

# *FAULTLINES*

The K.P.S. Gill Journal of Conflict & Resolution

Volume 26



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Volume 26

edited by  
AJAI SAHNI



Kautilya Books

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THE INSTITUTE FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



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FAULTLINES: THE K.P.S. GILL JOURNAL OF CONFLICT & RESOLUTION

Edited by Ajai Sahni

## **FAULTLINES - THE SERIES**

FAULTLINES focuses on various sources and aspects of existing and emerging conflict in the Indian subcontinent. Terrorism and low-intensity wars, communal, caste and other sectarian strife, political violence, organised crime, policing, the criminal justice system and human rights constitute the central focus of the Journal.

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# Foreword

A darkness is gathering over India, but its leadership – across party lines – appears concerned only with the seizure of power and its use and abuse for personal and partisan ends, and not with the enlargement of national power and the well-being of the people. After a period of entirely premature strutting about as an ‘emerging great power’, India finds itself sliding on almost every index of national power. Even as it celebrates its emergence as the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, overtaking the United Kingdom, what is studiously ignored here is that the United Kingdom has a population of about 67 million, while India currently stands at 1.38 billion. In per capita income terms, India ranks a low 142 out of 193 countries and accounts for the largest population of the poor in the world. Current trends indicate that Bangladesh, five ranks below in 2019, is positioned to overtake India in per capita income in 2020. The government’s response to all this has been obfuscation, increasingly opaque policies and comprehensive institutional erosion. The distinctions between truth and falsehood are being erased, and state institutions increasingly manipulate data to mask performance failures.

Much of this is not unique to India. There has been a significant deterioration in the cultures of governance – particularly in democracies – across the world. This cannot, however, offer consolation or an alibi for Indian failures, nor will it help ward off the crippling infirmities and deficits that are resulting from dysfunctional policies. These infirmities have compounded security vulnerabilities, widened existing and emerging deficits of

capacity and capability, and undermined institutional coherence and integrity at a time when the regional security environment is becoming increasingly unstable, with a predatory China pairing up with Pakistan to project harm, and to encircle India through a range of interventions in the wider neighbourhood.

Technology – and the wide Indian lag in adopting cutting edge science – has augmented security challenges. Significant here is the proliferation of the Internet and social media, which have been harnessed with great efficiency by disruptive forces, even as the state's responses continue to be hobbled by bureaucratic incomprehension, delay and grossly inadequate investments. These have become the principal instrumentalities for radicalization and incitement, with both domestic extremist formations and external entities, including those backed by foreign intelligence agencies, playing a critical role. 'Digitized hate', as one of the papers in this volume describes it, is a powerful malignancy ranging across the region, with significant and augmenting impact on India.

But the social media, like almost every instrumentality produced by science, can be a force, equally, for good, as its role in Ukraine's 'Euromaidan revolution' demonstrates. What dominates in a particular society is largely defined by the political cultures that prevail – and the truth, today, is that India's political culture has turned toxic. The very institutions that are intended to protect against this toxicity have, unfortunately, so deeply absorbed the pervasive bile, that they lend themselves eagerly to manipulation by the prevailing and polarizing powers. The judicial fakery surrounding the prosecution of purported 'urban Naxals', and the denial by courts even of basic humanity – leave alone human rights – in the case of the aged and ailing Varavara Rao and Stan Swamy, demonstrate the subordination of India's highest institutions to a vicious and vindictive political executive that manipulates reality with the invention of categories that have little basis in reality to persecute critics and dissidents.

If India is to extract itself from the increasingly dire conditions that afflict its internal and external environment, its leadership will have to engineer not only a strategic transformation, but, equally, a fundamental transformation of the prevailing political culture. There is, however, little evidence that the present political leadership possesses the capability, the sagacity or the vision to imagine and realize such a critical paradigm shift.

Ajai Sahni

November 2020



# Digitised Hate

## Online Radicalisation in Pakistan & Afghanistan: Implications for India\*

Peter Chalk\*\*

Online radicalisation has emerged as an issue of increased concern to many governments around the world. A variety of violent religious, ethno-nationalist, xenophobic and single-issue movements have leveraged cyber platforms to recruit, indoctrinate and inspire, which has served to greatly expand their logistical and operational reach while simultaneously provided greater latitude for the execution of semi-autonomous attacks conducted by so-called “lone-wolf” terrorist actors. These dynamics have been on stark display across Western Europe, North America, the Middle East and Australasia for several

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\* This paper is based on the 2<sup>nd</sup> KPS Gill Memorial Lecture Series organized by the Punjab Police at Chandigarh on December 11, 2019.

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years. However, they are now also being increasingly felt in theatres outside these core “digital” areas, including South Asia. This paper focuses on the manner by which the “virtual world” is impacting on militant extremism in two states that have long been held hostage to rampant terror in this part of the world – Pakistan and Afghanistan. It first discusses the nature of international security in the contemporary era before going on to look at how the Internet causally affects processes of radicalisation, the manner by which this is occurring within the specific Pak-Afghan context and the implications these influences have for India’s national security interests. The essay concludes with some thoughts on remedial measures and best practices that can be instituted to effectively counter this growing threat.

#### **THE NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA**

In stark contrast to the Cold War, few of today’s dangers take the form of overt military aggression stemming from a clearly defined sovereign source. By contrast, conflict and general threat definition have become far more diffuse and opaquer, lacking the simple dichotomies of the linear superpower division between the United States and the Soviet Union. The challenges currently confronting the global community more often stem from non-state actors and non-governmental processes, invariably transcend international boundaries, blur the distinction between civil and military security, frequently interact with one another to exacerbate their individual threat quotient and, for the most part, are not readily deterred by the physical defenses/borders that governments have traditionally relied on to protect their populations and territories.<sup>1</sup> In the

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1 Peter Chalk, *Non-Military Security and Global Order: The Impact of Extremism, Violence and Chaos on National and International Security*, Macmillan, London 2000, pp.1-2.

words of James Woolsey, the former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, “we have slain a large dragon, but now we find ourselves living in a jungle with a bewildering number of poisonous snakes. And in many ways the dragon was easier to keep track of.”<sup>2</sup>

There are several fundamental features of the present international environment that are contributing to the spread of this global disorder:

- The emphasis on economic prosperity and power conceived in terms of wealth – itself amplified by the severe wealth disparities that exist in many parts of the world – which has led to the emergence of “black dollar” organisations seeking to satisfy their material aspirations on the back of sustained criminal enterprises.
- The resurgence of atavistic forms of ethno-national and religious identity, which has given rise to a dizzying array of highly fanatical movements that are quite prepared to shed blood in pursuit of their self-defined primordial interests.
- The rapid expansion of international transportation links, communication networks and financial flows, which has facilitated the transnational diffusion of security threats in such a way that novel and unanticipated hazards can quickly arise.
- The growth of unsustainable megacities, which has contributed to environmental degradation, over-population and pollution as well as helped spawn

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2 Cited in John Ciccarelli, “Preface: Instruments of Darkness: Crime and Australian National Security,” in John Ciccarelli ed., *Transnational Crime: A New Security Threat?*, Australian Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1996, p. xi.

squalid shanty towns that have acted as incubators for disease, crime and violence.<sup>3</sup>

One of the more notable threat contingencies that has arisen at the top of this new security agenda is terrorism, which as a phenomenon has, itself, become a far more complex and multifaceted problem for a number of reasons:

- Numerous conflict zones around the world have provided extremist militants with multiple fronts to not only operate simultaneously but also gain extensive first-hand combat experience.
- Globalisation, modern means of communication, increasingly efficient transportation networks and porous borders have all allowed terrorists to operate on a truly international basis, contributed to the growing spectre of volunteer foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and facilitated the emergence of a new ‘breed’ of violent extremist – the *ad-hoc*, amateur lone wolf.
- The proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which has provided terrorists and violent extremist (VE) groups with a range of tactical options that were formerly the reserve of governments and their armed forces. Somalia, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Yemen, Libya and Mali are just a few examples where non-state actors have been able to elevate their attack tempos to the extent that they now match or even supersede those of their sovereign adversaries.
- In many cases militant extremists are increasingly looking to inflict death not so much as a means of expressing identity but as a way of creating it. More specifically, terror is now being used as an all-

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3 Peter Chalk, op. cit., p. 3-7.

encompassing end in itself with self-engorging and indiscriminate killing more the rule than the exception.

- Lastly, terrorists have become far savvier and more sophisticated in using information technology and online platforms to indoctrinate, recruit and plan.<sup>4</sup>

The analytical context for this paper is derived from this last aspect.

### **ONLINE PLATFORMS AND THEIR IMPACT PROCESSES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

Terrorists and VE groups use the Internet in much the same way as society as a whole does – to communicate, collaborate and convince. Organisations such as Islamic State (IS), al-Qaeda Central (AQC) and its various affiliates around the world, al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) – to name but a few – have all exploited online forums and social media platforms to promote their ideologies, justify their actions, recruit foot soldiers, condemn ‘infidels,’ inspire attacks and encourage lone-wolf actions.

Messages and missives are directed at multiple audiences, although it is minors that are most commonly targeted. Two basic reasons account for this. First teenagers and adolescents have a very heavy online presence. Second, they are highly susceptible to simplistic, yet alluring extremist narratives that routinely emphasise parsimonious solutions to what are, in reality, highly complex problems. AQC and IS are exemplars of modern movements that have sought to leverage social media platforms as a means for simplifying the world and its complex human interactions to a single base denominator

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4 For a seminal analysis of the manner by which terrorism has evolved in the modern era see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006.

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that is specifically tailored for youthful audiences. Although the two groups remain locked in a struggle for ideological supremacy, they have both put out a basic thematic message that routinely stresses highly linear black and white reasoning between right and wrong.

While currently much of the emphasis is on jihadist exploitation of the Internet and digital social media, it would be a mistake to suggest that it is only violent Islamists that have embraced online platforms to foster radicalisation. There are many other entities that have adroitly used these mediums for their own nefarious purposes, including pro-life militants, anarchists, Black Block anti-globalists, environmental and animal rights extremists, and white supremacists.

The far right has been especially active on-line and, indeed, many research groups in North America, Australia and Europe currently see the white supremacist and *jihadi* threats as two faces of the same coin. To give but two examples: In the US, where hate groups such as the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) historically grew primarily out of personal connections and word of mouth, today's xenophobic extremists have mastered how to exploit the Internet to reach, recruit and coordinate among a huge pool of potential racists.<sup>5</sup> And in the UK, the neo-Nazi group National Action (NA) was proscribed in 2016 precisely because of its digital glorification of violence, which has been leveraged to build up a 'fan' base through the use of explicit online material to reach new recruits and vulnerable audiences.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Farhad Manjoo, "A Hunt for Ways to Combat Online Radicalization," *The New York Times*, August 23, 2017.

6 Sam Christie and Felix Allen, "Who are National Action? Neo-Nazi Terror Group Banned in the UK Who Praised Jo Cox's Killer Thomas Mair," *The Sun*, January 03, 2018.

How then do the Internet and associated social media platforms causally impact on processes of radicalisation?

First, information technology creates more opportunities for radicalisation by breaking down traditional barriers of geography and space, allowing extremists to interact with what would otherwise be unreachable target audiences in a real-time format.<sup>7</sup> In this manner the Internet serves as an accelerant for violent extremism in that it allows individuals to connect in an instantaneous and continuous way, effectively acting as a ‘conveyor belt’ for incubating would-be terrorists.

Second, social media networks algorithmically connect-like minded individuals and amplify their passions. This is the core of the business model upon which these platforms are based. However, these inter-personal ties and linkages can also channel people into ‘echo chambers’ where highly emotive content that would otherwise be deemed egregious or highly objectionable in the physical world gains a degree of – if not full – acceptability in cyber space. This self-bolstering dynamic plays an integral role in the reinforcement of extremist messaging, often at a rapid and extensive pace through the posting and reposting of individual tweets by hundreds of other users.<sup>8</sup>

Third, the Internet can give the illusion of strength in numbers where radicals brought together by online journals, blogs, services and chat rooms, more easily see themselves not as individuals but as an active part of a broader, networked

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7 Ricard Apau, “Youth and Violent Extremism On Line: Countering Terror Exploitation and Use of the Internet,” *African Journal for the Prevention and Countering of Terrorism*, Volume 7, Number 1, 2018, p. 26.

8 Daniel Byman, “An Intelligence Reserve Corps to Counter Terrorist Use of the Internet,” The Hoover Institution, Aegis Series Paper No. 1018, 2018, p. 4.

extremist movement that operates nationally, regionally or even internationally.

Fourth, the Internet ensures a degree of anonymity – something that is particularly true for sites that enable encrypted communications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Kik and Signal. This facet can encourage otherwise risk-averse individuals to engage in actions that they would not normally do in the physical world. More specifically, curious would-be militants may well feel more confident in approaching/contacting ‘people of interest’ in the cyber world, largely because the initial risk of detection by authorities is low.<sup>9</sup>

Fifth, the Internet offers a ‘one-stop shop’ for all the information an extremist may need to carry out a violent action – from how to manufacture and place Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) to suggestions for alternative, cheap methods of attack (such as the recent tactic of using cars, trucks and vans as ramming weapons) and ways of best publicizing a successful operation. In addition, it opens the way for ‘cyber-coaching,’ allowing militant leaders to keep in near-constant contact with attackers and prod, encourage, guide and facilitate their actions.<sup>10</sup>

Sixth, the Internet allows individuals to access radical content and entities from the comfort of their own personal space without having to physically attend secret gatherings at a pre-arranged meeting place.<sup>11</sup> In so doing it arguably enhances the potential for self-radicalisation where the entire process takes place online in the absence of any face-to-face contact.

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9 See, for instance, Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, The New Challenges*, United States Institute for Peace, Washington D.C., 2006, p. 4.

10 Daniel Byman, op. cit., p. 5.

11 Charlie Winter, “The Virtual ‘Caliphate’: Understanding Islamic State’s Propaganda Strategy,” *Quilliam*, July 2015, p. 7.

This potential gives rise to the spectre of lone-wolf terrorism, a manifestation that is addressed below.

Seventh, the Internet and social media offer a cheap and effective propaganda capability, making it easy not only to disseminate information but also to create and tailor messages that are directly geared to buttress the militants' objectives. This facet reflects the basic fact that modern vectors of information technology allow violent extremists to bypass established media outlets, meaning they are no longer dependent on communication mediums that in the vast majority of cases are vehemently opposed to their ideology and cause.<sup>12</sup>

Eighth, the Internet provides an online platform for infusing terror. By loading videos of highly destructive attacks and posting images that graphically depict how 'traitors' will be dealt with, terrorists can leverage the virtual world to instil fear in enemy audiences and discourage moderates from speaking out against their actions. Multimedia content produced by IS is a classic example of this type of messaging at work. To reference just one example, before the group captured the Iraqi city of Mosul in June, 2014 it rolled out an extensive online campaign with text, images and video that threatened those living there with unparalleled death and destruction if they resisted.<sup>13</sup> Such intimidation was a deliberate tact designed to intimidate the urban population into submission and thereby minimise the likelihood of a local rejection of IS and its ideology.

One common theme running through many of these causal links is the notion of 'leaderless resistance,' which has, in varying degrees, come to characterise the organisational configuration

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12 For a general discussion of this see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Chapter-5, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006.

13 Jared Cohen, "Digital Counterinsurgency: How to Marginalize the Islamic State Online," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 94, Number 6, 2015, pp. 52-58.

of many terrorist movements in the contemporary era. First developed by Louis Beam, a Vietnam War veteran and former Grand Dragon of the Texas KKK, the main aim of the concept is to base a group on so-called phantom cells that operate independently of one another, but which are able through the combined force of their actions to precipitate a chain reaction that eventually leads to a national/global revolution.<sup>14</sup>

Information technology has been integral to the development of leaderless resistance by facilitating interactions between like-minded militants and providing a vector for circulating and distributing propaganda and information. Cyber-based mediums such as the Internet, chat rooms and online journals have all played a crucial role in ensuring that militant extremists are kept fully abreast of events, allowing for planned responses and attacks that are typically based on their individual initiative. Used in this way, digitised communications technology has both overcome the ‘tyranny of distance’ and obviated the requirement for orders and directives – thereby precluding the need for a physical group per se.<sup>15</sup>

The adoption of these amorphous and largely ephemeral linked structures marks a significant change in terrorist organisational dynamics, setting the US militia movement, European neo-Nazi organisations, anti-globalist radicals and the global jihadist nebula apart from the more established militant groups of the past. In particular, they have played a pivotal role in fostering what is rapidly emerging as a new norm in violent extremism – homegrown lone-actor terror. Although these individuals lack the training, resources and expertise to

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14 Peter Chalk, et. al., *Trends in Terrorism: Threats to the United States and the Future of the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act*, RAND, Santa Monica, 2005), 45, f/n 11.

15 See, for instance, Peter Chalk, “Grave New World,” *Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy*, Volume 15, Number 1, 2000, pp.15-16.

execute large-scale strikes against well-protected facilities, they represent a unique and problematic policing challenge for at least six reasons:

- In many cases lone wolves have no prior attachment to militancy and, hence, may only be peripherally known to law enforcement and intelligence agencies, if at all. This makes them very difficult to track, predict and pre-empt.
- Lone wolves are potentially more prone to extreme acts of violence as their activities are neither defined nor bounded by the organisational constraints that have historically been imposed on members of more structured groups.
- The fluidity of lone wolves provides these individuals with the necessary latitude to initiate and develop independent operational strategies – an advantage that makes them more capable of coming up with new and unforeseen patterns of terrorist attacks
- While lacking the ability to decisively hit so-called ‘hard’ targets, lone wolves are perfectly able to attack the numerous civilian-centric ‘soft’ venues that abound in modern societies, such as shopping malls, cinemas, busses, metro/train stations, restaurants and pedestrian pathways. In so doing, they serve to greatly inflate the perceived threat of terrorism as their actions are specifically and necessarily directed against sites, locations and hubs that are integral to the day-to-day lives of ordinary citizens.
- Because they are not dependent on a large organisational structure, lone wolves can indefinitely sustain their activities on a minimum of resources that do not require financial outlays of the size that could attract

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the attention of intelligence and law enforcement authorities.

### **THE PAK/AFGHAN CONTEXT**

What relevance does all this hold for the specific Pakistan/Afghanistan context? A plethora of terrorist and VE groups exist in the two neighbouring states, operating across a highly fungible border area that the US State Department has repeatedly described as a crucible for global terror. Among the more prolific organisations centred in the region are AQC, its affiliate al-Qaeda in South Asia (AQIS), the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), IS, LeT, Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). These movements are all a product of the hardening of the religious divide that has occurred in South Asia over the past 20-30 years, engaging in communal violence, vehicle-improvised explosive bombings (VIEBs), drive-by shootings, kidnappings, assassinations and indiscriminate suicide attacks on an almost daily basis.

Although undeniably violent, terrorist exploitation of online platforms in the Pak/Afghan region has historically not been extensive due to the low penetration of social media in this part of South Asia. Indeed, when the Taliban governed Afghanistan, the Internet (along with movies and photography) was totally banned on the grounds that it promoted obscene, immoral and anti-Islamic material.<sup>16</sup>

However, in both states exposure to the Internet has risen with the passage of time. In Pakistan, the rate of penetration has increased from 15.5 per cent of the population in 2017, to 22.2 per cent in 2018 to 33.6 per cent in 2019 and there are

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<sup>16</sup> “Taliban Blackbans the Internet,” *CNN.com*, July 13, 2001.

now over 70 million broad band users in the country.<sup>17</sup> While the vast bulk of these people go online for purely innocuous reasons there are growing indications that violent extremists are exploiting these mediums to further their own logistical and operational designs.

In 2017, a survey by the national *Dawn* newspaper found that 41 of 64 proscribed groups in Pakistan, including sectarian, Islamist and nationalist extremists, maintained an extensive presence on *Facebook* in an official or unofficial capacity. The site was variously being used to propagate militant ideology, glorify fighters, provide updates on a particular movement's activities and post pictures and videos. Some of the site's pages were organised by district or electoral constituency and many were published in languages other than English such as Urdu, Baloch and Sindhi.<sup>18</sup>

That same year, the banned Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) – which acts as the charity arm of LeT – organised a series of social media workshops at Multan, Rawalpindi and Lahore to invite volunteers to join efforts in creating unrest in Jammu and Kashmir. Anti-Indian jihadist groups based in the region currently have around 17,000 fake *Twitter* accounts and are actively working through encrypted sites such as *WhatsApp* to instigate protests and riots in the valley.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, these same platforms have been used to establish operational and logistical links with AQIS, a Karachi based affiliate of AQC that was set up in 2014 to battle governments in Pakistan,

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17 “Internet World Stats Usage and Populations Statistics: Pakistan,” online at <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/pk.htm>; “Total Broadband Users in Pakistan Hit 70 Million,” *The Express Tribune*, June 2, 2019.

18 Jahanzaib Haque and Omer Bashir, “Banned Outfits in Pakistan Operate Openly On Facebook,” *Dawn*, September 14, 2014.

19 “JuD to Conduct Social Media Workshops to Create Unrest in Kashmir,” *Asian News International*, April 4, 2017.

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Afghanistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh in order to establish an Islamic State in South Asia.

*Telegram* is a further (encrypted) site that is increasingly being accessed in Pakistan. IS first used the platform to officially confirm the establishment of its Afghan-Pak Khorasan (ISK) province under the command of Hafiz Saeed Khan Orakzai on January 11, 2015, releasing a series of videos through its media office with the following pronouncement:

There is no doubt that Allah the Almighty blessed us with *jihad* in the land of Khorasan. All of this is for the sake of establishing Shariah. Know that the Islamic Caliphate is not limited to a particular country. These young men will fight against every disbeliever, whether in the west, east, south or north.<sup>20</sup>

Since then, IS has adopted *Telegram* to target and recruit university students, doctors, engineers, lawyers, journalists, businessmen and other professionals who are increasingly being groomed as a mainstream membership element; announce responsibility for major attacks inside the country such as the suicide bombing of the Government Hospital in Quetta on August 8, 2016, that left more than 70 dead and another 130 injured; and verify tactical and transactional partnerships that have been forged with LeJ and other local groups such as Lashkar-e-Islam (LeI) and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA).<sup>21</sup>

The TTP is another group that has leveraged *Telegram*, in this case to claim responsibility for bombings, share tactical

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20 Center for Strategic and International Studies Backgrounder, "Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K)", 2018, <https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/terrorism-backgrounders/islamic-state-khorasan-k>.

21 Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, "Islamic State Comes for South Asia," *The Diplomat*, June, 2019.

information and facilitate the dissemination of electronic publications. In this latter respect the group has increasingly focused its attention on exploiting the platform to radicalise young women, using the site to launch an online magazine in 2017 (named *Sunnat-e-KhauLa*) that calls on females to join the ranks of the *mujahideen* and learn how to use combat weapons such as grenades and assault rifles.<sup>22</sup>

In a more general sense, the Internet has helped to fundamentally transform the perceived nature and character of the typical militant in Pakistan. As Bruce Hoffman, a Senior Fellow for Counter-Terrorism and Homeland Security at the Council on Foreign Relations has observed:

The past stereotype of a jihadist from the mountains in traditional garb with bandoliers of ammunition slung over his shoulder has been replaced. The new generation consist of well-educated, cosmopolitan, university-educated Pakistanis drawn from middle-class backgrounds who can navigate our globalized society, whether virtually or physically, with ease and confidence.<sup>23</sup>

Although not as extensive as Pakistan, Internet access in Afghanistan has also shown a demonstrable increase in recent times, rising from just 6 per cent of the population in 2013

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22 Madeeha Anwar and Pir Zubair Shah, "Pakistani Taliban Try to Broaden Reach with Women's Magazine," *Voice of America*, August 5, 2017. The TTP's emphasis on women reflects a growing appreciation of the operational, logistical and psychological benefits this particular demographic has to offer: females can penetrate targets more easily than men largely because modesty in the Muslim religion precludes more concerted body checks on them; they provide a critical support base as financiers and propagandists; and their attacks generally generate a higher shock value (as females are typically viewed as preservers, rather than takers of life).

23 Cited in "ISIS Courts White-Collar Recruits in Pakistan," *CBS News*, March 2, 2016.

to 17.6 per cent in 2019.<sup>24</sup> Currently about 40 per cent of households in the country have access to the Internet.<sup>25</sup> Again at least some of this online presence has been tied to terrorist and VE groups, including the Taliban, IS and AQC.

After being forcibly removed from power in 2001 the Taliban systematically moved to expand its leverage of information technology, increasingly viewing virtual platforms as a highly conducive forum from which to launch electronic propaganda warfare. The movement currently possesses several Internet domains, although the main one is *Alemarah*. The site is not interactive, mainly acting as a one-way dissemination tool. It is published in Pashto, Dari, Urdu, Arabic and English languages, which allows the group to target a variety of audiences, locally, regionally and internationally.<sup>26</sup>

The Taliban also makes extensive use of social media to distribute videos, films and electronic propaganda to countless Afghan cell phones at a time, as well as maintain contact with journalists, much of which is orchestrated through outlets such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube*. The movement has established an official media committee to oversee this effort and has reportedly set up a professional production studio, *Al-Shahamat*, to generate digital content. These same sites are used to reach foreign financiers/sympathisers and communicate with sister groups in other parts of the world.<sup>27</sup>

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24 “Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics: Afghanistan,” online at <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/af.htm>.

25 Ezzatullah Mehrdad, “Inside Afghanistan’s Online Battlefield: Social Media Provides Another Front for Battle between the Afghan Government and the Taliban,” *The Diplomat*, October 2019.

26 Thomas Johnson, et. al., “The Taliban’s Use of the Internet, Social Media Video, Radio Stations and Graffiti,” in Thomas Johnson ed., *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict*, Oxford Scholarship Online, Oxford, 2018.

27 Bashir Ahmad Gwakh, “The Taliban’s Internet Strategy,” *Radio Free Europe*, September 9, 2011.

Since commencing operations in Afghanistan in 2015 – formalised by the announcement of its ISK province that same year – IS has used hundreds of fake accounts on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* and *Telegram* to find recruits and promote the group’s ideology and propaganda. These efforts have borne dividends and are generally thought to have played a significant contributory role in helping to build an active multi-national membership that is now conservatively estimated to number between 3,500 and 4,000 fighters.<sup>28</sup>

IS has also leveraged the Internet and social media platforms to export its violent ideology to the West. The group released congratulatory videos following the 2016 attacks in Orlando, Florida and Magnaville, France and has subsequently used cyber-space to inspire, direct and authorise additional autonomous-cell and lone wolf attacks in both the United States and Europe.<sup>29</sup>

For its part, AQC has used the Internet and social media platforms to tap into the plethora of local grievances that abound in Afghanistan – ranging from physical insecurity to government corruption, poverty and growing social inequality – and incorporate these into a wider, all-encompassing Islamist narrative aimed at furthering popular legitimacy and justice. Mimicking similar efforts in countries such as Yemen, Syria, Libya, Turkey and Pakistan, the ostensible aim has been to generate and solidify a unique ‘glocal’ self-identity that is now emerging as the foundation for an all-encompassing grand

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28 Claire Parker, “The Islamic State is Far from Defeated. Here’s What you Need to Know About Its Affiliate in Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2019; Abdul Basit, “IS Penetration in Afghanistan-Pakistan: Assessment, Impact and Implications,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 11, Number 3, 2017, p. 23.

29 Center for Strategic and International Studies, op. cit., 2018.

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strategy to guide AQC's evolving operational trajectory – both in Afghanistan as well as other key theatres around the world.<sup>30</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Terrorist and violent extremist use of the Internet and online platforms in Pakistan and Afghanistan has direct relevance for the national security of India. As noted, *Twitter* is already being used to promote riots and protests in Kashmir and now that the province has been stripped of its special autonomous status<sup>31</sup> groups such as LeT (acting through JuD) will doubtless seek to escalate the tempo of this unrest through other online mediums.

In addition, Islamabad's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, which has a long history of backing anti-Indian outfits operating in the disputed territory, may well leverage encrypted social media sites, secure telecommunication platforms and online mapping technology to covertly facilitate jihadist recruitment drives or directly support terrorist strikes in the region. The 2008 Mumbai massacre, which resulted in 164 fatalities and over 300 injured, is germane in this regard. The perpetrating group is widely regarded to have been the Kashmir-oriented outfit, LeT, and the ISI is generally considered the key supporting agency that bankrolled and guided the attack. Notably, the 10 terrorists who conducted the operation received orders from their handlers in Pakistan via Voice over the Internet Provider (VoIP) phone services and

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30 Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda's Resurrection", *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 6, 2018.

31 In October 2019, the Modi government formally revoked Jammu and Kashmir's constitutional autonomy and split the disputed state into two federal territories that would be ruled directly from Delhi. The move was aimed at integrating what many viewed as an outlying province back into the mainstream Indian polity.

were able to quickly navigate their way to targets across the city with the assistance of digitised Google Earth images that were transmitted from Islamabad.<sup>32</sup>

Ominously a high-level meeting between the ISI and various terror groups took place in Islamabad in 2019, during which a plan was reportedly fleshed out to conduct fresh attacks in Kashmir and other parts of the country. Among those in attendance were representatives from JeM and LeT.<sup>33</sup> The former was behind the 2019 Pulwama attack that left 44 police reservists<sup>34</sup> dead, while as noted, the latter is widely believed to have been responsible for the 2008 Mumbai atrocity. Should another incident on the scale of either of these two events occur, it could trigger a severe Indo-Pak stand-off that, if not carefully managed, could quickly escalate to the level of a major military confrontation between the two nuclear-armed states.

Because information technology has been so integral to the genesis of leaderless resistance - which as an organisational construct has as much relevance for extreme Islamist movements as the far right - it could also be effectively used to inspire and endorse militant strikes by lone or semi-independent actors in India. Working from its enclaves in Afghanistan, IS has been doing this for some time with regards to attacking the West and there is no reason why similar action could not be undertaken that targets prominent cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai or Ludhiana.

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32 Jeremy Kahn, "Mumbai Terrorists Relied on New Technology for Attacks," *The New York Times*, December 8, 2008.

33 Jitendra Bahadur Singh, "Desperate for International Attention, Pakistan's ISI Meets Terror Groups to Plan Attacks Across India," *India Today*, September 10, 2019.

34 Personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force, CRPF.

The virtual links that AQIS has established with Kashmiri militants could also serve as a medium through which to encourage and instigate attacks in northern India. Undertaken as part of the overall objective to establish a Muslim State in South Asia, this would conceivably be of considerable interest to AQC as it would signify the effective Islamisation of a conflict that has long acted as a major thorn in Delhi's side. When taken in the broader context of AQIS' growing ties to the Taliban and the group's increasingly explicit moves to hijack the rapidly expanding Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh and Myanmar, this would represent a major surge in AQC's regional operational capabilities, directly threatening the stability of India's wider geo-strategic neighbourhood. Such a scenario could become a real possibility should a US troop drawdown occur in Afghanistan – something that Donald Trump, the former US President has repeatedly called for – as it would create a void that terrorists and VE groups would no doubt quickly seek to fill by leveraging instruments of both physical and cyber power.<sup>35</sup>

Lastly, an intensive social media effort aimed at radicalising young Sikhs is currently being waged by pro-Khalistani militants based in Pakistan and Diaspora groups operating out of the US, UK and Canada. There are growing indications that the ISI is orchestrating much of this activity as part of a wider campaign to co-join instability in Punjab with unrest in Kashmir. Indeed, the aforementioned 'terror conference' that the Directorate organised in 2019 also included leading members of the Khalistani Zindabad Force (KZF), which according to intelligence sources in Delhi were strongly urged

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35 The Soufan Center, *Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: The Nucleus of Jihad in South Asia*, New York, January 2019, p. 10.

to make their operational channels available for facilitating attacks across India as a whole.<sup>36</sup>

### **CONCLUSION: RESPONDING TO ONLINE RADICALISATION**

All of this begs the question of exactly how should South Asian governments respond to and counter online radicalisation? Action in this area will require governments, civil society groups and the private sector to join and collaborate in fine-tuning best practice solutions.

Thus far, most of the focus has been on introducing legislation and initiatives that allow governing authorities to identify, block and expeditiously delete any malignant electronic information or communication that is deemed to pose a national security risk. In Pakistan, for instance, a series of laws are in place to prevent the misuse of the Internet and social media platforms, including the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), the Investigation for Fair Trial Act (FTA), the National Counter-Terrorism Authority Act (NACTA) and the National Plan for Countering Terrorism and Extremism (NPCTE).<sup>37</sup> Islamabad has also implemented measures for bottom-up social media and monitoring, introducing a digital portal and mobile app called *Surfsafe* to encourage Internet users to anonymously report any extremist or online hate content they come across.<sup>38</sup>

While such measures may work to temporarily disrupt the propaganda, recruitment and operational activities of terrorist

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36 Jitender Bahadur Singh, “Desperate for International Attention, Pakistan’s ISI Meets Terror Groups to Plan Attacks Across India, op. cit., 2019.

37 “Legal Provisions on Fighting Extremism: Pakistan,” The Law Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/fighting-extremism/pakistan.php>; “Pakistan Passes Controversial Cyber-Crime Law,” *Reuters*, August 12, 2016.

38 Madeeha Anwar, “Pakistan Launches Application to Combat Cyberextremism,” VOA, January 30, 2018.

and violent extremist groups, they are essentially stop-gap remedies that militants can quickly overcome by switching to other platforms, communicating through VoIP services, accessing Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), opening new accounts or simply operating through proxies. These initiatives may also serve to merely drive militants further underground by seeking refuge in the ‘dark web’ where they are effectively beyond the reach of any formal monitoring mechanisms.

Just as importantly, approaches along these lines have very real implications for three intrinsic values that most democratic nations hold as sacrosanct: freedom of speech, the right to privacy and net neutrality. Pakistan’s PECA, which was introduced in 2016, is a case in point. The legislation has been widely criticised for containing poorly defined terminology as to what constitutes cyber terrorism, how this differentiates from cybercrime and what mechanisms are in place to ensure any censoring activities are necessary and enacted for the greater public good.<sup>39</sup>

A more holistic and effective response would involve directly intervening in the process of radicalisation. Bringing communication experts and civil society groups together to develop and execute alternative messaging campaigns that credibly challenge the foundations of terrorist propaganda are essential to this effort, as is promoting awareness and education among the youth so they can make critical and informed choices about what they see and read online. To the extent possible, these should be run as government-independent programs as lessons (good and bad) from the UK, France, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Indonesia, among others, have all shown this is

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39 Matthew Marcus, “Pakistan’s Assault on Digital Rights,” *The Diplomat*, February 27, 2017; Fariha Aziz, “Pakistan’s Cybercrime Law: Boon or Bane?”, *Heinrich Boll Stiftung*, February 14, 2018.

the best way of maximising the prospects they will be viewed as unbiased and neutral in terms of content and direction.

The UK's PREVENT program is a case in point. Instituted as an integral component of the country's Counter-Terrorism strategy (CONTEST), it is essentially aimed at pre-empting vulnerable populations from being radicalised and drawn into violent extremism. Part of this endeavour involves the use of grassroots organisations, specialist public relations agencies and media companies to develop on-line and off-line alternative and counter-narratives that are then directed at those deemed to be most at risk to terrorist recruitment. However, overseeing this work is a secretive government department called the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU), the activities of which was for many years kept from public scrutiny. When investigative journalists revealed the extent of RICU's behind the scenes role in 2016, PREVENT's strategic communications effort suffered a serious setback simply because it could no longer be presented as an independent, community-based campaign.<sup>40</sup>

It is crucial that efforts to develop cogent and consistent alternative and counter narratives on the Internet are accompanied by corresponding measures taken in the physical world. There are numerous places of religious worship and instruction in Afghanistan and Pakistan that exist in the absence of official control and which have been tied to inflammatory preaching and teaching of the sort that fans the ardour of violent extremism. The hate-laden public sermons and lectures put out by these ostensibly legal organisations need to be checked – if not entirely eliminated – as in many cases they eventually find

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40 Ben Hayes and Asim Qureshi, "Going Global: The UK Government's 'CVE' Agenda, Counter-Radicalization and Covert Propaganda," *tni*, May 10, 2016.

their way onto social media platforms in the form of brazen video messages and clips.<sup>41</sup> Again, it is vital that any action taken in this area emanates from accredited, locally respected and independent religious scholars and community elders. If there is even a slight suspicion that the moderate messaging campaign is being controlled or directed by the government, its overall credibility is likely to be seriously jeopardised.

