

In mid-November, 2005, Mr. Usman Majid, a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and Minister of State for Planning and Development, J&K State (Jammu and Kashmir), India., was nearly assassinated while driving in his car in front of the State Bank of J&K in Srinagar. He miraculously survived, while his bullet-proof car was demolished. He is a member of the Awami League, and his down-to-earth politics was the reason for the attempt on his life. Mr. Majid, a Muslim and former anti-Indian terrorist, is the perfect spokesperson for what is wrong with terrorism in Kashmir. He has walked both sides of the fence, as well as traveled to Pakistan for militancy training in the early 1990s. And, like every other Kashmiri who is fed up with violence in the once peaceful Vale of Kashmir, admits that terrorism is the wrong solution to a problem that is fueled by much more than indigenous unrest.

Mr. Majid was nearly killed because of his opposition to the claim that terrorism in Kashmir is currently an indigenous freedom struggle. As a Kashmiri himself, he claims most of the valley's inhabitants feel the same way as he does, and more and more are willing to publicly take on this stance. And for that, he is more than willing to risk his life.

Nine weeks prior to this assassination attempt, I had the opportunity to interview Mr. Majid in Srinagar. He had much to say, and the interview was very enlightening. The full interview (54 minutes) can be heard at the Indo-American Kashmir Forum website. Excerpts from the interview below help explain why he is a top target on the terrorists' hit lists—none of them want the truth to get out about their activities and goals. Perhaps we can all learn a lesson from his last statements below, urging the President of the United States to truly tackle terrorism at its roots—in Pakistan.

Rahul Pandit, M.D.
Director, Indo-American Kashmir Forum

Excerpts from Interview with Usman Majid:

RP Can you tell me where you developed your training in militancy?

UM It's in Pakistan. We crossed from here to POK, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, and from there we were sent to Peshawar [in Pakistan]. We got there training and then came back.

RP Can you share some of your stories or experiences in militancy training?

UM Oh yes, the first thing which stuck in my mind, that was when they were filling the forms, the registration forms in camps. They told me, 'What do you want? You want accession with Pakistan or independence?' I told them 'Independence. I don't want accession with Pakistan. Why, if we say that we fight against India, why should we accede to Pakistan then? We will make independence then?' They said, 'No! What is this nonsense? Don't talk like that. We'll see how you'll get it.' I said 'I don't know.' That was the first shock to me. And then, they probably, during the training, they used to talk about, that 'He's an Indian', burn institutions, and destroy the bridges, destroy buildings,

and kill those people who are Indians, kill soldiers, kill Muqbir (Muqbir means informers), kill informers, those who were supporting security forces, and kill critical workers, plus the security forces. They told that thing. That was the shock when I got there, to kill people, innocents, that if they will talk Indian. And on top of that, to destroy the buildings, to destroy even hospitals have been damaged during the militancy, bridges destroyed, and even schools were burned, set ablaze by our militants. So that shocked me when they told me this is the story. And that I thought there only that this is something different.

And I got a chance again in '93 to go to Pakistan. When I went Pakistan, everything was in my mind. I became the Vice-Chairman of United Jihad Movement. So I got the chance to meet all the higher ups, the higher ranks of the ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan's intelligence agency], politicians, and beaurocrats. I fully remember I, in '93, whether it was '94, I questioned Director of ISI, 'What is the policy of how you are going to liberate Kashmir?' He told me, 'Who the hell are you to ask this question? You have no right.' I told him, 'No, we are killing ourselves, we are there fighting. It's not Pakistan, it's not your kids who are fighting there.' Ultimately we came out of the room, for 2 ½ hours it was the argument between their people [and us], and 'Please come inside the room, again come to the meeting.' We said, 'No, no, no, our question is simple, he should answer it. So again, after 2-3 hours preservation, they took us back to the meeting hall. I again told him, 'What's the policy?' He told me, 'My policy is, if you want to know, prick and bleed.' I told him, 'What is this, prick and bleed?' [He said,] 'Yes, you should not prick so deep that India in retaliation will attack us.' So I told him, 'It is cobra. India is a cobra coming towards Pakistan. And you had given us a needle. Whenever it is coming towards Pakistan, we stop it with a needle—ooh. It turns it's head back. He stings sometimes 5, sometimes 10, sometimes 20 [people] in a day. We are not providing opportunity for him to go to Pakistan because he was given the needle. Every day we used to prick it. Is it like that?' I told him this is not acceptable to me. They don't have any policy. They are just trying to stop India to come to Pakistan.

Then ultimately Sardar Qayoom told me, 'I thought you Kashmiris are the wisest people on the globe. But I can see you are the biggest fools.' I told him, 'Why, sir, what is the reason?' He told me, 'No. Look. You are dying, but you do not know for what you are dying.' I told him, 'Sir, what should I do.' He told me, 'Save yourself, and if you are able to save your people, do that also.' This struck me.

