

Rise of Extremism and Growing Threats of Transnational Terrorism

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Abstract

Extremism, though not a new phenomenon, has undergone complete metamorphosis in the South Asian context. While in Sri Lanka, the discriminatory policy of ruling Sinhalese towards Tamil minority was reason of latter's taking up arms to assert their identity, India is inflicting war on the assertive Kashmiris who are struggling for the recognition of their right of self-determination. At the same time, the ultra-right government of the BJP is encouraging religious extremism. With his baggage of Gujarat pogrom, Prime Minister Modi is treading a dangerous path of fanning Hindu nationalism. Afghanistan was subjected to the communist elements under the Babrak Karmal regime which had the backing of the Soviet Union and the traditional Afghan society was not receptive to the foreign ideology. People stood up against the direct Soviet intervention which they took as heretic. They were supported in their armed struggle by the US and Pakistan. As Soviets withdrew ignominiously from Afghanistan, the warlords went into civil war to assert themselves which created a vacuum filled by the Taliban. The US attacked Afghanistan to remove Taliban who were thought to have be harbouring the perpetrators of September 11, 2001 attack. The Kabul government however couldn't win the confidence of the people and Taliban resurgence has cost the country dearly with ramifications for Pakistan. The element of extremism and violence was introduced in Pakistan was in Afghanistan after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and got different and colossal dimensions post September 11, 2001 tragedy. In Pakistan, the Tehrik i Taliban Pakistan were formed after the Lal Masjid operation. There is hardly any parallel in history to match the devastating terrorist rampages costing huge loss of life and property. Unfortunately, the neighbouring India is fishing in the troubled waters to achieve some petty gains. While Afghanistan has its own circumstances and hence its responses to end the imbroglio, Pakistan has a long way to go end the menace of extremism as well as terrorism, of course in conjunction with Afghanistan, without which peace cannot return to the region.

Keywords: Extremism, Terrorism, Security Threats, Pakistan

Introduction

Extremism has undergone a complete metamorphosis in the world over centuries. Whereas it is used to mean holding of extreme political or religious views, it has now attained a variety of connotations. With the introduction of violence in both the political and religious domains, an extremist is one who holds extreme political or

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religious views, especially one who advocates illegal, violent, or other extreme action (Oxford Dictionary, 2017).

Terrorism, due to its wide connotations has been described in many ways. The American FBI defines it as ‘the use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce, a government, civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives. This definition slightly differs from that of the State Department which lays stress on premeditation. It describes terrorism as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetuated against non-combatant by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. Yassir Arafat, Chairman of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) however, makes a distinction between the revolutionary and the terrorist for ‘reason for which each fight.’ (The Terrorism Reader, 2003 p.3,6).

The extremism in its traditional sense started transmutation with the dual interrelated developments, although not with the same sequential chronological order, extremism started much earlier but developed into terrorism. The genesis of intolerance and violence in South Asia has varied, depending on the area in the region. In Sri Lanka’s conflict with Tamil Tigers, for example, the policy of ruling Sinhalese towards Tamil minority was a reason of latter’s taking up arms. Tamils were not happy with the ‘illiberal language policy (Sinhalese only), the refusal to give all Tamils citizenship, and attempt to repatriate some of them to India, even though they had been born in Sri Lanka.’ The initial revolutionary inspiration of Castro and Guevara gave way to ‘militant separatism pure and simple’ (The Terrorism Reader, 2003 p.84 and 85).

The situation was different in the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan. This area had not witnessed extremism in the current form and manifestation as late as middle of the last century. Apart from the brutalities and tragedies of premeditated massacres like 1919 Jallianwala Bagh which went unpunished (Tharoor, 2016 p 90) and which hardly anybody equated with terrorism and, in fact, were rewarded, Pakistan and India had not witnessed violence until at the time of partition. Though there are no exact numbers of people killed and displaced, but estimates range from a few hundred thousand to two million killed and more than 10 million displaced (Dawn.com, 2015). Was the partition a political division between Hindus and Muslims as claimed by Shashi Tharoor - and therefore liable to be excluded from our study - or, as accepted by Jaswant Singh, due to ‘different faith and worship rituals, some different social norms, certain specific and mutually unacceptable customs dietary preferences...? (Among other reasons)?’ (Singh, 2009 p.19; Tharoor, 2016 p. 288). Reality is that the sub-continent witnessed unprecedented brutality, from the both sides, crossing the line of extremism and was due to the lack of political and military control which neither side wanted to happen.

