

The Religious and Political Dynamics of *Jamiat Ahle-Hadith* in Pakistan

Introduction:

This paper focuses on the religious and political dynamics of the Markazi Jamiat Ahle Hadith (JAH) in Pakistan, within the current context of the spontaneous groundswell of religious zeal in Pakistan. It seeks to study the *raison d'etre* of this party, which has no popular support and overtly fosters militant jihadist networks in its midst but is still capable of sustaining itself in mainstream politics through its alliance with a popular political party, while simultaneously maintaining its parasitical relationship with the military and the Saudi financing community.

With the aim to meaningfully identify the nature of the party and put into perspective JAH's standing in Pakistani politics, the paper also focuses on the reasons and implications for JAH's existence through which it is able to influence and disrupt public policy to some extent. It outlines the particular puritanically idealistic vision of Pakistan that is harbored by the JAH, tries to understand how this idealism nourishes the JAH and at the same time makes it irrelevant to the general public in Pakistan.

It also studies JAH's policies in the light of their Salafist doctrine and the extent to which this doctrine has an impact on its relationship with politics and violence. The paper also studies how the organization's madrassas and educational networks create and glorify a culture of violence in the name of jihad and serve as the prime recruiting ground for jihadist groups. Ultimately the paper argues that the JAH's agenda is reflective more of its political aspirations than its religious ones, which is significant given that religion is the haloed rationale for JAH's existence around which it rallies its sparse public following.

A Brief Background:

The Markazi Jamiat Ahle Hadith (JAH), a religio-political party, is the central Salafist organization in Pakistan. The JAH, claims to be the only 'genuine' representatives of the Saudi sponsored Ahle Hadith movement in Pakistan.¹ This status provides them without a doubt with a potent array of advantages not the least of which is that it gives them a clear upper hand within the religious community in Pakistan.² Being closely linked to Saudi Arabia, the JAH assiduously follows the lead of Saudi *ulema*' with their most orthodox and stringent school of interpretation of Islamic law. The party operates within small pockets and limited areas only, while their most visible following is the youth affiliated with their madrassas network.

Although the JAH had existed earlier as a religious group, it was transformed into a political party in 1986 under the leadership of Ehsan Elahi Zaheer. This was done, with the help of generous Saudi funding and support, to gain popular mandate and draw the Pakistani people into JAH's 'revivalist program' through electoral politics, instead of 'remaining confined to mosques and madrassas'.³ Since the very occasion of its launching the JAH embarked on a vehemently violent sectarian campaign to malign and harass Muslims from other sects and Sunni schools of thought. They also targeted the Ahmadi community with a vengeance, publicly inciting their followers to eliminate members of this sect. Zaheer's assassination in 1987, presumably by Shia militia, is said to have heralded the beginning of organized sectarian violence in the country.⁴

In the political arena the JAH has managed to have a marginal presence inspite of the fact that it does not have any significant public support. The JAH has been closely aligned with the PML-N group ever since its inception, an alliance that has somewhat served to fortify its standing in the political sphere by allowing JAH to be represented in the Parliament through a few members.⁵ JAH was also part of the Muttahida Majlis-e-

¹ Interview with Professor Sajid Mir . The official website of Ahle Hadith. [http:// ahlehadith.webs.com](http://ahlehadith.webs.com)

² Cohen, Stephen P. *The Idea of Pakistan*. Brookings Institution Press. 2004, pg181

³ Jamal, Arif. *Pakistan's Jihad So Far*. The News (Pakistan). 2000

⁴ Zahab ,Mariam Abou. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement“ in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009 pg 131

⁵ Interview with Arif Jamal.

Amal (MMA), an alliance of Islamist parties, that came into power with 11.3 percent of the popular vote at the 2002 elections.⁶ The party is currently led by Professor Sajid Mir, who is currently a member of the Pakistan Senate.

Initially the JAH had tepid relations with the military, given the fact that it did not support the Afghan jihad. However in the consequent years the JAH 'fell in' with the ISI strategy to cultivate ties with radical Islamist groups in order to counter other such groups.⁷ Therefore in spite of its lack of public following, the JAH have thrived in an environment conducive to Islamist political activism and militancy where they have had the privilege to be sustained by free-flowing Saudi money, assisted by a mainstream political party and protected by Pakistani intelligence services.

