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Discourse on Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami and Its Founder Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi

Uncovering the Philosophy and Nuance of America's Adversary in Pakistan

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Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has expended extensive efforts in imposing their vision of Sharia on Pakistan's public life since the founding of the state in 1947. They stand opposed to any secular ideas introduced into Pakistan and are intolerant of other Muslim belief systems that do not espouse their views. JI, like other Islamist groups, confuse secularism as a modern form of religion versus as a mechanism to manage Pakistan's diverse ethnic and religious (Muslim and non-Muslim) groups. In order to interact effectively with Pakistan, America's leaders must gain an understanding of the core struggle between two of Pakistan's founders: the secular vision of Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), and the Islamist vision of Abu al Ala al-Mawdudi (1903-1979). This essay is a distillation of a dozen books written by Mawdudi and published in Arabic, and attempts to get into the mind of an important ideologue of modern radical Islamist movements. Mawdudi's books are referenced in this essay. Commentary and analysis of Mawdudi's work, as well as comparisons are listed at the end of this work.

The ideology of JI is Islam as a comprehensive system of life, not merely a theological philosophy but a call to direct political action. Mawdudi deemphasizes service to Islam through talk and speeches. Rather, he calls for direct action to rid the land of oppressive government, rid society of hypocrisy, and uphold Islam as a complete system for humanity generally, and for Muslims specifically. Mawdudi stood against national ideals represented by the post-colonial Indian National Congress Party. In his book *Muslims and the Current Conflict*, he spoke of opposing the civilizational dominance of the west. In February 1948, Mawdudi gave a speech at a law school in Lahore, declaring that "governance of Pakistan is to God alone, and it is up to Pakistan to carry out God's commands." In Mawdudi's copious writings and speeches, he emphasized that *Shariah* (Islamic law as understood by him and his followers) was to be the law of the land, and called for the cancellation of all laws that contravene the Shariah.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, on the other hand, was married to a Zoroastrian and advocated a Pakistan as a land with a Muslim character but accommodating of minorities and diverse Islamic beliefs through secular governance. Jinnah would become Pakistan's first President and a driving force in freeing the Indian subcontinent of British colonial rule. He first advocated anti-colonialism and opposition to British rule through India's National Congress Party, a collection of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs who all shared a common vision of opposing British domination of India. However, as independence loomed after World War II, Jinnah saw in Pakistan a means of collecting Muslims in a land that would protect them from Hindu oppression. Jinnah would die in 1948, only a year into Pakistan's independence, an event comparable in significance to

George Washington dying a year into office. This was one of the political misfortunes of Pakistan: that Jinnah's speeches, words, and dream of reconciling India and Pakistan under an economic or confederated system would perforce be interpreted or ignored by Pakistan's future leaders.

The Islamist visionary of Pakistan, in contrast, would live on until 1979. Until his death, Mawdudi advocated that a change in Pakistan's government would come from changing society first through proselytizing and *tarbiah* (correcting public behavior), re-instilling Islamic awareness and advocating *Islah Ijtimaae* (social reform). The problem with these notions is that Pakistan has diverse Islamic practices aside from Shiite and Sunni; moreover, there are differing interpretations within these two branches of Islam, to include a myriad of Sufi orders. Imposing a form of Shariah will alienate the others and lead to social chaos. Just take, for example, the Sunnis of Pakistan. If they are Salafi (fundamentalists), are they Deobandi or Ahle-Hadith or an amalgam of the two? This is just within a narrow fundamentalist doctrine within Sunni Islam. Mawdudi's form of political Islam was shaped from 1947 to 1956 on the street with conflicts against Pakistan's socialists, Hindus, and secularists, and ended with the triumph of Mawdudi's engineering an Islamic supremacy clause in Pakistan's constitution.

