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*Madrasahs:*  
The Evolution (or Devolution?) of the Islamic  
Schools in South Asia  
(1857-Present)

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Honors Thesis Submission: Oberlin College History Department  
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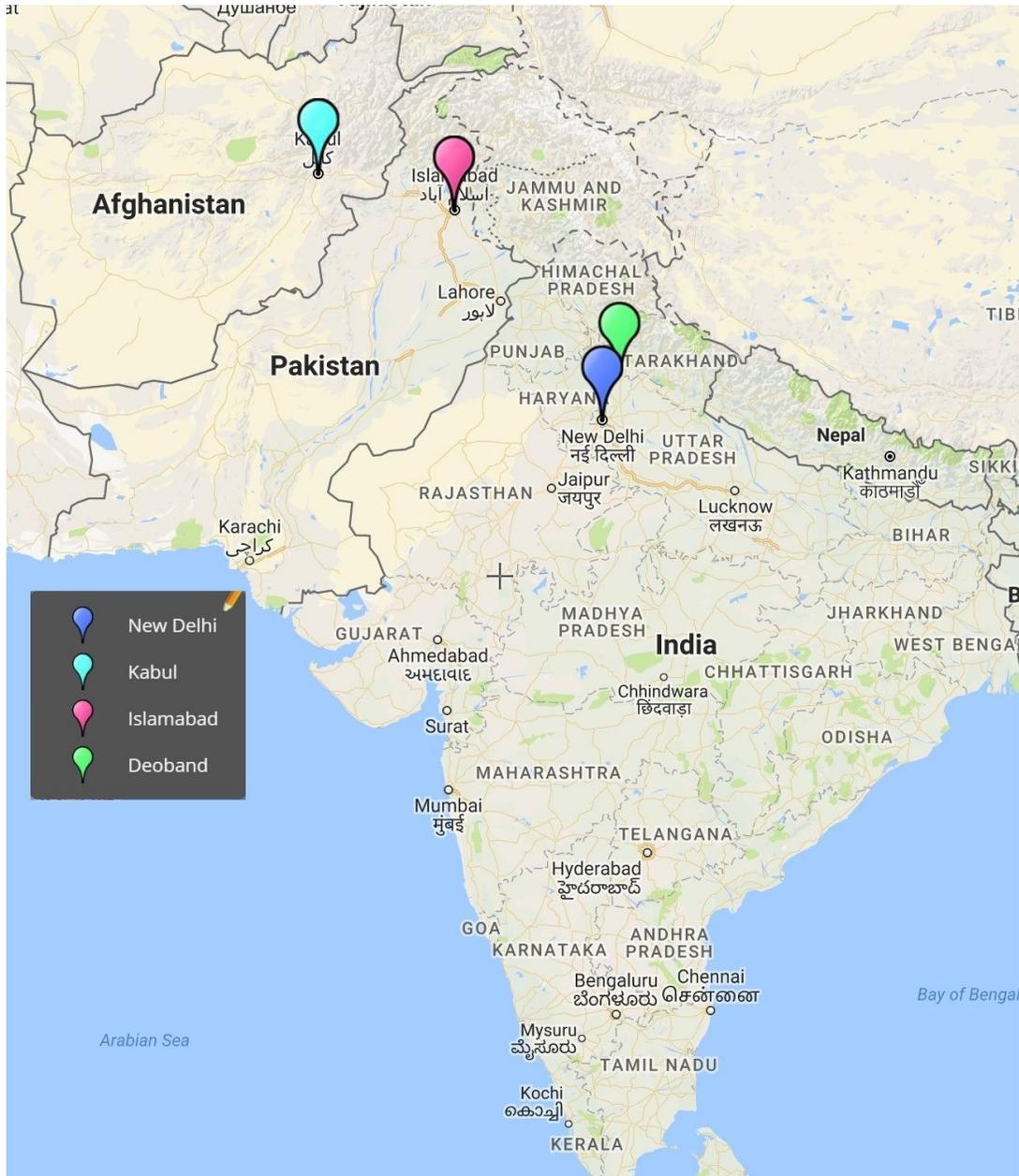
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## GLOSSARY

<b>Darul Uloom</b>	Arabic term meaning “House of Knowledge” Many <i>madrassas</i> also carry the title Darul Uloom.
<b>Deoband</b>	Town in Uttar Pradesh, India, to the north-east of New Delhi. The conservative Deobandi Islamic ideology and <i>madrassas</i> were founded here.
<b>Jamaat e Islami</b>	An Islamist organization founded by Abul Ala Mawdudi in 1941. It later turned into an active political party in Pakistan.
<b>Jihad</b>	In Quranic terms, it either means spiritual struggle or holy war.
<b>JUI</b>	Jamiat Ulema e Islam, an offshoot of Deobandi ideology and an organized political party.
<b>Madrassa</b>	Institutions of Islamic education.
<b>Pashtun</b>	An ethnic group that forms the majority of the Afghan population and inhabit North West Pakistan.
<b>Pashtunwali</b>	The cultural code of the Pashtun people.
<b>Taliban</b>	A talib is a <i>madrassa</i> student. Taliban is a movement created by <i>madrassa</i> graduates during the Soviet-Afghan war.
<b>Zia ul-Haq</b>	Pakistan’s military dictator between 1978 and 1988.

### Map of Region



Map Created on Scribble Maps (<https://www.scribblemaps.com/>)

## INTRODUCTION

In 2004, three years after the United States occupied Afghanistan, U.S. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell called *madrassas* - Islamic schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan - “breeding grounds for fundamentalists and terrorists.”<sup>1</sup> A year before that, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wrote a memo stating: “Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the *madrassas* and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?”<sup>2</sup> This rhetoric largely surrounded the *madrassa* schools in places such as Pakistan following the events of 9/11, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and the beginning of the War on Terror. In the same memo, Rumsfeld asked a question steeped with irony: “How do we stop those who are financing the radical *madrassa* schools?”<sup>3</sup> The United States was, in fact, one of the parties involved in the financing of the radical *madrassas* during the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. Historically, *madrassas* have been centers for general education; the word *madrassa* in Arabic refers to a place of learning.<sup>4</sup> The political and violent radicalization of these spaces is a relatively recent phenomenon; and through this thesis, I aim to historically analyze how this shift occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey. 2005. "The Madrassa Myth." *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/14/opinion/the-madrassa-myth.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "Rumsfeld's War-on-Terror Memo" 2003. *USA Today*, October 16,. <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/executive/rumsfeld-memo.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jamal Malik. 2007. *Madrassas in South Asia: Teaching Terror?*. Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series. Routledge. 1.

This project traces the evolution of the South Asian *madrassas* that followed the Deobandi ideology, from their roots in education provision during the British colonial period, to their reputation of being terrorist training centers. The Deobandi school has historically played a major role in the political sphere under the British colonial administration, and many *madrassas* that have produced militant activity can be traced back to this school of thought. Deobandi thought is typically considered conservative, focusing on the interpretation of religious texts and decreasing the emphasis of rational sciences in *madrassas*. I will cover three distinct periods from the mid nineteenth century until today. The first period will encompass the British colonial period in India between 1857 and the partition of India in 1947; this will include the creation of the *madrassa* at Deoband<sup>5</sup> and its creed to understand how it has evolved with increased external influence. The second period will look at the Soviet-Afghan War between 1979 and 1989, along with then President of Pakistan, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's (1978-1988) Islamization policies, which entailed a great deal of *madrassa* reform in a radical and political sense. The third period will focus on the Taliban movement led by Mullah Mohammed Omar (1960-2013), and its relationship with *madrassas*, whose students took part in its military battles. This will cover the period after the Soviet-Afghan War until the events of 9/11.

Historical literature about *madrassas* and the reasons for their gradual shift toward militancy tend analyze the domestic issues that gave rise to this phenomenon. Authors of secondary literature relating to this focus on specific actors, events, or sociopolitical circumstances, such as poverty and lack of better education options. I aim to look at the *madrassa* system holistically from a global perspective, identifying the various international

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<sup>5</sup> A town in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India.

political actors who have historically been responsible for the political radicalization of *madrassas*, especially during the colonial and Cold War periods. This thesis engages with existing secondary literature on *madrassas*, as well as my own nuanced analysis.

With regard to the British colonial period and the creation of the Deobandi ideological school, I will discuss the ways in which the Deobandi *madrassa* incorporated conservatism into its curriculum, as well as analyze its political presence in the region. In *Islamic Revival in British India*, Barbara Metcalf argues that the revival of *madrassa* education was because Muslim identity was threatened under British colonialism. Metcalf writes that the curriculum of the *madrassa* emphasized religious education over standard western education, which gave rise to the *madrassa*'s association with conservative religious education. In terms of *madrassa* political identity, Metcalf argues that *madrassas* were intended to be apolitical spaces, but her definition of the *madrassa* is based on the internal rather than the external. Rather than focusing on the external political factors that contributed to the creation of the *madrassa*, she only focuses on the internal dynamics of the *madrassa* when discussing its political nature. I will argue that since *madrassas* were created as a response to British colonialism, the concept of the *madrassa* was inherently political, and prone to radicalization.<sup>6</sup>

In discussing the evolution of *madrassas* during the Soviet-Afghan War, I will use *Pakistan: Between Mosque And Military* by Husain Haqqani to inform my analysis. I will discuss the roles of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan in causing a shift in the ideology of the *madrassas*. Haqqani argues that Pakistan's military dictator of that time, Zia ul Haq, was responsible for making Pakistan and its *madrassas* into centers of political Islam. His

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Daly Metcalf. 1982. *Islamic Revival in British India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Pr.

argument is centered around Zia's Islamization policies, which also created a breed of *madrassa* graduates who took part in a religious war (*jihad*) against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The textbooks used during this period glorified religious war, and this was turning point in the image of the *madrassas*. However, he neglects to give appropriate weightage to the involvement of foreign governments, such as Saudi Arabia and the United States in the militant training of these students. Both of these powers were heavily involved in the financing of these schools, as well as the indoctrination of their students, which I will incorporate into my thesis along with the role that Zia played.<sup>7</sup> It will add to my argument that external actors such as Zia played a role in the political radicalization of the *madrassas*.

To analyze the Taliban, a movement that directly resulted from the *madrassa* educational system, I will look to *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* by Ahmed Rashid to analyze the political roles of both Mullah Omar, as well as Maulana Sami ul-Haq in the the Taliban movement and government. He argues that Pakistan's education system had collapsed during Zia-ul-Haq's rule, leading to *madrassas* growing in popularity, and provides an informative narrative of the role of Pakistani *madrassas* in producing militancy. This led to the use of *madrassas* as recruiting grounds for the likes of the Taliban. I will also use Rashid's text to argue that the Taliban was more than just a conservative religious movement, but also had Pashtun<sup>8</sup> nationalist tendencies, which strengthen its identity as a political movement.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Taliban movement directly evolved from the radical *madrassa*

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<sup>7</sup> Husain Haqqani. 2005. *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*. Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment for Internat. Peace.

<sup>8</sup> An ethnic group with a large presence in Afghanistan and North Western Pakistan.

<sup>9</sup> Ahmed Rashid. 2010. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. 2nd ed. ed. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.

education during the Soviet-Afghan War, and continued the trend of radicalization while in power, which will add to the overall argument.