In all cases timing is key. There is often a brief window of opportunity to positively influence an individual who has exhibited an initial interest in an extremist ideology. If the intervention comes after a decision has been made to join the cause or commit a violent act, it will almost certainly be too late.<sup>42</sup> For instance, research conducted in Europe and Asia has shown that when jihadists began planning their trips to join the Taliban and AQC in Afghanistan and IS in Syria and Iraq, they were too far down the extremist path to receive, much less accept, any new information that was presented to them as to why they should not go.<sup>43</sup>

Tech companies, big and small, must also move to proactively champion digital resilience by ensuring that condemnations, refutations and alternatives to terrorism are sufficiently present and accessible online. Ad targeting, one of Google's most effective marketing technologies, could be leveraged to ensure that these missives are consistently pushed to online users who exhibit traits that may abet radicalisation.<sup>44</sup>

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41 Mina Sohail, "Fighting Terrorism on Social Media: Pakistan Is Trying to Combat Terrorist Organizations, with Mixed Results," *The Diplomat*, March 2015.

42 See for instance, Jytte Klausen, *A Behavioral Study of the Radicalization Trajectories of American 'Homegrown' Al-Qaeda-Inspired Terrorist Offenders*, US Department of Justice, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Washington D.C., November 2016, p. ii.

43 Farhad Manjoo, *op.cit.*, 2017.

44 *Ibid.*

Finally, there is room for developing responses that have a more tactical and strategic bent, especially in the short-term. Police forces, spy agencies and service providers could, for example, all usefully exploit the online interactions of terrorists and extremist sympathisers to gain intelligence on their activities and gather evidence that can then be used for prosecutorial purposes. The Afghan government is moving in this direction and now regularly (if not systematically) monitors social media pages to identify and arrest those who post messages in support of the Taliban.<sup>45</sup> If developed adroitly and with due consideration for oversight and accountability, such interventions could pay dividends in terms of blunting violent online logistical and operational designs.

Digitisation represents one of the modern world's most liberating innovations. It is essential that this communication tool is used for the purpose it was created – to promote knowledge, debate, discussion and inclusivity – rather than subverted to sow the seeds of intolerance, hatred and violence.

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45 Ezzatullah Mehrdad, *op. cit.*, 2019.

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# India's National Security: Imperatives of a Paradigm Shift

Jitendra Kumar Ojha\*

It is ironical that it takes a protracted stand-off on the border with China, with the possibility of a military confrontation, for New Delhi to realise the gravity of the most complex and formidable national security threat that India has faced. This has been further compounded by internal governance deficiencies, many of which stem from colonial legacies.

What most security and strategic experts – both Indian and Western – often ignore is the fact that the combined threats from Pakistan and China are beyond usual neighbourly rivalry and irritations. They appear driven by a perceived sense of conflict of identity, albeit of different shades. Both of India's neighbours are driven by a superior sense of identity and view its traditionally liberal and pacifist values as an opportunity to impose their aggressive and extractive designs. The very nature of the threats driven by such ideas is so complex that

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they are nearly impossible to avoid, even if they do not always translate into military conflagration or war.

Further, India as well as democratic states in the developing and developed world must realise that serious deficiencies in democratic governance make a liberal and transparent society far more difficult to defend, especially in a globalised world.

Over the past few decades, Pakistan's deep state has evolved an unusually emotive campaign of propaganda against India, as well as an elaborate covert infrastructure of terror and crime to pursue its strategic objectives. It appears to have done so in a bid to entrench itself, using its professed quest for the supremacy of Islam on the subcontinent and beyond, as a convenient pretext. The entire dynamics has built its own momentum of radicalisation that is difficult to handle. Several radicalised elements and groups have gone beyond the control of Pakistani state, making the task of their containment far more difficult. Going by the current trend, at least the next few generations of Pakistanis will struggle to live in peace not only with a secular, plural India, but also non-Muslims anywhere. The resultant reactions will threaten social cohesion on a much larger scale, destroying the element of social trust which provides a key foundation for industry, enterprise and initiative.

Going by the cumulative exposures of Pakistan's nexus with world-wide terrorist attacks and terrorist groups, state institutions all over the world will struggle to contain the threat from India's western neighbour to non-Muslims and even liberal Muslims worldwide. These associations have already had a spiralling impact on large sections of people in Pakistan as well. This is despite the fact that the world is more aware today about Pakistan's extensive clandestine and covert capacities to support and fund Islamist terror and even use global crime

syndicates for this purpose. However, global forces, despite professing strong action against terrorism, appear helpless in the face of Islamabad's machinations and ability to exploit its purported strategic utility for external powers. There is no let-up in the Pakistani deep state's primary objective to bleed India through increasingly innovative forms of terror and crime.

Simultaneously, aggressive nationalism in Communist China – driven by a sense of Han superiority and backed by spectacular economic and technological transformation – not only legitimises an opaque and authoritarian regime but also appears to empower it to bulldoze every opponent at home and abroad.

A democratic India, with a long civilisational history, appears a natural anathema to the Chinese establishment, proud of the country's long journey as a prosperous, independent and continuously expanding state. China has repeatedly sought to project itself as a distinctly superior civilisation to the rest of mankind, while grudgingly acknowledging the currently superior strength of the United States. Beijing has not concealed its patronising and arrogant ways in dealing with India, virtually threatening it through its state sponsored media by citing its substantial dominance in economic and military terms.

Even otherwise, the rise of a democratic India could potentially threaten the authoritarian ruling cliques in both China and Pakistan, creating possibilities of igniting a domestic clamour for greater rights and liberties. Hence, while Pakistan may have its traditional animosity towards India, even China appears to be using several unscrupulous, deceptive and subversive strategies, either on its own or through others, to obstruct India's economic rise, which could also be a potential threat to Beijing's hegemony in the region.

India's defence forces and diplomatic establishment have, so far, handled the combined threat from China and Pakistan quite well, aided by the growing world-wide suspicion of China and the exposure of Pakistan's connection with terror. But the enormity of this threat has been increasing manifold in a globalised world, where trade and technology could be lethal tools of predation and many of India's democratic institutions are battling obsolescence and the entitlement of its political, corporate and bureaucratic classes.

The expanding asymmetry of economic and technological power with China, sustenance of covert war in Kashmir and the continued Pakistani clout in Afghanistan and beyond, are reflective of sustained under-performance of certain key institutions of India. This is notwithstanding certain enclaves of institutional excellence, a highly skilled middle class, fairly influential Diaspora and probably the most professional and disciplined defence forces.

One doesn't know the extent to which the higher echelons of India's political-governance establishment have been cognizant of the dynamics and complexity of the overall national security challenges. But over the last few decades, they have struggled to build commensurate strategic-institutional capacities to deal with the daunting scale of threats challenging India as a state and civilisation. The existing trend has the potential to gradually deplete the over-all economic, technological and professional capacities of the Indian state to address the whole gamut of national security challenges – driven by the combined resolve of two determined geopolitical adversaries – amidst the dysfunctionality of some of its own key institutions, and in a global order that is not entirely favourable.

Under these circumstances, it becomes imperative for India to explore a paradigm shift in its entire governance and

national security edifice and outlook to bolster its overall capacities and output. America, has been part of its own larger strategy, where India has no role to play.

### **STRATEGIC PSYCHE AND OUTLOOK OF INDIA AND CHINA**

In the context of a speech by Xi Jinping in 2017, where he had used the term civilisation repeatedly, an eminent Sinologist has emphasised that in recent years Chinese leaders and thinkers have been stressing China's global status and aspirations in the past, present and the future<sup>1</sup>. Many such discourses have involved not only evaluation of their own outlook and responses over a much longer period of time, but that of others as well. They have often tried to drive home the point that China is the only continuous civilisation-state in the entire world, which reflects its resilient and robust strategic culture. They do acknowledge a few reverses, but tend to blame the 'Hundred Years of Humiliation' by the West to explain their poverty and constraints in 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A large number of Chinese political academics and thinkers have often described India only as a civilisation and not a state. There has been emphasis on its political fragility and disunity over most of its history, except for a brief period in the medieval era when external occupiers brought a large swath of the subcontinent under a common rule. They have derived pride in the fact that China has maintained its cohesion as civilisation and state, despite all reverses and setbacks. While they seem determined to avenge wrongs done to them during the 'hundred years of humiliation', the perception of a larger culture of political disunity and fragility in India has indeed

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1 Alison Kaufman, "China's Discourse of Civilization: Visions of Past, Present, and Future", *The Asan Forum*, Volume 8, Number 6, 2020, <http://www.theasanforum.org/chinas-discourse-of-civilization-visions-of-past-present-and-future/>.

shaped their strategic outlook in the region, compounded by their own sense of civilisational and cultural superiority.

It is in this context that one should see the rush to revive the Confucian idea of harmony, Sun Tzu's principles of warfare, to Shang Yang and Han Fei's codes of governance, besides the articulation of the modern Chinese dream. Consistent stoking of nationalist passion has been backed by successes in poverty alleviation as well as creation of better access to opportunities at home. Externally, there is a clear move to influence and shape the world in accordance with the purportedly superior civilisational virtues of China, which translates into tangible moves towards strategic domination of Asia and beyond at one level, and opposition to Western values and outlook on the other.

Such an element of national or racial superiority has always been part of the political psyche of the Chinese state. This may have had a role in Chinese expansion, subsuming people and their territories who were described as Nomad in Sima Qian's *Shiji* – one of the earliest chronicles on Chinese history compiled close to the turn of First Millennium AD. A similar outlook has continued to manifest in the behaviour and outlook of China's leadership from the time of Mao, when it comes to dealing with the rest of the world. Of late, there has been repeated Chinese emphasis on how, from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD until the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, China had remained the richest country on the planet. China's poverty and misery of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been blamed on “unequal and exploitative treaties” deceptively imposed by the West.

In this context, an appeal in the name of avenging wrongs to the nation not only inspires younger generation but also influences the global outlook of sections of China's communist leadership as well. Simultaneously, it enhances the

legitimacy of an unelected regime. Despite some dissidence, rising prosperity levels, national power and global prestige helps snuff out dissidence at home. This entire dynamic virtually exposes the hollowness of the Western prophecy that democracy automatically descends with a certain level of prosperity. Prosperity has, in fact, driven China to influence, shape and dominate the world in accordance with its own strategic psyche.

India, as a civilisation and state, has been universally perceived as perennially lacking in sound strategic culture over the last millennium or so, especially following the decline of Gupta empire. This is notwithstanding a few exceptions including Ranjit Singh and the Marathas and some other notable historical figures. This is, indeed, paradoxical for a state and civilisation with such rich and formidable history. China's own Buddhist monk Fa-Hien or Faxian of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE had described the unparalleled prosperity and social tranquillity of the Gupta Empire of India, which was far larger than its Chinese counterpart in that era. Even the Western records now confirm that India as a civilisation had remained way ahead of all other ancient civilisations including Rome, Greece, China, Babylon or Mesopotamia or others at one point of time. When master strategist and statesman Kautilya sought to resurrect India as a civilisation and state as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, it was still bigger than the subsequent Roman, Chinese and other empires, with far stronger economic, military and governance features. Hence, the decadence and degeneration in strategic culture would have been of a very high intensity, notwithstanding efforts to reverse these.

A larger culture of lack of outward strategic vision as well as lack of internal political cohesion have been a reality that has troubled India as a state and civilisation for centuries. This

is notwithstanding brilliant innovations and initiatives to the contrary from certain quarters. The cumulative impact of a deficient strategic culture continues to manifest in India's half-hearted efforts to conclude the covert of war from Pakistan as well as the proclivity to ignore the expanding asymmetry of power with China. These are further backed by failure to regulate domestic political competition and encourage integrity and excellence in institutions, which are critical for national power and a stronger national security architecture. As a result, some key institutions of governance, despite their resilience, have struggled to optimise the collective strength of its people and harness these towards comprehensive national power.

Stakeholders in independent India have failed to acknowledge the fact that internal political cohesion – based more on persuasion and less on oppression – and stronger external strategic outlook supplement each other. Civilisations or political entities lacking internal cohesion and stability have always struggled to build a strong strategic outlook and requisite infrastructure to pursue strategic goals. This is a vicious trap as internal decay and degeneration become inevitable if a state or ruling establishment fails to appreciate and prepare for the challenges posed by its geo-political environment. This is what explains India's vulnerability to even non-state entities in the past, resulting in its external occupation and colonisation, despite its exceptional material prosperity.

Post-independent India, despite being the world's biggest democracy, has continued to display serious lack of a comprehensive and pragmatic national security outlook. It has struggled to devise dynamic, consistent, suitable and sustainable strategies to pursue some of its core security interests. India apparently sacrificed its strategic interests in Tibet and Eastern Turkistan in deference to China's goodwill.

Whereas China promptly violated the trust and entered 110 kilometres inside the existing Sino-Indian border in the Aksai-Chin sector, which was the only point through which an all-weather road could be built to link China's recent acquisitions like Tibet and Xinjiang<sup>2</sup>. The association of both these regions with China has been nominal and fairly recent, with people of both the places being mentioned as Nomads and Tribes in Chinese history. In fact, as a civilisation, India had a much stronger footprint in both the regions, with the Tibetan script being similar to Devnagri, and Hindustani being a more familiar language than Mandarin in Kashgar.

It is intriguing that the British archives mention that once they had almost settled British India's boundary with China in 1897, with the Chinese accepting the Ardagh-Johnson Line, but they suddenly developed an interest in Aksai Chin at the instigation of Russians after two years and reneged in 1899.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, a Peking University map of 1928 had clearly acknowledged the whole of Aksai Chin as part of India as per the 1840 Treaty of Chushul and the Shimla Convention of 1913. Even with Tibet, their nominal association of 192 years had terminated in 1912, but Maoist China completely overwhelmed the region by 1959, after continuous coercion from 1950 and forcing a 17-point Agreement on the Dalai Lama in 1951.<sup>4</sup>

The first generation of independent India's leaders were agitators and freedom fighters, driven by a sense of idealism. They lacked any meaningful exposure to geostrategy and

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2 Jitendra Kumar Ojha, "Border Stand-Off: Handle the Crises But Build a Strategic Capacity", *Democracy, Geopolitics And National Security*, May 23, 2020, <https://www.democracyandgovernance.com/2020/05/recurrent-sino-india-border-standoff.html>.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

geopolitics, and pursued colonial style decision making, distrusting military-security institutions. They preferred building a bridge of friendship with fellow Asian countries rather than to act with foresight. In 2019, the state-owned TV channel Doordarshan brought out a rare video footage of probably the last media interview that the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, had given (May 18, 1964), barely a week before he passed away on May 27, 1964. Speaking with American TV host Arnold Michaelis, Pandit Nehru spelt out the both governance constraints of the nascent and yet the biggest democracy of the world as well as the serious security threats it was facing from both China and Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

He appeared particularly disappointed at the manner in which China had betrayed his trust, responding with contempt to all gestures of goodwill like support on Tibet and Taiwan and a seat at UN Security Council, among others. He noted that China was driven by a sense of racial and civilisational arrogance, treating everyone else, including India, as “uncivilised”, or even barbaric, despite the fact that they were poorer than India.<sup>6</sup> China’s aspiration for regional, or even a wider, hegemony was amply evident even at that point of time. It has only become more amplified with the rising economic and military prowess of China following fruition of Deng Xiaoping’s modernisation programmes focusing on Agriculture, Industry, Defence and Science & Technology.

Pandit Nehru also mentioned what the world had known all along, how the Jinnah-led Muslim League, acting at the behest of colonial Britain, had opposed India’s independence, and orchestrated the partition of the country, involving the

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5 Prasar Bharati Archives, “Jawaharlal Nehru’s last TV Interview – May 1964”, May 14, 2019, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zITfXWFQYGQ>.

6 Ibid.

worst genocide and carnage in human history. The West was extremely ambivalent on the issue and supported Pakistan, disregarding reality, only to pursue its own strategic interest of containing Soviet Russia during the Cold War. In many Western academic and social quarters there has often been an attempt to equate India and Pakistan by describing India as a Hindu-dominated state and Pakistan as a Muslim majority state, ignoring differences in the basic character and outlook of the two states. Even now there is very little mention of the fact that non-Muslims, who constituted more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total population of territories that are part of Pakistan, were almost completely wiped out from both parts of Pakistan, even as the Muslim population of independent India continues to grow.

India had conceded the most fertile land to Pakistan and accepted far larger number of refugees, nearly 15 million compared to the 0.35 million who left India.<sup>7</sup> With an oversized army, access to far more resources per capita and almost no national vision or character of its own, the newly created state of Pakistan soon saw a new ruling establishment that started re-shaping its identity in terms of hatred towards India and made Kashmir a permanent bone of contention. India was reluctant to interfere in Kashmir until the Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession to protect his people from a Pakistani military-sponsored 'tribal invasion'. In fact, ever since the call for 'Direct Action' by Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1946, a section of Muslims of the subcontinent, most of whom are now in Pakistan, have rationalised assaults on Hindus and India. Of course, there has been reaction on the other side as well, but there is no comparison with structural domestic atrocities against minorities in, and the global support structure of Islamist terrorism that has flowed out of, Pakistan.

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7 William Henderson, "The Refugees in India and Pakistan", *Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 7, Number 1, 1953, pp. 57-65.

Interestingly, Prime Minister Nehru had recommended that the solution to these twin challenges was to make India internally stronger to face these effectively. There is no doubt that there has been substantial progress in this direction since then. But given the enormity of internal challenges as well as the magnitude of the twin threats, the progress towards building a reliable national security architecture has not been optimal. The primary impediment has been the lack of a wider culture of strategic and leadership-driven initiatives at political-bureaucratic levels in pursuit of a stronger and sustainable national security architecture. Such an architecture would need to be able to handle and even eliminate all shades of combined and diffuse threats from both Pakistan and China, without dislocating its strategic development and national consolidation goals. The professional skills and motivational levels of India's defence forces have been universally acknowledged. The real challenge lies in building a strong ecosystem of economic prosperity, technological innovation, high quality human resources, dynamic and effective institutions, and a wider culture of leadership and excellence. Breaking the existing inertia will not be easy, but this is the challenge history presents to any visionary and determined leadership.

#### **ANATOMY OF THE CHINESE THREAT**

The Chinese threat to India's national security has always been fairly comprehensive, strategic and nearly inevitable unless India becomes militarily and economically stronger. If China peacefully co-existed with India as a civilisation in the ancient era, it was largely due to India's stronger economic and military capacity and its reluctance to militarily expand towards China. China as a state and civilisation has many strengths, but it has demonstrated a penchant to dominate all powers and civilisations that appear vulnerable and weaker.

There has been an element of remarkable consistency in this notwithstanding its paternalistic political structure and political psyche, often inviting its own downfall and disaster at regular intervals.

Today, China has acquired the capacity to dislocate both long-term and short-term economic and security interests of India and it has not concealed its intent to do so under favourable circumstances. Such indicators are not confined to the border dispute, military support to Pakistan, opposition to Indian moves to curb Pakistani terrorist groups, blocking India's entry into institutions like Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), creation of strategic bases in the Indian Ocean, or aggressive wooing of smaller neighbours of India in South Asia. China has struggled even to conceal its contempt even for the West, given their relatively shorter history, but it has been particularly aggressive towards India both during its early years after the Communist Revolution, as well as in the aftermath of its spectacular economic transformation. There has been repeated emphasis at every level on the distinctly superior economic and military capacity of China compared to India. Its global power ambitions are not merely manifest in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or securing its strategic influence and domination in the Far-East, Asia-Pacific, Indian Ocean, nearly the whole of Africa, barring a few states, Central Asia, and parts of West Asia. Notwithstanding recent statement of Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi that his country had "no intention of challenging the United States or replacing it or entering into total confrontation with it,"<sup>8</sup> this is inevitable given the internal political dynamics of China. Of course, it will be careful under normal circumstances to avoid total

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8 Christian Shepherd, "China says ties with US at lowest point since 1979", *Financial Times*, July 9, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/cb2aab03-8a77-49fd-a928-b470948bebfd>.

confrontation that could be detrimental to the Chinese regime as well as the Chinese state or its domain of influence.

But the very Confucian ideal driving the Chinese leadership, has a strange notion of enduring harmony, envisaging domination of the powerful and submission of the rest as its foundation. China has made its intent to dominate the entire world absolutely clear, despite the acceptance that it is no position to achieve this goal at this juncture. The United States remains formidable as of now and hence a direct confrontation would be avoided. However, it has been clear that China has become extremely powerful in whole of Afro-Asian region, where it has even tested the resolve of the United States with its stance on the South China Sea. It can accept some degree of US presence but it perceives its right to dominate and control the region as unquestionable. It would not like anyone to upset or disturb such calculation and India appears a potential threat in this direction. Simultaneously, it is also clear that India is in no position to challenge the Chinese domination of the region on its own. It has to do so with the backing of the western powers, especially the United States, which has been promoting a greater role for India in the whole of Indo-Pacific region.

China has the baggage of its dispute with India, which ranges from grudges like India's hospitality to the Dalai Lama to so called territorial claims. Support to terror breeder Pakistan, despite the vulnerability of its own soft underbelly of Uyghuristan (Xinjiang) to Islamic radicalism, has to be seen in this context. Going by the psyche of the Chinese leadership, China could deploy every possible means to wage modern hybrid and multi-faceted irregular war, while avoiding large-scale damage to its own strengths, to ensure that India did not threaten Beijing's larger objectives. Given their larger ways of working, India has to remain extremely careful about

subversion of its own institutions as well as indirect threats from Pakistan among others.

For India, a strained relationship with China has been a longstanding reality following the 1962 War, and China's proximity with Pakistan. Following the much-talked-about meeting between Deng Xiaoping and Rajiv Gandhi in 1988, there had been considerable advancement in confidence building measures and the two sides have managed to improve economic relations, though these have remained unfavourable to India. A suitable response would lie, not merely in blaming China, though this may be part of building psychological pressure to exact some concessions. But strategic policy makers and stakeholders in India have ignored the widening economic, industrial and technological gap between the two countries, especially since the turn of this century.

If some retired senior Indian diplomats are highlighting that China no longer talks of Sino-India partnership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the same way it did earlier, it is because they see a larger tectonic shift in geopolitical realities. China has become far stronger in Asia and Africa, creating an exceptional model of strategic, economic and military domination. Its economic power is supplementing its military capacities and vice-versa. It has captured the space of a superpower ceded by Soviet Russia in a somewhat different and more sustainable way. At the same time, India has been reduced to an economic and technological minnow. Hence, over the last 8 to 10 years, China has been consistently violating all confidence building measures, even on the border, which had been decided on earlier. This is part of a larger strategy to subdue India, to snuff out any possibility of direct or indirect challenge to China's domination of the region. Its aggression in the South and East China Seas, stronger economic and strategic presence in the

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Far East, Indian Ocean, Africa, Central Asia and even South America, has been part of its own larger strategy, where India has no role to play.

### **RECENT BORDER STANDOFF**

By mid-July 2020, India and China were still negotiating the de-escalation of the worst border skirmishes since the 1967 border clashes near Nathu La. Though China has concealed the actual number of its casualties, all reliable indicators have confirmed that these are substantially higher than those on the Indian side. Nevertheless, Beijing appears reluctant to withdraw entirely and restore the status-quo ante, and has, indeed, extended its intrusions to several other areas. Indian experts assess that the mutual withdrawal from the point of scuffle near Galwan River or fingers area of Pangong Tso Lake or Hot Springs amounts to Line of Actual Control being pushed in by a few kilometres on the Indian side. The Indian government has given the assurance that this arrangement is only temporary and would not have a permanent impact on the actual border between the two countries.

However, what is worrying is the clear spurt in total number of Chinese incursions into the Indian side of the border since 2012-13, as projected by the following table:

<b>Chinese transgressions</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Total</b>
2020	130	30	10	<b>170</b>
2019	110	70	7	<b>187</b>
Figures Jan to April				
<b>Aerial transgressions</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Total</b>
2019	32	64	12	<b>108</b>
2018	31	42	5	<b>78</b>
2017	27	4	2	<b>23</b>
2016	17	4	2	<b>23</b>
2015	19	0	1	<b>20</b>

India-China border: Chinese transgressions, aerial transgressions<sup>9</sup>

Another study had compiled data from 2003 onwards, which showed a somewhat sudden increase in such border transgressions by the Chinese from 2012 onwards.<sup>10</sup> There were 16 transgressions between 2012 and 2014, compared to 14 over the preceding 10 years. The table above only indicates that such a trend has not merely sustained since 2012, but has built a momentum of its own. This is not possible without a well-planned strategic calculus on the part of the Chinese establishment.

It is also difficult to believe that the July 2020 border stand-off was unplanned. Such massive mobilisation at a time when the entire world had been battling the Wuhan virus (COVID-19)

9 Sushant Singh, "What does the increase in Chinese transgressions mean?", *The Indian Express*, June 16, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/chinese-transgressions-ladakh-line-of-actual-control-6421855/>.

10 Mihir Bhonsale, "Understanding Sino-Indian border issues: An analysis of incidents reported in the Indian media", *ORF Occasional Paper*, February 2018, [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ORF\\_Occasional\\_Paper\\_143\\_India-China.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ORF_Occasional_Paper_143_India-China.pdf).

for which most countries have held China responsible – is not possible without adequate preparation. Perhaps the mounting global pressure on the Communist regime for concealing vital information about the disease was a trigger point, forcing moves aimed at deflecting criticism. But the Chinese resolve to browbeat India appears to be part of a wider and consistent strategy. This was amply manifested even during the Doklam crisis, which was completely unprovoked, and in the opinion of many security analysts, aimed at conveying a message to Bhutan that India was in no position to guarantee the security of its borders. However, a tough stance by the Indian Army eventually repelled the Chinese.

Nepali Prime Minister K.P. Oli’s recent utterances and his efforts to create an artificial boundary dispute with India<sup>11</sup> has to be seen in the context of rising covert capacity of the Chinese state to influence and manipulate fragile and smaller states. The very possibility and space for exercise of such covert influence by China in India’s own backyard is extremely worrying for the latter’s national security interests.

Following the abolition of the special status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the *Global Times*, a mouthpiece of the Chinese Government, had threatened in an August 12, 2019, editorial, that India would incur risks over such a move. It had termed the Indian government’s decision to partition the state into two union territories as “reckless, provocative... and unilateral,” and one that had “broken the status quo on the border, challenging the interests of India’s neighbours.” Cautioning that the decision could impact the regional situation, it had warned that “opposition of Pakistan and Muslims in

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11 Nayanima Basu, “Oli now says India has ‘encroached’ Nepal’s territory since 1962, should return it”, *The Print*, June 10, 2020, <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/oli-now-says-india-has-encroached-nepals-territory-since-1962-should-return-it/439344/>.

India-controlled Kashmir may have actual consequences. If the Muslims collectively oppose India's move, it is hard for India's system to control the situation. We do not see that India has the political and other resources to fully take over the area."<sup>12</sup>

Given the Chinese support to Pakistan's efforts to internationalise the situation, many Indian observers believe that China had probably started planning aggression in the Ladakh sector since Delhi's moves on Jammu & Kashmir on August 5, 2019. What is interesting is that the report also accused the West of "conniving with India, when China was busy at the trade war and the Belt and Road Initiative." The editorial went on to caution India, warning that New Delhi "needed a friendly neighbourhood in its own interest."<sup>13</sup>

Some experts on China have dismissed such rants in *Global Times* as pieces of propaganda warfare. But others believe, and quite logically, that even such propaganda offers a valuable insight into the thinking of the Chinese leadership, who rarely speak their mind publicly and often use party-controlled media to vent. All reports and writings on such important issues are cleared at an appropriate level by the Chinese Communist Party, whose functionaries ensure consistency, if not identity, with the party line.

At the height of 2020 border stand-off, *Global Times* used somewhat intimidatory language to assert Chinese supremacy in the region, even as it appeared wary of the growing US support for a greater Indian role in the Indo-Pacific region:

...in recent years, favourable opinion toward China has rarely been heard from India, but voices that cater to the values-

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12 "Unilateral move will incur risks for India", *Global Times*, August 12, 2019, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1161227.shtml>.

13 Ibid.

based alliance and the Indo-Pacific Strategy are becoming louder. Can these provide strong strategic support to India's desire to rise? These concepts dominated by the US implicitly target China, and Washington needs a country like India to spearhead attacks on China...<sup>14</sup>

If New Delhi is obsessed with playing such a role, it is giving up on itself rather would do everything possible to dominate the world, than being strategically active. It will turn itself into a tool of the so-called value alliance, abandoning its ambition of being an independent big country.<sup>15</sup>

Another such editorial openly sneered at any suggestion of possible economic and political competition or rivalry with India. Emphasising its comprehensive superiority, it asserted:

...some Indian people mistakenly believe their country's military is more powerful than China's. These misperceptions affect the rationality of Indian opinion and add pressure to India's China policy...the gap between China's and India's strength is clear. China does not want to turn border issues with India into a confrontation. This is goodwill and restraint from China. But China is confident in the situation at the border. It does not and will not create conflicts, but it fears no conflicts either. This policy is supported by both morality and strength.<sup>16</sup>

While the eventual outcome of the border dis-engagement talks, as well as the sustainability of the understanding reached, remain uncertain, a careful analysis of such media reports and other gestures of the Chinese leadership reflect their significant trust in: a) the capacity of the Pakistani state machinery, or

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14 "Border peace basis for healthy China-India ties", *Global Times*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1191967.shtml>.

15 Ibid.

16 "India needs to rid two misjudgements on border situation", *Global Times*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1191846.shtml>.

Pakistani deep state, to engage and at least harass India through non-conventional and asymmetrical strategies; b) possibility of Indian Muslims in Kashmir aligning with the agenda of the Pakistani state in the region; c) possibility of large scale disaffection of Indian Muslims against the Indian state, possibly through the covert strategic designs of the Pakistani deep state, translating into serious pressure on the Indian state; d) deficiencies of India's political and administrative institutions in handling such internal and external pressure; e) combined strength of China and Pakistan, supplemented by other smaller states in the region, to impede and obstruct the optimal rise of India as a major power; and f) China's own ability to manoeuvre the entire geopolitical context in its own favour, given its superior technological, economic and institutional prowess.

There may be some element of substance in China's self-belief, but the prevailing geopolitical equations are not as simple as they appear. China has spread itself far too much, both economically and politically, and the consequences of any increased confrontation may be far too high for both sides, as the differences in economic capacities do not necessarily translate into proportionate differences in military capacities and strategies. Beyond a certain point, outcomes may depend upon the ability of the two sides to absorb and recover from shocks. In the prevailing geopolitical and strategic calculus, India has its own strengths, despite the vulnerabilities ascribed by the Chinese strategists.

However, this does not eliminate the importance of a stronger geostrategic approach and building suitable capacities through internal reforms. Simultaneously, India needs to factor in the possibility that dictators and irresponsible power-driven oligarchs never act with rationality. The Chinese system lacks

adequate checks and balances, with few people in a position to question Xi-Jinping. He is vulnerable to more political miscalculations and security risks, which can eventually prove self-destructive for China as well. The apparent softening of the Chinese position on the Indian border and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's conciliatory tone towards the United States, especially after the latter's tough stance on the South China Sea amidst a chorus of protest from regional powers, reflects an element of caution, though it could simply be a tactical retreat.

### **DECODING CHINA'S STRATEGIC- MILITARY CALCULUS**

A careful analysis of the thrust of China's modernisation programmes, its BRI, its footprints in resource rich pockets of Africa, Central Asia, West Asia, the Far East and even South America, or its domination of critical sea routes, capture of the South China Sea or domination of the East China Sea, or securing somewhat monopolistic access to large resources all over the world, among others, indicate a stronger capacity and intent to: a) strongly defend itself from any possible aggression; b) dominate large part of the region and possibly keep even the United States at bay, or at least substantially enhance the cost of their intervention in the region; c) secure access to resources, markets, bases for strategic and economic domination; d) lock up global resources for itself and deny similar access and opportunities to others; e) maintain a close nexus between its economic agenda and military capacity, backing these through technological innovation.

Since the time when communism was collapsing in the Soviet Union and other East European countries, China has been further strengthening its internal security regime. This could possibly have been aimed at denying any space for covert CIA operations to destabilise communist nations. The ruthless

suppression at Tiananmen Square was followed by moves to placate people at one end and strengthen military and other security capacities on the other. A careful look suggests that the Communist regime may have become more entrenched internally and is fairly strong in its own backyard. However, it is amply clear that it is in no position to threaten the United States, militarily or in terms of stronger infrastructure for technological innovation, at least in the foreseeable future.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) had reported a small rise in China's nuclear warheads to 320 in 2020,<sup>17</sup> which is well beyond the threshold of minimum credible deterrence. What is significant is the large number of reports in the open domain indicating consistent improvement in its credible deterrent capacity and simultaneous advancement in its missile technology, capable of carrying nuclear payloads. From the mid-1990s China's military modernisation programme gained a strong momentum. A RAND corporation paper,<sup>18</sup> that assessed China's military modernisation over 1996-2017, has certain significant observations suggesting rapid strides by the Chinese People's Liberation Army. An analysis of these inputs together with other available information in the open domain suggests following:

China has managed to bridge significant gaps to enhance the cost and risk of any American military attack on China, the East Asia region, including Japan, Philippines, Taiwan or South China or Chinese territory, either from its ground

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17 "Nuclear weapon modernization continues but the outlook for arms control is bleak", *SIPRI*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/nuclear-weapon-modernization-continues-outlook-arms-control-bleak-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>.

18 "An Interactive Look at the U.S.-China Military Scorecard", *RAND Corporation*, September 14, 2015, <https://www.rand.org/paf/projects/us-china-scorecard.html>.

bases in the Far East or even US aircraft Carrier Strike Groups (CSGs).<sup>19</sup>

PLA has built a large inventory of (over 1400) advanced short (less than 1000 km) to intermediate (1000 to 3000 km) range ballistic and cruise missiles, with much greater accuracy that threaten forward US air bases in Japan and potential naval deployments in the region. For example, the Hypersonic DF-17 missile with a range of 1800 to 2500 kilometres is assessed to have high-precision strike capability that can counter adversary missile defences by its higher manoeuvrability and lower-altitude flight, which are difficult to detect and counter. US officials assess that, during 2008-2018, China conducted 20 times more hypersonic weapons' tests compared to the United States.<sup>20</sup>

During its National Day parade in 2019 (October 1) China exhibited an exceptional number of new high-tech weapons of diverse range, which accounted for 40 per cent of the total weapons showcased. These sought to demonstrate China's technological superiority in information, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and conventional precision strike capabilities. Some of these weapon systems appeared capable of disrupting US communication and information networks, disrupting US situational awareness and precision targeting, and exposing US and allied forces in the Asia-Pacific to threat from manoeuvring munitions that challenged the existing US air and missile defences. A stronger underwater surveillance capacity appeared capable of threatening the dominance of US submarines in the region.<sup>21</sup>

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19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ian Williams, "More Than Missiles: China Previews its New Way of War", *CSIS Brief*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/more-missiles-china-previews-its-new-way-war>.

Some experts assess that China's newer conventional capabilities, along with several new or upgraded nuclear delivery systems, mobile Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and Submarine-launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) appeared aimed at enhancing the survivability and penetration capacity of China's nuclear forces. Moreover, the technical sophistication and modernity of China's strategic missile force, a central consideration in Chinese nuclear decision-making, reflected Chinese aspiration to supplant the United States as the leading military and technological power in the Asia-Pacific region. Concerns persist over the dual-capability of China's medium-range systems. China's DF-26, for example, has both conventional and nuclear variants, and similar uncertainties persist over the nuclear capability of China's hypersonic glide vehicle (HGV) programs.<sup>22</sup>

Despite induction of newer SEAD (suppression of enemy air defences) stealth aircraft, the ability of the US Air Force to penetrate and strike targets opposite Taiwan with minimal risk had significantly declined. This is largely due to substantial improvement in China's integrated air defence system (IADS), with the induction of newer missiles with more sophisticated seekers and ranges of up to 200 kilometres, combined with more sophisticated fighter aircraft and the addition of new airborne warning and control system-equipped aircraft. However, the US capacity remained robust in the case of the Spratly Islands due to the much smaller target area and its proximity to the coast.

With the development of new generations and larger and more varied inventory of all-weather precision weapons with longer ranges deployable from a growing variety of platforms, and hitting targets from hundreds of kilometres, the US Air

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22 Ibid.

Force can attack more targets and even virtually shut most Chinese airbases around Spratly Island and South China Sea, if it deploys one or more of its aircraft carriers in the area. However, such weapon systems are finite and in case a conflict prolongs, this advantage would be mitigated.