The JAH's Vision of Pakistan:

The JAH upholds a manifestly puritanical vision of Pakistan that seems excessive and out of sync with the sentiments of the general population. This possibly largely accounts for the fact that this party has no significant public following.

Following the hard-line religious and political discourse purported by the Salafist ideology, JAH seeks to "empower society by providing a universal alternative model of truth and social action".⁸ One of the major focus of JAH's political agenda is its effort to address the "deliberate and organized efforts at the state level to replace honorable Muslim values in society with the offensive Western culture".⁹ The party is vehemently against the 'Westernization' of Pakistani society and is generally suspicious of all modernity. It aggressively calls for taking measures at the state level to arrest 'vulgarity and obscenity' in the media and public sphere.

The JAH believes that the cure to all of Pakistan's problems lies in returning to the 'original' form of the religion, cleansed of 'innovations that have misguided the faithful'.

⁶ International Crisis Group 2009, 'Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge', Asia Report no.164.

⁷ Husain Haqqani Weeding Out the Heretics: Sectarianism in Pakistan, Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, Hudson Institute journal, 2005

⁸ The official website of Jamaat Ahle Hadith. <http://ahlehadith.webs.com>

⁹ Interview with Professor Sajid Mir. The official website of Ahle Hadith. <http://ahlehadith.webs.com>

It describes Pakistan's crises as a consequence of "a weakness of faith", which has been "poisoned by secular democracy". It also threatens with "direct action against secular, anti-Muslim forces" who "as agents of colonists were cashing in on the Muslims' disunity and had obliterated the ideological and cultural identity of the country".¹⁰

JAH also pursues an overtly hostile rejectionist policy towards all those whose beliefs differ from theirs and remain convinced that they alone embody authentic faith in Pakistan.¹¹ Among others they describe their fellow Sunni Deobandis as *mushrikin* (unbelievers) for their veneration of the Prophet and vilify the Barelvi's and the Sufis for wrongful innovations in their practices, considering them to ignorant shrine-worshippers.¹² The JAH is also in the forefront of the radical Sunni groups as standard-bearers of anti-Shi'ism in Pakistan. The founder of JAH, Ehsan Elahi Zaheer blamed the Shias of heresy and accused them of being Zionist agents in Islamic countries in his magnum opus, titled '*Shias and Shiism*'.¹³

The JAH also considers Ahmedis to be heretics. It seeks the removal of Ahmedis from key government offices and restoration of contentious information about Ahmedis in academic syllabi, removed during the Musharraf era under public pressure. Recently it has sought to ban the Ahmedis from the public places and called for the destruction of their mosques or 'centers of apostasy'. According to the official JAH literature "it is the religious duty of every Muslim to dispatch an Ahmedis to hell".¹⁴ They also issue fatwas against other Muslim sects as part of their quest for religious purity and regularly publish and distribute anti-Ahmedi and anti-Shiism tracts. The JAH also strongly supports the contentious blasphemy law in Pakistan and has been campaigning assiduously against its amendment in the recent times.¹⁵

¹⁰ Interview with Professor Sajid Mir. The official website of Ahle Hadith. <http://ahlehadith.webs.com>

¹¹ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, Columbia University Press, 2009 pg 129

¹² International Crisis Group 2009, 'Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge', Asia Report no.164

¹³ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, Columbia University Press, 2009 pg 131

¹⁴ Official website of Ibtisam Elahi Zaheer. www.quran-o-sunnah.com

¹⁵ Official website of Ibtisam Elahi Zaheer. www.quran-o-sunnah.com, The Daily Times. Dec 7, 2010.

In terms of economic policy the JAH considers the prevalent economic system as 'un-Islamic', calling for an introduction of Islamic provisions in the economic sphere. It also denounces the governments decisions to take loans from hegemonic international agencies and instead calls for 'taking help from friendly Muslim countries'.¹⁶ The JAH also harbors a rigidly restrictive outlook towards foreign policy with it's outright rejection of all efforts for peaceful reconciliation with India, without first 'making Delhi to solve Kashmir issue', and any overtures towards the recognition of Israel.¹⁷

As with other religious parties JAH leadership tries to appease public opinion by indulging in excessive anti-American rhetoric. The louder the rhetoric the more it consolidates the party's religious credentials.¹⁸ Consequently the JAH vehemently condemns US attacks in tribal areas and believes that Washington should be "held responsible for terrorism and global unrest". They are not only anti-American because of Washington's support to Israel but also because of it's overt backing of successive moderate 'un-Islamic' governments in the past.¹⁹

