

The Red Mosque operation and its impact on the growth of the Pakistani Taliban

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English summary

The objectives of the present report are two-fold: firstly, to appraise the alleged militancy associated with the Red Mosque, by examining the history of the mosque and its leading luminaries, and the possible links between the mosque and terrorist organisations. Subsequently, acts of terrorism to have taken place in Pakistan in the latter half of 2007 are delineated and analysed with a view to explain whether they represent direct responses to the military operation against Lal Masjid in July 2007. For this purpose, news items and journal articles were reviewed and pitted against inculpatory information found on the Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa websites, as well as relevant jihadi audios and videos released in the tumultuous aftermath of the Lal Masjid incident. A few Pakistani analysts and journals were also interviewed via phone to further illuminate the linkages between the Lal Masjid episode and subsequent acts of terrorism in Pakistan. Finally, in light of all this, an attempt is made to determine where – if at all – Lal Masjid lies on the “militancy scale”, i.e. whether the institution itself can be seen as “militant”. The second part of this report revolves around the phenomenon of Talibanization which is defined here as the spread of Taliban activities – including both acts of terrorism (against Pakistani security personnel and politicians considered to be perfidious puppets of the West), as well as efforts to establish a parallel form for governance based on retrograde Islamic principles. An attempt is made to explain what the Pakistani Taliban *is* and the spreading and strengthening of its influence across Pakistan in the backdrop of Operation Silence on the Red Mosque in July 2007.

It shall be argued that, insofar as the Lal Masjid is concerned, although its clerics and students have openly expressed support for the Taliban and al-Qaeda, as well as Pakistani sectarian groups, there seems to be scant evidence of Lal Masjid – its administrators or students – being involved in actual acts of terrorism. However, it is likely that the operation against Lal Masjid figured highly in turning the tide of terrorism in Pakistan as we see an increase in suicide bombings since the military raid against the mosque and its seminaries. In the aftermath of the operation, Pakistan witnessed a rapid surge in violent extremism; the incident was presumably used by various jihadi groups as a rallying point from where to attract more attention and support. Once Operation Silence on the Red Mosque was “broken,” Pak-Taliban appears to have emerged as a ferocious force to be reckoned with in Pakistan.

As an appendix to this report is a timeline covering the period July – December 2007 of attacks against Pakistani personnel and politicians after the Lal Masjid operation in July 2007.

Sammendrag

Denne rapporten tar for seg to spørsmål: for det første søker den å analysere i hvilken grad institusjonen Lal Masjid (Den røde moské) kan si å ha hatt tilknytning til militante miljøer. Dette gjøres ved å se på moskéens historie, ledende personligheter forbundet med den, og hvilke forbindelser en har sett mellom moskéen og militante bevegelser. Videre, tar rapporten for seg de terroristaksjoner som har funnet sted i Pakistan siste halvår av 2007 og vurderer hvorvidt disse kan ses på som et resultat av det pakistanske militærets håndtering av hendelsen i Islamabad i juli 2007. Kildematerialet inkluderer nyhetsoppslag, diverse artikler, samt oppslag internettssidene til Lal Masjid og søster-institusjonen Jamia Hafsa. En rekke Jihad-filmer og lydklipp publisert i etterkant av hendelsen er også brukt for å kaste lys over saken.

Det andre spørsmålet rapporten tar for seg er fenomenet ”Talibanisering”. I denne rapporten defineres dette som spredningen og omfanget av Taliban-aktiviteter, både i form av terroristaksjoner – inkludert angrep mot pakistansk sikkerhetspersonell og politikere sett på som å være for vest-vennlige, og med tanke på de forsøk vi har sett på å etablere lokale former for Taliban-inspirerte former for å opprettholde lov og orden. Rapporten forsøker således å forklare hva det pakistanske Taliban er og dets spredning og styrke i etterkant av Lal Masjid hendelsen.

Rapporten argumenterer for at selv om Lal Masjid lærere og elever eksplisitt har uttrykt støtte til Taliban og al Qaida, i tillegg til andre sekteriske grupper basert i Pakistan, er det få bevis på at Lal Masjid – hverken de ansatte eller elevene – har vært involvert i terroristaksjoner. Vi ser derimot at Lal Masjid hendelsen og all oppmerksomheten rundt denne har bidratt til en økning av selvmordsangrep. Pakistan så en sterk økning av voldelige aksjoner i etterkant av hendelsen, og selve forløpet ble hyppig brukt i propaganda og informasjonsvirksomhet av ulike Jihad-grupperinger for å oppnå mer oppmerksomhet og støtte. Det er også i det lys vi kan se opprettelsen av Det pakistanske Taliban.

Som et vedlegg til denne rapporten har vi samlet en oversikt over angrep utført mot pakistansk sikkerhetspersonell og politikere i perioden juli – desember 2007.

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1 Introduction

On 2 July 2007 the Pakistani government reinforced Rangers force deployed near the Lal Masjid, or Red Mosque in Islamabad, with another two wings, each with 500 personnel, thus totalling the number of Rangers to 1,500, plus a 500 police commando. These security personnel were installed to surround the Lal Masjid complex and monitor the activities of the Lal Masjid and its adjoining madrassas (or religious seminaries), Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Farida. Till then the government had declared that it had no intention of raiding the Lal Masjid but “the forces deployed near the mosque will take stern action against Lal Masjid students if they take law in their own hands or attack any massage centre or CDs shop.”¹

However, trouble erupted the next day on 3 July when several Lal Masjid students got into a scuffle with paramilitary soldiers at a close-by checkpoint. This unleashed a fierce clash between the students, who were said to be armed, and the security troops. Using the mosque's loudspeakers to order suicide bombers to get into position, a man belonging to the Red Mosque announced: “They have attacked our mosque; the time for sacrifice has come”.² Lal Masjid students started to patrol the mosque area, carrying guns and Molotov cocktails. They set fire to two adjacent buildings – belonging to the Ministry of Environment and Capital Development Authority (CDA), all the while chanting “Taliban, long live Taliban.” The day long shootout between the seminary students and security force personnel left at least 10 dead and 150 injured.³ The next day, the chief cleric of Lal Masjid, Maulana Abdul Aziz, was arrested while trying to escape clad in a burqa. In the meantime, his brother, deputy cleric of the mosque, Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi⁴, took over the command of the complex. Around 1,200 Lal Masjid students (800 male students and 400 female students of Jamia Hafsa) reportedly surrendered to the authorities, and those remaining in the mosque barricaded themselves along with Abdul Rashid and took up positions with their arms.⁵ Some of the captured students confessed their affiliation with the banned Jamat-ud-Daawa (JD). Security agencies also claimed that they had the body of one of the Lal Masjid militants: identified as a close relative of Maulana Masood Azhar, head of the banned militant group Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), he was allegedly associated with the

¹ Syed Irfan Raza & Munawar Azeem, “Reinforcement around Lal Masjid”, 3 July 2007, *Dawn*, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/07/03/top6.htm> accessed 12 August 2007

² “Shooting at Islamabad’s Lal Masjid; 10 including one soldier killed”, 3 July 2007, *Dawn*, <http://dawn.com/2007/07/03/welcome.htm> accessed 12 August 2007

³ Syed Irfan Raza & Munawar Azeem, “Fierce gun battles rock capital”, 4 July 2007, *Dawn*, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/07/04/top1.htm> accessed 1 August 2007

⁴ The Maulana was wanted in 25 criminal and terrorism cases, including plotting terrorist attacks, kidnapping of police officials and Chinese citizens and snatching of state property.

⁵ “Pakistan cleric offers surrender,” 5 July 2007, *BBC News* website, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6274518.stm, accessed 10 July 2007

publication wing of JeM. However, no foreign extremists, expected to be holed up in the madrassa complex (and the chief reason behind the raid against Lal Masjid), were recovered.⁶ The following days saw more attacks between the Pakistani military and Lal Masjid militants. Gunfire was exchanged throughout the day on 5 July and Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao announced at a press conference that 50-60 militants were still expected inside the mosque complex.⁷ The siege continued on 6 July and Interior Secretary Kamal Shah disclosed that so far 1,221 people, including 795 men and 426 women, had surrendered and 19 had died in clashes between the Lal Masjid students and security forces (SFs).⁸ The same day President Musharraf had left for the flood-affected areas of Balochistan province; while his plane took off from Islamabad airport, militants – whose association with Lal Masjid is unknown – fired guns at the President’s plane from the roof of a nearby house.⁹ Meanwhile the holed up cleric of Lal Masjid, Maulana Abdul Rashid, told the private TV channel, *Geo*, that he and his associates were ready for martyrdom. Said the Maulana:

"We have decided that we may be martyred, but we will not surrender... We are sacrificing our lives for the supremacy of our religion and for the enforcement of Islamic laws. We have no regrets and we will embrace martyrdom."¹⁰

President Musharraf finally issued an ultimatum, warning the “militants” inside the Red Mosque to surrender or be killed,¹¹ and on 7 July the Pakistani army replaced the paramilitary troops deployed at the site of the mosque and began raiding the outer perimeters of the compound.¹² During these days several attempts at reaching a negotiation between the besieged Lal Masjid administration and the government authorities were made, but without a positive outcome. Unsuccessful rounds of talks took place, including delegations politicians and clerics, chiefly belonging to Muttahida-Majlis-e-Amal¹³ or MMA who visited a besieged Lal Masjid to cut a deal with Rashid Ghazi.¹⁴ On 9 July the government even agreed that Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil,

⁶ Most eminent of these foreign extremists, being harboured by the Lal Masjid, was Abu Zar – however no proof of his presence was given; *Aaj TV*’s “Live with Talat Hussain;”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kRwZfaEF8Y>, website accessed 10 August 2007

⁷ “Pakistan cleric offers surrender,” 5 July 2007, *BBC News* website,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6274518.stm, accessed 10 July 2007

⁸ “Ghazi, militants vow to fight to bitter end,” 6 July 2007, *The Indonesian Embassy, Islamabad* website, server.kbri-islamabad.go.id/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1027&Itemid=43, accessed 2 August 2007

⁹ “Fresh fighting at Pakistan mosque,” 6 July 2007, *BBC News* website,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6278074.stm, accessed 15 August 2007

¹⁰ “Mosque leader vows fight to death,” 7 July 2007, *ABC News* website,

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/07/07/1972467.htm>, accessed 14 September 2007

¹¹ “Pakistani Colonel killed in clash,” 8 July 2007, *BBC News* website,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6281404.stm, accessed 10 July 2007

¹² “Pakistan mosque clashes intensify,” 8 July 2007, *Al-Jazeera English* website,

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2007/07/2008525133119372933.html>, accessed 10 July 2007

¹³ Muttahida-Majlis-e-Amal is a 6 party coalition between religious political parties in Pakistan; it comprises of Jamaat-Ulema-Islami, Maulana Fazlur Rehman faction (JUI-F), Jamaat-Ulema-Islami, Maulana Sami ul Haq faction (JUI-S), Jammata-e-Islami (JI), Jamaat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP), Tehrik-e-Islami, and Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith.

¹⁴ In a phone interview with a newscaster from the Pakistani station *ARY One World*, Abdul Rashid stated that the Ulema were forbidden from carrying out negotiations with Abdul Rashid at the behest of the

a leader of the banned group Harakat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) visit Lal Masjid to find a solution to the standoff that had entered the seventh day – however this attempt was also met with futility. Most reports indicate that Maulana Ghazi was willing to surrender provided his conditions were met, but General Musharraf had rejected the terms.¹⁵

Fierce storming of the Red Mosque by the Pakistan Army commandos on 10 July resulted in the death of deputy cleric Maulana Abdul Rashid. Up till his demise, the media-savvy Maulana held a number of brief interviews with local and international reporters, including Al-Jazeera, allowing for a detailed coverage of the events from his perspective.¹⁶

By the time “Operation Silence” was “broken”, on 11 July 2007, the death toll had reached 106 – however, this figure remains shrouded in controversy as many believe it to be a lot higher.¹⁷ The same day al-Qaeda posted a new internet video calling for revenge against the Pakistani government’s assault on the Red Mosque. Al-Qaeda’s second in command, Aymen al-Zawahiri said in the video:

“This crime can only be washed by repentance or blood...”¹⁸

1.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of the present report are two-fold: firstly, to appraise the alleged militancy associated with the Red Mosque, by examining the history of the mosque and its leading luminaries, and the possible links between the mosque and terrorist organisations. Subsequently, acts of terrorism to have taken place in Pakistan in the latter half of 2007 are delineated and

government. He insisted that the government never had any intention of negotiating and had planned to attack the mosque full-on from the outset; *Lal Masjid Abdul Rashid Ghazi last message on ARY TV*, 9 July 2007, You Tube video search, <http://www.forumdl.com/izle.php?k=5EpN0QnJzm8&m=lal-masjid-abdul-rashid-ghazi-last-message-on-ary-tv>, website accessed 10 August 2007

¹⁵ According to government officials, Abdul Rashid had been granted a “safe passage” but in the last minute the cleric demanded that safe passage be offered to foreign militants, too, who were said to be harbouring inside the Red Mosque. PBS interview with Hassan Abbas and Samina Ahmed, 10 July 2007, PBS website, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/july-dec07/pakistan_07-10.html accessed 12 August 2007

However, speaking with news show hosts on *Aaj TV*, Maulana Abdul Rashid insisted that there were no foreign militants inside the Lal Masjid compound and the government was merely using that allegation as pretext to carry out the pre-planned “killing.” *Lal Masjid Abdul Rashid Ghazi last demand*, 9 July 2007, You Tube video search, http://www.forumdl.com/izle.php?k=T0_j5uo33HU&m=lal-masjid-abdul-rasheed-ghazi-shaheed-last-demand, accessed 10 August 2007

¹⁶ The Al-Jazeera English TV crew was the last to be inside the Red Mosque before the siege, and from thereon provided day to day coverage of the attack on Lal Masjid. The lead reporter, Rageh Omaar, held video interviews with Abdul Rashid days before the operation and continued to communicate with him (via phone) during the siege; updated 26 July 2007, Witness, *Al Jazeera* website, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/6325AEC8-9953-489E-8BD2-BA0C43CF4D8A.htm> accessed 10 August 2007

¹⁷ Abid Ullah Jan, “Lal Masjid: what really happened?”, 15 July 2007, *The Independent Centre for Strategic Studies and Analysis*, http://icssa.org/article_detail_parse.php?a_id=1140&rel=1137 accessed 15 August 2007

¹⁸ “The aggression against Lal Masjid,” Aymen al-Zawahiri’s audio message, downloaded from <http://www.w-n-n.net/showthread.php?t=30045>, accessed 17 July 2007

analysed with a view to explain whether they represent direct responses to the military operation against Lal Masjid in July 2007. For this purpose, news items and journal articles were reviewed and pitted against inculpatory information found on the Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa websites, as well as relevant jihadi audios and videos released in the tumultuous aftermath of the Lal Masjid incident. A few Pakistani analysts and journals were also interviewed via phone to further illuminate the linkages between the Lal Masjid episode and subsequent acts of terrorism in Pakistan. Finally, in light of all this, an attempt is made to determine where – if at all – Lal Masjid lies on the “militancy scale.” Borrowing proxies from an empirical study conducted by Saleem Ali¹⁹, who looked at the linkages between sectarian violence and religious seminaries in Pakistan, the Lal Mosque will be considered “militant” if the mosque should exhibit the following features:

1. Visited by a leading militant leader whose documented speeches have clearly incited violence towards other sects (and/or beliefs)
2. If the students or in-charge of Lal Masjid participated in jihadi procession or gatherings
3. If madrassa administrators lobby for or provide leadership to jihadi issues
4. If madrassa managers or students were reportedly involved in militant crimes
5. “Cyber spotting” of websites belonging to jihadi organizations to see whether they have related to Lal Masjid and how.

Since Ali only looked at the role of madrassas in relation to sectarian violence, an additional 5th proxy was added by the author to broaden the scope of definition.²⁰

Should the Red Mosque espouse a number of these characteristics, and is recorded to have shown them at a frequent pace, it is said to lie at the high end of the “militancy scale.” On the other hand, if it comes to light that the mosque only rarely displayed one or two of the features, it will be positioned at the lower end of the said scale. It is acknowledged that some of the proxies listed here are more incriminating than others, and an effort will be made to measure the exact bearing of each point in relation to the Lal Mosque and its seminaries.

The second part of this report revolves around the phenomenon of Talibanization which is defined here as the spread of Taliban activities – including both acts of terrorism (against Pakistani security personnel and politicians considered to be perfidious puppets of the West), as well as efforts to establish a parallel form for governance based on retrograde Islamic principles. An attempt is made to explain what the Pakistani Taliban *is* and the spreading and strengthening of its influence across Pakistan in the backdrop of Operation Silence on the Red Mosque in July 2007.

¹⁹ Saleem Ali’s book on the link between madrassas and militancy in Pakistan is currently under review by Oxford University Press. References in this report are based on a manuscript of Ali’s book and a phone interview with the professor, carried out on 3 September 2007.

²⁰ This 5th proxy has been added by the author as websites of certain militant organisations, for example Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), showed more support for the Red Mosque via articles they published in their monthly and weekly magazines.

I shall argue that, insofar as the Lal Masjid is concerned, although its clerics and students have openly expressed support for the Taliban and al-Qaeda, as well as Pakistani sectarian groups, there seems to be scant evidence of Lal Masjid – its administrators or students – being involved in actual acts of terrorism. However, it is likely that the operation against Lal Masjid figured highly in turning the tide of terrorism in Pakistan as we see an increase in suicide bombings since the military raid against the mosque and its seminaries. In the aftermath of the operation, Pakistan witnessed a rapid surge in violent extremism; the incident was presumably used by various jihadi groups as a rallying point from where to attract more attention and support. Once Operation Silence on the Red Mosque was “broken,” Pak-Taliban appears to have emerged as a ferocious force to be reckoned with in Pakistan.

2 Lal Masjid

2.1 History

The Red Mosque lies in the heart of the Pakistani capital city of Islamabad. Its administration subscribes to the Deobandi school of thought, led by Maulana Abdul Aziz (chief cleric) and his younger brother Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi (deputy cleric). The Lal Masjid boasts two madrassas, one for boys (Jamia Farida), led by Abdul Aziz, and the other for girls (Jamia Hafsa) led by his wife, Umme Hassaan. As of April 2007, there were known to be approximately 7,000 pupils studying at both these madrassas, belonging mainly to the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Afghan-bordering tribal areas²¹ – authorities claimed that up to 70% of the student body came from these regions.²²

Lal Masjid was constructed by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and funded by the Ministry of Finance in the 1960s. In 1966 Maulana Muhammad Abdullah was appointed its first Imam (prayer leader) by the then President Ayub Khan. Years later, in 1981, the restructuring of the mosque, worth Pakistani rupees 7.255 million, was conducted on the directive of the religious President Zia ul Haq.