For my analysis of the reasons as to why *madrassas* have continued to grow even after the beginning of the War on Terror, I will turn to a report published by the Brookings Institute titled beyond “Madrasas: Assessing the Links Between Education and Militancy in Pakistan” by Rebecca Winthrop and Corinne Graff. They argue that *madrassas* are not a major reason for the increase in Islamic militancy in Pakistan, and instead argue that poverty is one of the main causes for this surge. Even though I acknowledge this as one of the factors that may have contributed to militancy, this argument does not take into account the history of imperialism and colonialism which gave rise to the sometimes violent political action taken by the *madrassas*, which I aim to discuss in detail in my thesis.<sup>10</sup>

There are various intellectuals who have analyzed the failure of Pakistan’s educational system, giving rise to the political powers of the *madrassas*. One such person was Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), whose book, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* provides valuable insight into why *madrassa* education is as important to the Pakistani public as it is. He argues that the Pakistani state’s inability to provide Islamic education to the public led to extremist interpretations of Islam, and it became increasingly difficult for liberal Islamic thinkers to enter the education sphere due to intolerance. I will use the ideas of Fazlur Rahman, to consider ways to improve education in Pakistan and Afghanistan whilst reducing the power of the *madrassas*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Winthrop and Corinne Graff. 2010. *Beyond Madrasas*: Brookings Institute.

<sup>11</sup> Fazlur Rahman Malik. 1982. *Islam and Modernity*.

In addition to the secondary literature discussed, I will also use archival material and primary documents which provide me with information from the different historical periods covered. For my analysis of the British colonial period in India, I will use *Maslak of the Darul Uloom Deoband*, written by Qaari Muhammad Tayyib, the 8th Vice Chancellor of the Deobandi *madrassa*, which discusses the creed of the Deobandis. Additionally, I will use *Papers by Command, Volume 8*, a British Parliamentary record from 1918 which discusses an anti-colonial plot known as the Silken Letters movement. In dealing with the period of the Soviet-Afghan War, I will use sources such as the *CRS Report for Congress Islamic Religious Schools, Madrasas: Background*. Additionally, I will use and analyze the literary work of Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979), whose religious ideology fueled Zia ul Haq's Islamization policies. In discussing the Taliban movement, I will use reports from the National Security Archives, as well as newspaper articles, and interviews. News agencies I will use include *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Al-Jazeera*. In the analysis of *madrassa* and education policy, I will again look to Fazlur Rahman's work, as a primary source due to his first hand knowledge of the religious landscape of Pakistan. I will also use education census data from Pakistan to inform my analysis of *madrassa* proliferation in Pakistan.

Investigating these time periods, the thesis will argue that the political presence of the *madrassas* was defined and radicalized by external actors and events in the region. From the British colonialists early on, to foreign governments involved with using the *madrassas* for their political gain during the Soviet-Afghan War, it was these actors that caused a shift in the mission of the *madrassas*, leading to their association with Islamic fundamentalism today. My first chapter will argue that the presence of British colonialism in India caused the radicalization of

the Deobandi *madrassas* to pursue political action. The second chapter will investigate the roles of Zia ul-Haq, the United States, and Saudi Arabia in the evolution of the ideology of these *madrassas* during the Soviet-Afghan War. The third chapter will discuss the Taliban movement, an offshoot of the radical *madrassas*, and will argue that this movement was influenced by political and ethnic interests of its leaders, who incorporated these ideas into the education of Afghanistan's students.

In addition to this, I will analyze data relating to *madrassas* and education policies in Pakistan in order to propose reform methods to improve literacy rates, while reducing the political power of the *madrassas*. I define the term political as being involved with, active in, and affected by social, economic, and governmental movements and issues, which results in radicalization of their political identity. My analysis will incorporate *madrassa* enrollment data as well as different policies that have been implemented in an attempt to hold *madrassas* accountable for terrorism in the region.

## CHAPTER 1: Politics and the Deobandi *Madrassa*

In 1857, Indian soldiers serving under the British revolted against their colonial masters, killing even English women and children “in cold blood.”<sup>12</sup> A rumour about their rifles had spread that “the grease used to lubricate the cartridges was a mixture of pigs’ and cows’ lard”<sup>13</sup> and since they would have to bite the cartridges off to use the rifle, this was unacceptable by both Hindu and Muslim standards. This historic event was known as the Sepoy Mutiny by the British, the sepoys being the Indian soldiers serving the British. Even though both Hindu and Muslim soldiers were involved in this revolt, Thomas Metcalf states that “the most bitter and widespread hostility was reserved for the Muslim community,”<sup>14</sup> and many were often hanged or jailed as a result. The belief of the British was that the Muslims led the rebellion and were its true masterminds, even though the Hindus also took part in it, leading to the targeting of Muslim Indians.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the decline of the Mughals meant confiscation of land and property from the landed Muslim elite, causing them to fear for both their class and culture.<sup>16</sup> To preserve the identity of the Muslim population, as well as ensure its safety following the repercussions of the

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf. 1964. *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press. 290.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Marshall. 2011. "British India and the 'Great Rebellion'." *BBC*.  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/indian\\_rebellion\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/indian_rebellion_01.shtml).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf, 298.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Metcalf, 91.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

revolt, the *madrassa* at Deoband was founded, and was thus a direct response to British colonialism in India.

*Madrassas* refer to places of general learning,<sup>17</sup> but in Islamic tradition and during the Mughal period, they have come to be known as being “educational institutions offering instruction in Islamic subjects”<sup>18</sup> especially in the context of South Asia. Three categories of Islamic religious schools emerged in colonial India; the *madrassa* itself ranges from grades one to ten, the *dar al-ulum*, eleven to twelve, and the *jamia*, which has the same status as a university.<sup>19</sup> For the purpose of this essay, the term *madrassa* will incorporate all three of these levels of education. This chapter trace the ways in which the *madrassa* at Deoband, a town in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India, was involved in the political sphere during the time of its inception, and how the school’s political presence evolved over time. It will further suggest a reason for this evolution and analyze the validity of this claim.

The political identity of the Deobandi *madrassa* is peculiar. According to Barbara Metcalf, the founder of the Deobandi ideology, Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi (1833-1880), envisioned a space which would be separated from the power of the state or external influences. The *madrassa* was to be funded solely by donations from the well-wishers of the school.<sup>20</sup> Within the constitution of the Darul Uloom (House of Knowledge) Deoband created by Nanotvi, he discusses the importance of *madrassas* not having any fixed source of income, since the

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<sup>17</sup> Malik, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. 2006. *Islamic Religious Schools, Madrasas: Background*: Congressional Research Service (CRS) Reports and Issue Briefs. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Metcalf, 98.

foundation of the Deobandi ideology was based on trust in God, and not “in the firm promises of men.”<sup>21</sup> Involvement of the government would also be very harmful,<sup>22</sup> as would external intervention of any kind, which would take away from the mission of the *madrassa* of being removed from the influence of other men. This was essential for the *madrassa* space to remain apolitical. As discussed in the introduction, Metcalf’s analysis of the *madrassa* as an apolitical space is key to the internal dynamics of the *madrassa*, including its ideology and curriculum. However, by looking at the *madrassas* on an institutional level and thus on a larger scale, I argue that the creation of the *madrassa* was politically charged and the circumstances of British colonialism made it political, and prone to radicalization.

This chapter will be divided into three sections, each dealing with a specific aspect of the political identity of the Deobandis within the context of British colonialism. The first section will discuss the creation of the Deobandi creed, ideology, and curriculum, and will discuss how British colonialism played a part in the initial aspects of the school’s radical political identity. The second section will analyze an instance of violent political action by the Deobandis in the form of an anti-colonial plot during WWI, termed the Silken Letters conspiracy. The last section highlights the Deobandi school as an organized political presence during the Pakistan movement as the Jamiat ulema-e-Hind and the Jamiat ulema-e-Islam. Each of these sections deals with a specific aspect of Deobandi ideology that was the result of radicalization of its political identity due to British colonialism.

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<sup>21</sup> Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi. 1980. *History of the Dar Al-Ulum, Deoband*. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Rizvi, 152-154.

### **The Madrassa at Deoband - Ideology and Identity**

As discussed previously, Darul Uloom Deoband was founded during a time in which Muslim identity in India was under threat. Created in 1867, the *madrassa* was a response to the colonial take over, as well as the aftermath of the 1857 sepoy rebellion. In 1867, the *madrassa* comprised of a single student and teacher in the old Chattah Masjid (Chattah Mosque) but quickly acquired a central library, classrooms, and full-time teachers and staff. The scholars (ulema) from the Deobandi *madrassa* took it upon themselves to fulfill the “legal and spiritual needs of their fellow Muslims.”<sup>23</sup> One of the *madrassa*’s founders, Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi, envisioned a space of mentoring, tolerance, and open-mindedness; some of his stated principles are as follows: “There should be no rigidity of views, and for this reason it is important that listeners hear it [opinions] with an open mind ... if we understand another’s idea [to be better], even if it is against us, we will accept it wholly.”<sup>24</sup> Nanotvi’s visions shows that the initial creation of the *madrassa* was contrary to its modern conception, which indeed includes “sectarian, sub-sectarian and anti-Western bias.”<sup>25</sup>

Nanotvi also envisioned a space which would be separated from the power of the state or external influences, as mentioned earlier. Even though the space was meant to be apolitical and non-violent in nature, the creed of the Deobandi *madrassa* was not entirely devoid of any mentions of *jihad* or political activism. The eighth Vice-Chancellor of Darul Uloom Deoband,

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Metcalf, 94.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>25</sup> Tariq Rahman. 2007. "Madrasas: The Potential for Violence in Pakistan?" In *Madrasas in South Asia: Teaching Terror?*, edited by Jamal Malik: Routledge. 70.

Qaari Muhammad Tayyab wrote about the ideology of the Deobandi school from its inception, with an insider's view. I have summarized some points of the Deobandi ideology as follows:

1. Spreading the teachings of the religious texts and Islam as a whole by establishing *madrassas*.
2. Spiritual reformation and purification.
3. Protecting the personal and social interests of the Muslims.
4. *Jihad* in the form of self-defense.
5. Rectification and reformation of society.
6. Assisting other nations which are part of the Islamic brotherhood as well as the preservation of an Islamic state (i.e. the Ottoman Caliphate).<sup>26</sup>

There are three things which should be noted here. First, the Deobandi school's main goal was to impart Islamic education as they saw fit, i.e. going back to a traditional form of education based on the Quran and Ahadith (the traditions of Prophet Muhammad). In response to British colonialism and the removal of Muslims from positions of power, the Deobandis aimed at the religious "rectification and reformation" of society. Second, the Deobandi goal of assisting other Islamic nations directly translates into the idea of willingness to engage in organized political activity. Third and most important, *jihad* is present in the creed of the Deobandis solely as a self-defense mechanism, in the form of learning how to defend one's self with nothing but a stick.<sup>27</sup> There is no mention of using *jihad* to attack or justify offensive militancy, but it is important to note that *jihad* is still a violent form of self defense and can be deemed a political

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<sup>26</sup> Muḥammad Tayyib. 1975. *Maslak-i 'ulamā-Yi Diyoband*. Translated by Afzal Hossen Elias. 1st ed. Lahore. 30-31.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

activity based in violence. This was necessary based on the violence the Muslims faced from the British following the sepoy rebellion.

The word *Jihad* refers to striving or fighting in its original Quranic meaning. In the context of religion, *jihad* can refer to a holy war or a crusade of sorts<sup>28</sup> and has been used as a political tool to justify violence for decades. The goals of assisting other Islamic nations, as well as using *jihad* as a self defense tool, can both be explained by the political circumstances under which these goals were set, which was during a time in which colonial powers dominated Muslim countries around the world. These colonized Muslim states included many under the Ottoman Empire, as well as India, where the Muslim Mughal Empire was taken over by the British. The anti-colonial Deobandis wanted to ensure the survival of their universal Muslim identity, and to this degree, decided to make the maintenance of Muslim states one of their main concerns.

