



# PIPS Policy Brief Counter-Violent Extremism

Working Group 3

Pak Institute For Peace Studies (PIPS) ● www.pakpips.com ● pips@pakpips.com

April 2017

## National Dialogue and Social Contract

### Summary

- This brief summarizes the findings of the third working group on Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE), which deliberated upon the need for holding national dialogue(s) to address critical politico-philosophical issues in the country, especially those producing and/or supporting extremism, and whether a revised social contract could provide answers.
- Debates around boundaries of state-religion relations dominate much of the Muslim world, the group said. In Pakistan, however, the debate should not be largely pivoted around the construction of social contract, which we already have, or its revision; instead, the prevailing narrative, which ends up sympathizing with those of the extremists, should be scratched.
- Broadly stating, participants called for shaping a narrative that is accommodative towards all citizens; the narrative should be sourced to the constitution.
- Participants suggested multiple dialogues be held with broad range of society, on the relation between state and religion, state and society, as well as state and citizen.
- Participants entrusted the Constitution as the guiding principle of any dialogue.
- Three separate dialogues, one each with state, civil society, and religious stakeholders be held, which end up producing "National Charter of Peace" to achieve peace and harmony in the country.

### Background

On April 3, 2017, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) convened a meeting of third working group on Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE), deliberating on the need for a national dialogue to address critical politico-philosophical issues in the country,

### Group members (arranged alphabetically by last name)

#### **Dr. Qibla Ayaz**

Former Vice Chancellor, Peshawar University

#### **Farzana Bari**

Gender activist

#### **Romana Bashir**

Peace activist

#### **Rashad Bukhari**

Scholar

#### **Dr. Zia-ul-Haq**

Director General, Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad

#### **Harris Khalique**

Poet and essayist

#### **Afrasiab Khattak**

Former senator

#### **Rahat Malik**

Political analyst

#### **Khursheed Nadeem**

Anchor and columnist

#### **Dr. Raghbir Naeemi**

Head, Jamia-e-Naeemia

#### **Niaz Hussain Naqvi**

Al-Muntazir, Lahore

#### **Dr. A. H. Nayyar**

Educationist

#### **Yasir Pirzada**

Columnist

#### **Muhammad Amir Rana**

Director, PIPS

#### **Dr. Ejaz Ahmed Samdani**

Darul Uloom Karachi

#### **Sabookh Syed**

Senior journalist

especially those producing extremism, and whether a revised social contract could provide answers.

This was the third in a series of 10 planned meetings convened by PIPS on CVE; the first working group, which met on March 20, 2017, deliberated about the mechanism for shaping a religion-based narrative that counters those of extremists; the second, which met on March 27, 2017, discussed the mechanism for reintegrating militants willing to shun violence and denounce *takfeer* (the practice of declaring fellow Muslims out of creed of Islam).

The themes of these working-group meetings are largely driven from the CVE model PIPS proposed in 2016. A group of scholars, experts, and practitioners had, in a series of meetings, brainstormed over different components of a Pakistan-specific CVE model, one of them about reintegrating and rehabilitating militants.

In 2016, participants recommended that national dialogues be convened to discuss critical issues facing the country – the specifics were, however, left for the latter stages.

The third working group, which met on April 3, 2017, explored those mechanisms, discussing if national dialogues are required to discuss the issues, and what exactly should be covered in those dialogues.

### Key considerations

*The group, deliberated about the **need of holding national dialogue and, if possible, revisiting the social contract.***

- Pakistan like other Muslim countries faces some deep philosophical questions touching upon role of religion and nature of the state. To find answers to them, participants suggested, Pakistan, following the trend of other Muslim countries, can hold national-level dialogues. The mechanism of those dialogues, for sure, should suit the needs of Pakistan.
- Most of the participants disapproved of the suggestion of re-writing a new social contract. They reposed their trust in the existing constitution, originally drafted in 1973. The same contract, they said, has even helped resolve several of the country's other basic questions, most recently in the form of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, delegating powers to the provinces.

Several participants, however, reminded that some of the clauses of the constitution too end up infringing on the freedom of the minorities.

The group suggested that room for amendments be left open. However, any change, whatsoever, should be brought in through the process already laid out in the constitution.