Lal Masjid and its seminaries were generally appreciated for their philanthropic work, including housing orphans and poor children, and providing them with education. However things started to take a different turn during the 1980s when the mujahideen’s fight against Soviet invasion was at its peak; Lal Masjid gradually came to serve as a major conduit for sending fighters to Afghanistan.²³

²¹ “Inside the Red Mosque”, updated 26 July 2007, Witness, *Al Jazeera* website, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/6325AEC8-9953-489E-8BD2-BA0C43CF4D8A.htm> accessed 10 August 2007; Iqbal Latif, “Jihadi Aunt,” 5 July 2007, *Global Politician* website, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/23043-jihad>, accessed 25 August 2007

²² Umer Farooq, “The firebrand cleric and his ‘Lal Masjid’ polemics,” 13 April 2007, *Des Pardes* website, <http://www.despardes.com/articles/2007/20070413-lal-masjid-cleric.htm>, accessed 5 September 2007

²³ Issac Kfir, “Analysis: the Red Mosque and the future of Pakistan,” 11 July 2007, *Jerusalem Post* website, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull&cid=1184168541679>, accessed 17 September 2007

Previously Maulana Abdullah had played a key role in mobilizing the masses in support of the protest against Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977, earning him President Zia ul Haq's gratitude, the general who had allegedly supervised the military-mullah alliance that helped him to oust Bhutto and assume power for himself. This gratitude deepened when Abdullah again proved pivotal; this time in churning large numbers of radical Muslims to fight the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Maulana Abdullah was a firebrand orator; from his pulpit he would preach the cause of jihad, and his sermons gained immense popularity among the military and civilian bureaucracy.²⁴ Zia rewarded him with land in a posh area in Islamabad (sector E-7) where Jamia Farida was built. In 1988 the government allotted land to the Lal Masjid to establish Jamia Hafsa (for girls). Its area was further expanded in 1994. In March 2001 the seminary purportedly encroached on a plot adjacent to the mosque; this incident was followed by a succession of numerous other encroachments.

Over time, Maulana Abdullah, who subscribed to the strict Deobandi sect of Islam, came to be heavily embroiled in sectarian politics; he supported anti-Shia militant organizations, like the Sipah-e-Sihaba (SSP), and it was allegedly such involvement that eventually led to his assassination inside the Red Mosque in 1998.²⁵

Maulana Abdullah's assassination paved way for his two sons, Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Abdul Rashid, to take over the administration of the Red Mosque. Abdul Aziz became the chief cleric of Lal Masjid and Abdul Rashid his deputy.

2.2 Abdul Rashid

A moment of transformation occurred for Abdul Rashid when his father was assassinated. Up till then Abdul Rashid had expressed no interest in the radical issues governing the administration of Lal Masjid. In 1966, when his father was appointed Imam of Lal Masjid, Abdul Rashid moved to Islamabad from his birthplace of Basti Abdullah in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. Here Abdul Rashid enrolled in the Federal Government School where he proved his academic acumen by continually being in the top of his class.²⁶ Despite his father's insistence, Abdul Rashid refused to enroll himself in Jamia Farida and instead pursued his education at the relatively "secular" Qaudi-e-Azam University in Islamabad. He completed his Masters in International Relations from Qauid-e-Azam in the early 1990s and at the time was viewed by his contemporaries as a progressive and even "westernized" man. Moreover, Abdul Rashid married into a "modern" family. His "secular" lifestyle irked his father greatly and for a long it remained a bone of contention between the two.

²⁴ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "The Taliban's brothers in alms", 14 March 2007, *Asia Times* website, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/IC14Df01.html accessed 1 August 2007

²⁵ Umer Farooq, "The firebrand cleric and his 'Lal Masjid' polemics," 13 April 2007, *Des Pardes* website, <http://www.despardes.com/articles/2007/20070413-lal-masjid-cleric.htm>, accessed 5 September 2007; Hassan Abbas, "The road to Lal Masjid and its aftermath", *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 5, Issue 14, 19 July 2007, *The Jamestown Foundation* website, <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373563> accessed 2 August 2007

²⁶ Shahbaz Rana, "Abdul Rashid Ghazi", July 11 2007, *The Nation* website, <http://nation.com.pk/daily/july-2007/11/index8.php> accessed 4 September 2007

Abdul Rashid worked as an officer at the Ministry of Education in Islamabad and later served as an assistant director to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). He held a brief stint as the editor of “Diyami”, the monthly magazine of the Ministry of Education. Ultimately, it was his father’s assassination in 1998 that would decide Abdul Rashid’s fate as a hard line cleric; he joined his brother in running the mosque and within a year exposed himself as a Taliban-sympathizer, eager to impose the *Sharia* or Islamic law in Pakistan.²⁷

In a televised interview with Dr. Shahid Masood²⁸ Maulana Abdul Rashid spoke of the incompetence of the government in dealing with the un-Islamic activities that were rampant in Islamabad, rendering it a responsibility of madrassa administrators and students to cleanse the city of such impurity: “if there is *kora* (trash) outside my door, the municipality should do something; if they don’t then we are to do something.”²⁹

2.3 Abdul Aziz

Abdul Aziz graduated from the infamous Jamia Binoria religious seminary in Karachi. After his father’s death, Maulana Abdul Aziz assumed the role of Imam at the Lal Masjid. He retained this position until the year 2005 when he was dismissed from service for issuing a *fatwa* or religious edict against Pakistani army officers fighting in the tribal areas around the Afghan border; the fatwa denounced the actions of the army by declaring that the soldiers killed during the fighting were not “martyrs” and will hence be barred from religious sanctions on their funerals. Since then the Maulana was illegally occupying the Lal Masjid. A replacement cleric was appointed to take over Aziz’s role as Imam of Lal Masjid, but such was Abdul Aziz’s popularity that hundreds of people refused to pray behind anyone but him.

Unlike his brother, Abdul Aziz is camera-shy and refuses to appear on TV or have his pictures taken; for this trait he has been likened to the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar. However, in a rare televised interview³⁰ (showing only his back to the camera) Abdul Aziz justified the unlawful activities of his mosque and madrassas; claiming that the “writ of Allah” supersedes that of the government and actual law enforcement bodies. Aziz proclaimed that even though Pakistan was created under the banner of an Islamic state, it has yet to fully espouse the *Sharia*; “our [Lal Masjid] aim is to raise the name of Allah and *Sharia* in our society ... we are doing this, not by

²⁷ Hassan Abbas, “The road to Lal Masjid and its aftermath”, *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 5, Issue 14, 19 July 2007, *The Jamestown Foundation* website,

<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373563> accessed 2 August 2007

²⁸ Dr. Shahid Masood is a political commentator and analyst, and host of the famous *Mere Mutabiq* (According to Me) on Geo TV. He interviewed Maulana Abdul Rashid on his show in April 2007; *Dr Shahid Masood’s interview with Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi*, 24 August 2007, Lal Masjid blog, <http://masjidlal.wordpress.com/2007/08/24/dr-shahid-masoods-interview-with-maulana-abdul-rasheed-ghazi>, accessed 25 August 2007

²⁹ *Ibid*; the interview was in Urdu, translated here by the author.

³⁰ The interview was conducted by *Indus News*, uploaded on 9 June 2007 and accessed via the Jamia Hafsa website, <http://www.jamiahafsa.page.tl/Home.htm>, on 10 August 2007

blowing up government buildings, instead we have voiced protest in a non-violent fashion, by taking up state land, so to push the government to adopt an Islamic court of law.”³¹

On the subject of suicide bombings, the Maulana suggested that they would be condoned as a last-ditch effort should the Pakistani military attack his mosque. Similar sentiments were reportedly echoed in his Friday sermons from early 2007 where Abdul Aziz insisted that “if there is violent operation then we will consider suicide attacks.”³²

2.4 Moderate to Militant

The Lal Masjid and its seminaries were not always considered to be “militant” or prone to violence; although they had challenged the writ of law in the past, their activities did not subsume extremism, and it wasn’t until recently that they started to acquire notoriety.

Previously Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa had come under international media spotlight when one of the suicide bombers of the 7/7 attack in London in 2005, Shehzad Tanweer, was suspected to be linked with the mosque; the Lal Masjid was raided by police as part of a crackdown on religious seminaries following the London bombing.³³ It made the headlines again when, during an international custody row, the British school girl, Misbah Rana, or Molly Campbell, showed interest in joining Jamia Hafsa.³⁴

More recently, during the course of early 2007, Lal Masjid and its madrassas increasingly gained infamy for their unlawful activities – these include kidnapping alleged prostitutes, publicly setting alight “un-Islamic” videos and DVDs. They also demanded the government install a parallel court system based on the Sharia, and in April 2007 succeeded in doing so: a Qazi judiciary court was established in Lal Masjid, comprising of ten counsels who would settle disputes in accordance with Islamic injunctions.³⁵ In addition, they abducted policemen in May 2007 who were to be released on the condition that bail is granted to five Lal Masjid students being held in government detention at the time.³⁶

³¹ Ibid; during the interview Abdul Aziz expressed the wish that he be the first to be *shaheed* (martyred) in the face of opposition. This is ironic as he was captured trying to escape the mosque, clad in a woman’s burqa (veil), a day after the operation against Lal Masjid was launched, on 4 July 2007

³² Quoted in Umer Farooq, “The firebrand cleric and his ‘Lal Masjid’ polemics,” 13 April 2007, *Des Pardes* website, <http://www.despardes.com/articles/2007/20070413-lal-masjid-cleric.htm>, accessed 5 September 2007

³³ “Pakistan police raids detain 200,” 20 July 2007, *BBC News* website, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4697281.stm, accessed 26 August 2007

³⁴ Syed Shoaib Hasan, “Profile: Islamabad’s Red Mosque,” 27 July 2007, *BBC News* website, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6503477.stm, accessed 6 August 2007

³⁵ Syed Irfan Raza, “Hafsa clerics set up Qazi court in Lal Masjid,” 6 April 2007, *Dawn* website, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/04/06/top1.htm>, accessed 29 August 2007

³⁶ A chronology of events from January-July 2007 can be found on *The Daily Times* website, “From library occupation to Lal Masjid operation,” 11 July 2007, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5C07%5C11%5Cstory_11-7-2007_pg7_24, accessed 14 June 2008

Lal Masjid students committed serious vandalism in Islamabad on 7 October 2003, the day Maulana Tariq Azam was assassinated.³⁷ Tariq Azam was the leader of the anti-Shia sectarian outfit, Sipah-e-Sahaba. Such violent riots were repeated in August 2004 when a warrant was issued against Abdul Rashid and Abdul Aziz in connection with attempted attacks on President Musharraf's life. The police had also tried apprehending Abdul Rashid on charges of giving refuge to an al-Qaeda operative in November of the same year, but police forces were met by violent resistance from hundreds of male and female madrassa students.³⁸ Weapons were also seized from Maulana Abdul Aziz's car, and it was widely rumored that the madrassa compound harbored a large supply of ammunition.³⁹

Much later, after the Lal Masjid raid had ended, the new *naib amir* (deputy cleric) of Lal Masjid, Amir Siddiqui, described the "possession of weapons including rocket launchers and machine guns" as government propaganda, but adds that during the Lal Masjid raid there were "13-14 guns in the seminary for self-defence... and according to UN guidelines, one can keep weapons for self-defence."⁴⁰

When it comes to trespassing, Jamia Hafsa boasts a sparkling record, dating back to March 2001 when Jamia Hafsa women started to encroach upon state land lying adjacent to the Lal Masjid. In early 2007 the female students forcefully usurped a children's library next to the Lal Masjid complex. In January 2007 the Capital Development Authority razed Ameer Hamza Mosque in Islamabad; this propelled the "burqa brigade" (as the female students of Jamia Hafsa came to be known) into action. Razing of Ameer Hamza Mosque threatened to be the start of a long spree of demolition work, targeted at mosques and seminaries that would ensure the surrender of encroached state land to the government. Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Faridia were included in the list of mosque and madrassas to be torn down by the CDA.⁴¹

Jamia Hafsa website shows a video clip of the protest in response to the demolished Hamza Mosque – in it they declare the debut of Jamia Hafsa women into the "jihad battle" and how revenge for the demolishment of Hamza Mosque will be exacted.⁴² Having conquered the library Jamia Hafsa students remained steadfast in their position, setting up a round the clock vigil and vowing to "fight to death" if the government should try to evict them. They were joined in their mission by madrassa students from across the country. This "baton force" stood up as the frontline against security forces on 9 February 2007 when the government decided to launch an

³⁷ Amir Rana, "Lal Mosque's terror links," 25 May 2007, *Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies* (PIPS)

³⁸ Ibid; regarding this particular charge, Ejaz-ul-Haq, Minister of Religious Affairs at the time, had intervened to get the indiscretions pardoned

³⁹ Ansar Abbasi, "Lal Masjid weapons cast doubt on role of agencies," 13 July 2007, *The News International* website, http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=8990, accessed 6 August 2007

⁴⁰ Subhatji Roy, "Lal Masjid's new chief takes old line: democracy is no solution", 7 January 2008, *The Indian Express* website, <http://www.indianexpress.com/story/258389.html> accessed 7 January 2008

⁴¹ Khurram Iqbal, "Children library to enforce sharia?" 12 March 2007, *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies* website, <http://www.san.pips.com.pk/pakistan/mar07/Shariah.html> accessed 24 August 2007

⁴² In this protest video, Jamia Hafsa girls chant "this is revenge; this is revenge, for Masjid Hamza."

operation to end the wrongful occupation of the children's library. However, after a member of the National Assembly intervened, the security forces were made to withdraw.

Farhat Taj⁴³ visited the Jamia Hafsa seminary during this escapade and reported on the views of the female students; the women revered Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar as their ideologues and were appeared primed to become suicide bombers in the name of Islam.⁴⁴

In March 2007 Jamia Hafsa women, stung with a missionary zeal, took to the streets and launched anti-vice campaigns. They kidnapped prostitutes, enacting their promise to launch a moral crusade against all sinful activities in Islamabad.

Soon after came the warning by Abdul Aziz that if Sharia was not established by the government, the seminary students will take it upon themselves to purify Islamabad of "immoral activities." He intensified his stance by announcing that the government will pay the price (in suicide attacks) if it dared to launch an operation against the mosque or madrassa. Via their illegal FM station, a threat was broadcasted on 12 April 2007: "There will be suicide blasts in the nook and cranny of the country. We have weapons, grenades and we are expert in manufacturing bombs. We are not afraid of death...."⁴⁵ This was later reiterated when the clerics claimed that there were over 100,000 suicide bombers on standby in Pakistan, including 10,000 in the Lal Masjid and its madrassas.⁴⁶

The Lal Masjid personnel also pushed for their cause by distributing fliers across Islamabad, listing four key demands: "immediate reconstruction of the demolished mosques in Islamabad, immediate declaration of Sharia in Pakistan by the government, immediate promulgation of Quran and Sunnah in the courts of law and removal of the un-Islamic clauses of the Women Protection Bill, immediate discontinuation to declaring jihad as terrorism by the government as it is the great sacred religious duty of Muslims."⁴⁷ Such demands were eerily similar to those of the pro-Taliban militants in the tribal areas.

2.5 Possible terror links

The Pakistani government has long been cognizant of the ties between Lal Masjid and banned militant groups; a senior state official reported: "We have confirmed information that there are a number of wanted men inside the precincts of Lal Masjid and associated madrassa of Jamia Hafsa

⁴³ Farhat Taj is a researcher at the Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo in Norway

⁴⁴ Farhat Taj, "Jamia Hafsa must close down", 3 February 2007, Daily Times Pakistan website, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007/02/03/story_3-2-2007_pg3_3, accessed 2 September 2007

⁴⁵ Quoted in Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Pakistan – the threat from within", 23 May 2007, Brief No 13, *Pakistan Security Research Unit*, University of Bradford website, <http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/download/attachments/748/Brief+number+13.pdf> accessed 3 September 2007

⁴⁶ "Over one lakh suicide bombers in Pak: cleric", 31 May 2007, *Rediff News* website, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/may/31pak1.htm> accessed 3 September 2007

⁴⁷ Noreen Haider, "Grabbing Attention", April 2007, *The News* website, <http://jang.com.pk/thenews/apr2007-weekly/nos-08-04-2007/enc.htm> accessed 5 September 2007

and whatever Abdul Aziz is doing he is taking advice from these people who are wanted in a number of terrorism related activities in the country.”⁴⁸

In the heels of the 9/11 attack and Musharraf’s support for the “war on terror”, Lal Masjid emerged as a rallying point for anti-Musharraf protests; Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid called Musharraf a traitor for cooperating with the United States and affirmed their own pro-Taliban stance.

Umme Hassan, the head of Jamia Hafsa madrassa, and wife of Abdul Aziz, delivered vitriolic, anti-government speeches from the seat of her seminary compound. In one of the video clips of her speech before a large gathering of burqa-clad students she announced that “we women have entered the *jihad* battle.”⁴⁹

The controversial edict issued by Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid in 2004, where Pakistani soldiers fighting tribal militants in Waziristan were to be denied a Muslim burial, exemplifies, to an extent, the brother’s backing of the Taliban. The brothers were unhesitant of voicing their sympathy for the struggle of “mujahideen” fighting in Afghanistan or Iraq or elsewhere: “We consider suicide attacks are right in Pakistan [sic] under a few circumstances while we consider them as absolutely justified in the context of Afghanistan and Iraq. We favored the Taliban not only in the past, we favor them even today.”⁵⁰

Prior to “Operation Silence,” Abdul Rashid had spoken of the support he and his administration received from militants in Waziristan: “Haji Omar [Taliban commander in Waziristan] said in an interview that if the government tried to attack Lal Masjid, they would take revenge. That was the last thing the government wanted and it lifted the siege and we asked the militants to leave. But the Waziris are still in Islamabad with their relatives, so if the government makes an advance again, they will immediately come to the rescue.”⁵¹ This and similar statements indicate that the Red Mosque received support from the Taliban factions in Waziristan (in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas or FATA). Indeed Lal Masjid has strong links to the tribal areas of Pakistan, especially since the area is home to many of its students.⁵²

⁴⁸ Umar Farooq, “The firebrand cleric and his Lal Masjid polemics”, 13 April 2007, *Des Pardes* website, <http://www.despardes.com/articles/2007/20070413-lal-masjid-cleric.htm> accessed 1 September 2007

⁴⁹ The same clip was used in several *jihadi* videos by different militant groups, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), that came out in the wake of the army’s raid on Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa in July 2007

⁵⁰ “Over one lakh suicide bombers in Pak: cleric”, 31 May 2007, *Rediff News* website, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/may/31pak1.htm> accessed 3 September 2007

⁵¹ Quoted in Syed Saleem Shahzad, “The Taliban’s brothers in alms”, 14 March 2007, *Asia Times* website, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/IC14Df01.html accessed 1 August 2007

⁵² Cited in Umer Farooq, “The firebrand cleric and his ‘Lal Masjid’ polemics,” 13 April 2007, *Des Pardes* website, <http://www.despardes.com/articles/2007/20070413-lal-masjid-cleric.htm>, accessed 5 September 2007; Iqbal Latif, “Jihadi Aunt,” 5 July 2007, *Global Politician* website, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/23043-jihad>, accessed 25 August 2007

During the Lal Masjid siege, many tribal elders and local Taliban leaders, including Baitullah Mehsud⁵³, pledged their support to Lal Masjid and Mehsud warned the government of the consequences of an attack on the mosque.⁵⁴ Direct links between Mehsud and Abdul Rashid supposedly came to surface when Pakistani intelligence officials claimed to have intercepted telephone calls between Mehsud and Abdul Rashid during the siege of Lal Masjid, where the militant told the Maulana that “if he is killed his blood will not be wasted.”⁵⁵ This further suggests that a relationship between Lal Masjid officials and Taliban militants existed.

