Countering Violent Religious Extremism in Pakistan

STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS

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A Note from the President

The following report is the product of a pilot research project conducted by the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD). Its purpose is to determine 1) the most effective approaches for countering the expansion of extremist religious violence and 2) how best to enlist archconservative Muslims (including Salafis) in the development and implementation of such approaches. To date, scant research exists to inform policymakers and foreign policy practitioners on the most effective ways to engage the religious sector in countries on the front lines of combating this kind of terrorism. To frame this issue in the Pakistani context, the authors have drawn on insights from the existing literature, ICRD's decade of in-country experience, and 44 interviews with scholars, civil society activists, and influential conservative religious leaders.

Given this limited scope, this report is not intended to offer generalized conclusions, but instead to outline a framework for future analysis and to help inform policy deliberations and further scholarship in this area. To build on the insights of this report, ICRD will be conducting more expansive research both in Pakistan and in other crucial states in the Middle East and South Asia. However, this report is being released at an early stage in the process to highlight the potential for constructive engagement with religious conservatives and to inspire further study of its importance. We hope you find it helpful.

Sincerely,

Douglas M. Johnston
President

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About ICRD

Founded in 1999, the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD) is a Washington-based non-profit organization whose mission is to bridge religious considerations and international politics in support of peacemaking. ICRD achieves its mission by practicing faith-based diplomacy and working to:

1. Decrease religion's role as a driver of conflict;
2. Increase the capacity and number of religious peacemakers;
3. Increase the role of religious clergy and laity in peacemaking; and
4. Increase policy-makers' awareness of and receptivity to the potential contributions of religious peacemakers.

While traditional diplomacy often includes religious actors in its deliberations regarding the management of violent conflict, the deeper spiritual convictions that compel people of faith toward understanding, respect, and cooperation in lieu of conflict are too often overlooked as tools for bridging differences between antagonists. ICRD adds measurable impact to the latter by intervening in conflicts where:

- US diplomacy has abandoned or has not yet engaged the area of conflict;
- Official diplomats cannot reach important conflict actors;
- Religious actors are actively involved in the conflict, or are ineffectively engaged in seeking peace; and
- ICRD has access to established relationships of trust that can be brought to bear on the problems at hand.

Throughout its sixteen years of work, ICRD has been involved in some of the most intractable conflict spaces on the globe. Among its many accomplishments, ICRD has helped end a civil war in Sudan, pioneered faith-based reconciliation in Kashmir and Syria, facilitated curriculum and pedagogy enhancement in the madrasas of Pakistan, facilitated the release of Korean missionaries held hostage by the Taliban, enhanced educational reform in Saudi Arabia, and supported reintegration and reconciliation efforts in Colombia.

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Executive Summary

While domestic terrorism has long been a challenge around the world, many countries are only now beginning to develop comprehensive strategies to address the causes of violent religious extremism. In seeking to understand how to effectively address this threat, it is imperative to examine frontline states like Pakistan. While Pakistan has waged war on and off with anti-state militants like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), it has struggled for more than a decade to deal with the ideological dimensions of such threats. Because the vast majority of extremist violence in Pakistan is perpetrated by groups that use religion for motivation and legitimacy, it is imperative that Pakistan, and other countries, develop strategies to address drivers of extremism based on a clear understanding of the religious dimension.

While few would contest the fact that the most prolific terrorist organizations in Pakistan claim a religious grounding, to date, policymakers and experts have devoted insufficient attention to studying and understanding the potential role of religion and religious actors in countering violent religious extremism. To correct this imbalance, the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD) has compiled the following research and analysis based on the scholarly literature, field interviews, and more than a decade of experience working with selected religious communities in Pakistan.

In the last two years, Pakistan has shifted its approach to countering terrorism and violent religious extremism, as outlined by the 2015 National Action Plan (NAP). The NAP outlines top policy priorities and weaves together both hard and soft power strategies. While the plan has gained a degree of political traction, the government has struggled to make progress on its soft power initiatives. In this area, however, Pakistan's civil society has stepped in to fill the gap; and small-scale success abounds among various civil society organizations in addressing the religious dimension of extremism.

A close examination of government and civil society strategies reveals three critical areas in which religion plays a role: de-radicalization of individuals, reform of religious institutions, and development of counter-narratives. Across these strategies, ICRD has found that it is essential to engage with religious conservatives, who tend to have the greatest access to (and influence with) the communities most vulnerable to radical ideologies. While such engagement poses unique challenges, it can be done effectively and constructively by: a) cultivating trusting relationships; b) building engagements around religious heritage; c) designing transformative programs; d) cultivating a sense of local ownership; and d) focusing on local religious actors.

Based on this assessment, ICRD recommends the following:

To the Government of Pakistan:

- ➤ *Focus on implementing ALL components of the NAP and the National Internal Security Policy.*
- ➤ *Foster greater collaboration between the government and civil society.*
- ➤ *Engage seriously and respectfully with religious stakeholders, including conservatives.*

To the Civil Society of Pakistan:

- ➤ *Pressure the federal government to enact all elements of the NAP and the NISP.*
- ➤ *Foster constructive relationships with and between religious communities and institutions.*
- ➤ *Amplify the voices of those religious authority figures who speak out against violent extremism.*

To the US Government:

- ➤ *Encourage the government of Pakistan to prioritize and support soft power strategies.*
- ➤ *Avoid direct involvement in Pakistani policies in order to maintain local ownership.*
- ➤ *Invest more resources into constructively engaging with religious actors.*

Key Terminology

As this study focuses on the role of religious conservatives in countering extremism, it is first essential to define this category. While conservatism is always relative, there are a few shared traits that can help distinguish conservative religious traditions or communities from their more liberal counterparts. For the purposes of this analysis, ICRD will define *religious conservatism* as having the following traits:

- *Ideological exclusivity*: Conservative religious ideology limits the range of beliefs and practices that are acceptable or tolerable. In Pakistan, for example, this might manifest in rejecting Ahmadi claims to Muslim identity, denouncing Sufi holidays or vilifying other so-called "deviant" religious practices.

- *Illiberalism:* Liberal ideals—pluralism, secular democracy, universal human rights—generally encounter greater resistance from religious conservatives, since liberalism offers a competing set of ultimate values that typically does not reference the divine.

- *Historical frame of reference:* Religious conservatives tend to resist efforts to break from historical tradition, as they perceive it. While in practice they may adapt to modernity, their rhetoric and frame of reference remains fixated on the past.

Throughout Muslim communities worldwide, this definition could be applied to encompass Salafism, Wahhabism, and some forms of Islamism and even Sufism.[1] In Pakistan, the Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith communities are clearly the most conservative given their exclusivist and illiberal tendencies (see Appendix A for background on these religious communities in Pakistan). This categorization, however, is not intended to be rigid: many Barelvis are quite conservative and some Deobandi or Ahl-e-Hadith can be relatively liberal. Any attempt at defining the religious sphere must recognize the fluidity of lived religion.

Distinct from conservative religion is *violent religious extremism*. While violent religious extremists often draw on similar ideological traditions as religious conservatives, they are willing to elevate violence to the level of a standing obligation. The use of violence distinguishes those conservatives who might be persuasively engaged from those who need to be prevented from causing immediate harm. The term "violent religious extremism" also serves to differentiate between groups and individuals for whom religion is the primary frame of reference and other violent extremists who draw on political or ethnic motivations.

1. Current State of Violent Religious Extremism in Pakistan

By all metrics, the level of terrorist violence in Pakistan is staggering, and constitutes a dire threat to Pakistani stability and security. Over the past decade alone, acts of and responses to terrorism have killed more than 26,000 civilians and security forces personnel and 30,000 terrorists.[2] While the casualty rate has begun to recede (see figure below), in 2014, Pakistan still had the fourth highest number of terrorist attacks (1,760) of any country, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace.[3]

Civilians and Security Forces Killed By Terrorism in Pakistan
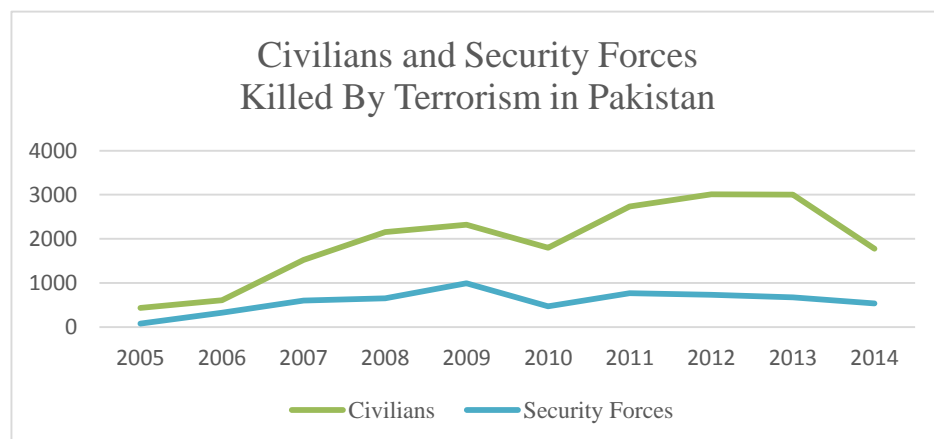
Source: (South Asia Terrorism Portal)

Pakistani terrorism is difficult to qualify, owing to the ubiquitous presence of violent narratives, the evolving identities of militant groups, and the broad array of contributing factors. To help frame the issue, this paper will draw on a classification system developed by Tariq Parvez, former National Coordinator of Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Authority. In a 2015 publication, Parvez disaggregates Pakistani violent extremist organizations (VEO) into three classes: 1) MITNOR (or militancy in the name of religion) groups, 2) sub-nationalist groups, and 3) ethno-political groups.[4]

In Parvez's classification, sub-nationalists are primarily Balochi liberation groups (i.e. those seeking independence for the province of Balochistan), while most ethno-nationalists are concentrated in Karachi. MINTOR groups, by contrast, are driven by a variety of national and international agendas and operate across the country. As the figure below illustrates, in 2013, MITNOR groups were responsible for 64% of terrorist attacks in Pakistan and 80% of all fatalities.

