power, the LeT has showed consistence and always followed a classical vision, defending Pakistani foreign interests against India. It explains why, from 1999, it decided to strike not only in Kashmir, but also in India broadly speaking, and that it presents itself as a group fighting for the Muslims in India. In doing so it was following the Pakistani approach towards South Asian Muslims, and giving itself the possibility to put more pressure on New Delhi regarding Kashmir⁵¹. It also appears that broadly speaking, in South Asia, the Lashkar is busy making regional links with other groups eager to oppose Indian influence⁵². The recent implantation of LeT in Afghanistan is only one example of such a fact⁵³. In those actions focused on South Asia, there is no desire to target another power than India. Hence, we are far away from an Al Qaeda mentality here.

Besides, it has been showed that so far, even if the Lashkar is able to win some autonomy, its links to the military establishment still exist. Al Qaeda and the Taliban do not trust the LeT precisely because of its historical links with the ISI⁵⁴. In relation to the State, the LeT has even done worse from the point of view of Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Indeed, in several of their declarations, for example Ben Laden's statements of December 2004, it is clear that democracy is seen as an unacceptable form of government⁵⁵. To be part of this system would be anathema for an 'Al Qaeda' group. Despite this, even if LeT has criticized the democracy, it has accepted this political system by its actions. In Punjab, more particularly in the North and the Centre, it has become a political force, able to lobby politicians and to support its favorite candidates⁵⁶.

Hence, it is difficult to see the LeT as a true 'new Al Qaeda' or as 'Al Qaeda in South Asia'. But it does not mean that LeT is not a threat for Pakistan. After the anti-Taliban choice of Pervez Musharraf, it appears that there has been some fragmentation inside LeT, with, as a consequence, the emergence of splinter cells not controlled anymore by the national leadership of the movement. It is very possible that the areas where the LeT and anti-Islamabad jihadists have been able to work together were in fact places where those splinter groups have been mixed up with the real Lashkar. For some specialists of this movement, like Samina Yasmeen from the University of Western Australia, such splintering inside the LeT franchise could even explain an event like the Mumbai attack⁵⁷. True or not, what is for sure is that these divisions give to more radical and anti-Pakistani jihadists access to well-trained veteran fighters and terrorists, that could prove dangerous

⁵¹ See Wilson John, *Lashkar-e-Tayyeba*, «Brief Number 12 – Pakistan Security Research Unit», May 21, 2007, p. 4.

⁵² Aminesh Roul, *Lashkar-e-Taiba and the strategy of "Encircling India"*, «Terrorism Monitor-Jamestown Foundation», Vol. 8, Issue 38, October 21, 2010.

⁵³ Alissa J. Rubin, *Militant group expands attacks in Afghanistan*, «New York Times», June 15, 2010, p. A1.

⁵⁴ Stephen Tankel, *Lashkar-e-Taiba in perspective. An evolving threat*, «Counterterrorism strategy Initiative Policy Paper», New America Foundation, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Christopher M. Blanchard, *Al Qaeda: statements and evolving ideology*, «CRS Report for Congress», February 4, 2005.

⁵⁶ Abdullah Muntazir, *Is Lashkar-e-Taiba a real global threat*, PakistanKakhudaHafiz.com, March 30, 2010.

⁵⁷ Dawn, *Can Pakistan shut down Lashkar-e-Taiba?*, June 21, 2009.

for Pakistan and for its regional environment. Last, but not least, as the act of the LeT or of a splinter group from the LeT, the terrorist attack on Mumbai, on November 23, 2008, has been terribly impressive. The terrorists involved have been able to target ten different locations in the city and to kill at least 172 persons. It has also put the Indian counterterrorist forces in front of their limitations, because they needed four days to deal with the terrorists⁵⁸. Such an aggression could have meant war, and it is very possible that a similar terrorist action could push India to retaliate against Pakistan in the future. LeT could indeed be a cause for war if it continue to support this kind of policy.

LET AS THE SOUTH ASIAN HEZBOLLAH

In fact, if a comparison needs to be made with another terrorist organization, it should be with the islamo-nationalist group Hezbollah in Lebanon rather than with Al Qaeda. Those two groups share the fact that they have become strong thanks to the support of States (Iran for Hezbollah, Pakistan for the Lashkar), but that they are not mere puppets of such States. Like Islamabad, Teheran sees itself as besieged by countries allied or under the influence of the Us, and using Hezbollah helped it to pressure the main regional ally of its challenger, i.e. Israel, in a way that looks like the pressure put by the LeT on India⁵⁹.

The two groups have also in common the fact that their agenda is strongly influenced by national geopolitics, even when it looks like that they have a transnational agenda. Indeed, for Hezbollah, a Southern Lebanese group, the focus on the Palestinian issue is logical geopolitically speaking. For this part of Lebanon, in particular for the mountainous area called Jabal Amil, there is a historical feeling that the region and Northern Israel are connected. This point of view has been strong in the local Lebanese population since the 1920s, when it became clear that for the Zionists at this period, and for the Israelis from 1949, to control this strategic region, rich in water, would be good to protect the national interests of their State⁶⁰. It is the same islamo-nationalist approach that explains the focus of LeT mainly on Kashmir and India. Here the LeT is doing nothing more than to support the Islamic diplomacy and ideology of Islamabad. As the country of the South Asian Muslims, ideologically speaking, Pakistan can only see the Muslim lands and peoples in India as naturally under the 'protection' of its State. Hence the South Asian approach of LeT is islamo-nationalist in that sense. Such roots on national geopolitics and ideology make those two groups particularly strong and difficult to target from the outside. It explains why even Pakistani intellectuals have difficulties to see the LeT members as terrorists, and

⁵⁸ For more detailed, see the testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security of the Us House of Representatives of Christine Fair, from the Rand Corporation, entitled *Antecedents and implications of the November 2008 Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) attack upon several target in the India mega-city of Mumbai*, March 11, 2009, www.rand.org.

