

## The 'British jihad' and the curves of religious violence

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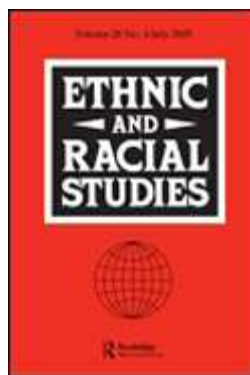
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**THE ‘BRITISH JIHAD’ AND THE CURVES OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE**

**ABSTRACT**

In exploring anti-civilian violence and alleged plots undertaken in the UK by small groups often termed ‘salafi-jihadi’ and popularly called ‘terrorists’, the essay attempts to present alternative routes of analysis. The violent events or (alleged) plots seen recently in the UK present a political and sociological form that is different to state-centric or transnational migrant politics, including political Islam and communitarian Muslim identity politics. The discussion of events in the UK extends to an analysis of a systematic pattern of association between small groups in the UK and Pakistani militias operating in Kashmir. The origins and ideologies of the militias are explored and the dynamics of the militia movements in relation to UK events are considered.

**KEYWORDS** Al Qaeda, terrorism, Dhiren Barot, Lashkar-e Tayyiba, Harakat-ul Mujahideen, Jaish-e Mohammed

## THE 'BRITISH JIHAD' AND THE CURVES OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

### INTRODUCTION

Dhiren Barot was born in India in 1971 and grew up in a *cul de sac* near the centre of Kingsbury, a dull north-west London suburb. Around 1992, he converted (reverted, he would say) to Islam, though whether he adopted a religion or embraced a political ideology is moot. In 2006, he pleaded guilty to planning a series of attacks targeting civilians in London using limousines filled with explosive fuels. Currently, he is an 'AA' high risk prisoner on a thirty year sentence without parole. Barot had argued that:

...any project that can be carried out in the UK [means] that it is extremely possible to transfer (the project) to other parts of the world (Inshalla). This is because security in the UK is probably the tightest in the world...the UK sets the benchmark (standard) for project feasibility / possibility (Allah s.w.t knows best).<sup>1</sup>

Barot is often described as the most significant Al Qaeda figure captured in the UK. Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, the so-called 'mastermind of 9/11', in a statement to the US Department of Defense Combatant Status Review Tribunal at Guantanamo Bay in March 2007, said he was responsible for the 'surveying and financing for the destruction of the New York Stock Exchange and other financial targets after 9/11'. These same targets were ones that Barot had undertaken surveillance of (US Department of Defense 2007, pp.18-19). Barot is also claimed to be the person named 'Issa al-Brittani' who Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, presumably following CIA interrogation that involved

waterboarding torture, said he sent to Malaysia and, under Bin Laden's direction, to the US in early 2001 (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004, pp. 150, 514).

Barot's treatise about his experiences as a fighter for a militia active in Kashmir is an important document widely circulated in the UK (Al-Hindi 1999). The book, written under the *kunya* of Esa al-Hindi, was published by a Birmingham bookshop, the Maktabah al-Ansar, an important source for the dissemination of so-called 'salafi-jihadi' material in the UK. His book exudes a piercing political sensibility, one occasionally poetic in it flourishes. His language as an operative is quite different:

Even in suicidal missions we might not live long enough to deliver a very highly radioactive RDD [radioactive dispersal device] that uses gamma-emitting sources and is not shielded. If we tried to protect ourselves by shielding the source, the weight of the RDD could significantly increase thereby increasing the difficulty of delivering the device and causing successful dispersion of the radioactive material.<sup>2</sup>

The formal register of this operational language is quite different from what is often seen as the irrational fanaticism of 'jihadis'. Barot openly calls his plans terrorist ones, intended to cause terror and chaos in London (unusually for this genre, he also refers to 'suicidal' actions.) The Madrid public transport bombings and the death of 191 commuters were considered by him to be a 'respectable' operation<sup>3</sup>.

As early as 1999, before the invasion of Iraq and the 2001 attacks in New York, Barot was promoting 'flank operations' that were to be undertaken in western countries using great stealth (Al-Hindi 1999, p.116-7). He was proposing *this* strategy in the late

1990s because of the awesome importance of Mullah Omar's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. For global visionaries who inhabited a specific political-intellectual universe, Taliban Afghanistan had world-historic significance. It was apprehended as a near perfect state and society by many like Barot and Omar Khyam, a central figure in the 2004 'fertiliser' bomb plot. It was also viewed as an ideal base for military training that had to be protected from western interference. Hence, the attention of key western countries had to be deflected away from Afghanistan through operations undertaken on their soil.

Can migrant politics or the politics of migration make sense of Dhiren Barot and the tendencies he represents? This *Special Issue* is about the political mobilization of migrant groups and the paths through which migrants do or do not become politically 'incorporated', 'integrated' or 'assimilated'. The absence of political 'incorporation' is not equivalent to a path towards political violence (as if the binary of democracy / terror completes all political possibilities, or sets apart two ideas that might be related in some circumstances.) However, it is unclear that nation-focused and state-centric approaches can properly account for non-violent transnational migrant politics, let alone the real and alleged plots to commit violence against formal civilians that we have seen recently.

