

Terrorism and Extremism in Pakistan: The Need for a Comprehensive Approach

Dr. Qurat ul Ain Bashir

Assistant Professor, Department of History and Pakistan Studies, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Pakistan

Professor Dr. Matloob Ahmad

Dean Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences The University of Faisalabad

Farah Naz Bhatti

Doctoral Candidate History, Department of History and Pakistan Studies, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Pakistan

Abstract

Terrorism and radicalism have kept Pakistan in turmoil for decades that induced immense socio-economic harm to the country. The persistent challenge has brought about elevation in casualties, dissolutions of government and worsen law and order scenarios. Till present, the governments have been unable to root out the extremist elements from the society. This paper offers outright approach to comprehend these defies. The paper considered multifaceted elements; such as; scarcity of education, political stability, sectarianism, destitution etc. as a core for the rise of extremism. Besides, Afghanistan being the neighboring country to Pakistan has served as a sanctuary for extremist groups. Thence, Pakistan has to deal with the national and international terrorist groups. This study does the appraisal of the endeavors made by the government for hindering the terrorism. So far, the chief government strategy has been to launch military action, terrorism prevention plans and dialogue against terrorist and extremist groups that caused soaring number of civilian casualties and remained in vain to get away with these social evil. The paper adopts comprehensive ground to address

the problem under study. The factors viz a viz; social reforms, economic prosperity and political stability are true remedies to defies. But, these remedies could only been effective if civil society, government in power and international stakeholders will work together for pragmatic resolutions. The paper argues that peace and instability could be happen in a country through a comprehensive approach towards the matter.

Keywords: Challenges, Extremism, Government, Pakistan, Remedies, Terrorism

Introduction

Subcontinent has a history of extremism and terrorism since British Colonialism which was the byproduct subjects' grievances. When people of the land had succumbed their rights before the injustices and atrocities of the then government then extremist mindset happened and the course of history has taken its path to achieve their rights by available means. Terrorism is an advanced form of extremism as it the practical conversion of the ideas into reality.¹

In Pakistan the seed of extremism had been systematically sowed into all institutions via Islamized policy of the government during the reign of General Zia ul Haq who has even rewrite the country history as per his own preferences. Sectarian conflicts, state-wide new interpretation of Islam and Muslim-Non-Muslim conflicts were the main highlights of the era. During Soviet- Afghan war the Zia has supported Afghanistan as to procure monetary benefits, weapons and supplies to the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) from Unites States. At that time one of the Saudi jihadi named Osama bin Laden's network was supported by the ISI.² Besides, during this war, a massive number of the Afghan refugees flooded in North-West Frontier due to well established connections with locals of these areas. Some of them settled in Pakistan and others have deep family ties here to which the extremist culture started to get its roots in our society. Their radical thinking, love for war, no work to earn bread and butter had enable them to preach extremism. Meanwhile the ISI influence and capabilities increased and

emergence of “Kalashnikov culture”. The conclusion of Soviet war resulted in the settlement of *jihadis* from other Muslim countries into Pakistan which was whole heartedly welcomed by the ISI. The ISI was overwhelmed after the win of Afghanistan and deemed that it might utilize these *jihadis* for Kashmir cause in the same way they had been used in Soviet-Afghan war. These *jihadis* activities did not support ISI to achieve its aims instead Pakistan reached at the verge of having nuclear war with India at two points of time from 1988 onward. After 9/11 episode the five important terrorist groups had been banned in Pakistan but the presence of Laden in Abbottabad and US security operation against him has again caused suspicions against the Pakistan’s efforts to counter the terrorism.³

Terrorism has comprehensive impact on state and regions as it drifts the whole planning of the state out of course and the survival became the fundamental priority. The comprehensive approach to study this topic is of the essence for not only the local and national stake holders have been involved into it but also the behavior of the international community towards the country from where such activities have been transpired is paramount. The factors that led these evils could not be discussed in isolation but through inter-connectivity approach the factors could be measured for propagating terrorism. Terrorism in Pakistan has a novel feature like its land has also been used to launch international terrorism which was only the intention of bunch of people who were not even the dwellers of its land. Hence, the topic needs discussion from all the possible dimensions to grasp its trajectory and solutions as well.

