



RESEARCH PAPER

**Accomplishments and Challenges of Pakistan's Fight against
Violent Religious Extremism: A Critical Analysis**

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: February 15, 2022	The aim of this paper is to critically analyze challenges faced by Pakistan in preventing and countering violent religious extremism (CVRE) and its accomplishments. The religious notions of identity formation are embedded in Pakistan's foundation since its birth. In the post-partition domestic politics, the apex political leadership, religious factions and right-wing political parties spread their own brand of religion that instigated radicalization, extremism and violence, causing threat to its homeland security. In Pakistan violent religious extremism is a phenomenon i.e. multi-faceted and multi-layered, in which not only internal but external actors are also involved making the situation even more complicated. The fight against religious extremism has been an uphill task for the state authorities. The paper analyzes the various measures taken to curb the on slot of violent extremism which includes the review of National Action Plan and the military operations at various times. The paper concludes by suggesting recommendations to curtail the ongoing menace of violent religious extremism.
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Introduction

According The phenomenon of terrorism is an essentially contested concept. Despite the efforts of many scholars, there is no consensual definition of terrorism. "Terrorism is a politically motivated tactic involving the threat or use of force or violence in which the pursuit of publicity plays a significant role." (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004) United Nations Convention Article 2 (1) defines terrorism as: Any act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act" (Kassa, 2015).

Hoffman reported that US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), terrorism is, "The unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, a civilian population, or any segment thereof in furtherance of political or social objectives" (Hoffman, 1999). As per State Department: "Terrorism means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against

noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." (Schmid, 2004).

Violent extremism in Pakistan is a multifaceted and multi-layered phenomenon. It exists in the form of sectarianism, *Shariah* (Islamization) movements, Talibanization, and a multitude of Jihadist organizations. Other forms of extremism manifest in the general opposition to American or Western policies, in the nationalist-separatist insurgency in Balochistan, and ethno-political violence in Karachi and parts of interior Sindh.

Since independence, Pakistan has been confronted with a series of ethnic, sectarian, and religious conflicts. Many of which have resulted in violence. Pakistan is the epi-center of ethnic and religious radicalization, which is supported by both internal and external actors who provided them with ideological contours and funded money for religiously and non-religiously motivated militancy. However, Pakistan collaborated with the US in the latter's goal to prevent communism from gaining ground in Afghanistan. In the aftermath violent extremism has escalated dramatically. The implications of the Taliban's emergence in Afghanistan, the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States, and later on Pakistan's willingness to fight the US War on Terror as a front-line ally are significantly greater than expected (Karamat, Muzaffar & Shah, 2019).

Pakistan's collaboration with the United States in the War on Terror has shattered the social fabric of the country. The growth of terrorism following 9/11 has wreaked havoc on Pakistan's homeland security. Pakistan has suffered greatly in terms of human cost of war, economic and infrastructure damage. In two decades, more than 83,000 people have died as a result of the disaster. According to Pakistan's Economic Survey, terrorism has cost the country \$126 billion (Pasha, 2021 Sep. 2). Pakistan has also suffered damages to schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure. Thanks to Pakistan's military operations in tribal areas, terrorist incidents have declined.

Pakistan faces multiple challenges to its physical and human security from international, regional, and local environments. Some of these are the result of intolerance, extremism, militancy, and terrorism in both rural and urban areas, while others are the result of the country's history of ties with regional and extra-regional powers. Many believe that ethnicity, sectarianism, and economic instability are factors involved in Pakistan's internal security collapse, which coincide with poor governance, political instability, and grievances among provinces, as well as economic disparity and illiteracy, all of which are negatively affecting the country's security fabric. It is critical to recognize that understanding Counter Terrorism and Counter Violent Extremism initiatives in Pakistan requires delving into problem's historical, economic, social, political, and ideological foundations. The majority population in Pakistan has been divided into religious, sectarian, and national identities that have become a melting pot. They have been categorized into two extremes, i.e., whether they are more religious in thought and practice (tilted towards fundamentalism) or more secular.

Literature Review

Khan (2011) observed that Pakistan is facing multifaceted threats – regionally, internationally, and domestically to its human security. A few of these arise due to intolerance, bigotry, militancy and terrorism both in the rural as well as in urban areas of the country and also because of its historical relationship with regional and non-regional powers that led to sectarianism, ethnicity, and financial insecurity in Pakistan.

