

*Vyacheslav Y. Belokrenitsky**

Islam and Islamic radicalism in Pakistan

Abstract. The paper renders an outline of the role and place of Islam in Pakistani society, considers the underlying causes for social radicalization of Islam and analyses the causes of militant extremism. The author gives a comprehensive account of the Pakistani political life since 1953 to 2015 carefully looking into internal and external factors that shaped domestic political life and had influence changes in foreign policy and the relations with neighboring Afghanistan and India.

Key words: Islamization, Islamic radicalization, civil and military governance, Suni-Shi'a tensions, Taliban militants, counterterrorist operations, foreign and domestic political changes.

The problem of radicalism related to Islam and camouflaged by Islam in contemporary Pakistan continues to draw special attention though in recent years similar processes in Arab countries of the Middle East have come into the fore.

The relevance of the subject is related to continuing terrorist tension in Pakistan and the civil war in neighboring Afghanistan. The paper aims to render a short outline of the role and place of Islam in Pakistani society, to consider the underlying causes for social radicalization of Islamism, to analyze the internal factors, such as Islamization of the policy pursued by ruling circles since the last third of the past century, together with impact of external factors (developments in the region) in order to identify phases and cycles in the evolution of extremism.

Islam and Community Relations

Pakistan is the country with the population of over 200 million people (on the sixth place after China, India, USA, Indonesia and Brazil) which are predominantly (96 per cent) Muslim. Since the adoption of the first Constitution in 1956 the country is named the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. It was precisely then that the definition of the republican system was made through religion. To date, the number of Islamic republics is four, and three of them, by the way, are in the neighborhood. The most known of them is the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the supreme authority is vested in Rahbar (spiritual leader) while representatives of the class of theologians hold a special place in the governance of the country. Pakistan has no such features, evolving in the form of a secular, parliamentary and federal republic. Yet Islam under the present constitution has the status of the majority religion. According to the basic law the state is obliged to help its Muslim citizens in their religious worship.

* Belokrenitsky Vyacheslav Y. Dr. Sc. (History), Professor, Deputy Director, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

Only a Muslim can become president and prime minister. And one of the tasks of government is to develop contacts with the brotherly Muslim countries and peoples.

Although Muslims make up the predominant majority of the population, they cannot be regarded as a monolithic mass. Approximately 80–90 per cent of Muslims belong to the most widespread Islamic denomination — Sunnis of (Hanifa mazhab), the rest are Shiites, mostly Twelver Shi'a (*Ithnā' ashariyyah*), but there are also Ismaili, divided into Khoja and Bohra (*Nizari*, the followers of Aga Khan and *Mustaali*) and representatives of certain other sects of Islam, that Muslim communities in the country as a whole do not accuse of heresy and apostasy.

At the same time one of the sects *ahmadiya* that consists of Mirza Gulam Ahmad Kadiani¹ followers, has been by decision of parliament declared unislamic and heretic in 1974. Since then, though members of this community consider themselves Muslims and observe basic dogmas and principles of Islam, they have been treated in Pakistan as a religious minority in the same way as Christians, Hinduists, lower castes Hindu groups, Sikhs and Zoroastrian Pars. According to the constitution ahmadians (kadiani) have one reserved seat in the lower chamber of parliament that bears official Arabic name of *Majlis-e shura* (consultative assembly).

Driving ahmadians out of Islam illustrates the possibilities of using dogmatic discord for political radicalization under the banners of Islam. Initial anti-ahmadian turmoil enveloped the country in 1953. It was initiated by adepts of “Islamic purification” from two organizations — *Jamaat-i-islami* (Islamic society) and *Majlis-i ahrar* (Assembly of free). Both political parties have not supported the struggle for the establishment of Pakistan. While many representatives of the rich community of indian ahmadians took an active part in this struggle and have later taken a place of prominence in national political elite. Thus ahmadian Chaudhari Zafrulla Khan became first minister of foreign affairs in Pakistan that emerged together with the independent India in 1947. He became the founder of the diplomatic service and of the whole foreign political system of the country².

