Issue Brief

Radicalisation: A Dilemma of Pakistan

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August 19, 2015

Overview

There is a considerable concern among the stakeholders and civil society at large at the rise of radicalisation and associated acts of terrorism in Pakistan. Pew survey of 2013 showed that 93 percent of Pakistanis surveyed thought that radicalism and terrorism is a major problem of Pakistan. In Pakistan, radicalism can be observed in different forms ranging from terrorism, violent extremism, ethnic and sectarian violence. It should be recognised that a security-oriented approach of neutralising militancy may deal with the problem superficially and if purely the root causes of the problem are not addressed, the problem of radicalisation can re-emerge in new forms.

Factors for Radicalisation

There are many themes constructed in the literature exploring how and why radicalisation occurs? Huntington theory of 'Clash of Civilisations' refers to all Muslims as a homogeneous group, predisposed to radicalisation because of their religion (1996). The National Counter Terrorism Centre US (2009) indicated that there was no single or set combination of factors for radicalisation. However, concluding from different researches, it is suggested that poverty and marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination are the important factors to be taken into account. According to Olivier Roy, a French expert on Political Islam, such explanations are partially accepted and satisfactory, but he suggests that new forms of identities are being constructed where faith becomes the defining characteristic without reference to culture and language (Roy, 2004).

Studying the situation on individual level, John Horgan, a famous political psychologist, argues that involvement and engagement in terrorism is a complex psycho-social process rather than a state. He believes, that while drafting a terrorist's profile we ignore the dynamics that shape and support the development of the terrorists. Similarly, Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, experts on political radicalisation, also conceptualise that there are multiple and diverse pathways that lead individuals towards terrorism. Both approaches suggest that identity gets radicalised and perhaps context is all-important.

Despite the largely homogenous character of Pakistan, diverse norms and sub-cultures underpin it, and the Pakistani society is distinctly different from western society. Dr. Rasul Buksh Rais, a well-known academician, once quoted that the absence of constitutional means, human freedom, unequal

distribution of wealth, a biased social structure and a fragile law and order situation produce radical movements in the developing states.

Causes of Radicalisation in Pakistan

In Pakistan, one of the offshoots of radicalism has been the rising sectarianism in the country. Sectarianism took roots in the country in the 1980s. The problem of radicalism in Pakistan is a mix of religious and political problems. Unfortunately, the issue of ethnic and sectarian violence in Pakistan started with the so-called "Islamisation of society" and also because of multi-lingual and multi-sectarian communities living here.

The era of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was used by the religious political parties who benefitted from the situation for their own interests and used it to achieve political means. This is how the concept of political radicalism started taking roots in Pakistan. The weapon culture also became common in the Pakistani society overlapping with the concept of Jihad in Islam.

In Pakistan, the communication network is also a significant factor in spreading radical ideology. Radical preachers interpret American foreign policy as a "War against Muslims", whereas the moderate groups see it as America's struggle for global hegemony. In this process of communication, militants use FM radio, audio cassettes and the print media as a tool to romanticise jihad in the society.

The most vulnerable target of radicalisation in the country has been the youth. In villages, most people cannot afford the schooling of their children, so they send them to the madrassas either in boarding or as day scholars. The teaching method in madrassa and their curriculum is not fully state-controlled. Around 20560 madrassas are registered with Wafaq-ul-Madaris, but they are not governed or controlled by the government. Besides this, the educated youth from the middle class and upper middle class are also becoming victims of this phenomenon. Recently, the investigation of Safoora incident in Karachi in May 2015 revealed that a young talented boy, highly educated from a well-reputed institute, was found to be involved in target killing activities on religious motives.

Initiatives by Government of Pakistan

Mashal De-radicalisation Camp was established by Pakistan Army in Swat in the building which was used as headquarters by the militants. Military officers, trainers, psychologists and clerics were chosen to erase the radical thoughts of those accused of aiding Taliban.

A de-radicalisation programme launched by the ministry of interior Punjab is running on the pattern of programme in Swat. It has been started by involving 350 militants in the first phase in an effort to bring them back to normal life. The Punjab Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) with the assistance of Provincial Strategic Council and Board and experts of Swat de-radicalisation programme are executing this plan. The programme is focused on influencing ideological beliefs and behavioural modification, and is one of the various ways for mitigating the potential future threat of detained terrorists.

Very little room has been given to the de-radicalisation efforts in National Internal Security Policy (NISP) and National Action Plan (NAP). Steps like establishing the military courts and execution of terrorists shows the short-term security oriented approach to the problem both the plans are lacking in terms of social reforms which can create a long-term impact and will contribute positively in the scenario.

International Radicalisation and Rehabilitation Programmes

Saudi Arabia's de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programme 'Prevention, Rehabilitation, Aftercare Programmes' (PRAC), post 9/11 has proven to be the most successful programme practised till date. The most successful part of the programme was that Saudi government was able to reach the public at large. The salient features of the programme were:

1. Eliminating extremism through a religious campaign.
2. Educational system was strictly controlled by the government.
3. Delegitimising the influence of extremists through extensive media campaigns.
4. Launch of "The Sakinah Campaign" of de-radicalisation on the Internet in which Islamic scholars used to interact with people online who wanted to expand their knowledge about Islam.
5. In-prison reforms were introduced. Psychological debates were generated for the rehabilitation of terrorists.

After the Bali Bombing in 2002, Indonesian citizens discovered that their country was also vulnerable to the phenomenon of global terrorism. A counter-terrorism strategy was initiated by Indonesian Counter Terrorism Agency. Indonesia's approach to de-radicalization between 2002 to 2005 focused on changing ideologies of imprisoned terrorists through the use of repentant jihadis. The other main feature of the programme includes building trust through personal approaches, counselling and providing vocational training.

Conclusion

In the domain of de-radicalisation, much more needs to be done.

1. FATA reforms as mentioned in National Action Plan must be introduced so that the politically and economically deprived area of FATA can be integrated with Pakistan.

2. The government should focus on social reforms rather than security-oriented operations.

3. Madrassa and educational reforms should be introduced on emergency basis. There should be standard operating procedures (SOP) for running madrassas like NGOs in the country.

4. We need to secure our porous borders. Only then we will be able to stop foreign intervention in Pakistan and stem radicalisation.

5. Merely filling prisons under National Action Plan will not work. We need to bring prison reforms based on the Indonesian model which focused on changing ideologies of imprisoned terrorists.

6. The recruitment process of youth in radical organisations through social media is one of the major issues in both developed and developing states. New policy clauses need to be added to the existing cyber crimes policy to deal with the increasing number of cyber crimes.

Most importantly, political will is the core element in drafting such policies. Any effective strategy for demilitarisation, demobilisation and rehabilitation needs to be framed by keeping in context the importance of geographic, socio-economic and cultural factors that underpin radicalisation.