MILITANT ISLAMISM IN BANGLADESH – GLOBAL JIHADIST CONNECTION?

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Abstract

The spurt of bomb violence conducted by the Islamist militants in 2005 in Bangladesh and their call for the establishment of Islamic laws in the country has raised a very critical question: does Islamist militancy in Bangladesh (Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh-JMB) have connection with "global jihadist" militancy? This article has tried to answer the question by applying theories that are used in understanding different types of Islamist militancy. In this connection, it has explored the core differences between global jihadism and the militant Islamism propagated by the JMB in Bangladesh. It has clearly shown that the agenda and intentions of the two are not alike. Thus, it has been concluded that any connection of JMB with global jihadist is a remote possibility. It is rather one of those of numbers of militant Islamist groups around the world whose emergence lies in some particular local factors fighting either to secede from the existing political community or to gain state power.

1. Introduction

The spurt of bomb violence conducted by the Islamist militants in 2005 in Bangladesh[1] and their call for the establishment of Islamic laws in the country has raised a very critical question: does Islamist militancy in

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[1] It stunned the whole nation and the different international quarters when on 17 August 2005, the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) conducted a nation-wide bomb explosion. Bombs were exploded in 63 of 64 districts in about 500 sites. This nation-wide bomb explosion was followed by several other bomb attacks in the subsequent months. Serial bomb explosions by the JMB on 3 October in courtrooms in the three districts of Chittagong, Laxmipur and Chandpur killed two and injured several others including a district judge. On 18 October, bomb attack took place on a judge of Speedy Trial Tribunal in the district of Sylhet. Suicide bomb attack killed two judges in the district of Jhalakati on 14 November. On 29 November, suicide bomb attacks in the court premises in the districts of Chittagong and Gazipur killed nine including lawyers and policemen. Gazipur experienced another suicide bomb attack on 1 December that killed one and injured many others. Suicide bomb attack on 8 December in the district of Netrokona in front of Udichi Shilpigosthi, a left-leaning cultural organization, killed eight people.

Bangladesh have a connection with "global jihadist" militancy? Two interrelated aspects make the question critical. One is the timing factor, i.e. continuous allegations for the last few years from both domestic and international quarters about the presence of Islamist militants in the country with "global jihadist" connection.[2] The bomb violence conducted by the militants in 2005 is viewed in a manner as if there has been nothing wrong in the allegations in particular with respect to their "global jihadist" linkage. In this regard, fingers are pointed at the second factor: the magnitude and pattern of bomb violence by the militants. In other words, the operational pattern of the Islamist militants in Bangladesh is often equated with global jihadists' style of operation, a phenomenon, among others, where the indoctrinated activists do not hesitate to commit suicidal attacks for their cause. This article argues that the much propagated "global jihadist" connection of the Islamist militants in Bangladesh is mere speculation and an outcome of conspiracy theories particularly stemming from the existing internal political polarization in the country. What is extremely lacking in the context is the presence of academic discourse. This paper, therefore, endeavours to make an intellectual investigation to the question as raised above.

Media investigations have discovered more than two dozen militant Islamist organisations in Bangladesh.[3] However, "militant Islamism in Bangladesh" in this article has been narrowed down to give particular focus on the ideology pursued by the outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). "Global jihadist" refers to militant Islamism propagated by Usama

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[2] In the internal political polarization in Bangladesh, in one side there is Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) which leads the right wing religious parties; and on the other side there is Bangladesh Awami League which leads the left-leaning parties. After the take over by the BNP-led four party alliance government in 2001, the opposition led by Awami League at times accused the ruling alliance of patronizing Islamic militancy in the country and that there were Taliban and al-Qaeda sympathizers in the government. The ruling alliance denied the presence of any such forces in the country and viewed opposition's charge as an attempt to tarnish the image of the country abroad and thus, discredit the government internationally. The incident of 17 August 2005 was followed by blame game between the two. The ruling group blamed the opposition of having hands in the incident while the opposition dubbed it as the outcome of government-patronized Islamic militancy. On international front, there have been Indian allegations that Taliban and al-Qaeda forces have been operating in Bangladesh. In this regard, more striking have been the coverage by international media like the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (4 April 2002) and the *Wall Street Journal* (2 April 2002). See for details, Taj I Hashmi, "Failure of the Welfare State: Islamic Resurgence and Political Legitimacy in Bangladesh", in Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah Saeed (eds.), *Islam and Political Legitimacy*, London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, pp.118-120.

[3] The Daily Star investigation has found over 30 religious militant organizations. These militant organisations are Harkatul Jihad, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMJB), Islami Biplobi Parishad, Shahadat Al Hiqma, Hizbut Towhid, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Ahle Hadith Andolon, Towhidi Janata, Bishwa Islami Front, Juma'atul Sadat, Al Jomiatul Islamia, Iqra Islami Jote, Allahr Dal, Al Khidmat Bahini, Al Mujhid, Jama'ati Yahia Al Turag, Jihadi Party, Al Harkat al Islamia, Al Mahfuz Al Islami, Jama'atul Faladia, Shahadat-e-Nabuwat, Joish-e-Mostafa, Tahfize Haramaine Parishad, Hizbul Mujahideen, Duranta Kafela and Muslim Guerrilla. See, *The Daily Star*, 21 August 2005.

bin Ladin's al-Qaeda. "Islamism" has been defined as "Islamic activism" which includes "non-violent and violent, progressive as well as reactionary, political movements."[4] Hence "militant Islamism" stands for violent activism justified in the name of Islam in order to achieve political goals.

