



Pakistan experience of counterterrorism

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Pakistan has made appreciable strides in its ability to gather and synthesize intelligence, track and target terrorist networks, and use direct action to eliminate terrorists and terror cells. It has also put in place a robust security architecture in coordination with the international community and protocols to deter terror threats. Of course, all these measures taken by Pakistan can be further improved to combat terrorism effectively, while addressing other security challenges. It can further strengthen and reform the counterterrorism bureaucracy as well as the policy-making process. At the same time, it can work in conjugation with international communities especially with its allies to build a strong defense against terrorism.

Pakistan's experience in combating terrorism has been very diverse. Pakistan's Action to Counter Terrorism (PACT) concerning Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been developed jointly by the Government of Pakistan and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It seeks to strengthen the processes related to pre-investigations, investigations, prosecutions, and adjudication of terrorism-related cases. The project also involves upgrading the skills and knowledge of law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges while promoting coordination between provincial and federal authorities as well as the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police.

Three other objectives include enhancing investigation processes and the use of forensic evidence by the KP Police Counter Terrorism Department for the preparation of terrorism cases; strengthening the capacity of the KP Prosecution Directorate and Judiciary to prosecute and adjudicate terrorist cases effectively, and; improve provincial and inter-provincial coordination on counter-terrorism to strengthen overall capacity on counter terrorism-related strategic analysis. These measures will further promote greater judicial integrity and human rights compliance through judicial processes in terrorism cases.

Besides the measures being taken by Pakistan, one may not ignore the fact that a major reason for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan to confront the terror attacks is that

both share borders with Iran and Afghanistan. On top of this, the infiltration of non-state actors inside the Pakistan border is easy because of the porous border areas of KPK and Balochistan. The merger of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province as per the 25th constitutional amendment, provided better law and order situation in KP. These efforts were further backed by the setting up of rehabilitation centers under the military in KP and the Peaceful Balochistan Package.

On top of that, a large number of former militants have been de-radicalized in rehabilitation centers under the military-led Sabawoon Project. These militants were taught Islamic courses and basic education courses besides being given psychological and psychiatric treatment. They were also given vocational training to make them productive members of society and to reintegrate them into the mainstream of society and the country at large. This was indeed a commendable initiative of the Pakistani government.

At another level, the Pakistan government formulated in January 2015 its National Action Plan as part of a comprehensive strategy to crack down on terrorism. It was to be a major coordinated state retaliation against the deadly Peshawar school attack. It provided the framework for the 21st Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan which established speedy military trial courts for terrorism-related offenses. It also led to the resumption of capital punishment and mandatory re-verification through fingerprint recognition of all subscribers on cell phones.

The National Action Plan also authorizes the foreign, finance, and other ministerial departments to reach out to the friendly Muslim countries to clamp down on financiers of sectarian and terrorist networks operating against Pakistan. This is where Pakistan can convert a challenge into an opportunity for growth by capitalizing on its youth population, which constitutes around 60 percent of the total population. Currently, Pakistani youth face some serious issues, including poverty, low literacy rate (estimated to be 53 percent for males and 42 percent for females), while 15 percent of the youth are unemployed, making them vulnerable to terror, drug abuse and other vices.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has been working in Pakistan for over 35 years in close collaboration with the Government of Pakistan and civil society for addressing development challenges, specifically related to drug abuse and other types of crime. Together with the government, the UNODC has developed its second Country Program to ensure that its support is directed towards strategic priorities and meets Pakistan's national needs. The second Country Program (CPII) draws on the experience of its predecessor (CPI) and aims to bolster the efforts of Pakistan in enforcing the rule of law.

To this end, the government of Pakistan and the UNODC have jointly agreed to promote peace and stability, complement government policies and programs, assist Pakistan in achieving international commitments, and implement UNODC mandates. The

development process has been built around mapping programs, strategic consultations with donors and baseline assessments. CPII is a dynamic framework that can be adapted as it is implemented according to Pakistan's changing needs and priorities.

