

Counter Violent Extremism (CVE): An Analysis of Pakistan's Policy Calculus

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of violent extremism with a focus on Pakistan's role and its response. Despite facing persistent challenges, Pakistan demonstrated resilience in countering extremism and terrorism. Over the past two decades, Pakistan has navigated through turmoil and emerged stronger, achieving milestones in academia, science, art, and sports, all while implementing a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy. Despite the menace of terrorism, Pakistan's cultural richness thrives alongside infrastructural development, supported by alliances with countries like China. With unwavering determination, Pakistan envisions a future marked by progress and prosperity, underpinned by its steadfast commitment to combating violent extremism that it hailed through national consensus. The study underscores Pakistan's approach to countering violent extremism by examining National Action Plan; legal and administrative course of actions; National Counter Terrorism Authority; National Internal Security Policies (2013-2018 & 2018-2023); National Security Policy 2022-26; Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE) Media Cell established by Pakistan Information Department at MoIB; legislative measures, law enforcement, and border security; intelligence gathering and sharing; border management; counter-radicalization efforts; and last but not the least by looking at Vision 2025. The study is deductive in nature and applies national security prism to unfold Pakistan's role and response to counter the violent extremism.

Keywords: Pakistan, CVE, NACTA, NISP, NSP, CPEC, CVE Media Cell, Counter Terrorism, Violent Extremism, Strategy, Policy Calculus

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1. Introduction:

Given immense geo-strategic importance, modern-day Pakistan stands as an often-overlooked triumph in the global battle against violent extremism. Despite frequent misrepresentation in global power dynamics, Pakistan is unfairly portrayed as a state and society. While isolated acts of terrorism grab headlines, the intricate realities of Pakistan's fight against this global threat are often sidelined or misunderstood. Despite facing relentless attacks on its core values and culture, the Pakistani people have shown remarkable resilience and belief in humanity's inherent goodness.

Their unwavering struggle against violent extremism unfolds as a crucial narrative that the world cannot afford to overlook.

This Research aims to provide an overview and snapshot of Pakistan's increasingly effective efforts against violent extremism. It begins by briefly introducing Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy and policy framework to offer insight into the authentic and evolving nature of the country. Building upon previous research, the study delves into the unique regional context of violent extremism and Pakistan's significant role as a frontrunner in the global anti-terrorism campaign. Furthermore, a dedicated section of the study elucidates the contemporary national resilience embodied in the form of the National Action Plan (NAP), Pakistan's comprehensive strategy to combat terrorism and its strategic vision for the future.

2. What is Violent Extremism?

Violent extremism refers to ideologies, beliefs, or actions that advocate or use violence to achieve political, religious, or social goals. It represents an extreme and radical interpretation of beliefs that often involve the use of force or coercion to impose those beliefs on others. Violent extremists may target individuals, communities, or governments perceived as adversaries, often resorting to terrorism or other forms of violent acts to instill fear, intimidate, or coerce others into submission (Striegher, 2015).

At its core, violent extremism thrives on intolerance, hatred, and the rejection of pluralism and diversity (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018). It often exploits grievances, real or perceived, to recruit followers and justify its actions. Violent extremists may exploit political, economic, social, or religious grievances to mobilize support and justify violence in pursuit of their goals. They seek to undermine the rule of law, democratic principles, and human rights, posing a significant threat to peace, stability, and security within societies and across borders (. Recognizing and addressing the root causes of violent extremism, such as socio-economic inequalities, political grievances, and ideological indoctrination, is essential in effectively countering this complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Marchei & Milani, 2024).

3. Regional Context of Violent Extremism:

The worldwide narrative on terrorism and violent extremism is widely recognized, indicating that this danger is not novel or confined solely to Pakistan. However, the causes and consequences of this menace for the country are, in many respects, distinct. Before delving into the factors that facilitate these causes, it is beneficial to objectively outline the drivers of extremism. Several notable causes of extremism in Pakistan stem from socio-economic marginalization, radical ideologies, and a pervasive militaristic ethos. These factors have gradually impacted and destabilized societal cohesion, presenting both tangible and intangible obstacles to governance.

