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## Pursuing the Caliphate: Pan-Islamism and Ideological Delocalization in the Kashmir Conflict

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### Introduction

In August 2019, the Indian government nullified Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, ending State Subject Rule (SSR) in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), nullifying Article 370 had been a long-standing political aim (India Today, 2019). SSR had been in place in J&K since 1927 and originally served to limit the influx of non-locals into the region to maintain the social structure and distinct culture that characterized Kashmiri identity (Zia, 2017). J&K has remained divided into an Indian-administered and a Pakistan-administered part since 1947, with the entire region being claimed by both countries. India's decision to abrogate SSR has thus especially drawn criticism from Pakistan. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan called the move *"illegal and a violation of UN resolutions"* (First Post, 2019). The BJP, in turn, has justified the end of SSR in J&K as imperative for facilitating economic growth and social stability in the region (Economic Times, 2019). Delhi also has long-standing security interests in Kashmir, which was home to an overt and covert anti-Indian insurgency since the 1990s that was backed by the Pakistani military establishment and its intelligence service, the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence). Following the abrogation of SSR in J&K, India's military presence in the region has expanded and was initially compounded further by a widespread lockdown on all forms of communication technology.

The prevalence of regional terrorist organizations continues to render insurgency and counterinsurgency operations a defining caveat of modern political life in J&K. The initial insurgency in the 1990s capitalized on deepened anti-India sentiments following disputed elections in the late 1980s. In the 1990s, ISI-backed Islamist outfits such as Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) began making inroads into the region. By advocating for an accession of J&K to Pakistan rather than Kashmiri independence, these groups differed from ostensible nationalist movements such as the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). Although the form or extent of support provided by Pakistan is not necessarily linear or consistent (in 2005, then-President Pervez Musharraf, for instance, instigated a partial crackdown on terrorist groups), many of the currently active groups in J&K have received (or do receive) support from the Pakistani State (Shahid, 2019), creating a link between shifts in Pakistan's Kashmir policy and shifts in J&K's militancy scene. As the Pakistani journalist Amir Mir (2006) observed, *"Pakistan's relationship with radical Islamic terrorism remains ambiguous. [...] Historically, military leaders [...] openly used [...] terrorist groups in Kashmir to advance Pakistan's strategic interests"* (p. 293). With Imran Khan describing Kashmir Pakistan's strategic *"jugular vein"* (India Today, 2019), Pakistan's posturing in J&K and the modern tenets of regional militancy remain inextricably tied to contemporary Indo-Pak relations.

In recent years, however, pan-Islamic terror groups, most notably Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS), have built inroads into the local militancy scene, challenging Pakistan's strategic primacy. Al-Qaeda has created its own affiliate in J&K, Ansar Ghazwut-ul-Hind (AGuH), whereas IS declared Kashmir a 'province' in May 2019 (Timsit, 2019) and has gained some regional influence through ISKP (Islamic State in Khorasan Province), an IS offshoot chiefly active in eastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan (Sayed & Clarke, 2020). Although the two organizations differ in terms of their exact strategies and goals, both are driven by a pan-Islamic logic that views Kashmiri Muslims as part of the Muslim *Ummah* ('nation'), the transnational Islamic community (Sheikh, 2002). This non-national perspective stands in contrast to the pro-independence or pro-Pakistani orientations of more traditional regional outfits such as JeM and LeT and Kashmiri nationalist organizations like JKLF. An *Ummah*-centred understanding has thus partially shifted how the conflict is conceptualized by regional actors, some of which now view Kashmir not as a potentially autonomous state or a part of Pakistan, but as part of a future Islamic Caliphate. Such a view 'delocalizes' the Kashmir conflict, removing it from its distinct regional and local grievances and dimensions and recalibrating it as part of a broader Islamic struggle.

This paper retraces this delocalizing, pan-Islamic dimension of modern militancy in J&K by examining how and why Islamic narratives and perspectives on the conflict have changed. The paper situates these shifts in the ideological stipulations of pan-Islamism. The conflict's partial pan-Islamization, it is posited, has delocalized the fight in both ideological and strategic terms by introducing ideological frameworks and operational tactics that have been more prevalent in the Middle East. To contextualize this shift in dynamics, this contribution first discusses the ideological origins and premises of pan-Islamism before retracing Islamic extremism and militancy in J&K from the 1980s until the emergence of AGuH and ISKP in J&K in the 2010s. In connection to this, the paper suggests that this partial delocalization has invoked a transitional moment in regional militancy that must be contextualized to be understood and effectively responded to.

