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Re-Visiting Syed Abul A'la Mawdudi's Life, Influence, And Islamic Ideology

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Abstract

Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979) was a prominent Islamic scholar and revivalist. The life, theological beliefs, and enduring influence of Mawlana Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903–79), has made a significant contribution to Islamic revivalism. Highlighted by the British magazine News Statesman as one of “12 great thinkers of our time” in 2003 due to his impact on both extremist and moderate Muslims, Mawdudi's interpretation of Islam is analyzed within the specific historical context of the Indian Sub-continent. This paper explores the historical context that shaped his ideology, particularly his call for Islamic revivalism and the establishment of an Islamic state. It then dives into four key themes of Mawdudi's thought: Islam as a complete way of life, the Islamic state, the distinction between Islamic and Muslim history, and a critical stance towards the West. Since Mawdudi's Islamic ideology is the product of a specific historical context, this paper sketches a brief historical survey of his life in order to understand his intellectual, political, and religious development of thought. In discussing his Islamic ideology, this paper discusses the several essential themes of Mawdudi's thought such as: (1) Islam as a complete code of life, (2) the establishment of Islamic state, (3) the distinction between Islamic history and Muslims' history, and finally (4) the anti-Western approach. Then, the research focused on Mawdudi's understanding of the concept of jihad. Finally, this paper offers the assessment of Mawdudi's overall ideology and its influence on the Islamic world.

Key Words: Abul A'la Mawdudi's Life and influence, Islamic ideology of Mawdudi, Mawdudi and Islam, Islamic Revivalism

Introduction

The British magazine *News Statesman* listed Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903–79) as one of “12 great thinkers of our time” on July 14, 2003¹. The publishers claimed that they included Mawdudi even after his death in the list because of his ideological “impact on Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda as well as moderate Muslims.”² Mawdudi, as a prominent ideologue and interpreter of Islam, played a key role in expressing several essential themes of Islam and sought to lead the Muslim *Umma* to Islamic revivalism.

After reviewing his life and influence in the Islamic world, this paper seeks to map out the various aspects of Mawdudi's theological beliefs. The paper will explore Mawdudi's unique interpretation and understanding of Islam that developed in the specific historical context of the Sub-continent. Furthermore, this research paper will specifically focus on Mawdudi's ideology on jihad by analyzing his writings on the subject. The examination of Mawdudi's ideology on the Islamic doctrine of jihad will help the reader to understand the mindset of contemporary jihadi movements who get their inspiration from Mawdudi's thought. Finally, the paper will present the critical evaluation of Mawdudi's Islamic ideology and its impact on Muslims in the contemporary world.

Influence and Brief Account of Mawdudi's Life

Concerning Mawdudi's influence as a thinker and writer, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* describes him as someone who, through “his interpretive reading of Islam,” has hugely contributed to advancing the notion of Islamic revivalism. Through his writings, the impact of Mawdudi's Islamic ideology has gone beyond the South Asian region and “is evident in the exegesis of Sayyid Qutb of Egypt, as well as in the ideas and actions of Algerian, Iranian, Malaysian and Sudanese revivalist activists.”³ His ideology sought to demonstrate how Islam, as a religion, could address the modern-day issues the Muslims were facing. His Qur'anic interpretive principles laid the foundation for

Islamic economic, social, cultural, political system. In 1941, Mawdudi established the political party *Jamaat-e-Islami* (which still exists as one of the political parties of Pakistan) and devoted his life to politics in order to bring his Islamic ideology into reality.⁴

Furthermore, besides being a philosopher, journalist, and imam, Mawdudi was also a prolific writer whose theological treatises were mostly written in Urdu but then also translated into English, Arabic, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Burmese, and many other languages. In most of his life, he remained actively engaged in writing and authored more than 120 books whose contents were rooted in Salafism.⁵ Many believe that his literary works have provided for the Muslim community a new direction and development in the Islamic thought.⁶ His prominent writings are: *Tafhim al-Quran* (Towards Understanding the Quran), *Tafhim al-Islam* (Towards Understanding Islam), *Tarjuman al-Quran* (Towards Understanding Qur'an), *Let Us be Muslims*, *Four Key Concepts of the Qur'an*, *The Islamic Way of Life*, *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*, *Al Jihad Fil Islam* (Jihad in Islam), *Jihad Fi Sabilillah* (Jihad in Allah's Way), *Human Rights in Islam*, *The Islamic Movement: Dynamics of Values, Power and Change*, *Musalman Aur Maujooda Siyasi Kashmakash* (Muslims and the Current Political Dilemma).⁷

Mawdudi's books continue to be utilized by many moderate Muslims in educational institutions as well as militant groups in Madrassas⁸ in the Muslim world. As a creative writer, Mawdudi employed the modern-day language with clarity to explain Islamic ideology and practices. His depiction and contextualization of Islam that addressed Muslims' real-life social and political issues made him a figure that motivated thousands and millions of Muslims around the globe. It is important to note, however, that while some admire Mawdudi's Islamic ideology and his political activism, others view him "as one of several Islamic fundamentalists that in the 20th century inspired and enabled the rise of modern jihadism."⁹ Thus, in light of this reality, Mawdudi has been labeled as "a key ideologue of Islamism" during the Sub-continent political and religious conflicts and "his legacy goes far beyond the putative divide, exemplified in

most mainstream journalistic accounts in the West as well as in the Muslim world, between ‘radical’ and ‘moderate.’”¹⁰

The field of sociological studies has rightly suggested that “all religious expressions are manifest within historical settings and are to some measure, whether for good or ill, shaped by their sociocultural contexts.”¹¹ In other words, one’s social, cultural, and political conditions play a significant role in shaping his religious ideology or beliefs. Therefore, in understanding the Islamic ideology Mawdudi promotes in his theological writings, it is helpful to review Mawdudi’s life in its social and political settings.