Khan (2016) elucidated that Pakistan since its inception has experienced diverse but mutually interlinked issues of sectarian, ethnical, and religious nature that ensued violence. Pakistan has to bear the impact of religious and ethnic terrorism supported by both, internal and external actors who are setting narrative as well as subsidizing both religiously and non-religiously motivated militancy in Pakistan. The intensity of radicalism has increased multitudinously in the post-9/11 terror attack, US War on Terror (WoT) in Afghanistan and the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Pakistan's support to with US war on terror has deeply shaken the texture of its society. The rise of psychological warfare in aftermath of 9/11 has badly affected Pakistan's internal security and has been enduring in terms of human casualties, financial harm, and infrastructure damage. But, despite this, Pakistan has been engaged and remained committed to combatting extremism and terrorism.

Doneux and Carter (2009) elucidated that in Pakistan religion has been manipulated to legitimize acts of violence by political and religious elites and many non-state actors. The phenomena of violent extremism and terrorism have historical roots. Currently extremist Salafi jihadi factions such as Tehreek-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Tehrik -e- Nafazi- Shariat-Muhammad (TNSM) and Sipah-e-Sahaba recruit and target young males for the accomplishment of their extremist agendas. Doneux and Carter narrated that it is the religion that makes it less demanding for fundamentalists to defame their adversary by portraying them as fiendish. Moreover, common perceptions and ethical avocations to control a society and bring violent radicals together such as Salafi jihadists have national and global plans to emancipate the world from evil. Doneux and Carter have also endorsed that these factions use religion to provide cover to their grievances and political goals.

Economic disparity and illiteracy are other most impelling causes leading the few Islamist fundamentalists towards extremism. The concentration of wealth in few hands and war waged by the Western world in the Middle East have led to justification for Jihad as economic woes and wars have benefitted the situation. Doneux and Carter (2009) contended that the four interrelated factors impelling extremist ideology are; individual connections, group dynamics, social bonds and effect of unequivocal thoughts and sentiments. The extremist networks expound the ideology that Muslims have been persecuted and they are charged with the duty to fight the oppressors and in order to fulfill this objective, they justify the use of violence. For this purpose, they use the "narrative of victimization".

Naveed (2004) narrated that the majority of Pakistani society lies in the two extremes either they are extremely religious or secular. Religion always dominated the politics as well.

Another big challenge is the presence of external as well as internal forces promoting extremist narrative and portraying Pakistan as the extremist state in front of the international community. Religious and sectarian violence by terrorist groups and their linkages to external agencies have not only disrupted Pakistan's soft image but its economic development. Another problem is the lack of political leadership who would address the grievances of different religious, ethnic, and lingual minorities that led towards increased violence. One more factor in cultivating extremism in the youth is domestic environment. Several Madrassas operating on different sectarian lines have been fueling religious extremism and encouraging militancy that go unchecked by the civilian leadership. During that period madaris were encouraged to propagate and promote jihad with the monetary support of Saudi Arabia, US, and Gulf states. The Mujahideen who fought for Afghanistan against external aggression, later on, became aggressors themselves and labeled as terrorists.

Another contributing factor to rising extremism in Pakistan which is constantly talked about is the circumstance in FATA. Pakistan is surrounded by unfriendly and hostile neighbourhood. After the US attack on Afghanistan, most of the Middle Easterners and Central Asian Taliban along with Al-Qaeda administration fled to the tribal areas of Pakistan, bringing FATA to the mainstream. Pakistan had to launch different military operations against the aggressors who were spreading their wings and adjusting themselves with other criminals in the state.

Basit (2015) rightfully explicated that Pakistan's initiatives to counter violent extremism. The CVE strategies adopted by Pakistan are of a bifurcated approach: de-radicalization and counter-radicalization. After drawing down TTP from Swat, a rehabilitation program for youth vulnerable to Taliban's ideology was proposed by the Pakistan's Armed Forces. Similarly, various programs were introduced in different parts of Punjab in collaboration with different non-governmental organizations. Basit explicitly observed the importance of decisions of the Zarb-e Azb operation started in 2015 by Pakistan's Armed Forces in tribal areas of Pakistan. The operation proved successful in annihilating the hideouts of militant outfits residing in FATA that include TTP, Lashkar-e-Taiba, al-Qaeda, Jundullah, and Haqqani network.

