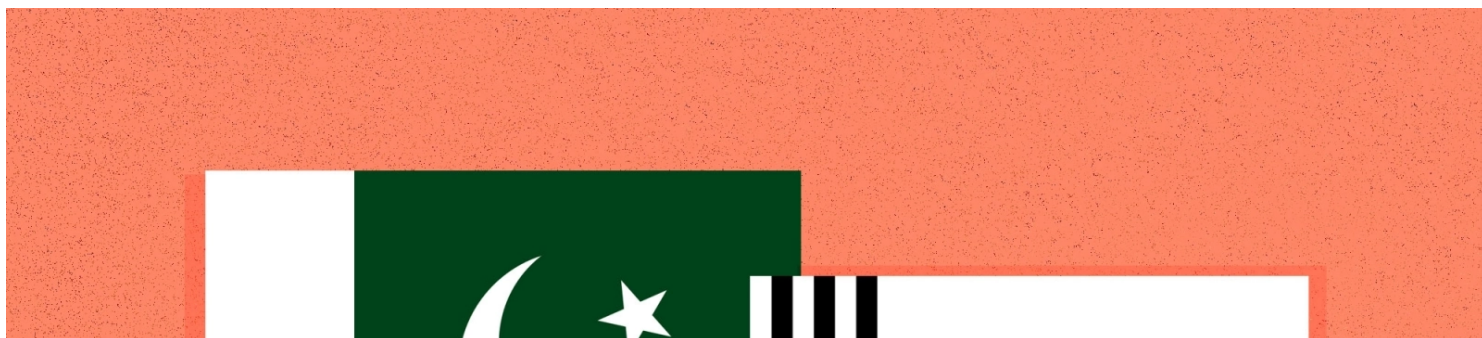




Flags of Pakistan and Jaish-e-Mohammad used for representational purpose only. Picture Courtesy: The Quint/Arnica Kala

Pakistan Is Ensuring Modi's Victory By Using JeM, Its 'Sword Arm'



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In late December 2001, Masood Azhar convened a fractious meeting of his newly minted organization, Jaish-e-Mohammad in the pro-Taliban Karachi madrassa, Jamia Binori. The ISI had forged this group following the 24 December 1999 hijacking of Air India flight 814 which, after a perilous course, landed in



Taliban-controlled Kandahar. After tense negotiations, the Indian government finally agreed to exchange the surviving passengers for three terrorists arrested by India: Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, and Maulana Masood Azhar. Upon being released, Pakistan's Inter-services Intelligence Directorate (ISI-D) escorted the terrorists to Pakistan.

The Inception of Jaish-e-Mohammad

On 31 January 2000, Azhar announced the formation of a new Deobandi terror group, Jaish-e-Mohammad. It would be comprised of members from other waning Deobandi militant groups such as Harkat-ul-Ansar, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami etc. It would retain close ties to the Deobandi Afghan Taliban as well as Deobandi terrorist groups murdering Shia, Ahmadis, Barelvis and non-Muslim minorities such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

The ISI would soon introduce this newly formed group into the Kashmir theater where it would introduce suicide bombings for



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It would become notorious for its 1 October 2001 vehicle-born suicide attack on the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly in Srinagar as well as the 13 December 2001 vehicle-born suicide attack on India's national parliament in New Delhi.

Also Read : [This Ramzan, Jaish-e-Muhammad's Taking Over Quack Medicine Market](#)



Splitting of JeM, Rise of Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan

Yet at the fag end of 2001—despite these “accomplishments—Azhar faced a rebellion in Karachi in a madrassah he considered his own. Most of his members were furious that then President and General Musharraf was facilitating the US invasion of Afghanistan to destroy the only Deobandi emirate of Sharia in that country, which the Taliban had worked to establish from 1994 onward with ISI help. Azhar's confederates wanted to turn on their Pakistani patrons. He disagreed and argued that Pakistani support was necessary to achieve the group's objectives.

Azhar's arguments fell on deaf ears. Most of the organization split, leaving him only the name of his group.



Most rallied under the name of Jamaat-ul-Furqan, which would bring the brutality of suicide attacks to Pakistan under the leader of Qari Hussain. This would be the first development which would eventually culminate in a rag-tag federation of Deobandi militant commanders which would coalesce under the banner of Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP) under the leadership of



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Also Read : [What Are India's Options with China Still Vague on Masood Azhar](#)

JeM Gaining ISI's Confidence

Azhar notified the ISI of the developments, a move which would endear him to the agency. The ISI used the parliament attack in



India to “arrest him” briefly, which was in truth a protective custody. For many years, the ISI invested in Masood Azhar helping him to re-establish the Jaish-e-Mohammad in his Southern Punjab base of Bahawalpur.

