



The Role of Ideological Distortions on Ensuing Extremism in Pakistan

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Abstract:

Pakistan has been struggling to accommodate itself by combating extremism and militancy. The state has been destabilized by intermingling of religion with politics against the vision of the founding father, generating violence on the socio-political landscape under the umbrella of religion. The state's inefficiency in effectively countering extremism has deepened the social divide and exacerbated economic challenges and harmed national image globally. The existing literature concerns with political and security facets of extremism overlooking the ideological distortions shaping the religious debate. This paper is an attempt to fill this gap by critically examining the role of theological-cum-historical factors on current state of extremism. It also assesses the efficacy of state response and deficiencies of state mechanisms in exploring strategies for effectively handling extremism. The central research question is: How these ideological distortions contribute to extremism and what measures should be taken to counteract them? The study is undertaken using qualitative analysis by exploring historical cleavages under discourse analysis. The paper provides 'ideological evolution' of extremist tendencies and examine counter-extremism policies. The study finds out that ideological narratives have greatly contributed to rise in extremism and militancy in Pakistan.

Keywords: Pakistan, sectarianism, extremism, Islamization, ideological distortions, regional politics, state response

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, Pakistan has experienced a concerning surge in extremism and sectarianism, marked by the relentless actions of militant Sunni and Shia organizations since the pivotal year of 1979. These groups have unleashed a wave of massacres and bombings,

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indiscriminately targeting political opponents and even children during prayer times in mosques. The repercussions of their activities have been starkly evident in the statistics, with 862 sectarian conflicts recorded between 1989 and 1994, resulting in 208 fatalities and 1629 injuries. Beyond the immediate toll on lives, these incidents have profoundly polarized communities, eroded civic order, and fostered political instability in Pakistan.

Delving into the roots of this surge in sectarian violence and extremism unveils a transformation within the ideological and intellectual role of the traditional religious institutions the clergy produced by them. Notably, the increasing involvement of ulema in politics has altered the landscape, fostering a new discourse on the role of Islam in political affairs. This shift has led to an intricate interplay between Madrassas, ulema, and regional states, reshaping the contours of Islamic activism with diverse approaches to the nexus between religion and politics.

As ulema became actively entangled in political processes, the trajectory of Madrassas evolved beyond their conventional roles, establishing connections with regional states and becoming influential actors in domestic politics. This dynamic not only marked a departure from the traditional functions of these religious education centers but also gave rise to a distinctive strain of Islamic activism. The consequences of this evolution reverberate in the complex interactions between Madrassas, ulema, and the broader political landscape, contributing to the multifaceted challenges of extremism and sectarian violence in Pakistan.

The state's inefficiency in effectively countering extremism has deepened the social divide and exacerbated economic challenges and harmed national image globally. The existing literature concerns with political and security facets of extremism overlooking the ideological distortions shaping the religious debate. This paper is an attempt to fill this gap by critically examining the role of theological-cum-historical factors on current state of extremism. It also assesses the efficacy of state response and deficiencies of state mechanisms in exploring strategies for effectively handling extremism. The central research question is: How these ideological distortions contribute to extremism and what measures should be taken to counteract them?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides a comprehensive exploration of historical developments and scholarly perspectives on the subject;

A detailed examination of the past three decades highlights a notable increase in extremism and sectarianism in Pakistan, with violent incidents polarizing communities and destabilizing the political landscape. A historical overview underscores the pivotal role of Madrassas, from their exponential growth to their sectarian affiliations, marking a significant shift from 137 in 1947 to over 8000 by the late 20th century. External funding from the Persian Gulf and its impact on Madrassas' ideologies and activities are key factors explored. Zia's military government's extensive involvement in Madrassas, financial support, and strategic alignment with religious parties is discussed, emphasizing the impact on voter demographics and political outcomes. The connection between Madrassas, zakat funds, and their changing character as a result of state-led Islamization is examined. The role of regional politics, particularly the support from Saudi Arabia and Iran, is analyzed in shaping sectarian and extremist trends in Pakistan. The Afghan war dynamics of

militarization of Madrassas, coupled with the influence of external actors like Osama bin Laden, underscores the multifaceted nature of regional dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

By employing a combination of exploratory, historical, and analytical research methodologies, this study aspires to provide an understanding of the factors contributing to rise in extremism and sectarianism in Pakistan. The adoption of a case study approach allows for in-depth exploration, while qualitative and comparative analyses facilitate a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon. The methodology section outlines the approach to investigating and understanding the phenomenon of extremism and sectarianism, including key aspects.