In 2013, the National Assembly of Pakistan passed a bill 'National Counter Terrorism Authority' (NACTA) and announced its first-ever security policy - National Internal Security Policy (NISP), which is aimed at maintaining security and stability and isolating terrorist organizations in Pakistan. Under NACTA, a major step was taken by formulating National Counter Extremist Policy for Pakistan (NCEP). It focused to look around the sources, problems, causes, and perspectives promoting extremism in Pakistan and the counter steps to control it. National Action Plan (NAP), proposed in 2014, effectively battle down the terrorist and extremist networks across entire country where it curtailed all the fundraising of terrorist groups working in northern areas of Pakistan through internal and external links.

Khan (2015) explicated that there is a dire need to come up with public-oriented policies, there is a wide range of developing areas that require programming and focus of the government by assessing their feasibility and long-term impacts. The very first solution author came up with is to bring the educational sector into consideration. He was of the view that there is an utter need to bring single national

curriculum and keep a close watch on Madrassahs, by monitoring their educational system and bringing reforms. He is of the view that there is an utter need to come up with a national narrative that will focus on the vulnerable youth who becomes easy prey for extremist and violent factions' ideologies who then recruit them to achieve their goals. He highlighted that poor quality of policing and lack of criminal justice are factors behind extremist groups to rise, operate and increase dependence on military involvement. The Thana culture" and politicization of public institutions have led to flourishing the extremist ideologies in Pakistan. Therefore, there is a dire need of bringing reforms in the judicial system which would provide people a hope for believing in the state and its institutions. Good governance and political reforms are other goals to achieve.

History of Extremism and Terrorism in Pakistan

The Islamic idealism by the Muslim League at the time of political campaign vanished soon after the creation of Pakistan and instead, the vested interest took over. Pakistan's socio-economic and political situation led to a crisis in the form of first martial law by Gen. Ayub Khan lasted for 11 years. The author has highlighted how religious elements were marginalized during his era which was later followed by a civil war in East Pakistan in 1971. This was the occasion when the student wing of Jamiat Tulaba was used by the military against the Awami League. Then came Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's era where help for radical elements from Afghanistan was invited in 1974. Despite the formation of an Islamic Constitution in 1973 that is still adopted, he could not attain religious and military support, and hence Zia ul Haq imposed martial law once again. The instrumentalization of Islam began in this era. This was the era where all the militant organizations that exist today, were formed after 1979. The rise in religious radicalism according to the author was due to the domestic and international circumstances that had emerged after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iranian Revolution. Iranian Revolution resulted in an extreme Arab-Iran rivalry and Pakistan it was reflected as Sunni-Shia hostility. On the other hand, international funding for Jihad led towards increased number of madrassas that provided active jihadis for war against Soviets. While the ISI chose to favor radical elements among Mujahideen as Hizb e Islami as long as they were actively fighting against the Soviet Union. After the end of the war in the late 1980s, the financial aid was withdrawn and Pakistan continued to train the Jihadi activists for two factors; the insurgency in Kashmir and to curb the Indian influence in Afghanistan. This policy led to Pakistan's support towards the Taliban who captured Kabul in 1996 and later became actively involved in terrorism in Pakistan and at the international level with Al-Qaeda. Due to the fear of isolation after 9/11 attack, Pakistan made a sudden shift to join war on terror and USA which was not welcomed by Taliban or their associates in Pakistan (Khan, 2005).

Factors Involved in Religious Radicalism and Terrorism

Majority of the Muslim population in Pakistan is divided into different sects, largely; Shia and Sunni. Intolerance towards each other has been long existed that triggered violence and terrorism. Khan did not identify the difference between terrorism and violence. However, the author has highlighted a very significant point that makes religious radicalism and terrorism linked. Apart from intolerance, multiple religious groups have formed their militant groups mainly after 1979. For instance during the Afghan jihad; Deobandi Sunnis joined with Ahl-e-Hadith and

Jammat-e-Islami that received the largest share of funding and were actively involved in sectarian terrorism (Khan, 2005).

Khan (2005) has highlighted that after the attacks of 9/11 in 2001 and linking them with al-Qaeda, the confusion regarding consensus over a single definition of terrorism with addition of terms such as "global terrorism", "international" or "catastrophic terrorism" have been increasingly used. Khan explicated that initially Taliban fighting for Afghan cause were labeled as Jihadis and freedom fighters shortly after 9/11 the labels were changed and they were labeled as terrorists that were launching violence and terrorist strikes worldwide.