MITNOR		Sub-National		Ethno-Political
Attacks (Deaths): 1,171 (2,137)		Attacks (Deaths): 449 (303)		Attacks: 224 (234)
Internal	External	Baloch	Sindhi	Source: (Parvez, 2015)
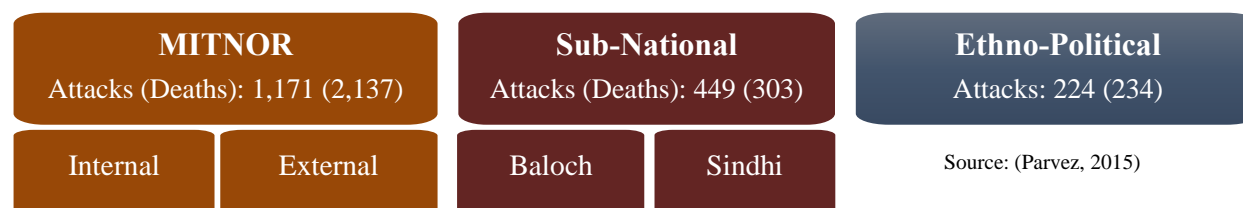
1.1 Pakistani "MITNOR" Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO)

Parvez's category of MITNOR helps to distinguish between violent religious extremists and other forms of violent extremism (e.g., ethno-nationalism and sub-nationalism). This paper will focus solely on MITNOR, while acknowledging that other forms of violent extremism warrant an equally robust response. All four of Pakistan's most influential and powerful terrorist organizations, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Haqqani Network (HQN), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), all fall under the MITNOR category. Despite the underlying influence of religion across these groups, important distinctions exist.

1.1.1 Tactics and Targeting

Using data from the START Consortium's Global Terrorism Database (GTD), the table below illustrates each group's specific geographic focus, tactics and tactical expertise.[5]

VEO	Staging Area	Targets	Tactics
TTP	**Pakistan** KPK and FATA, also cities in Sindh and Punjab.	Pakistani government, military, law enforcement, US security; religious minorities, schools and students, aid workers and doctors.	Wide variety of low-tech attacks, including suicide bombings, some coordinated attacks.
HQN	**Afghanistan** Southeast region and Kabul.	US military, coalition forces, Afghani government, Western diplomatic assets.	Coordinated attacks and massive bombings.
LEJ	**Pakistan** Quetta mostly, also Karachi and Lahore	Primarily Shi'a civilians, including mosques and religious gatherings, law enforcement.	Mostly armed assaults or targeted killings, less often bombings.
LET	**India** mostly, also **Pakistan** and **Afghanistan**.	Pakistani and Indian government, military, or law enforcement.	Mostly armed assaults (Fedayeen-style attacks)

1.1.2 Ideologies, Narratives, and Recruitment

Though all four groups consider the violent implementation of Taliban-style *shari'a* as the highest priority, they do not all share a common religious background.[6] The LeT has been linked to the Ahl-e-Hadith sect,

while the others have roots in the Deobandi tradition. This sectarian dimension leaves LeT at a strategic disadvantage, owing to the relative small size of the Ahl-e-Hadith sect and religious disagreements with mainstream clerics:

> *Ahl-e-Hadis may account for only ten percent of the Pakistani population, and LeT is even in dispute with the mainstream Ahl-e-Hadis ulema over the issue of jihad. As a consequence, LeT has a restricted access to Ahl-e-Hadis for recruits and funds. In contrast, Deobandis have the most madrassas in Pakistan, and their ulemas are more supportive of militant jihad.[7]*

The LeT adapts to this reality by seeking out other channels for needed resources. The group recruits members from public schools and higher levels of education, receives substantial funding from Gulf-state donors and finds some refuge from a strategic relationship with the Pakistani government.[8]

Unlike the LeT, the TTP draws strength from local religious bonds. The disparate groups that banded together to form the TTP were *"all linked by ideological and historical commonalities [and] emerged out of Deobandi madaris located in Pakistan's KPK and Balochistan."*[9]

In the case of HQN, religious actors and networks were also central to the groups' rise in Pakistan. Terrorism expert Jeffrey Dressler argues:

> *Conservative clergy were receptive to the Haqqanis not only for their mujahedeen credentials but also because the network openly embraces the traditionalist religious networks and the most radical brand of Islam that is preached in madrassas throughout Loya-Paktia [a region in Afghanistan]. Furthermore, these local conservative religious networks enabled a steady stream of recruits in addition to the foreign militants flowing across the border from the Waziristan.[10]*

1.2 The Influence of ISIS

While ISIS does not appear to have a true presence in Pakistan at this time, they have built considerable influence in the country, forming a working partnership with the LeJ and drawing oaths of allegiance from the chief cleric of the infamous Lal Masjid and several TTP commanders in the Jundallah faction.[11] The growing influence of ISIS could have several consequences to Pakistan:

- *More violence may lie ahead for Pakistan's beleaguered religious minorities.* The LeJ and the Jundallah TTP faction are both known for their brutal attacks on religious minorities. It was Jundallah that carried out Pakistan's worst ever attack on Christians, a twin suicide bombing at a Peshawar church that killed 85 parishioners and wounded 100 as they left services.[12] The Pakistani government and military believe that a wave of ISIS-inspired terrorism against the nation's religious minorities is imminent.[13]

- *ISIS could destabilize the landscape of Pakistani VEOs.* The rivalry between al-Qaeda's core and ISIS could be fueling a major schism amongst Pakistani VEOs. HQN and most TTP commanders have rejected overtures from ISIS to form trans-national alliances, likely owing to the influence of al-Qaeda, which is believed to be in Pakistan. The LeJ, on the other hand, has established training camps in Erbil, Iraq and works closely with ISIS. With ISIS now beginning to challenge the TTP and HQN for recruits, resources, and influence in Pakistan's tribal regions, a rift between the groups could spark a 'civil war' of Pakistani VEOs.[14] Terrorist in-fighting could further weaken the groups, which have been severely strained by ongoing military actions.[15]

2. Drivers of Violent Extremism

What factors are behind this explosive growth of violent extremism in Pakistan? Despite a large and growing volume of research dedicated to identifying and understanding the driving forces, the search for so-called 'root causes' has yet to uncover any solitary factor that overwhelmingly correlates to violent extremism

generally. Instead, researchers tend to view radicalization as a process during which an individual's worldview advances toward terrorism. One such model, adapted from Dr. Max Taylor of the University of St. Andrews suggests a four-stage radicalization process as follows:[16]

Pre-Radicalization → Radicalization → Violent Radicalization → Active Participation

According to some experts, the factors that carry an individual along this path can be roughly separated into negative environmental factors that *push* an individual towards violent extremism and positive factors that *pull* them. "Push factors" may include poverty, poor access to quality education, socio-political marginalization, corruption and lawlessness, or a bad/absent government apparatus.[17] "Pull factors," by contrast, are enticements or perceived benefits of joining or supporting a violent extremist group, such as financial incentives (salaries, shares of goods), a sense of belonging or prestige, or a sense of fulfilling certain religious obligations.[18]

As the table below demonstrates, pull factors generally exploit grievances related to push factors:

Push Factors	Related Pull Factors
Socio-Economic Factors - Widespread poverty - Unemployment or under-employment - Perception of relative deprivation	Promises of financial incentives to recruits and families, land redistribution, Islamic economic systems.
Socio-Political Factors - Social marginalization - Political disenfranchisement - Oppression	Promise of power, social status, revenge against the enemies of Islam, (i.e., Zionists, Christians, or their Muslim 'puppets').
Civilian Security Factors - Lack of legitimate, centralized governance - Lack of reliable law and order mechanism - Widespread corruption and impunity	Promise of strict and fair implementation of *shari'a*.

