Terrorism in South Asia: The 1971 War and Pakistan's Turn To Islamism

West Pakistan found itself in increasing confrontation with its compatriots in the other wing of Pakistan that was separated by the expanse of India. This conflict eventually came to a head with the military crackdown in the spring of 1971. As refugees, mostly Hindu at first, but also Muslim, began streaming into India, India saw the opportunity to break Pakistan in two.

And thus, by December of 1971, India and Pakistan were in a full fledged war. That war did not end until East Pakistan had been liberated and set itself up as independent Bangladesh. At the time of the war or after the war, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the leader of Pakistan. He inherited basically the rump of Pakistan which is West Pakistan.

Now it should be noted that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was not an innocent bystander. Bhutto had in fact been one of the architects of the war because he was one of the people that could not countenance being governed by Bengalis. So Zulfikar Ali Bhutto becomes the leader of West Pakistan.

But he inherits a Pakistan that not only is broken in two, but it's also riven by numerous other ethnic disputes. And these disputes went back to the earliest days of the state. Those in Balochistan wanted to be independent. Those Pashtuns in the Northwest frontier province had their own aspirations as well.

And so Bhutto decided that he was going to embrace Islamism ever more forcefully as a way of suppressing all of these other ethnic identities that were rivals. So it was Bhutto that turned Pakistan away from South Asia and moved them in fact closer to the Arab Gulf states.

It was also a time when the so-called "petro dollars" were coming into development. And Zulfikar saw an opportunity that by pandering to these wealthy Arab Gulf states, he could get money for his own national project.

It was also Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that introduced this concept of an Islamic bomb. He would say to Arab backers that the Jews have a bomb, the Crusaders have a bomb, the Hindus have a bomb, why don't we have a bomb? Zulfikar made drinking illegal. He outlawed gambling. He closed down the few go-go bars that were in Karachi. And so it's actually Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that began this process of Islamization.

One of the most important, controversial, and I would argue, dangerous things that he did was that he attempted to placate the Islamist parties that were opposed to his government. And in an effort to sort of throw them a bone, he declared Ahmadiyyas to be non-Muslims.
The Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan is a complicated problem. Ahmadiyyas do not recognize the finality of the Prophet. This is a position which is anathema to many Muslims, because for them, the sine qua non of a Muslim is someone who recognizes the finality of a Prophet. This means that everything that the Ahmadiyyas do, whether they go to their places of worship-- they're not allowed to call them Mosques-- when they read the Koran, when they pray, they are essentially blasphemers.

So caving in to the Islamist elements and declaring the Ahmadiyya to be non-Muslims really opened the Pandora’s box for the other groups of people that these Islamist organizations would eventually lobby to also be declared non-Muslims, for example Shiite, for example Sufis.