

from my interviews. There are moments of overlap between the ideas that become visible ahead and the ideas treated in the three preceding chapters. However, taken together they illustrate what the strong trends in the Taliban narratives are, and can, therefore, contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the religious mind of the Taliban.

The Taliban communications include recruitment videos and recorded speeches, leaflets and pamphlets (shabnamen), jihadi anthems (taranay), and press releases to the local media that take responsibility for violent attacks and explain the reasons behind them. The data was collected between 2007 and 2011, and draws on religious references, concepts, myths, and imagery in a way that makes it evident that they address 'the insider' in order to convince co-religionists about the legitimacy of the Taliban jihad and sharia aspirations, and to convey a clear understanding to the adherents and supporters of the Pakistani Taliban of what they are defending, who the enemy is, and how it should be combated. Religious justifications for violence, therefore, stand out especially clearly in this sort of material. Together with the interviews, these materials have helped me understand the various roles religion plays in the Taliban narratives as well as the limitations of religious discourse. As will be clear, the Taliban are drawing on both secular and religious discourses, attempting to strike a balance between the preservation of religion and tradition on the one hand, and self-defence and security arguments on the other.²

The public communications of the Pakistani Taliban are primarily aimed at a local audience. Some, however, are aimed at a larger, transnational Muslim audience and others at adherents of the Taliban and affiliated movements. In the last category, I, for instance, examine a speech delivered by the Red Mosque activist Hamna Abdullah to her fellow students, arguing that the time for militant jihad has come, and a speech delivered by the TTP leader Mullah Fazlullah to a dozen young suicide bombers (fedayeen) just before they left to carry out their missions.

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Religion in the Taliban Narratives

This chapter explores how the Pakistani Taliban groups invoke religion in their public communications as a justification and motivation for violent acts. It provides an in-depth understanding of the many *different* ways in which religion is invoked in the narratives of the Taliban. The schematic understanding I introduce here might be helpful for analysing and understanding other instances of religious violence also. At the same time, my analysis here also extends the findings of other studies that have tried to deduce the logic of religious violence and it can thus be seen as a contribution to the larger debate on the relationship between religion and violence.¹

The chapter is organized according to the various ways in which religion appears to play a role in the Taliban narratives justifying violence, namely as (a) an object to be defended; (b) a threat; (c) the purpose of armed struggle; (d) a limit on war; and, finally, as (e) imagery and myth. The analysis in this chapter is mainly based on different genres of public communications issued by the Pakistani Taliban, which complement the material

The audio and video recordings I have examined are largely intended as recruitment tools.³ Some are available on the Internet, but most of the material is distributed locally in the KPP and the tribal areas. The videos include statements made by prospective martyrs before carrying out suicide operations.⁴ They also include statements elaborating on the aims and enemies of the various Taliban factions (often accompanied by pictures of beheadings of spies or war scenes). For instance, one video shows the former TTP leader Hakimullah Mehsud explaining why the TTP is fighting against the Pakistani military.

The videos also contain jihadi anthems; most of the anthems I cite in this book are taken from the videos. The anthems are emotional, martial, and nationalistic songs, often glorifying battle and the fighters. They are meant to be emotionally moving and to provide legitimacy for a violent course of action. As described in a report from the International Crisis Group, this sort of material contains 'emotive chanting, archival footage from the fight against Soviet forces and the Soviet-backed regime, images from Iraq and clips from Western documentaries, as well as videos of insurgent training, attacks on government and international forces, and equipment seized or destroyed'.⁵

Taliban-affiliated groups also distribute flyers, pamphlets, and handouts, including the so-called shabnamen or night letters. The shabnamen are a traditional means of communication in the tribal areas: they are unsigned letters distributed clandestinely overnight, often containing handwritten warnings or messages to a particular population. According to the Pakistani analyst Muhammad Amir Rana, these have become the core channel of communication in the KPP and the tribal areas.⁶ Shorter messages from Taliban leaders are aimed at the populations of the areas where they operate, whereas the more elaborate statements issued by Taliban leaders and commanders are intended for a larger audience. The leaflets with short messages, which are disseminated by hand, convey concrete imperatives from the Taliban for either security reasons or religious ones. They also

generally warn that those who violate the imperatives will be discovered and punished.

Though the Taliban communication material provides religious evidence for their cause in the form of references to the Quran or jurisprudential literature, much of the material seems to be based on the implicit premise that the Taliban interpretation of God's laws represents authentic Islam and is indisputable. Especially in the shabnamen distributed to the local population in the KPP, their interpretation of sharia is presented as religious imperatives, and no argumentation to support their conclusions is considered necessary. An illustrative example is the statement below, which is addressed to the residents of Kurram Agency.

- It is mandatory to keep a beard according to Islamic Sunnah. Cutting and shaving it is a big sin.
- Women should be veiled. They are banned from going into the mountains and fields.
- Lavishness in wedding ceremonies is prohibited, and music is forbidden for everyone.
- Wearing a *tobi* (headwear resembling a calotte or skullcap) is compulsory for every man.
- Prayers in the mosque should be strictly attended, and people should go to the mosque for prayers. The mosque of every village should have an imam and his pay should be at least Rs 5,000.
- Intoxicating materials, hashish, alcohol, and other narcotics and the like are strictly banned.
- Charging interest [on monetary loans] is haram. Those who have charged interest earlier should explain themselves.
- People dealing with NGOs should be arrested. Those having connections with the NGOs should also step forward and explain themselves.
- For women it is haram to attend burials. This means that men should advise their families that women should not attend burials (of non-relatives).
- Tailors should sew clothes according to the Sunnah and not according to the English style.
- Dish antennas should be removed from houses.

- Taking bribes and *halaat* (taking money from a poor party or presenting weak evidence behind a charge) is prohibited in the jirgas.
- Thieves will be given the punishment prescribed in sharia.
- The agreement with the Shia is only about the road.⁷ Having friendships or any dealings with them is haram.
- The *haq mehr* (dower) for women at the time of the wedding ceremony is to be fixed at Rs 70,000 and 2 *tolas* [25 grams] of gold. Other traditions are banned. This means the dower should be given at the time of the wedding. In the event of a divorce, women have the right to the valuables and the gold.
- Setting fires in the mountains is banned; anyone who is caught will be punished.
- Those who have relatives in Peshawar or foreign countries should tell them that it is important to grow a beard, and their lame excuses will not be accepted.⁸

In addition to the aforementioned sources, I have examined some special documents, such as the will of Abdul Rashid Ghazi (the imam of the Red Mosque who was killed during Operation Silence) and a biography of the former TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud, written by Azam Tariq, a TTP spokesman. These sources are notable for their use of religious imagery and ideas about divine intervention.

In studying materials of this kind, it is important to understand how they are produced and distributed in order to evaluate how official and authoritative they are, to what degree are they sanctioned by the leadership of the Taliban movements, and who the intended audiences are. Although there have been comprehensive reviews of the Al-Qaeda communications, very little has been published on Taliban communications in Pakistan.⁹ It has been observed in some of the few available accounts that the leadership of the TTP is using a media-production entity, the Al-Sahab Media Foundation, and a distribution and translation network, the Global Islamic Media Front—both formerly connected mainly with the Al-Qaeda.¹⁰ In addition to implying collaboration between the TTP and the Al-Qaeda, this

connection suggests that the TTP is also addressing a broader, transnational audience.

The TTP also has its own official media organ, Umar Studio. Another outlet, Ummat Studio, seems to have produced far less material, though it can be traced to the TTP.¹¹ Another lesser-known production entity is the Fateh Studio, which is connected to the Taliban in Swat.¹² I have also examined the Pakistani Taliban material published by independent production entities that are sympathetic to them, such as Studio Intiqam (related to a small Taliban-sympathizing movement, Ittehad-e-Mujahideen Khurasan, which allegedly has formed an alliance with a local Taliban faction), and *Hitteen* (an Urdu magazine addressing a larger, transnational audience). These materials are of interest not only because of the messages they convey but also due to the means by which their productions are distributed. These include popular online jihadi forums, notably Alqimmah.net, and the forums administered by the Al-Qaeda-sympathizing movement Ansar al-Mujahideen (the Helpers of the Mujahideen).¹³

Establishing the authenticity of these materials, particularly the leaflets and shabnamen, is sometimes difficult because of the highly decentralized and informal character of such communication. It is conceivable that fake materials that are not issued by the Taliban are also distributed, since the government of Pakistan might have an interest in engaging in the propaganda war. Only a few of the leaflets carry any form of logo or letterhead, most are undated, and many are written by hand and generally reflect a very informal way of communicating. However, they are often signed by the issuing leader or commander (*amir*), and structural and thematic elements in the documents aid in comparison and in establishing their origin.¹⁴ Because of the uncertain provenance of this kind of material, I have treated it cautiously, citing only content and arguments that appear frequently enough to form an identifiable pattern.