The need for self defense is also understandable based on the backlash that Muslims faced following the 1857 sepoy mutiny. In *Aftermath of the Revolt*, Thomas Metcalf writes that “all sepoys from mutinous regiments who could not give a good account of themselves were to be hanged, while rebellious villages along the line of march were to be destroyed and all male inhabitants killed.”<sup>29</sup> The British indiscriminately slaughtered Indians, especially Muslims who they saw as the main perpetrators of the mutiny. This level of violence against the colonized Muslims did slow down after a year, but it made it clear that the British could use force against the people at any time. People such as Nanotvi were also directly involved in the mutiny and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Metcalf, 291.

therefore must have deemed it necessary for self-defense in the form of *jihad* (or struggle) to be integrated into the founding Deobandi ideology. These are both examples of specific political tools used by the Deobandi *madrassa*, far more radical than anti-colonial sentiment. Both of these radical political goals of the Deobandis can be attributed to British colonialism, which provides evidence to the argument of this thesis.

At the curricular level, the Deobandis used the Dars-i Nizami syllabus, developed during the 18th century, which emphasized the teaching of Arabic, logic, and mathematics, as well as Islamic jurisprudence, the Quran, and Ahadith.<sup>30</sup> The Deobandis, however, put more focus on learning the Ahadith and religious sciences over the “rational” sciences,<sup>31</sup> which was one of the only forms of anti-colonial sentiment present in the syllabus due to its emphasis on preserving Muslim identity over secular education. The curriculum, otherwise, was highly apolitical, but “it was up to the person teaching the Quran or the Ahadith to give it whatever interpretation”<sup>32</sup> and due to this, it was very easy for teachers to influence what aspects of education to give more importance to, even in terms of teaching a politicized Islam. This, however, did not occur until much later on in the history of South Asia, when *madrassas* were used as militant training centers against the Soviets during the Soviet-Afghan War. At this point, the syllabus was revised to glorify *jihad*, which will be discussed in chapters to come.

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<sup>30</sup> Tariq Rahman, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Metcalf, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Tariq Rahman, 67.

### **The Silken Letters Movement**

One of the earlier attempts to use *jihad* as a tool to pursue political gains was in August 1916, when the British government uncovered an anti-colonial plot which came to be known as the “Silk Letters” or “Silken Letters” case. This was one of the earlier instances of a movement which attempted to use *jihad* as a tool to pursue political gains. The two key actors in this plot were Maulana Mahmud Hasan (1851-1920) and Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi (1872-1944). Maulana Mahmud Hasan was hailed as the first student of the Deobandi *madrassa* and was thus very strongly associated with it, as was Obaidullah, who was trained there as well. There is much controversy as to who the actual founder and leader of the movement was. According to British documents, the mastermind behind this anti-colonial plot was Maulana Obaidullah, who wanted to spread his pan-Islamic and anti-British sentiment in India.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, historians on the side of Deobandi argue that Maulana Mahmud was the one who introduced Maulana Obaidullah to the politics of Muslim India, and therefore attribute this movement to him.<sup>34</sup> Regardless of who founded the movement, there is no contention over the fact that this movement was specific to, and can be attributed to the Deobandi school.

When the Turks entered World War I, the British had to make it clear that they were fighting them purely on political, rather than religious grounds. The Muslims of India saw the Ottoman Caliphate as the leader of the Muslim world, and it was feared that going to war with them would stir up rebellion by the Indian Muslims. By highlighting that this war was political, the British tried to prove that they were not attacking the Muslim world, but a political entity.

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<sup>33</sup> Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. 1918. *Papers by Command Volume 8*. 74.

<sup>34</sup> Maulana Muhammad Miyan. 2012. *Silken Letters Movement* Shaikhul Hind Academy, Darul Uloom Deoband. 44.

They argued that the Turks had entered the war of their own accord and, once again, that the British fight was for political rather than religious reasons. The British also promised that the holy cities would not be harmed during the war. They went as far as to acquire *fatwas* (Islamic rulings) from Indian ulema, declaring that the Ottoman Caliphate was not a real Caliphate,<sup>35</sup> something which they needed to do to maintain peaceful relations with their Muslim subjects. However, when it came to Deobandi scholarship, British plans did not work out because Deobandi scholars such as Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957) argued and believed that the Turks were forced into joining the war due to the British seizing their war planes.<sup>36</sup> This refuted the claim that the Turks chose to enter the war of their own accord. When the British collected signatures to validate the *fatwa* about the Ottoman Caliphate's invalidity as a real Caliphate, Maulana Mahmud Hasan, who was in charge of the Darul Uloom Deoband refused to sign the document.<sup>37</sup> This was a turning point in the political action of the Deobandis, who saw that they needed to take direct action against the British to protect their interests. Thus, the Silken Letters movement was born.

According to British reports, Maulana Obaidullah had “started a school in Delhi” which aimed at propagating and glorifying *jihad*. He had circulated two texts attempting to bring together the Muslims studying those texts, in a united rebellion against the colonial British.<sup>38</sup> This was one of the first instances that *jihad* was used as a political tool in the *madrassa* space

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>38</sup> Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. 1918. *Papers by Command Volume 8*. 74.

and was a step in the more radical direction in the anti-colonial effort. Initially, Maulana Obaidullah searched for supporters of his cause in Kabul, where he met a Turko-German mission. After receiving a declaration of *jihad* from Maulana Mahmud, he proceeded to convene with the Germans and Russians and proposed an alliance with the Ottomans to fulfill his anti-colonial goals as well.<sup>39</sup> Obaidullah sent Maulana Mahmud various letters, written on yellow silk, providing details of his dealings with the Germans and Turks. The letters also outlined his plans to form an “army of God” comprising of Indian soldiers, along with an alliance of Muslim states globally.<sup>40</sup> These letters were, however, captured by the British, and Maulana Mahmud and his compatriots were taken prisoners, causing the plot to fail.

To analyze the Silken Letters, we must return to the creed of the Deobandi school, which mentions both *jihad*, and the willingness to engage in political activity to maintain the safety of Muslims across the world. The Silken Letters incident was a mix of these concepts but took them both a step further in terms of how they were practiced. To reiterate, the *madrassa* at Deoband was created in response to British colonialism. The Muslims in India were stripped of their power, and the Deobandi school aimed at maintaining their religious identity. When the British decided to engage in a war against the Turks of the Ottoman Empire, the center of global Muslim life, the Deobandis could not sit idly and simply let this happen. Doing so would be against the very foundations of the Deobandi ideology. Therefore, the Deobandis decided to take action to ensure the safety of the Caliphate, as well as overthrow the British who had historically threatened the Muslim identity. This decision was highly political, and the method by which this

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<sup>39</sup> "Concealing Enemy Assets." 1918. *The Times of India (1861-Current)*, Jul 20.

<sup>40</sup> Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. 1918. *Papers by Command Volume 8*. 75.

took place was very much radical, as it took the original Deobandi interpretation of *jihad* a step further.

*Jihad* was a part of the Deobandi creed only as a self-defence mechanism; declaring *jihad* against the British and attempting a violent take-over of India was something that was not initially a part of the ideology of the Deobandis. In addition to this, Maulana Obaidullah introduced texts glorifying *jihad* in an attempt to indoctrinate students, which was not something that was a part of the initial mission of the *madrassa* at Deoband. This was one of the first cases of the evolution and radicalization of the *madrassa* space at the level of curriculum, something that had not been used as a political tool in the past. This was a clear example of British colonialism bringing out the worst in Deobandi Islamic politics. As noted by Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, “it was impossible to expel the English from India and get it independent without using force and violence,”<sup>41</sup> and this notion caused a violent political action on the part of the Deobandi Muslims who saw no other way of engaging with the British at this point. British colonialism had radicalized the Deobandi school’s political position to the extent that they attempted to use *jihad* as a political tool against them.

### **The Pakistan Movement**

The failure of the Silken Letters plot made it clear that violently opposing the British was not going to work if India wanted to see an end to colonialism. Instead, the Deobandis began to form organized political organizations to tackle colonialism, which resulted in the creation of the Jamiat Ulema-e Hind (JUH) in 1919. Organizing politically was like negotiating with the British

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<sup>41</sup> Miyan, 51.

in a language that they could understand. Founded by prominent Deobandi ulema and headed by Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani - who was also the principal of the *madrassa* at Deoband - it was clear that JUH was representative of Deobandi political interests. The JUH was interested in full independence from the British, and ended up supporting the Indian National Congress, which had similar political interests. Under Maulana Madani, JUH supported a united India and was against the creation of a separate state for Muslims, i.e. Pakistan. Madani argued that the Hindus and Muslims of India were of one nation, even if they were of separate religions. He stated that national boundaries could not constrain Islam and that the Jews and Muslims lived in the same city during the time of the Prophet.<sup>42</sup> He also declared the call to create Pakistan an attempt by the British to further divide India, but was met with criticism by other Muslim leaders.<sup>43</sup>

The disagreement between the pro-Pakistan Muslims and Madani eventually led to a political partition within the Deobandi factions. A large number of Deobandis, including the members of JUH supported the Indian National Congress, whereas another portion of powerful Deobandis supported the All India Muslim League (AIML) and its plea for a separate state of Pakistan. There was a divide in opinion which produced contradictory fatwas: some were in favor of “composite nationalism,” which brought the Hindus and Muslims together, whereas others were against it.<sup>44</sup> The “master-stroke,” as Sayyid Pirzada calls it,<sup>45</sup> was when the grand

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<sup>42</sup> Muhammad Qasim Zaman. 2002. *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*. Princeton [u.a.]: Princeton University Press. 33.

<sup>43</sup> Sayyid A. S. Pirzada. 2000. *The Politics of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Pakistan 1971-1977*. Pakistan: Oxford University Press. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Pirzada, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

mufti of Darul Uloom Deoband sided with those who demanded a separate state for the Muslims, putting an end to the debate. JUH did not stop its support of Congress, however, which eventually led to the formation of the Jamiat ulema-e-Islam (JUI) that emerged from within the ranks of the JUH in support of the AIML. However, the JUI played more of a major part in the post-partition era. The creation and the politics of the JUH was an important part in the Deobandi movement. The JUH was one of the earlier instances of political organization by the Deobandis, steering away from violent forms of protest against colonialism. What is most interesting about this JUH account was the difference in political opinions between those who supported Congress and those who supported the AIML; it is important to note here that this difference in opinion was still within the boundaries of what Maulana Nanotvi envisioned for the Deobandis. As discussed earlier, Nanotvi stated that there should be no rigidity of views and the students of Darul Uloom Deoband were to accept another's opinion if they deemed it to be better.<sup>46</sup> The fact that Maulana Madani continued to support Congress after the fatwa of the Grand Mufti in support of AIML shows that there was still a sense of respect for other Deobandi views.

The JUH was very much an anti-colonial organization; it went as far as to go against the creation of Pakistan because it believed that the British had a hand in it. The initial creation of JUH as an organized political entity was a clear example of the extent to which Deobandi politics had been radicalized by the anti-colonial sentiment; the Deobandis were willing to engage with a system that they knew the British would themselves acknowledge. In addition, the ways by which the Deobandis exercised their right to disagree on matters was a very much radicalized version of what was envisioned at the beginning. From disagreeing over certain religious

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<sup>46</sup> Barbara Metcalf, 94.

matters, the Deobandis had come to the point that they were arguing over whether or not the creation of an entirely new state was valid.

Following partition, the JUI began to play a major political role in Pakistani politics, aiming to turn the newborn nation into an Islamic theocracy, implementing *sharia* law, and stating that all matters of governance were first and foremost by God's will. Consequently, they actively campaigned for *jihad* against the Indians in Kashmir, thus continuing the trend of violent resistance but this time against their new enemies, the Hindus, rather than the British colonial powers. The JUI, along with the Jamaat e Islami<sup>47</sup> under Abul Ala Mawdudi, played a significant role in the decades to come, with the Soviet-Afghan war not too far in the future. At that point, Deobandi *madrassas* had been radically politicized by British colonialism to the extent that there was no turning back.