Comprehensive data collection on government actions against extremist organizations, documenting major military operations against militant groups. In-depth analysis of the success or failure of government efforts in curbing extremism. Rigorous analysis of the impact of military operations on reducing extremist activities. Evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the National Action Plan (NAP) in addressing extremism. Examination of the challenges hindering the realization of NAP objectives, including the role of National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA). An assessment of the cohesiveness and coordination among civilian and military establishments in anti-extremism efforts.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THEORIES IMPLIED

Realism and Regional Security Complex (RSC) Theory in Understanding extremism and sectarianism in Pakistan.

The theoretical underpinning of realism in International Relations (IR) provides valuable insights into the motivations and actions of states, which can be applied to comprehend the regional dynamics influencing extremism in Pakistan. Realism is a theory of international relations signifying the quest for national interests in the anarchic international system, elucidates the impact of external factors such as Saudi Arabia and Iran in shaping the sectarian landscape. The competition between these regional powers, as evident in their support for Sunni and Shia groups, aligns with realist notions of power struggles and strategic maneuvering.

RSC theory provides us with conceptual framework for understanding security dynamics within a specific region. To understand the regional security paradigms, one must understand state alongside with non-state actors. Thus, region places itself (in terms of security posture) above state while below international system (Hoogensen, 2005). In the case of Pakistan, the proliferation of extremism and sectarianism can be seen as a manifestation of security concerns within the South Asian regional security complex.

Another dimension of the literature on security postulates the spillover of conflict or diffusion e.g., the civil war contagion and forming of rebel groups within the states or non-state actors and terrorists undermining state authority (Lane, 2016). The synthesis of realism and regional security complex theory is instrumental in comprehending the interconnected factors leading to extremism in Pakistan. Realist principles explain the motives of external actors, their strategic calculations, and the competition for influence. Simultaneously, the regional security complex theory sheds light on

how security interdependence shapes the dynamics within the South Asian region, where the actions of one state have repercussions on the security environment of others.

Policymakers should consider the broader geopolitical context, acknowledging the influence of external actors and their strategic interests in shaping the domestic landscape of extremism in Pakistan. The segregation of realism and 'RSC' theories suggest an inclusive framework to analysts and policymakers to understand the evolving nature of extremism, facilitating more informed and contextually relevant interventions.

THE ROLE OF MADRASSAS AND PHENOMENON OF SECTARIANISM

The phenomena of sectarianism especially in Sunni sects are closely linked with the spread of Madrassas in Pakistan and particularly in the province of Punjab in late 70s, 80s and 90s. Gradually, Madrassa's students and graduates began to involve in local and national politics and attempted to Islamize state and also involved themselves directly or indirectly in militants' activities/movements. Some important militant organizations set up during this period were Harkat-ul-Ansar, Sunni Tehrik, Lashkar-i-Taiba, Lashkar Jhangvi, Sipah Sabah and Pakistan Sunni Ittihad etc. it is important to note that in 1947 there were 137 Madrassas in Pakistan and by mid 1990s there were about more than 8000 Madrassas.

The spread of religious seminaries belonging to different schools of thought e.g. the Deobandi school, the Bareilvi school and Ahl-i-Hadith school, began in mid-1970. There was noted a huge increase in the number of Madrassas (three and half time) between 1975 to 1996 from 700 to 2463 and out of 2463 Madrassas about 750 were aggressively sectarian (Herald, 1996). During the period from 1975 to 1979 the rise of madrassas could be linked to the flow of money from Gulf countries aimed at promoting rightist politics in Pakistan. The initiation of the kind of activities were aimed at strengthening religious institutions and articles of faith. It was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto the premier who not only constructed strong relations with Gulf states but also sanctified his partly from leftism. Pakistani ulema also developed link with these states during the same period and received funding. Similarly, Shia ulema and Shia institutions received massive funding from Iran after 1979 revolution (Syed, 1992).