Cause of Terrorism in Pakistan

Terrorism in Pakistan has several causes that are complex mixed of socio-economic and politico educational factors. Some of the significant grounds that enhance terrorism in Pakistan are political instability, poverty, lack of education, sectarianism and religious extremism. The former cited factors and growth of terrorism are directly proportional. This section will observe the causes of terrorism and its influence on the increase of terrorism in Pakistan to get the comprehensive view of the problem.

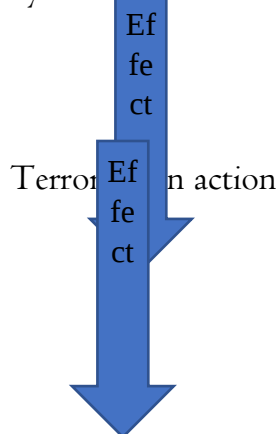
Political Instability and Terrorism: Correlation

Political stability is the defense mechanism of any country and its fragility supports the anti-state elements to undermine its sovereignty. As a matter of fact the series of change in governments, corruption and lack of governance has caused conducive environment for the growth of terrorism. In Pakistan the worth noting terrorist groups are Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan, Al-Qaeeda and Lashkare Jhangvi.⁴ When government and opposition fight for power and military coup occurs frequently than these elements got opportunity to plan and execute their intentions practically. The terrorism wave have been experienced hype in Pakistan in the decade of 1990's when frequent debacle of governments transpired. Being a porous boarder the Afghanistan also play important role in political dysfunctioning of the Pakistan being she does not support democracy.⁵ The assassination of former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto in 2007, attack of Srilankan cricket team in 2009, attack on Army Public School in Peshawar in 2014, three attacks in Quetta in 2021 etc. have happened due to political weaknesses.

The terrorist groups could easily established strong control over the local population in those regions where the writ of the government is fragile.

In Pakistan the terrorism once occur due to political fragility leads to more political fragility, acute outcomes and social instability. People lost their confidence and hope on government and fear and feel living without system and governance. The law and enforcement agencies could serve society by enhancing its capabilities and skills but is also depend on the initiative of the government.⁶ The relationship between said factors is like:

Extremist Factor in seeking opportunity to express terrorism which is given by Weak governance



More acute weak governance

Lack of Education and Terrorism: Co-relationship

Significant number of children do not have access to education due to which they are more exposed to the extremist ideology that give them purpose and meaning in life. Minor children find their radical ideologies romantic and feel pride in being part of these groups and ideologies. Religious studies, which are mostly interpreted by the *Mullah* community, are a major source of education in Pakistan. People without education rely on them for Islamic knowledge and do not question *Mullah*; as a famous proverb goes, "uneducated people always believe what they have been told, and educated people always question," so people who lack the sense and skill to distinguish between right and wrong are more inclined to their version of knowledge.

Taliban in Pakistan had been attacking educational institute mostly of women as they comprehend that educated population is a threat to their ideologies as it empower themselves with knowledge and don't let peoples' brains and actions to be controlled by other terrorist groups.⁷

Education: Pro-Terrorism

Most of the people who do not have modern schooling are from impoverished and marginalized background they joined *Madrasa* schools. This education setup does not offer reasonable opportunities for them to find decent salary jobs amid modern trends of the society. The alumni of these setup either joined other religious groups or construct same set up for themselves as a job so they can get donations from society. On one hand no education is causing terrorism and on other hand the Islamic education which is tailor made by the *Mullah* for his vested interest is also triggering terrorism. Balanced syllabus is the prerequisite to give mature minds to the people which *Madrasa* system does not allow which is manipulated by *Mullah*. The madras are producing militants groups that have strong loyalty with their institutions. The reforms in education based on the combination of world and true Islam could only serve as a remedy to the terrorism.⁸