Actual “radical” conduct by the Lal Masjid associates was also observed; for instance, riots (ransacking public and private property) were organized by Lal Masjid students in the aftermath of Azam Tariq’s assassination.⁵⁶ The issue of bemoaning and mobbing by Lal Masjid students at the passing of an SSP leader has been said by analysts to be symptomatic of the mosque’s sympathy, and even affiliation, with this sectarian group. Furthermore, the Sharia plan that was being ardently endorsed by Lal Masjid bears a close resemblance to that of Sipah-e-Sahaba’s; the group is known to have openly allied with Lal Masjid.⁵⁷ All this suggests close ideological relations between the two parties. However it is difficult to ascertain whether this ideological affiliation translated itself on a practical, operational level.

In a sermon delivered 13 July 2007, head of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (the political front of the banned extremist group, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba) denounced the military raid on the Red Mosque, exclaiming that the “evil-doers who have committed this sin, I wish to see them suffer.”⁵⁸ However, for the most part Hafiz Saeed uses the episode as a tool to attack the government and its policies, and to sway his audience into believing that Pakistan is in danger of adopting “Turkey-like secularism” and that the US will not be appeased by just one Lal Masjid being attacked – instead “they will only be appeased when we have abandoned our faith, our ideology.”⁵⁹ In a later sermon, dated 3 August 2007, Hafiz Saeed speaks of the virtues of jihad against the “kufr,” in particular the US and its “agents” (Pakistan army) and enlists reasons it should be promulgated – one of which is to protect mosques.⁶⁰ He also criticises the Pakistani military regime “extremists” who “want to

⁵³ Baitullah Mehsud is the head of the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* or the Movement for the Taliban in Pakistan; he is based in South Waziristan

⁵⁴ Safdar Sial, “Conflict: is the Lal Masjid saga over?” 12 July 2007, *Pakistan Institute for Political Studies* website, <http://www.pips.com.pk/san/pakistan/july07/Masjid12.html> accessed 24 August 2007

⁵⁵ “Former Guantanamo inmate blows himself up in Pakistan”, 24 July 2007, *Dawn* website, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/07/24/welcome.htm#LatestNews> accessed 3 September 2007

⁵⁶ Muhammed Amir Rana, “Lal Masjid’s terror links”, 24 May 2007, *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies*, <http://www.san.pips.com.pk/pakistan/may07/LalMosque.html>, accessed 25 August 2007

⁵⁷ Ibid; Maulana Tariq Azam had proposed a 5-point plan, namely that: shops must close with Azan (prayer call), Friday should be a holiday, bribes and impermissible business must be stopped, cable network must be terminated, and every decision should be taken in consultation with Ulema

⁵⁸ Hafiz Saeed, audio sermon dated 13 July 2007, *Jamat-ud-Dawa* website, <http://www.jamatuddawa.org/data1/pages/audio.htm>, accessed 7 August 2007

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hafiz Saeed, audio sermon dated 3 August 2007, *Jamat-ud-Dawa* website, <http://www.jamatuddawa.org/data1/pages/audio.htm>, accessed 10 August 2007

destroy madrassas to show the international media that they're a frontline state in fighting terrorism."⁶¹

Moreover, some of the surrendering men at Lal Masjid allegedly belonged to Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD)⁶², suggesting links between the two parties. However it should be remembered that the Lal Masjid administration adheres to the Deobandi creed of Sunni Islam, whereas JuD subscribed to the Ahl-e-Hadith sect; keeping in view the latent belligerency between different sectarian groups in Pakistan, a close cooperation between the Red Mosque and JuD is not expected. Indeed, perusing through past articles published by various JuD magazines and listening to speeches by JuD leaders reveals few signs of a strong affiliation.

More detailed accounts of Lal Masjid's possible terror links to the Pakistani Taliban, as well as extremist groups like Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), are given in the following chapters.

3 Repercussions of Operation Silence

The Lal Mosque briefly reopened for Friday prayers on 27 July 2007, but due to the ensuing violence it was made to shut down again.⁶³ It officially reopened on 3 October 2007⁶⁴, having lost its trademark red colour to beige.

On its re-inauguration, President Musharraf, in an interview with *Geo TV's* Kamran Khan, re-assured the public that the "mosque will not again be taken over by militants."⁶⁵ Shortly afterwards, Maulana Abdul Aziz delivered a sermon that called on his followers to start a revolution and fight in retaliation for his brother, Abdul Rashid's death and that of the madrassa students who died during the siege:

"The nation should be ready for jihad because only jihad can bring a revolution... The students of schools, colleges and universities should spread in the nook and corner of Pakistan and work for bringing Islamic revolution."⁶⁶

Aziz continued to profess a retaliatory jihad against Pakistani authorities, stating that those who were killed "were dear to Allah. That's why they have embraced martyrdom [which] has boosted our morale. Every mosque in the country is Lal Masjid."⁶⁷

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "Musharraf assassination attempt? Cleric vows not to surrender," 6 July 2007, *Des Pardes* website, <http://www.despardes.com/NewsExplorer/2007/200707-lal-masjid.html>, accessed 11 September 2007

⁶³ Isambard Wilkison, "Red Mosque suicide attack kills 13 in Islamabad," 29 July 2007, *Telegraph* website, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/07/27/wmosque227.xml>, accessed 30 July 2007

⁶⁴ It was briefly re-opened on July 27, 2007 for Friday prayers, but due to the ensuing violence (clashes between protestors and SFs occurred on the mosque site, while a suicide bomber detonated a device in the busy Aabpara market close by) that sparked, it was shut down again

⁶⁵ *Geo TV* online streaming

⁶⁶ Video speech of Maulana Abdul Aziz, posted 17 January 2008, downloaded from a *Jamia Hafsa* website, http://jamiyahafsa.multiply.com/video/item/52/Latest_video_speech_of_Molana_Abdul_Aziz_sbDAMAT_BARAKATUHUM, accessed 2 February 2008

In late October of 2007, during the military-militant standoff in Swat, the new *naib imam* (deputy cleric) of Lal Masjid, Amir Siddiqui⁶⁸ (nephew of the late Abdul Rashid Ghazi), openly announced support for Maulana Fazlullah⁶⁹ and warned the government that “the situation in Swat will be more dangerous for the army than that in the tribal areas and Balochistan.”⁷⁰ Support for Fazlullah’s Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM)⁷¹ further solidifies Lal Masjid’s support for the Pakistani-Taliban that had waged a war against the Pakistani security forces.

Even during the siege of Lal Masjid, from 3-10 July 2007, several protests and incidences of violence were reported to have taken place in Waziristan apparently in retaliation for the military operation. Soon after the military pulled out of the Lal Masjid, it was certain settled areas of the North West Frontier Province and Waziristan that were put on high alert and more troops came to be allocated to these regions. Most of the Red Mosque students belonged to these areas, and so the possibility of a backlash was never wholly discounted – rather, it was expected – and according to leading Pakistani journalists, the immediate spate of terrorism targeting security forces was “retaliatory in nature and were meant to harm those who had taken part in the military operations at the mosque and madrassah complex in Islamabad.”⁷²

The warnings issued by the Lal Masjid clerics and their supporters quickly turned to prophecy when violent ripples of repercussions were felt across Pakistan, especially in the NWFP and tribal belt, once Operation Silence was over. Using illegal FM radio channels, radical clerics tried to instigate an armed uprising. Certain “dormant” jihadi outfits were expected to rise in the aftermath of events at Lal Masjid; for example Maulana Fazlullah, the head of the banned militant group TNSM, which has a stronghold in NWFP’s Swat area, managed to rally a large group of armed people at his Imam Dheri madrassa.⁷³

Unprecedented in Pakistan's history, suicide terrorism in 2007 emerged as the popular trend among militants, particularly after the Lal Masjid event and the breakdown of a peace agreement between the tribal lords of North Waziristan and the military government.⁷⁴ Fifty-six suicide

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Maulana Amir Siddiqui is a 42-year-old madarsa-educated Maulana, who took charge of the family-run Lal Masjid about three months ago when it re-opened

⁶⁹ Leader of TNSM in the Malakand division of NWFP, and a commander of the Pakistani Taliban

⁷⁰ “Lal Masjid cleric supports Fazlullah,” 26 October 2007, *Dawn* website, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/10/26/top7.htm>, accessed 27 October 2007

⁷¹ TNSM’s trademark is the black turbans and it shares a common religious vision with the Taliban. It has its stronghold in Malakand (North West Frontier Province) and Bajaur (Federally Administered Tribal Areas). The Malakand division comprises of Malakand district, Buner district, Swat district, Shangla district, Upper and Lower Dir districts and Chitral district.

⁷² Rahimullah Yousafzai, “Accord and discord,” August 2007, *Newsline Pakistan* website, <http://www.newsline.com.pk/NewsAug2007/specrepaug2007.htm>, accessed 4 October 2007

⁷³ Safdar Sial, “Lal Masjid: aftermath and future repercussions,” 16 July 2007, *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies* website, <http://www.pips.com.pk/san/pakistan/july07/LalMosque16.html> accessed 24 August 2007

⁷⁴ It should be mentioned however that whereas acts of suicide terror rose, there was in 2007 a decrease in other variants of terrorism, chiefly missile or rocket attacks or improvised explosive device blasts. Only 417 incidents of missile or rocket attacks occurred in 2007, as compared to 528 incidents in 2006, “Ten-

attacks took place in Pakistan in 2007 (a remarkable increase to the 22 total suicide attacks to take place between March 2002 to 2006). In July 2008, a year after the commando raid on Lal Masjid, Pakistan's *The News* reported that forty-four of these acts of terrorism had occurred after the military raid on Red Mosque and had claimed the lives of up to 2,729 people (484 security personnel) between July-December 2007⁷⁵. The figure includes Pakistan's first ever female suicide (allegedly an Afghan refugee) bomber who blew herself up on 4 December of 2007, in Peshawar.⁷⁶

Immediately after the operation against Red Mosque, there were 15 suicide strikes between July 14 and 31 (an average of one a day)⁷⁷ – a horrifying aftermath by any calculation. In addition to this, there have been numerous clashes, including ambushes, rocket and gun attacks, between militants and security forces.

Of the 56 suicide strikes in 2007, twenty-three were in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), twenty-one in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), nine in Punjab, two in Balochistan and one in Sindh province. Of the twenty-three in FATA, only two were in North Waziristan and one in Bajaur Agency, where the US contends al-Qaeda infrastructure is located. The remaining twenty occurred in Baitullah Mehsud-controlled areas of South Waziristan. Two military cantonments suffered repeated attacks – 5 in Rawalpindi and 3 in Kohat.

The full fury of militants was felt mostly in the tribal belt and NWFP where military operation has been the strongest and stormiest. However ripples of radicalism were felt also in the heart of Pakistan when suicide bombings occurred in and around the capital city of Islamabad. This was confirmed by an Interior Ministry report on suicide attacks released in September 2007, which stated that the Lal Masjid military operation had caused an increase in suicide attacks on army and paramilitary forces, mostly in the North West Frontier Province and FATA.⁷⁸

fold increase in suicide attacks in Pakistan,” 14 January 2008, *Rediff News* website, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/jan/14pak.htm> accessed 3 February 2008

⁷⁵ Post Lal Masjid suicide attacks claim 4,300 lives, 5 July 2007, *The News* website, http://thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=122261 accessed 5 July 2007

⁷⁶ Female suicide bomber killed in Pakistan blast: police, 4 December 2007, *AFP* website, http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hwXEUC57cFMvDd-j_S_5IJTG-jaw accessed 11 January 2008

Moreover, female “*fedayeen*” (fighters) are being prepared to carry out suicide attacks against US interests. On the website of the extremist group Jamaat ud Dawa (JD), 200 women showed aspirations to strike US targets: “If the US tried to attack Iran or Pakistan like Afghanistan or Iraq, then we will kill the Americans through suicide attacks. We will tie bombs with our body and stop the Americans from entering Iran and Pakistan: Quoted in “Pakistan’s Radical Red Mosque Returns,” 25 October 2007, *Terrorism Monitor* website, <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373741> accessed 3 November 2007

⁷⁷ See Appendix

⁷⁸ Azaz Syed, “129 army, FC personnel killed in 9 months,” 18 September 2007, *The Daily Times*

In the weeks immediately following the Lal Masjid operation, various places in Pakistan – from Hub to Hangu to Miranshah to Islamabad – all witnessed suicide strikes.⁷⁹ The primary target was the security forces (SFs), however political figures also came under the wrath of militants. A comprehensive list of attacks against SFs and politicians operation from July to December 2007 can be found in the appendix section of this report.

The truce, signed on 6 September 2006, between militants in North Waziristan⁸⁰ and the military regime ended on July 15, 2007, and soon thereafter, the 2005 peace accords between militants in South Waziristan and Bajaur Agency and the Pakistani government also came under immense strain, resulting in a welter of violence in the region.

North Waziristan has seen a surge in attacks on military convoys, government targets and it is speculated that militants from the tribal areas also carried out “revenge attacks” in other parts of the country. From 13 August 2007 onwards, the military came to be a target in South Waziristan (after nearly two and a half years of abatement in such violence.) The extremists kidnapped and attacked soldiers, and on August 17 this tribal agency experienced its first suicide bombing. As for the NWFP there was a rapid transit to anarchy in 2007 when twenty-two out of its twenty-four districts were affected by varying levels of militant mobilisation. The Swat Valley was particularly torn by terror, with a reported 60% of Swat’s 1.5 million inhabitants leaving the area.⁸¹

On 23 July 2007, shortly after the military operation on Lal Mosque had ended,, “pro-Taliban” groups in North Waziristan warned Pakistani soldiers to quit fighting or face the “gift of death” through new suicide attacks: in pamphlets, distributed in Miranshah town (of North Waziristan), entitled “Till Islam Lives in Islamabad” a group calling itself the Mujahideen-i-Islam (Islamic Holy Warriors) threatened that suicide bombs would again bring soldiers the “gift of death.”⁸² They added: “We know that you have become America’s slave and are serving infidel Musharraf and have become a traitor to your religion for food, clothes and shelter.”⁸³

In September 2007 Pakistani security agencies publicized intelligence reports according to which: “there are chances that that male and female former students of Jamia Hafsa, Jamia Fareedia and Lal Masjid that managed to escape from ‘Operation Silence’ could carry out suicide attacks across the country.”⁸⁴

⁷⁹ On July 14 2007, a suicide bomber killed 26 soldiers in Miranshah; 13 died when a suicide bomber exploded outside a court in Islamabad on 18 July; in Hangu a police academy became the target of a suicide attack; and in Kohat a suicide bomber detonated inside a mosque on 19 July 2007

⁸⁰ Peace accords dating back to 2006 and 2005, respectively.

⁸¹ Kanchan Lakshman “The sledgehammer in Swat”, 3 December 2007, *South Asia Terrorism Portal* website, http://satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/6_21.htm accessed 17 December 2007

⁸² “2 troops, 35 militants killed in NWA fierce battle,” 24 July 2007, *The Daily Mail* website, <http://dailymailnews.com/200707/24/news/dmtopstory01.html>, accessed 5 September 2007

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Shahnawaz Khan, “Government warned of attack by female bombers,” 24 September 2007, *The Daily Times*

Also with respect to the suicide bombings that took place in Islamabad in July 2007⁸⁵, security agencies reportedly traced them down to a network of terrorists operating across Pakistan; Interior Ministry spokesperson at the time, Javed Iqbal Cheema revealed that those arrested were linked with Lal Masjid and Waziristan.⁸⁶ Moreover, the suicide attacks on the Marriott hotel and airport in Islamabad to have taken place in early 2007 are also said to be connected with Lal Masjid; both the suicide bombers allegedly detoured at the mosque before heading for operation.⁸⁷

The suicide blast in the army mess of Karar Company of Special Services Group (SSG) at the cantonment area of Tarbela Ghazi (near Islamabad) was also linked to the Red Mosque: Karar had participated in the Lal Masjid operation.⁸⁸ According to South Asia Analysis Group, it was a Pashtun army officer belonging to SSG who committed the suicide bomb attack on the mess; apparently his younger sister was among the dead in the aftermath of the Lal Masjid escapade.⁸⁹ Some Pakistani officials made links to al-Qaeda as the attack was on an elite unit tasked with tackling al-Qaeda networks.⁹⁰ Indeed right after the siege of Lal Masjid had ended, al-Qaeda's second in command, Aymen al-Zawahiri, warned that General Musharraf would be 'punished' for the killing of Ghazi: "Let the Pakistan Army know that the killing of Ghazi and the demolition of his mosque have soaked the history of the Pakistani army in shame ... which can only be washed away by retaliation against the killers of Ghazi," he said.⁹¹

On 20 September 2007, messages again emanated from the heads of the international terrorist organisation; chief of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, vowed to retaliate against "infidel" President Pervez Musharraf for the killing of Lal Masjid cleric Ghazi Abdul Rashid: "We in al Qaeda call on God to witness that we will retaliate for the blood of Ghazi and those with him against Musharraf and those who help him."⁹²

Police claimed that the "al-Qaeda network and the Taliban"⁹³ were most probably behind the 30 October 2007 suicide attack in the garrison town of Rawalpindi that killed seven people (see Appendix); the attack itself was linked to the "Red Mosque, the situation in Swat, and the tribal

⁸⁵ "Chronology: attacks in Pakistan since July 2007," 21 December 2007, *Reuters* website, <http://www.reuters.com/article/asiaCrisis/idUSB647837>, accessed 17 January 2008

⁸⁶ "Nation wide terror cell uncovered: Cheema," 22 August 2007, *The Daily Times*

⁸⁷ Iqbal Latif, "Jihadi Aunt," 5 July 2007, *Global Politician* website, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/23043-jihad>, accessed 24 August 2007

⁸⁸ "Blast kills 20 in Tarbela Ghazi," 13 September 2007, *The News International* website, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/updates.asp?id=29162>, accessed 14 September 2007

⁸⁹ B. Raman, "Pashtun Army Officer Kills 19 SSG Officers," 14 September 2007, *South Asia Analysis Group* website, <http://www.saag.org/papers24/paper2371.html>, accessed 1 October 2007

⁹⁰ "Government probes al-Qaeda link to attack on commandos," 14 September 2007, *Aaj TV News* website, <http://news.aaj.tv/news.php?pg=3&show=detail&nid=79253>, accessed 14 September 2007

⁹¹ "The aggression against Lal Masjid," Aymen al-Zawahiri's audio message, downloaded from <http://www.w-n-n.net/showthread.php?t=30045>, accessed 17 July 2007

⁹² Lin Noueihed, "Bin Laden vows revenge on 'infidel' Musharraf," 20 September 2007, *Reuters* website, <http://www.reuters.com/article/newsOne/idUSL2041722020070920>, accessed 20 September 2007

⁹³ "Pakistan sees al-Qaeda link to blast near Musharraf HQ," 31 October 2007, *Dawn* website, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/10/31/rss.htm>, accessed 17 July 2008

areas,” said the Rawalpindi chief of police.⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that al-Qaeda was seen as a perpetrator behind an attack linked to the Lal Mosque. However, as the police chief’s statement highlights, it isn’t the Lal Masjid incident by itself, but a broader collection of events that are working together to provide impetus to the militant’s wrath.