After Iranian Revolution in 1979 Saudi Arabia and UAE came to support Sunni sects and their Madrassas and thus link developed between Saudi and Pakistani ulema. In 1996 out of 2463 registered Madrassas, about 1700 were receiving funding from outside Pakistan (Herald, 1996). This connection was also tailored with the Saudi Arabia greater plan of controlling Muslim World through different institutions such as Rabitah-Alam-Isami and to encourage its own vision of Sunnism in Muslim world. Saudi Arabia supported these Sunni-Madrassas in Pakistan as counter balancing strategy against the growing Iranian influence in the region. During Afghan war in 1980s, these Persian Gulf Sunni states also provided massive funding to religious institutions in Pakistan. These funds were provided for supporting Jihad in Afghanistan against the occupation forces of the former Soviet Union. In addition, the rise in the number of Pakistani working in several Gulf state also provided financial supports to Madrassas, preachers and ulema (Rubin, 1997).

State Led Islamization during Zia's Regime

Military government under Zia (1977-1988) profoundly involved madrassas in the process of Islamization in Pakistan. During his eleven years long rule over Pakistan, Zia formed many Islamic socio-political institutions and opened various government agencies to radicalize activist (Iqbal, 1995) The military government of Zia provided massive financial assistance and other supports to Madrassas and developed close link with religious parties and ulema in order to strengthen his position in power. It is also interesting to note that from 1980s onward, religious seminaries became the major recipient of government zakat fund (3rd pillar of Islam, and obligatory to be paid once a year). For instance, in 1984, 9.4 percent from zakat funds were given to Madrassas, which benefitted about 2273 Madrassas (Malik, 1996).

Zia Military government also encouraged the spread of Madrassas by growing opportunities for employment of their graduates in state institutions. In 1982 government announced that it would view Madrassa's certificate as equal to Public Schools Certificates if Madrassas bring about some reforms in their curricula. Zia under the umbrella of religion gained the active support of right wing (Islamist political parties) – may be due to his perception of the changing character of Pakistani voters during Afghan Jihad. It is due to this reason that in 1985 non-party-based election, Islamic parties performed well, though not as much as Zia had hoped (Malik, 1996).

Zia government's initiative had tremendous influence on moderate and self-styled Islamists and the encouragement led Islamic scholars establish their own Madrassas. For example, the Jammat-e-Islami (Islamist political party founded by Maulana Maududi), created a network of seminaries across Pakistan increasing their number to 70 till 1990 (Raza, 1996). The influence was so much significant that other religious figures such as Dr. Israr Ahmad, Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri did the same and they also established their own Madrassas i.e., Khuddmal-ul-Quran and Minhaj-ul-Quran, respectively. In these institutions both religious and modern education was given to students. (Raza, 1996).

There were two motives behind establishing these self-styled Islamic organizations: a) to obtain maximum funds from the government; and b) to expand their circle of influence for political purposes or to gain maximum political support. The government initiatives such as the introduction of reforms in the Madrassa's curricula further brought ulema at the center of Islamization program. The government patronage of ulema deepened the role of ulema in politics. The maturation of the ongoing Islamization process encouraged competition among various factions of Islam for exerting pressure and controlling the process. The reforms in madrassa syllabus also altered the character and orientation of their graduates leading to degeneration of the quality of madrassa education. Most of the newly established Madrassas were founded and managed by low-ranking ulema and it was where the radicalization of Madrassas begun. After 1979, in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) due to their closeness to Afghan war, Madrassas also started giving military training to its students along with traditional religious education.