Mawdudi's Ideology Matters in 21st Century Violent and non-Violent Islamist Movements

Why does this matter in the 21st century? First of all, Mawdudi influenced the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) considered the most important theoretician of modern militant Islamist ideology, and a theoretical influence on al-Qaida leaders Ayman al-Zawahiri and Usama Bin Laden. Yet the al-Qaida leaders are selective in their emphasis on Mawdudi, highlighting his calls for the Government of God on Earth while marginalizing his call for an Islamist constitution. JI's own constitution, promulgated by Mawdudi, opens with a preamble that the organization would operate openly and not in secret. Mawdudi was influenced by Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahab, the founder of Saudi Wahabism; Pakistan's Mohammed Iqbal (poet and nationalist writer); and exchanges with the Egyptian Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. All three are problematic ideologues for al-Qaida today. The Wahhabi clerical establishment in Saudi Arabia has ostracized al-Qaida, and while Mohammad Iqbal came up with the idea of a Pakistan for Muslims, he never endorsed a theocracy as a means of governance. Further, Hassan al-Banna and his Muslim Brotherhood has been the subject of vitriol by Zawahiri, with the al-Qaida Deputy writing a 1994 book demonizing the organization created by al-Banna. This demonstrates the narrowness of al-Qaida ideologically, even within those Islamists who debate the character of what constitutes an Islamic state.

This leads to the second issue of 21st century significance. The notion of the Islamic state and what that is, has been a subject of debate since the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD. Since the Prophet left no guidance of the mechanics of an Islamic state, it has been left to Muslims to organize themselves in a way that preserves the Quranic injunction of justice and consensus. Mawdudi wrote of an Islamic state having a legislative, judicial, and executive branch with an Islamic character; he also wrote about what he believes is an Islamic economic system. But Mawdudi's ideas had been shaped by his experiences on the Indian sub-continent. Mawdudi saw in British democracy as practiced in India a means for a Hindu majority to dominate a Muslim minority. He believed a democratic Hindu majority would begin to erode Islam in India first through its education system, watering down generations of Muslims of an

understanding of Islam. In an independent Pakistan, Mawdudi embraced democracy as a means of challenging the military juntas. He saw in an Islamized democracy a means of addressing the rise of militarism and dictatorship that had spread not only in Pakistan but throughout the Arab and Muslim world of the 1950s and 1960s.

Biography of Mawdudi and his Books

Born in 1903, Mawdudi's father, Ahmed Hassan, was a lawyer practicing during the time of the British Raj who abandoned a lucrative career to pursue a life of an Islamic ascetic. His cleric urged him to return to the law in defense of the oppressed, taking on cases of Muslims suffering under what was viewed British tyranny and oppression. Ahmed Hassan made little money as a lawyer and defender of Muslim rights in the British Raj, but he instilled in his son, Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi, a robust Islamic education. This included not only Quranic memorization, but also knowledge of Arabic and the Hadith (sayings and attributions of Prophet Muhammad); his study included all the known books of Hadith, as well as the earliest book of Hadiths, Malik's Muwatta – and even knowledge of French. Ahmed Hassan narrated to his son the glories of Islamic history from Prophet Muhammad, to his Companions, to the Islamic dynasties that ruled over India before the British. Father and son prayed communally five times a day, and he attracted like-minded boys for Mawdudi to engage in Islamic discourse. Mawdudi was schooled by his father until age 11, at which time he joined a high school, graduating at 14. It was in high school that his talent for writing and public speaking blossomed. This is extraordinary given that Mawdudi grew up in poverty and walked 20 miles each way to school. While at high school he developed a love of journalism and began writing seriously at age 14. His essays focused on Muslim pride and the need to restore honor to the tarnished Caliphate. Mawdudi became Editor in Chief of al-Muslim, the newspaper of Jamiat Ulama Group, at age 17 from 1920 to 1923. During this phase, he used the newspaper's library to absorb and improve his Arabic grammar, understanding of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tafseer* (Quranic exegesis), Arabic literature, logic; and he taught himself to read English. Mastering English in less than a year opened a further world of ideas, English literature, history, philosophy, and social sciences. He used this knowledge not to empathize or understand the ascendancy of the British, but instead to compare and contrast Western and Islamic cultures and to seek the reasons for Muslim decline and the dominance of European colonialism.