- Comparison was also drawn between Pakistan and the Muslim world at large. Several said the wave of militancy is a phenomenon common in the Muslim world, which is struggling with a multitude of common issues ranging from identity politics to legitimate rule.

Where Pakistan has similarities with rest of the Muslim world in terms of the rise of faith-based extremism, what differs Pakistan from many of the others is that the country has a unanimously-passed constitution and a history of movements agitating against martial laws. One said, the country didn't have any need for an Arab Spring.

- Instead, Pakistan's problem was of narrative; the prevailing narratives end up sympathizing with those of the extremists.

One of the broad sources of those narratives comes from the way Islamic thought is represented in the country. Members called for revisiting and responding to the prevalent construct of religious thought, which usually ends up justifying violence in the name of Islam. It is because of this construct that broad segment of society is unable to have an outright condemnation of faith-based violence and militancy; instead, they justify the [violent] action on one pretext or another. The group was told that this point, of revisiting how religious thought is constructed [through certain skewed interpretations of Islamic precepts], was already discussed in detail in the first working group and its related first policy brief. (See PIPS's policy brief, *Religious Thought and Conflict*, March 2017)

Some participants reminded that some faith-based actors have already worked towards structuring peaceful narratives. Reference was made to some of the recent writings of Mufti Muneeb, a renowned Barelvi scholar, and to a charter released by a Deobandi seminary Jamia Ashrafia in 2010.

Yet, given that society has been brought up in favouring extremists' narrative, even the inclusive thoughts of the scholars are not absorbed with ease. The thoughts of Mufti Muneeb, although a prominent Bareilvi scholar, are cited as his personal. While people tend to know about extremist groups around the Muslim world, they know little about scholars like Rashid Ghannoucci, architect of the concept of "Muslim democrats."

One of the causes of the intolerant narrative is state's own leeway towards it. Students are told about arch-rival India as "cunning" and "scheming" Hindus. "Our society was radicalized later; first the state was radicalized", one said. Participants, therefore, suggested the state institutions should disassociate themselves from the previous narratives.

Broadly stating, participants called for shaping a narrative that is accommodative towards all citizens should be produced; the narrative should be sourced to the constitution.

*Participants also brainstormed over **the themes for national dialogues and their potential players.***

- Most of these themes took state institution as key player in any dialogue.

A key dialogue theme suggested was to discuss relation between state and religion. Such a discussion, it was proposed, would automatically discuss role of minorities in the country, besides others. As discussed, several blamed the state's policies for ending up into intolerant narratives in the country.

Another broader theme evolving out of the discussion was relation between state and citizen. This came as the group, while putting their trust on the constitution, desired of its implementation. To this end, one of the urgent dialogues, some participants said, is required between civil society and power elites of the country. One participant said that civil-military relations should also be discussed as a corollary of this larger dialogue theme. Another participant called for holding a debate on "what is national interest" of the country.

- Some participants pointed at themes involving players directly interacting with each other to resolve their tensions.

One called for exploring tensions between those who are known as the modernist Muslims and the traditionalists. Even their true representatives are missing: The modernists, it was suggested, represented landed gentry and bureaucracy, while the traditionalists have been reactionary to anything logical.

Another called for holding dialogue between different communities or provinces, especially by engaging their civil societies, intellectuals, and poets.

- Participants trusted in constitution as the guiding principle of any dialogue. It was reminded that while constitutional mechanism has resolved many problems, many others can be resolved through the same process.

Even when engaging militants, rules of engagement should be set within the constitutional framework. For one, those who abide by the constitution, willing to shun violence, and/or denounce declaring each other infidel, should be engaged. The point was elaborated in the second working group discussion on reintegrating of militants. (See also, PIPS Policy Brief, *Reintegration of Militants*). A participant in the third session, however, suggested those who reject the constitution of Pakistan as un-Islamic should rather be first told that it doesn't have anything contrary to Islam. This, it was argued, will pave way for dialogue with them.

- It was also reminded that any dialogue aimed at resolving key philosophical challenges confronting the country, should take into women too. The outcome of those debates will, in that way, be more sensitive towards women.
- Some participants argued that the intellectual response to CVE from liberals was as scant and coherent as from religious circles. One even said, it was because of 'silence' of liberal forces that extremists found space. Another said, secularism and liberalism are often meant as deviation from religion, which is not the case; these words may be re-narrated through new native terms.