It should be remembered that immediately after the operation against Lal Masjid, reinforcement troops were sent to the Waziristans and, as this was perceived by the militants to be a violation of the 2005 and 2006 peace agreements between tribal warriors and the government, a renewed battle between the militants and security forces lit up. Also in Swat (NWFP), where President Musharraf has also deployed troops, it was the army presence that most irked the locals and Taliban leaders; with regards to dialogue with the government, Fazlullah’s spokesman had announced to Pakistani newspaper *The Nation* that “we can sit across the table for talks when the government stops the operation immediately and withdraws the military and paramilitary forces from the Swat valley.”⁹⁵ He further threatened: “now we will fight the security forces till death by using suicide attacks and waging guerrilla war against them.”⁹⁶

According to Ayesha Siddiqa⁹⁷, the Lal Masjid incident carried “symbolic weight” for Islamic radicals and militants across Pakistan. The operation was a show of force designed to send a message to the militants that: failure to comply with the government would lead them [militants] to suffer a similar fate to that of Red Mosque.

Since a “mosque” was attacked, this sent a shockwave across Pakistani religious and militant groups who previously believed they had the support of the state. Therefore alarm bells rang in certain segments of the extremist network who have hitherto felt protected by the government, leading to anger and resentment. Siddiqa suggests that these groups’ violence towards the state may be perceived as a retaliatory reaction in response to the state’s apparent breach of the “unwritten contract” that has always existed between the army and militant organizations. This alleged “transgression” by the military is likely to have further aggravated the enmity felt by the tribal residents and militants towards the army; and it could be this (rather than the Red Mosque incident per se) that acted as the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. And so it becomes important to keep these considerations in mind when analysing the impact of the Lal Masjid raid on the subsequent campaign of violence in Pakistan.

It is therefore difficult to analytically isolate violent incidences related to political/social agitation from terrorist acts linked to Lal Masjid. Sifting the two will not be easy since many of the terrorist incidents could have been carried out by militant groups whose motivations were unrelated to the Lal Masjid events.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Haq Nawaz, “Fazlullah declares suicide, guerrilla attacks,” 29 October 2007, *The Nation* website, <http://www.nation.com.pk/daily/oct-2007/29/index2.php>, accessed 30 October 2007

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ayesha Siddiqa is an independent security analyst and strategic affairs columnist. She is also the author of *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan’s Military Economy* (2007). She was interviewed over the phone on 12 February 2008

It has proved difficult to establish with any degree of certainty whether the violence to consume Pakistan in the aftermath of the Red Mosque operation were *directly* linked to al-Qaeda or other groups who released videos glorifying the Lal Masjid administration and vowing vengeance.⁹⁸, Nor has it been possible to ascertain who the perpetrators of these attacks actually are. This is mainly due to the dearth of reliable data available which would help expose who is responsible for the violence; the identity of suicide bombers, for example, has not been revealed in most of the cases, and the statements issued by Pakistani officials regarding the culprits are treated with dubiety.⁹⁹

However, according to some news reports, Baitullah Mehsud has claimed responsibility for selected acts of terrorism to have consumed Pakistan in the aftermath of the Lal Masjid escapade. A journalist for one of Pakistan's leading newspapers, Dawn, Syed Irfan¹⁰⁰, reports that during his correspondence with Baitullah's spokesmen, the latter acceded to some allegations imposed on them. For most of the attacks to have taken place in the tribal belt and NWFP, Mehsud's spokesman, Maulvi Mohammad Omar has claimed responsibility. As for the suicide blasts to have shook Punjab it is "likely", he said, that "Baitullah elements" are present.¹⁰¹

Pakistan's security situation has intensified and complicated itself due to the nation's finicky political and social situation; namely, the return from exile of the ousted Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, the imposition of "emergency" in November 2007 by President Musharraf, the feverish run-up to the elections (and their questionable "fairness") in February 2008, the on and off dismissal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007, rising inflation rates and last but not least – the lawyer and civil society movement in Pakistan that has been picking up speed. The growing anti-Musharraf/anti-army and anti-government sentiment to have ignited and spread like wild fire across Pakistan has given impetus to a rocky and destabilizing state of affairs. It is also worth mentioning that, with so much taking place in Pakistan, attention of the military and the media was possibly diverted away from terrorism and onto other issues plaguing the country. This could imply that at times the militants were given more leg-room to carry out and strengthen their activities, while the media focus was also drawn to other matters. Therefore thorough timeline coverage of militancy might have gone amiss.

⁹⁸ The commander of another militant group in Pakistan, Ansar al-Islam, also released a video diatribe in response to the Lal Masjid operation. He expounded on the evil crime committed by Musharraf and his "cronies" and urges everyone to partake in the jihad that has "now become mandatory in Pakistan;" "Video speech from commander of Ansar al-Islam in Pakistan, Abu Hafs Omar al-Farouq", 19 July 2007, *SITE Intelligence Group* website, http://www.sitemultimedia.org/video/SITE_AIP_Abu_Hafs_Farouq.wmv accessed 2 August 2007

⁹⁹ Government officials in Pakistan have gone so far as to claim that suicide bombers seldom carry "national identity cards" and it is therefore that they have not been able to identify them!

¹⁰⁰ Syed Irfan mainly covers conflict areas in Pakistan - most notably in the tribal regions and the North West Frontier Province. He also covered the Lal Masjid operation in July 2007.

¹⁰¹ Excerpts are taken from a phone interview with Syed Irfan in February 2008. According to him, the Lal Masjid incident served as a mere catalyst: "while linked with the violent repercussions that Pakistan suffered since the event, this is not an exclusive link. The elements were present from before, the Lal Masjid disaster just added fuel to the fire."

On 6 July 2008 thousands of Lal Masjid supporters gathered at the mosque site to observe the first anniversary of the military operation against the mosque and seminary. Speakers at the conference – entitled “Lal Masjid Martyr’s Conference” – vowed that jihad will continue, to which the crowd chanted “al-jihad” in response.¹⁰² Key speakers included the General Secretary of Wafaq-ul-Madaris (Board of Madrassas), Qari Hanif Jalandhry, and Sipah-e-Sahaba’s¹⁰³ Maulana Alam Tariq, as well as some political figures.¹⁰⁴ Shah Abdul Aziz, a former member of the National Assembly, and a guest speaker at this conference, urged jihad against foreign forces in Afghanistan and their cronies in Pakistan:

“We must wage jihad against American, NATO forces and their cohorts in Pakistan, who are part of the conspiracy against Muslims in our country.”¹⁰⁵

Soon after the Lal Masjid convention had subsided a suicide bomb blast took place in nearby Melody Market where at least 17 people were killed (15 of who were policemen).¹⁰⁶ This is despite the fact that security across Islamabad had been tightened especially for fear of reprisal attacks on the one year anniversary of the Red Mosque raid. In fact the suicide bomber had struck a party of 40 security personnel deployed to provide security to the attendees of the conference. The attack is widely being viewed as a revenge action for Operation Silence.¹⁰⁷

4 Creep and crawl of Talibanization

A most noticeable development to take place in Pakistan in 2007, and especially since the Red Mosque raid, is the spread of a unique process and phenomenon – “Talibanization.” The term “Talibanization” and what it connotes has been in existence in Pakistan’s context before 2007 and the army operation on Lal Masjid. However for the purposes of this report, Talibanization is defined as the spread of Taliban activities; this encompasses targeting people deemed un-Islamic, “westernized” (hence traitorous), as well as efforts to establish a parallel form for governance based on retrograde Islamic principles. The former involves, for the most part, suicide attacks against security forces and politicians – that is, those considered “agents of the West” by extremist groups. The latter refers to acts of violence to promote an “Islamic” way of life – such as setting up court systems based on Sharia law, discouraging women’s education by bombing girls’ schools.¹⁰⁸ This bifurcated notion of Talibanisation is seen to have intensified in the aftermath of Operation Silence.

¹⁰² Pakistan Islamists vow jihad year after mosque siege, 6 July 2008, *Khaleej Times Online* website, http://khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/subcontinent/2008/July/subcontinent_July188.xml§ion=subcontinent accessed 6 July 2008

¹⁰³ Sipah-e-Sahaba is a known anti-Shia sectarian group. It’s presence at the conference further draws on the close ties suspected of existing between the Lal Masjid administration and this group

¹⁰⁴ One year on...: Seminaries declares war on US, NATO forces, 7 July 2008, *Daily Times* website, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008/07/07/story_7-7-2008_pg11_1 accessed 7 July 2008

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ اسلام آباد میں ’خودکش حملہ، دس ہلاک‘, 6 July 2008, *BBC Urdu* online, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2008/07/080706_isl_blast_shtml accessed 6 July 2008

¹⁰⁷ Suicide bomber avenges Lal Masjid crackdown; 15 policemen killed, 7 July 2008, *Dawn* website, <http://dawn.com/2008/07/07/top1.htm> accessed 7 July 2008

¹⁰⁸ This is discussed in greater detail in the course of the chapter.

Generally, the word “Taliban” has been used indiscriminately by the media, used to describe just about any act of terrorism in Pakistan’s context. However, in Pakistan’s context it remains unclear what the Taliban actually *is*, or the stretch and shades of its Talibanisation. Yet, the process of Talibanisation has manifested itself in concrete organisational structures, such as the official formation of *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) in December 2007; a group of militants appearing to conglomerate under one banner, headed by Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan¹⁰⁹. According to Hassan Abbas¹¹⁰, Baitullah commands 5,000 fighters under him.¹¹¹ TTP was allegedly involved in the killing of nine tribesmen associated with pro-government leader Maulvi Nazir on January 7, 2008 in South Waziristan.¹¹² But prior to the official formation of TTP, various trends had already started to emerge which carried with them the blueprint of Taliban with an added “Pakistani” tinge to them.

Torching music and barber shops¹¹³, bombing girl’s schools¹¹⁴ and NGO buildings¹¹⁵, beheading women and army officers¹¹⁶, kidnapping, terrorizing, and calling/enacting jihad against anyone deemed a “kafir” (infidel) became common happenings in parts of Pakistan, particularly in the aftermath of the military operation against Red Mosque, and are widely considered to be the handiwork of the local “Taliban.” To assert their power in many areas, they have taken control

¹⁰⁹ Tehrik-e-Taliban appears to be a conglomeration of various Taliban factions operating in Pakistan. Maulana Fazlullah of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammad (TNSM) was appointed the Taliban commander in Swat, whereas Maulana Faqir Mohammad was the Taliban commander in Bajaur Agency, and Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan took the title of *naib amir* (deputy) of TTP. However there have been reports that the TTP might be sharing human resources with other militant groups in Pakistan. This point shall be discussed later.

¹¹⁰ Hassan Abbas is a political commentator and the author of *Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America’s War on Terror* (2005)

¹¹¹ Hassan Abbas, “A Profile of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan”, January 2008, Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, *Harvard University* website,

http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/17868/profile_of_tehrikitaliban_pakistan.html accessed 10 January 2008

¹¹² 9 aides of Maulvi Nazir killed, 9 January 2008, *The Daily Times* website, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008%5C01%5C08%5Cstory_8-1-2008_pg1_4 accessed 9 January 2008

¹¹³ “Tailoring shops, music centres blown up,” 17 October 2007, *Dawn* website, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/10/17/top17.htm>, accessed 2 November 2007

¹¹⁴ “Bomb blasts school building,” 30 October 2007, *Geo TV* website, http://geo.tv/geonews/urdu_details.asp?id=20821&cat=1, 30 October 2007; “Girls’ school blown up,” 21 October 2007, *Dawn* website, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/10/22/top8.htm>, accessed 22 October 2007; “Girls school in Miranshah bombed,” 22 October 2007, *Khaleej Times* website, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?xfile=data/subcontinent/2007/October/subcontinent_October737.xml§ion=subcontinent&col=, accessed 22 October 2007

¹¹⁵ Man killed, two hurt in Karak NGO office blast, 22 October 2007, *Dawn* website, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/10/22/welcome.htm> accessed 22 October 2007

¹¹⁶ 6 افراد کے گلے کاٹ 10 October 2007, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/10/071012_six_beheaded_as.shtml accessed 10 October 2007; “More beheadings in Swat,” 28 October 2007, *The Daily Times* website, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5C10%5C28%5Cstory_28-10-2007_pg1_3, accessed 8 November 2007

over hospitals and police stations (e.g. in Matta, Maidan and Kalam), hoisted white party flags, and also set up check-posts (in Shakardara, Charbagh) and parallel Islamic courts in occupied areas. On 9 October 2007, for instance, Maulana Fazlullah announced the formation of a militia called “Shaheen Force”, functioning both as a crime and moral police, which would patrol the towns like Matta and “control law and order and traffic problems.”¹¹⁷ The oft-targeted security forces suffered the brunt of the violence.¹¹⁸ All this indicates that the group is eager to mark its territory by usurping the prevailing posts of authority in the region, and prove themselves as the new leaders.

To this day the Taliban in Pakistan appears to be spreading the tentacles of its “Talibanization” across various sections of Pakistan. On Friday, 6 June 2008, Government Girls’ Middle School in Bibyawar (Dir, NWFP) was bombed by the TTP who left a signed letter declaring: “We had warned the locals in advance through such letters to ensure *pardah* (veil/modesty) for the school-going girls and female teachers” as it was “un-Islamic” for them to attend school.¹¹⁹ On May 5, 2008 it was reported that deputy TTP, Faqir Mohammad (Taliban commander in Bajaur Agency), had banned musical alerts on cellular phones.

Symptomatic of the Pakistani Taliban’s progression towards establishing itself as a fixed entity is its growing media cell. The Taliban appears to have several different spokespersons, often holding interviews (in person or over the phone) with news agencies. Maulana Fazlullah is infamous for promoting his organisation using numerous illegal radio stations¹²⁰ - this has helped him to spread his propaganda and even rally much support for his radical missions, as well as earn him the title of Maulana FM. In October 2007, Matta area, a sub-division of Swat district was reportedly under the control of local Taliban who were constantly communicating through an illegal FM radio channel.¹²¹ On some occasion the airwaves were used to glorify Taliban’s progress: “announcements about the [Taliban] advance were made on a pirate FM radio station run by cleric Mullah Fazlullah, as militants hoisted their party flag on police stations and government buildings and distributed stweets.”¹²² The Pak-Taliban is also known to disseminate pamphlets as part of its campaign to dispel fear and dread in the locals, which would ensure successful Talibanization.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Bill Roggio, “Pakistani military deploys in Swat,” 25 October 2007, *The Long War Journal* website, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/10/pakistani_army_deplo.php, accessed 27 October 2007

¹¹⁸ Due to the rapid spread and strength of Talibanisation, tribal police grew scared of performing its duty, there was a dearth of takers for political jobs in the region, and several Frontier Corps (FC) soldiers were reported to have refrained from their orders or to have left the force entirely (many FC soldiers were Pashtun and so did not want to fight their “own people.”)

¹¹⁹ Taliban bombs girls schools in Dir, 7 June 2008, *The News* online, http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=117154 accessed 7 June 2008

¹²⁰ ایف ایم پر نظریات کی سوات: 31 October 2007, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/10/071031_swat_fms.shtml accessed 31 October 2007

¹²¹ Haq Nawaz, “Fazlullah declares suicide, guerrilla attacks,” 29 October 2007, *The Nation* website, <http://www.nation.com.pk/daily/oct-2007/29/index2.php>, accessed 30 October 2007

¹²² “Militants make fresh gains in northwest Pakistan,” 7 November 2007, *Aaj TV News* website, http://www.aaj.tv/news/4_detail.html accessed 7 November 2007

¹²³ In October 2007, for examples, a bomb ripped through a school building in Hangu (NWFP) and later pamphlets were found on the burnt campus, threatening to close down all girl’s schools in the region: 1

In addition to this, the Taliban has orchestrated public killings of soldiers – by decapitation, hanging or by a firing squad.¹²⁴ This had the desired effect of intimidating soldiers and lowering their morale¹²⁵ and to further boost the Taliban’s ego and might. The proof is in the pudding – Taliban kidnapped over 200 security personnel (including some senior ranking officers), who apparently did not put up a fight against the militants, and who were released only when the government had first satisfied the militant’s demands.¹²⁶

4.1 TTP and Lal Masjid

Although more extensive research is required in order to fully understand what constitutes the “Pakistan Taliban”, several militant groups, like TNSM, have openly declared to be pro-Taliban and use aggressive means to enforce Sharia law¹²⁷. TNSM leader, Maulana Fazlullah, was also formally appointed the Taliban commander in Swat district in December 2007 when the formation of *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* was announced.