If the paradigmatic events for migration studies are movements from the rural to the urban and from the 'periphery' to the west, Dhiren Barot's key journeys exemplify the exact opposite. These 'jihadi' journeys make sense because affiliates are 'integrated' and competently 'worlded'. This 'worlding' can be reliant on peripheral urban to peripheral rural migration that bypasses the cosmopolitan metropolitan experience; or it can be based in largely metropolitan settings, and in travel from and through them rather than migration to them<sup>4</sup>; or it can depend on the social competencies required to

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3 navigate global cities, the ‘developing’ megacity and the most economically peripheral of  
4 rural spaces. The social ‘worlds’ of Dhiren Barot’s included Britain, India, Pakistan and  
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6 Kashmir, but also Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and the US. The relevance of  
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8 migration and migrant politics recedes amidst these different modes of transnational  
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10 political competence and the new relations they make available or now engender –  
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12 including new associations between very large transnational military, security and police  
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14 institutions and the smallest of personal spaces in distant civil societies.  
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22 **ANALYTICAL ISSUES**  
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26 Since the London public transport bombings of 7 July 2005 by Mohammed Siddique  
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28 Khan, Shehzad Tanweer and others, there have been copious analyses of what is  
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30 characterised as ‘global terrorism’ and these dovetail with many post-2001 commentaries  
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32 on Al Qaeda and terrorism. The now common phraseology regarding ‘global terrorism’,  
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34 ‘terror networks’ or ‘global jihad’ is as evident in sober terrorism studies as it is in screeds  
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36 that fantasise ‘Londonistan’, ‘Eurabia’ or a civilizational war in which something called  
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38 ‘Islam’ is determined to annihilate the west. Similarly, ‘jihadi’ ideology is seen as  
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40 coextensive with action: the word of the fanatic has become the violence it conjures.  
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43 However, generalising approaches that invoke ‘global terrorism’ can elide many key  
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45 distinctions between movements, groups, tendencies, ideologies and regions, and can  
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47 become analytically pejorative in situations where specificity might be definitive. We  
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49 might summarize some of the sociological problems as follows.  
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56 *Topologies of omnipresence.* The spatial and organizational topology of the ‘global jihadi  
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58 movement’ are characterised in many inconsistent ways. It is a protean, shape-shifting  
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60 transnational entity that refuses to settle on any one organizational form, but it is also

characterised as a social movement (e.g Wiktorowicz 2003) or a network (e.g. Castells 2004), or an hierarchical organization with a clear identity (e.g. Gunaratna 2002); or it is a fluid and dynamic entity comprised of socially ephemeral units (e.g. Sageman 2004) but which is nevertheless politically and ideologically rigid and doctrinaire and has enduring parts; or it is an entity hidden within social interstices but can also be manifest – both covert and spectacular; or it is operationally highly competent, patient and sophisticated, or incompetent, amateur and relies on luck and determination; or it is an entity having clearly recognised boundaries; or it is a dispersed, cellular assemblage, both acephalous and polycephalous, locally autonomous and having no recognisable boundaries that distinguish it from the societies, religions or ‘civilizations’ in which it is manifest; or it has no existence except as a brand (‘Al Qaeda’) or franchise (Bergen 2002), an ideology (Burke 2004), a propaganda-media outfit (As-Sahab) or, simply, a metaphor that has causal powers across discontinuous times and spaces.

The *inability of current taxonomy* to describe convincingly the varieties of politicized religion or contain them within categorical boundaries (on this, see Roy 2004.) Hence, each tendency is considered *sui generis* (such as Al Qaeda) or compressed into a tripartite taxonomy (reformist, radical, revolutionary; moderate, radical, extremist; Islamist, salafi, salafi-jihadi.) Taxonomic problems proliferate, especially when south Asian political movements enter the analytical fray, and they usually do. Some analytical issues are a consequence of insufficient historical distance and an Al Qaeda-focused analysis starting from 2001 (such that the *significant* history of religious militias is taken to commence then) and working backwards into the Afghan jihad and the history of the Muslim Brotherhood or Wahhabi salafism from a perspective already settled by the 2001 events. This approach can generate an historical account overdetermined by ‘terror, terror, terror’ (Fisk 2006), one that necessarily solicits a distinctive political, ethical or emotional



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3 partiality. Taxonomic issues also reflect difficulties in ascribing ideological boundaries to  
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5 the phenomena. Thus, much discourse moves fluidly from political Islamists to  
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7 terrorists, from civilian resistance to military occupation to anti-civilian terrorism, from  
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9 hijab to human bomb. Boundary issues might be empirically real (a few ‘liberal’ Brelwi  
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11 movements also engage in sectarian violence and possess militias engaged in ‘jihad’), but  
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13 also reflect deeply political issues – for example, both Israel and India have developed  
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15 ferocious military strategies regarding colonized Palestine and Indian-controlled Kashmir  
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17 as part of the US-led ‘global war on terror’.  
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24 The *dominance of the network analogy* and the *assumption of organizational consonance*. The  
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26 overwhelming view is that there is a transnational *network* – a sociologically corrigible  
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28 ‘global terrorist network’ which penetrates diasporas in the west. The desire to impute  
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30 organizational consonance across the network is manifested in the plethora of terms (‘the  
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32 global jihadi movement’, ‘global terrorism’, ‘terror networks’) that attempt to describe a  
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34 unitary transnational entity, even if regional discriminations are subsequently elaborated.  
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37 The assumption that there exists a global network that demonstrates organizational  
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39 consonance and ideological familiarity can nourish a political view of a tentacular global  
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41 structure – or a high velocity phantasmatic *intensity* – that can strike civilians anywhere. It  
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43 is not obvious that a geosocial topology based on the ‘network’ is necessarily valid, and  
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45 its analytical use can displace other sociological dynamics, including non-linear  
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47 transnational ‘sovereignities’ and the involvement of shadow states and parastatal militia  
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49 combines (Bhatt 2007). Further, the network narrative of ‘global terrorism’ functions  
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51 partly because of the absence of data about the current form, capacity, intentions or  
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53 precise whereabouts of the genuine Al Qaeda. Alternatively, well-described empirical  
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55 instances are universalized, or very different ‘networks’, events, histories and regional  
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57 settings are conflated. The aim is often to demonstrate an association between events or  
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groups and Al Qaeda, either by showing a direct link, or by showing the involvement of a diverse armed groups that are designated by the US, UN, EU or UK as 'terrorist', and said to be 'Al Qaeda-linked' or 'related'. This is not to deny the existence of important transnational links, including ones to operatives who are incontrovertibly associated with Al Qaeda or who seek to accomplish major and horrifying atrocities.