For the purpose of analysis, the article extensively borrows ideas from the theories of insurgency. The objective behind such an undertaking is to find out the relationship between insurgency and Islamist militancy. Defining insurgency is, therefore, a necessity. Insurgency is, as defined by O'Neill, "a struggle between a nonruling group and the ruling authorities in which the nonruling group consciously uses *political resources* (e.g., organizational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations) and *violence* to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics."[5] As per this definition, the nature of Islamist militancy is found to be one of insurgency. Therefore, an understanding of the nature of insurgency can provide a lens to figure out the various types of Islamist militancy, their agenda and intentions.

The article at first attempts to understand the various types of Islamist militancy in the lens of that of insurgency. It then briefly looks into the agenda and intentions of global jihadism and various elements of al-Qaeda. The next section is followed by an attempt to offer a concise profile of JMB and its top leadership and make a succinct analysis of JMB's agenda and intentions. These deliberations would help draw the conclusion of the paper to find the answer to the question - does JMB's militant Islamism have any connection with global jihadism, primarily in terms of agenda and intentions?

2. Types of Islamist Militancy in the Lens of that Insurgency

2.1. Types of Insurgencies

The ultimate goal of an insurgent movement is the fundamental determinant that distinguishes it, as O'Neill points out, from the other ones. Failure to look into the underlying distinction in terms of goals will cause a major mistake. This is because drawing distinction among goals has

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[4] Thomas Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism After Iraq War", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Winter 2006), p.12.
[5] Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, Washington, Brassey's, 1990, p.13.

academic value and practical implications as well. In this regard, O'Neill suggests that the first problem about which an analyst should be aware in dealing with insurgency is its type. He finds seven types of insurgent movements-anarchist, egalitarian, traditionalist, pluralist, secessionist, reformist and preservationist.[6] Christopher Clapham describes four broad groups or types of insurgency-liberationist insurgency, separatist insurgency, reform insurgency and a new of its kind, is that of warlord insurgency.[7] A review of typologies offered by O'Neill and Clapham respectively would propose the following nine types of insurgencies.

Table 1: Insurgents' Types and Goals

Types/sub type(s) of Insurgencies	Goal[8]
Anarchist	Elimination of all institutionalised political arrangements because the insurgents consider the superordinate-subordinate authority relationships associated with them as unnecessary and illegitimate.
Egalitarian	Imposition of a new system based on the ultimate value of distributional equality and centrally controlled structures intended to mobilize the people and radically transform the social structure within an existing political community.
Traditionalists (Subtype) Reactionary-Traditionalists	Replacement of the existing political system with a new one that existed in the recent or distant past, the values to which they adhere are primordial and sacred ones rooted in ancestral ties and religion. More zealous group seeking to re-establish an ancient political system that they idealize as a golden age.
Pluralist	Establishment of a system in which the values of individual freedom, liberty and compromise are emphasised and in which political structures are differentiated and are autonomous.
Secessionist	Withdrawal of loyalty from the existing political

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[6] *Ibid,* p.17.
[7] Cited in Jakkie Cilliers, "Resource wars — A New Type of Insurgency", Institute for Security Studies, Online, http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/BOOKS/Angola/2Cilliers.pdf, accessed 11 June 2006.
[8] (Adapted from) O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, pp.17-21; Cilliers, "Resource wars — A New Type of Insurgency".

	community of which they are formally a part and the formation of a new independent political community.
Liberationist	Liberating a nation from an outside ruling class, i.e. achieving independence from foreign rule or domination.
Reformist	Rejection of discriminatory practices and the achievement of more political, social and economic benefits for their constituencies without rejecting the existing political community of which they are a part.
Preservationist	Preservation of the existing political system and policies (because of the relative privileges they derive from it) by engaging in illegal acts of violence against non-ruling groups and the authorities who try to effect change.
Warlord	Directed more towards a change in leadership and control of the resources available to the state than to a change in policy, ideology or indeed in patterns of patronage.

2.2. Types of militant Islamism

The lens of the types of insurgency would provide us three dominant types of militant Islamist groups prevailing in the contemporary world-traditionalist militant Islamist, secessionist militant Islamist and liberationist militant Islamist.

Traditionalist militant Islamist

This type of militant Islamists struggles for state power, i.e., to replace the existing political system with a broader socio-revolutionary agenda rooted in the early phase of Islam. The first of its kind emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the Middle East in general and in Egypt in particular. Since they struggle for state power, their enemies are the local political regimes. The agenda of this type of militant Islamist, since its very inception, has been such that they fall into the category of reactionary-traditionalist militant Islamist.

Secessionist militant Islamist

This group of militant Islamists resorts to violent struggle primarily not for state power but for a specific territory in order to establish an independent state. Their Muslim identity distinguishes them from the non-Muslim majority community group of the larger political community of which they are a part. In other words, they are the minority group within the larger political community but they constitute the majority in the specific territory (part of a larger political community) from which they want to secede. Islam or Muslim identity is the source of their nationalist ideology. Often, jihad which they term as holy war serves to legitimise their violent struggle against non-Muslim majority state (opponent is the local ruling class) of which they are a part. Secessionist militant Islamism was adopted in the 1980s and 1990s in places like Indian held Kashmir and in Chechnya.

