

The Rise of Extremism in Pakistan: International Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

Extremism in Pakistan has been the outcome of so-called Jihadists who wanted continuous recruitment for the Afghan-Soviet war(1979-89) and madrassas were settled with primary aim of propagation of so-called Jihad. Pakistan, being an Islamic Republic had already fertile ground for the promotion of Islamic ideology but this unfortunately was misconstrued by U.S. funded war which later turned Pakistani society into an abyss of extremism. Wave of sectarianism, drugs and political instability fomented extremism in the society. Internal strife coupled with international dynamics, badly distorted Pakistan's image internationally. That is the reason terrorists enjoyed support of masses despite military operations against them. This paper highlights that how the extremism rooted into Pakistani society caused wave of extremism, terrorism and hate. Pakistan faced serious challenges to economy and internal stability. Pakistan waged counterterrorism operations under the National Action Plan (NAP) but there is a need of counter-extremism policy that will normalize the society and regain its potential to excel.

Key Words: Extremism, Pakistan, International Dynamics, Terrorism & National Action Plan

Introduction

Trend of extremism and terrorism emerged in Pakistan when the state decided to commence Jihad in Afghanistan -to liberate the Afghan soil from the Soviet and Indian forces. Both extremism and terrorism challenges have roots in foreign and security policy choices towards wars in Afghanistan, and in an unsettled question, where should religion be situated, in society or in the structure of the state, is one of the fundamental political questions in the Muslim majority states. Conflicting answers to this question have also contributed to state and non-state responses to the conflicts within the region. The question of religion raises many controversies

about the rationale of the state, ideology, identity and the purpose of Muslims' life in the modern age.

Pakistan has been confronting this menace of extremism from the beginning because of its quest for an identity as a moderate Muslim state. Its struggle for finding a specific national path divided its political elites, parties, intelligentsia between modernists and Islamists—though Islamists dominated over the majority of modernists. Indeed, Islamists wanted to give the new state an Islamic identity, establish the supremacy of the Islamic law, and transform Pakistan into an Islamic state in its own image. The religious groups and parties hit big with the passage of the “Objective Resolution in the early years of Pakistan” (Munir, 1980). In successive decades, they kept demanding more, organizing themselves into several political parties and contesting for public offices. The pressure tactics of the religious groups worked: they persuaded a seemingly modernist and westernised political leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to declare Ahmadis—a religious group that claimed to be Muslims then—to be declared non-Muslims by amending the constitution (Mahmood, 2015:140). Better times for the Islamist groups had yet to come: the third military regime led by Ziaul Haq (1977-88) found a common ground with the religious parties for Islamizing the state and society (Abbas, 2013:50), thus Islamists survived and applied their self-interpreted ideology by opening and supporting *Madrassas* (Islamic Schools) in the country—which eventually glorified the Islamists and they heavily relied on *Madrassas* as a strong source of economy.

The state-owned drive for Islamization in the decade of 1980s coincided with the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-89) that shaped the second wave of the Cold War between the superpowers. The United States (US) and its Western allies promoted, funded and aided Jihadist groups from all over the world including Pakistan which was a close partner of the US in the 1950s, and 60s. Pakistan became a willing partner in this war and a ‘frontline’ state to rollback the Soviet intervention in its neighbouring country Afghanistan. A complex set of factors morphed into the rise of radical Islamism, which includes the three cycles over the forty-years war in Afghanistan, Pakistan’s strategic considerations in supporting the Jihadists in Afghanistan, internal political expediency and involvement of Middle Eastern powers in strengthening conflictive sectarian and religious streams. More importantly, a subjective worldview has taken strong roots in conservative sections of Pakistan society that celebrates historical narratives of Muslim invaders of India, assumes religious righteousness about fighting against any power that hurts the Muslim ‘interest’ even in other lands. Further, the unending the US war in Afghanistan—for the last eighteen years—has promoted a social climate favourable to Islamic radicalism that is fed by emotive notions of injustice, aggression, repressions, occupation and victimhood of Muslims.

The internal security challenges that the Islamic terrorist groups have presented Pakistan have grown too complex and too threatening to be handled effectively without coming into grip with the nature of this threat. After suffering

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colossal loss of lives,—seventy-five thousand casualties—a big economic cost that is estimated to be well over \$1 billion (Pakistan, 2018:51). There is some reflective introspection within the political elite and the security establishment. It is now widely recognized that terrorism poses a serious threat to national security than external adversaries (Tellis, 2008:10). However domestic militancy and violence has also its roots, genealogy, in transnational Jihad with the centre in the Middle East. Internally as well internationally, the fundamental or extremists Islamists in Pakistan have close collaboration with, and they are part of a global system of militant ideas and ideology.