## The concept of dialogues as initially conceived in 2016:

The Dialogue	Responsible institution
<p><b>A. National Dialogue Forum</b></p> <p>There is a dire need for establishing a National Dialogue Forum (NDF), to serve as a platform for scholars, academics, political and religious leaders and policymakers to bring the key challenges on the discussion table and to understand various viewpoints. The NDF cannot only help connect diverse ideological, social and political segments of society, but also create an environment to discuss critical issues.</p> <p><b>B. The dialogue observatory</b></p> <p>The NDF secretariat can have support from a counter-extremism research centre comprising experts from the relevant fields of social sciences and religious studies. This centre can also establish a desk to monitor the extremist narratives and hate speech. Similarly, provincial counter-extremism research centres can be developed and connected with the NDF.</p> <p><b>C. The debate</b></p> <p>During the Arab Spring events in Egypt, concern was raised that radical and violent actors could try to exploit the situation to pursue their objectives. However, such apprehensions proved to be unfounded because a debate in the background slowly defused violent tendencies in Egypt at the time of the Arab Spring.</p> <p>Egypt passed through a violent phase in the 1990s when the government made all-out efforts to dismantle jihadist groups in the country. The Hosni Mubarak regime had jailed thousands of suspects. Although rejection of violence by the Muslim Brotherhood had shrunk the space for violent actors in Egyptian society, the discourse facilitated among captive members of the Islamic Group and Al Jihad, the two main jihadist groups in Egypt, on the issue of legitimacy of pursuing a violent path, contributed much in countering violent ideological tendencies. The debate provided an opportunity to Islamic Group and Al Jihad members to review their strategies and give up violence.</p> <p><b>Is such debate possible among Pakistan-based militants?</b></p> <p>Though the religious scholars in Pakistan have issued more than a dozen conditional religious decrees against suicide attacks, stating that there is no justification for such attacks on Pakistani soil, such conditional or even</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The initiative must come from the chief executive of the country, with the support of parliament. The Prime Minister's office can lead this initiative, with a formal secretariat and administrative body.</li> <li>• National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), Pakistan Peace Collectives (PPC), an initiative of the Federal Information Ministry, can serve the purpose of the centre.</li> <li>• Apart from NDF, religious scholars, civil society organizations and educational institutions can play effective role in triggering debates on critical ideological issues.</li> </ul>

unconditional religious decrees cannot reverse the phenomenon of militancy in Pakistan. A debate within religious and militant circles is essential. Such debates can enrich the discourse of the national dialogue to respond critical challenges.

The moderate religious scholars can do this job more effectively both in terms of reconstruction of political and religious views and contributing to a national dialogue.

### New recommendations

- The Constitution of Pakistan is trusted as the social contract and should be upheld thus, tightening its implementing and removing any loopholes:
  - Some faith-centric clauses that accord second-class status to minorities can be revisited, but the mechanism to do so should follow the one detailed in the Constitution.
- Civil society may also hold multiple other dialogues, with broad range of society including teachers, lawyers, religious hardliners, media, and parliamentarians.
  - Any dialogue convened should uphold the constitution of Pakistan.
- Specifically, three separate “**dialogue forums**” be constituted, one each for the state, civil society, and religious stakeholders
  - These different forums should debate the critical intellectual/philosophical tensions in the country.
  - Some of the themes these forums may discuss are about relation between state and religion, state and society, state and citizen.
  - The findings of these forums should help produce “**National Charter of Peace**” which vows to achieve peace and harmony in the country, and lays down the mechanism for achieving peace and harmony in the country.
  - The outcomes of such dialogue forums shall be disseminated widely, engaging a broad range of stakeholders such as media, school teachers, lawyers, and even religious hardliners.
- Curriculum should be urgently reformed, ridding it of the radicalizing and excluding content.

### Observers

1. Sajjad Azhar, Associate Editor, *Tajziat*, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
2. Shagufta Hayat, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
3. Lema Jan, Embassy of Germany in Islamabad
4. M. Shoaib, Pakistan Peace Collective

### Rapporteurs

1. Atif Hashmi, Contributor/columnist, *Tajziat*, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
2. Muhammad Ismail Khan, Associate Editor, *Conflict & Peace Studies*, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)