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Paper

Politics of Radicalization and De-radicalization Impact on Pakistan's Security Dynamics

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Pakistan today stands at a major crossroad where the choice for the moderate and enlightened foundations on which the country was built is threatened by a steadily increasing radical expression of religion. While this spread of religious radicalism and its violent manifestation in the form of militancy and jihad have domestic origins, much of it has come up as a result of policies pursued during the 1980s as a direct consequence of Pakistan's collusion with the US in a bid to oust the Soviet Union from neighboring Afghanistan. The issue of radicalization of Pakistan's policy outlook is nonetheless linked to the question of state formation. The dichotomous debate on whether the state was created for safeguarding Islam or for protection of rights of the disenfranchised and beleaguered Muslim population of British India remains not only unanswered, but has gradually caused the country to drift towards its current state of affairs. The state envisioned and conceived by Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the political elite supporting the cause prior to 1947 was to be a tolerant, moderate and accommodative society, which would accord respect and equal status to everyone, regardless of class, caste or creed and where political and, specifically, religious identity were questions of personal choice for each individual.[1] However, in the 63 years of the country's existence, the invocation to religion has moved from the personal domain to the mainstream body politic of the state and that now haunts it in the form of terrorism, militancy and extremist manifestations.

The idea of a tolerant Muslim state, which would protect, promote and respect the religious and political aspirations of not only its Muslim citizens, but also of followers of other faiths, was very clearly laid out by Jinnah in his August 11, 1947 address to the Constituent Assembly.[2]

Unfortunately, this message was lost very soon after the creation of Pakistan. Several factors contributed to this development, first and foremost was to build a rationale for the independent Muslim state, which now faced a "Hindu" India supported by the British. The religiously motivated groups and factions effectively used perceived threats from India as a rallying call for jihad. Ironically, these very factions had previously rejected the very idea of creation of Pakistan. However, not only did this post-independence crisis offer them a shot at legitimacy, but also enhanced their political clout in certain segments of society. The passage of the Objectives Resolution in 1949 further minimized the secularist ambience of the country. In the following decades, the country not only faced political instability coupled with repeated imposition of martial law, and constitutional crises but also a gradual rise in religious radicalism and politics of Islamization.

Contrary to the often believed notion that Pakistan was conceived as a radical ideological state, in reality the appeal towards religion and religiosity grew together with the worsening of governance and political state of affairs. The appeal towards religion was also an attempt towards seeking unification and a national identity. It was during the Soviet-Afghan war for the first time that a "reverse indoctrination" of sorts in favor of the Mujahideen became discernable within the army: the "handlers" were won over by the cause of jihad in suppression of the authority of the state. What comes first: Islam

or the state? By the 1990s, public discussions demonstrated that more and more Pakistanis were inclined to say that they were Muslims first and Pakistanis later.[3]

This has led to a situation today where the country is faced with extreme dichotomy between the moderates and the orthodox, between those who—owing to the altered dominant discourse since the 1970s—perceive Pakistan to be a state created solely in the name of Islam and one which is the rightful custodian of Islam, with an enhanced sense of Islamic *Ummah*, and place pan-Islamism ahead of nationalistic fervor. The meta-narrative which politically rallied the Muslims of British India under the banner of Muslim League, *Pakistan ka matlab kya; La Ilaha Illallah (*What is the meaning of Pakistan; there is no lord worthy of worship but Allah*)*, got resuscitated under military dictator Gen Ziaul Haq. The discourse took a different direction, with textbook syllabi remodeled. In certain refugee and predominantly Afghan-Pashtun population areas, the textbooks introduced were part of a University of Nebraska project, supported and funded by the CIA.[4] Unfortunately, this renewal of ultra orthodox religiosity was in utter contrast to the moderate and tolerant religious practices which were part of the country's inherent culture. As Paul Brass aptly points out, "Islamic ideology is a social construct sponsored by elite in pursuit of political objectives."[5] Last, although by no means the least, was the open-arms policy Pakistan adopted during Zia's rule towards Afghan refugees, who fled their country first in the wake of the April 1978 Saur Revolution, and thereafter following the 1979 Soviet invasion.

