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Islamic Militancy getting worse, not better: The recent attacks on the Ahmadi mosques in Lahore

Dr. Simon Ross Valentine¹

On Friday 28 May, the ugly head of terrorism, apparently that of Islamic militants, was raised against the Ahmadiyya Jama'at, a sect proclaiming "Love for all, hatred for None". Within minutes of each other two Ahmadi mosques, in Model Town and Garhi Shahu in eastern Lahore, were attacked by *fidayeen* style terrorists [guerrilla fighters characterized by "sacrifice" for Allah] during the obligatory, Friday *jumma* prayers. Two teams of gunmen, some wearing suicide vests, stormed the mosques strafing the worshippers with bullets while holding off police. Several attackers, armed with AK-47 rifles, shotguns and grenades, held people hostage inside the mosque in Garhi Shahu, while some took up positions on top of the minaret, firing at police below. It was several hours before the Police took control of the two mosques.² At least two of the seven attackers were captured, while some died in the stand-off. To date it is reported that at least 100 people were killed in the attacks, and an equal number injured.³ Amidst scenes of dignified respect and sorrow some of the victims were buried at Rabwah, [called Chenab Naghar by the state, due to its refusal to recognize the group], the Ahmadi headquarters in Pakistan. This terrorist attack raises various questions for practitioners and policy-makers alike.

Who are the Ahmadi?

The Ahmadiyya Jama'at is a little known reform movement within Islam, officially formed in 1889 at Ludhiana, India. According to the Ahmadi, their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908), was not only the *Masih-i-mawud* (the promised messiah) and the *Mujaddid*, the expected reformer, but was also the *Mahdi* for Muslims, the Messiah for Christians, a manifestation of Krishna for Hindus and a prophet, all-be it a lesser one. Ahmad, in his will, established *khalifat*, a succession of spiritual leaders to govern his movement after his death. However, a section of the Ahmadiyya movement broke away, forming the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam Lahore, or the Lahori Ahmadi, establishing its headquarters at Lahore. The Lahori Ahmadi, numbering only about 30,000 worldwide, although agreeing with the Qadiani group that Ahmad was a *mujaddid* (reformer), and the promised Messiah and Mahdi, reject the idea that he was a prophet. The Ahmadiyya Jama'at, regarding itself as the true Islam created to unite all Muslims, is today an international movement

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² "Pakistan Ahmadi bury Lahore mosque attack victims", BBC News, 29 May 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/10190389.stm, accessed 29/5/10.

³ "Lahore attackers were Pakistani Taliban", 29 May 2010, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hkiMxbHNNH0BqgpWA2ZG6VD6wVTmAD9G0JE9G0>, accessed 29/5/10.

with large numbers in America, Britain, Europe, Indonesia and Nigeria. There are at least twelve million Ahmadi world-wide and approximately 286,000 in Pakistan.⁴

Why are the Ahmadi persecuted?

Although Ahmadi beliefs and practices are generally similar to those of mainstream Sunni Islam, certain teachings are regarded as heretical, if not blasphemous by other Muslims.

Concerning prophethood, mainstream Islam teaches the doctrine of *khataman nabiyeen*, the finality of prophethood, the idea that Muhammad is the seal, the greatest and the last of the prophets. The Ahmadi, although acknowledging that Muhammad “was and will ever remain the greatest Prophet of all times”⁵ and that he is “the last law bearing prophet”,⁶ claim there can still be lesser prophets,⁷ non-legislative, *zilli* (shadowy) prophets. Ahmad is accepted as *ummatai nabi* (a subordinate prophet). The Ahmadi, basing their teaching on the Qur’anic principle that “there is no compulsion in religion”, “strongly reject violence and terrorism in any form and for any reason”.⁸ Ahmad presented *jihad* mainly as a defensive doctrine, arguing that *jihad-bil-qalam* (*jihad* of the pen) must take the place of *jihad bi-saif* (*jihad* of the sword) in the present age.⁹ Aggressive *jihad* therefore, according to the Ahmadi is nothing less than “murder in the name of Allah”.¹⁰