### Pan-Islamism

Groups such as AGuH and ISKP are pan-Islamic in their ideological orientation, marking a distinction from the nationalist and accession orientation of traditional actors in regional militancy. As such, a conceptualization of pan-Islamism and its political origins as well as its contemporary aims and manifestations is warranted. How does pan-Islamism re-envisage political order?

The foundational ideologue of pan-Islamism was the writer Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni, who viewed a unified Islamic polity as key for challenging the colonial structures imposed on the Muslim world by European imperialism. Al-Afghāni, born a Shia in Afghanistan in 1838/1839, grew up in a Muslim world marked by instability and upheaval as the Islamic polities that had long ruled the northern African part of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) were gradually integrated into the expanding European empires over the course of the 19th century. Previously, the presence of European powers in northern Africa had been

mainly limited to minor trading communities and small European enclaves. Although political opposition and military confrontation between the Christian and Muslim world had occurred in the past, northern Africa did not start falling victim to full-scale European imperialism until the 1830s. Driven by technological sophistication and imperialist ambitions, underpinned by the notion that “oriental” people were inferior (Aydın, 2006), the main European colonial powers began integrating African polities into their expanding empires: Algeria and Tunisia fell to France in 1930 and 1881 respectively whereas Great Britain subjected Morocco in 1856 and Egypt in 1882 to its rule. Over just roughly fifty years, Western powers had slowly expanded their strategic footprint in the MENA. In 1911, Libya was transferred to Italy following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Tripolitanian War between Italy and the Ottomans. Much of the Islamic world al-Afghāni grew up in, then, was penetrated by European imperialism and the submission of Muslims as colonial subjects.

Besides the expanding European powers, the Ottoman Empire constituted the other major political player in the MENA. Ruled by Islamic Sultans, the Ottoman Empire was a multi-ethnic, predominantly Muslim entity that spread from its Turkish heartland throughout the coastal regions of the eastern Mediterranean Sea down to the south-eastern shores of the Red Sea. Owing to its geographical size, the Ottoman Empire was home to a highly heterogeneous population that included various religious and ethnic minorities. Although most Ottoman subjects were Muslim, other identity categories (such as kinship, sectarian belonging and ethnic heritage) played a key role in defining social belonging and status under Ottoman rule (Dundar, 2015). East of the Ottoman boundaries were Persia and Afghanistan, in themselves home to a variety of peoples and cultures (Riaux, 2012). Even the Muslim polities in al-Afghāni’s world were subsequently marked by political structures that prioritized different forms of social belonging over simply being Muslim.

Al-Afghāni identified this political fragmentation of the Islamic world as its core weakness and initiated a revivalist movement that sought to strengthen the Islamic identity in the face of Western colonization. This revivalist ambition was inherently anti-colonial and anti-Western in orientation, espousing Islamic solidarity and seeking to liberate Muslim peoples from foreign (read: European and non-Muslim) rule. Al-Afghāni hereby assigned a distinct political dimension to the religious identity of Islam and re-invoked the imagery of a past “Golden Age” of Islam in which Islam was superior to the Christian civilizations (Mellon, 2002). For al-Afghāni, re-establishing this status quo was interlinked with Islamic solidarity: rather than emphasizing identity categories such as racial, ethnic or sectarian belonging, Muslims were to accentuate their shared identity as Muslims. Al-Afghāni hereby reinforced the colonial distinction between the colonial rulers and colonial subjects as distinctly different. This revivalist approach addressed the two issues that al-Afghāni perceived as defining the lived experience of the Muslim world: firstly, Western oppression was alleviated by solidarity, resistance and ultimate liberation. Secondly, the ethnic and sectarian heterogeneity of Islamic communities was eradicated through the focus on non-sectarianized Islam as the defining identity category. This marked a radical approach in a social environment in which both colonial and Islamic rulers stressed the importance of ethnic and sectarian belonging. Al-Afghāni envisaged the Islamic community (*Ummah*) to be governed by a pan-Islamic Caliphate that was inclusive and true to its Islamic roots. In implementing his political vision for the

Islamic world, al-Afghāni sought to reconcile his revolutionary ideas with the political structures present in the Islamic world. As a unified Muslim leadership was seen as decisive for gaining independence from Western imperialism, he espoused the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph (Kia, 1996). Al-Afghāni also proposed a Muslim, Sultan-led bloc that would incorporate the Ottoman Empire, Persia and Afghanistan, an idea that was picked up in the Ottoman Empire but rejected in Persia (ibid). Although his plans were only partially welcomed, al-Afghāni was successful in establishing a pan-Islamic ideological framework that emphasized the similarities rather than the differences between Muslims in its pursuit of Islamic revival and liberation.