2.1 Radicalization in Pakistan

Scholars have advanced and tested numerous theories on which of these drivers of radicalization are most prevalent or important in Pakistan. In one recent survey, for example, researchers asked 500 security officials who worked in high, medium, and low security zones in Pakistan to rank 65 terrorism risk factors according to their importance.[19] They found that the most highly rated factors—dishonest leadership, unjust and unfair accountability system, and corruption—were directly related to poor governance. Factors such as sectarianism and criminality were considered second tier, while improper protection of minority rights and negative civilian attitudes towards the government and security forces were not considered critical.

In another study, three researchers from Forman Christian College in Lahore tested several hypotheses by drawing on publicly available datasets, including the Global Terrorism Database. Their analysis supported the 'relative deprivation' theory, finding no detectible association between income levels and terrorism, but a strong positive association between 'higher horizontal, cross-provincial inequality' and terrorist attacks.[20] Furthermore, the team found that US military aid and public education expenditures were both positively associated with terrorism. Based on these findings, the authors suggest that the pedagogy and curriculum found in Pakistani public schools *may actually be a more effective radicalization tool than madrasa education.*

During ICRD's study, key Pakistani stakeholders and experts (including professors, government officials, and civil society activists) were interviewed and asked to rank the importance of a variety of potential drivers of violent extremism. From a list of several push and pull factors, respondents identified the influence of local religious leaders, sectarian tensions, and the influence of religious education or madrasas as the most important factors.

Ranking Drivers of Violent Extremism
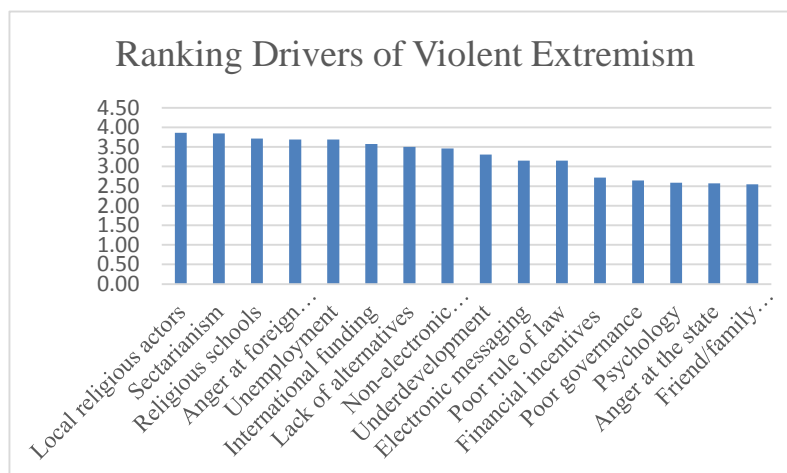
As the chart shows, the influence of local religious leaders, sectarian tensions, and madrasas are ranked highest, followed closely by anger at foreign states and high unemployment. It is also interesting to note that 1) extremist messaging through traditional media sources was considered to be somewhat more important than social media or the internet, and 2) anger at the state was ranked very low by respondents.

> **Internet and Social Media**
> The experts' ranking of traditional media over social media and the internet is surprising given the current priority given to research on social media-based radicalization. This finding, however, is not without precedence. In a study commissioned by the UK Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism, Dr. Noemie Bouhana and Professor Per-Olof Wikstrom gave this explanation for a similar finding: "the fact that the technology presents obstacles to the formation of intimate bonds could explain this counter-intuitive finding." (x) Although it is quite possible that there are other explanations for this finding, such as the fact that Pakistan has a very low internet penetration or that most subjects interviewed were quite a bit older than the average users of social media.

2.2 Religious Drivers

While the highest tier of contributing factors, according to the local stakeholders interviewed for this study, is centered on issues of religion; the relationship between religion and terrorism has tended to be overlooked or ignored in most scholarly literature. The authors of a 2009 RAND Corporation monograph, *Social Science for Counterterrorism,* note:

> *Most [counter-terrorism] literature… avoids or skirts the issue of religion (except in studies that purport to show that it is not an important factor in terrorism)… Why is this? A basic reason is that the subject is uncomfortable.*[21]

In spite of a paucity of data, several other studies shed a degree of light on the relationship between religion and violent extremism:

- In a 2007 survey, researchers found that individuals holding extreme conservative views (e.g., opposition to democracy or desire for increased 'talibanization' of daily life) were more likely to support terrorism in Pakistan than those holding moderate religious views.[22]

- In another effort, published three years later, Dr. Bridget Nolan, of the University of Pennsylvania, demonstrated a relationship between documented incidents of suicide bombings and clerical statements about such attacks. According to Nolan's data, in Pakistan, "what the clerics say does matter, and that the effect is not merely a matter of the amount of chatter," it is also a matter of the content of their messages.[23]

- Researchers at the University of Malakand conducted interviews of 200 adult men from businesses, academia, and the clergy. They found that respondents blamed "*acute social problems*" for militancy (37%) above any other factor, followed by "*emotional attachment to religion*" (19%). When asked about the role of Pashtun culture in violent extremism, subjects replied that the cultural emphasis on aggression and traditional religious attachment were key factors.[24]

- A 2008 study conducted jointly by WorldPublicOpinion.org and the United States Institute of Peace found that while there was strong public support for giving Islam a wider role in Pakistan (e.g., implementation of Islamic law), there was minimal support for 'talibanization'.[25]

- In 2009, a team of researchers from Georgetown, Princeton, and Stanford conducted a nationally-representative survey of 6,000 Pakistani men and women to better understand the relationships between support for violent extremist groups and religious and socio-economic factors. Their findings, show that:

  o Support for violent extremist groups *is not* related to common measures of religiosity or piety, but *is* related to the shared doctrinal beliefs.

  o Poor Pakistanis dislike militant groups more than middle-class Pakistanis – probably due to their increased exposure to terrorist violence.[26]

From the studies cited above, several key conclusions can be drawn: 1) religious drivers of violent extremism should at least be given equal treatment with socio-economic drivers in terrorism research, 2) efforts to counter violent extremism should focus on challenging religious narratives of violence and intolerance particularly in middle class populations, and 3) religious actors who have scriptural authority and social legitimacy can play a critical role in such efforts in Pakistan. In short:

> *[E]fforts to deal with the potential for violence of Islamist political movements should focus on the content of religious doctrine. In this sense, nascent programs in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia that seek to enlist religious scholars in deconstructing and delegitimizing the theological justifications for violent politics should be welcomed and supported…[27]*

3. Government Efforts to Counter Violent Religious Extremism

Despite the significant religious and ideological dimension of both the threat and its potential solution, the government of Pakistan has tended to rely heavily on periodic military campaigns and other kinetic responses to counter violent religious extremists. Over the years, some efforts have been made to curtail radical religious influences by reforming or regulating the madrasas, but these efforts have struggled to gain traction. Only recently has the state begun to take serious, concrete steps toward developing soft power strategies that could address the religious dimension of extremism.

3.1 Military Responses to VEOs

Since 2001, the Pakistani Army has conducted at least seven major military operations targeted at anti-state extremists, including the TTP and Tehrik Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM). These include: Enduring Freedom (2001-2002); Al Mizan (2002-2006); Zalzala (2008); Sher Dil, Rah-e-Haq, Rah-e-Rast (2007-2009); Rah-e-Nijat (2009-2010); Rah-e-Shahadat (2013); and Zarb-e-Azb (2014-Present). These operations have all focused on challenging militants in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), with varying degrees of success. The most recent operation, Zarb-e-Azb, for example, achieved tangible victories (837

hideouts destroyed, 18,087 weapons captured, 2,763 militants killed), but—as demonstrated by the January 2016 attack on Bacha Khan University—it has not prevented the Taliban from conducting horrific attacks.[28]

Periodically, these campaigns are disrupted by controversial peace agreements, which have served well to temporarily end the bloodshed, but they never last long before dissolving.[29] While both the military operations and peace agreements consistently prove successful, that success is always short term. According to Dr. Mariam Mufti, while these tactics have succeeded in rooting out some militants, they have failed to address the deeper problems that continuously fuel extremist groups and repopulate their ranks.[30]

3.2 Initial Soft Power and Ideological Responses

After repeated campaigns to drive out militants have failed to reduce the overall impact of terrorism in Pakistan, the state has gradually acknowledged the importance of soft power. Recognizing the importance of religion and other ideological drivers, efforts have been made to target the sources of extremist ideology.

