

EVOLVING TERRORISM THREAT

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Introduction

International experience in fighting terrorism shows that counter-terrorism campaigns are usually long and complicated with no clear vision of when or how they will end. This is because of the diverse character of the threat. Examples from our neighbourhood show that Sri Lanka defeated Tamil Tigers after a 26 yearlong campaign, meanwhile, the United States has failed to address the issue of terrorism in Afghanistan even after 18 years of what New York Times described as “grinding, bloody war”¹. Experience of the United Kingdom's three decades long fight against Provisional Irish Republican Army reveals that although PIRA and its affiliated paramilitary groups had ceased their activities in 2005², but the threat persists and incidents of violence continue to occur there.

Pakistan has suffered immensely at the hands of terrorism. The problem of terrorism in Pakistan has long history of sectarian and ethno-nationalist violence dating back to 1950/60's, but the contemporary discussion is mostly focused on the period starting with the government's policy decision in 2001 to join the US led war on terror after the tragic events of 9/11³. Pakistan, in the post 9/11 period, suffered unprecedented levels of violence resulting in nearly 64,000 fatalities and economic losses to the tune of more than \$130 billion⁴.

The State in its effort to tackle this menace at home undertook a series of military operations of varying scales during this period starting with Operation Mizan to the current Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad. These operations have delivered mixed results and the country remains beset with the terrorism problem including religiously motivated militancy, sectarianism, and ethno-nationalist violence.

On the surface it looks that Pakistan is finally moving out of the post 9/11 phase of the terrorism problem, as suggested by the fewer number of high profile attacks, lesser suicide bombings, and declining number of casualties ever since the 2009/10 peaks, but scratching a little beneath the surface reveals that, notwithstanding the progress made so far, the problem still exists even though it may not be in the news headlines with the same frequency. It is only that this menace is morphing into newer forms, but continues to be a potent threat to national security.

Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa on the fifth anniversary of the Army Public School carnage (Dec 16, 2019), which is seen as the defining moment in the fight against terrorism, said: “We have come a long way in failing terrorism as a nation. United we move towards lasting peace and prosperity of Pakistan.”⁵ The statement clearly shows that Pakistan is yet to achieve sustainable peace despite the progress made so far.

¹Peter Baker, Mujib Mashal and Michael Crowley, “How Trump's Plan to Secretly Meet With the Taliban Came Together, and Fell Apart,” New York Times, September 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/08/world/asia/afghanistan-trump-camp-david-taliban.html>.

²Stevenson, Rachel, and Nick Crossley, “Change in covert social movement networks: The ‘Inner Circle’ of the provisional Irish Republican Army,” *Social Movement Studies* 13, no. 1 (2014): 70-91

³Syed Muhammad Ali Shah, “Pakistan and the War against Terrorism.” *Pakistan Horizon* 60, no. 2 (2007): 85-107.

⁴“Fatalities in Pakistan,” Global Terrorism Database, January 2020,

https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?chart=fatalities&casualties_type=&casualties_max.

⁵“APS carnage will never be forgotten,” COAS, President say on 5th anniversary of horrific attack,” Dawn, December 17, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1522579/aps-carnage-will-never-be-forgotten-coas-president-say-on-5th-anniversary-of-horrific-attack>.

The trend of the terrorism incidents during 2019, showed a further decline of 12.5% in terms of number of attacks, 46% reduction in fatalities from terrorism and 30% cut in the list of wounded in the violence. The terrorists, during 2019, targeted security forces, law enforcement agencies, civilians, and sectarian minorities using improvised explosive devices and fire arms more frequently. There were only four suicide attacks in 2019 as compared to 11 in the previous year⁶. Most of the terrorist attacks in 2019 took place in KP and Balochistan⁷. Meanwhile, the sectarian incidents remained concentrated in Sindh and Balochistan and ethno-nationalist violence mostly occurred in Balochistan.

The muscular approach to tackle the problem helped only to the extent of suppressing the problem. The continuing terrorist attacks with a relatively high frequency, though at a lower scale, underscore the point that terrorist groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) plus its splinter outfits; Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ); Daesh; and the Baloch nationalist militants despite having been severely weakened by the counter-terrorism operations retain a reasonable level of operational capability to execute attacks.

Better results could have been achieved by undertaking structural, governance, and legal reforms especially the revamping of the criminal justice system; dealing with the issue of surging extremism more seriously; and addressing the underlying causes of terrorism and extremism alongside the kinetic operations.

Counterterrorism officials and policymakers will face three strategic challenges in the 2020s –

⁶Asma Khalid, Security Report 2019, Islamabad Policy Institute, January 01, 2020, <https://pipk.org/security-report-2019/2020/01/01/>.

⁷Muhammad Amir Rana, "the ongoing challenge," Dawn, December 29, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1524992/the-ongoing-challenge>.

⁸Syed Rubab, Ahmed Awais Khaver, and Muhammad Yasin, "Cyber Security: Where Does Pakistan Stand?," Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), February 2019, [https://sdpi.org/publications/files/Cyber-security-where-does-pakistan-stand%20\(W-167\).pdf](https://sdpi.org/publications/files/Cyber-security-where-does-pakistan-stand%20(W-167).pdf).