Initiators of 1953 ahmadian massacre were brought to criminal court that sentenced Abdul Ala Maududi, founder of *Jamaat-i-islami* to capital punishment. After several years in prison he was pardoned and continued his active preaching, political and literary activities³.

After two decades since anti-ahmadians have been denounced gradual radicalization of political Islam, i.e. the use of religion for political ends, has led to their demands being satisfied. This happened under Zilficar Ali Bhutto, head of the country who attempted to combine ideas of Islam and socialism. In the beginning of the 1970s he initiated left democratic transformation relying on religious tradi-

¹ About him and his teaching see: L. R. Gordon-Polonskaya Muslim Trends in Social Thought of India and Pakistan. M., Oriental literature publishing, 1963, p. 154–160.

² A. Jalal The Struggle for Pakistan. A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 63.

³ See in detail: O. Pleshov Islam, Islamism and nominal democracy in Pakistan. M.: IOS RAS, 2003, p. 40–44.

tions. After the military coup in June 1977 general Zia-ul-Haq who came to power launched Islamization of all the aspects of social life⁴. It became an instrument of legitimization of the coup and set up an atmosphere that allowed after two years former president Bhutto to be hanged.

Suni-Shi'a tensions

Islamization was carried out according to the canons of the Hanafi (Sunni) fiqh (jurisprudence), which caused harp resentment of Shiites. It resulted in the massive street protests. On the crest wave Shi'a political organizations were born. Successful Shi'a consolidation was boosted by (neo- Shi'a) ideology established after the Islamic revolution of 1978–79 in the neighboring Iran. Confrontation of the principal branches of Islam led to the emergence of radical militant groupings — *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (Sunni, warriors of the Prophet associates) and *Sipah-e Muhammad* (Shi'a Prophet warriors). Clashes between the “warriors” have acquired a protracted and bitter character. They seriously complicated Pakistani-Iranian relations, but since the mid-1980s partly, probably, under the influence of clandestine Pakistani assistance to Iranian nuclear program, confrontation has declined. Clashes resumed again in the second half of the next decade, when assistance to Iran in the nuclear field was apparently no longer provided.

Another external factor in the radicalization of political Islam in Pakistan on the basis of Sunni — Shi'a confrontation, was the situation in Afghanistan. Afghan Shiites account for about the same share of the local population (10–15 per cent), as in Pakistan, but they mostly belong to one ethnic group, the Hazaras. Persecution of Shia Hazaras by Taliban, who in the second half of the 1990s, with the support of Pakistan, established control over most of the country, led to new complications in Pakistani-Iranian relations and further pushed the process Pakistani Islamist radicalization. Sunni-Shi'a bloody showdown took particularly acute form in 1997–1998 covering, in particular, the most populous province of the country Punjab⁵. This happened 10 years after the death of Zia ul-Haq in a plane crash, during the so-called democratic intermission, when the functioning of the parliamentary system had resumed between the military regimes.

It should be stressed that Afghan Taliban who firmly established their power in Kabul in the mid-1990s, were mostly students of religious madrasas (schools), located in refugee camps in the Pakistani territory. Refugees from war-torn Afghanistan (an estimated number was 3.5 million) consisted mostly of Pashtuns, the ethnic group that had largely preserved traditions of tribal and clan organization.

Although the Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, they number about a half of Pakistani Pashtuns who helped their Afghan “brothers” through a

⁴ Ibid, p. 82–201; I. Talbot. Pakistan. A New History. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 126–130.

⁵ V. Belokrenitsky. Ethno-national, Religious and Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan — in: Conflicts in the East: Ethnic and Confessional. M.: Aspect-Press, 2008, p. 342.

period of forced migration. That further blurred the already poorly observed and protected state border⁶.

Not surprisingly, since the radicalization of ideology based on Islam, has helped the Afghan Taliban to prevail over their Islamist rivals (*mujahideen*) in the struggle for power, similar phenomena began to gain strength in Pakistan. Heyday of maximalist Islam both as an ideology and as practical political action came in the second half of the 1990s.