With its increasingly credible and robust over-the-horizon (OTH) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capability to detect precise input about any movement in waters beyond 2000 kilometres from the Chinese coastline, China has achieved approximate capacity to deter anti-surface attacks by the United States. China has developed the first ever anti-ship ballistic missiles – the first ever weapon system of their kind – posing an unexpected threat for US naval deployments in waters close to Chinese territory. Details of this missile system are not known nor is there any input available in the open media about any weapon system developed to counter these by Americans. There has been massive expansion of the Chinese Navy and, as on March 9, 2020, they have deployed a 76-submarine fleet, many of which are believed to be armed with cruise missiles as well as torpedoes. A RAND assessment suggested that their effectiveness (as measured by the number of attack opportunities it might achieve against carriers) has risen significantly.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, many independent observers have maintained that the capacity of most Chinese submarines to sustain longer voyages on their own is suspect. They are in no position to threaten US amphibious superiority in general but their existing capacity is strong enough to threaten US Naval deployment close to their own shores.

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23 Jon Harper, “Eagle vs Dragon: How the U.S. and Chinese Navies Stack Up”, *National Defence*, March 9, 2020, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2020/3/9/eagle-vsdragon-how-the-us-and-chinese-navies-stack-up>.

Despite the decline in US capability against Chinese amphibious forces, with a combination of submarine, air, and surface attacks, the US still enjoys clear superiority over Chinese amphibious forces and their ability to conduct or sustain an amphibious invasion, especially beyond Chinese waters.

In the eventuality of a counter-space conflict, China has fairly strong defensive capabilities. It may not be in a position to dazzle or obstruct American satellites away from its own territories, but it can certainly protect its own territory from observation by other satellites.<sup>24</sup>

These observations suggest that China has succeeded in building what appears to be a near impregnable shield of protection for itself through defensive and localised offensive capacities. It is clear, however, that at this stage, instead of threatening America, China is keener to protect its own territory, deter any US attack on China, and to dominate the East China Sea and South China Sea by making any American military adventure extremely risky and expensive. However, the net consequences of a full-blown US-China conflict would be extremely dangerous and the real efficacy of Chinese weapons would be known only then. What is apparent at this stage is that China's military capacity has become strong enough to dominate Asia, but it is still in no position to threaten or compete with United States globally.

The following table compares relative numbers of different military variables of India, China, Pakistan and the United States:

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24 Missile Defense Project, "DF-17", *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, February 19, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/df-17/>.

<b>MILITARY VARIABLE</b>	<b>INDIA</b>	<b>CHINA</b>	<b>PAKISTAN</b>	<b>UNITED STATES</b>
ACTIVE TROOPS	2140000	2300000	653000	1281900
RESERVE TROOPS	11550000	8000000	513000	8111000
TANKS	4427	7760	2735	6393
ARMOURED VEHICLES	5681	6000	3066	41760
ARTILLERY	5067	9726	3745	3269
SELF PROPELLED ARTILLERY	290	1710	325	950
ROCKET ARTILLERY	292	1770	134	1197
TOTAL AIRCRAFTS	2216	4182	1143	12304
FIGHTER AIRCRAFTS	323	1150	186	457
MULTI-ROLE AIRCRAFTS	329	629	225	2192
ATTACK AIRCRAFTS	220	270	90	587
HELICOPTERS	750	1170	323	4889
TOTAL NAVAL VESSELS	214	780	Not Known	437
AIRCRAFT CARRIERS	02	02	0	20
DESTROYERS	11	36	0	20
FRIGATES	15	54	9	0
CORVETTES	24	42	0	0
SUBMARINES	15	76	15	71

Source: Compare Armed Forces<sup>25</sup>

The relative numbers do not necessarily translate into real time war-winning capacities. While all out military conflict at any level would have serious consequences for all concerned, Indian defence forces have advantages beyond what these numbers may suggest. They have far more improvised and

25 “Compare armed forces”, accessed on July 16, 2020, <https://armedforces.eu/compare/country>.

reliable weapon systems compared to both the Chinese and Pakistanis. They are the only major defence force with combinations of the best improvised weapon systems from American, Russian, Israeli and indigenous inventories. The Indian Navy has superior experience and is fairly strong within the Indian Ocean where they would be operating closer to the shore. Many experienced observers have conveyed that, notwithstanding its strengths on paper, China's military technology has several snags. Even their fast-expanding Naval system is believed to be facing severe constraints. Naval experts describe their two naval carriers as nothing more than show pieces and their submarines as incapable of sustaining themselves for long durations in the ocean. They may be strong in the South and East China Seas, but they are certainly vulnerable in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

#### **STRATEGY OF GLOBAL DOMINATION**

A closer look at China's moves, especially over the past two decades, suggests that they are going by the traditional military strategies of domination of critical locations at land, sea, air and now space, with the backing of significant technological innovations. Incorporation of cyber and biotechnological elements in the overall military arsenal remains a possibility given their secretive approach. They are also building stronger and sustainable economic capacities to back their strategic and military designs, which in many cases involve grave human costs for people outside China, by unethical exaction or even plunder of their resources. This suggests that China is not content with building a stronger defensive security cover itself, but is in the process of building strong pockets of economic, military and strategic domination around the world, which would constrict choices of other states and people and eventually threaten global stability.

A recent *Foreign Policy* commentary observed, “The conventional wisdom was that China would seek an expanded regional role – and a reduced U.S. role – but would defer to the distant future any global ambitions. Now, however, the signs that China is gearing up to contest America’s global leadership are unmistakable, and they are ubiquitous.”<sup>26</sup>

While China is in no position to challenge America militarily or economically on a global scale, its increasing capacities, approach and strategic psyche force an inference of strong intent. Its efforts to build logistical bases, dominate and control crucial waterways way beyond its shores or build pockets of influence by supporting tyrants and autocrats, use coercive strategies against every possible adversary and opponent, especially in the context of individual ambitions of President Xi Jinping, reflect this penchant for domination of other races and people.

Further, the *Foreign Policy* commentary notes, China has “put more vessels to sea between 2014 and 2018 than the total number of ships in the German, Indian, Spanish, and British navies combined.”<sup>27</sup> Its technological and military modernisation programmes or even economic domination should not have threatened or alarmed other countries. But it has been coercing virtually all its neighbours to capture pieces of land and water. The virtual occupation of South China Sea and confrontation with Japan in the East China Sea over the Spratly Island has been followed up with attempts to further push borders with India beyond its own stated position of 1960s and later. Borders with Nepal and Bhutan have also been

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26 Brands and Jake Sullivan, “China has two Paths to Global Domination”, *Foreign Policy*, May 22, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/22/china-superpower-two-paths-global-domination-cold-war/>.

27 Ibid.

breached. Under these circumstances, Chinese actions arouse nervousness all over the world, especially given its internal political dynamics and a strategic psyche of territorial and national expansion. China has clearly demonstrated a tendency to use its economic and military capacity for outright coercion of smaller nations and powers.

Under these circumstances, it is clear that China seeks domination over others and not “peaceful co-existence.” The model of funding such military modernisation and sustaining economic development by securing access to uninterrupted supplies of natural resources and creating captive markets, as well as using diplomatic as well as covert influence to preserve these, are quite worrying. Chinese support to autocratic and even rogue regimes is well known.

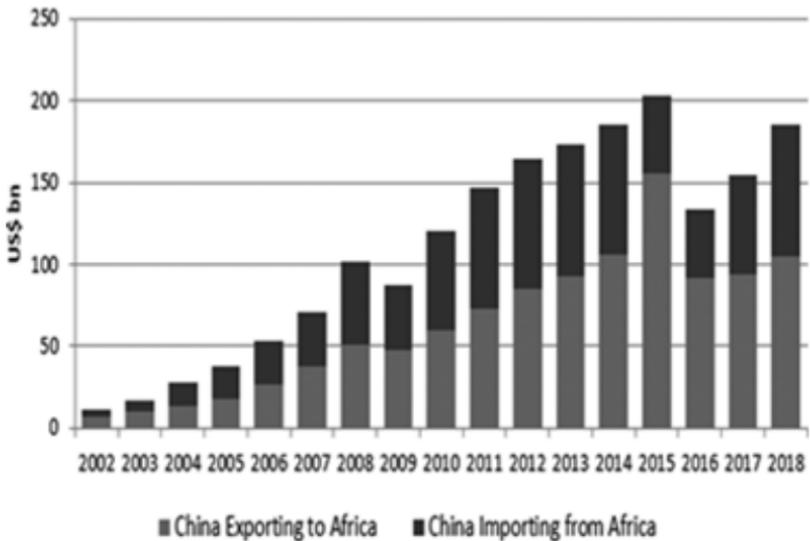
Beijing has simultaneously been increasing its domination and influence in resource rich Central Asia and the Eurasian region as well, in an attempt to consolidate its questionable control and oppression of people in Tibet and Xinjiang. Resource rich but impoverished countries of Africa are threatened by the burgeoning Chinese might. China's major trading partners, or suppliers of natural resources are some of the most impoverished countries with somewhat non-transparent political system. At the top of the list are “South Sudan, Angola, Eritrea, The Gambia, DR Congo, Guinea, Zimbabwe, Gabon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Mauritania.”<sup>28</sup> A media report recently suggested that “China also gets 95% of South Sudan's crude petroleum exports as of 2017. These included funnelling a sixth of its total daily output – 30,000 out of 170,000 barrels

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28 Abdi Latif Dahir, “Africa's resource-rich nations are getting even more reliant on China for their exports” *Quartz Africa*, April 26, 2019, <https://qz.com/africa/1605497/belt-and-road-africa-mineral-rich-nations-export-mostly-to-china/>.

– to the Export-Import Bank of China to fund the young nation’s infrastructure needs.”<sup>29</sup> Simultaneously, resentment has been growing against China, and this, in a few cases, has resulted in the killing of Chinese employees of various Chinese corporations and projects in Africa.

### China-Africa Trade



Source: John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies as borrowed from UN Comtrade<sup>30</sup>

The extent of Chinese influence in Africa is difficult to evaluate simply on the basis of available data of trade and investment. Former *Financial Times* correspondent in Africa, Tom Burgis had highlighted China’s role in what he described as “loot of the resources of the continent”, along with few other

29 Ibid.

30 “China-Africa Trade”, *John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies*, accessed on July 16, 2020, <http://www.sais-cari.org/data-china-africa-trade>.

shadowy forces.<sup>31</sup> He has specifically documented China's murky dealings through a controversial conduit, Sam Pa, to exact huge amounts of resources by bribing autocrats and dictators and securing access to infrastructure projects.

The US magazine *National Interest* claimed:

China lent nearly USD125 billion to Africa between 2000 and 2006 and recently pledged USD 60 billion at the 2018 *Forum on China-Africa Co-operation*. The Chinese superficially appear to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with Africa by providing financial and technical assistance to Africa's pressing developmental needs. Trade between China and Africa has grown from USD10 billion in 2000 to USD190 billion by 2017. It is estimated that 12 per cent of Africa's industrial production, or USD500 billion annually – nearly half of Africa's internationally contracted construction market – is carried out by Chinese firms.<sup>32</sup>

It is clear that China's expanding military and economic capacities seem to supplement each other. Logistical bases acquired under BRI or expansion in Central Asia or South China Sea and even Africa are likely to bolster Chinese capacities for both economic and military domination, not only within those regions but at a global scale. China appears to be locking up resources in these regions for its exclusive use, exploiting the vulnerabilities of people there. People in these regions are

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31 Tom Burgis, *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Oligarchs, Corporations, Smugglers and The Theft of Africa's Wealth*, Public Affairs, New York, 2015.

32 Akol Nyok Akol Dok and Bradley Thayer, "Takeover Trap: Why Imperialist China Is Invading Africa", *The National Interest*, July 10, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/takeover-trap-why-imperialist-china-invading-africa-66421>.

becoming so dependent upon China that their own ability to decide their destiny is being seriously undermined. On the other hand, secure and captive access to resources and markets will keep fuelling China's own economy, notwithstanding some benefits reaching others, giving Beijing enough surpluses to invest in military and technological modernisation, which help build its capacity to dominate others even further.

All this underlines the need for a concerted effort to address a larger challenge to meet the developmental aspirations of the people of poor but resource-rich nations. China's quest for military and economic domination through the existing model of development threatens to throw these regions into perpetual instability and poverty and to undermine the security of world at large. Countermeasures by impacted states are likely to enormously enhance the role of the military-industrial complex, dislocating the broader agenda of global governance.

It is extremely difficult to second-guess China's intentions within the region or beyond, to assess their larger impact on India's national security. Nevertheless, a careful appreciation of the larger regional and global context, as well as overall capacities – economic, strategic, military, technological and diplomatic – in the context of China's recent moves, presents a highly disturbing trend. China has openly flaunted its superior strength and has not hesitated to browbeat independent nations. For example, Australia, which has been a longstanding supplier of commodities and natural resources to China, has been complaining for quite some time about clandestine Chinese interference within their country, including in critical political processes. Many Australians perceive this phenomenon as detrimental to their own people and violative of transparency in governance. The Chinese have simply been dismissive of such reports.

Recently, when Prime Minister Scott Morrison called for independent review to probe the role of China into the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese Ambassador, in somewhat undiplomatic language, threatened Australia with sanctions. Quintessentially vituperative editor of *Global Times* went a few steps ahead to insult Australians when he wrote: “Australia is always there, making trouble. It is a bit like chewing gum stuck on the sole of China’s shoes. Sometimes you have to find a stone to rub it off.”<sup>33</sup> It is such disdainful dismissal of criticism that causes concern over both the rising economic influence of China and many of the unethical ways it employs to support and sustain its economic and military empowerment.

China has repeatedly shown its aggressive intent towards India, and such instances have increased in recent years. This could be driven by its own understanding of its relative economic-military and even purported cultural superiority, compared to India. The larger international as well as domestic context of China, along with some of India’s vulnerabilities, may have given an additional push to such an approach. As a major power, India cannot risk its national security interests and objectives by relying on the good intentions of others. While New Delhi’s immediate options may be limited as far as addressing the standoff on the border is concerned, a long-term restructuring of all its institutions to bolster their capacity is indispensable for the defence of India as a civilisation and a state.

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33 Felix K. Chang, “Social Distancing: Australia’s Relations with China”, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, May 22, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/05/social-distancing-australias-relations-with-china/>.

## **THREATS FROM PAKISTAN**

Pakistan has remained a perennial threat and it is likely to remain so for a long time. The primary national security threat from Pakistan can be summarised as under:

Military-Strategic Threat as a neighbour;

Low-cost diffuse covert war in Kashmir;

Its covert capacity to use global terror and crime to pursue the strategic and mercenary objectives of the Pakistani deep state;

There has been complete unanimity among security experts that Pakistan on its own is incapable of posing any serious conventional threat to India. Its nuclear deterrence is a credible shield against a conventional military confrontation against a much stronger India. Nevertheless, Pakistan remains an important factor in a hypothetical situation of two-front conflict, in which its territories can be used by China and Pakistani armed forces can operate alongside the Chinese. Hence, its oversised conventional capabilities compared to size of its territory and population cannot entirely be ignored. Its higher number of nuclear warheads and stockpile is again a matter of concern, given its congenital hatred towards India and the pervasive fragility of its formal state structure.

## **PAKISTAN'S USE OF TERROR IN KASHMIR'S PROXY WAR**

What has troubled and irritated India most is the sustained covert war in Kashmir, with its combination of terrorism, propaganda, subversion and radicalisation. Such wars in general are difficult to handle but the one that the Indian security forces have been fighting in Kashmir is, indeed, the most complex of its kind. Even the most formidable conventional armed forces, with access to the most sophisticated firepower and absence of

the kind of restraint that the Indian Army exercises in Kashmir, have failed to conclude such wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. What has complicated this conflict is the infusion of the element of the Islamic identity, for which the Pakistani military establishment had been investing intensive clandestine efforts soon after Zia ul Haq took over the reins of power in Pakistan.

The Pakistani deep state exploited the porous border to create pockets of support through Islamic radicalisation and propaganda to avenge Pakistan's comprehensive debacle in Bangladesh, and wrest Kashmir through a new strategy. Such efforts took nearly a decade for fruition, when concerted militancy erupted in the state in the late 1980s. The Indian state was not fully prepared and it had ignored clandestine activities and subversion that had been going on for some time, and that probably continues even now in other parts of the country as well. Manipulation and rigging of local elections may have acted as a trigger, but such well-organised armed attacks on security forces and civilians was impossible without sustained secret planning, organisation, coordination and financial-military backing by Pakistan's state machinery.<sup>34</sup>

It is pertinent to recall that, following Soviet Russia's intervention in Afghanistan and the strategies used by Pakistan with the backing of allied forces to destabilise Afghanistan, there was a steep rise in Rawalpindi's overall technical, financial and social capacities to fight proxy war. The Pakistani state recruited young people both domestically as well as from the wider region and beyond, who were radicalised, trained and launched into Kashmir. Hence, the initial armed militants

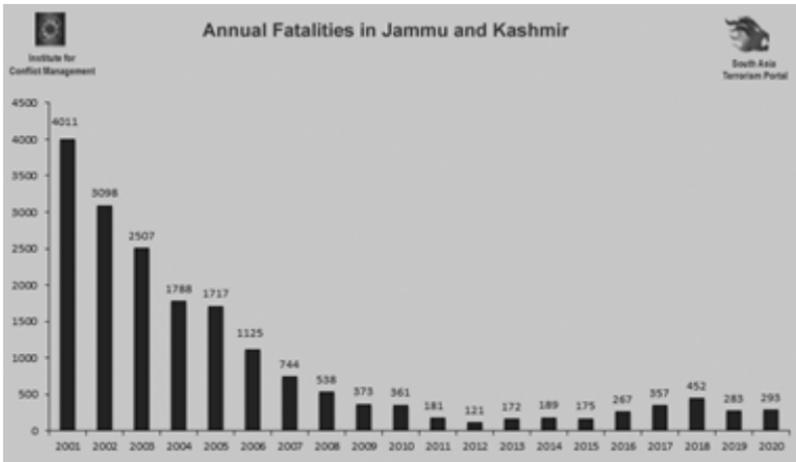
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34 Priyanka Bakaya and Sumeet Bhatti, "Kashmir Conflict: A Study of What Led to the Insurgency in Kashmir Valley & Proposed Future Solutions", 2005, <https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/Kashmir%20Conflict%20-%20A%20Study%20of%20What%20Led%20to%20the%20Insurgency%20in%20Kashmir%20Valley.pdf>.

in the Kashmir Valley in the 1990s were mostly outsiders. The Pakistani state relied on the spiral impact of such war to provoke excesses by the Indian security forces, which like all other conventional militaries initially struggled to handle such guerrilla attacks where civilians were used as shield.

As the conflict prolonged, some degree of alienation of the local population was inevitable. The Pakistani deep state exploited this with their infrastructure across the border, to provide sanctuary, succour and support to sections of the youth who had been radicalised by Pakistani infiltrators and local sympathisers. With their newfound resources, they could fund and arm an Islamic insurgency and use their diplomatic infrastructure to lavishly spread propaganda to build further pressure on the Indian state. Exploiting the constraints of security forces to protect civilian population over such a large area, small but well-armed Pakistani sponsored groups held civilian populations to ransom, forcing complete exodus of the minority Hindu population from the Kashmir valley.

Nevertheless, there has been remarkable fightback from the Indian state, which has been spearheaded domestically by the Indian Army and backed by Central Para-military Forces and the State Police. Sections of the civilian Muslim population also started speaking out against Pakistan-backed forces once the security situation improved. But the very dynamics of such diffuse but identity-driven irregular war generated large-scale radicalisation and some degree of avoidable alienation of the local population. It was both the democratic credentials of Indian state as well as subsequent improvement in capacities of Indian security forces to fight such a war that led to a steep decline in armed militancy from around 2005-06. Following table, drawn from the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) reflects the broad trend:



Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP)

While there has not been a comprehensive study to calculate total costs of Pakistani sponsored covert war in Kashmir, its negative impact on India's larger economic development must be significant. Security forces have built capacities to handle the element of violence, especially acts perpetrated on Indian territory, but appreciation of the complexity of the entire range instruments deployed in this form of conflict, as well as their effective neutralisation, remains a challenge. All traditional counter-insurgency experts have unanimously observed that it is easy to ignite an insurgency, but eliminating one is extremely difficult.

Even among these, the one driven by Islamic identity has been the most emotive in the overall context of South and West Asia, especially after 1980s. There appears to be no solution to such identity driven hatred, which initially led to creation of Pakistan, and which continues to drive the persecution of non-Muslims in that country even now. It manifested itself in expulsion of Hindus from the Kashmir Valley. Hence, despite exposure of the Pakistani role in fomenting radicalised Islamic

terror in the Valley and its world-wide infrastructure for terror and propaganda, years of radicalisation and unavoidable civilian losses have given a push to the very momentum of such insurgency. Amidst these, the Pakistani cross-border infrastructure of support, sanctuary and radicalisation has never allowed the situation to normalise.

Most Western experts have displayed limited understanding of the complexity of the Islamic identity-driven war engineered by Pakistan through every possible means. Many of them came to realise the potent appeal of a certain version of Islam in inciting hatred and terror against non-Muslims, and deeper involvement of Pakistan in this game, only after the 9/11 terror attacks. This changed perceptions about Pakistan forever. However, the Pakistani security establishment managed to pretend to be with the West at one end and continue with their clandestine terrorism-backed war against India.

Most western security experts still struggle to appreciate that Pakistan carries the legacy of the biggest man-made carnage and genocide in the name of Islam in recent human history, the partition of the subcontinent, and such sentiments continue to drive sections of the Pakistani security establishment and society. With its own strategic objectives of containing Soviet Russia, the West had turned a blind eye to Pakistani transgressions during the Cold War era. The idea of Islamic radicalisation reached its pinnacle during the conflict with the Soviets in Afghanistan. There was little foresight within the West's own security establishment about the larger strategic consequences of this development. There was no empathy about the possible impact of radicalisation on secular India and the plight of people in the entire subcontinent.

It has taken several decades and huge human costs to force a realisation about the enormity of identity-driven conflicts.

Even now, sections of the Pakistani state establishment and civil society continue to emphasise the superior identity of Muslims in a language that makes any reconciliation and peaceful coexistence with India nearly impossible in foreseeable future. No amount of concession and goodwill is going to help, as the Pakistani state is simply incapable of reining in such forces.

There has been a large number of studies in recent years emphasising the challenges of the emotive dimensions of identity-driven irregular wars that India has been facing from Pakistan. In one well-researched paper, Louis Kriesberg argues that collective identities create “difficulty in reaching an accommodation between conflicting groups.”<sup>35</sup> Kriesberg maintains, “members of groups with identities that place a high priority on being honoured and being treated with deference may have difficulty making compromises for or respecting other groups. Furthermore, some self-conceptions relating to ideas of sovereignty, authority, and legitimacy constitute barriers to successful settlement of a conflict.”<sup>36</sup> It is precisely such a psyche that has shaped the Pakistani outlook towards India. Many among its security and political establishment continue to emphasise the superior identity of Muslims. Voices of sanity, who talk of accommodation and coexistence are simply snuffed out. This is what explains the demolition of a Hindu temple in Islamabad,<sup>37</sup> and the continuous succession of atrocities and state protected discrimination against all minorities in Pakistan.<sup>38</sup>

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35 Louis Kriesberg, “Identity Issues”, *Beyond Intractability*, July 2003, [https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/identity\\_issues](https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/identity_issues).

36 Ibid.

37 “Temple Built With Govt Permission Demolished In Islamabad In Pak, No Action From Minority Ministry”, CNN-News18, July 7, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4\\_79GHL9Ako](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_79GHL9Ako).

38 Rajat Sharma, “Double Faced Pakistan: Attacks on Hindus and Temples”, *India TV*, November 03, 2020, <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/>

It is, again, these sentiments that drive the Pakistani covert war in Kashmir through use of terror, subversion and crime – to defy its original instrument of accession with India or wider aspiration of Kashmiris to stay with India as demonstrated in peace and tranquillity in the Valley decades after independence. It was a failure of the strategic psyche and somewhat fragile governance that allowed the Pakistani deep state to initiate this identity driven diffuse war in the region.

In its United Nations System Staff College paper, Britta Gade observes, “Armed violence has progressively become more complex over the past three decades. Not only has the number of wars that are exclusively inter-state decreased – it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between armed conflict and contexts that are shaped by regular instances of violence and crime without being considered in official statistics. The proliferation of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and the rise of identity-driven insurgency has led to the assumption that we are dealing with an entirely new type of warfare, the so-called ‘new wars’.”<sup>39</sup>

A careful examination would suggest that an appreciation among academics about such wars may be new, but not the nature of these wars, particularly given the predominance of clandestine and covert elements in conflict. Gade goes on to add “even though the idea that these wars are entirely new is debated, both within academic as well as in practitioners’ circles, the complexity of armed violence today does pose important challenges to the UN and its partners. This starts

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double-faced-pakistan-attacks-on-hindus-and-temples-rajat-sharma-opinion-aaj-ki-baat-662066.

39 Britta Gade, “Understanding the Complexity of Armed Violence in the 21st Century”, *United Nations System Staff College*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.unssc.org/news-and-insights/blog/understanding-complexity-armed-violence-21st-century/>.

with the question of what non-state armed groups really are. Many of them are in fact not entirely 'non-state' but cultivate good relations to official authorities... Many have links to organized crime networks and engage in the trafficking of drugs, weapons or natural resources... non-state armed groups need to be understood in their local context."<sup>40</sup>

In recent years, every independent research study has concluded that Pakistan has traditionally used Islamic extremism and terrorism to further its strategic interests in the region. It is now universally acknowledged that it is the Pakistani deep state that has created, nurtured and supported terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Harakat-ul Mujahideen (HuM), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), the Mullah Nazir Group, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and the Afghan Taliban and its affiliated Haqqani Network, among others. In recent years, it has been found propagating the idea of Ghazwa-e-Hind, which has energised and motivated a large number of Pakistani and even non-Pakistani youth. This concept has been advocating the conquest of the entire Indian subcontinent by Muslims.<sup>41</sup> As part of this larger agenda, several religious preachers have also been making inciting sermons to help recruit cadres. Several preachers and mosques within India have been feeding such propaganda through their interpretation of certain tenets of Islam that are hateful towards non-Muslims, creating a larger support structure for the Pakistani deep state.

#### **PAKISTAN'S INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DIFFUSE COVERT WAR**

Over the years, the deep state of Pakistan appears to have built formidable world-wide capacities – in the form of spirited crime syndicates, radicalised clerics as well as organised

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40 Ibid

41 "Ghazwa-e-Hind" *Islam & Islamic Laws*, July 11, 2019, <http://www.islam-laws.com/ghazwa-e-hind/>.

terrorist groups in the region and beyond – that are financially self-sustaining and appear particularly rewarding to their incumbents. Hence, Pakistan’s comprehensive infrastructure for all-out diffuse covert war through every possible means – including propaganda, deception, terrorism and clandestine subversion – cannot easily be dismantled. Even though some of the terrorist groups have drifted apart and splintered, Pakistan’s larger clout among a significant number of these remains intact. This has been demonstrated by facilitation of the recent US-Taliban Agreement by Pakistan.

Recently the European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS) as well as the US-based Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) accused Pakistan of “stoking the present escalation of Taliban violence” in Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup> These reports go on to argue that “if Pakistan possessed enough leverage over the Taliban to get it to the negotiating table with the US, it certainly should have the clout to get the Taliban to eschew violence at a time when such violence is threatening to tear apart the US-Taliban agreement.”<sup>43</sup> Such developments only reflect that the Pakistani deep state is unlikely to give up the covert capacity which it has built over the years. It is keen to control both Afghanistan and its drug trade, and yet manage a strong bargain with the United States.

Given the obvious threats that they face from these groups, the West has been more concerned with the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network. India thus, has to devise its own ways and means, along with suitable low-cost and sustainable capacities, of addressing Pakistan’s covert war.

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42 ANI, “Pakistan’s behind-the-scenes role in thwarting intra-Afghan talks comes to fore with intensified Taliban violence”, *Business World*, July 18, 2020, <http://www.businessworld.in/article/Pakistan-s-behind-the-scenes-role-in-thwarting-intra-Afghan-talks-comes-to-fore-with-intensified-Taliban-violence/18-07-2020-298850/>.

43 Ibid.

Crucially, Pakistan's entire claims about its so-called War on Terror are misleading. *Counterextremism.com*, an American watchdog on extremism and counter terrorism observed in a July 2020 report that:

Pakistan has instead focused most of its counterterrorism operations against groups that seek to challenge and overthrow the Pakistani state. These groups, which pose a more direct threat to the state, include the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—a subset of the Pakistani Taliban and the deadliest of indigenous Pakistani extremist groups, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ).<sup>44</sup>

The report goes on to note that Pakistani Prime Minister “Imran Khan accepted Pakistan’s responsibility in creating multiple militant groups but said that they no longer served Pakistan’s interests and fighting violent extremism was necessary for Pakistan’s stability.”<sup>45</sup>

But a July 2020 European Foundation for South Asian Studies report clearly suggests that either Imran Khan has been misguiding the international community or he is in no position to push the Pakistani deep state to give up its clout through terrorist proxies even in Afghanistan, where the Americans are at receiving end. Arguing that Pakistan’s past counter-extremism efforts have generally been insufficient, the American watchdog quotes a 2016 report of the US Department of State which claimed, “Pakistan was not doing enough to disrupt the activities of LeT and JeM – both of which continue to operate, train, organize and fundraise within Pakistan.”<sup>46</sup> It

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44 “Pakistan: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, *Counter Extremism Project*, July 20, 2020, <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/pakistan>.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

is well known that LeT and JeM are operating in Kashmir. Subsequently, Indian authorities have cited a huge amount of data that confirms Pakistani involvement in large number of terrorist attacks, including the Pulwama incident of 2019.<sup>47</sup>

Pakistan's world-wide influence and role in global terrorism is not new. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there had been increasing disclosures by Western intelligence agencies about the level of radicalisation in Pakistan, radicalisation that has impacted Pakistanis almost all over the world. Even second-generation British Pakistanis were on the forefront in the Islamic State-backed *jihad* in Syria. Disclosures in 2013, quoting MI5, claimed that hundreds of British Muslims were fighting in Syria.<sup>48</sup> Subsequent media reports revealed that a majority of them were first- and second-generation British Pakistanis. British academic Lewis Herrington released graphic details quoting intelligence sources about British Pakistani nationals, radicalised in Pakistan or within the Pakistani community in the United Kingdom, conspiring to perpetrate terror attacks in Britain and beyond.<sup>49</sup>

Herrington had quoted the then MI5 Chief stating that, in November 2006, the agency knew of up to 30 terrorist-related plots designed to kill UK citizens and damage the economy. He had also quoted political sociologist and former US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer Marc Sageman who had argued that the greatest threat of terrorism came from

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47 Muhammad Feyyaz, "Contextualizing the Pulwama Attack in Kashmir – A Perspective from Pakistan", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 13, Number 2, 2019, pp. 69-74.

48 "Hundreds of Britons fighting in Syria - MI5 chief", *BB News*, November 7, 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24856553>.

49 Lewis Herrington, "British Islamic extremist terrorism: the declining significance of Al-Qaeda and Pakistan", *International Affairs*, Volume 91, Issue 1, 2015, pp.17-35.

westernised Muslims undergoing the process of radicalisation in inner-city areas of Birmingham, Luton, Leeds and London, describing these places as the 'hotbeds of radicalisation'. Most of these areas are dominated by Pakistanis.<sup>50</sup>

The writer, who was posted as a diplomat in Indian mission in London during 2009-12, during a visit to Sheffield in November 2009 came across shocking levels of hatred among sections of British Pakistanis against Indians. In his role as Consular Officer, he had taken up the issue of British Pakistanis consistently harassing Indian female students. During the visit, the concerned police authorities of West Yorkshire Police District, initiated action. Eventually, they landed up conducting 35 to 36 raids throughout their jurisdiction as they discovered that the concerned British Pakistanis were radicalised and involved in drug trafficking, which suggested a strong possibility of their involvement in Pakistan-linked terrorist plots in the UK. Further details were not available, but the incident highlighted the reality of deep-rooted radicalisation among Pakistani youth in the UK.

In his 2015 study, Herrington claimed:

...without exception, Pakistan served as the main training ground for those who engaged in Islamic extremist terrorism in Britain between 2003 and 2006. In four of the five plots examined, two individuals external to the cell organized and partly financed the training. The first and perhaps the most high-profile individual alleged to have performed the tasks of fundraising and facilitating is Luton-based Mohammed Quyyam Khan, also known as Q. Both the Crevice conspirators and the now deceased Theseus suicide

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50 Ibid.

bombers received direct assistance from Q in obtaining training in Pakistan. A second man, Mohammed al-Ghabra, organized trips to Pakistan for the cell members of both Vivace and Overt. In all four plots, evidence suggests the conspirators received explosives training from Al-Qaeda specialists, namely Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi and Abu Ubaida al-Masri. Operation Crevice – the notorious ‘fertilizer plot’ exposed in 2003 – clearly illustrates Pakistan’s role in training and finance before 2006. British-born and raised Omar Khyam is widely believed to have led the conspirators, whose targets included nightclubs, shopping centers and domestic utility installations. Aged 18, Khyam travelled to Kashmir and fought with Pakistani-backed Islamist groups against Indian forces. Before returning to London in 2001 he spent time in Afghanistan, obtaining an audience with Taliban commander Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi. Following this meeting, Khyam agreed to undertake fundraising in order to supply finance and equipment to Hadi. By 2003, Khyam and his friends were sending up to £4,000 a month to Afghanistan. Khyam and at least four other associates were already attending events facilitated by the now banned Islamic fundamentalist group Al-Muhajiroun (ALM).<sup>51</sup>

Such details are the tip of a much bigger iceberg,<sup>52</sup> but these highlight the extent of radicalisation in Pakistan and its wider global impact. Though several reports claim that such threats from Pakistan have declined in recent years, the regular trickle of terrorists in Kashmir or Pakistani clout with Afghan Taliban or its nexus with larger terror-crime syndicates, appear

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51 Ibid.

52 “Pakistan: The Footprints of Terror”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <https://www.satp.org/islamist-extremism/data/Pakistan-The-Footprints-of-Terror>.

intact. Given the clandestine nature of the entire edifice and infrastructure of terror, security agencies – despite massive access to resources and professional specialisation – have struggled to tame these forces. The challenge becomes formidable when a large number of state agencies encourage, abet and clandestinely or even openly support such forces of terror, as has been the case with Pakistan.

A few spirited investigative journalists and researchers may have exposed this nexus, but the real contours of the dynamically evolving world of terror is difficult to fathom in its entirety. Pakistan's deep state or, for that matter, any other force, may not be able to control and regulate all the terrorist proxies it once created. But its covert capacity to regulate and manage a large number of these remains formidable. Further, the kind of radicalisation that it has helped ignite on the subcontinent and beyond has gathered its own momentum, feeding not merely terrorism but also more complex shades of global crime that are not easy to detect. The dynamics of secrecy and deception enhance the magnitude of the threat and overall pressure on security agencies.

Despite the containment of the terrorist infrastructure in many parts of the world, Pakistan's capacity to peddle terror as well as global crime through clandestine global syndicates appears substantially intact. Such capacity for terror can transition into different forms of subversion with a reduced level or newer form of violence. Pakistan's nuclear power status allows it to pursue these strategies with confidence. An open state with somewhat deficient institutions of governance like India, which has been facing the brunt of Pakistani covert and clandestine subversion, is far more vulnerable. The poor regulatory capacity of the Indian state in the context of a deficient criminal-justice system, enhances such vulnerability.

Simultaneously, though the large Muslim population of India has so far escaped the deep spiral of radicalisation, the Indian state has traditionally neglected subversive propaganda by organised seminaries in the name of religious freedom. The possibility of some degree of clandestine involvement of the Pakistani deep state cannot be ruled out. But the expanding social fissures and continued propagation of somewhat conflicting versions of Islam by even the most established seminaries, such as Deoband, have the potential to undermine social cohesion of India, which can have seriously negative consequences for its overall national strength. While rationalisation of all shades of crime in the name of religion must be strictly curbed through an efficient criminal justice system, any attempt to undermine India's social cohesion enhances its vulnerability to subversive propaganda by Pakistan-linked groups.

