The Caliphate Project and the Kashmir Conflict

by **Rajiv Malhotra** (July 2025)

Individual Moslems may show splendid qualities—but the

influence of the religion paralyses the social development of those who follow it. No stronger retrograde force exists in the world. —Winston S. Churchill, *The River War*

Introduction

It is difficult to avoid noticing that many conflicts in different corners of the world involve Islam. As Samuel Huntington pointed out a generation ago, Islam has bloody borders the world over. And no matter how the designated enemies may differ from one another, the issues among Muslim fighters—both the ideology and the rhetoric—are remarkably similar. Were these merely local secular clashes of territorial rivalries, as most Western observers tend to assume, or do we need to look deeper? Instead of playing out as independent conflicts, however, one even finds shared leadership training camps at both physical and online sites as well as shared financial and political support; and even many of the boots on the ground are transnational.

Are all these conflicts merely remarkable coincidences? Are the various conflicts indeed separate and independent issues that put Muslims around the world at odds with their neighbors, or are they local manifestations of a larger, consistent global phenomena.

A mere correlation of disparate situations could be coincidental and does not prove a causal relationship. But, given how many and how pervasive these Muslim–infidel conflicts are around the world, such correlations should certainly provoke a deeper inquiry into the *possibility* of some global forces or shared myths that could be driving many of these flareups.

This article investigates a completely different diagnosis of Islam's conflicts with others. It proposes that the key factor driving these conflicts could be Islam's deep-rooted

aspiration (subliminal or explicit) for re-establishing a global *Caliphate*. The idea of a Caliphate—a theocratic Islamic government under a single ruler (Caliph) who serves as both a political and religious leader of the Muslim world—stems from Islamic history and theology and was derived from a combination of Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet).

A Caliphate is an Islamic global political system superseding and overriding all national and ethnic boundaries. The law of a Caliphate must be Sharia, as set by Allah and the Prophet Mohammad, and this overrides all man-made laws. The Muslim term for the rule of the Caliphate is *Dar al-Islam*: the realm of submission (to Allah), and the term for infidels in that realm is *dhimmi*, as those both legally and socially inferior to Muslims.

In its 1,450-year history, Islam has been ruled by a Caliphate (i.e., Islamic theocracy) almost all the time for the first 1,350 years. Only in the past hundred years, since the Ottoman empire was dismantled in 1924, has there been a long period with no Caliphate. Islam's grand narrative sees the Caliphate as the desired state of triumphalism.

I use the term *Caliphate Project* to refer to a variety of campaigns whose combined effect is to encourage a unified Islamic political assertiveness worldwide. This is a powerful religious movement led by holy warriors bent on the extermination of their demonized enemies and the conversion or subjugation of the infidel world. The Muslim term for the nations that are as yet not part of Dar al-Islam is *Dar al-Harb*, the realm of the sword (warfare), and infidels in that realm are *harbis*, those destined to the sword.

The term *Caliphatists* refers to those who directly or indirectly subscribe to the Caliphate Project in any form. A Caliphatist is a Muslim who believes that a global Caliphate should arise to subject all infidels to Sharia. Such a person is invested in this grand mission to unify all Muslims and

overthrow non-Islamic laws and nation-states.

This article problematizes the Caliphate Project and Caliphatists and does not accuse all Muslims or Islam of these imperialist drives. Indeed, there are many Muslims who reject this project, and they find themselves attacked by the hardliners. It is important not to alienate the Muslims but to isolate the Caliphatists and thereby encourage the liberal Muslims to shut down transnational terror networks that victimize innocent infidels and Muslims alike.

This article cites numerous surveys showing that support for a Caliphate varies from 33% among British Muslims to an average of 66% of Muslims in Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and Indonesia. Support for Sharia as the law of the land is even higher, more than 75% in most Muslim majority countries, including Pakistan. Clearly, this aspiration impacts all non-Muslims worldwide.

Given this body of evidence, it seems plausible that the variety of conflicts around the world can be explained (at least in part) as local manifestations of the Caliphate Project. My exploration is based on citing Islam's own holy texts, the centuries-long history of Caliphates, and the views of Muslims today in Muslim majority countries.

Even if this thesis is only partially true, and the Caliphate Project is one among multiple factors, it would call for a wider approach to analyzing conflicts, and a new and courageous approach to policymaking. This would generate a radically new kind of conversation with open minds that, unfortunately, most people presently want to avoid. It is ill advised to ignore the Caliphatist's ideologies, and to project secular wishful thinking and a non-Islamic value system to interpret their long-cherished aspirations.

The problem is the complete denial of such a phenomenon even though it is the elephant in the room as this article shall

demonstrate. Secularists have blocked such a thesis from consideration, and their posture is an enabler of the syndrome we are discussing, because it provides cover for the Caliphatists.

Those who dare speak up with evidence to present such a thesis are muzzled by the cancel culture today and declared Islamophobic. Caliphatists and Leftist "progressives" eager to avoid the slightest suspicion of prejudice, have united to assert ownership of the public sphere to control the discourse on Islam. They intimidate anyone attempting to connect the evidence in any fresh, imaginative, and more accurate way.

To make real progress in resolving these conflicts, it is important to evaluate such a diagnosis with an open mind, and to invite people across the ideological spectrum to discuss one of the root causes of global conflicts. Many Islamic Initiatives—such as Jizya (a tax historically levied on non-Muslims living under Islamic rule), Halal food certification (compliance with Islamic dietary laws and scriptural mandates that have started dominating the food supply chain even for non-Muslims), Islamic banking (Islamic laws pertaining to money), and even social issues such as the Pakistani grooming gangs in the UK—are frequently interpreted as isolated incidents/initiatives driven by localized interests. However, this view underestimates their strategic coherence. These measures are, in fact, integral to the broader geopolitical grand narrative of the Caliphate project with a long-term vision of influence, expansion and control. They represent the infrastructural foundations of a systematic effort to entrench Islam's presence globally and reshape regional and global power dynamics in the Caliphate project's favor. These are major topics beyond the scope of this introductory article.

As a case study, I will show that the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan cannot be understood properly by reducing it to a secular border dispute. Rather, it is being driven by the global jihadi forces whose stated agenda is to establish

Sharia law. The global jihadis use local vulnerabilities and tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims to ignite conflicts and bring in transnational jihadi fighters from a variety of Muslim countries for their common cause. The funding for this enterprise is also global as is the ideology, training, weapons, and political support.

Unfortunately, this dimension of many of these conflicts, most recently the India-Pakistan conflict has been slipped under the rug out of fear and for the sake of political correctness. But such suppression helps to camouflage jihad as a merely secular territorial conflict. This is the cover under which the jihadi networks proliferate quietly until they find opportunities to erupt.

Part 1: Project for an Islamic World Order

Islamic Caliphate

The Quran, though not explicitly prescribing a Caliphate as a political system, has frequently cited verses compelling all Muslims to have unity, leadership, and common governance. For example, Surah Al-Imran (3:103) urges all Muslims everywhere to "hold fast to the rope of Allah and do not be divided," which is interpreted as a call for political unity under a Caliph. Surah An-Nisa (4:59) commands obedience to "those in authority among you," which is interpreted as support for a centralized Islamic leadership.