Liberationist militant Islamist

Militant Islamists of this type also use Islam as a nationalist ideology, but unlike the secessionist militant Islamists, their opponent is an outside ruling class. In other words, their primary goal is to liberate their nation against foreign rule or domination. The hard-line Hamas justifies their violent struggle as jihad against Israeli rule in Palestine. Usama bin Ladin's al-Qaeda's global jihadism, which constitutes the major point of focus in the article, is to liberate the Muslim world from Western domination.

3. Global Jihadism: The Al-Qaeda Case

The concepts of "global jihadism" and "al-Qaeda" are inseparable. "Global jihadism", as Hegghammer points out, "found its primary operational expression in the international terrorist activity of al-Qa'ida and the so-called Afghan Arabs from the mid-1990s onwards."[9] It emerged following a declaration of holy war by Usama bin Ladin in August 1996 against the United States and its allies. What warrants the attention of analysts in this regard is the appearance of the phenomenon as a recent and new one in the intellectual discourse of militant Islamism.[10] The factors that constitute the newness of the phenomenon can be found in the mental map

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[9] Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism After Iraq War", p.12.
[10] *Ibid.*

of the advocates of global jihadism and in their threat perception and ultimate goals summarized below. It may be mentioned that there have been plenty of scholarly works on the worldviews, threat perceptions and goals of global jihadists primarily using the texts released by top al-Qaeda leadership. A survey of a few of them reveals the following attributes of global jihadism. The attributes have been summarized without going deep into their details. However, it can serve the primary purpose of this paper.

3.1. Attributes of Global Jihadism

Mental Map: The world is split into two blocks – the *Ummah* (the greater Islamic World) which belongs to the believers' camp and the West which represents infidels' camp. Western abuses of the Muslim world have been responsible for this division. Muslims are victims of oppression, occupation and war in a world dominated by their historic enemies, the so-called infidels, labelled as crusaders belonging to Judaism and Christianity.[11]

Opponent: The main opponent of the *Ummah* was no longer the local regimes ("the near enemy") but the United States ("the far enemy") and its allies. All true Muslims had an obligation to heed the call to a global jihad against the infidels.[12]

Goals: The goal of the global jihad is to liberate the *Ummah* from the oppression and occupation of the infidels and the aspiration lying at the heart of this vision is the reinstatement of the Caliphate.[13]

Operational Pattern: As pointed out by Thomas Hegghammer, "their operational pattern is transnational, either in the sense that they prefer to strike at international targets in their local battle zone, or that they are willing to carry out terrorist attacks far outside their territorial base, for example in Europe or in the US."[14]

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[11] See for details, John L Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp.20-25; Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism After Iraq War", p.13.

[12] John L Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, pp.20-25; Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism After Iraq War", p.13.

[13] Fidel Sendagorta, "Jihad in Europe: The Wider Context", *Survival*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Autumn 2005), p.65.

[14] Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism After Iraq War", p.15.

Recruiting Base: Recruiting base is not constrained by territory or nationality; rather it is worldwide in scope.[15]

The pertinent question now is: what types of insurgency does global jihadism fall into? An examination of its attributes would lead one to consider it as reactionary-traditionalist insurgency – hence it can be called reactionary-traditionalist militant Islamism. It can also be called liberationist militant Islamism since it advocates the liberation of the *Ummah* from the oppression and occupation of the infidels. But what is new in the context is that the phenomenon appeared with a global cause of the Muslims – fighting no longer for a "specific territory or for state power in a particular country" but to "defend all Muslim territories at the same time."[16] And unlike the traditionalist and secessionist Islamists, the main enemy of the *Ummah* was no longer the local regimes ("the near enemy") but the United States ("the far enemy") and its allies.

3.2. Al-Qaeda Elements

In regards to al-Qaeda, the problematic meaning of the term has been nicely dealt with by Jason Burke,[17] yet Thomas Hegghammer believes that the term is, "most relevant to describe the organization which took shape around Usama bin Ladin in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001."[18] However, what is relevant in the context of the main purpose of the paper is to know more about al-Qaeda elements than about its meaning. One of those who have made excellent contributions in analyzing al-Qaeda elements is Jason Burke. In his analysis, the first element is the "al-Qaeda hardcore" which refers to the group consisting of bin Ladin and his dozen or so long-term close associates who have stayed with him since late 1980s; and hundred or so highly motivated men indoctrinated by bin Ladin. The hundred or so radicalized individuals came under the ideological influence of bin Ladin particularly during their stay in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001, the period when Al-Qaeda enjoyed access to a territory. These motivated men included many veterans of the Afghan war and many who had also taken part in fighting in Bosnia and Chechnya. Usama bin Ladin and one of his close associates Ayman al-Zawahiri indoctrinated these

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[15] Challenges of Peace Operations: Into the 21 st Century (Krusenberg Report 2003), Online, http://www.challengesproject.net/roach/Krusenberg.do?pageId=69, accessed 22 July 2006.
[16] Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism After Iraq War", p.13.
[17] Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2003, pp.7-22.
[18] Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism After Iraq War", p.13.