*A definitive ideological lineage and the assumption of ideological familiarity.* The ubiquitous claim is of a definitive ideological genealogy that explains the phenomenon. The claim rests alongside the desire to attribute ideological familiarity to all 'jihadi' phenomena. The ideological lineage is seen to commence from the medieval al-Ghazzali and Ibn Taymiyya and travels via al-Wahhab to Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Abdullah Azzam and finally to Bin Laden via the interpolation of al-Zawahiri and the ideology of Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The influences are usually post-1960s salafism, post-1970s Muslim Brotherhood ideology and the Afghan jihad (though the Taliban or Deobandi sects are usually seen to contribute little independent *intellectual* content.) The influence of 'jihadi' ideology is characteristically imagined in viral, epidemiological terms. It is popularly seen to animate several 'jihadi personalities': the grimly calculating, the frenzied, the deprived, the damaged, the sexually aggravated and the brainwashed. Hence also, the adiaphoric personality transforming instantly into the hostile one manifesting a fanatical haemophilia that has something to do with concupiscence and repression, primordial revenge and death fantasy.

*The foregrounding of one type of political violence,* usually human bombs that target European and north American formal civilians. The focus on human bombs, martyrology and gross events (such as beheadings in Iraq and Afghanistan) can distance attention from the routine violence of religious armed groups and elide the wide forms of political,

gender-based and sectarian violence enacted by them in different circumstances. Similarly, the common doublet of ideas regarding ‘terrorism as tactic’ and ‘terrorism as spectacle’ for a mass mediated global audience, can displace other ways of understanding political violence that are not completed by analytical recourse to either instrumental rationality or fanatical totalitarianism. Anti-civilian political violence need not exemplify a strategy or tactic, but this also does not imply that it is simply the manifestation of a xenocidal ideology. (Additionally, it is not the commitment to a metaphysics of violence that is exceptional – numerous political tendencies, from varieties of neoconservatism to revolutionary Marxism and revolutionary feminism make an ideological pledge to some form of political violence against some formal civilians in some circumstances for the greater good of all humanity, even if the pledge is perpetually deferred.)

**ATERRITORIAL PARAMILITIAS**

Since the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and the 2005 London bombings, there have been important transformations in orientations towards political violence among many political Islamists, theological and political salafis and several important ‘salafi-jihadi’ clerics who formerly supported wider forms of political violence against civilians but have partially modified some of their former judgements. The latter significantly include major ‘salafi-jihadi’ clerics, such as the Jordanian Abu Mohammed Asim al-Maqdisi<sup>5</sup>, and the stern London-based Syrian advocate of jihad and *takfir*, Abu Basir al-Tartusi, who said after the London bombings, though with qualification, that martyrdom operations were closer to suicide, a sin (*As Sharq Al-Awsat* 27.08.2005; *As Sharq Al-Awsat* 01.09.2005).<sup>6</sup> Theological salafism has also come under pressure from Saudi Arabia, which has made a concerted global effort to present Wahhabism and salafism as equivalent to peace and contrary to ‘terrorism’. However, ‘terrorism’ and ‘innocence’

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3 have motile meanings. Hence, this Saudi effort routinely backfires because of the highly  
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5 sectarian xenologies of many Saudi Arabian and other Gulf clerics, as well as their  
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7 regularly ambiguous qualifications about different kinds of political violence.  
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12 More generally, the relations between ‘salafi-jihadi’ clerics and operatives has  
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14 transformed, often substantially and in many detailed ways and some themes can be  
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16 outlined here. The broadest field of ‘salafi-jihadi’ theological opinion on legitimate forms  
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18 of violence (including against Muslim and non-Muslim civilians, against women, children  
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20 and the elderly, through beheadings and other mutilations, by human bombs and though  
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22 insurgencies directed against states or formal civilian groups) is readily available.  
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25 Opinions are supplemented by a potent philosophical anthropology, now definitive of  
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27 several forms of salafism and ‘salafi-jihadism’, in which disavowal, enmity and  
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29 dissociation constitute the natural human dispensation and xenological solidarity a  
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31 natural condition (for example, Al-Fawzaan, 1997; Al-Qahtani, 1993). Even if  
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33 judgements are abrogated by clerics who initially gave them, the abrogation can be  
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35 dismissed as resulting from US or Saudi pressure. Operatives also readily make  
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37 theological opinions: as major respected clerics have receded, the distinction between  
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39 who is an operative and who a cleric has diminished, as has the difference – if there ever  
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41 was a clear difference – between a jurisprudential opinion, a political opinion and an  
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43 operational judgement. Somewhat in parallel, the strategic distinction between small  
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45 group acts against formal civilians and the incitement of popular violent insurgencies  
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47 against armed occupiers or other formal civilians is frequently blurred. Hence, committed  
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49 operatives do not necessarily require further theological legitimation for the  
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51 ‘uncontentious’ bulk of operations, including against civilians. While there are strong  
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53 countervailing trends that continue to appeal to the magical and supernal aspects of jihad  
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55 (for example, Al Sahli, 2003; Surur, not dated), the orientation of operatives has shifted  
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from the theological, mystical or miraculous to the rational, strategic and operational, and this can be seen as a declension of the theological. These factors do not mean religious jurisprudence is unimportant, but rather the relevant opinions are commonly understood to legitimise a wide field of operations against formal civilians, despite the prevalence of contrary religious opinions. Except for the most jurisprudentially contentious of acts, the choice between religious opinions is largely about political or strategic judgement rather than theology. Strategically, there is a range of evolving ideas, ranging from the imperative to generate insurgencies to autonomous, covert cellular structures or independent lone individuals operating in the west, as suggested by key ideologues such as Abu Musab as-Suri (Naji 2006; see also Lia 2007), or small groups making use of readily obtainable materials, as advocated by figures like Dhiren Barot.