The democratization process after the end of Zia's military rule in 1988 changed political environment and slackened the speed of Islamization process. Moreover, economic depression reduced employment prospects and promised jobs for the graduate of Madrassas could not be materialized, which led to the most of graduates of Madrassas to join the rank of disappointed jobless. Zia government preferred higher ranking ulema and they were given patronage and high government offices. On the contrary, people like low-ranking clergies, preachers and graduates of

Islamic seminaries were not directly involved in the Zia's Islamization program. At the demise of military rule, these non-recipients of the process had to resume to their traditional roles e.g. leading the mosques and Madrassas at the grassroots level – and it is here where the nourishing of sectarianism started in Pakistan which has been declared as 'the revolt of petty ulema' by Mumtaz Ahmad (Ahmad, 1997).

They used Mosques, Madrassas and others institutions under their control in rural areas for sectarianism and also used sectarianism as an Islamic ideology for enrollment, unrestricted from the control of prominent ulema and their Madrassas. The new breeds of Madrassas graduates were also had a claim in politics and were also militants/jihadist in outlook which developed during Afghan war. Many of them view Taliban conquest in Afghanistan as an ideal to follow which pressed them to the direction of radicalism. In a state having ethnic and socio-economic conflicts and Kalashnikov culture, this militancy soon turned into violence (Newsline, 1996).

Reports reveal that criminal activities across Pakistan, particularly between Karachi and KP e.g. smuggling, extortions, abduction for ransom have been carried by those affiliated with extremist organization. The involvement in militant activities by radicals are so filthy that they have been alleged to receive funding for promotion of radicalism in the society. Sectarianism, and its promotion is carried out under the umbrella of religion which is such a nasty trend that create splits within society. Taking strong action against such mongers are doing crack-down against them is a little difficult for the security agencies because they view arrests and trials as harassment of a particular religious sect or faction and the culprits are envisioned as martyrs of Islam. Things have been further complicated by supporting these sectarian groups by major Islamist political parties (Herald, 1994).

This trend also changed Madrassas from academic institutions to political arena and Madrassas became training and recruiting ground for militant organizations. This practice further gravitated the situation and now the sectarianism was seen as pivotal mean to secure financial assistance and promote violence in the name of religion. For instance, the Sunni and Shia sectarian division is attributed to the involvement of gulf states after Iranian revolution. More and more sectarian groups tried to outdo each other both orally and physically by inflicting violence to attract more financial gains. The influence of financial assistance could also be found on the internal politics of sectarian movements or formation of sectarian based organizations. The struggle for financial gains has been so much prominent within the factional organizations that it has created splits within and led to the formation of new organization to secure funds. For instance, after the murder of Sipah-e-Shaba's (SSP) two prominent leaders Jhangvi in 1989 and Qasimi in 1991, the internal conflict for financial control of the Madrassas funds was so deepened that it led to splits within SSP leading to the inception of new similar organizations. The newly formed faction of the previous SSP was Lashkar-i-Jhangvi under Riaz Basra – according to Roy (1994) was formed in such a manner that it surpassed its predecessor in violence.

The patronage of religious schools and bringing them into mainstream politics not only raised the number of these schools but also their entry into political fabric gave rise to extremist tendencies in national politics. At the end of Afghan war, the government felt real hardship in closing those Madrassas which were associated with Afghan Jihad. It was even more difficult to demilitarize the Mujahideen groups associated with them. The continuance of the Afghan civil war through Talban,

which was entirely Madrassas based and the dispatching of many militants to Kashmir, further aggravated the situation. For instance, the Jamiat-i-Islami and Gulbuddin Hikmatyar's (Afghan leader) Hizb-i-Islami ran guerilla training camps were associated with Deobandi Taliban and Harakat-ul Ansar which further expanded the political role of Madrassas (Herald, 1997). As the attention of most of the religious parties were fighting for power, they considered their religious communities as their political *jagirs* as has been done by feudal of Sind and Punjab about their constituencies (Malik, 1997).