Born on September 25, 1903, in Aurangabad, Deccan, Syed Abul A'la Mawdudi’ was the youngest of five children from the second marriage of his father, Syed Ahmad Hassan Mawdudi. Mawdudi’s family claimed a prestigious lineage—the branch of Chishti Sufi order. Proudly owning his heritage, Mawdudi wrote that “I belong to one such family that has a 1,300–year history of guiding, asceticism and Sufism.”¹²

Mawdudi's family history shows the presence of traditional Islamic thought, values, and practices. Mawdudi’s autobiography suggests that he admired the religious influence of his parents, which played a vital role in his religious development. In *Khud Niwisht*, praising his parents’ religious commitment, Mawdudi writes:

“A year after I was born my father washed his hands of the world, and for three years lived like an ascetic. Later on, although he had returned to the world, it was not to his old world which he returned, but to a purely religious one. The result of this revolution in his life was that as I opened my eyes and gained my senses, I found myself in a religious setting. My father’s and mother’s lives had a distinct religious coloring. Their example and our upbringing imprinted my heart and mind with religious fervor.”¹³

In 1916, Mawdudi went to Hyderabad to attend Darul-'Ulum College of Hyderabad for his tenth-grade degree. He could barely spend six months and had to leave due to his father's deteriorating health condition. From that point onwards, Mawdudi continued to struggle financially. In his struggling years, initially, he joined the editorial board of *Medina* in Delhi, followed by their weekly publication *Taj*. When his financial condition improved, Mawdudi resumed his postponed educational journey—the period in which he studied Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, including the Western philosophical literature of that time under the supervision of prominent scholars. The studying of the Western literature developed Mawdudi's interest in secularism, and especially the issue of nationalism in politics. At this point, he seriously started pursuing journalism as his career. He wrote two essays in honor of two prominent Congress leaders, namely Gandhi and Madan Mohan Malaviya, in the years 1918 and 1919. While in Delhi, he also got the opportunity to meet the intellectual elite of the Muslim community, and also got familiar with modernist literature as well as the independence movement. In the year 1919, he also got actively engaged in the Khilafat movement—the platform he used to encourage Muslims to join the Congress Party of the Sub-continent.

Mawdudi's stay in Delhi marks his political launching, which provided him with an opportunity to meet an important Muslim leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan). Later in 1921, Mawdudi met with the senior leadership of Jam'iyat 'Ulama'-i Hind that promptly recognized Mawdudi's talents as an activist and writer and offered him the editorial job of their official newspaper known as *Muslim*, which was later replaced by *al-Jam'iyat*. This platform provided him awareness of the political affairs in light of his religious faith.

In addition to the political dilemma under the British Raj, the growing religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims further shaped Mawdudi's religious ideology. In 1925, a Hindu revivalist leader, Swami Shradhanand started a

religious campaign that sought reconversion of low-caste Muslims back to Hinduism. He boldly affronted Muslim beliefs.

In the subsequent years, Mawdudi envisioned himself as a revivalist promoting radical communalism. In 1932, he published his journal, *Tarjumanul Qur'an*, whose aim was to proclaim the idea of Islamic revivalism. The journal, as its core purpose, demanded Muslims of India to come under the same banner for the elevation and establishment of Islam. Mawdudi's literary efforts bore fruit, and thus Jamat 'at-i-Islami was founded in 1941. In 1947, the partition of India gave rise to an independent state, Pakistan.

Interestingly, in India, Mawdudi frequently opposed the Muslim League's idea of a separate state for Muslims. After the partition, however, he split Jamat 'at-i-Islami into Indian and Pakistani units and moved to Pakistan to supervise Jamat 'at-i-Islami in Lahore. Mawdudi's vision of Islamization of Pakistan was realized in the regime of Pakistani dictator, General Zia ul-Haq (1977–1988), who implemented Mawdudi's Islamic ideology into the Constitution of Pakistan taking the country into a completely new direction.

In 1953, Mawdudi wrote a controversial booklet on *Qadiyanism* that forced the Pakistani Marshal court to charge him with a death sentence. Later, the death sentence was replaced by life-imprisonment, which was later eradicated by the High court freeing Mawdudi without any criminal charge. Due to health issues, Mawdudi requested his organization, Jamat 'at-i-Islami, to relieve him of the responsibilities. He utilized this time to work on his Qur'anic *Tafsir*. Later, Mawdudi fell seriously ill and was taken to the United States by his son, who worked as a medical doctor in Buffalo, USA. He died on September 22, 1979, in the USA but was buried in Lahore.¹⁴

Mawdudi's Islamic Ideology: Historical background of Islamic Fundamentalism in the 19th Century

Ideologies, whether they be social, political, or religious, are not developed in a

vacuum. This fact holds even more in the development of religious ideologies. A religious community's historical circumstances can inspire some people to develop the ideology. Mawdudi initiated to advance his understanding of Islamic beliefs around 1932. In the succeeding years until his death, he promoted his Islamic ideology and interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith through several articles, public-talks, sermons, and his journal *Tarjuman ul-Qur'an* specifically.¹⁵ Before delving into the nature and content of Mawdudi's Islamic theological beliefs, a glimpse at the social, political, and religious context of the Muslim world in the nineteenth-century will be helpful.

