

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN: METHODS, CHALLENGES AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

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Abstract

Pakistani society has been through the decades of radicalization and violent extremism that is mostly linked to the religious extremist activities which ultimately breeds radicalization. To examine the prevailing issues of radicalization this research aims at investigating the various phenomenon, drivers and approaches of violent extremism in Pakistan. This paper suggests three phases of de-radicalization i.e. protect, prepare and prevent to employ an effective Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) approach in Pakistan. Notable CVE initiatives of Pakistan for reforming inmates have also been discussed in detail. Theoretical underpinnings with highly effective models of Indonesia through family engagement and cyber de-radicalizing, the Malaysia model, which employed CVE through clerics and their sermons, and the U.S. model have been discussed to infer lessons for improving Pakistan's CVE programs. Pakistan's counter-terrorism narrative (Paigham-e-Pakistan) needs to be taught at public schools and colleges to prevent any future recruitment and terrorist activities. This paper underlines prominent challenges to Pakistan's CVE efforts and concludes by suggesting that a civilian authority to manage CVE programs will help increase efficiency. It recommends that the government should establish more CVE centers under civilian authority, in order to give onus of responsibility to government.

Keywords: Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), CVE Models, Paigham-e-Pakistan.

Introduction

There are several terms used interchangeably in contemporary literature on terrorism and counter-terrorism, which include violent extremism and fundamentalism. Some people use these terms interchangeably, whereas others try to differentiate and explain them.¹ Even the United Nations Security Council has urged for the adoption of a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism and

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violent extremism. In the resolution of 2178 (2014) underlines CVE is an essential element of addressing threats to global peace and security. The adoption of UNSC resolution 2178 is the extension of UNSCR-1624, which stresses upon the role of educational institutions, religious society and the role of media.² Daniel Benjamin (2010) described CVE as;

“efforts to stop those most at risk of radicalization from becoming terrorists by providing the means to undercut the ideological and rhetorical narratives which drive violent extremism.”³

The US Department of Homeland Security defines violent extremists as, “individuals who support or commit ideologically motivated violence to further their political goals.”⁴ Violent Extremism (VE) is multifaceted as it may belong to various manifestations like religious extremism, anti-government and right-wing. But in most of the reported cases, violent extremism has been practiced in the form of religious extremism. There is a common perception of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs that they lay much emphasis on religious extremism, whereas it seeks to address all kinds of Violent Extremism. With the rise of transnational terrorism, appeal for countering violent extremism, counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism is becoming a top priority for policy-makers around the globe. There are some CVE programs in terrorism affected countries, which bring forth some lessons for Pakistan’s CVE initiatives.

The first technique that most of the governments adopted for countering violent extremism is “the strategic communication”. Strategic communication programs were aimed at changing people’s mind through various talks, lecture, community engagement and indoctrination by religious scholars. Such programs had a low rate of success because of governmental priorities. As the technique of strategic communication is time-consuming and it requires sustainability couple with uninterrupted funding. After the unfruitful government-led programs of strategic communications campaigns in Pakistan, an alternate of empowering credible voices at the grass-root level and expanding them to vulnerable communities seems to work better than the previous strategy. This approach is useful not only in Pakistan but other terrorism ravaged nations too but is a slow-moving force to bring any tangible change. Although the history of violent extremism is much old it re-emerged after various militant and so-called Jihadist groups started campaigning their radical narratives after the United States launched a global war against terrorism in 2001. It includes the Al-Qaeda, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Salafi Jihadi Movement, Al-Shabaab, Jabhat-Al-Nusra and the Taliban with the primary objective of recruiting youth and achieving their respective politico-religious objectives.⁵

