Extremism in Contemporary Pakistan: Threats, Causes and Future Policy

Saqib Khan
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
Umbreen Javaid
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

The origin and foundations of religious extremism in Pakistan are a byzantine mix of national, regional and international influences resulting in a complex scenario. The extremists have been multiplied as a result of improved organization, and comparative inaction of government to counter them. Muslim extremism at the global level has a variety of root causes. The Afghan war of the 1980s supported and assisted by the West as a proxy war against the Soviet Union, saw the appearance and promotion of pan-Islamic militancy. Islam as a religion was used to tie together masses, worldwide Muslim support. Since Pakistan's establishment as a distinct state in 1947, Pakistan has struggled with the connotation of its identity. General Zia, who tumbled the government of Z. A. Bhutto in 1977, used Islam to validate his rule. Extended military interferences in politics led to an insecure political system. Ethnic differences and nationalist movements further deteriorated it. In such surroundings, parties were estimated as the shields of national identity based on Islamic standards and temperate political forces were considered as an intimidation to Islamic identity of Pakistan.
Key Words: Religious extremism, Intolerance, Violence, Terrorism

Introduction

This article possesses three main aims: firstly to consider the threats to Pakistan posed by religious and ethno-nationalist extremism; secondly to locate support for extremism in a socio-economic, political and historical setting; thirdly to suggest a range of policy options which can stem the tide of militancy. Religious extremism is a major challenge faced by Pakistan.

Religious Extremism

> "Religious extremists are willing to Murder because they embrace theologies that sanction violence in the service of God. They have no sympathy for their victims, because they view those Victims as enemies of God. And they sacrifice their own lives because they expect huge and immediate after life rewards in

return for martyrdom". (Iannaccone & Berman, 2005)

'Religious extremism is simply extremism when ideological beliefs are religious in nature and ideological behaviors are religiously motivated and rationalized'.

According to the researcher ''religious extremism is the adaptation and recognition of religious extremist ideologies mostly given by religious elite for the purpose of political and sectarian benefits and they want to impose that religious ideology to the other people by religious interpretations''.

Definitions of religious extremism and modernization keep changing. An individual or an organization can be labeled as religiously extremist in one context and politically moderate in another. For example, those belonging to the *Tableeghi Jamat*, the non-political Wahhabis may be called radicals in the religious context but politically they probably are not.

Olivier Roy considers Islamic radicalism a combination of two elements: a call for the return of all Muslims to the true tenets of Islam or what is perceived as such; and, a political militancy against the foes of Islam who could include existing Muslim rulers. (Roy, 1994)

Many Pakistani scholars, however found it difficult to agree with the first element of Roy's definitions of Muslim radical movements, because many religious organizations call for a return to the Quran and Sunnah but that does not mean that they should be branded as radicals or extremists. (Ahmed, 2009)

Pakistan on issues related to religious extremism and militancy are largely an expression of the people's religiosity which would not be acceptable to the majority of the people of Pakistan. Religious sensitivities run deep in Pakistan and the people often have a violent or aggressive demeanor on matters touching upon their religious beliefs and international politics. Religion remains a core element of people's belief system and illiteracy and critical thinking confuse the views of most of people on issues such as extremism, Jihad, religious violence, radicalization and terrorism. The majority of the people in the country are confused to understand the complex phenomenon of religious extremism, violence and terrorism. (Sial and Anjum, 2009)

Dr. Davin Hansen has also noted in his recent research on radicalization in Pakistan that People in Pakistan had a common tendency to use radical rhetoric when discussing other religions, sects, nations and people, but when it came to their practical behavior, the majority of Pakistanis was moderate. (Hansen, 2012)