RP This seems like a pretty impressive statement for the former Prime Minister of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

UM Exactly, I have seen he never used to discuss these things with government people. But he used to discuss these things with us. And I got shocked, I told him that does it mean that I should go back and try to save my people. He told me, 'You can save your people. You'll get nothing.' So that was the biggest shock to me. I decided, it was '94 December, let me go back to the valley and fight the real war for the restoration of

democracy and peace. I came here. We started at that time. And today you see where we are. It [militancy] is not indigenous now. And the people of state of Kashmir do not like militancy now. And we succeeded in that.

RP So moving onto your history, you joined the Awami League, which again was the political organization, and can you describe your process to achieving your current high position in the government of J&K over the last part of the 1990s and the early part of the 2000s.

UM See, what we experienced and what we have seen during militancy, what was in the mind during the anti-Indian period, we have seen that now it is the right time to work for the benefit of the people. Because we'll get nothing out of it. It is just an emotional blackmail, and Pakistan is using us for their own design. And there are people who have vested interests that this part of the world should remain burning.

RP And who would those people be?

UM It is, most probably you have seen, the Hurriyat people who don't have following, they are the people.

RP The All Parties Hurriyat Conference [APHC]?

UM Yeah, all those who are talking Pakistan, independence, they are the vested interests. If you will go to the people and talk to them about . . .

RP I'm sorry, but what is their vested interest?

UM Interest is, number one, lot of money has been pumped from Pakistan to them. And they have made huge properties, without, this is fact, they don't have following of the people. And the vested interest—you know, they are earning easy money, and every facility is there, how will they leave it very easily?

RP And are you referring to Geelani's faction, Umer Farooq's faction of All Parties Hurriyat Conference, or the other factions, or just in general?

UM I'm talking of everyone. I'm talking of Geelani, I'm talking of Umer Farooq, I'm talking of Professor Ghani, I'm talking of every man who is in Hurriyat, who is with Geelani, or there are some more groups, there is a lot of vested interest which has developed in their ranks and file. And that's why easily they can't leave it. They might say that it should burn for 200 years, because they are earning, and earning, and earning, on the heads of the innocent people of the state. And that is the reason we thought that our own political parties also equally helped play a dirty role—that means those who are in the mainstream. They never told the truth. We thought that let's launch a political party, which will be based absolutely on an agenda that follows the truth, and which is purely in the interest of the state of the people. And we gave the name as Awami League.

My interest in the Kashmiri Muslim is with my country, with India. Because there are so many Muslims, why do we want to part ways? Why should we live to say that India is not in our interest. It is such a democracy, the largest democracy in the world. Here you have every right of speech, you have right to express your ideas, it is not in Pakistan, we have seen Pakistan, we have seen what they are doing.

I'm telling you people want India now. They have seen that India is only in our interest, and nothing else. There is a percentage who used to say, who used to talk that 'Kashmiris are not with this', 'Kashmiris are with Pakistan', 'Kashmiris want independence'—this is wrong, absolutely wrong. I have traveled all over the state. Every day I am meeting common people, they are not with anything else, except with India.

RP Just turning the question to the presences of the Indian forces in the valley of Kashmir—do they represent a threat to truly ascertaining the common will of the people, in other words, are they engaging in activities that are suppressing the will of the people, as some may have suggested, or would you say their presence is more to counteract the effects of cross-border terrorism from Pakistan.

UM There I will tell you one thing. Why Indian army is out from the barracks, there is a reason for that. Because when there is lawlessness, when militants are around, does that mean they should sit inside and eat and enjoy? After all, they have to fight militancy, that's why they are out in the field. Tomorrow if there is no militancy, what's the reason for them to remain outside? It will not take them 2 minutes to go inside the barracks. It's because you stop militancy, next day you will see troops are withdrawn. You go around, I will just request you if you are in Kashmir, please go around and see what relationship security forces have with the common people. I am proud of my Indian army.

RP Do you see an end to violence in Kashmir in the near future?

UM Yes, we all have to, I mean, especially United States has to play a role in it. They have to play a very big role, because they have seen what terrorism is.

RP How can they play a role in this?

UM Because they have to convey straight to Pakistan that 'Stop militancy in J&K and solve your problems through dialogue.' That's the only way. And that will have impact on other terrorist problems all over the world. If it is discouraged here, I'm sure it will benefit us all over the world. So they have to play a role in it. I request the President, I request the people of America, please play a positive role in it. Terrorism is the enemy of all of us. You have lost innocent lives, and we have lost innocent lives. Let's save this world. It is our turn to save the world, play the role in this world. And if Pakistan will stop militancy, it will have positive impact all over the world. Because every time you see the connection of Al Qaeda, other things, it comes from Pakistan.