The United States has been a pioneer country to introduce CVE program. It initiated in the late 2000s as the State Department of the U.S. (Agency for International Development) made extensive efforts to clarify the definition of CVE. Primarily, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) functions on various issues of development and poverty alleviation but it expanded its scope to other areas including countering violent extremism as well because it is closely linked with economic development. A “Catch-all Category Approach” was adopted by different agencies and bureaus across the United States. The Bureau of Counter-terrorism within the State Department established a new section for focusing on CVE. In the U.S, various stakeholders including state government, local government, communities, private sector, NGOs, social services organizations, mental health providers and academia play a crucial role in CVE.⁶ Following the footsteps of the United States other governments and international organizations also started developing their programs of CVE. In line with the U.S., the United Kingdom and the European Union began to initiate their programs on CVE. The United Arab Emirates has been thought as the center-stage for extremist ideologies, where anti-Shia sentiments were on the rise because of the governmental policies and the fall-out of Saudi-Yemen war. In 2012, the *Hedayah* International Centre for CVE was established in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) by the coalition of international governments. Hedayah is devoted to counter all sorts of violent extremism through research, dialogue and capacity building programmes.

In Canada, there have been terrorist attacks since 2014 and the terrorists were inspired by extremist ideologies and since 2002, 20 individuals have been convicted of terrorism and another 21 have been charged with terrorism offenses. Canadian government started working on CVE efforts on various levels. Canada adopted a strategy of building resilience against terrorism that provides a framework to address the issues of terrorism threats. The strategy has similar elements such as

- Prevent,
- Detect,
- Deny and
- Respond.⁷

The Indonesian model of CVE is also quite groundbreaking. In 2002, after the Bali bombings in Indonesia, the security forces along with the Indonesian government contributed towards soft and ideological approaches of counter-terrorism like its Western equals i.e Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). The Indonesian government introduced some innovative and revolutionary CVE initiatives.⁸ An International non-profit organization Search for Common Ground

(SFCG) Indonesia executed a 3 years plan titled '*Reducing the Recruitment and Recidivism of Violent Extremists in Indonesia.*' The program involved several stakeholders and worked towards a common goal of addressing the ongoing challenge of violent extremism. The recruitment of vulnerable younger humans into violent extremist companies and the excessive chance of recidivism for launched prisoners (especially the ones convicted of terrorism) after their launch on parole. The overall objective of the task changed into lessening the risk of violent extremism amongst young people and offenders in Indonesia.⁹

In most of the cases, the common cause of violent extremism is attached to social marginalization, government repression, fragmentation and poorly governed areas, where citizens face an identity crisis, rampant corruption and violation of their fundamental rights. Therefore, under-developed countries experience virulent violence and violent extremism. Some groups, who consider themselves oppressed and victims of marginalization take up violence as a tool to end their suffering and achieve liberty and glory.¹⁰ Such groups get support from various quarters to foster their movement, at the same time, these groups launch massive propaganda campaigns to raise funds and continue recruitment. The United States and European nations are making a shift to prioritize a "surrogate strategy" for combating such propaganda. But there is an asymmetry between the programs operating at the grass-root, community level and the law enforcers.¹¹ A major goal of the CVE program is to achieve the following objectives:-

- Building resilience to deflect extremism.
- Developing strategic communication and counter-narratives.

Only a holistic approach aimed at capacity building, resilience and social services may add much power to the programs instead of extensive surveillance or intelligence-led methods. In Pakistan mostly government-led operations are centered on counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization, whereas, very limited efforts have been carried out to counter-violent extremism. Pakistani society has been through indoctrination of radicalization during Zia's regime, which took a decade of extensive radicalization to continue so-called Jihad in Afghanistan. According to some reports it was funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in collaboration with the then Saudi regime. That so-called imported Jihadist ideology bifurcated the whole Pakistani society and also triggered the wave of sectarian terrorism. Therefore, all the challenges that include counter-terrorism, counter-radicalization, de-radicalization and countering violent-extremism are much trickier in Pakistan than in other countries. Polarized societies are more prone to violent extremism because of the internal schism. Other related factors include the collision

of popular belief and state's ideology, the divergence of interest between state and clergy. However, the primary objectives of CVE are the same all over the world. According to an already published study, there are three popular phases in CVE;

- **Protect:** Protection of civilians, crowded places, sports stadiums, markets, shopping malls and religious congregation etc are the topmost priority as any negligence in protection may cause massive casualties in case of any violence.
- **Prepare:** It is the primary responsibility of government to prepare for mitigating the impact of any emergency situation. A well trained and equipped counter-terrorism squads and rapid response forces can avoid loss of lives and infrastructure.
- **Prevent:** The strategy of prevention includes preventing people from becoming terrorists and follow extremist agendas. Fascinated by extremist ideologies, some of the people start supporting extremist groups or their agenda while rescuing such people from lethal extremist ideologies is sine qua-non to maintain peace in society.¹²

The CVE is a soft approach that is effective to the counter-terrorism. Western countries are more efficient in their response to the threat of CVE and kick-started various CVE programs, which suggest the engagement of youth and focus on winning the hearts and minds of local the populace. Softer approaches like CVE are sustainable because the potential extremists are reformed through engagement approach. That is the reason other affected countries are borrowing lessons from the Western-established programs.

