

Pakistan's Countering Terrorism Efforts: An Analysis

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the efforts made by Pakistan to counter the terrorism. Terrorism is the most sensitive issues to the national security of Pakistan, which must be handled and dealt with through-proper policy making and its implementation. Conclusions are drawn with the contributions of primary and second sources material. These issues affect not only the foreign relations of Pakistan but also the domestic harmony, leading to unrest and terrorism in the state. Due to such activities Pakistan is disturbed on external and internal basis. For their proper handling a thorough approach from legislation to some intelligence-sharing and exchange of successful best practices is needed, as these issues reflect a difficult and different nature of threat to the national security.

Key Words: Terrorism, Countering Terrorism, Pakistan

Introduction

Pakistan's counter terrorism and extremism efforts are unmatched in the world¹. 'Pakistan is a tragic land, an Islamic state increasingly turned

¹ It should be noted that many states have developed and implemented national strategies to deal with violent extremism pertaining to their very own challenges and environments. The states like Bangladesh, Algeria, Egypt, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and UAE are worth mentioning here. These strategies can provide Pakistan an insight into the steps taken and their results achieved so that its policy makers can understand the gravity as well as, nature of problem in hand. There have been two major baskets of these national strategies. First being, **Multi-axiom Strategy** and other is, **De-radicalization Strategy**. The first includes security diplomacy which was initiated by UAE; restructuring of legislative infrastructure to punish such acts through iron hands; and promoting the culture of moderation across all sectors of society. The second includes rehabilitation and reintegration programs for those

fundamentalist and violent.’ Pakistan is facing unique type of violent militant movements throughout the country like;

- a. Religious sectarianism spreading over all provinces and Gilgit Baltistan.
- b. Ethno-nationalism irredentism in Baluchistan and Karachi trying to get greater autonomy through violence.
- c. Forces motivated by religious fervor including tribal groups getting strength in Punjab and Karachi due to state confusion regarding tackling them, resulting into the weak writ of the state.

International experiences especially those in Iraq and Afghanistan pertaining to countering terrorism (CT) lessons indicate that it is not easy to combat terrorism in isolation through kinetic methods; which further enhance their (terrorists) capabilities and capacities as ‘power’ is not always a good permanent solution in this regard so non-kinetic means are mandatory which provide flexible and innovative approaches to tackle both tangible and intangible aspects of terrorism² Therefore, on Pakistani part using both hard and soft power without a proper long lasting strategy created a vacuum and room for the extremist elements to strengthen them and spread their ideologies at mass scale level. It is important to note here that Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program primarily, is formulated and implemented for following objectives.

- (a) Stop terrorists and their organizations from further growing and expanding
- (b) Stop their support from public at large
- (c) Spread a positive message to public against such elements
- (d) Provide support to deprived segments of society which are normally at red line or most vulnerable in this regard
- (e) Stopping youth from being recruited by such elements.

who return or leave the violent extremist activities, through their reeducation, psychological counseling, family and financial support, along-with moderate religious discourse.

² Simpson, E., Why We Failed to Win a Decisive Victory in Afghanistan, *Foreign Policy*, 2015, March 2.