Major violent trends in Hindu extremism were discernible since long in India but due to 9/11 tragedy the focus was more on Islamic extremism. In the past decade, ‘they have increased their attacks on Christians, until there are now several hundred per

Rise of Extremism and Growing Threats of Transnational Terrorism

year.’ During independence movement, side by side with the secular and socialist Congress, rival Hindu nationalist Sangh Parivar (“family of organizations”) proclaimed an ideology of “Hindutva,” aiming at ensuring the predominance of Hinduism in Indian society, politics, and culture against the British raj and its tactics included violence and terror (Marshall, 2004).

Extremism and terrorism have now attained a new dimension after the election of Narendra Modi in 2014. India, which took pride in claiming to be champion of secularism, is fast losing its religious face with the rise of ultra-right BJP government. The episodes like lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq and his family by Hindu extremists over rumoured beef possession have become new symbols of Modi’s India. Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) groups are continuing to aggressively push their agenda for a “Hindu” India rather than the secular nation envisioned by its founding fathers (Prasad and Kumar, 2015). Religious minorities are being terrorised. According to Mumbai-based Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS) and the UK-based Minority Rights Group International (MRG), India witnessed in 2016 more than 700 outbreaks of communal violence that killed 86 and injured 2,321 people. The actual number, however, could be higher as many cases go unreported (Nilanjana, 2017).

The Indian government has also embarked upon a reign of terror in Kashmir to the utter helplessness of the local Kashmiri population and consternation of Kashmiri leaders. Taking advantage and refuge of the US focus on terrorism in the context of Afghanistan, Indian Prime Minister Modi is projecting a narrative equating struggle for self-determination of Kashmiris to terrorism. With his baggage of Gujarat pogrom, he is treading a dangerous path of promoting Hindu nationalism (IAMC, 2017). This is also affecting Pakistan’s relations with India in political, economic and other areas.

Apprehending this persisting tendency, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Asif blamed religious extremist’ government for hampering Pakistan-India relations and ruled out chance of any improvement for relationship with the present religious extremist government in Delhi. He cited Gujarat massacre of over 2,000 Muslims and continuing killing of Muslims in Kashmir to assert that genocide and ethnic cleansing of Muslims was going on (Pakistan Today, 2017).

Afghanistan

In December 1979, the Soviets, taking subterfuge of invitation of Babrak Karmal, entered Afghanistan under the pretext of a 1978 treaty of friendship. Karmal was a former Deputy Prime Minister, in virtual exile in Eastern Europe and was accompanied by several thousand Soviet combat troops, the numbers of which rose to an estimated 85,000 by the end of January 1980 with hundreds of tanks, giving rise to fears for the security of Pakistan and Iran. (Keesing’s Record of World Event, 1980). Traditionally conservative Afghan populace took it as a Communist invasion of Afghanistan and was not acceptable to them.

Murad Ali and Reema Murad

The intervention came at a time when American influence was under threat in the South East Asia (Laos and Cambodia), Africa and Latin America. The same year was the last year of staunch American ally, the Shah of Iran. Washington saw these developments in the same backdrop of rising troubles for the US. In Pakistan, General Zia ul Haq was feeling isolated internationally after hanging deposed Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and needed legitimization (Muhammad Khan, 2013).

The traditionally religious Afghan society was already not happy with the political developments in the country where ruling elite had communist leanings. The Soviet intervention proved a combustible straw to ignite anti-Communist feelings. Afghans perceived armed struggle against the Soviet 'infidels' in Afghanistan as a religious duty. Muslims from Arab and other Muslim countries around the world joined them to partake in this holy war. Later when these experienced fighters from other countries went back to their homes, they established militant cells (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2004), thus creating waves of extremism and terrorism in their homeland.

