

Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Policy: Its Goods & Bads

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

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In December 2014, attack on an army-run school in Peshawar was supposedly a game changer, which killed 150 plus, mainly children, claimed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). A week later, the Pakistani government gave away a new counter-terrorism strategy which consisted of twenty points; termed as National Action Plan (NAP) that purportedly vowed to target all terror groups without any distinction. After few months, amid terror attacks remained continued, the NAP looked far more like a swiftly-envisaged wish-list formulated for public consumption for the period of crisis than a lucid and coherent strategy. Trusting on lethal force (Hard Power) and non-coercive blunt instruments (Soft Power) to counter-terrorism risks rendering more harm than good, exclusively when provide grist to the jihadis' propaganda mills as well as constitutionalism, the rule of law and democratic governance is undermined intentionally. Furthermore, for containing Violent Extremism (VE) and countering terror threats, a reformed and strengthened Criminal Justice System is usually deemed to be pivotal and inevitable.

More importantly, the over-militarisation of Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy seemed to be putting at risk Pakistan's gradual evolution towards greater civilian rule, which itself was a needed component but wasn't a sufficient provision to stabilise Pakistan's democratic transition. No doubt, the coercive side of Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy (Hard Strategy) has performed well throughout, even without governance and structural reforms. But issues lie with the root causes of terrorism and extremism those have remained unaddressed so far. So therefore, violent jihadis have been continuing to make the most of the absence of this more vital rule of law. Here it's noteworthy that in conflict zone (Pakistani tribal belt), military's continual undermining of civilian authority even after democracy's restoration in 2008 has remained a sole challenge to consequential and sustained reforms in Soft Counter-terrorism Strategy. Hitherto, Pakistani political leadership also has been admitting its responsibility for failing to push back and worsening the circumstances that led to lose of thousands of lives of innocent Pakistanis in terrorism, as a result, its credibility and authority got solemnly damaged. Who else was left to take the driving seat

of CT in Pakistan? Of course, it was and it is none other than the military, who are having indeed deeper roots and support in the public than the Pakistani politicians.

For that reason, after inaugurating the NAP (on 24 December 2014), the Sharif government immediately executed two major demands of the military without any further delay under pressure of its public: it lifted the (predecessor government's 2008) moratorium on the death penalty; and also it dared to pass (on 6 January 2015) the 21st constitutional amendment that led to empowering the special military courts to try all terrorism suspects; including civilians.

Other newly-formed parallel structures like provincial "apex committees" facilitated the military to bypass representative institutions and play a more direct role in 'Soft Counter-terrorism Strategy' that is usually a sole responsibility of government of the state. Hence, fortified with new legal tools, the military has seemed to be dominating Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy by marginalising civilian institutions in devising and implementing it. Unfortunately, but honestly, neither previous Pakistani civilian governments were interested nor they were capable enough to take the lead role in CT at any point.

Hence, the military despite claims to the contrary has almost complete control over national security and counter-terrorism policy. But it got its drawback also since it was only a one man show and that's why it had to face criticism from the world about its distinguished behaviour between "bad" jihadi groups (those targeting the security forces) and "good" jihadi groups (those supposed to promote its strategic objectives in Afghanistan and India). But here it's noteworthy that ground reality was very much different from this false allegation. Other allegations that Pakistan had to face despite her huge collateral damage in war against terrorism include Haqqani Network and Jamaat-ud-Dawa, (JD, the renamed version of the banned Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, or LeT) an anti-India outfit which hasn't been touched even when it has been claimed by the international community that JD is expanding its activities via so-called charity means. Even more allegations kept on arriving about Afghan insurgents like Haqqani Network,

that they exclusively have not been targeted in operations in the North Waziristan agency of FATA. Instead, the LeT/JD, like Haqqanis, have been kept off Pakistan's list of terrorist groups.

Though, if you ever have got a chance to travel to North Waziristan Agency, you can witness the achievement of Pakistani military by your own eyes, and you wouldn't be find any imprints of militant elements there, rather, at each corner and at every peak, soldiers are positioned to keep an eye on any suspicious activity that negates such allegations entirely. As far as JD is concerned, its involvement hasn't been found in any terrorist activity in Pakistan, which is why Pakistani CT authorities used to prefer to stay silent on the matter of JD. But meanwhile pressure from international community kept on rising and this time an additional factor of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has played a decisive role to pressurize Pakistani government to make the arrest of Hafiz Saeed, chief of JD, possible. On the other hand, here it's worth mentioning that for the very first time on the international front Pakistan has achieved a remarkable victory in ICJ (International Court of Justice) by successfully proving that Pakistan has long remained a victim of Indian Sponsored Terrorism (IST), which yet needs to be cashed positively by Pakistani government in days to come.

Apart from that, Pakistan is trying hard to come out of 'Grey List' of FATF, which is why its Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has arrested the Punjab politician Rana Sanaullah red handed carrying drugs in his private vehicles. Number of other relevant arrests also being claimed by ANF; all these endeavours are testimony of Pakistan's struggle to get rid of Grey List of FATF. But question is why Pakistan has been put on Grey List despite of her huge loss in war against terrorism. Its answer is very simple: because Pakistan always kept her CT policy Hard Power centric, and she never paid any attention towards its soft power component that consists of enlightened education, culture, media, intellectual rehabilitation, curbing the finances of terrorism and more; such as money laundering and drug money are believed to be key sources of financing terrorism. Neither have we found its countering mechanism in NAP.

Unsurprisingly, the progressing speed on number of NAP targets is still not satisfactory enough; like efforts to curb hate speech and literature, to make the madrasa sector conform and blocking of terrorist financing have been haphazard at most. Moreover, individuals and groups banned in Pakistan as well as blacklisted under UN Security Council (UNSC Resolution 1267), still continue to operate without restraint.

Reformed and strong Criminal Justice System could have assisted to achieve NAP targets. The Pakistani government still has time, albeit fast shrinking, to annul the slow-course and evocatively revamp the counter-terrorism strategy, but this necessitates more involvement of the civilian government in CT related affairs; otherwise circumstantial justification for emergence of agitating groups like PTM (Pashtun Tahafuz Movement) shall remain. The government therefore, now without more ado needs to engage this front to replace an overly-militarised response with a refurbishing, intelligence-guided CT strategy, led by competent and well-trained civilian law enforcement agencies, mainly the police including the Counter-Terrorism Department. Dismantling and disrupting terror networks and terror financing, detaining and prosecuting jihadi leaders as well as foot soldiers, and ceasing radicalisation through hate speech or literature will require reallocating limited resources with the aim of strengthening the capacity of the Provincial Police Forces. Despite the fact that three basic bodies of law; the Penal Code, Evidence Act, and Criminal Procedure Code urgently require to be modernised; it is all the more urgent to erect police capacity to put into effect these laws immediately. Besides, that competence has been sternly eroded due to the shortage of resources, internal accountability, autonomy and training.

In nutshell, an empowered and resourced police force, no doubt, serves as most plausible tool for imposing a persistent and effective CT strategy. The current stress on revenge or retribution and the emasculation of fundamental rights as well as rule of law are gradually declining citizen reliance on the state to dispense easy and cheap justice; also, a blemished approach that stimulates grievances which smoothly assists the VE, the NAP still sternly needs to combat.