

Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan: An Appraisal of Pakistan's CVE Initiatives

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Abstract

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) has become a daunting task around the globe because of the changing nature of conflicts. To address the issue, this paper investigates the phenomenon of violent extremism and the drivers contributing to it with special reference to Pakistan in the last two decades. It also examines the measures adopted by Pakistan in its CVE programme, its implementation and overall efficiency. At present, Pakistan is faced with multiple challenges. The phenomenon of violent extremism is one of the major challenges confronting Pakistan's security. The recurrent drivers of violent extremism, its resurgence by terrorist organisations and their linkages to hostile foreign agencies are not only disrupting Pakistan's social fabric, but are also adversely affecting its economy and development.

Keywords: Countering Violent Extremism, De-radicalisation, Terrorism, Islam, Sectarian Conflicts, Madaris reforms.

Introduction

Since independence, Pakistan has seen phases of diverse but inter-related conflicts of ethnic, sectarian and religious nature, resulting in violence. Pakistan bears the brunt of ethnic and religious radicalisation that is aided by both internal and external actors who are providing a narrative and funding for both religious and non-religious militancy. However, the intensity of violent extremism has increased manifold since Pakistan's alliance with the US in the latter's strategy of countering Communism in South Asia and particularly in Afghanistan. The consequences of the emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan, 9/11 attacks

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against the US and the resultant US War on Terror (WoT) on Pakistan are far higher than anticipated.

Pakistan's alliance with the US in the WoT has deeply shaken the social fabric of its society. The rise of terrorism after 9/11 has badly affected the security situation in Pakistan. Pakistan has suffered a great deal in terms of lives, economic opportunities and damages to infrastructure. The loss of lives accounts to more than 81,000.¹ According to Economic Survey of Pakistan, during the last fourteen years, Pakistan had incurred US\$106.98 billion in direct and indirect costs owing to terrorism. However, the yearly losses from terrorism declined in 2014-15 by a third to US\$4.5 billion, in part due to military operations in tribal areas and the Karachi operation.² Moreover, Pakistan has also borne damages to schools, hospitals and other infrastructural facilities due to its partnership with the US in the WoT.

The growing extremism and terrorism has affected Pakistan adversely. Despite heavy losses, Pakistan has remained committed to eliminating terrorism. Considering the factors contributing to violent extremism, countering it is a huge task that not only depends on the intent of government of Pakistan but also on international support.

Approach to the Study

The growing religious intolerance and extremism leading to violence is a widely debated subject; however, it lacks a detailed scholarship on who carries out these acts of extremism, how and why, and how the government in the presence of laws has responded to and addressed the problem. For this purpose, this study is divided into three parts. The first

¹ "Body Count: Casualty Figures after 10 Years of the War on Terror, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan," *Physians for Social Responsibility*, March 2015, <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/body-count.pdf>

² "Economic Survey 2014-15: Losses due to war on terror down by a third to \$4.5 b," *Express Tribune*, June 4, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/898015/economic-survey-2014-15-losses-due-to-war-on-terror-down-by-a-third-to-4-5b/>

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part highlights the weaknesses in explanations of violent extremism due to exclusive reliance on the literature produced by the Western scholars. The second part discusses an approach to understand the forces behind violent extremism and the idea of an international model of CVE to examine whether it can be adopted and practiced in other countries, particularly in Pakistan. The third part of the essay examines the areas posing serious security challenges for Pakistan. It explores the driving forces behind violent extremism in Pakistan and the government's efforts to counter it. The purpose statement around which this paper revolves is to evaluate whether Pakistan's CVE policy can be categorised as the one fulfilling the criteria of international, or to be more specific, the Western model of CVE strategy or not.

Defining the Term Violent Extremism

Violent Extremism as a complex phenomenon is defined and analysed differently in academic circles. It is perceived and accepted differently in various societies according to their own setups. Moreover, terms such as radicalism and terrorism are used interchangeably with violent extremism. Academics and scholars make a conscious effort to treat radicalisation and radicalism as distinct from extremism and terrorism. The reason is that both positive and negative connotations are associated with radicalisation. Nonetheless, it does not mean that radicals cannot be extremists or terrorists as radicalisation may lead to extremism.³

Separating extremism and radicalism, Schmid says, "extremists tend to be closed-minded supremists and radicals tend to be open-minded egalitarians."⁴ Bockstette defines terrorism as a combination of psychological and tactical elements, which occurs when conflict erupts between two asymmetrical groups. The weaker one then responds in

³ Muhammad Amir Rana, "Litterateurs' Response to Extremism in Pakistan," *PIPS*, June 6, 2010, san-pips.com/download.php?f=40.pdf