Poverty and Terrorism: Co-relationship

In Pakistan approximately 24 percent of the population is below the poverty line. Lack of education and poverty has great effects on the terrorism as they fertile the ground to sow terrorism. In this context several studies have been done that confirm the relationship between poverty and terrorism. For instance, accordingly to the research occurred by the Institute for Economics and Peace; Pakistan stood 6th out of 163 countries on the Global Terrorism Index. This number identifies the impact of terrorism on all spheres of the state. This study also strengthen the fact the terrorism in Pakistan is strongly related with poverty and political instability.⁹ Poverty has been exploited by the terrorist organization on so many occasions to get recruitment in their wings. One of the prominent organization is Taliban that has manipulated poverty and desperation in youngsters to recruit them in their wings. The strategy of this organization is to offer support and money to those who were in need of money. Impoverished localities are the feeding areas to these organizations. In the poorest pockets of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province the presence and influence of the Taliban are deep. Young people are more into Taliban as they are easy to brain wash, influence and trap due to lack of their experience and vulnerability to them.¹⁰

Another example that can be included to comprehend the directly proportional relationship between poverty and terrorism is the episodes of sectarian violence in Pakistan. Sectarian violence has been flared up by political grievance and poverty because people who feel marginalized and out of political process were willing to support radical actions against the state.

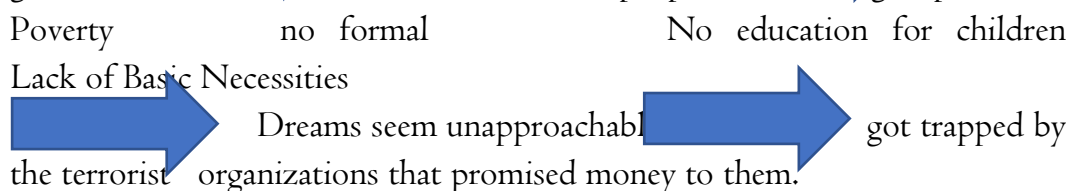
A number of sectarian violence attacks have been happened in Pakistan that caused thousands of innocent lives, such as; the suicidal attack occurred in Shia Mosque in Peshawar in 2013 in which more than 80 people were killed and several were injured. This attack is just one of the sectarian attacks that transpired in Pakistan due to poverty and political resentment.

Addressing poverty is crucial to get rid of terrorism in Pakistan. In order to achieve that we required to increase education and employment opportunities

especially in rural areas, besides this health services and political resentment must be attended before they became some of the reasons of terrorism.

In this government has launched couple of projects to reduce poverty and terrorism. The Benazir Income Support program is a government initiative to offer some money support to poor. More than 5 million families have been benefiting from this project but in present scenario due to inflation it is not enough to achieve its goals.

National Action Plan is launched in 2014 to fight terrorism. The main aims of the said project is to increase educational and job opportunities, improve health and sanitation services. The relationship between both the factors could be following diagram; that helps in understanding by keeping general factors that led to the recruitment of people in terrorist groups.



Porous Border:

Afghanistan

Pak-Afghan border is the most porous border due to poor control measure from Pakistan side. It is easy for militant to move across the border. The geophysical features is a contributing factor for in-effective control over border.¹¹ Even at this point of time the security at Torkham border has improved but even though smuggling of goods like cigarettes, pan leaves and other resources are intact. Previously even weapons had been smuggled by the militants to Pakistan. Beside this, the tribal areas are historically autonomous and under the tribal structure which is not in line with the legal and administration system of Pakistan. Even when government tried to impose its command; it had faced resistance from local dwellers for they consider it encroachment in their traditional tribal system. So, to secure the border from Afghanistan side is a challenge within the country itself. These border pockets are one of the main causes for militant attacks in Pakistan.