⁹Data is collected from multiple sources including official websites of South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), <https://www.satp.org/>; Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), <https://www.pips.gov.pk/>.

preventing the current phase of militancy and terrorism from morphing into a prolonged and more resilient form; curbing the expanding footprint of Daesh in the region; and dealing with the looming prospect of cyberterrorism⁸. At the same time there has to be realization that while our counter-terrorism agencies and personnel have gained immense experience over the past 18 years, the terrorists too have learnt to adapt to routine counterterrorism tactics and are developing countermeasures of their own. Therefore, a review of the internal security strategy is urgently needed. But, above all our policy makers and security agencies need to develop clarity as to what is their end goal and which strategy they intend to pursue for achieving it.

Trend of Terrorist Attacks and Counter-Terrorism Operations in 2019

During 2019 a total of 230 terrorist attacks were recorded in which 318 peoples lost their lives, while another 720 were injured. The incidence of terrorist attacks decreased by about 13% over 2018 when there were 262 incidents. The fatality figure was meanwhile, 46% lesser than the previous year when 595 people lost their lives. The

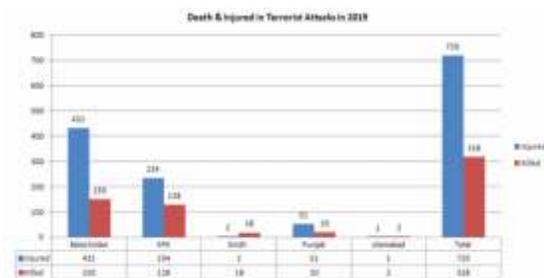


Figure 1: Causalities in Terrorist attacks: January–December 2019
Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) & Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)⁹

number of those injured in terrorist attacks declined by 30% from 1030 in 2018.

The targets of these attacks, much like previous years, remained security forces, law enforcement agencies' (LEAs) personnel, civilians, and sectarian minorities

Of the 318 terrorism related fatalities occurring in 2019, 158 were active military and LEAs personnel. Meanwhile, 201 of 720 wounded were from the forces and LEAs. In 2018, 222 military and LEA personnel were martyred in terrorist attacks, which mean the fatality tally for security/LEAs personnel decreased by 29% in 2019. Most of these security forces/LEAs casualties occurred in KP (85 deaths and 108 injured) followed by Balochistan (56 deaths and 86 injured) and Punjab (10 deaths and 6 injured). In Sindh 05 security agencies/LEAs personnel lost their lives, and 2 were martyred and another was injured in the federal capital.

The civilian fatality figure, meanwhile, recorded a 56% decline going down to 160 in 2019 from 369 in 2018. Balochistan suffered most of the civilian casualties - 94 deaths and 346 injured. KP recorded 43 civilian deaths and 126 injured, Sindh suffered 13 fatalities and 02 injuries, and Punjab 10 deaths and 45 injured. No terrorism related civilian casualty occurred in the federal capital in 2019.

The geographical distribution of incidents indicates that most of the terrorist activity occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan in 2019. The numbers of total militant attacks reported from KP in 2019 were 124, almost at par with 125 in 2018. Meanwhile, Balochistan with 84 stood second in terms of number of terrorist attacks marking a decline of 27% in the tally of terrorist strikes as compared to 2018 when terrorists carried out 115 attacks.

Region	Killed	Injured	Total Casualties
Balochistan	56	86	142
KP	85	108	193
Sindh	05	00	05
Punjab	10	06	16
Islamabad	02	01	03
Total	158	201	359
Source: National & Local Newspapers, SATP, PIPS. ¹			

Region	Killed	Injured	Total Casualties
Balochistan	94	346	440
KP	43	126	169
Sindh	13	02	15
Punjab	10	45	55
Islamabad	00	00	00
Total	160	519	679
Source: National & Local Newspapers, SATP, PIPS.			

¹⁰Data regarding Military casualties during January-December 2019 is gathered from various national & local newspapers, official websites of SATP and PIPS.

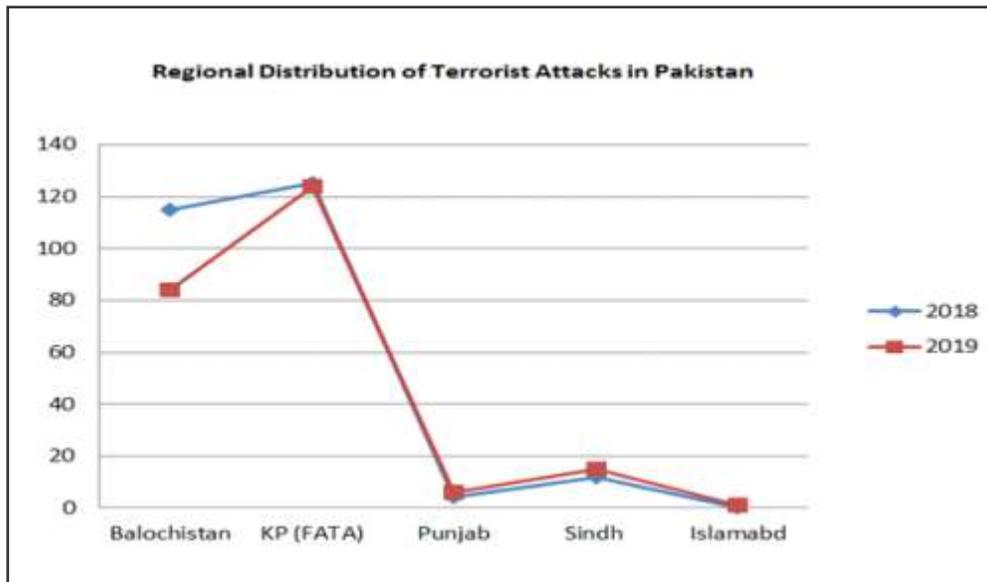


Figure 2: Number of Incidents in Provinces (2018-2019)

Source: National & Local Newspapers, SATP, PIPS

Quetta remained the worst hit city in Balochistan suffering 24 attacks by various militant, nationalist insurgent and sectarian outfits. Reports, moreover, indicate that threat level around Quetta, particularly of sectarian violence, remains high because of presence of LeJ and Daesh. Sindh had 15 terrorist attacks during 2019 as compared to 12 terrorist hits in the previous year. Punjab, meanwhile, suffered 06 incidents as compared to 04 in 2018 and the federal capital was struck once.