In the nineteenth-century, the Muslim community, on the whole, went through a significant social, economic, and political transformation. The Muslims all over were protesting against the European colonial control as well as the penetration of the Western culture and values into Islamic religious identity. The Muslims' revolt against the Westernization led them to novel interpretations of Islam. The new interpretations mainly attempted to address the issue of "why the West had become so successful economically and militarily."¹⁶ The Muslims lamented the vanishing of the Islamic golden era and wondered in frustration how "the West had far outdistanced the Islamic world in most arenas of life. Whereas many modernized Muslims the solution to Muslims' plight lied in getting Western education learning their values, other Muslims strongly opposed this idea. Representing the stance of the opposing party, Linda S. Wallbridge writes that Muslims of this camp believed:

If they turned to the imperialistic West for direction, they would be betraying their own history, their own values, their own religion. In fact, many of them became convinced that it was the wholesale surrender to the West and its materialism that had led to the downfall of the Islamic world. Movements sprang up throughout Muslim societies challenging Western values and asserting that all knowledge and goodness emanated from the Qur'an. The Qur'an was presented as the solution to all the modern ills of society. Following the Qur'an and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) Muhammad (PBUH) was the only way out of the dilemma in which Muslims found themselves.¹⁷

The activists of this trend of Islamic thought—who are generally labelled as “Islamic fundamentalists,” by the West aimed to “purify” the religion of Islam from all contaminated stains of modern cultural beliefs. They desired to replace the cultural belief system by establishing “Islamic practices that are strictly in concurrence with the Qur’an and the sayings of the Holy Prophet. The Islamists believed that Islam, if rightly understood, is a religion that suits itself to all the ages, including the modern age. Thus, it is “the only religion totally in harmony with modernity.”¹⁸ This ideological development of Islam was prevalent in the Sub-continent in the 1900s due to the domination of British Colonialism and religious and political confictions between the Hindu and Muslim communities. In the South Asian region, the prominent ideologue who strove for Islamic purity was none other than Mawlana Mawdudi.¹⁹

Major Tenets of Mawdudi’s Islamic Ideology

“The plan of action I had in mind was that I should first break the hold which Western culture and ideas had come to acquire over the Muslim intelligentsia, and to instill in them the fact that Islam has a code of life of its own, its own culture, its own political and economic systems and a philosophy and an educational system which are all superior to anything that Western civilization could offer. I wanted to rid them of the wrong notion that they needed to borrow from others in the matter of culture and civilization.”²⁰

Mawdudi’s words above provide the gist of his Islamic ideology. They depict Mawdudi’s zeal for attaining revivalism for the Muslim *Umma* as well as some element of fear for the negative impact of the Western civilization on Muslims. Essentially, working with this paradigm of thought, Mawdudi urged the Muslim community to obey the *Shari’ah* (the Islamic law) wholeheartedly. He also highlighted the deep connection between politics and religion, suggesting that Islamic beliefs and practices can only be realized in a true sense through political power.

In the following discussion on Mawdudi's Islamic ideology, this paper will highlight some of the specific themes that are found in Mawdudi's theological treatises. This discussion is not comprehensive, rather it will focus on some particular areas in which Mawdudi's ideology has shaped the discourse of the Islamic world.

Firstly, one of the most essential perspectives in Mawdudi's ideology is the notion of "Islam as a way of life." This idea suggests that "Islam constitutes a *nizam-i-zindagi*—a complete system of life that is simultaneously an ideology, a civilization, and a legal-political order."²¹ In other words, Mawdudi does not perceive Islam as simply an amalgam of certain beliefs, ceremonial rituals, and rites. Instead, Islam is a holistic *din* (religion) that operates in all aspects of life on an individual as well as corporate level. According to him, the Islamic Shari'ah contains all the commands and instructions that can be applied in all spheres of life, i.e., religious, personal, moral, familial, social, economic, judicial, international, and so on.²²

Charles Adams argues that Mawdudi's Islamic perspective may seem to be odd to contemporary readers, but the Sub-continental Muslims of the twentieth century found this vision quite appealing. Historically, the Muslim intellectual elite of that era considered the Muslim community deprived of political power in the face of developing ideologies of the modern world. Mawdudi's holistic approach to Islam, which brought spiritual, social, and political elements together, found relevance in their context. He advocated that the role of the Shari'ah cannot be confined to personal and family matters alone. Rather it can play a significant part in state affairs as well.²³ Mawdudi, in his book, *Islami tarz-e-zindagi* (The Islamic Way of life) writes:

"The chief characteristic of Islam is that it makes no distinction between the spiritual and the secular in life. It aims to shape both individual lives as well as society as a whole in ways that will ensure that the Kingdom of God may be established on earth and that peace, contentment, and well-being may fill the world."²⁴

It is important to note that Mawdudi elevates and glorifies the Islamic way of life because of his pessimistic view of modernization that sprang from Western civilization. Mawdudi perceived the modern world “as an arena of evils.” Mawdudi’s totalizing approach to Islam places Islamic ways, beliefs and directives above all other existing religious ideologies. Consequently, for Mawdudi, there is “no room for individuals or societies to accept certain tenets of Islam while rejecting others.”²⁵ The *Shari‘ah* must regulate every aspect of life, and those who challenge its applicability are infidels.