⁴ Alex P. Schmidt, "Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?" *ICCT Research Paper*, May 2014, <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Violent-Non-Violent-Extremism-May-2014.pdf>

violence. In terrorism, media is used as a medium to influence the audience.⁵

According to Holmer, violent extremism is driven by many push factors, social and psychological elements in different societies, which make the very term relative and unpredictable for any radicalisation model. Mostly, the two terms – criminal violence and extremist violence – are not distinguished due to lack of understanding of grey areas and a proper mechanism to deal with non-state actors and misconstrued contextualisation.⁶

Extremism originates from polarised ideological attitudes and practices resulting in a state of mind of superiority over others. Also, it stems from struggle between state's ideology and popular belief system, socio-politico-economic disparities, divergence of great powers' interests and their policies of violence.⁷ The US Department of Homeland Security defines violent extremists as, "individuals who support or commit ideologically motivated violence to further political goals."⁸

Rana, while explaining radicalism and extremism, argues that most Pakistanis are unfamiliar with the academic or even literal explanations of the two concepts, particularly when the Western scholars define them. These definitions are generally not relevant to Pakistani context. Hence it is useful to understand the public perceptions of extremism and

⁵ Carsten Bockstette, "Jihadist Terrorist Use of Strategic Communication Management Techniques," *European Centre for Security Studies, Occasional Paper Series, no 20* (December 2008) <https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/14536/uploads>

⁶ Georgia Holmer, "Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective," *USIP Special Report 336* (September 2013) <http://www.usip.org/publications/countering-violent-extremism-peacebuilding-perspective>

⁷ Safdar Sial and Tanveer Anjum, "Jihad, Extremism and Radicalization: A Public Perspective," *PIPS* (April 2010) www.san-pips.com/download.php?f=119.pdf

⁸ "Countering Violent Extremism," <http://www.dhs.gov/topic/countering-violent-extremism>

radicalisation by employing reductionism: taking violence, militancy and also terrorism as reducible phenomenon for this purpose.⁹

Driving Forces Behind Violent Extremism

There is no general theory of why and how violent extremism occurs. More diverse opinions are expressed regarding the causes for the spread of violent extremism. The disagreement over the factors contributing to violent extremism makes it more important to identify the driving forces behind it, which helps in tackling it.

Given that in most cases religion has been manipulated to justify acts of violence by religious and political elites, the new actors in this game are the non-state actors. Though the history and growth of violent extremism is very old, today we see radical narratives in the form of Salafi jihadi movements, ISIS, Jabhat al Nusra, al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, Boko-Haram and the Taliban with the aim to target youth for recruitment in Muslim societies.

Religion makes it easier for extremists to demonise the enemy by portraying them as evil. Additionally, in many cases, common perceptions of and moral justifications for regulating a society bring violent extremists together, for example Salafi jihadists,¹⁰ with national and global agenda of ridding the world of evil. Esposito has also validated this point that terrorist groups' primary grievances and goals are political for which they use religion.¹¹ Frustrations with the local and global political environment, and most of the times ideologically

⁹ Rana, "Litterateurs' Response to Extremism in Pakistan."

¹⁰ Guilain Denoeux & Lynn Carter, "Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism," *USAID* (February 2009)
http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadt978.pdf

¹¹ "Does Islamophobia Feeds Radicalization," Interview with John L. Esposito, November 30, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-30/does-islamophobia-feed-radicalisation/6985440>

motivated thoughts are also behind violent actions.¹² On the contrary, according to a report compiled by TACSTRAT:

It is simply false to declare that jihadists represent the “tiny few extremists” who sully the reputation of an otherwise peace-loving and tolerant Muslim faith. In reality, the truth is far more troubling – that jihadists represent the natural and inevitable outgrowth of a faith that is given over to hate on a massive scale, with hundreds of millions of believers holding views that Americans would rightly find revolting. Not all Muslims are hateful, of course, but so many are that it is not remotely surprising that the world is wracked by wave after wave of jihadist violence.¹³

Most studies by Western scholars suggest that economic disparity and illiteracy are the driving forces behind violent extremism in the Muslim world, which may be true in some cases. However, many acts of violence after 9/11 in various counties contradict the assumption of socio-economic and educational setting as the factors contributing to violent extremism. Piketty, however, argues that the high concentration of wealth in few hands (countries with less population and more wealth), and the wars waged by the West in the Middle East have led to frustration and justification for jihad. Economic deprivation and wars have benefited only the “few” in the region; therefore, economic inequality is the major driver of terrorism.¹⁴ The following figure illustrates this argument.