[illegible]

تمام تر بغیر اللہ اس ذات کیلئے ہیں جس کی عزت و کبریائی کے سامنے دنیا کی تمام مخلوق و دنیا کی طاقتیں بچے تو تیر ہیں لاکھوں درود

عبدالغفر کے پاس ایک سو قلم و چرکی لٹکائی تھیں۔ پتے والے انسب مسلک کے متقلد عوام کو حیدر کی خوشیاں مبارک ہوں۔ اس موقع پر تمس اللہ

رب العزیز کی رحمت سے اُمید رکھتے ہوئے اُمیدوار اور احیائے خلافت کی تازہ بہ تازہ کیڑیوں کی خوش خبری دار بننا ہوتا۔

یہاں تیس ہفتے کے حکمرانوں کا بہترین مرتبہ ہو گئے۔
انصار اللہ شام، یمن، عراق اور صومالیہ سے لیکر پاکستان، افغانستان اور چین تک جاری عالمی اسرائیلی تحریکوں ساتھ ساتھ مصر کی واپس

میں اس موقع پر پاکستان کے قلمسلمان مولام کو یہ بتانا چاہتا ہوں کہ ہماری یہ عبادی ضرورتی

جہاں اسلام کے نام پر حاصل کی گئی تھی، آج غلام، آقا، جہاں میں جا چکی ہے اور پاکستانی قوم کو غلام بنایا جا رہا ہے۔ خود اور دوسروں کے

فوجوں کی غلامی میں بن گئے۔ اس لیے اس سیکرٹری کا نام، ہم سب پر کر رہا ہے۔ میں خود ہوا جان دو چہرہ سرسبز ہوا

معاذ اللہ کہتے ہیں۔ ہم اس کے ساتھ ساتھ ۱۵ دن سے صیام بھی کر رہے ہیں۔

میں اس سیکرٹری نظام کے خلاف لڑنے والے ملے جلے لوگوں کی کوشش کی ہوتی ہے۔ جب تک ہم حق پر قائم رہیں گے

اللہ کی نصرت ہمارے شامل حال رہے گی۔

لہذا آپ شریعتِ معلہ کی روغنمایاں میں اپنی کاروائیاں جاری رکھیں اور اس فکری نظام کی تعلیمی لینے والے کرسمنے والے ہر کارکن کو لانا۔

انقلابی منش: مصر نے ایک نیا نام، بلکہ لبرٹی اور خاندانی حفاظت کا سورج جوگیا اور اسلام خالی ہو کر رہے گا۔
ہماریس اور القذافی العزیز کی قزاق پر عین ریش وہ مصلحتوں کا دروازہ ہے۔

حکیم الامت مسعود

نہ اس پر انہیں کھڑے کر دیا

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دکھامیر علی خان پستان

Figure 2 Message from the former TTP head Hakimullah Mehsud, distributed on the occasion of Eid ul Fitr on 18 August 2012

Note: The leaflet was collected from Miran Shah in North Waziristan in 2012, in which Mehsud argues that it is mandatory for Muslims to overthrow the secular system in Pakistan. He urges Muslims to unite and face the 'tyrannical rulers', and reassures the mujahedeen that God and victory will be with those who are fighting for truth and justice. Mehsud also urges the mujahedeen to continue their activities against the 'infidel' system and to target groups that are strengthening such a system. He tells them to keep up the faith that God helps the oppressed. If God is willing, he says, the Islamic system [*khilafat*] will prevail not only in Pakistan but eventually in the whole world.

Despite the informality of these materials, it would be an error to assume that the local population does not take them seriously. It is likely that public executions of those who have flouted these warnings have instilled fear in the local population and led them to pay greater attention to the messages, regardless of their sources.

The sections ahead are based on an analysis of these sorts of communication materials and bring forward the different ways in which religion appears as a justification for the Taliban embracement of violence.

Religion as an Object to be Defended

One of the most striking features of the Taliban calls to jihad is the repeated claim of exceptionalism and urgency. Militant jihad is deemed urgent because religion—specifically, sharia or religious institutions such as seminaries and mosques—is under dire threat. The defence of these institutions is always equated with the defence of the central religious doctrine of *tawhid*—the oneness and unity of God.¹⁵ Jihad thereby becomes a matter of defending the very foundations of Islam.

Tawhid is the central faith doctrine in Islamic tradition and also the first part of the Muslim declaration of faith: 'There is no God but God' (*la ilaha illallah*). Any threat to tawhid makes jihad a matter of the life or death of religion. This argument was less prominent in my interviews: tawhid was not frequently mentioned as an object to be defended.

Since the Red Mosque incident in 2007, religious seminaries and mosques have taken on a special significance as physical symbols of Islam under threat. In the speech delivered by Hamna Abdullah in front of thousands of female activists after the demolition of the historical Amir Hamza mosque, she claimed that '[o]ur bodies will fall, but mosques will stand. Rivers of our blood will flow, but [we] will not let the greatness of Islam be harmed.'¹⁶ She equated mosques with 'the greatness of Islam'.

As already noted in Chapter 3, she also referred to the mosques and seminaries as 'Islam's forts' and 'God's house', thus equating the defence of these structures with the defence of Islam.¹⁷ Such claims imply that without the protection of its human guardians, Islam could die out.

Recruitment materials of the TTP also often describe 'martyred' mosques or seminaries, as in a video issued by the Darra Adam Khel faction of the Taliban: 'Look at this madrasa. This is the madrasa of Sherakai. It was attacked in the holy month of Ramadan by the apostate [murtad] and impure [*nafak*] army on a Friday. In this attack, scores of innocent people were killed and many sustained injuries.'¹⁸ Such an image functions to justify violent actions against the Pakistani army. In the public communications, the defence of political sovereignty is also discursively connected to religion and the defence of divine authority. This equivalence was also evident in my conversations with the Taliban activists, who repeatedly depicted Afghanistan as the only place on earth where the rule or system of God was implemented. Thus national borders must be defended because they are simultaneously constituted as Islamic borders. This points to an odd paradox in the Taliban narratives: on the one hand, God is established as sovereign and almighty, yet on the other hand, jihad is justified by the claim that His authority on earth is threatened and in need of human defence.

It is worth highlighting that what, in turn, are related to tawhid and divine political authority are abstract ideas of 'peace' and 'order' attained through the implementation of sharia (depicted as unmediated Godly reign), and with it a particular notion of a more 'efficient' punishment system that, according to the Taliban narrative, can eliminate crimes and immoral acts (according to their narrative, it also presents a more 'human' alternative to the existing Pakistani justice infrastructure). The Pakistani Taliban thereby depict themselves as defending the interests of the Pakistani people.

A video issued by the TTP in the frontier area of Darra Adam Khel claims that Talibanization eliminated crimes in the area:

Darra Adam Khel was earlier home to thieves, dacoits, alcoholics, powder [heroin], hashish, and other criminal acts. Praise be to Allah, through the emergence of the Taliban, the power of the violence-makers was finished. Charg [a name meaning 'chicken' in Pashto] was the leader of the offenders and had heavily tortured the locals. Praise be to Allah, he was killed by the hands of the Taliban and people were freed from him. Hashish, heroin, and alcohol were wiped out from the region.¹⁹

The virtues of justice as practised under sharia are also expressed in an address by Hakimullah Mehsud recorded in a video: 'In an Islamic government, there is salvation from things such as the police of the English system, complicated court systems, law courts, and offices—what is otherwise interpreted as "law and order" today.'²⁰

The same kind of portrayal of the Taliban as the well-wishers of the Pakistani people is often seen in the jihadi anthems. In an address to young men about to depart on suicide missions, Mullah Fazlullah explains the purpose of the Taliban in terms of the common good: 'Brothers, it is our faith that Allah is with us.... Allah is our well-wisher, Islam is the religion of peace, we are the well-wishers of the people, whether they are Hindus, Sikhs, or Christians, or whether it is the kafir army or *mushrik* [idolater] army.'²¹

One of the anthems played in a recruitment video includes the following lines:

We are the well-wishers and admirers of the masses and the country,
We are fighters hailing from every house and family,
O Allah, be our guardian, we are travellers in the black mountains.²²

The Taliban imperatives in the shabnamen are framed in the same altruistic terms, with the goals of protecting the people and their lands against chaos and establishing peace.²³ These narratives always present sharia and the re-establishment of the glory of Islam as the prerequisites for a stable society. In a statement by Azam Tariq, the spokesman of the TTP, removing the 'secular'

leaders is considered to be in the interest of the Pakistani people: 'We can give the Pakistani nation the well-meaning advice that if the Pakistani people want peace in the country, they should take on the responsibility of removing the present establishment of secular rulers and ending the army's American war.'²⁴