During the military siege of Red Mosque, Maulana Fazlullah and Baitullah Mehsud had both publicly pledged their support for Lal Masjid. Maulana Fazlullah had managed to rally a large group of armed people at his Imam Dheri madrassa, and threatened jihad if the military operation on Lal Masjid was not aborted. Meanwhile, Baitullah Mehsud warned the government of the

October 2007, *Geo News Urdu* website, http://geo.tv/geonews/urdu_details.asp?id=20821&cat=1 accessed 1 October 2007.

In other cases Taliban has been reported to have forced at least 30 schoolchildren in the Tank district to sign up for suicide missions. The school principal and policeman who stood up against this were killed by the militants; Hassan Abbas, “Is the NWFP slipping out of Pakistan’s control?” 26 November 2007, *Terrorism Monitor* website, <http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373812> accessed 9 December 2007

¹²⁴ Militants killed three abducted soldiers near Razmak, 8 November 2007, *Aaj Tv Online* website, <http://news.aaj.tv/news.php?pg=3&show=detail&nid=84764> accessed 8 November 2007; Pakistani Soldiers Executed, 8 November 2007, *Al-Jazeera Online* website, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/4D44C587-6545-4CD4-B0B0-C5F8CB8EE004.htm> accessed 8 November 2007

¹²⁵ During clashes between security forces and the Taliban in Swat, many soldiers reportedly abandoned their duties, allowing the Taliban to reign in the region; the soldiers expressed fear of being slaughtered; 15 SFs abandon duties, 12 November 2007, *Jang* website, <http://jang.com.pk/jang/nov2007-daily/12-11-2007/mulkbharse.htm> accessed 12 November 2007

¹²⁶ On November 4, a day after Musharraf imposed emergency, the army traded 25 imprisoned Taliban for the release of its 200 captured soldiers and agreeing to the reinforcement of the 2005 peace-agreement between the Waziris and the government: 25 طالبان کے بدلے 200 سپاہی بازیاب 4 November 2007, *BBC Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/11/071104_soldiers_released_fz.shtml accessed 5 November 2007; وزیرستان: فوجیوں کی رہائی ’متوقع‘ 4 November 2007, *BBC Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/11/071104_waziristan_soldiers_jirga.shtml accessed 5 November 2007

Included in the list of Taliban members released by the officials was Sohail Zaib, a close relative of Baitullah Mehsud. Also, Mullah Obaidullah, considered Mullah Omar’s 3rd in command; Amir Khan Haqqani, a Taliban senior; as well as brothers of another high ranking Taliban, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Osmani were also amongst those released: “While Pakistan burns,” 9 November 2007, *Newsweek* website, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/69494> accessed 10 November 2007

¹²⁷ In addition, Fazlullah’s brigade twice attempted to demolish a 7th century Buddha statue in the Jihanabad village in September 2007. Such incidences point to a toxic mix of militancy and Talibanization that has started to eat up certain areas within Pakistan’s FATA and PATA

consequences of an attack on the mosque.¹²⁸ On 9 July 2007, another Taliban commander, Maulana Faqir Mohammed¹²⁹ also led protests in Bajaur Agency, rallying thousands of tribesmen and apparent militants wielding rifles and chanting “death to Musharraf.”

Baitullah’s group and TNSM have taken up considerable limelight ever since July 2007. The former has confessed to several attacks against the Pakistani armed forces in the region and also warned that any newspaper to have declared the soldiers who died during Lal Masjid operation to be “shaheed” (martyr) will not be allowed into Waziristan.¹³⁰ Some sources claim Mehsud to have “organised a number of suicide terrorist strikes in protest against the commando raid into the Lal Masjid in Islamabad from July 10 to 13, 2007...”¹³¹

As mentioned earlier, more direct links between Mehsud and the deceased Lal Masjid cleric Abdul Rashid surfaced when intelligence officials claimed to have intercepted telephone calls between Mehsud and Abdul Rashid during the siege of Lal Masjid, where the militant told the Maulana that “if he is killed his blood will not be wasted.”¹³²

As for TNSM, the fiercest outbreak of its activities was suffered by the Swat Valley in the NWFP.¹³³ Swat suffered 4 suicide attacks this year, all of which took place after the Red Mosque event.¹³⁴ However, the threat of a creeping Talibanisation in Pakistan was ominous in Swat prior

¹²⁸ Safdar Sial, “Conflict: is the Lal Masjid saga over?” 12 July 2007, *Pakistan Institute for Political Studies* website, <http://www.pips.com.pk/san/pakistan/july07/Masjid12.html> accessed 24 August 2007. Later in mid-November Taliban spokesperson Surajuddin warned that they will resort to guerrilla warfare if they have to in order to fight against the security forces

¹²⁹ Maulana Faqir Mohammad has been previously linked with TNSM and is alleged to have harboured al-Qaeda operatives. He was recently appointed third in command of the newly-established Tehrik-e-Taliban, making him the Taliban head in Bajaur Agency: Sohail Abdul Nasir, “Al-Zawahiri’s Pakistani ally: profile of Maulana Faqir Mohammad,” 9 February 2008, *Terrorism Monitor* website, <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369893> accessed 21 March 2008

¹³⁰ طالبان کی مزید حملوں کی، 22 July 2007, *BBC News Urdu*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/07/070722_lalmasjid_warning_revenge.shtml accessed 6 August 2007

¹³¹ B. Raman, “Pakistan: attempt to kill Benazir Bhutto,” 21 October 2007, paper 2420, *South Asia Analysis Group*, accessed via *IntelliBriefs* blog website, <http://intellibriefs.blogspot.com/2007/10/pakistan-attempt-to-kill-benazir-bhutto.html> on 28 October 2007

¹³² “Former Guantanamo inmate blows himself up in Pakistan”, 24 July 2007, *Dawn* website, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/07/24/welcome.htm#LatestNews> accessed 3 August 2007

¹³³ The terrorists in Swat apparently also come from other areas, such as North & South Waziristan, and many of them include Uzbeks, Chechens and Afghans; and it has been argued that this makes for a pragmatic strategy on the part of these militants as it detracts military pressure on North and South Waziristan: “Terrorist moved from S Waziristan to Swat,” 21 December 2007, *The News* website, http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=11826 accessed 21 December 2007; Adnan Shah Bukhari, “Swat: a dangerous flashpoint in the making,” 6 December 2007, *Pakistan Security Research Unit* website, <http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/download/attachments/748/Brief25finalised.pdf> accessed 30 December 2007

Despite the army’s considerable success in destroying the terrorist infrastructure in Swat, there is evidence that the militants might be searching for new sanctuaries in nearby areas – for instance, on 30 November 2007 TNSM members were found and captured in an adjacent district, Dir (NWFP)

¹³⁴ July 12: A suicide bomber killed three police personnel by detonating explosives wrapped around his waist in the Swat District. The suicide attack came moments after a military convoy passed through the area.

to the Lal Masjid incident; in April 2007 NWFP officials had revealed that the government had been investigating Taliban activities in NWFP's southern districts¹³⁵ - however, these activities seem to have soared and taken a sharply terrorist turn after the storming of the Lal Masjid. As many of the Lal Masjid students came from NWFP (including Swat), this helped Fazlullah garner more support from large sections of the Swat populace in the aftermath of the July operation. Even during the raid, on July 3 and 4, Maulana FM broadcasted on his channel, calling for jihad and asking his supporters to take up arms against the government and avenge the assault on Lal Masjid. Fazlullah had threatened to teach the security forces "a lesson" and that the tribal belt is not like Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa – "we have mountains... we will launch guerilla wars...." A day after the military attack on the said mosque, and perhaps in response to Fazlullah's call on his radio channel, police personnel were targeted in Swat.¹³⁶

Militants like Baitullah Mehsud and the TNSM have arguably profited from the Lal Masjid incident in terms of amassing more support. It could further be suggested that the Lal Masjid showdown is inextricably linked to the upsurge in Talibanization, as it serves as a catalyst for pro-Taliban leaders (especially in Waziristan and NWFP) to escalate their activities.

When the TTP officially established itself in December 2007, one of its objectives was to enforce Sharia and "unite the Taliban against NATO forces in Afghanistan and to wage a 'defensive jihad' against Pakistani forces here."¹³⁷ Other demarches included abolishment of military checkpoints in FATA, asking the government to end its military operations in Swat and North Waziristan and a refusal to negotiate with the government on any future peace deals. They also demanded the release of Lal Masjid cleric Abdul Aziz – underscoring their continued support for the Red Mosque, and how the militancy of TTP might also serve as an expression of their loyalty to the mosque and its administration.

That Baitullah and Fazlullah have issued threats in connection with the Lal Masjid siege, and have then gone to single it out as one of the key points on the TTP agenda, signifies the strong

Unconfirmed reports said that there were two suicide bombers. July 15: At least 13 SF personnel and six civilians, including three children, were killed and more than 50 people sustained injuries at Matta, when two suicide bombers rammed two cars packed with explosives into an Army convoy early in the morning. August 3: A suicide blast targeting the family of a Government official killed two persons and injured six members of the family in the Gora village. October 25: Eighteen soldiers and two civilians died and 35 others, including nine civilians, were injured in a bomb blast aimed at a vehicle carrying Frontier Constabulary personnel at Nawan Killi.

¹³⁵ Lakshman. K (2007) "Pakistan Frontier State dotted with Extremist Encroachment" 30 May 2007, *Dur Desh* website, <http://www.durdesh.net/news/Article602.html> accessed 23 September 2007

¹³⁶ The violence in Swat kept perpetuating itself: two days after a suicide bomber targeted a vehicle carrying Frontier Constabulary personnel in Swat on October 25, heads of two Frontier Constabulary personnel were paraded through the streets of Matta village near Saidu Sharif, the capital of Swat. Later, when a full-fledged war between the government and Swat militants was underway, on 27 October 2007 Maulana Fazlullah announced "we will have no more talks with the government, which did not pay heed to our repeated calls for political settled of the issue. Now we will fight the security forces till death by using suicide attacks and waging guerilla war against them."

¹³⁷ Centralised Taliban organisation set up, 15 December 2007, *Dawn* website, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/12/15/top7.htm> accessed 15 December 2007

regard tribal militants hold for the Lal Masjid and its clerics. This regard for the mosque and the enmity to have sprung between these tribes' people and the military after the latter raided the Lal Masjid is clearly one of the factors propelling extremism in the region.

4.2 Reaction to Lal Masjid operation: smoke, not fire

Syed Irfan insists that the reasons behind the terrorism to grip Pakistan in latter half of 2007 are not all rooted in Lal Masjid. While there is “compelling evidence” that the violence is related to Lal Masjid, as the stream of verbal threats by Fazlullah and others attest, it is not the source. The ongoing fighting in Waziristan and Swat, as well as places like Dera Adam Khel

(a village in FATA), all worsened the situation, raising the ire of the militants that has resulted in a vicious cycle of terrorism. Irfan also points to the “broad Taliban agenda” as another inducing factor for their militant activities:

“When I asked the Taliban what they hope to achieve after conquering Swat, they responded that they hoped to spread across Pakistan, and then beyond. So it is not just about Lal Masjid or military presence, there is also a broader religious aspect pushing them...”¹³⁸

This echoes the thought mentioned in the previous chapter: the anger over the military operation against the Red Mosque is perhaps just one of many factors that has resulted in increased acts of terrorism in Pakistan in 2007. The Lal Masjid incident itself may not have caused so much havoc, but its significance snowballed due to the subsequent actions by the military; the deployment of army troops by then President Musharraf in the Waziristans and NWFP in July 2007 caused deep resentment in militants there who saw the army presence as a violation of the 2005 and 2006 peace agreement with the Government of Pakistan (GoP). So it is an intricate mix of the assault on Lal Masjid, followed by the “inexcusable” presence of the Pakistani army in the Pashtun belt that resulted in a grave series of suicide strikes across Pakistan, targeting (mainly) at security personnel.

Ever since the first military operation was carried out in the Waziristans in 2003, once Pakistan had joined the “war on terror,” the tribal people and extremist leaders felt resentment towards the military; as this area had always been considered autonomous and treated as such, the perceived “invasion” of the army left the people feeling embittered – a sentiment exaggerated when innocent people came to die as a result of the military’s attacks in the area.

Successive peace negotiations managed to bring relative calm, until emotions were triggered again when Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa were raided – many of its students hailing from the Pashtun belt of Pakistan, and pro-Taliban militants in the region holding high regard for the Lal Masjid and its endeavours to create a Taliban-like system in the capital city – and a renewed military presence in the region came into focus.

¹³⁸ E-mail communication with Syed Irfan dated March 2008

Viewed in such a backdrop, the anger over the Lal Masjid event itself is only smoke coming from a much bigger fire, which has been burning for a much longer period, in the hearts of the tribal people.

Moreover, as Irfan mentioned, the TTP's agenda extends beyond mere retaliatory attacks for the sake of Lal Masjid – it aims to establish a Taliban-like system throughout Pakistan. So, removed from the squabbles between the militants and the government over the Red Mosque raid or the “violation” of peace accords, is yet another impetus that could be the steering terrorism. Namely, there is a religious motif to turn occupied areas into Islamic emirates, and expand the phenomenon throughout the country “and beyond.”

TTP's “broad agenda” is in congruence with its alleged active involvement in neighbouring Afghanistan. In statements issued by TTP, the organisation has not hesitated from publicly promising violence in Afghanistan: as early as July 2007, Taliban leader in Waziristan, Maulana Abdul Khaliq Haqqani threatened that, along with avenging the deaths of those who died in the Lal Masjid siege, the “mujihadeen commanders” will fight in Afghanistan if the US ever attacked Waziristan.¹³⁹ Seeing as US drone planes have been sighted in Waziristani airspace on a number of occasions, and even carried out attacks there which led to the killing of many civilians (according to Pakistani officials), this implies that the wrath of local militants has been further provoked and intensified, and may presage greater threat for foreign troops in neighbouring Afghanistan.

In May 2008, it was reported that the Pakistani Taliban leadership had started sending militants into Afghanistan to fight Western forces.¹⁴⁰ The allegation reinforced itself when news arrived in early June 2008 that many of Baitullah's men were amongst the dead in Afghanistan in the aftermath of an airstrike by coalition forces.¹⁴¹ On 24 May 2008, Baitullah Mehsud had vowed to carry on fighting NATO and US-led troops in Afghanistan regardless of the peace deal with the Government of Pakistan: “Islam does not recognize frontiers and boundaries. Jihad in Afghanistan will continue.”¹⁴²

Also on 9 June 2008, and in reaction to a statement by Rehman Malik, advisor to the Prime Minister on Pakistan's Internal Affairs, about the “collapse” of the government's peace deal with militants, Tehrik-e-Taliban spokesperson Maulvi Omar threatened that the TTP would take its “war” to the federal capital and elsewhere should the government scrap peace accords with militants in certain tribal regions. Maulvi Omar reportedly said:

¹³⁹ Riffat Allah Aurkazi, “طالبان: امریکی حملے کا جواب دینگے” 25 July 2007, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/07/070725_taliban_commander.shtml accessed 3 September 2007

¹⁴⁰ “Taliban chief to send fighters to Afghanistan,” 25 May 2008, *Washington Times* website, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/may/25/taliban-chief-to-send-fighters-to-afghanistan/>, accessed 30 May 2008

¹⁴¹ Several Baitullah's men die in Afghan bombing, 7 June 2008, *The News* online, http://thenews.jang.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=15186 accessed 7 June 2008

¹⁴² Afghan jihad will continue: Mehsud, Alamgir Bhattani, 25 May 2008, *Dawn* online, <http://www.dawn.com/2008/05/25/top3.htm> accessed 1 June 2008

"The US and its allies want the bloodshed to continue on our soil. But we have made it clear that if a war is imposed on us, we will take this war out of tribal areas and NWFP to the rest of the country and will attack security forces and important government functionaries in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi and other big cities."¹⁴³

This may be more than an empty threat; the Pakistani-Taliban is known to have gained more muscle considering the fact that the Tehrik-e-Taliban conglomeration has brought together Baitullah's group with other local "Taliban" leaders in the different tribal agencies, as well as uniting it with militant groups like Tehrik-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) that is based in Swat and run by Maulana Fazlullah.¹⁴⁴ An overlap between the Pak-Taliban and other extremist groups in Pakistan has also been observed (discussed below) – creating an image of the "Pak-Taliban" as being a monster network that could spell disaster for Pakistan and regional security.

On 6 February 2008, it was reported that, according to intelligence agencies, militants in Waziristan were likely to target Western diplomats and nationals as well as leading political figures in Pakistan.¹⁴⁵ However, despite TTP's vehement anti-Western sentiments, attacks against Westerners *inside* Pakistan have been few and far between. Below is a chronological outline of attacks against foreigners/foreign targets in Pakistan since the 9-11, taken from the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP)¹⁴⁶:

October 28, 2001: Catholic Church, Bahawalpur. Police personnel and 17 Christians, including five children, killed.

January 23, 2002: Karachi, US journalist Daniel Pearl abducted.

March 17, 2002: Protestant Church, Islamabad. Five persons killed.

May 8, 2002: Sheraton Hotel, Karachi. 10 French and 5 Pakistanis, including the suspected suicide bomber, killed.

June 14, 2002: US Consulate, Karachi. 10 persons, including five women, killed.

July 13, 2002: Archaeological site, Mansehra. 12 persons, including seven Germans, injured.

August 5, 2002: Christian Missionary School, Murree. Six Pakistanis killed

August 9, 2002: Mission Hospital, Taxila. Three women, terrorist killed.

September 25, 2002: Idara Amn-o-Insaaf (Institute for Peace and Justice), a Christian charity, Karachi. Seven Christians killed and three others injured.

December 25, 2002: United Presbyterian Church near Sialkot, Punjab province. Three women killed and 15 persons injured in a grenade attack.

February 28, 2003: United States Consulate in Karachi. Two policemen guarding the Consulate are killed and five others injured by an unidentified gunman.