The resistance by the Afghans against the Soviets was dubbed as 'jihad' and the fighting forces as 'Mujahideen', giving the entire operation a religious connotation, which attracted many to take up arms and fight in the name of Allah. The CIA-sponsored "jihad" became a success, because of the massive influx of weapons, money and resources from virtually across the world. For many in the US administration, Afghanistan was the opportunity to avenge Vietnam,[6] and they would spare no effort to achieve that goal. For the Soviet Union, which was already stretched thin both in military and economic terms, Afghanistan was the proverbial last straw that led to the ultimate collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). For the military regime in Pakistan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought about international acceptance and recognition, helping it gain legitimacy both externally and internally, and using religion very effectively to further its agenda.

Ironically, the 'Mujahideen', who had been hailed as heroes and hosted to dinners at the White House, were promptly discarded when the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan and the US proxy war in the region ended. With nothing in terms of a proper post-conflict reconstruction plan in sight, except an exceptionally flawed Geneva Accord, Afghanistan predictably soon fell victim to internal strife and intense clashes among militias of different warlords. The same 'Mujahideen', trained by the CIA and the ISI, now became mercenaries with heavily armed militias, fighting each other to claim control of Kabul. Pakistan being the immediate neighbor remained constantly affected by these developments, not least because of shared ethnic population and Islamabad's deep involvement in Afghanistan, which stemmed from multiple factors. Afghanistan was and still is, albeit with a different connotation, considered by Islamabad as its strategic depth. Given the civil war in the country, millions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan did not return to their homeland. The open border between the two countries not only proved a haven for smuggling and trafficking of all sorts of contrabands, but lack of the writ of the state also resulted in attracting non-state actors such as Al Qaeda and many others to establish their presence in the tribal area. After 9/11, US forces once again entered Afghanistan, but this time the 'Mujahedeen' were the dreaded Taliban and terrorist elements, who had sided with the perpetrators of the 9/11

terrorist attacks in the US, and were to be hunted down, detained or killed. For the domestic audience in Pakistan, Washington's selective engagement with Islamabad not only enhanced anti-American sentiments, but a clear dislike emerged for the Pakistan military and correspondingly the government, for initiating operations against insurgents and militants in north-western Pakistan in a war that many did not consider their own. A number of madrassas, which were traditionally religious seminaries attached to mosques, became lethal jiahdi training camps, as well as recruitment centers for fighters, at times by both internal and external forces. These were funded generously by Saudi, Emirati or Iranian money.

Following the "success" of the 'jihadis' in Afghanistan, the strategy was replicated in Indian-held Kashmir, resulting in a long drawn out, low-intensity conflict there. The returning jihadis, not only found a footing in every Islamist liberation movement worldwide, but were also used by their creators even inside Pakistan, which resulted in intensified ethnic and sectarian fissures that have become more entrenched over time, now manifesting themselves in the form of pockets of full-fledged radicalized insurgency in the northwestern part of the country. This had serious consequences for the internal security and sovereignty of the state, as militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, Jaish-e-Muhammad and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan turned large parts of the country into killing fields, eroding the writ of the state there.

The decision makers, both military dictators and democratically elected rulers, failed to appreciate the dangers as they exploited religion as a tool to gain legitimacy and internal unification. With religion moving from the periphery to occupy centre stage in the political and social discourse, the socio-cultural landscape of the country drastically changed. Codified laws on blasphemy, Hudood Ordinances, Islamic code of punishments and imposition of a puritan Shariah—first experimented by General Zia and later considered even by democratically elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif—were followed by calls for implementation of *Shariah* by non-state actors in areas such as Swat and elsewhere, indicating a dangerous erosion of the writ of the state. On the one hand, these actions were instruments to establish the Islamic credentials of the state, and on the other they also empowered the privileged mainstream sections of the country and significantly reduced the critical liberal space.

Although the government denies any support for radical elements, yet when it comes to the securitization of Pakistan's eastern border with India, non-state actors are considered as proxy allies and viable strategic assets by many who set the security calculus. There is little realization that such policies are counter-productive, as Khaled Ahmed has aptly pointed out:[7]

> The induction of jihad into national war had its consequences for the sovereignty of the state and its "monopoly of violence." The formation of jihadi militias and their location within civil society after their military training tended to create multiple centers of power in Pakistan. … There are non-state actors, meant originally to strike outside Pakistan, who are now striking inside Pakistan on behalf of the very foreign states once targeted by Pakistan through them.