Despite this avowed altruism, many of these communications are intolerant of religious or moral failings. The call for jihad is based on the premise that true believers never compromise with respect to their religion, and the framing of both religion and the definition of the true believer is, therefore, inflexible. The anonymous editor of the jihadi outlet *Hitteen*, where the Taliban leaders publish their views, describes 'the leadership of truth' (meaning the Taliban) as those who are 'never ready to negotiate with sin, disobedience [towards God], or *kufur* [unbelief] and shirk, and are always ready even to give their lives for the establishment of the sovereignty of Allah'.²⁵ This uncompromising stance is evident in the shabnamen that describe the ongoing jihad as unending as long as enemy attacks continue and at the same time undertake to 'ensure' that jihad will be continued to the last breath.²⁶

Religion as Threat

The defence aspects of the narratives on jihad are clear in the recruitment and communication materials. The militants are defending religion (particular dimensions of it) against elimination attempts by the enemy. This discourse implies that the Pakistani Taliban represent their own actions as *reactions* and devote considerable space in their communication and recruitment materials to displaying the bad intentions and actions of their enemies. Whereas religion clearly appears as something to be defended, it also appears as something to be protected against, namely when it comes to the religion of the enemy. Thus religion is part of the threat image in a particular way, as I describe ahead.

Generally, a common ambivalence can be traced in the material in the way the religiosity of the enemy is constituted. On the one hand, the religiosity of the enemy is constituted as wrong religiosity (driven by 'wrong' faith doctrines, for example, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism) and on the other hand, the religiosity of the enemy—somewhat paradoxically—consists of adherence to non-religion, disbelief. Thus while references to a crusade war initiated by the 'Jews and Christians' are recurrent, equally present is the tendency to frame the West as devoid of any religion.

The main enemy, the US, is seen as driven by both religious expansionism and the intention to eliminate Islam. In his speech to aspiring suicide bombers, Mullah Fazlullah interpreted George Bush's reference to a crusade in literal terms: 'O Muslims and warriors of Allah's religion, you know that a crusade war is going on. The crusade has been raised, and nearly the whole world is united under it to eliminate Islam and erase the mujahedeen and jihad.'²⁷ The enemy forces are also frequently described as 'the forces of kufr', while those supporting the US and NATO forces are described as 'crusader slaves'. In TTP materials, this expression is frequently applied to the Pakistani government and security forces.²⁸

The enemy, whether ascribed religiously expansionist intentions or the intention to eliminate Islam, is also depicted as an adherent of shirk (idolatry or polytheism). Through a series of metaphoric associations, this phrase often refers to the support of democracy. Through analogies with Quranic depictions of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, shirk is equated with tyranny, injustice, and oppression.

The pharaohs were seen by their people as the personifications of one of the many Gods that were worshipped in ancient Egypt, and thus they held the status of both kings and gods at the same time. In the Quran, a core element of the story of Prophet Moses is his confrontation with the then pharaoh in Egypt: Moses conveying the message of tawhid and the pharaoh rejecting it, instead asking people to worship him. Thus in

Islamic mythic history, the pharaoh is the ultimate symbol of human arrogance. Furthermore, several verses of the Quran refer to the injustice and crimes the pharaoh committed against his people, making him a symbol of oppression and tyranny.

Besides the *kufr* (in this case denoting the one who rejects the doctrine of tawhid and sovereignty of Allah) and the *mushrik* who embraces democracy, others who invite God's anger and are thus designated enemies of the Taliban are the *munaḥiq* (hypocrite) and the *murtad*. These latter terms are often applied to the Pakistani government, again because of its embrace of democracy. Democracy is, in turn, equated with *kufr* and contrasted with sharia. Azam Tariq, for example, continuously describes the conflict that the Taliban is part of as a battle between 'Kufr and Islam'.²⁹

The TTP and its member organizations in the tribal areas and the KPP consider the democratic system itself to be a threat. Mullah Fazlullah entreats his video audience:

My dear friends, save yourselves from sins like democracy. Democracy is a pagan [*kufr*] system, and it is the opposite of sharia. If there is democracy, then the sharia system cannot be implemented. The Western democracy is the enemy of the sharia of Muhammad [*shari'ate muhammadi*]. And whoever is in the system of democracy is eliminated from the religion Islam. In democracy, the power is with the people. This is against the Islamic system, where the power rests with Allah Almighty.³⁰

Democracy is simultaneously equated with the 'system of the Christians',³¹ shirk, and *fitna*.³² As stated by Hakimullah Mehsud in his criticism of the Pakistani government: 'This governmental system is democratic, which is shirk in its entirety.' He goes on to characterize democracy as an unjust, despotic, unethical, and tyrannical system: 'We are not the enemies of Pakistan or the Pakistani nation. Instead we are the enemies of this current *kufr* democratic system that has been forced on us. This system is unjust and despotic. This unethical and tyrannical setup is a *kufr* system irrelevant to sharia.'³³ Hakimullah Mehsud and Wali

al-Rahman Mehsud denounce the government as follows: 'After they have adopted kufr laws, how can they be Muslims? They are most loyal in their friendship with the kuffar, and they are the perpetrators of murder of thousands of Muslims. Therefore, we cannot call them Muslims.'³⁴

The Pakistani government and security forces are also depicted as the enemy because of their alliance with the main enemy force, the US. According to the Taliban frame of understanding, this alliance and its adherence to democracy qualifies it to be categorized as murtad or munafiq—an alliance that earns the wrath of God (and thus also the wrath of the Taliban).

Other members of these threat categories include India, the former Afghan president Hamid Karzai, and Shia Muslims. India is constituted as the enemy due to Pakistan's dispute over Kashmir and is framed as being both a kafir and a mushrik country with Hinduism depicted as the driving force behind the actions of India in Kashmir. On par with the former Pakistani president Asif Zardari, the former Afghan president Hamid Karzai was framed as a murtad—an apostate who, due to his friendly relations with the US, has left Islam.³⁵

The Shia Muslims are framed as kafir due to their faith doctrines, which, in the Taliban perception, are disrespectful towards the companions of the Prophet and amount to kufr because of the fragmentation they cause among Muslims.³⁶ With this, India is made equivalent to a mushrik, Karzai and the Pakistani government and its security forces are likened to murtads, and the Shia Muslims to kafirs (disbelievers/'wrong-believers'). In sum, the enemies are not only seen as driven by religion or anti-religious doctrines, but they are also signified through the use of religious terminology.

Religion as the Purpose of Armed Struggle

While the defence of the different dimensions of religion is a constantly present way to explain the purpose of jihad, this is

accompanied by parallel references to militant jihad as a faith imperative under the given 'extraordinary circumstances', where Islam is seen as being under attack. Thus another ambiguity can be traced in the role religion plays: whereas religion as an object requiring defence is inscribed in a clear defensive security discourse, more offensive or proactive justification claims related to religion can also be traced in the jihad narrative. These play a double role. On the one hand, the purpose and justification behind the militant engagement in jihad is explained by religion, thus facilitating violence, and on the other hand, religion instructs the legitimate means and behaviour of jihad, thus also constituting its boundaries (the latter aspect will be discussed in the subsequent section).

The more offensive aspects of the role of religion are clear in those parts of the Taliban narratives that explain what the legitimate purposes behind jihad are. As a storyline, this offensive story runs parallel to the defensive story where a foundational religious referent object is being threatened by the 'wrong-believing' or disbelieving enemy. First, the offensive claims of justification are constituted through the active engagement of sources of religious authority (particular religio-textual references, religious jurisprudence, particular exegeses) and religious injunctions depicted as mandatory upon Muslims. My analysis shows that this plays out concretely through the use of references to particular chapters and verses of the Quran that—according to the Taliban depiction—deal with the themes of hypocrisy, Islamic doctrinal exceptionalism, monotheism, idolatry, the forming of alliances with Jews and Christians, sharia, the existence of a vanguard of believers that 'enjoins the good and forbids the evil' (the Taliban) and, not the least, jihad. These verses are interpreted ahistorically and applied as evidence when it comes to demarcating enemies and legitimizing uncompromising measures taken against them.

Given ahead are examples of the Quranic chapters referred to and how they are used:

Surah An-Nisa: Several verses (4:61, 4:63, 4:64, 4:88, 4:138, 4:140, 4:142, and 4:145) of this chapter deal with munafiqs, who are defined as those insincere in their faith, pretending to be good Muslims but in truth driven by other interests. These verses also state that the munafiq earns God's anger. This chapter is especially used to justify jihad against the Pakistani government.