The rise of militant Islamism

During this period, Taliban seized power in Kabul (capital of Afghanistan), and has driven its opponents from the so-called Northern Alliance to the borders with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It seemed that this poses a threat of radical Islamism spreading from the “Heart of Asia”, as Afghanistan has long been referred to, further to the north, into Central Asia and the Caucasus. It was precisely at this time that terrorist attacks were done in Uzbekistan and Wahhabi attacks memorable for Russians were perpetrated in the North Caucasus.

Taliban strengthening in Afghanistan made the Islamist threat loom over Pakistan. The wave of religious fanaticism has swept over Pakistani Punjab, primarily in its southern and central districts and in Lahore, capital of the province. Yearly congregations of proselytizing educationalist movement *Tablighi Jamaat* (Society of Appeal) held in the town of Muridke near Lahore at that time had gathered 2–3 million people. Recruiters from this movement penetrated (despite the language barrier) into Central Asia and even in some regions of Russia. In Russian-speaking environment, they were known as “davattsy” from the word “dava”, meaning recruiting appeal⁷.

It should be mentioned that, in addition to Afghani impact, Kashmiri factor has contributed to the strengthening of Islamic radicalism. In Jammu and Kashmir a state belonging to India which is challenged by Pakistan an anti-government rebellion erupted at the turn of 1980–90s. It was actively supported by Pakistani official circles (Islamabad). Special public funds were raised by a number of Islamic organizations in addition to the government support allotted for the struggle of Kashmiri separatists⁸.

⁶ Official authorities of Afghanistan do not recognize existing border in mountain Pashtu area as legitimate. Demarcation enforced in 1893 on suggestion of Anglo-Indian authorities, known as Dirand line did not satisfy the Emir of Afghanistan but he had to concede under pressure and in the aspiration of British subsidies. It was this particular fact of yielding under pressure allowed Kabul authorities to dispute since the formation of Pakistan legal status of the border line. See: Ju. Panishkin. “Dirand line” and Pashtu issue in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan — in: *Islamic Factor in History and Modernity*. M., Oriental literature publishing, 2011, p. 179–187.

⁷ V. Belokrenitsky *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia: The Influence of Pakistan and Afghanistan* — in: Rumer B. (ed.) *Central Asia at the End of the Transition*. N.-Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2005, p. 179–180, 191.

⁸ I. Talbot. *Pakistan: A New History*, p. 166–167.

At the very end of 1999, Pakistani terrorists managed to capture an Indian passenger plane and landed it in the city of Kandahar under Taliban control in southern Afghanistan. Yielding to death threats to passengers, New Delhi had agreed to release four previously captured in Kashmir militant leaders. Their release was taken by Islamists as a clear success and strengthened their positions in Pakistan⁹.

Kashmiri problem remained to be exceptionally inflammable during the last decade of the previous century. Another military coup in Pakistan in October 1999 was preceded by a mini-war in Kashmir provoked by Pakistani military. It could be that the army leadership thus wanted to create conditions for the overthrow of Nawaz Sharif government whose party sweepingly won the elections of 1997 and tried to remove the generals from control over the country. After coming to power in a coup, the military, led by General Pervez Musharraf made a stake on moderately pro-Islamic political forces. They turned away from the Taliban in autumn of 2001. Islamabad allowed radical elements under its influence, as if in compensation, to commit acts of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and to carry out the attack on the Indian parliament building in New Delhi.¹⁰ An acute crisis in Pakistani-Indian relations that lasted for about six months has shown all the danger of confrontation between the two nuclear powers (nuclear tests they conducted in May 1998) unrecognized by the international community, and it was resolved by actual withdrawal of Islamabad's political support to Kashmiri extremists.

This was accompanied by a setback of religious radicalism around the center of Eurasia. What happened after the elimination of Islamist (Wahhabi) attacks on Chechnya and Dagestan in 1999–2000 and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on the United States. The attacks have given a pretext for US incursion in Afghanistan, where Arab extremist organization Al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden found refuge under the protection of Taliban. The crushing defeat of Taliban troops in autumn 2001 — winter 2002 by US-British coalition forces assisted by Taliban rivals from North Afghanistan consisting of a heterogeneous group of mostly Pashtun and non-Pashtun mujahideens of the first enrollment has brought to power in Kabul¹¹.