Before initiating any major CVE program, it is imperative to understand the trends that underpin the phenomena³. The CVE initiatives are basically sub-component of any state's counter terrorism policy and these CVE initiatives are always context bound and case specific, so Western one-size-fit-all formula cannot be successful in Pakistani context. Pakistan has multifaceted and multilayered phenomena which lead to violent extremism. These include but not limited to sectarianism, Islamization and Talibanization. As Pakistan is heterogeneous society with diverse religious, social and ethnic communities with distinct cultures and traditions, so patterns of extremism in different parts may changes a bit due to changed socio-economic ground realities. Pakistan has been affected with extremist ideology and its impacts in the shape of terrorism more than any other state in the region and it has always condemned them in whatever form, shape and manifestations they might be. It joined international community in its war against terrorism just after 9/11, whatever the reasons may be, but it permitted its land, air and waters to US and UN mandated coalition to be used as supply routes etc. Pakistan has played an important role by arresting and sending over 600 suspects; alleged to have direct links with Al-Qaida and has contributed to the national, regional as well as, global efforts for countering violent extremism and terrorism. Its military is ever since engaged in countering terrorism inside and outside the state. Role of India has also been very suspicious in this regard, as whenever Pakistan is about to achieve success at Afghan border against terrorists, India deploys its forces on its international border with Pakistan threatening it through aggressive posture and Pakistan has to divert its attention, which results in insufficient guarded Afghan border, hence resulting into the more influx of extremist fighters to Pakistan. These militants have the same physical features and language as that of tribal people living at the Afghan border; hence they mingle with them, camouflage and become next to impossible to be recognized. The end result is they start reorganizing, reconstructing and regrouping. Once, these militants succeeded in establishing their sleeping cells in tribal areas, they tend to establish these into the rural as well as, urban

³ Rathore, M. & Abdul Basit, Trends and Patterns of Radicalization in Pakistan, *Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies*, 2010. pp. 8-10.

outfits and start terrorist activities in different places in Pakistan.⁴ Dr. Hassan Askari also places militancy along-with extremism at the top among all challenges faced by Pakistan. Further Moeed has shown through study that Pakistani youth wants to see it as an Islamic state and in this regard they are more emotional than logical, hence more prone to extremist ideologies⁵.

These militant groups have been so deeply rooted into the society that their presence has been firstly felt with full jolts in the *Lal Masjid* (Red Mosque) episode in 2007 in Islamabad under the '*Operation Silence 2007*'. This operation gave us two lessons namely; (i) that use of force results in more rigorous militant response and (ii) that there is need for new heroes for young generation which can set be looked upon. In the same year TTP's existence was officially announced under the leadership of Bait-Ullah-Mehsud. Pakistan proscribed them in 2008 and froze their assets and accounts and barred them from media appearances, with bounties announced on the heads of its different leaders. Yet, due to lack of effective coordination and proper mechanism especially in FATA, all these steps resulted into nominal outcomes. This TTP has posed real threat to the national security and peace of Pakistan, as they had found local collaborators to implement their agenda. These local collaborators knew the ins and outs of the soil; they were well trained, motivated and properly networked to participate into different terrorist activities. These extremist organizations work in close coordination with each other, irrespective of their ulterior motives; hence they form a multi-faceted mosaic. The Kashmir prone radicals include a cluster of Deobandi groups, which are associated directly or indirectly to jamiat-ulmaie-islam JUI and include following.

Categories of Militant Groups in Pakistan

- i. Jaish-e-Muhammad
- ii. Harkat-ul-Mujahedeen
- iii. Harkat-ul-Ahrar

⁴ Rizvi, Hasan Askari, *At the Brink? In the Future of Pakistan*, Lahore: Vanguard Books, (2012).

⁵ Moeed, Yusuf, *Youth and the Future, in the Future of Pakistan*, Lahore: Vanguard Books(2012).

- iv. Lashkar-e-Taiba⁶ (LeT)
- v. Hizbul-Mujaheedeen
- vi. Al-Badr⁷
- vii. Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan⁸
- viii. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi⁹
- ix. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan¹⁰ (TTP)

Hence, the result was more organized attacks both on civilian and military targets, suicide bombers at processions and public places, which started to give a continuous sense of insecurity to every citizen of Pakistan. Suicide bombers have remained hall mark of their attacks and now they have come up with organized attacks on schools and universities through a bunch of terrorists who kill everybody until they are themselves killed. A national consensus was therefore reached to handle these people with iron hands and eliminate their hide outs and outfits, so since 2008 a series of military operations have been launched in this regard, in different areas of Pakistan. In the recent past Pakistan has implemented following. **Operations against Terrorists**