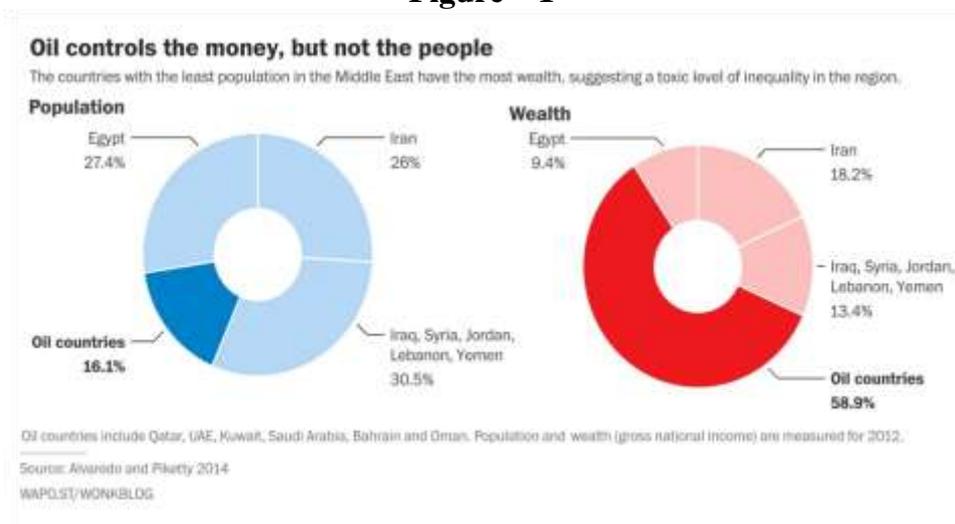
¹² Minhas M. Khan, “Understanding and Identifying Violent Extremism,” *ISSI Issue Brief* (October 29, 2015) http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Final-Issue-brief_minhas_dated-29-10-2015.pdf

¹³ David French, “Statistics on “Few Extremists” Point of View,” December 8, 2015, <http://tacstrat.com/content/index.php/2015/12/08/statistics-on-few-extremists-point-of-view/>

¹⁴ Jim Tankersley, “This might be the most controversial theory for what’s behind the rise of ISIS,” *Washington Post*, November 30, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/11/30/why-inequality-is-to-blame-for-the-rise-of-the-islamic-state/?tid=sm_tw

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Figure – 1



Source: WAPO.ST/WONKBLOG

It is important to note that extremists do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they feed off ideas that flourished in Muslim communities over decades. That is to say that a combination of religious literalism and conspiracist politics is at the core of their anti-West ideology.¹⁵ Besides the policies of the West, the persistent Islamophobia alienates youth from their societies. It is argued that the response to extremism has to be “not only military but one has also to evaluate the policies over the last fifteen years that continue to generate some of these extremist groups and to attract and mobilize their followers.”¹⁶

Many would disagree with the analysis laying emphasis on the motivating forces mentioned above, but it is a fact that all these factors

¹⁵ Ed. Husain, “A Global venture to counter violent extremism,” *Council on Foreign Relations Policy Innovation Memorandum No. 37* (September 9, 2013) <http://www.cfr.org/radicalization-and-extremism/global-venture-counter-violent-extremism/p30494>

¹⁶ “Does Islamophobia Feeds Radicalization,” Interview with John L. Esposito.

promote and use violence. These factors can be reduced to the idea that perceptions and beliefs are the main forces behind violent extremism. This has been substantiated by the technological advancement where extremists use information technology to advance their agenda, thereby showing that communication technologies increase their offensive potential.¹⁷

Another aspect of violence, which is rarely included in the ambit of violent extremism, is the one found in the West against the non-whites and particularly Muslims after 9/11. Denoeux and Carter argue that “there are four sets of interrelated drivers as the root cause of violent extremism: 1) personal relationships, social bonds and group dynamics; 2) impact of strongly held ideas and deeply felt convictions; 3) historical legacy of foreign domination, oppression, subjugation and interference, which make it easier for “victimisation narratives”; 4) the perception that international system is fundamentally unjust and it functions as a key mechanism through which Muslims are oppressed and their culture devalued.”¹⁸

The attacks in Paris and San Bernardino precipitated distrust of Muslims, which led to a sharp increase in hate crimes and prejudices, making Muslim immigrants the victim of Islamophobic harassment in Europe and the US. Against this backdrop, President Obama in his speech, at the United Nations General Assembly, stressed on the need to eradicate violence extremism as a common mission of all nations. He asked for breaking the cycles of conflicts and grievances, and noted that Islamophobia feeds into extremist narratives.¹⁹

The US National Strategy (2011) for Empowering Local Partners defines violent extremists as “individuals who support or commit

¹⁷ Khan, “Understanding and Identifying Violent Extremism.”

¹⁸ Denoeux & Carter, “Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism.”

