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*Media Seminars on Militants' Media in  
Pakistan and its Impact*

By Pak Institute For Peace Studies



## Dialogue

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organized a series of policy dialogues to seek expert opinion on a PIPS research report titled 'Understanding Militants' Print Media in Pakistan and its Impact'. The report maps the militants' media, its genesis and evolution, and impact on the Pakistani state and society. The report also profiles publications of the militants' media, colloquially known as 'jihad media', along with publications of madrassas, sectarian groups and/or associated individuals, and mainstream media groups which support the narrative of the militants' media. Besides content analysis of the four types of publications, the report also discusses at length the parallel propaganda campaign by militants in the form of leaflets and *Shabnamas* (night letters). The report finds that the militants' media is gradually expanding its influence and outreach, having frustrated government efforts to close it down by continuously resurfacing under new names.

The sessions brought together a large number of media representatives, scholars and academics to discuss the militants' media in Pakistan. There was near consensus during the sessions that the mainstream media also shared responsibility for the current spate of militancy and radicalization in Pakistan as it had failed to put in enough efforts to counter, or at least not side with, the militants' media. Details of three sessions organized by PIPS are given below:

### **Session 1**

First event of the series entitled "Jihad Through Media" was organized in Islamabad on October 20, 2009.

Zafarullah Khan (Executive Director, Centre for Civic Education)

Religious journalism is not a new phenomenon in Pakistan. However, we need to differentiate between religious journalism and militants' journalism. Government-endorsed bodies such as the Council of Islamic Ideology have been giving recommendations to regulate the media and tune it according to Islamic values. But I was amazed at the significant change that came about in the tone and tenor of the recommendations after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. I would like to quote one recommendation that emerged in a meeting in 1978, suggesting that Pakistan should include *Kalima-e-Tayyaba* and inscribe Allah-o-Akbar on the national flag as these symbols would be a source of inspiration for the majority of the people in Pakistan, instigating in them the desires of martyrdom and jihad. Quite surprisingly, the flag of the Taliban bears these symbols.

Academic discourse has also remained supportive of this kind of media narrative. Some of the leading scholars in journalism in Lahore and Karachi have been asserting that if we want to reform Pakistani society, we need Islamic journalism whose sole source of inspiration should be "*Amr bil Ma'roof wa Nahi Anil Munkir*", enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, a methodology which was later internalized by almost all jihadi publications. Some academics have even argued that it is a false notion that the media's sole responsibility is to provide accurate and up-to-date information. They insist that the media is also bound to interpret developments from an Islamic perspective and strive to promote the Islamic way of life through its discourses.

Despite their huge circulation, militants' publications may have little impact. You can find commonalities between the militants' media and some segments of the mainstream media. To be honest, the vocabulary, the argument, the construction of the argument, especially in *Zarb-e-Momin* and a few Urdu newspapers,

has startling similarities. I have tried to decipher 10 to 12 columns, which had amazing similarities but I do not have any empirical evidence. May be it was just a simple case of plagiarism.

Amir Zia (Director News, Samaa TV)

The PIPS study on the militants' media is unique, phenomenal and groundbreaking. But I have a few observations and reservations. First, we should not call the militants' media 'jihadi media'. The term jihad is sacred to Muslims. Jihad is one of the basic tenants of Islam. So calling such publications jihadi is akin to providing them much needed religious legitimacy. My second reservation is regarding the use of the term Islamic journalism. A journalist is a journalist. IN its essence, journalism means being objective, fair and neutral. The militants' media does not meet the basic standards of journalism. Hence, it may be called propaganda literature. The effective manner in which it changes the minds of innocent people through half-baked and faulty information and discourses should be looked into seriously.

Then there is the question of freedom of expression in the media, which is also important. I remember when daily *Islam* was banned a few years ago, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists and the Karachi Union of Journalists organized protests to oppose the government's decision in the name of freedom of press. But I think propaganda and journalism should be separated. The state has every right to ban hate material, or any literature or writing that may incite violence or terrorism.

Afzal Khan (South Asia Free Media Association)

The concepts of freedom of expression and freedom of press come with certain social, political and cultural responsibilities. Everyone should have the right to raise one's viewpoint but using the media as a tool and instrument of propaganda to incite and mislead people and distort facts amounts to abusing the freedom of expression.