JAH therefore fits perfectly into the textbook description of militant-sectarian organizations which follow "organized and militant religious-political activism whose specific aim is to safeguard and promote the sociopolitical interests of their particular Muslim sectarian community." It has it's own "discourse of power," which promises empowerment of their particular sect "in tandem with greater adherence to Islamic norms in public life." It also hopes to achieve greater power and greater piety "through mobilization of the sectarian identity in question and the marginalization of the rival sectarian communities, largely through prolific use of violence."²⁰

The Role of Madrassas and Mosques :

¹⁶ Official website of Jamiat Ahle Hadith. <http://ahlehadith.webs.com>

¹⁷ Interview with Professor Sajid Mir. The official website of Ahle Hadith. <http://ahlehadith.webs.com>

¹⁸ Khaled Ahmed. The power of the Ahle Hadith. The Friday Times. July 12 - 18, 2002

¹⁹ Interview with Professor Sajid Mir. The official website of Ahle Hadith. <http://ahlehadith.webs.com>

²⁰ Seyed Vali Nasr, "International Politics, Domestic Imperatives and Identity Mobilization: Sectarianism in Pakistan, 1979-1998," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 32,2 (January 2000): 171.

The JAH has direct control over the *Wifaq ul Madaris Salafiya*, which controls Salafi madrassas all over Pakistan. The headquarters for the *Wifaq ul Madaris Salafiya* is located at the *Jamiaa Salafiya* in Faisalabad, which is personally headed by Professor Sajid Mir and serves as the hub of all of JAH's religious activity.²¹ This network not only provides a ready platform for promulgating Salafist rhetoric of the top JAH leadership to the public and is a convenient means for disseminating JAH propaganda to thousands of students affiliated with the network.

This network has witnessed a stunning increase in membership since the late 1980's, which is directly traceable to private Saudi financial support. The Saudi Arabian organizations, like the Harmain Islamic Foundation etc reportedly provide direct financial assistance to all the JAH madrassas.²² In keeping with the advent of the 'Madrassa industry' in the post-Afghan war era,²³ the JAH network set out earnestly to take part in the recruiting and converting thousands of young men to bring them into the Ahle Hadith fold. The number of JAH madrassas in Pakistan have grown fourfold, with the total number of 134 madrassas in 1988 reaching 3,000 by 2006. Many observers describe their success in setting up new madrassas and 'converting' other madrassas as 'phenomenal'.²⁴

This madrassa network also provides the primary support base to the jihadist elements in the organization. The foot soldiers of militant Islam are the socially deprived poor who have relied on the madrassas for their very survival, and have been politicized and radicalized towards violence in defense of what their indoctrination continuously impresses upon them - that Islam is under threat from a non-Muslim, Judeo-Christian axis.²⁵ These madrassas, which are largely unmonitored and unregulated by government agencies, continue to create an environment conducive to religious bigotry and extremism. Many of the Salafist teachings they employ describe militant jihad against

²¹ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 133

²² Cohen, Stephen P. The Idea of Pakistan. Brookings Institution Press. 2004, pg181

²³ Abbas, Hassan. 2005. Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror. M.E Sharp Publisher. P.238-239

²⁴ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 132

²⁵ Khaled Ahmed. *The Grand Deobandi. Consensus*. Feb, 2000

infidels to be “the summit of Islam”, as “one of the noblest and most magnificent acts of obedience to God”, where martyrdom is a “noble life force” because “Islam requires all apostates to be killed”. Textbooks used in these schools glorify the martyr killed in the pursuit of jihad and encourage children to sacrifice their lives for “the great nuclear power that Pakistan has become.”²⁶

Unlike madrassas from other schools of thought this network combines Islamic education with a modern curriculum teaching subjects like English, mathematics and science.²⁷ This is also makes them attractive for the lower middle class families who cannot afford private English medium schools but seek a dignified education for their children. However this network largely aims to use contemporary academic systems along with modern technology to spread the message of jihad and prepare children from a young age to become *mujahideen*. Infact according to given statistics most of these centers function as 'feeder schools' for a multitude of jihadist organizations but mainly for the JAH's jihadist wing the Tehreek ul Mujahideen.²⁸

Rivalry with other Ahle Hadith Groups:

