

Emerging Counter-Extremism Strategy

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Abstract:

There is a considerable concern among stakeholders and civil society at large at the rise of violent radicalization and associated acts of terrorism. The Pew Survey of 2013 showed that 93 per cent of Pakistanis surveyed, thought terrorism was a very big problem only to be topped by fear of crime at 95 per cent. It should be recognized that the security oriented approaches, like military operations deal with the problem superficially and if the root causes are not addressed then the problem of violent radicalization re-emerges, perhaps as a different phenomenon. There is a concern that if cultural variables that underpin violent radicalization are not accounted for, the danger for slippage back into violence remains higher all the time. This paper attempts to study the local context that appears important in explaining the paradox why certain areas promote violent radicalization and other areas demonstrate greater social resilience and resistance to violence.

Keywords: Radicalization, Terrorism, Social Resilience, Violent Extremism, *Madaris*, Justice.

Introduction

Violence is not epiphenomenal in Pakistan and terrorism since 2001 has resulted in 50,000 deaths and inflicted US\$106.78 billion damage to the economy.¹ With the Peshawar school attack the authorities were forced to react strongly to this danger. The recognition and acknowledgement of

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¹ National Internal Security Policy 2014-2018, and Ministry of Interior, 26-27, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, <http://nacta.gov.pk/policies/NISP.pdf> Annex IV, Impact of War in Afghanistan and Ensuing Terrorism on Pakistan's Economy,' *Pakistan Economic Survey 2014-15*, (2015) Finance Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.

the insidious and devastating impact of terrorism by the civil and military establishments of Pakistan is embodied legislatively in the 21st Amendment and in policy terms, the National Action Plan (NAP) for which, National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) has overarching responsibility. Together, National Internal Security Policy (NISP) and NAP, provide the framework for dealing with terrorism and in particular violent religious extremism.

This article, while accepting that the government response is work in progress, attempts to identify critical hitches in implementation of NAP. It identifies short, medium and long term issues that are overlapping and which need to be addressed if the counter-terrorism strategy is to be executed effectively. Simultaneously, the paper documents the work that has been done and evaluates the degree of success of various aspects of the strategy and specifically focuses on the violent religious extremism dimension of the Plan.

The methodology of this paper is based on the various official publications associated with NAP, 26 one-to one interviews with: experts on security, scholars from leading think tanks and security practitioners, members of the civil administration and police, politicians and journalists. This is a comparative local study examining factors that lead to and facilitate violent radicalization and/or promote social resilience to violent militancy. It examines two localities with similar populations, which have different trajectories where one has seen relatively higher rates of violent radicalization in comparison to other. The investigation addresses gaps in the society by considering the issues in the prism of short, medium and long term. The research will help national policy makers and practitioners in shaping the future policy.

Short-term Issues

The NAP is over-focused on security dimension and other socio-economic dimensions have not been addressed adequately. It uses different definitions interchangeably: terrorism, radicalism and religious extremism, which are slippery categories because there are multiple definitions and meanings attached to them² This ambiguity reverberates

² David Mandel, "Radicalization: What does it mean?," in T. Pick & A. Speckhard, eds., *Indigenous terrorism: Understanding and addressing the root*

throughout the implementation process, which may undermine its effectiveness and might result in possible violations of human rights. Furthermore, the plan needs to disable various support structures for religious extremism through better regulation to reinforce the gains made by the security operations.

The issue about definition is more than an academic debate as it provides policy with ownership and precision. NAP demonstrates that the civil and military establishments are aware of the ambiguous and differing pattern of violence in the country and for practical considerations terrorism is too broad a classification to be useful other than for rhetorical purposes. The Plan treats Balochistan and Karachi as different from the problem of violent religious extremism as the Plan's agenda is to find a political solution for Balochistan and sees Karachi violence as a combination of factors: politics, crime as well as religious extremism.³

The article, given the wide scope of the NAP, focuses only on the religious extremism strand. The overall pragmatism guides policy makers on the immediate focus of religious extremism. While all violent religious groups are included in the remit of the Plan, currently more focus is on the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, various sectarian groups and the Punjabi Taliban.⁴

The inclusion of the hegemonic narrative of radicalization as the immediate focus of the counter-terrorism strategy is indicative of the primary concern of the civil and military establishments with religious extremism. Radicalization is a US-driven narrative that views

causes of radicalization among groups with an immigrant heritage in Europe (Amsterdam, IOS Press, 2009).

P. Neumann, "Joining al-Qaeda: jihadist recruitment in Europe," Adelphi paper no. 399 (Chapter 5) (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2008).