The Hadith provides stronger support for the Caliphate, with several sayings of the Prophet emphasizing it. A well-known Hadith states, "Whoever dies without having pledged allegiance (to a Caliph) dies a death of ignorance." (Sahih Muslim, Book 20, Hadith 4562).

Early Islamic scholars in the Sunni tradition developed the concept of the Caliphate as a necessary institution to uphold

Islamic law (Sharia) and maintain the unity of the Muslim community (Ummah). (In Shia Islam, the concept of leadership differs, focusing on divinely appointed Imams rather than an elected Caliph. But the results are the same: the rule of Islam.)

The Caliphate's legitimacy is heavily based on the example of the Rashidun Caliphs (the first four successors to Muhammad: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, ruling 632–661 CE). Their leadership (despite the constant internal strife) is considered a model of good governance. The continued conquests to the east and the west, galvanized the project to create the Caliphate as a divinely sanctioned institution. This was followed by the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750), and then the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258). The fourth major Caliphate was the Ottoman Caliphate from 1517 until it was formally abolished as part of the 1924 Western global hegemony after World War I. Thus, for most of its history, Islam has had a Caliphate except for the past hundred years.

The modern period of Western dominance (since 1800) has produced an unresolved cognitive dissonance among Muslims who cleave to this narrative of Allah-granted dominance. Western superiority undermined the proof of their faith's destiny to dominate. The sudden superiority of the West, particularly the unexpected success of the Jews only two decades after the dissolution of the Caliphate's end in 1924, triggered a school of Muslim scholars who saw the US and Israeli superiority as an existential threat to Islam itself, and as the apocalyptic battle of the End of Time (Sayyid Qutub).

The response to this dissonance ignited the dream of a Muslim world empire. If it were only dreams, we might live with them, but this medieval dream of conquering and subjecting the infidels the world over has fervent believers who will do extraordinary deeds to prove the glory of Allah. Calls to genocidal violence occur frequently in both their writings and preaching, especially the apocalyptic Hadith about killing the

Jews before the Day of Judgment.

Soon after the end of the Ottoman Caliphate, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged making the case that the Caliphate should replace modern nation-states because these nation-states are man-made and hence artificial and imposed by colonial powers to fragment the Ummah and destroy the Faith. This narrative has become standard among the global jihadi groups, valorizing the historical unity under the early Caliphs and the Quranic call for unity (e.g., Surah Al-Anbiya 21:92, "This Ummah of yours is a single Ummah" (implying that the worldwide Muslims are one community.) Only this unity of purpose can save Islam from the modern tsunami of secularism.

In 1979, a new wave of apocalyptic movements emerged, dedicated to reasserting Islam's destiny to rule, both among the Shia (Iran) and Sunni (Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Afghanistan). They inspired other such groups (Hizballah 1982, al Qaeda and Hamas, 1988, proliferating, producing ISIS and its abominations. The massive violence and dislocation that has plagued Arab lands like Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, reflects the success of the Caliphatists' global Jihad to sow the conditions of chaos.

This cannot be dismissed as a conspiracy of a few extremists, but a deeply held grand plan that goes back to the earliest Muslim conquests. Nor is this war aimed at the West alone; it targets infidels everywhere, in Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, India, Myanmar, and Indonesia.

The allegiance to a Caliphate is not universal among Muslim groups. Many Muslims and scholars argue that the Caliphate is not mandatory provided a man-made nation-state upholds Islamic principles. This serves the interests of rulers in Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Indonesia that do not want to relinquish power to a Caliphate.

I am not denying that Muslims have genuine issues in different

parts of the world and that resistance and conflicts are often justified. Many such situations are not driven or exacerbated by global Islamic forces. These are secular issues faced by Muslims just like other communities. However, the situations being problematized in this article are those where Muslims in one country with no stake in the problems of another country get aligned and support with Islamic rhetoric, just for the sake of rallying together against infidels.

Sharia Versus Man-Made Laws

Sharia means "the path" or Islamic law and is derived from the Quran and Hadith. The Quran is seen as the ultimate source of authority, and Sharia is its practical application. Its adherents believe it represents divine injunctions and is superior to all human-made laws. For example, Surah Al-Ma'ida (5:44) states, "Whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, they are disbelievers," which Caliphatists interpret to mandate that Sharia must supersede all man-made laws. Democratic human legislation cannot override divine will. In addition to rejecting secular constitutions, this view also freezes the Sharia permanently, because any amendments would be man-made and hence illegitimate.

Some Muslim scholars argue that Sharia can coexist with man-made laws in those areas that are not explicitly covered by Islamic texts (e.g., modern traffic laws, international trade regulations). Some go further and accept the principle of "public interest" (Maslaha) to adapt Sharia to contemporary needs. Therefore, the implementation of Sharia varies: Turkey combines it with secular laws, while Saudi Arabia (until very recently) applied Sharia far more comprehensively.

Democracy, Caliphate and the Global Left

In recent years, the Global Left has joined Islam to defeat their common enemies in the prevailing world order. This is the nexus of woke ideology that is manifested at places like Harvard and other campuses. Though Caliphatists and Leftists both want to dismantle the present world order, they have conflicting commitments to what would replace as the new world order (i.e., theocracy vs. secular progressivism). Hence their present alliance is temporary; the Left does not realize that it too is the target of Caliphate enmity. Hence, we see several parodies like gays and feminists for Palestine.

The good cops among Caliphatists, the non-violent cognitive warriors, are engaged in a relentless but undeclared war on the principles of secularism even as they infiltrate and embed in secular society by exploiting its freedoms. But they betray their liberal host at a later stage by supporting the bad cops (jihadis) or even converting to become the bad cops. The bad cops openly see democracies as blasphemies and incompatible with Sharia. For them there are no innocent infidels, the very act of disbelief in the message of Allah's last Prophet demands punishment by death.

The Caliphatist cognitive war seeks to subvert the enemy by using the enemy's own ideology, rhetoric, laws, and culture — freedom, equality, human rights. Initially, this entails a Muslim minority gaining acceptance as law abiding citizens contributing to society and complaining about any criticism of Islam as "Islamophobia". The effect of this has been to generate massive ideological support from non-Muslim liberals and secularists, to highlight the Muslim "plight" in the West as a primary human rights cause. This has culminated in a formidable alliance between the Left and Islam, and especially in movements like feminism and decolonialism, despite how misogynist and imperialist the Caliphatists are.