Within Pakistan, the Ahle Hadith groups suffer from systemic fragmentation and incessant internal strife and consequently they spend significant time and energy vilifying each other. JAH which is considered to be the central Ahle Hadith party does not have cordial relations with any of the other Ahle Hadith groups because of intrinsic political differences over rites, rituals and strategy.²⁹ JAH's principal challengers are the Jamaat ud Dawaa (JuD) and it's jihadist offshoot the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The JAH had aggressively opposed the formation of the Markaz Dawat ul Irshad(MDI), the earlier avatar of JuD, because of a perceived sense of competition. The JAH leadership was so proactive in their campaign against the MDI, that the MDI could initially not get

²⁶ Mariam Abou Zahab. "Deobandi Groups and Ahl-e Hadith" in *Islamic Affairs Analyst*, Janes, July 2009

²⁷ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 135

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. pg 130

any Saudi funding because of JAH opposition. The JAH had also barred the MDI (JuD) and LeT from recruiting any student from their madrassas.³⁰

The biggest contention between these groups lies in their different doctrinal outlooks towards jihad. The JAH considers jihad to be a '*fardh kifaya*' (non-compulsory obligation) while the LeT considers it to be '*fardh-e-ain*' (compulsory obligation).³¹ Because the JAH controls the Ahl-e-Hadith Madrassas, it is extremely difficult for LeT to recruit from these madrassas. Consequently the JAH and its jihadist wing the Tehreek-e-Mujahedeen are extremely hostile towards the LeT and the JuD.

Another factor in this rivalry is that because the JAH had opposed the jihad in Afghanistan at the time of its launch, it was sidelined by the military. Coerced into existence largely at the behest of the ISI, when the LeT emerged on the jihadi front and slowly marginalized the JAH. Many in TM view LeT as an organization that was created by the ISI to undercut its religious standing. By mid-1990, the LeT had become the biggest Ahle Hadith jihadist group, openly challenging the supremacy of the JAH.³² Infact, LeT's Hafiz Saeed publicly derided the JAH for its inertia against waging jihad, further corroding their religious standing in their perception. In return, the JAH openly blame LeT for making money out of jihad by embezzling large sums of money collected for the sake of this cause.³³

A Drift towards Militancy:

Interestingly then the JAH only co-opted its jihadist wing the Kashmir based Tehreek-e-Mujahedeen, in 1996 after it was blamed incessantly by other Ahle Hadith

³⁰ Jessica Stern. 'Pakistan's Jihad Culture'. Foreign Affairs. Nov/ Dec 2000

³¹ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 137

³² Arif Jamal. Pakistan's Jihad so far. The News. March 2000.

³³ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 137

organizations for being overly interested in politics and not being militant enough.³⁴ They seem to have been forced into this alliance by circumstances as they obviously did not want to be left behind in a social culture that had somewhat venerated jihadist recruitment and had in fact turned into a 'jihad factory'.³⁵ In doing so JAH also fell in conveniently with the ISI strategy of giving low-profile political parties a limited but well-defined role in the Kashmir jihad, which would advocate for a political solution to the Kashmir issue and thus give a political facade to the jihad.³⁶

This collaboration with the ISI has eventually led the JAH to adopt an increasingly aggressive stance in terms of its jihadist goals. Its ties with the state and the military have further strengthened over the years, in keeping with the military establishment's policy to restrict the growth of secular and ethnic-based political parties that often do not share the establishment's hostility toward India.³⁷ The Military and the mullahs have been symbiotically linked to each other in Pakistan's politics for decades and in JAH's case, both have often needed and helped the other attain their respective goals. The JAH provides a convenient cover up for jihadist activities and the military extends its support by secretly encouraging radicalism, while routinely denying that it is doing so - as has been a consistent feature of the Establishment's practice.³⁸

Consequently over the years the JAH has become gradually more violent in its outlook, in comparison with other religious organizations like the JI which also overtly supported militancy through the Hizbul Mujahideen (HB) but started abandoning the culture of violence by the late 1990's in the favor of political dialogue.³⁹ In a stark contrast to this trend, the JAH sponsored TM has time and again threatened peace initiatives in Kashmir and ostracized the political leaders for their 'anti-jihad policies'.⁴⁰ On the political front the JAH's anti-India propaganda has been becoming increasingly

³⁴ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 131

³⁵ Interview with Arif Jamal

³⁶ Arif Jamal. *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir*. Melville House, 2009 .pg 242

³⁷ Interview with Arif Jamal.