1980s is the decade during which foreign militants' influx into Pakistan under the watch of ISI. When war ended, they not only make Pakistan their home but also base to launch their operations and other activities. The presence of these militant groups has put intentional sanctions on Pakistan, even millions of Afghan refugees have settled in Pakistan since 1980s and have played crucial role in creating extremism and practical terrorism in Pakistan. The event of 9/11 and presence of Laden had played great role in weakening the anti-terrorism stance of the country.¹²

Pakistan has taken several measures to tackle terrorism. Some of them are:

- Launch of military operations against militants
- Increase in border security
- Dialogues with local tribal leaders

Pakistan also have increase in extremist activities like kidnapping, snatching, violence etc., because of proliferation of arms from Afghanistan border that are requisite for such social disturbances. Currently Pakistan is facing lack of resources, political instability to settle the issue. But hopefully middle path will be design in future to resolve border issues with time.¹³

India

Pak-India border is mostly porous in the area of Punjab which was drawn in 1947 by the Radcliffe Line. The Afghanistan and Indian borders with Pakistan have a similar trait that relatives are living on both side of the border. Weapons also enters into Pakistan from India. The government from both sides have facilitate the visa policy for families, religious tourism and patients to curb illegal movement across the border but it has not happened to be a success story till yet.¹⁴

Iran

Pak-Iran has long porous border through which cross border terrorism and militant activities held. Terrorist groups also enter Pakistan to use it as a base to launch attacks against Iran. Some of the important terrorist groups that have conduct cross border terrorism through Pak-Iran border are:

- Taliban
- Al-Qaeda

- Islamic State (IS)

The Pakistani side of the border is mountainous and difficult to monitor. This region had remained a home of so many militants who were engaged in cross border terrorism. Due to rough terrain and porous border the militant take advantage to move back and forth between the two counties.

The tribulation of cross border terrorism had adversely affected relationship of both the countries which has profound impact on the regional security too. It has also contributed instability and to some extent the ongoing issue in Afghanistan.¹⁵ Both the countries are working on the issue to find some workable solutions to secure their border from being breach for such kind of violent and subjective activity.

The “diagram A” will suggest measures/initiative that both Pakistan and neighboring countries need to adopt counter terrorism and projection peace in the region.