By the time Pakistan was founded, the *madrassa* space itself, which was never intended to become political, had opened to external intervention, as seen by the introduction of *jihadist* texts by Maulana Obaidullah during the Silken Letters movement. Darul Uloom Deoband was created during a time that anti-colonial political activism was on the rise. Its political presence and activism evolved over time, as the Deobandis needed to find ways to counter the colonial efforts of the British. The *madrassa* at Deoband led the way for anti-colonial activism, and regardless of the *madrassa*'s success, it is not difficult to see the evolution of its political presence.

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<sup>47</sup> A prominent and organized Islamic movement in South Asia  
See: Zahid Ahmed. 2012. "Political Islam, the Jamaat-E-Islami, and Pakistan's Role in the Afghan-Soviet War, 1979-1988." In *Religion and the Cold War*, edited by Philip Muehlenbeck.

However, The end of British colonialism was not the end of the radicalization of the *madrassas*. In the following chapters, I will illustrate how *madrassas* were radicalized and controlled by external actors for years to come, eventually leading to the reputation that they now have: centers of militant violence.

## CHAPTER 2: *Madrassas during the Soviet-Afghan War*

Following the partition of India in 1947, very few *madrassas* existed in what became the predominantly Muslim state of Pakistan. According to a paper published by the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), located in Pakistan's National Defence University, at independence, there were only around 200 *madrassas* on the Pakistani side of the border, whereas, as of 2015, there were reportedly between 17,000 and 40,000 institutions across the nation.<sup>48</sup> One of the major periods of *madrassa* proliferation was during the Soviet-Afghan War and President Zia ul-Haq's rule in the 1980s, when the numbers increased to almost 3000<sup>49</sup> due to the role that these institutions played in producing warriors to combat the Soviet invasion. Since then, these numbers have continued to increase steadily, and many of the *madrassas*, such as Darul Uloom Haqqania, have produced alumni involved with the Taliban and other extremist groups.<sup>50</sup>

This chapter will discuss the role of the *madrassas* during the Soviet-Afghan War, as well as the role that President Zia ul-Haq's policies played in transforming and evolving the *madrassa* system from what it was during the British colonial period. It will be divided into three sections, each dealing with a specific theme with regard to *madrassa* evolution during this period. The first section will discuss the rise of Zia ul-Haq and his early Islamisation policies, influenced by the political party, the Jamaat e Islami, and its prominent founder Abul Ala

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<sup>48</sup> Abdul Rauf Iqbal and Sobia Raza. 2015. "Madrassa Reforms in Pakistan: A Historical Analysis." *ISSRA Papers*. 34.

<sup>49</sup> Tariq Rahman, 64.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

Mawdudi. The second section details the background of the Soviet-Afghan War in 1979, which was the environment in which *madrassas* were used as political tools to revive ideas of *jihād* in the Cold War. The final section of the chapter will use the historical and political context provided to assess the ways by which the *madrassas* had been politicized, looking at specific aspects of the original mission of Darul Uloom Deoband and how they changed during the war. I will argue that the Deobandi ideology was used as a political tool to transform the *madrassas* into extremist and violent organization. This radicalization was financially and ideologically supported by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.

An important note that I want to make here is that the geographic course of this thesis will now shift from India as a subcontinent at large, to what is now Pakistan, as well as its neighbor to the west, Afghanistan. The state of Pakistan was created from what was western India for the large number of Muslims who resided in the region. Since Pakistan was a country created in the name of Islam, and promised to provide a safe haven to Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, the various ideological schools, including that of the Deobandis also moved their operations to Pakistan. Even though a branch of the Deobandi *madrassa* still exists in modern day India, the majority of the political action and radicalization I discuss in this thesis occurred in Pakistan, and I will therefore focus on Deobandi politics here.

### **Zia ul-Haq, Mawdudi, and the Jamaat e Islami**

General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq was named Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff on March 1, 1976, by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (s. 1973-1977). As a devout Muslim, Zia took various steps to Islamize the army during the early days of his appointment as Chief of Army

Staff, including attempts to spread the ideology of the Jamaat e Islami and its founder Abul Ala Mawdudi, a widely-read Islamic philosopher who was among the leading architects of 20th century Jihad.<sup>51</sup> Even though Bhutto was not initially opposed to this, Zia had his own long term ideas of how he wanted to promote his ideas of what a Muslim state should look like. In July 1977, however, Bhutto was arrested on charges of election irregularities, resulting in a military coup d'etat.<sup>52</sup> Bhutto was overthrown by Zia ul-Haq, who became the Chief Martial Law Administrator<sup>53</sup> and Pakistan's third military ruler. Later, Bhutto was sentenced to death for conspiring to kill a political foe and was hanged by the Pakistani state under Zia in 1979.<sup>54</sup>

According to Husain Haqqani, Zia ul-Haq is "often identified as the person most responsible for turning Pakistan into a global center for political Islam."<sup>55</sup> Not only did he attempt to define Pakistan as an Islamic state, but also "nurtured *jihadist* ideology."<sup>56</sup> According to *Dawn News*, a prominent Pakistani news outlet, Zia considered himself a "soldier of Islam,"<sup>57</sup> and believed that Pakistan will only survive if an Islamic system was implemented in the country.<sup>58</sup> He therefore began to Islamize Pakistan by implementing various governmental policies which he saw as being essential to creating and preserving an Islamic state in Pakistan.

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<sup>51</sup> Haqqani, 111-114.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Niesewand. 1979. "Bhutto is Hanged in Pakistan." *The Washington Post*, April 4,. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/27/AR2007122701067.html>.

<sup>53</sup> "Pakistan: Madrasa, Extremism and the Military." 2002. *International Crisis Group*.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Niesewand. 1979. "Bhutto is Hanged in Pakistan." *The Washington Post*, April 4.

<sup>55</sup> Haqqani, 131.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> S. Akbar Zaidi. 2017. "Despotic Islamisation." *Dawn News*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364410>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

This ideology was heavily influenced by Mawdudi and disseminated through his political party, the Jamaat e Islami. To better understand Zia's inspiration for his Islamisation policies, it is important to analyze Mawdudi's work.

Mawdudi was an influential Islamic thinker and author, whose ideas on political Islam are still prominent today. He wrote about what he believed was the correct interpretation of Islam as a religion. He strongly opposed Western-imperialism and "Westernism" as a whole and was critical of modernist Muslims who "lacked sincerity"<sup>59</sup> in their attempts to imitate the West. He proposed his own methods of creating an Islamic state without Western influence in Pakistan in his book titled *The Islamic Law and Constitution* (1955). He strongly believed that "the idea behind Pakistan has been the establishment of a country where Islamic state and Islamic society could be established,"<sup>60</sup> declaring that:

- 1) The sovereignty in Pakistan belongs to God alone.
- 2) The basic law of the land is the Islamic *Shariah*.
- 3) All the existing laws which may be in conflict with *shariah* shall be repealed.
- 4) The state shall not transgress the limits laid down by Islam.<sup>61</sup>

Not only did Mawdudi believe in this concept of an Islamic State, but he actively campaigned to implement it, even by the use of coercive force.

In one of his speeches, compiled in a book titled *Jihad in Islam* (1939), Mawdudi defined *jihad* as "to exert one's utmost endeavour in promoting a cause."<sup>62</sup> He discussed that the "goal"

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<sup>59</sup> Syed Abul 'Ala Maudoodi. 1903-1979. 1955. *The Islamic Law and Constitution*. Pakistan. 20.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>62</sup> Maududi, Abul Ala. 1939. *Jihad in Islam*. 5.

of Islam was “to destroy all states and governments anywhere on the face of the earth which are opposed to the ideology and programme of Islam regardless of the country or the Nation which rules it,”<sup>63</sup> meaning that the implementation of Islamic ideology is one of the main goals of the faith. Mawdudi said that the only way to do this was “to press into service all forces which can bring about a revolution,”<sup>64</sup> which he called *jihad*. This was radically different from the notion of *jihad* for self-defense. Mawdudi’s ideology thus encouraged his followers to partake in a struggle against all non-Islamic states. In another one of his books titled *Towards Understanding Islam* (1965), Mawdudi wrote “one of the Islamic principles is that we should suffer a lesser loss to save ourselves from a greater loss. How can the loss of some lives, even if the number runs into thousands, be compared to the calamity that may befall mankind as a result of the victory of evil over good ... In order to escape this greater evil God has, therefore, commanded us to sacrifice our lives and property for His pleasure.”<sup>65</sup> Mawdudi does, however, also discuss how Islam is against unnecessary bloodshed and tells his followers to stop fighting when the enemy stops “their aggressive and anti-Islamic activities.”<sup>66</sup> In summary, Mawdudi’s ideology of creating an Islamic state encourages violent *jihad* against any non-Islamic government, whereby the loss of thousands of lives could be justified in preserving the mission of Islam.

Mawdudi’s work was influential both before partition, as well as following the creation of Pakistan. It was only during Zia ul-Haq’s rule, however, that his work was given importance

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Abu-'l-A‘lā Maudūdī. 1965. *Towards Understanding Islam*. 9. ed. ed. Lahore u.a: Islamic Publ. 74.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

at the level of the state and the educational system. Soon after Zia came to power, he gave Mawdudi the status of senior statesman, and according to Vali Nasr, also “sought his advice, and allowed his words to adorn the front pages of newspapers.”<sup>67</sup> Zia embraced Mawdudi’s ideology, and he gave members of the Jamaat e Islami party, who bought into this *jihadist* ideology, “high positions in the government.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, these Jamaat e Islami members had access to making policy reforms in various sectors, especially religion and education. Zia’s Islamisation policies therefore incorporated Mawdudi’s ideas at various levels. Zia instituted reforms in the legal sphere, such as introducing a *shariah* court to implement *shahriah* law in Pakistan. He attempted to Islamize the economy by implementing mandatory payment of *zakat* (Islamic charity), as well as by attempting to remove interest-banking, since taking interest is forbidden in Islam. Additionally, he attempted to give more importance to religious figures in his government and the legislature, as *ulema* from various sects were given representation in parliament.<sup>69</sup>

However, this was not all Zia did to improve the standing of these religious figures. He also declared that a “diploma from *madrassas* was equivalent to a university degree,”<sup>70</sup> thereby improving the educational standing of the *madrassas* in the educational sphere. Additionally, Zia’s legitimacy as a ruler was always under question because he came into office as a result of a military coup. His Islamization goals may be seen as an attempt to gain this legitimacy through the noble goal of promoting Islam. Also, he sought to use the social power of the religious

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<sup>67</sup> Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr. 1996. *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* Oxford Univ. Press. 46.

<sup>68</sup> Zahid Ahmed. 2012. "Political Islam, the Jamaat-E-Islami, and Pakistan's Role in the Afghan-Soviet War, 1979-1988." In *Religion and the Cold War*, edited by Philip Muehlenbeck. 277.

<sup>69</sup> "Pakistan: Madrasa, Extremism and the Military." 2002. *International Crisis Group*. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Haqqani, 152.

figures of Pakistan for his own gain - if popular religious leaders accepted him as a leader, the people would not question his rule.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and still building on Mawdudi's notion of *jihad*, Zia turned *madrassas* into one of the essential components of how Pakistan was going to deal with the intruders. Due to the religious and political climate in Pakistan following Zia ul-Haq's Islamisation policies, it was very easy for these *madrassas* to be used as political tools to fight the Soviets. The direct involvement of the ideology of Mawdudi's Jamaat e Islami in the form of their appointment as government officials, as well as the direct influence of Zia's Islamisation policies on *madrassa* education paved the way to this, and thus it was essential to discuss them to understand the evolutions of *madrassas* through this period.