¹⁴³ Taliban warns of attack on capital, Mushtaq Yusufzai, 10 June 2008, *The News* online, http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=15239 accessed 10 June 2008

¹⁴⁴ Maulana Fazlullah is now a key commander of the Tehrik-e-Taliban, operating from Swat

¹⁴⁵ Mohammad Asghar, "Waziristan-based terrorists may target political figures," 6 February 2008, *Dawn* newspaper, <http://www.dawn.com/2008/02/06/top20.htm> accessed 6 February 2008

¹⁴⁶ Pakistan Assessment 2008, *South Asia Terrorism Portal* website, <http://satp.org/satpor/tp/countries/pakistan> accessed 14 May 2008

May 15, 2003: 21 British and US gas stations owned by Royal Dutch/Shell Group and Caltex. Five persons are injured during serial bomb blasts at 21 gas stations.

May 3, 2004: Chinese nationals working on a sea-port project in Gwadar. Three Chinese engineers were killed and 11 persons, including 9 Chinese nationals, sustain injuries in a car bomb attack.

May 26, 2004: Pakistan-American Cultural Centre and residence of the US Consul-General in Karachi. Two persons are killed and at least 33 others, mostly police and media personnel, are wounded when two car bombs explode in succession.

November 15, 2005: KFC restaurant in Karachi. At least three people are killed and 20 others, including two South African women, sustain injuries in a powerful car bomb explosion in front of the KFC restaurant.

March 2, 2006: US Consulate in Karachi. A US diplomat, identified as David Fyfe, his Pakistani driver and a Rangers official were killed and 54 persons injured in a suicide car bombing near the US Consulate.

March 15, 2008: Luna Caprese restaurant in Islamabad. A bomb blast occurred at the Italian restaurant, killing a Turkish woman and wounding about 15 other foreigners, including some US diplomats.

June 2, 2008: Danish embassy, Islamabad. A suspected suicide bomber blew up his car outside the Danish embassy, killing at least eight persons and injuring 30 others. The Danish Foreign minister said a Pakistani cleaner employed at the embassy and a Danish citizen of Pakistani origin had died and three other local employees were hurt, but the embassy's four Danish staffers were unharmed.¹⁴⁷

Pakistani politicians have, on the other hand, been subjected to numerous acts of terrorism. In late December 2007 former Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao was targeted in a mosque; Sherpao remained unhurt but at least 50 people were killed in the suicide blast.¹⁴⁸ Sherpao was the Interior Minister at the time of the Lal Masjid raid. Also in late December a former Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam faction) minister, Asfandyar Amirzaib, was killed in a roadside bomb blast in Swat. Another bomb blast occurred on the residence of PML-Q Amir Muqam, who was the Federal Minister and a close ally of Musharraf.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ It should be pointed out that despite the target being "western", the death toll of these attacks consisted mainly of Pakistani citizens. This could be partly due to reduced number of foreign nationals in Pakistan, as well as the low profile, and high level of security, kept by those still remaining in the country. Also, the symbolic value of targeting a western outpost may be more important to the militants than the nationality of those who die. Notwithstanding this, the killing of innocent Pakistani Muslims appears too self-contradictory with regards to al-Qaeda's aims and ideology. It may be a tactless manoeuvre too, since Pakistani militants may not in the future agree to carry out attacks involving the bloodshed of their fellow "brothers" (unless these brothers were decidedly dubbed *munafiqeen* or "apostate".)

¹⁴⁸ "50 dead in Charsadda suicide blast", 21 December 2007, *The News* website, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/updates.asp?id=34331> accessed 21 December 2007,

¹⁴⁹ *Geo TV* online streaming

In November 2007, former chief minister of Punjab, Pervaiz Elahi warned that “anybody who had any direct or indirect involvement in the Lal Masjid issue remains under threat.”¹⁵⁰ He alleged that Baitullah Mehsud had attempted to assassinate his cousin, former President of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), Shujaat Hussain.¹⁵¹

As evident by this list above, there was no attack against foreigners in Pakistan in 2007 which shows no link between the Lal Masjid incident and violence against Western targets. It further suggests that TTP’s agenda against Westerns might be limited to targeting US and NATO forces in neighbouring Afghanistan, and that militancy within Pakistan is chiefly focused on Pakistani security forces and those politicians considered to be the “puppets” of the West.¹⁵²

5 The Pakistani Taliban: a multi-headed Hydra?

Emanating from Pakistani and Western media in 2007 is a deluge of news reports blaming a generic “Taliban” for most of the militancy that has shook Pakistan. This has rendered it difficult to separate the nuances within this seemingly broad network of terrorists. Perhaps because the Pakistani-Taliban is little understood at present, there emerged from a timeline of terrorist events to have occurred in Pakistan in the latter half of 2007 an image of “Taliban” that is constantly evolving; different militant units and actors seem to have coalesced to fight a common enemy: the military regime.

Different radical and terrorist groups, big or small, seem to have merged, and opened their arms to criminals, to the poor and unemployed, and the angry and vengeful. That is, both professional and “freelance” terrorists appear to be operating under the banner of “Taliban.” Syed Irfan has echoed this notion by stating that the fold of jihadis now encompasses a veritable cocktail of actors and “perhaps the one thing they have in common is that they all feel like the victims of state injustice.”¹⁵³ The current understanding of Pakistani-Taliban therefore includes a vast array of actors, to the point where the term “Pak-Taliban” gets bogged down in the clutter.

As early as September 2007 Rahimullah Yusufzai¹⁵⁴ had started reporting closer cooperation between North and South Waziristan in fending off the Pakistani military.¹⁵⁵ Militants in Swat were also brought into the fold; caretaker Federal Information and Broadcasting Minister, Nisar Memon, in December 2007 informed that militants from Waziristan were moving over to Swat,

¹⁵⁰ “Baitullah Mehsud tried to kill Shujaat”, 29 November 2007, *Indonesian Embassy Islamabad* website, http://server.kbri-islamabad.go.id/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2977&Itemid=43 accessed 7 March 2008

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² There was, however, in 2007 one suicide attack against Chinese engineers in Hub, Balochistan – however, the workers managed to escape death.

¹⁵³ Quoted from a phone interview held with the journalist

¹⁵⁴ Yusufzai is Resident Editor of *The News International*, a daily newspaper in Peshawar

¹⁵⁵ Rahimullah Yusufzai, “Accord and Discord” 3 September 2007, *Newsline*

and that a lion share of these included Uzbeks, Chechens and Afghans.¹⁵⁶ The alliance between Taliban and TNSM has been observed above, but to accentuate the point, it is worth mentioning that, that prior to the formal declaration of Tehrik-e-Taliban and upon earlier enforcement of its writ in Swat, TNSM foisted Taliban's party flags on at least five police stations. The fact that the TNSM raised Taliban flags suggests that the two groups are working as one; adhering to and promoting the same agenda.¹⁵⁷

Further incriminating the possible unifying of other militant groups (previously centred on Kashmir) with the Taliban in Waziristan and Swat areas is a report by Syed Saleem Shahzad.¹⁵⁸ According to his report, a turning point for the jihad movement in Pakistan occurred when, in 2006-2007, Kashmiri jihadi organisations moved to North and South Waziristan – boosting the number and strength of militants in that area. The report maintains that the Kashmiri separatist groups brought with them a specific guerrilla strategy which has altered the dynamics of the Taliban – “[it has] reorganised and regrouped the Taliban movement along the lines of a separatist guerrilla movement that has had a cascading affect in the region.”¹⁵⁹

The *Daily Times* reported on 27 November 2007 that a number of Punjabi veterans of the Kashmir jihad have shifted from their previous militant stance and are now fighting in Swat. One such jihadi interviewed by the *Daily Times* spoke of the fighting in Swat as a part of the grand al-Qaeda strategy of “establishing small independent emirates” to be administered by them and their Islamist colleagues in Waziristan, Swat, Bajaur and in Afghanistan.”¹⁶⁰ This would imply that militancy in Pakistan is being coordinated by al-Qaeda who is struggling towards expanding its powerbase in various new areas within Pakistan. Whether al-Qaeda is involved or not, the gelling of terrorist groups in Pakistan suggests that new (militant) blood is being injected into the body of Taliban, giving the organisation a fresh look and vitality.

5.1 Lal Masjid, Jaish-e-Mohammad and the Pakistani-Taliban

The TTP has been suspected of having been joined by other militant outfits, such as Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM). Members of Jaish-e-Mohammad group are known to be active in Swat

¹⁵⁶ “Terrorist moved from S Waziristan to Swat,” 21 December 2007, *The News* website, http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=11826 accessed 21 December 2007; Adnan Shah Bukhari, “Swat: a dangerous flashpoint in the making,” 6 December 2007, *Pakistan Security Research Unit* website, <http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/download/attachments/748/Brief25finalised.pdf> accessed 30 December 2007

¹⁵⁷ Billy Ahmed, “Crisis in Pakistan’s NWFP: a Pashtun insurgency?,” 12 January 2008, *The Daily Star* website, <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=18806>, accessed 4 February 2008

¹⁵⁸ Syed Saleem Shahzad is the Pakistani Bureau Chief of Asia Times Online; he writes on global security issues with a focus on al-Qaeda and Taliban in Pakistan

¹⁵⁹ Syed Saleem Shahzad, “The gathering strength of Taliban and tribal militants in Pakistan,” 19 November 2007, *Pakistan Security Research Unit* website, <http://www.newslines.com.pk/NewsAug2007/specrepaug2007.htm> accessed 3 October 2007

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Kanchan Lakshman, “The sledgehammer in Swat”, 3 December 2007, *South Asia Intelligence Review* website, http://satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/6_21.htm accessed 16 December 2007

(TNSM's base) with alleged links to other Taliban commanders; 161 some of the militants killed in Swat in November 2007 allegedly belonged to JeM¹⁶² – fighting alongside the TNSM points to their close alliance. Recently, on 5 April 2008, six Jaish-e-Mohammad members in the Pakistani district of Bahawalnagar (in Punjab province) were arrested; according to the District Police Officer (DPO) the militants had links to Baitullah Mehsud.¹⁶³ Additionally, JeM leader Maulana Masood Azhar in a speech on 12 November 2007 praised the Fazlullah group and their actions.¹⁶⁴

Jaish-e-Mohammad's online articles and audio messages demonstrate its support for the Taliban. A JeM conference recently held in the Pakistani city of Bahawalpur in late April 2008 was also aimed at soliciting more support for the group's militant activities in Kashmir and Afghanistan.¹⁶⁵ In their monthly and weekly magazines available online, as well as in conferences organised by the group, JeM has time and again voiced its support for Taliban.

Along with viewing the Pakistan army as "infidels", both groups share ideological pathways with regards to Afghanistan; TTP's militant motives in Afghanistan have already been mentioned, but from a speech given by Masood Azhar at a JeM conference in late April 2008 it became clear that JeM militants were also active in Afghanistan, and its leaders and supporters continued to recruit more members for activities in the region.¹⁶⁶ It is therefore not too farfetched to speculate that – based on the sharing of ideology and evidence of JeM presence in Swat – the two organisations are working towards the same goal and hence, most likely pooling resources.

Half-way through the Lal Masjid siege, on 8 July 2007 it was reported that members of the outlawed radical organization, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) were in actual control of the Red Mosque.¹⁶⁷ On the very first day of the army operation against the Red Mosque in July 2007, the body of Maqsood Ahmed, a member of JeM and close associate of the group's leader Maulana Masood Azhar, was allegedly recovered.¹⁶⁸ The passing of Maqsood Ahmed in the precincts of Lal Masjid has occasionally been mentioned on JeM's magazine for women, called Banaat-e-

¹⁶¹ Swat village still militant den, 1 June 2008, *The Daily Times* online, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\06\01\story_1-6-2008_pg1_11 accessed 1 June 2008

¹⁶² "Operation against Swat militants," 1 December 2007, *The Daily Times*

¹⁶³ Six Jaish-e-Mohammad militants captured, 5 April 2008, *BBC News Urdu*

¹⁶⁴ Maulana Masood Azhar of JeM said in his speech: "Whatever Mullah Fazlullah is doing in Swat is just according to Islam. He is teaching the infidels a good lesson – the infidel Pak Army."

¹⁶⁵ Conference audio downloaded from the JeM website, *Rang O Noor*, <http://www.rangonoor.com> in April 2008

¹⁶⁶ Masood Azhar's speech implicated JeM's involvement in India and Afghanistan: "We have Allah on our side that is why America has not been able to defeat us; instead we are breaking their legs. I know of a mujahid who went to Afghanistan to fight and after he was shaheed, the cloud of fire read "Allah o Akbar", and I know of a mujahid who, before being shaheed, was greeted by a paradise hoor in his dream portending their meet. And look at India who is helpless before the mujahideen force. In all these years they have not been able to touch JeM! This is by the grace of God."

¹⁶⁷ "SSG commander killed in gunfire," 8 July 2007, *Des Pardes* website, <http://www.despardes.com/NewsExplorer/2007/200707-lal-masjid.htmlm>, accessed 24 August 2007

¹⁶⁸ "Wanted men control Red Mosque," 8 July 2007, *BBC News* website, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6282084.stm, accessed 6 September 2007

Ayesha, where Maqsood Ahmed is hailed as a martyr who sacrificed his life in the name of “Islam and jihad.”¹⁶⁹ Maqsood Ahmed is also described as the chief editor and ideologue behind Banaat-e-Ayesha.¹⁷⁰

Various experts have underlined the link between Lal Masjid and JeM.¹⁷¹ Months before the military operation against Lal Masjid, Pakistani government officials had alleged that the chief cleric of the mosque, Abdul Aziz, was in constant consultation with activists of JeM who were behaving as his key advisors.¹⁷² Of the speeches delivered from the seat of the Lal Masjid against Musharraf, one was made by the leader of JeM, Maulana Masood Azhar, and some sources claim that “the person ideologically controlling Lal Masjid militants is Masood Azhar’s brother, Mufti Abdul Rauf”¹⁷³, who apparently escaped the Lal Mosque prior to the raid. Mufti Abdul Rauf’s involvement with the Lal Masjid was reported back in April 2007, when he supposedly arrived in Islamabad with his associates to defend the Red Mosque against any government action.¹⁷⁴ It was also divulged that the JeM terrorist suspect was last seen at the Lal Masjid on 17 April 2007.¹⁷⁵

At a Jaish conference in late April 2008, where the same Mufti Abdul Rauf was a chief speaker, members listed some demands they had of the new Pakistani government; one was to release the detained Abdul Aziz of Lal Masjid¹⁷⁶ – pointing to a strong undercurrent of loyalty between JeM and the Red Mosque administrators.

Moreover, recent articles in JeM’s al-Qalam weekly, and its sister jihadi magazine, Banaat-e-Ayesha, have been dedicated to the Lal Masjid (in honor of the 1 year anniversary of those who were martyred in the operation). The articles are decidedly anti-Musharraf (going to the extent of likening him to Hitler) and denounce the military raid on the mosque, stating that its only outcome was a spate of terror against the “army and agencies.”¹⁷⁷ They further accuse the authorities for allowing “safe passage” to Musharraf (who faced possible impeachment) when the

¹⁶⁹ For example, in “Rabb ki adalaat mein,” July 2008 edition, *Banaat-e-Ayesha* website, http://www.alqalamonline.com/banat/shumara/mustaqil_01.htm, accessed 3 July 2008

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Safdar Sial, “Conflict: is the Lal Masjid saga over?” 12 July 2007, Pakistan Institute for Political Studies website, <http://www.pips.com.pk/san/pakistan/july07/Masjid12.html>, accessed 24 August 2007; Pervez Hoodbhoy, “Pakistan – the threat from within”, 23 May 2007, Brief No 13, Pakistan Security Research Unit, University of Bradford website, <http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/download/attachments/748/Brief+number+13.pdf>, accessed 3 September 2007,

¹⁷² Umer Farooq, “The firebrand cleric and his ‘Lal Masjid’ polemics,” 13 April 2007, *Des Pardes* website, <http://www.despardes.com/articles/2007/20070413-lal-masjid-cleric.htm>, accessed 5 September 2007

¹⁷³ Who are these militants? 9 July 2007, *Indonesian Embassy Islamabad* website, http://server.kbri-islamabad.go.id/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1067&Itemid=2 accessed 19 November 2007

¹⁷⁴ Amir Mir, “The fluttering flag of jihad,” 27 April 2007, *The Post*, downloaded from the *Pakistan People’s Party* website, http://www.ppp.org.pk/party/issues/p_articles58.html, accessed 13 October 2007

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Conference audio downloaded from the JeM website, *Rang O Noor*, <http://www.rangonoor.com> in April 2008

¹⁷⁷ For example, “Mehfooz rasta, magar kyon?,” June 2008, *al-Qalam* website, <http://www.alqalamonline.com/color/naveed.htm>, accessed 5 June 2008.

cleric of Lal Masjid, Abdul Rashid Ghazi, was denied one. The scribe threatens that all “Lal Masjid sympathisers” will “deal a heavy blow to anyone who allows Musharraf a ‘safe passage’” and that “Musharraf will pay for the thousands killed during the Red Mosque operations.”¹⁷⁸ Sympathy is repeatedly expressed for the students of Lal Mosque and its seminaries, who were “martyred” in July 2007, and reproach the government and courts for not bringing the matter to justice – the sympathy takes on a more solid shape in the form of a book, *Laho Laho Lal Masjid* (“Blood, Blood, Red Mosque”), allegedly published by the Jaish group after making its first appearance in the Banaat-e-Ayesha magazine, and later in the form of a book.¹⁷⁹ The book recounts the “unjust” bloody episode of the raid on Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa, and Banaat-e-Ayesha declared it their *farz* or “duty” to publish it.¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, in July 2008, a year after Operation Silence, a JeM member and writer for al-Qalam, Naveed Masood Hashmi, relates an interview with former cleric of Lal Masjid, Maulana Abdul Aziz, whom he was “meeting after one year” and who “embraced me tightly.”¹⁸¹ Abdul Aziz’s point of view with respect to the Lal Masjid incident is narrated, where he reprimands the Musharraf government for acting at the behest of US President Bush – whose sole agenda is to “destroy our mosques and madrassas... and un-veil our women so that they become shameless...”¹⁸² In a separate article by a female writer at Banaat-e-Ayesha, entitled *Salaam! Shahadaye Lal Masjid* (Greetings, o martyrs of Lal Masjid), she pays ode to the “male and female martyrs”, to “Umme Hasaan” (the head of Jamia Hafsa), to “Ghazi *shaheed*”, and the “Martyred mother” (referring to Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid’s mother who died in the Lal Masjid during its siege).¹⁸³

All this arguably exposes the existence of a very close relationship between JeM and the Lal Masjid-Jamia Hafsa complex. Leading members of both groups appear to have maintained a good friendship over a period of time, with JeM militants acting as key counselors to the Lal Masjid managers. Saleem Ali, who studied madrassas in Islamabad, reported that the women’s magazine Banaat-e-Ayesha was in circulation at the Jamia Hafsa seminary,¹⁸⁴ suggesting the latter’s esteem for JeM ideology. JeM’s allegiance to its close ally is found in the series of sympathetic articles it published on Lal Masjid.