⁵⁹ See Kathryn Haahr, *Iran's changing relationship with Hezbollah*, «Terrorism Monitor-Jamestown Foundation», Vol. 2, N° 19, October 7, 2004.

⁶⁰ Walid Charara and Frédéric Domont, *Hezbollah, an islamo-nationalist movement*, New York, Fayard, 2004, p. 34 (in French).

why Lebanese citizens of another faith than Shia Islam can still see Hezbollah's fighters as national heroes.

Besides, they are both strongly implicated in the social and political life of their respective countries, something that look like the usual the islamist bottom-up strategy to influence their environment. Indeed, both have built a social welfare infrastructure because their States have been unable to offer one to their peoples. It made Hezbollah and LeT highly popular in their respective countries⁶¹, but it is opposed to the 'Al Qaeda' way, that sees only the violent conquest of the political vanguard as a legitimate course of action. Moreover, both the LeT and Hezbollah have accepted to integrate themselves in the more or less democratic system of their respective countries, something that would not be done by a transnational jihadist group.

Last, but not least, both had relations with Al Qaeda at one point or another, but it does not mean that they join its transnational fight. Indeed, as we have seen before, the relationship between LeT and Al Qaeda as well as with the Ttp has been complex at best. As for Hezbollah, some analysts have claimed there has been some sort of cooperation at a time when Ben Laden wanted to have a non-sectarian front against the Us, and Al Qaeda members needed training from the best terrorist organization in the Middle East⁶². To say the least, this cooperation did not transform Hezbollah into 'Al Qaeda in Lebanon' or into the 'next Al Qaeda'.

LeT being the South Asian Hezbollah is not necessary good news for Pakistan, and it is definitely not for India. Hezbollah is indeed strong enough to be a 'State within a State'⁶³ in Lebanon. The LeT is not there yet, but it is the only jihadist institution that could evolve to this level. It has a popularity that looks like the one Hezbollah can benefit in part of the Lebanese public. Contrary to other jihadist institutions, the conquest of hearts and minds is not an issue. Hence, because of its structures, its influence, and its military experience, it is the only group that could contest Islamabad's sovereignty if it continues to grow and if it is not on the same page with the army anymore. Besides, Hezbollah has been the only fighting group with some success against Israel, and if the Mumbai attack is any indication, it appears that LeT is preparing itself to become the greatest security challenge for New Delhi in the decade to come⁶⁴. Which means more tensions between India and Pakistan, and the possibility of Indian military actions against Pakistan because of the Lashkar actions. It would mean, in the long term, a State made much weaker. LeT, as the 'Hezbollah of South Asia', could be one of the roots of a future conflict, a confrontation that Islamabad is not sure to be able to put up with.

⁶¹ Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah. Born with a vengeance*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 147.

⁶² See Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda. Global network of terror*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, pp. 146-7.

⁶³ See what it means for Lebanon, with, for example, Robert G. Rabil, *Hizbollah and Lebanon: the curse of a State*, openDemocracy.net, May 22, 2008.

⁶⁴ See for example Jeremy M. Sharp (coordinator), *Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah conflict*, «CRS Report for Congress», September 15, 2006, downloadable at www.fas.org.

Hence, the different jihadist groups, even the ones that still seem under the control of security forces in Islamabad, appear to be a challenge for Pakistani security in the years to come. Those threats will not disappear only thanks to successful military actions. In fact, the jihadist movements are directly linked to deep-rooted issues in the country, looking beneficial in the short-term but problematic in the longer term. But if one would make the effort to put himself or herself in Pakistan's shoes, so to speak, it would appear clearly that Islamabad did not choose to have to deal with such a blowback. The choice to support extremist groups has been seen as a way to deal with geopolitical issues, and to find easy solutions to difficult political problems.

The logical conclusion to such an analysis is to understand that there will be no real disappearance of the jihadist problem without a geopolitical evolution in South Asia. There is a need for Pakistan not to feel besieged anymore. Such an evolution will be possible only if Pakistani national interests are taken into account in its regional environment. Of course, it does not mean to give satisfaction to the Pakistanis on every subject related to Afghanistan and Kashmir. But it does mean that Afghanistan needs to be rebuilt with Pakistan, and not without it or against it. It also means that to deal with the jihadist problem in the 'AfPak area' will pass by a serious focus on the Kashmiri. On both those issues, of course, to take into account the legitimate interests of India and to help both these States to find compromises through regular talks is essential. As such a result has not been obtained so far, a real implication of the international community in this part of the world, especially from those States, which, like the Us, are fighting against transnational jihadism, is of a great importance.