Most of these attacks were executed with improvised explosive devices and fire arms. Together the IEDs and firing by fire arms accounted for 94% of all attacks. Others less commonly used means of attacks were rocket attacks, hand grenade, and gun and bomb attacks. The trend of suicide bombings continued to decline this year as well and only four incidents happened as compared to 11 in 2018. In two other incidents terrorists blew themselves up after being surrounded by the LEA personnel.

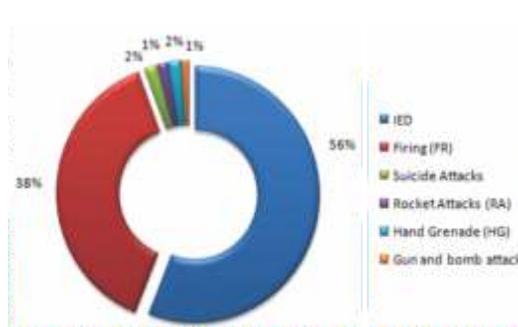


Figure 3: Tactics & Methods used in Terrorist Attacks: January-December 2019

Source: National & Local Newspapers, SATP, PIPS

Attacks by religiously inspired militants (130 attacks) made up almost 56% of the terrorism related incidents, while strikes by ethno-nationalists (62) was the second highest category constituting 27% of the incidents. The third major types of attacks were sectarian in nature (15) with a share of 6.5% of the overall violence. Origin of

twenty-three incidents was not known.

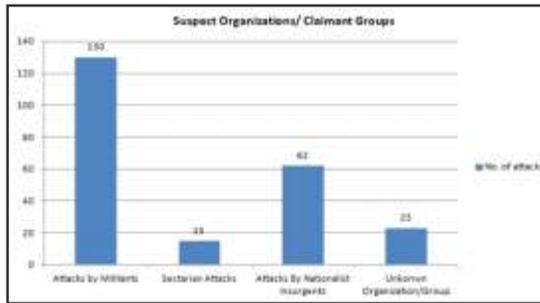


Figure 4: Responsibility Attribution: Suspected Organization and Claiming Groups

Source: National & Local Newspapers, SATP, PIPS

These figures illustrate that despite having been subdued by the counter-terrorism operations, the terrorist groups have not been thrown out of business as yet and they retain a reasonable level of operational capacity. Even more worrisome is that not only these groups are organizationally intact, but they are getting regular supply of new recruits, which in a way points towards the bigger failure of the existing counter-terrorism and counter-extremist violence strategies.

Large ungoverned spaces in Afghanistan pose a serious security threat to Pakistan as fighters and leaderships of many terrorist groups carrying out attacks here have taken refuge there. Absence of cooperation between the two countries in dealing with this issue because of challenges in bilateral relationship has further complicated this problem. However, some of the measures taken by Pakistani security forces and LEAs have made it difficult for Afghanistan based leadership of terrorist groups to connect with support groups here with supplies and resources. This contributed to the fewer large-scale attacks this year.

The religiously motivated and sectarian attacks were carried out by Tehrik-i-Taliban

Pakistan/TTP (82 attacks), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi/LeJ (08), Hizbul Ahrar (14), Jamat ul Ahrar (01), Daesh and its affiliated groups (01), other local Taliban factions (32), Lashkar-e-Islam (2) and Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan (02). Meanwhile, groups involved in ethno-nationalist attacks in 2019 were Balochistan Liberation Army/BLA (29), Baloch Republic Army/BRA (06), Balochistan Liberation Front/BLF (11), Lashkar-e-Balochistan (06), Baloch Raji Aajoi Sangar/BRAS (03) and Sindhudesh Liberation Front Army/SDLF/SDLA (03). One incident of violence was blamed on Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement/PTM as well.

Nature of Attacks	Suspect Organization/ Claimant group	No of attacks
Attacks by Militants	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)	82
	HizbulAhrar	14
	JamatulAhrar	01
	Local Taliban	32
	ISIS affiliated groups	01
Sectarian Attacks	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)	08
	Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan	02
	Rival sectarian group	03
	Lashkar-e-Islam	02
Attacks by Nationalist Groups	Nationalist insurgents	04
	Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)	29
	Bloch Republic Army (BRA)	06
	Baloch Raji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS)	03
	Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF)	11
	Sindhudesh Liberation Front Army (SDLF/SDLA)	03
Unknown Organization/Group	Nil	23
Total	230	

Source: National & Local Newspapers, SATP, PIPS

TTP has been substantially weakened by internal fissures and counter-terrorism operations targeting its infrastructure and ranks. This is evident from the steady decline in the number of attacks, the group has been able to execute over the years. The numbers have fallen from 645 in 2013, the year preceding the start of Zarb-e-Azb¹¹ when the political and military leadership dithered over whether or not to go after the terrorist group, to 85 strikes in 2019.