Surah Adh-Dhariyat and *Surah Al-Baqarah*: Some verses of these two chapters establish the doctrine of tawhid in opposition to shirk. They also mention that those who equate other things with God earn His anger and punishment (for instance, verses 51:54, 51:55, 51:56, 51:57, and 51:58 of *Surah Adh-Dhariyat* and verses 2:163, 2:164, 2:165, 2:166, 2:167, and 2:168 of *Surah Al-Baqarah*). These verses are used as evidence that God is with the militants who are fighting shirk.

Surah Al-Maidah: Some of the verses in this chapter are about the distortion of the divine messages spread by Moses and Jesus. This chapter also describes Jewish and Christian scepticism towards the Prophet Muhammad when he claimed to receive revelations from their God. Verses 5:50, 5:51, and 5:52, in particular, are interpreted as a divine warning against making alliances with Jews and Christians, and as a religious justification for the Taliban fight against the Pakistani army because Pakistan has formed an alliance with 'the Jews and Christians'.

Apart from direct references to the Quran, there are also references to classical Sunni Muslim exegesis in, for example, passages defining those who betray the Muslims as kafirs (such as Tafsir Al-Tabari, which is a classical Sunni exegesis from the ninth century, and Tafsir Al-Qurtubi, a classical seventh-century exegesis with the specific objective of deducing juristic injunctions and rulings from the Quran). However, there seems to be no rigid ideological commitment to any particular trend within the various Sunni Islamic interpretational traditions. Despite the original Deobandi background of the Taliban, there are evident influences from major Salafi ideologues, classical

as well as modern. These include the medieval theologian Ibn Taymiyya known, amongst other things, for ranking jihad above traditional means of worship (for example, his compilation of jurisprudential rulings in *Majmoo al-Fatawa*),³⁷ and also Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab (d. 1792), for example, for his work *Kitab al-Tawhid*.³⁸ The latter is especially used to justify violent measures being taken against those who are constituted as mushrik and those who assist the mushrik.³⁹

Besides references to religio-textual evidence, a second way militant jihad is justified more proactively by religion is by representing jihad as a pillar of Islam on par with the its five orthodox pillars: the faith declaration (shahada), prayers (namaz/salaat), pilgrimage (hajj), fasting (roza/saum), and paying alms (zakaat); jurisprudentially, all belonging to the sphere of worship (*ibadaat*).⁴⁰ Warfare jihad is constituted as the required way of worship under the present extraordinary circumstances and gains priority above the orthodox pillars of Islam. However, it is again the extraordinary context (that Islam is existentially threatened) that is decisive for why there is more emphasis on militant action than on orthodox measures of pious behaviour (praying, fasting, and so on). In the words of Mullah Fazlullah: 'Religion is not just about praying or fasting or missionary activities or [obtaining] traditional Islamic knowledge, but acting out that Allah is Almighty.'⁴¹ Very illustratively, he continues:

If there are no pillars, then it is not possible to construct the building; similarly, pillars have no importance if they have no roof. Nowadays the situation of Islam is very awful. The pillars of 'prayer' and 'fasting' are standing, but the roof over them is made by Christians and the unbelievers. So, my dear friends, we should take care of this issue.⁴²

A third offensive dimension of jihad is based on the religious duty to implement sharia. The following two examples from recruitment materials are clearly illustrative of this sort of trend,

where the implementation of sharia seems to be the main justification for jihad.

A Muslim nation is bound to be regulated by an Islamic system: we [the TTP] struggle for the system not because we beseech it, but because it is our fundamental right. The Tehrike Taliban Pakistan aims to create this Islamic system by engaging in the operation of jihad.⁴³

Our aim is to create Allah's rule on Allah's land under the skies of Allah on Allah's people. We will give every type of sacrifice for its establishment; we want nothing short of it.⁴⁴

This argument sometimes forms part of the defensive discourse, whereby the threat from democracy and the crusading intentions of the enemy necessitate the implementation of a just and godly system, but it is also sometimes presented as an obligation to be undertaken proactively in order to realize the glory of Islam. It can be argued that the struggle for sharia inside Pakistan has become increasingly militarized in parallel with the resistance against external forces in Afghanistan, and thus there is no clear-cut distinction between the defensive constitution of jihad and the more aggressive constitution of jihad as the fulfilment of the Muslim duty to establish sharia and the glory of Islam.

A fourth way in which religion plays a more offensive role in providing justification for entering into militant jihad is through ideas of divine intervention. The significance of dreams is clear in the biography of the former TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud written by Azam Tariq and published in the *Hitteen*, disseminated among the adherents and supporters of the Taliban. It is, for example, described that the father of Baitullah Mehsud was initially against his son's engagement with jihad, but then he saw the Prophet Muhammad in a dream telling him to devote his son to the cause of jihad and not create barriers for him. This made him change his mind and after the dream not only did he support his son but also actively engaged in jihad himself.⁴⁵

In another example, Baitullah Mehsud supposedly had a dream before he died (in a missile attack on his father-in-law's house), in which the Prophet told him, 'That is enough, Baitullah, now you should come!' This made him realize, according to Tariq, that 'the time for his martyrdom was near'.⁴⁶

Another interesting and illustrative example of divine intervention and its significance is a speech by Hamna Abdullah, delivered in front of thousands of female followers, in which she explains the background for the Jamia Hafsa's decision to enter jihad, citing divine communication:

The Lord of Medina was troubled. The Lord of Medina was disheartened and was saying: 'Oh, mujahed daughters, your country [Pakistan] was established for Islam, but 58 years have passed, and Islam is being persecuted here. Mosque after mosque has been martyred, the sacredness of the Quran has begun to be razed; yet I do not see anyone rising up. Clouds of sadness prevail everywhere. Spiritual daughters of Maulana Abdullah Shaheed [the first imam of the Red Mosque], information has reached me that the police attacked you twice. You fought with much bravery and courage; you drove back the police. One hundred of your female students were wounded, but you still stood your ground.' ... The Lord of Medina is saying: 'My great daughters, daughters bathed in the longing for martyrdom, daughters waiting for martyrdom: I do not see anyone rising up. No one is seen rising up for the dignity of mosques and the Quran. Thus you [must] stand up for jihad.' O Prophet of Allah, we are weak. We are the weaker sex, we do not have the strength—how do we wage jihad? Then suddenly you [the Prophet Muhammad], peace be upon you, visit a girl in her dream and offer one girl a shining sword, and say: 'Daughters, rise, wage jihad. Allah will help you.'⁴⁷

The power of ideas about divine intervention and support is significant in the Taliban movements led by charismatic and powerful leaders. Their legitimacy is often found in the Hadith narrations that bind the guidance through dreams to the expectation of an approaching apocalypse. In one Hadith, the Prophet Muhammad is recorded to have said that 'when the Day of

Resurrection approaches, the dreams of a believer will hardly fail to come true, and a dream of a believer is one of the forty-six parts of prophecy, and whatever belongs to prophecy can never be false' (Sahih al-Bukhari). In another Hadith, the Prophet is recorded to have said, 'Whoever sees me in a dream, surely he has seen me, for Satan cannot impersonate me' (Sahih al-Bukhari). The belief in true dreams is also based on the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who is reported to have dreamt parts of the Quran. According to observers, the visionary dream has broadly continued to hold an exalted status among Muslims.⁴⁸ It appears to be a common trait among activists engaged in militant jihad and the 'worship of fighting' that dreams are seen as guidance: taken as warnings or glad tidings.

Typically, descriptions of dreams and experiences of divine intervention are kept within the circle of followers. Mullah Omar, who is recognized as the supreme leader by both the Afghan and the Pakistani Taliban, allegedly had a dream in which the Prophet Muhammad appeared to him and instructed him to bring peace to Afghanistan. Later he removed a cloak said to belong to the Prophet from its Kandahar shrine and put it on. For his followers, this was a sign of Mullah Omar's divinely conferred authority, because only a true leader of the faithful would be able to remove the cloak. Mullah Omar's authority as the commander of the faithful (Amir ul Momineen) was reportedly based on 'true night dreams' (*ruya*) received by himself or his closest followers.⁴⁹

Religion as a Limit on War

It is remarkable that religion does not appear strong in those parts of the jihad narratives that relate to the rules and means of jihad. Arguably, this is because religious discourses on rules and legitimate means in jihad potentially limit and put restrictive conditions on the practice of jihad. However, rather than restricting the practice of jihad, most of the directions for action

given in the jihad narratives establish the basis for action that, according to criteria in classical Islamic jurisprudential literature, would be regarded as unlawful. This is because necessity and urgency arguments take a more prominent role than references to orthodox religion in those parts of the Taliban narratives that prescribe the legitimate rules and means of jihad.