S.V.R. Nasr, 'The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulama in Society and Politics', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol 34. no. 1 (2000).

³ Anil Kaphle, "Pakistan announces a national plan to fight terrorism, says terrorists' days are numbered," *Washington Times*, December 24, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/12/24/pakistan-announces-a-national-plan-to-fight-terrorism-says-terrorists-days-are-numbered/>

⁴ Interview with Amir Rana, Director PIPS, April 23, 2015.

radicalization as a problem with Islam.⁵ It results in rather simplistic dichotomy of good/bad Islam, where Sufi Islam is seen as a peaceful variant that needs to be nurtured while Salafi and Wahhabi version have to be contested. The civil and military leadership's narrative articulated in the, NISP and NACTA glides unpredictably between different categories i.e., terrorism, radicalization and extremism. The difficulty in having such loosely defined categories will simply result in rounding very large number of people with no positive impact on security. A coherent and consistent counter narrative such as violent extremism, with the emphasis on the adjective violent, as used by the US and UK government to narrow the focus,⁶ is necessary to define the problem in reasonably narrow sense which is manageable. In order to successfully counter violent extremism, Pakistani authorities need to decide on a clearly defined narrative.

The over reliance on the security dimension by NACTA combined with ambiguous narrative is resulting in difficulties in implementations. NACTA has established a data base and brought increased coordination between the civil administration, police, security and intelligence agencies in monitoring and apprehending known terrorists, establishment of a counter-terrorism force, oversee the SIM verification programme, banning of military grade weapons, the implementation of the loud speaker ban, registration of occupants of guest houses/hotels, removing and monitoring hate speech material and overseas financing of terrorist organization.⁷

⁵ M. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the 21st Century*. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

M.D. Shabler, & A. Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* New York Police Department, New York, 2007.

⁶ *Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007*, US Congress, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/s1959/text>; Communities and Local Government Committee (2010) *Preventing Violent Extremism*, Sixth Report of Session 2009–10, House of Commons, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomloc/65/65.pdf>

⁷ Performance of Ministry of Interior (From June 2013 To Date) (and) Ministry of the Interior, Islamabad, file:///C:/Users/ISSI/Downloads/Ministry%20Performance%20Report%20English.pdf

Interview with Syed Zafar Dall, DCO Rawalpindi, April 8, 2015 and

Interview with Tariq Ali Basra, AC Hazro, April 16, 2015.

It is important to note that the focus on the imprecision in the definition is partly to explain the issues arising from implementation. Over half of the individuals detained in the Punjab under anti-terrorism orders had to be released due to the lack of evidence against them whereas the NACTA database for assessing security threats has been overwhelmed with information.⁸ Part of the problem in both cases derives from a definition, which is too broad, and policy makers need to give clear steer to the security agencies by narrowing the focus. The other aspect is that the police forensic and investigative side is underdeveloped and in some cases officers operate on hunches and get influenced by superiors in executing orders.⁹

What complicates this problem of imprecision is that rounding up people who may be peripherally involved in religious extremism and detaining them with hardened violent extremists may transform them into religious fanatics. It is because prisons and detention centres are recognized worldwide as locations where extremism is nurtured and it turns marginal players into hardened violent extremists such as the case of French prisons or a more specific example such as Abu Bakr al Baghdadi the head of Daesh.¹⁰ Thus an immediate concern is that there is a need for a Demilitarization, Demobilization and Rehabilitation (DDR) strategy. During which hardened violent extremists are separated and the rest can be disarmed, disbanded and provided training to assist integration into society rather than sent to detention centres and prisons. This may include de-radicalization process whereby deep religious convictions are challenged with alternative religious narratives by trained clerics. At present the army in Swat and the Punjab government in

⁸ Intikhab Hanif, "Indecent Haste' brings ignominy to DCOs, DPOs," *Dawn*, May 2, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1179485>

Interview with Amir Rana, Director PIPS, April 23, 2015.

⁹ Interview with Dr Shoaib Suddle, Senior Fellow at GTTN NUST, May 4, 2015.

¹⁰ Interview with Senator Sehar Kamran, April 14, 2015.

Michael Birnbaum, "French prisons, long hotbeds of radical Islam, get new scrutiny after Paris attacks," *Washington Post*, January 28, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/paris-killers-radicalized-in-prison-now-leaders-want-to-fix-that-problem/2015/01/28/52271e28-a307-11e4-91fc-7dff95a14458_story.html and

Profile: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, 15 May 2015, *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27801676>

Southern Punjab operate the only de-radicalization camps.¹¹ These need to be expanded to deal with the individuals that are being detained, who need to be rehabilitated prior to release.