Actors Involved in Promoting Extremism in Pakistan

Two major actors in Pakistan use religion to instigate terrorism. Although the two actors are interconnected there are differences in their objectives and activities. The first actor Khan (2005) has mentioned is the sectarian groups. The root cause of communal schism on sectarian lines was the result of Gen. Zia ul Haq's Islamization process from 1977 to 88. Additionally abundant weapons, external influence, and foreign funding were provided during the Afghan Jihad. The sectarian conflict turned into a blood feud between two sects. Since the 1980s amongst the major organizations involved in terror activities were Shia Tehreek e Jaffna and its faction Sipah e Mohammed on one side and the Sunni Sipah e Sahaba Pakistan and Lashkar e Jhangvi on the other side. In June 2004 it was reported that more than 300 people had been killed as a result of sectarian violence. Militant groups were targeted are high profile civilians of different sects.

The second actor Khan (2005) has identified is jihadi groups that were considered as jihadis till 2001 due to their active involvement in the Afghan Jihad war. Until October 2001, the militant jihadi groups were not directly involved in terrorist activities inside Pakistan however after the 9/11 attacks, the government made a major shift in its policy from pro to anti-Taliban and joined the USA bloc in the war on terror, some jihadis also started terrorism within Pakistan. Largely, their objective is not to intimidate the country's population but they have their divergent position with the country's government. The author has quoted the example of attacks on President Parvez Musharraf in December 2003 which he escaped narrowly and the attacks on Military Corps Commander in June 2004 in Karachi. Besides al-Qaida, militant religious organizations such as Harkat al-Mujahideen al Awami and Harkat e Jihad al Islami were also held responsible for the attacks. After 2002 when Jaish e Muhammad and Lashkar e Taiba were banned due to international pressure many organizations that were actively involved in insurgency in Kashmir distanced themselves from domestic terrorist violence.

Measures taken by Pakistan to Curb Extremism and Terrorism

Pakistani government's efforts to counter al Qaeda threat offered concrete results. Since 2001, the government apprehended around 600 operatives and foreign militants. Significant arrests are Abu Zubayda in Faisalabad in March 2002, Abu Faraj al Libbi in Mardan in 2005, and Khalid Sheikh Muhammad in Rawalpindi in 2003. Moreover the role of Pakistan in freezing the bank accounts of al Qaeda and welfare organizations associated with it such as the Rabeta Trust. An operation was also

launched against Al Qaeda in FATA. By February 2005, Pakistan's military launched 44 operations in which 302 terrorists were killed and 663 were captured. The capture of Al Qaeda operative Mohammed Naeem Noor Khan and Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani showed horrific details about the kinds of attacks al Qaeda had planned however the international response to Pakistan's efforts was not very impressive (Khan, 2005).

National Action Plan (NAP)

National Action Plan was formed in December 2014 after the APS attack in Peshawar 2014 by the apex civilian and military leadership of Pakistan. NAP- a 20 point agenda provided both short-term and long-term measures to counter-terrorism. NACTA was given the responsibility to implement NAP. On 9th September 2021, Premier Imran Khan chaired his first meeting of the NAP to curb emerging security challenges and bring judicial and civil reforms. After the fall of Kabul, reports of Taliban's gaining strength again and upsurge in terrorist attacks in Waziristan resulted in deaths of several officials and soldiers. In the last days of September, an intelligence-based operation was held in South Waziristan Agency that killed 10 terrorists. Due to the TTP's continued attacks, and further escalation of terrorist violence Muhammad Amir, Director, Pak Institute for Peace Studies has presented a detailed overview of revised NAP formulated in 2021. This plan focuses on:

- Strengthening of the Counter-Terrorism Department
- Action against terrorism through media awareness
- Banning of terrorist financing
- Measures against religious and sectarian violence and bringing reforms in FATA
- Reconciliation process in Baluchistan (Gillani, 2021).