#### **LIMITED IMPACT OF FATF ACTION**

Indian authorities appeared pleased at the decision of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to place Pakistan on the grey list in June 2018. Given the level of the Pakistani deep state's direct and indirect involvement in all shades of terrorism and global crime, the move was fairly mild. Interestingly, the Asia Pacific Group (APG), an intergovernmental technical body of 41 states on anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing, in its October 2019 report, pointed out serious deficiencies in Pakistani compliance on checking money laundering and terror-financing. The report rated Pakistan as non-compliant or partially compliant on most of the 40 parameters identified for evaluation of its progress on countering terror finance and money laundering. It also highlights serious institutional deficiencies and lack of autonomy as well as integrity where institutions just cannot act independently. The report pointed out:

Pakistan completed its first Money Laundering (ML) and Terror Finance (TF) National Risk Assessment (NRA) in 2017. However, the NRA lacks a comprehensive analysis. Competent authorities have varying levels of understanding of the country's ML and TF risks, and the private sector has a mixed understanding of risks.

While Pakistan has established a multi-agency approach on the subject, it is not implementing a comprehensive and coordinated risk-based approach to combating ML and TF.

Pakistan is using financial intelligence to combat ML, TF, predicate crimes and trace property for confiscation but only to a minimal extent. Critically, the FMU (Financial Monitoring Unit) cannot spontaneously or upon request disseminate information and the results of its analysis to provincial CTDs (Counter-Terrorism Departments), which are designated as TF investigation authorities.

Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) have undertaken 2,420 ML investigations, resulting in 354 prosecutions (primarily self-laundering cases) and the conviction of one natural person for self-laundering related to corruption.

Pakistan's law enforcement efforts to address ML are not consistent with its risks.

LEAs have measures to freeze, seize, and prevent dealing with property subject to confiscation. LEAs are seizing some assets in predicate offences cases, but not in terror related ML cases.

Overall, the value of confiscated funds is not commensurate with Pakistan's ML/TF risk profile. In addition, the cross-border cash declaration system is

not effectively utilised to seize cash/Bearer Negotiable Instruments at the border.

Screening by Financial Institutions (FIs) and Designated Non-Financial Businesses & Professions (DNFBP) is similar to that of TFS for terrorism and TF. No funds or assets owned have been frozen.

All other FIs have limited understanding of their ML/TF risks.

NBFIs are not filing Suspicious Transaction Reports (STR) commensurate with ML/TF risks in these sectors. There are no enforceable AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering/Countering Financing of Terrorism) requirements for Pakistan Post, CDNS (Central Directorates of National Savings) and DNFBPs.

The State Bank of Pakistan does not have a clear understanding of the ML and TF risks unique to the sectors it supervises.

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has a limited understanding of ML/TF risks and has not implemented a risk-based supervisory approach.

There is little evidence that SECP's supervisory activity is improving.

Major ML predicate crimes include corruption, drug trafficking, fraud, tax evasion, smuggling, human trafficking and organized crime. Corruption is endemic across Pakistan's economy. As with TF noted above, Pakistan's geography and porous borders increase its vulnerability to smuggling and narcotics trafficking.<sup>53</sup>

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53 "Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures-Pakistan" Mutual Evaluation Report, *APG*, October 2019, <http://www.fatf->

Not much has changed over successive evaluations, beyond some formal compliance, as in the passage of legislation. In its latest Plenary on October 21-23, 2020, FATF once again retained Pakistan on its grey list, with the organisation's President, Marcus Pleyer pointing to very serious deficiencies that still have to be repaired and observing that Pakistan, consequently, still faced the risk of being moved to the 'black-list'. In its release on October 23, 2020, FATF, stated, that "as all action plan deadlines have expired, the FATF strongly urges Pakistan to swiftly complete its full action plan by February 2021".<sup>54</sup> In the release it asked Pakistan to

...continue to work on implementing its action plan to address its strategic deficiencies, including by: (1) demonstrating that law enforcement agencies are identifying and investigating the widest range of TF [terrorist financing] activity and that TF investigations and prosecutions target designated persons and entities, and those acting on behalf or at the direction of the designated persons or entities; (2) demonstrating that TF prosecutions result in effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions; (3) demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all 1267 and 1373 designated terrorists and those acting for or on their behalf, preventing the raising and moving of funds including in relation to NPOs [Non-Profit Organisations], identifying and freezing assets (movable and immovable), and prohibiting access to

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[gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/mer-fsrb/APG-Mutual-Evaluation-Report-Pakistan-October%202019.pdf](https://gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/mer-fsrb/APG-Mutual-Evaluation-Report-Pakistan-October%202019.pdf).

54 Fayyaz Hussain, "'To remain on grey list': FATF urges Pakistan to complete action plan by Feb 2021", *Dawn*, October 24, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1586624/to-remain-on-grey-list-fatf-urges-pakistan-to-complete-action-plan-by-feb-2021>.

funds and financial services; and (4) demonstrating enforcement against TFS [Targeted Financial Sanctions] violations, including in relation to NPOs, of administrative and criminal penalties and provincial and federal authorities cooperating on enforcement cases.<sup>55</sup>

Despite such observations Pakistan has demonstrated the determination as well as the clout of the deep state to evade the noose of international watchdogs. None of the major member countries, including US, UK, China and France made any adverse remarks against Pakistan, or called for the country's blacklisting for such defiance. The West may have done so because of its dependence on the Pakistani security establishment in Afghanistan or in deference to Pakistani support for their counter-terror operations within their own countries or regions. China's support to Pakistan is well known, and Beijing is in a position to exploit Pakistani clout with terrorist groups to its own advantage, at least for the time being, both internally and externally. However, the net outcome of such a scenario does not augur well for India.

Following observation by the non-governmental American watchdog mentioned above becomes significant:

“On April 20, 2020, it was reported that Pakistan removed thousands of names from its terrorist watch list over the past 18 months. Among the names removed were senior members of al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba. The proscribed persons list, maintained by Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), provides a guideline for

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55 Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring, *FATF*, October 23, 2020, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/high-risk-and-other-monitored-jurisdictions/documents/increased-monitoring-october-2020.html#pakistan>.

financial institutions to avoid doing business with or processing transactions of suspected terrorists.”<sup>56</sup>

It is abundantly clear that FATF and international (Western) pressure has proved demonstrably inadequate in dismantling Pakistan's terrorist infrastructure.

### NEXUS WITH CRIME

Organised crime has always been used to fund insurgencies and terrorism. Various studies have consistently highlighted this dimension. The Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) observes:

...terrorists require financing to recruit and support members, maintain logistics hubs, and conduct operations. Thus, preventing terrorists from accessing financial resources is crucial to successfully counter the threat of terrorism. However, many States lack the legal and operational frameworks and technical expertise needed to detect, investigate and prosecute terrorist financing cases.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, UNODC reports have successively highlighted the terror-crime nexus, along with the capacities of state institutions.

The UN Security Council has always been cognizant of this connection and a month after the 9/11 attacks, it adopted resolution 1373/2001, which recognised a “close connection between international terrorism and transnational organized

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56 “Pakistan: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, *Counter Extremism Project*, op. cit.

57 “Countering Terrorist Financing”, *UNODC*, accessed on July 17, 2020, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/news-and-events/terrorist-financing.html>.

crime, illicit drugs, money-laundering, illegal arms-trafficking, and illegal movement of nuclear, chemical, biological and other potentially deadly materials.”<sup>58</sup> The resolution called for “national, regional and international cooperation to combat terrorism financing and money laundering.”<sup>59</sup>

In March 2019, the UN Security Council adopted yet another resolution (2462), which addressed terrorism financing, and in July 2019 an open debate took place at the UNSC on organised crime–terrorism linkages. Yet, real progress in implementation has been extremely difficult.<sup>60</sup>

Both Indian and other agencies have regularly highlighted the Pakistani nexus with global crimes such as money laundering, drug-trafficking, circulation of fake currencies, extortion and piracy. Over the years, formidable Pakistani state-backed crime networks have expanded their clout and reach. It is well known that the most sophisticated crime cartel run by Dawood Ibrahim on Indian soil had the active support of the Pakistani state till he fled to Pakistan in the wake of the 1993 serial bombings in Mumbai. Pakistan is now sheltering Dawood Ibrahim in Karachi and assisting in the clandestine operations of his group, which operates across South and South East Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Social capital with terror groups is a low-risk and high gain commercial proposition for both the Pakistani deep state and for organised crime groups. Terrorism is a smaller but significant component of the entire edifice and infrastructure

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58 Summer Walker and Tuesday Reitano, “New Security Council Resolution recognizes broader links between terrorism and organized crime”, *Global Initiative*, July 26, 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/new-security-council-resolution-recognizes-broader-links-between-terrorism-and-organized-crime/>.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

that generates huge all-round dividends. The link with terror and radicalisation converts illicit and criminal operations into a religious obligation. There are multiple reports indicating how the Pakistani deep state and Taliban have been controlling the lucrative drug trade in Afghanistan.

In this connection, a few recent incidents have caught the attention of security specialists. One pertains to gold smuggling through alleged misuse of the diplomatic bag by the UAE Consulate in Indian state of Kerala. India's top counter terror investigation agency has initiated probe in to the matter.<sup>61</sup> Whether the terror link is established or not, what is worrisome is that such smuggling has been going on for quite some time and it was only due to the spirited efforts of officials that the crime was detected and action was initiated on this occasion. Given the general laxity and perceived corruption in many government departments, the scale of such or similar crime may be quite high. Even if the terrorism link is not established, the very sustenance of such a large-scale criminal link constitutes a potential support structure for hostile state and non-state actors.

Similarly, on April 1, 2020, the Sri Lankan Navy seized a vessel with nine Pakistani nationals that was smuggling 605 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine and 579 kilograms of ketamine.<sup>62</sup> Media reports noted, "the seizure had reinforced contention of the Indian agencies that Pak based cartels had

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61 "Kerala gold smuggling case: NIA registers FIR to probe if it's linked to terror activities", *The New Indian Express*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2020/jul/10/kerala-gold-smuggling-case-nia-registers-fir-to-probe-if-its-linked-to-terror-activities-2167972.html>.

62 Devesh K. Pandey, "Haul points to Pak-based cartels' role in drug trafficking via sea routes", *The Hindu*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/haul-points-to-pak-based-cartels-role-in-drug-trafficking-via-sea-routes/article31237497.ece>.

been indulging large scale drug trafficking via sea route in the region.” The reports cited the similar seizure of 500 kilograms of contraband heroin and 100 kilograms of methamphetamines on March 5, 2020, by the Sri Lanka Navy. in which eight of the 16 arrested crew members were Pakistani nationals and the origin of the contraband was traced to Pakistan’s Makran Coast. Reports had quoted officials and cited data that such seizures were the tip of a much larger iceberg of drug trade carried out with the collusion of the Pakistani deep state. The African bases of such cartels and the arrest of Pakistan-sheltered Dawood Ibrahim’s son in Barcelona in 2015 on charges of drug trafficking give an idea of the larger footprint and reach of such cartels.<sup>63</sup>

A retired official of the Sri Lankan Navy disclosed, on condition of anonymity, that these were not the first incidents of their kind. In one such incident, which had not surfaced in the media, the Sri Lankan Navy was probing the role of its own retired personnel who were caught off the Sri Lankan coast along with Pakistani nationals in 2016, while carrying an illicit cargo of arms.<sup>64</sup>

Hence, the Pakistani deep state’s ability and incentive to sustain its proxy war also provides enormous individual gains and clout for its incumbents. The absence of a strong and effective criminal justice system in India, as well as in other states affected by the Pakistan-backed criminal-terrorist proxies, works to the advantage of the Pakistani deep state. Their protection and sheltering of Dawood Ibrahim – whose networks are believed to be active in money laundering, smuggling, drug and human trafficking, extortion and several other crimes – is a clear indicator of the strong covert support

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63 Ibid.

64 Telephonic interaction April 5, 2020.

structure that the group is running on Indian soil. The problem is compounded by India's weak and deficient criminal justice system, which impedes ability of the state to guard itself and its people from serious subversion in such hostile regional geopolitics.

In this connection, it is worth citing a 2014 study by the US Army that pointed out that “insurgents commonly use criminal organisations to accomplish objectives.”<sup>65</sup> It had identified “theft, drug, human trafficking, smuggling of illicit materials, extortion, prostitution, kidnapping, blackmail, counterfeiting, taxing of civilians, bank robbery and bribery” among the activities employed. Criminal organisations may also assist insurgents in actions such as intimidating government officials, conducting assassinations, kidnapping key personnel, initiating sectarian violence, strikes, demonstrations, riots, and smuggling high value leaders, advisors or weapons.” Given the identity driven war by the Pakistani deep state, the very operation and existence of any organised crime of this nature, or even large-scale bureaucratic corruption or opaque political funding, enhances the overall vulnerability of India's national security.

India's domestic security agencies have contained the threat to a significant extent but the response has largely been tactical. Further, the fragility of political and governance institutions, and a poor criminal justice system have conceded space for larger subversive networks to flourish and thrive. It is debatable whether India was ever in a position to destroy the capacity of the Pakistani deep state to raise such an army of radical terror groups – in the process radicalising their own society. What is worrying is that, in the absence of such

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65 “Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies”; *Department of the Army*, Washington: DC, June 2, 2014, <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>.

capacities and progress in the direction of building such capacities, the cost of managing the Pakistani sponsored covert war is going to increase, taking it to a level where it can hurt India economically, socially and even politically.

### **NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT**

The above analysis clearly underlines the need for a strategic paradigm shift on India's national security strategy and outlook. Hostility from two major nuclear armed states – including a new global super power – who happen to be its immediate neighbours, multiply national security challenges, especially given the pressures of addressing rising needs and expectations of a burgeoning population. China's intent and capacity for strategic domination of the region and beyond is fairly obvious. It has not only enhanced the cost and risk of US intervention in most parts of Asia, including the Far East, Asia-Pacific and Central Asia, but its rising influence in Africa, South America and parts of Europe and even West Asia, have aided its capacity to challenge the US global domination. Its cohesive political-governance apparatus appears better capable of responding to any crises, or extraordinary situations, more decisively, swiftly and flexibly than democracies. Crucially, China's decisions appear largely unfettered even by human costs.

In the prevailing dynamics, as well as given its strategic psyche, China is likely to do everything possible to eliminate space for any challenge to its regional supremacy that India may pose, either on its own or in collaboration with others. The sudden spurt in the Chinese belligerence on Indian borders since 2013, in the context of the Xi Jinping regime's aggressive posture towards all its neighbours, except known client states like Pakistan, appears part of a clear design. On the other hand, the very nature of evolution of the Pakistani

state and society – with the rising influence of radical forces and unrelenting grip of the deep state over political power – makes the possibility of peaceful co-existence, or a genuine and sustainable rapprochement with India, improbable in the foreseeable future. What is more worrying is that, besides Chinese support to Pakistan, even major Western powers appear reluctant to antagonise India's western neighbour beyond a certain point, despite a near-global outcry against its collusion, support, patronage and sponsorship of terrorism and organised crime. This has been amply manifest in the fairly soft approach of the APG towards Islamabad's brazen defiance of the FATF guidelines on countering terror finance.

The Pakistani deep state appears to be deriving a form of tacit acknowledgment of its strength and utility, by virtue of its clout with regional and global crime-terror networks. Pakistan's Military-ISI complex demonstrated its utility for the West by facilitating the US-Taliban agreement in Afghanistan and remains a possible conduit for any potential tactical deal between the West and China in future. India has to be alive to the possibility that, in a tighter situation with limited choices, the West may even be content with simply confining Pakistani influence and activities within this region, rather than attempting a complete dismantling of its terrorist and crime infrastructure, the latter task appearing increasingly onerous.

Under these circumstances, India needs to find innovative strategies to address the expanding asymmetry of power vis-à-vis China and quickly build capacities to crush the sustained low-cost covert war from Pakistan that has been haemorrhaging it for decades. The nature of war in Kashmir or the unique dynamics of terrorism and radicalisation has created such levels of complexity that these are unlikely to be addressed through conventional strategies.

India, as a major international power, cannot risk its core national security interests by relying primarily or exclusively on diplomatic support and international goodwill, even though these are critical and must be pursued in all sincerity. Diplomatic support and goodwill do not always translate into tangible and sustainable strength, given the fluid dynamics of global and regional geopolitics. Unconditional military-security support also becomes difficult if other parties do not have an equally abiding stake in issues or if their gains are not commensurate with the risks involved in such support. Hence, a stronger and sustainable national security capacity, involving a proactive strategy to deter hostile intent and actions of actual and potential adversaries, needs to be backed by stronger economic, technological and governance capacities. At one level, India will have to shun its inward-looking approach, to engage, influence and shape issues and events beyond its frontiers, without eroding its military-economic strengths or diplomatic goodwill. On the other, it has to address its internal governance challenges and build suitable defensive and offensive capacities to address its security needs in the evolving situation.

India's defence forces have been exemplary in protecting the legitimate military interests of the country, but its political-bureaucratic and corporate institutions, notwithstanding a few notable exceptions, have struggled to optimise the country's collective potential and strengths and to harness these towards comprehensive national power. This has manifested in avoidable asymmetry of power *vis-à-vis* China. The inability of many governance institutions to perform optimally or respond decisively and swiftly to emergent challenges, has been worrying. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has already tested our institutional capacities to handle an epidemic or natural calamity of a large scale. This only reinforces our

belief in the need for a major transformational restructuring in this direction. This would also be critical for securing, among others, food-water-energy-communication needs of a massively expanding population amidst depleting resources like land and water.

The relatively sluggish pace of economic-technological advancement, in the context of the prevailing security and geopolitical dynamics, could become increasingly serious national security challenges. Similarly, a deficient criminal justice system generates avoidable stress on internal social and political cohesion and compounds sloth and inefficiency in large sections of the bureaucracy. In a competitive world, where trade and technology have emerged as lethal tools of predation, something for which mankind earlier resorted to wars, the country can no longer continue with unsatisfactory state of R&D institutions or larger components of an uncompetitive private sector. Similarly, the exodus of super-skilled human capital or flight of natural resources, the poor state of average health of the population and deficiently skilled work force, negatively impact the ability to sustain a stronger national security cover.

While no country can attain or pursue absolute national security, the vulnerabilities and challenges for India, compared to its institutional capacities, have continued to expand. These appear unlikely to be bridged by any tactical initiatives to improve the professional-technical capacity of existing institutions. One can measure the quality of national security capacity of a state by evaluating the sum total of its institutional capacities to: a) prevent, pre-empt, and deter real and potential threats – external or internal – without eroding its long-term strengths; and b) the ability of these institutions – including their structures and processes as well as larger underlying

values – to optimise the comprehensive national output of its people. On these criteria, the world’s biggest democracy and the oldest civilisation has its task well cut out.

#### **NATURE FOR THE PARADIGM SHIFT**

A higher quality of human resources, in terms of stronger physical-cognitive-technical capacities, as well as larger values such as the integrity of industry and enterprise, have traditionally constituted the base of the pyramid of national security. Instead of sheer numbers, such attributes reflect the real strength of the population. India’s record is quite alarming on these parameters, with relatively low life expectancy, high incidence of malnutrition and morbid diseases, impaired cognitive skills and stunted growth of a large percentage of children, among others, resulting in physically weaker and deficiently skilled work force. With poor access to high quality technical, professional and life skills, the overall productivity of the country’s collective human resources is way below its potential, diluting the advantage if sheer numbers. Such challenges appear unlikely to be resolved by the existing free-flowing, and somewhat chaotic dynamics of markets or the state of existing governance and healthcare institutions.

Simultaneously, disproportionately larger sections of our productive human resource appear to have been sucked into non-productive professions like political activism, cinema, infotainment, marketing, advertising, public relations, domestic chores and even various others pursuits whose real contribution to tangible economic power may be suspect. These could be symptoms of a deeper underlying challenges like extreme inequality, deficient regulation, and structural imbalances of the market economy. It will stretch the genius of even the best among Indian economists to find innovative

solutions, going beyond the prevailing theories and concepts of the market economy, to facilitate optimally productive deployment of this large population.

Simultaneously, the nature of reforms that we need in the regulatory and enabling capacity of the state may not have any ready-made parallels. India needs stronger and sharper capacities to segregate *bona fide* corporate entrepreneurship, to nurture, protect, encourage and support these in a larger quest for the economic and technological empowerment of the country. It will have to adopt more innovative approaches and strategies to build its private sector as a genuine partner in wealth creation, gainful employment of people as well as major driver of technological innovation and excellence. This would be difficult in the absence of larger trust-based social systems that encourage and sustain a wider culture of excellence and integrity-driven leadership. It will test the leadership abilities of all major stakeholders of the country to unleash an agenda for transformation of institutions of state and society for this purpose.

Internal cohesion has always remained the most critical ingredient of national security. This enables states to handle external threats better. Despite sustained assaults on social harmony, and downsides like caste-based divisions, India's cohesive heterogeneity has remained fairly robust and resilient. However, the situation could have been better with a robust and efficient criminal justice systems as well as stronger curbs on abuse of freedom in this direction. India needs to devise innovative and low-cost strategies to curb internal fissures, as these erode the capacity of the state to deal with external subversion and aggression. Despite consistent clandestine efforts of Pakistani deep state-sponsored networks, the overwhelming majority of Indian Muslims have remained

immune to subversive propaganda and derive pride from their Indian identity. However, all identity-driven fissures, including radicalism in the name of Islam, can be addressed only through combined efforts of the criminal justice system and societal initiatives like persuasion, communication and social reform. Subversive radicalism peddled by hostile forces through clandestine global networks needs to be dealt with through exemplary and deterrent coercion. However, political exploitation of identity divides has an equally serious negative impact on internal cohesion. Coercive actions can deter assaults on internal cohesion only if these are channelled through a process of a credible and impartial criminal justice system.

There are large number of studies suggesting that organised subversion – including radicalisation and terrorism – and organised crime thrive and feed on each other. These eventually build a spiral of their own, making it difficult to differentiate normal corruption and sponsored subversion. India has to find a more effective solution to deny space to organised subversive and crime networks which have been flourishing, with the clandestine support of hostile forces. With strong pockets of global influence, these clandestine networks, aided by access to advanced technologies and ability to operate swiftly and flexibly, can wield far more influence than is ordinarily visualised. These can potentially subvert key institutions of state, and interfere with our democratic governance processes and institutions to the detriment of our comprehensive national security. In certain situations, these can virtually paralyse the capacity of key institutions to defend and protect even the legitimate national interests of a democratic country.

The seriousness of the threat of subversion to open and democratic states is manifest in the US allegations of external interference in its electoral process, as well as other institutions.

Sections of the US media have highlighted this issue, along with the malicious abuse of the mechanisms of lobbying, by exploiting the open nature of their society. It is difficult to fathom the entire reality in this context, but the vulnerability of even the most powerful democracy of the world, which boasts of a comprehensive network of efficient and autonomous institutions with access to most sophisticated technologies, is evident.

Given the greater fragility of institutions and intensity of hostility of some of its adversaries, India would be far more vulnerable. Tactical efficiency like improvements in transparency in all financial transactions, including electoral funding, or curbs on bureaucratic corruption or effective deterrents to money laundering, may be necessary but are probably insufficient to address the scale of threat. A comprehensive restructuring of institutions, to infuse a larger culture of efficiency and integrity, howsoever difficult and utopian it may sound, will have to be attempted, given the scale of threats.

### CONCLUSION

India, at this juncture of history, faces a predicament that probably very few major powers or civilisations have faced. Its potentials and opportunities to rise as a major global power are entwined with formidable challenges. There is massive domestic aspiration as well as wider international support for the rise of a democratic and heterogenous India, which can be the biggest antidote to both Islamic radicalism as well as opaque authoritarianism. But there are serious internal and external impediments in this direction. Besides, global cliques and cartels, as well as the rough and tumble of a globalised world, create uncertainties and threats within which large

sections of India's own political, corporate, bureaucratic as well as other elite, may be uncomfortable with the idea of transformational changes. Many of them have thrived and flourished in an ecosystem of fragile institutions and a shift towards competition, transparency and meritocracy may result in loss of privileges and advantages to entrenched sections of the elites.

China's spectacular governance accomplishments have raised serious doubts about the efficacy of the existing democratic governance institutions to transform the plight of people in post-colonial states. This is especially given the relative decline in governance capacities of even the advanced democracies of the West. Chinese scholars often claim that the West was able to establish its comprehensive material, intellectual and technological superiority largely due to the colonial moorings of its early prosperity, which provided the foundation for subsequent innovations, industry and enterprise. China claims to have built its prosperity and technological modernisation through sheer strength of its civilisational values and governance model, which it describes as more meritocratic, encouraging greater industry and enterprise.

India's societal ethos has retained its essentially humanist, plural and transparent nature, despite all pressures and distortions or degenerations, reversed by phases of resurrection. This is what explains the sustenance of democracy in India even under adverse circumstances. Any drift towards authoritarianism is likely to seriously erode its capacity and output as a nation, and hence will be counter-productive for its national security objectives. At this stage, the country has to explore refinements of some of its key institutions, ranging from political parties to civil services, criminal justice system, corporate sector, media, civil society entities, institutions of higher research, health-

care, the elementary education regime, among others, to bolster collective national output. This will be crucial for building and sustaining a stronger national security architecture, capable of pursuing robust and innovative strategies. To improve the quality of output of each of these institutions, as well as their contribution to national power, they need to be equipped with credible norms, values and procedures to promote skill and merit-driven performance as well as a culture of genuine leadership, which can continuously optimise the quality of their output. Political, bureaucratic or even corporate rent, or entitlement driven privileges or hereditary leadership, is a luxury that no dynamic democracy can afford within any of its institutions, including political parties or larger corporate organisations. India will have to spearhead democratic innovations in this direction to protect its core national security interests.

Democracies can potentially create far superior governance institutions than authoritarian states, provided they can marshal their basic principles to build a stronger synergy between individual and institutional excellence, where both drive each other. India has to explore an integrated and yet dynamic framework of high-quality governance and social institutions, where each enjoys autonomy and independence at one level, to optimally grow and evolve, and yet be able to collaborate with the others. This is possible with suitable safeguards as well as larger instruments of functional complementarity and a culture of integrity that enables swift and decisive responses. The challenges towards such a transition would be huge. But it is time to embark on a journey in this direction.







# Social Media in Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution

Akhil Bakshi\*

Social Media is slowly but surely changing the political landscape of the world. An increasingly powerful tool for global communication, it spreads information at lightning speed, uniting people with a common cause. Using platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *YouTube* to organise thousands of like-minded individuals, it has been instrumental in enabling movements – and even revolutions. The success of the Libyan Revolution and Arab Spring of 2011 can partly be attributed to social media providing trustworthy news and countering unreliable state-controlled media by showing visuals of official ruthlessness and public protests to both the national and world audiences.

Applying the methodology of the 2011 revolutions, the youth of Ukraine effectively used social media in 2013 to oust their government and change the course of history of their ancient nation. Their initiative is popularly known as the Euromaidan Revolution. For the enabling role of the social media, it is also referred to as the Facebook Revolution.

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## THE BACKDROP

Political activism at the Maidan Nezalezhnosti<sup>1</sup>, better known as just the Maidan (a Persian word commonly used in West and South Asia to denote an open space), has made and demolished leaders. In 1990, before independence from the USSR, student protests resulted in the resignation of the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, Vitaliy Masol. The Orange Revolution<sup>2</sup> of 2004 saw hundreds of thousands protesting in the square and nearby streets against electoral fraud committed by the Presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovych, a lackey of the Russians. As the country went into elections, Viktor Yushchenko, a politician from the rural northeast and with no ties to the political clans and business mafias of the Russian-dominated eastern Ukraine, was clearly in the lead. Suddenly, he fell violently ill during the campaign

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- 1 Walking out of my hotel in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, I exited onto the Independence Square, Maidan Nezalezhnosti. Dominating the square is a majestic sky-piercing column with a glowing Berehynia, a female spirit in Slavic mythology, perched on the top, stretched away to zenith, too lofty to be admired. Another enchanting sculpture is that of Cossack Mamay, the Ukrainian folk hero, playing the kobza, a Ukrainian lute, his sword, representing people's strength, lying next to him, and his muscular stallion, symbolising freedom and fidelity, standing behind him. In keeping with Cossack Mamay's folklore, Independence Square, or the Maidan, has been the centre of people's struggle for freedom and loyalty to the nation.
  - 2 Ukrainians responded to corruption and electoral fraud in the second round of the 2004 Presidential elections with massive protests. Thousands of hardcore activists occupied the centre of Kyiv, where they set up residence in tents and organised sit-ins, strikes, and various forms of non-violent protest to demand a revote in the run-off between opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko and the ordained successor of outgoing President Kuchma, Viktor Yanukovych. Hundreds of thousands of citizens filled the capital, with the number of demonstrators reaching as many as 1 million on November 27, 2004. As a result of the protests the election results were voided and a re-vote ordered by the Ukraine Supreme Court at the end of December. Yushchenko won 52 per cent of the vote in the new election to become the third president of the Ukraine.

and was taken for treatment to Vienna, where it was diagnosed that he had been poisoned with a dioxin of a strain produced in a handful of countries, including Russia - but not Ukraine. The timely diagnosis saved his life but disfigured his face. Heavily medicated and in excruciating pain, Yushchenko returned to the election campaign, garnering even greater support of the electorate. However, when the official results were announced, Yanukovich had a lead of 2.6 per cent. It was soon discovered that he had rigged the results by tampering with the Election Commission's server. Yushchenko's outraged supporters took over the Maidan, camping in tents for several weeks, enduring the cold and snow – until fresh elections were ordered by the Supreme Court. That election was won sizeably by Yushchenko. Yanukovich, the main target of the Orange Revolution, became, for the second time, the Prime Minister.<sup>3</sup>

Despite a series of controversies in his political career,<sup>4</sup> Yanukovich finally won the Presidential election in 2010 – internationally certified as free and fair – and immediately began to plunder his country. The oligarchs took over, usurping public assets and cornering markets. Parliamentary seats, political offices and directorships in state enterprises were horse-traded; opaque deals were struck and corruption was rampant. The government was robbing the public rather than serving it. Critics were crushed. Courts covered up injustice instead of protecting citizens. Prosecutors perpetrated crimes instead of investigating them. The state had become malicious.

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3 Serhii Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*, Penguin Books, United Kingdom, 2016, pp. 332-334.

4 Yanukovich's private and public life had been full of infamous episodes. In 1967, when he was 17 years old, Viktor Yanukovich had been imprisoned for three years for robbery and assault. He had reached over the wall of a cabin in a public latrine to steal the fur cap of a person squatting on the toilet. Upon his release, he was again jailed for two years on charges of assault. He was also once convicted for rape – for which he didn't do time.

Usurping vast acres of protected forest land in the outskirts of the capital Kyiv, Viktor Yanukovich built himself a chalet surrounded by Roman statues, fake French antiques, fancy light fixtures, chandeliers, a private zoo, an underground shooting range, an 18-hole golf course, tennis courts, bowling alley, a fleet of modern and vintage cars, motorbikes and a luxury boat.<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that the President and his associates embezzled USD 40 billion<sup>6</sup> during his corrupt rule.<sup>7</sup>

Yanukovich paved the road towards a dictatorship from the first days of his Presidency. His approach was: everything needs to be controlled. In 2010, right after his election, Yanukovich saw to it through the Constitutional Court that the form of governance in the country was changed from parliamentary-presidential to presidential. This gave him the power to appoint ministers and to control the army and all law-enforcing departments. In addition, he also controlled the majority in Parliament (which is a separate branch of governance) while exercising control over the deputies of the opposition. Yanukovich also cruelly got rid of his staunch opponents, such as the leader of the opposition, Yulia

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5 Benjamin Preston, “Viktor Yanukovich’s Car Collection Was a Private Automotive History Museum”, *The New York Times*, February 26, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/27/automobiles/viktor-yanukovychs-car-collection-was-a-private-automotive-history-museum.html>.

6 Tanya Kozyreva and Jason Leopold, “Here’s How Ukraine’s Ousted Government Got Away With \$40 Billion”, July 12, 2018, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tanyakozyreva/ukraines-ousted-regime-made-40-billion-disappear-and-no>.

7 There used to be a popular joke in Ukraine: Two destitute vagabonds were collecting empty beer bottles to exchange for money. One of them was wrapping every bottle in old newspaper and rags. When the other asked him why he was doing so, he got the reply – Yanukovich will hear the tinkling of bottles and take the business for himself.

Tymoshenko, who was jailed on what many believe are false charges.<sup>8</sup>

The stage was thus set for a people's revolt against Yanukovych and his government.

In November 2013, defying the will of the people, President Yanukovych refused to sign a political association and a free-trade agreement with the European Union (EU). Ukraine had requested an unreasonable USD 27 billion in loans and aid. The EU offered a paltry 3 per cent of the amount – USD 838 million – and demanded major changes in Ukraine's laws and regulations in return. Russia, keen to retain Ukraine within its ambit, offered USD15 billion, cheap gas – and wanted no changes in law.<sup>9</sup> Yanukovych<sup>10</sup> was obviously inclined to accept Russia's easy money and political protection. But young Ukrainians, keen to shake off the post-Soviet legacy of corruption and human rights violations, wanted to distance themselves from Russia and integrate with western Europe. They wanted a Ukraine that respected democracy, freedom, rule of law, and its citizens, and were infuriated by Yanukovych's decision to dump the EU and align with Russia. Nobody wanted 'Back in the USSR'. Students, particularly, had much to gain from the signing of the deal, known as the European Union Association Agreement. They saw their futures tied with European Union integration and viewed European-style

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8 "Ukraine's 'Revolution of Dignity' for People and Business", *The Wharton School*, University of Pennsylvania, January 31, 2014, <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/ukraines-revolution-dignity-people-business/>.

9 Jamila Trindle, "The Loan That Launched A Crisis", *Foreign Policy*, February 21, 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/21/the-loan-that-launched-a-crisis/>.

10 He is the son of a Russian mother and Polish-Belarusian father, former governor of the ethnically Russian Donetsk region.

political reform as a way to combat the corruption that plagued Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

Ukraine ranked 144 out of 177 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Index in 2013, tying with Nigeria, Iran and the Central African Republic. And according to a Gallup poll, 21 per cent of Ukrainians wanted to leave the country to improve their standard of living that year.<sup>12</sup>

Several surveys of the protest participants conducted in early December 2013 and again at the end of January 2014 suggested that the two driving factors of the protests were anger at President Viktor Yanukovich as well as a desire for Ukraine to enter the EU. Notably, the most unifying factor seemed to be opposition to Yanukovich's efforts to crack down on protesters.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the student protest quickly evolved into a mass nationwide movement against the government. In a way, the rapid and dramatic expansion of the civil resistance was due to the enormously critical attitude of the people towards the policies that were being implemented by those in power, as well as the authoritarian misuse of power.<sup>14</sup>

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11 "Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution", *The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies*, February, 2018, [https://jsis.washington.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Ukraine\\_Euromaidan\\_CCP\\_ii.pdf](https://jsis.washington.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Ukraine_Euromaidan_CCP_ii.pdf).

12 "Understanding the Outrage in Ukraine", *The Wharton School*, University of Pennsylvania, December 9, 2013, <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/understanding-outrage-ukraine/>.

13 Keith Darden and Lucan Way, "Who are the protesters in Ukraine?", *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/02/12/who-are-the-protesters-in-ukraine/>.

14 Yuriy Shveda and Joung Ho Park, "Ukraine's revolution of dignity: The dynamics of Euromaidan", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Volume 7, Issue 1, 2016, p. 85.

**PEOPLE MOBILISE – PEACEFULLY**

On the morning of November 21, 2013, at 09:02 hours, after it became known that President Yanukovych had refused to sign the agreement with the European Union, Mustafa Nayem, a popular Ukrainian journalist, posted on *Facebook*:

Okay, let's be serious. Is there anyone who is ready to go to the Maidan today until midnight? 'Likes' do not count – only comments under this post with the words 'I am ready'. As soon as there are more than a thousand, we will organise. We will meet at 22:30 at the Independence Monument. Dress warmly, bring umbrellas, tea, coffee, a good mood and friends. Reposts of every kind are welcome.