- a) Socio-economic Disenfranchisement: Pakistan emerged in a region lacking the essential physical and institutional framework required for swift progress. Despite noticeable advancements, significant areas still grapple with socio-economic deprivation. These regions have at times been manipulated by organized religious fervor and other nefarious interests to coerce unwitting individuals into extremist activities.
- b) Radical Belief Systems: Violent and extremist doctrines promoted by entities such as Al-Qaeda International (AQI) and now DAESH have taken advantage of a blend of socio-economic disenfranchisement and the religious fervor of the populace.
- c) Militaristic Culture: The combination of socio-economic disenfranchisement and extremist doctrines fuels a culture of militarism, which has its roots in the context of the Iranian revolution and conflicts in Afghanistan and Kashmir. This culture gains momentum from

regional instability, external interventions, and the ongoing denial of the right to self-determination.

The drivers mentioned above may exist in various societies, but what sets Pakistan's situation apart demands a thorough explanation. This can be elucidated by revisiting the root causes or facilitators behind the three aforementioned drivers.

- i. Trans-national Linkages: Many terrorist groups operating in Pakistan's border regions derive inspiration, strategic direction, and sometimes material support from trans-national terrorist organizations. Consequently, Pakistan's immediate challenges are intricately linked to the successes or setbacks of the global community against these sources of inspiration. While Al-Qaeda International (AQI) has long served as a primary source of inspiration, its prominence has recently been overshadowed by groups like DAESH. Hence, it's imperative to recognize the solid trans-national connections to Pakistan's national issues (Mazhar & Goraya, 2019).
- ii. Perceived Global Injustices: Terrorist organizations like AQI, DAESH, and their local affiliates exploit tragic global realities to manipulate vulnerable minds. Issues such as the Palestine conflict, the enduring aftermath of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the ongoing strife in Syria are exploited to fuel extremist narratives (Staffel & Awan, 2016).
- iii. Afghan Conflict Scenario: Afghanistan has been engulfed in violence and instability for more than forty years. Throughout this enduring turmoil, Pakistan has provided shelter to millions of displaced Afghans and endured significant socio-economic burdens. Unfortunately, Pakistan has primarily borne the consequences of actions and inactions by external parties (Mulk, Ali & Ullah, 2020).
- iv. Indian Rigidity: India's reluctance to engage in meaningful dialogue with Pakistan to resolve bilateral disputes, including the Kashmir issue, directly fosters extremism and militancy in the region (Amin, Naseer & Raza, 2022). Moreover, India has actively exploited ungoverned territories in Afghanistan to arm and fund extremist factions targeting Pakistan. The recent capture of an active Indian Intelligence Officer, Commodore Kalbushan Yadav, in Balochistan Province, orchestrating attacks against civilians, underscores India's destabilizing role (Mujahid, 2022). It's noteworthy that India's adverse agenda has garnered support from various state and non-state actors, both regional and international.

These drivers and their associated catalysts delineate the complex web of factors contributing to the proliferation of violent extremism, a challenge Pakistan has been confronting for nearly two decades, presently addressed through the National Action Plan (NAP) strategy.

4. Pakistan and the Fight against Terrorism:

Consistently, Pakistan has encountered itself positioned amid global fault lines, frequently leading conflicts. During the 19th century, Great Britain sought to restrict the expansion of the former Soviet Union towards Afghanistan, resulting in regions like Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and the Northern Areas of Pakistan, including Kashmir, being transformed into battlegrounds (Yar, Ihsan & Hafiz, 2022). Although the undefined borders of that era delineated contemporary Pakistan, their impact on the socio-cultural dynamics of the region was less pronounced. Nonetheless, they instigated a lasting security anxiety stemming from the unstable and tumultuous political landscape of Afghanistan for the immediate neighboring regions, comprising KP, Baluchistan, and the Northern Areas of Pakistan.

The political landscape of Afghanistan in the 20th century mirrored its turbulent past, marked by persistent instability and a subsequent Soviet expansion. Consequently, during the late 20th

century, primarily due to the climax of the Cold War and heightened global competition between the USA and the former Soviet Union, ideological confrontation intensified, positioning Afghanistan as a new battleground. Once again, Pakistan found itself at the center of the storm, not just as a geographical entity but also as an ideological, political, economic, and sovereign nation. With the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan bore the physical and economic costs of an ideological struggle (Karim, 2017).