- (a) Operation Rah-e-Haq (2007)
- (b) Operation Rah-e-Rast in Swat¹¹ (2007-9)
- (c) Operation Rah-e-Nijat in South Waziristan till 2009
- (d) Operation Sherdil in Bajaur (2009)
- (e) Operation Zarb-e-Azab (2014)
- (f) Operation Khyber – I
- (g) Operation Khyber –II
- (h) Operation Khyber-IV

⁶ It is Punjab based Ahl-e-Hadith organization and has fought with Jaish-e-Muhammad in Kashmir and India and also most recently Jaish-e-Muhammad has fought against Pakistani military too. These have also operated in Afghanistan against NATO forces.

⁷ They along-with Hizbul-Mujaheedeen are ethnic Kashmiris and focus on Kashmir

⁸ It is pro-Saudi sectarian group and has been involved in sectarian killings in Pakistan.

⁹ It is also sectarian radical and extremist organization under the influence of Deobandis and is also pro-Saudia and anti-Iranian.

¹⁰ It is more of a network, which changes leadership and allegiances frequently and when required and are in close coordination with Afghan Taliban. They demand the imposing of Sharia, as they see it is. They have links with Punjabi Taliban as well as, Al-Qaida. Suicide bombing is their hallmark.

¹¹ In Swat a process of de-radicalization was also started with the help of doctors, religious scholars, psychologists etc which included screening; counseling (religious); educating people formally; giving them vocational training and reintegrating those into the man social stream.

- (i) Operation Zalzalā
- (j) Operation Thunderstorm
- (k) Operation Rud-ul-Fasad

With the above a number of military operations have taken place in the shape of drone attacks and alike, in the FATA. As a strong message had to be given to Jihadists through aggressive military actions, yet such aggressive actions remain short to medium term solutions and for effectiveness a different discourse is needed i.e. an alternate narrative for all those having Jihadist mindset. The approach of ‘westernized-us’ and ‘barbarian-you’ is to be changed, who is telling the truth and who is at the wrong side must be reconstructed, as, “supporting ‘good’ religion while repressing ‘bad’ leads to violence.”¹²

Therefore North Waziristan remained a troubled area, harboring terrorists and becoming a safe haven for militants of both local and foreign origin. In 2003, due to international and national pressure, the terrorism was an electoral issue. Nation wanted to eradicate terrorists, the new government preferred negotiations with the militants due to pressures from the religious allies in the start. But to a shame, thanks to continued terrorist attacks and stubborn attitude of militants, this four month long process ended in failure. Once the talks failed, government started Operation *Zarb-e-Azab* on June 15, 2014 in North Waziristan. More than a million people were displaced, yet major targets were achieved within first three months, resulting into more than fifteen hundred militant casualties leading to decimating of their middle level command and damaging their capacity to carry out organized violent activities as being done previously, yet they still retain their capability to do so. There is a national consensus on the ongoing military operation and this operation is in Pakistan’s national interest and it is important to note here that in this regard Pakistan has not considered any internal as well as, external pressure and has acted completely in its national interest by choosing timings and area for the operation, which has been backed by popular people’s support. The operation has received widespread support from the Pakistani political, defense, civilian and religious sectors and is destined to eliminate the extremists. These Pakistani military operations in the

¹² Iannaccone, L. R. , Religious Extremism The Good, The Bad, and The Deadly, *Public Choice*, 128(1), 2006, pp. 109-129.

Western border region from Swat to Waziristan are primarily targeted against Pakistani Taliban, but they have also squeezed Al-Qaida's operating space and contributed to its isolation.¹³

The policy of appeasement rather than defeating and demolishing the radical outfits was drastically changed after Army Public School (APS) incident (2014) and Pakistan started to demolish their infrastructure and very basis through its rigorous military operations through the launch of National Action Plan (NAP). Christine Fair (2014) has stated that in the past Pakistan had to create linkages with these organizations, just to counter India and in case there had been any nuclear war between both, then armies of both would have become crippled and at that juncture of time as the lender of last resort, these organizations would have become Pakistan's front line forces to counter Indian aggression. This thinking as per her is not only absurd but also not realistic.