In the early 1920s, Mawdudi published *Al-Nashatat al-Tabshriyah al-Turkiyah (Activities on the Spread of Turkish Nationalism)*, and *Majazir Yunaniyah fee Smyrna (Greek Massacres in Smyrna)*. Both works focused on how Turkish nationalism destroyed the Ottoman Empire and the defeat of the Ottomans at the hands of the Greeks in the nineteenth century. With the abolishment of the institution of the caliphate in 1923, Mawdudi sought answers to what he and many saw was the absolute dominance of the west over Islam. By 1928, he published *Masdar Quwa al-Muslim (Source of Muslim Strength)*, and *al-Jihad fee al-Islam (Jihad in Islam)*. These books ended the decade of the 1920s with Mawdudi calling upon Islamic self-improvement – and the need to rediscover jihad (as fighting) to overthrow British rule over India. He was influenced by stories of the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, in which Muslims challenged British forces in India. Although this rebellion was the Muslim Mogul's last stand against the British, Mawdudi neglects that Hindus joined Muslims in India's first national revolt. He was also no doubt inspired by anti-colonial movements gaining voice after World War I. This included the 1919 riots in Egypt against the British, the 1920 revolt in Iraq against the British, and the 1921

Battle of Maysaloon against the French in Syria. Between 1933 and 1937, Mawdudi began another spate of books, a total of five significant works. The most influential in Islamist circles of the period include *Mafaheem Islamiyah hawl al-Deen wal Dawla (Islamic Understanding of Religion and the State)*; *Usus al-Iqtisad bain al-Islam wal Tuta al-Muasirah (Between Islamic and Current Economic Theories)*; and *al-Hijab (Taking the Veil)*.

Mawdudi thought of European colonialism and calls for secular nationalism as part of the same disease. He wrote that Arab nationalism brought down the Ottoman Empire and was exploited by the British, who pitted Muslim against Muslim. It was, he asserted, the Young Turks whose adherence to Turanism (Turkish Nationalism) caused the destruction of the Ottoman caliphate from within. He also despised Mahatma Gandhi and his alliance of Muslims and Hindu against British rule manifested in the Indian National Congress Party. Mawdudi countered the nationalist trend with an advocacy of pan-Islamism, morality, and the quest for social, political, and economic justice. His most novel slogan was the challenge to all Muslims to raise God's word on high, and the notion on God's sovereignty as opposed to popular sovereignty. These ideas would stimulate Qutb in Egypt and Khomeini in Iran, respectively the sources of Sunni and Shiite radicalism.

Mawdudi: As Editor and Journalist

Mawdudi took over as chief editor of *Tarjman Quran Magazine* in 1933, and was not known to be a good delegator. He wrote articles, managed subscriptions, edited articles, even licked the stamps and mailed the magazine himself. He would actively proselytize, calling on fellow Muslims to make their hearts and minds Muslim in the service of God and to reject the jahiliyah (ignorant) systems, come to the straight path, and claim God's book with force so as to become (once again) masters of this world, and the leading civilization. His masthead for his magazine was an invitation to jihad. Muslims in India saw in his message a means to stir anti-colonial sentiment, and his magazine was translated into French, English, Persian, and Arabic. This is likely the way such radical leaders of the latter part of the 20th century such as Khomeini in Iran and Qutb in Egypt absorbed his ideas. This notion of *jahiliyah*, although literally translated as ignorance, really means the pre-Islamic ignorance of Arabia before Muhammad. Mawdudi's modernist interpretation in his book *al-Jahiliyah al-Qadima wal Hadeeth (Jahiliyah Old and Modern)* labels Muslim society under colonial rule and Muslims who sustain colonial rule as being in a state of pre-Islamic ignorance that needs to be purged. Qutb was excited by this theory that his own book, "*Milestones along the Road*," considered an important manifesto for al-Qaida, devotes many pages to the concept, although not attributing it to Mawdudi.