Extremism has badly damaged Pakistan, its international image, national economy, internal coherence, and stability. Extremism has gravely hurt Pakistan's security and survival. For the first time, the country is engaging in a serious debate on what and why went wrong in the country. Ideological and political differences apart, there is a national consensus on addressing Islamic extremism. Progress is slow, but the right direction appears to have been set in the past few years. This article makes an attempt to understand the challenge of extremism and Pakistan's policy responses. The basic argument is that the state of Pakistan will have to go beyond military operations and rest its policy on changing the militant culture by developing a coherent, comprehensive, consensual and sustainable strategy for normalizing the country and society. In dealing with the menace of terrorism for well over a decade Pakistan has learnt many lessons, in the light of which, it has reformulated its policies and has put in place better legal and institutional mechanisms. It has made tremendous progress in defeating terrorism, restoring its writ in the borderlands, but it is in a long struggle for peace and stability. As militancy in this part of the world is a transnational problem, much will depend on how and when the wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East get settled. Warlike situation in Afghanistan and the Middle East always have had serious impacts on Pakistan-Islamists exploit the youth to gain their personal political or religious interests. This paper explains how extremism has taken root in Pakistan and what countering strategy is espoused by Pakistan.

Contending views

Contending views provide an academic view that how extremism took place in Pakistan. One of the first violent trends that attracted the attention of the scholars and analyst writing about militancy and terrorism was the emergence of better-organised and well-funded sectarian groups in the 1980s. Three events external to this region may be taken as a backgrounder. First was the Islamic revolution in Iran and the ascendancy of Shia clergy into the highest position of power in February 1979. One of the major policy changes, in clergy-ruled Iran was, reaching out to the Shia communities in the proximate and wider Muslim regions, and empowering them by advocating their rights and granting them funds for religious education. Shia identity and revival has been on the rise, which has roots in the Iranian revolution, with or without assistance from Iran (Nasr, 2000:190).

Related to this, a second important fact is the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia over the influence of the Muslim populations. Both have been pouring funds directly and indirectly through “private” means in countries like Pakistan to expand the mosque and *madrasas* networks of their favourite sects. The rich individuals and organizations of the Gulf states, not necessarily the rulers have been a consistent source of funding for the religious institutions that have vastly expanded since the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-88), and have become more influential(Hussain,2010).

Thirdly, many cycles of the Afghan wars for the past forty-years have greatly contributed to Islamic radicalization in every part of Pakistan. Tens of thousands of Pakistanis motivated by the spirit of Jihad have gone into Afghanistan first to fight along the Mujahedeen against the Soviet Union, and then in the civil war joined the Afghan Taliban. In my view, the Afghan wars and the conflict over Kashmir with India are two critical factors in shaping of the Jihadist culture among the radicalized youth. Finally, the state-sponsored programme of Islamization during the military regime of General Zia ul-Haq (1977-88) has been the constant reference in the literature and political discussion on the rise of militancy in Pakistan(Iqbal,1986).

A lot has been written in the newspaper columns, some scholarly articles and books about what has really gone wrong with the Pakistan and how the militant mind-set and extremism have emerged as the most immediate and biggest threat to the stability and national security. For such a complex phenomenon as Islamic extremism, no single explanation can be sufficient. Nor can extremism be associated with or determined by single event. It has grown gradually, spiked by certain domestic, regional and transnational events.

In a pioneering work on sectarianism in Pakistan, Mohammad Waseem examines three major forces that have shaped ‘new sectarianism’ in Pakistan. These are, international environment, state’s failure to deliver on its basic obligations, and the unsettled question of relationship between religion and politics(Waseem,2000:38). He makes a pertinent point in arguing that “sectarianism in contemporary Muslims society (focus on Pakistan) is at least partially the product of earlier achievements in the direction of Islamization”(Waseem,2000). The national, regional and international forces of Islamic politics, sectarianism, conflicts, and most importantly responses of the state to internal crises generated by the post-colonial expectations of a better life, better governance and better security have all added to a climate in which radicalism has flourished.