In 2008, this author saw a report (in Urdu) from the Bahawalpur police which documented his expanding empire. He freely roamed around conducting rallies, giving religious speeches and even publicized his various books.



In 2006, he and his ISI patrons irked the international community when his brother-in-law, Rashid Rauf (from Birmingham), sought to smuggle liquid bomb-making substances on to transatlantic airlines in effort to blow them up. Unsurprisingly Rauf “escaped” from Pakistani police custody and he would later plan the January 2016 Pathankot attack.

In 2009, the international press caught wind of these developments. The reason for ISI's investments in JeM were simple: the more Deobandi militants Azhar could ingather, the fewer would target Pakistan.



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Also Read : [What Does the Return of IED Attacks in Kashmir Mean for the Army](#)

Post Zarb-e-Azab, JeM Becomes ISI's Sword Arm

By 2014, Azhar would prove his worth. After months of advance warning, in June of 2014 the Pakistan army launched his



haphazard Zarb-e-Azab against the Pakistan Taliban. However, before doing so, it tried hard to rehabilitate its wayward proxies by christening them “good terrorists” once again. It offered them two routes to redemption.

First, they could go to Afghanistan and fight with the Taliban. The timing was perfect: they would be able to join forces with the Afghan Taliban to disrupt the 2014 presidential election in effort to ensure a victory by President Ghani, whom Pakistan preferred to Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.

Alternatively, it could rejoin the Jaish-e-Mohammad and kill Indians. These were the “ghar vapasi” programs of which they could avail. Those who demurred would not be spared.



In 2014, my interlocutors in Pakistan told me that they were observing a mustering of Jaish forces along the line of control. When Jaish-e-Mohammad launched the audacious attack on the airbase in Pathankot in January 2016: the only thing that surprised me was that the attack had come earlier than I had expected.

Since then, Jaish-e-Mohammad has become the sword arm of

name of Jamaat-ud-Dawa) engaged in efforts to battle Deobandi militants as well as the Islamic State and the ever pressing need to siphon off these Deobandi militants into ghar vapasi programs in Afghanistan and India, Jaish has become an invaluable strategic asset to the deep state once again. These developments once again attest to the simple fact that much of what Pakistan does outside of its territory is driven by its own compulsions.



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Also Read : [Pulwama Attack: Decoding JeM Threat, Azhar's 'Holy War' on India](#)

Through Pulwama Attack JeM Reclaims Initiative in the Subcontinent

The recent Pulwama attack is another example of the same. Pakistan has looked worryingly at its projects in Kashmir and elsewhere in India. The Islamic State and Al Qaeda Indian Subcontinent have sought to malign Pakistan and scorn Kashmiri and other Indian Muslims for their supine response to the rise of Hindutva politics in India. The emergence of brutal cow vigilante attacks, the demand to rebuild the Ram Mandir have not found a befitting response from the Muslim 'warriors'.

This attack involved the reintroduction of vehicle-born suicide attacks after a nineteen-year hiatus; the recruitment of a local Kashmiri boy for the attack instead of the tried and true Pakistani Punjabi, the pre-attack "shaheed" video and his message to Kashmiri and other Indian Muslims to step of their jihadi game. Hence, it can also be seen from the optic of Pakistan's equities: to reclaim the initiative and undermine the efforts of the Islamic State and Al Qaeda -Indian subcontinent.

Also Read : [Pulwama Attack: Modi Has No Choice But to Flex](#)



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Pakistan Wants to Ensure Another Modi Victory

However, these factors do not explain the timing of the attack. I argue that it has much to do with the election. Pakistan knows that Prime Minister Modi is facing a tighter race than he did five years ago and there is little doubt that Pakistan wants to ensure another Modi victory.





Nothing suits Pakistan's communal agenda like another Modi victory. His policies have animated the murderous proxies under Pakistan's nuclear umbrella.

They have also reassured Pakistanis that Muslims can never be safe in India and have bolstered the Pakistan army's claim that if left to civilian devices, pusillanimous civilians will seek peace with the country's national enemy.

The Pakistanis have given Modi a powerful opportunity to flex his chest muscles and bolster his support which has waivered in recent months. And given the audacity of the attack and calls for revenge, Modi has few options to play into Pakistan's cunning gamble.

(C. Christine Fair is the author of In Their Own Words: Understanding the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (OUP, Hurst: 2018) and Fighting to the End: the Pakistan Army's Way of War (OUP, 2014). She is a Provost's Distinguished Associate Professor at Georgetown University in the Security Studies Program. She tweets @CChristineFair. This is an opinion piece and the views expressed above are the author's own. The Quint neither endorses nor is responsible for the same.)



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