

Pakistan's Strategy of Countering Violent Extremism: Need for Soft Power

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Abstract

In Pakistan's context, there is a dire need to evolve a strategy to counter violent extremism. This paper argues that Pakistan, along with hard power, should also consider the elements of soft power to counter violent extremism. As soft power is meant to win hearts of the people by applying non-violent procedures, therefore to countering extremist ideology a combination of both hard and soft powers is need of the hour. This will strengthen national integration process, enhances community resilience against extremism and accelerates the process of rehabilitation and reintegration of militants in to the society. In order to understand the elements of soft power would prove effective for a particular society also requires a clear understanding of political, cultural and religious settings of that society. In this regard, to counter terrorism and violent extremism in Pakistan, this paper will focus on approaches of soft power. While accepting the importance of de-radicalisation programmes, this paper will also try to infuse elements of soft power in addition to the existing strategies of countering violent extremism and terrorism in Pakistan.

Keywords: Soft Power, Terrorism, Violent Extremism, Smart Power, Military Power, Soft Image.

Introduction

In today's time, states mainly rely on hard power to pursue their broader national security objectives. Since the last two decades, the US has been utilising hard power as a tool to eradicate terrorism but it could not establish lasting peace and harmony in the world. This has raised the question of the credibility of hard power and forced the people to think about the alternative approaches to counter such threats. The aim of this paper is to highlight the need to infuse elements of soft power while developing an effective strategy to counter violent extremism in

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Pakistan. This will not only help Pakistan to stabilise itself internally but to project its softer image abroad also. There is a general misconception that employment of soft power tools causes delay in solutions of such problems. History is witness to the fact that reliance on hard power remained the most significant tool for the protection of national security whereas soft power was given negligible attention and that, too, was limited to intellectual and academic debate only.¹

However, the concept of soft power has evolved over time and today it is used as a tangible tool to bring change and spread influence. With the growing threat and danger of violent extremism across the world, policy makers and governments have started to integrate the concept of soft power in their policy choices. At the global level, it has been believed and practiced that change can be brought about more easily if non-coercive measures (soft power) are carried forward. In Pakistan the development of soft power will start from basic institutional reforms and then steps will be required to sustain those reforms to achieve the desired results.

The phenomenon of violent extremism in Pakistan is complex to understand as it exists in different forms and manifestations. Due to its multi-layered dimensions, it is very difficult to violent extremism in absolute terms. Keeping in context the current situation of Pakistan, the definition used in this article has been adopted by a Pakistan based think-tank. According to that definition, “violent extremism means forcefully rejecting the existing means of political participation, attempting to create new ideologies and narratives to bring about a structural change in all the spheres of life (social, political, economic) by challenging the legitimacy of the existing system institutions.”² The objective of considering this definition is to analyse the problem of violent extremism within the Pakistani society.

A popular view links extremism with psychological factors. This means extremism has some links to irrationality or insanity. This popular view of extremism is mostly rejected because of its simplistic nature. Another viewpoint links it to economic deprivation, poverty, and inequality in the society. This may lead to producing a specific mindset which may try to

¹ Hadia Rahman, “Pakistan’s Soft Power: Prospects and Limitations,” *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2014): 257-263.

² “Defining the Phenomenon of Radicalisation in Pakistan,” Pak Institute of Peace Studies, January 2009.

snatch the basic living through force and violent acts. Ted Gurr in this book, *Why Men Rebel*, has discussed the idea of relative deprivation in which he argues that when there is a difference between what an individual deserves and what he actually receives through economic processes, this can lead individuals or groups towards violence.³ Therefore, it can be argued that a weak economic distribution mechanism in a state could cause frustration and that could result in use of violent means. In other words, economic deprivation makes the work of extremist organisations very easy to recruit a frustrated young mind.

The aim of this paper is to analyse Pakistan's capacity and capability to develop soft power. Besides the use of effective tool of hard power, Pakistan needs to build a national narrative on building its soft power which can consolidate the gains achieved through the use of hard power. To build a comprehensive counter violent extremism narrative and strategy, the state needs to reform its institutions. To build a positive image at the global level it also needs to project its social and cultural values and defend its narrative through effective diplomacy. These steps can also be useful in shaping the basic structure of soft power in Pakistan.