¹⁹ “Remarks by the President at the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism | February 19, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/19/remarks-president-summit-countering-violent-extremism-february-19-2015>

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ideologically motivated violence to further political goals.” It defines the root causes of violent extremism as “radicalization that leads to violent extremism includes the diffusion of ideologies and narrative that feed on grievances, assign blame, and legitimize the use of violence against those deemed responsible.”²⁰

The Idea Behind Countering Violent Extremism

CVE has become a popular term among policy makers and practitioners. It has emerged as field of policy and practice due to the changing nature of terrorism, and the advent of decentralised actors and self-radicalised small groups. It focuses on countering the pull of terrorist recruitment and influence by building resilience among populations vulnerable to radicalisation. Moreover, it emerged from international and national security policy-making community as part of a broader effort to counter terrorism.²¹

CVE is regarded as a soft approach to counter terrorism. Many Western countries with their own CVE programmes, ranging from engagement to winning the hearts and minds of the people,²² would like to see their model adopted by Muslim states. The counter-terrorism has increasingly defined its work as countering violent extremism. It was in 2010 when Daniel Benjamin described CVE as “efforts to stop those most at risk of radicalization from becoming terrorists” by providing the means to undercut the ideological and rhetorical narratives which drive violent extremism.²³

²⁰ “EMPOWERING LOCAL PARTNERS TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE UNITED STATES,” *The White House* (August, 2011) www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf

²¹ Georgia Holmer, “Countering Violent Extremism.”

²² Muhammad Amir Rana, “Counter – Violent Extremism Models,” *Dawn*, September 20, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1208104>

²³ “Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan,” *USIP* (May 17, 2012) <http://www.usip.org/publications/countering-violent-extremism-in-Pakistan>

More importantly, violent extremism prevalent in the Muslim world and the individuals and groups involved in or endorsing acts of extremism have been studied intensively. However, besides ignoring some of the most common misconceptions in the discourse, that link violent extremism with Islam, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive approach to explore the drivers of violent extremism in the Muslim world,²⁴ as well as the one widespread in the West.

Challenges to Pakistan in Countering Violent Extremism

Examining various factors as mentioned above, it is clear that each one has played a role in violent extremism found in Pakistan. Pakistan is confronted with multidimensional threats - international, regional and domestic environment - to its physical and human security. Some of these arise out of intolerance, extremism, militancy and terrorism, both in the hinterland and urban areas²⁵ and others due to its history of relationship with regional and extra-regional powers. Many find that ethnicity, sectarianism and economic instability are fundamental variables of internal security threats to Pakistan,²⁶ coinciding with poor governance, political instability and grievances among provinces, economic disparity and illiteracy, all of which are affecting the country adversely.

It is imperative to understand that CT and CVE initiatives in Pakistan can be understood only by exploring the historical, economic, social, political and ideological roots of the problems. With a population of 184 million, it is an amalgamation of religious, regional and national identities. Majority among the Pakistani society can be placed somewhere in the middle of the two extremes, i.e., whether they are more religious in thought and practice or more secular, they cannot be termed as fundamentalists. There is, thus, a division where many people support

²⁴ Khan, "Understanding and Identifying Violent Extremism."

²⁵ Ehsan Mehmood Khan, "Internal Security Strategy for Pakistan," *San Analysis*, January 2011 san-pips.com/download.php?f=75.pdf

²⁶ Naveed Safdar, "Internal security threats to Pakistan," https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235137940_Internal_Security_Threats_to_Pakistan

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a greater role of religion in politics and others belonging to secular school of thought support segregation of both. Yet, majority of the former do not poll in support of religious political parties and latter are labeled as liberals supporting Western policies.

Sandwiched between Afghanistan and India, Pakistan is a geo-strategically important country in South Asia. With its strategic importance for the US and the rest of the world, Pakistan can play a constructive role with regard to CVE. However, the global image of Pakistan is largely defined by the misperceptions about its role in international terrorism.²⁷ Pakistan has been rejecting these allegations, insisting that international community should take notice of foreign interferences in its territory resulting in disorder. These concerns were raised recently when Pakistan shared three dossiers with the UN, carrying evidences about Indian interference in Balochistan, FATA and Karachi to fuel ethnic and religious violence.

A *Forbes* contributor in May 20, 2013, observed, "Pakistan is a tragic land, an Islamic state increasingly turned fundamentalist and violent." He quoted Vali Nasr as saying, "Pakistan is nuclear armed, in near conflict with India, has a dangerous civil war with its own extremists, is now subject to one of the most brutal terrorism campaigns against its population, and is coming apart along sectarian lines."²⁸ These are indeed herculean challenges for which Pakistan is criticised, by some quarters, for its past policy of alliance with the West. However, perceptions are changing. In a recent article in *Forbes*, Daniel F. Runde, Director of Project on Prosperity and Development at CSIS, expressed his views as:

Pakistan has the potential to be a global turnaround story. The US policymakers and business leaders need to look at Pakistan beyond the

²⁷ Imtiaz Gul, ed., *From Jihad to Al Qaeda to Islamic State*, (Islamabad: CRSS, 2015), 7-8.