In the materials I have analysed, there are, nevertheless, references to Quranic chapters addressing the topic of appropriate behaviour in jihad (for example, the chapters Al-Anfal, Al-Imran, and Al-Hujurat). Comparatively, however, concrete references to the Islamic sources of law are far more frequent in the discourses on the legitimate purpose of jihad treated in the section above. In some of the material, religion is completely sidelined when it comes to this issue, and necessity and urgency arguments appear to be more prominent in deciding what is seen as appropriate means. For example, a TTP video carries a statement accompanying the beheading of a kidnapped Polish engineer, in which expediency (the 'requirement of the day') takes priority over religious doctrine:

It is the requirement of the day that all the unbelievers should have the same fate, but we still, on account of our religion, tried very hard not to kill Peter [the Polish engineer]. If Allah wills, this will be the fate of all the foreign hostages that we take, whether they are from China, Britain, or other countries. We will not leave anyone in our grip alive.⁵⁰

This does not mean that the normative rules and principles of jihad are not given any importance. Competing discourses are also to be traced in the communication and recruitment materials putting some kinds of limitations on jihad. Mullah Fazlullah's speech to the suicide bombers includes the observation: 'If we commit cruelties, Allah will give someone else power over us, and they will beat us. May Allah save the Taliban from un-Islamic acts, and may Allah bless us with that jihad which the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, performed.' He continues:

I am ordering the Taliban, rather requesting them, not to break the rules of jihad. Jihad is a holy practice, but also a dangerous one. Remember, if you break the rules of jihad, then even if you kill thousands of enemy personnel, you will not benefit in the life hereafter. Do not include yourselves among those people about whom the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, 'Lots of people participated in jihad but would get nothing for it in the life hereafter.'⁵¹

However, the most central and recurrently mentioned condition deciding the legitimacy of using war as a means is having the right intention or *niyat*. Interestingly, this requirement establishes the conditions of the possibility of considering unorthodox measures, such as suicide attacks and the killing of spies, as legitimate. For instance, Mullah Fazlullah explains: 'If two, three, or four pious people stand up, they will beat the satanic government, because it is the promise of Allah, but listen: these people should be pious, patient, have strong faith and determination. Their aim should be only to make Allah happy.'⁵²

Thus even though limiting civilian deaths is encouraged, they are not considered unlawful as long as the perpetrators had the intention to defend the sovereignty of God, make Him happy, and to fight for Islam. Thus paradoxically, religious conditions of war are represented and interpreted in a way that expands jihad's room for manoeuvre. In a night letter, for instance, it is stated that the kidnapping of people other than spies is against Islamic directives. Kidnapping is, however, considered lawful if it is done in the name of the higher purpose of jihad, whereas kidnapping for ransom is condemned and calls for punishment.⁵³

Added to this, there is a very blurred concept of who the legitimate target is. A principle of discrimination is based on representing the enemy (and thus the legitimate target) under the broad category of disbelievers and apostates. Due to the content put into these labels, this means that not only those involved in active combat activities are seen as legitimate targets but

also those who facilitate the enemy. Those who are constituted as disbelievers and apostates are encompassed in this flexible category of enemies that ultimately does not put up very strict principles of discrimination. For example, Abdullah Mehsud, a powerful Taliban commander who died in 2007, wrote:

The people who fight together with the unbelievers against the mujahedeen [the Al Qaeda and the Taliban] and help to get them caught, spy on them, and provide evidence to prove that the activities of the army are right, are all, including the army's unbelievers, apostates. To kill them is mandatory for every Muslim.⁵⁴

It is, however, worth noting that the ideal of keeping collateral damage to the minimum is simultaneously upheld in keeping with traditional Islamic jurisprudence governing the conduct of jihad.⁵⁵ In comparison to the means applied by the enemy (drone attacks being one example put forward), the *fidayee* attack targeting selected buildings, vehicles, and tanks of the enemy is, for instance, highlighted as being more precise, since it leads to less collateral damage. In addition to this, in the Taliban discourse on jihad, civilian deaths can be forgiven as long as they are not intentional. Mullah Fazlullah, for instance, told the suicide bombers:

We always tell the *fidayeen* to target two types of people: the Pakistan army and their supporters. And the leaders and members of the Awami National Party [the secular Pashtun nationalist party, driving the main resistance against the Taliban in the KPP]. You people should also act on this principle. Try to target them with minimum damage to the masses, but if there is any collateral damage, then we will not be held responsible for it in the court of Allah.⁵⁶

Another related principle that restricts the practice of jihad, as evident from the material, is sufficiency: to use the required means, but not to exaggerate the use of power. Fazlullah advises: 'Consider yourselves the slaves of the masses; don't get proud when you have power because jihad is about modesty.'⁵⁷ The principle of sufficiency is, however, also open to interpretations

that can ultimately intensify the use of force, and thus can be an argument for embracing harsher means to match the enemy.

The stress on the importance of following just rules in war is, however, most vocal in the context of evaluating the acts of the enemy. Many of the Taliban videos 'reveal' the brutality of the enemy and its inhuman way of fighting the war. For instance, the dead bodies and faces of massacred children and babies are shown, in some cases paving the way for proportionality arguments when deciding the legitimacy of means (the argument that acts of cruelty should be met with similarly cruel acts) and, in other instances, constituting a contrasting identity for the Taliban self. The treatment of prisoners is also a recurrent theme, as Fazlullah's speech demonstrates:

People have seen the so-called peace of those who claim peace. Taking prisoners from their cells and throwing them out of helicopters.... Treating innocent and powerless people this way was their peace. Prisoners have rights, even unbelieving prisoners.... In Pakistan, there is no sharia law imposed, no humanitarian or Islamic rights are given to the people. This could be cured by jihad only.⁵⁸

Thus, somewhat paradoxically (considering their initial critique of the means applied by the enemy), this in some instances paves the way for a stronger discourse of proportionality, allowing the Taliban to take harsher measures due to the character and nature of the threat. The abusive treatment of Aafia Siddiqui in US custody and the case of the CIA contractor Raymond Davis, who fired 10 bullets at two Pakistani youngsters in a crowded market in Lahore in early 2011, are used as examples of enemy brutality and immorality that justify proportional acts of retribution.⁵⁹ In the shabnamen, the Pakistani government's violation of peace deals is also presented as a violation of the rules of just war.⁶⁰ This also means that religious conditions for legitimate war behaviour are evoked mostly to evaluate the conduct of the enemy rather than to regulate and restrict the Taliban use of force.

Religion as Imagery and Myth

The communication materials and militants' speeches are rich in allusions to Islamic history, particularly references to famous battles. These are used to inspire recruits, but they also function to validate contemporary actions as part of the enduring struggle to defend Islam. For example, after the demolition of the Amir Hamza mosque under the leadership of Musharraf, the women's action committee of the Jamia Hafsa seminary adopted the name '313', the number of the Prophet Muhammad's followers who took part in the Battle of Badr against the Quraysh tribe. In addition, contemporary events are often interpreted according to Islamic principles and precepts and as evidence of divine will. In this section, I describe some of the mythic events and religious concepts that hold particular significance for the Pakistani Taliban.

The widespread use of religious imagery and myth adds a transcendental layer to the explanation of jihad and thus ascribes a special spiritual significance to jihad. The conflict is then decontextualized, made ahistorical and cosmic. First, among the identified themes in the constitution of jihad is the willingness to sacrifice oneself for religion, which is framed as a specific pious trait that enhances one's religious standing in the eyes of God. The willingness to sacrifice oneself for religion, with the particular meaning of undertaking a suicide mission, is framed as a sign of devotedness to God.

Theologically, sacrifices are often interpreted as a means of enhancing one's religious standing, though they also have other connotations that have nothing to do with human sacrifice. Nevertheless, the biblical and Quranic story of Abraham, who so deeply trusted in God that he, without questioning, was willing to sacrifice his only son, points to the religious significance of human sacrifice.

In the materials, the theme of sacrifice is invoked to differentiate between those who prioritize religion and God above worldly goods and those who do not. The theme of sacrifice, for

example, is invoked in Mullah Fazlullah's speech to a handful of suicide bombers on their way to fulfil their missions. He presents the option to sacrifice oneself as a special blessing from God and those conducting the sacrifices as especially pious:

He [Allah] wants the bodies of the pious, not of everyone. Because of the faith of the pious, their flesh and bones have become so valuable that Allah himself is purchasing it . . . This is the special blessing of Allah upon you people. Accept the favour of Allah, thank Him and turn your bones and flesh into weapons and target the kafir government [referring to the Pakistani government].⁶¹

Another example from the same material stresses how the willingness to die—sacrifice oneself—is interpreted as evidence of true devotion: Mullah Fazlullah, for instance, holds that 'if at the age of 80 they [the clerics and the intellectuals] are not ready for death, it means that their love for Allah is artificial and not real.'⁶²

The link between the willingness to sacrifice oneself and devotion to religion is also established in the jihadi anthems. Here is an illustrative example:

They are sacrificing themselves on their wish,
They are the friends of the religion Islam,
They are attacking in their turn,
They are friends of religion,
They are in love with all the verses of the Holy Quran,
The fidiyeen are on their way,
And they are beautiful youth.⁶³

The TTP spokesman Azam Tariq describes martyrdom as a 'new' form of sacrifice that is required in the fight against satanic powers and unbelief. Human sacrifices through the use of suicide tactics are regarded as more powerful than the enemies' use of 'weaponry, tanks, missile launchers, helicopters, jet aircrafts, drones and long-range missiles'—precisely because they are made in God's name and thus sanctioned by God.⁶⁴ The Taliban materials hence stress the virtue of sacrifice, and the practice

of sacrificing one's life for a higher cause is distinguished from suicide in order to circumvent the religious injunctions against taking one's own life.