What is Soft Power

Power is the ability to affect others to get the things you want.⁴ In general terms, the concept of hard power is defined as a "coercive approach in the international political affairs. This involves the use of military and economic power to influence or control the behaviour or interests of other states or political groups."⁵ This means that the countries with economic and military might have a greater influence over other states which are less powerful than them. In this context, Joseph Nye describes hard power as "the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will."⁶ Powerful states use their influence on smaller countries by following this carrot and stick policy, sometimes by presenting rewards and sometimes by threatening or imposing sanctions.

³ Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Routledge, 2015), 24.

⁴ Joseph Nye, "The Future of Power," *Public Affairs* (2011).

⁵ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it: the Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 2 (1992).

⁶ Joseph Nye, "The Changing Nature of World Power," *Political Science Quarterly* vol. 105, no. 2 (1990): 177-192.

On the contrary, the concept of soft power, being recognised as a tangible tool, has also started emerging as an effective tool to achieve certain objectives through non-coercive means. The definition of soft power used in this research article is closely linked to the Nye's definition of soft power who is also known as the father of the idea of soft power. According to him, soft power is a more subtle form of power. It is a "persuasive approach to international political relations, involving the use of a nation's cultural, historical and diplomatic influence." Soft power is a form which can attract and cooperate to persuade other states instead of coercion or using force. By indirectly convincing other states to follow a certain path and desired goals, soft power is much more tangible as compared to hard power. Nye stated that soft power relies mainly on three dimensions: culture, political values, and its foreign politics. The countries such as the US, the UK, France, Japan etc., have successfully used soft power as a tool of foreign policy in conducting their international relations.

However, many international relations experts view Nye's idea of from the lens of capability rather than behaviour. Nye presents soft power as a combination of phases of power and the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion. The appropriate response to the changes occurring in world politics today is not to abandon the traditional concern for the military balance of power, but to accept its limitations and to supplement it with insights about interdependence.⁷ Nye is of the opinion that today there are many challenges to combine persuasion in terms of carrot and stick policy for any actor in the international politics. The great powers of today are less able to use their traditional power resources to achieve their objectives than in the past.⁸ The modern states are the most powerful actors in the arena of the international politics but they are not the only powers to exist. They have been joined by a host of other power brokers as well.

To strengthen his argument of significance of soft power further, Nye describes power in world politics as a three-dimensional structure. One at the top is the military power, which is headed by the US as no other world power come close to the US. Second is in the middle which regulates economic relations among states as it is ruled by one state but is multi-polar in nature. Third one lies at the bottom which regulates

⁷ Joseph Nye, "Soft power," *Foreign policy*, 80 (1990): 153-171.

⁸ *Ibid.*

transnational issues which fall outside the realm of hard power like violent extremism, cybercrime, climate change or global pandemics. It is pertinent to note that if one wants to deal these issues at a societal, national or transnational levels it requires an extraordinary ability to use a combination of hard and soft power.⁹ The use of this combination can also help a state formulate a full toolset to shape or reshape its image internally as well as externally. Similarly, Pakistan can also apply this combination to counter violent extremism and to project its image as a peace loving nation abroad.

Pakistan's Strategy of Countering Violent Extremism

As far as Pakistan's strategy to eliminate violent extremism is concerned, earlier, several policy measures were adopted during the 1980s. However, some of these policies could not achieve favourable results and as a consequence, extremist elements gained more strength and they exploited this land as their breeding grounds. The emergence of terrorist groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was one of its direct outcomes. The TTP's action against the state of Pakistan proved that such groups are also exploited by foreign elements who wanted to destabilise Pakistan.

In the post-9/11 era, Pakistan again took several initiatives to get rid of these extremist elements. Along with other national measures, Pakistan employed hard power and its armed forces conducted many operations against the militants which include Operation *Rah-e-Haq* (2007); Operation *Sher Dil* (August, 2008); Operation Black Thunderstorm (April, 2009); Operation *Raah-e-Raast* (May, 2009); Operation *Rah-e-Nijat* (June, 2009); Operation *Brekhna* (Nov, 2009); Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* (June, 2014)¹⁰ and recently Operation *Radd-ul-Fassad* in 2017, as a comprehensive national strategy to eliminate extremists elements.

Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* (the strike of the sword of Holy Prophet PBUH) is one of the comprehensive strikes by Pakistan military forces in North Waziristan in which around 30,000 soldiers took part. This operation also

⁹ Nye, "The Future of Power."