highly motivated men and made them perceive their role as the vanguard of global jihadists who were fighting to liberate the *Ummah* from the occupation and oppression of a Jewish-crusader alliance.[19]

Burke mentions a second element of al-Qaeda which is popularly conceived to refer to scores of other Islamist militant groups around the world. To label them "al-Qaeda" would overlook the particular local factors behind their emergence. Some elements within these groups may have some links with the hardcore element in respect of receiving funds or training or contacts between the senior figures, but those ties are very tenuous ones. And almost all Islamic militant groups active in the world today have links with each other and have multiple associations and support lines where funding and training come from sources beyond bin Ladin. They may have cooperation with each other even occasionally with bin Ladin to the extent it serves their purposes. Bin Ladin, as mentioned by Burke, may be a symbol of a heroic figure to them, but they may not care for his vision of global jihad. In other words, they have their own leadership and agenda which are deeply parochial.[20]

Burke describes a loose "network of networks" of Islamic militants which does not mean an "al-Qaeda network". It is a way of, in his understanding, "describing those elements within the broad movement of Islamic militancy who have some connections to the al-Qaeda hardcore however varied and indistinct." Thus, along with the "al-Qaeda hardcore" and the "network of networks", he finds a third element: "The Idea, World View, Ideology of al-Qaeda and those who subscribe to it". Burke's analysis suggests that a huge swathe of largely youths subscribe to this. They may be part of a group or not, but they subscribe to al-Qaeda's world view. In other words, al-Qaeda's world view is the lens through which they perceive the world, understand and interpret events and act accordingly, but it would be erroneous to label them "al-Qaeda".[21]

The third element described by Burke can be a useful framework to understand the changing face of the "al-Qaeda hardcore" after the U.S. led campaign in Afghanistan. The campaign destroyed its centre of gravity and, thus, its monolithic organizational concept. As a result, al-Qaeda today has become, as described by Bruce Hoffman,

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[19] Burke, *Al-Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror*, pp.13-14.
[20] *Ibid*, pp.14-15.
[21] *Ibid,* pp. 16-17.

an amorphous movement tenuously held together by a loosely networked transnational constituency rather than a monolithic, international terrorist organization with either a defined or identifiable command and control apparatus…The result is that today there are *many Al Qaedas* rather than the single Al Qaeda of the past. It has become a vast enterprise-an international movement or franchise operation with like-minded local representatives, loosely connected to a central ideological or motivational base, but advancing their common goal independently of one another.[22]

It is a phenomenon that can be explained by the theory of contagion and diffusion.[23] The phrase "many al-Qaedas" in the above expression refers to the fact that al-Qaeda currently has become more an idea or concept than an organization, as also argued by Burke.[24] Hegghammer also holds a contention similar to Hoffman's. To him "many al-Qaedas" are called "al-Qaeda" because there is a lack of better term. The factor that ties them together is largely their anti-Americanism and their motivation to attack Western targets.[25]

The conclusion that can be drawn from discussing the elements of al-Qaeda may be as follows. The first element, the "al-Qaeda hardcore", may fall into the category of liberationist insurgency since they are the vanguard of global jihadism against the West. The third element, although varied and indistinct, may fall into the same category in the sense that individuals or groups belonging to this element subscribe to al-Qaeda's ideology. Individuals or groups belonging to the second element who do not share al-Qaeda's vision of global jihadism and are deeply parochial may fight for state power or to secede from a larger political community. Therefore, they can be either secessionist Islamist or reactionary-traditionalist militant Islamist fighting for state power, but not stand for global jihadism.

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[22] (Italics emphasized) Bruce Hoffman, "The Changing Face of Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism", Online, http://psweb.sbs.ohio-state.edu/grads/bstrath/PS145/terror/hoffmann.pdf, accessed 22 June 2006.
[23] Jonathan Fox, "Religion as an Overlooked Element of International Relations", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 3, No.3 (Fall 2001), p.68.
[24] Jason Burke, "Think Again: Al-Qaeda" *Foreign Policy*, (May/June 2004), p.18.
[25] Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism After Iraq War", p.14.

4. Militant Islamism in Bangladesh: The Case of JMB

Bangladesh like many other Muslim countries could not escape the post-Afghan war diffusion of militant Islamism. At the beginning of the 1990s, some quarters doing politics in the name of religion in the country raised a slogan: *Amra sobai hobo Taliban, Bangla Hobe Afghanistan* (We will all become Taliban and turn Bangladesh into Afghanistan). The makers of the slogan are Afghan war veterans who went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet army in the 1980s and returned home with militant ideologies. National media investigations find more than two dozen militant Islamist organizations which have set up their network across the country since 1989 with the central objective of establishing an Islamic state. A defence analyst of Bangladesh notes that Islamist militancy in the country began to breed in the late 1980s. The phenomenon reorganized in the mid 1990s and it got exposed in the late 1990s[26] with some sensational killing attempts by Harkatul Jihad (Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami-Huji).[27] This militant organization was established in 1992 and its activities came to notice in 1996.

4.1. JMB and Shaykh Abdur Rahman: A Concise Profile of Activities

There is the extreme lack of information on the profile of JMB and its top leadership. Hardly anything is known about it from official sources. What is known in this regard is from media investigations and observations of columnists. But these investigations, to a large extent, are incomplete although this paper relies on them to make a concise profile of JMB and its top leadership.