A second image invoked in the narratives is that of a divine test (the framing of the Taliban as being tested by God), which again strengthens the image of the Taliban as especially pious and as the chosen ones. The image of a divine test is linked to the narrative that hardship and adversity are God's way of testing His strongest believers. In Muslim tradition, hardship that tests believers is most typically regarded as coming from God. According to one interpretational discourse, hardship from God is to test the patience [*sabr*] of believers, and patience in the face of hardship, in turn, is seen as the requirement for heavenly rewards. In the Taliban material, this theme is especially invoked in convincing suicide bombers that God is on their side though the mission seems hard. In his speech to the suicide bombers, Mullah Fazlullah states that 'hardship erases sins', thus providing a religious motivation for their actions.⁶⁵

However, the Pakistani Taliban also uses hardship—such as the earthquakes and floods that struck Pakistan in the early years of this century—to strengthen another type of discourse. In this, hardship is framed as a punishment from God for not living according to His/the Taliban's vision of sharia, and for not having implemented the Taliban perception of good public morality. In the communication material aimed at the adherents of the Taliban, the discourse that hardships are signs that God is with those who are tested, is, however, dominant. The following quote, also from Mullah Fazlullah's speech to the suicide bombers, illustrates the way this theme is invoked: 'You people are believers; that is why you are under examination. You people have dignity; there are a lot of races in the world and in Pakistan, but you people and those from the tribal areas are suffering because you are all believers.'⁶⁶

In the shabnamen, traditional poetry is quoted for the same purpose. In one of his statements, Azam Tariq recites a poem by

the most famous national poet of Pakistan, Allama Iqbal: 'The offspring of Abraham [the Muslims] are surrounded by fire and enemies. Again someone is testing someone.'⁶⁷

If God sends exacting tests to the faithful and harsh punishments to the unbelievers, He can also send evidence of His support in the struggle. From the communication materials, it is clear that the Taliban are convinced that they are acting for God and with His support. A statement from the TTP encourages followers to draw confidence from revelations of the divine will:

The bullet which is written for me will hit my body, not anyone else. Allah told me three times: I will take your life at the required time. *Malak al-Maut* [the angel who takes the soul away after death] came and told me not to worry. He said that he will not come before the due time, and if he has not arrived, no one can kill you. So listen: no one can kill you before your time is due.⁶⁸

A third theme that is related to the use of dreams is that of the expectation of an approaching apocalypse. In the narratives, the extraordinary circumstances are conditioned not only by the constitution of an external threat to religion, but also through the constitution of the idea that the jihad undertaken is part of an apocalyptic struggle. God is, therefore, currently active in earthly matters (most significantly through night dreams). The battle itself is also described in terms of a cosmic war, again giving jihad a specific spiritual significance, since it then becomes constituted as a battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil: God versus Satan.

A fourth way in which religious imagery appears is through the use of analogies to important symbolic battles that have gone down in Islamic mythic history as battles with special spiritual significance due to the intervention of God. These include the Battle of Badr, the Battle of Karbala, and the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh.

The Battle of Badr (624) has been passed down in Islamic history as a decisive victory for Muslims attributable to divine

intervention and as a symbol of the battle between truth and falsehood. The Prophet Muhammad and his companions expected to meet 40 unarmed men but instead met a well-prepared army three times the size of their own. This was the first battle the Muslims ever engaged in and is also the most famous and renowned because of the religious narratives about several extraordinary events that occurred during it. References to the Battle of Badr are made when it comes to defining the Taliban self, the enemy, and the nature and significance of jihad—but most importantly also when it comes to providing a promise of ultimate victory.

Abu Sufyan, a leader of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca, was a staunch opponent of the Prophet Muhammad before accepting Islam later in his life. According to Islamic myth, the conflict was seeded when the Quraysh confiscated the belongings of Muhammad and his followers after they migrated to Medina in 622 to seek refuge from hostile attacks. The Battle of Badr took place when Muhammad and his followers saw a passing caravan led by Abu Sufyan and went to stop him and reclaim their belongings. At this point, most Muslims believe, God revealed to Muhammad that his people were now permitted to defend themselves, rather than to continue to suffer persecution. In this context, the following verse is frequently quoted by the militants: 'O Prophet, urge the believers to battle. If there are among you twenty [who are] steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among you one hundred [who are] steadfast, they will overcome a thousand of those who have disbelieved because they are a people who do not understand' (Al-Anfal 8:65).⁶⁹

References to the Battle of Badr, both implicit and explicit, frequently appear in Taliban communication and recruitment materials. For instance, in Azam Tariq's biography of Baitullah Mehsud, the battles led by Mehsud against the Pakistani security forces are described as similarly unequal conflicts, with 'tanks, missiles, helicopters, drones and heavy military artillery' on one

side, and the mujahedeen, armed only with 'high spirits' and guns on their shoulders, on the other. The mujahedeen are portrayed as winning miraculous victories.⁷⁰

Besides the Battle of Badr, images of the Battle of Karbala (685) between the supporters and relatives of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussain ibn Ali on one side, and the forces of the Umayyad caliph Yazid ibn Muawiya on the other, are also invoked. In Islamic myth, this battle has spiritual significance, not because it led to the victory of Hussain and his followers, but, on the contrary, because it led to his death and paved the way for subsequent revolutions against the unjust Umayyad dynasty. Thus this reference also plays into the theme of sacrifice and hardship. In the will written by Abdul Rashid Ghazi before he died in the besieged Red Mosque, he describes the siege of the mosque by hostile (Pakistani government) forces as 'no different from that of Karbala'. He describes 'suffering' and 'martyrdom' as prerequisites for an 'Islamic revolution' ('We are confident that our blood will plant the seeds of a revolution'), and draws an explicit analogy to the suffering that Hussain endured.⁷¹

Another historical encounter that is frequently mentioned in the communication and recruitment materials is the one between Moses and Pharaoh. The following statement is illustrative: 'The pharaoh of the past did not have jet fighters, tanks, drones or modern weapons. But our determination is the same as that of Prophet Moses. So by the grace of Allah, we will eliminate these by the stick of Prophet Moses.' The same imagery is also drawn upon in several leaflets, framing the Taliban as Moses and the US as Pharaoh.⁷²

Polarized rhetoric pitting good at war with evil and the faithful at war with unbelievers is common. According to Fazlullah, 'In every era the fight between good and bad has taken place, and this is also happening today'.⁷³ A TTP video proclaims: 'There are two open fronts in this world today: the first is the battle array of the mujahedeen and *ansar al-muhajireen* [the helpers of the refugees]. The second is the battle formation

of the kuffar and the *munafiqeen*.'⁷⁴ And Hakimullah Mehsud declared in a speech: 'Today a war between Muslims and the unbelievers is going on; this is not a fight between the Taliban and the USA. This war is the war between the Muslim *ummah* and the unbelievers.'⁷⁵

A fifth type of religious imagery invoked in these communications involves the afterlife. This type of rhetoric both urges patience in waging jihad and encourages those engaged in jihad to expect rewards not in this life but in the next. One of Mullah Fazlullah's speeches is again a good example:

People and clerics of some communities say about me that I deceive the boys [the suicide bombers] by giving them expectations of heaven. Well it is true, I tell them of heaven, give them hope and expectations of heaven, because I have nothing, and I cannot repay them. Allah will repay them, and Allah has said that the repayment for this is paradise.⁷⁶

Enabling others, even the current enemy, is also sometimes constructed as an objective of jihad: 'We want all of them [the enemies] to embrace Islam and save themselves from hell and enter into Heaven.'⁷⁷ In some of the shabnamen distributed to local villagers, the Taliban imperatives are framed as a means of escaping damnation in the next world, and the willingness to sacrifice one's life for the sake of Allah is framed as the path to salvation (*rahe nijat*).⁷⁸

An expanded timeline into the afterlife makes death and human sacrifice necessary in order to obtain the ultimate reward for the struggle, namely paradise. Thus the purpose of jihad cannot only be explained by the constitution of religion as an object to be defended or the more aggressive discourse of establishing sharia on earth, but also through the parallel struggle for salvation in the hereafter. This expanded timeline that moves into the afterlife both promotes patience in relation to the effects of jihad and adjusts the expectations of those engaged in jihad so that they do not take payoff in this life to be a criterion of success for their activities.