### **The Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989)**

On Christmas Eve 1979, the Soviet military invaded Afghanistan as a part of the Soviet global struggle for power against the United States during the Cold War. The United States, allied with Pakistan, which also had an anti-communist stance, attempted to maintain the balance of power in the region. Pakistan was already involved in Afghanistan by this period, attempting to “combat communism [in Afghanistan] with religious fervor.”<sup>71</sup> They did this by financing and training Islamist parties who were strongly influenced by Mawdudi and the Jamaat e Islami. Haqqani calls this a “low intensity proxy war”<sup>72</sup> fought by Pakistan and Afghanistan, whereby Pakistan attempted to encourage and instate an Islamic state in Afghanistan.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 174.

By the time the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan was ready to support the anti-communist, pro-Islamist rebels, known as the *mujahideen*. Zia made it possible for the public to fund mosques and *madrassas* in Pakistan through allowing *zakat* payments to be made to mosques and *madrassas*, which was not the case before, since *zakat* was supposed to be given to the poor and needy. This gave rise to an increase in Deobandi *madrassas*. Additionally, more than 3.2 million Afghan refugees were taken in by Pakistan which also created rising demand for education.<sup>73</sup> According to Zahid Ahmed, the *madrassas* “grew fivefold between 1979 and 1985”<sup>74</sup> and many of these hosted and educated the Afghan refugees. Seeing a political opportunity, Zia took on the role of gaining foreign support to use these *madrassas* as centers for training the rebels to fight the Soviets.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States allied itself with Pakistan to combat communism and exchange intelligence. Thus, the United States and Saudi Arabia, its rich oil-producing and Islamically conservative ally, began providing the *mujahideen* with large amounts of aid, supplies, and funding. This aid was not only given to the *mujahideen*, but the *madrassas* as well. During this period, the Deobandi affiliated JUI had set up “hundreds of *madrassas* where it offered Afghan refugees the chance of a free education, food, shelter and military training.”<sup>75</sup> The United States - in an attempt to leverage the conservative, faith-based education system - decided to modify what was taught at these *madrassas* as well, to indoctrinate the students and encourage them to defeat the Soviets and run them out of Afghanistan.

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<sup>73</sup> Zahid Ahmed, 285.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Rashid, 89.

The United States played a major role in promoting the *jihad* against the Soviets. According to a 1985 *Washington Post* article, the anti-communist insurgents in Afghanistan “received a total of \$625 million in U.S. aid [from the CIA] since the 1979 Soviet invasion.”<sup>76</sup> Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway wrote in another article for *The Washington Post* “the United States spent millions of dollars to supply Afghan schoolchildren with textbooks filled with violent images and militant Islamic teachings.”<sup>77</sup> Zahid Ahmed says that the strategy of the United States was “to unite billions of Muslims worldwide to wage jihad (holy war) against the Soviets.”<sup>78</sup> Thus the United States was not only involved in providing financial support to the *mujahideen*, but was also directly involved in the indoctrination of the *madrassa* students, emphasising *jihad* in their textbooks. The article goes on to report that these books “were filled with talk of jihad and featured drawings of guns, bullets, soldiers and mines” and that “even the Taliban<sup>79</sup> used the American-produced books.”<sup>80</sup>

This indoctrination of encouraging and glorifying *jihad* as holy war against the Soviets was also made possible by the efforts of Saudi Arabia. By the time of the Soviet occupation, the Saudis had already begun to fund *madrassas* to propagate an extremist version of its conservative religious ideology of Wahhabism to grow in the schools. The European Parliament

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<sup>76</sup> William Claiborn. 1985. "Reports of More Aid to Afghan Rebels Stir Feuds." *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, Feb 7.

<sup>77</sup> Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway. 2002. "From U.S., the ABC's of Jihad; Violent Soviet-Era Textbooks Complicate Afghan Education Efforts." *The Washington Post*, Mar 23.

<sup>78</sup> Zahid Ahmed, 276.

<sup>79</sup> A movement started by Mullah Omar to end the violence in Afghanistan and create an Islamic State after the end of the Soviet War. This will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

<sup>80</sup> Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway. 2002. "From U.S., the ABC's of Jihad; Violent Soviet-Era Textbooks Complicate Afghan Education Efforts." *The Washington Post*, Mar 23.

in Strasbourg, for example, defined Wahhabism as the “main source of global terrorism.”<sup>81</sup> As an ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam, it emphasizes and forces the practice of the core tenets of Islam, and has inspired various terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda.<sup>82</sup> The introduction of Wahhabism into South Asia, according to Zahid Ahmed, “created a completely new genre of madrassas -- ones that were equally if not more concerned with Jihad than with religious scholarship.”<sup>83</sup> This fit in with the Pakistani government’s policy of promoting the Afghan *jihad*, and was thus allowed and encouraged.

Although foreign powers influenced the *madrassas*, Pakistan also made the indoctrination of the students possible through the work of the government, and the Jamaat e Islami, which made Pakistan the other major actor in allowing this indoctrination to take place. The government under Zia ul-Haq was involved in this process at various levels. Under Zia, the state opened its borders to facilitate the influx of foreign fighters to join the jihadists. In his “pan-Islamic zeal, [he] allowed volunteers from all over the world to come and train alongside the Afghan mujahideen,”<sup>84</sup> which allowed for foreign influence in the *madrassas*, including the ultra-conservative ideology of Wahhabism from the Saudis, as mentioned earlier. The government also secured and distributed foreign aid to the *mujahideen* through the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence), its primary intelligence agency. Furthermore, the government encouraged Jamaat e Islami ideology in the *madrassas* by “involving the Jamaat in the religious

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<sup>81</sup> "What is Wahhabism? the Reactionary Branch of Islam from Saudi Arabia Said to be 'the Main Source of Global Terrorism'." 2017. *The Telegraph*, May 19. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/what-is-wahhabism-the-reactionary-branch-of-islam-said-to-be-the/>.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Zahid Ahmed, 286.

<sup>84</sup> Haqqani, 191.

education of the Afghan refugees” as well as in the “organization of the *mujahideen* and the planning and execution of the *jihad* next door in Afghanistan.”<sup>85</sup> All this closely followed Mawdudi’s ideology which encouraged *jihad* against non-Islamic states (in this case the Soviets), making it easier to indoctrinate and justify the war against the Soviets.

The United States made the Pakistani people believe that the “Communist invasion of Afghanistan had endangered Islam,”<sup>86</sup> and that they were fighting to protect Islam. The United States was, however, not concerned with *jihad* to preserve Islam in the region, and was simply trying to fulfill its goal of ridding the region of Communism. They saw the politicization of *jihad* as an easy way to indoctrinate the rebels to fulfill their cause. The proliferation and manipulation of the *madrassa* system and the students were an easy target to train and send to fight.

### **Reappraisal of the Evolution of the *Madrassa***

From the background of Deobandi *madrassas* I have provided from their inception in British India through the Soviet-Afghan War, I will extract the core Deobandi ideology using the *Maslak of the Darul Uloom Deoband*, written by the 8th Vice Chancellor of the Darul Uloom Deoband - Qaari Muhammad Tayyib - and will trace aspects of change in these core principles to investigate evolution towards radicalization.

The first aspect of change happened at the level of sources of funding. Zia’s policy of public funding of the *madrassas* through *zakat* was against the original vision of the founder of the *madrassa* at Deoband, Nanotvi, who emphasised the importance of the *madrassas* functioning without a fixed source of income. This gave rise to the possibility of foreign funding

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<sup>85</sup> Zahid Ahmed, 287.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 283.

from patrons around the world, such as the Saudis, who used their financial influence over the *madrassas* to spread their Wahabi ideology, promoting *jihād*. This *madrassa* proliferation came at a price: it put the apolitical nature of the *madrassa* space in danger, and allowed for the *madrassas* themselves to become subject to the will of others.

The next aspect of change was in the redefinition of the targets and goals of *jihād*. The United States attempted to convince the people and the government of Pakistan that it was their “religious duty to fight in the war on the side of America, which was said to be fighting for Islam.”<sup>87</sup> This would protect the social and personal interests of Muslims, which was one of the goals of the Deobandis. The United States thus encouraged and called for *jihād* against the Soviets. This involved the politicization of another goal of the Deobandis, which was using *jihād* in the form of self defense.<sup>88</sup> The United States called it the religious duty of Muslims to fight the Soviets, who were threatening Islam in Afghanistan. This resulted in Pakistan and Afghanistan making it their goal to educate and train the students of the *madrassas* to become successful *mujahideen* fighters. These practices were the next steps in the politicization of the *madrassas*, allowing *jihād* to become a political tool against the enemies of a state (in this case, the Soviets). This was a radicalized form of politicization, which took the role of *jihād* a step further from just self-preservation against the British colonialists from the 1800s and early 1900s to actually attacking a foreign enemy with the use of modern weaponry and military training.

The final aspect of change occurred in the form of the Jamaat e Islami’s role in *madrassa* education during the time of the Soviet-Afghan War. The original Deobandi creed stated the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 283.

<sup>88</sup> Muḥammad Tayyib. 1975. *Maslak-i ‘ulamā-Yi Diyoband*. Translated by Afzal Hossen Elias. 1st ed. Lahore. 30-31.

importance of societal reform, as well as the goal of preserving and protecting the Islamic state.<sup>89</sup> The reformation of society was one Mawdudi's primary goals in his Islamist agenda, in the form of ridding the world of non-Islamic States and practices. To do this, *jihad* as holy war was one of Mawdudi's solutions, and even if thousands of lives were lost in the cause, it would be worthwhile. This would not only count toward the rectification and reformation of society, but would aid in the struggle to perhaps create and maintain an Islamic state in Afghanistan, according to Mawdudi. The Jamaat e Islami was not and is not usually involved in *madrassa* education, but during this period, Zia "involved the Jamaat in the religious education of the Afghan refugees,"<sup>90</sup> thereby promoting their ideology. This used the creed of the Deobandis for the political purpose of furthering the Jamaat e Islami's Islamist agenda, and was thus another example of the radicalized politicization of the *madrassa* by an external actor.

To conclude this chapter, the period between 1978 and 1989 saw a significant change in the political role and identity of the *madrassas*. Zia ul-Haq's Islamisation policies caused the ideology of Mawdudi and the Jamaat e Islami to be one of primary importance in Pakistan, which influenced the *madrassa* sphere during his reign. Additionally, the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia's use of the *madrassas* as political tools to indoctrinate and train students to fight the Soviets in the name of Islam caused a major shift in the political identity of the *madrassas*. *Madrassas* were originally intended to be centers for Islamic education in South Asia, but began teaching from textbooks which promoted violence and *jihad*. This had long

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Zahid Ahmed, 287.

lasting repercussions in the form of the Taliban movement, which I will discuss next. With this in mind, I ask, was the damage already done by the end of the Soviet-Afghan War?