In the decades after his death in 1897, the struggle for the liberation of the Muslim world did not take on the pan-Islamist bearings that al-Afghāni had advocated for as liberation movements zeroed in on ethnic, racial and sectarian categories. The defining identity categories hence took on the form of territorialized nationalisms rather than pan-Islamic belonging (Jalal, 2008). Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, the Ottoman territories in the Middle East were ceded to France and Great Britain, who delineated their respective spheres of influence via the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement (Barr, 2011). The collapse of the Ottoman Empire additionally meant that the *Ummah* lost its potentially institutionalized dimension in the form of the Ottomans, thus reducing the *Ummah* to an imagined political community rather than one that had a potential physical manifestation (Sheikh, 2002). Under the novel British/French colonial administrations, demands for independence and self-determination in the MENA prevailed. Yet, calls for liberation were increasingly organized along ethnic and sectarian lines as Western-inspired notions of nationalism and national homogeneity emerged as dominant. As such, people sought their liberation not to be manifested through the liberation of all Islamic peoples, but through the freedom of their specific national group. In this context, Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt juxtaposed the nationalist Arab governments, culminating in widespread prosecution and oppression of Islamists by nationalist administrations like that of Gamal Abdel Nasser (Zollner, 2019). This deepened the fault lines between Islamists and nationalists within Islamic countries (Jalal, 2008). Following the end of World War II in 1945 and the Western-backed establishment of the State of Israel, ethnicity-focused movements such as pan-Arabism, which advocates for ethnic (Arab) rather than explicitly religious (Islamic) belonging (Dawisha, 2003) also gained more traction, again focusing on ethno-cultural identity rather than the shared heritage of Islam. Although not located in the MENA, Pakistan, which came into being after India's independence from Britain in 1947, also directly tied Islam to Pakistani national identity (Akturk, 2015). In lieu of achieving 'liberation,' then, the form and grounds of liberation diverged significantly from those envisioned by al-Afghāni.

Today, internal as well as external conflicts continue to dominate the MENA as well as parts of South and Southeast Asia. Sectarian disputes between intrastate communities, for instance in Iraq, shape domestic processes whilst sectarian fault lines also inform interstate relations, most notably between the Sunni-Wahhabi Saudi-led bloc and the Shia Ayatollah regime in Iran. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, sectarian identity pivotally shapes everyday life, for example in the prosecution of non-Sunni communities such as the Ahmadiyyas. These modern

conflicts pertain to the impact of colonialism and the subsequently changed structures in the Islamic world, which introduced new ideational and political structures that did not emphasize finding common ties within the Islamic community as a whole. As such, the political environment that inspired al-Afghāni's notion of pan-Islamism has been altered as ethnic and sectarian fault lines render an Islamic Caliphate tolerant of diversity increasingly unlikely.

The usage of pan-Islamism as a political concept has changed according to the broader political trends that have reshaped the Muslim world, with the rise of Al-Qaeda and IS being the most pertinent embodiments of this. In line with al-Afghāni, IS declared a Caliphate that consciously did not adhere to the boundaries of modern nation-States. IS openly opposes the national borders of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which are seen as dividing and weakening the Arab world (Gelvin, 2016). For some time, IS managed to replace Al-Qaeda as the most dominant Islamist organization, and, unlike Al-Qaeda, IS managed to establish the bearings of a State, providing public services and collecting taxes in the areas it controlled (Oosterveld & Bloem, 2017). In some respects, IS' short-lived Caliphate has imitated al-Afghāni's ideational model. Yet, IS partially also stands in direct conflict with al-Afghāni's teaching of Muslim solidarity through its indiscriminate violence against other Muslims and religious and ethnic minorities (Clarke, 2019). In turn, the rise of IS and this modern manifestation of Sunni militancy is only cognizable once the American invasion of Iraq and the erosion of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-led regime is considered, indicating how emerging forms of Islamist ideology and militancy connect to the geopolitical development of the last century.

It is key to recognize the historical and ideological factors that gave rise to pan-Islamism to contextualize how it reimagines the world and what its appeal may be. Although organizations such as IS have misused al-Afghāni's pan-Islamic ideology in their indiscriminate violence, their political and military successes have also given the concept of the Caliphate an at least short-lived physical manifestation and, thus, political legitimacy. The following section will discuss the historical origins of militancy in J&K to illustrate how pan-Islamism becomes situated in the specific local-regional dimensions of the Kashmir conflict.

