



## Countering Violent Extremism In Pakistan

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### Abstract

The threat of violent extremism is the most powerful of the various by-products of terror affecting the State and society of Pakistan. The tolerant cultural and religious ethos of the country has been damaged. The killing in Peshawar on 16 December last year of 132 school children is a resounding reminder that extremism poses a vital threat against Pakistan (Basit, 2015). Despite the terrorist operations, radicalisation and extremism remain a serious concern in Pakistan. The Pakistani Government has now implemented a number of counter-violent extremism programmes (CVE). But the implementation of the effective CVE programme remains a serious challenge (Bashar, 2017). CVE is designed to reduce the size and depletion of the active membership of terrorist groups and a support base between local communities (Hargon, 2010).

**Key Words:** Counter Violent Extremism, Extremist, Narrative, Counterterrorism, Media, education

## **Introduction**

CVE can be seen by jihadist organisations as counter-radical narratives which encourage intolerance and values which can contribute directly or indirectly to the country's growing cycle of violence and extremism in the future. It is crucial that the linkage between States and companies and the elimination of the trust deficit be strengthened to achieve optimal results from a CVE policy. (Toronto, 2015)

Defeating extremist ideologies calls for a common approach between the state and society. The CVE policy primarily offers masses an account against extremist ideologies and rekindles public confidence in the state, a prerequisite for fighting against violent extremism. It helps government agencies contain the recruitment drive of terrorist groups by neutralizing their social and political paths to support and understanding (Abid).

There are grave security challenges to the growing traction of violent extremism ideology in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Sequential counter-terrorism dynamic operations did little to prevent terrorist organisations from being recruited. Pakistan has therefore taken initiatives aiming particularly to raise social awareness in softly counter-violent extremism (CVE). In order to achieve optimal results, Pakistan needs a long-term strategy, commitment, adequate investment and skilled leadership in the CVE programme. This article provides a brief overview of CVE initiatives in Pakistan to highlight areas of concern. All CVE programmes have the same objectives, different ways to achieve them: they are context- and country-specific (Horgan, 2014).

## **Background**

However, the masses are the final victims of radicalisation, a certain degree of sympathy for the extremist causes lying in a religious tone and colour in Pakistani society exists. Anything religiously available in a traditional religious society like Pakistan is immediately appealing and, unwittingly, people end up supporting the extremist agenda. However, support for such causes should not be allowed to condone violence (Mirahmadi et al., 2017)

The problem has also been compounded by the ambiguous and ambivalent perception of domestic terror as external. Weak governance, broad social injustices and the madrasa that is intellectually stagnant and public education system helped to further that (Zaidi, 2013).

The main source of jihadist stories broadcast in Pakistan is jihadist literature available in vernacular press, social media and traditional religious courses in the madrassas. These narrative reports are written by a range of extremist groups, such as Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, the domestic groups such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and others.

In terms of terrorism, Pakistan's main challenge is to confront jihadist groups and their ideological stories which reflect risks and vulnerable social groups. Pakistan's main challenge is In Pakistan, 79 so called jihadist organisations, or 11-B-(1) r/w Schedule-I (ATA), 1997) have been outlawed by the Ministry of Interior (NACTA, 2021). In Pakistan, the majority of these prohibited organisations participate in terrorist attacks.

For the past 15 years, Pakistani security forces have been fighting homemade terrorist groups. In the northwest province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), including the NMDs, at least ten large and numerous small military operations were performed against these militant outfits.

Despite all this, Pakistan has suffered over 61,000 casualties and economic losses of \$118 billion. The primary objective of Pakistan's CVE programmes is to address the issue of the growth of home-grown terrorism. However, a high level of religious extremism, with constant persecution of religious minorities and display of religious intolerance, is also plaguing Pakistani society. The latest example is the lynching by a violent mob of university students of a university student Mashall Khan on false accusations of blasphemy, and the killing by a vigilante mob of a 10-year old Hindu boy in Balochistan. The deep permeation of extremism in Pakistan has been pointed to both incidents and several similar cases.

### **CVE achievements and challenges in Pakistan**

In Pakistan's Strategic Community and legislators, the unprecedented expansion of Islamist radicalisation is certainly a huge challenge. While political leaders were unable to devise a concrete framework for antiterrorism, civil society and the military undertook a number of disjointed CVE initiatives. Several CVE initiatives are developing from their embryonic to adolescent phases in Pakistan. While some achievements are made in the fight against violent extremism, there are still no substantial gains. Indeed, in a religiously separated and politically polarized country like Pakistan, despite its unity, putting a CVE structure is no less than a result. The implementation strategies will vary from Pakistan geographical units, communities and classes. Although the overall structure of CVE in Pakistan may be the same, the mechanism of implementation will have to take account of local dynamics (Iqbal, 2014).