As a recent example of this alliance, a self-proclaimed feminist named Ather Zia puts her stance in her article's title, *"Intifada: From Palestine to Kashmir."*[1] She writes:

"Kashmir is often compared to Palestine and sometimes referred to as 'another Palestine.'" She justifies the leftist-Islam goal,

> *to fortify a decolonial transnational feminist praxis that dreams and stands vigil for collective liberation from all modes of European imperialism, a decolonial feminist solidarity that becomes evident in all expressions of humanity—poetry to protests, analysis to arguments. That is, a decolonial feminist praxis that makes our existence resistance.*

She goes on to elaborate:

> *Kashmiris have always seen their resistance reflected in the Palestinian struggle against a European settler occupation. They have historically been in solidarity with Palestine, organizing passionate demonstrations and rallies. … A big part of the political culture in Kashmir is public prayers deployed as protest, which resonates with supplications for the freedom of Palestine as much as for Kashmir's own. … The ideas Edward Said puts forward in his essay "Intifada and Independence" resonate with the political tragedy of Kashmir and its hapless resistance. … Supporters of the Kashmiri freedom movement invoked "Kashmiri intifada" to honor and reiterate the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle and draw inspiration and momentum for their fight for azadî. I have argued that this is a form of "[affective solidarity](#)" from Kashmiris to Palestinians.*

She conflates Kashmir and Palestine both as "remnants of colonial hegemony". And therefore, "Kashmiris' resistance has been influenced by Palestinian literature …"

The reality of Kashmir is far more complex, but the Leftist supporters have no interest in getting into the details.

Surveys on Support for Caliphate among Muslims

There is no recent global data that reliably quantifies support for a Caliphate across all Muslim-majority countries. However, there are surveys by competent organizations during the period 2006-2013 that give some indication.

The WorldPublicOpinion.org Survey (2006–2007) was conducted in Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and Indonesia. It found that about 66% of Muslims in these countries agreed with the goal of unifying all Islamic countries into a single Islamic state or Caliphate. This is limited to four countries and may not reflect Muslim opinion worldwide. The sample size and methodology details are also limited.

A 2008 YouGov survey of Muslim students in the UK found that 33% supported "a worldwide Caliphate based on Sharia law." This is a specific demographic (young, educated Muslims in the UK) and not representative of the broader Muslim population. But it could be representative of teachings in several mosques.

The 2013 Pew Research Center survey is considered one of the most extensive studies on Muslim attitudes. However, the concept of a Caliphate was not explicitly covered as a standalone question. The pollsters probably considered it best to be ignored.

Surveys on Support for Sharia among Muslims

There is much better data available on Muslim opinions regarding Sharia. The 2013 Pew Research Center survey, based on over 38,000 face-to-face interviews across 39 countries, is the most comprehensive and robust data on Muslim attitudes toward Sharia. It asked whether Muslims want Sharia to be "the official law of the land" in their countries.[2]

Globally, most Muslims surveyed favored Sharia.

- In south and southeast Asia: There was nearly universal support in Afghanistan (99%), very high in Pakistan (84%), Bangladesh (82%), Malaysia (86%), Thailand (77%), and Indonesia (72%).
- In Middle East and North Africa: Widespread support in Iraq (91%), Palestinian territories (89%), Morocco (83%), Egypt (74%), Jordan (71%), but lower in Lebanon (29%) and Tunisia (56%).
- In Sub-Saharan Africa: High support in Niger (86%), Djibouti (82%), DR Congo (74%), Nigeria (71%), but lower in Ghana (58%) and Ethiopia (65%).
- In Central Asia and Southern/Eastern Europe: Much lower support, e.g., Turkey (12%), Kazakhstan (10%), Azerbaijan (8%).

The type of support also varied. A significant percent of Muslims who support Sharia believe it should apply *only to Muslims*, and not non-Muslims. Opinions also vary regarding the extent to which Sharia should be imposed. Many Muslims support it for matters of justice, family law, or moral guidance, and not necessarily for harsh punishments or theocratic governance. The support is strongest for applying Sharia to family and property disputes like marriage and inheritance, with over 75% in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia,

and Southeast Asia favoring Islamic judges for such cases. However, support for severe punishments (e.g., amputation, stoning) is lower, with less than half in many regions, though higher in South Asia (over 75%).

Muslims who pray multiple times daily are more likely to support Sharia, with differences as high as 37 percentage points in Russia and 28 points in Lebanon compared to less religious Muslims.

Besides Pew Research, there have been a few other, more recent surveys:

- A 2016 Policy Exchange survey in the UK found that 43% of British Muslims supported "the introduction of Sharia law," with 49% in London favoring "Sharia provisions" with British law. Younger Muslims (18–24) showed 35% support, and nearly half of those over 55 supported at least some provisions.
- A 2016 Channel 4 survey in the UK found 23% of British Muslims in some regions supported introducing Sharia law.
- A 2015 Center for Security Policy survey of 600 U.S. Muslims found that 19% believed violence in the U.S. is justified to make Sharia the law of the land, but this poll's methodology (online opt-in panel) and small sample size raise methodological questions.

This data suggests that there is a massive recruiting pool for Caliphatists to respond to the call of the global Caliphate. This could potentially be an explosive "audience," and its appeal increases as the goal seems to be within reach.

Jihad: Violence explicitly based on Islam[3]

Caliphatists consider any means to bring about the victory of Islam as legitimate including lying, dissembling, deceiving, threatening, and making war. They are convinced that eventually all infidels must face conversion, submission, or death.

Caliphatists do not believe that there are any possible compromises to be made with the infidel: it's a non-negotiable zero-sum game. Amicable relations with infidels are forbidden or allowed only tentatively until a more assertive form becomes practical to achieve. A real friendship with an infidel who does not plan to convert is often seen as a betrayal of the cause. They take the principle of al Wala wal Bara to mean *love your fellow Muslim* no matter what he does, right or wrong, *and hate the infidel* whether he is right or wrong. Jihadis consider infidels as transgressors resisting Islam's truth. For many Jihadis all infidels are legitimate targets of their attacks. Those who struggle for the Caliphate dedicate the entire beings to the grand project right down to blowing themselves up for the cause.

Between 1979 and May 2021, at least 48,035 Islamist terrorist attacks took place worldwide.[4] These caused the deaths of at least 210,138 people. The list below gives a small sample of this lethal attitude towards infidels among Jihadis; it is not a list of the great terrorist attacks, but rather a violent global everyday contempt.

- In September 2013, at Nairobi's Westgate Mall, Caliphists murdered people who couldn't answer[5] questions about Islam.
- In 2015 Mali,[6] Caliphists screaming "Allahu Akbar" took hostages, freeing those who could recite the Qur'an and

killing others.

- A Caliphist in Minnesota[7] in 2016 asked mall shoppers if they were Muslim and then stabbed the non-Muslims.
- A testimony before the UN Security Council hearing on the massacre of 26 civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2017, stated,[8] "They [the attackers] also recorded information about each person, including their name and religion. They asked them why they had not converted to Islam and showed the Qur'an to one of them. Photos of the dead show that they had been bound and some had been tied together. After the killings, they shot in the air twice, saying that they had killed all the "kafir".
- In July 2017 in Kenya,[9] Islamist terrorists asked Christians to "recite Islamic dogmas" and murdered them when they couldn't do so.
- In September 2018, in Kenya,[10] Islamist terrorists murdered two non-Muslims for failing to recite the Qur'an.
- In Mozambique in June 2021,[11] Islamist terrorists were hunting for Christians door-to-door.
- In Burkina Faso[12] in November 2021, Islamist terrorists asked villagers if they were Christian or Muslim, then killed the Christians.
- In January 2022 in Nigeria, a man recounted[13] that Fulani jihadis stopped him and started beating him. Then they asked him if he was Muslim or Christian. When he said he was Christian, they intensified the beating.
- In the Philippines[14] in February 2019, Islamist terrorists murdered a man for failing to recite Qur'an verses while releasing six others who could recite them.