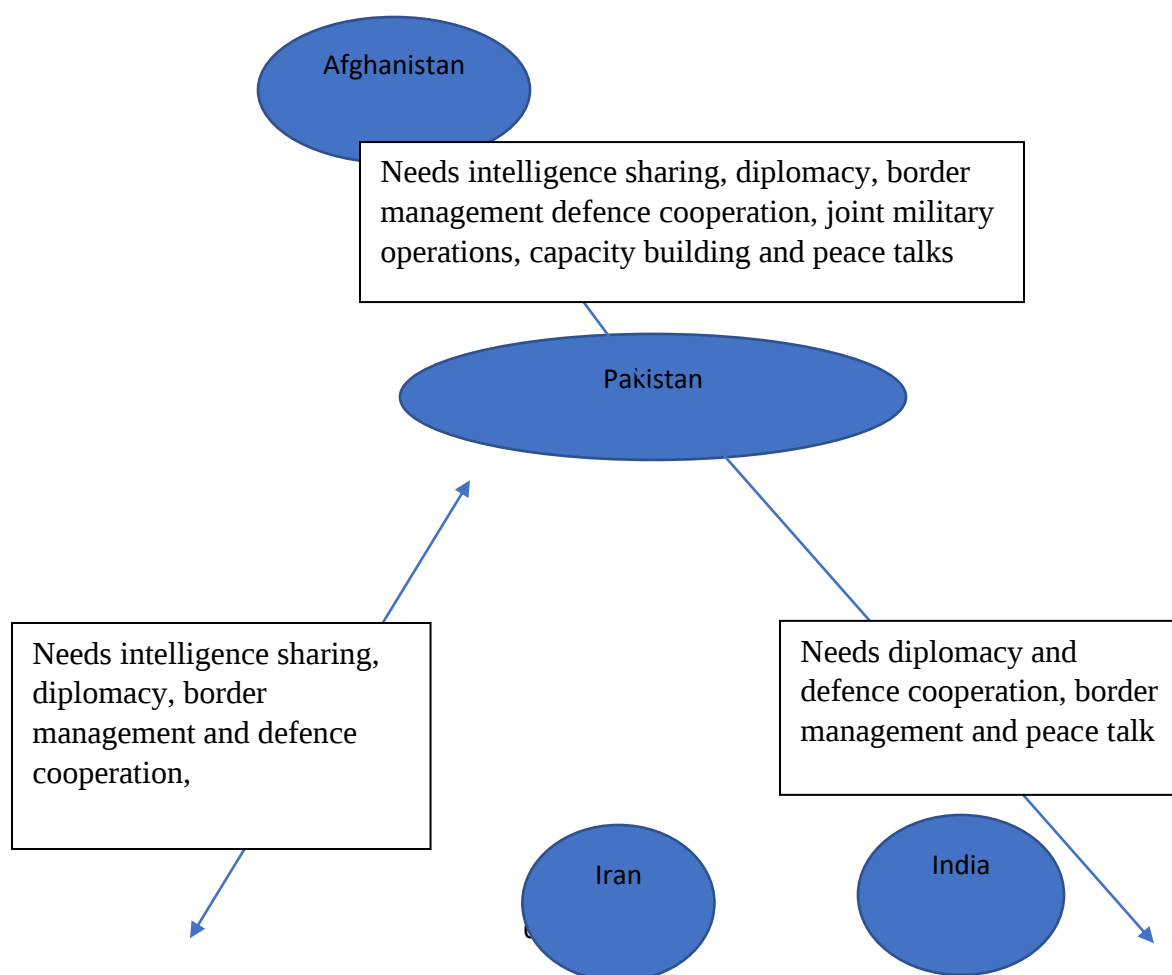


Diagram “A”

Pakistan into Grey List:

On several occasions Pakistan has been included into FATF grey list with the complaints of insufficient measure to curb money laundering and counter terrorism (see Table I).

Duration	Reason for being in FATF
28 February 2008 till June 2010	standards failed to get rid of AML and CFT
16 February 2012 till 25 February 2015	Non-adherence with the set standards to combat money laundering and terrorist financing
28 June 2018 till 20 October 2022	Country remained unable to curb terror financing within Pakistan and urge country to complete its action plan by February 2020

Source: M Amin, Khan, M. and Naseer, R., 2020. “Pakistan in the FATF grey-list: challenges, remedies and international response”, *Margalla Papers* 24, no. 1 [2020], Islamabad: National Defence University, 31-43.

The FATF identified that terrorist financing has been prevailing and government efforts to curb them are not sufficient to attain results. More specific reasons that included Pakistan in the FATF list are as:

1. Unable to implement measure fully for Anti-Money Laundering (AML); and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CTF). Pakistan was denounced for ineffective administration of financial institutions, weak financial intelligence gathering and poor screening of cross-border transactions.
2. Pakistan was blamed for being the terrorist financier and supporter to terrorist organizations within a country.

3. Found to be non-compliant with some of the FATF standards; for instant; those related to customer due diligence, suspicious transaction of money and lack of cooperation with international world in these regards
4. Unable to have strong criminal, legal framework and gaps in legislation for the implementation of FATF measures.
5. Pakistan has been asked to ensure additional measure as per the need of the country to strengthen AML and CTF.¹⁶

Just for an instant, if we draw the terrorism scene in Pakistan from 2008 to 2022 with numbers then it shows the pattern of persistent visible existence of terrorism in Pakistan which put us on FAFT list. (see Table 2).

Year	Number of Militant Attacks	Casualties
2008	1149	6683
2009	1665	11317
2010	1246	7342
2011	1573	6050
2012	2347	6188
2013	2034	5294
2014	1569	5510
2015	950	3685
2016	526	1797
2017	294	1269
2018	164	693
2019	136	365
2020	193	506
2021	267	663
2022	365	971

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (Delhi: Institute for Conflict Management, 21 June 2023), n.d, <http://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan#>