This has given rise within the country to pockets of militancy, which have become ungovernable as well as completely lawless. The nexus between the politicized clergy and religious radicals has totally transformed the face of the country. These radical elements are trained in combat, detest the West's modern values, and are adept at the use of sophisticated technology that helps them wage their campaigns. In the 1990s, Pakistan slipped into a deadly spiral of sectarian violence, which has since been

overshadowed by large-scale militancy, marked by target killings, hostage taking and suicide bombings. The state policy of nurturing and tolerating militant outfits as strategic assets may have been deemed tactically viable, but strategically and in view of long-term consequences it has had extremely disastrous consequence for both internal security and external outlook of the state.

Given the socio-political and economic situation, more and more people are getting radicalized and are being drawn into the vicious web of militancy. Another crucial and often overlooked aspect is that of the link between lack of adequate education, underdevelopment, poverty and the appeal towards militancy and radicalization. Pakistan is a county of 185 million people and the figure could reach 335 million by the year 2050, according to UN estimates. Along with a fast growing population, Pakistan also hosts one of the youngest populations in the world as well as very high population density. Around 59 percent of the country's population, or 101.95 million people, are below the age of 24.[8] With worsening economic and social indicators, the prospects of this youth bulge being used by extremists and radical elements are alarming. With faith-based orientation coupled with declining opportunities, the people particularly the youth are more driven towards the ideologues who promise money, empowerment, employment as well as a sense of purpose.

In order to seek solutions to these problems, one must also examine what militancy and radicalization mean. Militancy can be explained as an aggressive posture in support of an ideology or cause, which would require use of force or violence directly, either in offence or in defence, thereby justifying the use of force based on the ideological rhetoric of the particular group.[9] In contemporary discourse, militancy is very often considered synonymous with radicalization and terrorism. In literal terms, it may be considered the state or condition of being combative or disposed to fighting,[10] which may entail active championing of a cause or belief. Radicalization is a process of relative change in which a group undergoes ideological and/or behavioral transformations that lead to rejection of democratic principles (including the peaceful alternation of power and the legitimacy of ideological and political pluralism) and possibly to the use of violence, or to an increase in the levels of violence, to achieve political goals.[11]

Would these literal interpretations make militancy and radicalization mere attitudinal and behavioral problems, an unbridled aggression or blind pursuit of ideology (religious or secular) through the irrational and indiscriminate use of force? Answering this question is critical in order to seek a lasting solution to these ills. Usually the response to these issues swings between the use of military power or reliance on a softer approach aimed at changing the hearts and minds of the people. Given the complexity of the problem, the best workable solution would be a combination of the two. De-radicalization is a process of relative change within religious movements, in which a radical group reverses its ideology and de-legitimizes the use of violent methods to achieve political goals, while also moving towards an acceptance of gradual social, political and economic changes within a pluralist context.[12]

Given the deep roots of militancy and radicalization, the solution can be found at three levels: ideological, behavioral and organizational.

A solution at the *ideological* level entails a militant or radicalized group undergoing such a process that does not have to ideologically abide by democratic principles. These democratic norms can both be electoral or liberal, and the group which voluntarily or driven by incentives, enters the said process, may

also not participate in an electoral process. At this stage *de-militancy* or *de-radicalization* is primarily concerned with changing the attitudes of armed, violent and ideology driven (religious or political) movements away from violence, rather than towards democracy. Many de-radicalized groups might still hold xenophobic and anti-democratic views.

At the ***behavioral*** level, it involves practically abandoning the use of violence to achieve political goals without a concurrent process of ideological de-legitimization of violence. The ***organizational*** level entails the dismantling of the armed units of militant or radical organizations, which includes discharging/demobilizing as well as disarming their members without the units breaking into splinters, getting defused or plunging into internal violence.