The role Pakistan played in assisting the US to defeat the Soviet Union nearly engulfed the entire country within the next decade. The disintegration of the Soviet Union subsequently plunged Afghanistan into an enduring dilemma, overshadowing Pakistan's aspirations for a peaceful political regime. The flawed political strategy and fluctuating political commitments of successive Pakistani governments in Islamabad gradually hindered rather than facilitated efforts to enhance stability in Afghanistan (Nagra, Mustafa & Imran, 2019). The difficulties following the collapse of the Soviet Union reached unprecedented levels with the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, which struck the twin towers in New York, marking another crucial juncture for Pakistan (Butt, Salman, Butt & Bukhari, 2020). Once more, Pakistan emerged as a key ally for the US-led global coalition against Al-Qaeda and related militant groups in Afghanistan. Although politically undemocratic yet strategically dynamic, Pakistan faced the ultimatum "either you are with us or against us" (Jabeen, 2009). Despite acquiescing to this coercive position, Pakistan persisted in dealing with the aftermath of conflict in its socio-culturally interconnected yet economically fragmented vicinity.

5. Phenomenon of Frontline Nation and the Unbearable Cost:

In the wake of the initiation of the US-led 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in the region, Pakistan faced not just a notable influx of migrants but also witnessed a sudden upsurge in terrorist assaults. The social structure of the nation hovered perilously close to collapse, as internal fault lines like ethnic, sectarian, ideological, social, and political divisions displayed a disconnection with the state's choice to align itself with the US-led worldwide war on terror. Consequently, national resilience was ill-prepared to fully embrace the concept of international security at the expense of its own interests. Notably, a suicide bombing in 2002 marked only the second instance of such an act of terrorism in Pakistan, with the previous occurrence dating back to 1995 (Yamin, 2015).

The cumulative impact of the deteriorating security situation severely hampered Pakistan's economic growth. Subsequently, the cost of the global war on terror predominantly affected Pakistan's ability to safeguard its citizens, resulting in significant human and economic losses. The interruption changed the typical economic path of Pakistan, elevating the expenses of conducting business, interrupting production cycles, and causing setbacks in export-focused sectors, such as the annulment of global orders. As a result, what was previously a thriving economy began to decline, with Pakistan falling behind regional rivals. Moreover, the general decline in security resulted in significant outflows of investment, exacerbating the damage to export-oriented industries (Rashid, Fatima & Wasif, 2023).

Pakistan's commitment to combating terrorism came at a greater cost than anticipated. According to the Washington Post that in reference to an interview of former prime minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan quoted that Pakistan lost over 80,000 lives in the war against terrorism, including four General Officers of the Pakistan Army. It further revealed that the country incurred a staggering cost of almost \$150 billion due to terrorism-related issues between 2001 and 2018. Apart from financial damages, places of worship, schools, shrines, and churches were specifically attacked for opposing the wave of terror. Even leaders from conservative religious groups were targeted in attacks during this time (Weymouth, 2018).

Financial aid provided to Pakistan over the years as part of the Coalition Support Fund barely scratches the surface of these costs. Moreover, the dilemma of the coalition support fund often resulted in a carrot-and-stick approach rather than a genuine acknowledgment of Pakistan's sacrifices (Rana, 2017). Despite the transnational nature of the threat, Pakistan has been tackling terrorism as a global concern, not merely as a matter of national security. While it was Al-Qaeda's denouncement of US hegemony that initially eroded Pakistan's political standing in the region, Pakistani blood and resources have been expended in the pursuit of global peace. It is imperative to recognize the sacrifices of tens of thousands of Pakistani martyrs and cease the repetitive rhetoric of "do more."

6. Pakistan's Approach to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE):

Given the context provided earlier, Pakistan and its armed forces have taken a leading role in the regional fight against terrorism. Despite limited resources and minimal international support, Pakistan and its armed forces have achieved remarkable successes. It's worth noting that the US expenditure on the Afghanistan war has reached nearly \$2.26 trillion (Sabga, 2021), while the Iraq war has surpassed \$1.79 trillion (Crawford, 2023). The overall spending on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan surpasses \$8 trillion (Coyne, 2022). Despite these substantial investments spanning over two decades, Iraq and Afghanistan remain the second and third most dangerous countries globally, following only Syria. Although Pakistan's dedication to counter-terrorism has been acknowledged, it hasn't always been fully recognized. This anti-terrorism effort has encompassed various strategies, including sustained internal security operations in Pakistan's border regions with Afghanistan and support for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan by the USA and NATO. Pakistan has proudly stood at the forefront of this global initiative by addressing the root of the global threat.