3.2.1. Madrasa Reform

Government efforts to reform the madrasas (religious schools) long pre-date the proliferation of violent religious extremism. During the 1950-60s, Gen. Ayub Khan proposed a series of reform measures for the curriculum and endowments of madrasas, which were generally rejected by all political parties. Reform efforts resurfaced under the rule of Gen. Zia ul-Haq, whose "National Committee for Deeni Madaris" offered recommendations for modernizing the curriculum and improving economic conditions. These suggestions were dismissed by the clergy, even as thousands of new madrasas proliferated across the country.

The unchecked growth of the madrasa sector prompted concern by the government of Benazir Bhutto, which closed the registration of new madrasas in 1994. At that time, madrasas had been legally required to register with the government according to the *Societies Registration Act of 1860.* Over the next few years, countless numbers of unregistered madrasas emerged. By the time registration was reopened in 1999, many madrasas were resistant to government involvement. In the early 2000s, President Musharraf passed several reform initiatives, including the Voluntary Registration and Regulation Ordinance of 2002 and a five-year $113 million plan to introduce secular subjects into the madrasa curriculum. These efforts gained little traction and received insufficient funding and support. Thus, the madrasas remained largely outside the sphere of government control or influence.[31]

In 2005, the government passed an amendment to the Societies Registration Act, which mandated that all madrasas formally register with the government, submit to financial auditing, and stop teaching militancy and sectarianism. The government made an effort to constructively engage with the National Madrasa Oversight Board (ITMD) in implementing this measure, but pre-existing tensions made the negotiations challenging, and many madrasas resisted these new regulations. After several more years, the ITMD and the Interior Ministry signed an accord agreeing to formal collaboration on a number of key issues including curriculum reform and registration. Following this deal, a total of 8,656 schools registered with the government, bringing the number of registered madrasas to 14,656, still short of the more than 35,000 that are believed to exist currently.[32]

3.2.2. De-radicalization in Swat

In 2009, a short-lived peace agreement ended the fighting between the army and the TTP for control of the Swat district in KPK. Seeking to prevent the influence of the TTP from lingering and emerging again, the army established a rehabilitation center for young boys who had been recruited by the militant group. The Sabaoon Center for Rehabilitation was intended to address both the ideological and social problems that had driven the boys to the TTP and assist them in reintegrating into society. While retaining close ties to the military, the Center was placed under the control of Dr. Mohammad Farooq Khan and the Hum Pakistani Foundation. Dr. Khan, a psychiatrist and Islamic scholar, developed a pioneering curriculum that relied heavily on tailoring interventions to the individual needs of the participants, based around four key components:

- Education, including religious re-education on issues such as sharia, jihad, and democracy;
- Vocational training;
- Counseling, therapy, and other mental health services; and
- Social services, such as counseling sessions with participants' families.[33]

While Sabaoon's model has been highly acclaimed by experts in de-radicalization, it remains a small-scale project, reintegrating just 143 child soldiers over the first two years.[34] The highly individualized approach prevents Sabaoon from falling into the same pitfalls as other de-radicalization programs, but also limits the replicability and scalability of the model. In Swat, the Sabaoon Center is complemented by Projects Sparley and Mishal, which focus on adult detainees. Three other de-radicalization programs (Rastoon, Pythom and Helia) have also emerged elsewhere, however, very little is known about these programs and their respective rates of success. [35]

3.3. Legislative Reforms

In 2009, official counter-terrorism policy in Pakistan underwent a dramatic shift. The heavy focus on counter-insurgency in FATA left the system imbalanced, with little training or resources allocated to sectors outside the military. In an effort to create a centralized, national body that could facilitate cooperation across all relevant sectors, the government established the National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA).

Though NACTA was initially established in 2009, the agency was not provided with the necessary resources or a clear political mandate and remained generally defunct for the next few years.[36] It was revived in 2013, when the Senate passed Act No. XIX, giving the agency legal backing and specific responsibilities, such as gathering intelligence, conducting research, and developing and coordinating national counterterrorism strategies. This legislation placed the agency under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister and Interior Ministry, in the hopes that their authority could overcome lingering resistance from the military and intelligence sectors.[37] Even these measures, however, were not enough to bring it alive.

While NACTA remained dormant, even with high-level support, its creation signaled a shift toward a holistic, national strategy for countering violent religious extremism. In early 2014, this shift manifested itself in the first-ever National Internal Security Policy (NISP). Implementation of the policy was tasked to NACTA, despite the fact that the agency still lacked real capacity.

The NISP is built around three core elements, which blend hard and soft CVE strategies: 1) dialogue with all stakeholders; 2) isolation of terrorists from their support systems; and 3) enhancing deterrence and the capacity of the security apparatus to neutralize threats to internal security. While the specific provisions are too numerous to be included in this limited space, several are worth highlighting:

- Developing a national narrative based on tolerance and respect for diversity that can turn public opinion against extremist ideology;
- Designing new, prison-based de-radicalization programs that build on the successes in Swat; and
- Integrating the madrasas into the mainstream education sector through registration and the monitoring of funding sources.[38]

While the NISP demonstrated that officials within the Interior Ministry recognized the need to address the social and ideological factors that were driving extremist recruitment, the policy had little time to take full effect. In December, 2014, TTP militants responded to the army's most recent offensive (Zarb-e-Azb) by attacking the Army Public School in Peshawar, killing 145 people, most of whom were schoolchildren. With public opinion fully galvanized against extremist organizations, Prime Minister Sharif announced a new framework for countering terrorism and extremism: the National Action Plan (NAP).

3.4. The National Action Plan (NAP)

The NAP consists of twenty points, which reiterate many of the same policies and initiatives that were featured in the NISP, while placing a greater emphasis on the role of the military.[39] Enactment of the plan has thus far been slow and uneven, despite clear political support. A full analysis of each point and the process of implementation can be found in Appendix B, but several key points are worth mentioning here.

Enhancing existing security measures, such as the 2013 operation to target criminal activity in Karachi, has been easy and tangibly effective. One internal assessment, for example, found that the operation had led to a measurable decrease in targeted killings, murders, extortions, robberies, and terrorism within the first few months of the NAP's implementation.[40]

Implementation of the newer initiatives, however, has proven to be more challenging. For example, one of the highest profile points in the NAP—the establishment of special military trial courts for terror suspects—was quickly mired in controversy and conflict. The courts were rapidly established a month after the announcement of the NAP through the 21st Constitutional Amendment, which passed the National Assembly without opposition. However, the amendment was soon challenged in the Supreme Court and could not be implemented until August 2015, when it was finally declared constitutional.[41]

> **Clash over the 21st Amendment**
> While the state made deliberate efforts to engage all of the key stakeholders in early discussions of the NAP, old tensions rose to the surface between the government and major religio-political parties. The inclusion of madrasa reform in the NAP inspired concern among the conservative JUI-F and JI parties, both of which have strong connections to the madrasa system. Although both groups were supportive of the NAP generally, their reservations came to the fore during negotiations on the 21st Amendment. Voicing concerns about the possibility that the government would exercise its popular mandate against extremists to persecute conservative religious communities, the JUI-F led protests and rallies against the Amendment. Since then, the JUI-F has increasingly become a roadblock to effective implementation of the NAP.

Unsurprisingly, the NAP has been unable to overcome pre-existing hurdles. NACTA, which was intended to act as the primary implementing entity, remained underfunded and largely inept. Its head, Hamid Ali Khan (who has since resigned), quietly announced only a few months after the NAP began that three of the points were too challenging and long-term, and would no longer be pursued: taking action against proscribed organizations, reform of the madrasas, and the repatriation of Afghan refugees.[42]

In sum, while the NISP and NAP both outline clear, holistic frameworks for degrading terrorist activities and undermining extremist ideology, enactment of these frameworks has been piecemeal and imperfect. Given the historic reliance on the military, it has proven far easier to bolster existing kinetic strategies than to develop new, soft power projects.

3.5. Lingering Challenges

The government of Pakistan faces a number of challenges in addressing the religious dimension of violent extremism organizations. Not least among these is the fact that the government simply does not have the credibility to effectively influence those at-risk of radicalization. This problem was highlighted by several Pakistani sources, and was even acknowledged by the Interior Ministry itself.[43] In the NISP Concept Paper, the Ministry notes that "religious scholars, intelligentsia, educational institutions and media are the key stakeholders for constructing and disseminating the National Narrative."[44] It is clear that for the Pakistani state to overcome its inertia in developing social and ideological counters to violent extremism, it must rely on constructive cooperation with Pakistan's civil society.

4. The Role of Civil Society

Throughout the course of ICRD's research, experts in both the US and Pakistan emphasized that Pakistan's best hope for countering violent religious extremism lay in its civil society.[45] Already, an extensive number of

civil society organizations—one study identified at least 100—have been engaged in countering extremism in one form or another.[46] While civil society actors can play a number of roles in this struggle— business leaders can invest in peace programs, mothers can intervene in the lives of radical youth, activists can promote civic engagement—this study focuses on programs or organizations that address the religious dimension of fomenting or combating violent extremism. Given the importance of religion in Pakistani society, the diversity of religious traditions, and the historic tensions between the government and religious sector, this aspect has proven to be particularly challenging for the government to address alone.