All the above examples reflect the fundamental Caliphist

belief that it is a crime to refuse to accept the mandates of Islam. Even in the 1971 India-Pakistan war, there are multiple documented references to religious mullahs issuing fatwas and statements that encouraged treating Hindu Bengali women—as "war booty" or "loot" as per Sharia.

Between August 2007 and May 2022, the UN Security Council condemned acts of terrorism 115 times. In all these cases except one, the entities committing the terrorism were self-identified Muslims or were done in circumstances or places that suggest their Muslim identity.[15] The only exception was the Christchurch Mosque attack in New Zealand by a white supremacist in March 2019.[16] The victims of Islamist terrorism include persons of all faiths, including several Muslims.

A European Union research paper on "*The root causes of violent terrorism*"[17] specifically mentions "a Salafi-jihadi interpretation of Islam." It asserts that "Political seekers are usually seeking support and are driven by political engagement. They tend to view themselves as saviors defending the people of 'the nation' or 'the umma'." They are motivated by a sense "that Islam is under siege" and a desire to "protect ummah under assault."

Europol defines Jihadism[18] as "a violent ideology exploiting traditional Islamic concepts. Jihadists legitimize the use of violence with a reference to the classical Islamic doctrine on jihad, [which in] Islamic law is treated as religiously sanctioned warfare".

It is important to distinguish between non-state terror actors and state actors, even though the former are often used as a tool in an asymmetric war by the latter—as in Kashmir and Gaza.

Failure of the International Community to Name the Root Cause

Unfortunately, despite all this compelling evidence, the international community has not named the religious ideology that drives most international terrorism. This is despite the fact that even the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has stated, "There is an international obligation of prohibition of incitement to hatred." Specifically, Article 20, paragraph 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law."[19]

Furthermore, according to OHCHR,[20] under international human rights standards, expression labeled as "hate speech" can be restricted under articles 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on different grounds, including respect for the rights of others, public order, or sometimes national security.

The UN definition[21] of hate speech is "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender or other identity factor."

One of the reasons for the failure to name certain interpretations of Islamic texts and ideology is the fear of being branded Islamophobic. However, in April 2021, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed—himself a Muslim and a former foreign minister of the Maldives—admitted to the UN Human Rights Council [22] that the term Islamophobia is "contested because *charges of Islamophobia have been inappropriately and dangerously leveled at persons who challenge majoritarian interpretations of Islam*, such as human rights activists and women's rights

advocates; members of minority Muslim communities within majority Muslim contexts; non-Muslims, including atheists and other religious minorities; and dissidents in authoritarian States." He also stated,[23] "international human rights law protects individuals, not religions" adding that "Nothing in [his] present report suggests that criticism of the ideas, leaders, symbols or practices of Islam is something that should be prohibited or criminally sanctioned."

OHCHR has stated that,[24] "the right to freedom of religion or belief, as enshrined in relevant international legal standards, does not include the right to have a religion or a belief that is free from criticism or ridicule" and that "the right to freedom of expression implies that it should be possible to scrutinize, openly debate and criticize belief systems, opinions, and institutions, including religious ones."

It is true that there is considerable diversity of views among Muslims on the issues of Caliphate, Sharia, and jihad. And many Muslims projecting themselves as liberals use this diversity to muddle the public debate on such an important topic. There is a managed ambiguity presented by Muslim apologists that gives Islam the benefit of doubt as the easy way to avoid controversy. Often, Muslims play the roles of good cops (those who decry violence) and others who play bad cops (promoting violence. Yet, the boundaries between these camps are fluid. There is funding leaking from the mainstream Muslim sources that finds its way indirectly to help the extremists. One also finds numerous instances of well-educated, modern and liberal Muslims raised in Western society and values suddenly flip and turn into radicals of the worst kind.

Clearly, the subject calls for open and unfiltered conversations in which Muslims and non-Muslims should participate with mutual respect and honesty.

Network of "Regional Caliphates"

It is important to note that a Caliphate must operate under Sharia law, but the converse is not true: Sharia law by itself can be implemented in each and any sovereign entity independently. Hence, there are Muslim groups championing local or regional nation-states under Sharia. In fact, while the Caliphate Project is a centripetal force bringing Muslims together for a common cause, the ethnic divides—-like the rivalry between Arabs, Iranians and Turks—acts as a centrifugal force pulling the Caliphate Project apart. But this does not keep them from aspiring for regional or ethnic versions of the Caliphate under their respective controls, like regional Islamic empires. In some ways, the US strategy has been to encourage such ethnic divides and prevent a truly global Caliphate from coalescing.

This situation is akin to a global franchise with Sharia as the common legal constitution, and the local franchisees are given varying degrees of autonomy in implementing that Sharia, variations often reflecting the *rapports de force* between Muslims and infidels in each state.

For the Caliphatists, this can serve as an initial stage in which separate Sharia-based Muslim states operate like a network of allies held together with Islam as their grand narrative. The global jihad forces work towards consolidating these into a Caliphate. Let us consider what keeps Turkey and Iran from joining a global Caliphate today.

Turkey, as a secular republic founded by Atatürk, abolished the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, but there have been accusations that President Erdoğan harbors ambitions to revive a form of Ottoman hegemony as a regional Caliphate. Examples of this hegemony include Turkey's regional role in places like Syria as well as its direct support for its Muslim ally, Pakistan,

against India. However, the secular structure of Turkey's government, its NATO membership, and public opinion (a 2019 poll showed 59% of Turks supported abolishing the Caliphate) make a Caliphate restoration unlikely in the near term.

Iran, as a Shia-majority Islamic Republic, prioritizes Shia religious leadership and explicitly rejects the concept of a Caliphate rooted in Sunni Islamic tradition. Its leadership, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, focuses on exporting its revolutionary model and supporting Shia communities across the region. Its support for Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, or backing Hezbollah are driven by regional strategy and sectarian alignment, not a push for a global Caliphate. Iran's support for proxies and its anti-Israel stance are efforts to expand regional influence and challenge U.S. and Sunni dominance. Historically, Iran's Safavid Empire (1501-1736) competed with the Sunni Ottoman Empire, and modern Iran continues to prioritize Shia identity over pan-Islamic unity. On the other hand, Iran has supported Turkey for pragmatic reasons in Syria. Iran's Shia ideology and rejection of Sunni institutions render it a regional and ethnic competitor unlikely to support a global Caliphate.

Most scholars of Islam agree that the Caliphate Project is unlikely to fructify in the near term as a ground reality, but my point is that the aspiration of an Islamic world order looms large and serves as a powerful myth driving extremism.