UNODC understands the particular challenges related to governance, security and public health in Pakistan. Accordingly, it is collaborating with the Government of Pakistan to counter these challenges effectively. The long-term objective of the UNODC is to expand the capacity of the Pakistani government to address long-term goals and maintain a high level of technical capacity. To this end, UNODC is focused on three interdependent domains: 1) illicit trafficking and border management; 2) criminal justice and legal reforms; 3) drug demand reduction, prevention and treatment; and two additional cross-cutting themes: e-Learning; and research and analysis. These efforts across the social and print media as well as intranet are bearing fruit, says UNODC on its website.

Let us look at the other faces and facets of terrorism in Pakistan. An attack on an army-run school in Peshawar on December 16, 2014, which killed 150 children, claimed by Tehreek-e-Taliban was a turning point in the history of terrorism in Pakistan. This led to the unveiling of a new counter-terrorism strategy, the 20-point National Action Plan, by the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. But six months later, amid continued terror attacks, the NAP looked like a hastily-conceived strategy for public consumption during a moment of crisis than a strong robust plan. It was also felt that there is a deep disconnect between the state and the society due to which anti-state elements are finding space to operate. It was then suggested that every district of Pakistan should have its anti-terrorist unit.

If we look at the timeline, then Pakistan suffered numerous terrorist threats in 2017, but these threats decreased later in subsequent years. These attacks were more destructive showing the complicity of several terror groups, who used different methods to attack targets. On February 16, 2017, a suicide bomber killed about 88 people and injured more than 300 people at the Sufi shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sindh Province. In fact, a series of terrorist attacks took place in Pakistan since 1979, when the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan. According to the South Asian Terrorism Portal Index, the terror attacks in Pakistan decreased by 89 percent in 2017 since its peak in 2009.

Another important component of Pakistan's experience in combating terrorism is its partnership with the US-led coalition. This alliance helped Pakistan to be positioned as a frontline state in curbing the menace of terrorism, while it also became a beneficiary of economic and military assistance. It also succeeded to restore Pakistani membership in the Commonwealth, which was suspended after the military coup of October 1999. But, Pakistan also paid a heavy price while working in the global war on terror. Pakistan suffered irreparable losses because of the terror attacks. According to a book titled

'Growth and Inequality—Agenda for Reforms' authored by renowned economist Dr. Hafiz Pasha, Pakistan has suffered a substantial loss of \$252 billion because of the US "war against terrorism". This amount is eight times higher than the financial help provided by the United States to Pakistan.

Major terrorist groups operating in Pakistan included the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, and the sectarian group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi al-Alami (LJA). Islamic State's Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) also claimed many attacks against Pakistani targets, some of which may have been conducted in collaboration with other terrorist outfits. Then there are groups located in Pakistan, like the Haqqani Network (HQN), Lashkar e-Tayyiba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), whose roles need to be discussed and debated.

These terrorist groups employed different methods to attack government institutions, academic institutions, markets, places of worship and even individuals. They used suicide bombings, rocket-propelled grenades, and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. On the other hand, the Pakistan government continued to strengthen its legislation, law enforcement and border security in a bid to foil terror attacks and to punish the perpetrators behind the attacks. The Pakistani government continued to implement the Antiterrorism Act (ATA) of 1997, the National Counterterrorism Authority Act (NACTA), the 2014 Investigation for Fair Trial Act, and 2014 amendments to the ATA, all of which allow more powers to Pakistani government agencies to combat terrorism.