The US and Pakistan had joined hands to help Mujahedeen drive away the Soviet security threat for Pakistan as the Soviet forces were right on its door steps. This ten-year long struggle carried an extensive account of huge losses, both human and material, for the Soviet Union. As the Soviets were crossing Amu Darya on their way out at the end of 1988 and beginning of 1989, the world was witnessing a big change. Cold war was about to end. Eastern Europe was undergoing transformation and Soviet Union was showing signs of weakness. Moscow's intervention brought Afghanistan to ruins. Extremism was on the rise and formation of al-Qaeda was also the result of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (Muhammad Khan, 2013 p.4).

Exiting Afghanistan after April 1988 Geneva Accords, Soviets left behind successful but fragmented clusters of warlords. Different Mujahedeen factions couldn't unite and agree on viable arrangements to govern the country. The vacuum created by the absence of a powerful central command was filled by Taliban who were the product of five years of civil war. These were the creation of hundreds of Madrassahs set up for refugees' children for which remittances used to come from Gulf countries and which mostly followed Salafi or Deobandi theological school. After Soviet departure, these Madrassahs spread to various areas of Afghanistan. Thus a whole generation was born which was outcome of these religious institutions. They were disenchanted, as was general Afghan public, with the civil war and ongoing serious and irreconcilable differences amongst Mujahedeen factions. As they started filling power vacuum by capturing various cities of Afghanistan, Kabul's grip further receded and they were in control of most of the country by 1996.

These Taliban however could not also bring any economic and social betterment. Under the leadership of Mullah Mohammed Omar, they only believed in military course of action which they called jihad. (Muhammad Khan, 2013 p. 52, 58). Transnational nature of the militancy was already established with the coming into

Rise of Extremism and Growing Threats of Transnational Terrorism

existence of Taliban in Afghanistan with deep outreach to the Afghan population as they couldn't have sustained without having deep roots in the Afghan society.

Al Qaeda was born out of those thousands of Mujahedeen who had volunteered from various Muslim countries to Pakistan and Afghanistan, including those who had joined jihad at the persuasion of CIA. After Soviet pullout, these fighters couldn't go back because their governments were not ready to accept them with their extremist and revolutionary ideologies. Those who returned were either arrested or sentenced to death. Taliban though having roots in the society, slowly became isolated due to their fundamentalist ideology and rigid policies towards women, their education and other social aspects. They destroyed 1800 year old Buddha's statue in Bamyan in March 2001 despite forceful intervention of Pakistan (Muhammad Khan, 2013 p. 67, 69).

The turning point however came after 9/11 attacks. The Taliban government refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of these devastating attacks because he was a 'guest' of Afghanistan and, it was offered that, he could be tried by Kabul if evidence of his involvement was provided. As he was not handed over, the US started 'Operation Enduring Freedom' on 7 October 2001 and on 12 November, the Northern Alliance aided by its allies captured Kabul. Osama bin Laden escaped and succeeded in hiding in the bordering areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan (Muhammad Khan, 2013 p.82). Much later, the US navy seals killed OBL in Abbottabad on May 2, 2011 in a secret operation.

The dislodged Taliban, who had melted away from Kabul, slowly resurfaced and started formidable resistance. American military might and abundant Afghan armed forces couldn't dent Taliban resistance to what have been perceived by Afghans as American occupation. They regard the US as the latest empire intent on destroying the Afghans' way of life (The Gaurdian, 2017).

In December 2009 in view of the escalating violence and more service members killed, President Obama announced his escalate-then-exit strategy. He ordered another 33,000 troops to battle al-Qaida militants and a resurgent Taliban. He viewed this surge of extra forces could force them back on its heels enough for the Afghans to take over the fight. Since the United States went to war in Afghanistan, the number of American troops spiralled and in May 2011 when OBL was killed in Pakistan, there were still 100,000 troops in Afghanistan (AP News, 2016).