Reform Movements

Many liberal Muslims have made efforts to reform Islam from within, and align it with non-violence, pluralism, and compatibility with modernity, while distancing themselves from expansionist or militant interpretations. Their attempts include reinterpreting Islamic texts, promoting ijtihad (independent reasoning) to emphasize flexible, ethical and

pluralistic principles over rigid jurisprudence (taqlid).

Such attempts started in the 19ᵗʰ century in response to Western challenges. For instance, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) promoted the adoption of Western sciences and institutions to strengthen the Muslim world against what he saw as Western imperialism. His disciple, Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), continued this by promoting educational reform and reinterpreting Islamic texts to modernize it. Another example was Syed Ahmed Khan (1817–1898) in India who sought to reconcile Islam with rationality and established what later became known as Aligarh Muslim University in India, embracing the English language as well as secular studies. The goal in all such cases was to strengthen Islam against Western hegemony by adapting Western methods.

Some of these reformers like Rashid Rida (1865–1935) supported the Caliphate while at the same time wanting to make it coexist with democracy and modern governance.

More recently, Muslim leaders like Asra Nomani have founded the Muslim Reform Movement (2015) denouncing violent jihad and extremist ideologies. They posted their declaration on the doors of the Saudi-affiliated Islamic Center of Washington, DC, as a direct challenge to conservative Islam. They emphasize personal faith over institutional control and male domination. So far, they have had a minimal impact.

There are other reformists like Khaled Abou El Fadl, Fatema Mernissi, and Edip Yüksel who are reinterpreting Islam's holy texts to advocate women's rights and non-violence. They espouse teachings for social justice. Some contemporary liberal Muslims see themselves as returning to the early principles emphasizing the ethical and pluralistic intent. They reject theocratic or expansionist models like the Caliphate. By promoting ijtihad, reinterpreting texts, and engaging in democratic processes, liberal Muslims seek to make Islam a personal, non-violent faith compatible with global

coexistence.

However, unlike the highly unified and empowered forces of pan-Islamic aggression, such reformers tend to be isolated in different countries with feeble resources and audiences. They have so far failed to gain mainstream support from Muslims.

Another factor that dampens the impact of reformers is that they often face accusations of being Western puppets. Meanwhile, the ultraconservative movements have been backed by wealthy Gulf states, and they promote a puritanical, often expansionist Islam.

There are recent shifts in the Saudi and UAE royal families toward the modernization of their societies. But it is too early to predict their impact on global Islam.

Part 2: The Kashmir Conflict as a Case Study

Khalifat Movement and the origins of Pakistan

The Khilafat Movement (Khalifat being a spelling for Caliphate commonly used in the Indian subcontinent) and the Moplah Massacre were significant events in early 20th-century India that shaped communal dynamics and contributed indirectly to the ideological and political groundwork for the formation of Pakistan.

The Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) was a pan-Islamic political campaign launched by Indian Muslims to pressure the British government to preserve the Ottoman Caliphate after World War I. It was supported by Gandhi's Indian National Congress, the famous freedom fighting movement, which saw it as an opportunity to foster Hindu-Muslim unity against British colonial rule.

Though the intention was to overthrow the British, the Khalifat Movement had serious unintended consequences. It

galvanized Indian Muslims with a sense of collective religious and political empowerment, highlighting their distinct concerns separate from those of Hindus. This laid the groundwork for Muslim separatism.

There was a temporary period of Hindu-Muslim unity for a united anti-colonial struggle. However, upon the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, the Muslims were disillusioned that the Khalifat Movement had failed and their leaders started projecting it as a betrayal by Hindus. This deepened Hindu-Muslim communal mistrust.

The Khalifat movement had elevated Muslim leaders and organizations like the All-India Muslim League, which later championed the demand for Pakistan. It also radicalized sections of the Muslim populace, making them more receptive to separatist ideas. Some leaders exacerbated Hindu-Muslim tensions by emphasizing Islamic solidarity over India's national unity. This contributed to a growing sense of separate communal identities.

The Khalifat movement spurred the Moplah Rebellion (1921) in Kerala as an anti-British and anti-landlord uprising by Muslims wanting to express their economic grievances. While initially anti-colonial, the rebellion took a communal turn, with Moplahs targeting Hindu landlords and, in some cases, Hindu communities, partly due to perceived Hindu dominance and economic disparities. This escalated into communal violence, with Muslim rebels attacking Hindu landlords, tenants, and communities. Official estimates suggest thousands were killed, and many Hindus were forcibly converted to Islam. B.R. Ambedkar described the atrocities against Hindus as "indescribable," noting widespread horror among Hindus.

The Moplah Massacre intensified Hindu-Muslim tensions across India. Hindu nationalist narratives portrayed the violence as evidence of Muslim aggression, while Muslim leaders defended their violence as resistance against economic oppression. This

polarized communities further.

The massacre fueled Hindu distrust of Muslim political movements, strengthening organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha, which opposed secular nationalism. Conversely, Muslims felt increasingly alienated by the secular freedom movement pushing them toward separatist ideologies.

The Muslim League and Muhammad Ali Jinnah (who later became founding father of Pakistan) used events like the Moplah violence to argue that Hindus and Muslims could not coexist in a single nation. The massacre became a reference point in the narrative that Muslims needed a separate homeland to protect their interests. Khilafat meetings in Malabar incited communal and anti-colonial feelings.

While the massacre was localized, its repercussions were national. It contributed to the growing perception among Muslims that their religious and cultural identity was under threat in a Hindu-majority India, bolstering what galvanized as the Two-Nation Theory to partition India into India and Pakistan.

In this way, the Khilafat Movement provided the ideological mobilization of Muslims, while the Moplah Massacre underscored the potential for communal conflict, making the idea of Pakistan more appealing to Muslims. The Movement trained a generation of Muslim leaders and activists, many of whom later joined the Pakistan movement. The Moplah Massacre, meanwhile, provided a cautionary tale that separatists leveraged to rally support.

The British exploited these communal tensions, further encouraging separate electorates and political divisions. By the 1940s, these events had contributed to a climate where the demand for Pakistan, formalized in the 1940 Lahore Resolution, gained widespread Muslim support, culminating in the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

After Independence and Partition

The 1947 partition of British India was rooted in religious identity, with Pakistan demanded as a homeland for Muslims. Pakistan's 1973 Constitution declared Islam the state religion and requires laws to align with the Quran and Sunnah, reflecting a legal framework that largely incorporates Sharia.

The India-Pakistan conflict, particularly over Kashmir, is often reduced to a territorial or nationalist dispute, but this is a mask hiding the ideological goals of militant groups. A deeper examination reveals the top-down role of Islamic jihad with the goal of establishing a Caliphate governed by Sharia law. This perspective is based on the role of militant groups, their ideological underpinnings, and the complicity or strategic alignment of elements within Pakistan's state apparatus.

The Islamization went into high gear when General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988) introduced Sharia-based laws (e.g., Hudood Ordinances), madrassa proliferation, and state patronage of Islamic orthodoxy, creating a fertile ground for jihadist ideologies. Zia even changed the army's motto from "Faith, unity, and discipline" to "faith, piety, and Jihad in the way of Allah" and had close ties with Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamist political party founded in 1941 in Lahore. The party's primary goal has been to promote Islamic values and establish an Islamic state governed by Sharia law.[25] This era saw the rise of groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), which coopted local grievances to propel global jihad. Their rhetoric, as seen in LeT's publications, like *Why Are We Waging Jihad?*, explicitly calls for a Caliphate, invoking historical Islamic empires and Sharia as the ultimate governance model.