¹⁰ Asad Ullah Khan, "Counter Terrorism Instruments," *The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, <http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final-Issue-brief-June-dated-01-6-2016.pdf>

includes the area along with the western border of Afghanistan. The operation was initiated after the failure of peace negotiation talk between the government of Pakistan and the TTP. Other incidents like Karachi Airport attack on June 8, 2014, assassination of Lieutenant General, Sana ullah Niazi, and beheading of 23 Frontier Corps (FC) personals in Feb 2014, were among the several reasons which also triggered this operation.¹¹

The Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* achieved success and, as a result, the number of terrorist attacks decreased significantly; the network of terrorism has been effectively broken and fatalities of civilians almost decreased by 50 per cent in different terrorist related incidents.¹² This operation left a great impact on Pakistan's Foreign Policy. Regionally, Pakistan emerged as a stronger and more refined state as its internal mess has been dealt with effectively through Operation *Zarb-e-Azb*.

There were four major objectives, kept on the table, at the start of this major operation:

- i Targeting the militants groups holding the area along the border with Afghanistan and North Waziristan;
- ii Targeting all foreign terrorist hideouts in the area;
- iii Saving civilian population from the terror of the TTP;
- iv Sustaining peace and internal stability through this operation.

The above three objectives are, no doubt, met through the operation but the fourth objective is still to be achieved. First three objectives were achieved through the application of hard power but the last one cannot be achieved through hard power only. The combination of hard power and soft power and resultantly the smart power will effectively work in this scenario. Pakistan can eliminate the root causes of violent extremism through a war of winning hearts and minds and it could be only done through elements of soft power. Pakistan cannot truly win this war without the participation of its own people. Every segment of the society must be engaged. The civil society needs to play its role, too.

¹¹ Umbreen Javaid, "Zarb-e-Azb and the State of Security in Pakistan," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan (JRSP)*, vol. 53, no. 1 (January-June, 2016).

¹² Ibid.

Pakistan is in need of a law which can effectively fight all this violence, militancy and terrorism.¹³ In order to prevent society from converging into the extremist ideologies, Pakistan needs to ensure rule of law at domestic level. Such measures will strengthen the beliefs of common man that their life and property is secure and they will not be deprived of their rights. To protect citizens from terrorism and to safeguard and guarantee their basic and constitutional freedoms,¹⁴ Pakistan enunciated the Pakistan Protection Ordinance (PPO) in 2013. However, some questions are raised over the nature and scope of this ordinance, yet the main feature of PPO is to provide protection to the society of Pakistan which is already fighting a war against terrorism. The ordinance gives armed forces and law enforcement agencies the authority to exercise “all the powers of a police officer.” which is not a complete solution to the problems of Pakistan but in short run, it may help to stabilize the society.

Later, in February 2014, the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) was presented in the Parliament by National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA). It was the first security policy and was preceded by the National Action Plan (NAP) in December 2014. The NISP was drafted because there was a lack of coordination among the security and intelligence agencies, and they needed to be brought under one umbrella.¹⁵ The main strategy of the NISP can be divided into three steps, initiation of dialogue with terrorist, isolation of terrorist groups and developing deterrence in the society. Some of the main issues mentioned in the NISP include; capacity building of security forces, erecting an anti-terrorist force at the federal level, cooperation and coordination, curbing of terrorist financing, madrassah reforms, as well as the repatriation and registration of Afghan refugees. The NISP document is a comprehensive plan which encompasses rehabilitation and reconciliation for the first time but the plan somehow was not much successful because of the implementation issues in Pakistan and the war tactics followed by the terrorist groups in Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan was much interested in following the drafted plan but the scenario

¹³ Arshi Saleem Hashmi and Mariam Shah, “The Protection of Pakistan Ordinance: Limitations and Prospects,” *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, (2016), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2728938> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2728938>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Naeem Ahmed, “Pakistan’s Counter-terrorism Strategy and its Implications for Domestic, Regional and International Security,” *FMSH*, 59 (2014), <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00937552/document>

changed when TTP backed out from the famous negotiation process known as Murree talks. Another prominent feature of the NISP is to promote the coordination among law enforcement agencies to carry out an effective operation against extremist elements. It is good to extend coordination to that extent, but how will it be achieved is the larger question, as police departments perform under the provincial governments and funds are being provided by the provincial governments.¹⁶

Need for Soft Power

Pakistan has always complained of being misunderstood in global affairs. If we look closely, it is also because of the fact the country has been facing challenges of violent extremism and it is being projected as terrorist safe-heaven. Undeniably, Pakistan has been a victim of terrorism and violent extremism for the last three and half decades. To defeat and counter this menace and to promote peace and harmony, an alternative narrative or ideology is the need of the hour. However, it must be understood that the elements of soft power should also be taken into account while developing a counter terrorism policy.

