

P O L I C Y B R I E F

**Academic Research
And
Counter-Terrorism in Pakistan**



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1. Introduction

It has become abundantly clear that Pakistan's struggle against extremists and terrorists is a medium- to long-term engagement. As a military campaign, the struggle is no longer contained to parts of the Tribal Areas, but has spread over the last years to the NWFP and increasingly into the Punjab and even Karachi. It has been argued in other policy papers, based on significant international evidence and analyses, that this struggle needs to be seen in a context larger than only a military-style campaign. Events over 2008 and 2009 in Pakistan have confirmed this, and support the approach suggested in these papers and by many academics globally that the struggle is not only one of force but also one of **ideas**. That is, extremists are driven by certain **worldviews**, or frameworks of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts in it. This framework is inherently contradictory to that of the bulk of the population and to its democratic aspirations, because it is authoritarian, unaccountable and violent.

In this case, much needs to be done to counter terrorism in the short and medium-term. On the one hand, there is no denying the need for military strikes, enforcement and containment. Pakistani society and government need to be able to strategically ensure their security by **protecting** citizens and infrastructure, investigating and **pursuing** terrorists, and **responding** to terrorist attacks coherently. A national counter-terrorism security strategy is urgently required to prepare society to deal with the terrorism that has claimed over 2,225 civilian and 1,000 military lives in 2009 alone.

2. Counter-Terrorism: A Battle of Ideas

On the other hand, it is clear that this is not a complete solution. As with most countries across the world, Pakistan also has to **pre-empt** terrorism by tackling its causes. Terrorists have made unrealistic political demands (for instance regarding summary removal of elected politicians, sovereignty of foreign nations, or upheaval of economic systems) in non-conciliatory manners (suicide bombing and mass-attack threats). Neither these demands nor their modes allow for any discussion, dialogue or negotiation. Since this is the case, Pakistani society and the Government need to analyze terrorist ideologies more carefully to prepare society to reject them. This political/cultural realm recognizes that, "Force alone is insufficient; it is vital to win the battle for 'hearts and minds' in order to separate extremists and terrorists from the people they are trying to mobilize."

- 1: Center for the Study of Gender & Culture (2010) *Counter-Terrorism Public Policy and Strategies in Pakistan*. Policy Brief. Lahore: Society for Arts, Gender & Education.
Department of Communication & Cultural Studies (2008) *Violence and Culture in Pakistan*. Policy Brief. National College of Arts: Lahore.
Department of Communication & Cultural Studies (2008) *Violence and Education*. Policy Brief. National College of Arts: Lahore.
www.csGPCPK.org/publications.html
- 2: Zaidi, Mosharraf (2009) "Where's that Counter-Terrorism Strategy?"; The News, Saturday January 2, 2010.
(http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=216509 last accessed January 7, 2010).

This well-recognized realm of counter-terrorism is founded on the global understanding that most terrorists are not only militant criminals but operate in Pakistan with a definite ideology and worldview. In fact, the messages emanating from terrorist leaders are not only geo-political or economic, but are also strongly ideological. They are based, in short, on a highly **rigid, authoritarian ideology** that brooks no dissent or discussion. Some aspects of this ideology are progressively getting clearer through terrorist actions, for instance strong prejudice against cultural expression, **violence against women** and their bodies, and violent silencing of any dissent. However, much more needs to be understood about the various aspects and implications of this ideology if there is to be any success in the battle for 'hearts and minds' of the people that terrorists are trying to mobilize.

This ideology is not restricted only to small groups of terrorists. Besides their ranks and new recruits, this ideology, wrapped in religious garb, ultimately needs **justification** from a wide support base within society. An analogy is often drawn of terrorist leaders as planters of violent seeds. It is true that seeds of violence, discontent, authoritarianism and terrorism are all planted by masterminds and nurtured to fruition, for instance through suicide bombings. However, to grow and carry out their purpose, these seeds are nourished within a soil. This soil is culture, not only as expressions of music, literature and arts but as a way of life that encompasses a worldview. The soil of culture can either enable seeds of violence to grow, or it can nip the seeds of terrorist authoritarianism by encouraging pluralist thought to emerge and blossom.