Secondly, Mawdudi’s Islamic ideology promoted the idea of an Islamic state. Mawdudi believed that Islamic revivalism could only be achieved through an Islamic state. The urgency of an Islamic state comes from his ideology of universal order. That is, Allah’s sovereignty to govern Muslim authorities and community can only be practiced in an Islamic state. Moreover, the implementation of *Shari‘ah* is only possible through the establishment of the government. In this way, Islam as religion gets involved in political affairs of the state. The obligation of an Islamic state whose constitution is based on the *Shari‘ah* is to uproot the evil system controlled by wicked authorities and transfer it to the reformers.²⁶ Additionally, Mawdudi outlines an Islamic state that is founded on three central principles: (1) *Tawhid*, (2) *Risalah*, and (3) *Khilafat*. *Tawhid* refers to Allah’s ultimate rule in the state. *Risalah* means that the *Shari‘ah* (i.e., the Qur’an and the Sunnah) will determine the state’s jurisprudence and political affairs. And lastly, the principle of *Khilafat* denotes the vice-regency of man.²⁷

For Mawdudi, religion and politics are two inseparable entities. Islam as religion, “wants to conduct politics also in accordance with the guidance provided by religion and to use the state as the servant of the Lord... Islam uses political power for the reform of the society and does not leave it to degenerate into ‘the last resort of a scoundrel.’”²⁸ Mawdudi further supports his ideology by arguing that all prominent leaders in Islamic history, such as the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the *Khilafat-i-Rashida*, the Muslim reformers, urged Muslims for the formation of

an Islamic state.²⁹ Mawdudi's invention of the notion of an Islamic state has gained momentum in the Islamic world. For instance, countries like Pakistan and Saudi- Arabia labeled themselves as Islamic states, presumably following Mawdudi's vision.³⁰

Thirdly, in his Islamic thought, Mawdudi draws a sharp distinction between 'Islamic history' and 'history of Islam.' For him, Islamic history is "the history of un-Islam or *jahiliyah*."³¹ This distinction dictates his interpretation of the Qur'an as well as Sunnah. In advancing his theological arguments, he almost always begins the discussion with the Qur'anic references or Hadith tradition, skipping the history of Muslim regimes. He believed that Islamic history has been tainted by impure human agendas and therefore "held no value and manifested no religious truths."³² Nasr, an expert of Mawdudian thought, tells his readers that, for Mawdudi, the history of Muslims testifies the fall of Islam. In his thought, the real history of Islam ended with the Caliphate Rashidun since "the social and political institutions that followed were incapable of reflecting the ideals of Islam in any fashion."³³ Thus, Mawdudi rejects all Islamic history after the rightly guided caliphs. He believed, however, that the history of Islam can be resumed if Muslims "work diligently to stop the current unfolding history of Muslim societies—to wrest control of history, to do what must be God's command rather than accept what had occurred and continued to be accepted as His will."³⁴

Fourthly, another central theme that principally runs through all theological writings of Mawdudi is his severe criticism of Western civilization, whom he considers "modern jahiliyyah." Echoing Mawdudi's attitude towards the West, Ansari tells that Mawdudi instructed Muslims that there is no harm in embracing Modern Western technology and achievements. These are for common human flourishing, yet "Western civilization should be subjected to critical scrutiny and analysis. Western social life should definitely be discarded."³⁵ Through his writings, he continued to proclaim the Islamic culture and thought superior to Western culture and ideologies, and chided those Muslims who indiscriminately

embraced Western culture, values, and ideologies.³⁶ The impact of Mawdudi's accusation and negative depiction of the West has produced schools of thought in Islam that advocate the ideology of jihadism. For instance, the extremist militant group *al-Qaeda* has adopted violent ways towards the West due to a religious and cultural clash of civilizations.³⁷

Mawdudi's Islamic Ideology on Jihad

While the above section has discussed some of the key beliefs of Mawdudi's Islamic ideology, here, the paper will focus on his ideology of jihad precisely. Among many, I chose the subject of jihad because of its: (1) exclusive religious connotation in the religion of Islam, (2) controversial nature among Muslim community and scholars, and (3) its current relevance. To analyze Mawdudi's thoughts on jihad, in addition to secondary scholarly material, I will primarily rely on Mawdudi's primary writings on this subject. Before dealing with Mawdudi's perspective on jihad, however, it will be helpful for a reader to explore how the Qur'an defines and understands this term in order to make a critical analysis of Mawdudi's approach towards jihad.