These three frameworks can either be applied simultaneously as a holistic process working at all three levels, or substantively—which would encompass a successful process of de-radicalization/ decommissioning of militant outfits at both the ideological and behavioral levels but not at the organizational—and lastly, pragmatically, indicating de-radicalization and de-militancy at the behavioral and organizational levels, but without an ideological de-legitimization of violence. Questions regarding the adequacy and success of such processes—that is the probability and likelihood of simultaneously aiming for and achieving these goals—are obviously important. But even before that it needs to be determined if the process should be holistic or piecemeal. Should a process of de-radicalization that appears more ideological in nature in comparison to the militancy which exhibits militaristic tendencies be tackled exclusively in their isolated domains or a strategy comprising the two should be applied? An important issue that comes up usually while undertaking such a process is to determine who the main stakeholders are and how the process could be initiated.

In the preceding paragraphs, the focus has been on the structural aspect of radicalization and militancy, which has both internal and external stimuli, be that legitimization of violent politics as a viable military strategy, considering the militant or radical elements as a strategic asset or a proxy ally, entering into selective geo-strategic engagements or maintaining a warped sense of identity politics. Some remedial measures could be reforms and improvement in the security and justice sector. Such reforms include strengthening the capacity and capabilities of law enforcement agencies, including police. Currently, most counter-insurgency operations in Pakistan are being carried out by the army, which like any conventional military has been trained to fight a traditional adversary and not internal asymmetrical warfare.

In the post-9/11 military operations, Pakistan has suffered the loss of life of more than 5,000 military personnel and 30,000 civilians.[13] Around 60,000 troops are deployed for counter-insurgency operations, a scenario that is not viable or sustainable in the long term. In the unprecedented prevailing scenarios, the military has to prepare for battle on both the traditional eastern front with India as well as the western border, where the distinction between enemy and friendly forces is increasingly blurred. Ideally, the counter-insurgency operations should be spearheaded by law enforcement agencies and institutions. However, in Pakistan's case not only are these institutions underdeveloped and ill-equipped but also once Pakistan allied with the US in the war on terror the bulk of counter-insurgency training was provided to the military, and not the law enforcement agencies, leaving them deficient in the face of a very well-equipped and organized adversary. The security sector, both the military and the law enforcement agencies, must be complimented by a robust judicial process, which delivers decisions in an expeditious manner. This is critical because many a time arrested hardcore terrorists and

insurgents are released owing to limitations of the judicial process or the investigation machinery, mainly on account of lack of evidence or some other lacuna. Also, in view of the authority and coercive force at the disposal of the security agencies, there is an absolute need for accountability, professionalism and transparency. Until an organization maintains professionalism as well as both internal and external accountability, there are risks of security forces personnel acting with virtual impunity and becoming repressive in the absence of accountability mechanisms. There also need to be layers of transparency, starting from public to at least institutional transparency, where at least the legislative bodies are properly informed.

In order to bring about structural changes, which would have immediate to long-term effect, winning the hearts and minds of the affected and vulnerable groups is extremely important. The youth and socially marginalized and less educated segments of society are among the vulnerable groups, who, owing to a lack of opportunity and incentives, are not only susceptible to radicalization but also to joining militants' ranks. Counter-measures must include promotion of shared and non-negotiable values, including respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech and belief, equality of opportunity, tolerance, respect and protection of all human rights, and establishment of an education system that neither discriminates on the basis of belief or ethnicity nor reflects sectarian or ethnic biases. At present, mainly three education systems co-exist in the country, including madrassas or religious seminaries catering to a large population group comprising of a poor and highly disadvantaged segment of society. In the war on terror, the West focused exclusively on the madrassas and the curriculum taught there as the fountainhead of religious militancy. The madrassa has roots in the Islamic history, where it was the epitome of learning and education of all kinds. Gradually, this institution became a source of education, shelter and sustenance for the poorer segments, and carried with it a promise of future earning. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, financial and other resources and the zeal for ousting the Soviets at all cost, turned this seat of learning into a breeding ground for militancy and radicalization. However, extremist and militant perspectives are by no means the exclusive domain of the madrassa system. The public education system fares no better, with the curriculum advocating hatred and breeding intolerance and a linear perspective. Lastly, the private school system, which is exclusive to a certain income bracket, with the number of beneficiaries considerably lower than the previous two categories, also does not provide any guarantee against radicalization.