There had been only one suicide attack in Pakistan before September 11 incident and later on more than four hundred have been recorded, which have taken thousands of lives and massive destruction of infrastructure. Pakistan alone cannot curb this terrorism, unless militant outfits in Afghanistan remain effective, peace cannot be brought in Pakistan. Role of India in this regard has also been very crucial, which has always exploited traditional fault lines, tarnished the image of Pakistan and provided platform to separatist ethnic elements from Balochistan. Baloch insurgency has also been a cause of violence especially in Balochistan and generally in other parts of Pakistan, with the help of drug cartels both Pakistani and Iranian, plus some help from Jihadi organizations too. Iranian role cannot be ruled out in this regard, which has its own vested interests in the area. This environment also raised the sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. CPEC has also been a major cause for Indian involvement in such activities in Pakistan.

It can be safely stated that following reasons call for having a comprehensive and exclusive CVE program in Pakistan-

- (1) Here a cause and effect relationship exists between extremists and resulting terrorism, therefore without curbing extremism, terrorism can never be eliminated.

¹³ Clarke, M. & Soria, V., Terrorism, *The RUSI Journal*, 1554, 2010, pp. 24-31.

- (2) Extremist ideology provides recruited youth for terrorists, so this supply chain must be broken to reduce their size and numbering.
- (3) War against terrorism, is actually 'war of ideas' and it cannot be won without hitting and countering the extremist ideologies, as keeping militants in jails cannot serve the purpose, their rehabilitation and reformation is mandatory.
- (4) As youth is more prone to terrorist attacks and suicide bombing, so a comprehensive program is needed for their proper guidance and channelizing their energies into some positive activities.
- (5) It is always CVEs which provide a way out in political solutions as majority of such people are those who feel deprived due to non-fulfillment of their basic needs, so there is a dire need to neutralize them through social support and fulfillment of their needs via CVE programs.
- (6) Further that, as God gives another chance to everyone to rectify, so do such militants deserve, who want to surrender and submit to the law of the state, and CVE program gives such people another chance in this regard.

So, Pakistan has taken following CVE initiatives-

- (a) De-Radicalization Programs in Punjab and Swat¹⁴.
- (b) Counter Radicalization Programs in the shape of madrassa reforms¹⁵; NISP 2014¹⁶; NAP 2014; Counter Terrorism Operations and PPA 2014¹⁷.

¹⁴ First program of this type started in 2009 in Swat against Taliban with Pakistan Army's help, which set up de-radicalization centres in four schools in Swat. In 2011, Eastern Punjab saw such programs by Police's CTD and TEVTA, which was abandoned in 2012 due to funds shortage.

¹⁵ APS attack in 2014, gave way to open debate on madrassa reforms, to reform them into centres of learning, promoting moderation and interfaith harmony and tolerance as few madrassas play a vital role in bridging the extremist ideologies with jihadi groups and sectarian militant organizations and people. General Musharraf in 2008 issued Madrassa Regulation Ordinance to bring them into state regulation through registration and work on curriculum to end hate speech, militancy and sectarian divide. Further, in 2010 PPP government signed an accord with ITMP to link different madrassas with Ministry of Education and prohibited them from publishing banned literature. But due to redtapism that accord was not presented to Parliament for necessary legislation.

¹⁶ This policy adopted 5-necked approach to handle terrorism through; (a) dismantling; (b) containing; (c) preventing; (d) educating and (e) reintegrating them. It provided for a clear infrastructure and roadmap in this regard. NACTA was created in 2009 due to it, but it could not come into force effectively.