JMB, after parting from Harkatul Jihad, was launched in 1998 under the leadership of Shaykh Abdur Rahman[28] But little has been known about its activities until 17 August 2005. This is because, on the one hand, the organization did not claim the responsibility of its terrorist attacks committed at times during pre-August 17 period. On the other, it was also

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[26] M Sakhawat Hossain, "Biswa Jihad O Bangladeshe Jangi Utthan—Ekti Samikkha (Global Jihadism and the Rise of Militancy in Bangladesh — A Survey)", *The Prothom Alo* (A Bangla Daily), Dhaka, 31 December 2005.

[27] HUJI activists allegedly made a failed attempt on the life of poet Shamsur Rahman at his residence in Dhaka on 18 January 1999. In July 2000, HUJI allegedly plotted to kill the then prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by planting explosives at the helipad at Kotalipara in the District of Gopalgonj.

[28] M Sakhawat Hossain, "Biswa Jihad O Bangladeshe Jangi Utthan—Ekti Samikkha (Global Jihadism and the Rise of Militancy in Bangladesh — A Survey)".

the blame game in internal politics which barred the state machinery to find out the group(s) responsible. According to the post-17 August media investigations, it is found that the first conference of JMB was held at Khetlal in the northern district of Joypurhat in early 2002. After that JMB activists started receiving training and occasionally clashed with the local police of the districts of Joypurhat and Dinajpur. At one stage, JMB went underground; extended its network around the country and Shaykh Abdur Rahman built his permanent headquarters in another northern district of Rajshahi where he founded Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) as the public front of JMB.[29]

JMB's terrorist activities committed during the pre-17 August period for which it did not claim its responsibilities included, for example, attacks on cinema halls in Mymensingh, an attempt on the life of writer Professor Humayun Azad, the murder of Rajshahi University teacher Professor Yunus and looting of NGO offices.[30] But what came to the public through the blessings of private media during the same period were the activities of JMJB. Starting from April 2004, JMJB under the leadership of Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai, made attempts to unlawfully neutralize the country's north-western region of the left-wing extremists. But JMJB's connection with JMB was unknown to the public. During this period local media was very vocal about JMJB's unlawful activities and accused some elements in the government of patronizing this militant organization. The government denied the existence of Bangla Bhai, its alleged patronization of JMJB and accused the media of deliberately creating a Bangla Bhai with a view to damaging the image of the country. Eventually, reportedly under pressure from the influential foreign missions and donor agencies in Dhaka, the government issued a press note on 23 February 2005 which admitted the involvement of JMB and JMJB in terrorist activities and banned both the organizations.[31] Sooner or later, the 17 August and the subsequent bomb violence in 2005 by JMB for which it claimed its responsibilities and through which the militant organization conveyed its existence and its agenda and intentions.

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[29] *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 28 August 2005.
[30] It has been admitted by the arrested JMB chief Shaikh Abdur Rahman and his associates to the interrogators that JMB operatives carried out the attacks on writer Humayun Azad and Rajshahi University teacher Prof Yunus in 2004, and four cinema halls in Mymensingh in 2003. JMB men also looted an NGO office in Tangail and the BRAC office at Rupganj in Narayanganj in May 2004. See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 9 February and 5 June 2006).
[31] See ANNEX I

In regards to the profile of JMB Chief Rahman, media investigations found some interesting points about his political, educational, professional and jihadi backgrounds. First, his father was involved with the politics of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) and Rahman during his student life joined the Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student front of JIB. Second, he graduated from an Ahle Hadith Madrasa in Jamalpur and later, as a son of a leading JIB leader, was sent to Madina University in Saudi Arabia for higher education at party expenses. Third, at one point of his professional career as a translator, he came in close contact with many diplomatic representatives in Dhaka from the Middle Eastern countries. In particular, he worked at the Saudi Embassy in Dhaka between 1985 and 1990. Finally, he travelled to India, Pakistan and Afghanistan among other countries. Having being inducted into the jihadi movement and after receiving training in Afghanistan, he returned to Bangladesh and formed the terrorist cell, JMB.[32]

According to another media investigation, Rahman was inspired for jihad in 1995 and in the same year he employed lawyers for the release of as many as forty activists and leaders of HUJI Bangladesh nabbed by the local police of Coxbazar, a southern district. In 1997, he travelled to Pakistan controlled Kashmir and received training there. His tour was sponsored by Abdul Karim alias Tunda, a top militant of Pakistan-based Kashmiri militant organization Laskar-e-Taiba (LT). He returned to Bangladesh in 1998 and formed JMB modelling it after LT.[33] These findings by a leading Bangla national daily claimed its source from the Task Force Intelligence (TFI), the intelligence unit assigned to interrogate the arrested JMB chief and its other leaders. Although the TFI disclaimed its connection with the information, the Bangla daily defended their position.