This post had a much larger impact on subsequent political developments than others that preceded it. Frustrated with Yanukovych's rule, a few thousand congregated at the Monument. And then the numbers began to swell, to become the largest protest gathering since Ukraine's independence.<sup>15</sup>

This people's movement, a leaderless and nameless revolution of historic scale for the fight for citizens' rights and freedom, conducted mostly through social media, lasted three freezing winter months, and brought the government to its knees. The bulk of the protesters were Ukrainian speakers from Western Ukraine and members of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the largest Eastern Catholic Church in the world. Solidarity with the protesters was expressed by the Crimean Tatar population of Crimea and almost all other major religious denominations, except for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The protests by businesspersons upset over

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15 Megan MacDuffee Metzger and Joshua A. Tucker, "Social Media and EuroMaidan: A Review Essay", *Slavic Review*, Volume 76, Number 1, 2017, p. 169.

the tax policy (the so-called Tax Maidan), students against the policy in education, and demonstrations against the arbitrary Police actions in Vradiyivka (arrests and detentions), were just the tip of the nationwide civil resistance.<sup>16</sup>

The Euromaidan Revolution demonstrated the power of social media in organising political activism and mass mobilisation. Activists named the movement “Euromaidan” to express their desire to identify Ukrainian society with Europe.<sup>17</sup> The messages posted by the protest participants and witnesses reflected their emotions, intentions, hopes, joys and pains. Some of the posts, extensively photographed by me from the displays at the exhibition on the ‘Facebook Revolution’<sup>18</sup> that

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16 Yuriy Shveda and Joung Ho Park, 2016, op. cit.

17 “Ukraine’s Euromaidan Revolution”, 2018, op. cit.

18 Zoryan Shkiryak was the first to comment on Mustafa Nayem’s post: *“The idea is appropriate and timely, it is supported. We need to roll out. Let’s try. Let’s jump.”*

At 2113 hours, Yuriy White commented: *“And you know... in my opinion this is a second chance. If we now intercept, this will be for many years. This is also a fundamental loss of free thinking. Now if you grab the gills (I don’t know how it’s done), the head will not be able to ask for ‘brotherly help’ to quiet the ‘lost nation’. In six months – it is very likely to see the riot police (OMON) from Russian city of Riazan on the streets of Kyiv and Dnipro. I treat Russians well – but their policies – no. And I do not want their national-fascist policy to become a part of my country. And now you understand how to ‘raze’ without blood and violence.”*

Vasiliy Kucherenko at 2117 hours: *“Come on, friends!!!!!! I will ask around Sumy for what to bring. If we succeed – wait for I will soon be in Kiev.”*

Oles Romanyuk at 2119 hours: *“On the Maidan there are webcams that live stream on the Internet everything that is happening. I discovered that, today at 18:00, for some unknown reason, there was no signal, no webcams were working. I have somehow to establish a broadcast through a laptop and give the address of a webcam here.”*

Yevhen Brahinets at 2141 hours: *“Instead of political flags I propose carrying only the flags of the European Union and Ukraine. To make it*

was being held at the Maidan, find mention in the narrative that follows.

Even before the designated time of 22:30 hours, people poured in streams into the square. Kyivians steadily changed their *Facebook* status to “I’m going to Maidan’ or reported their arrival at the venue. For the next nine days 50,000 to 200,000 protestors showed up at the Maidan, walking elbow to elbow. Throughout the night the Maidan was packed with protestors. Volunteers distributed hot tea and sandwiches. Popular musicians set up stages to entertain the crowds. Taxi drivers offered free rides to those joining the protest. There was no turmoil. Everything went on harmoniously, as if conducted by some invisible leader.

### STATE REACTS – VIOLENTLY

Amidst the ongoing protests, Yanukovych officially walked away from the agreement with the EU, which he was expected to sign at a summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, on November 28, 2013, and accepted the multibillion dollar “bailout” package from Russia, further infuriating the protestors. With growing support for the movement and no end to the agitation in sight, the government decided to act. In the wee hours of November 30, the brutish Berkut, a special Police unit, attacked and dispersed the protestors using tear gas and stun grenades. Fleeing activists were chased, and those who fell were kicked and pummelled with batons.<sup>19</sup>

At 0412 hours on November 30, Inna Nerodyk@nerodyk posted on Facebook: “*Friends say they wept*

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*clear to Europe that we ourselves make the decisions in our country and who we should join, and not this muzzle. Who is ready to print them?”*

19 “A New revolution on Maidan Square”, *The Economist*, December 7, 2013, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2013/12/07/a-new-revolution-on-maidan-square>.

*when they saw protestors surrounded and being beaten, when unconscious girls were being dragged across the asphalt by their legs by Berkut #euromaidan.”*

Twenty-two minutes later she followed up with another post: *“People at #euromaidan are being removed quickly. At exactly 4:00 a.m. the Berkut started clearing out the territory. People were unable to resist, they were sleeping, or simply sitting.”*

TarasMalyi@TssMals posted at 0457 hours: *“#Euromaidan #Kyiv has been cleared. Call your friends as we are searching for ours. There is information that not only were people beaten brutally, but there were also shots fired in the air.”*

At 0501 hours Darya Lameshko@Lemesh posted: *“the Maidan is empty, the police has cordoned it off. Official version: people were trying to steal a Christmas tree. #euromaidan”*

The Berkut also raided St. Michael’s Golden-domed Monastery where 50 activists, many of them injured, had sought sanctuary. Refusing to be intimidated, the activists held a spontaneous meeting at St. Michael Square. By 1600 hours, 5,000 people had gathered at the square that resounded with shrill cries of ‘Revolution!’ and ‘Won’t forgive!’ By nightfall, their numbers swelled to 10,000 – with another 10,000 on their way from Lyiv to join the agitation in Kyiv. A government decree banned all protests. To defy the ban, the activists planned a protest march from St. Michael’s Square to the Maidan the next day, December 1.

Gathered at St. Michael’s Square, the activists began a movement that brought together half a million citizens back to Independence Square. The same day, a group of activists occupied the Kyiv City State Administration Office, and

skirmishes took place on Bankova Street in central Kyiv.<sup>20</sup> While opposition<sup>21</sup> leaders called for a nationwide strike and prolonged peaceful street protests to demand that the government resign, several thousand people broke away and marched to Yanukovich's nearby office. A few hundred of them, wearing masks, threw rocks and other objects at Police and tried to break through the Police lines with a front loader. After several hours of clashes, riot Police used force to push them back. Dozens of people with what seemed to be head injuries were taken away by ambulance. Quite a few journalists, including some beaten by the Police, were injured in the clashes.<sup>22</sup>

The second stage of the protests saw changes not only in the nature of Euromaidan but also its demands. If the main slogans of the first phase were fixated on signing of the Association Agreement with the EU and returning to the European integration course; the second stage was to demand the resignation of Yanukovich and his cabinet.<sup>23</sup>

## MASS PROTESTS

Throngs of 100,000, some say 350,000, chanting 'Kyiv is Ours!', 'Out with the thugs!' and singing the national anthem,

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20 Yuriy Shveda and Joung Ho Park, 2016, op. cit.

21 The opposition was represented by three parties: Batkivshchyna, a party headed by the imprisoned Yulia Tymoshenko; UDAR, headed by Vitaliy Klychko, and Svoboda, headed by Oleh Tiahnybok. In December 2013, these party heads became the formal leaders of the Maidan, the movement named after Kyiv's central square, which has become the focal point for the protests.

22 Maria Danilova and Yuras Karmanau, "Massive anti-government rally in Ukraine turns violent", *CNBC*, December 1, 2013, <https://www.cnbc.com/2013/12/01/massive-anti-government-rally-in-ukraine-turns-violent.html>.

23 Yuriy Shveda and Joung Ho Park, 2016, op. cit.

took to the streets leading to the Maidan. For kilometres there were rivers of people. It was a moving spectacle. They came prepared with ski and motorcycle helmets. Some had stocked jerrycans of petrol, firecrackers and crowbars for scooping cobblestones in the boots of their cars. Thick rows of Policemen, in riot gear and gas masks, stood helplessly as the crowds either rebuked them or reminded them of their oath to serve the people. Venting their frustrations, the mobs turned riotous. They broke into and occupied the City Hall and the Trade Unions' Building. An attempt was made to storm the President's office with a bulldozer. Grossly outnumbered, the Police were on the run. Maidan was retaken. Overnight, a tent city was established in the historic square. At night, the Maidan became a quivering lake of flickering bonfires. Tapping into the public anger, the shrivelled opposition leaders came out of their shells to join the protest.

The protests continued through all of December and January, 2014. The Maidan remained occupied and government buildings were blockaded. Hordes of people had left their homes to camp in the biting cold. By mid-December, there was no space left to pitch another tent. Barricades were placed along the perimeter of the square to keep the Police away. Cameras provided live streaming of the agitation. Meanwhile, negotiations continued between the government, opposition leaders, representatives of the civil society and the European Union. Soldiers bustled about, guns in hand, finger on the trigger, ceaselessly trying to dislodge the protest camps. The agitators, with veterans from the Afghan War joining their ranks, countered with vigour and energy and held their ground. With social media becoming instrumental in organisation of the protests, the Berkut raided offices of opposition parties, ransacking and confiscating their computers, cameras and servers.

## Social Media and Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution

In the early hours of December 11, with the temperature at  $-13^{\circ}\text{C}$ , the Government sent in riot Police and bulldozers to clear the Maidan of the 5,000 or so protestors who were camping there. As the word of Police action spread through *Facebook* and *Twitter*, another 25,000 activists, undaunted by the weather, descended on the Maidan with chattering teeth, forcing the Police to withdraw. Later that morning, after cutting off the power supply, the Police made an unsuccessful attempt to recapture the Kyiv Town Hall. The activists, having made the steps of the building slippery with ice and cooking oil, beat them back with fire hoses, smoke bombs and firecrackers.

The internal security forces and Berkut made one more attempt to clear the Maidan forcibly, pressing and beating protesters – most of whom did not even resist – with batons. Law enforcement officers pulled out people from the crowd and escorted them behind the line of attack, where they were arbitrarily beaten by the Berkut. Dispersing the crowd was tough because of the 50,000 people who poured into the square at night using all possible means of transport. According to official data, at least 49 people, including 11 law enforcement officers, were injured as a result of the special Police force attack.

After the effort to disperse Euromaidan failed, the Government initiated negotiations with the oppositional leaders, wrongly assuming that they were the ones coordinating the protest. Those negotiations resulted in passing the so-called amnesty law on December 19, 2013.<sup>24</sup>

Fedor Sivtsov posted on *Facebook*:

*Today, three things happened to me. 1. I believed in God. When the Berkut broke through behind the*

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24 Human Rights in Ukraine, “Euromaidan Events and Human Rights”, 2014, <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1432629035>.

*barricades and began to press the people, when women and children were gathered on stage, and those who could not fit there – were around the stage. And people prayed and held onto every ounce of strength – so they would not cry out from either weakness or fear. Then suddenly in the night there was a bell ringing. And that ringing meant hope. At that moment I believed in God. 2. I became a nationalist. When I saw these soldiers – my compatriots, those who should personify the law, those who should protect the law in my country. Fulfilling a stupid monstrous order that defends the interest of only one person – the president of a neighbouring country (president of this country is not recognised by anyone) they went after peaceful demonstrators – children, women, old people, and they did not care. Then a shout came from the stage – ‘They heard us! People from all over Kyiv are coming!’ When I looked back into the wasteland, I saw an endless stream of people – Ukrainians, not indifferent to the fate of their fellow citizens. Simple compatriots who came to the defence of civilians. At that moment, I became a nationalist. 3. I was free from fear. When they surrounded the square from all sides and pressed us. When their strength gave out, we joined crowd and were able to rebuff them, and if not oust them, then at least stem the flow of these animals. At that moment, I was free from fear. Believe me, I am far from being the most courageous or reckless man in this country. But today I will go out again to the Maidan. For this night, for these people, for the pride of being one unified nation – for the pride we defended tonight. And I encourage you to get rid of your doubts and fears and come out with me. God is with us, honour and strength are with us, PEOPLE are*

*with us! With us – with Ukraine. Together – to victory!  
And once again – Glory to Ukraine!”*

### SAINT AND SINNERS

Three days later, on December 14, Okean Elzy, a popular Ukrainian rock band, gave a concert at the Maidan to an audience of 100,000, dedicating the event to the injured activists. The performance became a strong emotional charge for all the protesters and the largest and most remarkable live music performance in the history of Ukraine. There was a mass celebration of Christmas and New Year at the Maidan. On New Year's Eve, a massive number of people gathered to show their solidarity with the core group of activists. Unable to confront the crowds, the Police began picking on individual leaders and activists who, brutally beaten, went around with broken jaws and noses, and fractured hands and legs. Despite the state's ruthlessness, the protests were getting more entrenched, the mood more defiant.

Young and old contributed to the Euromaidan Revolution. Elina Slobodyanyuk wrote on Facebook:

One grandmother jostles about an electric train for three hours to bring goods to the Maidan: everything that can be collected from her neighbours/friends of her sleepy town... Long ago, she brought her meagre pension to the Maidan. She brings heavy bags several times a week. She shakes her provincial dreamy kingdom and explains the importance of the Maidan to her fellow countrymen, better than any politicians do. She involves people in helping. But for her, this is not enough. On her last visit, she rushed to wash the toilets of the Ukrainian House. Her name is Mariya. In my opinion, she is a saint...”

The Maidan movement thus became an archetype of a state, incorporating those values which all Ukrainians and the successors of the post-communist system dreamt of. It was a self-organised structure, where everyone, from an artist to a plain villager did that which most suited his or her knowledge, capability and vocation. And whenever there was danger or the threat of an attack, the Maidan mobilised itself and protected the demonstrators. It acted as one organism. Good managers organised work; cooks fed the people; doctors provided medical care; the stout and brave assured order; and the imaginative and inventive forged new initiatives.<sup>25</sup>

### SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVES

While of course no one can claim that Nayem's original *Facebook* post was the sole cause of all that followed for Ukraine, the Euromaidan protests may be the first where we can point directly and unambiguously to social media as a pivotal moment of organisation.<sup>26</sup> The protests, especially those in November 2013, had two different ways of using social networks. The rally on November 24 was organised using already established party institutions; it was coordinated from "above" by several opposition leaders; furthermore, the rally was planned ahead and had a long-term strategy. In other words, it was an example of classic "collective action." On the other hand, November 21, was marked by a considerable spike of online activity prior to the protests, signifying that social networks had anticipated the events and were being used as a tool of mass mobilisation. The civil unrest was sparked by a *Facebook* post that did not feature any political demands or slogans and did not provide any long-term strategy. People organised themselves on a horizontal, voluntary basis, with

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25 "Ukraine's 'Revolution of Dignity' for People and Business", 2014, op. cit.

26 Megan MacDuffee Metzger and Joshua A. Tucker, 2017, op. cit.

no leaders involved. The whole process of organisation was from the grass-roots, with no participation of established institutions. And it was spontaneous, as nobody knew about it until a couple of hours before the event.<sup>27</sup>

During the ensuing protests and demonstrations, a *Facebook* page, 'Euromaidan SOS', was launched for locating casualties, listing names of the wounded, missing or detained by the Police. It soon evolved into an information service: reporting movement of the Berkut; sharing images of Police violence, wounded protestors, volunteer medics assisting the injured; news updates; maps showing locations of free tea and sandwich stalls and warm areas where firewood burned in oil barrels; narrating individual accounts and experiences; and providing links to live streams of the protests. At least 250 volunteers, worked around the clock on the page, searching for the missing and keeping a direct telephone line open to the protest organisers. The use of social media, primarily *Facebook* and *Twitter*, and other communication tools for crowdsourcing were critical for sustaining Euromaidan over a long period. Activists used crowd mapping technology to envisage Euromaidan needs and connect those willing to fill them with protesters on the ground. Euromaidan SOS had more than 76,000 followers in just 8 days, and over 200,000 within the first 10 weeks of the protests. People interacted with this information and within the first two weeks, 2,000 updates posted on the page garnered almost 50,000 comments and over a million likes; and their content had been shared over 230,000 times.<sup>28</sup>

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27 A.M. Zaezjev, "Understanding Political Mobilization Through Social Media Content Analysis: Facebook and Vkontakte in the First Days of Euromaidan Revolution", *Dialogue*, 2018, p. 10, <http://www.dialog-21.ru/media/4558/zaezjevam.pdf>.

28 Tetyana Bohdanova, "Unexpected Revolution: The Role of Social Media in Ukraine's Euromaidan Uprising", Volume 13, Number 1, June 2014, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1007/s12290-014-0296-4>.

By posting in English, the ‘EuroMaidanPR’ *Facebook* page turned an ostensibly regional issue into an international one. Another *Facebook* page provided legal assistance to protestors. One Kyiv-based NGO collected donations through the Internet to help keep protestors warm and fed. Websites like ‘Don’t Ditch Maidan’ kept protestors keyed up, ‘Euromaidan Civic Sector’ promoted the Gandhian ideal of non-violent civil resistance; ‘Strike Placard’, run by a group of designers, created and circulated free Euromaidan posters; and ‘I’m A Drop in the Ocean’ designed posters and videos about Euromaidan.

Musicians kept the protestors entertained, while an initiative called ‘Open University of Maidan’ had university professors and academicians giving lectures three to five times a day in the open air or in the underground passages of the Maidan. A total of 295 lectures were held during the three-month period. Other civic initiatives included: Maidan Self-defence, a group for maintaining order within the tent camps and protecting areas controlled by the tenacious protestors from the persecuting authorities; ‘Automaidan’, which had motorists creating constant noise and nuisance outside the homes of the President and his ministers, maddening them with blasts of their horns and the roar and thunder of their engines, magnifying their misery by not letting them sleep at night, and the ‘Maidan Museum/Museum of Freedom’, which collected artefacts, documents, photographs and oral stories that later formed the basis for the National Memorial to the Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred and Revolution of Dignity<sup>29</sup> Museum.

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29 With good reason, the Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine has been named the “Revolution of Dignity”. Standing right next to simple workers are wealthy individuals, and the middle class stands shoulder to shoulder with students and workers, protecting the right for the very survival of their nation.

## Social Media and Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution

The Maidan Field Post, a postal service complete with its own stamps, enabled those living in the Maidan's tent city to communicate with each other through letters, while 'Civic Sector of Maidan' provided information and logistical support to the activists. The 'Artistic Hundred' comprised protestors who documented the historic movement through installations, art and photographs.

We may not yet comprehend the full impact of social media or the exact mechanisms through which it was impactful, but it is clear that social media was a vital tool used for organising and sustaining the protests, and that at least some of the efforts organised online would have been incredibly difficult using traditional means. The ability to accept donations online, to organise carpools across long distances, and to receive widespread shows of support from around the world are all hallmarks of the digital nature of this movement. The Euromaidan was largely leaderless, but not disorganised, ideologically varied but not uncooperative.<sup>30</sup>

### THE TIDE TURNS

On January 19, 2014, Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) surreptitiously passed sweeping anti-protest or "dictatorship laws", criminalising all the methods employed by the activists at the Maidan. This provoked a further surge in protests, even as riot Police began to violently crack down on demonstrations. Protestors responded by throwing bricks and Molotov cocktails, leading to days of violent clashes and the death of three protestors.<sup>31</sup> Some 200,000 people, concealing their faces with masks and hard hats, gathered at the Maidan to demonstrate against the draconian laws. Noticing the winds

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30 Megan MacDuffee Metzger and Joshua A. Tucker, 2017, *op. cit.*

31 "Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution", 2018, *op. cit.*

of change, senior government and defence officials began resigning from their posts. A former naval chief appealed to defence personnel not to follow orders of the criminal regime, and promised that those who were dismissed for insubordination would be reinstated once the new government took over. Riots erupted as crowds descended upon Parliament. By now, many activists had added Molotov cocktails to their arsenal. In the bitter cold, the Police repelled them with powerful jets of cold water.

The first death occurred on January 21, the 61<sup>st</sup> day of the protests, when a man fell from a 13-metre-high colonnade<sup>32</sup> either fleeing the Police or pushed by them. Bloody clashes occurred on January 22, at Hrushevskogo Street near the Presidential Administrative Building. Two more activists were killed in Police firing, further infuriating protesters. Some of the injured protestors admitted for treatment in hospitals started disappearing. The government made counter-allegations, accusing protestors of kidnapping, torturing and killing servicemen. Clashes continued for several weeks amidst international efforts to restore calm. But if the authorities were hoping to intimidate the protestors, they failed.<sup>33</sup>

On February 18, a day after Russia announced that it would be releasing the next tranche of USD 2 billion of the USD 15 billion loan offered to Ukraine, 20,000 protestors stormed Parliament. Security forces and the protestors engaged in violent skirmishes. In an ugly confrontation, Police and protestors fired at each other and the fighting continued all night. Stun grenades and pump-action shotguns were used by the Police. The protestors responded with Molotov cocktails.

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32 “History of the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine”, *112.International*, November 21, 2016, <https://112.international/ukraine-top-news/history-of-the-revolution-of-dignity-in-ukraine-11253.html>.

33 Yuriy Shveda and Joung Ho Park, 2016, op. cit.

By morning, 26 people, including 10 Policemen, were dead and over 1,100 injured. Earlier, around midnight, several protestors were killed when the House of Trade Unions, which served as a revolutionary news centre and hospital, was torched by security forces. The Berkut, assisted by provocateurs deployed by the government, also made an unsuccessful attempt to storm the Maidan encampment. Though many tents were set on fire<sup>34</sup>, the protestors still controlled the square.<sup>35</sup>

On February 20 someone – no one still knows who – ordered snipers positioned on the roofs around the Maidan to open fire into the crowd. The massacre was filmed by professional and amateur journalists and widely disseminated on the Internet. More than 100 protestors died, and thousands were injured in the gunfire and ensuing melee. President Poroshenko later claimed there was evidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin's aide, Vladislav Surkov had organised and directed a team of foreign snipers that shot at the protestors on the Maidan.<sup>36</sup>

On February 21, the Euromaidan participants rejected an agreement between the opposition politicians and the President

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34 Ivana Kobernik posted that night on Facebook: *"Night. Frost. Hrushevskiyi Street. Frontline. Shouting. The sound grenades thunder, and further away, Molotov cocktails burn. In the corner sits a completely charred dude in camouflage, a bat on his knees, a mask on his face, a helmet on his head, mittens on his hands. He covers his ears with his hands and screams into his phone: 'Transfer the meeting from ten to twelve – move it to one. And call (some surname) and say that the signing of the contract is postponed until Wednesday... in the evening, no... in the evenings I am busy.' He looks around and sighs 'I do not know. I will do it when I am free.'"*

35 Wikipedia, 2014 Ukrainian Revolution,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014\\_Ukrainian\\_revolution#18\\_February](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Ukrainian_revolution#18_February).

36 Borislav Bilash II, "Euromaidan Protests – The Revolution of Dignity", *Euromaidan Press*, February 20, 2016, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/02/20/the-story-of-ukraine-starting-from-euromaidan/2/>.

and stormed the Presidential Palace again, demanding the ouster of Yanukovush, who fled the capital, realising the dire situation. On February 22, the Verkhovna Rada, or Parliament, accepting the demand of the citizens, removed him from the position of President of Ukraine, and elected an acting Prime Minister and acting President who promptly declared they would sign the association agreement with the European Union.<sup>37</sup> This date is important, as it marked the logical end of the ‘Revolution of Dignity’.<sup>38</sup>

Having achieved their aim, the protestors withdrew from the Maidan, leaving behind scorched buildings, smouldering fires, streets covered with grime, shattered barricades, the lingering pungent smell of burnt rubber and more than a 100 dead. There was no sense of triumph amidst the quiet tears.

The Euromaidan Revolution, an uprising for dignity, was over.

## AFTERMATH

Days later, from my perch in an Italian café, I looked down at the flowers and wreaths, some fresh, some dried, placed in front of the long row of photographs of the Heavenly Hundred who died during the struggle, and a granite memorial and individual plaques inscribed with the names of the martyrs. Despite the Maidan being full of people lazing, loafing, chatting and enjoying the spring sun and warmth, a heavy atmosphere of disquiet and gloom prevailed.

In late January 2014, the Ukrainian Government stepped down and by the end of February, Yanukovych fled to Russia.

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37 Steven Pifer, “Ukraine: Looking forward, five years after the Maidan Revolution”, *Brookings*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/02/22/ukraine-looking-forward-five-years-after-the-maidan-revolution/>.

38 Yuriy Shveda and Joung Ho Park, 2016, op. cit.

## Social Media and Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution

Following elections in May, Petro Poroshenko became President, presiding over a coalition of democratic and Ukrainian nationalist parties promoting greater independence from Russia and a pro-European, reform agenda.

Pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine and Crimea opposed these developments, and in March 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, while armed conflict erupted in two eastern Ukrainian provinces between Russia-backed and government forces.

This had four major consequences. First, the successful revolution and subsequent Russian aggression fostered a wave of patriotism and Ukrainian identity, and raised hopes that reforms could stem emigration and the related loss of manpower, skills, and brains.<sup>39</sup>

Second, western nations slapped sanctions on Russia – their relations hitting a post-Cold War nadir.

Third, Ukraine became an EU associate member, its citizens given visa-free entry into the EU countries, and the EU-Ukraine Trade Agreement substantially increased commerce between the two regions.

And finally, a flourishing civil society saw 50 Maidan protestors become members of the 450-seat Ukrainian Parliament.

Poroshenko won by a wide margin in the elections that followed in October 2014, and spearheaded some impressive reforms over the next two years. These included reviewing and revamping government finances, pension reforms, an

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39 Franck Düvell and Irina Lapshyna, “The Euro Maidan Protests, Corruption, and War in Ukraine: Migration Trends and Ambitions”, *Migration Policy Institute*, July 15, 2015, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/euromaidan-protests-corruption-and-war-ukraine-migration-trends-and-ambitions>.

e-declaration system requiring that officials declare their wealth, an e-procurement system for government purchases, energy sector and price reform (thereby wiping out a huge subsidy cost for the government), and weaning the country off natural gas from Russia.<sup>40</sup>

Euromaidan had been the longest protest in recent memory, lasting uninterrupted for 92 days. In comparison, the 1989 Velvet Revolution to overthrow the communist regime in Czechoslovakia lasted 42 days; and in Romania, the protest that culminated in the execution of their dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, lasted a mere 11 days.

As this is written, the Hong Kong demonstrations against China's Extradition Law Amendment Bill have overtaken Euromaidan as the longest lasting protests. In Hong Kong, too, the protestors have used social media to mobilise support, organise gatherings and document the movement. The Chinese authorities are not far behind in actively applying this modern tool to influence public opinion – showing that social media is a double-edged sword that can also be used by repressive governments to suppress opposing views.

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40 Steven Pifer, 2019, *op. cit.*

# Intellectuals and the Maoists

Uddipan Mukherjee\*

A revolution, insurgency or for that matter, even a rebellion rests on a pedestal of ideology. The 'ideology' could be a contested one – either from the so-called leftist or the rightist perspective. As ideology is of paramount importance, so are 'intellectuals'.

This paper delves into the concept of 'intellectuals'. Thereafter, the role of the intellectuals in India's Maoist insurgency is brought out. The issue turns out to be extremely topical considering the current discourse of 'urban Naxals/Maoists'. A few questions that need to be addressed in the discourse on who the Maoist intellectuals are:

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Are the intellectuals always anti-state? Can they bring about a revolution or social change? What did Gramsci, Lenin or Mao opine about intellectuals? Is the ongoing Left-wing Extremism *aka* Maoist insurgency in India guided by intellectuals? Do academics, students, writers, journalists, film-makers, actors and poets, within India and without, in any way provide a fillip to the movement? Is there any ecosystem that binds the intellectuals and the insurgents together? Are the counter-insurgent Police well within their mandate to nab ‘intellectuals’ in the urban landscape, allegedly as supporters of the Maoist movement? How is the future trajectory shaping up in this contest between the state, intellectuals and the insurgents?

Perhaps Kyle Burke is spot on in his analysis when he opines that the characteristics of the US Police have taken their contemporary shape as a result of hobnobbing with the US military.<sup>1</sup> The interaction between the Police and the military has made the former learn the nuances of counterinsurgency warfare, which in turn has altered its approach to handling criminals. It is not clear if such a thesis would hold ground for the Indian Police, but it is certainly the case that the latter has showcased significant counterinsurgency musculature in its confrontations with the Left-Wing Extremists [LWE] *aka* Maoists.

In November 2019, Police in India’s southern state of Kerala arrested two activists of the mainstream leftist political party – Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPI-M). They were booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act [UAPA] due to their alleged links with the banned Communist

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1 Kylie Burke, “The Police Know Guerrilla Warfare”, *JACOBIN*, December 12, 2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/12/badges-without-borders-stuart-schrader-policing-counterinsurgency>.

Party of India – Maoist (CPI-Maoist). Incidentally, one of the activists Alan Suhaib, was a law student.<sup>2</sup>

Discussions, both within the CPI-M as well as in the public domain have been intense with some pertinent questions doing the rounds. Does the Kerala wing of the CPI-M harbour or even encourage the ultra-leftist viewpoints within the party? Or was this a failure of the local party leadership to curb the growth of such radical views? Or is it a mere aberration, the adventurism of two young party activists who were still in their formative stages of ‘ideology’?

Notwithstanding the responses to these questions, one aspect is clear as crystal – educated youth can somehow get attracted toward extremist viewpoints.

Why?

Is it romanticism? Is it a youthful predilection? Is it pure ‘josh’?

In November 2019 itself, Police in the Bastar District of Chhattisgarh arrested a Professor of Delhi University and another academic of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, along with a few Maoists, in connection with the murder of a tribal villager in the LWE affected Sukma district of Chhattisgarh. One of the professors was Nandini Sundar, writer on tribal anthropology and the activist who spearheaded the Public Interest Litigation [PIL] in the Supreme Court leading to the quashing of the vigilante movement, *Salwa Judum*.

Interestingly, in the happening month of November 2019, the Pune Police searched the Noida home of an Associate Professor of Delhi University in connection with a 2017 case

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2 P.S.G. Unnithan, “Kerala: 2 CPI(M) activists held for alleged links with Maoists”, *India Today*, November 2, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/kerala-2-cpi-m-activists-held-for-alleged-links-with-maoists-1615152-2019-11-02>.

where ten activists had been imprisoned for more than a year while on trial for alleged Maoist links.<sup>3</sup>

Barely a month before this string of incidents, in October 2019, an Assistant Professor of the Hyderabad-based Osmania University was arrested for suspected links with the banned Maoists.<sup>4</sup> The academician K. Jagan, was also a member of Viplava Rachayitula Sangham, a revolutionary writers' association – and possible front organisation of the Maoists.

Going back in time, in 2017, the Maharashtra Police felt vindicated when the Maoists put up posters in support of the Delhi University Professor G.N. Saibaba, who was arrested and subsequently convicted for alleged links with the communist ultras.<sup>5</sup>

## BEYOND INDIAN BORDERS

*The New York Times* came out with a stunning report in September, 2018<sup>6</sup> that examined the gradual de-radicalisation of Chinese students who were initially immersed in the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party [CCP]. They had read the literature of Marx, Lenin and Mao and had investigated the nature of the campus proletariat. They could

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3 Pheroze L. Vincent, "Six-hour Elgaar case search at DU professor's home", *The Telegraph*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/six-hour-elgaar-case-search-at-du-professors-home/cid/1704012>.

4 "Varsity professor held for alleged links with Maoists", October 10, 2019, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/varsity-professor-held-for-alleged-links-with-maoists-119101001433\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/varsity-professor-held-for-alleged-links-with-maoists-119101001433_1.html).

5 Pavan Dahat, "Maoists have confessed their link to Prof. Saibaba: Anti-Naxal unit", *The Hindu*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/maoists-have-confessed-their-link-to-prof-saibaba-anti-naxal-unit/article17591084.ece>

6 Javier C. Hernandez, "China's Leaders Confront an Unlikely Foe: Ardent Young Communists", *The New York Times*, September 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/28/world/asia/china-maoists-xi-protests.html>.

also recite the slogans of President Xi Jinping. Thereafter, when these radicalised student-activists were converting their theoretical and empirical knowledge into social action, they started demanding greater protection for workers. The CCP then realised that their ideological ‘cyborgs’ were going out of control. Several activists were detained and the authorities dealt with the rational voice of the proletariat and the activists in a ham-handed manner, arresting and detaining the activists.

Popular uprisings are as old as history, writes Gizachew Tiruneh.<sup>7</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas firmly asserts that a revolutionary group is by definition ideological, although not all ideological groups are revolutionary.<sup>8</sup>

Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci asked a germane question:

Are intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group have its own particular specialized category of intellectuals?<sup>9</sup>

He continued to research the question ‘who is an intellectual’ among an array of administrators, scholars, scientists, theorists and philosophers. According to Gramsci, all men are intellectuals, but not all men serve the function of intellectuals in society. Gramsci writes that, although one can speak of intellectuals, yet one cannot speak of non-intellectuals because non-intellectuals do not exist.

Maoist doctrine was endorsed, in varying measure, by a stream of French intellectuals. Richard Wolin observes:

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7 Gizachew Tiruneh, “Social Revolutions: Their Causes, Patterns, and Phases”, *SAGE Open*, Volume 4, Issue 3, 2014.

8 Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Is ISIS a Revolutionary Group and if Yes, What Are the Implications?”, *Perspective on Terrorism*, Volume 9, Number 4, 2015, pp. 42-47.

9 Antonio Gramsci, “Intellectuals and Education”, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, 1971, pp. 3-23.

“Suddenly and unexpectedly, Maoism had acquired immense cachet as political chic. It began attracting prominent intellectuals—Michel Foucault as well as Tel Quel luminaries Philippe Sollers and Julia Kristeva—who perceived in Maoism a creative solution to France’s excruciating political immobilism.”<sup>10</sup>

In *All Said and Done*, Simone de Beauvoir, notes:

“Despite several reservations – especially, my lack of blind faith in Mao’s China – I sympathize with the Maoists. They present themselves as revolutionary socialists.”<sup>11</sup>

Jean-Paul Sartre, popular as a philosopher and writer, was also known as an advocate of social engagement. In this respect, he is renowned as an active supporter of varied causes such as the Algerian, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions. Sartre even wrote the introduction to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he endorsed revolutionary violence as a liberating force in the face of the violence of the ruling regime. Sartre however, avoided any direct commitment to parties that espouse these revolutionary ideas. It is a rather obscure anecdote that Sartre had joined the French Maoist militants in their protest actions, assumed the titular editorship of several of their newspapers, and publicly gave away copies of banned Maoist papers on busy Paris boulevards.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010, p. 4.

11 Ibid, p. 140.

12 Henry Giniger, “Sartre Is Arrested at Last, but Briefly, for Role on a Maoist Weekly”, *The New York Times*, June 27, 1970, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/06/27/archives/sartre-is-arrested-at-last-but-briefly-for-role-on-a-maoist-weekly.html>.

The father of post-modernism, Michel Foucault, joined the prisoner advocacy network GIP or the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons. GIP functioned as a support group for detained Maoists in France. Foucault became deeply involved with Maoists and adopted the Maoist method of social investigation to gather information on French prison conditions. Within Foucault's framework, it is not enough to carry out academic studies and remain confined merely within "textuality". More important is the act of actually immersing oneself among the masses and learning directly from them through 'social practice' (praxis).

Foucault argued that it is clear that we live under a dictatorial class regime, under a class power that imposes itself with violence, even when the instruments of this violence are institutional and constitutional. When the proletariat triumphs, it will also exert a power that is violent, dictatorial, and even bloody, over the class it has supplanted. While agreeing with the fact that the existing court system manifests the interests of the ruling classes, Foucault rather amusingly opposed the creation of people's courts on the basis of proletarian class interests.

Many of the French intellectuals who became infatuated with Maoism in the 1960s would eventually end the dalliance due to several factors. The death of Mao in 1976, the capitalist upsurge in post-Mao China as well as the fall of Soviet Communism, led many 'bourgeois intellectuals' to veer away from the path of revolutionary change. Moreover, Postmodernism became the new craze as many of these very same intellectuals, who were poster boys of Maoism, started sternly criticising the concepts of class analysis, the party, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Marxist theory on the whole.

## WITHIN INDIA

The government of Karnataka had prepared a list of college teachers, newspaper editors and some NGOs purportedly ideologically close to the Naxals [Maoists]. A group of these intellectuals, arrested in 2003,<sup>13</sup> included the likes of actor-director-playwright Girish Karnad, winner of a slew of national awards, including the Padma Bhushan. Karnad had also served as Chairman of the national Sangeet Natak Academy and President of the Karnataka Nataka Academy, both Government backed institutions. Apart from Karnad, the list included Professor Govind Rao, Dr Sridhar and others, who were incarcerated in 2003 when they had participated in a rally in support of the Supreme Court decision with regard to a Sufi shrine.<sup>14</sup>

Binayak Sen is another case in point. He was arrested by the Indian Police for alleged links with the Maoists. At the other end, he was nominated for the Gandhi Peace Award in 2011 by the Gandhi Foundation – an organisation based in London that could safely be construed to be driven by intellectuals. The organisation, with mentors of the stature of Bhiku Parekh and Richard Attenborough, painstakingly scripts a peace award in the name of Mahatma Gandhi each year. The initial wordings of the Award contained a *faux pas*<sup>15</sup>:

“...the Gandhi Peace Award 2011 is being conferred to the tribal people of India, on behalf of whom, Dr

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13 Ambrose Pinto, “Lalgarh: Intellectuals, Maoists and the State”, *Mainstream*, Volume XLVII, Number 30, July 11, 2009, <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article1497.html>.