Through National Internal Security Plan (NISP), the government has identified the main administrative, legal, operational and policy issues involved in dealing with the problem of extremism. This has led to the creation of National Counter Terrorism Authority. The whole plan talks of command structure, operational requirements, coordination through intelligence sharing, personnel involved and finances needed. However, due to lack of resources and no time bound details coupled with less responsive environment, un-appropriate enabling enactments and unskilled human resource, with no 'will' of political government has made the whole plan a 'mission statement' only. A comprehensive and detailed approach is mandatory for CT, which must take in its ambit all the facets pertaining to extremism and terrorism along with rehabilitation of these people. In this regard Pakistan has taken initiatives and tried to adopt and bring reforms to stop proliferation of terrorism, as well as, curb facilitation to i.e.

- (a) academic curricula at all levels has been revised to tackle controversial material;
- (b) There have been consistent efforts to reform banking sector and religious seminaries so that extremist outfits cannot get cash flow.

A detailed and most comprehensive NAP has been issued by Pakistani Government to counter and eliminate terrorism through reshaping, reorganizing and retraining of CT forces with providing them latest equipment and weapons through integrated approach of intelligence sharing with strategic reintegration. In this regard, "*Protection of Pakistan Act 2014*" was also approved to facilitate prosecutors and law enforcement agencies in punishing these terrorists through speedy trial. An amendment in the Constitution has also been made¹⁸ to craft a two years time-bound¹⁹ provision for military courts for trial of 'jet-black' terrorists.

Twenty Point Agenda for National Action Plan (NAP)

1. Execution of convicted terrorists

¹⁷ A bill in July 2014 by the name Pakistan Protection Bill 2014 was passed to counter-terrorism, empowering forces with extra powers to fight against them. The Bill adopted guilty-until-proven innocent approach. Some NGOs and segments from civil society showed their concerns that Pakistan would become a 'police state', so a two years cap was given to it initially.

¹⁸ Through 21st Constitutional amendment and Pakistan Army (Amendment) Act 2015.

¹⁹ Termed as, Sun-set clause. The government had to use this period to strengthen its civilian law enforcement agencies coupled with criminal justice system, which could not be properly achieved.

2. Establishment of special trial courts
3. Ensure no armed militants are allowed to function in the country
4. Strengthening and activation of National Action of Countering Terrorism Act (NACTA)
5. Countering hate speech and extremist material
6. Chocking financing for terrorists and terrorist organizations
7. Ensuring against re-emergence of proscribed organizations
8. Establishing and deploying a dedicated counter terrorism force
9. Taking effective steps against religious persecution
10. Registration and regulation of madrassas
11. Ban on glorification of terrorism and terrorist organizations through print and electronic media
12. FATA²⁰ reforms
13. Dismantling communication networks of terrorist organizations
14. Measures against abuse of internet and social media for terrorism
15. Zero tolerance for militancy in Pakistan
16. Taking the ongoing operation in Karachi to its logical conclusion
17. Balochistan reconciliation
18. Dealing firmly with the sectarian terrorists
19. Policy to deal with the issue of Afghan refugees
20. Revamping and reforming the criminal justice system

Section 4 of NACTA Act 2013

It mandates to prepare comprehensive national counter terrorism and counter extremism strategies, under which the Authority drafted a ‘National Counter Extremism Policy, which included academicians, religious elite, political leaders,

²⁰ Art 247 of Pakistan Constitution gives FATA status of special tribal area, where normal state laws are not applied and is regulated by an administrative system through Tribal Councils, termed as Jirgahs. It enjoins Afghanistan and stretches about 450 km having approx area of 27,200 sq. km with loose administration of Pakistan. Since 1849, when Britishers came in contact with them and started administering them through political agents, the same has been in force. Quaid-e-Azam promised them to be administered as per the traditional system as special area and withdrew military from tribal areas. In 1980s *Madrasahs* were established there due to massive Saudi funding, which led to radical mindset and resulted into fights with military more recently. In 2003 Musharraf started to normalize relations with them and introduced few election reforms as well as, local government reforms, which reduced the state writ there and we have seen the results in shape of control of Swat by extremists and influence of Jihadists in FATA areas. Researchers are of the view that the poor developments and non-fulfillment of basic needs of FATA people is the real cause of radicalism and extremism there.

representatives from media, civil society, military, bureaucracy, NGOs and other stakeholders to give input on the issues. These led to six proposed themes on counter extremism i.e.