### CHAPTER 3: The Taliban Movement: An Islamic Government?

After a long battle, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. But the “Afghan society remained divided into two main factions: the Kabul government, and the mujahdeen groups led by several conflicting groups,”<sup>91</sup> according to Neamatollah Nojumi. The Pakistani government was dissatisfied with the coalition government in Kabul, and pushed for the installation of the Islamist forces to power, with the aid of the United States and Saudi Arabia. This was successful, and the government was overthrown by the *mujahideen* in 1992. A government comprised of seven member parties of Afghanistan was put into place, under the Peshawar Accord. The accord stated 12 points, designating different roles to the various *mujahideen* groups, including within the education system. According to it, for example, “The Deputy Prime Ministership and the Ministry of Education, [was delegated] to Hizb-e-Islami of Maulvi Khalis,”<sup>92</sup> Hizb-e-Islami being one of the prominent *mujahideen* groups that fought the Soviets. This arrangement was to last for no more than 2 months, with each of these parties who had played roles as the *mujahideen* rebel groups during the Soviet-Afghan War, having an equivalent part in the interim government. However, these groups, which were a direct result of the radical *madrassas*, began to fight amongst themselves, which negatively impacted the lives of the Afghan people.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Neamatollah Nojumi. 2009. "The Rise and Fall of the Taliban." In *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, edited by Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi: Harvard University Press. 100.

<sup>92</sup> "Peshawar Accord." 1992. <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/services/cds/agreements/pdf/afgan2.pdf>.

<sup>93</sup> Peter Marsden. 2002. *The Taliban : War and Religion in Afghanistan*. England. 38.

It was under these circumstances that the Taliban movement was formed, and it offered stability and peace in war torn Afghanistan. The Taliban was led by Mullah Omar, a graduate of one of the *madrassas* under the influence of Zia ul-Haq's policies, and who took part in the Afghan *jihad* against the Soviets.<sup>94</sup> Omar is believed to have been a student of Darul Uloom Haqqania in Pakistan, nicknamed "The University of Jihad" due to its reputation as a recruiting ground for rebel fighters during the Soviet-Afghan War, and its continued spread of *jihadist* ideology to this day.<sup>95</sup>

As indicated in the previous chapter, the Deobandi *madrassas* underwent a drastic change from the British colonial period until the end of the Soviet-Afghan War. Even though the Soviets had left Afghanistan, this was by no means the end of the story: the seeds of radicalization were already planted in the *madrassas* where the *mujahideen* and members of the Taliban had been educated. Absolute radicalization had occurred through the *madrassa* reform during this period, but as a result of this radicalization, the Taliban movement emerged and created a state with an Islamic government in post-war Afghanistan.

However, the Taliban's goals were more than just politically religious in nature. In addition to aiming for establishing an Islamic state in Afghanistan, I argue that the Taliban also had Pashtun nationalist tendencies, attempting to prevent the decline of the ethnically Pashtun people, who are predominantly in Afghanistan and parts of North Western Pakistan. In other words, the Taliban used their *madrassa* training and education to pursue their ethnic-political goals. In Anwar Ahady's article titled *The Decline of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan*, he argues that

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<sup>94</sup> Kamal Matinuddin. 1999. *The Taliban Phenomenon* Oxford Univ. Press. 24.

<sup>95</sup> Tim Craig. 2016. "WorldViews Pakistan's 'University of Jihad' is Getting Millions of Dollars from the Government." *The Washington Post*.

the decline of the Pashtuns' power was a major factor as to why there was so much support for the Taliban on their end, because the members of the Taliban came from this ethnic group. The Pashtuns had been in a clear political decline since 1992, when groups of ethnic minorities took over Kabul. This came as a major blow to the Pashtuns who had controlled Kabul for centuries as founders of pre-modern empires, and the rise of the Taliban made the Pashtuns feel optimistic about their future.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, the Taliban's ability to mobilize the Pashtuns and gain their support, was due to their "expert knowledge of the Pashtun power tapestry,"<sup>97</sup> according to Abdulkader Sinno. Thus, the Taliban were effectively able to gain the support of the Pashtuns, since they were working towards a goal favoring them.

The Pashtun nationalist goals, as well the Taliban's aim of creating an Islamic state in Afghanistan were highly political in nature, and the politicization of Islam and *madrassas* by various external actors during the Soviet-Afghan War was capitalized upon to reach these ethnic-political goals. The use of *jihad* and *madrassas* as political tools by the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia made it possible for the Taliban to use religion for its own political and ethnic gains as well. Additionally, the use of *madrassas* as recruiting grounds for the Taliban, provides a direct relationship between the radicalization of these institutions to this fundamentalist political movement, the ethnically-based Islamic government it later created after the war.

In discussing these goals, as well as their relation to *madrassas*, I will divide this chapter into three sections. The first section will discuss the origins of the Taliban and the role of Mullah

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<sup>96</sup> Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady. 1995. "The Decline of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan." *Asian Survey* 35 (7).

<sup>97</sup> Abdulkader Sinno. 2009. "Explaining the Taliban's Ability to Mobilize the Pashtuns" In *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, edited by Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi. 88.

Omar in founding and leading this movement that is rooted in the *madrassa* educational system. In the second section I will analyze the Taliban as a governing body of Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001 and its policies and role in the international political sphere. The final section will deal specifically with Taliban's educational system within their Islamic state, to indicate how it was highly influenced by Zia-ul-Haq's *madrassas* and how it differed from the original *madrassa* platform. This section also looks at the role of the United States in critiquing the Taliban's educational system and using this to launch media campaigns against the very radical group it created and supported during the long years of the war.

### **Mullah Omar, Pakistan Madrassas, and the Rise of the Taliban**

The exact origins of the Taliban movement remain unclear. As per the United States' National Security Archives, under a document titled *The Taliban - Who Knows What the Movement Means?* the "organization seems to have its origins in the Jehadi group of the same name, which consisted of Pashtun madrasa students who fought with distinction against the Soviets."<sup>98</sup> According Kamal Matinuddin, "although several articles have been written on this so-called 'mysterious army,' no researched or authentic material has so far been published on the historical perspective of the Taliban movement."<sup>99</sup> The rise of the Taliban, however, can be attributed to necessity in a broken state, undergoing a civil war.

Ahmed Rashid described Afghanistan as being in a "state of virtual disintegration just before the Taliban emerge at the end of 1994."<sup>100</sup> There was a power vacuum left by the chaotic

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<sup>98</sup> *The Taliban - Who Knows what the Movement Means?*. 1994: The National Security Archive.

<sup>99</sup> Matinuddin, 21.

<sup>100</sup> Rashid, 21.

war, and when the Taliban came into the picture, they promised to unify the country under a single Islamic government and end the fighting. According to journalist Tom Hussain, the leader of the Taliban movement, Mullah Omar, “first arrived in Karachi in 1979 to study at the Jamia Binoria Dar-ul-Aloom,”<sup>101</sup> a well known Deobandi *madrassa*.

Following the end of the war against the Soviets, Omar returned to a *madrassa* to continue his studies. However, like many mujahideen fighters who had taken part in the war to see an Islamic institute put in place, he was dismayed by the endless fighting. Omar’s movement against the Kandahar warlords started in 1994, when he was informed of the abduction, humiliation, and rape of two teenage girls from the village of Singesar. Omar “enlisted some 30 *Talibs* [*madrassa* students] who had only 16 rifles between them and attacked the base, freeing the girls and hanging the commander from the barrel of a tank.”<sup>102</sup> Later, people started coming to the Taliban for help with local matters against the warlords, who regularly abducted and raped the Afghan women.<sup>103</sup> These problems were usually solved, and Omar asked for no rewards for his work, only that those who he helped follow him in his quest to set up an Islamic system in Afghanistan. Omar was viewed as a hero who fought in favor of the local customs of “*nang* (reputation) and *namus* (local honor with respect to women).”<sup>104</sup> Both of these customs were part of the Pashtun code of the conduct known as *Pashtunwali*. The origins of the Taliban movement,

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<sup>101</sup> Tom Hussain. 2015. "Mullah Omar Worked as Potato Vendor to Escape Detection in Pakistan." *McClatchy*. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article29940219.html>.

<sup>102</sup> Rashid, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Nojumi, 101.

as well as its popularity, can thus be traced back to a sense of strong Pashtun identity combined with a radical Islamist ideology.

The backbone of Taliban's government were the graduates of the war period's *madrassas* who were also ethnically Pashtun. "The main forces of the Taliban," Nojumi writes, "were the students and graduates of the religious schools [*madrassas*] that were built during the Soviet occupation."<sup>105</sup> An estimated 30,000 students from various *madrassas* joined the Taliban movement. According to another report from the United States' National Security Archives from 1995, titled *Finally, A Talkative Talib: Origins and Membership of the Religious Students' Movement*, nobody was more surprised at how fast the movement caught on than the Taliban's leadership. The Taliban's representative commented on the role of Zia ul-Haq's *madrassas* in this and stated that "the *madrassa* network in Pakistan's NWFP [modern-day KPK] and Baluchistan was able to provide willing recruits in a short period of time."<sup>106</sup>

The Taliban and its leadership of *madrassa* graduates were thus a reactionary movement to the infighting between the mujahideen groups in Afghanistan following the Soviet-Afghan War. The origins of the Taliban, as well as Mullah Omar, can easily be seen as politically motivated. Even though the Taliban argued that Omar led the organization due to his piety, his interest in creating an Islamic state in Afghanistan went beyond just an interest in improving living conditions in the country. As discussed in earlier chapters, the idea of an Islamic state and the importance of implementing it can be attributed to the Jamaat e Islami, and its founder, Mawdudi, whose ideology was very influential in Zia-ul-Haq's *madrassas* where many of the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>106</sup> *Finally, A Talkative Talib: Origins and Membership of the Religious Students' Movement*. 1995: The National Security Archive.

Taliban— including Omar— were educated. The Taliban’s ability to use violent force to establish themselves as the peacekeepers of Afghanistan can also be traced back to the training they received at the *madrassas* during the Soviet-Afghan War. Another aspect I will further discuss is the emphasis of Pashtun culture within the Taliban, starting from Mullah Omar gaining legitimacy through his observance of the *Pashtunwali* code. The *madrassa* graduates too, had learned how to use the guise of religion for their political benefit.

### **The Taliban: An Islamic Government?**

The formation of a Taliban state began with the conquest of Afghan territories, which began in 1994 with the seizure of the Afghan border post Spin Boldak, along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>107</sup> One of the Taliban’s major victories was the capture of Herat (a large city in western Afghanistan) in 1995, which Rashid calls the “beginning of the end for the Rabbani government.”<sup>108</sup> Ismail Khan, the governor of Herat at the time, made a grave miscalculation by assuming that the Taliban were too weak to fight when he launched an attack against them in 1995. In a previous attempt to take Herat in February, the Taliban were crushed by air attacks from Ahmad Shah Masud, the field commander of the Kabul government. He sent an aircraft to attack the Taliban’s front lines and airlifted 2,000 Tajik fighters to fight the Taliban. The Taliban took heavy losses due to their lack of airpower, organization, and command structure, which pushed them out of most of the territories they had captured earlier. There was a

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<sup>107</sup> Michael Rubin. 2002. "Who is Responsible for the Taliban?" *The Washington Institute*, March. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/who-is-responsible-for-the-taliban>.

<sup>108</sup> Rashid, 40.

general lack of resources at the hands of the Taliban, which was why Ismail Khan launched his offensive against them, thinking that they were falling apart.

Pakistan's ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) had other plans for the downtrodden Taliban. The Taliban had spent the summer rebuilding their forces with arms, ammunition, and vehicles provided by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, as well a new command structure created with the help of the ISI.<sup>109</sup> The ISI helped negotiate an agreement with one of the Uzbek warlords of the time, Rashid Dostum, who not only sent his technicians to repair Taliban equipment and helicopters, which gave the Taliban access to airpower, but also began bombing Herat with his own planes. Along with this, the Taliban were able to quickly mobilize around 25,000 men to fight Ismail Khan's forces.