The terrorist group, however, still has enough manpower, resources, and capacity to carry out attacks. Its share in the terrorist attacks, as shown by the 2019 figures, remains high at 36% even though the focus of the group, for the time being, appears to be inwards as it is looking for self-preservation and to some extent rehabilitation. One crucial aspect contributing to the continuity of TTP threat is that the group has the potential to radicalize and recruit from among the disgruntled and impoverished youth.

TTP has, meanwhile, expanded its footprint beyond North Waziristan into Zhob and Loralai regions of Balochistan, which in the past also hosted the group's presence. Similarly, there are reports of re-emergence of TTP in South Waziristan from where it had earlier been routed¹².

JuA, which was once seen as the most brutal splinter group of TTP and executed several high profile attacks between 2014 and 2018, has been decimated to a large extent and its presence is currently restricted to Rawalpindi/Islamabad region. It carried out one attack in the year targeting LEA personnel in Islamabad¹³.

Daesh, which first emerged on Pakistan's terrorism landscape in 2015 when it formed the Afghanistan based 'Khorasan Province', formed a separate unit comprising Pakistani territory in 2019. The setting up of the new Pakistan province, which coincided with another in India, aligns with the goals set by the group's leadership to expand in South Asia and the associated organizational restructuring. The creation of a new chapter would enable Daesh's local cadres to devise their strategy according to the local conditions. The factors possibly considered by Daesh leader before going for a full-fledged chapter in Pakistan include presence of large disenfranchised segment of society, high level of radicalization and existence of militant groups. These factors could offer Daesh opportunities for establishing itself in this region. Daesh is based in Balochistan and has forged alliances with other local and regional militant groups primarily LeJ. The terrorist group too has faced several counter-terrorism operations that inflicted serious losses on its ranks. However, the group has maintained a tenacious presence with the help of experienced local militants, including former al-Qaeda members and other militants, who turned to Daesh¹⁴. The challenge for Pakistani security agencies, therefore, is to prevent this terrorist organization from exploiting sectarian fault lines in the country. The strategy for eliminating Daesh from Pakistan would need a multifaceted approach under which its financial flows and connections with other militant groups could be disrupted. Moreover, anti-Daesh regional cooperation would have to be developed.

Ethno-nationalist organizations, especially the Baloch nationalist organizations, are the other set

¹¹Urwa Elahi and Umbreen Javaid, "Operation Zarb e Azb: A Decisive Strike." *Pakistan Vision* 20, no. 2 (2019).

¹²Zahid yaseen and Muhammad Muzaffar. "Extremism in Pakistan: Issues and Challenges." *Journal of Politics and International Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 31-42.

¹³Ibid

¹⁴"Country Reports on Terrorism 2017," United States Department of State Publication, September 2018, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/crt_2017.pdf.

of militant outfits that pose serious threat to peace and stability. These groups too have been considerably weakened by the actions of LEAs and inter-group rivalries. The dip in militant violence in Balochistan is indicative of Baloch insurgency losing steam. In view of the situation three of the main separatist groups Balochistan Republican Army (BRA), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), and Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) formed their first ever alliance – Baloch Raaji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS) – towards the end of 2018 for pooling together and sharing their resources including weapons, human resources, and safe havens. This not only helped these organizations remain alive, but also enhanced their capacity to launch large scale and sophisticated attacks¹⁵.

BRAS launched 3 major attacks in 2019 including an attack on FC convoy in Panjgur district on February 16 in which 6 FC personnel were martyred; the Ormara bus attack on April 8 in which 14 Navy and Army personnel were martyred; and kidnapping of 8 people in Turbat district in July.

Security forces in 2019 conducted 367 intelligence based operations. These operations were directed against TTP (which was target of 122 operations), Daesh (75), Al-Qaeda/Foreign Fighters (44), Afghan Taliban (4), and other militant groups (119). This number of IBOs in 2019 showed a sharp decline as compared to 2018, which witnessed 45,764 – the highest number of IBOs and combing operations in a year under Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad.

Future Security Challenges

Pakistan would over the next few years face strategic challenges in the fight against terrorism, which is becoming increasingly complex. Degraded by years of counter-terrorism operations, the terrorist groups are adopting novel ways for survival including formation of alliances; sharing of resources with other groups and acquiring modern techniques especially for undertaking cyberattacks.

The counter-terrorism strategy, therefore, needs to be recalibrated in a way that it prevents terrorist groups from finding means for survival. Physical elimination of terrorists is not enough. The ideology, on which they thrive, their narrative, support networks, avenue for finances and fresh recruits would all have to be dealt with comprehensively. In this regard, there has to be a renewed focus on countering extremism, undermining their ideology, reforming madrassahs that are a major source of extremists' recruitment, choking their finances and reforming the criminal justice system. Their online activity would also have to be curbed effectively to take away from them their preferred communication channel and a recruitment source.

These steps could help LEAs better prepare themselves for dealing with terrorism threat in coming years in which the terrorism landscape is expected to change in a big way.

a. Counter-Extremism Strategy

The fact that Pakistan's battle against extremism will decide the future of its fight against terrorism is not fully understood in Pakistan and hence there

¹⁵Pamir H Sahill, "The terror speaks: inside Pakistan's terrorism discourse and national action plan." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 41, no. 4 (2018): 319-337.

is the absence of a strong political will to deal with it.

The government's strategy is driven by The National Internal Security Policy 2018-23¹⁶, and The National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines¹⁷, a document which was launched in 2018. Meanwhile, another initiative titled Paigham-e-Pakistan¹⁸ presented a unified stance against extremism and its violent form.

These documents at the best present a strategy, but there has hardly been enough follow up to implement that.