The presence of a significant number of Pashtuns in Kabul government, was largely due to the pressure from Islamabad, which, as was noted above, at the last moment before the collapse of Taliban regime broke off relations with them, and using the advantage of its geographical position, provided valuable logistical assistance to Americans. The United States in reciprocity kept a blind eye to Taliban leaders and thousands of rank and file members of the organization crossing the border with Pakistan¹². Pakistani territory has become a rear front

⁹ A. Rashid. *Descent into Chaos. The U. S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. L., Penguin Books, 2008, p. 112–114.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115–116.

¹¹ See: V. Korgun. *History of Afghanistan 20th Century*. M., IOS RAS, Conclusion, p. 462–476. *Modern Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries*/Ed. by M. Arunova. M.: IOS RAS, 2011.

¹² V. Belokrenitsky, R. Sikoyev. *Taliban Movement and Prospects for Afghanistan and Pakistan*. M.: IOS RAS, 2014, p. 158–160.

base to Afghan radical Islamist forces. It gave refuge and shelter to militants and insurgents from Taliban and allied organizations, primarily from the so-called Haqqani network¹³, as well as from Al-Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and others.

Taliban resistance had gained new strength and found welcome support in Pakistan, especially among mountainous Pashtuns soon after 2003 (when the new Iraqi campaign distracted US military attention from Afghanistan). This support was initially concentrated in Federally Administered Tribal Areas of North Waziristan (the official name of Pashtun tribal areas). First noticeable figure among them was Nek Muhammad from Wazir tribe killed in the summer of 2004 by a US missile. After his death, militants were headed by Baitullah Masood (from the same tribe), who proclaimed the creation of *Tehrīki-i Taliban Pakistan* (Taliban Movement of Pakistan, (TMP) in 2007¹⁴. Taliban is considered to organize the terrorist attack that ended the life of Z. A. Bhutto daughter Benazir, who twice (in 1988–1990 and 1993–1996.) headed Pakistan's Cabinet of ministers. TMP had also organized a series of terrorist attacks in the north-west of the country, in Islamabad and in the largest port city Karachi¹⁵.

The peak activity of Islamic militants came in a time of crisis for General Musharraf's regime. After the parliamentary elections of February 2008 and his retirement in August of that year, conditions were ripe to repel Islamist's offensive that brought under their control a number of districts in the vicinity of Peshawar (the main city of North West Frontier Province, now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Islamabad. In 2009 and 2010. Pakistani army conducted major anti-terrorist operations against the Pakistani Taliban, and regained control over the main centers of the north mountainous Pashtun area.

Death of Baitullah Masood in US drone missile attack in 2009, had weakened the power of the TMP, which split up after Baitullah's successor Masood Hakeemullah shared his fate befell in 2013. Gradual decline in terrorist activities was also seen after the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011, found and killed by US commandos in Pakistani town of Abbottabad. This strengthened effectiveness of counterterrorist operations by the Pakistani army, paramilitary and special task units¹⁶.

¹³ Militant organization under that name acted under the command of Jalaluddin Haqqani, veteran of Islamist clandestine network from the Afghan border tribe Dzhadran. Actually headed by his son Sirajuddin since the mid-2000s; *Ibid.*, p. 164, 168.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁵ See: N. Zamarajeva. Strengthening of Islamic Extremism in Pakistan in 2008–2010. — in: *Muslim Space on Border Perimeter of Caucasus and Central Asia*. M.: IOS RAS, 2012, p. 179–201.