³⁸ Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Pakistan - The Threat from Within," *Pakistan Security Research Unit*, Brief no. 13

³⁹ Arif Jamal. *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir*. Melville House, 2009 .pg 249

⁴⁰ Ibid .pg 264

virulent. They publicly justify this violence in the name of Islam, calling the Indians 'infidels' and apostates and therefore reducing the concept of jihad to a violent struggle against infidels, whether armed or unarmed- men, women and children.⁴¹

Currently the JAH is among those Salafi groups that openly espouse violence.⁴² Officially the fact that group rejects bloodshed on paper makes them, in some ways, untouchable.⁴³ But their promotion of the same ideology that militant radicals follow, with its rigid rejection of any other form of Islamic practice, marks them out as extremists in their own right—and ones whose message could easily be twisted into violence. In a way militant rhetoric and violence has become a political weapon for them with which to threaten, believers and unbelievers alike.⁴⁴

Jihadist Connections:

In spite of the fact that the JAH extended political patronage to Tehreek al Mujahedeen publicly in 2000 after having adopting it covertly in 1996, the JAH leaders like Professor Sajid Mir and Maulana Shabudin Madani had attended conferences in Kashmir under the banner of TM as far back as 1990.⁴⁵ One of the main reasons behind their earlier affiliation was to increase public support and increase their standing in the religious community. Initially when JAH adopted the TM in 1996 as its militant wing, the TM fighters led by Maulana Jamilur Rehman consisted largely of freedom fighters from the Occupied Kashmir. Although the TM attracted a minimal amount of Kashmiris, it trained thousands of young Pakistani recruits from the JAH at its training camps which were set up all over the country under ISI patronage. ⁴⁶

The JAH and consequently TM currently both work in close collaboration with the ISI. The main ISI support for TM comes in the form of unconditional authorization to

⁴¹ Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah : Jihad in South Asia*. Harvard University Press, 2008.pg 313

⁴² Official website of Jamiat Ahle Hadith. <http://ahlehadith.webs.com>

⁴³ Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Pakistan – The Threat from Within," *Pakistan Security Research Unit*, Brief no. 13

⁴⁴ Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah : Jihad in South Asia*. Harvard University Press, 2008.pg 313

⁴⁵ Arif Jamal. *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir*. Melville House, 2009 .pg 264

⁴⁶ Arif Jamal. *Fueling a proxy war*. The News. Dec, 1999

operate and expand militant training camps in Pakistan. The ISI provides funds to the TM for operations in Indian Kashmir. However most funds for TM come from the Saudi government agencies through JAH, which enjoys official Saudi support for all its socio-political activities. In return for this support JAH follows and implements Saudi agenda. The growth of numerous jihadi groups in Pakistan incidentally threatens the 'interests' of Saudi Arabia. Therefore supporting TM is sort of an 'insurance' against unwanted threat and intimidation from other jihadist groups.⁴⁷

This merger between JAH and TM brought about to the 'Pakistanization' of the group and the consequent 'broadening of their horizons'.⁴⁸ TM's affiliation with the JAH has also eventually led to a hardening of it's initial flexible position towards peaceful negotiations and political dialogue with the Indian government. The TM is increasingly developing a global or at least regional outlook. Apart from the militant activities in Kashmir, there is other evidence to suggest that JAH and TM members have been involved in terrorism elsewhere.⁴⁹

In 2007 security agencies raided a JAH supported madrassa, the *Darsatul Islamia* in Karachi to arrest 19 students in connection with the Bali bombings. The madrassa was however not shut down nor was it penalized for any connections with terrorism.⁵⁰ In the recent past the JAH leadership has been found on record to have openly threatened Western civilians in Pakistan for 'polluting' the society with immorality and openly invited 'true followers' to attack America and American targets. On their part the JAH consider such actions to be 'justifiable' and further glorify them.⁵¹

Such activism has an ideological explanation in the fact that Salafism as practiced by JAH represents a social and religious movement which has manifest inclinations towards political violence. Many critics point out that one of the weakest aspect of

⁴⁷ Interview with Arif Jamal.

⁴⁸ Arif Jamal. Pakistan's Jihad so far. The News. March 2000.