On 5 April 2008, six Jaish-e-Mohammad militants were captured who were allegedly planning a retributive attack against Ejaz-ul-Haq, religious affairs minister at the time of the Lal Masjid raid;

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ “Rabb ki adalat mein,” July 2008 edition, *Banaat-e-Ayesha* website, http://www.alqalamonline.com/banat/shumara/mustaqil_01.htm, accessed 3 July 2008

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ “Lal Masjid! Kya khoya, kya paya,” July 2008, *al-Qalam* website, <http://www.alqalamonline.com/color/naved.htm>, accessed 8 July 2008

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ “Salaam! Shahadaye Lal Masjid,” July 2007, *Banaat-e-Ayesha* website, http://www.alqalamonline.com/banat/shumara/fehris_02.htm, accessed 24 July 2008

¹⁸⁴ Saleem Ali’s book on the link between madrassas and militancy in Pakistan is currently under review by Oxford University Press. The information given here is based on a manuscript of his book, sent via e-mail, and a phone interview with the professor, carried out on 3 September 2007.

they were behind the botched suicide bomb attempt at the former minister in December 2007.¹⁸⁵ The ring leader of this terror cell, Maulana Farooq Rajanpuri, was supposedly a classmate of Abdul Rashid Ghazi (the deputy cleric of Lal Masjid who died during the operation).¹⁸⁶

5.2 The role of “revenge attacks”

Another dimension to the conglomeration of actors that has emerged in recent times is the role of local tribesmen and “revenge attacks.” During its clashes with militants in Swat in November 2007, the military claimed to have killed numerous “Taliban militants”, including one working to deliver weapons to Fazlullah’s group and involved in beheading officers – the man was allegedly a local tribesman.¹⁸⁷ He was also accused of harbouring al-Qaeda terrorists.¹⁸⁸ In a jihadi video by the Uzbek terrorist group, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), produced in the aftermath of the military operation against Lal Masjid, example of Mir Ali (in North Waziristan) is cited where ordinary tribesmen aided militants in the capturing of soldiers (to be subsequently slaughtered) who had come looking for the “mujahideen” in the area: “tribesmen would bring in the soldiers for the mujahideen to slaughter. Thus avenging the death of innocent boys and girls killed during the Lal Masjid attack.”¹⁸⁹

Syed Irfan has highlighted the “revenge” factor for playing a potent role in the attacks we have seen in Pakistan in the aftermath of the Lal Masjid incident. Overtime there has been a growing resentment towards the state, especially by the inhabitants of the tribal areas. They view the state as having failed to provide for jobs, health or education. Instead, the state is perceived to be attacking them: the military action in the region is known to have victimised many innocent people, and the tribal locals view this as yet another injustice lashed upon them by the state. The army presence is also widely seen as an invasion. Having always been treated as *ilaqa gheyr* or “no man’s land” – left to tribal customs and authority – FATA now teems with security officers. When the casualty figure from the military strikes includes the lives of relatives or fellow tribe/clan members, the indignation of the tribes’ people is amplified.¹⁹⁰ Hamid Mir¹⁹¹ interviewed Maulana Fazlullah’s spokesman Sirajuddin who claimed that the Taliban was not

¹⁸⁵ “6 Jaish-e-Mohammad militants arrested,” 5 April 2008, *BBC News Urdu*

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ “Key Taliban members arrested,” 13 November 2007, *Jang News* website, accessed 13 November 2007, <http://jang.com.pk/jang/nov2007-daily/13-11-2007/main.htm>

In some incidences, TNSM has pinned the responsibility for the attack on security personnel in Swat and their subsequent decapitation on the tribal locals who were angry over the Lal Masjid massacre: B. Raman, “Jihadi anarchy in Swat,” 28 October 2007, *South Asia Analysis Group* website, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers25%5Cpaper2430.html> accessed 15 July 2008

¹⁸⁸ Pakistan seizes ‘top militant’ for harbouring Al-Qaeda, *The News* website, http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=11135 accessed 13 November 2007

¹⁸⁹ “Lal Masjid,” *Harakat-ul-Islami Uzbekistan and Jundullah* production, video last retrieved from the link <http://www.rapidfile.net/?d=49A3FF922> on 20 December 2007

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Syed Irfan, February 2008.

¹⁹¹ Hamir Mir is a reknown Pakistani journalist and editor, as well as the talk show host on Pakistan’s Geo TV

responsible for the killing of the soldiers, instead: “the locals are seeking revenge as the army’s gunship helicopters had killed a large number of innocents.”¹⁹²

As for the military attack on Lal Masjid, many tribal locals had family members studying at the madrassa complex. Others, more religiously inclined, might have viewed the government’s attack on a mosque (a sacred place) as blasphemous, and this, on top of their existing enmity towards the state, added to the grudge. This makes it easier for the local tribal men in Pakistan’s conflict-areas to despise the government and the army and to act, explicitly or implicitly, against them, thus welcoming an alternative form of governance – the Taliban.

In some cases, however, the tribal folk have shown resistance to the Taliban. In January 2008, for example, 14 tribes in Orakzai Agency stood up against the Taliban movement.¹⁹³ As the Taliban need the support of the locals, an effort is made to appease them (lest they switch sides and turn to the Taliban’s arch-enemy, the government). Under such pressure, there is talk of the Taliban agreeing to change its tactics – i.e. just shooting soldiers instead of slaughtering them, as the slaughtering “intimidates” the locals.¹⁹⁴

During the Red Mosque standoff, there was a tame response from the supposed “Lal Masjid brigade” and this could be because the madrassa students were not armed for a protracted confrontation against the military.¹⁹⁵ Instead it is probable that the Lal Masjid survivors – most of whom believe that they lost “thousands” of fellow students, friends or relatives in the raid¹⁹⁶ – who may not have been militant before, grew enraged and embittered by the conduct of the

¹⁹² Hamid Mir, “Taliban has the responsibility to arrest Musharraf,” 6 November 2007, *Rediff News* website, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/nov/06taliban.htm>, accessed 11 November 2007

¹⁹³ طالبان کے خلاف قبائلی لشکر 29 January 2008, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2008/01/080129_tribal_jirga_fz.shtml accessed 20 February 2008

¹⁹⁴ Phone interview with Syed Irfan, February 2008

¹⁹⁵ According to Abdul Rashid Ghazi, during his many phone interviews with different television news groups during the Lal Masjid raid, the mosque was not armed to the teeth as portrayed by the government. Indeed speculation arose when the media was invited into a bullet-torn Red Mosque after the operation had ended and saw weapons neatly stashed in the rooms. Several news reporters asked questions as to why, if the madrassa students were so armed, they had not used these weapons during the attack. Others implicated the army for having implanted the weapons on the Lal Masjid campus so to stage (false) evidence of the madrassa’s extremism. Ironically, Abdul Rashid Ghazi, in a live telephone interview before his death claimed that “after the government has *shaheed* us all, they will plant weapons inside the compound and show you.”

¹⁹⁶ Amir Siddiqui’s aid, Syed Ali Hussain, has said, “We don’t know how many of our brothers and sisters are buried beneath this ground. There were around 3,000 students... even if we subtract 1,300 young men and women who surrendered, there are still 1,700 students missing”; Shubhajit Roy, “Lal Masjid’s new chief takes old line: democracy is no solution,” 7 January 2008, *The Indian Express* website, <http://www.indianexpress.com/story/258389.html> accessed 19 January 2008

Articles bemoaning the “902” Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa students to have gone missing were found on the Jamia Hafsa website, <http://80.190.202.79/pic/j/jamiahafsa/report2.gif>

Some news reporters, as well as the religious political party, Jamaat-e-Islami, also questioned the “mass graves” that were “secretly” dug by the army to bury the missing boys and girls. On the website of Jamaat-e-Islami, a video highlights the “government propaganda against Lal Masjid”: حقیقت کیا ہے؟ *Jamaat-e-Islami* website, <http://jamaaturdu.org/index/default.php> accessed 2 February 2008

government/army during the July raid, and have now hopped on the “Taliban” bandwagon (for it can provide them with the moral and weaponry support they require in order to attack their nemesis.) Such individuals may not subscribe to any one organisation (i.e. has no deep affiliation to a specific terrorist group and its ideology) but due to their shared enmity towards the government and the army, they have shared targets – security personnel.

Serving as an example of this is the young Pashtun officer (whose sister was killed during the Lal Masjid assault) who is suspected of having been responsible for the attack on the army mess of Special Services Group (SSG) in the cantonment area of Tarbela Ghazi, near Islamabad.¹⁹⁷ An additional example of how “revenge attacks” may be figuring highly in the spate of suicide violence in Pakistan post-July 2007 may be the suicide blast to hit Sargodha (Punjab) on 1 November 2007 – directed at the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) base.¹⁹⁸ Abid Hunzala was found to be the perpetrator behind this attack. Abid was enrolled in Lal Masjid at the time of the raid against it; he had been arrested but was later released. Abid was incriminated on the basis of a suicide note recovered from a hideout in Karachi.¹⁹⁹ Head of the terror cell, retired army Major Ehsan ul-Haq apparently also confessed to the Crime Investigation Department that the group had used Abid as the suicide bomber to attack the PAF target.²⁰⁰ Given the evidence it would not be unrealistic to say that Abid Hunzala was radicalised and revengeful after the madrassa-military standoff in July 2007, which led him to become part of a terror cell to unleash violence against Pakistani security bases.

Moreover, it was reported that that head of the cell, Ehsan ul-Haq, “was said to be close to Afghan Muslim guerrilla commander Younis Khalis, who battled Soviet forces in the 1980s and later had links with the Taliban. Haq ran a militant training camp in Afghanistan during Taliban rule.”²⁰¹ Interestingly, during the time of ul-Haq’s capture in January 2008, a senior al-Qaeda commander, also with alleged links to Younis Khalis, was apprehended in the Pakistani city of Lahore.²⁰² All this raises important questions about the role of Pakistani ex-servicemen in orchestrating the ongoing militancy in Pakistan, and the links between extremist groups in Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban, al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to delve into these questions. However, in the following section the presence of

¹⁹⁷ B. Raman, “Pashtun Army Officer Kills 19 SSG Officers,” 14 September 2007, *South Asia Analysis Group* website, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers24%5Cpaper2371.htm> accessed 15 July 2008

¹⁹⁸ سرگودھا: فضائیہ کی بس پر خود کش حملہ 1 November 2007, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/11/071101_sargodha_blast.shtml accessed 3 November 2007

¹⁹⁹ شدت پسندوں کے بدلتے طریقہ کار 6 February 2008, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2008/02/080206_pakistan_militants_np.shtml accessed 6 February 2008

²⁰⁰ Suicide bomber in Sargodha blast identified, 25 January 2008, *The Daily Times* website, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008%5C01%5C25%5Cstory_25-1-2008_pg7_25 accessed 28 January 2008

²⁰¹ Suicide bomb mastermind arrested in Pakistan, 9 January 2008, *Reuters* website, <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSISL112538> accessed 22 January 2008

²⁰² Bill Roggio, “Report: Osama bin Laden’s security coordinator captured in Pakistan”, 6 January 2008, *The Long War Journal* website, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/01/report_osama_bin_lad.php accessed 6 January 2008

“foreign elements” with relation to Lal Masjid will be briefly discussed. This will help to shed light on possible terror links the Red mosque had with international terrorist organisations and the extent of foreign involvement in the Pakistani Taliban.

5.3 Foreign Elements

Once the military operation against Lal Masjid was over, a plethora of jihadi videos by foreign terrorists began to circulate the Internet. One of these was by Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Libi²⁰³ where he extols the efforts of Jamia Hafsa women: “it took a stand in which chastity and virtue screamed in the face of profligacy, shamelessness, and debauchery, and the voices of pride in faith and in religion were heard decrying and belittling the calls for the sinful modern civilizations, and the shameless Western freedom, which is promoted by the advocates of depravity in Pakistan.”²⁰⁴

Osama bin Laden’s deputy, and al-Qaeda’s second in command, Aymen al-Zawahiri also reacted speedily to the Lal Masjid incident, releasing a video a day after Operation Silence on Lal Masjid had ended, calling for revenge for the assault on Lal Masjid. Broadcasting his message in video and print form²⁰⁵, al-Zawahiri condemned the military’s raid on the mosque – he dubs Musharraf and his army the “Crusader’s hunting dogs” – and calls upon the Pakistani Muslims and their clerical leaders to stand up against Musharraf’s regime and partake in jihad.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, after the Lal Masjid siege it came to light that Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid might have been working on the directive of al-Zawahiri: senior officials claimed to have found letters inside the Lal Masjid written from Zawahiri to Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid.²⁰⁷

The exact nature of Abdul Rashid Ghazi’s link with militants remained inconclusive right up to the time of his death. However, there were reports that he might be directly associated with al-Qaeda when Osama bin Laden’s driver, Usman, was arrested in Islamabad in 2004; Usman was staying in Islamabad as Maulana Abdul Rashid’s guest and traveled in his car.²⁰⁸ Calls from Usman's phone to Mustafa, an alleged al-Qaeda terrorist in Karachi, were traced and he was also arrested – surprisingly, however, Abdul Rashid was not pursued in Usman's case.²⁰⁹

²⁰³ Abu Yahya al-Libi is an al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan

²⁰⁴ Al-Libi proceeded to encourage Pakistanis to follow the example of Afghanistan, whose people “crushed all the dishonored agents and you should do likewise.”

“Of the masters of martyrs...,” 11 August, 2007, *Inshallah Shaheed* website, <http://inshallahshaheed.wordpress.com/2007/08/11/shaykh-abu-yahya-al-libbi-of-the-master-of-martyrs> accessed 29 August 2007

²⁰⁵ In the Urdu jihadi magazine, *Hittin*, Issue 2, p. 28-31

²⁰⁶ Ayman al-Zawahiri, audio message, “The aggression against Lal Masjid”, <http://www.w-n-n.net/showthread.php?t=30045> accessed 17 July 2007

²⁰⁷ Dean Nelson and Ghulam Hasnain, “Bin Laden’s deputy behind the Red Mosque bloodbath”, 15 July 2007, *Times Online* website, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article2076013.ece>, accessed 3 September 2007. However, many observers have treated such officials’ statements regarding the Lal Masjid incident with dubiety, as they view them to be false and created only to justify the army attack against the mosque and its seminaries

²⁰⁸ Safdar Sial, “Conflict: is the Lal Masjid saga over?” 12 July 2007, *Pakistan Institute for Political Studies* website, <http://www.pips.com.pk/san/pakistan/july07/Masjid12.html> accessed 24 August 2007

²⁰⁹ Amir Rana, “Lal Mosque’s terror links,” 25 May 2007, *Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies* (PIPS)

Despite official claims that there were foreigners in Lal Masjid, none were found upon raiding the mosque in July 2007. In the aftermath of the Lal Masjid siege many Pakistani news reports have raised the issue of the lack of proof given by the government with reference to the alleged foreign militants hiding inside the mosque – an allegation which served as the potent pretext for launching a raid against the mosque.²¹⁰ Hence, at best, a very tentative connection between al-Qaeda and the Red Mosque can be drawn based on known information. Yet, as discussed below, numerous indications of the presence of foreign militants in Pakistan’s tribal areas does point to a relationship between the Pakistani Taliban and foreign militants – which calls attention to a subsidiary link to Lal Masjid considering the support it received from the Pak-Taliban.

During clashes between the government and “Taliban” militants in Swat in late 2007, authorities in NWFP claimed there to be foreign elements present in the region.²¹¹ A Taliban commander, Akbar Hussain²¹², refuted this claim – however he contended that:

“All fighters are locals. We are in contact with al-Qaeda, Afghanistan and the Taliban in tribal areas, and they have offered their assistance to us... At the moment we have clout over the inhabitants of this area, but once foreigners enter the situation may be out of our hands.”²¹³

This admission points at a possible existing relationship between militants in Pakistan, Taliban in Afghanistan and al-Qaeda. The recent killing of Abu al-Laith al-Libi²¹⁴ in North Waziristan may serve as testimony to this relationship.²¹⁵

On 10 October 2007, protracted battle between security forces and militants in Waziristan allegedly resulted in the death of 200 militants, 50 of whom were foreigners.²¹⁶ In a separate incident on 14 October 2007, an exchange of fire between Taliban and SFs in Mir Ali led to the death of 3 militants that included 2 Uzbeks.²¹⁷ On October 30, 2007 three suspected militants (two from Azerbaijan and one from Turkey) were arrested in Bannu (adjacent to Waziristan).²¹⁸

²¹⁰ *Aaj TV*’s “Live with Talat Hussain;” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kRwZfaEF8Y>, website accessed 10 August 2007

²¹¹ ‘سوات میں غیر ملکی موجود ہیں’ 7 October 2007, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/10/071031_swat_foreigners_as.shtml accessed 7 October 2007

²¹² Taliban commander in Kabal (Swat)

²¹³ ‘غیر ملکی نہیں ہیں، مگر آ سکتے ہیں’ 31 October 2007, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/10/071031_swat_commander_as.shtml accessed 2 November 2007

²¹⁴ Abu Laith al-Libi was a senior al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan

²¹⁵ Al-Qaeda commander moved freely in Pakistan, 4 February 2008, *Washington Post* website, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/03/AR2008020303147.html> accessed 16 February 2008

²¹⁶ Foreigners Among Rebels Killed Near Afghan Line, Pakistan Says, 12 October 2007, *New York Times* website, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/12/world/asia/12pakistan.html?_r=1&ref=world&oref=slogin accessed 12 October 2007

²¹⁷ ‘میر علی جھڑپ: افراد 3’ 7 October 2007, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/10/071014_mirali_killing_zs.shtml accessed 7 October 2007

²¹⁸ ‘تین غیر ملکیوں سمیت پانچ’ 30 October 2007, *BBC News Urdu* website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2007/10/071030_bannu_arrest_zs.shtml accessed 14 November 2007

Presence of foreign militants, especially Uzbeks, in Pakistan has been frequently documented in news releases from the past year. On 26 October 2007, for instance security forces arrested 40 Afghan and Uzbek nationals during a search operation in Chaman area near Pak- Afghan border.²¹⁹ On January 29, 2008, a missile was fired at a house owned by Madad Khan, a local leader of the Taliban in Mir Ali (North Waziristan). While Madad Khan reportedly survived the attack, his 10 guests – all believed to be Uzbeks and Arabs – were killed (including Abu al-Laith al-Libi).²²⁰ Shortly after, a suicide bomber attacked a minibus carrying trainees of the Armed Forces Post-Graduate Medical Institute in Rawalpindi in February 2008; his identity has been traced to one of the Central Asian states.²²¹

The role of Uzbek terrorists particularly stands out here since the amir of militant group Harakatul Islami Uzbekistan (IMU), Mohammad Tahir Farooq, has spoken of their involvement in the jihadi violence that enveloped Pakistan after the military operation against Lal Masjid in July 2007. In the heels of the Lal Masjid incident, IMU, in collaboration with Jundullah,²²² released two jihadi videos where Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa are glorified and the military condemned for its actions.²²³ The group vowed revenge for the “thousands” of lives lost when the military attacked Lal Masjid. Two videos show armed men, presumably the militants, shooting and slaughtering Pakistani guard/soldiers²²⁴ as well as trying explosives.