4.1. Government and Civil Society in Cooperation

Although the Pakistani state has often struggled to engage constructively with religious actors in civil society, there have been some notable examples of success. One such example, cited by several Pakistani sources, has been the state's efforts to maintain peace during the Islamic holy month of Muharram.[47] During this month, Shia Muslims mourn the death of Hussein Ibn Ali, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Their celebrations and processions, particularly during the Day of Ashura, have frequently been targets of violent attacks conducted by sectarian militants.

After several years of bloodshed, federal and provincial governments began to ramp up their security measures. In 2013, tens of thousands of police personnel were deployed in major cities during the processions, and a temporary ban was placed on the distribution of material that promoted hate speech.[48] The next year, in addition to these security measures, the government of Punjab called upon religious leaders to assist in maintaining peace and to promote cooperation with the state. Many responded enthusiastically to this call to action, including the Pakistan Ulema Council—a network of 112,000 scholars and clerics and 13,600 madrasas—which appointed more than 2000 of its members to work with local governments in preventing hate speech or incitements to violence.[49] While this kind of cooperation is still sporadic and limited in scope, it is worth noting that there are models for successful government-civil society partnerships that can be replicated in other spaces.

> **Tension between Government and Civil Society**
> While Pakistan's government and civil society have cooperated in some areas, at other times they have been divided in the shared struggle against extremists. In 2005, local leaders in Swat and FATA established the Global Peace Council, which organized conferences and seminars to raise awareness about the spread of extremism, even working with leaders of the militant TNSM. However, according to Peace Council founder Ahmed Shah, this work was violently undermined in 2007, when Operation Rah-e-Haq uprooted residents from their homes. With so much internal displacement, local resilience to extremism weakened, and the Taliban expanded its influence. With its ability to muster civil society resistance to extremism diminished, the Global Peace Council called on the military to lead another campaign in Swat. The following year, however, the government signed an accord with the militants that released a number of captured combatants, who quickly expanded their control in the region. The back and forth between the military and the Taliban may have achieved brief victories, but it ultimately crippled efforts to cultivate a local resistance movement.

4.2. Key Programs and Strategies

Countering extremism requires a holistic approach that incorporates a range of strategies—extending from promoting democratization to improving governance to creating job opportunities for youth to a host of other factors too numerous to cover in depth here.[50] In this context, ICRD has identified three key areas that best address the religious drivers of violent extremism in Pakistan. These categories, outlined below, include individual-level interventions (de-radicalization), community-level work (counter-narratives), and national/international-level strategies (reform of religious institutions). This focus is not intended to diminish the importance of other strategies, but only to illustrate the key challenges and opportunities involved in addressing the religious dimension of this issue.

4.2.1. Individual De-Radicalization

At the interpersonal level are programs "directed against individuals who have become radical with the aim of reintegrating them into society or at least dissuading them from violence."[51] De-radicalization programs, like the Sabaoon Center's (described above), directly address extremist ideologies and attempt to transform active radicals into functioning members of society. While the military has overseen the most formal and well-known de-radicalization programs in Pakistan, civil society groups have made some crucial in-roads as well.

The PAIMAN Alumni Trust, for example, has been highly successful at integrating de-radicalization into its existing peace-building programs. PAIMAN's de-radicalization strategy hinges on its ability to identify radical youth and engage them as willing participants. It does so by leveraging its connections to community actors across FATA and KPK, who are aware of which individuals in the area are becoming radical or wish to leave a militant organization. PAIMAN has developed these relationships by training and empowering mothers, youth, and others as peace activists.

Once a radical individual has been identified, PAIMAN staff members work in collaboration with that individual's friends, families, and other social networks to encourage that person to participate in PAIMAN's de-radicalization program. Those interventions—which include individualized care and counseling, training in livelihood skills, and facilitating education or career opportunities—have helped a number of ex-Taliban youth dramatically transform their lives.[52] PAIMAN, like Sabaoon, may struggle to replicate its success on a national scale. However, their local and regional successes thus far illustrate the crucial importance of cultivating strategic partnerships with trusted members of a community—including religious actors—who can facilitate access to the most vulnerable populations.

4.2.2. Counter-Narratives

In addition to targeting specific individuals or institutions, it is also critical to change popular understandings of Islam. Extremists have effectively managed to popularize historical and social violent narratives about Islam and align them with Pakistani identity.[53] Many Pakistanis who denounce the Taliban or the LeJ nevertheless support the kind of intolerant and exclusivist visions of Islam that these groups favor. Both the Pakistani government and the international community have recognized the need to develop compelling counter-arguments to these narratives as well as credible alternatives. For the sake of brevity, all such efforts will be labeled as "counter-narratives".

During the course of this research, interviewees in Pakistan could identify only one counter-narrative effort: the work of Javed Ahmad Ghamidi.[54] A prominent media personality, Ghamidi is a former member of the Council of Islamic Ideology and the founder of the al-Mawrid Institute of Islamic Sciences, an international research and education organization dedicated to promoting knowledge about Islam. As a student of renowned scholars—Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi and Amin Ahsan Islahi—Ghamidi rose to national prominence as an authority on Islamic sciences. He now advances his vision of Islam through al-Mawrid and various media channels (Geo TV, PTV, etc.) and staunchly condemns the extremist ideologies of the Taliban. Ghamidi's popularity and unabashed criticism has earned him the ire of the extremists, and he currently resides in Malaysia, after extremists made an attempt on his life in 2010.

Assessing the overall impact of counter-narratives like Ghamidi's is nearly impossible. While his name and work is widely recognized, it is difficult to determine whether or not he is dissuading anyone from accepting extremist narratives. However popular he may be, it is impossible for a small number of scholars to saturate the market to the same extent the extremists have. Though many religious leaders across Pakistan have condemned extremism or terrorism, very few have managed to build a high profile like Ghamidi. As a result, many Pakistanis are simply unaware that Islamic scholars are condemning extremism.[55]

> **Fusing Counter-Narrative and Institutional Reform**
> For several decades, Minhaj ul-Quran International (MQI) has sought to transform the system of religious education in Pakistan from the ground up. Under the leadership of Dr. Tahir ul- Qadri, MQI has built 630 schools across the country as well as a major university, all of which provide both general education and courses on Islam. On the one hand, MQI's schools serve as a means to disseminate Dr. Qadri's peaceful counter-narrative. However, at a deeper level, these schools act to gradually reform the way Islamic scholars are trained. Treating religious education like other professions, MQI places special emphasis on developing religious leaders who have been through higher education. According to Dr. Hussain Qadri, Deputy Chairman of Minhaj University Lahore, MQI has now produced a generation of highly respected scholars who have demonstrated to the religious establishment the value of MQI's methods.

4.2.3. Reform of Religious Institutions

Religious institutions—from local mosques to the Council of Islamic Ideology—play a pivotal role in shaping and defining Islamic education and ideology in this highly religious society. As such, these institutions can push youth either toward or away from violent extremist ideology. As noted above, madrasa reform and other such strategies have been viewed as an essential component of Pakistan's internal security policies.

Implementing reform has proven difficult, however, and the state has frequently been stonewalled by key stakeholders within religious institutions. Many leaders of religious institutions worry that they will lose their autonomy or open their members to persecution if they accede to a government-led agenda. Thus, reforms have only been possible when conducted in close cooperation with civil society organizations and leaders, who have leveraged their relationships to inspire reform within these institutions.

The National Research and Development Foundation (NRDF), for example, has spent more than twenty years cultivating a network of religious leaders in the Northwest Frontier Province. By convening imams, scholars, and other community leaders in meetings to discuss the role of the religious sector in development, NRDF has built credibility with a strong and viable network. Through this network, the organization has been able to challenge extremist messaging on controversial issues (development, family planning, polio vaccines) through the mosques.[56]

Gaining the trust and support of local religious institutions is no easy task, particularly among conservative religious communities. In this regard, no organization has been more successful than the Peace and Education Foundation (PEF). PEF has established trusting relationships with thousands of madrasas— mostly Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith madrasas—by responding to the leaders' expressed interest in enhancing their curriculums to include modern subjects and by respecting the historically prestigious role of the madrasas in Islamic history.

Having developed that trust and influence, PEF is able to work alongside madrasa stakeholders in facilitating wide-reaching reforms. In its workshops, PEF engages madrasa teachers in conversations on critical thinking, religious pluralism, human rights, and civic engagement. Their impact on the madrasa sector has even surpassed that of the Pakistani government. Most recently, this success was manifested in the form of a textbook, *Peace Education and Islam*, produced by PEF in collaboration with the National Madrasa Oversight Board (ITMD). Through Teacher Training Centers established by PEF in the headquarters madrasas of the five sects that sponsor these religious schools, more than 700 madrasa teachers have already been trained in the use of the textbook, which is based on Qur'anic teachings and Islamic principles.