Finally, this battle of ideas is not abstract or restricted to intellectual leaders. Rather, terrorists need popular justification for their political and economic agenda. Their ideology, therefore, does not and cannot remain restricted to their small numbers, but is spread across society in a number of channels. The perpetuation of rigid, authoritarian ideology requires **mediation**, or dissemination in a variety of ways. So, not only do terrorists draw upon an established framework of historical and philosophical analyses and ideas, but they also find ways of spreading this ideology through various media to find justification and legitimation for their supporting actions, such as suicide bombing of the Pakistan Armed Forces, Government targets, or cultural symbols of free expression.

3: Chatham House (2004) "Responding to Terrorism and Other New Threats and Challenges in Central Asia and Afghanistan", Report of a seminar in May 2004. London: Chatham House.

3. Messages of Extremist Terrorism

Extremist terrorists draw on a wellspring of rigid and authoritarian scholarship and ideas that legitimate their actions. It is these ideologies which are mediated and spread in a variety of ways across Pakistani society to help seek popular justification and support. In part, the ideologies are translated into **political action**, for instance preserving sovereignty of Pakistan by expelling foreigners or eliminating the constitutional legal system for replacement by their own brand of justice. In part, the ideologies are translated into **cultural and popular action**, for instance violently banning women in public spaces, enforcing dress codes and “moral” behavior, and restricting cultural expressions such as music.

In these, and other, cases, the translations are means to convey the underlying messages of extremist terrorists. The translations of ideologies (into calls for political, legal, economic or cultural action) often appeal to Pakistani society in the face of **popular discontent** with the country's political, legal, economic, and cultural trends. For instance, some communities in the Tribal Areas in Pakistan and in Afghanistan welcomed the “Taliban brand of justice” as being accessible, swift and transparent in contrast to the constitutional system which was often perceived as distant, slow and corrupt. Economic trends of marginalization and increasing poverty in Pakistan create fertile soil of acceptance for extremist calls to redistribute wealth, etc. Lack of cultural self-awareness coupled with often mindless adoption of Western modernity create an appeal for the extremist messages of puritanism and nationalism.

A political/ cultural strategy to counter terrorism that seeks to isolate extremist terrorists from the population they are trying to mobilize must obviously **address these discontents**, or at least appear visibly and publicly committed to addressing them. The Government of Pakistan has already declared in its joint Parliamentary Resolution of October 22, 2008 that removing structural inequities with “development” is a precursor to countering terrorism.

However, this is not a complete solution. Globally, it is recognized by many academics now that “structural inequities” (such as economic marginalization, poor access to justice, etc.) are complicating factors but do not explain the fact of extremist terrorism, for instance in Pakistan. Such explanations discount the history of Pakistani society, which has been living in such conditions before without turning to rigid, extremist, authoritarian ideologies. Thus, while addressing the causes of popular discontent is

4: Cf. Daily Times, October 23, 2008.

(http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\10\23\story_23-10-2008_pg1_1 - last accessed January 7, 2010).

important, it must remain inadequate in countering terrorism politically. Similarly, vague and ill-defined calls for “negotiation” with extremists are bound to, and have, failed because of the specific worldview of the underlying message, which is at odds with that of much of the country's population. Instead, a political/ cultural strategy to counter terrorism must also **address the messages and ideologies** of extremist terrorists that underlietheir translations into action.

A political/cultural strategy, such as has been argued for in a separate paper, must begin with an **analysis of the messages** which are at the foundation of extremist terrorist calls for political and cultural/popular action. While such an exercise remains to be done, three features may be readily identified. First, the extremist message may be defined as **rigid**. That is, the extremist message is, almost by definition, one that denies pluralism and open enquiry into religious issues, as well as one draws on a strict interpretation of religious traditions. Although some commentators use the word “conservative”, this itself is a term open to interpretation and inappropriate in many cases. Rather, one fundamental message underlying extremist calls for political and cultural action is not “conservatism” but rigidity in not allowing alternative interpretations to legitimately exist.