One of the most significant issues is the question of identity of the state that became tied to Islam in the imagination and construction of the Pakistani state. What is interesting about Pakistan is that secular elites, and essentially modernist in outlook has consistently made Islam the reference point of Pakistani nationalism. The two-nation theory, which was at the heart of Pakistan movement, and defining principle for demanding a separate country, created the mythology of

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Muslim nationalism. The political discourses of pre-partition days continued to have a spell on the nature and character of the Pakistani state in the formative years. The assertion that Pakistan was created ‘in the name of Islam’ provided it legitimacy for the Islamic groups to demand and struggle for an Islamic Pakistan. Bringing Islam into the politics of state-building and identity has created a much bigger space for Islamist groups of all shades and opinion—ranging from institutionalists to radicals(Rais,2017:22)

Although the support base of Islamist groups—sectarian and mainstream of political Islam remains narrow in the society and they have been rejected at the popular level in general elections, they remain a very strong voice for Islamization and have created much wider and denser networks of political, social and civil society organizations in the society. The three major religious parties—Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, and Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan, together polled 21 percent of popular votes in the 1970 general elections. In the July 2018 elections, the popular vote percentage of the coalition of five religious parties was shrunk to 5 percent. Besides the parliamentary politics, the religious parties and groups they dominate the urban street, *madrasas* network and mobilize provincial and national religious constituencies of their respective faith in assistance of local power struggles. Ayesha Siddiqi, one of the prominent Pakistani writers, believes that “The Jihadi and [radical] Islamists have replaced the traditional feudal in Punjab” even in the rural areas (Siddiqi,2013:1). However, it has not yet happened, but the surge of militant Islam in every province and region of Pakistan has been on the rise with the spread of radical organizations and their involvement in sectarian and Jihadi conflicts within the country and across the borders in Afghanistan and the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir.

Most of the studies on Jihadism and terrorism have adopted a multifactor approach from making references to historical Shia-Sunni schism in the early decades of Islam to the sectarian divide in the Middle East and rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Khalid Ahmad takes that route to explain Pakistan’s ‘sectarian war’. He argues that anti-Shia sentiments and violence and reactive Shia militancy are post-independence development, owing largely to the politics of identity, Islamization in the 1980s, and around that time, the extension of Arab-Iranian rivalry to Pakistan. In his view, what made the conflict so ugly and destructive is the revival of *tafkir* (apostatisation), which the British had refused to acknowledge as legitimate jurisprudence(Ahmad,2011). It appears to be a persuasive account of religious violence in Pakistan. However, the rise of Jihadist culture and radical religious thought are more complex and wider phenomenon. In the next section, we explore some of the forces that have shaped it.

The dynamics of extremism

What has generally been ignored in scholarship and debates on Islamic extremism in Pakistan and even in other Islamic countries is the nature of social and political discourses. There are always some powerful ideas that shape such debates and

controversies. In a semi-literate, relatively poor society with vast population like Pakistan, the discourse at popular level is not what the intellectuals, the scholars or experts of the subject say or write about. They are very few in the first place, and whatever they write is not accessible to the general public. And going by what is available in the vernacular (Urdu) press and writings that are accessible to the general public, the discourse on every issue that indirectly influences extreme attitudes is retrogressive. What Pakistani read in mostly the Urdu newspapers, watch on the cable television that has vastly proliferated in the country, or hear in public conversation is a narrative of grievances. The narrative begins with the creation of the state of Israel and how the Palestinians, the Arabs and the Muslims have been wronged by the Western powers, notably by the US. The US invaded Afghanistan, installed an anti-Taliban regime, and has, for the past nineteen years, been fighting a war against the Afghan 'people' Taliban. The coalition forces led by the US removed a "Taliban government that had established peace and fought against the warlords"(Roheena,Interview). More importantly, the Taliban had established an Islamic state, which the West was unwilling to accept and live with.