Clearly, Kashmir is much more than a territorial prize. It is

a symbolic frontier for global jihadists. Since the 1989 insurgency, militant groups have framed their violence as a religious struggle to "liberate" Kashmir from India's "Hindu rule" and establish an Islamic state under Sharia. The 2008 Mumbai attacks by LeT, which killed 166 people, were not merely anti-India operations but part of a broader ideological campaign to destabilize India's secular democracy and inspire a transnational jihad. LeT's leader, Hafiz Saeed, publicly advocated for a Caliphate extending beyond Kashmir, aligning with global jihadist movements like al-Qaeda and ISIS, which share the vision of a Sharia-governed Islamic Caliphate. LeT and JeM draw strong ideological and material support from global jihadi networks, including al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

In 2015, former President Pervez Musharraf admitted to training Kashmiri insurgents in the 1990s. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has been accused of supporting militant groups, as noted in U.S. intelligence reports and declassified documents (e.g., 2010 WikiLeaks cables). This support is strategic: Jihadi proxies weaken India without direct military confrontation by the Pakistani state. It reflects ideological sympathy within Pakistan's military and political elite, who view Pakistan as a vanguard of Islamic governance. The Pakistani military's use of Islamic imagery in propaganda, such as calling soldiers "ghazis" (Islamic warriors), reinforces the jihadist narrative. This alignment suggests that the state enables groups whose ultimate goal is a Sharia-based Caliphate.

The 2019 Pulwama attack, claimed by JeM, which killed 40 Indian paramilitary personnel, was framed as a defense of Muslim rights against India's secular state. Such attacks aim to radicalize populations and erode India's pluralistic framework, creating conditions for an Islamic governance model.

The use of foreign fighters in Kashmir clearly ties the conflict to global Jihadist ambitions. After the Soviet-Afghan

war ended, the transnational jihadi pool of mujahideen were redirected from Afghanistan to Kashmir under Pakistan's Operation Tupac. Groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Hizbul Mujahideen, and Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami have openly recruited fighters from several countries to fight for their common cause that transcends man-made boundaries.[26]

Furthermore, financial support from Pakistan's ISI and other countries in the Middle East and UK sustains this jihadi ecosystem, channeling funds through hawala (money laundering) and groups like World Association of Muslim Youth and Jammat-e-Islami.

The most explicit international support for Pakistan's fights against India come from far-flung countries like Turkey that have no direct interests in the region and that are driven entirely by religious zealotry. Turkey, of course, also has the memory of being the Caliphate in the past.

The Appendix gives a partial list of the major Islamic groups classified as terrorists by the Indian government.

Common Counterarguments and Our Rebuttals to them

A variety of counterarguments have been put forth by analysts, including apologists of global jihad, moderate Muslims, and Western leftists wanting to deny religion as a fundamental driver of geopolitics. These are summarized below followed by my rebuttals to show that these arguments do not negate the significant role of Islamic jihad in driving the India-Pakistan conflict toward a caliphate with Sharia law.

- **Territorial, Geopolitical and Economic Factors**: Critics argue that Kashmir's strategic location, water

resources, and historical claims fuel the rivalry. Pakistan's struggling economy drives the export of militancy as a low-cost proxy war, not a religious crusade. Competing global alignments (e.g., India with the U.S., Pakistan with China) have at times exacerbated the tensions.

- *Rebuttal*: LeT and JeM's public statements consistently prioritize religious objectives—establishing Sharia and a Caliphate—over mere territorial control. Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind's main objective is to impose Sharia law upon Kashmir and to "spread the Islamic state caliphate to Jammu and Kashmir," opposing democracy as being in violation of Sharia[27]. Pakistan state's ISI's support for groups like LeT, as documented in reports by the U.S. Congressional Research Service, leverages religious fervor to sustain low-cost militancy, with the ideological goal of weakening India's secular state, a prerequisite for a Sharia-based order. Kashmir is a means to an end, a symbolic battleground to rally jihadists, as seen in their global recruitment efforts.

- **Internal Political Dynamics**: Some argue that militancy is a byproduct of Pakistan's internal politics, where the military uses Islam to consolidate power against civilian governments. The conflict is less about a Caliphate and more about maintaining domestic power and justifying defense budgets.

- *Rebuttal*: Pakistan's military's tolerance of jihadist groups suggests ideological sympathy. The military's failure to dismantle LeT and JeM, despite international pressure (e.g., UN sanctions), indicates a shared vision of Pakistan that Kashmir is a frontier for broader Islamic expansion.

- **India's Policies as a Catalyst**: Critics contend that India's heavy-handed policies in Kashmir, such as human

rights abuses, the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition, and the 2019 revocation of Article 370, provoke domestic militancy. The conflict is thus a legitimate reaction to oppression.

- *Rebuttal*: The anti-India global jihadi groups emerged before these issues. Besides, their attacks, like the 2001 Indian Parliament assault, target India's sovereignty broadly, not just Kashmir, reflecting a rejection of secular governance. The Caliphate narrative is proactive, not merely reactive.

- **Diversity of Actors**: The militant landscape is diverse, with some groups focused on ethnic Kashmiri autonomy rather than a global Caliphate, such as the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). Not all actors share the same ideological goals.

- *Rebuttal*: While militant groups vary, the dominant players like LeT and JeM share a jihadist vision, as evidenced by their literature and global affiliations. The consistent invocation of Sharia and a Caliphate in LeT and JeM's literature transcends local pragmatic disputes. Local autonomy movements are often co-opted and used by these groups, whose actions—such as the 2019 Pulwama attack—align with a transnational Caliphate agenda.
  Moreover, many political and charitable organizations in Pakistan such as Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) serve to propagate and support the Caliphate project through Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), a political organization was founded with a goal to establish an Islamic state governed by Sharia law, rooted in the vision of its founder, Syed Abul Ala Maududi, and it supports LeT. Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) (JUI-F) is a Deobandi Islamic political party with a goal to implement Sharia law supports JeM in Kashmir.

In summary, the jihadist ideology aiming for a Sharia-governed caliphate is a major driver of the conflict, intertwining with territorial, geopolitical, and political factors. The consistent religious rhetoric, state complicity, and global jihadist connections underscore this global jihad ideological core, making it a critical lens for understanding the India-Pakistan conflict.

Pakistani Public Support for Caliphate and Sharia

There is no recent, comprehensive survey specifically asking Pakistanis about their support for a Caliphate. However, the WorldPublicOpinion.org Survey (2006–2007) found that 65% of Pakistani respondents supported the goal of unifying all Islamic countries into a single Islamic state or Caliphate.