Along with this rigidity, extremists consistently underlie their messages with **authority**. That is, their subjective interpretations and pronouncements are given validity by their self-claimed authority as well as their message for society to rely on their authority. There has been much academic work on authoritarianism globally, and one definition of the term may be useful here to relate to extremist tendencies. Authoritarianism combines “highly concentrated and centralized power structures in which political power is generated and maintained by a repressive system that excludes potential challengers” with the principles of “rule of men, not rule of law; important decisions by unelected leaders behind closed doors; and the informal and unregulated exercise of political power.” Essentially, there is a message of lack of accountability of those making decisions to the bulk of society. Furthermore, authoritarianism offers no guarantee of civil liberties or tolerance for opposition, or of freedom to associate, and an attempt to “impose controls on virtually all elements of society.” Finally, authoritarianism is noted for the appearance of stability by excessive use of force and indoctrination. Extremist terrorist groups in Pakistan can be seen to fulfill many of these conditions themselves, besides asserting these values in their messages about how to organize Pakistani society under their authority. Political philosopher Hannah Arendt also pointed out that this form of authoritarianism is one step behind totalitarianism, which has been exercised in various forms across time and space. One consequence of this authoritarian world view is its extreme monoculturalism, denying value in all diversity or diverse opinions.

- 6: Center for the Study of Gender & Culture (2010) Counter-Terrorism Public Policy and Strategies in Pakistan. Policy Brief. Lahore: Society for Arts, Gender & Education.
- 7: Vestal, Theodore M. (1999) Ethiopia: A Post-Cold War African State. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, p. 17.

Finally, a third feature of the underlying message of extremist terrorists is that rigid authoritarianism can pervade all levels of society. There is no subject that is beyond the competence of extreme terrorists, and hence there is no limit to their intrusion into people's lives and intellects. The message is, fundamentally, a **multi-level** one. The vast number of networked terrorist organizations operating in Pakistan call for multiple levels of political action (local, national, regional, even global) and multiple levels of cultural action (related to women's bodies, artistic expressions, sale of goods in shops, etc.). Traditional and new media allow them to spread these messages across society through television and radio shows, news analysis and commentaries, even educational curricula.

The reason that so many diverse extremist terrorist groups can remain coordinated in their agenda is that these messages underlie their various calls to action. They also all draw on the same body of rigid, authoritarian and multi-layered **research**. If there is to be a successful counter-terrorism political strategy in Pakistan, then, it must analyze and address these messages thoroughly. To do so would require a body of research that does not exist in contemporary form in the country.

4. Ideas to Counter Terrorism

If extremist terrorists draw on a well-formed body of research to project and promote their agenda, the only possible way to counter extreme terrorism in the medium- to long-term is to analyze this appropriately and project an alternative ideology and agenda. **Positive research** could form the heart of a sound counter-terrorism political/cultural strategy.

Globally, this strategy is well recognized. Much of academic scholarship across the world, especially in Europe, the UK and USA is dedicated to understanding the ideological message of extremist terrorists, including in Pakistan, and to proposing alternatives. While some of this research emerges from university departments, much of it does not. Rather, the new hub for such research is either in non-institutional networks of independent researchers or in "smaller" think tanks. Independent researchers can be encouraged and facilitated, but by definition evade any strategic efforts. Think tanks, in contrast, can and have been encouraged and mobilized to counter terrorism in the 'battle for hearts and minds.'

8: Arendt, Hannah (1951) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Schocken Books.