There is an urgent need to expand the provision of education in schools and madrassas for all, irrespective of class, creed or financial status. Across the board review of textbooks, and curricula and reforms in the education sector must aim at promoting inter-faith harmony and tolerance. Besides promotion of a uniform system at private and public schools, the state must also ensure better socio-economic incentives for education and enhance work opportunities, as poverty, intolerance, ignorance and socio-economic hardship provide fertile ground for breeding militancy and radicalization. De-radicalization and counter-militancy processes need to run in tandem with military action, and support garnered from political actors, legislators, media as well as leadership of faith-based institutions. Successful de-radicalization and reintegration models practiced in several countries, including Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, need to be studied and tailored to local needs, keeping in view the socio-economic and cultural norms. Thus, by promoting local solutions, and building adequate civic capacity, a sense of ownership in the process can be created. In such programmes, the role of women is critical, as the proverbial silent majority is not only a victim of the vicious cycle of violence and radicalization, but can also help implement a successful reintegration process. The media can both spoil and facilitate these

efforts and must be used in a non-partisan fashion to promote communal and inter-faith harmony and to build narratives of de-radicalization and counter-militancy.

Last but not least, the official approach towards militancy and radicalization must find the right balance in the use of soft and coercive measures. The military also needs to learn lessons from the counter-insurgency efforts so far. There is a critical need to remember that military and political solutions go hand in hand to be effective, and the onus lies on both institutions to strike the right balance. Given the multiple threat levels, there is no space for complacency. Any sustained and successful campaign must be multifaceted and able to detect altering ground realities and respond accordingly. That obviously demands better intelligence coordination. Schemes such as arming and encouraging private or citizens' militias have drastic long-term consequences for the state. Promotion through review, reform and mutual deliberations of a holistic governance mechanism will go a long way in finding workable solutions to the challenges that pose the greatest threat to the country. Harboring and facilitating militant elements has proven counter-productive in the past and is unlikely to work in the future either. The state needs to learn that ensuring human security is the best way to ensure national security.

Notes:

[1] "Mr. Jinnah's presidential address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947," transcribed from printed copy by Shehzaad Nakhoda, *Dawn*, Independence Day Supplement, August 14, 1999, http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent_address_11aug1947.html, (accessed June 23, 2011).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Khaled Ahmed, "Pakistan and nature of the State: Revisionism, Jihad and Governance," *Criterion* Quarterly 5, no. 2 (2010): 6.

[4] The primers provided to students at junior or entry level actually taught the Urdu alphabet thus: *Alif* for Allah, *Bay* for *Bandooq* (gun), *Jeem* for Jihad, and *Kaaf* for *Kafir* (infidel). The word infidel also accompanied a uniformed Soviet soldier. There were many such examples, which at a very young and impressionable age very subtly conditioned children's minds towards the CIA-sponsored resistance movement.

[5] Mohammad Waseem, "Origins and Growth Patterns of Islamic Organizations in Pakistan," http://www.apcss.org/Publications/Edited%20Volumes/ReligiousRadicalism/PagesfromReligiousRadicalismandSecurityinSouthAsiach2.pdf, (accessed June 23, 2011).

[6] Steve Coll, *Ghost wars: the secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 91-97.

[7] K. Ahmed, "Pakistan and nature of the State: Revisionism, Jihad and Governance," 5-9.

[8] Shahid Javed Burki, "Historical Trends in Pakistan's Demographics and Population Policy;" and Moeed Yusuf, "A Society on the Precipice? Examining the Prospects of Youth Radicalization in Pakistan," in Michael Kugelman and Robert M. Hathaway, eds., *Reaping the Dividend: Overcoming Pakistan's Demographic Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011), 56-105.

[9] "Critical Analysis of the Rise of Islamic Militancy," http://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/47081/4/Critical_Analysis_of_the_Rise_of_Islamic_Militancy.pdf, (accessed June 23, 2011).

[10] www.thefreedictionary.com/militancy.

[11] Omar Ashour, "Votes and Violence: Islamists and the Processes of Transformation," in *Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) at Kings College, 2009), 5.

[12] Ibid.

[13] "Sacrifices in war on terror should be acknowledged: Gilani," http://www.dunyanews.tv/index.php?key=Q2F0SUQ9MiNOaWQ9MjY1NDU, (accessed June 23, 2011).

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