Throughout the campaign, Pakistan has executed numerous successful counter-terrorism operations. The primary operation, Operation Al Mizan (Balance), involved deploying substantial military forces into historically challenging regions like the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), adjacent to Afghanistan. Furthermore, Operation Rah-e-Rast (The Straight Path) was launched in the Swat region, recognized globally as an exemplary counter-insurgency operation. These operations effectively reinstated state authority and captured fleeing al-Qaeda militants from Afghanistan, neutralizing hundreds of extremist targets in the process (Irfan, Khan & Naqvi, 2022). In June 2009, Pakistan commenced Operation Rah-e-Nijat to eradicate terrorist presence in South Waziristan, followed by significant socio-economic development endeavors. Then, on June 15, 2014, Pakistan intensified its fight against remaining terrorist elements in the mountainous areas of North Waziristan along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border with Operation Zarb-e-Azb (Strike of the Sword). This operation, marked by its intensity and rapid pace, involved the year-round deployment of over 180,000 Pakistani security forces, making it the world's largest ongoing anti-terrorism effort (Afridi, 2016). Operation Zarb-e-Azb's success, propelled by a collaborative effort across all military branches garnered widespread recognition. Subsequently, Operation Radd-ul-Fassad paved the way towards prolonged peace in Pakistan (Bilal, Khan & Azhar, 2021).

As a result of these major operations and numerous smaller ones, Pakistan has achieved sustainable peace. Independent estimates indicate that Pakistan's security forces have eliminated 32,954 terrorists, many of whom were common enemies of the free world (Rashid, Fatima & Wasif, 2023). Pakistani soldiers and citizens who sacrificed their lives in combating terrorism have contributed to global peace. Despite facing desperate terrorists resorting to cowardly acts such as attacking innocent schoolchildren, the nation has displayed resilience and determination.

In this setting, the year 2014 ended with a tragic event etched into the nation's memory. On the morning of December 16, 2014, terrorists launched an attack on the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar, resulting in the deaths of more than 140 innocent children and leaving many hundreds more wounded, some permanently disabled (Mufti, Mufti & Bresnahan, 2019). The city of Peshawar, historically serving as a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia, was deeply affected by this act of terror. In reaction to this tragedy, the Government of Pakistan promptly sanctioned the National Action Plan (NAP), a comprehensive strategy designed to complement Operation Zarb-e-Azb (Said, Gul & Akbar, 2021).

The NAP orchestrated a holistic approach involving both civil and military law enforcement agencies for counter-terrorism operations, supported by political and legal mandates. In accordance with its pledge, the NAP also included socio-economic initiatives aimed at restoring administrative and social infrastructure. The post-APS national response entailed substantive measures to address the challenges posed by violent extremism. Although born out of exceptional circumstances, the NAP is grounded in Pakistan's National Internal Security Policy (NISP), which aims to integrate national efforts into a unified approach to deter and dismantle terrorist networks. After the tragic incidents at APS, Pakistan reiterated its determination to address the evolving terrorism, now intricately linked with regional political dynamics. In January 2015, Pakistan unveiled the National Action Plan (NAP), consisting of 20 key points. This national initiative, supported by all political factions in the national assembly/parliament of Pakistan, was also legally sanctioned. On January 7, 2015, the Pakistani government, in collaboration with opposition parties, ratified the 21st Constitutional Amendment, formally authorizing the NAP. The legal framework introduced by the 21st amendment essentially reinforced the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) and introduced two significant elements: the implementation of the death penalty for terrorists and the establishment of special military courts (Madni, Habib & Akhtar, 2021).

Despite substantial political activism in Pakistan, the decision to establish special military courts encountered legal hurdles in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. However, after a comprehensive examination of all legal and judicial aspects, the Supreme Court delivered its verdict on August 5, 2015. The highest judicial authority upheld the nation's political consensus, which had already been endorsed and enacted by the parliament through the 21st Constitutional Amendment. The establishment of military courts was thus validated, ensuring safeguards against miscarriages of justice through provisions for judicial review, a mandatory requirement emphasized by the Supreme Court in its decision (Munir & Mahmood, 2020). Additionally, Pakistan's Army Chief underscored the necessity of military courts, emphasizing that they were not merely a preference of the military but an imperative in extraordinary times.