The Taliban, which controlled the entire west of Afghanistan following this victory, launched an attack on Kabul during October and November of 1995 but faced push-back from the Kabul military. This siege lasted for ten months; it resulted in many casualties as well as unrest in the ranks, with a stalemate between the Taliban and Masud's ranks. To bring the various Taliban groups together, Mullah Omar was designated the *Ameer-ul Momineen* or Commander of the Faithful,<sup>110</sup> which made him the unquestioned leader of Afghanistan, as well as the *jihad*. This was a highly political move. By declaring Omar the Commander of the Faithful, the Taliban gave religious legitimacy to Omar as a leader, ensuring that he would have the respect of the Muslim Afghans, implying that his legitimacy as a ruler was derived from more than just his piety.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 42.

In August 1996, the Taliban convinced Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to fund another major attack on Kabul and its government. This attack started with the surprise offensive of Jalalabad, just east of Kabul; they attacked from the south, and Pakistan allowed armed supporters of the Taliban to cross the border and attack Jalalabad from the east. By mid-September, the Taliban captured three other eastern provinces, leaving Kabul completely open from the east. They immediately moved to Kabul, and, on September 26, 1996, the Taliban took over the capital city.

Immediately after completing their military conquests, the Taliban started to build an Islamic government allegedly based on the Deobandi *madrassa*'s teachings. They began by switching the legal institutions from using modern codes into applying Islamic law: "Within 24 hours of taking Kabul, the Taliban imposed the strictest Islamic system in place anywhere in the world."<sup>111</sup> The Taliban wasted no time in implementing their version of the *shari'a*, banning women from education and work. This ban restricted their public appearance to the extent that women and children had little to no access to health care and basic welfare services.<sup>112</sup> Women were viewed as second class citizens, if citizens at all. Juan Cole recalled an account of Afghan women being beaten and punished in the street for wearing white socks; the reason for this was that white was "the color of the Taliban flag, and women do not have the right to wear white. It means they are defiling the flag."<sup>113</sup>

This strict implementation of the Taliban's laws were highly ethnicized rather than ideological. To a great extent, the concept of honor is related to the women belonging to the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>112</sup> Nojumi, 108.

<sup>113</sup> Juan R. I. Cole 2003. "The Taliban, Women, and the Hegelian Private Sphere." *Social Research* 70 (3): 771-808.

family of a Pashtun man, and honor, as discussed previously, was a major part of *Pashtunwali*. One way of preserving the honor of a woman is to ensure that she is always in a state of seclusion. Beliefs such as this made their way into the *shari'a* enforced by the Taliban. “The line between *Pashtunwali* and *Shari'a* law has always been blurred for the Pashtuns,” Rashid writes, “Taliban punishments were in fact drawn largely from *Pashtunwali* rather than the *shari'a*.”<sup>114</sup> This blur between Islam and Pashtun ethnicity is another way by which Pashtun nationalism managed to creep into the religious Taliban.

Rashid also wrote about the Taliban’s *jihad* against other Muslims, saying that “jihad does not sanction the killing of fellow Muslims on the basis of ethnicity or sect,”<sup>115</sup> but the Taliban continued to kill the minorities, justifying it as being against corrupt and evil Muslims. He continues, writing that “Ethnic minorities see them [the Taliban] as using Islam as a cover to exterminate non-Pashtuns,”<sup>116</sup> which provides further proof that the Taliban used religion to further their political gains in Afghanistan -- in this case, in the form of putting Pashtuns on a pedestal. This, along with the incorporation of *Pashtunwali* into the version of *shari'a* practiced by the Taliban created an obvious bias of the Taliban’s support of the Pashtun people over any other ethnic group.

In terms of the economy of the Taliban’s state, it was organized in a way that reflected more ethnic biases and less Islamic law. According to a decree by Afghanistan’s Ministry for the Protection of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, Mullah Omar banned sixteen activities, one of

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<sup>114</sup> Rashid, 112.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

which read, “Drug trafficking is forbidden, along with the use of drugs.”<sup>117</sup> According to a report in the United States’ National Security Archives, the Taliban said that “Poppy growing is un-Islamic,” and that “the Taliban shura [organization] will not allow the people to grow drugs.”<sup>118</sup> However, one of the Taliban’s major exports and methods to raise revenue was by the sale of drugs. They taxed the sale of drugs, and even “provided an Islamic sanction for farmers to grow even more opium, even though the Koran forbids Muslims from producing or imbibing intoxicants.”<sup>119</sup> They justified this by saying that the opium was being consumed by *kafirs*<sup>120</sup> in the West. Hashish, on the other hand, was consumed by Afghan Muslims and was therefore strictly banned. This double standard was less rooted in the essence of the religion, but more in the economic system of Afghanistan as a whole, and the Pashtun tribe in particular, as well as the need for government revenue. It was an inherently political goal justified through the use of religion.

Public punishment was a common spectacle, one that was not voluntary. These punishments were “staged publicity that ritually reaffirmed their [the Taliban’s] power and legitimacy.”<sup>121</sup> These punishments had little to do with religious practice and more to do with asserting dominance, and were very far removed from traditional laws in Islam. This also showed how, with the guise of implementing Islamic law, the Taliban was simply using religion as a way to maintain their political legitimacy. The original Deobandi ideology had little to do

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<sup>117</sup> Cole, 788.

<sup>118</sup> *Meeting with the Taliban in Kandahar: More Questions than Answers*. 1995: The National Security Archive.

<sup>119</sup> Rashid, 118.

<sup>120</sup> Non-believers. Those who hide the truth (about the existence of God).

<sup>121</sup> Cole, 782.

with strict punishment according to Islamic law, seeing as this was not a part of its main goals of Islamic preservation and education. The creation and maintenance of an Islamic state were ideas brought forth by Mawdudi, and even if the Taliban's enforcement of its laws were based on their *madrassa* education, it was far removed from the original mission of the Deobandis.

The *jihadist* ideology of the Taliban was, compared to the Deobandi's original mission, highly politicized and radical. As I discussed earlier, the original *madrassa* at Deoband identified *jihad* as a core ideal, but only in the form of self defense against the British colonialists who threatened the integrity of the Muslim identity. On the other hand, the Taliban, who waged *jihad* on other supposedly "corrupt" and non-Pashtun Muslims, showed a very politicized understanding of this goal. To them, the non-Pashtun minorities threatened their power and existence as Pashtuns, and to prevent this decline, they used *jihad* to justify their killing. This is far removed from the original, anti-colonial goal of the Deobandi *jihad*.

Additionally, the Taliban created an Islamic state that they believed was in accordance with the mission of the Deobandis. However, the circumstances of what an Islamic state entailed was very different following the Zia ul-Haq era than it was during the colonial era. The original Deobandi goal of protecting and maintaining the Islamic state was specific to the Ottoman Caliphate, the head of the Muslim world. The idea of an Islamic state, ruled by *shari'a*, was one propagated during the Zia era, when Mawdudi's ideology was prevalent and encouraged in the *madrassas* where a large portion of the Taliban leadership was educated. Their concept of the Islamic state was, therefore, already radicalized through the *madrassa* education of the 1980s.

## **Taliban's State and Islamic Education**

During and after consolidating their state, the Taliban continued to use *madrassas* in its political system. This begs the question: what was the actual relationship between *madrassas* and the Taliban? To understand this, I will delve into the relationship between Maulana Sami ul-Haq, the leader of one of the most prominent *jihadi* *madrassas* in Pakistan, and the Taliban. Sami ul-Haq was born on December 18, 1937 in Akora Khattak, in the province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.<sup>122</sup> Sami ul-Haq was educated in Darul Uloom Haqqania, a Deobandi *madrassa* founded by his father, and has served as its Director and Chancellor since his passing (1988-present).<sup>123</sup> The *Washington Post* wrote that both Pakistan and the U.S. used Haqqania “to recruit and nurture rebels who resisted the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan,”<sup>124</sup> and to this day Sami ul-Haq recognizes and encourages his Afghan students, many of whom have served the Taliban in leadership position, to fight for their freedom in Afghanistan.<sup>125</sup>

Following the Soviet-Afghan War and the creation of the Taliban as a movement, Sami ul-Haq was “in constant touch with Omar,” aiding him in international relations decisions and advising him on how to implement *shari‘a*.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, according to Ahmed Rashid, Sami

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<sup>122</sup> "Molana Sami Ul Haq" Darul Uloom Jamia Haqqania., <http://www.jamiahaqqania.edu.pk/index.php/sami>.

<sup>123</sup> Imtiaz Ali. "The Father of the Taliban: An Interview with Maulana Sami Ul-Haq." The Jamestown Foundation., <https://jamestown.org/interview/the-father-of-the-taliban-an-interview-with-maulana-sami-ul-haq/>.

<sup>124</sup> Tim Craig. 2016. "WorldViews Pakistan's 'University of Jihad' is Getting Millions of Dollars from the Government." *The Washington Post*.

<sup>125</sup> Maria Golovnina and Sheree Sardar. 2013. "Pakistani "Father of Taliban" Keeps Watch Over Loyal Disciples." *Reuters*. <https://in.reuters.com/article/pakistan-taliban/pakistani-father-of-taliban-keeps-watch-over-loyal-disciples-idINDEE98E03320130915>.

<sup>126</sup> Rashid, 91.

ul-Haq sent his students to fight for the Taliban: he “shut down his *madrassa* and sent his entire student body to fight alongside” them and helped organize reinforcements for the Taliban army on multiple occasions.<sup>127</sup> According to journalist Frud Bezhan, the Taliban used Haqqania in both Pakistan and Afghanistan to “systematically recruit young graduates,”<sup>128</sup> and fight the involvement foreign entities in Afghanistan.

According the website of the Darul Uloom Haqqania, one of the primary objectives of Haqqania is “Equipping holy warriors with culture and moral.”<sup>129</sup> This insinuates a strong relationship between *jihadist* ideology and Haqqania, since one of the goals of the *madrassa* is, in fact, to train and educate those who are interested in taking part in *jihad*. This rhetoric was prevalent in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule as well, as it formed the basis of the Taliban movement. During the Taliban rule, the violent books used during the Soviet-Afghan War were reprinted multiple times, with some modifications (e.g. removing images of faces).<sup>130</sup> The Taliban continued to encourage *jihad* education, but managed to politicize their education policy further by banning the education of women and young girls in Afghanistan.

The decision to deny education to women stemmed less from the Taliban’s religious affiliation, and more from the requirements of *Pashtunwali*, which restricts the mobility of women in the interest of maintaining their honor. Additionally, it stemmed from the Taliban’s anti-modernity standpoint, since the education of women was seen as a Western phenomenon,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Frud Bezhan. 2018. "'University of Jihad' Gets Public Funds Even as Pakistan Fights Extremism." *Rferl*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-jihad-university-haqqania-government-funding-haq-taliban-omar/29092748.html>.

<sup>129</sup> "Objective of Jamia." Darul Uloom Jamia Haqqania. <http://www.jamiahaqqania.edu.pk/index.php/objective>.

<sup>130</sup> Dana Burde. 2015. *Schools for Conflict Or for Peace in Afghanistan*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press. 82.

which must not be tolerated in their ultra-conservative society. The education that was available to Afghan men was specifically religious in nature and merged the ideology of the Deobandis with the *Pashtunwali* code, making it hard to distinguish between the two.<sup>131</sup>

With such radicalized state ideology, the Taliban government was internationally recognized by a few states, which, between the 90s until 2001 were Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).<sup>132</sup> The United States -- the country that funded and armed the creation of the Taliban for its own Cold-War gains -- also ironically became critical of the Taliban's radical government. For example, the human rights violations conducted by the Taliban, especially in respect to women, received the attention of then First Lady, Hillary Clinton, who criticized the Taliban's treatment of women. Clinton said that "It is no longer acceptable to say that the abuse and mistreatment of women is cultural. It should be called what it is -- criminal."<sup>133</sup> Additionally, the United Nations and the United States put an arms embargo on the Taliban's disputed regions, and the United Nations also cut aid to Afghanistan. As the United States turned its back on the Taliban, this only increased the Taliban's isolationist and anti-modernity stance throughout the 1990s.