¹⁶ Pakistani secret services had serious losses in the struggle with terrorists. Official data are not available. The estimate of public Pakistani and international organizations gives 15 000 people as the overall figure of losses between 2001–2013. General major, other senior officers of both the army itself and the border guards who are usually listed as paramilitary formations as well as heads of police and secret services fell victims to terrorist attacks. Overall figure of Pakistanis that had fallen from the hands of terrorists including the terrorists as well has reached 50 000. See: V. Moscalenko, P. Topichkanov *Strength and Weakness of Pakistan*. M.: Carnegie, 2013, p. 45; Shah, Aqil. *The Army and Democracy. Military Politics in Pakistan*. Cambridge (Mass.), 2014, Fn. 45.

Parliamentary elections of May 2013 brought to power Pakistan Muslim League party, led by N. Sharif. This experienced politician, headed Pakistani government, for the third time but had, as in previous terms of his premiership (in 1990–1993 and 1997–1999.) he had to share his power with the generals. Differences between civil and military branches showed up on the question of policy toward Islamists. The political leadership, both in the center and in the Pashtun province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has sought to negotiate agreement with Taliban, seeing in them primarily Pashtun nationalists and hoping to use them in the game. The army was skeptical about the possibility of a dialogue with them, considering them irreconcilable rivals of existing states.

In the beginning of June 2014 militants, mainly of Uzbek origin, acting under the flag of Taliban made a daring raid on Karachi airport, which paralyzed the main air gate of the country. After that, the army leadership had forced the civil authorities to agree with the beginning of a large-scale punitive operation against the main factions of the Pakistani Taliban, the Haqqani network, al-Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, entrenched in the remote mountainous areas of North Waziristan. According to army service of public relations the military offensive under the code-named *Zarb-e-AZB* (Sword of the Prophet, or a smashing blow) in the fall of 2014 completely crushed terrorist hideouts and camps killing over one thousand militants. It is not possible to check out the accuracy of triumphant reports due to restrictions imposed by the army on collecting information about their activities. Most likely, the insurgents did have heavy losses, but the majority of them fled probably along secret mountain paths to the neighboring areas of Afghanistan. Using their rear bases there, they were ready to strike back. On December 16, 2014 terrorists attacked a prestigious school for the children of military personnel in Peshawar. As a result, according to official figures, which some in Pakistan consider underestimated, 145 pupils and their teachers were killed. The tragedy in Peshawar reminded Beslan massacre of 2004 particularly because, according to some sources, head of the attack was a native Chechen and there was not a single Pakistani among the attackers¹⁷.

The attack on military school that was, incidentally, quite quickly repelled by army special units gave the impetus to the new phase of antiterrorist struggle. The Government approved National Action Plan, providing for a wide range of measures to eradicate terrorism. In accordance to the plan the list of banned organizations was enlarged adding 12 new formations, including such seemingly “untouchables” (due to suspected links with Pakistan’s counter-intelligence as the Haqqani network, and *Jamaat-ud Dawa*. India considered the latter responsible for terrorist attacks on its territory¹⁸ and demanded to prosecute its head, radi-

¹⁷ Peshawar school attack // The Express Tribune. Retrieved 16 December 2014; Beslan 2004: The other cowardly terror attack on kids // Times of India. Retrieved 17 December 2014; Beslan in Pakistan // Pravda.ru, 16 December 2014.

¹⁸ Including the largest of them — a boat attack from the sea by militants getting to the main naval port Mumbai (Bombay) on November 26 2008 that took the lives of 160 people.

cal preacher Hafiz Saeed¹⁹. Pakistani parliament in January 2015. Adopted 21st Amendment to the Constitution, according to which military courts for quick trial of cases related to terror were set up (temporarily, for two years). Finally, a ban on the death penalty was lifted and in the first months of 2015 several dozen criminals were hanged in prisons and military garrisons. The army or to be more precise its subordinated paramilitary formation (“Sind Rangers”) made an important step in the fight against chronic violations of the law and order having launched a cleansing operation in Karachi that lasted for many months. This city, the largest in terms of population (according to conservative estimates, having 16 million people) and playing a key role in the national economy, had long been one of the most insecure cities of the world. Every day it witnessed kidnappings for ransom; there were frequent skirmishes between mafia and mob groups. Ulema from opposing religious movements, public figures and politicians were killed. Fighting in the city was carried out for both political and economic motives. City real estate rapidly increased in price and it became the subject of lucrative illegal operations. Since 2010–11 Pakistani Taliban had been actively migrating to Karachi shifting their part of its clandestine network. Taliban fight for control over the city against long-entrenched local mob and bandit groups had turned some of its districts into “urban jungle” of the world²⁰.