A couple of speculations may be made about Rahman from these media findings. First, he may have been influenced by the intolerant Wahhabist ideology during his experiences at Madina University and working experiences with Middle Eastern embassies in Dhaka. This may have been further exacerbated by his training in Afghanistan and Pakistan eventually inspiring him to resort to violence for establishing Islamic laws in Bangladesh. Funding seems to have been no problem for him to run his

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[32] For example see, Zayadul Ahsan, "Inside the Militant Groups – 7: Profiles Show Them Interlinked", *The Daily Star*, 28 August 2005.
[33] *The Prothom Alo*, Dhaka, 24 March 2005.

terrorist cell. His previous Middle East connection may have been conducive to receiving petrodollars from the region's Islamic NGOs.[34] Second, the findings may be also important to understand the JMB's and his personal connection with regional militant Islamist groups whose agenda can be understood through the lens of the second element of al-Qaeda.

4.2. Agenda and Intentions of JMB

Discussions on the agenda and intentions of JMB focus on the following: goal, enemy perception, recruiting base and operational pattern.

Goal:

The agenda and intentions of JMB can be understood from its leaflets found at the bombing sites on August 17, 2005. The following excerpts are mentioned below to this purpose.

> We're the soldiers of Allah. We've taken up arms for the implementation of Allah's law the way Prophet, Sahabis [companions of the Prophet] and heroic Mujahideen (holy war fighter) have done for centuries. We want to earn Almighty's satisfaction by establishing Khalis Tauhid [pure monotheism] by putting an end to bida't [activities which are literally interpreted as not allowed by Quran or Hadith] and want to make the people happy in the world here and hereafter. If the government does not establish Islamic laws in the country after this (third) warning and, rather, it goes to arrest any Muslim on charge of seeking Allah's laws or it resorts to repression on Alem-Ulema, [religious scholar] the JMB would go for counteraction.[35]

The leaflets further reflected JMB's views towards democracy:

> Those who want to give institutional shape to democracy are the enemies of Islam…if they want 'hedayet [blessings] of Allah', both the government and the opposition should unitedly introduce Islamic law immediately by burying party conflicts. [Because]

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[34] See ANNEX II.
[35] Phrases in the brackets added by the author to express the meaning of non-English words or phrases. *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 18 August 2005.

democracy is the product of evil power. Democracy is the main weapon to establish evil forces in the world. This evil order allows the arrest of Mujahideen who are on Allah's path. [36]

The leaflet also carried a call for all members of the armed forces, including other law enforcing agencies to protect the laws of Allah instead of "evil laws" prevailing in the country under the present constitution.

Make your life worthy by gaining Allah's blessings by extending your all-out cooperation in establishing Islamic laws. Don't abide by evil laws, obey the laws of Allah. Don't take arms under the evil laws against the soldiers of Allah. Give up your loyalty to evil power and join the force of Allah's soldiers. [37]

JMB has a strong abhorrence of the country's exiting secular judicial system which they call *taguti* (infidel's) judicial system. Targeting court premises, judges and lawyers of their attacks is one of the indicators in this regard. Other indicators are available also. For example, in reaction to the verdict of the death sentence of seven JMB militants including its top two leaders Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai on 29 May 2006, they instantly decided that they would not appeal to any *taguti* court. Their immediate statement can help clarify their position on this: "Although we asked the government for holding our trial by an Islamic jury board, it did not pay any heed. Out trial has been conducted hastily by a *taguti* court…We want to appeal to an Islamic jury board. We will not appeal to any *taguti* court."[38] What then is the goal of JMB? Again it is the insurgency theory that fits best to get the answer. By using violence, as held by O'Neill, the insurgents seek to achieve specific long-term, intermediate and short-term goals. Obviously, the long-term goal is directed at changing the political community, political system, authorities, or policies. The intermediate goal is to erode government's psychological support by scaring the officials and their internal and international sympathizers.[39] In regards to JMB, its long-term goal can be identified through the lens of the types of Islamist militancy. It is neither secessionist militant Islamist nor one of liberationist ideology, but one of traditionalist ideology. Hence, in the long-term, the violent struggle is for state power, i.e. replacing the

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[36] *Ibid.*
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 30 May 2006.
[39] O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, p.24-25.

existing constitutional system with the laws of God. However, according to a defence analyst, the leadership pattern and operational pattern of JMB suggest that its perpetrators might not have been confident of their success. Their short-term or intermediate goal might have been to infuse panic into public mind and eventually to destabilize the state by exploiting the existing division in the mainstream politics in the country.[40] The confessional statement of JMB's arrested military chief Ataur Rahman Sunny can help substantiate this contention as he said, "We carried out the bomb attacks to create a sense of disgust among people at the government, with the ultimate aim to unseat it."[41]

Enemy: Near or Far?

One can draw attention to the anti-Western rhetoric of JMB expressed in its leaflets found at the 17 August bombing sites. In a separate appeal to world Muslims, they said:

> the biggest terrorist of present world is George W Bush who launches attack on innocent Muslims by resorting to terrorism and tries to make the Muslim nonbelievers by forcibly imposing Kufri [evil] Constitution. They want to bring the whole world under their control through a new world order by establishing Kufri concept of democracy. It seems to be a neo-Pheraoni ambition, but the soldiers of Allah will not allow their ambition to come true and establish kufri concept of democracy.[42]

This anti-Western statement does not necessarily mean that the primary enemy of JMB is the far one. Needless to mention, anti-Western rhetoric is very much common to all types of militant Islamist struggle operating around the world. It is more an attempt to justify their violent struggle and exploit the sentiment of the local population. While "the West as the enemy" constitutes the *raison d'être* for understanding global Jihadism in general, the case may not be the same in understanding other types of Islamist militancy. As JMB's violent struggle is first and foremost for state power, its primary opponent is not the far enemy but it is the near

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[40] Hossain, "Biswa Jihad O Bangladeshe Jangi Utthan—Ekti Samikkha (Global Jihadism and the Rise of Militancy in Bangladesh — A Survey)".
[41] *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 9 February 2006.
[42] (The word in brackets added by the author to express the meaning of the non-English word) *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 18 August 2005.

enemy, i.e. the local regime and other forces who have faith in the present constitutional system.