A **think tank** is an organization, institute, corporation, or group that conducts research and advocates for the results of that research to inform policy. Most think tanks are non-profit organizations, ensuring independence, although they are funded for specific projects by government, interest groups, businesses, or even charitable support. Ideological perspectives are common to both independent researchers and most think tanks, which often adds value to their research. Ideological perspectives are common to think tanks globally, and there is little effort to obscure or hide political affiliations. Rather, this adds depth and perspective to their research, and recognizes that some subjective viewpoint is always inherent in any research. Ideological attachment also does not prevent many think tanks from commenting on or propagating their views on a variety of subjects. Many think tanks across Europe and North America, for instance, combine research and advice on foreign policy with domestic economics, politics, science/ technology, business, social and environmental policies.

Many of the **leading think tanks** in the North have budgets in excess of anything that a Southern nation such as Pakistan could imagine. Arguably the leading think tank, RAND Corporation in USA, employs over 1,600 people (including almost 1,000 researchers) and earned a revenue of US\$223 million in the fiscal year 2007. Even smaller think tanks, such as the CATO Institute in USA which accepts no government funding and relies largely on individual contributions, employs over 75 full-time staff and earned over US\$22 million in fiscal year 2005. Activities in most think tanks range from organizing seminars and public events, to publishing and launching books, to custom-designed policy advice, to regular publication of papers and newsletters, and to using traditional and new media to communicate. One of the leading foreign policy think tanks in the UK, Chatham House, publishes more than 40 books, briefing papers and reports in a year around only three themes: energy/environment, international economics, and regional/security studies. The primary function of these, and the hundreds of other think tanks now dedicated to studying extremist terrorism across the world, is to enable and establish a debate of diverse ideas around these issues of concern. While Governments remain in the policy-making seat, think tanks provide the necessary research and evidence for officials to make policy in an informed and committed manner. The basis for this policy advice and opening a space of debate is **sound research**. Think tanks count for their existence on credibility, which is assessed at least in part on academic impact. Thus, think tanks often measure and project their validity in terms of scholarly impact, for instance citation of their papers.

9: www.rand.org

10: www.cato.org

11: www.chathamhouse.org.uk

The global (especially Northern) model of think tanks may be far removed from the reality of most Southern nations such as Pakistan, particularly regarding financing. However, the need remains for **sound research into the underlying ideological message of extremist terrorism and concrete alternatives**. Most importantly, it is clear that many think tanks and researchers outside Pakistan, operating within their own national restrictions, cannot fully appreciate the ground situation in the country, or do not have legitimacy to propose and conduct good research on extremist terrorism in Pakistan. There is a clear need for indigenous research, which is not being met locally.

Pakistan has a developing higher education sector, and many **university departments** are being enhanced and supported by the Higher Education Commission. However, upgrading and faculty development is a slow process, requiring systemic enhancements which are not yet visible. Also, research is urgently needed now in some of the most neglected of university departments and developments, i.e. in the social sciences and humanities. None of these across the public or private sector have demonstrated any consistent, significant and sound research on extremist terrorist ideologies and their calls for action. There is little relevant research in universities for a national political/cultural counter-terrorism strategy to draw upon. A significant constraint of universities in this regard is their dependence on and management by government (in the case of public sector universities) or their reliance on profit-making (in the case of private sector universities). A further constraint is the absence of highly qualified or well-trained social scientists and humanists to conduct such research independently.

There are a number of **independent researchers and media commentators** (newspaper columnists, etc.) who have been writing or speaking about related issues, but they often do not have the requisite background in academic research, access to contemporary global research, or accountability in the form of peer-reviewed academic outputs. Finally, there are only about 35 **think tanks** in Pakistan (leading ones include Institute of Strategic Studies, Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, and Institute for Policy Studies). The existing think tanks, however have very limited outputs (one leading Pakistani think tank produced 23 papers over the last nine years), typically limited scope (foreign policy in exclusive International Relations and Political Science frameworks), little independent quality control (in the form of blind peer-reviews) and ideological perspectives related to the military establishment or right-leaning religious political parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami.