Regional Politics and Rise of Sectarianism and Extremism

One of the important factors that provide support base for ensuing sectarianism and extremism is regional politics on the expense of nationalism. During 2002, there were estimated 58 religious political parties and 24 major militant-jihadist groups while most of their finance came from gulf states. Jihad is the holy war of Islam but the extremist ideologists consider and project it in terms of 'use of force to enforce their brand of Islam' which the moderate ulema do not consider correct interpretation of Islamic law of Jihad. They also work on the theme of helping the suffering Muslims around the world by fighting Jihad on their behalf. Therefore, their ideology has no limits or borders and it is universal. Islam says that protection should be granted to non-combatants like, elderly, women and children even during active war. But the extremist organization though projecting themselves holy warriors yet have least concern for these basic tenants of Islam. Nonetheless, not only non-Muslims e.g. Hindus, Jews and Christians are their target today but they also consider Muslims with different and moderate views as their enemies (Abbas, 2005).

After Afghan war, Harket-ul-Mujahidden and Harket-ul- Jihad-i-Islami merged to form Harket-ul-Ansar (HUA) in 1993 (later rebranded as Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) and they began to support freedom fighter in occupied Kashmir. As these militant groups were ideologically linked with Deobandi religious parties, its competitor Jammat-i-Islami also launched its own militant wing Hizb-ul-Mujahidin, partly for operating in Kashmir to remain relevant to the times.

Osama Bin Laden, after his return to Afghanistan in 1996 found the militant organizations in Pakistan had anti-American sentiments which could help him gathering support base. According to intelligence reports by Pakistani agencies that certain militant outfits e.g. HUA had come into close contact with Al Qaeda during 1995-96. Osama through his organization provided funding to those militant outfits for training for Jihad. It is believed that in the strategic move by Bin Laden, he was able to attract the support of HUA and some secret member of the agencies from Pakistan. According Abbas (2005), Osama and Pakistani intelligence were not in close contact because Pakistan had been receiving financial assistance from Saudi government that OBL was opposed to.

It is a truth that the number of Madrassas increased during Zia's era and then became nurseries for supply of men to Afghan Jihad. But another factor which was equally important was the failure of government to invest in public sector education which is reason for increased enrollment in traditional religious institutions. All these factors contributed to militants' groups very strong due to their equally strong support base in Madrassas. Some the deadliest militant groups operational in Pakistan were Sipah-i-Sahaba, Lashker-e-Jhangvi, Terhrik-i-Nifazi Fiqhi Jafaria, etc. Established in 1985, SSP is considered to be an off-shoot of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) which is a religious political party. JUI is an important political force with its history of promoting democratic culture in

Pakistan. Saudi Arabia is considered as one of the major financial contributors to these organizations through Pakistani agencies due to her concerns about the expansion of Shiite influence in Pakistan under the influence of Iranian revolution (Abbas 2005).

SSP grew to become a pure sectarian based network during 1980 by confining itself to anti-Shia stance spreading Jihadist literature labelling Shia as infidel (non-Muslim) and issued fatwas about their deaths. In due time criminals also developed connections with SSP and even they give money to them for killing Shia. On the alternate, the Iranian started funding Shia groups against Sunni jihadists. Meanwhile, Pakistan became a battleground for Sunni and Shia militant groups serving as proxies of Saudi Arabia and Iran. Pakistani government did not adopt a comprehensive and effective policy to check and balance this dangerous development.

South Asian Regional Security Framework and its Effects

Geography and physical location are important determinants in establishing a country's importance in a region. Pakistan's location at the crossroads of South Asia, West Asia and Central Asia, influences the economic and security dynamics of the region (Tufail, 2018). Pakistan through its crucial geostrategic positioning could play a pivotal role as energy and economic corridor and strategic partner in curbing terrorism in the region (Shaheen, 2011).

By understanding the power dynamics of South Asia one can better understand Pakistan's place with regard to regional security construct:

- South Asia could be seen as a hot spot harboring global rivalries between regional powers and world powers.
- Long standing disputes and historical rivalry between Pakistan and India's (both nuclear powers), arm race and missile race in South Asia which presents a shaky balance of power.
- Afghanistan historical disposition as country harboring terrorism and providing playground for competition among regional and world powers – often referred to as neo-great-game.
- Indian spy networks supporting insurgencies in Pakistan by supporting Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and sponsoring separatists in Pakistan.
- Post US-withdrawal Taliban sponsorship of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) an anti-state, most fatal terrorist organization working against Pakistan.