²⁸ Doug Bandow, "The Islamic Republic of Pakistan: The World's Most Dangerous Nation Holds an Election," *Forbes*, May 20, 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/dougbandow/2013/05/20/the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan-the-worlds-most-dangerous-nation-holds-an-election/>

security lens. The United States will need to view Pakistan not as a problem to be solved but as a potential partner. The Pakistan of today is similar to that of Colombia in the late 1990s. Back then, words like “drugs, gangs, and failed state” were freely associated with the Andean country. Today, Colombia has a free trade agreement with the US, a stable 3.5 percent annual GDP growth, and security is vastly improved. Similarly, Western headlines on Pakistan today gloss over the progress on the security front, the increased political stability, and incremental progress on the economic front. In spite of this potential for Pakistan, it continues to suffer from a terrible country brand that has not caught up with realities on the ground. Pakistan’s improving security dynamic is the first change to note. What has not sunk into international perceptions about the country is the tangible consensus among government, military, and Pakistani citizens against violent terrorists including the Pakistani Taliban and the alphabet soup of other terrorist groups in and around the country.²⁹

Regional and International Dimensions

The regional and international dimensions of the threats faced by Pakistan are interlinked in present day’s globalized world. To evaluate the challenges, it is important to compare the CVE strategy of Pakistan with international model of CVE. Pakistan is in the grip of fundamentalist ideologies, which must be encountered with a counter narrative. Internal as well as external anti-Pakistan forces have manipulated these vulnerabilities.

The resurgence of ethnic and religious violence by terrorist organisations and their linkages to hostile foreign agencies are not only disrupting Pakistan’s social fabric, but are also adversely affecting its economy and development. One reason for the worsening ethnic strife, though it existed in the early days of independence, was the failure of the political leadership in addressing the grievances of different ethnicities. It

²⁹ Daniel Runde, “Pakistan: The Next Colombia Success Story?,” *Forbes*, August 3, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/danielrunde/2015/08/03/pakistan-the-next-colombia-success-story/#ac2195a3b609>

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is also observed that the conflict presented fertile grounds for foreign powers to manipulate the situation in their interest, for example in case of separation of East Pakistan and in ethnic conflicts in Sindh and Baluchistan. Moreover, Pakistan is also facing the effects of crises in Syria, Yemen and other sectarian conflict-prone sub-regions in Middle East where Iran and Arab states back their sectarian proxies. The ongoing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia have put Pakistan in a situation where it has to decide wisely so that it can remain impartial.

Religious, ethnic and linguistic identities universally connect people in a globalized world at present. For example, the case of Iran-Pakistan-Saudi Arabia, based on Shia-Sunni identity, has a global connection to a sectarian violence in Pakistan and Middle East. The schism between the two sects in Pakistan widened during General Zia era, which left a huge impact on sectarian politics in Pakistan.

Domestic Environment

Various domestic factors also contribute to radicalism and extremism in Pakistan. For example, sectarianism grew in parallel with the Islamisation process in the Zia era. This was partly driven by Zia's desire to develop solidarity with Saudi Arabia and Muslim world.³⁰ This also resulted in a drift towards Sunni-Shia divide and divisions within Sunnis. Non-Muslim minorities' rights suffered as well. Many religious political parties openly criticised minority sects' clerics. Imams in some rural and urban areas were encouraged to use hate speech in mosques against rival sects and non-Muslims.

Some madaris have been fueling religious extremism and fostering militancy since the days of Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union. It was during that era that madaris were encouraged to preach and promote jihad with the support and financial backing of the US, Saudi Arabia and Gulf states. The students of these madaris who fought inside Afghanistan later on joined militant groups carrying out acts of violence.

³⁰ Sial & Anjum, "Jihad, Extremism and Radicalization."

According to a report compiled by Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, Islamabad (PIPS), more than 60 per cent of madaris have political affiliation. Though the religious political parties have not fared well in elections with the exception of 2002 elections, it is alleged that certain political elites have strongly relied on them. Various secular quarters have routinely criticised the role of religious leaders as inciting violence. Many activists have been killed in their attempts to repeal Hudood Laws, and militant groups claimed responsibility of their involvement in these killings and tried to justify these killings in the name of Islam.