**ONLY CONNECT**

These broader changes are relevant to the UK where there has been a string of high profile trials of those accused under expansive UK counter-terrorism legislation. Key trials have followed major police and security service operations. These include the massive Operations Crevise (the ‘fertilizer’ plot), Overt (the ‘transatlantic airline bombing plot’), Rhyme (the group associated with Dhiren Barot), Mazhar (an important Internet group), Overamp (a group from London, with connections to individuals from the failed 21 July 2005 London public transport bombings), Vivace (the latter failed bombings), Baguette (a Manchester group), Bivalve (an arrest at Luton airport) among numerous others. In 2007, there were 257 arrests related to terrorism legislation or associated offences, of which 126 individuals were released without charge (Carlile 2008, p.67.) From 11 September 2001 to 31 March 2007, there were 1,228 arrests related to terrorism legislation or related offences, of which 669 individuals were released without charge.<sup>7</sup> In

a few years, there may be up to a thousand such prisoners and their already evident political mobilization as ‘prisoners of war’ – the war being the ‘global war on terror’ – will become important. Alongside are vocal demands from some prisoners regarding racism, anti-Muslim prejudice, human rights and the physical attacks upon them by other inmates. One might foresee something approaching the shape of the ‘H-Block’ campaigns of the Provisional IRA during the 1970s and 1980s, if the currently small prisoner campaigns gain symbolic momentum. Comparisons have been made with ‘gang structures’, including those of sectarian Republican and Loyalist prisoners. Political demands have not just arisen from the prisoners themselves: Shehzad Tanweer, one of the July 2005 bombers, in a predictably slick video released in July 2006 by As-Sahab, Al Qaeda’s media wing, threatens an intensifying series of attacks in Britain unless it pulls its troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq, stops military and financial support to the US and Israel, and releases all Muslim prisoners from Belmarsh and ‘your other concentration camps’ (As-Sahab, 2006). Dhiren Barot has been attacked in prison with boiling oil and water and has complained bitterly about what he sees as the racism and Islamophobia he has faced from the criminal justice system and the media (Barot, 2007). Omar Khyam, convicted as the key organizer of the ‘fertilizer’ plot, has also been attacked, as have other Muslim prisoners.

Of importance is the extent to which suspects, evidence or events in separate trials, including current or pending trials, are reportedly associated (raising a range of ethical issues about research in this area.) Describing sociologically just the British links through terms such as ‘social movement’, ‘network’, ‘organization’ or ‘group’ is only partially sufficient and the network analogy undersupplies us with an convincing social topology of the UK ‘clusters’ and their transnational associations. If it is relatively uncomplicated to show a network of ‘clusters’, it is far less easy to demonstrate the

genuine significance of ‘the network’, coherence within it, systematic organization across it, or the relevance of key personalities in animating it. Personal and familial bonds, organizational associations, and co-presence at events, militia training camps, cities and villages are evident in various cases. Online associations are regularly demonstrated. However, the ‘clusters’ are not necessarily existing socio-political groups but ones made distinct through criminal investigations (the network made visible through forensic, criminal and legal process is not necessarily the same as the geosocial network.) Much of the apparent configuration of UK clusters has resulted from intelligence obtained from (and therefore managed and constrained by the exigencies of) Pakistan’s intelligence services, through the confessions of a few key individuals or through confessions obtained through torture.

Other important aspects remain to be described accurately: changing transnational ‘jihadi’ pathways (especially post-2003), the anthropology of the militia and ideological camps and their substantial variety, the nature of different courses of instruction and training (though some of this is well known), the role of rural guides, instructors and camp *amirs*, the significance of peripatetic mercenaries, financial exchange, and other dynamics related to inter-militia relations. Virtually unremarked is the dense and sophisticated *aesthetic* universe created by religious militias. The aesthetic dimensions vary regionally but include consistent themes, motifs, lilt, nasheed, calligraphy, poetry and images.

Some information relevant to the UK is necessarily curtailed here and is described using public sources. But it is more accurate to speak of disparate ‘operational’ and propaganda ‘clusters’ in the UK, some of which overlap others, some of which show tenuous links with other ‘clusters’ or individuals, others which are (or currently appear to



be) relatively independent, and others which show an indirect relation through the co-presence of individuals at common events in the UK (though the latter regularly lead to an overemphasis on Al Muhajiroun and the Supporters of Sharia.) Several key clusters demonstrate associations with each other via (the mediation of) Pakistani militias operating in Kashmir. Direct associations with 'Al Qaeda' have been either shown or regularly alleged, as in the 2005 bombings and the 'fertiliser', the 2006 transatlantic airline, the 2007 Birmingham 'Muslim soldier beheading' plots and the 2007 Glasgow airport attack. However, what is meant by 'Al Qaeda' can be a figure from a militia operating in Kashmir. Some clusters are small and tight, others sprawling and unbounded, vanishing into quotidian sociality. If one can speak of a prominent ideological shape, it includes the importance attached to Kashmir (and symbolically, Palestine), the attacks on Afghanistan, the 2002 Gujarat carnage, and the ideologies of Pakistani militias. Of key significance are ideological groups organised around (now former) key bookshops in the UK. In addition to the symbolic standing of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden, the late al-Zarqawi and the late Ibn al-Khattab (today's Che Guevara), key inspirational figures include Abdullah Azzam, Masood Azhar, Hafiz Mohammed Saeed, Mohammed al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada, but there is a very wide range of other figures exemplifying a diverse ideological universe. Some political and highly technical material is ubiquitous.