⁴⁹ 'Pakistan: Karachi's Madrassas and Violent Extremism'. International Crisis Group. Asia Report. No. 130, March 29, 2007 Also Lahore, Daily Times, June 15, 2006

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Interview with Professor Sajid Mir. The official website of Ahle Hadith. [http:// ahlehadith.webs.com](http://ahlehadith.webs.com)

Salafism is the 'underdeveloped nature of its political vocabulary'.⁵² Since Salafism places emphasis on doctrinal purity and not politics, its contentious link with politics forms the 'central dilemma' in Salafism.⁵³ As is the case with Salafist groups openly indulging in politics, the JAH's overt political activism transcended politics and has eventually taken the form of violence and jihad. In other words it has 'shaded off' into the political violence that seems intrinsic to Salafism.⁵⁴

While Salafism is by no means a monolithic entity and most Salafis are divided on the issue of political activism, they all agree on the definitive principles such as the doctrine of '*al-wala' wal-l-bara*' which upholds that one must show loyalty to God and provide assistance to fellow Muslims, while evincing hatred and enmity towards non-Muslims. This doctrine forms the basis for violent engagement with non-Muslims and the practice of *takfir* towards fellow Muslims, which basically legitimizes the use of violence against other Muslims.⁵⁵ In keeping with this the JAH upholds both the doctrine of '*al-wala' wal-l-bara*' and considers *takfir* not only to be a legitimate practice but also a religious duty incumbent upon the individual believers.⁵⁶

Religious vs. Political Agenda:

The JAH, like all other Ahle Hadith has limited appeal beyond some segments of urban commercial and professional middle classes. Although they have gained some political strength since the 1990's and are more organized than the other Ahle Hadith groups, they remain a negligible minority with narrow, puritanical views.⁵⁷ JAH does not have any mass following and has never been able to win a seat in the Parliament on its own, but its affiliation with PML-N enables it to do so and allows it to have some standing in the national politics. For PML-N in turn, an affiliation with the JAH adds to their religious respectability and provides it with a powerful conduit to Saudi Arabia. It

⁵² Roel Meijer(ed) , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 34.

⁵³ Ibid. pg17-18

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. pg49-50

⁵⁶ Interview with Professor Sajid Mir. The official website of Ahle Hadith. [http:// ahlehadith.webs.com](http://ahlehadith.webs.com)

⁵⁷ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 141

can be noted that the JAH has been a significant factor in cementing the PML-N's resilient relations with the Saudi government.⁵⁸

Within the religious community in Pakistan Salafist factions like the JAH are considered to be an elitist group who worship in separate mosques and refuse to pray behind imams belonging to other sects. In many cases they refuse certain occupations and avoid socializing for the fear of contamination of their purity by mingling with *mushrikeen* or non-believers.⁵⁹ Reflecting this the JAH leadership, with its encouragement of religious disharmony, seems clearly focused on furthering politically motivated interpretations of Islam which serve only to reinforce the divisions between Muslims in general. This leadership continues to use Islam for fostering exclusionary politics and to consolidate their own power base, especially since it lacks political legitimacy. Their success lies largely on their dexterous political manouevering rather than their religious credentials.⁶⁰

In this respect it can be argued that they are following a political agenda rather than a religious one, as they claim to do. The JAH has never shied away from compromising it's religious values in order to further their political career as is evident from its subservient and parasitical affiliations with the military establishment on the one hand and the Saudi government on the other. In other words their policies speak more about their political ambitions than their religious preferences. In this regard the Islamic revivalism that is envisioned and propagated by JAH seems inextricably linked to power politics and the personal gains of it's political leaders.

Conclusion:

The analysis of the JAH's religious and political dynamics reveals a symbiotic relationship between political religiosity and militancy. It can be argued that encouraging genuine Islamic scholarship and a public debate on this relationship may present a

⁵⁸ Interview with Arif Jamal.