Another factor contributing to radicalism and violence, which is constantly debated, is the situation in Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). As mentioned, due to hostile neighbourhood, Pakistan has remained a victim of international power politics in this region. After the US invasion of Afghanistan, most of the Arabs, Afghan and Central Asian Taliban along with al-Qaeda leadership fled to the tribal areas of Pakistan, bringing FATA to the centre stage of international politics. Pakistan launched various military operations against the militants who were spreading their wings and aligning themselves with other criminals in the rest of the country. Moreover, the rise of ISIS may prove to be an inspiration for militant organisations in Pakistan, which share a common ideology with the former.

The trends of radicalisation and religious extremism in Pakistan gained strength most recently in FATA and Swat valley.³¹ The situation in Swat is now under control due to the military action in 2009. However, situation in FATA still remains alarming. Many quarters believe that the people of FATA are manipulated into playing roles in shaping developments in the region. Ideological indoctrination and political marginalisation are also the factors due to which its youth feel frustrated. Moreover, as a result of military operations in FATA many people have been displaced.

³¹ Ibid., 9-10

Pakistan's Initiatives to Counter Violent Extremism

Having discussed the challenges posed by violent extremism and their impact on the polity in Pakistan, it is imperative to have a look at the initiatives taken by the Government of Pakistan and their outcome. Many analysts argue that foreign models of CVE cannot be applied in Pakistan. The Western model of CVE is diverse. In France, for example, the emphasis is on the importance of law enforcement agencies rather than role of local imams to create a connection between them and the local community. However, the US, the Netherlands, Britain, Norway, Germany, Sweden and Colombia adopted rehabilitation programmes to bring radicalised individuals back to the society by disengaging them from extremist groups. Similarly, Saudi Arabia has introduced its "PRAT" strategy, which is focusing on prevention, rehabilitation and aftercare. Indonesia also has initiated a program to neutralise the ideological fundamentals of the militants. The Yemeni CVE model includes dialogue between the clerics and the militants and reintegration of former militants into the society.³²

Basit³³ presents six compelling factors for drafting an all-embracing CVE programme in Pakistan. 1) All the causes of terrorism will have to be eliminated by denying physical access to terrorists, countering their ideology and influence, and capacitating vulnerable segments of the society. 2) CVE reduces terrorist outfits by terminating their recruiting system and depriving them of the support base in the society. 3) Rehabilitation programmes in prisons can be more effective in correcting the terrorists' demented ideologies, than keeping them in prisons and making them wait for trials. 4) Legions of terror can be broken into by brokering a negotiated deal with the terrorists and exploiting the fissures in their network. 5) A better counseling and guidance program can help save the misguided youth that seem to have landed in the fertile ground

³² "Countering Extremism: Strategies and Sharing Best Practices", *PIPS Seminar Report* (2009), san-pips.com/download.php?f=11.pdf

³³ Abdul Basit, "Countering Violent Extremism: Evaluating Pakistan's Counter-Radicalization and De-radicalization Initiatives," *IPRI Journal*, vol. XV, no. 2 (Summer 2015), 49-52.

of terrorism. 6), Those terrorists who surrender themselves to the state should be allowed to live a normal life.

Pakistan made an effort to apply a comprehensive CVE strategy. This strategy can be said to have adopted an international model of CVE, i.e., of engagement and de-radicalisation on one hand, and counter-radicalisation in the form of use of force, on the other. Pakistan's CVE policy is two pronged: de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation. After defeating TTP in Swat, a rehabilitation programme for indoctrinated youth was introduced under the supervision of Pakistan Army. Similar programmes were introduced in parts of Punjab, some supervised by Counter Terrorism Department, others were conducted in collaboration with some non-governmental organizations.³⁴

Of capital importance was the decision to launch Operation Zarb-e-Azb on June 15, 2014, in the tribal areas when the peace talks with the Taliban ended without achieving their objectives. The operation proved successful in debasing and dismantling the organisational structure of militant outfits active in the FATA. Though it helped in improving the security situation inside the country and provided space for better regional coordination to counter terrorism and promote stability in the region,³⁵ it is still believed that the various attacks by TTP show that they have not been flushed out of the area completely.

The question, however, remains whether such routine military operations will prove successful in eliminating the menace of extremism, which seems widespread even after the launch of the operation. Realising that terrorism in all its manifestations poses a serious threat to national harmony in Pakistan, the Government of Pakistan passed various bills, which again reflect international models of CVE. Pakistan's National Assembly passed the National Counter-Terrorism Authority Bill in 2013. The bill revitalised the dysfunctional National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA), established in 2010. As a result of this bill, Pakistan

³⁴ Ibid., 44-68.

³⁵ "Pakistan's Security Landscape in 2014," <http://san-pips.com/index.php>

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announced its first ever National Internal Security Policy (NISP) on February 25, 2014.