To the chagrin of mainstream Muslims, the Ahmadi believe in the appointment of *khalifas*, leaders, who will unify the *ummah*, the Muslim community worldwide. The Ahmadi teach that Jesus, instead of dying on the cross as Christians believe, or being taken alive into heaven as mainstream Muslims teach, escaped from the Romans, travelled to the East, finally settling and dying in Kashmir.¹¹

Mainly because of these teachings Ahmadi are regarded by mainstream Muslims as *kuffar*, unbelievers, and condemned as *murtadd*, apostates and *zindique*, heretics. In 1953, militant Muslims called for a banning of the Ahmadi,¹² resulting in rioting and arson attacks against Ahmadi property throughout Pakistan. Abul Ala Mawdudi, founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami, published his pamphlet *The Qadiani Question*, and his book *The Finality of Prophethood*, criticising Ahmadi teaching. In 1974, President Bhutto passed a resolution which declared that the Ahmadi were to be regarded as a non-Muslim minority. In 1977, General Zia ul-Haq, having imposed martial law, allowed a further period of fierce persecution against the Ahmadi to take place. Later, in 1984, Zia introduced Ordinance XX, which added sections 298(b) and 298(c) to the

⁴ See S. Gregory & S. R. Valentine, *Pakistan: the situation of religious Minorities*, Writenet Report, UNHCR, 2009.

⁵ K. Zirvi, *Welcome to Ahmadiyyat, the true Islam*, Ahmadiyyah Movement in Islam, 2002, p. 285

⁶ Dabbous, M., *Al-Baseerat*, December 1992, p. 6.

⁷ *Mahzarnama - the Memorandum: Submission by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat to the National Assembly of Pakistan Regarding Its Basic Tenets*, Tilford: Islam International Publications Ltd, 2002, p. 108.

⁸ Ali, M., *The Ahmadiyyah Movement*, Lahore: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha’at Islam, 1984, p. 13. For a full appraisal of the Ahmadi teaching of *jihad* see Valentine, S.R., *Islam and the Ahmadiyya Jama’at*, op.cit., ch. 9

⁹ Bakhsh, K.S., *The Debt Forgotten*, Lahore: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha’at Islam, 1993, p. 36

¹⁰ See Ahmad, M. T., *Murder in the Name of Allah*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1989.

¹¹ Ahmad, G. M., *Jesus in India*, Islamabad: Islam International Publications, 1989, p. 66

¹² Ahmadiyya Muslim Association, *Persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan*, London, 1988, p.6

Pakistani Penal Code. Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the “anti-Ahmadi laws”, prohibits Ahmadi from calling themselves Muslim, preaching or propagating their religious belief, inviting others to accept Ahmadi teachings, or “insulting the religious feelings of Muslims”. The punishment for violation of the section is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine.¹³ This legislation also prohibited the Ahmadi using the *azan* (the call to prayer); calling “his place of worship as *Masjid* [mosque]”; to pray according to Islamic custom; the use of the *kalima* (declaration of faith) and the inscribing of Qur’anic verses on their mosques. In May 1984, due to continued fears for his life, the Ahmadi *khalifa* was removed from Rabwah, to new headquarters in London. In 1991, section 295 (c) was amended to make the death penalty the only punishment for blasphemy.

Most Ahmadi are restricted from possessing a passport, and going on the *hajj*. Under present passport regulations, applicants are required to sign a declaration that they “consider Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani to be an imposter *nabi* and also consider his followers whether belonging to the Lahori or Qadiani group to be Non-Muslim”. Ahmadi similarly face discrimination in relation to the national identity card which every citizen must have in order to vote because those wishing to be listed as a Muslim must affirm on oath their belief in *khataman nabiyeen* and their denunciation of *Ahmadiyyat*. Discrimination also occurs in education as students must declare their religious affiliation, and belief in Muhammad as the final prophet, on application forms for entrance to state universities and private educational institutions. Since 1983 Ahmadi have been prohibited from holding public conferences or gatherings, and been denied permission to hold their annual conference. In conversation with Ahmadi in Faisalabad, Lahore and Rabwah the present writer was informed that the Government persistently discriminated against Ahmadi in hiring for the civil service and in admissions to government institutions of higher learning. Ahmadi businessmen, even solicitors, are often ostracized by other members of their trade or profession and by the local community generally. The Ahmadi I spoke with in Pakistan manifested a stoical, benign resignation to such daily persecution. To their credit retaliation for the attacks is not likely to occur. As Ahmad wrote: “Now just as I do not pay any attention to abuse, I advise my community also that they should listen to abuse and tolerate it and they should never retort with abuse for, by doing so the blessing will be lost”.¹⁴