Osama bin Laden's killing in 2011 left a trail of embarrassment for Pakistan because it had all along denied his presence in the country. Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani termed it an 'intelligence failure.' (Gul, 2012) But this US operation caused lasting damage to the level of trust between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the one hand and Pakistan and the US on the other hand.

Earlier, during one of the last of National Security meetings, President Bush reviewed Afghanistan policy and the meeting concluded that the US couldn't succeed in Afghanistan without resolving three problems i.e. curtailment of corruption, checking

Murad Ali and Reema Murad

the opium trade and reducing and eliminating Pakistani safe havens (Woodward, 2011 p.43-44). Sixteen years of war and these problems still seem to be of major concern to the Afghan and the US governments. Both these countries unabashedly blame Pakistan for the Haqqani network operating from Pakistan despite the fact that large area is not under Kabul's control.

According to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, the Taliban control over Afghan territory has increased in the past six months, an indication that the security situation there remains precarious despite US committing several thousands more troops. As of August 2017, 13 percent of the 407 districts in Afghanistan were under Taliban control or influence, compared with 11 percent in February. The Taliban infiltration in the Capital with series of barriers and checkpoints is so much that a devastating truck-bomb attack outside German Embassy on May 31 killed at least 150 people. The Afghan government blames such attacks on Afghan Taliban with bases in Pakistan which the latter denies (Business Insider, 2017).

The period of acrimony between Pakistan on the one hand and Afghanistan and the US on the other hand, which continues even today, began with the coming into power of President Hamid Karzai (2004-14) and has continued through the Presidency of his successor, Ashraf Ghani. The US and Afghanistan blame that attacks on the US and Afghan forces are carried out from safe havens in Pakistan. The US government has however skirted the real issue of engaging Taliban believing that application of force can change ground realities (Ashraf, 2012).

Things have not changed with the coming to power of President Trump. He announced on 21 August 2017 a long-awaited Afghanistan strategy ruling out a hasty withdrawal which would create a vacuum for terrorists, including ISIS and Al Qaeda. He portrayed his approach as a stark break with the Obama administration, arguing that while his predecessor set artificial timetables for American involvement in Afghanistan, his strategy would be a comprehensive, conditions-based regional approach that would aim for a political solution. He said that the United States would put significant new pressure on Pakistan to crack down on the terrorist sanctuaries that line its border with Afghanistan (Landler, 2017). The new strategy however invited an anti-American backlash in Pakistan, triggered both by President Trump's threat to punish the country for harbouring insurgents and by his invitation to India, to become more involved in Afghanistan's future (Constable, 2017).

Pakistan continuously denies such presence and blames Afghanistan for the existence of sanctuaries of anti-Pakistan elements of TTP with support from India. The US recent assertion in its semi-annual Pentagon report to the US Congress that it is prepared to take "unilateral steps" in areas where Pakistan differs with the US in how to address the regional military threat will create more problems for Pakistan because it will provide more ammo to the militants for undertaking violent activities (Dawn.com, 2017).

Rise of Extremism and Growing Threats of Transnational Terrorism

Pakistan

The element of extremism and violence was introduced in Pakistan post Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and got different and colossal dimensions post September 11, 2001 tragedy when, Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others (CBC News. 2010).

Religious militarization which was not yet considered as terrorism found its place in South Asia as a result of promotion of Jihadi culture to violently counter the Soviet intervention and for latter's forcible eviction from Afghanistan. The orthodoxy was promoted as an undeclared state policy under the dictation of international force as an effective tool to fight against the onslaught of Communism (Javaid, 2013 p.106).