NISP is established on mutual inclusiveness and integration of national efforts. It is based on three elements: 1) dialogue with all stakeholders; 2) isolation of terrorists from their support systems; 3) enhancing deterrence and capacity of security apparatus to neutralise the threats to internal security of Pakistan.³⁶

A major step to counter violent extremism was the initiation of the National Action Plan (NAP) after the brutal attack on Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16, 2014. The 20-point NAP³⁷ very clearly defines the government's counter-radicalism and counter-terrorism strategy by announcing zero tolerance for militancy and the steps to strangle terrorist organisations by choking their financing and dismantling their communication networks physically and on media as well.

To this end, various steps including raising a counter-terrorism force, conviction of the terrorists through military courts and reformation of criminal system were suggested. To counter religious and sectarian terrorism, madrassah reforms and scrutinising of religious material were made necessary to prevent the spread of hate material. NACTA was proposed to be strengthened to make peace long lasting. FATA reforms, issue of Afghan refugees, Baluchistan reconciliation and taking the Karachi Operation to its logical conclusion were the other major steps that NAP vowed to accomplish. However, the general perception is that the military component of NAP was implemented effectively and there is a strong expectation that civilian aspect of the NAP be flashed out and operationalised. This would help the government to deal with the threat of violent extremism.

³⁶ "Text of National Security Policy 2014-2018," *Nation*, February 27, 2014, <http://nation.com.pk/islamabad/27-Feb-2014/text-of-national-security-policy-2014-18>

³⁷ "National Action Plan," http://nacta.gov.pk/Download_s/Presentations/National_Action_Plan_NACTA_Pakistan.pdf

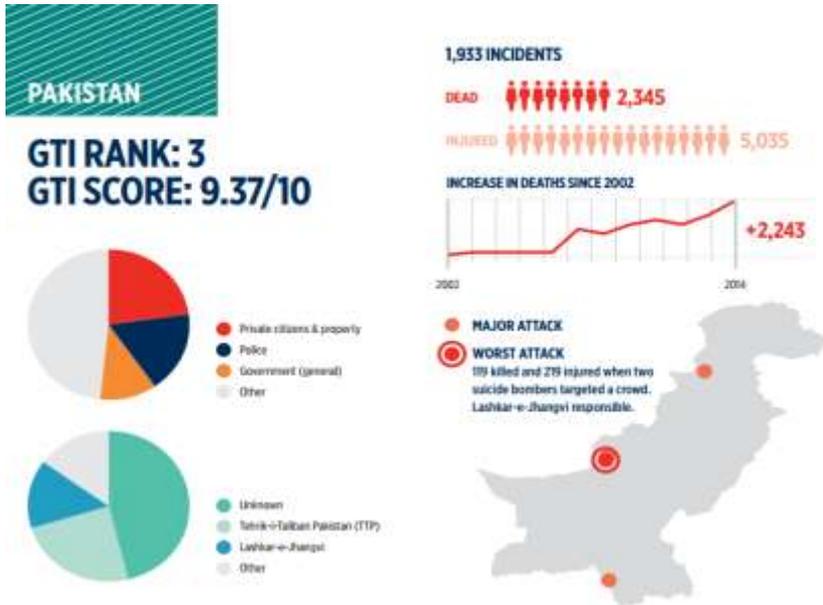
Moreover, audit of their accounts and transfer of their fund through banks will go a long way in monitoring of madaris. In addition, the efforts of the government to block terrorists' funding through Hawala and Hundi have proved successful to some extent. The government's decision of zero tolerance with regard to hate speech and fanning of sectarianism in Punjab is a step in the right direction but it needs to be implemented fully and comprehensively in all provinces. Moreover, kidnapping for ransom and collection of funds, most commonly used by terror organisations particularly in Karachi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have shown downward trends.

A global study by the London-based Institute for Economics and Peace has ranked Pakistan third on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) list. The report, however, highlights that from 29 in 2012, the number of acts of violence perpetrated by different groups has dropped to 23 in 2013. Those responsible for violent extremism are not only from Islamist groups, but also from separatist movements.³⁸

³⁸ "Pakistan Ranks Third on the Global Terrorism Index," *Dawn*, November 18, 2014, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1145300> (accessed December 15, 2015).

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Figure – 2



Source: visionofhumanity.org

The statistics of year 2014 present a positive trend in terms of security situation, as there was decrease in incidents of violence. The number of terrorist attacks came down by 30 per cent as compared to 2013.³⁹

Often Pakistan is accused of patronising non-state actors as “strategic assets.” Realising that these non-state actors are threatening the sovereignty of the state, Pakistan has also started to address the regional and international concerns regarding radicalisation and terrorism. Important landmarks in this direction were the hosting of “Heart of Asia Conference” in December 2015 and the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) talks in January 2016, aimed at kick-starting peace talks

³⁹ “Pakistan Time Line,” 2015, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/timeline/index.html>

between Afghanistan and Taliban, were steps toward dialogue with mutual consent of all parties concerned.