A final tendency in the material is that the Taliban and mujahedeen are often identified as God's chosen ones, a vanguard: 'Allah has selected those He likes most for this work [to establish His rule on earth]. So who are these people whom Allah selects and raises for this work? Allah selected those people who are near to Him.'⁷⁹ Hence the mujahedeen are also described in terms that indicate that they are close to God, such as the 'friends of the holy Prophet',⁸⁰ the 'children of Prophet Jacob',⁸¹ the 'servants of Muhammad', or 'Allah's lions'.⁸² The application of these designations frames them as special and their actions as especially noble. The following quote from the recruitment materials is a good illustration:

The mujahedeen of Tehrike Taliban Pakistan are Allah's slaves, Muhammad's agents; we are servants of Muhammad, a mercy to the world, peace be upon him. If hideous jokes and cartoons are made about my Prophet, then your Taliban brothers are the only ones who bring honour through retaliation, who risk their lives and are martyred to show their love for Muhammad, peace be upon him, whereas other people engage in demonstrations, protests, boycotts, and give political statements.⁸³

The special closeness to Allah and his prophets is also established by addressing the prophets with family titles, such as Uncle (for Moses and Jesus), Grandfather (for Noah), and Father (for Abraham).⁸⁴ Comparisons are sometimes made between the missions of the prophets and that of the Taliban. A speech by Mullah Fazlullah invokes many of these comparisons and justifications:

Prophet Noah stood against the whole world, but he never surrendered and continued his work till the end. Allah eliminated the evil, and good flourished then. Similarly, Prophet Abraham stood alone in the battle against the kingdom of the whole world, and he did not surrender either. He left the country but never stepped back from his mission or religion. Prophet Moses and his brother faced Pharaoh, who had a strong force of seven million. They didn't withdraw but continued their mission. They and their nation suffered great hardships in this mission. We should also get used to

such sufferings. If this path was not good, then Allah would have stopped His prophets. Because of them, their whole nation suffered, but Allah praised them.⁸⁵

Implicitly, such comparisons cast the Taliban as an important force in the history of Islam. According to a text by Abdullah Mehsud, the Taliban is represented as the first generation to promote unity since the 'four rightly guided caliphs' who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad.⁸⁶ Furthermore, such comparisons imply a place for the Taliban and its leaders among the Islamic prophets.

Similarly, praise of the Taliban leaders and commanders echoes the biographical literature (*sirat*) about the Prophet Muhammad, which praises both his outward beauty and his inner qualities. For instance, Tariq's biography of Baitullah Mehsud describes the Taliban leader as follows:

He was neither short nor tall. He had a whitish complexion, smiling face, long black beard, thick hair, and big black eyes. He had strong health and nerves. Furthermore Allah had blessed him with a strange set of praiseworthy traits. He had a humble nature, adventurous attitude, and eagerness for jihad; he was good at making important decisions, was a good orator, and was endowed with leadership qualities.

Biographies like this are used on par with the prophetic examples—as 'a model for the Muslim ummah', a 'glowing chapter in the history of Islam' that encourages Muslims 'to follow in the footsteps of Amir Baitullah'.⁸⁷

Adherents of the Taliban often stress the movement's sense of justice by generating heroic narratives about the low crime rate or the socio-economic justice during the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, as was especially clear from the interviews I have conducted. These narratives are, however, used by the Taliban supporters as religious references to an idealized and morally superior society on par with the ideals traditionally derived from the Quran and the Hadith (narrations about the Prophet Muhammad's life and words). Whereas the example of Medina

under the prophetic reign is the typical or 'orthodox' reference for a politically just society among Muslims, the Taliban reign in Afghanistan takes on a similar role for Taliban adherents. Hence religion and religious imagery are drawn upon in unorthodox ways and the particularity of these is important to understand in order to take the role of religion seriously. The challenge in any study of religious violence is precisely to understand the particular ways religion is applied in the justifying claims, and to avoid treating religion as a general and inflexible category.⁸⁸



Notes and References

1. See, for example, Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (eds), *Buddhist Warfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds), *The Fundamentalism Project: Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, Vol. 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
2. See also my summary of the roles religion plays in the Taliban material in Mona K. Sheikh, 2012, 'Sacred Pillars of Violence: Findings from a Study of the Pakistani Taliban', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13(4): 439–54.
3. Tim Foxley, 'The Taliban's Propaganda Activities: How Well Is the Afghan Insurgency Communicating and What Is It Saying?', SIPRI Project Paper (Sweden: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2007), available at www.sipri.org/research/conflict/publications/foxley (accessed on 25 January 2011); Muhammad A. Rana (ed.), *Understanding the Militants' Media in Pakistan: Outreach and Impact* (Islamabad: Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2010).
4. International Crisis Group, *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?*, Asia Report 158 (Kabul/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2008), p. 24. See also Brian G. Williams, 2007, 'The Taliban

- Fedayeen: 'The World's Worst Suicide Bombers?', *Terrorism Monitor*, 5(14), available at www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4285 (accessed on 1 June 2011).
5. International Crisis Group, *Taliban Propaganda*, p. 14.
 6. Rana, *Understanding the Militants' Media*, p. 102. Rana's account does not, however, include a systematic overview of Pakistani Taliban publications or their distributors.
 7. This refers to an agreement signed in February 2011 between leaders of the Sunni and Shia communities of Kurram Agency. The agreement guaranteed safe passage of Shias on the Thall-Parachinar Road, lifting the almost four-year blockade of the Shias of Parachinar.
 8. Fazal Sayed Haqqani, the leader of the Tehrike Taliban, Kurram Agency, 'Message from TTP Kurram Agency', distributed on 10 May 2011 in Kurram Agency.
 9. One of the few publications on this is Muhammad A. Rana's *Understanding the Militants' Media in Pakistan*. On the Pakistani Taliban's use of the media, see Christopher Anzalone, 'The Pakistani Taliban's Media Jihad', *Foreign Policy*, 17 June 2011, available at http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/17/the_pakistani_talibans_media_jihad (accessed on 1 October 2015). For a comprehensive overview of Al-Qaeda-related media, see Daniel Kimmage, 'Al-Qaeda Central and the Internet', Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, March 2010); Daniel Kimmage, *The Al-Qaeda Media Nexus: The Virtual Network behind the Global Message* (Washington: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2008), available at http://docs.rferl.org/en-US/AQ_Media_Nexus.pdf (accessed on 1 October 2015).
 10. Anzalone, 'Pakistani Taliban's Media Jihad'.
 11. Anzalone, 'Pakistani Taliban's Media Jihad'. The few available details about its productions indicate that it has close connections with the TTP in the tribal areas, most likely the local Darra Adam Khel faction of the Taliban. A search on the SITE Intelligence Group website showed only a single production by Ummat Studio. The production included here was collected physically in the KPP. SITE is a monitoring service that provides numerous daily translations of propaganda and multimedia from 'terrorist' websites. See <http://news.siteintelgroup.com> (accessed on 17 July 2011).