The goal of any counter-extremism strategy is to deny the extremist organizations opportunities to exploit the people through their narrative. This is done by presenting a counter-narrative and removing the social support base that they enjoy. It also aims to prevent them from getting fresh recruits. But, it is clear that neither the ideological base of the extremists and terrorist organizations has been dented nor has their supply of new recruits been squelched. One implication of this is that the strategy is not working. Therefore, both flaws in the strategy and importantly the implementation mechanism need to be rectified urgently.

A fresh look at the religious and national identity project, which is open to exploitation by the extremist groups, is required. The vulnerability of State's ideological basis to exploitation has

increased because the outfits, which are out to do so, have from time to time been also used by the State. This has further allowed them ingress into the social and political structures of the country in addition to allowing them establish strong linkages with various State institutions.

Any counter-extremism project, moreover, needs to be broad based covering structural, educational, economic, legal and governance reforms because multiple factors including poverty, social exclusion, denial of justice, unequal opportunities to grow, and lack of representation cause extremism to thrive. As far as the educational reforms are concerned, such actions would have to go beyond mainstreaming/ reforming of madressah system of education. In other words an environment that is not conducive to spread of extremism would have to be created¹⁹.

The current narrow focus of the strategy allows extremists to exploit the loopholes in the system for not only surviving, but also expanding by convincing other disenfranchised segments to join in. Therefore, counter-extremism actions, without complementing progress on improving governance, economic and security situation, will have a minimal impact.

The project of mainstreaming sectarian leaders, who have in the past indulged in hate crimes against other sects and followers of other religions, was obscurely undertaken by the State. Such initiatives have their own limitations²⁰. These

¹⁶Ministry of Interior, "National Internal Security Policy (NISP) 2018-2023," Government of Pakistan, <http://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/National-Internal-Security-Policy-2018-2023-1.pdf>.

¹⁷"National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines," National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) – Pakistan, <https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NCEP-Guidelines.pdf>.

¹⁸Merwah Hamid Qureshi, "Paigham-E-Pakistan: A Historic Fatwa Against Terrorism And Extremism," Geopolitika.ru, January 21, 2019, <https://www.geopolitika.ru/en/article/paigham-e-pakistan-historic-fatwa-against-terrorism-and-extremism>

¹⁹Zahid Yaseen and Muhammad Muzaffar, "Extremism in Pakistan: Issues and Challenges." *Politics and International Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 31-42.

²⁰ [Senator Rehman Malik](https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/259960-growth-of-militancy-and-efforts-for-mainstreaming), "Growth of militancy and efforts for mainstreaming." *The News*, December 24, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/259960-growth-of-militancy-and-efforts-for-mainstreaming>.

sectarian leaders may have cooperated with the initiative in anticipation of regaining the public/political space that they had lost because of the crackdown against their respective organizations, because there is nothing to publicly suggest that they have renounced violence while benefitting from mainstreaming. Without renunciation of violence the beneficiaries of this project have hardly done anything so far to restrain their cadres from committing violence against other groups. These approaches, nevertheless, complicate the State's response to their sinister designs.

b. Madressah Reforms

Madressah reforms, believed to be the key to tackling surging extremism in the country, have been pursued by successive governments without much success. It is understood that the curriculum of madressahs promotes intolerance towards others sects and religions among the students and makes them vulnerable to be exploited by sectarian and religiously motivated militant organizations²¹.

There is no confirmed figure for the number of madressahs in the country because of the mushrooming growth it experienced since the CIA led Afghan jihad days, when these institutions were used to prepare recruits for fighting the Soviet Union. That pattern has continued ever since and it is believed that 30,000 – 35,000 madressahs belonging to different sects and of various sizes exist²². These madressahs are normally autonomous in their functioning and are part of one or the other of the five Wafaqs - Wafaq-ul-

Madaris Al-Arabia; Tanzeem-ul-Madaris; Rabital-Madaris Al-Islamia; Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Salfia; and Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Shia²³. Each Wafaq represents a particular sect and in turn all the Wafaqs collectively come under Ittehad-i-Tanzeemat-i-Madaris Pakistan (ITMP). The primary role of the Wafaqs is to function as the oversight body setting the curriculum to be taught in their affiliated institutions, conducting exams and awarding degrees.

The effort at reforming the wide madressah education system so far has been largely aimed at registering the institutions, improving the employability of the graduates of these schools, and widening their worldview so that they do not only see others through the bigoted lens of their respective sects²⁴.

The efforts could not make much headway because of faulty strategies by the governments in the past, which undertook cosmetic and half-baked measures to tackle the issue, and madressah's fear of losing the turf.

PTI government in May 2019 took a step forward by reaching an agreement with ITMP on the reforms package, which envisaged giving Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training the charge of dealing with the matters related to madressahs; registration of the madressahs; and the madressah students appearing in examinations of Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) in four subjects. The education ministry would have a directorate

²¹Nazia Nazar, Karin Österman and Kaj Björkqvist, "Religious Tolerance, Gender Equality and Bellicose Attitudes: A Comparative Study of Three Educational Systems in Pakistan." *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research* 4, no. 5 (2017): 126-135.

²²Douglas Johnston, Andrew McDonnell, Henry Burbridge and James Patton, "Countering Violent Religious Extremism in Pakistan: Strategies for Engaging Conservative Muslims," International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, December 2017, <https://icrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Countering-Violent-Religious-Extremism-in-Pakistan-White-Paper.pdf>.

²³Moeed Yusuf, "Madressah Reforms: Breaking the Cycle," *Dawn*, August 18, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1500025>.

