

Terrorism The Biggest Threat to Pakistan

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Essay

Terrorism is second to none amongst the threats faced by Pakistan. The cost it has incurred, overweighs the losses bore in any other turmoil in history of the country. The complexity of this multifaceted menace lies in the fact that it is caused by multitude of factors ranging from internal situation to external developments. It has been damaging not only the economy, political stability, social sector and social fabric of the country but also national security and integrity. The country's image abroad and its foreign relations are severely affected, as well. Moreover, the risk of being termed as a failed state was born out of the implications of no other problem but terrorism. Nevertheless, the increasing realization and resolve of the political, civil and military leadership to combat this threat with iron hands harbingers a strong action to eradicate terrorism. However, this problem will not go away easily given the isolated responses from state institutions. A comprehensive and integrated counter-extremism and counter-terrorism strategy is need of the hour. The emerging clarity among institutions and political consensus among major stakeholders is a positive sign in this regard.

The origin of terrorism in Pakistan can be traced back to two important events that brought obscurantism, intolerance and resultantly terrorism in Pakistan. Before 1980s, religion has never been a controversial issue in Pakistan. The sectarian militants emerged in Pakistan after the 1979 Iran Revolution which transformed the nature and magnitude of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

Besides, Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was the most critical event leading to the spread of militancy. A fundamental change that altered the very character of society in Pakistan occurred after the outbreak of Soviet-Afghan war. However, the real damage was exposed only after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, when there emerged weaponization and violence in Pakistan. Lately, in the wake of US attack on Afghanistan, and Pakistan's entry into War on Terror as an ally, the extremism and terrorism soared.

With its multifarious nature, the magnitude of terrorism has become greater. Ethnic, sectarian; nationalist, separatist; and jihadi terrorism are some forms of it.

Ethnicity has been haunting Pakistan since its emergence as an independent state. This was the ethnicity factor that led to dismemberment of the country in 1971. Arson, bombings, assaults, vandalism and even murder have been some aspects of this nuisance.

Separatist terrorism is another threat to Pakistan. The Balochistan province has been facing the intermittent guerilla wars. The tribal militants, allegedly patronized by foreign powers especially India, carry out heinous acts of terrorism and even resort to target killings to advance their separatist agenda.

The so-called jihad is another form of terrorism that is most widespread nowadays. This type of terrorism emerged with Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s. After the Soviet withdrawal, this armed struggle transformed into a sort of civil war, and later Afghanistan became a breeding ground for terrorists.

Furthermore, after 9/11 attacks, when Pakistan entered in war against terrorism, some of these sham Jihadi groups turned their guns against Pakistan.

This violent phenomenon has become complex in nature due to multitude of the causes. The situation in Pakistan is more complicated due to its underdevelopment, strategic location, diverse cultures and religious orientation of society. The first and foremost cause is

widespread illiteracy in Pakistan. Pakistan ranks 113th among the 120 nations in the literacy rate index. Since, people lack the knowledge of the true teachings of Islam; they are easily carried away by the emotional and sentimental speeches of religious fanatics.

Secondly; injustice or lack of justice is also one of the core causes of terrorism. People are suffering from many social injustices including, but not limited to, unequal resource distribution, restricted access to quality education, the elite's hegemony in political system, lack of basic health facilities, and non-availability of necessary commodities to major portion of the population. There is plethora of examples in history when deprived and marginalized people rebelled and even resorted to violence to gain their rights. In Pakistan, the underprivileged and depressed class is prone to be exploited by the terrorists.

Thirdly; poverty is also a major cause of terrorism. According to a study conducted by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, every third Pakistani is living below the poverty line i.e. 58.7 million out of 180 million are living in abject poverty. A survey conducted by Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) revealed that around 45.7% population of Pakistan is poor. These people, caught in the vicious cycle of poverty, join terrorists for monetary benefits.

Fourthly; derailing of democracy by military dictators also contributed to the spread of terrorism in Pakistan. History of the country manifests that these were the decisions of military rulers that put Pakistan in this quandary. It was Zia's decision to involve Pakistan in war against Soviets in Afghanistan. Again, it was Gen Pervez Musharraf's decision to become a frontline US-ally in war against terrorism.

Fifthly; the ever-growing religious intolerance in Pakistan also fosters terrorism. In recent past, more than 100 Shiites were killed in Quetta in one attack. In addition, many Sunni/Shia processions were attacked and churches were set ablaze.

Sixthly; Pakistan's participation in Afghan War has also plagued the country with terrorism. Pakistan still ails from the disease it acquired during Soviet-Afghan war. Now, those militias have become so unbridled that they even challenge the writ of the government in various parts of the country.

Seventhly; the crippling economy also gives rise to terrorism. The faltering economy has increased inflation, poverty and unemployment. Almost 50% of the Pakistani workforce is unemployed, reveals the survey released by the Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW). Miseries compel people to find additional sources of income and the terrorists lure these marginalized people. Thus, economic frailty makes recruitment for terrorists easier.