### Militancy in J&K

This paper contends that the partial ideological delocalization of the conflict dynamics in J&K through pan-Islamism marks a significant disruption of prior political motivations. This section elaborates on the origins of militancy in J&K, which initially emphasized either the attainment of Kashmiri independence or accession to Pakistan. Considering the strategic role of Pakistan is key in this context.

The development of militancy in J&K is heavily tied to the shifting interests and strategies of the Pakistani State. Pakistan has viewed J&K as part of Pakistan ever since the partition of British India into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), West Pakistan (Pakistan proper) and India in 1947. Under British rule J&K had been a princely State, a status that bestowed the Hindu Maharajah of Muslim-majority J&K with significant political autonomy. When British India underwent partition, the princely States could opt for either independence or accession to

India or Pakistan. J&K's Maharajah at the time, Hari Singh, was inclined to opt for independence and in the wake of such inclination, Pakistan-affiliated forces invaded western J&K in October 1947. To ensure Indian military support against Pakistan's invasion, Singh signed the Instrument of Accession, legally declaring J&K a part of India. Although the Indian forces managed to push back the Pakistani troops, Pakistan held on to the western parts of J&K, now known as Gilgit-Baltistan and so-called Azad ('free') J&K. Following mediation from the United Nations both countries agreed to hold a plebiscite that would determine the accession of J&K to either India or Pakistan. The 1948 UN Resolution stipulated that Pakistani troops had to depart the occupied areas for an impartial plebiscite to take place. This departure is yet to take place, resulting in the *de-facto* separation of Jammu & Kashmir into an Indian-administered part (Indian Administered J&K) and a Pakistani-administered part (Pakistan Administered J&K). Today, J&K remains India's only majority-Muslim state: 33.5% of the population in Jammu is Muslim, compared to 96.4% in Kashmir (Business Insider, 2019). J&K's different religious demography relative to the rest of India as well as Pakistan's and India's sustained claims over the entirety of the region have rendered the area a hotbed for conflict between the two countries. Following the first Indo-Pak war in 1947, the two countries went to war again in 1965, 1971 and 1999. The size of India's military has hereby boosted Delhi's strategic position, undermining Islamabad's ability to gain control over J&K *viz* conventional military means (i.e. military invasion and subsequent occupation).

Pakistan's Kashmir strategy began to shift in the 1980s under General Zia-ul Haq, who pursued an Islamization of Pakistani society and inserted Islamist militant groups into the Kashmir conflict. Zia's military government had toppled the democratically elected administration of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977 and deepened Pakistan's strategic and cultural ties with the Gulf States. The adaptation of a Wahhabi interpretation of Islam prevalent in some Gulf States, most notably Saudi Arabia, resulted in what some have described as the 'Wahhabization' (Roy, 2002) and 'Saudization' (Hoodbhoy, 2017) of Pakistani society. The influence of Islamic clerics was strengthened, Saudi-funded Wahhabi *Madrassas* were established throughout the country and *Sharia* law was introduced as Pakistan's governing legal framework. Zia also radicalized Pakistan's foreign policy as the ISI obtained a key role in supporting the *Jihad* of the Afghan *Mujahideen* against the Soviet Union from 1979 onwards. Crucially, Zia's government granted the Afghan Taliban access to the Pakistani borderlands as spaces for strategic reorganization, also advocating for Pakistanis to fight with the Taliban against the Soviet occupiers. Pakistan's political apparatus and society underwent rapid radicalization due to Zia's reforms, altering Pakistan's social fabric towards one that began to align more closely with a Saudi-based interpretation of Islam.

Zia's Islamization also reshaped Pakistan's Kashmir policy by recalibrating Pakistan's support for militancy towards Kashmir, especially following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989. The end of the Soviet-Afghan war had created an oversupply of battle-hardened, radicalized fighters within Pakistan. Zia had planned for this eventuality from as early as 1984 in the form of 'Operation Topac', which aimed to use fighters that had been previously active in Afghanistan in militant proxy groups in Indian Administered J&K to weaken Delhi's control over the region. Also known as the Zia Plan, Operation Topac included three key aims: (1) working towards disintegrating India; (2) utilizing spy networks to conduct acts of sabotage;