"In addition, reframing work in such fields in terms of its contribution to the prevention of terrorism, CVE poses significant risks to practitioners and participants, whose local engagement may be seen as extension of America's often-controversial counter-terrorism (CT) policies and thus such initiatives are the targets of critics".¹³

There are some non-violent organizations, which later turned into violent extremist and caused violence at a greater level. The Lal Masjid operation was done in 2007 to maintain the writ of the government, which was challenged by a few hundreds in the capital city of Islamabad. The reality is that several terrorists had previously been participants of reputed non-violent extremist organizations that lend credence to the fact that such corporations can serve as a steppingstone to terrorism.¹⁴

The United Nations Security Council Resolution-2178, which addresses the CVE, calls upon the UN member states to take measures for enhancing international

cooperation to prevent violent extremisms and terrorism. Such a diplomatic forum provides an international legal framework, where states may enhance cooperation to address violent extremism and terrorism. As the UNSCR-2178;

“emphasizes in this regard the importance [...] to expand non-violent alternative avenues for battle prevention and resolution by using affected people and nearby groups to decrease the danger of radicalization to terrorism, and of efforts to sell non-violent alternatives to violent narratives espoused through overseas terrorist combatants, and underscores the role schooling can play in countering terrorist narratives”.¹⁵

Disproportionate imprisonment and punishments of violent extremists may invoke backlash from inmates. Same was the case with the United States' Guantanamo Bay prisoners. Folks, who are not yet violent extremists but are kept in prison with other potential violent extremists or terrorists, would consider such disproportionate sentence as a tool of repression by governmental authorities. It will make those violent extremists as a potential sympathizer of those terrorists in jail. For terrorist organizations, it becomes relatively easier to launch extremists as terrorists to steer the goals of terrorist organizations. The appropriate example is the Camp Bucca Jail in Iraq, which underwent the same circumstances after the American invasion in 2003. In Camp Bucca, Jihadists were held together with other inmates and they might without difficulty get in contact with each other. It enabled the Jihadists to employ followers amongst non-Jihadists.

CVE Initiatives and Pakistan – An Analysis

In Pakistan, the counter-terrorism, is given more preference as a strategy but countering violent extremism is also given equal importance. CVE has following primary purposes: -

- It keeps terrorist organizations from growing stronger.
- It builds resilience in community as well as society.
- It deprives terrorist organizations of gaining local support and recruitment.

Terrorist organizations, whether local or transnational aim to gain strength. Through CVE programs, resilience can be built in the local community to prevent local support and recruitment for terrorist groups. As discussing and examining the challenges posed to Pakistan's polity, it is vital to analyze the steps taken by the Pakistan government for countering violent extremism. Several scholars argue that the foreign models of CVE are not applicable in Pakistan due to its diverse nature. Pakistan also adopted a strategy of preventing violent extremism as part of Pakistan's

counter-terrorism efforts. Most of the terrorists entered in Pakistan from the porous border of Afghanistan, as Afghan Taliban, who influenced local sub-factions (Punjabi Taliban).¹⁶ Pakistan has its own method of CVE which is different from the one used in the Western countries. But that is debatable as CVE is a global threat and the CVE models of the West may offer some lessons to Pakistan. The models of CVE in the West are varied for instance in France, more focus is on the law enforcement agencies rather the local Imams of the community used as a bridge to link connection. Nevertheless, the U.S.A, Norway, Netherlands, UK, Colombia, Germany and Sweden implemented rehabilitation programs by disengaging the people from extremist organizations and bringing them back to society. Likewise, Saudi Arabia had introduced its "PRAT" approach that emphasizes on the prevention at first place, rehabilitation and post-rehab care. Moreover, Indonesia has introduced a program to neutralize the fundamentalist thinking of the radicals. The CVE model of Yemen involves the frequent contact between clerics and the radicals, which is highly useful for the rehabilitation of former militants into society.¹⁷ Abdul Basit in his research "*Countering Violent Extremism: Evaluating Pakistan's Counter-Radicalization and Deradicalization Initiatives*" presents six convincing aspects for enlisting a comprehensive CVE program in Pakistan.¹⁸