The jihadi organizations and their literature particularly mushroomed during General Zia-ul-Haq's martial law and the Soviet-Afghan war. The state also encouraged the mainstream media to highlight the jihad in Afghanistan.

Taufeeq Asif (President Rawalpindi Bar Association)

The media needs to be unbiased and impartial in reporting militancy. It is the best tool for freedom of expression but it may not be used to disseminate hate messages and advocate violence.

Javed Siddique (Resident Editor, daily *Nawa-i-Waqt*, Islamabad)

The publications of religious political parties in the Subcontinent including those of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan were there even before Pakistan gained independence. However, before independence, such publications were not necessarily advocating jihad as vigorously as is being done now. I agree with the other speakers that the Afghan jihad, endorsed by the CIA, ISI and other forces, led to a mushroom growth of militancy and the militants' media in Pakistan. Jihad publications have supported Al Qaeda, Taliban and other jihad groups in Pakistan. In fact, the Kashmir dispute, the occupation of Palestine and the presence of international forces in Afghanistan have provided jihadi publications a cause to promote violence and incite participation in jihad in Kashmir, Afghanistan and Palestine. As long as the issue of Kashmir, Palestine and Afghanistan

are unresolved, jihadi organizations and their publications will continue to flourish and it will be difficult to curtail them.

Dr. Tariq Rehman (Director, National Institute of Pakistan Studies)

The militants' worldview, that is to dominate the world through any means, precedes the 9/11 tragedy. It is promoted by international hooliganism, by trade powers, but also by the fact that most of the rulers in the Muslim world are from exploitative elites. These authoritarian regimes have not allowed the liberties which normally prevent grievances from becoming extremism. The publication of reports on such topics by PIPS will help understand the different dimensions of militancy in Pakistan, of which the media front is the most important. Some of the speakers raised very important points regarding the terminology used to describe such media. There is a case for rethinking the terminology we use because language is a powerful tool that influences the mind. There is a worldview, emotions and attitude which grow with the language. It is, therefore, important to pay attention to the terms we use.

## Session 2

The second event of the series, entitled 'Assessing the Reporting, Approach and Impact of Militants' Print Media in Pakistan', was organized in Lahore on November 18, 2009.

Hussain Naqi (Journalist and human rights activists)

An analysis of the militants' media in Pakistan that fails to discuss the role of the mainstream media will not be a true description of the narrative being pursued and promoted by the former. It is hard to ignore the opinion expressed throughout this seminar that part of Pakistan's mainstream media has been manifesting an approach that is very close to the militants' media's, and media barons of Pakistan cannot be absolved of the responsibility of creating and promoting an extreme religious or ideological view in the country.

Qazi Javed (Intellectual)

The jihad media blossomed during the Afghan jihad and has been consistently demonizing 'others' - anyone other than militants - until now. In the 1990s, around 100 jihad publications were disseminating radical and extremist ideas among Pakistani youth. A big segment of the mainstream media tacitly endorses the jihad media narrative.

The basic objective of the militants' media is to publicize their cause in an emotional tone. The difference between the free and jihad media is that the free media presents the facts before the masses but the jihad media interprets the facts according to their own agenda, which is not regional but international. Therefore, the war against these jihadi outfits is not only for the survival of a country but for humanity and civilization. It is a true world war and the failure to recognize its importance would be disastrous.

Hameed Akhter (Columnist)

Pakistan's mainstream media has miserably failed to counter the militants' media. Unfortunately, the mainstream media also subscribes, intentionally or unintentionally, to the ideology being disseminated by the militants' media. Its effectiveness and outreach and its sphere of influence is greater than that of the militants' media.

Dr. Rubina Saigol (Human rights activist)

The textbooks being taught in schools contain content that incites against non-Muslims and the space for alternative thought is shrinking. Even in the mainstream media, anyone speaking about the rights of Ahmadis and Christians is considered a heretic.

Khaled Ahmed (Member PIPS Advisory Board)

The Pakistani media is under immense pressure and threat from militant outfits. Militant and extremist outfits do not tolerate criticism. The Pakistani media is quite vocal in criticizing the government for the sake of criticism but we see that it is reluctant to raise a powerful and clear voice against terrorist outfits.