Considering these dynamics Pakistan is striving hard to safeguard herself through out the course of history. Pakistan's foreign policy's main goal is to make Pakistan both internally and externally secure. The maintenance of security throughout its history has so challenging that has not provided room for fully capitalizing the foreign policy truly on country's location – which could have been helpful in connectivity of the region and rising as influential regional power (Iftikhar, 2018). Pakistan active sponsorship so far has provided US and NATO forces to launch successful war on terror operations in Afghanistan and facilitate forces withdrawal and Afghan peace process (Idrees, Rehman, & Naazer, 2019). Pakistan was supporting the peace process because she wanted friendly government in Kabul but also believed in the Afghan led and Afghan owned political solution to the issue and weaken Indian leverage in Afghanistan (Ali, 2019).

The aftermath of 9/11, and central role of Pakistan in sponsoring the US operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan aimed at punishing Taliban for sponsoring Bin Laden the culprit of 9/11 attacks on US, has far reaching impacts on Pakistan and Pak-Afghan future. In case of non-

cooperation with US and her allies the repercussion could be severe for Pakistan. Musharraf took a historic U-turn by revising the Taliban policy going against them and taking side with the US by becoming non-NATO ally (Abbas, 2005).

Beyond supporting the US war on terror, Pakistan had to take stronger measures against extremist groups by imposing ban on Jash-e-Muhammad, LeT, SSP, TNFJ and TNSM. Due to deep rooted support base of the Jihadist organizations in Pakistan street protest were launched condemning Pakistan's support for US led Afghan campaign. These things created initial discontent for Musharraf but he was able to manage and discourage the trend skillfully. However, it is evident that Bin Laden popularity within Pakistan inspired the Jihadist in two major provinces (KP and Balochistan) bordering Afghanistan. The early estimates reveal that about ten thousand fighters entered Afghanistan from Pakistan to fight alongside Taliban. Pakistan's law enforcement agencies arrested almost two thousand extremists in 2001, but due to lack of sufficient evidence against them most of them were released.

It has been observed that the basic hindrance in the way of launching a crackdown against Jihadist was Pakistan's long-standing resolve and support of Kashmiris. The issue rose to the core during 2001 when suicide attack was made on Kashmir's Legislative Assembly and a similar attack on Indian Parliament by Jihadists. India blamed two organizations namely LeT and Jaish-e-Muhammad behind these attacks but also suspected the involvement of ISI (Abbas, 2005). Musharraf condemned these incidents but did not agree to hand over those wanted by India – for military government going against the Taliban in the given circumstances was conceivable but giving up Kashmir Jihad was not in the options for at that time. Due to anti extremist campaign in Afghanistan Pakistan was under severe pressure and the Kashmir policy was openly criticized by enemy broadcasts. The most important thing according to Abbas (2005) which was misunderstood by Musharraf was the narrow link between “amalgamation of extremism” within the Jihadists organizations inside Pakistan and fighting in Kashmir.

These incidents brought India and Pakistan of the daggers drawn and on the verge of active confrontation but the US mediation worked and things started calming. Pakistan under immense pressure of US in 2002 had to suspend the Kashmir Jihad. According to reports, when the ISI officials asked the Jihadists leaders to stop their activities they resented and some of them called Musharraf a betrayer of the Kashmiris. Some news reports suggest that the failure of the meeting highlights the ISI leak to show that Jihadists were out of ISI control. Still, it has been observed that Jihadist did not fully abandon their activities in Kashmir.

Some immediate set-backs of the policy were rise of terrorism in Pakistan. It was noticed that most of the attacks on Shia, Christians and foreigners were carried out by the affiliate of banned Jihadist groups previously fighting in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Pakistan regards Kashmir as the unresolved part of the partition of India and has never compromised on its Kashmir policy e.g. supporting the right of self-determination of Kashmiris. But observing silence amid continued oppression of Kashmiris should be seen as accepting the status quo. The 2002, election and Musharraf designed engineering to oust PPP and section of PML (N) but he ignored the rise of religious populist forces in domestic politics. The candidates of the MMA used anti-American sentiments/feeling in election and managed to get highest number of seats since Pakistan creation by any Islamic group. MMA Government in NWFP (now KP) started Islamization campaign in province and also started

crackdown on TV operators, Cinema owners and Musicians and also attack on Billboard featuring women (Hassan, 2005)