14 Ibid.

15 Uddipan Mukherjee, “Gandhi Peace Award And Adivasi Consciousness”, *Uday India*, December 24, 2019, <https://udayindia.in/2011/12/24/gandhi-peace-award-and-ativasi-consciousness/>.

Binayak Sen and Mr. Bulu Imam would receive the honour...”

After several tribal groups reacted strongly, the foundation made its first retreat, rewording the award script, with the home page of the organisation’s website reading, “Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award 2011 will be presented to Dr. Binayak Sen and Bulu Imam.”<sup>16</sup> Conspicuously, the phrase ‘tribal people of India’ was missing.

Interestingly, most Indians know Dr. Sen through the media, and their opinion about him, his family and other activists spread around the Maoist heartland, was shaped by news articles, both in the national as well as in international circuits. At the time of the Gandhi Peace Award, Dr. Sen was yet to be totally absolved of the charges of sedition. An award for him in the international arena at that juncture could have created a mess for the Indian judiciary. Sen, however, voluntarily relinquished the award.

The award for Dr. Sen was surely a decision taken by a coterie of sociologists, anthropologists and activists. It did not reflect the ‘will’ of the autochthonous *Adivasis*, and the conferment of the award did not elevate Dr. Sen to the position of a ‘messiah’ of the *Adivasis*. Yet, such a move by the Gandhi Foundation surely elevated the ‘intellectual’ Sen to a pedestal of infallibility even while he was facing serious criminal charges. That, in turn, may have encouraged other ‘intellectuals’ to collude with the Maoists, as a pathway to attain cult status as ‘celebrity (read seditious) rebels’ against the state.

Film-maker Aparna Sen, dramatist Shaonli Mitra, poet Joy Goswami and others were arrested by the Police while entering Lalgarh, the epicentre of the 2009 crisis in West Bengal. Police

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16 Ibid.

reports submitted to the government suggested that some of the Maoists had accompanied the intellectuals during their Lalgarh trip. When the intellectuals were questioned about this nexus, they expressed total ignorance.<sup>17</sup>

On the global platform, the phenomenal French Revolution did not occur in an intellectual vacuum. Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu and Rosseau drove the intellectual revolution, years before the actual physical revolution took place. Rousseau's concepts of 'sovereignty' and 'general will' played a substantial role in radicalising the movement. That was the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In the present era, there is a group of intellectuals who have received prominence through the media, a motley group of professionals: litterateurs, actors, singers, players, painters, sculptors, *et.al.*, who have successfully tamed the supply-demand curve in their respective domains. Barring a handful, most do not qualify to be termed 'intellectuals.' To render opinion is one thing, but to claim scholastic aptitude of the genre of Voltaire or Rousseau is completely different.

The submission of the doyen of subaltern historiography Ranajit Guha, is startling. In an interview, Guha emphatically says<sup>18</sup>:

“Later, I became something of a Naxal intellectual. I still consider myself to have been inspired by Charu Mazumdar's ideas which, I think, contain a lot of validity. But Charu Mazumdar and his followers were weak in organizational capability, which resulted in the

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17 Saugata Roy, “Intellectuals pay price for championing Naxal cause”, *TNN*, June 25, 2009, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Intellectuals-pay-price-for-championing-Naxal-cause/articleshow/4699277.cms>.

18 “In Search of Transcendence: An Interview with Ranajit Guha”, February 2, 2010, [https://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/history/download/ranajit\\_guha\\_interview\\_2.2.11.pdf](https://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/history/download/ranajit_guha_interview_2.2.11.pdf).

movement being crushed. I have elsewhere condemned the role of some intellectuals in Indira Gandhi's period who supported her moves to crush the revolt..."

Guha points toward various kinds of intellectuals; one set of intellectuals who 'oppose' the state (to which Guha belongs in this case) and another set which aligns with the state in order to obliterate the former – in a war of ideology, ego and power.

Genuine intellectuals however, ought to remain neutral and posit an analytical perspective in a dispassionate manner. Moreover, an intellectual cannot be despised simply because her/his viewpoint is congruous with that of the ruling dispensation. It has however become quite a fashion for a bulk of the intellectuals in today's India to criticise government policies and programmes. In a sense, criticising the government seems to be a criterion for being qualified to be an intellectual. India today needs, what Gramsci termed as "organic intellectuals" — committed to the cause of the people.

Talking of Naxalism/Maoism, Mao Tse-tung, who had attacked intellectuals on a massive scale in his Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s, had called for recruiting large numbers of intellectuals during the course of the revolution. He wrote:

In the long and ruthless war of national liberation, in the great struggle to build a new China, the [CCP] must be good at winning intellectuals, for only in this way will it be able to organize great strength for the War of Resistance, organize the millions of peasants, develop the revolutionary cultural movement and expand the revolutionary united front. Without the participation of the intellectuals, victory in the revolution is impossible.<sup>19</sup>

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19 Mao Tse-tung, "RECRUIT LARGE NUMBERS OF INTELLECTUALS", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, December 1, 1939, [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_22.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_22.htm).

Such a posture by Mao can best be described as opportunistic.

Earlier, in 1917, Lenin and Trotsky were guilty of the worst type of political adventurism; opines Ian Thatcher,<sup>20</sup> arguing that, in the name of the proletariat, Lenin and Trotsky had established a dictatorship of socialist intellectuals. They hoodwinked an ignorant lot of people, by alluring them with the carrot of a golden future. Interestingly, Lenin was a strong votary of a vanguard proletariat party in which intellectuals were supposed to take a back seat; though Lenin himself could best be described as an intellectual.

#### **THE GENESIS: INDIA'S NAXALITES AKA MAOISTS**

It all began in March 1967 with a young share-cropper, Bigul Kisan, in the Naxalbari area of the northern part of West Bengal, attacked by armed goons of the local *jotedar* when he had gone to till the land, in possession of a judicial order empowering him to do so. Oppression however was thwarted by arms; autocracy of the landlord-bourgeoisie nexus was bludgeoned by a unified band of tribal-peasants, invigorated by the fiery speeches of the ideologue of class-annihilation – Charu Mazumdar.

Since then, the movement has seen several ups and downs, bitter internecine showdowns, severe state repressions as well as splits, mergers and a mega-merger in 2004. But, the central theme of the Naxalites [derived from 'Naxalbari'] has remained almost the same. They have viewed independent India as a multi-national country and supported the right of nationalities to self-determination, including secession.

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20 Thatcher, Ian D., "Lenin, Trotsky and the Role of the Socialist Intellectual in Politics", in David Bates (ed.), *Marxism, Intellectuals and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2007, pp. 43-67.

Moreover, they have clearly stated that the ruling bourgeoisie is comprador, Indian independence was fake, and that India has a semi-colonial and semi-feudal status. Thus, in order to establish a people's government in India, Mao Zedong's guerilla warfare tactics have to be employed and a protracted armed agrarian revolution is the only feasible solution in this regard.

State and politics in India from 1947 to 1967 was a period of the formation of a developmental state. This implied significant intervention of the government in the economy through the progressive taxation of personal and corporate incomes and the consequent provision by the state of public services such as education, health and transport.

The late 1960s, and especially 1966 to 1968, were a period during which modern history boasts of a multiplicity of revolutionary movements, cutting across regions and continents. It was also a phase when student agitation gained unprecedented ground. Whether it was Berlin or Paris or Calcutta, the intellectual stimulus had engineered student movements – highly radicalised in thought and action. Blame it on the zealot-philosophers Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse or Jean-Paul Sartre, to name a few!

Fanon passed away due to leukemia in 1961, but before that his firebrand writing achieved cult status. In his monograph *The Wretched of the Earth*, he wrote,<sup>21</sup>

...this same violence will be vindicated and appropriated when, taking history into their own hands, the colonized swarm into the forbidden cities.

Fanon believed that society had to be changed and could only be changed through violence, and violence was a personal

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21 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, 2004, p.6.

cathartic – an individual could only find true expression and release in violence

The late 1960s were also a period of the rise of the ‘New Left’. Herbert Marcuse believed that man in Western capitalist society was every bit as enslaved as his counterpart in the totalitarian societies of the Soviet bloc. The New Left rejected both western capitalism and Soviet-bred communism. According to the New Left, the state maintained a dominant class interest through violence, psychological as well as physical. Hence, it was ‘just’ to use violence against the state as an instrument of emancipation.

Violence was also projected to be glamorous and, in the post-1967 world, Peter Reed opines, rugged good looks and violence came together in the ideal poster: Che Guevara. Heroic failure was more potent than success. 1967 was an eventful year – the death of a student in Berlin in a fracas with the Police, which later on assumed deadly proportions in the rise of the Baader-Meinhoff gang and its series of abductions and high-jackings, the death of Che Guevara in a Bolivian ravine, and finally the commencement of the historic Naxalbari uprising in India’s eastern province of West Bengal.

On March 18, 1967, a peasants’ conference was held under the auspices of the Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPI-M) Siliguri sub-division in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The conference, *inter alia*, called for:<sup>22</sup>

1. ending of monopoly ownership of land by the landlords,
2. redistribution of land through peasants’ committees and

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22 Rajeshwari Ravikant, “People’s War and State Response: The Naxalite Movement in Telangana, India (1970-93)”, 1995, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0098990>.

3. organisation and arming of the peasants in order to destroy the resistance of landlords and rural reactionaries.

The conference further cautioned the landless to be prepared for a protracted armed struggle.

The eviction of Bigul Kisan by a *jotedar* in spite of a court order in his favour acted as a spark for the ensuing melee. Naxalbari quickly came to enjoy an iconic status among Indian revolutionaries. ‘Naxalite’ became shorthand for ‘revolutionary’, a term which evoked romance and enchantment at one end of the political spectrum and distaste and derision at the other.

Charu Mazumdar was a frail heart patient.<sup>23</sup> However, he emulated the likes of Mao, Guevara, Castro and perhaps Cambodian dictator Pol Pot, as he unleashed his ‘Eight Documents’. He attempted to justify the use of violence against the Indian state by positing his ‘Theory of Annihilation’ of class enemies. While building the theoretical framework of the movement, partly Marxist-Leninist, partly anarcho-communist, and verily fanning the sentiments of the youth and the dispossessed by glorifying violence, Mazumdar blew the trumpet to “Make the 1970s the decade of liberation.”<sup>24</sup>

Calcutta’s Presidency College and Jadavpur University spilled over into the rural backyards of Bengal to ‘spread’ the revolution – with an apparent Cuban-styled ‘foco-ism’ without, however, explicitly and unequivocally accepting the

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23 Sumanta Banerjee, “In the Wake of Naxalbari”, *Sahitya Samsad*, 2009, <https://www.amazon.in/Wake-Maxalbari-Sumanta-Banerjee/dp/8179551628>.

24 Mazumdar, Charu, “Make the 1970s the Decade of Liberation”, in Suniti Kumar Ghosh (ed.), *The Historical Turning Point: A Liberation Anthology*, S.K. Ghosh, Calcutta, 1993.

Cuban *modus operandi*. Nonetheless, violence was the fuel – driving the engine of revolution.

The class enemy was not clearly defined, but the ‘annihilation’ campaign was on – which was sometimes grotesquely evidenced in the form of ‘police-wallahs’ being murdered in broad daylight, often while not on duty and unarmed. Rag-pickers in Calcutta, branded as informers, were also not spared the ‘*fasces*’ in the name of the revolution – or may be at the altar of Rousseau’s ever misconstrued ‘General Will’ or the new-found Maoism which over enthusiastically claimed ‘Chairman Mao as Our Chairman’ – a sentiment strongly objected to and refuted by the Chinese.

Alongside the tumultuous actions in Calcutta, the countryside remained the main arena of the movement. Annihilation of usurious landlords through small squad actions, operations which were bloated to be termed as guerrilla warfare, were carried out with impunity – with the fervent hope that such numerous and gory actions would definitely ignite the revolutionary consciousness of the masses.

On the contrary, such dissolute actions by the Naxalites only hastened their loss of connectivity with the people and paved the way for their eventual defeat in the first phase of the movement and triggered the dismemberment of the party – along the pro-mass line and the pro-annihilation line. The chief architect of the Annihilation Theory, Mazumdar was finally arrested by the Calcutta Police on July 16, 1972, and lived only 12 days after his arrest. Was indiscriminate use of violence the fundamental cause of the demise of the romantic revolutionary vision? Indubitably, it was one among others, if not the primary reason.

In the first phase of the insurgency, violence ruled the roost – inter-party murders, assassinations of Police personnel, and

torture of the Naxalites (both by the Police and the mainstream party cadres) in the physical realm, while an ambience of fear, the feeling of being in a war-zone, dominated the psychological sphere.

The debacle of the Naxalites, however, was critically rooted in their lack of armed preparedness and the imperfect development of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army [PLGA]. Military affairs were given secondary weightage *vis-a-vis* political indoctrination by the *Bengalee bhadrak* revolutionary – again a gross misunderstanding of the Maoist tradition. Kanu Sanyal differed ideologically with Mazumdar's line in as far as developing the mass organisations (frontal or otherwise) was concerned.

Interestingly, this dichotomy would turn out to be the seeds for the next level synthesis of the Naxalite/Maoist programme in India, though after considerable bloodshed and energies sapped and time consumed. As Sumanta Banerjee observed,<sup>25</sup> the movement fizzled out with a “farrago of factions” and gradually the scene as well as the leadership rotated outwards from West Bengal to Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. The baton of the race, which was left unattended, was picked up by two disconnected groups – the Kanhai Chatterjee-Amulya Sen faction giving rise to the Maoist Communist Centre [MCC] in Bihar; whereas three groups emerged in Andhra Pradesh – led by Nagi Reddy, Chandra Pulla Reddy and Kondapalli Seetharamayyiah. Eventually, in the 1980s, the Kondapalli Seetharamayyiah-bred People's War [CPI (M-L) (PW)] emerged as the major faction.

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25 Sumanta Banerjee, *op. cit.*, 2009.

## THE STORY CONTINUES

We find Anil<sup>26</sup> leaving the intellectual and sometimes pseudo-intellectual horizons of Kolkata's Presidency College – more specifically the Baker laboratories, and acting as Kishenji's courier and plunging into the real-life laboratory at Bastar; that elusive urban connection is what Sonu and Rajanna of the same story<sup>27</sup> obtain, it is the umbilical cord which got detached, albeit unnaturally, in the early 1970s, which they painstakingly strive to revive through frontal organisations and hidden arms manufacturing units in Indian cities.

It is the city and the growing conurbations where the final war would be fought. Mao too envisaged encircling cities from the countryside. Rajanna concurs: "The main war should be fought outside the jungle, in cities."<sup>28</sup> The jungle after all, is basically a guerrilla zone a hideout against the agile counterinsurgent – a geographical ruse to aid hit-and-run tactics. The jungle is the beginning not the destination. The cities were hamstrung though, both in India as well as in Latin America and Western Europe in the early 1970s and late 1960s. In Western Europe, under the philosophical tutelage of Herbert Marcuse, Althusser and Franz Fanon, radical student outburst was directed at saving the 'depressed' and 'alienated' worker from the capitalist-industrial set-up.

Equally radical, if not more violent and bloodthirsty, were the youth in Kolkata and its environs during the Naxal movement in 1970. Journalist, author and activist Sumanta Banerjee eulogises them to an extent: "They were not common criminals, which the police tried to make them out, but dreamers with a

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26 Shubhrangshu Chowdhury, *Let's Call Him Vasu*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2012, p 6.

27 Ibid, p. 134, and p.191.

28 Ibid, p. 202.

violent mission, characters whom Dostoyevsky would have been proud to have created.”<sup>29</sup> However, it is germane to note, as Banerjee quotes then Naxal leader Sushital Ray Chowdhury, “Sentimental students were used to perform democratic and socialist revolutions simultaneously. Such activities as burning educational institutions, libraries, laboratories and destroying the educational system were prescribed. It is enough to say that no discussions were held in the Party’s Central Committee before these tasks were adopted.”<sup>30</sup>

This author interviewed ex-Naxals of late 1960s, belonging to both their ideological realm as well as squad action teams, who now are leading cosy lives in Kolkata either as government officials or entrepreneurs. A more or less unanimous verdict oozed out:

We committed errors. We should have taken the masses into confidence. Alienating them was a grave mistake.

Furthermore, interviews with people affected by the Naxal violence of the early 1970s in then North Calcutta brought out stories which indicate ruthlessness and immaturity on the part of the erstwhile and so-called revolutionaries.

Accepting the wrong tactics and to some extent the philosophy are the causes of failure that were identified by other ex-Naxal leaders like Kanu Sanyal (who reportedly committed suicide in 2010). Charu Mazumdar’s annihilation line led them nowhere. The failure of the first avatar of the movement probably provided the Maoists the lessons to couple Guevara’s *foco* theory with Mao’s protracted people’s war as a model, more or less successfully applied in the Bastar-Abujhmad region, in the post-Charu period.

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29 Sumanta Banerjee, op. cit., 2009.

30 Ibid.

Noted Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm opines that the political impact of Marxism is the most significant achievement of Marx from the point of view of history; at least insofar as the guerrilla movements are concerned. At the other end, the concept of a nation-state which emerged from the treaty of Westphalia holds itself intact till date and at least in the immediately foreseeable future doesn't seem to be affected by the onslaught of the guerrilla battle-zones. Marx cheers for the Paris Commune; Mao doesn't believe that a revolution could be peaceful and effected at leisure; Rajanna innovates with the ammunition and targets the administration. The counterinsurgent firmly holds the gun and deservedly so. In the process, he fires at Rajni, Rajanna and Sonu. He keeps a strict vigil on the cities. He gathers intelligence and plants moles. He aims and shoots.

Does he have any other alternative?

Does the counterinsurgent deserve a rebuke from the intellectual?

### **THE FORCE OF DIALECTICS**

Opinions of contemporary scholars and writers have varied regarding the ongoing 'conflict' in the wide strip of land stretching from the Indo-Nepal border in the north to the Nallamala jungles in the south.

Aruna Roy, Mahasweta Devi, *et.al.*, firmly believe that the *adivasis* may genuinely 'protest' against maladministration.<sup>31</sup> However, they have overtly not adhered to the view that the 'Maoist-type of insurgency' is the acceptable format of protest.

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31 Aruna Roy, "Questions & Answers: Aruna Roy", *The Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 2009, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB125723504437924775>.

They basically stress on ‘separating’ the tribal-*adivasi* from the Maoist insurgent.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, Arundhati Roy opines that the Maoists have in essence granted the tribal-*adivasi* a semblance of dignity.<sup>33</sup> At least, the importation of the gun; according to Roy, if not the ideology, has given the poverty-stricken *adivasi* a weapon to engineer ‘survival’; if not emancipation.<sup>34</sup>

Bela Bhatia too, while analysing the Naxalite movement in Central Bihar, agrees that the Naxalites (pre-2004 era) empowered the labouring and oppressed classes of the region.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, she feels that the Naxalite leaders are *not interested* (emphasis added) in ‘development’ and hence the quality of life in the villages has not improved.

Gautam Navlakha even goes to the extent of conflating the tribal with the armed Maoist.<sup>36</sup>

In this aspect, if one agrees with Arundhati Roy, then one is led to understand that Ranajit Guha’s element of ‘consciousness’<sup>37</sup> (if at all there is such) is provided by the Maoist leadership. Does Roy intend to say that the Maoist leadership (who are mostly urban-bred intellectuals) along with their dogmatic concepts associated with the ‘1930s China’

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32 Mahasweta Devi, “Government should Talk to Maoists”, *Pro Kerala News*, April 7, 2010, <http://www.prokerala.com/news/articles/a126638.html>.

33 Arundhati Roy, “Mr Chidambaram’s War”, *Outlook India*, November 9, 2009, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262519>.

34 Ibid.

35 Bela Bhatia, “The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 40, Issue 15, April 9, 2005, pp 1536-1549.

36 Gautam Navlakha, “Days and Nights in the heartland of Rebellion”, *Sanhati*, April 2, 2010, [http://sanhati.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/navlakha\\_days\\_and\\_nights1.pdf](http://sanhati.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/navlakha_days_and_nights1.pdf).

37 Guha, Ranajit, “The Prose of Counter-insurgency”, in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Selected Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 45-84.

have essentially provided the necessary ‘consciousness’ to the *Adivasis*?

If that is agreed upon, then how does one explain the host of tribal uprisings in a non-Maoist political landscape during the Imperial Raj? Of course, if we completely disagree with Roy, then surely, we are led to accept the discourse that the urban intellectuals have acted as ‘usurpers’ in the tribal domain, which upholds the spirit of *primus inter pares*.

It cannot be denied that parts of the mainstream media, and a few think-tanks are, to an extent, alienated from the Maoist movement; morally and sometimes financially and physically abetted by the urban intelligentsia. ‘*Alienation*’ does not mean in terms of information, dossiers or papers, but in terms of understanding the ‘*root cause*’ of the armed insurrection. In that direction, Arundhati Roy hits the bull’s eye in her essay.<sup>38</sup> However, Roy flounders at the very beginning when she argues,<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the Kondh are supposed to be grateful that their Niyamgiri Hill, home to Niyam Raja, their ‘god of universal law’, has been sold to a company with a name like *Vedanta* (the branch of Hindu philosophy that teaches the Ultimate Nature of Knowledge).

‘*Has been sold*’ is a phrase which is completely ‘*out of phase*’ with reality. In fact, throughout her article she uses such phrases to bolster paranoia. Is she trying to mock at the age-old Hindu Philosophies pertaining to the Vedas or just castigating the then-Home Minister, P. Chidambaram? Not clear at all.

Roy vociferously proclaims:

Of course, the Maoists are by no means the only ones rebelling. There is a whole spectrum of struggles all

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38 Arundhati Roy, op. cit, 2009.

39 Ibid.

over the country that people are engaged in — the landless, the Dalits, the homeless, workers, peasants, weavers.

Here, she is exaggerating the internal security threat to the country and undermining India's success as a democracy.

Moreover, is Roy eulogizing these movements? In the first place, she needs to appreciate the vastness of India, not only in the sense of territoriality but also in terms of ethnicity, religion and caste. By no means are struggle of the landless, Dalits, peasants and workers novel in India. They had been documented since the days of the Raj and continue to spark the headlines even today. It is the sheer efficacy of democracy that such incidents get reported more often today and hence, debated and, thus, sometimes acted upon.

That in independent India, we get the opportunity to discuss, debate and criticise, is in itself a pointer towards the existence of a free democracy. Every system has its bottlenecks and India is no exception. And this is the fact which Arundhati Roy probably fails to understand or, maybe, deliberately evades. To quote her:

“They're pitted against a juggernaut of injustices, including policies that allow a wholesale corporate takeover of people's land and resources.”<sup>40</sup>

This is sheer hyperbole. There is no gainsaying the fact that at times the policy-makers and the executive have treated the tribal populace with disdain. There is also no denial that, post-1991, the Indian economy has proceeded towards the LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) policy. Nevertheless, the scenario is surely not as bleak as Roy portrays it to be. Statements like “wholesale corporate takeover

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40 Ibid.

of people's land and resources" and "the women raped as a matter of right by police and forest department personnel" are horrendous and mirror a Bollywood movie script rather than any description of fact.

The usurpation of farm and forest lands on which the livelihood of millions depend has, indeed, fomented movements, both of the non-violent and violent genres. Naxalbari in 1967 through Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal, can be cited as viable case studies. There has been corruption. But then people have spoken and acted against these 'State malfunctions.'

Further, Roy laments:

"Right now in central India, the Maoists' guerrilla army is made up almost entirely of desperately poor tribal people living in conditions of such chronic hunger that it verges on famine of the kind we only associate with sub-Saharan Africa."<sup>41</sup>

This is another extreme exaggeration. Roy should present proper data in order to corroborate her assertions. True, there is poverty, hunger and malnutrition in India, even after seven decades of independence. But that does not necessarily make India comparable to sub-Saharan Africa!

Roy continues undaunted:<sup>42</sup>

"They are people who, even after 60 years of India's so-called independence, have not had access to education, healthcare or legal redress."<sup>43</sup>

First, let us deliberate on the concept of the 'so-called independence' of India. This phrase has reverberated through decades, starting from the rantings by the Communist Party

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41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

of India [CPI] right after 1947. But the sheer ambivalence of the CPI regarding the definition of the term has manifested over time. To rebuke the government for its failures in order to usher in change and better governance is a welcome step, but not at the cost of jeopardising national sentiments. Roy should realise that casting aspersions in a blatantly indiscriminate manner on the Indian government in the international media generally boomerangs on oneself. Populism at national cost is unacceptable.

One fails to gauge why Roy doesn't join the ranks of the Maoists, when we come across the line, "Their journey back to a semblance of dignity is due in large part to the Maoist cadre who have lived and worked and fought by their side for decades."<sup>44</sup>

Arundhati Roy fails to mention, *inter alia*, about the Right to Information Act (2005) or the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) which have made independent India proud and have provided benefits to millions of the poor. On most occasions, she looks at just one side of the coin. She presses on with excessive demonisation of the government and puts forward wrong false picture – even invented data – as in the argument: "To get the bauxite out of the flat-topped hills, to get iron ore out from under the forest floor, to get 85 per cent of India's people off their land and into the cities."<sup>45</sup> The census of 2011 indicates that 68 per cent of Indians live in the countryside, and not 85 per cent as Roy claims; moreover, even if a quantum of dispossession is conceded, it is limited to relatively limited strips of mineral rich land, and certainly does not comprehend the entire rural population.

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44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

One thing is crystal clear though. Roy is definitely against any armed operation against the Left-Wing Extremists [LWE]. She advocates talks with the Maoists. But, she does not bring out the negative fallouts of an armed rebellion. What are the solutions offered by Roy? Apart from talks with the Maoists, she offers no further clue.

A few words of caution are probably necessary, despite this autopsy. The administration ought to continuously be more and more pro-people. Nonetheless, the intelligentsia needs to restrain its verbosity. It would not only be mutually beneficial, but also a catalyst for democracy and for the development of the tribals on the whole.

The fact of the matter is that a Mumbai-born Kobad Ghandy or a Ganapathy have simply displaced a modern-day Birsa Munda or a Sido. Instead of being the torch-bearers for the ‘subaltern *adivasi*’, the Maoist leadership has undertaken a ‘struggle for power’, enmeshed in their own intellectual abstractions of dismantling the purportedly comprador-bourgeoisie Indian democracy.

To a large extent, this idea seems to be echoed by past Naxalite leaders like Kanu Sanyal<sup>46</sup> and Azizul Haq.<sup>47</sup> Amusingly, they hold the opinion that the present Maoist struggle is nothing but a ‘power struggle’ and is using the tribal peoples as pawns. One thing, however, is noteworthy and deserves attention. If the urban-bred intellectuals are merely perceived as ‘foreigners’ in the *adivasi* heartland, then how could they extend their influence? It is a bare fact that the palpable absence of any pro-people structure of authority in

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46 “Terror can’t bring change, Kanu Sanyal says”, May 25, 2007, [http://naxalwatch.blogspot.com/s2007\\_05\\_20\\_archive.html](http://naxalwatch.blogspot.com/s2007_05_20_archive.html).

47 Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey, “Naxal veterans slam Lalgargh misadventure”, *The Times of India*, June 19, 2009, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-06-19/kolkata/28208994\\_1\\_naxalites-lalgargh-tribals](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-06-19/kolkata/28208994_1_naxalites-lalgargh-tribals).

these areas of the Indian landmass have created a power vacuum in these regions. Compounding this is the over-exploitation by an unholy nexus of money-lenders, bureaucrats, politicians and corporate honchos.

The ‘intellectual foreigner’ intervenes in the world of the *adivasi* as the neo-Birsa. Hence, Birsa’s 1899 chants of ‘*Katong Baba Katong*’ (O father, kill kill) echo in Liberation slogans:<sup>48</sup>

*Khet par adhikar ke liye ladho, desh me janawad ke lie badho*

(Fight for land rights, march towards democracy in the country)

or

the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) slogan of

*Apni satta, apna kanoon* (Our power, our law).

This author had a conversation with Abhijit Mazumdar, Secretary, Darjeeling District Committee, CPI (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation and the son of Charu Mazumdar. An intellectual by his own right, Abhijit Mazumdar argues that the role of *avant garde* intellectuals globally is hailed in Marxist history. He lauded the erstwhile Naxalbari movement which, according to him:

“...could organically address the grass-root ferment toward a revolutionary transformation vis-à-vis the status quoist, compromising positions adopted by the revisionist leadership of formal communist parties... The Naxalbari movement could also inspire a large number of urban intellectuals to cast off their bourgeois moorings to engage themselves as professional

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48 Bela Bhatia, op. cit., 2005.

revolutionaries... I believe, that we may refer back to the idea of producing organic intellectuals following Gramsci and which may only be possible through the interface between the rural and urban base..."

On being asked what late Charu Mazumdar's perception was on intellectuals, his son was candid enough to refer to his father's ideas about the role of intellectuals which shaped up "through the debate he (Charu Mazumdar) had with Sushital Roy Choudhury over the issue of demolishing the statues of national icons like Rammohun Roy, Vidyasagar, Tagore *et al.*"<sup>49</sup> Charu Mazumdar inspired the revolutionary youth to grow into liberated intellectuals and to have the courage to reinvent India's historiography. The rise of 'Subaltern studies' too remained complimentary to his basic position, according to his son Abhijit.

In an inner-party note, Charu *babu* had asserted that in reality the true of Indian culture is a product of cultivators (agriculture > culture) and the artisans; it further hinges on the mode of production and the relations of production. His son Abhijit *babu* lauds public intellectuals like Amartya Sen, Irfan Habib, Romila Thapar, Arundhati Roy and Ramchandra Guha, for carrying on with "this essential dialectical take" of Charu Majumdar.

### 'URBAN NAXALS'

In August 2018, activists Sudha Bharadwaj, Gautam Navlakha, Varavara Rao, Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira were arrested by the Police in simultaneous country-wide operations.<sup>50</sup> The houses of few other activists and lawyers were

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49 Conversation with Abhijit Majumdar.

50 Mahira Dasgupta, Freedom of Expression and the "Urban Naxals", *Indian Folk*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.indianfolk.com/freedom-expression-urban-naxals-edited/>.

also searched. They were accused for their involvement in the Bhima Koregaon violence and of having ties with the Maoists. Marxist historian Romila Thapar petitioned in the Supreme Court against the house arrest of five activists arguing:

“We were all born Indians, lived as Indians all our lives. These activists are fighting for good causes and terming them urban Naxal is a political move.”<sup>51</sup>

Erstwhile researcher of the Manohar Parrikar- Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, P.V. Ramana, explains the term ‘Urban Naxalism’:

The presence of, and activities carried out by, Naxalites, or the CPI (Maoist), in urban areas — towns and cities — are together termed as Urban Naxalism. The activities of the Maoists in urban areas include maintaining safe houses for leaders and cadres while in transit, place for recuperation and for holding meetings; providing logistics support to under-ground squads; mobilising and recruiting youth, students, academics and workers from industry and other organisations.<sup>52</sup>

In this regard, advocate Vrinda Grover’s caustic remark is significant<sup>53</sup> as she asserts that the term ‘Urban Naxals’ has been coined and deliberately placed in the public discourse to demonise dissent. While at the other end, Union Home Minister, Amit Shah visited the Central Reserve Police Force

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51 “Who Is an Urban Naxal, Romila Thapar Asks the Government”, *The Wire*, September 30, 2018, <https://thewire.in/rights/who-is-an-urban-naxal-romila-thapar-asks-the-government>.

52 P V Ramana, “Prateek Goyal asked: What is ‘Urban Naxalism’?”, *IDSA*, October 22, 2018, <https://idsa.in/askanexpert/What-is-Urban-Naxalism>.

53 Shriya Mohan, “‘Urban Naxals is a term to demonise dissent’”, *Business Line*, August 31, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blink/know/urban-naxals-is-a-term-to-demonise-dissent/article24828924.ece#>.

Uddipan Mukherjee

(CRPF) headquarters and made clear his no-nonsense approach against Urban Naxals and their facilitators.<sup>54</sup>

### **MAOISTS' URBAN PERSPECTIVE**

One of the major reasons for the 'demise' of the Naxalite movement of the late 1960s and early 70s was due to the wrong strategic evaluation of the then leaders of the insurrection. Their defective understanding of urban warfare and penchant of initiating a bloody confrontation with the administration in the cities led to their abysmal show. However, after the grand merger of the two major Naxal splinter groups in 2004, a series of bulky documents from the side of the Maoists have made their way into the public domain, which speaks volumes of their refined doctrinal position vis-à-vis strategy and tactics, especially for urban areas.

Out of those documents, two merit serious attention and analyses. The first is the "Strategy and Tactics of Indian Revolution" prepared in September, 2004 (henceforth STIR). The other one came out three years later; termed the "Urban Perspective: Our Work in Urban Areas" (henceforth UPUA). In the backdrop of the recent spate of arrests of 'Maoist activists' from urban areas and cities; it appears that a re-reading of the two documents to decipher the long-term strategy of the Indian Maoists has become a necessity.

In STIR, the Maoists stress on the large concentration of the petite bourgeoisie in urban areas of India. It is no wonder that the rebels are still basing their revolutionary tactics on the

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54 Amit Shah asks CRPF to go after "urban Naxals and their facilitators", *The Hindu*, November 16, 2019, [https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/amit-shah-asks-crpf-to-go-after-urban-naxals/article29990585.ece?homepage=true&utm\\_campaign=socialflow](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/amit-shah-asks-crpf-to-go-after-urban-naxals/article29990585.ece?homepage=true&utm_campaign=socialflow).

lower middle class of Indian society. Further, in STIR, they write with Marxian moorings:

We should not forget the dialectical relationship between the development of the urban movement and the development of the armed agrarian revolutionary war.<sup>55</sup>

The Maoists admit, “In the absence of a strong revolutionary urban movement, the growth of the people’s war will face limitations and difficulties in its advancement.”<sup>56</sup> The pressing question in this context is, how will the urban work of the Maoists aid and abet their ongoing rural insurrection?

The answer, was clearly stated in STIR itself, and is far more conspicuous and resolute in UPUA of 2007. The document reads thus: “Working class leadership is the indispensable condition for the new Democratic Revolution (NDR) in India. Working class has to send its advanced detachments to rural areas.”<sup>57</sup>

Thus, being the centers of concentration of the industrial proletariat (industrial workers), urban areas play an important part in the political strategy of the NDR. The task of the party in urban areas is to mobilise and organise the proletariat in performing its crucial leadership role.

According to the Indian Maoists:

...the specific characteristics of revolutionary war in India is to determine the military strategy as that of protracted people’s war – of first establishing revolutionary base areas in the countryside where the enemy (read the government) is militarily weak and

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55 “STRATEGY & TACTICS OF THE INDIAN REVOLUTION”, *Central Committee (P) CPI (Maoist)*, September 21, 2009, <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/strategy.htm>.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

then to gradually surround and capture the cities which are bastions of the enemy forces.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, it is clear from the Maoists' document that the armed struggle and the movement in the rural areas will play the primary role; whereas the work in the cities will play a secondary role, complementary to the rural work.

Mao Tse-tung had, in fact, stated:

...the final objective of the revolution is the capture of the cities, the enemy's main bases, and this objective cannot be achieved without adequate work in the cities.<sup>59</sup>

Che Guevara also opines: "The importance of the urban struggle is extraordinary."<sup>60</sup>

The Maoists assess that presently, India has a larger proportion of the population in urban areas and a much larger working class than at the time of the Chinese revolution. This increases the relative importance of urban work in the particular conditions of the Indian revolution.

Nevertheless, in cities, the counter-insurgency state forces are very strong and hence, the Maoists are careful while establishing bases. Nevertheless, since a steady supply of urban cadre is necessary to fulfill the financial and logistical needs of the rural movement (protracted people's war), establishment of urban bases is imperative for the Maoists.

#### **URBAN GUERRILLA WAR IS FAR-OFF**

The main challenges that the Maoists face in the urban areas are:

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58 Ibid.