and (3) “exploit porous borders with Nepal and Bangladesh to establish bases and conduct [anti-India] operations” (Winchell, 2003, p. 379). Operation Topac deepened Pakistan’s efforts to destabilize India from within: prior to 1984, the ISI had already lent support to the separatist Khalistan movement in the Indian Punjab, which had advocated for an independent Sikh state (Khan, 2009). Zia believed that a Sikh uprising in the Punjab, coupled with a Pakistan-backed Islamic movement in Afghanistan and a Pakistan-organized struggle in J&K, would help to loosen India’s hold over Indian Administered J&K, allowing the region to ‘free’ itself from India and accede to Pakistan (Mohanty, 2009). The militants recruited by Pakistan received a geographical base in Pakistan Administered J&K that could then be used for staging subversive operations in Indian Administered J&K. Operation Topac was aimed to be fully implemented by 1991 - however, the plans were accelerated by the ISI following Zia’s death in a plane crash in 1988 that casted doubts over the future of Operation Topac in post-Zia Pakistan. Pakistan’s support for militancy in Kashmir had been launched.

Pakistan’s new Kashmir policy found its earliest expression in the ISI’s support for ostensible nationalist movements advocating for an independent Kashmiri state. Amongst these groups was the JKLF, which had been founded in Birmingham in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1977 and gained notoriety in South Asia for its 1984 assassination of the Indian diplomat Ravindra Mhatre in Birmingham. Driven by a growing public disillusionment with Indian rule in J&K after the 1987 state elections, which were widely believed to be rigged (Chowdhary & Rao, 2003), the JKLF received support from the ISI in forms of arms, funds and training to assassinate alleged Indian collaborators and spies. Fueled by sentiments of exclusion and marginalization, the late 1980s thereby became witness to an intensifying erosion of the concept of Kashmiriyat (‘Kashmiriness’, embodied by “*a spirit of independence and secularism joined by free will to a larger comity*” (Akbar, 2002, p. 192)). In its narrative, the JKLF advocated for an independent Kashmiri state and invoked the cultural legacy of Kashmiriyat whilst describing itself as Muslim but not Islamist (Anant, 2009). The JKLF simultaneously also displayed internal ideological conflicts: while older generations favored accession to Pakistan, many younger members argued for independence. The ideological and operational role of Pakistan in shaping local militancy was subsequently given from the offset.

Sensing the growing support for JKLF’s nationalist narrative, the ISI turned towards more religiously motivated groups that favored accession to Pakistan. Besides advocating accession, groups such as Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), led by the mantra *Nizam-e-Mustafa* (‘Rule of Mohammed’), also sought to Islamize J&K’s demography by destroying Sufi shrines and ‘Western’/secular businesses such as hairdressers and cinemas (Pandya, 2020). Through its support for more radical sectarian groups, Pakistan hereby shifted the ideology of Sufi-induced Kashmiriyat as a reference point of Kashmiri identity to one that aligned more with a Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. As a result, the insurgency became more underpinned with radical religious ideas and was delocalized to an extent as local frameworks (moderate Sufism and Kashmiriyat) were slowly replaced with non-local ones (Wahhabism). This delocalization was also expressed in the composition of these new groups: fighters were no longer predominantly recruited from Kashmir but from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan hereby capitalized on its strategic clout in the regional militancy scene to recalibrate religious militancy towards the Kashmir conflict,

which was increasingly seen in the terms of *Jihad*. Initially, this delocalization resulted in low public support for the new Pakistan-backed groups, impeding on their ability to operate effectively and undermining their political legitimacy (Anant, 2009). Pro-Pakistani outfits were nevertheless boosted by the end of Pakistani support for the JKLF in 1993 and the dismantling of JKLF's military wing in 1994. JKLF's departure from the scene of organized militancy shifted the character of that scene from an at least partially nationalist one to one that almost entirely pursued J&K's accession to Pakistan. A significant transition in regional militancy had begun to manifest itself.

The influence of radical militancy in J&K started to diminish in the mid-2000s, also due to decreasing Pakistani support. Following 9/11, Pakistani President Musharraf had become under increased diplomatic pressure to crack down on Pakistan-based terror outfits. Terrorist organizations also had become more influential within Pakistan: in 2004, Musharraf survived an assassination attempt by Harkat-ul Mujahideen al-Alam, another Pakistan-based organization. Musharraf's successor Asif Ali Zardari later conceded that Pakistan had propped up terrorist organizations (Wolf, 2020). Although Islamabad has officially halted its support for terrorist outfits, the political autonomy and influence of the ISI, often described as a '*State within a State*' (Shams, 2013; Sirrs, 2017) leaves significant doubts as to whether Pakistan has truly stopped supporting regional militancy. Even if State support was not given, groups such as LeT have grown more independent and remain capable to execute attacks in India proper, as is exemplified by the 2008 Mumbai Attacks. The Pakistani establishment furthermore continues to strategically distinguish between '*good*' Taliban (those serving Pakistan's policy in Afghanistan) and '*bad*' Taliban (those challenging the authority of the Pakistani State within Pakistan) (Ahmed, 2019). Considering this, it is clear that the connection between increasingly Wahhabized militancy in J&K and backing by Pakistan is perhaps not necessarily linear, but nevertheless a vital one.