Since 2014, the Government of Pakistan has been working on the National Counter Terrorist Authority's national narrative (NACTA). Several initiatives in this area, including the involvement of moderate religious clerics, such as Dr Javed Ahmad Ghamdi, have been set up by a separate directorate since then. There have also been various seminars and workshops. The CVE programmes of other countries such as Malaysia and Turkey were sent to NACTA officials outside of the country (Zahid, 2017).

The government has started several military operations to disturb the terrorist networks, dismantle them and destroy them. The KP province and tribal areas' Military Operations have so far been unable to deal with the Taliban militancy despite several Taliban groups being expelled from the region. In Afghanistan's border areas, the grouping and reorganization of these militant outfits appear to neutralize the benefits of Operation Zarb-e-Azb. Further, in some parts of Pakistani tribal regions and in the KPK province, the government's writings have been re-established. Similarly, there were some positive results of the operation in Karachi. No practical action has, however, been taken against Karachi's Islamist terrorist organisations such as Rah-e-Haq, a new political face of Lashkar e-Jhangvi, a sectarian organisation (and its mother organisation Siphah-e-Sahaba). In the municipal elections held in Karachi in December 2015, Rah-e-Haq managed to win 9 electoral divisions.

### **Major components of the CVE initiatives**

The key characteristics of CVE initiatives in Pakistan are to raise awareness of religious education in society and to motivate communities to build social resilience. These comprise:

#### **Religious Education**

Extremists often use religious space for recruiting and disseminating their radical ideas. For example, partnering with religious leaders who play a major role as community leaders is a key element of Bangladesh's CVE programme. Religious leaders are coopted to alert and raise awareness of violent extremism in the Muslim community.

#### **CVE Messaging through print and electronic-media**

For CVE messages, newspapers, radio, and television are used by the Government of Pakistan, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The Government is currently producing documentaries, short films and publicity that confront extremist stories with a focused CVE message. Further, TV channels, including private media channels, are instructed to broadcast anti-terrorism and extremism programmes.

#### **Engaging Educational Institutions**

The Education Ministry promotes education institutions in order to increase awareness among teachers, students and parents of extremism and terrorism. Teachers, parents and students are also told to be alert and report back to the police if any student is involved in extremist activity or misses for 10 days.

## **Revising Madrassa syllabus**

There have been madrassas who preach religious intolerance and extremism. As a result, Madrassa's books were overhauled and the government ordered the Ministry of Education to continue examining the curriculum of Madrassa.

## **Controlling extremist messaging on the internet**

In order to monitor social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, Pakistan has taken steps. This is the subject of work by the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority.

## **Community initiatives**

The efforts of the Bangladesh government's CVE have been made by Muslim clerics in Pakistan. The fact that the apex Islamic religious body of Bangladesh is endorsed by valued scholars provides an effective counterweight to extremist propaganda. It helps to delegitimize the dangerous stories of IS likes, thus dissuading those who are attracted to extreme violence.

## **Gaps in Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Efforts**

The government launched many CVE measures, but the gains must be consolidated and the implementation mechanism improved by regular evaluation. Contra-terrorism is, of course, very costly and CVE is one of the main pillars of every country's overall counter-terrorism strategy. In implementing CVE measures, Pakistani policy makers have to analyse challenges. Above all, the strengthening of NACTA needs to be accelerated as it is the primary agency that leads efforts in implementing CVE-initiatives.

The CVE wing of NACTA could not carry out the NISP and NAP policy initiatives. Other challenges such as funding, a lack of skilled professionals and an environment that is not conducive to the implementation of CVE policy initiatives can arise. The provincial governments' lack of agreement to revise public school curricula and to implement reforms to Madrassa undermined the CVE initiatives.

The various safety agencies in the country need more coordination and information sharing. Despite the government's emphasis on better coordination and the establishment of several commissions in order to achieve this, the coordination is limited.

The implementation and efficiency of the CVE programmes are not assessed in order to make any necessary adjustments.

It is not efficient to detect or counter extreme trends on social media platforms as there is a lack of dedicated and technologically qualified professionals.

The response of Pakistan remains weak on the strategic front. Some initiatives use the media to raise awareness of social issues and to resist extremism and terrorism. The progress is, however, slow and the result is still visible.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the above efforts, the obvious results in terms of CVE measures are insignificant. In Pakistan there is a realization that the current problems of religious militancy would remain unresolved without the implementation of CVE measures. Since 2001 (in some cases LeJ even earlier than 2001), the country has had a number of Islamic terrorist groups but to date it has no broad counter-terrorist policy. It seems that Pakistan's success against terrorist groups remains limited with no proper framework for organizing counter-terrorism policies. A practical counter-terrorism policy must be developed that includes all essential instruments, a roadmap and a mechanism for implementation. Policymakers need to evaluate and evaluate CVE measures' successes and failures in the last decade and develop a functional strategy that is agreed by all stakeholders.

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