Some analysts have the opinion that the non-violent extremism and some analysts call 'virtual radicalism', is present in Pakistani culture and society to a significant magnitude and the non-violent or virtual radicals be blamable for Ideological support and a breeding ground for the militant extremism .The transformation from the former to the latter is also very difficult to envisage and both forms of extremism are discrete but they are equally critical. It was dominance of religious speeches, *fatwas,* and radical rhetoric, an expression of extreme feelings of anger and promotion of hatred instigated among the masses

mainly by the religious political parties that motivated a police guard to assassinate the Punjab governor in January 2011 in Islamabad because of the latter's criticism of the man-made blasphemy law. Many other examples abound of religious extremist, religious rhetoric and *fatwas* leading to acts of sectarian violence, in Pakistan. (Ramar krishna, 2010)

Militant Religious Extremism and Ideology of Pakistan

Pakistan is a Muslim state but its idea does not have any connection with the ideology of militant religious extremism. Islam is derived from the word "Salam" which means peace. It preaches the establishment of an egalitarian social structure. The theme of Holy Quran is humanity. Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W), the prophet of Islam, is called the Rehmat-ul-lil-alimeen (Blessing for the entire Universe). Islam orders its followers to keep away from militant religious extremism, aggression, corruption, injustice, violence, chaos, and disturbance. Islamic teachings promote modernity, tolerance and moderation.

Some writers, religious elites, politicians, intellectuals, and religious extremist people believe that Pakistan was created for Islam and Islam being an ideological command should lead all socio-cultural and political matters. The problem does not end here; People of Pakistan belong to various sects and every sect demands the enforcement of its own version of Islam. Pakistan was not created under the leadership of religious Ulema and it was not created as an ideological state. Islam might be used as a political tool during freedom movement to gain support of the Muslim community at lower level but neither Jinnah nor top leadership of Muslim League ever used the slogan of Islam.

After partition the founder of the country, in his 11th August 1947 speech in Constituent Assembly clearly rejected the idea that Pakistan would be an ideological state by committing to the secular idea of equal status of all citizens irrespective of their religion. Unfortunately religious elites began to demand an Islamic constitution and political system in the state. Objective Resolution was passed which says that state will enable its individual to follow Islam. Later on it became a trend to use religion to sanction political activities. Even Ayub Khan (considered as liberal politician) used religion to oppose candidature of Fatima Jinnah who was contesting elections in 1964 against him by raising the issue that woman cannot become a ruler in an Islamic ideological state. Z.A.Bhutto used and misused Islam to get the support of religious parties. Zia- ul-Haq misused Islam for the protection of his despotic rule in the country. Almost all politicians used and misused the religion and ideology of Pakistan according to suitability of their self-interest and environment of the country.

Jihad and Sectarianism

Sectarianism and jihad both are mixed in Pakistan. Because jihad in Kashmir and Afghanistan was commanded by the state and it was the strategy of the

government to protect the national interest of the country against India and the Soviet Union. Khaled Ahmad writes in his book ''Sectarian War Pakistan's Sunni-Shia Violence And Its Links To The Middle East''(2013) '' when a Jihadi outfit got into troubles as a result of its indulgence in sectarian or simple criminal violence, it was rescued by the intelligence personnel, usually drawn from the army''. The jihadi outfits were raising money freely from the public through the use of religious notion of Jihad. Apparently they were fighting against the Soviets and Indians but critically they have the sectarian political agendas also. They were considering Mujahidin for public who were working for the freedom of the Kashmir and Afghanistan but minorities and Shia community in Pakistan always feel threat from these groups. Jihadi outfits remained fully armed while located inside the cities. Pakistan was a little sectarian at the time of birth. But it became more after the passage of time and the period of 1980's was the most favorable period for the growth of sectarianism. The religious parties during all previous elections in the history of Pakistan could only win a few seats. The best strategy for these religious parties is to divide the country on religious sectarian grounds. The leader of these religious political parties wanted to reach the corridors of power through the use and misuse of religion in their politics.

Religious Extremism has the severe implications in the politics and economy of the country. It has brought high costs in terms of personal losses through deaths, economic costs and undermined both the social fabric and political stability. It has created a negative international image for Pakistan which has discouraged direct overseas investment. The projected losses are around $70 bn. Moreover, tourism industry of Pakistan is also in a disappearing state. Furthermore, the threat of terrorism also induces the government to divert capital to security spending.