Initially, Pakistan was not able to employ elements of soft power effectively. Its geo-strategic location and its national security concerns compelled it to focus on building hard power. As a result, it paid little attention to develop effective tools of soft power.¹⁷ However, there is now a realisation among policy makers that soft power would be equally helpful to get rid of this menace of terrorism. It believes that the impact of soft power will enhance considerably when Pakistan is able to use culture, heritage and its quality of domestic values¹⁸ to ensure rule of law domestically and to build a credible image in the eyes of the world.

Pakistan has always been known to be the one of the most resilient nations in the world. This nation has been fighting against violent extremism and terrorism for many decades, yet it has not lost its hope. This

¹⁶ Shakeel Ahmed Ramay, "National Security Policy: Where We Stand," *Sustainable Development Policy Institute Islamabad*, (2015).
<https://www.sdpi.org/publications/files/National-Security-Policy-Where-We-Stand.pdf>

¹⁷ Masood, "Developing Soft Power."

¹⁸ *Ibdi*.

resilience needs to be highlighted as it depicts the readiness of the people of the country to fight against any danger posed to their state, no matter what the consequences are.

Pakistanis have been discriminated globally despite being the victims of violent extremism. The race to access advanced media technologies in this information age has started a new type of warfare that is known as information and propaganda war.¹⁹ It is a high time that renowned Pakistanis in the fields of film and literature should employ this element of communication as a tool of soft power to play their role and highlight the suffering of the people of Pakistan. The use of media as tool should not be utilised to get relief or acknowledgement from the international community but it should also be directed at reducing the negative criticism against Pakistan. Pakistan needs to construct its national narrative and brand itself as a peace loving nation. This would require systematic efforts and time to improve its softer image.²⁰ Pakistan as a nation has already paid a heavy price in its fight against terrorism, yet its efforts are misunderstood. It is time for retrospection; Pakistan needs to brand itself by employing soft power tools and by promoting its softer image of a peace loving nation.

Culture is one of the most important ingredients of soft power because it is what grabs the attention of others and has the most impact on an individual's life choices. Their views, desires, thinking, values can be shaped up by culture. Culture provides people with a sense of belonging and purpose. It is a bond which ties people together and thereby can cause most purposeful change. All the four major cultures of Pakistan (Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashtoon, and Balochi) have many common things like hospitality, folk music, poetry, life style and peace. However, cultures of Pakistan have a negative impression at the global level which needs correct interpretation of Pakistan's true values and norms. Culture in politics is to place culture within state foreign policy as the expression of a national interest, which contributes to the ratification of the national character, belief systems, strategic cultures and national identity.²¹ When the concept of soft power is proposed in any radical society, the key to bringing change in that particular

¹⁹ Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (Yale University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Masood, "Developing Soft Power."

²¹ Hwajung Kim, "Cultural Diplomacy as the Means of Soft Power in an Information Age," *Institute for Cultural Diplomacy*, (2011): 2.

society is through its cultural values that further shape its foreign policy. No society of the world is violent or extremist in nature. It is actually how it is interpreted and misunderstood under different circumstances.

Diplomacy is one of the oldest means of promoting country's soft power. In fact, it was significant in winning the Cold War. We have seen that states with effective foreign policies efficiently use the combination of both hard and soft power. It is considered as a good combination when states utilise both soft and hard power proportionally to spread their influence or get their desired results. Use of either one policy can turn tedious or produce futile results in case the other state goes rogue in the face of hard power or utilise the fruits of soft power to get their way but a mix of the two has proven to get productive results. For example, the recent Iran deal has proven successful as it offered Iran relief and incentives, whereas threatening strict economic and other sanctions if it breaks the terms and conditions of the deal.

Today, the strategy to win against transnational terrorism is winning hearts and minds and the sole reliance on hard power is not enough. Diplomacy is one of the strongest tools in the arsenal of soft power. A smart public diplomacy requires a need for an understanding the role of civil society, credibility, and self-criticism in generating soft power. When people are overwhelmed with the volume of information confronting them, it is hard to know what to focus on. Attention rather than information becomes the scarce resource and those who can distinguish valuable information from background clutter gain power.²² There is a dire need to link soft power with other modes of power using diplomacy as a medium of linkage.