Moreover, Pakistan's cooperation with India in the wake of the recent attacks on Pathankot air base in India is a positive step in improving relations between the two states. The Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif clearly stated that Pakistan will not allow its soil to be used against any other country for terrorism. To show its commitment, Pakistan arrested many workers of Jaish-e-Muhammad, a step appreciated by India.

These initiatives were lauded at global level as well, but the assertion and accusations remained the same. A January 2015, Brookings Institution paper suggested that the US should convene counter violence practitioners and experts, diaspora leaders and academics to guide the development of the counter violent extremism agenda in Pakistan. The successful efforts and practices there can ultimately serve as a blue print for other regions facing similar challenges.⁴⁰

In this regard, Prime Minister's address to the UN General Assembly in September 2014 is very important. He said that the threat of terrorism should be defeated by addressing underlying causes, opposing extremist ideologies and countering the narrative of terrorists through the just resolution of "the several instances of oppression and injustices against Muslim in various part of the world."⁴¹

Recommendations

The growing radicalism demands strengthening of internal security based on mutual consensus of all stakeholders. It is because the major

⁴⁰ Hedieh Mirahmadi, et.al, "Empowering Pakistan's Civil Society to Counter Global Violent Extremism," *Brookings Institution* (January 2015), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/01/countering-extremism-pakistan-civil-society>

⁴¹ "Statement by PM during the General Debate of the Seventieth Session of the UN General Assembly," September 30, 2014, http://www.pmo.gov.pk/pm_speech_details.php?speech_id=62

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hurdle for Pakistan in tackling this menace is weak governance. Good governance will help in building institutions, besides bringing systematic cohesion among all relevant institutions and society as a whole. It will also help in bringing political and economic stability, a prerequisite to meet external challenges.

We have to realise and accept that the ethno-sectarian problems will remain a huge impediment in economic prosperity. At domestic level the government has to adopt an “Engage and get Engaged” approach by bringing together all stakeholders at the table as ethnic, sectarian and religious divide are threats to internal harmony.

On matters of international relations, Iran–Saudi Arabia tension should not bring Pakistan to a position where it has to stand with one at the cost of losing the other. The government should call for parliamentary debate to reach a consensus on maintaining neutrality, keeping in mind the domestic and international pressures. The government has to decide wisely because the nation cannot afford to get embroiled into Iran–Saudi Arabia cold war when it is still embroiled in the WoT.

All stakeholders, the governments, political and religious leaders and civil society need to play their role by influencing the masses to reject violence, specifically in the form of sectarian and ethnic conflicts. It is also important to engage faith communities in dialogue to have one voice against violence and to counter this menace.

The responsibility to falsify the terrorist narratives (that misrepresent Islam) and to develop a counter–narrative lies with political and religious leadership and civil society. If such ideas are not challenged or denounced, extremism will continue to flourish even if thousands of extremists are eliminated.

Finally, implementation of the NAP in letter and spirit is the best means to effectively choke terrorism financing, prevent abuse of social media and sustain meaningful madaris reform. Economic and political reforms in FATA need to be introduced, which will be beneficial not only for the area, but also for the entire country.

Conclusion

Having discussed various factors contributing to violent extremism explained by Western scholars, this study attempted to describe that the Western model of CVE gets reflected in Pakistan's CVE strategy. However, poverty and illiteracy are not the only drivers contributing to violent extremism. In case of Pakistan, it can be best explained by grouping these causes into three categories: situational, strategic and ideological.⁴²

The three causes then validate that not only domestic but also regional and international environment has had a role in engendering violent extremism in Pakistan. Radicalism in all its forms, and used by any ethnic group or the followers of any religion to justify acts of violence, will not remain confined to one place but will be felt around the globe. So it is in the interest of international community to not corner Pakistan for the past policy of the West, and should rather help it in curbing the menace. Having said that, it is also important to recognise that there are several factors that explain where and how Pakistan failed to address the issue.

All the factors discussed in the study are interdependent, which need to be addressed as it is in the interest of Pakistan to grow economically and politically. To conclude, the immediate requirement is to introduce political, economic and educational reforms and take bold initiatives to prevent future threats. It is an accepted fact that investing in education and socioeconomic development can lead to development and stability and hence a peaceful and harmonious society. Educating the masses is as important as educating "Muslim thought leaders," both in mosques and educational institutions, about the radicals among the Muslims who are threatening Muslim communities.⁴³

⁴² Mathew Francis, "What Causes Radicalization: Main lines of Consensus in Recent Research," January 24, 2012,

<http://www.radicalisationresearch.org/guides/francis-2012-causes-2/>

⁴³ Husain, "A Global Venture to Counter Violent Extremism."