Jihad in Mawdudi's Thought

One can examine Mawdudi's understanding of jihad in his several writings, such as *Tahfeem ul Islam* (Towards Understanding Islam), *Khutbaat* (Let Us Be Muslims), *Islam ka Nizam-e-Hayat* (The Islamic Way of Life), *Tahfeem ul-Quran* (Towards Understanding the Qur'an). However, the books where he deals comprehensively with this subject are *Al-jihad fil-Islam* (Jihad in Islam), *Rah-e-Khuda Mein Jihad* (Jihad in Allah's Path), and *Haqeeqat-e-Jihad* (Reality of Jihad).

In his foreword of the book *Al-jihad fil-Islam* (Jihad in Islam), Mawdudi reacts to Gandhi's charge on Islam as the religion which "took its birth in an environment whose pivotal force has been the sword and will remain the sword."³⁸ To refute this statement, Mawdudi then explains how this accusation of non-Muslims is

based on discrimination and long-standing misunderstanding, followed by an appeal that “the non-Muslims who reject blind hostility towards Islam must study this book to get the accurate understanding of jihad in Islam.”³⁹ Likewise, in *Rah-e-Khuda Mein Jihad* (Jihad in Allah's Path), Mawdudi beginning with his anti-Western approach argues that the Western world has failed to comprehend the actual concept of jihad.⁴⁰ Thus, it becomes evident from the books' introductions that Mawdudi's tone is going to be apologetic in presenting his ideology on jihad. Demonstrating the general understanding of the notion of jihad, Mawdudi argues that the term has usually been translated and interpreted as “holy war” for such a long time that now “it has become synonymous with war undertaken by religious fanatics.”⁴¹ Furthermore, commenting on the inaccurate understanding of jihad, he argues that whenever someone hears term jihad, he imagines something like this:

A group of religious fanatics, with a sharp-edged sword in their hands, blood in their eyes, long beard on their faces, shouting a slogan of *Allah ho Akbar*, are running everywhere, and wherever they find a non-Muslim, they grab him forcing him to proclaim *kalma-e-shahadat* or otherwise he will be beheaded.⁴²

Mawdudi blames the West for creating such an awful picture of jihad. He also counter-attacks the Western civilization by arguing that the West has no justifiable reason to condemn jihad since “they themselves have been engaged in the ‘unholy war’ of extreme level for many centuries.”⁴³ He further adds that “they proclaim unholy wars on other nations not for God's sake, rather for the pursuit of self-ambitions, materialism, power and control.”⁴⁴ Mawdudi asserts that Islam, along with its beliefs, has been attacked for hidden political agendas of the West. Consequently, in light of this reality, he says that it is imperative to clear the misunderstandings concerning the concept of jihad. Mawdudi points out two major misunderstandings that play a significant role in distorting the Islamic connotation of jihad. According to him, the first misunderstanding takes place when the religion of Islam is understood in the ordinary sense of the term. The second confusion concerning jihad arises when others identify Muslims as a

nation in the ordinary sense. According to Mawdudi, these two misunderstandings have caused failure to other nations to comprehend not only the concept of jihad but also Islam altogether.⁴⁵

The two misunderstandings pointed out above imply that: (1) Religion of Islam is not a religion in the ordinary sense which merely instructs its adherents to follow its beliefs and practices privately, and (2) the Muslims are not simply a group of people who have shared social and religious culture and customs. It is a wrong conception of both Islam and Muslims. “Islam is not a religion and Muslims are not merely a nation” in ordinary sense.⁴⁶ Rather, to Mawdudi, “Islam is an international revolutionary movement that desires to mold the whole world in accordance with its ideals,” while Muslims denote the international revolutionary party which is used by Islam to implement its agenda.”⁴⁷ “Jihad,” in this regard, “is the revolutionary exertion or striving undertaken by the members of the Islamic party to bring their cherished ideals into practice.”⁴⁸ Further expounding his ideology on jihad, Mawdudi says:

“Like all revolutionary movements, Islam also employs and develops its distinctive revolutionary concepts and phraseology to distinguish itself from all other religious ideologies. Jihad is one of those terms. Islam deliberately rejected the Arabic word *harab* (war) and its cognates, and instead employed the term *jihad* to express its unique religious connotation.”⁴⁹

Islamic jihad is not fighting for one's pursuits, instead, it is *jihad-i-fi sabilillah* (fight in Allah's path). Its execution seeks to please Allah alone by fulfilling his will.⁵⁰ It can be observed from Mawdudi's writing that he firmly believes that the ideology that Islam promotes for the welfare of humankind is the only best available ideology. Therefore, this ideology obliges all Muslims to strive hard to implement Allah's plan in the whole world (Q 3:64; 12:67; 26:151–52).⁵¹

Explaining the purpose of jihad, Mawdudi states that Islam is more than a combination of religious beliefs and practices. Instead, it is a system that intends to replace the world system that contains evil, injustice, and corrupted systems by

its program, which promotes human welfare, peace, and justice around the globe. The implementation of this Islamic system into the world is carried out by the International revolutionary party of Muslims through jihad. Mawdudi strongly proposes that the sole aim of this revolutionary party (i.e., the Muslim community) is to overthrow all existing systems based on worldly standards and enforce the system based on Islamic ideology.⁵² Further, describing the nature of this revolutionary party of Muslims, he asserts, "this party does not contain merely a group of preachers and evangelists, rather this party represents the divine army."⁵³ In this regard, the purpose of jihad is "to replace all non-Islamic systems of the world by an Islamic system."⁵⁴