Ethno-nationalist extremism is equally threatening as it risks the break-up of the country. Ethno-nationalist mobilization with separatism in its extreme form has been present in Pakistan since its appearance as an independent state Indeed Bengali ethno-nationalist struggle led to disintegration of the country in 1971.

The Baluchistan region has been facing spasmodic guerrilla wars. The tribal militants, ostensibly patronized by foreign powers especially India, carry out terrible acts of terrorism and even recourse to target killings to spread their separatist agenda. Religious and ethno-nationalist extremism has led some commentators to call Pakistan a failed state. While this under-estimates the state's historical resilience, extremism has undermined the process of democratic consolidation. The May 2013 elections were a watershed, with a democratic transformation taking place for the first time in the country's history. However, the polls were blemished by terrorist attacks. If the atmosphere of insecurity prevails, democracy will never flourish and people will lose faith in the democratic process.

The foundation of religious extremism in Pakistan can be traced back to two important happenings in the 1970s: the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The former laid the roots for sectarian militancy on a scale that had not previously existed.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was the supreme grave event leading to

the spread of jihadist militancy. The impact within Pakistan only became apparent after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, when there appeared weaponization and violence in Pakistan. Since 9/11 in the wake of US attack on Afghanistan, and Pakistan's admission into war on terror as an ally, extremism and terrorism have soared. This has not only included sectarian and jihadist violence, but ethno-nationalist manifestations within Baluchistan. The self-styled Jihad is also threatening to Pakistan's national integrity. This type of religious extremism emerged with soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s. After the Soviet withdrawal, this armed struggle transformed into a category of civil war, and later Afghanistan converted into a breeding ground for terrorists. Furthermore, after 9/11 attacks, when Pakistan entered in war against terrorism, some of these jihadi groups twisted their guns against Pakistan. Moreover, the presence of terrorists invites drone attacks which are a grave challenge to the country's sovereignty.

Extremism possesses a socio-economic as well as strategic context. Pakistan is vulnerable on both fronts because of its geo-political location and its poverty and underdevelopment. The lack of education and employment opportunities creates a pool of discontented and marginalized youths who can be recruited by religious or ethno-nationalist militant groups.

The first and notable cause is general illiteracy in Pakistan. Pakistan ranks 113th position among the 120 nations in the literacy rate index. There are still 42% uneducated people in the country according to economic survey of Pakistan who even do not know how to write their names. Illiteracy has enabled intolerance to flourish. This not only undermines social cohesion, but can result in a breeding ground for sectarian, jihadist and ethno-nationalist extremism. Ultimately in a weaponized society and with weak law enforcement, violence can be the outcome. This is the reason that a report prepared by the World Bank places Pakistan among the most dangerous countries to live. This poor situation is outcome of conservative attitude, poverty, literacy and lack of accountability. Social development and tolerance can be brought about through economic prosperity, education and rule of law.

With respect to poverty, it is also a barrier in the way of tolerance and social advancement. According to Economic survey of Pakistan, 23% people of total population still live under the poverty line. According to another study conducted by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, every third Pakistani is living below the poverty line i.e., 58.7 million out of 180 million are living in abject poverty. A survey conducted by the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) exposed that around 45.7% population of Pakistan is poor. Some of these people, trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty, join militant organization because of financial inducement. They cannot meet their basic needs. They cannot easily make ends meet. They have to borrow. They also have to beg. In this kind of situation, they can adopt two ways either they kill others who do not care for them or they kill themselves along with their children. This is the reason that cases of suicides have increased in in Pakistan. Almost 50% of the Pakistani workforce is unemployed, reveals the survey released by the Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW).