- Terrorism and extremism are intertwined, therefore, it is hard to control terrorism without tackling the menace of extremism. There is a need to neutralize extremists appeal in Pakistani society to prevent future recruitments by terrorist organizations.
- CVE is carried out to choke supplies of membership and diminish support of locals for extremist ideology and groups.
- Keeping low scale terrorists in prisons won't help much rather reforming and rehabilitating them and their extremist ideology.
- The military solution is effective but real and long-term results come from CVE efforts, therefore, a multipronged non-kinetic framework is required.
- An improved psychotherapy and guidance program can help save the imprudent youth from terrorists' bait.
- Those extremists who decide to disengage from extremists and surrender to the state, should be given a chance to reintegrate in the society and live a normal life afterwards.¹⁹

However, Pakistani government attempted to adopt complete CVE approach based on various components of international CVE model like engagement and de-radicalization on one hand and counter-radicalization on the other. That is the reason Pakistan's CVE policy is split as the de-radicalization and counter-

radicalization. After flushing TTP out of Swat, a rehabilitation program was set up under the supervision of Pakistan Military. In some areas of the Punjab similar programme were carried out under the direct supervision of counter-terrorism branch and in collaboration with Technical Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA).²⁰ Punjab de-radicalization programme in 2011 jointly managed by Counter-terrorism Department of Police and TEVTA was a commendable effort but it lacked financial support. After reforming about thousands of militants it faced closure because of the lack of funds.

Pakistani government adopted de-radicalization program to alter the behaviour of already captured terrorists from radical to moderate. But counter-radicalization is also required to reach better standards of stability in the country, which was effectively done through the National Action Plan (2014) by waging military operations combined with Madrassa reforms. Among others, Pakistan launched the following notable CVE initiatives for de-radicalization of inmates;

- Swat De-Radicalization camp
- Mishal
- Sparley
- Rastoon
- Pythom
- Heila

Counter-terrorism strategy can only cope with terrorism but in the long run there is a need to adopt softer measures to prevent future terrorist attacks. The dilemma with Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy 2014 (National Action Plan) has been that it relied mostly on counter-terrorism efforts. Such a strategy may serve in a shorter-term but softer approach his not being underlined in policy formulation. Though counter-terrorism operations destroyed terrorist networks and their infrastructure, but their ideology might still be appealing to radicals. That is why they still are getting recruitment from Madrassas, educational institutes and social media to continue their extremist ideologies. Counter-terrorism operations achieve the shorter success which is limited to destroying safe havens of terrorists only. Counter-terrorism strategies are the short term solution to combat terrorism as is apparent from the U.S. experience of counter-terrorism lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq. It shows that countering terrorism through kinetic means is capital intensive and prolongs beyond calculated time.

Unfortunately, Pakistani society is divided along sectarian and ethnic fault lines since its independence that later was exploited by internal and external elements to make deeper divisions in the society. After the wave of terrorism in

Pakistan, this division in society made the task of peace-building more complicated and on the contrary, gave rise to multiple factions of terrorist groups. The National Action Plan (NAP) very clearly underlines²¹ the government's counter-radicalism and counter-terrorism methods by pronouncing zero tolerance for militancy and the concrete measures to strangle terrorist enterprises by choking their financial lifelines and destroying their communication network.²² After the implementation of NAP few strategies were crafted to countering violent extremism as well. The NAP had included the following four clauses to efficient counter-terrorism and violent-extremism approach.²³

- Stern action against the literature promoting hate and extremism.
- Ensuring that proscribed organizations do not re-emerge with different names.
- Clamping a complete ban on the glorification (terrorists and their organizations) through print and electronic media.
- Dealing firmly with sectarian terrorists.