With the trust and support of religious institutions, it is possible for civil society leaders to effect substantial changes that are simply not possible through purely government-led efforts. Government efforts to register madrasas, for example, are only possible when madrasas agree to cooperate. While this agenda in particular has often been hindered by some religious organizations—most recently the JUI-F—others have been quick to

cooperate. The Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC), for example, expressly encouraged the madrasas in its network to support implementation of the NAP and to register with the provincial governments.[57] As PUC's network of more than 13,000 madrasas accounts for over a third of the estimated number of madrasas in the country, this single point of leverage is invaluable.[58]

These examples clearly demonstrate that it is possible to transform religious institutions (both at the local and national levels) into institutions that resist extremism, rather than support it. That change, however, cannot be forced from the outside; it must be facilitated from within.

5. Insights from the Field

To move beyond this overarching assessment, and develop recommendations for future action, this study draws on research conducted in Pakistan between October 2014 and October 2015. This research was carried out by a local nonprofit, which will go unnamed out of concern for its security. Researchers conducted personal interviews with religious actors and civil society activists in Islamabad, Punjab and FATA. All of the interviews were recorded, with some exceptions for security reasons. The research team obtained permission in most cases to use the subject's names, but ultimately felt that due to the subject matter involved, subjects would be better served to remain anonymous.

These interviews revealed some key challenges to constructive collaboration with the most conservative religious actors. Many subjects who identified as Ahl-e-Hadith expressed support for a state-sponsored obligatory jihad against the enemies of Islam (sometimes identified as India or the U.S.), a view in alignment with popular extremist narratives.[59] Additionally, many were quick to express anxiety over perceived threats to their identity or identity group, whether from America, liberal Pakistanis, the Pakistani state, or even from foreign extremists (e.g., Afghani fighters). They tended to designate many enemies and few allies.

Despite this challenge, many were nonetheless adamant in expressing opposition to sectarian conflict within Pakistan. These respondents described their particular ideology as the antithesis of sectarianism, denouncing *takfirism* (ex-communication) and division within the *ummah* (Muslim community). In expressing their opposition to sectarianism, these Ahl-e-Hadith actors challenged the divisive anti-Shia discourse propagated by their coreligionists in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.

An overwhelming majority of respondents felt that religious institutions, such as mosques and madrasas, and religious actors play key roles in spreading violent religious extremism, though they disagreed on how to implement meaningful reform. Some called for direct state oversight of religious institutions and practice, including state appointment of imams or regulation of Friday sermons. This type of state supervision, which is practiced in Saudi Arabia and throughout the Middle East, has not been a feature of Pakistan's democratic government, and respondents' acknowledged that it would likely encounter significant resistance. Nonetheless, both Ahl-e-Hadith and civil society respondents expressed optimism that the religious community can play a constructive and effective role, in collaboration with the government, in reforming religious institutions and countering religious narratives of violence and intolerance.

All respondents were critical of current and previous Pakistani administrations. However, while they were disappointed in the government's efforts to counter violent religious extremism thus far, they expressed an eagerness to collaborate. Some, in principle, expressed admiration for the government's comprehensive, well-funded, and politically-supported strategy to counter violent religious extremism, though they were frustrated by its poor implementation. Subjects generally welcomed a stronger government effort to counter violent religious extremism and expressed the desire to participate in future programs, particularly those focused on ending sectarian violence, at least between the Ahl-e-Hadith sect and the Barelvi and Shi'a sects.

A select number of these interviews are summarized below:

5.1 High-Level Figures

National Political Figure and Leader of a Religio-Political Party and Major Religious University, KPK

This subject emphasizes the need to develop an ideological response to extremism in lieu of the kinetic approach employed by the Pakistani military. He notes his own efforts to oppose extremism, such as sending a letter to the leaders of Boko Haram, requesting that they release the kidnapped girls. Key to this ideological response is education, and he insists that the government and education sector should work hand in hand to promote peace. Despite his support for collaboration, he claims the growth of madrasas in Pakistan was a direct reaction to the expansion of secular schools, and that while madrasas have no objection to the secular curriculum, the secular schools are hostile toward religion.

Former Leader of a Banned Militant Organization, Islamabad

This subject laments the limited role of religion in society, bemoaning the perceived efforts of secular powers to isolate and marginalize religion. As a result, he claims, madrasas have failed to live up to their potential and no longer provide students a viable career path. Many madrasa students thus consider violent extremism to be an appealing alternative. This subject insists that vocational training and other institutional reforms—such as training teachers to promote an inclusive, nonsectarian worldview—are necessary, but only if they are championed by the madrasas, not the West.

5.2 Religious Actors

Ahl-e-Hadith Religious Scholar, Punjab

Like other Ahl-e-Hadith respondents, this subject feels that his ideology provides the antidote to sectarian extremism, blaming the Deobandis for the current level of sectarian animosity toward Shi'a and Sufi communities in Pakistan. In particular, he emphasizes the significance of religious leaders, noting: "if the *ulema* [religious scholars] wanted to, they could end sectarianism, because they themselves are the ones promoting it." He similarly attacks Taliban ideology for its suppression of other Islamic sects and asserts that the group should be eliminated by force.

However, while this subject rejects sectarian violence, he still professes views that align with extremist ideologies. For example, he describes the true meaning of jihad as fighting the *kuffar* (non-Muslims or infidels), identifies India as Pakistan's greatest enemy, and argues that American hegemony is responsible for most of the conflict in the Islamic world.

According to him, countering religious extremism in Pakistan requires a comprehensive effort from the government, civil society, and religious actors. This subject expresses deep admiration for Saudi religious scholars and feels that the Kingdom's model of state regulation and patronage of the religious sector should be adopted in Pakistan, specifically the regulation of all mosques and imams. He believes Pakistan was created as an Islamic state and should use state media to promote the true meaning of jihad, as most media outlets speak against jihad and thereby violate *shari'a*.[60] Despite his desire for state regulations, the subject expresses profound disappointment in the Pakistani state, criticizing the government as weak, corrupt, and historically led by dishonest rulers. Nonetheless, the subject states that he would be eager to participate in de-radicalization programs in his area that involve the government and *ulema*, but is not aware of any.

Ahl-e-Hadith Politician, Punjab

Having received a basic education in a madrasa in Punjab, this subject attended college in Dubai and Kuwait, where he converted from being Deobandi to Ahl-e-Hadith. After returning to Pakistan, he eventually became the head of the Ahl-e-Hadith Youth Force and is now a senior member of the Markazi Jamiyat Ahl-e-Hadith political party.

While he echoes the other Ahl-e-Hadith in emphasizing his tolerance of sectarian differences, he breaks from the others by rejecting the legitimacy of violent jihad against non-believers on the grounds that there is no *Ameer-ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful) to lead it. Despite his ideological moderation, he identifies India as the greatest enemy of Pakistan and expresses admiration for the activities of the Jamaat ud-Da'wa (JuD) both on and off the battlefield in Kashmir.

This subject envisions that religion can play a constructive role in countering extremism, and has personally participated on interreligious and intersectarian councils. He sees great promise for such programs to promote unity and tolerance, but notes certain challenges. In his view, for example, madrasas try to promote social harmony, but are slandered by unregulated NGOs. Similarly, he cautions that local clerics can spoil peace agreements made at higher levels. Like others, he offers Saudi Arabia as a model for Pakistan, while nonetheless reiterating his support for democratic governance.

Head of Islamic Studies at a major university, Punjab

This subject expresses mixed opinions on religious violence. He claims that Muslims are in a state of war against all non-Muslims and must respond to enemies attacks with 'equal retaliation'. He explicitly identifies the US, UK, and Israel as enemies of Pakistan, but India is considered the greatest threat. The subject expresses admiration for the JuD, though he does not specify whether or not his support is related to its militant activities in Kashmir. Despite offering views that seem to support violent religious extremism, this subject is firmly opposed to sectarian violence and believes that madrasa reform could significantly reduce radicalization. According to him, "an educated scholar could not possibly encourage extremist violence; it would be unimaginable for any Muslim to support the beheading of his Muslim brother."

5.3 Civil Society Activists

Awami National Party (ANP) Operative and Social Media Activist

This subject believes that sectarianism is the primary terrorist threat in Pakistan today, and blames 'Saudi Arabs' for introducing sectarian discord, explicitly linking the ideology of the Taliban and LeJ to Saudi Salafism. To counter this ideological influence, the subject suggests that it is imperative to reform the curriculum of madrasas and public schools, both of which advocate extremist violence.

In addition, he believes there is a need to develop compelling counter-narratives, and promote them through social and electronic media. He is heavily critical of state policies, particularly the state's tendency to offer greater protection to extremists than to 'tolerant *ulema*'. According to the subject, this directly undermines the work of local law enforcement. In the absence of effective security, local conflict resolution committees, which had helped to curtail radicalization, have been eliminated by targeted assassinations. He laments that influential local leaders and the customs and traditions that enable social resistance to extremism have been effectively demolished.