Miseries induce people to find extra sources of income and the terrorist trap these marginalized people. Thus, economic infirmity makes recruitment for terrorist easier.(https://www.thenewstribe.com/tag/pakistan-economy-watch/ retrieved as 19-06-2015)

Militancy has also been encouraged by the absence of justice arising from the slow working of the courts and the barriers which poor people face in accessing them. Militants promise that sharia justice will provide a fairer and speedier redress. The absence of justice links in with the glaring social inequalities in Pakistan. These include: controlled access to quality education, the elite's domination in political system, lack of elementary health facilities, and non-availability of essential commodities to highest portion of the population. In Pakistan, the deprived and depressed class is prone to be abused by extremists.

The derailing of democracy by martial dictators also contributed to the spread of terrorism and religious extremism in Pakistan. History of the country demonstrates that these were the choices of military rulers that put Pakistan in this dilemma. It was Zia's verdict to include Pakistan in war against soviets in Afghanistan. Pakistan still suffers from the syndrome it acquired during Soviet-Afghan war. Now, those militants have become so uncontrolled that they even challenge the writ of the Government in numerous parts of the country. Again, it was General Pervez Musharraf's choice to become a frontline US-ally in war against terrorism. Pakistan's involvement in Afghan War has also beleaguered the country with religious extremism and terrorism.

Intolerance has given rise to sectarianism in Pakistan. People are divided in different sects. Every sect is unwilling to listen and accept the teachings of other. Sectarianism takes many forms, but an especially violent contemporary manifestation is provided by the attacks on Hazara Shias in Baluchistan. About three hundred Hazara people were killed in 2012. The casualties have increased since then moreover; latest two bomb-blasts killed 86 Hazara people in Quetta which forced them to stage a sit-in along with dead bodies (You need to provide a date for this episode and also to reference it with a source in a footnote, Dawn for example carried accounts of this episode). Shias in Gilgit Baltistan are also not safe. They cannot freely move. A gruesome targeted killing occurred on March 2, 2012 when, a bus going to Gilgit from Abbottabad was stopped, and 26 Shias were beheaded after identifying them (http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/10477/shia-killing-identified-offloaded-and-shot/ retrieved as 12 February, 2016).

There is an overlap between militant groups and actions which are sectarian in colour and membership of jihadist organizations. Some groups under the umbrella of the TTP have launched attacks on symbols of state authority, as they regard the Pakistan state as un-Islamic, pro-western and acting as a barrier to the implementation of a true Islamic system. Even military bases have not been secure from their attacks which have targeted Mehran Base, Kamra Air Base and General Head Quarter (GHQ). (You need to provide dates for these attacks and to have footnote sources for them). The scale of losses can be collected from the fact that only one Saab 2000 air draft fitted with an Airborne Early Warning and Control

System (AWACS) destroyed at Kamra was worth $250 million Militants have also targeted schools, especially girls' schools. They have destroyed more than three hundred and fifty schools particularly in Swat during the period of Taliban occupation and other regions of the country. All this is because of intolerance. The attack on Malala Yousafzai on 9 October 2012 highlighted the attacks on female education and led to an outpouring of international support. Militants have also attempted to undermine the attempts to eradicate polio through vaccination. They have killed a number of doctors, vaccinators and their security guards (Haider, 2012). They blame that polio-vaccination is against the teachings of Islam and it is given to reduce Muslim population in the world. Nevertheless, the increasing consciousness of the political, civil and military leadership to combat this menace points to a future strong action to eradicate religious extremism. A complete and united counter-extremism and counter terrorism approach is need of the hour. In this final section of the article, a number of policy proposals are laid out. First of all, spiritual leaders and scholars can play a vigorous role in this regard; they should use speeches and writings to address the message of peace. Two, civil society also needs to come forward and play its role in sorting out the problems face by the nation. Moreover, a huge movement is required to defeat the ideologies of terrorists. This campaign or mass movement can be used very effectively with co-operative and collective efforts. Three; uniform system of education can play a sustainable role in eliminating religious extremism and terrorism. The syllabus should be free of all the biases, religious prejudice, intolerance, violence and fanaticism. It shall comprise moral, spiritual, religious and modern education in equal magnitudes. The minds of younger generation need to be washed of all the religious rigidness; then only peace and prosperity will prevail in society. Four, media can be the most operative, active and functional tool in eliminating religious extremism. Media can be used to instruct, teach and train people and bring them on board about trail and challenges confronted by the country. Soft corner for religious violence and militancy in general public can only be exterminated by well-organized media efforts. Five, peace in Afghanistan is one of the prerequisites for reduction of terrorism in Pakistan. Presence of NATO and Allied Forces in Afghanistan is a main cause of uncertainty, instability and insecurity in the region. Sixth; an operative strategy to counter militant and extremist groups pivots in the capability to gain timely and precise intelligence. The local intelligence and aptitude needs to be supported in terms of organization, equipment, harmonization, training and coordination.