7. NAP's 20 Point Agenda:

The National Action Plan (NAP) didn't introduce groundbreaking measures but rather stressed the strict enforcement of existing laws while swiftly addressing constitutional gaps. The aftermath of the APS tragedy marked one of the most challenging periods for the nation, especially for the political leadership, which had previously shown varying levels of commitment to counter terrorism. This time, the nation eagerly awaited a unified political determination from all parliamentary factions. The charged environment compelled all state institutions to exhibit their dedication unanimously and endorse the National Action Plan.

The NAP's 20 points emphasized national actions against banned militant groups, preventing their resurgence under new names, disrupting their financial channels, dismantling their communication networks, continuing operations in Karachi, monitoring social media content to suppress pro-violence sentiments, and disbanding militias functioning as private armies. Several points of the

NAP strongly advocated for measures against networks operating on sectarian lines, stressing the halt of their communication channels, including the dissemination of hate speech. Special focus was placed on enhancing the effectiveness of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), regulating seminaries, aiding in the rehabilitation of temporarily displaced individuals (IDPs), and implementing reforms in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Additionally, the plan called for the development of a comprehensive policy to address the issue of Afghan refugees (Saleem et al., 2022)

8. NAP's Implementation Mechanisms:

The comprehensive policy, supported by constitutional backing, can only realize its intended goals if executed through a robust mechanism that ensures national consensus. Thus, in alignment with the sincere dedication to the National Action Plan (NAP), various institutional entities had initiated efforts to implement the 20-point agenda. The Prime Minister, acting as the Chairman of the committee oversaw the NAP plan of action, provided policy insights and directives. The committee consists of three Chiefs of the armed forces and nine cabinet members. The principal institutional framework included an "apex committee" in each province, led by the respective Chief Ministers, which encompasses civil-military representations like provincial bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies. This entity monitored the progress achieved in implementing the plan and suggested cases for trial in military courts.

9. The Achievements and Progress So Far:

The comprehensive progress made in line with the NAP plan of action is a time-consuming process and may not necessarily be fully detailed within this study. However, some significant areas are highlighted below to illustrate the national efforts:

- a) Restriction of Banned Groups: In accordance with the NAP, militant organizations are forbidden from operating within the nation, and disbanded groups are prohibited from resurfacing under different names. A fundamental aspect of Pakistan's national effort is to assert the state's sole authority over violence, preventing the emergence of pseudo-states. Another crucial policy direction aims to eliminate any remnants of the Jihadist culture prevalent in the 1980s and early 90s, eliminating any ambiguity regarding the categorization of acceptable or unacceptable such as good or bad Jihadists (Ali, 2023).
- b) Oversight of Religious Seminaries: The connection between religious seminaries and terrorism is often misrepresented or exaggerated. Similar to Christian seminaries or Jewish Yeshivas, Islamic Madaris are not known for producing scholars like Einsteins or Hawkings. However, they have been deeply ingrained in Pakistani culture and heritage for centuries, serving as charitable institutions and centers of religious instruction. As a matter of fact, approximately 90 percent of Madaris have no ties to terrorism. Nevertheless, the NAP seeks to regulate all Madaris and shut down those suspected of terrorist involvement. As an initial step, a comprehensive survey of religious seminaries nationwide has been conducted. Additionally, the Federal Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan are collaborating to integrate the curriculum of these religious institutions into the mainstream educational framework (Malik, Khan & Fatima, 2021).
- c) Management of Hate Speech and Literature: A pivotal component of the NAP is the oversight of hate speech and the dissemination of provocative literature. Thus far, thousands of criminal cases have been filed against individuals violating these regulations, hundreds of outlets distributing such material have been shut down, and substantial quantities of equipment have been seized (Wahab, 2021).