NGO President, FATA

This subject frames the threat of violent extremism as primarily foreign. He traces the origin of extremist ideology in Pakistan to the massive influx of foreign Arab fighters that he claims arrived following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan with support from the CIA. He believes that their ideology was accepted by locals because the local communities held Arabs in high regard and the cause of the Arabs was universally championed by Pakistan, the US, and the Islamic world. Other subjects in FATA similarly identified the glorification of the Afghan Jihad as a contributing factor to the legitimacy of religious extremism.

The subject contrasts the Barelvi and Deobandi traditions, which constitute the majority in Pakistan and which both follow the Hanafi school of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), with the predominately Hanbali Arab traditions. He identifies the Hanbali *fiqh* as inherently extremist, and claims that Deobandi and Barelvi mosques and

madrasas are less likely to foster radicalization. Based on this assessment, he argues that the rise of sectarian rhetoric and violence is part of a proxy war funded by Saudi Arabia and Iran. Strangely, however, he goes on to state that it is not a major driver of violent extremism, because sectarian violence is a "business" and will subside when external funding sources are exhausted or blocked.

According to this subject, a more important driving factor in extremism is Pakistanis' anger toward foreign states, which is fueled by the perception that Islam, Pakistan, or the Pushtun suffer under the 'cruelty of the West'. He believes that religious extremists exploit this perception in Pakistani teenagers, who are often illiterate, isolated, and unemployed.

The subject thinks that recruitment in violent extremist groups is currently low, but retention of existing extremists is high. He advocates for a comprehensive CVE policy that follows three 'Ds' (deterrence, dialogue, and development) that will take more than a decade to create meaningful change.

Peace Activist, Religious Scholar

This subject claims that violent extremism originated in madrasas during the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, though it has since spread through many channels, including the internet and social media. Like other respondents, he argues that madrasa education has been 'promoting radicalization'. However, unlike the others, he believes that it is the pedagogy and "ethos" of the madrasas, rather than the curriculum, that is at fault. Due to a lack of emotional development, many madrasa students are vulnerable to the influence of violent extremists. The subject asserts that the madrasa curriculum must be expanded to prepare students for the real world, but he acknowledges that a lack of capacity and political will prevents this from happening.

Similarly, this subject is optimistic that it would be possible to curtail extremism by promoting specific religious arguments concerning the legitimacy of declaring someone an apostate (*takfir*), treatment of religious minorities, and gender equality. However, like other subjects, he feels that such counter-narratives will take time and a determined whole-of-government approach that is unlikely in today's climate. In this vein, he expresses admiration for Saudi Arabia's willingness to dedicate resources and political capital to this work.

6. The Role of Conservative Religious Actors

From the preceding sections, it is clear that certain religious doctrines play a crucial role in driving violent extremism and that collaboration with religious actors is an indispensable element when it comes to effectively challenging extremist ideologies and influence. Religious actors and institutions can facilitate access to vulnerable populations and can lend credibility and legitimacy to efforts that might otherwise be dismissed as "Western" or "liberal" in nature. Because many Pakistanis are already skeptical of ideas like "countering violent extremism", legitimacy is a precious commodity.[61]

Not all religious actors, however, possess credibility among the communities who are most at-risk of radicalization. For example, Dr. Tahir ul-Qadri, whose counter-narrative work is cited above, identifies as a Sufi, and thus may struggle to project religious legitimacy among Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith communities.[62] Because extremists generally emerge from the religiously conservative communities, it is important to identify actors within those communities who can credibly invoke shared religious values, *while rejecting the use of violence*. By the same token, external interventions risk tainting the very legitimacy of the religious leaders by associating them with government or Western interests. Such attempts must therefore be undertaken with great care and respect for the partner's autonomy.

6.1. Theory of Engagement with Conservative Muslims

The idea of constructively engaging with the most conservative Muslims to counter violent religious extremism has been fiercely contested in the US and Europe. Efforts to collaborate with conservative communities in the UK and France have inspired a strong backlash, with critics arguing:

- Even those conservatives who are non-violent can act as "conveyor belts" that feed young Muslims into terrorist groups;[63]

- Lending legitimacy to conservatives will ultimately undermine social cohesion;[64] and

- Simply because a religious actor or community shares certain ideological similarities with violent extremists does not mean that it can credibly dissuade people from violent extremism.[65]

These concerns are important to consider when discussing engagement with conservative religious actors. First and foremost, it is essential to identify the leaders or actors who actually have the capacity and credibility to influence at-risk populations. Beyond that, care must be taken in any strategy that includes working with conservative actors or institutions to ensure that potential partners are not discretely funneling recruits into extremist organizations or overtly increasing their intolerant behavior. It would be naïve to assume that all potential partners are authentic in their offers to resist violence. Ideological transformation does not occur overnight; and in a conservative religious society like Pakistan, selecting the right partners can be challenging. For this reason, the timeframe for engagement must not only focus on immediate conflict intervention, but also take a longer view in cultivating meaningful relationships. In some instances, "generational" change may be required to undo deeply-held, prejudicial social convictions.

6.2. Conservative Islam in Pakistan – Key Considerations

In the past few decades, ideological and sectarian divisions have become increasingly rigid and explosive in Pakistan. Decades of identity-based hostilities have fostered intense suspicion and distrust of religious "others". In general terms, this means that any "zero-sum" effort to empower one religious community at the expense of another will likely prove ineffective. Well-intentioned efforts to strengthen Barelvi or Sufi voices as a counter or alternative to Deobandi or Ahl-e-Hadith ideology, for example, are unlikely to have much of an impact.[66] While an individual's lived religious experiences often transcend these discrete categories, few Barelvi or Sufi actors hold substantial credibility or influence within Deobandi or Ahl-e- Hadith communities.

Instead, it is important to identify the institutions and actors that possess significant religious capital within these conservative circles. As noted in Section 5, conservative religious actors in Pakistan identified organizations like Jamaat Islami (JI) and Jamaat ud- Dawa (JuD) as respected or influential.[67] However, both groups maintain troubling relationships with militancy, raising questions about their viability as partners against extremism.[68]

JI and JuD

JI is a political and social movement founded in 1941 by Abul Ala Maududi, with a mission to transform Pakistan into an Islamic state. The organization considers itself an ideological vanguard, and focuses on recruiting 'elite' members (e.g., intellectuals, politicians). Despite its small numbers, JI's network wields significant influence. The organization even maintains its own system of madrasas.

JuD is an Islamic charity organization run by Muhammad Saeed, the founder of the LeT. Though JuD is considered by some to be a front for the disbanded LeT, the organization has amassed significant public goodwill through its charity efforts. It has been involved in disaster relief efforts and even runs its own English-language schools. However, given JuD's connections to Saeed and the LeT, its activities are allegedly under careful watch by the Ministry of the Interior, and many activists have called for it to be placed on the list of proscribed organizations.

In the course of this research it became abundantly clear that many ordinary religious actors hold mixed views regarding identity conflict, at once condemning sectarianism and lauding violence against India. This complexity makes many Western proponents of CVE wary of engaging with or empowering actors or institutions which may not share all their values. However, while it is important to remain cautious about strengthening divisive voices, it is also essential to recognize that true social transformation will not be possible without collaboration with Ahl-e-Hadith and Deobandi stakeholders.

6.3. Ensuring Constructive Collaboration

Despite some shared frustration with India, the West, and the Pakistani government, the case studies summarized in Section 5 reveal significant internal disagreements over violent tactics and exclusivist ideologies. Many respondents vehemently condemned sectarian ideology and supported efforts to curtail the Taliban. They recognized the need to reform madrasas, promote positive religious messaging, and engage with the government, despite serious social and political obstacles. Above all, it is important to recognize that there is an existing inclination among the more conservative communities to oppose the excesses of extremist groups. These voices, however, are rarely heard, largely because those who speak out against terrorist organizations or ideologies are routinely labeled as foreign agents and are often threatened or attacked.[69] Religious conservatives are not immune from threats of violence, and many risk losing their popular support, if they contradict widely-shared extremist narratives.

One clear example, who is held in high regard by several sources, is the late Maulana Hassan Jan.[70] Jan was a leading Deobandi cleric in Peshawar who held leadership roles at the Darwesh Masjid and Wifaq-ul-Madaras Al-Arabia. He served as a Member of the National Assembly in the JUI-F, and was a good friend of its current leader, Fazlur Rehman. Despite his religiously conservative background, Jan actively spoke out against terrorism and the violent actions of the Taliban, even participating in a delegation of Pakistani scholars who tried to convince Mullah Omar to expel Osama bin Laden from Afghanistan. Jan's outspoken support for moderation attracted the ire of militants, and he was assassinated in 2007. The violence committed against Jan, and others like him, serves as a warning for any religious leaders who dare to extend themselves on behalf of tolerance and non-violence.