According to media “cleansings” made by rangers and the police in 2015 have significantly improved the situation in the city. Although dominant political forces, in particular, the party *Muttahida Qaumi movement* (United National Movement), that was supported by people who migrated from India after 1947, and by their descendants, had often protested against the rudeness and inappropriate actions of the law enforcement officers, the majority of city residents and, most important, the influential “middle class” together with the rich business community, had met with understanding the tough actions approved by the central government as well as by the authorities of Sindh province, where Karachi is the main city.

Thus, 2015 can become a turning point in the history of the Pakistani state struggle against manifestations of radicalism and terrorism. If at the beginning of the year a number of resonant terrorist attacks was still committed against Shiites in Sindh, the Shia Hazara in Balochistan and Christians in Punjab since last summer there have been no such reports. However, in the future the situation may change for the worse. It is yet unclear whether a temporary decline in the activity of extremist Islamists is only an episode caused by chance coincidence or it is caused by basic irreversible changes.

¹⁹ On his activities and the ideology of his organization see: Iqtedar H. *Secularizing Islamists. Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamaat-ud-Dawa in Urban Pakistan*. The University of Chicago, 2011, p. 109, 122–123 et al.

²⁰ Zaman F., Ali N.S. *Taliban in Karachi*//Dawn, Mar 31, 2013. Retrieved from www.dawn.com 02.10.2015.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be said that throughout almost nearly 70-year history of Pakistan there can be seen, though uneven, but steadily growing strengthening of religious positions in public and political life. At the same time the influence of Islamism as an ideology, is on the rise and that is being used by religious parties and organizations. Under the direct influence of Islamization policy promoted by the military regime of M. Ziya-ul-Haq in the late 1970s and 80s, there was a noticeable increase in Islamic radicalism. Islamization campaigns were carried out by the central and local authorities also later. The underlying cause of extremism can be seen in such social factors as Sunni — Shi'a frictions and tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims. Social and political tensions on this basis were further complicated by the impact of regional events — local wars of Islamists (mujahedeen) with the Afghan government and by anti-government demonstrations in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, which had clear Islamic flavor. Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan and India had also seriously contributed to the rise of radical Islamism.

Summing up history of the events presented in this article, we can single out several phases in the evolution of Islamic radicalism in Pakistan. At first there was a period of his gradual rise. It began in 1980 with worsening of Sunni-Shiite relations due to Islamization campaign initiated by the authorities and ended (relatively, of course) in 1998, with the adoption of tough measures by the authorities to curb the Sunni-Shiite clashes in Punjab. During almost 20 years radicalization of Islam had amplified because of the events in Afghanistan (primarily in the 1980s) and in Kashmir (in the 1990s). In the second stage (1999–2004) there was a decline of extremist and terrorist activities, and during the third stage (2005–2009) a new rise had been marked by the offensive of the Afghan Taliban on the positions of government and foreign (US — NATO) forces in Afghanistan. In unison with the resurgence of Afghan Taliban the bridgehead of Pakistani Taliban in the northwest of the country was getting stronger and that established a threat of Pakistan's talibanization. The fourth stage began in May of 2009 and lasted until 2015. It is characterized by the systematic, sometimes bitter struggle of the armed forces of Pakistan with Islamic radicalism, and as a result we can see a gradual, albeit uneven decay of this movement accompanied by driving Pakistani radicals out to Afghanistan. As can be seen from the proposed periodization the evolution of radicalism has a clearly pronounced cyclical nature. Obviously, more or less final solution of extremist and terrorist problem in Pakistan is possible in future only if the victory over Islamists would be gained in the whole region ranging from Afghanistan to Iraq and Syria.