- d) Prevention of Terrorist Financing: Since the initiation of the NAP, numerous illicit or suspicious financial transactions have been intercepted, leading to the recovery of tens of millions of dollars. Under the action plan, specialized Counter Terror Finance (CTF) Units have been established within provincial Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs). These units collaborate with provincial law enforcement agencies to investigate and uncover "Reverse Leads" associated with terrorist funding (Zia, Abbas & Arshed, 2022).
- e) Addressing Organized Crime: Alongside a nationwide effort, significant success has been achieved against the nexus between terrorism and organized crime, particularly in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and the world's eighth-largest. Since the initiation of NAP, Karachi has witnessed a significant reduction in incidents of terrorism, targeted killings, random murders, and kidnappings (Phillips & Davis, 2022).

10. Legal and Administrative Course of Action to Counter Violent Extremism (CVE):

- a) **National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA)**: The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) has played a crucial role in Pakistan's efforts to counter violent extremism. Established in 2009, NACTA serves as the focal organization for coordinating national counter-terrorism efforts, facilitating intelligence sharing between various agencies, and formulating comprehensive strategies to address the threat of extremism. NACTA acts as a central hub where intelligence from different sources is analyzed and synthesized to identify emerging threats and formulate appropriate responses. Moreover, NACTA collaborates closely with provincial governments, law enforcement agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure a cohesive and coordinated approach to counter-terrorism efforts across the country. Through its initiatives, NACTA has helped strengthen Pakistan's institutional capacity to detect, prevent, and respond to terrorist activities, thereby contributing significantly to the nation's security and stability (Ghani, 2019).
- b) **National Internal Security Policies (2013-2018 & 2018-2023)**: Pakistan's internal security policies from 2013 to 2018 and 2018 to 2023 played pivotal roles in countering violent extremism within the country (Virk, 2022). During this period, the government implemented several comprehensive strategies aimed at addressing the root causes of extremism while enhancing the state's capacity to combat terrorist threats effectively. In the period spanning 2013 to 2018, following the tragic events such as the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar, the National Action Plan (NAP) was introduced as a comprehensive strategy to tackle extremism and terrorism (Makki & Akash, 2015). This plan involved coordination between civil and military law enforcement agencies, legislative measures to strengthen anti-terrorism laws, and socio-economic reforms to address grievances that fuel extremism. The NAP emphasized the suppression of banned militant groups, regulation of religious seminaries, control of hate speech, and curbing terror financing, among other measures. These policies helped in dismantling terrorist networks, disrupting their financial resources, and addressing ideological underpinnings of extremism within society. Similarly, in the period from 2018 to 2023, the government continued its efforts to counter violent extremism through a multifaceted approach. The National Internal Security Policy (NISP) 2018-2022 was formulated to build upon the achievements of previous policies while adapting to evolving security challenges (Ashraf, Mustafa & Ali, 2023). This policy focused on strengthening intelligence gathering and sharing mechanisms, enhancing border security to prevent cross-border infiltration, and promoting counter-radicalization efforts. Additionally, legislative measures such as amendments to anti-terrorism laws were

undertaken to streamline legal procedures for prosecuting extremists and ensuring swift justice.

The implementation of these internal security policies contributed significantly to reducing incidents of terrorism and improving overall security within Pakistan. By addressing socio-economic grievances, regulating religious institutions, and enhancing law enforcement capabilities, the state was able to weaken the influence of extremist ideologies and dismantle terrorist networks operating within its borders. Furthermore, concerted efforts to enhance regional cooperation and engage in diplomatic initiatives aimed at addressing root causes of extremism helped in fostering a more secure and stable environment both domestically and regionally (Sargana et al., 2019).

- c) **National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-26:** This first ever policy of Pakistan represents a comprehensive and forward-looking approach to addressing the issue of violent extremism within the country. With a focus on ensuring national security and stability, the NSP emphasizes the importance of countering violent extremism through multifaceted strategies. It acknowledges the complex nature of the threat posed by extremism and recognizes the need for coordinated efforts across various sectors to effectively combat it (Asia, 2021).

The NSP 2022-26 prioritizes the establishment of specialized entities and mechanisms aimed at countering violent extremism. One significant initiative outlined in the policy is the creation of a dedicated Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE) Media Cell, overseen by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in collaboration with the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA). This media cell utilizes data-driven approaches and leverages digital media platforms to conduct research, monitor extremist activities in real-time, and disseminate counter-narratives aimed at undermining extremist ideologies. Additionally, the NSP emphasizes the importance of collaboration and coordination among government agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to develop and implement comprehensive strategies for countering violent extremism effectively. Through these concerted efforts, the NSP aims to mitigate the threat of violent extremism and promote peace, stability, and security across Pakistan (Ali, 2023).