More robust data exists on support for Sharia as the official law of the land, primarily from the 2013 Pew Research Center survey and a 2018 Gallup Pakistan-Gilani poll. The 2013 Pew Research Center Survey showed that 84% of Pakistani Muslims supported making Sharia the official law of the land. Of those supporting Sharia, 78% (roughly 65% of the total population) said laws should "strictly follow the teachings of the Quran," while 16% (about 13% of the total) said laws should follow Islamic principles but not strictly the Quran. Only 2% said that laws should not be influenced by the Quran. The Pew report noted that 62% of Pakistanis supported the death penalty for apostasy, indicating strong support for certain Sharia-based punishments, though this is lower than in Afghanistan (79%).

2018 Gallup Pakistan-Gilani Research Foundation Survey found that 67% of Pakistanis said Sharia should be the only law in the country. The survey suggested a trend toward radicalization, with a 16% increase in support for Sharia as

the sole law from 2010 to 2018.

Pakistani Political Leadership Support for Sharia

Pakistan's Parliament has passed Sharia-related legislation, and the country's legal system already incorporates Sharia in certain domains. The 1991 Enforcement of Shariat Act, passed by the National Assembly under Nawaz Sharif's government, declared Sharia the "Supreme Law" of Pakistan, stipulating that courts must interpret laws in line with Islamic jurisprudence. This bill was supported by a majority of MPs, indicating broad parliamentary backing for Sharia.

The Federal Shariat Court, established in 1980, has the power to nullify laws deemed un-Islamic, and the Supreme Court's Shariat Appellate Bench reviews its decisions. These institutions reflect parliamentary support for Sharia's role in governance. Specific Sharia-based laws, such as the Hudood Ordinances (1979), Qisas and Diyat Ordinance (1990), and blasphemy laws (1980s), were either passed or upheld by Parliament, suggesting strong historical support.

Even Benazir Bhutto, a leftwing liberal supported by Western feminists and an opponent of Zia's Islamization, did not repeal these laws during her tenure (1988–1990). Her PPP, despite being historically more secular, continued the Sharia laws when in power, suggesting that even its MPs acquiesce to Sharia's role to avoid political backlash.

Besides the small fringe parties (with 5%-10% share of parliament seats) supporting Sharia, even the m

ainstream parties (PTI, PML-N, PPP) holding 90–95% of seats, support Sharia in specific areas (e.g., family law, blasphemy, banking), as evidenced by their votes for the 1991 Shariat Act and related laws. However, they also uphold certain secular elements like the British-based penal code, indicating a mixed

system.

In 2023, the Federal Shariat Court struck down parts of the 2018 Transgender Persons Act as un-Islamic, and no major parliamentary opposition emerged, indicating continued support for Sharia-based judicial oversight.

A 2016 Dawn newspaper article cited a survey showing that 78% of Pakistanis "strictly support" Quranic teachings influencing laws, suggesting that MPs face pressure to align with Sharia.

In summary, approximately 80–90% of Pakistan's MPs support Sharia law as a significant or primary legal framework, based on historical votes (e.g., 1991 Shariat Act), the constitutional mandate, and public sentiment (84% in 2013, 67% in 2018). This includes 100% of religious party MPs and a majority of mainstream MPs. Only 10–20% (likely PPP liberals or urban elites) might favor limiting Sharia to personal laws while prioritizing secular codes.

Conclusion

The contemporary geopolitical landscape is increasingly shaped by competing visions of global order, each rooted in distinct ideological foundations. On one end, the progressive Left advances a globalist framework centered on equity, inclusion, and wealth redistribution—essentially a reimagined form of Marxism adapted for the 21st century. This vision emphasizes transnational governance, climate justice, and social equity as the pillars of a just world order. In stark contrast, the Islamist vision aspires the myth of a unified Caliphate governed by Sharia law, encompassing not just religious authority but a comprehensive sociopolitical and administrative system. Meanwhile, a third vision is being crafted by technocratic elites and Silicon Valley futurists, who envision a hyper-automated world stratified between a super-rich managerial class and a vast underclass, sustained

through AI-driven surveillance, digital currencies, and post-labor economies.

A possible fourth contender is the resurgent nationalist bloc that rejects supranational institutions and globalist agendas in favor of sovereign control, traditional values, and ethnocentric governance.

These competing world orders—progressivist, Islamist, technocratic, and nationalist—are increasingly in friction, each seeking to shape the norms, rules, and institutions of the emerging global system. These paradigms are not merely theoretical; they actively inform real-world policy, diplomacy, and conflict.

Institutions such as Islamic banking, halal certification networks, Sharia-based legal systems, madrasa education, WAQF boards, and even historical frameworks like the jizya tax are not merely religious or cultural practices—they form a ready-made infrastructure that could be rapidly mobilized on a global scale as part of a Caliphate-oriented movement. These systems are transnational in nature, already embedded in multiple countries, and could serve as the administrative, economic, and ideological backbone of a broader Islamist political order. Their integration into state structures under a unified Caliphate would provide both the tools and legitimacy to enforce conformity, control dissent, and reshape governance along rigid theocratic lines.

Thus, the Caliphate project poses significant dangers to the sovereignty of nations, pluralism, individual freedoms, and liberty. It starts with soft influence, extends its reach through strategic expansion, and culminates in the consolidation of its chokehold. To gradually expands its foothold, it leverages the existing tools and freedoms of democratic systems—such as legal protections, electoral participation, and free speech—not to uphold them in the long run, but to eventually weaken them from within. It often

forges uneasy alliances with elements of the progressive Left, exploiting shared rhetoric around rights, identity, or anti-imperialism, to advance its initial objectives until it no longer needs such partnerships.

American policymakers should examine the thesis that Gaza, Kashmir and other sites for Islamic conflict are local manifestations of this very old, partly invisible, global war since the beginning of Islam. Unfortunately, this is not easy to discuss publicly out of fear of retribution. The fear of being accused of Islamophobia and being cancelled by the cancel culture prevalent in American public spaces has kept this issue from getting the scrutiny it deserves.

Appendix: Main Islamic Groups Classified as Terrorists by the Indian Government

- Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT): LeT, founded in 1987, is a Pakistan-based militant group designated as a terrorist organization by India, the United States, and the European Union. It is notorious for high-profile attacks, including the 2001 Indian Parliament attack and the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which killed over 160 people. LeT is allied with other militant groups and has ties to al-Qaeda. LeT's ideology, rooted in Ahl-e-Hadith (a Salafi-inspired movement), envisions a global Islamic struggle against perceived Muslim oppression. While its primary focus is on Kashmir and weakening the Indian state, LeT's broader rhetoric aligns with establishing an Islamic governance model based on sharia. Its vision of the caliphate is less explicit than that of groups like ISIS but draws on the idea of a unified Islamic order under divine law, inspired by historical Muslim empires like the Mughals. LeT's attacks aim to destabilize India as a step toward this broader goal, though it does not explicitly declare a territorial

caliphate.

- Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM): Founded in 2000 by Masood Azhar, JeM is a Pakistan-based group designated as a terrorist organization by India and the United States. It emerged from Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and is linked to the 2001 Indian Parliament attack and the 2019 Pulwama attack, which killed 40 Indian paramilitary personnel. JeM's ideology is Deobandi, emphasizing jihad to establish Islamic rule. Like LeT, its immediate focus is on Kashmir, but its rhetoric includes a vision of a broader Islamic governance system. JeM's leader, Azhar, has referenced the restoration of Islamic rule in India, evoking the Mughal era, but the group does not explicitly advocate for a global caliphate like ISIS. Its vision aligns with a regional Islamic state under sharia, potentially as a precursor to a larger unified Islamic polity.

- Hizbul Mujahideen (HM): Formed in 1989 as the military wing of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, HM is a Kashmir-based militant group designated as a terrorist organization by India and the United States. It is one of the largest militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir. HM's primary goal is ethno-religious nationalism, focusing on Kashmir's liberation. Its ideology, influenced by Jamaat-e-Islami, emphasizes sharia-based governance and its vision of a caliphate is secondary to its regional objectives of a local Islamic state.

- Indian Mujahideen (IM): IM, operational since 2003, is a homegrown Indian militant group acting as a proxy for LeT and other Pakistan-based groups. It is designated as a terrorist organization by India and linked to attacks like the 2008 Jaipur bombings and the 2010 Pune bombing. IM's ideology aligns with LeT's Salafi-jihadist framework, emphasizing jihad against India's secular state. IM's propaganda, including publications like *Voice of Hind* (linked to ISIS), rejects nationalism and promotes joining a global Islamic order. Its vision

likely mirrors LeT's goal of establishing sharia-based governance, potentially as part of a broader caliphate-inspired movement.

- Islamic State (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS): ISIS and AQIS are global jihadist groups with limited but growing presence in India. ISIS has inspired attacks like the 2019 Sri Lanka Easter bombings, while AQIS, formed in 2014, aims to expand al-Qaeda's influence in South Asia. Both are designated as terrorist organizations by India. ISIS explicitly aims to establish a global caliphate, as declared in 2014 under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, governing through a strict interpretation of sharia. Its Indian affiliates, like Junudul Khilafah al-Hind, promote this vision via propaganda like *Voice of Hind*, urging Indian Muslims to reject nationalism and join the caliphate. ISIS's caliphate is territorial, centralized, and expansionist, aiming to control regions like Jammu and Kashmir as provinces.
- AQIS: Al-Qaeda's vision involves a caliphate as a long-term goal but prioritizes jihad to weaken enemies (e.g., India, the West) first. AQIS sees India as a battleground for global jihad, aiming to establish sharia-based governance through violence. Its caliphate vision is less immediate than ISIS's, focusing on creating conditions for Islamic rule rather than declaring a territorial state.
- Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT): HuT, a global pan-Islamist group founded in 1952, was declared a terrorist organization by India in October 2024 due to its advocacy for a global caliphate and alleged jihadist activities. Unlike other groups, HuT officially promotes non-violent means but is criticized for radicalizing youth. HuT envisions a centralized, transnational caliphate governed by sharia, with a detailed constitutional model. It seeks to unify the Umma under a single caliph, rejecting nation-states and promoting intellectual and political

mobilization to overthrow secular regimes. In India, HuT's propaganda emphasizes replacing the secular state with Islamic governance, though it avoids direct violence, focusing on ideological influence.

- **Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB):** JMB, a Bangladesh-based group, is designated as a terrorist organization by India for attacks like the 2013 Bodh Gaya bombing. It has a presence in eastern India and collaborates with other jihadist groups. JMB's ideology aligns with global jihadist movements, particularly ISIS, emphasizing sharia-based governance. Its attacks and propaganda suggest support for a regional Islamic state as part of a broader jihadist vision, potentially linked to ISIS's caliphate model.
- **Harakat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM):** HuM, founded in 1985, is a Pakistan-based group designated as a terrorist organization by India and the United States. It shifted focus from Afghanistan to Kashmir in the 1990s and is linked to the 1999 Indian Airlines hijacking. HuM's ideology, rooted in jihadism, envisions Islamic rule in Kashmir as part of a broader struggle. While not explicitly advocating a global caliphate, its ties to al-Qaeda suggest alignment with a vision of sharia-based governance, potentially as a step toward a unified Islamic polity.

The various groups' postures toward Caliphate may be summed as follows:

- Some are explicit about wanting the Caliphate, while others see that as a long-term goal and want to focus on the immediate goal of a regional caliphate.
- Some groups prefer to focus strictly on weakening the Indian state and democracy, and do not want to be considered pro-Caliphate, even though their anti-India terrorism facilitates the work of pro-Caliphate groups.
- Most of them advocate violence, but a few advocate

peaceful means to establish Sharia as the first step.

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https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/intifada-from-palestine-to-kashmir/. Downloaded February 27, 2025.

[2] The 2013 Pew survey did not cover major Muslim populations like India, Saudi Arabia, or Iran due to political sensitivities or security concerns. More recent global surveys are scarce, and localized polls (e.g., UK, U.S.) may not reflect broader trends.

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[25] https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/jamaat-e-islami

[26] Afghan militants, particularly those linked to the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989), infiltrated Kashmir after 1989 under Pakistan's Operation Tupac to spread radical Islamist ideology. Between 1991 and 1999, 279 Afghan jihadists were killed in Kashmir. Groups like Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, associated with al-Qaeda, had Afghan connections, with leaders like Ilyas Kashmiri in the region. Examples of Pakistani operatives include Talab Mansur (Gujranwala), Rashid Aziz and Abu Isha (Sialkote), and Abu Salama (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir). Between 1991 and 1999, 383 Pakistani militants were killed by Indian forces. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) trained and armed these fighters under the guise of "mujahideen" waging jihad.A small number of Saudi militants were killed in Kashmir between 1991 and 1999. Six Sudanese militants were killed in Kashmir between 1991 and 1999, and Sudan has been linked to broader Islamist networks supporting jihadist movements. Four Yemeni militants were killed in the same period. Two Lebanese militants were killed between 1991 and 1999. Egypt, Iraq, Bahrain, Turkey, Tajikistan, and Bangladesh have each contributed with at least one militant killed in Kashmir between 1991 and 1999.

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Table of Contents

Rajiv Malhotra has lived in the USA for 55 years, and is a renowned Hindu American author and public intellectual. He is the founder of Infinity Foundation in Princeton, USA, as well as a founding-trustee of the American Hindu Jewish Congress.

Initially trained in physics and computer science with a specialization in artificial intelligence, he had a successful corporate career and then became a tech entrepreneur, launching 20 startups in different parts of the world. In the 1990s, he took early retirement to devote his full time to civilizational research to enrich America. As part of this, for over three decades, Malhotra has critically examined the representation of Hinduism in academia, media, and public discourse, and pioneered the study of biases against Hinduism. He developed a robust framework for understanding and countering Hinduphobia, which he has framed as a deep-rooted system like Antisemitism. He is the architect of a unique School of Thought that integrates Hindu perspectives with contemporary global issues. Malhotra has authored more than twenty influential books that have become essential resources for scholars and changemakers worldwide. His work has helped redefine interfaith and civilizational dialogues. Through Infinity Foundation, he mentors a new generation of Hindu scholars.

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