To carry out the employment of Islamic ideology all around the world, Mawdudi suggests that Muslims should begin with the word of invitation. Upon rejection of *dawat* (invitation), however, Muslims must proclaim jihad in terms of warfare. Providing the religious justification of his ideology, he writes that:

Allah's messenger initiated his mission of spreading Islam and its ideology to surrounding nations by invitation. However, when the ruling elite rejected the implementation of Islam's ideology in their nations, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) declared war on them. The war of *tabuk* was made for this reason. After Muhammad's conquests, Abu Bakr attacked the non-Islamic nations of Rome and Iran. Then, Hazrat Umer took the responsibility of overthrowing non-Islamic nations.⁵⁵

Mawdudi's quotation above implies the necessity of the execution of the Islamic system in all nations. Muslims should begin with an invitation. However, when the invitation is turned down, the ambition must be achieved through physical warfare.

A critical feature in Mawdudi's overall ideology of Islam that somehow influences his understanding of jihad is his disapproval of "passive Islamism." He openly condemns those Muslim leaders who have diverted the attention of the Muslim community towards mystical practices and superstitious elements within religion as a shortcut way to attain welfare and salvation. In Mawdudi's sight,

these people want to achieve religious ambition through religious rites and rituals so that they could escape martyrdom and hard-work. He calls these religious passivists “seekers of cheap salvation.”⁵⁶ Thus, for Mawdudi, there is no room for passive Muslims in Islam. All true believers must engage actively in advancing the kingdom of Allah throughout the world, even if it costs them their own lives. Furthermore, the prominence of jihad in Mawdudi’s thought can be seen through the fact that his writings on jihad are not only present in the books mainly written on this subject, instead one finds this doctrine in several books.⁵⁷ In his book *Let Us Be Muslims*, highlighting the role of jihad in Islam, Mawdudi says that all “pillars of Islam” have a religious significance. Yet, they are not to be understood as an end in themselves, “nor are they meant to please Allah by their mere outward appearance.”⁵⁸ He then tells that these religious activities train Muslims to achieve a higher goal, namely jihad. He writes:

Stated simply: the ultimate objective of Islam is to abolish the lordship of man over man and bring him under the rule of the One God. To stake everything you have—including our lives—to achieve this purpose is called Jihad. The Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving and Pilgrimage, all prepare you for Jihad.⁵⁹

According to Mawdudi, all Islamic practices lead Muslims to jihad in fighting for Allah’s sake so that the whole world embraces the divine law of Islam. He believes that the only ideal order that can function well in the world is the Islamic order, and all other existing systems of the world are human-made and have been corrupted by humanity’s evil motives.⁶⁰ Thus, Mawdudi introduces the criterion of true Muslims’ recognition by emphasizing, “True believers carry only one identification: all their efforts are directed to eradicating every false Din—and every Din other than Allah’s is false—and establishing in its place the true Din. They love, suffer losses, and die in His cause.”⁶¹ He further counsels that *Jihad fi sabilillah* (jihad in Allah’s way) is not for faint-hearted, rather “it is meant only for those who have the will to fight for their cause, and such people are always few in number.”⁶²

Mawdudi's religious perspective on jihad is also found in his book *Tahfeem ul-Islam* (Towards Understanding Islam), where he views the role of jihad as a defense of Islam. After describing the different ways in which jihad can be carried out, he informs that Shari'ah uses the term jihad, "particularly for the war that is waged solely in the name of Allah and against those who perpetrate oppression as enemies of Islam."⁶³ Mawdudi explains that the "supreme sacrifice of lives" through jihad is mandatory for all Muslims. However, if a group volunteers for jihad on behalf of the whole community, then not all have to go for a war. If nobody comes on the front for jihad, then the whole community is guilty. Moreover, if the non-Islamic nation attacks the Islamic state, then "everybody must come forward for the *Jihad*." In conclusion, Mawdudi asserts:

In all these cases, Jihad is as much a primary duty of the Muslims concerned as are the daily prayers or fasting. One who shirks it is a sinner. He is plainly a hypocrite who fails in the test of sincerity and all his *Ibadat* and prayers are a sham a worthless hollow show of devotion.⁶⁴

Here, Mawdudi's position on key Islamic doctrine of jihad is quite conservative. He questions the believers' religious beliefs and practices if they are not prompting them to active involvement in jihad.

Mawdudi's renowned commentary on the Qur'an can also be helpful in understanding his ideology on jihad. Commenting on Surat *al-Baqara* (The Cow) ayat 190–191, he elucidates that believers ought to be combative and hostile towards those who hinder their religious cause. He says that in the initial period in Mecca, when Muslims were politically and militarily weak, all they practiced was preaching and patience. But when Muhammad had established a small city-state in Medina, Muslims "were commanded for the first time to unsheathe their swords against those who had resorted to armed hostility against their movement of reform."⁶⁵ Furthermore, providing the religious rationale for jihad, Mawdudi comments:

Bloodshed is bad, but when one group of people imposes its ideology and forcibly prevents others from accepting the truth, then it becomes guilty of

an even more serious crime. In such circumstances, it is perfectly legitimate to remove that oppressive group by the force of arms.⁶⁶

The above comment implies that the aggressive form of Jihad is justifiable for Muslims when Islam's ideology is being hindered from prevailing by others.

