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# Pakistan: Reclaiming the Founding Moment

*Suroosh Irfani*

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Rooted in a democratic struggle that ended British rule in the subcontinent, there was something remarkable about Pakistan's emergence on August 14, 1947 as a sovereign Muslim state. This was as much reflected in the founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah's address to Pakistan's first Constituent Assembly as in its national anthem and flag celebrating Pakistan's founding moment. Jinnah's speech set the direction for Pakistan as a modern democratic state, where religion was a personal matter that had "nothing to do with the business of the state," and people could creatively rework a divisive past for a promising future.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the inclusive spirit of a South Asian Muslim identity was reflected, on the one hand, in the national anthem composed by Jagan Nath Azad, a scholar of Indo-Persian culture, and on the other hand, in a flag that celebrated Pakistan's 3% religious minority population by giving them 25% of the flag's space — its white section. Such eclecticism, rooted in Indo-Persian culture, also prevailed in the new national anthem adopted seven years later: the anthem is as much in Urdu as Persian, the composition is by a Zoroastrian, and the chorus giving it an "Indian" aura comprises almost equal numbers of female and male singers (respectively five and six).<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's populist slogan of "Islam, Democracy, and Socialism" that gave him a landslide win in Pakistan's first general elections held in 1970 also reflected the eclectic spirit of Pakistan's South Asian Muslim identity. However, General Zia ul-Haq, who toppled Bhutto's government in a military coup in 1977 and had him hanged two years later, set Pakistan on a different track that eroded the South Asian spirit of its identity. Lacking a political or social base of his own other than the army, Zia carved out a constituency for himself through a Saudi-backed polity of "Islamization." This policy infused Islamic conservatism in the state and society and co-opted religio-political parties, especially the Jamaat-e Islami — Pakistan's best organized religious party that historically stood in opposition to Jinnah and Pakistan. Moreover, Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in support of Kabul's Marxist regime in 1979 helped to entrench General Zia's regime and turn Pakistan into "America's most allied ally" as a Cold War frontline state.



*Suroosh Irfani is a writer and columnist based in Lahore. He was senior Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, and co-director of the Graduate Program in Communication and Cultural Studies at National College of Arts, Lahore. His current interests include the transformation of popular Muslim imagination, and the dialogical self in Sufism and Jungian Psychology.*

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1. Muhammad Ali Jinnah's address to Pakistan's first Constituent Assembly, August 11, 1947.

2. Composed by Ghulam Ahmed Chagla, the new anthem was first played at Karachi airport on March 30, 1950, when the Shah of Iran visited Pakistan. It took another four years for an official Committee to select Hafeez Jallanduri's poem for the anthem's lyrics, from over 700 entries.

Indeed, if the Cold war had given General Zia a shortcut to legitimacy on the international front, the Afghan *jihad* enabled Zia to stake Pakistan's future on the *jihadi* politics in Afghanistan, giving rise to a plethora of homegrown militant groups. Clearly, the US-Saudi backed Afghan *Jihad*, occurring in a regional context shaken by Shi'a revivalist Ayatollahs of the Iranian Revolution, had fateful consequences for Pakistan. At the same time, with the virtual collapse of state education, religious schools linked with *jihadi* groups rapidly expanded as breeders of a violent *jihadi* culture that eclipsed Pakistan's South Asian identity while promoting an "Arabist shift." This tendency to view the Arab as the only "real"/pure Muslim uses this trope of purity as a self-righteous weapon for recasting the present in a glorified imaginary of a triumphal Arab past.<sup>3</sup> Such reasoning is reflected in a detained Pakistani suicide bomber's recent interview on Geo Television, the largest satellite channel in the country. The would-be bomber justified the killing of innocent children and citizens in the ongoing spate of suicide bombings by invoking the *fatwa* of "a great Arab cleric," to the effect that those who died in the bombings were not innocent victims as they did not support Taliban's *jihad*.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, in the 1990s, when Pakistan helped the Taliban rise to power in Afghanistan, Talibanic Islam became virtually synonymous with Usama bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida through fusion with Wahhabi-Salafi radicalism, even as Peshawar became "the capital of the Islamic world."<sup>5</sup> According to al-Qa'ida strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, "Every ongoing discussion and debate [in Peshawar] quickly spread out to the rest of the world, through audio *communiqués*, books, leaflets, audiocassettes, and through couriers and visitors."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, if the founding moment of Indo-Persian culture was rooted in the 11<sup>th</sup> century publication of *Kashf ul Mahjub*, [*The Unveiling of the Hidden*], a treatise on Sufism by Lahore's patron saint, Ali Uthman Hujwiri (d. 1077),<sup>7</sup> the publication in Peshawar of al Suri's *The Experience and Lessons of the Islamic Jihadi Revolution*<sup>8</sup> in 1991 might well have signaled the internalization of an Arabist shift in Pakistan.