The role of the Pakistani media in fomenting extremism remains unexplored, but since it has played a biggest role than generally acknowledge, it needs dedicated, focuses studies. Two things are commonly observed in Pakistani media. First, the representatives of the political Islam have been given much larger space and time in the media than their popular support base would justify their views have generally gone uncontested. That has been a routine affair for more than a decade, until the terrorists struck the students and teachers of the Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16, 2014 and 132 children were killed(BBC News,2014). These narratives have legitimized the Taliban resistance in Afghanistan, have generated support for the movement in every corner of the country, and have also given birth to the Tehreek Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP), which the Pakistani forces have been battling for years to wrest control of the frontier regions. After more than a decade of successive military operations, they have vacated the Taliban occupation. Having been pushed into stateless areas of Afghanistan, they continue to intrude and attack Pakistani forces on the borders. Another strand of discourse of grievance has an endless focus on India and the Kashmir dispute. The events in the Indian-administered part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, whenever they happen, instantly become 'breaking news' and dominate the media scene and popular conversation at the popular level. Again, we see a strong streak of victimhood, and a story of death and destruction by a 'Hindu' India. The essence of the debate is that the 'peoples' of Kashmir, Afghanistan, Palestine, Myanmar, Muslims genocide in Rohingya, and other places are 'targeted' because they are Muslims. The media highlights the news of these conflicts with a slant, leaving many questions about the complexity of these problems open for ordinary people to think about. The folks at the street level neither have the knowledge nor any degree of evolved intellect to find out anything about those complexities. They reduce these and other conflict, like Iraq,

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Yemen, and Syria into a ‘Western conspiracy’, double standards and strategic manipulations to keep the Muslim lands unstable, embroiled in conflict and weak (Fazl,2015). This is a typical headline, routinely published in the newspapers and discussed on the electronic media.

Over the decades, the idea of ‘injustice’ has struck very strong roots in the Pakistani mind. There cannot be a uniformity of views on these or any other set of issues in Pakistan, but even a tiny minority, and that might be the case, can create trouble. There is even “something deeper” in the Muslim mind than litany of wrongs, as Bernard Lewis suggests. The ‘roots of Muslim rage’ lie in humiliation and defeat by Russia, loss of empires and power and corresponding desire to re-establish the glory of the past(Lewis,1990). But the author has found other reasons. These are internal failures—too many them in the Muslim world and Pakistan. Incompetence and corruption of the elites transfers the decline, weakened position and lack of vision or effective strategy to rise again to the hatred against the outside world. For Pakistani extremists, the immediate enemy is India—the present anti-Muslim environment in India has deeply convinced the people that India is Muslims enemy, and the very powerful, ‘conspiratorial’ and ‘imperial’ West which never takes action against their enemies.

The story of a woman terrorist, Tafsheen Malik, expressing commitment to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) while attacking a holiday party at the Inland Regional Centre, San Bernardino, California on December 2, 2015 can be traced to the Punjab, the largest province of Pakistan. It was in Multan, the cultural and educational hub of the southern Punjab where she spent a good part of her adult life and got a university degree. One of her relatives disclosed that “Malik’s religious beliefs seemed to change during her time at the (Bahauddin Zakariya University—a public institution of higher learning(Stack,2015) How she and her terrorist husband got extremist and what inspired them are some of the questions, answers to which may “touch Pakistan and the virulent strands of religion circulating with growing ferocity in the Muslim world”(DAWN,2015). Another female medical student, Noureen Laghari, was arrested by the security forces from the major city of Punjab, Lahore. Noureen had joined ISIS, she was student at university of Jamshoro, Sindh. She was connected with ISIS’s man via Facebook and got married an extremist, Ali Tariq, he was expert in preparing suicide vests(The Hindu,2017). The author has met many folk in South Punjab and they share their views that “Jihadist teaching is common in the *Madrasas* they are funded by the international and national organizations”(The Guardian,2009).

Religion is the supreme social force in Pakistan, more so in the sprawling urban areas of the country. Unfortunately, this force has been manipulated for political and strategic ends by the leaders of Pakistan from the first Kashmir war in 1948 to the Soviet-Afghan war. In this war, and in subsequent two equally deadly cycles, including the last starting in November 2001, Jihad has emerged as the most powerful narrative. Pakistani state, compelled by its geographical location, weaker position, and grave perception of real or imagined threat to its security. The poor children are sent to the *madrasas* to enlist for Jihad. They are religiously

motivated. The youth from poor sections of the society found in Jihad an opportunity for resources and empowerment.

There are several points of agreement on the sources of extremism among the top leaders of the police department serving in the field. First, poverty is a serious issue—only those parents send their children to *madrasas* who cannot support even a small fee in the public schools. Additionally, the students get free food, medical care, shelter and clothing. This is not the first choice or preference of poor families though. This is confirmed by a major representative study on the *madrasa* education in Punjab, which concludes that families send some children to public school and some to *madrasa* due to financial constraints(Andrabi,2009). There is a strong view within the security establishment of Pakistan that the sectarian terrorists and the TTP networks have been recruiting from within the vast *madrasa* network that operates without much state control(Farooq,2016).