59 Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Work of Mao Tse-Tung Volume II*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1965, p. 317.

60 Ernesto Che Guevara, "Guerrilla Warfare", Ocean Press, New York, 2006.

1. Democratic party-system is well entrenched in the cities and urban areas. So, it is extremely tedious to dent the political ethos in cities and towns.
2. Extremely strong administrative machinery exists in these regions and thus counterinsurgency will be effective.
3. The trade unions, which are a potentially fertile ground for fomenting dissatisfaction amongst the urban proletariat, already have established ties to mainstream political parties.
4. The presence of the Maoists in key industries like defence production, telecom and the like are poor.

Undoubtedly, an urban base can provide logistical support to the armed struggle, i.e. technical and medical help. It further helps to recruit and send cadre to rural areas. The Maoists also plan to infiltrate 'enemy organisations', such as the Police, para-military and military forces in these populous regions. They attempt to do so by conducting propaganda warfare; viz. upholding the problems of the ordinary constables and soldiers.

Favourable conditions exist in the urban areas of India for the building of broad mass fronts against the state structures, that is, at least, in the evaluation of the Indian Maoists as articulated through UPUA. It may be inferred that the Maoists are venturing into the Indian cities with obvious intentions of solidifying and extending their networks and in addition to that, they are in the process of colluding with other terrorist outfits based in the Northeast, Bangladesh and Nepal, which has grave security implications for the Indian state.

In STIR, the rebels stress the formation of secret party units in the *bastis* and slums of urban areas. Their main focus is that of mass political mobilisation by inculcating the leadership

qualities in the urban working class: the class, according to Karl Marx, which possesses the ‘revolutionary consciousness.’

The Maoists have realised their folly in the early part of their revolution, when they engineered a drastic showdown with the Police in urban areas. Hence, they warn their comrades, they cannot and should not, at the present stage of the revolution, organise for an armed offensive against the state in urban areas.

They accord special importance to small towns, small mining centres and areas in the vicinity of their base areas and guerrilla zones. They focus on the formation of both open and secret defence teams to resist state repression.

### **LWE PART STRUCTURE IN URBAN AREAS**

The basic task of the Communist Party of India (Maoists) in the urban domain is to deal with the problem of coordination between open and secret work. Another chief component is to retain contacts between city organisations and the leadership in the rural areas – the heartland of the insurgency.

In urban areas, the Maoists seem to adhere to the principle of ‘political centralisation and organisational decentralisation’. That is, their Central Committee contemplates small squad-level groups which would be mature enough to take decisions independently, but along party lines. The squad leaders need not refer to the party high command for all minor issues and day-to-day work.

In UPUA, they acknowledge that their party’s work and organisation in the cities/towns is extremely weak and generally cannot achieve a dominant position till the final stages of the people’s war. This ‘objective reality’ forces the Maoists to carve out a ‘mellowed-down’ long-term policy for urban areas.

However, there have been arrests made (from 2007 onwards) by the Indian Police, of prominent Maoist leaders

from cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Thane, Nasik, Kolkata, Chandigarh and other urban areas. These are pointers to the fact that the ultras have spread their wings in cities, more so, after the publication of the UPUA.

So, what is the long-term strategy of the Maoists with regard to urban areas?

1. They would not adopt a short-term approach of direct confrontation with the state forces in order to achieve 'quick results.'
2. Thus, the threat perception to Indian cities in a form comparable to the cross-border terrorists is highly unlikely.
3. Urban terrorism accompanies a substantial amount of collateral damage. That acts as a dampener for the Maoists to go for a Lashkar-esque operation in the cities, because such sporadic and wanton acts of terror would create a disconnect between the left-wing ultras and the masses: a situation they totally detest.
4. The Maoists are concentrating on a long-term approach of solidifying their bases in the urban areas through their front organisations.
5. If at all they have a short-term goal; that has to be to use their urban bases in supplying money, spare parts, medicines, arms, recruits and ideologues to the rural guerrilla zones.
6. To further the military objective of the revolution, the Maoists surely would strengthen their cyber-warfare strategy.
7. Propaganda through student-worker organisations would be the mainstay of their strategy for the time being.

8. Their rural insurgency is in the stage of strategic defense. So, they would very likely continue the above discussed strategy in the urban areas till the rural insurgency reaches the stage of strategic offense.
9. Till then, the Maoists would try hard to penetrate the white-collar employees, intellectuals and youth so as to bolster their insurgency.

While evaluating the Iraqi insurgency (2003-06), Major Edward Brady in his thesis submitted at the Maxwell Air Force base, Alabama, in June 2008, rightly assesses that urban areas provide access to the insurgents to soft targets that could be attacked by small cells. Moreover, easy sanctuaries are provided to the insurgents to thrive in the cities. However, we may safely hypothesise that keeping in mind their historic failure in the 1970s, the Maoists would be reluctant to enact a Baghdad-type insurgency in Indian cities at this stage of their revolution.

Nevertheless, it always could happen that if the top leadership of the Maoists is annihilated by targeted killings/incarcerations, then a breakaway faction could unleash ghastly acts of terror emulating the cross-border militants. That will probably be a cost which we might have to incur in return of the decimation of the insurgency.

In the meantime, the Police needs to step up its human intelligence network and continue to nab the urban outfits of the Maoists, as they had been doing for some time. Panic buttons need not be pressed right now. But cognizance must be taken of the fact that the spread of the Maoists in the sprawling towns and cities of India could shape up as a major destabilising parameter in the future.

Establishment of any base in the cities however will not be feasible for the Maoists without help from the city-based intellectuals – students, academics or professionals.

### **WHAT IS TO BE DONE?**

The intellectual support to the Maoists to a large extent provides the financial backbone to the ultras. Funds/grants are generated in the urban areas for the Maoists. In order to counter it, the following needs to be emphasised:

1. Police espionage on frontal organisations of the Maoists.
2. Arrests of suspected leadership of those organisations.
3. Police espionage in college/university campuses, especially those with a history of a rebellious past, like Presidency College, Jadavpur University or institutes with potential radical ambience like JNU, Jamia Milia Islamia.
4. Police espionage in social media interactions of suspected/potential rebels in urban areas – in *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Telegram*, *WhatsApp* and the like.

Overall, multi-agency coordination by the Security Forces is important to uncover the financial trails of the ultras. In fact, the government has well specified set of teams in this regard and ought to continue with this *modus operandi* in order to keep a strict vigil on urban Maoists and/or intellectuals in urban areas.<sup>61</sup>

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61 “Government sets up teams to choke Naxal funding”, *The Economic Times*, July 11, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/govt-sets-up-teams-to-choke-naxal-funding/articleshow/64072449.cms?from=mdr>.

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The bottom-line is that, to disrupt the financial pipeline of the Maoists, multi-pronged action is required – from the security perspective, as well as from the purely financial angle.

The Security Forces must have a very strong public relations wing in the urban areas, who ought to cultivate anti-Maoist perceptions among the youth, through seminars in colleges, universities and academic institutions.

Vigorous pro-government ideological propaganda in television, radio, social media, internet, among other platforms, has to be carried out on a sustained basis.

Specific courses on ‘Internal Security’ at graduate and post-graduate levels need to be introduced.

The academic discourses in the Humanities and Arts faculties, especially in Sociology and Political Science disciplines, need to be monitored so that seditious literature/sentiment/thought is not encouraged in the classroom.

The Ministry of Home Affairs at the national level and state governments at the provincial level should introduce in colleges, universities, academic institutions, and think-tanks, academic disciplines related to Defence and Strategic Studies with specialisation in counterinsurgency, internal security and insurgency management, among others. Degrees from the bachelor level to PhD can be offered.

Local journalists need to be befriended by the state police so as to garner leverage in the war of information, propaganda and perceptions. The brand image of the security forces on the ground as well as in the national and international fora has to be promoted as a humane workforce meant for development of the country and the ugly face of the Maoists on the other hand, needs to be projected to all quarters.

A designated spokesperson for the Security Forces in each district ought to be appointed. It would be preferable if a civilian officer not directly related to operations is made the spokesperson, because that would help bridge the trust deficit between the security forces and the local population, media houses and others.

Incidentally, the Maoists are looking for urban intellectuals and intellectual youth to overcome their leadership crisis and to educate their ground-level cadres. They have failed to build the second-rung leadership due to the lack of educated youth in their ranks. Intellectuals from urban areas could come to their rescue. However, with the closest vigil on urban intellectuals by civil authorities, the tussle would undoubtedly be fascinating.

It would be pertinent to quote K.P.S. Gill commander of the counter-terrorism campaign in Punjab during the Khalistan movement:<sup>62</sup>

To fail to exercise this legitimate coercive authority is, thus, not an act of non-violence or of abnegation; it is not a measure of our humanity or civilisation. It is, rather, an intellectual failure and an abdication of responsibility that randomises violence, alienating it from the institutional constraints of the State, and allowing it to pass into the hands of those who exercise it without the discrimination and the limitations of law that govern its employment by the State.

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62 Manoj Joshi, “KPS Gill (1934-2017): The man who finished Khalistani terrorism in Punjab”, May 27, 2017, <https://scroll.in/article/838859/kps-gill-1934-2017-the-man-who-finished-khalistani-terrorism-in-punjab>.

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# Religious Militant Extremism in Pakistan: Threat to South Asia

S. Krishnan\*

The gravest challenge Pakistan faces today is a militant extremism that has already claimed thousands of innocent lives. The Taliban, Al-Qaeda and local militant groups, which were mostly based in the tribal belt since 2001, have joined hands with various violent sectarian groups and religious organisations, and spread to urban areas of Pakistan. Various sectarian groups and religious organisations have become a part of their networks; together they have led to acts of violence and terrorism. *Jihadi madrasas* also play a crucial role in fuelling extremism. Effective counter terrorism strategies need to be developed and adopted by both the provincial and the federal governments to stem this violent tide before it is too late. Shunning petty differences, the political parties, religious and sectarian groups, media and civil society need to join hands

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against the rising spectre of extremism. A unified society, rather than one that is fragmented, will be the best resistance to the ever-growing trend of militant extremism in Pakistan. Religious tolerance and moderation are key to de-radicalise Pakistani society.

Religious extremism is spreading rapidly across the world, but its implications are particularly severe in the case of Pakistan. Low growth rates, declining foreign investment, ever-increasing poverty and unemployment, and the military mullah nexus have, in combination, sparked unrest and helped extremists woo people to their cause. The roots of violent religious extremism in Pakistan need to be understood in a historical perspective.

Extremism is a complex phenomenon. Some researchers and analysts have defined it as “views that are inconsistent with existing norms,” while others describe it as “beliefs, feelings, actions and strategies that are far away from ordinary.” When individuals or groups adopt extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations and seek a radical change in society, it is called radicalisation. When they use violence to achieve these goals, it becomes extremism. This spectrum includes terrorism, and other forms of politically motivated communal and sectarian violence. Irrespective of their motivation, almost all forms of violent extremism seek change through coercion, fear and intimidation, rather than constructive democratic processes. They also tend to target women, children, and other innocent civilians.

#### **FACTORS MOTIVATING VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

While there are several causes that motivate extremists to use violence as a means to achieve their goals, there are two broad categories:

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- Push Factors are the negative social, cultural, and political features of one's societal environment that aid in 'pushing' vulnerable individuals onto the path of violent extremism. 'Root causes' include poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, and political/economical marginalisation.
- Pull Factors, on the other hand, are the positive characteristics and benefits of an extremist organisation that 'pull' vulnerable individuals to join. These include the group's ideology (e.g., emphasis on changing one's condition through violence rather than 'apathetic' and 'passive' democratic means), strong bonds of brotherhood and sense of belonging, reputation building, prospect of fame or glory, and other socialization benefits.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of Pakistan, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, economical marginalisation and a toxic combination of the military and the mosque, have encouraged many people to join violent extremist groups. Many organisations pay youngsters to join them, before exploiting their vulnerable and impressionable minds. A study revealed that most youngsters join such organisations because they gain power and self-esteem, which they would otherwise not normally receive in society.<sup>2</sup>

### **RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM: NOT A NEW PHENOMENON**

The impact and influence of rising religious fundamentalism on the global geo-political stage cannot be ignored. Religious

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1 Muhsin Hassan, "Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism: The Case of al-Shabab and Somali Youth", *CTC Sentinel*, Volume 5, Issue 8, 2012, <https://ctc.usma.edu/understanding-drivers-of-violent-extremism-the-case-of-al-shabab-and-somali-youth/>.

2 Randy Borum, *Psychology of Terrorism*, University of South Florida, Tampa, 2004, pp.10-13.

beliefs and traditions increasingly influence ecology, economy, demography, rights, personal life and international relations in some form or the other. Globalisation and the US ‘War on Terror’ have also played a key role in these upheavals.

Extremism is based on the concept of exclusivism. Extremists think they are different from others on cultural, linguistic, ethnic or sub-religious grounds, and use violence to express their identity and pursue their ideological, social, economic and political objectives. Religious extremism is not new; it has existed in diverse forms throughout our history. Religious fundamentalism stems from a very strict adherence to the basic and traditional views of a religion, and is usually in direct opposition to modernisation.

Such extremism is not the exclusive preserve of the Islamists. There has been a distinct rise in rabid nationalism or nativism across the world. In the Indian subcontinent, we can take comfort in the fact that Islamic groups in Bangladesh have not been allowed to morph into a politically overwhelming force because of undercurrents of the secular Bengali psyche. In both India and Myanmar—India in particular—the liberal and secular way of life is being gradually challenged by another form of extremism, where people in saffron are calling the shots.

Extremists in one country usually take comfort in the rise of their kind in neighbouring countries, because it helps justify and reinforce their own existence. In Myanmar, ‘Buddhist bin Ladens’ have garnered enough strength to influence the ruling *junta*. Government sponsorship of these groups is clear from the fact that while political dissent of any kind is prohibited in Myanmar, thousands of Buddhist monks openly flaunt their pathological dislike for a particular ethnic group, proclaiming that any supporter of the Rohingya is their enemy. This is

significant at a time when the Myanmar military is engaged in a pogrom against the Rohingya.

Ideological extremism has the uncanny capacity of self-perpetuation, fed by minds that are at best ill-educated. An uneducated or even half-educated mind is more malleable, particularly when religion – even if it involves distorted narratives from the scriptures – is used as the means to bend the mind. ‘Self-radicalised’ individuals, who may not belong to any particular extremist or *jihadi* organisation but are motivated by media reports and violent radical organisations or individuals, are particularly vulnerable. The ability to promote and propagate distorted radical or religious beliefs to a large number of people instantly through the Internet and social media adds to the problem. Which is why strategic planners have added cyber war to the list of air, land, sea and space wars.

### **VIOLENT AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN**

Pakistan is subject to severe forms of extremist violence, which include terrorism, targeted killings and suicide attacks, and this is one of the main causes of the country’s economic meltdown. Extremist militant organisations of all shapes and sizes threaten the nascent democratic environment of the country through their flawed militant ideology of Islam. Violent extremism has not only affected the law and order situation of the state but has also disturbed business and other economic activities in the country.<sup>3</sup>

Ever since Independence, Pakistan has been striving hard to compete with the rest of the world. But frequent changes in government, mismanagement and underutilisation of

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3 Mujahid Hussain, *Punjabi Taliban: Driving Extremism in Pakistan*, Pentagon Press, Delhi, 2012.

resources, corruption and failure of governance, and the worldwide recession have had a catastrophic impact on the country's economy. Growing extremist and religious violence has made things much worse.

Pakistani society is heavily fragmented in terms of religious, regional and national identities, as well as fractured along economic, religious, regional, ethnic and linguistic faultlines.

According to the CIA's World Factbook, the "provisional results of Pakistan's 2017 national census estimate the country's total population to be 207,774,000," comprising "Punjabi 44.7%, Pashtun (Pathan) 15.4%, Sindhi 14.1%, Saraiki 8.4%, Muhajirs 7.6%, Balochi 3.6%, other 6.3%." As for religion, the population is "Muslim (official) 96.4% (Sunni 85-90%, Shia 10-15%), other (includes Christian and Hindu) 3.6% (2010 estimates)."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, divisions within the Sunni community also exist, most prominently among Barelvis and Deobandis.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from such fragmentation of the society, the country ranks third in the world on violence and terrorism.<sup>6</sup> The Global Terrorism Index (GTI), 2019, places it at the 5<sup>th</sup> rank, among the worst affected countries,<sup>7</sup> up from the 7<sup>th</sup> rank in GTI 2018.<sup>8</sup>

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4 "The World Factbook", CIA, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>.

5 Ian, Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, Hust & Company, London, 2009, pp. 7-13.

6 Adeline Delavande and Basit Zafar, "Stereotypes And Madrassas Experimental Evidence From Pakistan", RAND Working Paper Series WR- 859, Mimeo, 2011.

7 "Global Terrorism Index", 2019, Institute for Economics and Peace, <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/11/GTI-2019web.pdf>.

8 "Global Terrorism Index", 2018, Institute for Economics and Peace, <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf>.

## Religious Militant Extremism in Pakistan: Threat to South Asia

Religious extremism is deep rooted in other South Asian states as well. In general, a major cause of such extremism in these states, and in Pakistan in particular, is the unbridgeable gulf that has been created between the government and certain religious radicals. In the case of Pakistan, the government is blamed for its alliance with anti-Islamic forces, and new religious groups are emerging each day with increasingly orthodox Islamic views.

Pakistan has a large liberal and moderate constituency, where most people possess a non-violent perception of Islam. But there is also a significant percentage of the population belonging to religious institutions which promote fundamentalism.<sup>9</sup> This has led to social vulnerability, instability, and lack of cohesion and unity among people of different religions and sects. The fundamentalist religious radicals have also won over many young adults to their cause.

### CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN

Since its turbulent formation in 1947, Pakistan—politically unstable, economically and militarily weak – has grappled with a range of internal and external threats. “None of these, however, can match the gravity of what the country now faces.”<sup>10</sup> Islamic fundamentalism is a recent phenomenon in Pakistan, and it has found itself embroiled in terrorism due to increasing religious extremism. Suicide attacks and bomb blasts have become routine. The government crackdown against militants has led to security personnel becoming the

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9 Umbreen Javaid, “Thriving Fundamentalism and Militancy In Pakistan: An Analytical Overview Of Their Impact On Society”, *South Asian Studies*, Volume 26, Number1, 2011, pp. 9-18.

10 Rohan Gunaratna and Khurram Iqbal, *Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London, 2011, p.7.

targets of these fundamentalists, who now operate in urban areas including the capital – Islamabad.

The surge in religious extremism in Pakistan can be traced back to the Iraq-Iran War and the US initiated war against Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The Sunnis of Iraq received support from a large population in Pakistan, which then became a battlefield for this Shia-Sunni war. The proxy war against the Soviet Union by the US, which used the religiously indoctrinated Mujahideen, fuelled further fundamentalism. The two developments radically impacted Pakistan's political, social and economic environment, particularly after the 1979 revolution in Iran.

Religion has been exploited by several Pakistani rulers to justify their actions and to prop up authoritarian and unelected regimes.

Religious fundamentalism was mainstreamed in the 1980s during the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq, a military dictator who wooed the radical Islamists to justify his rule. His policies created serious rifts between various sects based on religion and language, and many of them started using violence and terror to promote their cause. Many now have links with the ultra-orthodox Taliban groups. "Under the rule of Gen. Zia, Islamisation of the society took deep roots. The Islamization by Zia was not acceptable to Shias, thus bringing differences between Shias and Sunnis and large-scale sectarian violence."<sup>11</sup>

A common perception is that Madrasas, or religious schools in Pakistan teach and preach *jihad* to "produce holy warriors."<sup>12</sup> But many who support the Madrasa system claim

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11 Ajay Darshan Behera and Mathew C. Joseph, (eds.), *Pakistan in a Changing Strategic Context*, Knowledge World, New Delhi, 2004, p.183.

12 Suba Chandran, "Madrasas in Pakistan", *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 2003, <http://www.ipcs.org>.

that these charitable religious schools help in raising the literacy level in Pakistan. There are some 8,000 officially registered madrasas across the country, with approximately four million students. Poor families send their children to these madrasas where education, food and shelter are free. Funded by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and local wealthy businessmen, traders, people and religious parties through donations, most of them churn out hardcore Islamic fundamentalists.<sup>13</sup> Madrasas are indeed a significant part of the conflict equation that needs to be considered dispassionately.<sup>14</sup> Further, radicalisation is one of the ways through which the poor and the dispossessed find a voice, often in the form of violent activism. This violent action may become terrorism in its extreme manifestations.<sup>15</sup>

The social and economic fabric of Pakistan reflects strong ethnic, linguistic, regional and sectarian divisions, making national integration extremely difficult. The deteriorating economy, low literacy levels, failure of government to provide basic amenities like healthcare and education have led to increasing resentment among the masses. This in turn is easily exploited by extremists, who show them a rosy picture, promising to eliminate all evils once they come to power. Young boys are given a few lakhs for their families, and induced to execute suicide attacks. “Through their growing network of religious schools and military training camps, they are raising a whole new generation of radicalized children.”<sup>16</sup>

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- 13 Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, “Pakistan’s Taliban Generation”, 2009, [http://www.pbs.org.frontlineworld/blog/2009/04/pakistanas\\_tali.html](http://www.pbs.org.frontlineworld/blog/2009/04/pakistanas_tali.html).
- 14 “Pakistan’s Madrasas: The Need for Internal Reform and Role of International Assistance”, *Brookings Institution*, 2009, [http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/08\\_pakistan\\_ali.aspx?p=1](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/08_pakistan_ali.aspx?p=1).
- 15 “Ideological Radicalisation”, *Dawn*, February 27, 2011, <https://www.dawn.com/news/609536/ideological-radicalisation>.
- 16 Umbreen Javaid, “Politics of Religious Extremism in Pakistan,” Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Punjab, Lahore, October 28, 2016.

That the “existing legal system of Pakistan is highly inefficient, corrupt and time-consuming and absolutely inadequate for the needs of an average Pakistani is well known and almost undisputed”.<sup>17</sup> The fundamentalists also want to reform the judicial system by establishing Sharia Courts to provide speedy justice, a prospect that traps people who are not satisfied with the existing judicial system and the corruption of the system. The absence of a fair judicial system does not affect the individual litigant alone, it affects the country’s whole economy, deterring domestic and foreign investors who fear unfair and time-consuming litigation, and shy away for fear of usurpation and misappropriation.

All these factors together have damaged Pakistan. The preachers of extremism exploit this situation, claiming that once they are empowered, they will enforce an Islamic system which will eradicate all evils.

### **ISLAM AS A SOURCE OF LEGITIMACY**

Islam in Pakistan and Bangladesh has not only served the instrumental function as a purveyor of legitimacy, but also represents a constitutive element of state identity. In Pakistan, the religious right has been a wilful accomplice of the state in reinforcing the instrumentalist use of radical Islam and has in varying degrees complemented the military both in its quest for legitimacy and its efforts at marginalising mainstream political parties. The military, which sees itself as the guardian of state power and has established the mandate to intervene should the civilian authority fail to deliver, relies on the Islam centric pillars of state ideology to retain its political primacy. Likewise, the religious groups have been the self-proclaimed guardians of the Pakistani state, defending the founding ideology of the

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17 Ibid.

state against perceived or real attacks on Islam, and at the same time championing the vanguard role that Pakistan plays as a leader of the *ummah* (global Muslim community).<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, the image of the military as the protector of ‘Islamic Pakistan’ against a ‘Hindu India’ has turned the Ulema into natural allies. In any case, the military requires their services to legitimise its engagement in politics and to counter the potential civilian opposition.<sup>19</sup>

The Military-Mullah Alliance expanded and gained strength during the 11 years of military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988). Zia had, in fact, joined hands with the religious parties prior to overthrowing the elected government. Predictably, religious conservatives like the Deobandi Ulema and the Jamaat-I-Islami not only guided Zia’s brand of Islamisation but also became the military’s partners in the Afghan war.<sup>20</sup> It was during the Afghan *jihad* that a definitive Mullah-Military Alliance developed into its current avatar.

Despite the restoration of democracy, the political process in the post-Zia period remained hostage to this ‘unholy alliance’, which had undermined the credibility of civilian political actors to such an extent that, when General Pervez Musharraf carried out a bloodless coup in November 1999, it did not attract even a whimper of protest.<sup>21</sup> The chief architect of the Kargil misadventure, Musharraf continued to utilise

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18 Aasim Sajjad Akhtar et. al., “Reading between the lines: The Mullah–Military alliance in Pakistan”, *Contemporary South Asia*, Volume 15, Issue 4, 2006, pp.383–397.

19 International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military”, Report No. 49, March 20, 2003, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/pakistan-mullahs-and-military>.

20 Hussain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, 2005.

21 Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle Within Militant Islam*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2007, pp.12-27.

the services of the Islamist forces for the consolidation of his hold on power. More importantly, his policy of persecution and harassment of his political adversaries facilitated the steady growth of the Islamist parties.<sup>22</sup> The six-party religious-political alliance, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), owed its victory in the October 2002 elections in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP)- renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan to state patronage, particularly the blessings of the military-led establishment.

Unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh has experienced no such alliance, even though there are instances of convergence of interests between the military and the clergy. This is possibly because Islam is not the *raison d'être* of the state. However, Islam assumed pre-eminence in the Bangladeshi polity after the introduction of a new national ideology following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the overthrow of his government by a military coup in August 1975.

Not long after his ascendancy as the new ruler of Bangladesh in November 1975, General Zia-ur-Rehman brought about a major shift in state ideology by replacing the secular 'Bengali nationalism' with 'Bangladeshi nationalism'.<sup>23</sup> Though outwardly inclusive, the new Bangladeshi nationalism essentially highlighted the Muslim moorings of the country, differentiating its Muslim majority Bengalis from their Hindu counterparts in West Bengal in India. This, in a sense,

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22 International Crisis Group, "Authoritarianism and political party reforms in Pakistan", Report No. 102, September 28, 2005, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/13691/102\\_authoritarianism\\_and\\_political\\_party\\_reform\\_pakistan.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/13691/102_authoritarianism_and_political_party_reform_pakistan.pdf).

23 Salahuddin Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Past And Present*, A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi 2004, pp.177-317; Zillur Rahman Khan, "Islam And Bengali Nationalism", *Asian Survey*, Volume 25, Issue 8, 1985, pp. 834-851.

“reinstated the ‘Two Nation’ thesis that the formation of Bangladesh had seemingly overturned. Hindu Bengal was once more recognised as Indian and alien.”<sup>24</sup>

On the basis of this new state ideology, Zia-ur-Rehman created the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to compete for power with the Awami League – the party closely identified with the regime he had overthrown. To counteract the political influence of the Awami League, not only did the Zia regime overtly flirt with Islamist groups and social movements, it also amended the Constitution in 1977 by replacing ‘socialism’ and ‘secularism’ with ‘social justice’ and ‘the absolute faith in God Almighty’, which transformed Bangladesh into a quasi-Islamic state.<sup>25</sup> Internally, this transformation enabled President Zia to legitimise his rule, while providing the ideological platform to justify his opposition to the Awami League. Externally, the state-led Islamisation brought the oil-rich Arab Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, closer to Bangladesh, even while the US preferred the pro-Western Islamists to the pro-Soviet socialists in Dhaka.

The Islamisation process started by Zia-ur-Rehman grew even stronger under General H.M. Ershad (1982–1990). Together with his outreach to the Islamic outfits to legitimise his rule– like the 1988 proclamation of Islam as the state religion, declaration of Friday as the weekly holiday, introduction of religious teaching in the military, promotion of madrasa education and construction of mosques – Ershad’s overplay of the ‘India card’ over the Farakka Barrage issue and attempts

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24 Brasted, Howard V., “Islam and identity in South Asia: At the crossroads of confusion and confrontation?”, in Nelly Lahoud and Anthony H. Johns eds., *Islam In World Politics*, Routledge, London, 2005, pp.105-126.

25 Ali, Syed Mahmud, “The Demise of Zia: From Bloody Mutinies to Abortive Coups”, in Habib Zafarullah ed., *The Zia Episode in Bangladesh Politics*, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1996, pp.165-169.

at politically reinstating the pro-Pakistani and anti-Liberation elements like Golam Azam and S.A. Rahman, helped create a popular support base for the Islamists.<sup>26</sup> Tazeen Murshid notes, “Religion and politics do not necessarily come together only when political institutions are weak, but also when dominant authoritarian regimes feel threatened.”<sup>27</sup>

### UNDERSTANDING THE MOSAIC OF POLITICS AND RELIGION IN SOUTH ASIA

The rise of the religious right was especially visible in world public opinion, where stunning changes in perceived threats seemed to confirm Samuel P. Huntington’s take on the world order. For instance, a massive Pew Global Attitudes survey of more than 38,000 people in 44 nations, conducted roughly a year after 9/11, turned up disturbing evidence of profound differences in how people from different regions of the globe viewed the United States and the US-led global war on terrorism.<sup>28</sup> A majority rated the United States favourably in 35 of the 42 countries in which the question was asked. The most negative opinions of both the United States and the global war on terrorism were recorded in predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East and South Asia – Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Pakistan, Egypt, and Bangladesh.<sup>29</sup>

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26 Hashmi, Taj I., “Failure of the “Welfare State”: Islamic Resurgence And Political Legitimacy In Bangladesh”, in Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah Saeed eds., *Islam And Political Legitimacy*, Routledge, London, 2003, pp.102-126.

27 Tazeen M. Murshid, *The Sacred and The Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses, 1871–1977*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, India, 1995, p. 370.

28 “What the World Thinks in 2002: The Pew Global Attitudes Project”, The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Washington, D.C, December 2002.

29 Of Muslim countries in what the survey designated the Middle East/ Conflict Area, only Uzbekistan, where an extremely high 85 per cent of

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An especially startling finding surfaced in a Pew follow-up survey question that queried respondents' view of suicide bombing in defense of Islam. At least a quarter of Muslims in 11 of the 14 countries surveyed, believed that suicide bombings could be justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Support for suicide bombing had surprisingly sizeable majorities in Lebanon (73 per cent) and Ivory Coast (56 per cent); and relatively high minorities supported it in the two Muslim-majority South Asian countries in the survey—Bangladesh (44 per cent) and Pakistan (33 per cent).<sup>30</sup>

Islam, whether combined with militancy, fundamentalism, radicalism or terrorism, no doubt occupies the spotlight in the West's efforts to beat the current challenge to its dominance of the global order. Islam may persist in this role – or even fill it in yet more catastrophically violent ways – well into the future.<sup>31</sup>

However, Islam is not the only religion on the planet able and willing to swell the ranks of religious radicalism or, for that matter, to inspire acts of terrorism. Militant Hindu and Sikh movements, frequently tinged with violence and terrorism, have lengthy histories in India. Religious radicalism

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those polled gave the United States a favourable rating, departed from the norm. Majorities in all Muslim countries in the survey, again excluding Uzbekistan but including Indonesia and Senegal, opposed the war on terrorism.

30 “What the World Thinks in 2002: The Pew Global Attitudes Project”, op. cit., December 2002.

31 This is the unsettling message of a recent commentary by a leading American academic. According to him, “a dialectical and symbiotic connection, perhaps an escalating and vicious cycle, exists between the [growth of the American Empire and the growth of Islamic terrorism], and the world is about to witness a titanic and explosive struggle between them.” James Kurth, “Confronting the Unipolar Moment: The American Empire and Islamic Terrorism,” *Current History*, Volume 101, Issue 659, 2015, p.404.

is not a rarity amongst Christians either. On the contrary, there are indications that the world's rapidly expanding Christian population may be acquiring "fundamentalist" traits hitherto attributed mainly to Islam. Observing that "in the past half century the critical centers of the Christian world have moved decisively to Africa, to Latin America, and to Asia," Pennsylvania State University historian Philip Jenkins argues that a revolutionary change in world Christianity is in progress. The motivation for change is conservative and fundamentalist at its core, and "in its variety and vitality, in its global reach, in its association with the world's fastest-growing societies, in its shifting centers of gravity, in the way its values and practices vary from place to place—in these and other ways it is Christianity [not Islam] that will leave the deepest mark on the twenty-first century."<sup>32</sup>

Sketching out a picture of the complicated relationship between religion, politics, nation-building and terrorism in South Asia, Partha S. Ghosh observes that religion has played an important role in the development of most modern states in the region. However, contrary to what many may think, Ghosh stresses that religion is not new to the political scene and that in India, for example, modern Hindu nationalism can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He also notes that while religion might play an important role in a state's formation, it need not drive all politics within the state. Conversely, he observes, a state with a secular constitution does not mean that religion does not play a prominent role within the policymaking process, such as seen in India today. Another element that Ghosh believes plays an important role in the mix of religion

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32 Philip Jenkins, "The Next Christianity," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 2002, pp. 54–55. Jenkins' ideas are elaborated in his book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002.

and politics in South Asia is ethnicity.<sup>33</sup> He points out that a review of South Asian politics over the past several decades shows that minority-majority tensions have played a key role in shaping South Asian politics. Recent developments in mass communications have amplified this effect by creating a broader sense of ethnic identity across traditional geographic boundaries.<sup>34</sup> From radio to satellite television, new information and communications technologies have been effectively harnessed, often in a negative way, to propagate religious and political messages throughout South Asia. This, Ghosh asserts, has amplified the virulence of ethnic and religious tensions throughout the region. Modern mass media has helped radicals spread propaganda and dissent to a much wider audience than they had been able to previously.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, Ghosh stresses that, although ethnic and religious nationalist movements throughout South Asia's history have been very powerful, states in their reaction to such movements must be careful not to give the movements more momentum.<sup>36</sup> In particular, states must guard against taking punitive actions against an entire ethnic or religious group as a means to respond to terrorist or other violent separatist movements. "A democracy has to respond to terrorism", Ghosh warns, "[but if] in the process of that response you violate human rights, you then, in the name of defending democracy, destroy democracy."<sup>37</sup>

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33 Partha S. Ghosh, *Conflict and Cooperation in South Asia*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1995, p. 22.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

## **REGIONAL CONFLICTS IN SOUTH ASIA**

The region harbours many interrelated conflicts. These include conflicts between Afghanistan and Pakistan; between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran; between Pakistan and India over Jammu and Kashmir and water resources; Iran's accusations of Pakistani sponsored terror against their Shia community; destabilising factors like insurgencies in Balochistan and Sindh inside Pakistan; forced conversions and Hindu ultra-nationalism. All these conflicts have the potential of becoming stimuli for clashes between countries, including large scale wars. This could also have a divisive impact on Euro-Atlantic security and security challenges in the wider region.

History shows that Western institutions and Westerners are vulnerable to terrorist attacks in the region. Air India flight 182 in 1985, the Mumbai attack in 2008, and the sudden calls for troop mobilisation along the borders in reaction to terrorist attacks are some examples of this.

On the other hand, seemingly unrelated conflicts can fuel confrontations and influence opinions in separate countries and exacerbate religious extremism. The conflict between Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar has incited elements from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh to broaden the boundaries of their belligerence, with religion being the only basis for this mobilisation.

Unprecedented, disastrous consequences await the region in case radical elements manipulate any such event and impart it with a religious colour. False and extremist interpretations of religion by nefarious elements in order to pursue and strengthen their political agendas have erected walls of religious intolerance and hate in South Asia. Constant malicious propaganda from both state and non-state actors has raised distrust amongst countries and their peoples.

## Religious Militant Extremism in Pakistan: Threat to South Asia

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the barbaric attack of December 16, 2014, in Peshawar on an Army school in which more than 140 innocent children were massacred. Yet there are voices in Pakistan, including an ex-President and an ex-intelligence chief, that blame India for the attack. This response is not based on any evidence, but on years of hostility ingrained into the psyche of many sections of society. An attack of this scale in a large city like Lahore or New Delhi, accompanied by accusations directed at each other, as was the case in Mumbai in 2008, could push these countries into the open use of force. Much has already been written about the possibility of a minor conflict between these two nations escalating into a nuclear confrontation.

Terrorist attacks in the US, London, Madrid and Paris have shown that regional turmoil can spread like a disease to other places as well. Some extremists in Europe derive inspiration from the successes of other extremists elsewhere, and have established ' sleeper cells ' which threaten the basic fundamentals of democracy in Europe. These ' sleeper cells ' are known to have received psychological and military training in this region, making them a formidable force to reckon with.

South Asia has proven to be a fertile land for religious extremism. The presence of militants from Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Middle East, China and Europe in the conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir bears witness to this. Many of these ' foreign ' militants are, from time to time, either arrested or killed in gun battles with security forces in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Kashmir. Their influx requires attention as it could aggravate the security challenges in the region. Factions of different terrorist organisations like Pakistan's TTP have also declared their allegiance to the Islamic State.

