
Jamaat-e Islami

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Nineteen seventy-nine was a momentous year for the Jamaat-e Islami in Pakistan. Maulana Maududi, whose writings provided both the financial and intellectual foundation for the party, died after a long bout with kidney disease in Buffalo, New York. The same year, the arch-nemesis of the Jamaat, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, became a victim of what most Pakistanis considered a judicial murder at the hands of its erstwhile ally, General Zia ul-Haq. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution proved to be equally important in shaping Jamaat's role in Pakistani politics and its participation in Sunni Islamist politics. After 1979 the Jamaat became less of what it always had viewed itself to be — the vanguard of Islamic Revolution — and more what its opponents had often accused it of being, an opportunistic player willing to make compromises with authoritarian leaders to gain political advantages.

While there had been broad agreement within the Jamaat-e Islami since its inception in 1941 on the goal of creating an Islamic state, there had been a robust debate over the means. For the first several years of its existence, the Jamaat had argued that it would focus on the creation of *salih* (virtuous) Muslims by focusing on changing the hearts and minds of ordinary people through its literature (written mostly by Maududi) and by the exemplary character and behavior of its members. Though the Jamaat had opposed the creation of Pakistan, it quickly became the major proponent of the creation of an Islamic state in Pakistan and led the movement towards incorporating Islamic clauses into all three Pakistani constitutions (1956, 1964, and 1973). A minority of Jamaat's members felt that engaging in electoral politics and working within the system would take it away from its goal of an Islamic revolution resulting in an Islamic state. Maududi convinced the majority that now that Pakistan was a reality, working within the political system was the best option. During the first few years of its existence, Jamaat was skeptical of Western-style democracy, but the first coup by Ayub Khan and his attempts to limit the influence of religion in public life made Jamaat a strong proponent of establishing a parliamentary democracy and protecting the civil and political rights of citizens. This anti-establishment posture continued and even deepened during Bhutto's rule.

Although the Jamaat had railed against communism and socialism in its printed literature for many decades, Bhutto's government intensified Jamaat's venom against socialism. Bhutto had insisted that he was not interested in "God-less" socialism, but rather that he sought to bring about Islamic socialism. To this, Maududi retorted: "They found out that their Socialism cannot dance naked, after realizing this they started calling



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socialism 'Islamic.' But if it is really based on the Quran and the Sunnah then what is the need for calling it Socialism? Now when they can see that this too does not work they have started calling it Islamic equality (musawat). But their object is the same — pure socialism.”¹

Under Zia ul-Haq's rule, there was a fundamental shift in Jamaat's posture towards the state. The Jamaat proved to be an important "civilian" support base for Zia's military rule. For example, the Jamiat-e Tulaba (the student federation affiliated with the Jamaat), the largest and most disciplined student organization in the country, and the NLF (National Labor Federation) had kept the students and the labor unions from presenting any strong challenges to Zia's regime.² Moreover, the Jamaat had urged its teachers, doctors, lawyers, farmers, and 'ulama' organizations to mobilize support for Zia's Islamization program.

In return for its support of the regime, the Jamaat was able to participate directly in government between August 1978 and June 1979, albeit as a part of an alliance with the PNA (a nine-party alliance against Bhutto). Moreover Zia's Islamization policies led to the creation of bodies such as the Majlis-e Shura (a body of advisors chosen by Zia), the Islamic Ideological Council, the Islamic University, local Sala' (prayer) and Zakat (Islamic tax) committees, and the Shari'a Courts — all of which were filled either by Jamaat members or its sympathizers.

Zia ul-Haq's Islamization policy renewed the debate within the Jamaat's ranks about the best tactics to achieve an Islamic state in Pakistan. Was the imposition of *Shari'a* the most important objective — and therefore did it not matter that it was imposed by a military general or by a monarch, as in Saudi Arabia? Some of the younger members of the Jamaat who were inspired by the Iranian Revolution argued that monarchy or dictatorship was incapable of introducing a truly Islamic system; therefore, the Jamaat should distance itself from Zia's government and Saudi patronage. Jamaat's ties to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini went back to 1963, when Maududi met him during the *Haj* season in Mecca. In the same year, the Jamaat published an article in the October issue of *Tarjuman al-Quran* which was highly critical of the Shah's policy toward the 'ulama' in Iran. The Iranian Embassy lodged a protest against the article to the Pakistani government. During the Iranian Revolution, the Jamaat gave its full support to Ayatollah Khomeini. Then, in January 1979, Khomeini sent two of his representatives to Maududi to thank him for the Jamaat's support. In February 1979, Mian Tufial Muhammad, the Jamaat's "Amir," led a delegation to Iran.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan ensured that the Jamaat would lean more toward the Saudi model of the imposition of Islam from above and less towards the Iranian model of an Islamic revolution. Until 1994, when the Taliban became

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1. See *Criterion*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1970), pp. 62-63.

2. See Stephen Cohen and Marvin Weinbaum, "Pakistan in 1982: Holding On," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1983), p.123.

the favored client of the Pakistani state, the Jamaat's ally, Gulbuddin Hekmetyar, was the greatest beneficiary of the Intelligence Services Directorate's (ISI) channeling of money and weapons. The Jamaat had maintained a close working relationship with Hekmetyar since the early 1970s, and after the invasion its relationship with Hekmetyer's Hezb-e Islami (Islamic Party) became even closer. In the 1980s things seemed to be going Jamaat's way. The Jamaat finally had the chance to fight the "Godless" communists by working closely with the ISI and the Saudis; its members also had gained access to Saudi charity funds and lucrative jobs in Saudi Arabia. Under Zia's regime, the Jamaat wielded considerable influence over the content of textbooks and radio and television programs.

But, as the 1990s revealed, there was a price to be paid for getting in bed with dictators. The Jamaat lost one of its most important electoral bases, Karachi, to the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM). The rise of the Taliban meant an increase in the influence of its competitor and sometime ally, the Jamiat-e Ulama Islam, Deobandi '*ulama*' organization whose madrasas had been the nurseries for the young Taliban. Zia ul-Haq's rule had offered an exceptional opportunity to the Jamaat — a share in governmental power and a chance to implement Islamic programs. The Jamaat had received some short-term benefits but incurred many long-term costs. The stigma of closely collaborating with a military regime was compounded by the Jamaat's participation in an Islamization process that many Pakistanis viewed as a sham. As one of Jamaat's own leaders so aptly put it in 1985: "Islam cannot be imposed from above through martial-law decrees."³

3. Interview with Munnawar Hassan, the Vice-President of the Karachi branch of the Jamaat, April 23, 1985. Munnawar Hassan is now the Amir (head) of the Jamaat-e Islami and has become a more conservative figure.