While most of the Pakistani experts of terrorism focus more on Afghanistan and the larger picture of events and how they have influenced the Pakistani society, the social transformations within the country are generally overlooked. We need to bring two issues concerning internal changes in Pakistan into focus to explain how they play a role in extremism. The first is the social and economic mobility of lower classes in the rural areas and their massive conversion from popular, mystical Islam of their ancestors to Wahabi religious orientation—a major source to interpret Islamism. Pakistan's urban growth has been exponential. A World Bank report calculates that 55% of Pakistani population lives in the areas with “urban characteristics”(Tribue,2015). In the town of Punjab, the new urban settlers got introduced to Wahabi creed through mosque, colleagues, religious rallies and religious sermons and conversation. The tendency among the educated youth to embrace this sect for its reformist appeal has been greater. The abstract principles of Wahabi Islam, in this respect, have won the battle of hearts over the colourful culture associated with the popular Islam of the shrines and saints.

The religious transformation of the new urban settlers has produced number of effects. First, new identity gives them a sense of equality on religious basis across castes and social classes. It marks a big change from their lower social standing in the stratified, hierarchical social structure of the rural areas to equal citizen in the urban setting. Second, they have acquired a new sense of liberation and empowerment that has come with education, jobs, businesses or professions towns and cities. In the urban setting, they have used affiliation with religious networks as a weapon to contest for political and social spaces. The powerless of yesterday turned into powerful of today, and with target killing of opponents they established an order of terror and violence in areas where the state apparatus was relatively weak. They became to be noticed, and even admired by the militant followers, inspiring more to join them. It is equally a contestable claim that every militant is religiously motivated.

How much role *madrasas* and their foreign funding have played in the development of extremist thought and militancy is a subject of lot of debate and

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discussion but with very little focused, empirical work. There are two essential facts that no analyst can ignore. First, the *madrasas* have proliferated, rather manifold during the past three decades with hundreds of thousands students enrolled in them. Second, all the *madrasas* are sectarian in character, as they teach one specific religious stream and produce specialists intellectually equipped to propagate and defend the truthfulness of their specific sect. Third, Pakistani state turned to the *madrasas* during the Soviet-Afghan war to recruit young men for Jihad in Afghanistan (Ganguly,2012:37). Finally, state used the idiom of Jihad for a strategic purpose, ending up mobilizing religiously motivated men who thought beyond the state. Actually, even the mainstream creed of the religious right in Pakistan finds the idea of territorial state incompatible with their religious beliefs. Unintentionally, Pakistan ignited the fires of one of the oldest and most powerful doctrines of Islam—the holy war and its transnational obligation. Every major conflict within Pakistan, in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and now in the Middle East, has gripped the minds of vulnerable Pakistanis, radicalizing them.

The religious extremism, as note earlier is not a specific phenomenon of *madrasa*, it is much wider, deeper and may last longer. But the *madrasa* education, the sheer number of them and the very large body of students and graduates of these traditional institutions need to be addressed. Every new government showing some initial resolve to enact reforms has hesitated doing so, fearing a backlash(DAWN,2019). Molana Fazlur Rehman a well known religious political leader staged sit-in against Prime Minister Imran Khan when the government planned to reform *madrasas* in the country. It is considered a big task, controversial and risky for political stability and social order.

Countering terrorism

Pakistan's responses to terrorism have changed over time because of the changing nature of the terrorist threat, the emergence of new terrorist groups like Pakistan TTP, the Islamic State in recent times, and ever shifting transnational connections among the terrorist networks operating from the border regions of the country to Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Middle East. Pakistan has learnt many lessons from its counter-terrorism strategy, and has accordingly reformulated its policies. Many of the groups that it supported in their Jihad in Afghanistan turned against it when Islamabad decided to side with the US in its war in Afghanistan to oust the Taliban and reconstruct a new state structure. We see a major shift in state policy for negotiating with the Taliban and other Islamic groups to waging a war against them. While it has succeeded in defeating the Taliban in all border regions of the country, there is much needed to be done in the light of the National Action Plan (NAP) which has ambitious objectives in addressing all problems that have contributed to the terrorist mindset.NAP was designed to curb religious extremists and facilitators those funded terrorists net work in the country.