The law allows for preventive arrest, permits the death penalty for terrorists, and creates special Anti-Terrorism Courts for trial. The government also renewed for two more years a constitutional amendment allowing military courts to try civilians on the charges of terrorism. These efforts were backed by military, paramilitary, and civilian security forces, who conducted counterterrorism operations all over the country. The Intelligence Bureau in Pakistan has nationwide jurisdiction and is empowered to coordinate with provincial counterterrorism agencies.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Interior in Pakistan has more than 10 law enforcement-related entities operating under its jurisdiction. The National Counter Terrorism Authority acts as a nodal point for coordination purposes. Pakistan has also put in place several other measures to combat terrorism. It collects biometric information at land crossings with its International Border Management Security System. It's National Action Plan to combat terrorism includes efforts to curb terror financing by boosting interagency coordination.

The government of Pakistan has not only been playing a leading role in hunting down Al-Qaeda operatives and their supporters, but also dealt strongly with the sectarian terrorist groups that have been involved in terrorism inside Pakistan. The two leaders of the dreadful Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Riaz Basra, and Asif Ramzi, were killed in 2002, and many other individuals associated with this organization have either been killed in police

encounters or are languishing in jails across the country. The Pakistani government took strong measures against such terrorist groups, who were threats to the internal peace and security of the country.

Lately, there have been some reports and indicators showing the improved security situation across the country. According to a report of Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies' (PIPS), over the decade terrorist activities in Pakistan have plummeted by more than 85 percent. This could be attributed to the determination and resilience of the Government of Pakistan in fighting against the menace of terrorism. It revised its foreign policy in Afghanistan. Pakistan also suffered diplomacy setbacks while supporting the freedom struggle of Kashmir. It also faced challenges from its civilian population while its economy remained weak and fragile. Therefore, it can be argued that Pakistan has been more or less a loser in the global terror coalition that evolved since 9/11.

In the regional context, the growing Indian influence in Afghanistan is a serious setback for Pakistan's foreign policy. The growing relations between India and Afghanistan and the Indian involvement in Afghanistan with the opening of four consulates have serious implications for Pakistan's security. For Pakistan, it presented the possibility of conflict operations being conducted inside Pakistan from its western border. The new Indo-Afghan engagements in the post-September 11 have been a major point of conflict between Pakistan and India. The spirit of cooperation on the regional level—especially among Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan—is completely missing. A case in point is the refusal of Afghanistan to hand over Aslam Farooqi, the leader of the terrorist outfit Daesh's splinter group, Khorasan Province (ISKP), "for further investigations" to Pakistan in early April.

But it is important to note that Pakistan is moving from strength to strength in combating terrorism despite several handicaps. Pakistan's National Action Plan has been devised to dismantle and prosecute terrorists and terror networks, and it stood the test of time. Strong military operations like the Operations Zarb-e-Azab and Rad-ul-Fasaad gave added strength and credibility to the NAP in curbing the menace of terrorism. Mr. Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, recently spoke high about Pakistan and its efforts to combat terrorism, and said that Pakistan has moved "from terrorism state to tourism state." He called for the need to recognize and commend the role of Pakistan at the international level. This is a moment of pride for Pakistan, but it still needs to keep its belt tightened to eradicate the menace of terrorism once and for all.

The terror menace is not yet fully over. It is evident from the monthly security review of Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies' (PIPS), which says that about 21 terrorist attacks took place in Pakistan during the first month of 2020. These were mostly low-intensity attacks confined to the province of Balochistan and KPK. Most recent attacks in 2020

were carried out by militant groups including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Hizbul Ahrar, Jamaatul Ahrar, local Taliban, and the Islamic State (IS) terrorist groups.

Terrorism in Pakistan still poses a significant threat to the people and the economy of the country. But, Pakistan is more prepared today to deal with any crisis than it was a decade ago. After more than two decades of relentless fighting against terrorism, real success for Pakistan needs to be measured by foiling an imminent terror attack. Therefore, it is the need of the hour to identify the terrorist groups that pose threats to its citizens and country at large. The Pakistan armed forces, particularly the Special Services Group (SSG) commandos, possess extraordinary talent in counter-terrorism operations, acquiring the knack to eliminate threats in a crisis rapidly and decisively.