²⁴Saad Sayeed, "Pakistan plans to bring 30,000 madrasas under government control," *Reuters*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-madrasas/pakistan-plans-to-bring-30000-madrasas-under-government-control-idUSKCN1S517Z>.

general for madressahs with its secretariat in Islamabad²⁵. The directorate general would then operate through a network of 16 regional offices across the country²⁶. Moreover, it was agreed that the government would provide teachers for the four subjects.

The registration process was set to commence from mid-Jan 2020.

Although, the agreement with ITMP has been signed, but there are simmering fears about the process. Resultantly, some of the leading figures associated with the madressah system have already begun expressing their concerns that the government was exceeding the agreement²⁷. These apprehensions have surfaced because of some of the flaws in the reforms package. More significantly the entire plan was not fully and transparently explained to and discussed with the madressahs before being concluded.

These worries relate to the completion of the required documentation for registration. Moreover, questions have arisen about the recruitment of the teachers to be provided by the government. The worries out there are that how the government would assure that the hired teachers are aligned with the sectarian slant of the institution where they would be appointed. The madressahs are apprehensive that with the salaries and administrative control of those teachers in the hands of the education ministry, they (the teachers) wouldn't be accountable to the administrations of their respective institutions. Similarly, there are suspicions about the examination system under FBISE. As per the

agreement, apart from the four subjects for which the students will appear in FBISE exams, the question papers for the other subjects related to core religious education too would be prepared by FBISE after taking input from the respective Wafaqs. The madressahs argue that FBISE does not have the relevant faculty to prepare the question papers.

Madressahs are belatedly contending that these steps could undermine the authority of the Wafaqs, even though they retain the role of administering the religious curriculum and the degree-awarding function.

A major shortcoming in the reforms package is that it fails to define what would constitute hatred towards other sects and religions. And without defining this critical element the crucial role of ensuring that the curricula would be free of hate material has been left to the Wafaqs. This shortcoming may have been left behind as a compromise for bringing the madressahs under a formal net while keeping their autonomy over curriculum intact, but this may, in the longer run, undercut the actual intent behind the whole exercise – ending sectarian hatred.

c. Terror Financing

Funds play a key role in the operations of the terrorist organizations. Therefore, interventions aimed at curbing terrorism have, in addition to other measures, focused on choking the finances of these groups. International efforts for suppression of the financing of terrorism intensified after 9/11 when a stricter scrutiny of financial mechanisms commenced²⁸. Regulatory frameworks and

²⁵ Ahmad Ahmadani, "Govt Starts Registration of seminaries across Pakistan," Pakistan Today, October 25, 2019, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/10/25/govt-starts-registration-of-seminaries-across-the-country/>

²⁶ Kashif Abas, "Directorate to regulate seminaries set up," Dawn, October 25, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1512734/directorate-to-regulate-seminaries-set-up>

²⁷ "Madressahs body asks govt to stop data collection of students," Dawn, August 10, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1499021>

²⁸ "Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism," International Monetary Fund, accessed January 07, 2020, <https://www.imf.org/external/np/leg/amlcft/eng/aml1.htm>.

institutions were established to control illicit financing.

Pakistan too during this period took number of steps to regulate the domestic financial systems for preventing the terrorists from misusing them. The first such major step after 9/11 came in 2002 when an Ordinance was promulgated, which amended Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947 for establishment of Exchange Companies²⁹. Later in 2004, Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) of 1997³⁰ was amended to deter the financiers and the supporters of the terrorists. A presidential Ordinance was issued in September 2007 to plug the informal market as part of compliance to UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee. The Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU) was later established under the same law³¹. The Ordinance was subsequently revised and enacted as Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Act in 2010³². The National Action Plan (NAP) adopted by the political leadership after the Army Public School tragedy too had a provision related to terrorism financing reaffirming the national resolve to deal with the issue.

The progress towards a secure financial system has, however, remained uneven and unsatisfactory due to a number of factors. This happened because of absence of policy clarity on various shades of terrorist groups and lack of implementation of UN Security Council sanctions against the listed

individuals and entities; LEAs/Banking sector's poor understanding of the risks posed by the financial avenue of terrorist organizations that were active in the country; capacity issues; and conflicting laws and financial regulations. For instance Sections 5 and 9 of the Protection of Economic Reforms Act, 1992 and section 111(4) of Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 contradicted the objectives of AML 2010³³.

Though, much of the national effort was directed towards checking the informal hawala/hundi money transfer services, till recently serious gaps persisted even on this count and there were weaknesses in border controls and movement of liquid cash.

Pakistan at FATF: The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) put Pakistan on its "grey" list in 2008 and again in Feb 2012 for not fully complying with UNSC Resolution 1267. The steps taken by the government to counter money laundering and terror financing made FATF remove Pakistan from its grey list in 2015³⁴. Notwithstanding, the progress then reported by the government including freezing of accounts and confiscation of large sums, issues about compliance with Resolution 1267, operations of couriers, suspicious transfers to madressahs and extremist organizations remained³⁵.

Pakistan was once again in 2018 placed on the FATF's grey list for a period of 15 months in view

²⁹“Exchange Policy Department,” State Bank of Pakistan, accessed July 30, 2002, <http://www.sbp.org.pk/epd/2002/FE9.htm>

³⁰“The Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997,” Ministry of Law and Justice, accessed January 08, 2020, <http://www.molaw.gov.pk/molaw/userfiles1/file/Anti-Terrorism%20Act.pdf>

³¹“Functions of FMU in terms of AMLO – 2009,” Financial monitoring Unit- Government of Pakistan, accessed January 08, 2020, <http://www.fmu.gov.pk/functions-of-fmu/>

³²“Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing Of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Regulations For Banks & DFIs,” State Bank of Pakistan, December 26, 2016, http://www.sbp.org.pk/l_frame/Revised-AML-CFT-Regulations.pdf.