Dialogue with militants

A state produces two-dimensional response in case of conflict (insurgency, militancy) either prefers use of force or negotiates. It should not be construed as surrender if a state declares a policy of negotiations with militants. It can never be guaranteed beforehand the use of force or negotiations will succeed in putting out the flames of insurgency. Insurgencies develop over a long time and establish their internal and external linkages for survival (Mets, 2017). For a country like Pakistan, it becomes challenging to defeat insurgency using any of the above mentioned options. Each government has different preferences and insurgents also respond different to a dictator than to democratic government. Because democratic government provide chances to engage in negotiations and share their demands. whereas dictators believe in use of force and aim to crush militancy.

Negotiations are slower but effective process than use of force. Pakistan army when launched operations against Taliban militants, they were not in favour of dialogue with Taliban. Some believed that talking to them is a useless exercise because Taliban were religious fanatics and were ambitious to capture the state control in Pakistan. After a lot of debate in the media whether to negotiate with the Taliban in 2013-14, the ruling party, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the opposition parties reached a bipartisan consensus within the Parliament to negotiate with the Taliban (Ghumman, 2013). The new government then, for right political reasons, wanted to exhaust the remedy of talks, while the military was preparing itself for delivering a deadly blow at the right time and at the right place, and even prepare for a long haul. It constituted a negotiating committee that med with the TTP representatives, a few times.

It was not for the first time that the Pakistan government had opted for dialogue with the Taliban. It signed no less than seven written and verbal agreements with various Taliban factions in different tribal agencies between 2004 and 2008. The first was in April 2004 with an obscure Taliban leader, Nek Muhammad Wazir, a young militant of twenty-year age. It was done after an ineffective military operation against his group in March in which the Pakistan security forces suffered heavy casualties. It was done to put pressure on him to end sanctuaries given to Arabs, Chechens and Uzbeks in South Waziristan [tribal area]. As part of the peace deal, the Pakistani government agreed to release Taliban prisoners, pay compensation to tribesmen for property damage as a result of its military operations, and provide money to the militants in return for surrendering the foreign militants and stop cross-border attacks into Afghanistan. Immediately after the signing of the agreement, Nek Muhammad refused to surrender foreign militants to the government, and his faction began to assassinate tribal elders who helped negotiate the agreement. The government then revoked Nek Muhammad's amnesty deal, and launched another military operation against his faction in June 2004, killing him in a drone strike (DAWN, 2004).

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The failed Shakai Agreement became the template of many more failed agreements with the Taliban (The News, 2004). They failed because the Taliban were not willing to compromise on the implementation of Islamic law. They had an illusion that they could raise the cost of military operations and force the government to accept their territorial control of the areas that they had captured. Over the years, they had gained power, accumulated a lot of wealth and had an organisation to control the local populations. They had succeeded in evicting the state by killing or intimidating state functionaries. They had got recognition by their representatives appearing on television shows and presenting their case. In a way, the government played a role in raising the stature of criminals and militants by negotiating with them. That reduced the importance and social standing of the tribal chiefs that had been on the targeting-killing list of the TTP (Fata Research Center, 2011).

The last important peace deal was with the Swat Taliban in 2008. Mullah Fazlullah rose into prominence in Swat, a former princely state, now a district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, between 2005-8 when a coalition of religious parties under the banner of Muttahidda Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) was in power. The religious groups won the 2002 election on the wave of anti-American sentiments because of its war against the Afghan Taliban. The MMA did not do anything to stop Talibanization of Swat, and even supported the rise of Taliban factions (Zaid, 2015).

Peace talks with religiously motivated groups have been a failure, at least in the case of the Taliban. There were many within the secular political parties, intellectual circles and the media that wanted no talks with the Taliban groups anymore that had taken over control of several tribal agencies, now districts in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The evidence they presented in support of their position was enormous: the military and previous governments over a period of almost a decade had negotiated at least many peace deals with the Taliban (Satar, 2014). None of those agreements lasted very long. The Taliban groups that were a mix of desperate militants from local tribes, other provinces of Pakistan, and from foreign countries had been exercising real power in the border regions. They were not willing to give up their 'Islamic' fiefdoms without a fight with the Pakistan army.