There has also been comparatively swift justice through the introduction of military courts and death penalty. It is applied to ‘jet black terrorist’ a term first used by the Army Chief to describe hardcore terrorists who have committed violent crimes.¹² In the short term there is concern for human rights as only few of the prisoners executed were involved in terrorism.¹³ It is argued that in mature democracies, in the heat of the moment, human rights can fall off agenda if the security dimension becomes paramount. The US record of rendition, black sites, torture and extra-judicial execution is sharp reminder of what can go wrong.¹⁴

There have also been attempts to control financing of extremist organization by monitoring money transfer through banks and hawala transfer. NACTA claims to have frozen Rs 10.3 billion in 120 accounts.¹⁵ The veracity of this claim is challenged because one of the challenges is the foreign financing that is mainly cash on VIP flight. To address the issue, the government is approaching Saudi Arabia and the UAE in assistance to control funding to the banned outfits.¹⁶ There is resistance from the religious parties and organizations, which refuse to be regulated by the government. It seems extraordinary that these entities

¹¹ Interview with Abdul Basit, Research Fellow at IPDS, February 21, 2015.

¹² Zahid Gishkori, “NACTA meeting: Provinces asked to identify ‘jet black terrorist’,” *Express Tribune*, January 1, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/815497/nacta-meeting-provinces-asked-to-identify-jet-black-terrorists/>

¹³ Munir Ahmed, “Pakistan resumes executions after terror attack, but kills mostly criminals, not militants,” *U.S. News*, September 9, 2015, <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2015/09/09/pakistan-among-worlds-top-executioners-after-terror-attack>

¹⁴ EU endorses damning report on CIA, *BBC News*, February 14, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6360817.stm>

¹⁵ Khurram Husain, “Nacta’s claim fails scrutiny,” April 10, 2015, *Dawn* <http://www.dawn.com/news/1174993/nactas-claim-fails-scrutiny>

¹⁶ Zahid Gishkori, “Govt approaches Saudi diplomat over funding of madrassahs, banned outfits,” *Express Tribune*, January 14, 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/821693/govt-approaches-saudi-diplomat-over-funding-of-madrassahs-banned-outfits/>

that for practical purposes are NGOs are unregulated and unmonitored. It is also reported that the attempts to regulate the *madrassas* under Musharraf's rule were abandoned after meeting stiff resistance from the Tanzeem-e-Ittehad ul Madris.¹⁷ The current government is insisting on registering *madrassas* but their determination has yet to be tested.¹⁸ All faith based organisations and NGOs need to be registered with more stringent procedures so they may not act as proxies for foreign powers.

There is another perspective that argues that the existence of certain political issues compounded with political rivalry at the different levels of the government, are delaying the implementation. Moreover, due to the 18th Amendment and devolution of powers, the provincial governments are believed to be lacking the capacity to execute the various aspects of the NAP. According to Rana, there is difference between the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education and Ministry of the Interior. These ministries need to be represented in NACTA to make implementation of reforms in these areas feasible.¹⁹ According to Kamran, political considerations appear to be a variable in delaying the implementation of the Plan.²⁰

Medium-term Issues

While a number of the issues discussed above overlap into the medium term, key issues in this phase are FATA reforms, the development of a community based anti-extremism approach and the need to revitalize and reform the criminal justice system. FATA reform is unavoidable if the hard-won military successes are to be sustained. Force has a limited use and value, unless combined with soft power.²¹ Ashraf argues that FATA needs to be integrated into KPK, and the constitutional and fundamental rights extended to the area. Moreover, the Pakistan Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act need to replace the Frontier

¹⁷ "NAP and Madrassa registration," (2015) *Daily Times*, July 6, 2015, <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/06-Jul-2015/nap-and-madrassa-registration>

¹⁸ Ashraf Ali, "Pakistan moving against extremist madrassas by making registration compulsory," *ABC news*, September 16, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-16/pakistan-finally-moving-against-extremist-madrassas/6777668>

¹⁹ Interview with Amir Rana, Director PIPS, April 23, 2015.

²⁰ Interview with Senator Sehar Kamran, April 14, 2015.

²¹ Robert Mandel, (2015) *Coercing Compliance: State-Initiated Brute Force in Today's World* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2015), 212.