The diversity of the UK clusters, their relative unboundedness and the nature of their international associations are illustrated by briefly considering three real or alleged plots though, as we see, one plot quickly segues into others. Some of those arrested during Operation Crevise (the 'fertilizer' plot) have been associated with the 7 July 2005 bombers and with two others later arrested and charged in relation to the latter. These associations between the July 2005 bombings and the fertilizer plot focus on Mohammed



Siddique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer's associations with some of the Crevice plotters in the UK. Individuals associated with the London bombings were also at camps in Mansehra or Malakand reportedly at the same time as individuals associated with the Crevice plot. Mohammed Siddique Khan of the 7 July London bombings and Mukhtar Said Ibrahim of the failed 21 July 2005 bombings were also associated via a training camp abroad, and the latter was also associated with another recently convicted UK-based group. Members of the 21 July failed plot were also reportedly associated with others in south London. Hence, both through the Crevice group and the '7/7' bombers, the associations expand in many disparate directions. Characteristically, as shown in the Crevice trial, online communications involved dummy Yahoo accounts and draft email documents were used for communication.

Both the '7/7' and Crevice clusters relate to religious militias operating in Kashmir. It is important to register the political potency of Kashmir for UK citizens whose parents or grandparents may have come from south Asia. Kashmir's 'liberation' is comprehensively entwined with secular Pakistani nationalism and regional Muslim religious absolutism. Kashmir is similarly prominent in secular Indian and Hindu religious nationalism. If 'Kashmir' bears symbolic power of considerable magnitude, this can intensify communal dynamics among south Asians in the UK. It can also lead to the view that partaking of armed 'jihad' in Kashmir is a noble venture, irrespective of whether the venture is religious or secular. Omar Khyam, whose immediate family is secular, was said by him to have held a celebration for him because of his involvement with groups active in Kashmir (his extended family in Pakistan included staff in the military and intelligence services who found him at a camp and brought him home.) Dhiren Barot's book is about his experiences in Kashmir and eulogises the Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT), the most powerful militia operating in Kashmir. Barot's book also speaks

highly of the Harakat-ul Ansar, Harakat-ul Mujahideen (HuM) and Al-Badr, militias operating in Kashmir that range from Deobandi to Islamist.

Another sprawl of associations between primarily propaganda clusters demonstrates an alternative topology. Following Operation Mazhar, Younis Tsouli from Ealing and two associates were convicted in 2007 for inciting others to commit acts of terrorism (*Economist* 12.07.2007). Tsouli, under the name 'irhabi007' ('irhabi' meaning 'terrorist', '007' referring to a fictional drinking and womanizing secret agent of the British state, an unusual coalescence of ambitions), had been active in numerous online activities. He was also said to be associated with Al Qaeda's military affiliate in Iraq and published al-Zarqawi's propaganda (*Guardian* 5.07.2007). Tsouli was initially arrested because of phone records obtained during the arrest of a Swedish man in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An online associate of Tsouli's group was said to have attempted to smuggle plans for a rocket launcher (a Hamas Qassam rocket) into the UK. Other online associates are linked to activities in the US, Canada and elsewhere.

One association leads to At-Tibyan, an important (if intriguing) online publisher of English language translations of key 'salafi-jihadi' texts. At-Tibyan's theopolitical material provides a wide field of 'salafi-jihadi' judgements of the kind described earlier (though it has so far avoided publicising the more visceral judgements.) Another group of UK individuals has been associated with At-Tibyan in a legal case. At-Tibyan has also published material which was formerly to be published by Azzam.com, a website run by Babar Ahmed (among others) who is facing extradition to the US. Babar Ahmed's case relates to connections that range from the US to Chechnya (USA v. Babar Ahmad 2004, p.9). Since its closure, Azzam.com's material has been published by the Maktabah al-Ansar bookshop in Birmingham, which also published Dhiren Barot's book on Kashmir.

The bookshop was reportedly co-owned by Moazzam Begg, who contemplated Taliban Afghanistan as a desirable holiday destination for his family, was held captive at Guantanamo Bay and later released. An individual who worked at the bookshop was arrested and later released without charge in relation to the 2007 Birmingham ‘Muslim soldier beheading’ plot. This latter plot reportedly links to militias operating in Kashmir; it also relates to the shipping of equipment to Afghanistan, a theme in several cases. These connections can be expanded much further in several directions and from various ‘nodes’, generating a sprawl of assemblages for which the network or the movement analytic seem like overdescriptions.

A third series of associations can be considered, starting with the ‘transatlantic airline liquid bomb’ plot in 2006. The arrest of Rashid Rauf in Pakistan led to the UK arrests, enormous alarm across the Atlantic and the creation of new hand-luggage rules concerning liquid products (*Independent* 19.08.2006). Of significance in this (and several other) plots were the numerous ‘martyrdom’ videos that individuals had produced. The language of political retribution and reprisal permeates these videos, as it does those of the July 2005 bombers, and this requires an explanation that moves beyond primitive vengeance. This plot also led to associations with militias in Pakistan and Afghanistan, including the important Jaish-e Mohammed militia operating in Kashmir.

Significantly, the connections vanish into the fog of military-militia dynamics in Pakistan. For example, Rashid Rauf was initially characterised in Pakistan as a key ‘Al Qaeda figure’ and allegedly associated with various UK plots. However, he managed to walk free from police custody (*Dawn* (Karachi), 18.12.2007) though he is now thought to have been killed in a US drone airstrike in North Waziristan. Similarly, Mohammed Naeem Noor Khan, a complex ‘key Al Qaeda’ figure from Pakistan, whose arrest led to

the arrests of Dhiren Barot, Babar Ahmed and others, was released without charge in Pakistan (*Observer* 08.08.2004; *Guardian* 23.08.2007.) This recurring pattern, which applies in a different way in the case of Omar Saeed Sheikh (below), is incorrigible unless the shadow state, the secret state and their associations with the ‘militia swarm’ are included in the pattern of transnational connections. The smoke and mirrors in the way the Pakistani military and intelligence services manage the militias are an essential attribute of the sociological description.