Military operations

Contrary to a widely held view, the military has consistently conducted operations against the militants in the difficult terrain of the tribal regions bordering Afghanistan for well over a decade (Abbasi, 2014). To curb expansion of the Talibanization the military launched the first operation in Swat in November 2007. It was codenamed as Operation Rah-e-Haq (the path of truth or rightness). It failed to destroy the Taliban networks and end militancy. The violence continued unabated through the 2008 elections, which the MMA badly lost. A coalition government of two secular parties—the Awami National Party and Pakistan

People's Party took over. In order to achieve stability, the parties hastily offered of peace talks to the Taliban in Swat, hoping that an agreement would put an end to the violence in the region and end Taliban's control. Within weeks, they signed a 16-point agreement on May 21, 2008, which accepted every demand of the Taliban, including implementation of Islamic justice system according to Islamic law (Ali,2008).

Within days of reaching this disagreement, the Taliban refused honour their obligation under the peace deal. They refused to surrender their arms as stipulated in the agreement, demanding that the government first withdrew troops from the valley. They also demanded the release of some of the most-wanted Taliban prisoners held. The militants began attacking state installation, killing government officials, establishing their courts and sentencing people to be hanged publically as they were doing before. In May 2009, the military launched Operation Rah-e-Raast (true path), the biggest ever that included evacuation of local population from Mingora the major city of the area. Within months, the number of Internally Displaced Persons reached 463,000 that sought shelter with families or lived in the camps(Center for Research and Security Studies,2014). The army suffered 985 casualties in the operation (Business Recorder,2011).

The biggest ever offensive was launched after the militants attacked Jinnah Naval base in Karachi. Named as Zarb-e-Azb (cutting strike), the operation targeted the last remaining stronghold of the TTP in North Waziristan, which it was using for attacks against the people and security forces. Thought to be the most difficult one, the military routed out the TTP within months, and since then, it has restored peace, rehabilitated and resettled displaced persons and has launched big post-conflict reconstruction projects (Ispahani,2016).

The National Action Plan

The National Action Plan was approved to eradicate extremists groups in Pakistan. It is a multifaceted action programme that has national consensus and has all the political parties and security establishment on one page. The consensus is that Pakistan cannot achieve stability and social order, let alone progress without putting an end to extremism (Haider,2014). It has many reform elements in it that includes hard-power elements (police and military operations) restoration of death penalty, establishment of military courts for speedy trial of terrorists, *madrasa* reforms and controlling the flow of foreign and domestic funding. There is remarkable progress in shaping national consensus on the issue of terrorism. Consequently, the public opinion has turned against militancy, which has offered an opportunity for the security agencies and the government to secure wider political support for the counter-terrorism measure.

The military operations as envisaged under the NAP have wiped out TTP base in the frontier regions while police have killed hundreds of terrorists in the 'encounters' in the urban areas. The Operation *Radd-ul-Fasaad* (Elimination of

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Discord) continues in every part of the country that usually results in apprehending members and the facilitators of the terrorist groups hiding in urban areas or they were never investigated by the governments. The previous government (2013-2018) and the military establishment designed a strategy to arrest them those facilitated the terrorists groups. It was so astonishing when the former minister of petroleum, Doctor Asim, was arrested in sheltering and treatment of terrorists, and criminals belonging to Mothida Qomi Movement (MQM) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) at his private hospital in Karachi. Many MQM's active members were arrested under this operation (Sohautara,2016).

An enduring success and normality of Pakistan may require more than the use of hard power, which is easily done. As recommended by the NAP, Pakistan needs to develop counter-narrative—against terrorism. The previous government of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) in collaboration with International Islamic University convened one of the largest gathering of religious clerics and sought a unanimous religious degree (*fatwa*) against terrorism. About 1829 clerics from all schools of religious thought in Islam declaring that intolerance towards other faiths, terrorism and violence against the state and society is against the principles of Islam(The Nation,2018) .The governance, institutional capacity of the state and responsive polices and politics would better address the problems that create frustrations, grievances, poverty and inequality in the society. It is the reform agenda in wider sense that remains a work-in-progress. Much will depend on how reforms, including the *madrasas* and their funding are monitored, controlled and brought to an end(Hussain,2015).