In the case of Pakistan, terrorism and extremism are intertwined, therefore tackling terrorism without weakening the bond of extremism is neither logical nor practicable. The CVE is considered as a sub-component of Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy.²⁴

Employing Strategy of De-radicalization

Pakistan Military initiated '*Mashal de-radicalization*' program to reintegrate captured militants in the battle of Swat 2009. The center for de-radicalization "Mashal" was established in the same building, which was once used by militants as their headquarters. This step was a psychological triumph over locals, who could see that once terrorist haven is now a rehabilitation center. The program of de-radicalization was the outcome of a realization that enduring peace could not be established with bullets only and there was a need to de-radicalize youth to avert the future threat of terrorism.²⁵ Pakistan Army having plentiful resources to run de-radicalization program started de-radicalizing militants by employing services of psychologists, moderate clerics and trainers.

More than three thousand of the militants have successfully been de-radicalized and the ratio for release is about 99%.²⁶ Such an impressive ratio of release reflected the efficiency and professionalism in the arduous task of CVE. Similar to the Indonesian model of CVE, a de-radicalization program designed involving families of the detainees also help in driving them out of such quagmire. Under the program "Mashal", the families of the detainees are also trained to

monitor detainees after their release from the facility. The rationale is simple that if released, the reformed youth still is prone to rejoin the ranks of terrorists. Through family monitoring, it becomes easy to recapture for further intensive de-radicalization. By invoking family bond, terrorists are reformed through the process of de-radicalization. The program in Swat aims to rehabilitate detainees, who worked for the Taliban. Rehabilitation provides them with another chance to live their new life that has a love for family, society, nation and country. Trainers at the de-radicalization center provide even vocational training to detainees that even after their release from the facility they can make a livelihood by adopting a vocation to live their life without financially depending upon others.²⁷

Sabaoon de-radicalization program; is a facility for youth between 12-18 years. Many other states are taking similar measures to keep record and surveillance of released prisoners through the police or family members of the detainees. Such states include Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore, United Kingdom and Ireland. Swat rehabilitation facility has been successful because of the post-release surveillance by police officials and military.²⁸ Otherwise, those young boys, who are now trained and de-radicalized were once used as pawns by the Taliban. Taliban were turning them into suicide bombers through indoctrination methods. Those militants were waging a fierce battle against NATO forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan Army. But the programs of de-radicalization have considerable success in returning those young-lads back to society after reforming them

Social Media as a Tool to Radicalize/De-radicalize

As most of the people are attracted towards violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism because of the religious factor, therefore religious dialogue is also used as a counter-radical tool in Pakistan through clerics. There is a case of Malaysia, where the government used clerics to dissuade militants from violence.²⁹ The smart strategy to de-radicalize militants has been in the use of Islamic scholars, who have more credibility and respect within the ranks of militants.³⁰

An Indonesian NGO used enticing method to de-radicalize through social media. Youth uses social media so widely that it had much success in de-radicalization through comic entitled “*Ketika Nurani Bicara (When Conscience Talks)*” began publishing in 2010. That spreads the message that human with a conscience may not accept attacking or killing of other fellow humans. The slogans that comics accompanied were the following:-

- Islam is the religion of peace

- Peace in the Month of Ramadan
- Islam is peace
- Islam is a peace-loving religion
- The Prophet (PBUH) did call for Islam, but not by violence ³¹

Such a strategy relates much to Pakistan's case because of the excessive use of social media in recent years by commoners. On the contrary, terrorist organizations also use social media to radicalize, recruit and raise funds through online sermons and appeals. It has alarmingly heightened the possibility of radicalizing youth via online-resources. Pakistan's more than 32.4 million population is an active user of the internet, whereas 70% among them is the youth. Such a massive number of social media users might be more vulnerable to extremist ideology without a regulating mechanism. As a sub-factor of Pakistan's CVE initiatives, the government must devise a mechanism to closely monitor online chat-rooms especially suspected of promoting so-called Jihadist materials. It should also monitor the websites and the activities of their subscribers.³² Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) is already doing a pretty good job but an already discussed Indonesian model may help to devise an effective strategy. Pakistani government is in the process of regulating social media and monitoring of websites along with certain legislation and debates in the parliament. The websites where hate-speech is promoted are permanently blocked. Social media campaigns against terrorist organization also reflect the unity of the nation against their odious ideology.