In the videos, IMU’s amir repeatedly speaks of his alliance with the Lal Masjid and its mission: “we consider them [Lal Masjid] a part of us before, during and after the incident... their wounds are our wounds, their *shaheed* are our *shaheed*... their prisoners are our prisoners... every member of the Harakat [i.e. IMU] will stand up against the terrorist act that took place on Lal

²¹⁹ “Uzbek, Afghan suspects arrested,” 27 October 2007, *The Daily Mail* website, <http://dailymailnews.com/200710/27/news/dmboxitem.html>, accessed 30 October 2007

²²⁰ B. Raman, “Al-Qaeda: US queers pitch for Pakistan,” 1 February 2008, *South Asia Analysis Group*, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers26/paper2576.html> accessed 24 February 2008

²²¹ Mohammad Asghar, “Bomber suspected to be a foreigner,” 6 February 2008, *Dawn* newspaper, <http://www.dawn.com/2008/02/06/top4.htm> accessed 6 February 2008

²²² Jundullah is a militant organisation known to produce propaganda literature (catering also to Qaeda’s media wing, al-Sahab Foundation) and runs a studio, Ummat.²²² Headed by Attaur Rehman, who allegedly has close ties to al-Qaeda’s network in Pakistan, Jundullah has been involved in a series of violent attacks in Pakistan, including the explosion near the US Consulate in Karachi in March 2006. Its cadres, said to receive training in Afghanistan and South Waziristan, and allegedly trained by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), were also responsible for the failed attempt on the life of a Corps Commander in Karachi in 2004; Zahid Hussain, “Al-Qaeda’s new face,” August 2004, *Newsline* website, <http://www.newsline.com.pk/NewsAug2004/cover1Aug2004.htm>

All in all, the major cases against the Jundullah militants were the Corps Commander attack case, blasts at the Pakistan American Cultural Centre building, the Bible Society blast, and Gulistan-i-Jauhar police station attack case. They had also bombed outside Indian singer Sonu Nigam’s concert in Karachi; **شدت پسند تنظیم کے رہنما گرفتار**, 30 January 2008, *BBC News Urdu* website,

http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/story/2008/01/080130_cpo_karachi_as.shtml accessed 30 March 2008

²²³ Clips last retrieved from the link <http://www.rapidfile.net/?d=49A3FF922> on 20 December 2007

²²⁴ There is graphic footage of a soldier being slaughtered, with chants of “Allah o Akbar”, in the background. This echo of the narrators claim: “It is every *mujahideen*’s dream to see the decapitated head of a Pakistani soldier.”

Masjid. ... After Iraq and Afghanistan, Pakistan ranks 3rd in the جهادی کاروای (“jihadi operations”) launched on its territory. We will always be a part of these activities.”²²⁵

Retribution for the attack on Lal Masjid is a recurrent theme running throughout the course of IMU’s videos: the narrator often remarks that the blood lost during the Lal Masjid debacle “will not go wasted,” while clippings of Lal Masjid operation and those of dead soldiers is showing in the background. It becomes clear from the videos that the militant’s are brimming with vindictive anger, the target of which is Musharraf and his army. Musharraf’s picture and clips are sporadically shown; however more coverage is given to the bullet-ridden corpses of soldiers, serving as a grim warning to the army. The soldiers are also advised not to fight against the militants as they are only pawns in Musharraf’s scheme “who only wants them [soldiers] dead as it brings in more dollars.”

Taken at face value, this inculpates IMU involvement in the attacks against security forces in the tribal areas in the second half of 2007. Links between IMU and Baitullah’s group are known to have existed for some time now; IMU is purported to have joined forces with Baitullah to battle the latter’s Pakistani targets.²²⁶ However, the TTP is divided on the issue of solidarity with the IMU: on 8 July 2008, dissent amongst the Pakistani Taliban was reported – where certain Pak-Taliban leaders (Maulana Gul Bahadur and Maulvi Nazir) “forged a unity against Mehsud” – over the issue of Baitullah’s friendly connections with Uzbek militants.²²⁷

According to the South Asia Analysis group, the IMU enjoys the support of both Baitullah Mehsud’s group, as well as the students of the Lal Masjid and its seminaries.²²⁸ It further claimed that, up till September 2007, “many, if not most, of the acts of suicide terrorism and attacks on the Pakistani Armed Forces since the Pakistan Army’s commando action in the Lal Masjid between July 10 and 13, 2007 ... were carried out by angry tribals motivated and trained by the IMU.”²²⁹ Given Baitullah’s support for, and links to, the Lal Masjid (discussed above), and IMU’s apparent umbrage at the military’s operation against the mosque and Jamia Hafsa, and bearing in mind the prevalent cooperation between Baitullah and IMU, it can be speculated from this that IMU together with Baitullah’s faction of the Pakistani-Taliban together partook in a portion of terrorist acts following the July 2007 episode. As mentioned previously, Dawn’s Syed Irfan had spoken with Baitullah spokespersons who had confirmed their participation in attacks against SFs in the Waziristan areas. The high number of Uzbek militants present in the tribal areas and NWFP – who have frequently been accused by Pakistani officials of perpetrating militancy in the regions – points to yet another “head” in the multi-headed Taliban phenomenon in Pakistan; where Taliban

²²⁵ “Lal Masjid,” *Harakat-ul-Islamic Uzbekistan and Jundullah* production, video last retrieved from website <http://www.rapidfile.net/?d=49A3FF922> on 20 December 2007

²²⁶ Pakistan blames IMU militants for Afghan border unrest, 2 July 2008, *Global Security* website, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/pakistan/2008/pakistan-080702-rferl01.htm> accessed 2 July 2008

²²⁷ Wazir tribes ratify new militant bloc, 8 July 2008, *The Daily Times*, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\07\08\story_8-7-2008_pg7_1 accessed 8 July 2008

²²⁸ B. Raman, “Global Jihad: Uzbeks to the fore,” 6 September 2007, *South Asia Analysis Group* website, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers24/paper2360.html>, accessed 17 September 2007

²²⁹ Ibid.

elements are seen as collaborating with Uzbek militant groups to fight a domestic war against Pakistani SFs.

It should be mentioned as a disclaimer here that the IMU's support for Baitullah Mehsud might only be a matter of "pragmatic exigency;" that is, in order to retain Baitullah's alliance to IMU, the Uzbek group must partake in the former's fight against the Pakistani SFs.²³⁰ This would suggest that the IMU involvement in exercising retaliation for the Lal Masjid operation was not for the mosque per se, but an extension of support for its arch ally, Baitullah Mehsud.

6 Conclusion

Seen from a bird's eye view, the Lal Masjid incident could be said to be the starter of a vicious cycle of militancy in Pakistan – that is, *all* acts of terrorism to possess Pakistan after the events of July 2007 are latently linked to it. The Red Mosque raid helped to unleash the copious amounts of pent-up anger and bellicosity already felt by extremist organisations and their sympathisers towards the Pakistani government and army.

Forty-four suicide attacks shook Pakistan in the time period extending from the Lal Masjid raid in July 2007 – by far the highest number of suicide blasts to hit Pakistan in the brief span of 6 months. It cannot be disputed that all this started to take place during, and immediately after, the military operation against the Red Mosque – giving the event the importance of a light switch that has been turned 'on.'

Hard-hitting evidence linking Lal Masjid administrators and students directly to this violent extremism has been scarce. At best, speculations can be made based on the historical profile of the mosque and the perceived nature of its relationship with militant organisations in- and outside of Pakistan.

By sketching profiles of the lead clerics of Lal Masjid and taking a glimpse into the mosque's history, only a feeble argument can be made of the mosque's association to militancy. It has been well documented that in the past, and under the auspices of Maulana Abdullah, the Lal Masjid did partake in jihadi activities; Imam Abdullah would preach jihad from the seat of his mosque, and students were allegedly groomed to fight against the "godless" Soviets in neighbouring Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Abdullah was also known for his staunch anti-Shia stance and support for sectarian groups like the Sipah-e-Sahaba. His sons, however, do not seem to have copied their father's template of sectarian hatred. Having performed empirical case analysis on the links between sectarianism and

²³⁰ Guido Steinberg, "A Turkish al-Qaeda: the Islamic Jihad Union and the internationalization of Uzbek jihadism," July 2008, *Centre for Contemporary Conflict* website, <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2008/Jul/steinbergJul08.asp>, accessed 8 august 2008

madrassas in Islamabad, Saleem Ali²³¹ reports Lal Masjid to have not partaken in any sectarian violence.

However, based on some of the actions of the mosque and its madrassa, and statements issued by its clerics (see Chapter 2), Lal Masjid did give a physical expression to its “radical” views, but not by terrorising, instead through vigilante activities, and so on. In countless televised and radio interviews given by Abdul Rashid Ghazi – an educated man with a relatively “secular” upbringing – it was difficult to discern in his manners or mien the traits of a rabid terrorist. A distinction needs to be made between Islamic individuals who are adamant about diluting what they deem to be “Western” influence in their surroundings, and replacing it with a system of governance based on Quranic principles, and actual terrorists who use extreme violence (hurling grenades in open markets to mass killing) to further their agenda.

Saleem Ali categorized madrassas into 3 categories: the select few with direct links to international terrorism; the larger share which partake in sectarian violence; and the neo-fundamentalist extremists who do not possess direct militant links but promote “radical” activity in the form of vigilante activities and aggressive demands for Sharia law. He places Lal Masjid in the final category.²³² When one considers the actions of known militant organizations, like the TNSM or JeM or indeed the Pakistani Taliban, who carry out bombings, beheadings and generally killings, Lal Masjid’s actions do pale in comparison. The mosque’s cardinal “crime”, based on available information, appears to be its loud and obtrusive call for an Islamic way of life in the increasingly “Westernized” city of Islamabad.

When judging the Red Mosque’s alleged militancy, the issue may just boil down to that of semantics: what is meant by the term “extremism”? The actions of the mosque and its madrassas – of kidnapping policemen, publicly setting alight “un-Islamic” DVDs, and so on – may be considered “extreme” by the layperson. For the purposes of this report, Saleem Ali’s proxies were used for measuring a mosque’s militancy; however it only looked at the role of madrassas in relation to sectarian violence. The 5th proxy – namely, “Cyber spotting” of websites belonging to jihadi organizations to see whether and how they have related to Lal Masjid” – was introduced by the present author and aimed to counter this limitation. The fulfillment of this proxy and its implications are discussed next.

Given the evidence analysed by this researcher, the most compelling points to a strong bond between the Lal Masjid administration and the outlawed extremist group, Jaish-e-Mohammad (see section 4B). Key members of JeM have been associated with the Red Mosque, a fact confirmed by JeM via their jihadi magazines and as evidenced by news reports of alleged JeM activists present inside the Lal Mosque. JeM militants were also captured in relation to a ploy aimed at killing the Ministry of Religious Affairs linked with the Lal Masjid operation. News of

²³¹ Saleem Ali’s book on the link between madrassas and militancy in Pakistan is currently under review by Oxford University Press. The information provided here is based on a manuscript of his book and a phone interview with the professor, carried out on 3 September 2007.

²³² Ibid.

the involvement of Jaish members in the terrorism in Swat, as well as speeches given by JeM associates (retrieved from the organisation's website), has revealed that JeM is most likely cooperating with the Pakistani-Taliban.

The interface between JeM and militants of the tribal areas appears to be a relatively recent development. Hitherto JeM's agenda has revolved around the "jihad" in Kashmir and Afghanistan, but having joined forces with the Pak-Taliban to fight the Pakistani military (in the case of Swat, for example), indicates a broadening of its activities. This development seems to have taken place after July 2007, further implicating the role of the Lal Masjid operation in pushing for a union of different extremist groups in Pakistan. Considering the bonds between the administration of Lal Masjid and its madrassas, and JeM, it could be reasoned that the group sought to seek revenge against the Pakistani SFs for Operation Silence, and in this pursuit joined the Pak-Taliban (with whom it now shares a common enemy).

The current report studied only a few websites belonging to militant groups in Pakistan, and it is possible that other jihadi outfits operating in the country – such as Harakat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) or Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), may also share the responsibility for the steep rise in terrorism in Pakistan since July 2007.

Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid, along with Umme Hassan of Jamia Hafsa girl's madrassa, publicly voiced their support for the Taliban and al-Qaeda and suicide attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq, while threatening a wave of suicide strikes themselves if the military raided their mosque-madrassa compound. The clerics claimed that Lal Masjid alone harboured 10,000 suicide bombers on stand-by. However we see from the reports of suicide strikes in 2007 that only one was by a female, but her link to Jamia Hafsa is unknown. In the cases of other bombings, it is only in the case of the PAF suicide attack in Sargodha that the perpetrator was directly linked to the Red Mosque. It is most probable that the Lal Masjid administration issued suicide threats only to weaken the resolve of the government to raid the mosque compound. Fearing the prospect of being razed or demolished (like other mosques in Islamabad at the time), it is likely that Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa put on the airs of being "jihadi" so to keep the military at bay and continue to own the (encroached) land, the price of which is in billions of rupees.

It might also be noteworthy to mention that the Lal Masjid clerics, albeit their public sympathy for the Taliban also differentiated themselves from the radical regime in Afghanistan by claiming that, unlike the Taliban, Lal Masjid was willing to encourage female education. In this sense it was slightly more "modern" as such a trait would not be expected of a strictly "Taliban-esque" organization.

Waziristan (FATA) and Swat (NWFP) suffered the brunt of the post-Lal Masjid militancy. These areas are also TTP strongholds, with Baitullah and Fazlullah leading militant activities against SFs in South Waziristan and Swat, respectively. Both these ideologues were supporters of Lal Masjid and had vowed revenge for the army operation against it.

Identity of most of the bombers to have hit the Punjab province is unknown, but for most of the violence targeted against SFs in the tribal belt and NWFP, the TTP and its affiliate, TNSM, were responsible. This was confessed by Baitullah Mehsud's and Maulana Fazlullah's spokespersons to different newspapers and in interview with journalists. The constant clashes between terrorists in these regions and the army has also intensified enmity between the two, leading to more suicide strikes by the extremists.

After Operation Silence was launched in July 2007, it is the face of the Pakistani Taliban that appears omnipresent in the violence that continues to destabilise the nation. Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan, and Maulana Fazlulalh in Swat, remain the two most distinguished harbingers of the TTP. The identities of perpetrators behind all the acts of terrorism are unknown, however it is the TTP that has claimed responsibility for many of the attacks against SFs in the Waziristans and NWFP, and is widely blamed for the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. A cursory glance at the situation would show that the number of suicide bombings against the SFs in these regions increased enormously after the Lal Masjid raid – and considering that both Baitullah and Fazlullah had decried the military's assault on Lal Masjid, while also threatening vengeance, the Lal Masjid incident would stand as the main trigger behind the violence which ensued. But, the Lal Masjid siege was quickly followed by deployment of troops in the tribal regions as well as Swat – this was perceived by the tribal militants to be an impingement upon the 2005 and 2006 peace agreements between the extremists and the Pakistani government. The resentment of militants towards the GoP, however, runs deeper than that – and has been mounting ever since Musharraf carried out the first military operation in Waziristan in 2003. All these factors combined are most likely to have borne a potent mix of anger that resulted in a vicious cycle of militancy, where we continue to see clashes between the army and the militants to this day.

The face of the Pakistani Taliban is not limited to just Baitullah and Fazlullah. While militancy increased in the aftermath of the Lal Masjid incident, and anti-government sentiment soared amongst the tribal people and those affected by the Red Mosque raid, different militant factions appeared to unite so to form a common front. Experts have emphasized this point: “transition from being Taliban supporters to sympathisers to becoming a mainstream Taliban force in the FATA initiated when many small militant groups operating independently in the area started networking with one another.”²³³

At present, TTP appears to be in a state of flux, constantly exposing new shades and hues. As discussed in previous chapters, groups like JeM and IMU, seem to be working alongside the TTP. To discern a direct link between Lal Masjid and these organisations, then, becomes complicated; that is, the “degrees of separation” – from Lal Masjid itself, to the TTP, and on to the IMU, or even al-Qaeda – increase, and hence only weak associations can be made as we move down the chain.

²³³ Hassan Abbas, “A profile of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan,” January 2008, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol.1, Issue 2

The complex nature of the issue is magnified when considering the role played by various different individuals who behave as freelance terrorists: “the group of militants operating in Pakistan at the moment comprise of persons from diverse walks of life... the fold of earlier jihadis now envelops criminals, professionals, etc. – creating a veritable cocktail of actors.”²³⁴ It has emerged that many persons, out of anger and resentment – because their loved ones either died in the Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa siege, or during the subsequent skirmishes between the Pakistani SFs and militants in the tribal areas and NWFP – have chosen to act as accomplices to terrorists. That is, the “Pakistani Taliban” seems to have spread its terrorist trawl to include other organisations, as well as individuals or “jundullahs” – referring here to angry young Muslim men not belonging to any organisation who have taken to acts of reprisal terrorism. This phenomenon of “jundullahs” is not specific to Pakistan, and has been observed elsewhere, for example in China.²³⁵ Future research on terrorism could benefit from studying this trend in greater detail. To grasp a better understanding of the TTP uprising in Pakistan, a thorough research needs to be conducted on the network – its constituents and exact parameter. However, this can only happen over time as more information regarding this phenomenon comes to surface.

²³⁴ E-mail communiqué with Syed Irfan dated March 2008.

²³⁵ B. Raman, “China’s Jundullahs: home-grown jihadis,” 15 August 2008, *Global Geopolitics News and Analysis* website, <http://globalgeopolitics.net/wordpress/?p=450>, accessed 16 August 2008

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