The demise of the Taliban's state soon followed, and that too at the hands of its very creator, the United States. The Taliban's ideological alliance with Osama bin Laden initiated organizations of Islamic extremism, such as al-Qaeda, to find their way to Afghanistan, where they took refuge and were trained. The Taliban's implementation of political Islam caused them

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 96-98.

<sup>132</sup> "Who are the Taliban?" 2016. *BBC News*, May 26. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-11451718>.

<sup>133</sup> Elisabeth Bumiller. 1999. "A First Lady's Plea for Women's Rights." *New York Times*, Mar 5.

to harbor these groups which shared the Taliban's ideology and were, therefore, given refuge there. From Afghanistan, these organizations conducted international terrorist missions, and "by the end of 2000, al-Qaeda contributed around 30 percent to 40 percent of the Taliban's core military forces."<sup>134</sup> Afghanistan's attraction of these Islamist militant forces put it on the center stage for war; the region was already vulnerable to non-state actors, and this just increased the participation of these actors who were either for or against international terrorism.

On September 11, 2001, members of al-Qaeda hijacked four passenger planes, crashing them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing thousands. This attack on American soil caused the United States to retaliate and consequently turn Afghanistan into an active war zone. The United States began an air campaign against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, allowing anti-Taliban youth to take up arms and free cities under Taliban control. In December, the anti-Taliban political groups created a transitional government with the aid of the UN and the U.S, creating a new constitution. They were protected by an international military force called the International Security Alliance Force. The Taliban were no longer in power.

Even after the Taliban was deposed, the United States still continued to attack *madrassas*, which, as I previously noted, were formerly supported by the U.S. government. This was due to the fact the *madrassas* had strayed too far from their original mission of providing religious education to the Muslim students of India. The incorporation of the *Pashtunwali* ideology into the already radicalized religious understanding of the Taliban, added another layer of anti-female conservatism to *madrassa* education in Afghanistan, as opposed to the *madrassas* in Pakistan.

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<sup>134</sup> Nojumi, 113.

The cycle of radicalization thus went beyond the Soviet-Afghan War and the reforms of Zia ul-Haq, and now there was no going back.

## CONCLUSION

Following the fall of the Taliban government to the U.S. invasion and the global War on Terror, local and foreign governments have worked to curb and tame the radicalized *madrassas*. In attempts to make reparations, Pakistan and Afghanistan have implemented various policies to reduce the power of *madrassas* and try and regulate their syllabi to remove remnants of the *jihadi* propaganda that began during the Soviet-Afghan War. However, the number of *madrassas* in Pakistan has continued to rise since the Zia ul-Haq era. According to the 2005 education census in Pakistan, 11,491 *madrassas* existed,<sup>135</sup> compared to the 3000<sup>136</sup> during Zia's time. As stated earlier in the thesis, according to a paper published by the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis, located in Pakistan's National Defence University, by 2015 there were between 17,000 and 40,000 *madrassas* in Pakistan.<sup>137</sup> I argue that this continuous growth, stems from one of the primary reasons as to why *madrassa* education still exists: the popular demand for religious education.

As for Pakistan, a Brookings Institute report indicates that, "families that do choose to send their children full-time to madrasas often do so not out of necessity but preference."<sup>138</sup> *Madrassas* provide a much cheaper alternative to conventional education for poorer families in Pakistan, but according to the Brookings Institute report, the high rates of enrollment are not due

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<sup>135</sup> NATIONAL EDUCATION CENSUS 2005 Pakistan: Government of Pakistan.

<sup>136</sup> Rahman, 64.

<sup>137</sup> Abdul Rauf Iqbal and Sobia Raza. 2015. "Madrassa Reforms in Pakistan: A Historical Analysis." *ISSRA Papers*. 34.

<sup>138</sup> Rebecca Winthrop and Corrine Graff. 2010. *Beyond Madrasas*: Brookings Institute. 17.

to financial constraints but because Pakistani families believe that their children should have strong religious education for their spiritual and moral growth. The report even states that “nearly half the families interviewed cited religious education as their ‘top educational priority.’”

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The clear demand for religious education then begs the question of why the government of Pakistan has not offered alternatives to the *madrassas* to provide such education to students, and meet the demands of their parents. According to Fazlur Rahman Malik, a modernist Islamic scholar of the 20th century, the state of Pakistan failed to produce Islamic education of the same level as secular subjects. Even though Pakistan was a state created on the basis of Islam, the availability of Islamic education did not reflect this. The private sector schools made no effort to improve their methods of teaching Islam, and public universities such as Punjab University lacked adequate teachers who would be acceptable to the Pakistani public. Were graduates of the *madrassas* qualified to teach at secular institutions? Along the same lines, were those educated in the West qualified to teach Islam, or was their knowledge of Islam biased in the favor of Western tradition?<sup>140</sup>

The simultaneous demand and lack of good religious education provided officially by the Pakistani state meant that unregulated *madrassas* were the only option for the public. However, with religious extremism on the rise since the Soviet-Afghan War, the government needed to implement policies to keep them under check. During President Musharraf’s reign (s. 2001-2008), there were attempts to standardize, regulate, and modernize the *madrassa* curricula.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Fazlur Rahman Malik. 1982. *Islam and Modernity*. 119.

Reformed *madrassas* were known as model *madrassas* and were provided with incentives to cooperate with the government. This included a plan to distribute \$20 million among 10,000 *madrassas* that agreed to register with the government, that promised to improve education standards and help in “spreading Islamic values at national and international levels.”<sup>141</sup> The *madrassas* that did not comply would not receive any government support. However, this policy, which attempted to keep track of the *madrassas*, did not succeed, largely because most *madrassas* rely on donations from private parties, not the government. Additionally, even if 10,000 *madrassas* were incentivised to register, that left a large number of unregistered and unchecked *madrassas* in the country unchanged.

The problem with Islamic education in Pakistan, Fazlur Rahman writes, was that faith and knowledge were seen as mutually exclusive; they “increase at each other’s expense.”<sup>142</sup> However, I argue that this should not be the case; rather, the study of Islam should be equally emphasised in public education as the rational sciences are. If the Pakistani public does not believe that public schools can adequately provide students with Islamic knowledge, the government should consider how to counter this. I argue that the best way to do so would be in reforming the public education system to provide adequate Islamic education. I recommend employing the suggestions of Rahman as well, which would involve recruiting the “best talent available”<sup>143</sup> and to produce new books on theology and ethics while interpreting old Islamic texts in the context of the modern age. The government would also have to incentivize these

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<sup>141</sup> "Pakistan: Madrasa, Extremism and the Military." 2002. *International Crisis Group*. 26.

<sup>142</sup> Fazlur Rahman, 135.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

individuals to look for a career in this intellectual pursuit, while teaching it to students. Unless the government incentivizes this and reforms religious education in the country in a way that it can be monitored, nothing will change.<sup>144</sup>

The goal of this method would be to improve the credibility of the education system in Pakistan with regards to religion. According to the Brookings Institute's Winthrop and Graff, the "majority of families that send a child to a madrasa also send their other children to other types of schools, either government-run or private,"<sup>145</sup> largely because the other schools are unable to provide their children with religious education. If the public schools could provide this new form of Islamic education to their students, these same families would see no need to send their children to the *madrassas* since all of their educational needs would be met at regular institutions. This would, in turn, reduce enrollment and political power of *madrassas*, since they would no longer be able to monopolize religious education. This would also allow the government to oversee the religious education of Pakistan's youth, which was attempted through Musharraf's policies, but evidently failed due to the government's inability to monitor and control the teachings of the *madrassas*. Therefore, the best method to prevent extremist religious education would not be to reform the *madrassas*, but to reform religious education in traditional schools in Pakistan.

The educational landscape in Afghanistan, on the other hand, underwent a great deal of reform following the fall of the Taliban. By 2008, as journalist Amir Shah indicates, only 336

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Rebecca Winthrop and Corrine Graff. 2010. *Beyond Madrasas*: Brookings Institute. 17.

Afghan *madrassas* were in operation.<sup>146</sup> Public education in Afghanistan grew rapidly, as did female enrollment in these schools, as compared to the Taliban era where women were banned from education. Unlike in Pakistan, there was a growing demand for public education, after years of educational oppression and persecution under the Taliban.<sup>147</sup> Additionally, Article 45 of the Constitution of Afghanistan, created after the fall of the Taliban, read:

The state shall devise and implement a unified educational curricula based on the tenets of the sacred religion of Islam, national culture as well as academic principles, and develop religious subjects' curricula for schools on the basis of existing Islamic sects in Afghanistan.<sup>148</sup>

The new Afghan government made it one of their priorities to provide students with proper Islamic education, representing the various Islamic sects in the country. There was no reason for Afghan students to seek religious education elsewhere, unlike Pakistan where *madrassas* were the primary centers for Islamic education.

However, after 2005, many of these public schools began to close down due to military clashes with the Taliban. The Taliban might have been deposed from the government, but were still a strong presence in the region, and continued to threaten the so-called western ideal of women's education.<sup>149</sup> In Taliban-controlled areas, religious and extremist education is still very prominent, and the same policies that existed during their rule are in place. In such areas, students have no choice but to attend these Taliban schools, since limited education for the boys

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<sup>146</sup> Amir Shah. 2008. "Afghan President Karzai Seeks International Help Building Madrassas, Or Islamic Schools." *Tucson*.

<sup>147</sup> Craig C Naumann. 2012. *Books, Bullets, and Burqas* Lit Verlag. 83.

<sup>148</sup> "Afghanistan's Constitution of 2004." Constitute Project. [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Afghanistan\\_2004.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Afghanistan_2004.pdf?lang=en).

<sup>149</sup> Naumann, 100.

is better than none at all. Also, in a large number of rural areas in Afghanistan, neither government endorsed schools nor *madrassas* exist, and locals have to turn to the Taliban to provide education, using the same logic of it being preferred to no education.<sup>150</sup> Consequently, the only people attending the Taliban's *madrassas* in Afghanistan are the students who are not given any other choice, whereas in Pakistan, parents voluntarily send their children to *madrassas* to receive religious education.

In this case, the solution to solving extremist education would be to loosen the Taliban's hold on these regions and to prevent attacks on schools causing them to close. By defeating the Taliban, as well as expanding the spread of educational institutions to reach a wide student base in urban and rural areas alike, Afghan students would not be subjected to the radicalized version of education that was initially pushed during the Zia ul-Haq era. Of course, this is easier said than done, but this intervention would be critical if reparation to the radicalized *madrassas* were to be made.

In conclusion, there are various reasons why *madrassa* enrollment and extremist education has continued to grow in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and each respective government must take the necessary steps to reduce this. Deobandi *madrassas* did not start as institutions promoting political Islam and *jihad*, but various factors external to the *madrassas* contributed to their steady radicalization. These factors started with British colonialism, but the use of Islam and *madrassas* for political gain occurred mainly during the Soviet-Afghan War, when Zia ul-Haq was the leader of Pakistan. The United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan also played various roles in radicalizing the *madrassas*, and even though Pakistan and Afghanistan have

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<sup>150</sup> Burde, 120.

made efforts to curb their political and military powers, the seeds of radicalization had already been planted, and it was too late to fix the damage. This was evident by the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, as well as the political power that they continue to have today. The best way to move forward would be to provide better, state-controlled alternatives to religious education. If the *madrassas* lose their students, they will also lose their political power, and the cycle of radicalization may end.

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