

Religious Discourses and Their Impact on Regional and Global Geopolitics: A Study of Deobandi in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan

Authors : Soumya Awasthi

Abstract : The spread of radical ideology is possible not merely through public meetings, protests, and mosques but even in schools, seminaries, and madrasas. The rhetoric created around the relationship between religion and conflict has been the primary factor for instigating global conflicts - when religion is used to achieve broader objectives. There have been numerous cases of religion-driven conflict around the world be it the Jewish revolt between 66 AD and 628 AD or the 1119 AD the Crusades revolt or during the Cold War period or the rise of right-wing politics in India. Some of the major developments which reiterate the significance of religion in the contemporary times include: (1) The emergence of theocracy in Iran in 1979 (2) Resurgence of world-wide religious beliefs in post-Soviet space. (3) Emergence of transnational terrorism shaped by twisted depiction of Islam by the self proclaimed protectors of the religion. Therefore this paper is premised in the argument that religion has always found itself on the periphery of the discipline of International Relations (IR), and has received less attention than it deserves. The focus of the topic is on the discourses of 'Deobandi' and its impact both on the geopolitics of the region-particularly in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan- and also at the global level. Discourse is a mechanism in use since time immemorial and has been a key tool to mobilise masses against the ruling authority. With the help of field surveys, qualitative and analytical method of research in religion and international relations, it has been found that there are numerous madrasas that are running illegally and are unregistered. These seminaries are operating in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, relation between religion and geopolitics was highlighted when there was a sudden spread of radical ideas, finding support from countries like Saudi Arabia (who funded the campaign) and Pakistan (which organised the Saudi funds and set up training camps, both educational and military). During this period there was a huge influence of Wahabi theology on the madrasas which started with Deoband philosophy and later became a mix of Wahabi (influenced by Ahmad Ibn Hannabal and Ibn Taimmiya) and Deobandi philosophy, tending towards fundamentalism. Later the impact of regional geopolitics had influence on the global geopolitics when the incidents like attack on the US in 2001, bomb blasts in U.K, Indonesia, Turkey, and Israel in 2000s. In the midst of all this, there were several scholars who pointed towards Deobandi Philosophy as one of the drivers in the creation of armed Islamic groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan. Hence this paper will make an attempt to understand the trend as to how Deobandi religious discourses originating from India have changed over the decades, and who the agents of such changes are. It will throw light on Deoband from pre-independence till date to create a narrative around the religious discourses and Deobandi philosophy and its spill over impact on the map of global and regional security.

Keywords : Deobandi School of Thought, radicalization, regional and global geopolitics, religious discourses, Whabi movement

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