Military Offensives launched in Pakistan

Pakistan has made enormous contribution to US backed war against terrorism that resulted in the decrease in the overall rate of terrorist activities. Mirza (2021) has drawn facts from research presented in Pak Institute for Peace Studies Report where he has mentioned human cost of the following military offensives in the last decade:

- The first military operation was launched in 2003 against a Wazir sub-clan from Darrra Akakhel on terrorist factions and their hideouts in tribal areas of Pakistan because al Qaida launched attack on US military camp in 2003. When they refused to surrender, the operation was intensified and 22 al-Qaida operators were killed along with seven tribesmen.
- The Wana Operation in March 2004 resulted in the death of 63 terrorists by the Pakistan's armed forces and the killings of 26 Pakistani soldiers by Al Qaida. In September 2005 and January 2008, operations in North Waziristan Agency and South Waziristan were started.

- To recover Bajaur Agency from Taliban Operation Sherdil was started in August 2008 and ended in February 2010.
- Operation Rah e Rast was against Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan in Swat. It was aimed to clear the Malakand Division resulted in the capture of Sufi Muhammad the head of Tehreek e Nifaz e Shariat e Muhammadi.
- Operation Raah e Nijat was conducted on 16th September 2009 that cleared Dera Ismail Khan, Zhob, and Region Tank from terrorist stronghold.
- 144 operations were conducted in 2011 that resulted in the execution of 1016 terrorists.
- The Pakistan military restored peace in North Waziristan Agency in 2012 and in Karachi and Balochistan in 2013 through its Rangers Operation.
- Operation Zarb e Azb killed 2100 terrorists in North Waziristan Agency after the APS attack in 2014.
- In 2015, the NAP took the task of bringing peace to Karachi and Balochistan through military operation in 2016. Pakistan law enforcement agencies took steps against Lashkar e Jhangvi and extremist groups in Balochistan.
- Operation Raddul Fasaad further eliminated the remaining terror elements from Lahore, KP, Sehwan Sharif, and FATA. Till 2018 Operation Raddul Fasaad had brought a 59 percent decline in terrorist activities across the country.

As per the Global Terrorism Index Report 2020, Pakistan's ranking has moved from fifth in 2019 to seventh in 2020. It also indicates that there is a 90 per cent decline in terror-related death rates since 2007 (Mirza, 2021).

Discussion and Analysis

In academic circles, violent extremism is characterized and analyzed in a variety of ways. It is viewed and tolerated differently in different societies depending on their circumstances. Furthermore, phrases like radicalism and terrorism are commonly used to describe violent extremism. Academics and researchers make an effort to distinguish radicalization and radicalism from extremism and terrorism. The reason for this is that radicalization has both positive and negative meanings. However, this does not rule out the possibility of radicals becoming extremists or terrorists, as radicalization can lead to extremism. "Extremists tend to be closed-minded supremacists, while radicals tend to be open-minded egalitarians," distinguishing extremism from radicalism (Schmid, 2004).

Terrorism has always been a threat to Pakistan ever since its creation along with political instability, lack of linear economic development, and presence of separatist elements and violent non-state actors. Later on, Pakistan truly became ensnared in this fight against terrorism. US used Pakistan to train Mujahedeen, funded them and gave them ammunition to fight the Soviets. When USSR withdrew

from Afghanistan after their disintegration the Cold War came to an end, the freedom fighters that were left unattended by the US turned into terrorists with distinct political agendas. This was the phase when Pakistan truly started to see terrorism as one of its biggest challenges ever, especially since 9/11 and Osama bin Laden's presence in Pakistan but the country smack in the middle of the War on Terror when it was suffering a lot as the victim of terrorism itself.

Khan (2015) enlightens that extremism originates from the divided ideological perspectives that are a result of ideological superiority. He further states that the clash of interests of the state and the citizens in terms of social, political, and economic policies also gives rise to extremism. Khan (2017) elucidates that violent extremism in Pakistan is difficult to comprehend due to its multifaceted dimensions and exemplifications. Concerning Pakistan, the idea of violent extremism revolves around the concept of rejecting writ of the state and introducing institutional as well as structural changes in all spheres of life (social, political and economic). Basit (2015) states that extremism in Pakistan exists in different forms ranging from sectarianism, increased inclination towards radical Islamism to hatred towards the West oriented policies, and rising insurgencies in Baluchistan, and violence in Karachi based on ethnic and political grounds. Yaseen and Muzaffar (2018) highlight that violence is not a new concept for Pakistan, it has been there for a long, due to which the socio-political fabric of the country has been tarnished immensely. They further add that extremism leading to terrorism has influenced the trans-regional and transnational spheres that require comprehension and reformation. Michael (2007) sheds light on the fact that despite being the frontline ally of the US in the war on terror, the country has fallen prey to increasing violent extremism in the forms of agitation and turmoil amongst the masses, public unrest, and terrorist attacks.