Crimes Regulation. The power vacuum is one of the reasons for an insurgency in the region.²² The reassertion of the monopoly of power in the region has to be accompanied by a development strategy with an ultimate goal to disrupt the militant-crime nexus by providing alternative socio-economic avenues for the returning Temporarily Displaced Persons (TDPs). This needs to be set in motion immediately in anticipation of cessation of military operations. With major military operations in FATA, displacement of large proportion of the population needs a coherent strategy in order to safeguard the hard won gains. The army has initiated some development work in Wana but the provincial and federal government need to do more. Failure to adequately address the development and reform question will only leave the problem to fester and reignite in the future in a more complex and difficult way.²³

There has to be ‘one size fit all’ approach for FATA, Punjab or elsewhere in Pakistan. As internationally recognized, it is critical for local context and local solutions to be articulated through community-based approach to violent extremism making the process sensitive to local patterns and variances. This is best done through local representation, which connects government strategy to the local and strengthens community capacity to resist shock and stigma and develop local approaches that prevent extremism.²⁴ According to Shams, the civil administration and police collaboration provides a greater degree of transparency to the implementation of the security measures,²⁵ and provides an alternative to the law and order perspective of the administration by including a wider outlook to religious extremism. It also requires a holistic perspective as a locality may be well off, with no overt evidence of religious extremist violence but religious extremism

²² Interview with Ashraf Ali, Freelance journalist in Islamabad, May 3, 2015.

²³ “Army chief inaugurates Wana Cadet College in Fata,” *Express Tribune*, September 16, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/957909/army-chief-inaugurates-wana-cadet-college-in-fata/>

Interview with Senator Sehar Kamran, April 14, 2015.

²⁴ Rachel Briggs (2008) *Social Resilience and National Security – A British perspective*, *Demos Report*, London; Communities and Local Government Committee (2010) *Preventing Violent Extremism*, Sixth Report of Session 2009–10, House of Commons,

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomloc/65/65.pdf>

²⁵ Interview with Shams Ur Rehman Swati, Politician associated with Jamat-i-Islami (JI), April 6, 2015.

may be embedded in the locality and the area that may act as a facilitator for violence elsewhere.²⁶ This understanding can be brought to the table by local representation. There is, however, resistance to district government's association with military rule and the lines of division between local, provincial and national representatives. However, the local context is paramount which means that responses cannot be micromanaged by the provincial and federal capital.

An anti-terrorism campaign can be successful with an efficient and effective policing where the military is used as backup in rare circumstances. It is also argued that the criminal justice reform has slipped of the agenda, as military led operations backed up by military courts have filled this gap in the short term. A quantitative and qualitative improvement of the criminal justice system is necessary for lasting impact on terrorism. Both, the police and the courts cannot handle the volume of work in the present circumstances without expansion with qualified and trained personnel. Moreover, the police lack effective investigative and forensic services and, at times police – population ratio aggravated by demands that should be filled by private security. The stress in the system is transferred to the courts as the poorly investigated cases, brought before the judiciary, result in unnecessary delay. Therefore, the prosecution service needs to be reformed and expanded into an effective filter that evaluates cases on the likelihood of success before being sent to the courts.²⁷

For their part the courts need to efficiently deliver justice. Also a mechanism to weed out incompetent individuals throughout the criminal justice system needs to be implemented through “the depoliticization of the criminal justice system.”²⁸ A depoliticized and independent criminal justice system would provide an effective check on the neopatrimonial system by bringing politicians to account, hence their reluctance to introduce change. Counter-terrorism in the medium term can only be

²⁶ Interview with Tariq Ali Khan, Freelance journalist, April 16, 2015.
Interview with Tariq Ali Basra, AC Hazro, April 16, 2015.

²⁷ Interview with Dr Shoaib Suddle, Senior Fellow at GTTN NUST, May 4, 2015
and

Interview with Taimur Khan, DSP Punjab Police, April 30, 2015.

²⁸ Hassan Abbas, *Reforming Pakistan's Police and Law Enforcement Infrastructure*, Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, 2011.

Interview with Dr Shoaib Suddle, Senior Fellow at GTTN NUST, May 4, 2015.

effective if the police and courts are unshackled and allowed to operate as independent institutions working with a community-based approach.

Long-term Issues

In the long-term there is a need to deal with generational issues such as the rise of hyper masculinity and militarization of society where we see the routinization of violence.²⁹ If ideology is removed from the equation there will be only violent crime between armed groups or against women and vulnerable groups. The scale of violence seen in Karachi is indicative of the scale that can be reached across the country. If a strategy to engage young people in practical employment is not developed, this kind of scenarios of depoliticized violence can take over.³⁰ In the present context, it is necessary to disconnect the convergence between the educational and radical narrative, which would require a convergence of the many streams of education in the country, that is, the government and private schools as well as *madrassas*. There needs to be a clear lead on *madrassa* reform and how they can be effectively integrated into the educational system of the country as well as reflect on the private sector.³¹ Example from other Muslim countries can be taken on board such as Mali where Islamic schools teach both religious and secular subjects which are favoured by parents and pupils because of their high standard of education. Another example is of

²⁹ Yunas Samad (2012) 'Making Sense of Chaos: National Security, Militancy and Interpersonal Violence' in *Securing a Frontline State: Alternative Views on Peace and Conflict in Pakistan* edited by Imtiaz Gul.