12. This relationship is confirmed by the descriptions found on SITE.
13. Links to these productions are posted not only on forums that are visited by those who have similar ideological inclinations but also on news sites aimed at a broader audience. For instance, many videos by the Swati Taliban are available on the news website Zamaswat.com (accessed on 7 July 2011).
14. See Rana, *Understanding the Militants' Media*, for a description of the characteristics of the shabnamen.
15. Ninian Smart's *Dimensions of the Sacred* is operational in understanding what aspects of religion are in play and defended by religious-political activists like the Taliban. See Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). This framework can be applied to the study of religious violence by using a discourse-analytical framework in order to clarify exactly what is meant by religion. See Mona Kanwal Sheikh, 2014, 'The Religious Challenge to Securitisation Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 43(1): 252–72.
16. 'Jamia Hafsa-Sisters Biyaan', video recording of a speech by Hamna Abdullah and prayer by Umm Hasaan, retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcTg8eVlcU (accessed on 11 January 2011). Translation by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), available at www.memritv.org/report/en/print2282.htm#_edn1 (accessed on 11 January 2011).
17. 'Jamia Hafsa-Sisters Biyaan'.
18. 'Tehrike Taliban Dara Adam Khel', video issued by TTP Darra Adam Khel, Ummat Studio, distributed by al-Moqatel, released 6 January 2011, collected from the KPP, winter 2010–11.
19. 'Tehrike Taliban Dara Adam Khel'.
20. 'Message from Hakimullah Mehsud and Wali al-Rahman Mehsud', video issued by TTP headquarters, Al-Sahab Media Production, released October 2009, retrieved from www.archive.org/details/AMEF_Message-Hakimullah-Wali-ur-Rahman-Mehsud_English (accessed on 11 January 2011). Translation from Ansar al-Mujahideen, available at <http://ansar1.info/> (accessed on 11 January 2011).
21. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers', video issued by the Swati Taliban, Fateh Studio, collected from the KPP, winter 2010–11.
22. 'Tehrike Taliban Dara Adam Khel'.
23. Examples include 'Message to the Three Mehsud Tribes', video issued by the Mehsud Faction, South Waziristan, n.d.; Azam Tariq, 'Statement by TTP's Central Spokesman from South Waziristan', issued by the TTP, South Waziristan, n.d.; Saif-ul-Islam, spokesman of the TNSM, Malakand Division, including Kohistan and Hazara, 'Organization of TNSM, Malakand Division Pakistan' (13 January 2011).
24. Tariq, 'Statement by TTP's Central Spokesman'.
25. Azam Tariq, 'Biography of Baitullah Mehsud', *Hitteen*, 2009. Translation titled 'The Life of Baitullah Masood', available at <https://ent.sitelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/10-29-10-gimf-baitullah-mehsud-bio.html> (accessed on 1 March 2011).
26. For example, 'Important Announcement from the Shura of Waziristan', issued by the leader and Mujahideen Shura of North Waziristan, distributed 24 October 2010.
27. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
28. For example, Tariq, 'Biography of Baitullah Mehsud'.
29. Tariq, 'Biography of Baitullah Mehsud'.
30. 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 4', video recording of a speech by Mullah Fazlullah (Swati Taliban), retrieved from YouTube/Zamaswat.com, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvpYawdgNtE (accessed on 11 January 2011).
31. 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 4'.
32. For example, 'Message from Hakimullah Mehsud and Wali al-Rahman Mehsud'. Statements from 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 4' are also illustrative: 'Look, the children of the same father have become each other's enemies because of the different parties taking part in the election. The grandsons of the same grandfather, the people praying at the same mosque, and the clerics of the same sect have become enemies because of democracy, which is the system of the Christians.' Another statement is: 'This [democracy] is the biggest idol in the present era and is pushing people to hell.' 'Message from Hakimullah Mehsud and Wali al-Rahman Mehsud'. The video 'Bloodshed and Revenge' contains a similarly illustrative statement: 'Tehrike Taliban's jihad in Pakistan is targeted at the kufr constitution, laws, and system in the region. It is against the guardians of this unjust system. We are neither the enemies

of Pakistan nor are we the enemies of the soldiers, police, and the leaders.' 'Bloodshed and Revenge', video released by the TTP headquarters, Umar Studio, July 2009, retrieved from www.2shared.com/file/7370960/8370331e/TTPENGDVD.html (accessed on 11 January 2011). Translation released by the producers, available at www.alqimmah.net/showthread.php?t=9318 (accessed on 11 January 2011).

34. 'Message from Hakimullah Mehsud and Wali al-Rahman Mehsud'.
35. For example, Tariq, 'Statement by TTP's Central Spokesman'; 'Lashkare Jhangvi (International)', issued by the organization of Lashkare Jhangvi, 12 December 2010; 'Shura Ittihad al-Mujahideen', issued by Hafiz Gul Bahadur, Baitullah Mehsud, and Mullah Nazir, 19 February 2009.
36. 'Message from TTP Kurram Agency'.
37. Ibn Taymiyya's *Mardin fatwa*, which distinguishes between the 'house of peace' (*dar al-Islam*) and the 'house of war' (*dar al-harb*), is a popular reference for militants who interpret the distinction as a green light to denounce other Muslims as infidels and wage war on them. It is also a critical text for the determination of legitimate versus prohibited targets.
38. The main text cited by the Taliban is the *Kitab al-Tauhid*. Regardless of how his writings are applied to justify militant jihad, Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab was a prominent reformer. He believed that Muslims had increasingly betrayed the original Islam (typified by the first generations of Muslims, the *salaf*) through harmful innovations (*bida*) and shirk. His criticism was initially aimed at Sufi rituals and interpretations of the intercession between the individual and God. See Natana DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
39. See, for example, Abdullah Mehsud, n.d., 'Is There Also Another Side of the Picture?', North Waziristan.
40. The two main classical categories of Islamic jurisprudence are *muamalaat* (the domain of interpersonal/social/political relations) and *ibadaat* (the domain of worship denoting the individual-God relationship).
41. 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 2', video recording of a speech by Mullah Fazlullah (Swati Taliban), retrieved from YouTube/

Zamaswat.com, www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaRLaEGrxh4 (accessed on 11 January 2011).

42. 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 2'.
43. 'Bloodshed and Revenge'.
44. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'. In the same speech, he intones: 'This is our slogan: Land of Allah, la ilaha illallah, people of Allah on this land, la ilaha illallah, Allah's sky over this land, la ilaha illallah, we want the rule of one God over this land, la ilaha illallah, we don't obey PATA or civil law, la ilaha illallah.'
45. Tariq, 'Biography of Baitullah Mehsud'.
46. Tariq, 'Biography of Baitullah Mehsud'.
47. 'Jamia Hafsa-Sisters Biyaan'.
48. Iain Edgar, 2008, 'The Inspirational Night Dream in the Motivation and Justification of Jihad', *Left Curve*, 32: 27–34.
49. Iain Edgar, 2008, 'The "True Dream" in Contemporary Islamic/Jihadist Dreamwork: A Case Study of the Dreams of Mullah Omar', *Dreamtime*, 25(1): 4–6, 34–6.
50. 'Tehrike Taliban Dara Adam Khel'.
51. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
52. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
53. 'Kidnapping' (original heading illegible), issued by the leader of the Mujahideen Shura of North Waziristan, 2009.
54. Mehsud, 'Is There Also Another Side of the Picture?'
55. John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
56. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
57. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
58. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
59. According to the account provided by the US embassy in Islamabad, Davis saw that one of them had a gun. Apparently fearing that he was about to be robbed, he opened fire on the youths, killing both. When US officials arrived to rescue him from a growing mob, they ran over a bystander, resulting in a third death. Rob Crilly, 'Raymond Davis Incident: What Sort of Diplomat Carries a Loaded Gun?', *The Telegraph*, 1 February 2011, available at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/8295780/Raymond-Davis-incident-What-sort-of-diplomat-carries-a-loaded-gun.html (accessed on 1 October 2015).

60. For example, 'Manifesto', issued by Zafar Khan, Shura Itrihade Mujahideen, Wana, South Waziristan, n.d.
61. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
62. 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 2'.
63. 'Tehrike Taliban Dara Adam Khel'.
64. Tariq, 'Biography of Baitullah Mehsud'.
65. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
66. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
67. Tariq, 'Statement by TTP's Central Spokesman'.
68. 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 2'.
69. Quotations from the Quran are from the Saheeh International version, available at www.quran.com (accessed on 1 October 2015).
70. Tariq, 'Biography of Baitullah Mehsud'.
71. Abdul Rashid Ghazi, 'Will of Abdul Rashid Ghazi', written before his death in the Red Mosque and published online on 8 July 2007, copy obtained through the administration of the Red Mosque.
72. See, for example, Tariq, 'Statement by TTP's Central Spokesman'.
73. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
74. 'Bloodshed and Revenge'.
75. 'Operation Rah-e-Nijat and the Actual Facts', video recording of a speech by TTP chief Hakimullah Mehsud, Part 1 of 3, retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6holdOJTdY (accessed on 11 January 2011).
76. Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
77. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'. This point is also related to the theme of sacrifice, where the afterlife is prized over life on earth. Later in his speech, Fazlullah advises the young suicide bombers: 'Don't destroy your eternal life for a mere profit in this short life.'
78. For example, Tariq, 'Statement by TTP's Central Spokesman'.
79. 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 2'.
80. 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 4'.
81. 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 1', video recording of a speech by Mullah Fazlullah (Swati Taliban), retrieved from YouTube/Zamaswat.com, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bC-CDUKiCiU> (accessed on 11 January 2011).
82. 'Bloodshed and Revenge'.

83. 'Bloodshed and Revenge'.
84. For example, see 'Maulana Fazlullah New Video 1'.
85. 'Fazlullah Speech to Suicide Bombers'.
86. Mehsud, 'Is There Also Another Side of the Picture?'
87. Tariq, 'Biography of Baitullah Mehsud'.
88. For a theoretical and methodological discussion on how to approach religion in international relations, see Mona K. Sheikh, 2011, 'How Does Religion Matter? Pathways to Religion in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 38(2): 365-92; Sheikh, 'The Religious Challenge to Securitisation Theory'.