Recruiting Base

The operational pattern and recruiting base of the JMB are different from those of global jihadist militants. In regards to its recruiting base, it is obviously local. As a Muslim majority state, Bangladesh has a unique geographical location. It is a country which shares neither land nor sea border with any other Muslim majority country. In addition, anthropologically people in Bangladesh are so different from that of other foreign Muslim nationals that it is difficult for the latter to hide themselves with the locals. These two key factors deny their access to Bangladesh for the purpose of getting involved in clandestine activities against the local regime and local people. Any possibility of transnational recruitment of JMB is, therefore, highly unlikely.

Operational Pattern

As for its operational pattern, JMB's violent activities have occurred within the borders of Bangladesh. More importantly, what warrants the attention of an analyst is that unlike the global jihadists, they have preferred to strike at local targets which are not associated with any Western interests. An array of local targets so far includes members of the judiciary like judges and lawyers, intellectuals, *sarbaharas* (leftist extremists), courthouses, NGO offices, government buildings, press clubs, cinema theatres, cultural programmes and others alike. It is notable that in most cases their targets have been those individuals or groups, institutions or programmes which are symbolic to the secular establishment and secular practices in the country.

4.3. Core Differences between "Global Jihadism" and "JMB's Militant Islamism"

The core differences between "global jihadism" and JMB's militant Islamism can be found in terms of goal, enemy perception, operational pattern and recruiting base. These are summarized in the following table.

Table 2: Difference between Global Jihadism and Local Militant Islamism in Bangladesh

Core Points of Differences	Types of Discourse	
	Global jihadism	**Local militant Islamism in Bangladesh**
Type of insurgency	combination of reactionary-traditionalist and liberationist with a global scope of operation	reactionary traditionalist with a local scope of operation
Enemy	The United States ("the far enemy") and its allies.	the local regime (the near enemy) in particular and the other political parties who have faith in the present constitutional system
Goal	liberate the *Ummah* from the oppression and occupation of the infidels; and the reinstatement of the Caliphate	gaining state power and establish *shariah* law
Operational pattern	"transnational, either in the sense that they prefer to strike at international targets in their local battle zone, or that they are willing to carry out terrorist attacks far outside their territorial base, for example in Europe or in the US"[43]	local target at the local battle zone
Recruiting base	Global	Local

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[43] Hegghammer, "Global Jihadism After Iraq War", p.15.

5. Conclusion

This article has explored the core differences between "global jihadism" and the "militant Islamism propagated by the JMB in Bangladesh". It has clearly shown that the agenda and intentions of the two are not alike. It can, therefore, be concluded that any connection of JMB with global jihadist militants is a remote possibility. Burke's framework of analysis with regards to the understanding of al-Qaeda elements can help support this conclusion. It seems that JMB is neither a part of the "al-Qaeda hard core", the first of its element, nor one of those of the third element, "The Idea, World View, Ideology of al-Qaeda and those who subscribe to it", but act independently. It is rather one of those of the second element popularly conceived to refer to militant Islamist groups around the world whose emergence lies in particular local factors fighting either to secede from the existing political community or to gain state power (in order to impose *shariah* law).

It would be, however, erroneous to reject the possibility of JMB's external connection. External connection does not necessarily refer to an al-Qaeda link. Again in the light of the characteristics of the second element of al-Qaeda, it can be argued that the JMB like other scores of local militant Islamist groups around the world may have networks, multiple associations and support lines beyond al-Qaeda hard core. Even if JMB has a connection with the al-Qaeda hardcore or with "many al-Qaedas", such a connection may be tenuous being limited to matters related to finance, training or other contacts. But being one of those of the scores of militant Islamist groups comprising the second element of al-Qaeda, JMB does not care for global jihadism as visualised by the al-Qaeda hardcore or "many al-Qaedas". Its operational pattern, to some extent, may have similarity with that of al-Qaeda and Bin Ladin may be the source of inspiration of its leadership. But it has its own agenda and intentions which are deeply parochial. And last but not the least, JMB may have connections with regional militant Islamist groups each of which has respective agenda; and co-operation among them occurs only when it serves the operational, financial or other aspects of their respective organization.

ANNEX I: GOVERNMENT PRESS NOTE BANNING JMB AND JMJB

(Copied from, *The Daily Star* online edition, http://www.thedailystar.net/, Dhaka, 24 February 2005, accessed 25 June 2006)

The home ministry yesterday afternoon issued a press note announcing the ban of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) accusing them of a large number of bomb attacks and killings in recent times to create anarchy.

"The government notices with concern that two organisations called Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh and Jama'atul Mujahideen have been carrying out a series of murders, robberies, bomb attacks, threats and various kinds of terrorist acts causing deaths to peace-loving people and destruction of property," the press note read.