### THE DYNAMICS OF THE ‘JIHADI CORRIDOR’

Hence, virtually every major plot or operation in the UK is associated with paramilitary or explosives training by Pakistani militias operating in Kashmir, or to training visits associated with Kashmir or Afghanistan. The future relevance of this pattern of militia training is unclear, in the sense that training abroad is not necessarily a requisite for further attacks. However, the pattern of militia training can be seen as a sociological space that is called here, for convenience, a ‘jihadi corridor’ from the UK to Pakistan. It is one of several ‘corridors’ that have existed from Britain to other countries. A key one, which remains surrounded by considerable speculation, was the progenitor UK ‘convoy of mercy’ to Bosnia in the 1990s that also lead to the development of further patterns of travel from the UK to Chechnya. Other ‘corridors’ linked the UK to Pakistan and then Afghanistan (through the Bosnia route, or directly.)

If we consider the ‘corridors’ as sociological spaces, then their disruption or change can have significant consequences. The exigencies within Pakistan – diverting returning militants from Afghanistan to Kashmir in the early 1990s, but also the subsequent impact within Pakistan from militias active in Kashmir – were noted by

figures like Dhiren Barot. One argument is that operations shifted to the UK after 2001 because the ‘corridor’ from Pakistan to Afghanistan (more an expressway during the 1990s) became progressively curtailed for foreigners and the ‘corridor’ from Pakistan- to Indian-controlled Kashmir, which cannot exist without military knowledge and connivance, was compromised after the nuclear brinkmanship between India and Pakistan following the Kargil episode during 1998-1999 (see also Abbas 2005). There is also evidence that individuals associated with Al Qaeda directed individuals to commit acts in the UK following the Iraq invasion (Burke 2008), seen as the last straw, as reported in the Operation Crevise trial. This does not explain why activities started in the UK before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, including the Wood Green ricin plot (2002-3) or the involvement of Richard Reid and Saajid Badat in the failed ‘shoe bomber’ plot (2001). Nor does it explain why individuals from the UK were regularly attending training in south Asia and returning home without fighting abroad well before 2003.

Evidence for the training of British citizens by Pakistani militias operating in Kashmir is consistent. Mohammed Siddique Khan reportedly trained in a Harakat-ul Mujahideen (HuM) camp in Mansehra district in the summer of 2001 with others from the UK (*Guardian* 21.05.08, 22.05.08.) Shehzad Tanweer reportedly received training from a ‘Jaish-e Mohammed camp’ (JeM) near Islamabad and both Siddique Khan and Tanweer reportedly met with Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT) (*Guardian* 01.08.05; *Daily Times* (Lahore) 17.07.2005). During the Crevise trial, two individuals reportedly the same as Siddique Khan (‘Ibrahim’) and Tanweer (‘Zubair’) went to a training camp in Malakand district, Pakistan. Visits to training camps run by HuM and LeT (among others) were described during the Crevise trial. During this trial, Omar Khyam interestingly dismissed the LeT as linked to the Pakistani intelligence services. Also of significance was the seemingly disordered way a group paid for training to be organised by a *maulvi* and his

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‘militia’, reflecting the relative ease with which this was possible and its contingent nature. Mukhtar Said Ibrahim, of the failed 21 July 2005 bombings, reportedly attended an HuM training camp in Pakistan. He also attended the same training camp as Mohammed Siddique Khan in North Waziristan agency (*Guardian* 12.07.07). Rashid Rauf, one of the plotters in the ‘transatlantic airline plot’ in 2006 (among others) was associated with Masood Azhar of the Jaish-e Mohammed militia operating in Kashmir, and was reportedly a member of a splinter from the latter. The association with Masood Azhar included family ties between Rauf and Azhar (*The Post* (Pakistan) 27.07.2007; *International Herald Tribune* 18.12.2007; *Guardian* 28.01.2008). A series of arrests in Pakistan that precipitated the UK ‘airline plot’ arrests included allegations of connections to Matiur Rehman of the Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ) (*Observer* 13.08.06). Other militias have also been implicated. These connections do not preclude direct associations with individuals in Al Qaeda, which have reportedly included Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi, Abu Obaidah al-Masri, Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, Abu Suleiman al-Jazairi, and individuals such as Mohammed Naeem Noor Khan, Dhiren Barot, Mohammed Junaid Babar and named others living in the UK and Europe.

## THE PAKISTANI ‘MILITIA SWARM’

While ‘Al Qaeda’ and the ‘resurgent Taliban’ remain in that order the key symbols in the demonology associated with religion, a third ‘actor’, the Pakistani religious militia swarm, has been largely evaded in analyses outside south Asia (Mir 2004; Abou Zahab & Roy 2004; Abbas 2005; Rana 2005; Swami 2007; Hussain 2007.) Also significant is the impact that alliances between militias might have regionally and internationally. Sometimes, the militias merge or work together as militia combines such that it is unclear whether they are separate entities, or are distinct from what is called ‘Al Qaeda’. Conversely, what is

often referred to as ‘Al Qaeda’ is often these militia organizations. Another key dimension relates to militant regional movements referred to collectively as ‘the Pakistan Taliban’ and which inhabit the same geographical space as that used by Al Qaeda fighters (the two tribal agencies of Waziristan) or by the militias already discussed (Swat and other parts of NWFP.)