Holmer (2013) very rightly suggests that due to the rising extremism and terrorism all over the world there is a need to adopt adequate policies to counter this threat. The potential of extremism to turn into terrorism must be minimized by mitigating the radical tendencies amongst the people, and this requires broad-scale policy-making and planning. Counter violent extremism (CVE) strategies are a part of this concept. Nawaz (2016) explains that the situation in Pakistan is crippling due to the extremism and even though mass military operations have been conducted in the country. The focus must be to prevent these extremist elements from disseminating their narrative. Otherwise the massive violence in the country will not only affect its internal security fabric but will also harm its neighbours that would further give rise to increased extremism and violence in the region. Khan (2013) says that countering violent extremism and terrorism is a matter of narrative building and unfortunately al-Qaida's side of the story is more powerful in attracting the youth. The narrative of al Qaida to 'save Islam' from crusaders and Jews has captured the attention of all the local and regional extremist organizations that now find a safe haven under the ideology of Al Qaida and consider it normal to conduct violent extremist activities in the name of religion. On the other hand, Pakistan as a state has been struggling hard to counter-violent extremism but it needs to construct a counter-narrative keeping in view local circumstances depending upon the interests suiting the benefits of the people in power. Khan (2015) annotates that the counter-violent extremism strategy of Pakistan finds its root in the global CVE strategy which is based on two basic principles of de-radicalization and disintegration of violent extremist groups. Several military offensives including Zarb-e-Azb 2014 and Rad-ul-Fassad

2017 have been conducted in Pakistan. The need of the hour is to construct a counter-violent extremism strategy in Pakistan that must be an amalgamation of hard and soft power. The objectives achieved through the use of hard power have remained successful for Pakistan but the strategies that require soft power needs to be utilized are still a grave challenge for the state.

The first thing which Pakistan did in terms of counter-terrorism was the formulation of The Anti-Terrorism Act in (ATA) 1997. This act defines terrorism and the terms commonly associated with terrorist activities. Moreover, this act deals with the penalties for terrorism and essentially, how the country would deal with terrorism. This Act was essentially meant to broaden the legal sphere for law enforcement agencies to operate and lower the frequency of acts of terrorism within the country (Trial and Terror: The Overreach of Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act, 2017). Other than that, special courts were also established to prosecute the terrorism related cases swiftly. This act remained unsuccessful in achieving its objective because in 2014 it was amended by the National Assembly of Pakistan. This amendment elucidates the broad scope of the Anti-Terrorism Act which is counterproductive looking at the aims of ATA since many such crimes fall under the legal precinct of ATA even though they are not associated with acts of terrorism as such. This means that almost 86 percent of the people hanged under the legal jurisdiction of ATA were those who fell in the aforementioned category. Therefore, if the anti-terrorism courts are knee-deep in such cases, it raises a big question mark on the validity of Pakistan's institutions involved in designing the legislation and criminal justice institutions.

When it comes to Pakistan's contribution in countering-terrorism, one of the significant contributions at institutional level is PACT which stands for 'Pakistan's Action to Counter Terrorism. This project was a result of collaboration between the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and NACTA. This project is mostly geared towards trying to prevent terrorism in the first place and even if it does occur, and strengthen the prosecution system to swiftly deal with it. Moreover, this project was streamlined by UNODC dealt with counter-terrorism in Sindh in particular. But this approach has its own glitches and loopholes that can be met with at national level. Firstly, it talks about how to deal with the threats of terrorism, then it talks about conducting effective investigation escalating the rate of cases and perpetrator being brought to justice; lastly, it talks about the proceedings of the court trials itself. This project is operating on the trial and tested principle of improving the present mechanisms rather than scrapping them and creating new ones because PACT focuses on evidence collection and collaboration between all tiers of the country's judicial systems. (Pakistan's Action to Counter Terrorism, n.d.)

The most significant military strike conducted by the Pakistan Army is Swat Operation in 2007. The first operation was named Rah-e-Haq in which 12,000 to 15,000 armed forces personnel were involved in trying to regain control of Swat territory from stronghold of terrorists. However, when this operation wasn't fully successful in the complete eradication of terrorists in the region, it called for Operation Rah-e-Rast involving around 52,000 armed troops. This was a 2-year-long offensive in which peace has been achieved but it brought with it the dilemma of huge internal human displacement with economic losses.