Pakistan's Counter-terrorism Narrative (Paigham-e-Pakistan)

After the extensive efforts of the Pakistani government over the last fifteen years, it succeeded in launching national narrative on counter-terrorism and extremism titled "Paigham-e-Pakistan" on January 16, 2018. Paigham-e-Pakistan is a *Fatwa* sought by the government of Pakistan to counter-terrorism and halt future recruitment and attacks by terrorists. Paigham-e-Pakistan rejects extremism, terrorism and sectarianism in all its manifestations and highlights the message of peace and harmony among Muslims in the light of the Holy Quran and Sunnah. The 22-point *Fatwa* (religious decree) was inked and endorsed by 1800 scholars belonging to all school of thoughts in Pakistan. The document is a unified stance against extremism and terrorism, which is a significant step towards providing the nation at least a counter-narrative. The state's pandering to purveyors of extremist ideologies has been crucial in seeding faith-based violence. To implement counter-narrative, a revivification of National Action Plan (NAP) will supplement the counter-terrorism strategy.³³ Along with other measures of national policy, counter-radicalization measures have also been crucial to dwindle down terrorism and checking potential

recruits for acts of terrorism. Pakistan had the following counter-radicalization measures:-³⁴

- Madrassa Reforms.
- National International Security Policy 2014.
- National Action Plan 2014.
- Counter-terrorism Operations.
- Pakistan Protection Act 2014.

There is a common perception that uneducated youth or illiterate people usually engage in violent activities. Recent incidents have changed that predominant perception as Mashal Khan's lynching at Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan by university fellows, Safoora massacre, where graduates from a prestigious institute participated and a medical student Noreen Laghari joined Islamic State, have been some out of many cases, where educated youth committed acts of violence and terrorism. Such incidents question the quality of public education on one hand and penetration of radical groups into public sector institutes on the other hand. Albert Einstein once stated that "education was not about the learning of mere facts, but to train minds think critically."³⁵ Majority of the youth, who was arrested by security forces and were de-radicalized, lacked critical thinking.

Categories of Violent Extremism in Pakistan

Extremism in Pakistan is broader in scope and may not be encapsulated into a single form. However, it can be categorized into some of the prominent forms such as;

- Anti-West violent extremism.
- Anti-American Violent extremism.
- Anti-Indian violent extremism.
- Anti-Liberal violent extremism.

It has been observed that majority of the extremists hold the Western culture and liberal values responsible for impugning Islamic values in Pakistan and they view them as a stumbling block on the way to implement Islamic laws nevertheless, such people are ignorant of national law formulation process and its implementation. Anti-American extremism is identical to Anti-West extremism, but there are more political reasons for violent extremism than religious ones. Iranian Revolution 1979 is linked with the U.S. policies to liberalize Iran under Shah's regime. Similarly burning of the U.S. embassy in Pakistan was due to a false report enunciating that the Islam's Holiest Place (Masjid Al-haram) was bombed by the

U.S., an enraged mob stormed into the embassy and caused killing of several Americans in November 1979. Terrorist attacks on U.S. consulates and embassies in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Athens, Syria, Saudi-Arabia, Indonesia, Peru, India, Kenya and Tanzania reflect how intense that anti-American violent extremism is and that is leading towards terrorism.³⁶ Anti-Americanism was on its rise after drone strikes in Pakistan.