The global war on terrorism launched in October 2001 had a visibly profound impact on the states of South Asia—on Pakistan most directly and physically — but in one way or another on the others as well. However, its impact on South Asia has been in certain key respects less traumatic, and politically and socially destabilising, than countries in some other regions. This is in part because so far, South Asia has not been a primary target in the war: it was not identified as the location of any of the so-called “rogue states”, or the notorious “axis of evil.”

But more importantly, South Asian states have taken the war on terrorism more or less in stride because religious radicalism and its terrorist offshoots were already staple of the political agendas of these states long before they reared their heads in New York and Washington D.C. These phenomena have none of the novelty in South Asia, to put it simply, that they undoubtedly possess in South Bronx.

Few if any of the world’s other geographic regions can boast of more deeply entrenched religious radicalism than South Asia. This applies especially to the two largest and most populous countries in the region, India and Pakistan, and, albeit to a lesser extent, to Bangladesh. Though they differ greatly when it comes to the roots, nature, and scale of religion-related radicalism, it is a major public issue in all three states, cropping up constantly both in their domestic politics and in their relations with one another.

Of late, New Delhi has ramped up its accusations of religious extremism against its major regional rival, Pakistan. The allegation that Pakistan was a ‘state sponsor of terrorism’ —in particular, of Islamic terrorism—in Muslim-majority Kashmir, was already a mainstay of Indian appeals for international (especially American) support by the middle of

the 1990s; and it grew steadily more prominent thereafter. In a letter to the then US President Bill Clinton on May 12, 1998, for example, in which he explained the rationale underlying India's initial series of nuclear tests, then Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee complained of India's "deteriorating security environment" and, without actually naming Pakistan, of India having been "for the last ten years ... the victim of unremitting terrorism and militancy sponsored by it in several parts of [the] country, specially Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir."<sup>38</sup> Echoing these sentiments and capitalising on the growing international unpopularity of Islamabad's patronage of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, Vajpayee's the then External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh declared in a public speech a year later, in the wake of the Kargil Crisis, that Pakistan's action was "an overspill of the 'Afghanistan disorder syndrome' ... a manifestation of this medieval malevolence spilling over from Afghanistan."<sup>39</sup>

The application of the terrorist label to Pakistan gained much greater credibility in late 2001, of course, when the West's hugely expanded apprehensions over the tactics of religious radicals suddenly seemed to overlap—and thus to validate—India's pre-existing fear that Kashmir had been 'hijacked' by Pakistan-based foreign militants. Having survived for years on Western political agendas primarily as an instance of human rights deprivation, the Kashmir dispute now seemed in real danger of slipping into the category of another front in the global war on terrorism.

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38 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords*, Pan Books, London, 2001, p. 86.

39 Jaswant Singh, "Kargil and Beyond" (speech given at the India International Centre, New Delhi, July 20, 1999), text reproduced by the Embassy of India web service.

Pakistan's national reputation has been subjected to relentless battering in recent years—and not only from its Indian adversary. Routinely described in the Western media as a politically maimed and potentially 'failed' or 'failing' state, Pakistan was said by responsible observers even before 9/11 to be "drifting toward religious extremism."<sup>40</sup> Prominent American academics and professional analysts claimed that many Pakistani Army officers "share the religious zeal of the fundamentalists"<sup>41</sup> and that the country's thousands of madrasas (traditional religious schools, seminaries or academies) were serving as massive institutional incubators of religious fanaticism as well as recruiting centres for the Islamic jihad.<sup>42</sup>

Prestigious American think tanks occasionally weighed in with highly damaging country profiles of their own. For instance, the comprehensive Transition 2001 Report presented to the Bush administration in its first weeks in office by a blue-ribbon panel assembled by the Rand Corporation contained the stark warning:

Pakistan is in serious crisis and is pursuing policies counter to important US interests. The United States should increase pressure on Islamabad to stop support for the Taliban, to cooperate in the fight against terrorism, to show restraint in Kashmir, and to focus on solving its own internal problems.... Pakistan continues to be beset by unhealthy political, economic, and strategic

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40 Barry Bearak, "Death to Blasphemers: Islam's Grip on Pakistan," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/12/world/death-to-blasphemers-islam-s-grip-on-pakistan.html>.

41 Sumit Ganguly, "Pakistan's Never-Ending Story," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 79, Number 2, 2000, p. 6.

42 See, for instance, Rahul Bedi, "Kashmir Peace Talks Collapse," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Volume 12, Number 10, October 1, 2000.

trends.... The most disturbing of these trends has been the growth of Islamic extremism. Extremist groups thrive because of Pakistan's continuing state failures and because they are intentionally supported by the Pakistan military and secret services in the pursuit of the latter's goals in Kashmir and Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup>

The advent of the global war on terrorism brought only modest relief for Pakistan's beleaguered public image. Though Pakistan found itself suitably positioned once again in the frontline of the West's fight against a common enemy, its reputation continued to take a beating. The radical Islamist cum terrorist brand clung to it like a tar baby—even more tightly, it seemed, when linked with allegations of nuclear recklessness. Witness, for example, the comments of Jim Hoagland, a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, in an article in the *Washington Post* on October 24, 2002, soon after accusations that Pakistan had supplied equipment for enriching uranium to North Korea, provocatively headlined “Nuclear Enabler: Pakistan Today Is the Most Dangerous Place on Earth,” declared that:

[President] Pervez Musharraf's Pakistan is a base from which nuclear technology, fundamentalist terrorism and life-destroying heroin are spread around the globe. American and French citizens and Christians of any nationality, including Pakistani, are indiscriminately slaughtered by fanatics as occasion arises. This nuclear-armed country is in part ungoverned, in part ungovernable.<sup>44</sup>

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43 *Transition 2001*, The RAND Corporation, Washington, D.C January 2001, xiii, p.45.

44 Jim Hoagland, “Nuclear Enabler: Pakistan Today Is the Most Dangerous Place on Earth,” *Washington Post*, 24 October, 2002, online edition/.

For those already convinced that the repugnant reputation was wholly deserved, the results of the October 2002 elections of Pakistan's national and provincial assemblies seemed to offer confirmation. The elections catapulted the MMA, a fiercely anti-US bloc of six ultraconservative Islamist parties, into the political limelight. The alliance won an unprecedented 52 of 272 seats (19 per cent) in the National Assembly election, lifting the religious parties into a potentially power-brokering role in the central government for the first time in Pakistan's history. In the provincial elections, the MMA won outright control of the NWFP and a major share in power in a coalition government in Balochistan—which, like the NWFP, is geographically situated next to the strategically sensitive Afghanistan border. There were a number of reasons for the MMA's electoral triumph; and some of them had very little to do with Islam. Moreover, the fact that the MMA secured only 11 per cent of the popular vote nationwide (and much less than that in the country's most populous provinces—Punjab and Sindh) argued fairly persuasively against the idea that religious fanaticism was sweeping the nation. Nevertheless, the belief that Pakistan was not wholeheartedly committed to the West's side in the global war on terrorism could not easily be dismissed.

The re-emergence of the radical religious right as participants in the electoral process is a major step backwards for Pakistan's democratic experiment. Or is it? The rise of the Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and the Milli Muslim League (MML) have certainly raised concerns. The capacity of such parties to mobilise supporters, as seen in the TLP's sit-in in Islamabad, further brings up fears of a radicalised Pakistani society both locally and internationally. However, sloganeering based on 'Islamic values' and religious intolerance is not likely

to bring enough votes for a Pakistani electorate increasingly concerned with socio-economic needs.<sup>45</sup>

Before engaging in such concerns, it is important to reflect on the previous participation of religious-affiliated political groups in Pakistan's politics: most notably, the MMA, an alliance of religious-affiliated political parties, won 59 seats in Parliament, formed a government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and was a partner in the coalition in Balochistan following the 2002 elections. MMA's electoral success was short-lived, however, when, in 2008, the coalition attained only five seats in the National Assembly and a mere 14 in the KP Provincial Assembly, where it was previously in power. MMA's relative failure in the 2008 elections can be attributed to anti-incumbency sentiments and MMA's internal bickering. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of seats the MMA won in 2002 were in KP highlights the party's limited geographical appeal and reach in Pakistan. The MMA was overshadowed in the 2008 elections by a rising secular Pashtun ethno-nationalism led by the Awami National Party (ANP).<sup>46</sup>

Religious parties in Pakistan, led by the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), JUI factions and others, took part in the elections individually in 2013. The MMA as an alliance of the religious parties has been out of action since 2008. An unsuccessful attempt at reviving the alliance was made in 2012 by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), with the JI refusing to join. Despite a 12-point manifesto which strongly opposed the US drone attacks and 'War on Terror', JUI-F failed to secure an electoral victory. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa largely voted in favour

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45 Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, "Pakistani Elections: The Radical Religious Rights in Pakistan's Electoral Politics", *South Asian Voices*, July 3, 2018, <https://southasianvoices.org/pakistani-elections-the-radical-religious-right-in-pakistans-electoral-politics/>.

46 Ibid

of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI); Balochistan marked a voter turn-out less than 2 per cent and no party got a majority. JUI-F won just 10 seats in the National Assembly. The JI, which was contesting an election outside an alliance for the first time since 1988, also marked a poor show, by managing to win only 3 seats in the National Assembly and an equally dull performance in the provinces. The performances of JUI-F and JI, on the other hand were much better than other religious parties. MMA, which emerged at the top during the Musharaff years, appeared to be nowhere in the picture. Also, the Quami Watan Party (QWP) could only win one seat in the National Assembly.<sup>47</sup>

However, there was an upward trend in votes to religious parties during the 2018 election. The share of votes polled by all the religious parties was around 10 per cent in the 2018 elections, up from barely 5 per cent in the 2013 elections. There has been an overall upward trend in religious votes during 2018 election as compared to the previous one. The debutant – TLP emerged as the fifth largest party in terms of votes received. The electoral eminence of TLP is the first and foremost indicator of the rise of the religious vote. The party ran a one-point campaign: it raised the issue of alleged threats posed to the Finality of Prophethood by those clauses (even after they had been amended). It represents the aggressive and militant face of Barelvi politics in Pakistan. Similarly, around 2.5 million votes were secured by MMA. Also, the MML first appeared on the electoral map in September 2017, a few weeks after the ouster of Nawaz Sharif as prime minister, when it famously contested the NA-120 by-election in Lahore and secured almost 6,000 votes. Even though it failed to make

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47 Anu Krishnan, “Pakistan Elections 2013: Declining Support for Religious Parties”, *IPCS*, May 29, 2013, [http://www.ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=3955](http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=3955).

an electoral mark in the 2018 election, its participation in the polling process may help some of its former militant cadres and leaders to become a part of mainstream politics in the future. The case of the Rah-e-Haq Party, the new personification of the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), which fielded candidates in as many as 70 National Assembly constituencies without success, is slightly different. The widely-circulated images of eminent political leaders seeking support from its associates suggest a significant political presence of its cadres in many constituencies.<sup>48</sup>

In brief, the 2018 elections demonstrated that the religious vote may have been marginal but it has worked as a balancer. It can also be argued that both the establishment and various mainstream political parties have tried to use religious actors for their own short-term electoral objectives in the election cycle without understanding that, by doing so, they have only furthered the long-term power of these religio-political groups with extremist leanings. Unfortunately, this pursuit of short-term political gains will only deepen Pakistan's long-range challenges of intolerance, extremism and militancy.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, has long enjoyed a reputation as an especially moderate Islamic country. Considered by many to be culturally more Bengali than Muslim, it was a relative latecomer to the list of nations said by some to be dangerously infected with the virus of religious radicalism. A number of developments prompted its placement in this category. One of them was the surprising capture of 16 seats in the National Assembly by the right-wing religious party- Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) in the October 2001 General Elections. In fact, this figure

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48 Asma Faiz, "Did Religious Issues Shape Voter Choices in Pakistan's General Election?", *The Wire*, September 1, 2018, <https://thewire.in/south-asia/did-religious-issues-shape-voter-choices-in-pakistans-general-election>.

represented only 5 per cent of the total number of seats. Moreover, JI's success was mainly the fortuitous product of its inclusion in a four-party electoral alliance formed by Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP, which won a smashing victory over the Awami League and an outright parliamentary majority in its own right. Bangladesh' Islamists were thus not in a position to claim an electoral coup even remotely on the scale of the one scored by Pakistan's Islamist parties exactly a year later.

Another equally potent reason for ringing the religious extremist alarm bell over Bangladesh were sensational reports of spreading Islamic militancy - including attacks on the country's Hindu minority (as much as 11 per cent of the population) - that seemed to surface with increasing frequency in world media in the wake of the October 2001 elections. To the great chagrin of the BNP's leadership, widely circulated articles warning of the mushrooming growth of militant-run madrasas, of the existence of covert military training camps for recruits to the Islamic jihad, and of a thickening web of organisational links between militant Bangladeshi groups with al-Qaeda appeared under such arresting headlines as "Beware of Bangladesh - Bangladesh: Cocoon of Terror,"<sup>49</sup> and "Bangladesh: Breeding Ground for Muslim Terror."<sup>50</sup>

In December, 2008, Sheikh Hasina promised to investigate and prosecute suspects for the genocide committed in 1971 by the Pakistan Army and their local collaborators – Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams – during the Bangladesh Liberation War. In March 2010, the government announced the formation of a three-member judges' tribunal, a seven-member investigation

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49 Bertil Lintner, "Beware of Bangladesh—Bangladesh: Cocoon of Terror," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 4, 2002.

50 Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh: Breeding Ground for Muslim Terror," *Asia Times*, September 21, 2002, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/D121Df06](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/D121Df06).

agency, and a twelve-member prosecution team to hold the trials according to the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) Act of 1973. The post-2010 trials of individuals accused of war crimes perpetrated in the Bangladesh Liberation War has notably targeted the senior leadership of the largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), ultimately crushing this extremist grouping.<sup>51</sup>

As a responsible and active member of the global community, and under the determined leadership and zero-tolerance policy of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has been taking the fight to terrorists and violent extremists. In 2010, the government formulated the National Education Policy, which highlighted the need for reforming the *Madrassa* curriculum. The government also introduced anti-extremism chapters in academic text books. The Sheikh Hasina government has also undertaken two major initiatives: first, the mega mosque and Islamic cultural centres project; and second, the mainstreaming of one of the largest faith-based groups, the students and graduates from the *Qawmi Madrassa* education system.

To better coordinate efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism, the government formed a 17-member ‘National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention,’ in 2009. The Money Laundering Prevention Act 2012, was the first legislation in Bangladesh to make specific provisions for money laundering and terrorism financing. Anti-terrorism sermons are routinely delivered in mosques across Bangladesh since July 1, 2016.<sup>52</sup>

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51 “The rise of Political Islam and Islamist Terrorism in Bangladesh”, *EFSSAS*, October, 2019, <https://www.efsas.org/publications/study-papers/the-rise-of-political-islam-and-islamist-terrorism-in-bangladesh/>.

52 “Bangladesh: Peace and Security”, *CRI*, September, 2018, [http://cri.org.bd/publication/pub\\_sep\\_2018/peace-security/Bangladesh-Peace-and-Security\\_Sep\\_2018.pdf](http://cri.org.bd/publication/pub_sep_2018/peace-security/Bangladesh-Peace-and-Security_Sep_2018.pdf).

In December 2015, Bangladesh formed a 600-member Police unit specialising in combating terrorism and violent extremism. Since 2009, the government has banned five extremist outfits: Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HUJI-B), Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), Shahadat-e-Al Hikma and Ansarullah Bangladesh Team (ABT). In terms of terrorist groups in Bangladesh, the most active and violent over recent years has been the JMB. The fight against the JMB has been bloody, but the country has been able to almost break their entire operational network as a result of high profile operations, prosecutions and convictions. Activities of JMB have been brought under strict control, as the law enforcers have successfully stopped regrouping of the 'neo-JMB'.<sup>53</sup>

On July 1, 2016, unfortunately, Bangladesh catapulted into international headlines in the wake of the deadliest single terrorist attack the country had experienced in decades. With five pro-Islamic State (IS) terrorists storming into the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka, the 12-hour siege ended with the death of 20 hostages, including 18 foreigners. The IS claimed responsibility for the attack. International concern over the attack prompted Sheikh Hasina's government to launch a massive counter-terrorism operation in order to suppress any terrorist movements within the country.<sup>54</sup> The government arrested approximately 11,000 suspected militants in 2016 as part of a crackdown on extremism, as a response to domestic criticism and international concerns.<sup>55</sup>

Although a relative success, the problem of *jihadi* terrorism is still a potent force in the country, and can create a challenge

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53 Ibid.

54 "The rise of Political Islam and Islamist Terrorism in Bangladesh", op. cit.

55 Ibid.

for the security apparatus at any given time. The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC), a specialized branch of the Bangladesh Police, notes that the ‘Dawahilallah Forum,’ an online propaganda forum affiliated with Al Qaeda and ABT, had increased its membership base from 550 to 3,000 by end of December, 2019. Nevertheless, security agencies are emphasising counter-narratives, de-radicalisation and awareness programmes, to curb militancy, alongside regular enforcement activities. The strong political will to fight against radicalism under Sheikh Hasina has motivated the security agencies to take resolute action.<sup>56</sup>

### **ROLE OF 9/11 IN CHANGING PAKISTAN**

Pakistan under Pervez Musharraf joined the War on Terror after 9/11, due to which religious extremism emerged in its most severe forms in the country. The incident affected the worldwide economy, but Pakistan, considered to be a home town of terrorists, extremists and militants—experienced the most drastic effects. Many religious institutions, including Islamic madrasas accused of promoting the ‘Jihad culture’, were blamed for the event. Not only were they blamed for injecting anti-American values among their students, but their brain-washing was considered to be a major cause of suicide bombings that killed many. Many people adopted an anti-American approach, while others blamed the government for becoming a frontline state in the war against terror and taking the responsibility of evacuating extremists and so-called terrorists from the land. There were no suicide bombings in Pakistan two decades earlier, but a sudden spike occurred soon after this 9/11, which had long-lasting impact on many

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56 “BANGLADESH: Containing Islamist Resurgence and Radicalism”, *South Asia Conflict Monitor*, January 13, 2020, <https://sspconline.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/SACM-JAN%202020.pdf>.

countries. The geo-strategic location of Pakistan and its alliance with the US in its war against terror adversely affected the political, social and economic environment of the country. Pakistan is still paying for its decision to join the war against terror. The number of suicide bombings and targeted killings has increased. The ideology behind suicide bombing and target killings is still ambiguous, but it has been tagged as ‘religious extremism’. Moreover, religious extremism and terrorism are two terms that are sometimes used interchangeably by different authors and analysts. Although terrorism is considered to be a consequence of religious extremism, it has become difficult to distinguish religious extremism from terrorism in Pakistan.

Moreover, there are conflicting positions and emotions among the population over the current economic crisis in Pakistan. There are also clashing views on the role of madrasas, with some authors like Adeline Delavande and Basit Zafar empirically arguing that madrasas are not fuelling religious and militant extremism,<sup>57</sup> while other researchers and analysts like Umbreen Javaid believe religious institutions have played a key role in fostering militancy in Pakistan, which has retarded economic growth and development of the country over the last two decades.<sup>58</sup>

Madrasas played a crucial role in raising the literacy rate in Pakistan, as they provided free education and food to their enrolled students till the 1970’s. But when the US intervened in Afghanistan to throw out the Taliban government after 9/11, religious madrasas started promoting *jihad*. The US blamed

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57 Delavande, Adeline And Zafar, Basit, “Stereotypes And Madrassas Experimental Evidence From Pakistan”, *RAND Working Paper Series* WR-859, 2011, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1923392#](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1923392#).

58 Interview with Umbreen Javaid, Chairperson, Department of Political Science and Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab on November 11, 2018.

the Taliban for harbouring Osama bin Laden and Pakistan for supporting the Taliban. Pakistan's then President General Pervez Musharraf, agreed to join the US and become a frontline state in the war against terror. Afghan refugees fleeing the US attack entered the tribal areas of Pakistan, while Pashtuns in the then Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) opposed the government for allying with the US and killing innocent Pashtuns across the border.

Soon after the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the number of madrasas in Pakistan mushroomed exponentially. General Zia's policy of the sectarian fragmentation of society had led to the consolidated the emergence of a theocratic state, where Islamic injunctions were increasingly followed or enforced.<sup>59</sup> Students in these madrasas were given military training by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and then held responsible for violence in the country. Recent estimates put the total number of religious madrasas at over 40,000.<sup>60</sup>

The root cause of extremism in Pakistan revolves around both internal and external factors. Umbreen Javaid has lucidly explained these causes in the context of the past and present situation of Pakistan.<sup>61</sup> The Islamisation of the society under Zia's rule was based on the Sunni interpretation of Islam, which the Shias saw as a threat to their existence in society. This led to increasing sectarian violence, and the forces of fundamentalism grew so strong that no political leader has been

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59 Sridhar K. Khatri and Gert W. Kueck, eds., *Terrorism in South Asia*, Shipra, Delhi, 2003.

60 Sarah Ashraf, "Lessons Learnt: Religious Education and Training Provided by Madrassas", Arts and Humanities Research Council, Public Policy Series No. 5, December 2012.

61 Interview with Umbreen Javaid, Chairperson, Department of Political Science and Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab on November 11, 2018.

able to rein them in, so far.<sup>62</sup> These internal forces combined with external forces and the increasing *jihadi* culture have inflicted irrevocable damage on the country's civil society and institutions.

A rising militancy denied basic and legal rights to the people, which left them with no channels to express their grievances and anger.<sup>63</sup> Religious extremism reached its climax during the regime of General Pervez Musharraf in the late 1990's. By then, the Pakistan's religious groups had joined hands with Al Qaeda and Taliban and had established independent channels of securing finance, giving them increased manoeuvrability.<sup>64</sup>

#### **ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN**

The economic condition of Pakistan is another main factor behind the violence prevailing in the country. As General Musharraf put it:

We need to understand that the root cause of extremism and militancy lies in political injustice, denial and deprivation. Political injustice to a nation or a people when combined with stark poverty and illiteracy makes the explosive mix leading towards an acute sense of deprivation, hopelessness and powerlessness. A people suffering from a combination of all these lethal ills are easily available cannon fodder for the propagation of militancy and the perpetration of extremist and terrorist acts.<sup>65</sup>

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62 Abbas Rashid, "Pakistan: The Ideological Dimension", in Mohammad Asghar Khan ed., *Pakistan Experience: State and Religion*, Vanguard Books Ltd., Lahore, 1985, p. 84.

63 Ilhan Niaz, *The Culture of Power and Governance of Pakistan 1947-2008*, Oxford University of Press, Karachi, 2010.

64 Abbas Rashid, op. cit. p. 84.

65 Available at [www.netpakistani.com](http://www.netpakistani.com).

## Religious Militant Extremism in Pakistan: Threat to South Asia

According to an Annual Review on Social Developments in Pakistan issued by Social Policy and Development Centre, Karachi (2009-2010), the War on Terror has had severe implications for social as well as economic development of Pakistan.<sup>66</sup> Today, a large proportion of the country's budget is allocated for security and Pakistan is locked in a vicious cycle of political instability and security breakdown, leading to an economic crisis through higher transaction cost, diversion of resources from productive use, and loss of life, property and investment, which in turn cause further instability.

Pakistan's economy has taken a hit mostly due to the political and social unrest in the country over the past two decades. This has impacted both domestic and foreign investments, which has impacted the growth rate. As always, the poor suffer much more under these circumstances than the rich. When there is less investment in the economy, production falls, and employment opportunities decline, leading to lower per capita income. According to Michael Todaro, the middle class is known for higher marginal rates of saving, but the violence attached with religious extremism and ever-increasing inflation have drastically decreased the savings rate over the past few years.<sup>67</sup> The rich hardly save due to their luxurious lifestyles, while the middle class consumes what it earns because of the low per capita income. Violent shows of strength by radical Islamists against what they perceive as attacks on their ideology greatly dampens business optimism.

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66 Mehmood, Tariq, "The Social, Political and Economic Effects of the War on Terror: Pakistan 2009 To 2011", ISSRA Papers, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), Tokyo, Japan, 2013, [https://ndu.edu.pk/issra/issra\\_pub/articles/issra-paper/ISSRA\\_Papers\\_Vol15\\_IssueI\\_2013/04-Policy-Paper-Tariq-Khan.pdf](https://ndu.edu.pk/issra/issra_pub/articles/issra-paper/ISSRA_Papers_Vol15_IssueI_2013/04-Policy-Paper-Tariq-Khan.pdf).

67 Michael Paul Todaro, *Economic Development in the Third World*, Longman, New York, 1985.

There are different schools of contradictory Islamic thoughts, which in turn foments clashes and extremism. The Red Mosque in Islamabad was one example of religious extremism in Pakistan. According to Umbreen Javaid, it was a host of militants and law breakers who created fear and horror all over the state.<sup>68</sup> The US pressure, combined with pressure from the Chinese government after students of the mosque took employees of a massage parlour hostage led to a military operation against the madrasa students and clerics of the Red Mosque, and the abolishing of two other illegally constructed mosques in Islamabad. As a reaction to this military operation, suicide bombings increased in Pakistan. Soon after this incident, the military acted against Maulana Fazallula who had captured and enforced his rules in the Swat region, affecting tourism adversely. The assassinations of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and the Minority Affairs Minister, Shahbaz Bhatti are prime examples of violent religious extremism.

### **ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF PAKISTAN IN SOUTH ASIA**

Pakistan's economy has been facing instability both at micro and macro levels, resulting in a fall in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows and increases in poverty and unemployment.<sup>69</sup> Religious violence and extremism have worsened the situation and their roots are connected to historical policies. Acts of violence have become a common practice to achieve ideological, religious and political goals.<sup>70</sup>

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68 Interview with Umbreen Javaid, Chairperson, Department of Political Science and Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab on November 11, 2018.

69 Z. Iqbal and G.M. Zahid, "Macroeconomic determinants of economic growth in Pakistan", *The Pakistan Development Review*, Volume 37, Number 2, 1998, pp. 125-148.

70 Ibid.

## Religious Militant Extremism in Pakistan: Threat to South Asia

These activities include terrorism and, specifically, communal and sectarian violence. Moreover, after the 9/11 attacks in the US, religious sectarianism and extremism emerged in their most severe forms in the country, leading to a negative impact on international relations, low FDI inflows and continuous decline in economic growth.

According to a study conducted by S. Mehmood (2014), Pakistan is attracting more and more researchers for studying the impact of terrorism on the economy, since it has a long and intense history of terrorism. Researchers are able to study and analyse the economy of Pakistan over an extended time period, in this context,<sup>71</sup> with a history reaching back to the Zia-ul Haq era. Estimates of direct cost of post-9/11 terrorism are around USD 7 billion. Cumulatively, terrorism has cost Pakistan around 33.02 per cent of its real National Income.<sup>72</sup>

Pakistan is a developing economy with an annual growth rate of 4.24 per cent in 2014-15, whereas 4.71 per cent was reported for the fiscal year 2015-16 by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. The country needs a higher growth rate (minimum 7 per cent) to achieve its developmental goals.<sup>73</sup> Presently, FDI inflows serve as the main engine of growth. Pakistan has been implementing liberalisation policies to attract higher levels of FDI inflows. Moreover, policy makers are continuously working to create a friendly environment for foreign investors, but the factors of terrorism and extremism discourage foreign investors.

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71 S. Mehmood, "Terrorism and the Macroeconomy: Evidence from Pakistan", *Defense and Peace Economics*, Volume 25, Number 5, 2014, pp. 509-534.

72 Ibid.

73 Ayesha Serfraz, "What is the effect of foreign direct investment inflows on economic growth in Pakistan? An empirical analysis in the light of religious sectarianism as catalyst for terrorism", 2017, <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/156415/1/882706489.pdf>.

Outwardly, terrorism is likely to be the most important factor disrupting FDI-led economic growth in Pakistan. According to Shahzad et. al., an upsurge in terrorist activities creates uncertainty and unsteadiness in economic and political accomplishments.<sup>74</sup> As a result, foreign investors fear that their investments and profits might run the risk of loss, which discourages investment. Religious sectarianism or extremism is a manifestation of hatred and prejudice among people who believe in diverse religions as well as people belonging to different sects within the same religion, and even encompasses the hatred between believers in a religion and non-believers. For example, the differences between Muslims and Jews and between different sects amongst the Muslims (Shia-Sunni conflicts) as well as the differences between believers and atheists. In the case of Pakistan, as Christian C. Fair observes, the internal wars, employing terrorist tactics, have claimed more lives than the wars fought across Pakistan's borders, and all these conflicts are based on religious sectarianism.<sup>75</sup> Muhammad Zakaria is of the opinion:

In the last 17 fiscal years since the event of 9/11, Pakistan's economy has suffered a direct and indirect cost linked to terrorist activities of almost \$126.79 billion, which is equal to Rs. 10762.14 billion... Further, normal economic and trading activities have also been disrupted, which has increased the cost of doing business. Terrorism has also adversely affected Pakistan's international trade. As a result, Pakistan has lost its market share and therefore remains unable

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74 S. J. H., Shahzad, et. al., "Relationship between FDI, Terrorism and Economic Growth in Pakistan: Pre and Post 9/11 Analysis", *Social Indicators Research*, Volume 127, Number 1, 2016, pp. 179-194.

75 C.C. Fair, "Explaining Support for Sectarian Terrorism in Pakistan: Piety, Maslak and Sharia", *Religions*, Volume 6, Number 4, 2015, pp. 1137-1167.

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to achieve its targeted growth rates. It is evident... that foreign investment, tax collection and exports have been badly affected due to terrorism. Other than financial and economic losses, Pakistan has also suffered human capital loss. Over last 14 years from 2003 to 2016, 21,485 civilian and 6660 security forces personnel have lost their lives in terrorist attacks in Pakistan.<sup>76</sup>

According to the Ministry of Finance, deteriorating law and order resulted in the stagnation of regular trading activities, interruptions in national production cycles, loss of local manufacturing, severe reductions in foreign direct investment, and loss of export markets at the global level.<sup>77</sup>

In case of Pakistan, religion has entered into politics resulting in extremism and sectarianism.<sup>78</sup> In the political arena, Islamist parties receive more support from middle and lower classes as compared to high income entrepreneurs. This conflict is intensifying sectarian conflict leading to violence especially in the most crowded city of Pakistan, which is also its economic hub in the sense that it is the largest city with seaport having a huge industrial set up – Karachi. All this has had a negative influence on economic growth, as the determinants of economic growth, particularly including FDI inflows, are adversely affected.<sup>79</sup>

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76 Muhammad Zakaria, et. al., “Effect of terrorism on economic growth in Pakistan: an empirical analysis”, *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, Volume 32, Issue 1, 2019, pp. 1794-1812.

77 Available at <https://www.internationalaffairshouse.org/economic-implications-of-terrorism-in-pakistan/economic-implications-of-terrorism-in-pakistan/>.

78 Ryan Clarke, *Crime-Terror Nexus in South Asia: States, Security and Non-State Actors*, Routledge, New York, 2011.

79 Ibid.

S. Krishnan

### **RECOMMENDED MEASURES**

So how does one deal with such a situation? What can be done to pick up the pieces and bring Pakistan and its people back to some semblance of normalcy? It's not easy, but here are some suggestions:

#### **REGULARISE THE MADRASAS**

This needs to be done on war footing. A federal board comprising religious scholars from all sects should be set up to jointly oversee the madrasa network, thereby minimising the possibility of sectarian clashes.

#### **REVAMP THE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

The government must allocate a minimum 5 per cent of GDP to the education sector, as already pledged by various Prime Ministers. All regularised madrasas should be given the right to award degrees like government schools, colleges and universities. All the existing systems of private schools and colleges should be brought under a common national education policy equivalent to the government system of education.

#### **INSTITUTIONALISE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS**

The exploitative role of so-called religious scholars who preach extremism and terrorism is a major problem in Pakistan. If the religious scholars are learned and equipped with research-based religious and conventional education, they can instead bring a positive change in the society. The government should encourage teachers to study religion through research and not just dogma, and get a conventional education as well. Only those who have a PhD level of education should be allowed to work as religious scholars.

### **FOREIGN RELATIONS, FUNDING AND DONATIONS**

Saudi Arabia and some other countries should be engaged with sound foreign policy, and any funding and donations from their side should be strictly regularised through official channels to prevent misuse. All attempts to curb or suppress Shias or other ethnic and religious minorities should be dealt with firmly. This polarisation is extremely dangerous, not just for Pakistan but for the entire Muslim world. Pakistan must use both government and non-government agencies as well as civil society to encourage religious amity and tolerance, and not take a prejudiced role influenced by the street power of the radicals.

All this is easier said than done, particularly given that the military uses the extremists for its own devious purposes. But unless this is done, and done soon, Pakistan faces an extremely bleak future.

To effectively overcome the challenge of extremism, Pakistan needs to evolve a whole-of-community approach targeting both the reality (through kinetic means) and ideality (non-kinetic means) of terrorism. In this regard, a joint state-society response is indispensable. It aims to create an environment that helps people to resist the appeal of militant ideologies.<sup>80</sup> In Pakistan, social polarisation and religious fragmentation has been a major stumbling block in evolving effective counter-extremist responses. The chances of overcoming these challenges increase if a cooperative environment is created. In this regard, a Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures policy

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80 Interview with Rohan Gunaratna, Head of International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research and Professor of Security Studies at the S. Rajatnam School of International Studies, Singapore, November 11, 2020.

can provide engagement opportunities to different segments of the society to discuss and evolve joint response to extremism.<sup>81</sup>

Extremism may have penetrated almost all segments of the Pakistani society. In the long-term defeating terrorism only through state-led efforts looks dim without engaging the community at multiple levels. The mind-set prevalent among the Pakistani community is that eradicating extremism and terrorism is only the government's job. However, in recent years government-public joint ventures have emerged as an essential component of contemporary conflict resolution frameworks. Britain's CONTEST approach working around four pillars; prevent, pursue, protect and prepare and Singapore's Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) are two cases in point.<sup>82</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Terrorism is spawned by a combination of factors, and they need to be addressed simultaneously on a war footing. While many believe that terror will help achieve the Islamic goal of a Caliphate that spans the world, the insidious, violent power struggles among various Muslim sects only encourages people with hidden agendas to keep the pot boiling. At the end of the day, innocent Pakistanis lose their lives or are forced to live in constant fear. As the killing of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and other moderate Pakistanis shows, the mullahs are not going to give up without a fight. The complex collaboration of militant groups, political parties and state agencies adds to the already deadly mix, leaving mainstream political parties or individuals afraid to take a stand against militant organizations. The state support for terrorist organisations makes many

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81 Ibid.

82 Marisa L. Porges and Jessica Stern, "Getting Radicalization Right," *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2010, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/persian-gulf/2010-05-01/getting-deradicalization-right>.

ordinary citizens believe that joining a militant outfit might actually improve their lot. An alarming number of people are either aligning with extremists or starting a new terrorist outfit in the hope of achieving fame, money, respect and power.

Extremism in Pakistan is certainly not confined to religiously inspired militancy and terrorism only; it is prevalent in the society at all levels. A large segment of the Pakistani society, especially youth, is vulnerable to extremist propaganda. The on-going narrow-focused de-radicalisation interventions in Pakistan will gradually lose their efficacy, as long as a moderate environment hostile to terrorism and militancy is not created. So, there is a dire need to build community resilience to immunise the society against extremism.

Pakistan should build mechanisms for community resilience and community engagement to create an environment hostile to extremism and terrorism. The policy should help the community to entertain moderate values, spirit of peaceful co-existence, interfaith harmony and respect for diversity. In addition, mechanism of community engagement can also be used to disrupt terrorist plots and recruitment efforts. Given the magnitude of the problem, Pakistan can only defeat terrorism through joint state and society efforts.<sup>83</sup>

Until and unless the state publicly and vehemently dissociates itself from extremist outfits and encourages civil society to do the same, terrorism will win. As long as terrorist leaders are allowed to roam freely under state patronage, Pakistan will continue to grapple with a deadly threat which could eventually lead to civil war and the fragmentation of the country. The country and its people deserve better.

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83 Madiha Afzal, "Education and Attitudes in Pakistan: Understanding Perception of Terrorism," Special Report 367, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 2015, <https://www.scribd.com/document/334997318/Art>.

# SOUTH ASIA INTELLIGENCE REVIEW

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