6.4. Strategies for Engagement with Conservatives

Despite the sobering challenges outlined above, constructive engagement with the most conservative religious actors is possible. Drawing on lessons learned from the organizations cited above, as well as insights derived from a decade of engagement with madrasa leaders in Pakistan and more recent conversations with Pakistani religious figures, the following section outlines four key strategies for successfully engaging conservatives in countering violent religious extremism.

1. *Cultivate trusting and respectful relationships.*

   There are many reasons why conservatives are resistant to opposing violent religious extremism— physical security, loss of religious legitimacy, commitment to tradition and habit. Thus, inspiring religious conservatives to take a more active role can require leveraging significant social capital that can only be gained through a long and careful process of building trust and strong interpersonal connections.

   This strategy is key not only on an interpersonal level, but at the level of the government as well. The fear among many madrasa leaders that the government will utilize the NAP to wrongfully target their madrasas is rooted in a distrust that has historical precedence. Rather than listen to and respect the concerns of these madrasa stakeholders, government officials often try to force through heavy-handed reforms, including the outright banning of madrasas in some areas.[71] This approach is counter-productive and will impede long-term solutions by straining already tense relationships.

2. *Build on, rather than challenge, religious heritage.*

   As noted by several key respondents, initiatives that are perceived as 'un-Islamic' or 'Western' are unlikely to gain traction among religious actors. It is essential for programs that involve religious extremism in Pakistan to be grounded in Islamic scripture or heritage. The Quran and Sunnah contain numerous examples of moderation, conflict avoidance, and tolerance, and efforts to counter violent religious extremism. Any effort to counter religious extremism should emerge from this heritage, rather than a modern, Western agenda.

3. *Make programs transformative for religious actors*

As demonstrated in the interviews, some religious actors may hold beliefs that reinforce extremist ideologies. It is essential not to gloss over these challenges, but to address them in the course of collaboration on issues of shared concern. In Pakistan, efforts should focus on the negative impact of religious extremism in a way that implicates the domestic, sectarian-motivated violence that the Ahl-e-Hadith subjects reject, while complicating the black and white worldview that justifies hatred of India or the West. It may be impossible to transform these deeply-held views overnight, but it is possible to plant the seeds of long-term change.

4. *Cultivate a sense of independence and ownership.*

The longstanding tensions between government officials and the madrasa sector are due, in part, to the fact that the government has attempted to force reforms from the outside. A far more effective strategy would involve inspiring religious actors and communities to recognize the problem of violent religious extremism and to lead their own efforts to counter it. Organizations like PEF and NRDF have proven that this can be an effective strategy. However, for it to succeed, the government of Pakistan, the international community, and civil society must accept that they cannot control and dictate every aspect of this process.

5. *Ensure that change filters down to the local level.*

Efforts to engage with religious actors often focus on winning over nationally-recognized figures. While these leaders have an important role to play in effecting far-reaching change, it is ultimately the local religious leaders who have the greatest capacity to influence individuals' beliefs and behavior.[72] ICRD's Pakistani sources repeatedly stressed that positive change will not be possible unless it is focused on the local *ulema* and imams.[73] Not only do these local leaders play a significant role in guiding their communities, they also have the capacity to undermine high-level peace agreements.[74] Thus, it is crucial to identify the actors and institutions that have the capacity to directly influence local religious actors.

7. Conclusion

While discrete acts of terrorist violence may have decreased over the past few years in Pakistan, violent religious extremist organizations have become a mainstay of Pakistani society. Countering this threat requires more than robust security measures; it requires fundamental shifts in the social, religious, and political spheres. While few people deny that Pakistan's most dangerous extremists have bound their causes to religious identity, efforts to address the religious dimension of this conflict have been grossly insufficient. Although the conservative religious establishment has often acted as an impediment to reform, there have been some signs of promising change.

In seeking to chart a path forward, ICRD offers the following policy recommendations for consideration by the civil society of Pakistan, and the governments of Pakistan and the United States.

7.1 Policy Recommendations

Government of Pakistan:

➢ *Focus on implementing ALL components of the NAP and the NISP, particularly those that rely on soft power.*

The policies and framework outlined in the NAP and the NISP are comprehensive and well-designed. The government, however, must be careful not to sacrifice long-term strategies (e.g., madrasa reform, counter-narratives, etc.) in order to achieve short term success (e.g., military campaigns, operations in Karachi, etc.). Instead, it should allocate sufficient resources and political support to enable NACTA to implement its total mandate.

➤ *Foster greater collaboration between the government and civil society.*

Implementation of the NAP and the NISP will simply not be possible without the assistance of civil society. The government needs the legitimacy, capacity, and expertise of civil society groups to effectively implement soft power responses to extremism. At the same time, any cooperation must be tempered by a degree of mutual independence, so that the government does not unwittingly taint the social legitimacy of its partners.

➤ *Engage seriously and respectfully with religious stakeholders, including those in the Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith communities.*

Any effort to engage with civil society must go beyond the secular organizations and liberal intelligentsia who have been most vocal in fighting extremism and thus been the principal recipients of financial and other support. This approach lends disproportionate weight to the secular, liberal perspective, and implicitly or explicitly disparages religious faith and the religious faithful. Religious stakeholders, particularly those in the more conservative communities, must be brought to the table. Implementing lasting reform of religious institutions and developing effective counters to the religious narratives of the extremists will only be possible if such efforts incorporate the inputs of religious conservatives.

Pakistani Civil Society:

➤ *Pressure the federal government to put serious weight behind enacting all elements of the NAP and the NISP.*

More than any other time in recent history, the government has mustered the political will to begin enacting serious efforts to challenge extremism. That change has come about in large part because of the public outcry following the attack on the Army Public School. The public must remain galvanized against extremism and must continue to pressure the federal government to take concrete action, or else the NAP will become little more than a symbolic gesture.

➤ *Begin fostering relationships with religious communities and institutions.*

Building constructive and collaborative relationships with religious actors and institutions takes time. Religious actors, including those who are most conservative, can be won over to supporting peacebuilding or reform efforts, but only if substantial trust-building occurs. Given the existing fractures in Pakistani civil society, it is essential to begin this process now, rather than waiting until religious extremism becomes even more pronounced.

➤ *Amplify the voices of religious authority figures who have spoken out against violent extremism.*

At the moment, the most vocal opposition to extremism comes from the liberal intelligentsia, who often lack credibility among Pakistan's pious masses. While many Pakistani religious leaders keep silent for fear of their personal safety, others are speaking up. Their voices should be amplified, not only to increase the number and influence of counter-narratives that draw on religious rhetoric, but also to give hope to other religious actors who may feel reluctant to stick their necks out. Civil society organizations and leaders can play a key role in identifying these voices and expanding their reach, as well as calling for their protection.

<u>United States Government:</u>

➤ *Encourage the government of Pakistan to prioritize and support soft power strategies.*

On the international stage, the United States has led the way in promoting innovative strategies for countering extremist ideologies. However, emphasis on military solutions has cast a long shadow over the US-Pakistan relationship. As long as the US continues to leverage its influence in favor of drone strikes and other kinetic strategies, there will be little international incentive for Pakistan to support soft power programs. The US and the broader international community must begin to prioritize non-military strategies for countering violent extremism, even in such explosive countries as Pakistan.

➤ *Avoid direct involvement in Pakistani policies and reforms to ensure that the process retains local ownership.*

While the United States and international community should exert diplomatic pressure to promote soft power strategies, they must be careful to avoid becoming too closely involved. Explicit support from the United States could undermine the widespread national support for the NAP, by allowing extremists to paint it as a foreign agenda. It has also been clearly demonstrated that the Pakistani government gets significant pushback from civil society when it's perceived to be bowing to US policy priorities. The US must be willing to lead from a distance and trust that the only chance for these strategies to succeed is if they are led by Pakistan.

➤ *Invest more resources and support for understanding how to constructively engage with religious actors.*

As outlined in Section 3, insufficient attention has been paid to the role of religion as a driver of (and counter to) extremism. While the US is often reluctant to acknowledge and deal with the important role that religion plays in peoples' lives, it is essential to develop a more nuanced understanding of how to effectively engage with the entire range of religious actors, including even those who embrace illiberal ideals.

Appendix A – Religion in Pakistan

Pakistan is a Sunni-dominated Muslim country, with sizable Shi'a, Christian, and Hindu communities, and small pockets of Sikhs and Ahmadis. Religious minorities in Pakistan are often impoverished and subjected to daily persecution and abuse, including a constant threat of communal violence and collective extrajudicial punishment for imaginary or fabricated infractions.

Sunni Islam in South Asia has historically been connected to the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Sufi traditions exported from Central Asia. