

A Journey to Counter Violent Extremism- Pakistan's Inside Story

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

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In recent times, terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, Boko Haram and Islamic State have reshaped our perception of Violent Extremism ⁽¹⁾ (VE) as well as it initiated the debate about how to tackle with this emerging threat. Also, their message of intolerance – cultural, religious and social – has just had dire outcomes for whole world. Indeed, by holding main territory and incorporating the social media as a key tool for (real-time) communication of their appalling crimes, they mere dare to test our shared value system; human dignity, justice, religious harmony and peace.

Therefore, it won't be enough to just counter VE rather we strongly need to avert it. And it calls for the 'Soft Power' ⁽²⁾ to put off risks driven by twisted version of culture and religion. Remember always violent extremists are either made or fuelled by unjust, malfunction and prejudice society but they are not borne for sure by carrying its genes. Neither any society/worldview nor any religious community can accommodate it. However, under the path of 'Radicalization' they try to get it registered as an enviable and legitimate means of action by other groups retaining the same ideology and working within society under the guise of its culture or religion. Its noteworthy that these groups take in both; ideologically-motivated home-grown violent extremists (HVE) and international terrorist organizations (ITO).

Hence, appealing process of de-radicalization must be begun with the immediate provision of basic human rights and off course the rule of law, with comprehensive dialogue across all boundary-lines of targeted society, and indeed by empowering youth on priority basis, and by taking all these kinds of initiatives as early as feasible, on the benches of schools.

Not surprisingly, under developed countries are more likely to be affected by VE because of their poor socio-economic conditions, lack of education, and rigid religious belief system. Although, there is no single pathway for VE but there are multiple institutional, deep sort of psychological and grave socio-economic factors that direct the vulnerable people towards VE.

These factors can be grouped into three main categories;

Push Factor

Push factors generate environment that drive individuals to VE as well as it fosters the growth or multiplication in its appeal / storyline. These include social disintegration and marginalisation, ungoverned or poorly governed vicinities, defiance to civil liberties, human rights violations, government oppression, prevalent corruption, elite indemnity, historical or socio-economic grumbles and cultural threat perceptions. However, these factors either work indirectly or in partnership with other variables.

Pull Factor

These factors deal with tempting new individuals towards the compelling discourses of extremist organizations by providing them ‘supportive social network’ and ‘spiritual comfort’ so they may get self-esteem, attention, fame and respect from peer group. Also, social and economic grievances, certain personal factors; coercion and oppression resort the individuals towards violent drives.

Contextual Factors

These factors make available a complimentary terrain; whereby fragile law and order situation, criminality and corruption and lack of rule of law lead to the emergence of violent extremist groups. No doubt, these aspects do matter but in absolute absence of organizations and/or influential ideologues these may not be able to initiate violence because only leading ideologues / organizations push the related grumbles on the path of violence.

Religious people usually are more prone to endorse violence, is well known myth. Seeing that extremists in Central Asia; Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are more to be expected for whom religious conviction plays an imperative job, accordingly; terrorist organizations make use of their flaws and limitations. Similarly, motivated individuals agreeable to give up their own lives for any cause or beliefs — religious, social, political, and economic — are also drastically more liable to be extremists than others in their mind-set toward violence.

There are frequent initiatives tracked by under developed countries to forestall violent-extremism/terrorism and warding off radicalisation, in both physical plus digital realms. In year 2018, as the Somali government started Digital Counter-extremism Centre (DCC) which aspires to dissuade youth from following militant groups, for instance, Islamic State and al-Shabaab. The DCC prompted counter-narrative campaigns in cyber domain such as, Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

Similarly, Nigerian Army headed out almost 30-days public awareness campaign, in October 2017, against violent-extremism. Likewise, to prevent violent extremism / radicalization in educational institutions, the Ministry of Education of Kenya initiated a new-fangled national strategy aiming youth in 2014, named ‘Initiatives to Address Radicalization of the Youth in Educational Institutions in the Republic of Kenya.’ The strategy assumed procedures that facilitate the students’ comfort, well-being, and interest; Such as, efforts to make child-friendly environments at schools and persuade students to join “Talent Academies” to track a domain of their own choice or interest.

More importantly, in March 2016, government of United States of America recruited American, Pakistani, and Italian college students to devise the social media campaigns to flout violent-extremist groups and student of LUMS, Pakistan were decided being beater of that competition.

Preventing /Countering Violent Extremism (PVE/CVE) in Pakistan

Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, her society has been remained vulnerable on multiple fault lines such as religious, sectarian, ethnic and communal that can be easily assaulted by both – intrinsic and extrinsic militant factions. Even though, constantly growing social stratification of Pakistani society is rendering the PVE efforts as futile as Islamic State is extending its tentacles to its social fabric. i.e. Case of Noreen Laghari. Conversely, this social stratification generates reasonable prospects for structuring a convincing counter-narrative to extremist dogmas and philosophies.

In Pakistan, thus, rise in VE is shocking despite of significant decrease in acts of terrorism in recent couple of years. For that reason, Pakistan has instigated her ‘Rehabilitation Programme’ named as

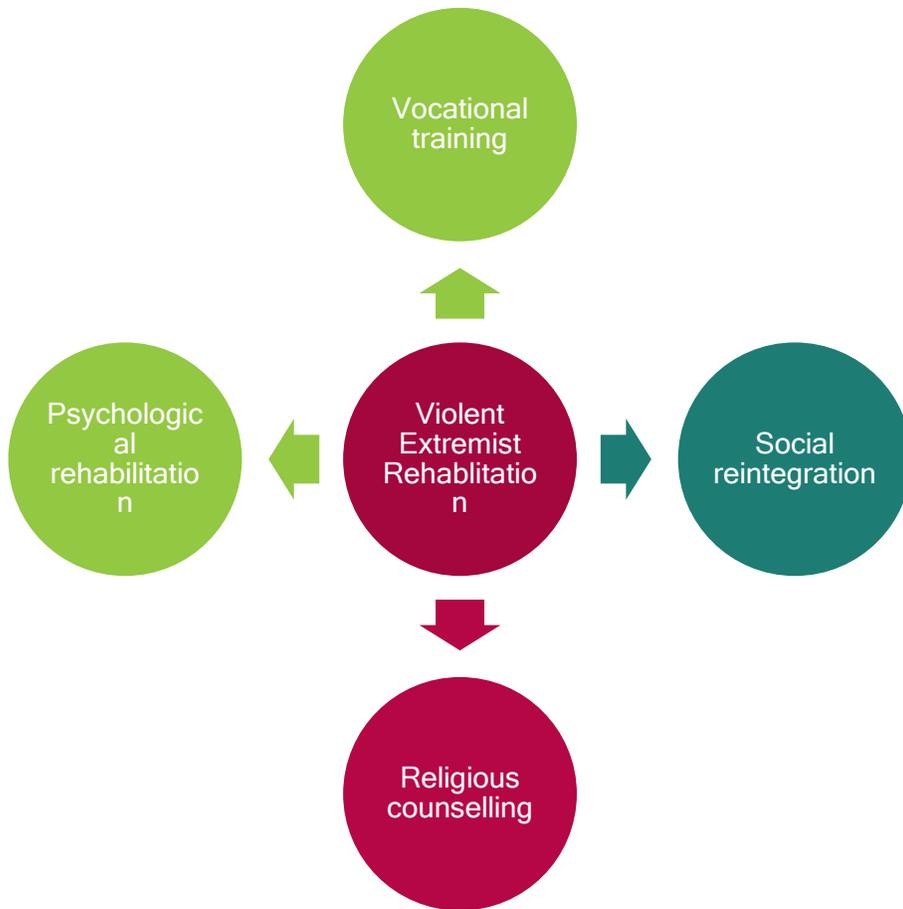
‘Sabaoon’ (Means dawn) in the wake of operation Rah-e-Rast in 2009. Many of the detained militants were found to be teenagers trained as ‘suicide bombers’ that revealed the precincts of ‘Hard Approach’ (3) to countering the challenges allied with terrorism in the country. Therefore, rehabilitation programmes provided them with second chance to carry on a normal life.

Presently, almost ten violent extremist rehabilitation centres are running across the country as ‘learning places’ rather than as ‘prisons.’

Rehabilitation Centres	Target Audience	Location
Rastoon & Sabaoon	Juveniles (12-18 years age)	Malakand Agency Khyber-PakhtunKhwa (KPK)
FEAST	Females	Swat KPK
Navi Sahar	Adults	Bajaur Agency FATA
Mishal	Adults (19-25 years age)	Mingora, KPK
Khyber Programme With 3 centres	Adults	Khyber Agency, FATA
SPARLAY	Families of militants	Tank, KPK
Punjab Rehabilitation Programme	Adults	Punjab (dysfunctional)

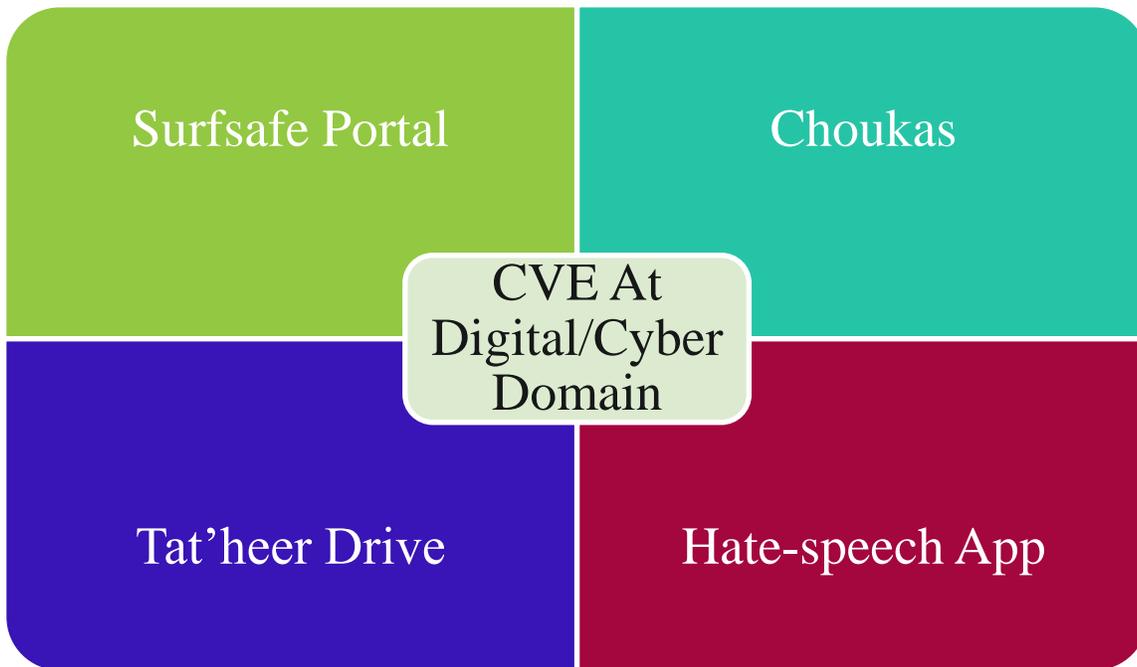
Table 1: Violent Rehabilitation Centres in Pakistan

Indeed, Pakistan has integrated in its VE rehabilitation Programme, very devoted team of psychologists, religious clerics, doctors and other relevant countering violent extremism professionals, also more importantly, captive extremist were allowed to meet with their families and encouraged to play a part in sports and cultural festivals. This profound rehabilitation encases around four vital elements.



Key Elements of Pakistan's Violent Extremism Rehabilitation Program

In Pakistan, National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) is the core organisation which copes with the counter-extremism, preventing-extremism, de-radicalisation, counter-terrorism and promotion of a persuasive counter-narrative. In almost one decade of its continuation, NACTA has undergone multifarious bureaucratic barriers including severe deficiency of finance, competent and trained human resource, and certainly lacking of a clear mandate. But in recent times, NACTA has found to be on the move of a little progress. It is working on a number of counter extremism/terrorism projects for instance, Surfsafe Portal (4), Hate-speech App and Tat'heer Drive (5). On the parallel lines to Tat'heer Drive that is solely Cyber Counter-terrorism Initiative, NACTA has developed an Android-iPhone apps also, given name CHAUKAS (6).



CVE Projects of NACTA

This app facilitates the citizens to report incognito and harmlessly about any suspicious activity or extremist content, hate speeches / banners and happenings (wherever they observe it) in their neighbourhood / society and also in the cyber world.

Similarly, Surfsafe has been made in access of citizens of Pakistan, by making them possible to report against online suspicious / extremist goings-on by sharing their web-links with NACTA. To plan a strategy and prepare modus operandi for responding abruptly to terrorism financiers, NACTA has gone into a joint venture with Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP) to assemble Safe Charities List (A database). With the exception of all these ventures, NACTA is also trying to put up 'National Counter-Narrative' together very strong and pliant social values.

Counter-narrative campaigns for public awareness, however, are only be thriving when the concerned men on the streets are drowned in the endeavour being embarked on. Albeit NACTA is putting in enormous effort to extend its counter-extremism campaigns for communal knowledge, these actions can be rewarding only when an outsized part of society is profoundly involved as a component of the

stratagem. Furthermore, NACTA wishes to stretch its span to educational institutes, private entities, think tanks, and media (electronic, print and digital media) to enlighten folks about their promotion drives.

Besides, there is an appalling need for NACTA to expand such form of tempting National Counter-Narrative which necessitates miscellaneous ideas and forbearance as key social value to construct a hard-wearing enlighten, and progressive society. Over and above, government authorities require to realize that counter-extremism efforts must be practical to control causes and spontaneous to symptoms — like indispensable approaches to argue against violent-extremism. Inert tolerance surrounded by segregated societies does not generate collective buoyancy. Pakistan has to be, therefore, acquainted with diversity as a high merit and follow plurality — positively and by design.

To cut a long story short, PVE / CVE will remain subtle in Pakistan unless it is consistently pushed by state and owned by her people. It needs to target the multi-layered composition of extremism clasped by terrorist organisations that aims to damage the tolerant ethos/culture of society. Terrorism in Pakistan has been self-motivated and relentlessly sprouting menace. Hence, the terrorist groups have been keeping change their mode of assault tactics, propaganda and recruitment. Accordingly, concerned Pakistani counter-terrorism experts / strategists have to be just equipped with their pre-emptive and preventive policies in order to stay valuable and relevant. Pakistan's counter / preventive violent extremism programme, with its prime focus on extremist / militant rehabilitation is a precise move on the defined track, though it is at its premature stage as yet. In order to fortify its efficacy and practicability, the programme needs to be extended at the national level, since at present most of the initiatives are entirely ad-hoc based such as lack of resources was the case in the Southern Punjab.

Likewise, an inclusive counter-radicalisation policy requires to be initiated in juxtaposition with the extremist / militant rehabilitation programme to generate an environment that is productive for spreading ideas pertinent to tolerance and antagonistic to the growth of extremism. In the absolute absence of a counter-radicalisation policy, and given the scale of emerging threats related to extremism in Pakistan,

existing de-radicalisation intrusions appear to be lessened, and run the threat of trailing steam over time.

Photo: Weekly Cutting Edge

References:

- 1- It refers to actions or beliefs of people who endorse or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve ideological, religious, radical, or political views.
- 2- Its non-coercive; the currency of soft power is culture, education, art, counter-narrative, political values, and foreign policies.
- 3- It's often aggressive by using military and economic means to influence the interests or behaviour of other political bodies.
- 4- More details can be found at <https://surfsafe.pk/>.
- 5- For more details please consult at <https://nacta.gov.pk/tatheer-drive/>.
- 6- Details related to this app can be accessed at <https://nacta.gov.pk/nacta-introduce-apps-citizens-2/>.