Terrorism is the biggest threat to a viable state. The first and foremost threat, it poses, is to democratic system of the country. Pakistan has had only a wobbling democracy. Proper democratic transition is taking place for the first time in the country's history. However, the elections were marred by terrorist attacks on election campaigns. If the environment of insecurity prevails, democracy would never flourish and people will lose trust in the democratic process.

Terrorism also threatens the sovereignty of Pakistan. The presence of terrorists invites drone attacks which is a serious challenge to the country's sovereignty.

One of the major reasons behind the crippled economy of Pakistan is terrorism. The terrorist activities in Pakistan have led to flight of capital and investors. The investors are reluctant to invest here due to law and order situation. The estimated losses are around \$70bn.

Moreover, tourism industry of Pakistan is also in a dying state. Furthermore, the threat of terrorism also compels the government to divert resources to security spending.

Terrorism also hampers the prospects of good governance. The government finds itself hapless to improve the law and order situation in the country. The schools are bombed and demolished which deprives people of the light of knowledge. The proponents of education are attacked; the case of Malala Yousafzai is an example in this regard.

Terrorism thwarts the progress of the country as well. Pakistan couldn't make any progress in the last decade rather all the economic and human development indices show a considerable fall. Pakistan ranks 145th on the Human Development Index. The country has spent more than \$20 billion on war against terror and is compelled to increase its defence budget. Resultantly, the spending on the social development has seen new lows. Hence, terrorism causes underdevelopment which leads to increase in miseries of the masses.

Terrorism endangers the national security as well. A fleeting look at the current situation reveals that the country is suffering from worst security crisis. Terrorists carried out, successfully, attacks even on most secure and strategically important places. The attacks on GHQ, Mehran Naval Base and Kamra Air Base are testimony to this fact. The magnitude of losses can be gleaned from the fact that only one Saab-2000 aircraft fitted with an Airborne Early Warning & Control System (AWACS) destroyed at Kamra was worth \$250 million.

Terrorism, lastly, is a great threat to national integrity. It is threatening the very roots and fabric of the society. Pakistanis are being divided into small sub-nations fighting to assert their existence and separate identity.

Despite the above-mentioned facts, Pakistan has all the capacity and potential to eradicate terrorism. All it requires is a comprehensive and coordinated strategy.

First of all, religious leaders and scholars can play a vital role in this regard. They should use speeches and writings to preach the message of peace.

Two; the civil society also needs to come forward and play its role in sorting out the problems face by the nation. Moreover, a huge campaign is required to defeat the ideologies of terrorists. This campaign or mass movement can be used very effectively with collaborative efforts.

Three; uniform system of education can play a viable role in eradicating terrorism. The curriculum should be free of all the biases, religious bigotry and fanaticism. It shall include religious and modern education in equal proportions. The minds of younger generation need to be washed of all the rigidity; then only peace will prevail in society.

Four; media can be the most effective tool in eliminating terrorism. Media can be used to educate people and bring them on board about challenges faced by the country. Soft corner for militancy in the general public can only be eradicated by well-organized media effort.

Five; peace in Afghanistan is one of the prerequisites for curbing terrorism in Pakistan. Presence of Nato and Allied Forces in Afghanistan is a major cause of instability in the region.

Sixth; an effective strategy to counter militant and extremist groups hinges in the capability to gain timely and accurate intelligence. The local intelligence needs to be strengthened in terms of organization, equipment, training and coordination. The intelligence agencies

should be made completely free of political interference.

Seventh; a coherent strategy on using force as last resort should be evolved. The foreigners cannot live among the locals unless they are sufficiently motivated to support these militants. The local tribesmen should be taken into confidence and must be encouraged to stand up against the foreign elements.

Eighth; economic and social disparity leads to increase in recruitment of terrorists. Economic recovery should be given the top priority, especially in the underdeveloped areas. Comprehensive plans to ensure revival of industry to generate economic activity and jobs should be devised.

Lastly, there is, undoubtedly, a need for providing speedy and affordable justice to poor masses. As 'Justice delayed is justice denied', the people feel themselves alienated from society. The performance of lower judiciary has resulted in loss of trust of general public in courts and thus the Taliban-type speedy justice system attracts public support in certain areas. Therefore, justice system should be reviewed to ensure that people get speedy and affordable justice. Moreover, the prosecution needs to be made effective in order to curtail the large acquittal ratio of terrorists.

There is no denying the fact that Pakistan is facing great threat of terrorism. It's a country which is plagued with multifarious terrorism caused by several intricate problems. It poses threat to essential ingredients of the state, from democracy to national security and integrity of the country. However, combating terrorism is not an insurmountable task for this resilient nation. The enormity of the challenge has led to the momentum that is underway with regard to building of consensus on the policy to combat terrorism. This would lead to a conclusive strategy to eliminate this menace. The policy accompanied with political resolve is bound to win this war and achieve the stability and prosperity in the country.