Sectarianism

Pakistan is predominately a Muslim country having several sects of Islam in it. The sectarian conflicts and tensions among these groups mostly develop violence easily. In some cases terrorist groups mostly take advantage of this situation and fulfill their violent agendas by putting the blames on the religious groups. In Pakistan the society is divided along religious sectarian lines due to which sectarian violence is multifaceted in Pakistan that cause attacks on mosques, shrines, religious processions.¹⁷ Two groups namely, Laskar e Khangvi and Sipah e Sahaba Pakistan have inflicted couple of ferocious attacks in which the members of Shia sect were particularly targeted. Governments has taken several measures like military operations to counter these activities but due to lack of political will, corruption and other ground defies these steps have been result oriented much. To address said issue; the sustainable efforts are required to project interfaith harmony and tolerance, rule of law, economic initiatives and social awareness amid all the segments of the society are requires. In order to break the networking and ties among terrorist mindset the cooperation of the international community is crucial to fight these evils.¹⁸

Way Forward to Tackle Terrorism in Pakistan/ Future Perspective: Through Comprehensive Approach

To suppress terrorism in Pakistan a comprehensive approach is required. To address the basis reasons of extremism several grounds had to be improved such as; role of law enforcement agencies needs to be fully equipped and trained. Intelligence capabilities must be strengthened, regional cooperation should be enriched and communities must be modernized in a way that resist extremist ideologies and let different opinions to exist in the society simultaneously. Let's discuss these potential ways to cope terrorism further separately:

Socio-Economic and Political Grievances

This is the most crucial factor to develop and intensify extremism This can be fixed by taking the initiative of development programs to empower people in arenas of economics, education and basic services. The underprivileged

areas are the main feeding source to extremism through these initiatives these areas conditions and mindset could be improved.

On the other hand, political reforms are also required to ensure accountability amid all the arenas of the society and reduce the corruption. When vested interests would be curbed and politics will happen for and from the point of people's benefit then extremist will be started to loosen its ground and strength from the society.

Strengthening Law Enforcement Agencies and Intelligence Agencies Capabilities

These capabilities are required not only to manage the terrorist threats but also to prevent it. The improvement is needed in:

- training
- infrastructure
- equipment
- improvement in communication and coordination amid different offices
- improvement in legal frameworks to counterterrorism

Ideologies to Counter Extremist Elements:

If communities at the grass root level will be exposed to pluralism ideologies, concepts of human rights besides meaning and importance of patience and tolerance then extremist ideologies happened to fade away with time. Awareness-raising campaigns and education are those tools through which moderate attitude within the community could be built to defy extremist narrative.

Enhancing Regional Cooperation

Terrorism is a global threat and cooperation among countries are crucial to combat it efficiently. Pakistan has been located at a geographical point which links it with the countries that could play important role in enhancing the regional peace. Being the neighbor of Iran, India and Afghanistan that had facing terrorism issues; she needs to have coordination, communication and intelligence sharing to secure the within and cross-border -terrorism. The combine effects of all the stakeholders would be more effective in eradicating

the root causes of extremism that is effecting the whole region. All the countries within the region must work together to get rid of this evil that is negatively effecting development in all these countries which are economically under progress.

Empowering Civil Society

Civil society organizations, human right groups, religious leaders, NGOs and other miscellaneous volunteer groups' play crucial part in promoting peace and countering extremist elements in the society for they have direct interaction with the populace. The government needs to build conducive environment for the promotion of awareness campaigns regarding role of citizen towards society and state. People participation in policy making should be increased and they must be given confidence that they are equal part of the government and has importance in the process of running the affairs of the government.

Conclusion

Terrorism is a persistent issue in Pakistan for several decades. Several groups viz a viz; Taliban, ISIS and Al-Qaeeda have remained main threat to the peace and development of the country for it inversely affected the Pak-International community relations. Their attacks have been targeting both civil society and security personnel that resulted in thousands of deaths. Pakistan has undertaken several military operations including *Zarb e Azb* and *Radd ul Fasaad* against terrorists but albeit terrorism is still one of the significant reality threat to the country. Through comprehensive approach; the combine efforts would be more effective and smooth to carry out anti-terrorist activities so the fully peace may be attain more swiftly.

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