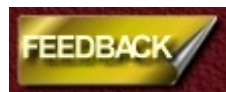


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JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI, HIZBUL MUJAHIDEEN & AL QAEDA

by B. Raman

US intelligence officers posted in Pakistan have reportedly been detailed enquiries into the likely links of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Pakistan headed by Qazi Hussain Ahmed with Al Qaeda of Osama bin Laden. These enquiries are reported to have been started following the arrest of Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, supposedly No. 3 in Al Qaeda, in Karachi in March from the house of a women's wing leader of the JEI at Raza Road, an area where many serving and retired officers of the Pakistan

2. Earlier this year, two other suspected cadres of Al Qaeda were arrested from the house of another JEI member in Karachi. These arrests give rise to a suspicion that JEI office-bearers and cadres not only in North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan, but also in other parts of Pakistan have been helping the surviving members of Al Qaeda who crossed over into Pakistan from Afghanistan in the beginning of this year.

3. After the arrest of Khalid Sheikh Mohammad and his handing over to the USA's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had organised separate briefings for foreign correspondents and journalists at the ISI headquarters. At those briefings, in response to questions about any links between the JEI and Al Qaeda, Maj. Gen. Tariq Aziz, who was then the media spokesman of President Pervez Musharraf, had claimed that the fact that some Al Qaeda members were arrested from the houses of individual JEI members did not mean that the JEI as an organisation was having links with Al Qaeda.

4. However, the US intelligence officers, who have been interrogating Khalid Sheikh Mohammad at a place outside Pakistan, do not appear to be convinced that this was just the rogue actions of some individuals of the JEI, of which the JEI leaders were not aware. Their concern about the possible links between the JEI and Al Qaeda have been heightened by the newly-established links of the Hizbe Islami (HI) of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar with Al Qaeda and the Taliban to harass the American troops in

Afghanistan.

5. Of all the Islamic fundamentalist parties of Pakistan, the JEI had been the closest to the HI and had maintained contacts with Gulbuddin even when he and his associates were living in Iran with the knowledge of the Iranian Government. After 9/11, Teheran, under pressure from the US, expelled them from Iranian territory. They were welcomed in Pakistani territory by the JEI and sympathetic serving and retired officers of the ISI and given shelter in the border areas.

6. The "Khabrain", an Urdu journal published from Lahore, has reported as follows: "If during the interrogation of Khalid by the FBI it is proved that the jihadi wing of the JEI has been co-operating with Al Qaeda and providing finance to them, then the US Government's special department "Office of the Co-Ordinator For Counter-Terrorism" may recommend to the Department of Justice as well as the US State Department to include the JEI in the list of terrorist organisations of the world. Reliable sources have revealed that the Co-ordinator For Counter-Terrorism Department has already started collecting information regarding the JEI's activities after Khalid's arrest."

7. It is learnt that, simultaneously, US intelligence officers in Pakistan have also been making enquiries about the links of the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) of Jammu & Kashmir with the JEI of Pakistan as well as with the HI of Gulbuddin and Al Qaeda. The HM was formed in 1990 at the initiative of the ISI and the JEI by merging nearly a dozen small terrorist organisations of J&K and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK). Its leader Syed Salahuddin lives partly in Rawalpindi and partly in the POK. Its offices in Pakistan, including the POK, are generally located in the offices of the JEI, which looks after the financial needs of the HM.

8. Before the Taliban captured power in Kabul in September, 1996, the recruits of the HM used to be trained in training camps in Afghan territory by instructors of Gulbuddin. The Taliban, which was then opposed to the HI, ordered the HM to close down its training camps and expelled all HM office-bearers based in Afghan territory. Since then, the HM recruits are trained in the POK by the ex-servicemen in the JEI and armed by the ISI.

9. Concerned over the links of the HM with the JEI and the HI, the Counter-Terrorism Division of the US State Department in its report on the Patterns of Global Terrorism during 2002 released last month has placed not only the HM, but also the Al Badr and the Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen, both associated with the JEI and the HI, in the list of "other terrorist organisations". This list includes the names of those organisations which, in the US judgement, have also been indulging in terrorist activities, but the evidence against them regarding their likely involvement in terrorism directed against the US is not strong enough to warrant their being declared as Foreign Terrorist Organisations under a 1996 law, which entails some punitive consequences such as freezing of funds etc.

10. The US action to categorise the HM, the Al Badr and the

Jamiat-ul-Mujashideen as terrorist organisations was triggered off not so much by their activities in J&K, as by their links with the JEI, the HI and possibly Al Qaeda too. The US State Department report states as follows on the HM: "The group is the militant wing of Pakistan's largest Islamic political party, the Jamaat-i-Islami. It currently is focused on Indian security forces and politicians in Kashmir and has conducted operations jointly with other Kashmiri militants. It reportedly operated in Afghanistan through the mid-1990s and trained alongside the Afghan Hizb-I-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) in Afghanistan until the Taliban takeover. The group, led by Syed Salahuddin, is made up primarily of ethnic Kashmiris. Currently, there are visible splits between Pakistan-based commanders and several commanders in Indian-occupied Kashmir."

11. The recently-announced curbs by the Pakistan Government on fund collection and other similar activities by the HM in Pakistani territory would seem to be more in response to US concerns over its activities and its links with the JEI and the HI than in response to Indian demands for action against it. It remains to be seen how far the Musharraf regime vigorously enforces these curbs, of which there is little evidence so far.

12. Qazi Hussain Ahmed has, in the meanwhile, denounced attempts to link the JEI with Al Qaeda as a conspiracy and denied any such links. At the same time, the JEI has reportedly asked the HM offices located in its buildings to shift elsewhere. It has disputed the US State Department's description of the HM as its militant wing.

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