### Session 3

The third and final event of the series entitled "Radical Media and its Trends in Pakistan" was organized at the Islamabad Press Club on December 17, 2009.

Tariq Parvez (Chairman National Counter Terrorism Authority)

The terrorists believe that half of their battle is being fought in the media. Therefore, the mainstream media needs to play its role to create popular support for government's counter-terrorism strategy. The media can be used as the best tool to defeat terrorist ideologies.

Abdul Majeed Mughal (Editor monthly *Nawa-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat*)

The militants' media is a propaganda campaign that need not to be included in a serious discourse on journalism. The government is equally responsible for the mushroom growth of such publications in Pakistan, which promote hatred and violence in the name of religion and jihad.

Wajahat Ali (Journalist)

Youth is the prime target of the militants' media. Such media tries to disparage the political and democratic process in Pakistan and presents religious extremists as an alternative to corrupt state elements. The conservative segment of the mainstream media also reflects the opinion of militants.

Abdul Latif Bhat (Kashmir Media Watch)

The militants' media in Pakistan has been instrumental in advocating global jihad.

Arif Bahar (Expert on Kashmir affairs)

The gap between religious and liberal journalism is widening, which is being exploited by the militants' media. In order to counter the narrative being disseminated by the militants' media, it is imperative to bridge this gap.

Abdullah Muntazir (Editor weekly *Jarrar* of banned Jamat-ud-Daawa)

The ban on legally published jihad publications during Gen Pervez Musharraf's regime paved the way for radical media, which is disseminating hatred and preaching violence in Pakistan.

Sajawal Khan Ranjha (Editor of monthly *Baidar-e-Millat*)

The Pakistani media still has to go a long way to its destination. It relies mainly on information and has not yet touched the education and training aspects. The reform and transformation of the media will come after that.

Shabana Fayyaz (Assistant Professor, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad)

Myopic policies of successive governments have contributed to the growth of the militants' media. We should not confuse religious journalism with militants' journalism.

Ammar Khan Nasir (Editor monthly *Al-Shariah*)

The militants' media is only one part of a bigger problem of militancy in the country. Pakistan needs to re-evaluate the discourse of jihad at the state level. It is also debatable if waging jihad in Kashmir and India is in accordance with *Shariah* law.

Salim Safi (TV anchor)

The mainstream media alone should not be blamed for supporting radicalism or militancy in Pakistan. The jihad ideology had influenced a large number of journalists during the Afghan jihad, which was endorsed by the international community.

Neelofar Bakhtiar (Senator, Pakistan Muslim League-Q leader)

The mainstream media need not create confusions among the masses but should create consensus on such issues. It is the moral and social responsibility of the mainstream media to counter the narrative being developed by the militants' media.

Zahid Khan (Senator, Awami National Party leader)

The role of the media has become very important in the face of organized propaganda by so-called 'jihadi' elements. The mainstream media could educate the general public on the issue of terrorism in a much more effective way.

Dr. Ayesha Siddiqi (Defense and political analyst)

I dispute the notion that the media enjoys freedom in Pakistan. Many writers with alternative points of view still find it difficult to reach out to the masses through the media.

Lt Gen (r) Talat Masood (Defense and political analyst)

The positive role of Pakistan's mainstream media to turn public opinion against radical and extremist forces is commendable. The people associated with jihadi publications feel that if they do not continue to propagate their ideology, other forces would dominate them at the local and international level. Extremist views being disseminated by the militants' media must be challenged intellectually and with concrete arguments.

## *About Institute*

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an independent, not-for-profit non governmental research and advocacy think-tank. An initiative of leading Pakistani scholars, researchers and journalists, PIPS conducts wide-ranging research and analysis of political, social and religious conflicts that have a direct bearing on both national and international security. The PIPS approach is grounded in field research. Our surveys and policy analyses are informed by the work of a team of researchers, reporters and political analysts located in different areas of conflict in Pakistan. Based on information and assessments from the field, PIPS produces analytical reports, weekly security updates and policy briefings containing practical recommendations targeted at key national and international decision-makers. We also publish survey-based reports and books, providing in-depth analysis of various conflicts or potential conflicts.



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