### Pan-Islamic Militancy in J&K Today

The pan-Islamization of militancy in J&K today builds upon the Wahhabization of Islam and the *Jihad*-narrative pushed by ISI-backed groups. Yet, pan-Islamist militancy diverges in its political aims, most notably regarding Pakistan. Indeed, new organizations now compete with Pakistan-backed organizations: AGuH, for instance, has been aggressively recruiting from the ranks of HM (The Hindu, 2019). Due to the growing influence of IS and Al-Qaeda affiliates, the conflict has been underpinned by a pan-Islamic logic while the employed tactics have begun to resemble those used in militant theatres in the MENA. How can this change in the ideological and operational character of the conflict be explained?

- Changing Conditions

A defining element of the current shift towards pan-Islamism and a more Wahhabized understanding of Islam is the Saudization and *Jihadization* of Pakistani-Kashmiri militancy. Crucially, Wahhabism's conservative-literal reading of the Quran stands in opposition to

Kashmir's more liberal Sufi traditions. Radical groups have framed Muslims in J&K as besieged by Indian Hindus, in the process chastising Sufism as too weak in the face of Indian 'occupation'. This renders Wahhabism and violent militancy as the sole way of halting New Delhi's assimilationist policies. In this context, Wahhabist pan-Islamism has replaced Kashmiri nationalism as the dominant narrative of militancy in J&K: "*Azadi baraye Islam*" ('J&K as part of a *Sharia*-ruled Caliphate') has displaced "*Azadi baraye Kashmir*" ('Independent J&K') or even, "*Azadi baraye Pakistan*" ('J&K is part of Pakistan') as the dominant slogans of regional groups (Pandya, 2020). Islamabad has lost its capacity to control the narrative through which militancy in J&K is justified and organized. In this context, a re-narrativization of the conflict dynamics increasingly dissociates the struggle in J&K from questions of Pakistani Statehood. The Wahhabization of J&K as a spill-over effect from Pakistan and the dissolution of Kashmiriyat have played a key role in enabling this process (Pandya, 2020). The Wahhabization of Pakistan (and, thus, also parts of Kashmir) is also hardly finished: Gulf governments continue to offer scholarships and other educational opportunities to Pakistani students, further incentivizing the participation in Gulf-backed organizations at home and abroad (ibid). The increasingly ubiquitous access to the internet (as well as its sophisticated use by groups such as IS (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, 2012)) has simultaneously heightened opportunities for self-radicalization whilst enabling a greater awareness for political developments in other Islamic countries, especially in the Middle East (Kuchay, 2019). These factors converge and delocalize the conflict into a broader global context of the Muslim fight against infidels. India emerges as another anti-Muslim oppressor in this narrative, in turn strengthening Wahhabism and its teachings. Indeed, 1.6 out of 6 million Sunnis in J&K are now Wahhabis (Pandya, 2020). This has two decisive implications: (1) the Wahhabization of J&K's social fabric further dissolves the already weakened Kashmiriyat and (2) the struggle in J&K is ideologically reformulated from a struggle for national self-determination to one of globalized, non-national *Jihad*.

This Wahhabization of the Kashmir conflict has decisive implications for India, hardening the conflict lines between the local population and Indian security forces. This ideational trend is validated and reinforced by perceived experiences of religious, political and cultural humiliation, which engender an ideological space for the pan-Islamic interpretation of the own experience "*in all the areas of collective experience*" (Pandya, 2020, p. 3). The conflict's pan-Islamization and *Jihadization* hereby justifies heightened violence against Indian security forces, non-Muslims and Muslims who do not agree with this narrative, adding a religious and sectarian dynamic that was not as pronounced before (Pandya, 2020). The securitized response by Indian security forces legitimizes this oppression-based narrative further by especially impacting the civilian population, therefore counterproductively contributing to the support for militant outfits. As terrorist violence is met with State violence, a cycle of retributory action is initiated that legitimizes the narrative of terror groups and, hence, their political standing in the population. An exemplification of this cycle is the killing of HM commander Burhan Wani by security forces in 2016, evoking widespread and partially violent protests throughout J&K that framed Wani as a freedom fighter rather than a terrorist (Jeelani, 2016). At the same time, the prevalence of terrorist activities justifies a more hard-handed security response that further deepens local antagonization. This cycle of

retributionary violence renders a more militarized response to the conflict as unlikely to benefit the security in the region.

Having emerged as a target itself for the activities of pan-Islamist terror organizations, Pakistan is also implicated by these shifts in the conflict dynamics. Pakistan's domestic security situation is already volatile as the government has struggled to contain ethno-separatist movements such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Sindhudesh Liberation Army (SLA) (Kumar, 2020). Moreover, the activities of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), a group partially consisting of fighters that used to fight for the Afghan Taliban, indicate that Islamabad's support for terror groups has detrimentally impacted its own national security (Behuria, 2007). Many local outfits have grown disillusioned with Pakistan's ambiguity towards Islamist groups, which has allowed pan-Islamic organizations such as Al-Qaeda and IS to make inroads into J&K (Pandya, 2020). Both groups are highly critical of Pakistan's role in the Kashmir conflict, accusing Pakistan of pursuing its own geopolitical agenda in Kashmir rather than representing the interests of local Muslims, thereby betraying the Islamist cause (ibid). By default, neither organization recognizes the State-defined boundaries, and, thus, the legitimacy of the Pakistani State. ISKP has thus framed the Pakistani State as a legitimate target for attacks due to Pakistan's (comparatively tolerant) approach to religious minorities and its non-adherence to *Sharia* law (Jadoon, 2018). Although not sharing the same level of anti-Shia militancy, Al-Qaeda has made similar claims before (ibid). The recent killing of eleven Shia Hazara coal miners in Balochistan by ISKP hereby exemplifies the capacity of these groups to perpetrate attacks in Pakistan, thereby further complicating Pakistan's sectarian and security landscape (Afzal, 2021). Such attacks as well as the more general inroads of pan-Islamic groups into the Kashmir conflict indicate that the contours of militancy in the region are in the process of changing, partially also at the detriment of Pakistan.

- **Changing Tactics**

The growing ideological importance of the MENA region for the Kashmir conflict is mirrored in the change of regional militant tactics and strategies. Combat tactics that have dominated the world of Arab militancy (including suicide attacks) have become increasingly prevalent in militancy in Indian Administered J&K. This can be interpreted as the delocalization of the operational strategies, increasingly emulating strategies used elsewhere. 2008 saw the eruption of mass, *intifada*-like protests in Indian Administered J&K that included a tactic of organized stone-pelting, constraining the mobility of security forces in urban terrain (Pandya, 2020). Stone-pelting was a tactic that was frequently used by Muslim youth in Palestine during the first and second *intifada*. Coordinated via online messenger platforms such as WhatsApp, stone-pelting has since often been employed in combination with large scale protests to effectively block the progression of security forces pursuing alleged militants (Shad, 2020). Pelting stones hence does not aim to kill the security forces but to constrain their mobility. This creates a nexus between armed militancy and the activities of the local civil population. The global coverage of the *intifada* protests and the increased emotional-political connection of Kashmiris to these protests and the Middle East may have inspired the employment of similar tactics, creating an important tactical link with Arab forms of militancy.

Another change in tactics is manifested in the increased usage of suicide bombings, IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and VIEDs (vehicle IEDs). The most salient suicide attack occurred in February 2019 in Indian Administered J&K's Pulwama district as a member of JeM killed himself and 45 Indian security forces via a VIED (Miller, 2019). According to the attacker's father, his son had joined JeM after having been beaten up by Indian security forces, highlighting the role that feelings of humiliation may have played in his radicalization (ibid). The Pulwama attack indicated that the tactics used by outfits were changing, relying less on the cross-border transfer of arms and more on the construction of IEDs. This is indicative of two things: firstly, India has managed to successfully mitigate the trade and transport of arms from Pakistan to Indian Administered J&K following the 1999 Kargil War, which may also help to explain the decline in armed militancy in the early 2000s. Secondly, however, this has forced terrorist outfits to recalibrate their operations towards an approach less dependent on the availability of arms. As such, India's mitigation of cross-border arms trade has resulted in terrorist groups applying tactics and strategies that are harder to track for Indian intelligence and security services. The constituent parts of IEDs, for instance, could be purchased separately and then constructed by someone with minimal training. At the same time, it is important to note that at least JeM now views the perpetration of suicide attacks as a legitimate tactic in the pursuit of its political goals and also has the technical means and know-how to perpetrate such attacks. JeM undoubtedly would have been inspired by IS' use of vehicles in suicide attacks in Berlin (2016), Nice (2017), London (2017) and Stockholm (2017). Although the Pulwama attack was not committed by IS, its operational footprint is apparent, indicating how tactics employed in the Middle East have become more relevant beyond the region.