The puritanical view of the religion promoted by the Wahhabism was used to fan the anti-infidel feelings amongst Mujahedeen in Afghanistan. It was a success story there and had obvious spill over effects in the neighbouring Pakistan and canvass was even wider for unscrupulous hate mongers and terrorist incidents like London Underground attack of July 5, 2005 which killed 50 people were unacceptable for any society (ABC News, 2017). In July 2013, the European Parliament identified Wahhabism as the main source of global terrorism (Armstrong, 2014). Wahhabism was identified as having connections with multiple terrorist groups worldwide, including the Afghan Taliban, Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and Boko Haram in Nigeria (Armstrong, 2014; Burke, 2015, pp. 45 and 154; The Week, 2015).

The US wanted to contain communism from spreading to South Asia and which could have spread to the greater Middle East and thus prove a threat to the oil supply to the industrial West. For the US it could be a good opportunity to take revenge of humiliation of defeat in the Vietnam War which lasted for two decades from 1955-75.

US and the Saudi Arabia-led Arab provided funding for the mujahedeen. (Understandingwar.org, 2017). Saudi funding for Madrassahs in Pakistan encouraged Deobandi school of thoughts, perception of which was associated with rigidity and intolerance. 'The opening up of cadres to the Deobandi madrassas opened a floodgate for illiteracy, utter backwardness, rigidity and mediocrity, and their response was very enthusiastic to financial allurements.' (Javaid, 2013 p.107). The extremism promoted by these institutions, embraced training and weapons to transform into terrorism and it met the purpose of infidel Soviet eviction from Afghanistan.

The world however changed after the September 11, 2001. The fateful 9/11 twin tower tragedy brought cataclysmic changes to become an alluding reference for describing succeeding developments. Although 15 out of 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals, American wrath fell on Afghanistan. American dared military intervention despite latter's disastrous history of being unwelcoming to the intruders. OBL was depicted as a monster to be fought till his elimination in May 2011. In the process, Pakistan was lured and helped in joining the United States in producing hard core

religious extremists who were ready to sacrifice their lives in the name of fighting infidels and for protecting Islam from the Communist attacks.

The transformation of extremism to terrorism unfolded as the months drifted into years. Six years on and Pakistan heard a big bang from ‘Sunrise Operation’ of siege of Islamabad Lal Masjid which later nobody wanted to own. Pakistani nation watched with utter dismay what unfolded before their eyes in July 2007 (Friday Times, 2012). According to the Lal Masjid Commission report, out of 103 persons killed in that fateful operation, 92 were civilians and 11 belonged to security forces. Among the 92 civilian casualties, 76 bodies were traced/identified, whereas 16 bodies remained unidentified (Pakistan Today, 2013). Life in Pakistan could never be the same even after the passage of a decade. Although acts of terrorism happened earlier as well, this ‘Madrassah tragedy’ however unleashed a wave of terror which Pakistani nation is still brazening it out.

About 70 percent of the students of the Madrassahs attached to Lal Masjid came from the FATA territories and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Many returned home to join the insurgency. Organised under the banner of the Ghazi Force, disciples carried out number of terrorist attacks. Such attacks increased after Lal Masjid operation. More than 88 bombings killed 1,188 people and wounded 3,209 in the first year alone. Two months after the Lal Masjid siege, an 18-year old boy blew himself up killing 22 soldiers inside the high-security base of Zarrar Company which was responsible for Operation Sunrise.

The birth of the TTP was another major turning point in the rise of insurgency in North Western Pakistan and the tribal areas. The Operation prompted the loosely connected militant groups to unite. Six months after the Operation, on December 14, 2007, some 40 militant leaders, commanding 40,000 militant fighters, gathered in South Waziristan to form a united front under the banner of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). There was already a nexus between the clerics of Lal Masjid and militant leaders such as Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan and Mullah Fazlullah in the Swat Valley. But the formation of the TTP gave a fresh impetus to the militant movement. It vowed to avenge the death of Abdul Rashid (Hussain, 2017). The Lal Masjid incident also supplemented this general feeling that Pakistan has joined the American war in Afghanistan (Muhammad Khan, 2013 p.14).