The terror funding and madrasa reforms

The biggest challenge is cutting the chain of funding to the extremists elements and check on the financing of the *madrasas* from foreign sources. The governments in Pakistan for decades have known the problem, but political expediency took the better side of their calculation of national interest. It has been widely known within Pakistan and external powers that Iran and some Arab countries have been financing religious networks in the country. After many years of silence, the Punjab Police Department told the National Assembly (Parliament) that private sources from 17 countries including non-Muslim were contributing hundreds of millions in rupees to about one thousand *madrasas* (Tribune,2015). The *madrasas* are not the only institutions that provided recruits for terrorism. Many of them have come from the mainstream educational institutions and society. Their leaders have been educated at the colleges and universities and are better placed than the poor students of the *madrasas*(Fair,2008:93). But they do feed into extreme narratives, some join Jihad enterprise and promote sectarian rift between Shia and Sunni.

A dominant view in Pakistan is that the *madrasa* education needs to be reformed, not only for the terrorists find the religious seminaries as a fertile ground for recruiting their ideological allies, but for justice, equality and quality education

for the poor. It is a known fact that some of the known terrorists, and the leaders and founders of sectarian organizations have *madrasa* background (Farooq,2016). Over the decades, there have been many proposals for *madrasa* reforms, but a well-organised coalition of *madrasa* networks that now run into tens of thousands, have very effectively resisted it. The real issue is how to mainstream *madrasa* education and provide an alternative to the financially constrained families that send their children to *madrasa*, as the only way out. This is both a supply and demand issue, which some drastic educational reforms with strong political will and economic resourced to back up the reforms may address in gradual fashion.

Under the NAP, the federal ministries of education and religious affairs were tasked to introduce social studies, mathematics, English and science subjects in the *madrasas* by providing funding for teachers in these subject for students from class one to five. While some *madrasas* have gradually started teaching these subjects, the overall objectives of reforms remain incomplete (Haq,2018). While the *madrasas* may be allowed to retain their autonomy and continue with religious education, efforts need to be made to give national curriculum option to the seminary students. This seems to be the way forward, as most of the *madrasa* are not averse to such initiatives, provided they are given resources, like teachers and funds.

Conclusion

Pakistan has been confronting with extremists and militant groups many of which have roots in sectarianism, and transnational Jihadism . They have posed one of the biggest threats national. They are relatively manageable and can be addressed through military deterrence and diplomacy. The problem with domestic terrorism is that develops roots, political affiliation and succeeds in developing a supporting political and social constituency.

Extremist groups and organisations proliferate and use political violence either to fill legitimacy vacuum of a state policy, its weak or absence, or poor responses to such threats when they surface. The Pakistani state was weak and vulnerable in the border regions, where tribal autonomy and growth of religious militancy owing to the Soviet-Afghan grew greater than the old-rustic administrative and security system of the Pakistani state. But such groups not alone, ethnic-subnational in major cities, sectarian and religious-radicals in both urban and rural Punjab also began to shape in the waning years of the military regime of Pervez Musharraf. The culture of militancy spread to even some political parties that have been contesting elections and speaking the language of constitution and democracy.

It is important to analyse the social, political and security conditions that create an enabling environment for the extremist groups to arise. The reason is that state responses can be and should be only reactive to militant situations but address the root causes of the problem. Otherwise, existence of the same policies or similar

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conditions might help the terrorist networks to grow and sustain themselves. One of the major failures of Pakistan is not realizing the impact of entering the second wave of Cold War (1980-88) and become a frontline state in support of the Mujahedeen war in Afghanistan. It made even a bigger error of judgement when it thought that was no other option but assist the US in fighting its war against the Afghan Taliban (2002), the war that continues across the border. It is in the light of these plunders and disastrous blow-back effects on national security. During the recent Iran-US tension, after Qasim Salmani's death, Prime Minister Imran Khan categorically said that Pakistan would not take part in anyone else's war but play a role as facilitator country.

Failures, mistakes and domestic and foreign policy disorientations of the past decades landed Pakistan in big problems, both domestic and international. Not addressing the question of terrorism in holistic sense with holistic responses is not an option; rather, it is a compulsion for Pakistan if it has to grow economy, be an attractive destination for foreign direct investment and achieve prosperity for fast growing population with a massive youth bulge. After the success of military operation at tremendous cost Pakistan needs effective post-conflict reconstruction, better administrative integration of the border districts into the national political mainstream. It has taken a historic step in merging the seven tribal agencies into the KPK province that has very strong political consensus across the party-lines. There is much that needs to be done with respect to national narrative of peace, *madrassa* reforms, and larger issues, justice and development.

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