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At the same time, Arab and Pakistani *jihadis* continued to flourish in the training camps of Afghanistan and Pakistani administered Kashmir after Zia's death and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, even as Pakistan briefly realized its dream of gaining "strategic depth" in Afghanistan under Taliban rule from 1996-2001. However, all this changed following the September 11, 2001 suicide attacks on the United States. And

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3. Suroosh Irfani, "Pakistan's sectarian violence: Between the 'Arabist Shift' and Indo-Persian Culture., in Satu Limaye *et al.*, ed., *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia* (Honolulu: Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), p. 148.

4. Geo current affairs program *Jirga*, July 2, 2009.

5. Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: the Life of Al Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (London: Hurst, 2007), p. 87.

6. Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*.

7. Translated by R.A. Nicholson into English in 1911, Hujwiri's was the first encyclopedic work on Sufism in Persian. As Persian became the administrative language of successive Muslim rulers in northern India, it also became the medium for a new cultural force symbolized by Sufism, reflecting a spiritual humanism that triggered a cultural efflorescence in Indian art, architecture, literature, and music.

8. Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, p. 486. Al-Suri later went on to write *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* (2004), the "Bible" of violent global *jihad*, available online in Arabic.

although the invasion by US forces in October 2001 led to the rout of Taliban and al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan, this further radicalized Pakistan's Islamist groups, even as Taliban and al-Qa'ida members sought refuge in Pakistan. Indeed, most Pakistanis regarded the Taliban as "true Muslims" and bin Ladin as a "hero of Islam," thereby enabling the terrorists to exploit local hospitality in Pakistan. It is therefore not surprising that Pakistani security forces arrested Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, al-Qa'ida's 9/11 mastermind, from the house of a Jamaat-e Islami member, while Taliban leader Abdullah Mehsud blew himself up in the house of a leader of Jamiat-e Ulama-e Islam (Fazalur Rehman group). Indeed, when former President Pervez Musharraf's government stepped up its campaign to hunt bin Ladin and other "religious terrorists," the rage of religio-political parties was summed up by former leader of Jamaat-e Islami, Qazi Hussein Ahmed, who denounced the campaign "a Zionist conspiracy."<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, the infusion of violent *jihadi* culture in Pakistan — spawned by the Afghan *Jihad* and state sponsored militant groups for *jihad* in Indian held Kashmir — poses a "mortal threat" to Pakistan. The ongoing Taliban insurgency in Pakistan's northwestern areas is a graphic example of this threat. The existential threat that Pakistan faces is not only because of Taliban *per se*, but also a complicit culture largely blurring the boundaries between "extremist" and "mainstream" in the Islamist spectrum.

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However, a sea change has occurred in Pakistan's public perceptions of al Qa'ida and the Taliban since the Pakistani Army moved into Pakistan's northwestern areas in May, 2009 to crush the Taliban insurgency. The airing of video clips of Taliban brutalities on Pakistan's TV channels were as critical as the Taliban's boasting of suicide bombings of Pakistan's civilian and security spaces in turning the tide of public opinion against the Taliban. According to a new public opinion survey held in Pakistan in May 2009, over 81% regard al-Qa'ida and Pakistani Taliban "a critical threat to Pakistan" — a huge increase from 34% in late 2007. As for the Afghan Taliban, "87 percent think that groups fighting to overthrow the Afghan government should not be allowed to have base in Pakistan."<sup>10</sup>

Even so, military action against the Taliban would remain inconclusive without socio-economic and educational measures for winning "hearts and minds," especially of the people displaced by recent fighting. At the same time, such measures should aim to promote a new political culture in sync with Pakistan's founding moment, summed up by Jinnah's speech to the Constituent Assembly. Indeed, reclamation of Pakistan's South Asian Muslim identity, so poignantly reflected in Jinnah's speech, is as crucial to the survival of a democratic Pakistan as the battle to defeat the Taliban.

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9. *The Nation*, July 2, 2002.

10. World Public Opinion Poll (WorldPublicOpinion.org), reported in *Dawn*, July 2, 2009.