³³Ibid

³⁴Sitara Noor, “Pakistan's political and diplomatic challenges at the 2020 FATF Plenary,” South Asian Voices, November 21, 2019, <https://southasianvoices.org/pakistans-political-and-diplomatic-challenges-at-the-2020-fatf-plenary/>.

³⁵“FATF and AML/CFT Regime in Pakistan,” State Bank of Pakistan, accessed January 9, 2020, <http://www.sbp.org.pk/FSR/2018/Box-4.pdf>.

of shortcomings in its terror financing and anti-money laundering regimes. The 27 point action plan agreed with FATF in 2018 for addressing the weaknesses in Pakistan's financial system envisaged identification and assessment of risks; keeping the law enforcement agencies updated about potential risks and the listed entities and persons; maintaining an up to date profile of proscribed individuals and entities; improving inter-agency and inter-provincial coordination on money laundering and terror financing risks; stronger prosecution of illicit financing cases to ensure that guilty gets punished; capacity building of banking officials; effective international cooperation; greater compliance with UN Security Council sanctions regime; tighter border controls for checking cash smuggling.

FATF, while extending Pakistan stay on the grey list for another four months in October 2019, noted that 5 of 27 action items had been implemented, with varying levels of progress on the remaining action plan. One of the main areas where Pakistan was found to be lagging has been the successful prosecution and convictions for the offenders in terror financing and money laundering cases³⁶. FATF in its recommendation called on Pakistan to show that “law enforcement agencies (LEAs) are identifying and investigating the widest range of TF activity and that TF investigations and prosecutions target designated persons and entities, and those acting on behalf or at the direction of the designated persons or entities.”³⁷

The government, in its latest report to FATF and

Asia Pacific Group³⁸, claimed that conviction rate of people linked to banned outfits in terror financing cases had improved significantly over the past few months. These convicts were said to be acting on behalf of designated/banned individuals or entities, although their names have not been disclosed publicly. It is not either known as to what positions they held in their respective organizations. There have been 88 such convictions, as per the government figures. The convicts were said to be associated with Daesh (13), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (37), Al-Qaeda (6), Jaish-e-Mohammad (45), Jamaat-ud-Dawa/Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation (18) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (1)³⁹.

There have, however, been no convictions of people associated with Haqqani Network and Afghan Taliban, although both organizations were listed by FATF as 'entities of concern' during previous reviews. There are 13 TF cases against these two Afghan groups. It is also interesting to note that first convictions against JuD/FIF and LeT men happened only after Pakistan's latest tryst with FATF. Hafiz Saeed, JuD chief, and Zafar Iqbal, another official of JuD, were indicted by a court on terror financing related charges in December 2019⁴⁰. They were booked for terrorism financing earlier in 2019 due to growing international pressure.

The convictions in these cases were done under Section 11 of the Anti-Terrorism Act. Most of the convicts were sentenced to 5 years or more in jail, while others were served lesser sentences.

³⁷“Pakistan escapes FATF blacklist, but gets warning,” Dawn, October 19, 2019, https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=19_10_2019_003_008.

³⁸“Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures Pakistan,” Third Round Mutual Evaluation Report, APG, Sydney, October 2019, <http://www.apgml.org/includes/handlers/get-document.aspx?d=389ff465-24a1-41cf-9ab9-27edc2e4c836>.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Asad Hashim, “Pakistan's Hafiz Saeed indicted on 'terror financing,’” Al Jazeera, December 11, 2019.

Besides, prosecution and conviction of the offenders, another serious challenge is dealing with the finances of the madressahs and mosques, which are unaudited and are open to be contributed to terror causes. These finances come from domestic as well as foreign donors in form of Zakat and charity. Some of these institutions have also invested in businesses, estate, and other sectors. Income from these investments is also not audited.

It has also been observed that the monitoring of finances of terrorist groups operating locally, much of which is in informal sector, is not very efficient either.

d. Legal Framework

Military courts were instituted across Pakistan by the 21st Amendment to the Constitution in 2015⁴¹ for two years to try hardened terrorists in the wake of a terrorist attack on Army Public School in Peshawar, which witnessed a shocking massacre of schoolchildren on 16 December 2014. The courts were renewed for two more years through the 23rd Amendment in 2017. The latter amendment (and its corresponding amendments to the Army Act of 1952) lapsed on 30 March 2019, as their two-year sunset clause expired.

The setting up courts was always viewed as an anti-democratic move and one that violated principles of the country's constitution. Their demise, however, occurred because of PTI government's failure to work with the Opposition parties for legislating on their continuation.

The abrupt end of the military courts once again underscored the failure of the political leadership to undertake criminal justice reforms. The reforms

of the outdated criminal justice system, which is in vogue, should have been one of the top priorities of the government because of deep linkage between its flaws and security.

Poorly trained prosecutors, lack of scientific evidence collection methods, absence of witness protection programs, corruption, and intimidation have often resulted in bails for the accused in heinous crimes, protracted trials, and acquittal of hardened criminals. The political leadership, besides failing to reform the system, has also exhibited a poor understanding of the route to meaningful reforms by repeatedly going for shortcuts like special courts, which only caused further degradation of the quality of justice.