- (a) Building Community Resilience
- (b) Media Engagement
- (c) Education Reforms
- (d) Enabling Environment
- (e) Promotion of Culture
- (f) Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Renunciation.

The recommendations in this regard have been regarding strengthening the state agencies to act vigorously and establishing writ of the state to minimize the militant movement across the country pertaining to ethnic, political and sectarian divide. The main reason in this regard is the weak state which has been apologetic and confused to take decisive actions against the extremist organizations and terrorists. The causes for this have been gradual decaying of administrative capabilities of the state, weak judicial system, no or very less economic and social development opportunities for masses coupled with disheartened madarassa reforms. The state also needs to involve tehsil level training of mentors for community education in de-radicalization through media. It may be termed as, battle of mind and hearts, as media is considered as an important tool for publicity, which at once transmits message to billions of people. Now it is a media battlefield, especially via social media, which must be used to defeat the extremist mindset and state should deny access to the terrorist organizations from using this as a tool. Educational reforms can only be done through provinces after 18th amendment of the Constitution 1973, as only higher education is now under the preview of federal government. These reforms must include strict regulatory mechanisms for primary schools and madarassas, as well as, skilled based teaching modules must be introduced with close coordination of all the provinces. Further that change agents must be selected very carefully, who can help in exit strategy for those pulled towards the extremist teachings. This must be done with due care and at the priority basis, the 'us versus them' divide must be ended now by avoiding hate material. Nevertheless, unless state controls the environment and guarantees the fundamental freedoms through enabling

environment for rehabilitation, reintegration and renunciation of those previously involved in extremist activities, the objectives cannot be achieved.

Conclusion

The Auqaf department must be made active to watch the mosques and make sure that the mosques are free from the sectarian influence. It is also recommended that the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) must be amended to include hate speech especially declaring a Muslim infidel (*Takfir*) as a special crime, to stop the dissemination of such speeches and materials. Further that a unified culture be promoted so bring interfaith harmony, diversity, openness and sense of integration among different ethnic and religious minorities. Democratic values along-with inter-provincial dialogue must be promoted through theater, music, dramas, films and cultural festivals. Even a faith based peace building can be a good option, where religion is used as a key player for conflict prevention, resolution and peace building. So, as per Fatima Sajjad, “enlightened and compassionate spirit of Islam found in the works of Rumi, Iqbal, FazlurRehman and many other intellectuals in modern Muslim world must be revived, promoted and projected through education and media.”²¹ Karen Armstrong also talks of practice of compassionate Islam in this regard, in her ‘Letter to Pakistan.’²²

However, apart from all the sincere efforts, Pakistan’s CVE program faces following major challenges i.e.

- (a) Hostile social environment due to weak governance system and social-political and economic disparities.
- (b) Resource scarcity for long term sustainable programs.
- (c) Monitoring and evaluation issues at such a large scale.
- (d) Online vulnerability i.e. radicalization through social media and internet.
- (e) Non seriousness from different religious and political parties, leading to confusions.

Pakistan has suffered huge losses in the shape of civilian and military casualties, economic and infrastructural loss and has given more sacrifices than needed. Its military is continuously engaged at the borders. These sacrifices and loss of blood need due acknowledgment and compensation from the international community. The army has started the rehabilitation and reintegration programs for

²¹ Sajjad, F., Countering Extremists’ Narrative in Pakistan, *NDU Journal*, 2015, pp. 75-94.

²² Armstrong, K. *A Letter to Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

the militants in eradicating terrorism. They have successfully established such programs in Swat to enhance the skills for the jobs and reintegration of such people and families into the main stream of the social and economic activities.