Assessment of Mawdudi's Islamic Ideology and its Impact on the Contemporary Islamic World

The analysis of Mawdudi's theological writings demonstrates his efforts of reinterpreting Islamic history and tradition in response to the socio-political settings of the twentieth century. For this reason, some scholars view "Mawdudi's thought as a product of the specific historical context in which he lived—the most seminal event of which was the partition of British India in 1947 and the rise of Pakistan nationalism."⁶⁷ Influenced by *Salafiyyah* approach to Islam, Mawdudi wanted Muslims to understand that the solution to their intellectual, political, and social predicaments lies in returning to the era of Muhammad and his Caliphates.

Muslims in the twentieth century, who were already going through the identity crisis, found hope in Mawdudi's ideology since it "reminded them of their glorious history and of the civilizations that their ancestors had created."⁶⁸ Although Mawdudi's ideology offered transient hope to the Muslim community, its ultimate consequence was negative. According to Kemal Ataman, the activist's religious philosophy hindered its adherents "to seek a methodology of Qur'anic interpretation that would be sound in scholarship, rationally reliable, and faithful to Qur'an itself."⁶⁹ Ataman argues that even the faithful adherents of Mawdudi could not become serious scholars of Islam since Mawdudi's religious interpretation "represented the last word in Islam."⁷⁰ This trend remains among Muslims even today who unquestionably embrace the Islamic ideology and interpretation of the religious authorities.

Furthermore, the anti-Western element in Mawdudi's ideology that held the Western civilization responsible for all social, political, moral issues, has caused

much damage to the mindset of the Islamic world. This hatred-orientated ideology has caused ever-growing conflicts between the Western and Muslim worlds. The majority of Muslims in the Islamic world continue to blame the West for all their issues without seriously considering 'what is wrong with them.' Thus, Ataman argues that Mawdudi's ideology shows "a lamentable lack of a realistic interest and awareness of the actual problems of the modern state or its society, let alone solutions to them."⁷¹ Mawdudi's writings reflect his belief on the superiority of Islamic civilization, he proves his premises, however, by comparing the Islamic beliefs and practices with the West. Riaz Ahmad critique of Mawdudi's antagonistic approach towards the West is valid since, he argues, Mawdudi compares his Islamic ideals with Western practices, and "the comparison of ideology with practice is always fallacious."⁷² Furthermore, Ahmad also criticizes Mawdudi for being unfair towards his critics and argues that Mawdudi is only receptive to those Western critics who "suit his ideas."⁷³

Another observation is that Mawdudi, through his written and oral discourses, urged Muslims to enforce the Islamic order using jihad as a tool actively. He viewed the authenticity of one's faith through his participation in jihad. This approach to jihad has earned him the title of the "ideological forefather of jihadism"⁷⁴ by some Westerners. Mawdudi's ideology has inspired both revolutionists like Sayyid Qutb⁷⁵ as well as prominent extremists like Osama bin Laden.⁷⁶ The Islamic militant groups like *al-Qaida* have also claimed Mawdudi to be one of the key ideologues from whom they get their motivation.⁷⁷

Overall, one cannot deny the fact that Mawdudi has gained prominence among Muslim intellectuals, military forces, politicians, and students in the educational institutions in the Muslim world. Whether Mawdudi's vision of an Islamic state purely based on the Shari'ah has succeeded or not is a controversial matter. His ideology has inspired millions of Muslims around the globe theoretically, but in realism, his ideas do not seem to produce better results. Roy Jackson's overall evaluation of Mawdudi's ideology is convincing. He thinks that despite his

influence and following, “Mawdudi has remained ignorant of the twentieth-century political arena where all political philosophers are necessarily influenced by the international context and the socio-economic conditions that are prevalent at the time.”⁷⁸

Conclusion:

Mawlana Abul A‘la Mawdudi is a key Islamic ideologue whose understanding and interpretation of Islam have hugely contributed to advancing the notion of Islamic revivalism. Through his writings, the impact of his Islamic ideology has gone beyond the South Asian region. He advocated the establishment of the early system of Islam that was developed by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the aliphate. Since Mawdudi’s Islamic ideology is the product of a specific historical context, this paper sketched a brief historical survey of his life in order to understand his intellectual, political, and religious development of thought. Furthermore, in discussing his Islamic ideology, this paper has discussed the several essential themes of Mawdudi’s thought such as: (1) Islam as a complete code of life, (2) the establishment of Islamic state, (3) the distinction between Islamic history and Muslims’ history, and finally (4) the anti-Western approach. Then, the research focused on Mawdudi’s understanding of the concept of jihad. Finally, this paper has offered the assessment of Mawdudi’s overall ideology and its influence on the Islamic world.

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¹ Often referred to as Mawlana Mawdudi. Different writings refer to his name with alternative spellings (e.g., Syed Maudoodi or Sayyid Abu A’la Maududi). This paper spells his name as Mawlana Mawdudi.

² See Ziauddin Sardar, *Great Thinkers of Our Time*, <https://www.newstatesman.com/node/194796> (accessed Nov. 1, 2019); Cf.