Following the lapse of the military courts, the definition of what constitutes 'terrorism' has also been narrowed by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in October 2019 after a spate of conflicting judgments. In a landmark judgment authored by then-Chief Justice of Pakistan Asif Saeed Khan Khosa titled *Ghulam Hussain v. State*, a 7-member bench of the Supreme Court ruled that terrorism is to be construed as what has already been defined in Section 6 of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 (ATA)⁴².

The ATA had been introduced by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as a means of combating a spike in sectarian violence in the late 1990s.

Twenty-two years after its passing, the ATA once again finds itself at the centre of the national discourse concerning terrorism. The Supreme Court judgment held that terrorism 'denotes commission of a crime with the design or purpose of destabilizing the government, disturbing the

⁴¹"The Constitution (Twenty-first Amendment) Act, 2015," Senate of Pakistan, accessed January 08, 2020, http://www.senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1490697984_538.pdf.

⁴²"Mr. Justice Asif Saeed Khan Khosa, CJ Mr. Justice Mushir Alam on Criminal Appeals No. 95 and 96 of 2019, Civil Appeal No. 10-Lof 2017 and Criminal Appeal No. 63 of 2013," The Supreme Court Of Pakistan, October 30, 2019, https://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/downloads_judgements/crl.a.95_2019.pdf

society or hurting a section of the society with a view to achieve objectives which are essentially political, ideological or religious' and that 'any action constituting an offence, howsoever grave, shocking, brutal, gruesome or horrifying' could not qualify to be termed as terrorism⁴³.

The Supreme Court also recommended that parliament consider substituting the present definition⁴⁴ of 'terrorism' with a more succinct definition, bringing it in line with international perspectives and focusing on violent activities aimed at achieving the aforementioned criteria of political, ideological or religious objectives.

e. CPEC Security

Countering terrorism and ensuring security for China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project sites, and Chinese personnel working in Pakistan has become the foremost priority of security cooperation between Pakistan and China⁴⁵. Workers on CPEC projects, both Pakistani and Chinese, have been targeted by anti-CPEC/anti-China elements in the past. Beijing and Islamabad have, meanwhile, increased all-round security cooperation against the militant groups involved in such actions⁴⁶. Pakistan in 2019 announced expansion of the Special Security Division (SSD), created at the time of commencement of CPEC in 2015⁴⁷, to ensure foolproof and layered security for Chinese personnel and CPEC installations across the

country.

In parallel, Pakistan has also directed resources towards development of less-developed regions, such as, Balochistan, where CPEC projects remain under active threat. Islamabad expects economic development to address concerns of local population, which may in turn lessen or even break the cycle of violence in the province. Precarious security environment in Balochistan is one reason why Chinese investors are shying away from investing in Pakistan, particularly in the province⁴⁸.

Pakistan is, meanwhile, implementing its new security strategy to ensure security of CPEC projects and Chinese citizens in close coordination with Chinese authorities. In January, 2019, China's Director General for External Security visited Pakistan and held in-depth discussions on formulating joint strategy to protect CPEC project sites and workers. Embassy of China in Islamabad and Consulate in Karachi remain in close touch with Pakistani authorities tasked with ensuring safety and security of Chinese sites and workers. A Joint Working Group (JWG) of Pak-China Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC), which is the apex coordination body of CPEC, has been tasked with ensuring coordination between Pakistani and Chinese officials on security issues⁴⁹.

Pakistan Army has time and again reaffirmed its

⁴³Hasnaat Malik, "SC asks parliament to redefine 'terrorism,'" Express Tribune, October 30, 2019.

⁴⁴Ibid

⁴⁵Khuram Iqbal, "Securing CPEC: Challenges, responses and outcomes." In *Securing the belt and road initiative*, pp. 197-214. Palgrave, Singapore, 2018.

⁴⁶Ejaz Hussain, "CPEC: Governance and security challenges—Implications for the Belt and Road Initiative." *Chinese Political Science Review* 4, no. 1 (2019): 135-147.

⁴⁷Oxford Analytica. "Pakistan's messy politics undercuts CPEC security." *Emerald Expert Briefings* oxan-es (2016)

⁴⁸Samrana Afzal, and Anum Naseem, "China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Challenges and Prospects." *Pakistan Administrative Review* 2, no. 1 (2018): 209-222.

⁴⁹Shahbaz Rana, "Pakistan, China agree to expand CPEC scope," *The Express Tribune*, November 6, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2094342/2-pakistan-china-agree-expand-cpec-scope/>.

commitment to ensure security of CPEC, because, it is Pakistan's sovereign obligation. During 2019, Beijing emphasized on Pakistan to ensure enhanced vigilance against security threats to CPEC and increased intelligence cooperation.

Conclusion

Pakistan's fight against terrorism is entering a new phase. Years of counter-terrorism operations have provided significant respite from the violence and put the terrorist organizations on the back foot. However, Pakistan is still no closer to elimination of the menace. This is because terrorist groups are getting a regular supply of fresh recruits and resources, which is allowing them to survive and sustain their operations. Moreover, international experience in fighting terrorism has showed that religiously motivated terrorist groups are more resilient than other militant groups and military force cannot alone end terrorist groups.

Counter-terrorism strategies should snuff life out of terrorism rather than simply reacting to terrorist attacks. There should be an improved understanding among the LEAs of the emerging strategic challenges in this fight. The terrorists can be definitively defeated by capacity building of LEAs, delegitimizing the extremist ideology that

fuels terrorism, and denying the terrorists access to finances and internet. International partnerships against terrorism also need to be strengthened especially with Iran and Afghanistan for disrupting terrorist groups.

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