If counter-extremism is to meet with success in Pakistan, the national narrative needs to be changed and this national narrative can only be changed by developing soft power. Public diplomacy is a state's strategy to use the public as a tool in shaping its foreign policy.²³ In case of Pakistan, its people are always keen to promote the peaceful image of Pakistan. Its artists are always working hard to promote its true picture but there is need to be done more than this. The clear vision of soft

²² Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 616, no. 1 (2008): 94-109.

²³ Joseph Nye, "The New Public Diplomacy," *Project Syndicate*, 10 (2010).

power in Pakistan will provide alternative choices in foreign policy. When soft power instruments are clear to decision makers their choices will not be limited to war/ hard power or power tactics. In short, Diplomacy is the part of world politics where NGOs and government organisations and other non-state actors project their message through such mediums to achieve real foreign policy objectives.

At domestic level, Pakistan has tried to promote the culture of education and literacy in the country by reforming its educational policies. According to Pakistan Higher Education Commission (HEC), there are 183 universities recognised by it. The higher education institutions have rapidly grown after 2002, and the major chunk of this growth was added in between 2010 and 2015. During this time Pakistan has experienced 78 per cent increase in the number of universities. In addition to this, during these five years, the student enrolment also increased up to 174 per cent. The government has increased the budget of the HEC in 2015, to Rs 73 billion, which is 70 per cent more than that it was allocated in 2011.²⁴

Now the point arises here that whether this performance of the government is satisfactory in education. Pakistan's education system needs overhauling from grass root level. Fixing of problems from school level will shape the future of young ones. Unlike other institutions in Pakistan, education is also facing the problem of corruption, lack of funds, ghost schools and teachers and lack of political will to fix this particular problem. Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa (KPK) took lead in this regards by bringing reforms in the educational sector. The KPK government took significant steps by bringing educational reforms at a grass-root level which includes the hiring of new teachers, activating the non-functional schools and increasing the student enrolment. According to the KPK Ministry of Education, the teacher-student ratio in government primary school level is 1:43 and in government secondary schools level is 1:22.²⁵ Such reforms in the educational system will raise the quality of educations and the schools will be able to produce better individuals for universities. As an incident, it

²⁴ Khalid Mahmood, "Higher Education Commission Pakistan," *Higher Education Commission (HEC)*, (2016).

<http://hec.gov.pk/english/universities/projects/TESP/Documents/FR-Assessment%20HE%20Sector.pdf>

²⁵ "Annual Statistical Report," KPK Ministry of Education, 2016, <http://www.kpese.gov.pk/Downloads/ASC/ASC%202015-16.pdf>

was noted in Abdul Wali Khan University the killing of a student, Mashaal,²⁶ by an uncontrolled and senseless mob accusing him of blasphemy without any concrete evidence, such steps are necessary to groom the minds of our young ones. Following the foot prints of KPK much has to be expected from other provinces as education is now a provincial matter.

Strong institutions play a vital role in projecting soft power. It would not be far-fetched to say that without strong institutions, soft power will not be instrumental in countering violent extremism or implementing counter-violent extremism policies. Soft power should be institutionalised as institutions can play a significant role in a war-damaged or war-torn areas and influence can be laid upon without using hard power. For example, we see after the WW II, the US in the form of Marshall Plan loaned billions of dollars to the western Europe to strengthen their hold against Russia (the Soviet Union).

Conclusion

In any region of the world, the life line of the nation is assured through hard power. The World has witnessed how the US, China, Russia and other European nations used the mix of power as an effective tool to dominate the world. Pakistan is currently in a phase where it is developing is soft power along with hard power, but the level of this mix is yet to be determined. Therefore, this perfect mix of hard and the soft power in accordance with nation's limitation and opportunities will define its position in maintaining peaceful co-existence at the international and regional level.

The real strength of the soft power is the right implementation of rule of law and strong institutions. The vibrancy of the nation is not dependent only on the size of its economy or size of its military, whereas its cultural heritage, shared values, and social synergy also plays the important role in the determination of its status in international politics. When we talk about Pakistan, the world has not seen the real picture of Pakistan because it has not been presented in the way it should be to the world at large.

²⁶ Ali Akbar, "Mardan University Student Incident," *Dawn* April 13, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1326729>