Analyzing Hard and Soft Policy Responses by Government of Pakistan

The government response has been seen as two-pronged e.g., soft policy and hard policy. Soft policy response which relies mainly on negotiations and giving space to militants to submit to constitution of the country, face fair trial and merge into society as equal citizen. Hard policy response is accompanied by lethal methods like military operations and targeting the safe havens of terrorist networks and dismantling and weakening their operational capabilities. Under the mixed policy approach Islamabad has faced great setbacks as the negotiations have given face saving and time to re-unite and generate waves of terrorism in Pakistan. The most recent waves of terrorism which have been linked to Taliban return to power in Afghanistan and the consequent upsurge of TTP has not only arose questions about revisiting the policy but also deteriorated relations with the Taliban regime.

These trends underscore the challenges in reconciling military force with diplomatic engagement. Pakistan's soft policy approach aligned with negotiations with insurgents and militant groups is considered both short lived and lacking trust and inconsistent due re-emerging violence. The negotiation rounds held so far with TTP and Baloch insurgents have proved to be unsuccessful. Though the government has strong resolve to establish peace by any means e.g. occasional ceasefire and peace deal military operations has been a dominant strategy against extremism. The peace negotiations have been short lived and provided space for insurgents to regenerate violence in the diverse ethnic and tribal regions. These trends are creating difficulties in balancing military action with diplomatic efforts.

The hard policy response works on different dimensions e.g., lethal military actions and intelligence-based operations, implying ground and air force. Efforts have been made by the Government of Pakistan to reduce radical Madrassas influence by introducing reforms; but these efforts failed completely to eliminate extremism from Pakistan. Since 2001, military conducted 15-20 major operations against militant extremist including TTP and TNSM. These include: Operation Enduring Freedom (200-2002), Operation Al Mizan (2002-2006), Operation Zalzal (2008), Operation Sher Dil and Rah-e-Haq (2007-2009), Rah-e-Nijat (2009-2010), while Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014) started after attack by terrorist on Army Public School in Peshawar, Operation Khyber I, II, III, IV respectively from (2014-17) and Operation Radd-ul-Fassad (2017).

After 9/11 incident military government of General Musharraf had taken historic U-Turn in its policy toward Taliban by supporting military campaign. At domestic front, he banned Jash Muhammad, Lashkar-i-Taiba, Sipah-i-Sahaba, Tehrik-i-Jafaria and TNSM and also arrested thousands of militants of these organizations. However, this action has intensified extremism in Pakistan (Abbas, 2005) A major operation against militant element was taken in 2009 against Tehrik-i-Talban Pakistan and other militant groups to re-establish the authority of the state. The Swat and North Waziristan operation was successful operation to some extent because it reduced extremist activities in Pakistan. But many militants including top leadership of TTP Qari Zia-ur-Rehman, Abdul Wali, Maulana Fazalullah and Maulvi Faqir fled away and take shelter in Afghanistan in other part of tribal area.

All the operations so far conducted got some success but they failed to check effectively rising tide of extremism in Pakistan because these operations against militants were not conducted with sincerity and there was lacked of co-ordination among civilian and military establishment. However, the most recent operation, Zarb-e-Azb achieved tangible victories (837 hideouts destroyed, 18087 weapons captured and 2763 militant killed) because this operation was started with the consensus of all stakeholders.

National Action Plan and its Efficacy

Looking back into 2016, the successful attack on Bacha Khan University highlighted that extremists still have the capacity to achieve their targets. The first ever comprehensive national policy to root out extremism the National Action Plan (NAP) is comprehensive plan with all stakeholders on board. However, NAP has not been able to overcome the hurdles in the way of its objectives. NACTA which was intended to act as implementing body still remained inactive. Hamid Ali Khan, head of this body, had to declare after few months of its establishment that three points of NAP were too challenging and long term and would no longer be pursued, i-e, take action against proscribed organization, reforms of Madrassas (JUI-F and JI opposing reforms) and repatriation of Afghan refugees (Masood, 2012).