⁵⁹ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 141

⁶⁰ Hussain Haqqani. "Pakistan and the Islamists". *Current History*, April 2007, Vol.106(699): 15

solution to the endemic violence that has begun to characterize the religious politics in Pakistan. Many scholars therefore conclude that only politically viable solutions in Pakistan can effectively suppress militant Salafism practiced by the JAH, making the government more accountable to the people by responding to demands coming from below and the need for stronger democratizing tendencies which incorporate mainstream religious inclinations.⁶¹

Others however believe that policy cannot help, simply because actions of government and its allies are often at odds with their stated policy of rejecting all association with orthodox, militant groups. This is the current official position taken by the state, but behind the scenes the government continues to collaborate with radical elements like the JAH for their own desired objectives. In this way it becomes harder to believe that such a policy can hope to stem the tide of religious radicalism that seems to be overwhelming Pakistani society.⁶²

On their part the JAH seem to have no specific solutions to the problems that beset the country or the common man and they only talk in generalities like most religious parties with similar agendas. In the context of public support the JAH is unlikely to engender any significant public support as it continues to move towards an extreme right wing position. The JAH's hostile 'othering of non-Salafi' Muslims has a very negative impact on the party's image.⁶³ The JAH also symbolizes the sectarian-jihadi complex that feeds off Shiites and other minorities' lives which further takes away from their integrity as a mainstream religious party.

Like their contemporaries the JAH will most likely continue to use its 'nuisance value'⁶⁴ in the form of street power to coax alliances with other parties and thus obtain an odd seat for their leaders. Eventually a majority of Pakistanis do not seem to want radical groups like the JAH to define their politics.⁶⁵ Their vision of Pakistan, like their

⁶¹ Hussain Haqqani Weeding Out the Heretics: Sectarianism in Pakistan , Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, Hudson Institute journal, 2005

⁶² Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Pakistan - The Threat from Within," *Pakistan Security Research Unit*, Brief no. 13

⁶³ Mariam Abou Zahab. Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement" in Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009. pg 141

⁶⁴ Khaled Ahmed. 'The Power of the Ahle Hadith. The Friday Times. July 12-18

⁶⁵ Mahnaz Isphahani, Religious Sword Over Pakistan, Los Angeles Times, May 21, 2004

other contemporaries, is so radical that they are held in contempt not only by the general public but also by the political and military Establishment that continues to sustain it. ⁶⁶

But while they do not have broad social or political support, they represent a threat to public order with their violence and street mongering. What is also worrisome is the fact that, unlike its overtly belligerent counterparts like the LeT and JuD, the JAH's political agenda allows its militant factions to operate freely under the cover of its ostensibly respectable political facade. So much so that the notion of a meaningful moral or political separation between the religiosity of this increasingly vocal religious group and the militant violence of jihadist groups becomes harder to maintain or even define.⁶⁷

In spite of their aggressive posturing however, it seems unlikely that radical groups like the JAH can threaten Pakistan in any significantly drastic way. Their attempts to infiltrate the state apparatus have been easily thwarted in the past, as they rely totally on state patronage for any political influence that they can exercise. In any case the Pakistan military is an insurmountable barrier in their attempts to gain power, since it would forcefully sideline any element that seeks to turn Pakistan into a comprehensively Islamic state. The utopian Islamic state envisioned by the JAH, which seeks to purify Pakistan of foreign and un-Islamic practices is categorically rejected by the people and military, as is their desire to wage active war against India. ⁶⁸

Having said that, while the military does not want to allow Islamist radicals to acquire any significant power in Pakistan, they are likely to keep manipulating militant groups like the JAH for domestic and foreign policy purposes as 'strategic instruments of power'.⁶⁹ The extent to which the military can exercise their control over such groups is however questionable. In many ways the assumption that Islamist forces and sectarian militias could be used and controlled has backfired against Pakistan's government and its military, which is now faced with the serious challenge of rolling back these extremist elements. In other words 'the state is now beginning to fear its own success as it comes under attack from religious militants and rival Islamic groups battle each other with heavy weapons'. ⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Stephen P. Cohen. *The Idea of Pakistan*. Brookings Institution Press. 2004 pg 175

⁶⁷ Mahnaz Isphahani. "Can Pakistan Be Saved?", *The New Republic*. June 16, 2003.