It said these people have been trying to create a social unrest by misleading a group of youths misusing their religious sentiments.

"Under the circumstances, the government announces enforcement of ban on all activities of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh and Jama'atul Muhjahideen. Their so-called leader Dr Asadullah al Galib has already been arrested. Meanwhile, police have been ordered to intensify their activities to arrest JMJB leader Bangla Bhai," the note continued.

Explaining the background of the tough stance, the government press-note said several incidents of attacks, bomb attacks and blasts have been carried out in the recent past on social, cultural and religious functions and several branches of Brac and Grameen Bank in different areas of the country.

It said the incidents prompted the government to intensify police vigil all over the country, resulting in 'red-handed' arrests of a number of suspects in Bogra, Joypurhat, Sirajganj, Gaibandha, Moulvibazar, Gopalganj, Dhamrai and Savar. The police operations also led to seizures of explosives and 'objectionable books and booklets'.

"According to the confessional statements of a number of the arrestees, they all are members of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh and Jama'atul Mujahedin [, and] they are engaged in such criminal activities to achieve their objectives," the press-note said.

"The government wants to inform all that such activities will not be tolerated," announced the note, adding, "The government is determined to take legal measures against whoever is engaged in terrorism or activities to frustrate peace and discipline."

ANNEX II: FOREIGN FUNDING OF ISLAMIC MILITANT ORGANIZATIONS IN BANGLADESH

(Copied from, Zayadul Ahsan, "Inside the Militants Groups – 2: Foreign Funding, Local Business Keep Them Going", *The Daily Star* online edition, http://www.thedailystar.net/, Dhaka, 22 August 2005, accessed 25 June 2006)

From outward appearance they were doing social works as welfare organisations, building mosques and setting up madrasas for the underprivileged children, many of whom are orphans.

Then they started investing in businesses in such sectors as transport, pharmaceuticals, financial institutions, real estate, media and education.

But behind the humanitarian and business façade, they were organising terrorists imbued with the ideals of armed Islamic revolution. Funding was no problem for them -- shady funders in Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, Libya, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia extended their hands, filling the pockets of the militant organisations.

Outside the official channel, these organisations also bring in funds through money laundering. There was a time when financial institutions in Lahore and Karachi were the main distributors of terror funding flowing into Bangladesh. But after the Pakistan government clamped down on these institutions, funds are now coming to Bangladesh in the form of Hundi through Jessore, Chittagong and Dhaka, according to a source who has conducted detailed investigations on terrorism in Bangladesh for an international terror watch agency.

A study by the Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) has affirmed that these organisations, once dependent on foreign funding, are now big enough to gather funds internally through various businesses.

According to the HDRC, these organisations earn about Tk 1,200 crore a year from their business investment.

These militants have invested in a large number of shrimp farms, using fake names and a good number of cold storages in the south-western region, according to Khulna police.

Saudi-based NGO Al Haramaine Islamic Institute is one such organisation that brought in Tk 20 crore through the NGO Affairs Bureau from 1997 to 2001, its annual report of 2002 said. It was finally banned in September 2002 after the UN listed it as a terror cell. Haramaine had Tk 19 crore more in the pipeline to be spent on Islamic education in 38 districts. The police arrested seven foreign citizens of Al Haramaine in September 2002 and

later, under a special arrangement with a Middle Eastern country, they were taken to a five-star hotel right from the Dhaka Judge's Court and then put on a flight under strict secrecy.

Militants received funds for madrasas from UAE-based welfare organisations Al Fuzaira and Khairul Ansar Al Khairia, Kuwait-based Doulatul Kuwait and Revival of Islamic Heritage Society and Bahrain-based Doulatul Bahrain, said intelligence sources.

The HDRC study said the JMJB, under a programme called 'Operation Research', received funds from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Muslim World League.

Ladin's close associate Enam Arnot and his organisation Benevolence International Organisation, which was registered with the NGO Bureau, had bank accounts in Bangladesh. A UN report said he was a top fundraiser for Ladin.

Pakistani citizen Mohammad Sajid, who was arrested for attacking poet Shamsur Rahman on January 18, 1999, told police that he received Tk 2 crore and gave it to someone called Bakhtiar. Bakhtiar, when arrested in Sirajganj the same year, confessed to police that he distributed the money among 421 madrasas for training activists of Harkatul Jihad (Huji).

Both the militants said Ladin had sponsored them to develop madrasa infrastructure.

The Korea Times reported on October 13 last year that three Bangladeshis, who were deported to Dhaka from Seoul in April the same year, collected about $87,000 and sent the money to Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh. The three were members of a Seoul-based Islamic Organisation, Dawatul Islam. Bangladesh embassy in Seoul, however, denied the contents of the report.

Dr Asadullah Al Galib, a militant now under arrest for attacking different NGOs including Brac and Grameen Bank, had confessed to the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) that he received around Tk 27 crore every year from the Middle East, especially from an organisation called Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) of Kuwait. RIHS was registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau on January 11, 1996. In his version, Galib spent the funds on the JMB, JMJB and AL Hiqma, all banned and the first one is suspected to be involved in the August 17 bombings. Since Galib's arrest, the government stopped disbursement of funds from RIHS.

RIHS was blacklisted by the State Department on September 9, 2002 for funding Islamist terrorists.