12: www.hec.gov.pk

13: www.issi.org.pk, www.irs.org.pk, www.ipripak.org, www.ips-pk.org

Irrespective of the quantum and quality of their research, none of the major think tanks in Pakistan are involved in research related to the issue above. For instance, none of the four major think tanks cited above have published a single book, article or report around the issue of women and gender in the context of radical extremism, or on the notion of culture and worldview, or on political theory of authoritarianism. There is, therefore, an **outstanding gap between contemporary, pluralistic, sound academic research and policy-making** to counter terrorism and even engage in the 'battle for hearts and minds.' One outcome of this is that while rigid and authoritarian elements gain access to the more-or-less free media to propagate their ideologies, there is little countering of these ideologies in the media by alternative groups, who do not have the research or scholarship to draw upon.

If the Government of Pakistan is going to counter terrorism by pre-empting and preventing it, there is no option but to engage in this battle of ideas and ideologies. In order to do so, however, the Government must be willing to support and facilitate independent research into these concerns in a variety of dimensions, not just security- and military-related but also into the “soft” domains of culture and ideologies. There is a telling example of this in the case of Soviet Studies in western countries. In an article about the collapse of the Soviet Union, an analyst asked a crucial question implicating the western approach to knowledge about such issues; and the tendency to view phenomena through the “thin slit of social science” which pays attention to only a very narrow range of factors: data on military force, economics, and the relationships among leaders. Frequently ignored, he says, are “the passions... the appeal of ethnic loyalty and nationalism, the demands for freedom of religious practice and cultural expression these conditions were 'soft' or 'unscientific' and those who emphasized them could be scorned.' Consequently, despite the “prodigious” efforts of western academics and the huge sums of money spent on their analyses, not one social scientist could predict what would happen to the Soviet Union or how. In the event, as summed by an extensive editorial in the Winter 1991 edition of *Wilson Quarterly*, intellectuals agreed that academic myopia had led to ignoring the “soft” factors which were ultimately decisive in the political events leading to the demise of the Soviet Union. Events surrounding extremist terrorism in Pakistan are doubtless very different from those surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, but the analysis of those events remains unfortunately the same. There is, now more than ever, a need to also analyze and Research the “soft” issues of cultures, philosophies, ideologies and gender which underlie extremist terrorism if steps are to be taken to prevent it from taking over the “hearts and minds” of Pakistan.

14: Ahmed, Durre (1995) *Islam and the West: An Analysis of C.G. Jung's Understanding of Islam*. Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute.

15: Connors, W. R. (1991) “Why Were We Surprised?” *The American Scholar*, Spring.

5. Conclusion

A case has been made in this policy brief for analyzing the political and cultural calls to action by extremist terrorists, as well as the underlying messages of rigidity, authoritarianism and interventionism that underlie them. The above is necessarily an incomplete analysis, and the argument has been indicative of the sort of such analyses needed. These messages are important to understand, since they constitute the battle of ideas and ideologies that terrorism represents, not only the security and military challenges. Extremist terrorists are not only petty criminals, but are propounding at different levels and using various media the type of society they want to see Pakistan become. If the Government of Pakistan is to devise an appropriate political/cultural strategy to “separate extremists and terrorists from the people they are trying to mobilize”, then **sound, relevant and independent academic research** is essential.

Such research, however, is gravely lacking in Pakistan. Individual researchers, university departments and the few think tanks are all inadequately structured or capable of engaging in such research. Rather, new efforts are needed in order to encourage and facilitate independent, high quality, academic research that analyzes extremist terrorism and proposes alternatives. Supporting the emergence and development of such institutions is a concern given the permanent fiscal challenges in Pakistan, but external agencies may be approached to that end with clear plans. What would be needed to realize such support is the **Government of Pakistan's willingness to take such academic research into consideration** while formulating and implementing policy. Expression and proof of such willingness would not only help mobilize intellectual and financial support for research, but would publicly declare the Government's strong commitment against terrorism.