- d) **Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE) Media Cell:** In accordance with the National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-26, enacted on January 14, 2022, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MoIB), Government of Pakistan, assigned the Press Information Department (PID) the responsibility of establishing a Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE) Media Cell and strategy in partnership with the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA). As part of this initiative, PID has set up a specialized CVE Media Cell that relies on data-driven and automated processes. This cell conducts research by leveraging digital media platforms, such as social media, and indexes both print and electronic archives. Additionally, the CVE Media Cell team utilizes social media platforms to develop predictive algorithms aimed at creating real-time nationwide monitoring tools.

A key aspect underpinning the Ministry's CVE endeavors is collaboration. In pursuit of this objective, PID has convened a Working Group comprising subject matter experts. This Working Group convenes periodic meetings to facilitate consultation, offer advice, and share knowledge regarding the resolution of issues related to violent extremism in Pakistan. While still in its nascent stages, the Working Group is poised to contribute to the formulation of a comprehensive policy framework. This framework will be built upon a foundation of cross-sectoral consensus, thereby enhancing efforts in CVE (PID, 2023).

- e) **Legislative Measures, Law Enforcement, and Border Security:** Pakistan has continuously fortified its legislative and legal framework to enhance its capacity in combating terrorism and organized crime. To this end, it has revised the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) of 1997 and enacted the Protection of Pakistan Act (PPA), granting expanded authority to law enforcement agencies concerning interrogation and prosecution (Khan, 2022). Furthermore, new initiatives have been introduced to implement essential modifications and reinforce the efficiency of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and the Fair Trial Act.
- f) **Intelligence Gathering and Sharing:** In response to challenges and deficiencies encountered during the prolonged war on terror, Pakistan's civil and military intelligence agencies have intensified inter-agency communication and information exchange. Institutional mechanisms have been established to counter terrorism effectively through centralized coordination and provincial collaboration. Additionally, the principal data agency of Pakistan, the National Automated Database Registration Authority (NADRA), provides comprehensive integrated capabilities to various civil and military intelligence agencies, facilitating the enhancement and streamlining of intelligence collection and sharing processes.
- g) **Border Management:** Pakistan has prioritized the regulation of cross-border infiltration, but the lack of cooperation from neighboring Afghanistan has significantly affected its society. Consequently, Pakistan has implemented biometric procedures under the International Border Management Security system, enhancing screening mechanisms at land border checkpoints along its Afghanistan border. Furthermore, at international airports in Pakistan, 12 specialized units are tasked with detecting currency outflows from the country. These units receive support from NADRA, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Pakistan Customs, and intelligence agencies from both civil and military institutions (Wahab, 2021).
- h) **Counter-Radicalization Efforts:** In conjunction with kinetic measures, Pakistan's Federal Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, along with the Public Relations Arm of the Defense Forces of Pakistan, has effectively launched a narrative campaign. The terrorist narrative has been thoroughly discredited, and the nation stands united against this threat. Additionally, the Pakistan Army has collaborated with prominent Civil Society Organizations to establish and potentially expand several centers for de-radicalization, corrective education, and the reintegration of radicalized individuals. The success of these de-radicalization programs, which focus on reforming extremist ideologies, has been remarkable, garnering high levels of social acceptance and exhibiting very low rates of recidivism (Khan, 2023).
- i) **Pakistan's Strategic Compass: Vision 2025:** Looking beyond the fight against terrorism, Vision-2025, unveiled by the Government of Pakistan on August 11, 2014, encapsulated the national aspirations, hopes, and tangible goals for the coming decade. This vision prioritized crucial areas such as the development of social and human capital, placing its people at the forefront of national development plans; achieving inclusive growth; and implementing governance and institutional reforms. It also aimed to address pressing national crises related to food, water, and energy. Moreover, the document underscored a commitment to enhancing the country's economic environment by focusing on efforts to stimulate private sector-led growth and foster a competitive knowledge economy.

Given the infrastructural challenges in Pakistan's major cities and their connectivity with the rest of the country, Vision-2025 pledged to modernize transportation infrastructure. Furthermore, the strategic vision of Pakistan extended its focus to greater regional connectivity, a goal already realized through initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Ahmad, 2020).