T.J. Scheff T. (nd) 'Mobilization and silence: Emotional/relational Dynamics', available <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/scheff/main.php?id=44.html> (accessed 3 July 2014).

³⁰ Charlotte Alfred (2014) These 10 Countries Have The World's Highest Murder Rates, 15 March 2014, *The World Post*, accessed 16 June 2015 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/10/worlds-highest-murder-rates_n_5125188.html

³¹ Lt Col Manzoor Abbasi (2013) De-radicalization of Pakistani Society: Evolution of A Balanced Education System – A lasting Remedy, in *Foresight; Global Challenges and Strategies*, Vol 1, 2013

A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim (2003) *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Text Books in Pakistan*, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad

Ahmed Salim and Zaffarullah Khan (2004) *Messing up the Past: Evolution of History Textbooks in Pakistan: 1947–2000*, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad.

Morocco which has taken a different approach by training imams in the social sciences to widen their horizons.³² Furthermore there needs to be a national curriculum connecting the different streams of education as well as textbook reform particularly in Pakistan Studies and Islamiyat. These are difficult and time consuming task but they need to be initiated in order to stop producing a generation of indoctrinated young men with a propensity for violence in any guise or shape. The difficulties are exacerbated by differences between the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Interior.

Conclusion

The NAP has made good initial progress but needs to address issues that may hamper further progress. In the short term the authorities need to decide on the narrative as the adjective violent is critical, perhaps it should be violent religious extremism. Imprecision in the definition is partly to explain difficulties in implementation clogging up the system with irrelevant data and forced to release individuals detained due to the lack of evidence. Hardened violent extremists when detained need to be identified and incarcerated separately from other detainees while the rest are sent to DDR and de-radicalization camps for rehabilitation and both need to be expanded. *Madrasa* regulation is necessary to remove the support structure and deny funding for violent extremism. All NGOs, religious and non-religious, need to be registered with more stringent procedures for larger organizations, a light touch for smaller ones so they cannot act as proxies for foreign powers. The Ministry of Religious Affairs is to be incorporated in NACTA, to avoid its differences with the Ministry of Interior, which is hindering progress. Furthermore the capacity of the provincial authorities needs to be upgraded to deal with violent extremism. It is also important to have a consensus among

³² Emilie Roy (in press) 'Arab Money in Malian Schools: Médersas' Co-optation of Monetary and Ideological Networks.' In Berglund, Jenny and Bocking, Brian and Shanneik, Yafa, (eds.), *Religious Education in a Global-Local World*. Dordrecht: Springer

Emilie Roy (in press) 'The Imams and the Girl Professor: Positionality and *Epistemai* in a Classroom-based Cross-Cultural Exchange of Knowledge.' In Charles B. Hutchison, Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry (eds.), *Voices of Immigrant Professors: Historical and Contemporary Challenges & Triumphs*. Routledge, Series: Research in Higher Education

political parties on the counter-terrorism strategy to effectively eliminate the menace.

In the medium-term it is important to understand that military force needs to be coalesced with soft power. More importantly, reforms are inevitable. FATA reforms are necessary to sustain the hard-won military successes. The Constitution must be applicable to the region and development programme needs to be expanded. Failure to do this will only leave the problem to fester and reignite in the future in a more complex and difficult way. More generally local context and a community-based approach to violent extremism, by recognizing its local patterns and variances is critical. Local government representation is an important variable that needs to support the administration and local security concerns cannot be micromanaged from the provincial and federal centres. The rolling out of local government elections is a positive factor as the local representatives need to have a say to make counter violent extremism strategy successful. Its work would be improved if local representatives were in place and collaborated on the security agenda with an input of local knowledge and ownership into the process. The police needs to lead on the anti-violent extremism strategy, with the military in a supportive role. Consequently the criminal justice system needs to be depoliticized and quantitatively and qualitatively developed to meet the serious task in hand.

In the long-term educational and *madrassa* reforms need to be enacted so that militants are denied a pool of disgruntled and angry youth who are directed into violent religious extremism. *Madrassas* need to be integrated into the educational system, which overall needs to be improved, along with the introduction of a national curriculum so that all forms of educational institutions teach a core curriculum. This debate needs to be initiated immediately so that reforms are on the agenda.