Al Qaeda’s ‘International Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders’, initiated by Bin Laden in 1998, now includes five Pakistani militias: LeT, HuM, JeM, Harakat-ul Jihadi-i Islami (HuJI) and Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ). Notwithstanding the Indian government’s sustained propaganda, the LeT reportedly ran the alliance following the US-led attacks on Afghanistan and Al Qaeda after 2001 (*Times of India* 12.08.2006; Raman 2005; *Asia Times Online* 12.08.2004.) While key Pakistani militias are members of Al Qaeda’s International Islamic Front, future militia assemblages might have the potential to become its symbolic competitors. The ‘Brigade 313’ and ‘Lashkar-e Omar’ alliances variously included LeT, JeM, LeJ, the interesting Harakat-ul Mujahideen al-Alami / Jundullah group and HuJI. Such combines represent a highly dynamic militia version of a sectarian Ahl-e Hadis – Deobandi political alliance, one now complicated by other regional militant movements (‘the Pakistani Taliban’). Sections of the Pakistan government, military or secret state have, at different times, actively fostered (rival) militia movements. At other times they are banned but allowed to operate relatively freely under a new name (LeT / Jamaat-ud Dawa / Falah-e Insaniyat Foundation, JeM / Khuddam-ul Islam). At other times still the militias have been at virtual war with sections of the state or government.

The background of the main militias is important to address briefly since, in one sense, they have regularly contained some British links. The first mainly Pakistani militia



fighting during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was the Harakat-ul Jihad-ul Islami (HuJI). This was formed in 1980 by the Jamiat Ulama-e Islami (JUI), a national federation of Deobandi clerics (a faction of which created the Taliban movement), and the Tablighi Jamaat, the transnational missionary organization misleadingly considered apolitical and quietist (Mir 2004, p. 117; Sikand 2003). A major offshoot of HuJI was the Harakat-ul Mujahideen (HuM), formed in 1985, which is also associated with Tablighi sections. In the early 1990s, HuJI, HuM and another militia merged under the name Harakat-ul Ansar (HuA). One of its key leaders and a formidable ideologue was Masood Azhar. His publications, tapes and CDs circulated widely in the UK during the 1990s and he visited the UK on several speaking and fundraising tours. Azhar's writings and speeches, including *Zaad-e Mujahid* (Khubaib Sahib not dated) an ideological book for mujahideen on preparation for 'jihad', written while in jail in India, and his *The Virtues of Jihad* (Azhar not dated) are widely available in Britain (possession of the former was important in a further conviction emerging from the July 7 bombings.)

Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, a British public schoolboy and LSE student, while on a 'convoy of mercy' to Bosnia in the early 1990s, become involved with the Harakat-ul Ansar (Mir 2004, pp.56-66). Masood Azhar of the HuA was arrested in Indian-controlled Kashmir in 1994 and Omar Saeed Sheikh was later arrested in India for plotting to kidnap westerners in order to force the Indian government to release Azhar. Following the hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight in 1999, supposedly by an 'HuA' front group, Masood Azhar and Omar Saeed Sheikh were released and returned to Pakistan. One of the hijackers was Amjad Farooqi who became a key figure in the Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ), the militia offshoot of Sipah-e Sahaba (SSP), an extremely violent sectarian organization in Pakistan that turned to massacring Shia leaders in Kashmir (Abbas 2005, p. 208.) In a very important sense, the SSP's violence established



a key precedent for many of the tendencies described in this essay. On release, Masood Azhar announced the formation of the Jaish-e Mohammed (JeM). Like the LeT, the Jaish-e Mohammed is a massive *social, political* and *militia movement*. Omar Saeed Sheikh was convicted for the kidnapping and murder by beheading in 2002 of the *Washington Post* journalist, Daniel Pearl, who was investigating the involvement of Richard Reid, the failed UK shoe bomber, with these militias and with the Tablighis (*Guardian* 23.02.2005; *USA versus Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh* 2002; *Mariane Pearl versus Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh and others* 2007). Amjad Farooqi, now dead, was named as involved in the murder, and Khaled Sheikh Mohammed said that he beheaded Daniel Pearl. The various tendencies that culminated in this murder show, perhaps emblematically, the early involvement of individuals from the UK, the convergence of several ideological and sectarian groups, the presence of militias independent of Al Qaeda and individuals from the latter.

The militias are politically rather than just militarily definitive: several Deobandi groups during and in the aftermath of the Afghan jihad had developed a powerful ‘global’ ideology. For example, the Jaish-e Mohammed’s motto is ‘jihad against the infidels and struggle against infidelity to faith [i.e. against other Muslims]’ (Azhar, quoted in Rana 2005, p.225.) In this curt statement, Azhar’s ideology illustrates two key dynamics: firstly, the tripartite struggle – locally in Indian-controlled Kashmir, against India itself (to ‘reclaim’ it as ‘Muslim territory’ that was once part of the ‘Caliphate’), and planet-wide to establish God’s justice and truth everywhere; secondly the need to discipline Muslims ‘internally’ while fighting unbelief ‘externally’. These south Asian ‘global’ ideologies cannot be viewed as unsystematic and disorganised in comparison with the lineage of violent salafism arising from Saudi Arabia and Egypt from the 1970s, nor are the former a simple consequence of the latter. (Distinctively, they contain the idea of a Hindu-Zionist-Crusader alliance encircling and threatening Muslims globally.)

This argument also applies in the case of the most powerful Pakistani militia, the Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT), an offshoot of one sect of the Ahl-e Hadis movement in Pakistan and so ideologically closer to Wahhabism. The LeT was created by Hafiz Saeed in 1990 as the military wing of the Markaz-ud Dawa wal Irshad founded by him and the late Abdullah Azzam, a Muslim Brotherhood figure who is usually portrayed as bin Laden's political mentor. Like HuJI, the progenitor Deobandi militia, the LeT from its inception was operating beyond Kashmir, Afghanistan and Pakistan. LeT members have been found in Chechnya, China, India<sup>8</sup>, Bosnia, south-east Asia and recently in Iraq (Mir 2004, pp.104-5; Rana 2005, p.334). LeT fundraisers have been active in the UK for many years. Allegations have been made that LeT and JeM activists in the UK formed an important first step in the 'jihad corridor' to Pakistan, Kashmir and Afghanistan, and the LeT has been directly implicated in the training of individuals from the UK. Ideologically, the LeT makes little distinction between its desire to plant 'the flag of Islam' in Delhi, London and Washington and its struggle in Kashmir. India, but also Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists are key symbols in its demonology. Similarly, the idea that killing Americans, 'looting their wealth' and 'enslaving their women' was permissible, since they were infidels warring against Islam and Muslims, was well-established among Ahl-e Hadis or Deobandi militias by the early 1990s and did not require Al Qaeda's interpolation.