Anti-Indian violent extremism does not support any kind of engagement with India, rather it seeks the total destruction of India. Some of the groups in Pakistan propagate Anti-Indian violent extremism. Even if the government tries to initiate some peaceful process to enhance Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) with India, such groups fiercely oppose governmental policies. Majority of the extremism in Pakistan is based on Anti-liberal violent extremism. It means to abolish liberal practices in Pakistan and replace them with *Sharia*. Alex P. Schmid in his research entitled *Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin*, mentions twenty indicators for monitoring extremism in any society and some of them are quite applicable to violent extremism in Pakistan. As extremists tend to;

- Reject the existing political and social order and situate themselves out.
- Overthrow government through revolutionary vanguard and struggle to establish their own.
- Take control of communal or state power.
- Reject democratic principles, which are based on sovereignty.
- Exhibit intolerance to others' views.
- Fixed ideas and close-mindedness.
- Lastly, in pursuit of their ideas and goals, extremists are willing to face death sentence and seek martyrdom.³⁷

Pakistan's counter-radicalization efforts have gained a laudable success to cope with such challenges, but it may take decades to drive extremism out of society.

Challenges Undermining Pakistan's CVE Efforts

Usually, there may be a lack of awareness among masses about the gravity of the threat that extremism poses to society. "The slight majority in Pakistan rejects violence, however, not always disagrees with the extremist agenda as such, that's couched in religious language".³⁸ Following are some of the essential demanding situations confronting Pakistan's current CVE strategies:

- **Social Environment and Risk of Re-radicalization:** In Pakistan where radicalism is stated to be wide-spread, few de-radicalization

centers are similar to isolated islands of normality in which militants are provided with wholesome surroundings to facilitate their go-back to everyday existence. However, the deradicalized youth are returned and reintegrated into our society, where the force of re-radicalization are nevertheless present, and the chances of their re-radicalization are pretty high. The government needs to address other correlated issues as well including deteriorated governance, significant socio-financial disparities as unemployment and lack of economic opportunities lead to a psychological state of mind, where they are willing to accept criminal tasks for an insignificant amount of money.

- **Political Marginalization:** Another gigantic challenge is of political marginalization, which provides a perfect breeding spot for the surge of radicalization. Without improving the aforementioned factors, the strategy of deradicalization may not bear better results. In the absence of a countrywide CVE coverage, countering extremism in Pakistan will stay herculean task.³⁹
- **Role of Institutions:** Institutions should start programs on CVE mandatory for all students to qualify. It surely will bear positive results in the long term de-radicalization strategy. CVE is an on-going, ever-evolving and a lengthy method. The government managing the de-radicalization program should ensure low recidivism chances. "Such claims seem untimely and exaggerated. The real fulfillment or failure of a de-radicalization program can only be judged after the passage of 10-15 years. Though Pakistan's de-radicalization program is working efficiently but it needs more years to mature to bear desired results."⁴⁰

In Pakistan, CVE is an evolving method in the counter-terrorism policy, which requires upgrades and rigorous re-assessment. An independent evaluation based on empirically verifiable data has not been carried out yet. Improving the monitoring of the program along scientific lines is another major challenge. But such an assessment method is likely to pinpoint those flaws, which need concrete measures. It is suggested that more CVE centers should be established and be given under the control of civilian authorities to turn the CVE initiatives to a comprehensive national-level program. Moreover, a bottom-up CVE approach may prove to be effective.⁴¹ According to some of the scholars, only a strong and effective educational system can steer Pakistan towards moderation and stability. It certainly may impact the minds of people to minimize the element of extremism from society as a whole.

Conclusion

The growing radicalism needs the governmental response by strengthening domestic security based on the mutual consensus of all stakeholders. It is pertinent to mention that the major stumbling block in tackling this challenge is susceptible governance. Moreover, there is a need to accept that the ethno-sectarian problems will continue to be a large obstacle in achieving financial prosperity in Pakistan. At the domestic level, the authorities should adopt “engage and get engaged” method by engaging all stakeholders into a single fold as ethnic, sectarian and non-secular divide are threats to inner concord. Nevertheless, it is high time to take bold initiatives to introduce the political, economic and educational reforms to tackle forthcoming challenges of political instability, economic degradation and educational lapse. Though counter-radicalization achieved success but to make it more sustainable soft approach (CVE) is the smart strategy. There are various effective strategies used by other countries to conduct efficient CVE, Pakistan should also adopt those soft approaches. The obligation to falsify the terrorist narratives (that misrepresents Islam) and to broaden a counter-narrative (Paigham-e-Pakistan) lies with politico-religious groups and civil society. If such beliefs are not challenged or condemned, extremism will continue to flourish despite counter-terrorism operations.

NOTES

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