Issues raised?

This incident clearly reveals that Pakistan’s terrorism problem is getting worse, not better. The TTP and other terrorist groups have, since 2007, killed some 10,000 Pakistani citizens and soldiers¹⁵ There is still some confusion over who was responsible for the attacks. The TTP has claimed responsibility but such claims are the usual response when terrorist activity occurs. Contacts I have in Pakistan claim the attacks were carried out by Blackwater, the security agency employed by the CIA and US administration, to further discredit the militants. Although discriminated against in Pakistan, the killing of members of a pacifist group such as the Ahmadi would [and

¹³ For the text of Ordinance XX, and a full report of the persecution of *Ahmadi* in Pakistan, see Ensor, J. (ed.), *Rabwah: A Place for Martyrs*, London: Parliamentary Human Rights Group, 2007

¹⁴ The words of M. G. Ahmad, Malfoozat, cited by S. R. Valentine, *Islam & the Ahmadiyya Jama’at*, op.cit., p. 240.

¹⁵“Pakistan’s challenge”, *The Nation*, 31 May 2010, <http://www.thenation.com/article/pakistans-challenge> , accessed 31/5/10.

has done] cause considerable outrage against the culprits on the international scenario. There is little evidence however to corroborate such claims. Other sources claim that one of the arrested terrorists, apparently a member of TTP, states that he and his colleagues were trained in Waziristan, a claim, which will heighten US desires to continue drone attacks in that area, action that will fuel rather than reduce militancy in the region.¹⁶

Although, as indicated above, the Ahmadi have been victims of continued persecution, this is the first time they have suffered from such well co-ordinated attacks. As such, terrorism in Pakistan is getting worse not better, with militants seeing groups like the Ahmadi as a “soft target” in a country where the state and Muslims generally refuse to see the sect as a Muslim group, and where the authorities appear reluctant, or are unable, to offer protection. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan had warned the government that the Ahmadi mosque in Model Town, Lahore was likely to be a target for terrorists over a year ago. However, with the majority of Muslims, including police officers, army officials and government leaders seeing Ahmadi as heretics, it is not surprising that requests for protection have apparently been ignored. When I visited the Lahori Ahmadi settlement, Darus-Salaam, Lahore in April 2004 the Amir Abdul Karim Saeed then spoke to me of constant fear of attack, not only from extremists, but from the local moderate community. While I was there armed guards manned the gates and patrolled the perimeter. Dr Zahid Aziz, spokes-person for the Lahori Ahmadi in the UK, stated to the author in an email exchange shortly after the attacks how he was horrified at the lack of protection offered by the state. Dr Muhammad Iqbal, spokes-person for the Ahmadiyya Jama’at in Bradford, West Yorkshire, expressed similar views when he stated how such an attack was foreseeable. Amongst other things the attacks have highlighted the governments “double talk” on religious freedom, in one breath proclaiming itself to be democratic, while in the other denying basic human rights to groups such as the Ahmadi, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Zikri and others. As one Ahmadi remarked to me: “it is time to abolish the blasphemy laws. Then wicked men would have no cloak to hide behind”.

¹⁶ “Attacks On Ahmadi Places Assailants Trained In Waziristan”, Pakistan News, 29 Mat 2010, <http://www.apakistannews.com/attacks-on-ahmadi-places-assailants-trained-in-waziristan-186176> , accessed 29/5/10.