Religion was never a controversial matter in Pakistani polity. Citizens professed and propagated their religions and beliefs without being aggressively challenged. Religious harmony was order of the day before the violent political changes in the neighbouring Afghanistan and foreign interference which followed those developments. What could have been a harmless process of spreading the teachings of Islam in a religiously tolerant Pakistan, the nation slowly immersed into the bigotry spread in the name of religion? ‘Radicalization is one the major issues faced by the state and society in Pakistan’ (Khan, 2011). Ideological extremism, along with its

Rise of Extremism and Growing Threats of Transnational Terrorism

vicious by-product, terrorism, is the primary national security threat facing most countries, including Pakistan (Gunaratna and Iqbal, 2011 p.7).

Role of India

Pakistan has remained the victim of a hostile and aggressive neighbourhood since its independence in 1947. Division of assets, blockage of water, subjugation of Kashmir against the will of Kashmiri people and denial of their right of self-determination despite promises in the United Nations, attack on East Pakistan to dismember the country in 1971 and myriad of other problems have badly vitiated its relations with the Eastern neighbour. Since Pakistan's joining of war on terror, India has fished in troubled waters by abetting the anti-state elements either directly or through its proxies or elements in Afghanistan.

Indian use of Afghanistan to foment trouble for Pakistan has been alleged by no less person than Chuck Hagel, who later became US Defence Secretary. In his speech at Oklahoma's Cameron University in 2011, he blamed that India has, over the years, "financed problems" for Pakistan in the war-torn country (Times of India, 2013).

The territory of Afghanistan is being used despite strong US presence by the hostile elements which are against Pakistan's stability. The US earlier had claimed of 8400 troops but later in August this year acknowledged of 1000 troops in Afghanistan (Cooper, 2017). US-Pak effective cooperation is a must not only to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan but also in the neighbouring Pakistan where tentacles of terrorism have left devastating imprint. The US has also to realize that India has to act responsibly before it ponders greater role for India in Afghanistan, a sensitive subject for Pakistan.

Pakistan's desire for effective border management to stop militants from moving across the border and return of Afghan refugees to their homeland has yet to materialize. Malicious propaganda belittling its achievements in the war against terrorism has also been unleashed by Afghanistan and India and bumped up by the US mantra of 'do more.' Pakistan claims that its security forces have undertaken indiscriminate and effective counter-terrorism operations against terrorism and extremism and that it has consistently emphasised the need of a political settlement owned and led by Afghans to end the raging conflict.

In a troubled neighbourhood, Pakistan continues to suffer at the hands of state sponsored terrorism, funded and abetted by our neighbours through proxies. These proxies, consisting of individuals, organizations and intelligence agencies, are working against Pakistan at the behest of regional adversaries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

Pakistan's government also accuses India being a country "with a record of defiance of UNSC resolutions, introduction of nuclear weapons in South Asia and use of terrorism as a state policy," and doesn't agree to India being projected as a regional

leader. Pakistan believes that 'South Asia's strategic stability is being undermined by India's unchecked brutalization of the people of Indian Occupied Kashmir and incessant ceasefire violations targeting innocent civilians (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

Conclusion

Extremism and terrorism have become inimitable to South Asia following the regional developments after 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Fifteen years of utter bloodletting chaos and lawlessness have played a havoc with Afghanistan and had a direct and devastating impact on Pakistan. The nature of geographic and demographic contours of the area is such that the two countries have to jointly find solution to the raging menace of terrorism. Pakistan is suspicious of Indian presence in Afghanistan and the latter will need to be cognizant of these sensitivities.

American military presence which is termed as an occupation of Afghanistan is also a sensitive issue for Afghan people who jealously and fiercely guard their independence against foreign interference. The Afghan government has to work on dual track of engaging Taliban in the political process and also expand its writ over the whole country so that its territory is not used to destabilize Pakistan by third countries.

General Public Awareness Programmes: Pakistan has already made significant stride through the military operations of unprecedented magnitude like Zarb-e-Azb (undertaken in 2014) and ongoing Raddul Fasad (undertaken in February this year). The extremism and terrorism took its root in decades and Pakistan will need to be well prepared to eradicate the menace in earnest in whatever time it takes. Therefore the law enforcing agencies as well as general public should be properly geared and educated to deal with this the matter which has become now all pervading in the society.