During the 1990s, religious militias in south Asia spoke not just of the Afghan, Kashmir, Chechnyan or Bosnian jihad but the idea of jihad in an abstract sense, one linked to a planetary struggle against *kufr* and *kaffir*, or to a cosmic struggle to establish God's truth and justice worldwide and to save the entire humanity from *kufr*. The political language inverts the order of priorities: the Kashmir jihad becomes important

because of the anterior necessity of ‘global jihad’. There is therefore an interesting set of dialectics between the territory of the planet, all the lesser ‘Caliphate territory’ conceived to be historically ‘Muslim’ and apparently having borne the law and footprint of the believer (Roy 2004, p.112), and the regional struggle against military occupation. The Kashmir jihad is coextensive with the jihad to ‘reclaim’ all of India, which is equivalent to the jihad to establish planetary peace under God’s law.

**CONCLUSION**

The ‘geographical’ movement from a north-west London suburb to Pakistani militia movements operating in Kashmir highlights elements of a sociological process and a political form that governs those who aspire to become involved with a territorial religious absolutist paramilitias. The novel connections between British youths and Pakistani militias operating in Kashmir and Afghanistan reflect a militarized political association between very small groups in the ‘diaspora’, militias abroad, and elements of the shadow state. Through their travels, a small group of young British men have enabled a range of associations between youths in the UK and militias abroad. Their movements have engendered new associations between international military and security apparatuses, groups in the ‘diaspora’ and a variety of states and parastatal bodies, associations that will spawn new political dynamics long after the ‘global war on terror’ is over. This situation adds an altogether different dimension to the ‘politics of the diaspora’, since militias largely created and partially managed by the Pakistani secret state have trained British youths who want to undertake anti-civilian operations in the UK. It is a highly contentious but moot point whether Al Qaeda’s agency was necessary for the major plots or operations in the UK. As the new US administration, with British assistance, undertakes more intensive and direct military assaults within Pakistan’s

sovereign territory, other potent communal dynamics, converging with secular-nationalist ones, will proliferate.

It has become possible for many to apprehend ‘salafi-jihadi’ politics solely through the perspective of resistance to military occupation or the exigencies of a war situation. But consider these words of Masood Azhar, leader of the Jaish-e Mohammed:

...it is to express to the unbelievers that all Muslims are like one body, so to touch or cause harm to any part of the body is like challenging the whole body.

Similarly, to lift the hand against a Muslim’s life, wealth or honour is similar to challenging the whole nation of the Muslims. (Azhar not dated, p. 132.)

This philosophy of unconstrained spatial and temporal consequentialism may converge with that of Al Qaeda but is also independent of it. It takes each individual on the planet as in principle embodying responsibility for actions and consequences anywhere and anywhen. Rather than the dehumanization of the enemy that ‘salafi-jihadis’ are regularly accused of, it is a recognition of fully human political capacity. It is not that concerns about genuine military occupations are removed from this latter political form, but that they are intended to make sense only in that form. This is quite different from the formalities of political Islamist or communitarian Muslim identity politics in the UK. It demonstrates instead a desire by a small virtuous group to usurp the law of humanity and settle upon a precise identification between *cosmos* and *nomos* (Arendt, 1973). Key ideas about virtue (the ‘character of character’) and approbation (akin to the honouring of moral character) recur in ‘salafi-jihadi’ discourse. A politics of virtue and character can exist relatively unbridled by the impersonal rule-imperative forms of ‘the political’ that are otherwise hosted by modernity. These ideas of virtue and approbation have

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remained the ‘dangerous supplement’ as well as the heady companion to normative modern political forms based on abstract judgement and impersonal procedure. They equally show considerable distance from domestic and transnational ‘migrant’ politics typically based on rights, distribution and recognition: if the secular father was arrested for making petrol bombs in anticipation of an attack by neo-Nazis or racist police in the midst of violent urban events occurring nationally, the anti-secular son is arrested for wanting to cause explosions among civilians for reasons that are at once secular and are a product of a political religion, one in which the worlds of the living have become mixed up with the worlds of the dead.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> 'Rough presentation for Gas Limos project', chapter 4, page 16. Document attributed to Dhiren Barot and obtained from computers searched during Operation Rhyme.

<sup>2</sup> 'Final presentation', page 3. Document attributed to Dhiren Barot and obtained from computers searched during Operation Rhyme.

<sup>3</sup> 'Rough presentation for Gas Limos project', page 35. Document attributed to Dhiren Barot and obtained from computers searched during Operation Rhyme.

<sup>4</sup> It is not an accident that a key media organiser for Al Qaeda and an important communicator of its ideas is Adam Pearlman, a 'white' American of part-Jewish, part-Christian parentage. It would thwart current 'profiling' measures in Europe and America if future attacks are undertaken by white, female or mixed groups with no south Asian or middle-Eastern members directly involved in the attack itself.

<sup>5</sup> Maqdisi's writings are available at [www.tawhed.ws](http://www.tawhed.ws) / [www.almaqdesse.net](http://www.almaqdesse.net), including his *Hadhibi Aqeedatuna* and *Millat Ibrahim*.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.en.altartosi.com/suicide.htm#B>. Tartusi's statement of creed is at <http://www.en.altartosi.com/Creed.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/security/terrorism-and-the-law/>, accessed 29 June 2008.

<sup>8</sup> The massacre of civilians in Bombay in November 2008 was undertaken by the LeT, which has also previously attacked the Indian Parliament and the Red Fort in Delhi.