Other than that, Operation Zarb-e-Azb is extremely noteworthy when it comes to countering-terrorism in Pakistan. It was launched after the APS attack in Peshawar in 2014 and it was a very large scale operation conducted in the North Waziristan Agency and KP region to eliminate insurgents in that area where they too have strongholds (Afridi, 2016). This operation provides significant results in lowering in the rate of terrorist attacks in the country.

Zahid (2017) sheds light on the countering violent extremism strategy of Pakistan that focuses on employing soft power approach by the state. Zahid highlights the National Internal Security Plan (NISP), National Action Plan (NAP), Protection of Pakistan Ordinance (POPA) and Anti-Terrorist Act (ATA) are some of the initiatives taken up by the states to diminish violent extremism. The crux of these plans focused on de-radicalization by initiating the de-radicalization and Emancipation Program and the Navi Sahar program in which the young teenagers trained to become suicide bombers were sent to rehabilitation centers. With the assistance of various organizations, the vocational training was provided (The Express Tribune, 2013 Oct. 12). Zahid (2017) further enunciates that that government is playing its role through legislation and policymaking. The Madrassa Regulation Ordinance 2008 to remove the pro sectarian content from the textbooks was adopted during the Musharraf regime. The madrassa board was also revived which did not achieve success. The 1st constitutional amendment gave the judicial courts the authority to carry out the trials of the terrorists and to punish them accordingly.

Rumi (2015) highlights that there is a need for broader policy reform to counter violent extremism in Pakistan because the policy reforms are reversed with the establishment of a new government in the country. Rumi ponders over the feasibility of the legislation and policy-making regarding CVE at governmental level of Pakistan. The limited control of the federal government over the National Internal Security Plan (NISP) created a lack of cooperation within the provinces and military intelligence groups. The political instability and one-sided military effort to curb the violent tendencies did not prove to be very fruitful and after the APS attack in 2014, the National Action Plan (NAP) was formulated that had similar goals and objectives as that of NISP. NAP, however, entails two additional policies of granting death sentence to the convicted and establishing special military courts. Rumi rightly highlights the weak coordination between the center and the provinces, the weak connection of intelligence in sharing military and civilian services, and the ineffective role of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (the central body for countering terrorism). The strategy of the government has been failed to a larger extent to prevent the banned Jihadist groups to regain the strength and operate, withdrawal of the influx of Afghan refugees from Pakistan's soil and madrassa reforms. Rumi highlights that the initial steps taken by the government to counter extremists have been immensely successful but the policies lack farsightedness and coherence.

Khan (2017) evaluates Pakistan needs to convey its soft image to the world which has been tarnished due to labels of Islamist extremism and violence. Nawaz (2016) says that it is impossible for Pakistan to completely root out the signs of extremism from land until adequate economic opportunities are available to the people of all sectors, races, and provinces. The economic spillover will minimize the extremist tendencies of the people of Pakistan. Zahid (2017) suggests long-term planning for national welfare. The consensus of the all stakeholders including the central and provincial governments, intelligence agencies, and military should be

taken into account. Rumi (2015) emphasizes the cooperation between provinces to root out extremism through legislation.

Khan (2020) narrated that Pakistan's National Assembly passed the National Counter-Terrorism Authority Bill in 2013. Taking another step on February 25, 2014, Pakistan announced its first-ever National Internal Security Policy (NISP) based on three elements: 1) dialogue with all stakeholders; 2) isolation of terrorists from their support systems and; 3) enhancing deterrence and capacity of security apparatus to neutralize the threats to the internal security of Pakistan. Of capital importance is the decision to launch Operation Zarb-e-Azb on June 15, 2014, in the tribal areas and recently Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad on February 22, 2017. These operations have been proved to be successful in debasing and dismantling the organizational structure of militant outfits active in different parts of the country including FATA. It helped in improving the security situation inside the country and provided opportunity for better national coordination to counter-terrorism and promoted stability in the region.

