

Religious Militant Extremism in Pakistan: Threat to South Asia

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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.¹

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.²

RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM: NOT A NEW PHENOMENON

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

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.³

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

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)."⁴ Furthermore, divisions within the Sunni community also exist, most prominently among Barelvis and Deobandis.⁵

Apart from such fragmentation of the society, the country ranks third in the world on violence and terrorism.⁶ The Global Terrorism Index (GTI), 2019, places it at the 5th rank, among the worst affected countries,⁷ up from the 7th rank in GTI 2018.⁸

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>.

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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.⁹ 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.”¹⁰ 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

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."¹¹

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

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.¹³ Madrasas are indeed a significant part of the conflict equation that needs to be considered dispassionately.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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.”¹⁶

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- 13 Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, “Pakistan’s Taliban Generation”, 2009, 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.
 - 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”.¹⁷ 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

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).¹⁸

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.¹⁹

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.²⁰ 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.²¹ The chief architect of the Kargil misadventure, Musharraf continued to utilise

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.²² 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'.²³ 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,

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.

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.”²⁴

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.²⁵ 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

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.²⁶ 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.”²⁷

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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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).³⁰

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.³¹

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

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."³²

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 19th 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

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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

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.³⁶ 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."³⁷

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.

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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."³⁸ 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."³⁹

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.

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."⁴⁰ Prominent American academics and professional analysts claimed that many Pakistani Army officers "share the religious zeal of the fundamentalists"⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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

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.⁴³

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.⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵

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).⁴⁶

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

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.⁴⁷

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

47 Anu Krishnan, “Pakistan Elections 2013: Declining Support for Religious Parties”, *IPCS*, May 29, 2013, 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.⁴⁸

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

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,"⁴⁹ and "Bangladesh: Breeding Ground for Muslim Terror."⁵⁰

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

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.

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.⁵¹

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, 2016.⁵²

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.

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'.⁵³

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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

Although a relative success, the problem of *jihadi* terrorism is still a potent force in the country, and can create a challenge

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.⁵⁶

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

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,⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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

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#.

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.⁵⁹ 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 40,000.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹ 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

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.⁶² 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.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴

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.⁶⁵

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.

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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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷ 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.

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_Vol5_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.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰

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.

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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,⁷¹ 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.⁷²

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.⁷³ 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.

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.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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

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.⁷⁶

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.⁷⁷

In case of Pakistan, religion has entered into politics resulting in extremism and sectarianism.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹

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.

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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.⁸⁰ 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

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.⁸¹

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.⁸²

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

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.⁸³

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.

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>.