Seventh; a coherent and clear strategy on using force as remedy should be evolved. The immigrants cannot live among the natives unless they are sufficiently motivated to support these militants. The local tribesmen and tribal chiefs should be taken into confidence and must be encouraged to stand up against the external and foreign elements. (Not all militants are 'foreigners' as this implies. Moreover this is a little inconsistent with the care you have taken earlier to explain the impacts of poverty/illiteracy etc. on the vulnerable that from within Pakistan are recruited to militant causes).

Eight; economic, political, social and religious difference leads to upsurge in recruitment of terrorists. Economic repossession should be given in the top priority, especially in the backward, immature and underdeveloped areas. There is, undeniably, a need for providing speedy and cheap justice for poorer citizens. As 'justice delayed is justice denied', the people feel themselves isolated from society. The presentation and performance of lower judiciary has resulted in loss of trust, of general public in courts and thus the Taliban-type speedy justice system fascinates public support in certain areas. Therefore, justice system should be watched to safeguard that people get speedy and inexpensive justice. Moreover, the prosecution needs to be made effective in order to restrict the large exoneration ratio of terrorists.

There is no repudiating the fact that Pakistan is confronting a great threat of religious extremism and terrorism. It is a country which is overwhelmed with diverse terrorism caused by several complex problems. It poses danger to vital ingredients of the state, from democracy to national security and honor of the country. However, fighting terrorism is not an impossible task for this buoyant nation. The atrociousness of the challenge has led to the thrust that is underway with regard to building of consensus on the policy to combat religious extremism and terrorism. This would lead to an irrefutable strategy to eradicate this menace. The policy accompanied with political resolve is bound to win this war and achieve stability and prosperity in the country.

Conclusion

The most horrible competitor of every religion is the fanatic who admits to follow it and tries to inflict his view of his belief on others. People do not judge religious conviction by what their prophets preached or how they lived but by the way their followers practice them. Christianity has a hard time explaining its inquisitors. Muslims will continue to be judged by the acts of groups like Taliban and mujahedeen who wage unending wars against the non- Muslims. And now Hinduism will be judged by the people like Uma Bharti, Sadhvi Rithambara, Parveen Togadia and the doings of Dara Sing, Bal Thackeray, and Narendra Modi. Religious extremism has well and truly taken a hold in South Asia and we have only ourselves to blame. Within Pakistan, there has been acquiescence, if not tacit support when extremists set ablaze books they did not like; beat up and kill journalists who wrote against them; attacked cinemas showing films they do not approve of or destroy the equipment of film-makers ready to shoot film scripts cleared by the government. Extremists have also smashed the studio and paintings of Pakistan's leading artist. They have also attacked members of religious minorities and destroyed their places of worship. Even shias are considered to be non-Muslims. Such extremism has isolated Pakistan, weakened its economy and undermined international support for its stance on Kashmir. India has gained propaganda advantages and can continually blame Pakistan for terrorist outrages. This state of affairs has resulted from earlier Pakistan regimes using religious

extremists, as well as from the domestic roots of militancy arising from poverty and political and economic instability. Moreover, previous use of 'Islamic proxies' has led foreign countries to blame Pakistan for not making sincere efforts to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorist and extremist outfits in the country.

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Biographical Note

Saqib Khan is Ph.D scholar at Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

Prof. Dr. Umbreen Javaid is Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, and Chairperson, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

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