Further Immersion into Pakistani History from Mawdudi's Lens

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) was perhaps the biggest influence on Mawdudi. The Cambridge educated poet and philosopher agreed that Islam should be used as an instrument of political activism. The two discussed recruiting future Muslim leaders who shared character and leadership qualities of which Mawdudi approved. From these ideas Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) was born in August 1941, with the lofty goals to establish God's religion on earth, establish an Islamic system (of governance), and to derive salvation in the hereafter. JI began with 75 members and 70 rupees (less than \$50), but it collected followers and was uniquely poised to exploit the cataclysmic event of the partition of India in 1947. The massacres of Hindus and

Muslims on the independence of both India and Pakistan, coupled with tense relations flaring up into several wars over Kashmir and what would become Bangladesh, radicalized Mawdudi further. He competed ideologically with Pakistan's founding father Jinnah, calling for God's sovereignty to be the ultimate legislator, and for Islam to be an alternative to Pakistani nationalism. He called on Islamist democracy to take political power through the ballot box and steer Pakistan away from the series of military juntas that took power after Jinnah's death in 1948. Ultimately, he would spend years on and off in prison until his death in 1979.

Mawdudi lived in a world in which the British, Hindus, nationalists, and Muslim hypocrites (Mawdudi's term used for those that do not share his view of Islam) were seen by him as conspiring against Islam. General Ayyub Khan, Pakistan's first military ruler (1958-1969), warned him to stay away from politics and stick to proselytizing. His answer was that he was on a divine mission to rid Pakistan of filth; he was jailed. Mawdudi continued writing, inciting, and thinking right up to his death. He had visited Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon in the 1950s, yet JI continues today to be a challenge to any government in Pakistan that is even cordial to the United States.

Current Views and Anti-American Narratives from JI

Ahmed Qadi Hussein, JI leader as of 2009, names the United States the leader of global terrorism against Iraq, Pakistan, and Palestine. He is a source of the conspiracy that the United States manufactured Usama Bin Laden and al-Qaida to sanction domination over Muslims through the global war on terrorism. Yet he also has stated in interviews published in Pakistani magazines like *al-Haqaiq* that there is no pact of protection between the Pakistani (Pashtun) tribes and Bin Laden. If any person approaches these tribes in peace and security, they will protect them as guests; to say the tribes will resist both the United States and the Pakistani Army is not in their interest. Whether this is disinformation or double-speak, it cuts both ways and can be used as part of any anti-AQ information campaign. Hussein's narrative also includes the tribal wars as being the will of Pakistani people against the Pakistani government which is allied to the west. He also has drawn a narrative that the West is secularizing Pakistan's education by marginalizing verses of the Quran that deal with jihad; this too cuts both ways, as the likes of Hussein emphasize seventy war verses and neglect over 140 verses of tolerance in the Quran. Moreover, he has created a religious cult that lives by only these verses when the Quran is 6,236 verses. Hussein is also a political operator, finding common cause with other political parties opposed to the regime of former leader General Pervez Musharaf (1998-2007). Finally, JI is a leading advocate of preserving Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, arguing that this is a right because of three Indo-Pakistani Wars; the creation by India of Bangladesh from what was East Pakistan; and India's possession of nuclear weapons.

Conclusion

By estimate, JI controls 20 percent of Pakistan's legislative seats and has branches in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and connections to the Muslim Brotherhood. It therefore makes sense for Americans interested in Pakistan and Afghanistan to immerse themselves in this history of this group and their founder, Abu ala al-Mawdudi, to gain a nuanced understanding into the political psychology of the region. This work is a distillation of reading a dozen of Mawdudi's works in Arabic, available in the United States through inter-library loan. Those counter-

terrorism analysts versed in Urdu can gain a deeper perspective than by reading Mawdudi or JI literature in Arabic or English. It is hoped that this work will stimulate debate among counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency specialists using direct Arabic sources, and that among those is a scholar, leader, and writer with command of Urdu who can add to the discussion by exposing us to the purely Pakistani perspective of Mawdudi and JI. In the 21st century, Jamaat-e-Islami has gone digital with a highly interactive website and its own TV station on-line at <http://jamaat.org/beta/home/index>. Their website can be accessed in Urdu, English, and Arabic and is worth a study on its own.

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The following books and sources were used to synthesize this essay.

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