Regional terror organizations have also reorganized their recruitment patterns by increasingly seeking to radicalize and recruit individuals online. This can again be understood as a response to the post-1999 militarization of the Indo-Pak border that rendered the border increasingly perilous for militants to cross. As discussed above, social media platforms additionally allow militants to communicate digitally and organize at a much quicker pace, enabling better coordination, for instance in the form of protests that help to shield militants (Shad, 2020). This digital shift concurrently also has important practical implications on the recruits' profiles: during the 1990s, militants were predominantly recruited from abroad, resulting in little public support for Pakistan-backed groups. The influx of foreign fighters was constrained by the intensified post-1999 militarization of the border, resulting in groups now directly recruiting Kashmiris, especially via social media. In practice, this means that individuals joining an organization do not undergo the same form or extent of military training as previous fighters as they cannot cross the border into Pakistan. It can be inferred that this has led to a *de-facto* deterioration of the military strength of regional organizations when measured in access to and training with arms. That being said, recruitment is now easier to facilitate, and IS' success in cyber radicalization has outlined the importance of an online presence for the creation and strengthening of a terrorist outfit (Gates & Podder, 2015). The Pulwama attack is hereby illustrative in showing how individuals with minimal to no military training are able to commit large-scale terror attacks. The fact that arms and experienced foreign fighters are less available might thus paradoxically have made terror organizations more, rather than less,

dangerous by shifting the operational strategies to IED/VIED and suicide attacks. Enhanced recruitment within J&K also bestows more legitimacy to regional terror organizations as the fighters are now Kashmiri and thus enjoy closer social bonds and support networks within the local communities. This shift has increased the internal legitimacy of organizations that initially lacked popular support because of their perception as foreign and non-Kashmiri.

It would be over-simplistic to conclude that the tactics and dynamics in J&K are identical to those in the Middle East. Clearly, conflict dynamics and strategies continue to be connected to local conditions, for instance regarding the availability of arms. That said, the increased linkage between terror practices and pan-Islamic ideologies in the Middle East and J&K is visible and has resulted in a partial delocalization of the conflict dynamics. These deepening links have accompanied the partial pan-Islamization of the Kashmir conflict, ultimately excluding pro-independence/nationalist narratives at the expense of a radicalized pan-Islamic ideology.

## Conclusion

Issues connected to militancy continue to dominate J&K's political landscape today, bearing key implications for its people as well as the broader relationship between India and Pakistan. By historically seeking to undermine Delhi's position in Kashmir via its support for terrorism, Pakistan has contributed to the political conditions that culminated in the nullification of Article 370. At the same time, India has failed to make genuine political concessions to the inhabitants of Indian Administered J&K. In this light, decisions such as the bifurcation of the state and the nullification of Article 370, unless they deliver the rapid economic development and growth that was claimed they would usher in, have the potential to amplify sentiments of alienation, providing possible further grounds for radicalization and militancy. In the long run, a hard-handed approach in Indian Administered J&K may thus detrimentally impact India's own national security interests beyond Kashmir.

These complex regional dynamics connected to militancy are further complicated by the growing role of pan-Islamic militancy, which fosters a distinctly new threat to both India and Pakistan. Pakistan loses control over militancy in its north-eastern territories and is increasingly targeted itself whilst India must develop new approaches to tackling new forms of militancy. Although not dominant yet, militant pan-Islamism in J&K has the potential to transform the region and its dynamics in the years and decades to come. The core appeal of pan-Islamism again speaks to socioeconomic and sociocultural exclusion. Because of this, India must seek to urgently address these fundamentally social grievances to arrive at a sustainable solution to the conflict. Whilst this is not to say that a security-oriented response is not also necessary, such a response must be well-weighted and accompanied by civil responses. Security forces that have committed crimes against civilians must be held accountable to improve India's local legitimacy. An improved civil response will be key for India to address the threat of pan-Islamism, now a far cry from the political ideas of al-Afghāni. Yet, as shown in the Middle East, its ideological influence nevertheless remains pervasive.

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