Richard Bulliet et al., "Mawdudi, Abu al- A'la (1903– 79)," ed. Gerhard Bowering et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 332.

³ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, "Syed Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979)," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Exposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 71; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: University Press, 1957), 236; Anne Stenersen and Farhan Zahid, "Jahiliyya, Jihad and the Islamic State: Abu A'la Mawdudi's Impact on Modern Jihadism," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* (2018): 39.

⁴ For a comprehensive study of Mawdudi's political party *Jama 'at-i Islami*, see Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama 'at-i Islami of Pakistan*, Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁵ Stenersen and Zahid, "Jahiliyya, Jihad and the Islamic State: Abu A'la Mawdudi's Impact on Modern Jihadism," 41.

⁶ *Javed Ahmad Ghamidi on Mawlana Abu'Ala Mawdudi*, a contemporary Pakistani Islamic scholar who disagrees with Mawdudi's ideology, but still acknowledges his impact and leadership in providing a new religious direction to the Muslim *Umma*. Ghamidi's discussion on Mawdudi's impact and ideology has been accessed from his interview, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swlxLoJ7at8> (Accessed on Oct. 15, 2019).

⁷ Much of English translations of Mawdudi's works have been done and supervised by Khurshid Ahmad, and most are available in short pamphlets. Khurshid Ahmad is a Pakistani Islamic economist and activist who works as an Assistant Professor at the Sheikh Zayed Islamic Centre, University of Karachi, Pakistan. See http://www.asafas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/kias/kyodo/pdf/kb4_1and2/09mehboob.pdf (accessed on Nov. 12, 2019).

⁸ Madrassa is a famous traditional educational institution in the Muslim countries that promotes learning based on religious beliefs and methodology. The educational curriculum in this system mainly focuses on the study of Islamic texts and literature. To further under the nature of education in Madrassa and the

challenges associated with it, see Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi, *Madrassa Education in Pakistan: Controversies, Challenges, and Prospects*,

https://www.academia.edu/3478643/Madrassa_Education_in_Pakistan (accessed on Nov. 12, 2019).

⁹ Stenersen and Zahid, “Jahiliyya, Jihad and the Islamic State: Abu A’la Mawdudi’s Impact on Modern Jihadism,” 39.

¹⁰ Richard Bulliet et al., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Bowering et al. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012), 332.

¹¹ Dennis Hollinger, “Enjoying God Forever: A Historical/Sociological Profile of the Health and Wealth Gospel,” in *The Gospel and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Douglas J. Moo (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 23.

¹² Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi, “Khud Niwisht,” in *Mawlana Mawdudi: Apni Aue Dusrun Ki Nazar Main*, ed. Muhammad Yusaf Buhtah (Lahore: Idarah-i-Ma’arif-i Islami, 1984), 24.

¹⁴ The secondary resources used for Mawdudi's biographical account are: Nasr, 9–46; Irfan Ahmad, “Mawdudi, Abu al- A’la (1903– 79),” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Bowering, Patricia Crone, and Wadad Kadi, n.d., 332–34; John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 527–30; Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*, 3–43; Mawdudi, “Khud Niwisht”; Roy Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 190–95; Thameem Ushama and Noor Osmani, “Sayyid Mawdudi’s Contribution towards Islamic Revivalism,” *IIUC Studies* 3 (2006): 93–95; Riaz Ahmad, “The Concept of the Islamic State as Found in the Writings of Abu A’La Mawdudi” (Durham: Durham University, 1969), 36–121; David Aaron, ed., “Seeds of Jihad,” in *In Their Own Words, Voices of Jihad* (RAND Corporation, 2008), 56–58; Khurshid Ahmad, *Mawdudi: An Introduction to His Life and Thought* (Lahore: Islamic Foundation, 2007); Linda Walbridge, *The Christians of Pakistan: The Passion of*

Bishop John Joseph (Routledge, 2012), 42–46; H. A. R. Gibb and P. J. Bearman, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 899–901.

¹⁵ Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*, 7.

¹⁶ Walbridge, *The Christians of Pakistan*, 41–42.

¹⁷ Walbridge, 42.

¹⁸ Walbridge, 42; Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, 28–34.

¹⁹ Note that although Mawdudi was a key ideologue of Salafism during the Hindu-Muslim conflict of the Sub-continent under British Colonialism, he was not the progenitor of this Islamic trend, however. In Islamic history, many promoters of Salafiyah thought such as Ibn Hanbal, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahab, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Hassan al-Banna, Ibn Badis, Abu Shu‘ayb al-Dukkali preceded Mawdudi. For the helpful survey, see Sadashi Fukuda, “Wahhābis and the Development of Salafism:,” n.d., 25; Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, 28–34.

https://www.ide.go.jp/library/Japanese/Publish/Download/Seisaku/pdf/201307_mide_08.pdf (accessed on Nov. 14, 2019).

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⁴⁷ Syed Aby Ala, 7.

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⁵¹ Syed Aby Ala, 11, 13.

⁵² Syed Aby Ala, 18–19.

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⁵⁸ Mawdudi, *Let Us Be Muslims*, 285. This is not my own translation, rather I have relied upon Khurshid Ahmad's translation.

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⁶⁰ Mawdudi, 295–300.

⁶¹ Mawdudi, 302.

⁶² Mawdudi, 303.

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