The overarching objective of Vision-2025 was to ensure peace and security, which was central to its mission. Five specific enablers underscored Pakistan's national agenda under Vision-2025, with key highlights outlined below (Planning Commission, 2024):

- i. In the economic sphere, it aims to significantly increase the tax-to-GDP ratio from 8.5% to 18%, raise per capita income from \$1,299 to \$4,200, reduce the incidence of poverty to less than 20%, and boost exports to over \$150 billion. Supported by the developmental framework of CPEC, substantial investments were promised to add over 25,000MW of electricity to the national grid by 2025, with the ambitious goal of propelling Pakistan into the ranks of the world's leading economies.
- ii. In the social sector, Vision-2025 sought to ensure:
 - Provision of clean drinking water to every Pakistani by 2025.
 - Achieving 100% student enrollment at the primary level and increasing the literacy rate to beyond 90%. The plan also aims to produce 25,000 PhDs by 2025.
 - Increasing women's participation in the mainstream workforce to 45% by 2025.
 - Reducing the prevalence of epidemic diseases such as diabetes, hepatitis, diarrhea, and heart diseases by 50%.
 - Targeting more than 30 medals in the Asian Games by 2025.
- iii. Socio-political stability is another goal outlined in Vision-2025, aiming for improved governance and envisioning Pakistan placed in the top 50th percentile for political stability, absence of violence/terrorism, and control of corruption.

Overall, Pakistan's Vision-2025 identifies security as a crucial factor for sustainable economic development, emphasizing the need for a peaceful regional environment. The vision also prioritizes cordial relations with the international community based on the principle of "peace with dignity" and advocates for the resolution of regional conflicts, particularly the Kashmir dispute, through international organizations like the United Nations. Pakistan, exemplified by the successful implementation of CPEC, stands ready to act as a bridge for adjoining regions rather than a barrier.

11. Where Do We Stand Now?

As terrorism's grip weakens, the global community has recognized Pakistan's resilience, determination, and accomplishments in the face of significant challenges and unwavering adversity. Starting from 2015, when Forbes Magazine proclaimed that despite its hurdles, "Pakistan holds the promise of a remarkable turnaround on the global stage" (Runde, 2015). A global acceptance has been observed since then that lauds Pakistan's achievements amidst adversity, acknowledging its ability to weather the storm and emerge as an inspirational example despite facing numerous challenges.

On the economic front, Pakistan has bolstered its longstanding partnership with the world's second-largest economy, China. Collaboratively, Pakistan and China are constructing an extensive economic corridor poised to bring transformative socio-economic opportunities to Pakistanis and establish the country as a pivotal hub for trans-regional trade and shared prosperity. This initiative will economically integrate South Asia with Central Asia and beyond, epitomized by the burgeoning development of the Gwadar deep-sea port, poised to rival Dubai as a regional shipping hub.

After enduring over two decades of relentless turmoil, the Pakistani nation has emerged even stronger and more resolute. Throughout this period of turmoil, Pakistan has remained steadfast in its pursuit of progress, consistently producing esteemed academics, globally renowned scientists, Nobel laureates, acclaimed filmmakers, captivating literature, and accomplished athletes. Despite the challenges, Pakistan has preserved its cultural heritage, including Sufi traditions, vibrant folklore, music, drama, culinary arts, and fashion. Amidst the chaos, Pakistan has continued to invest in infrastructure development, constructing modern roads, shopping complexes, monuments, and showcasing excellence in arts and crafts. Supported by allies such as China, Saudi Arabia, and numerous global partners across Europe, America, and Asia, Pakistan remains determined to forge ahead on its path of progress and development.

12. Conclusion:

Pakistan's role and response to the regional dynamics of violent extremism underscore its resilience and commitment to combating this global challenge. Despite facing multifaceted challenges, Pakistan has emerged as a crucial actor in the fight against extremism, leveraging strategic alliances with countries like China and Saudi Arabia to bolster its efforts. Through comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies, collaborative initiatives, and steadfast determination, Pakistan has navigated through adversity, achieving milestones in various domains while steadfastly combating the scourge of terrorism. As Pakistan continues to forge ahead, it envisions a future marked by progress, prosperity, and enhanced regional stability, reaffirming its pivotal role in addressing the complex dynamics of violent extremism in the region.

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