Another step to counter the violent extremism was the introduction of the National Action Plan (NAP) after the brutal attack on Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16, 2014. The 20 point NAP very clearly defines the government's counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism strategy. Various steps including raising a counter-terrorism force, the conviction of the terrorists through military courts, and reformation of the criminal justice system were suggested in NAP. To counter violent extremism of all shades, madrasah reforms and scrutinizing religious material were made necessary to prevent the spread of hate speech and material. FATA reforms, the issue of Afghan refugees, Balochistan reconciliation, and taking the Karachi Operation to its logical conclusion were the other major steps that NAP vows to accomplish. However, the military has done its job now the apex civilian leadership is trying hard to maintain its soft image to countering the violent extremism and keep NAP operationalize. This would help the government to deal with the threat of violent extremism.

Conclusion

Pakistan attempted to implement a comprehensive CVE strategy. This policy might be described by following an international paradigm of CVE, i.e., engagement and de-radicalization on the one hand, and counter-radicalization on the other. De-radicalization and counter-radicalization are two aspects of Pakistan's CVE program. Following the defeat of the TTP in Swat, the Pakistan Army implemented a rehabilitation program for the youth that has fallen prey to Al-Qaida ideology. Similar programs were implemented in several districts of Punjab, some of which were overseen by the Counter-Terrorism Department and others which were carried out in partnership with non-governmental organizations. When the peace talks with the Taliban failed to achieve their desired goals the consensual decision was taken to initiate Operation Zarb-e-Azb in the tribal areas on June 15, 2014. The operation was successful in degrading and eliminating the organizational structure of militant groups operating in FATA. Though it contributed to improve the security situation inside the country and allowed room for improved national coordination to combat terrorism and enhance regional stability, it is still considered that TTP has not been completely flushed out of the area, as seen by the multiple terrorist attacks in the

country. The issue remains, however, whether such routine military operations will be successful in eradicating the threat of extremism, which appears to be persistent even after the military operation is done. Recognizing that terrorism in all of its forms constitutes a severe threat to national peace of Pakistan, the government approved several measures that follow worldwide CVE models. The National Counter-Terrorism Authority Bill was enacted by Pakistan's National Assembly in 2013. The bill breathed new life into the National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA), which had been dormant since its inception in 2010. Pakistan unveiled its first-ever National Internal Security Policy (NISP) on February 25, 2014, as a result of this bill. The foundation of the NISP is mutual inclusion and integration of national initiatives. It is built on two pillars:

- 1) strengthening deterrence and capacity of security apparatus to neutralize threats to Pakistan's internal security.
- 2) isolating terrorists from their support networks.

After the terrible attack on Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16, 2014, the National Action Plan (NAP) was launched as a crucial step in combating violent extremism. The 20-point NAP is government's counter-radicalism and counter-terrorism strategy, including zero tolerance for militancy and actions to strangle terrorist organizations by cutting off their funding and disrupting their communication and infrastructure. To that goal, numerous measures such as forming a counter-terrorism force, convicting terrorists through military courts, and reforming the criminal justice system have been proposed. To combat religious and sectarian terrorism, madrassah reforms and scrutinization of madrassa curriculum have become important steps to prevent the dissemination of hate content. NACTA was intended to be strengthened to ensure long-term peace.

FATA reforms, Afghan refugee issues, Baluchistan reconciliation, and bringing the Karachi Operation to a logical end were among the other significant goals set forth by NAP. However, the consensus is that the NAP. Furthermore, auditing the accounts of terrorist outfits and transferring their funds through banks will help to track madaris. Furthermore, the government's efforts to stop terrorists from finding themselves through Hawala and Hundi have been partially successful. The Punjab government's resolution to have zero tolerance for hate speech and sectarianism is a start in the right direction, but it must be enforced thoroughly and comprehensively across the province. Furthermore, kidnapping for ransom and fund collection, which are routinely exploited by terror groups in Karachi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have exhibited a declining trend.

The government of Pakistan is working on right direction. There is need to implement Financial Action Task Force (FATF) suggestions in order to curb terrorism and violent extremism in Pakistan.

Recommendations

- Quick political, economic, and educational reforms, as well as daring measures, are required to avert future risks. It is common knowledge that investing in education and socio-economic development leads to growth and stability, and hence to a peaceful and harmonious society.

- It is just as necessary to educate the general public both in mosques and educational institutions, about the radicals within Muslims who are posing a threat to Muslim communities.
- Judicial system needs reforms.
- Thana Culture should be reformed.

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