The Madrassah Reforms: Religious institutions have been used to promote the extreme ideology. The educational institutions have therefore to be in the vanguard to germinate the air of tolerance in the people and the religious leadership with stakes in the educational institutions have to be on board. The education imparted by too many Madrassahs doesn't equip them to find employment and doesn't help them adjust to the modern world. It leaves them fit only for employment in similar Madrassahs and hence proliferation of these educational institutions. This has acquired national security dimensions and the leadership, military and civilian, needs to address this matter on war footing.

Thus for Pakistan's struggle against extremism to succeed, much hinges on the issue of Madrassah reforms. After all, we have the example of Aligarh Movement when a man rose against the tide and harnessed/channelled energies of the youth to a movement which ultimately prepared them to the idea of an independent state where they could organize their lives according to the tenets of eternal message of peace.

Rise of Extremism and Growing Threats of Transnational Terrorism

Bringing Madrassahs at par with public school systems will not be easy and nor the latter are any enviable model of imparting education. On the intellectual plank, the elimination of hate has also to be equally addressed. The air of intolerance, apparently on the rise in the mainstream education system also, should equally get attention in Madrassah sector where preaching, formally or informally, intolerance and dislike for other groups and sects is believed to be widespread. Educational institutions, for primary or higher learning have to be nurseries of urban future generations and not hate mongering zealots (Dawn, 2017).

Role of Religious scholars

In view of the influence religion wields and the esteem Ulema enjoy in Pakistan's religio-social milieu, the Ulema have a special role to play to eliminate the scourge of extremism and terrorism from the society. They have been reluctant, for obvious reasons, to issue such a religious decree or fatwa, in clear terms. The realization is however making home that the Pakistani nation has immensely suffered needing an unambiguous stance on the part of religious leaders and they have already been on that course. More than 30 prominent scholars from all Muslim schools of thought gathered in May this year and issued a unanimous decree condemning extremism and terrorism. This fatwa, issued first-time, categorically defined jihad as being the purview of the state and disallowed the use of force to compel obedience to Islamic laws. The Islamic Research Centre of the International Islamic University, Islamabad organised this national seminar with the support of security institutions and this religious decree came at its conclusion, though many religious scholars were hesitant to give a clear verdict. Such an approach should be encouraged in the country (Rana, 2017).

Will mainstreaming be helpful?

Another controversial but much talked about solution to eliminating the scourge of extremism and terrorism is mainstreaming of the militants. This came to the fore, and attributed to former ISI DG Lt-Gen Rizwan, was that allowing militant organisations to enter mainstream national politics would channel energies of militant groups away from violence and towards peaceful politics (Hoodbhoy, 2017). Mainstreaming has however the potential to legitimize earlier actions of involved elements and introduction of their extremist ideas to the mainstream thus pushing the society into further chaos.

Festering issues of Palestine and Kashmir

The enraging factors of discontentment fuel extremism not only amongst Palestinians but also Muslims around the world, who feel betrayed by the US policies of support for Israel and who feel that the Palestinians will never be allowed space to become an independent political community. Use of force by the Israeli forces to coerce the Palestinians in accepting the hopeless situation they are in, is also a strong factor of

Murad Ali and Reema Murad

their disillusionment. The Israeli propaganda machinery portrays them as terrorists liable to be taken out by drone attacks or other means.

Not far off from the Middle East theatre is Kashmir imbroglio, where Kashmiris are being victimized for demanding the implementation of the UN resolutions on plebiscite in Kashmir. Those who are in the forefront or become symbols of freedom struggle are being eliminated by Indian forces. There seems to be a similarity in Indian and Israeli approach to extinguish the zeal of both peoples' struggle. Therefore there is an urgent need by the international community to address both major issues which provide a strong excuse to the extremists to advance their own brand of intolerance.

Rise of Extremism and Growing Threats of Transnational Terrorism

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