**Muslim World in Turmoil after 9/11**

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After the historic terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, several things transformed politically and socially in Muslim countries. The alleged perpetrator’s network Al Qaeda’s ideology was deemed to have significant roots in the political strife and widespread religious thought in the Middle East; therefore, that region became the epicentre of the war. Because of these transformations, the Middle East is embroiled in a pattern of unprecedented domestic changes from political turmoil to frail economic conditions. However, the public discontent manifested in the “Arab Spring” failed to usher in an era of widespread democratic reform in the Middle East in the years that followed. Many people in the Gulf states have looked to a democratic process for change, but the monarchs there are now striving to implement those reforms themselves.

The ‘transformation’ therefore, envisaged and set out by Middle Eastern monarchies has a modest political and economic cost. Still, its impact is enormous: it is altering Muslim societies worldwide. Some believe that the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE, and the growing moderation Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

(MBS)-led reforms in Saudi Arabia may undermine the rebel groups in Muslim nations that have been bolstered by the Gulf governments’ financial and political backing. So yet, there is a shortage of data to support this claim, but the rate and results of the aforementioned “change process” would make such verification much simpler.

Ideological and political shifts in Pakistan may also be traced back to changes in the Middle East. The latter, meanwhile, is worried about the growth of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the shift in power in Iran, and the increase in communal violence in India. Combined, these externalities and the state’s response to them are altering the country’s societal and ideological landscape in subtle but significant ways. Although the effect will not be immediately apparent, the shift will influence religious thought and set the stage for future extremist movements. For the time being, non-state actors, religious groups, and political elites are all striving to make sense of the regional shifts to adapt their strategies accordingly.

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Pakistan’s increasing reliance on the Gulf region will affect the country’s geopolitical and strategic decisions and the state’s stance toward religious groups who exploit Pakistan’s close communal affiliation with Middle Eastern countries, particularly Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan’s political and ideological environment reacts to events in the Middle East.

The traditional Salafi and Deobandi religious sects in Pakistan face a significant challenge from the religious reform in Saudi Arabia. Not just the dangerous Deobandi sectarian groups affiliated with them but also more than 20 Salafi groups and parties flourishing under the sponsorship of the Gulf governments. A small number of organizations are making moves to adapt to the new circumstances to continue receiving funding from the Gulf states. Some, though, push back and look for assistance elsewhere, whether in the form of increased foreign finance or broader local networks.

One of the largest Salafi organizations in Pakistan, the banned Jamaatud Dawa (JuD), is changing its relationship with its armed wing, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). This development can shed light on how extremist elements in Pakistan are influenced by regional shifts and state institutions’ strategies. Three competing viewpoints are currently holding the organization back. One school of thought advocates dialling back violent tactics in favour of more traditional forms of proselytization and teaching. These individuals are also in acceptance of the Abraham Accords and the policy of MBS.

Within the group, a sizable contingent also advocates for entering electoral politics. The JuD spent a lot of money and time campaigning in the recent general election but came in dead last. Despite pressure from their cadre seeking the return of organizational activity, the young leadership sees politics as an excellent safe escape. Although this viewpoint is unpopular with the JuD’s top brass, it is widely held among the party’s rank and file members and supporters as they weigh their advantages against the Barelvi Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan, the group they believe has stepped in to fill the void left by the JuD. In addition to these two schools of thought, the group also contains a third that is steadfast in its commitment to jihad, unwilling to give up its militancy, and content to continue its operations independently of the state.

The JuD cadre has committed its existence to the organization and even involved families. Most used to rely on JuD aid, but now they are in a crisis and require immediate assistance. The government has done little to help these discarded workers. Now terrorist organizations like the Islamic State of Khorasan have an easy target (IS-K). Other outlawed communities are experiencing a similar problem. Since the Salafis’ have been given a bad name due to violent and nonviolent fundamentalist movements, they have few options. The people of this region are torn between MBS and IS-K. Both options are available to them, with little room for compromise.

The Deobandis are divided, as they always have been, but the vast majority, including the most extreme sectarian groups, still identify with the Saudis. With their conquest of Afghanistan, the Taliban might also feel like winners. The Saudis are incentivized to maintain their support for the group so long as Iranian influence in the nation is challenged on both the social and political fronts. Government agencies would consider these organizations’ potential usefulness in future political contexts.

Due to Pakistan’s democratic credentials, Gulf governments will continue to rely on their traditional supporters in religious-cum political parties rather than cultivating links with the country’s broader civil society. To what extent the Gulf State would strive to impose reform agenda on the religious organizations remains to be seen. Regarding Pakistan, Iran is not interested in betraying its Shia allies. There will be no sudden shifts among the religious communities due to the evolving upheavals in the Middle East.

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