⁶⁸ Stephen P. Cohen. *The Idea of Pakistan*. Brookings Institution Press. 2004. pg 198-200

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* pg 173

⁷⁰ Pervez Hoodbhoy. "Pakistan- The Threat from Within". Pakistan Security Research Unit. Brief no.13

This can be assessed from the fact that the military has not had the courage to take any meaningful steps to challenge the growing muscle of groups like the JAH. In the context of the crackdown on terrorist groups in the post 9/11 scenario, it is significant to note that such groups which operate with the military support against India in Kashmir have been treated in a remarkably different and light-handed way compared with the anti-national sectarian militant groups like *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, the *Sipah-e-Sahaba*, the *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen al-Alami*, etc inside Pakistan.⁷¹ In their campaign against terrorism the state seem to have been conspicuously selective and perhaps self-serving. One of reason for inaction is also that such groups enjoy considerable support within the military itself. Given the increasingly potent strength of such groups and the endemic violence that they perpetrate, the military's power over such groups has been described as a 'facade that must crack sooner or later'.⁷²

In the light of such evidence there is more of a chance of continuity of JAH's policy on it's jihadist connections in the future. As they have increased their ability to raise funds globally through Saudi patronized Salafist networks, their networks have become less dependent on direct state assistance and hence less amenable to state influence. In case of the extremist elements, the jihadis eliminated through the use of force are quickly replaced by more powerful cadres, who are constantly being inducted through their madrassa networks.⁷³

The JAH, like other contemporary Islamist groups, is aware of it's strength and the government's weaknesses. It seems cognizant that until Pakistan's government keeps on relying on militant Islamists for the consolidation of state power and support in Kashmir, it will continue to court such Islamist partners.⁷⁴ For the foreseeable future, then, groups like JAH will continue to constitute a fringe element and exert it's marginal but disruptive influence in Pakistan's political system.

⁷¹ International Crisis Group Report, 'The State Of Sectarianism In Pakistan', 2005

⁷² Abbas, Hassan. 2005. Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror. M.E Sharp. pg 239

⁷³ Pervez Hoodbhoy. "Pakistan- The Threat from Within". Pakistan Security Research Unit. Brief no.13

⁷⁴ Ibid

Bibliography:

- Ayesha Jalal , *Partisans of Allah : Jihad in South Asia*. Harvard University Press, 2008
- Arif Jamal. *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir*. Melville House, 2009
- Hassan Abbas. *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror*. M.E Sharp. 2005
- Stephen P. Cohen. *The Idea of Pakistan*. Brookings Institution Press. 2004
- Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009 .

Articles and Resources :

- Arif Jamal. *A Guide to Militant Groups in Kashmir*. Terrorism Monitor, Volume: 8, Issue: 5. Feb, 2010
- Syed Vali Nasr, "International Politics, Domestic Imperatives and Identity Mobilization: Sectarianism in Pakistan,1979-1998," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 32,2 (January 2000): 171.
- Mariam Abou Zahab. *Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement*". Roel Meijer , *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* , Columbia University Press, 2009 .
- Mariam Abou Zahab "Deobandi Groups and Ahl-e Hadith" in *Islamic Affairs Analyst*, Janes, July 2009.
- Husain Haqqani. *Weeding Out the Heretics: Sectarianism in Pakistan* , Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, Hudson Institute journal, 2005
- Hussain Haqqani, "Pakistan and the Islamists". *Current History*, April 2007, Vol.106 (699): 15
- Jessica Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2000.
- Khaled Ahmed .*The power of Ahle Hadith*. July 12 - 18, 2002
- Khaled Ahmed .*The Grand Deobandi Consensus*. The Friday Times. Feb 4-10 2000
- Mahnaz Isphahani. "Can Pakistan Be Saved?", *The New Republic*. June 16, 2003. (http://www.cfr.org/publication/6052/can_pakistan_be_saved.html)
- Mahnaz Isphahani. *Religious Sword Over Pakistan*, Los Angeles Times, May 21, 2004

- Pervez Hoodbhoy, "*Pakistan – The Threat from Within*," Pakistan Security Research Unit, Brief no. 13

- '*The State Of Sectarianism In Pakistan*', International Crisis Group 2005. http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/asia/south_asia/095_the_state_of_sectarianism_in_pakistan.pdf

- '*Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge*', International Crisis Group, Asia Report no.164, ICG website, 13 March 2009

- '*Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism*', International Crisis Group Asia Report, No. 130, 29 March, 2007.

- Arif Jamal. '*Pakistan's Jihad so far*'. The News. March, 2000.

- Arif Jamal. '*Fueling a proxy war*'. The News. Dec, 1999

- Official website of Jamiat Ahle Hadith. <http://ahlehadith.webs.com>

- Official website of Ibtisam Elahi Zaheer. www.quran-o-sunnah.com

Interviews:

- Arif Jamal. Author *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir*.