One of the objectives of NAP was to strengthen NACTA but the outcomes are not well drawn. The policy was designated with a full commitment and national resolve to fight terrorism but there are short comings in its full implementation and lack of coordination between the stakeholders (Khan & Rafique, 2019). PILDAT report tells differences in opinion about its implementations among government, military, judiciary, media and civil society (PILDAT, 2017). Therefore, it has been advised to emphasize on addressing more pressing issues e.g., governance, madrasa reforms, hate speech and mainstreaming FATA region. Pakistan army has been working on multi-dimensional strategies implying both soft and hard approaches, they have also achieved some initial successes in achieving peace in Swat and Waziristan. But without engaging with local stakeholders, tribal elders and political activists' peace within cannot be established while for lasting peace a meaningful engagement with Taliban is necessary by implying a regional consensus with regional stakeholders like China and Iran and pressurize them to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries from their soil.

Recommendations

Terrorism and extremism have badly affected Pakistan both internally and externally. Due to this problem more than 70 thousand people lost their lives and economic loss is about more than 126 billion dollars since 9/11 incidents. Extremism has also defamed Pakistan in the comity of nations. Culture of violence, terrorism and extremism is actual danger to Pakistan. It is certainly an intricate matter which really needs to be resolved as soon as possible through effective policies. NAP given by present government after bringing about 21st amendment in the constitution is important step toward root out extremism and terrorism from Pakistan. Therefore, Implementation of the recommendations of NAP is also essential to get rid from this problem. If Pakistan has to recover from the phenomena of terrorism the state has to immediately undertake the following steps:

- The Government must get unanimity on this long-standing problem. It should also make NACTA vibrant and autonomous body and bring coordination among many civil and military agencies and other stakeholders.

- All Madrassas presently teach their own syllabus called Dars-i-Nizami, which was developed in 18th century. The contents taught under this system are primitive and does not wholly address modern issues. The government must be practical and work towards establishing with the collaboration of Madrassas board to change their syllabuses that meets modern requirements. A graduate from unregistered Madrassas should not be permitted to issue verdict.
- After 18th amendment education is now provincial subject. Now it is responsibility of Provincial Government to bring about constructive change in its curriculum. To change outdated and prejudiced syllabus that offer nothing about the importance of interreligious harmony in society. All prejudicial text hurtful of other religion must be removed. Memorization learning must be replaced by syllabus that encourage curious mind.
- The government will have to spend more to increase economic opportunities that aim to connect the potential and enable the growing ratio of youths. Economic prosperity will raise the standard of living of people and also eliminate poverty which is one important cause of promotion of extremism in Pakistan.
- Higher education has a great role to play in creating knowledge-based economy. The prosperity and well-being of a nation in modern fast changing world is knowledge-based economy, which is directly associated with the investment on higher education.
- Provision of less expensive and speedy justice is another important step which can check the growing trend of extremism and terrorism.
- Administrative reforms in FATA, media campaign and awareness of masses by political parties may also helpful to check the growing surge of extremism in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the multifaceted rise of extremism and sectarianism in Pakistan over the past three decades demands a nuanced understanding of its roots and manifestations. The entanglement of mosques with politics, particularly during Zia's regime, fueled the proliferation of Madrassas and their subsequent instrumentalization by the state for political purposes. The influx of funds from Persian Gulf states, notably Saudi Arabia, further fueled the radicalization of these religious institutions, shaping a new generation of ulema with a distinct political agenda. The consequences have been dire, with sectarian violence, militant activities, and the intertwining of criminal elements contributing to social polarization and political instability. The state's inconsistent response, marked by periods of patronage and crackdowns, failed to address the deeper socio-political and economic challenges fueling extremism. Efforts to counter extremism, such as military operations and the National Action Plan, have yielded mixed results. The ongoing struggle requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the ideological transformation of religious institutions, fosters socio-economic development, and reclaims the pluralistic and tolerant essence of Islam. Pakistan's journey towards a harmonious and progressive society hinge on confronting these challenges with strategic vision and sustained commitment.

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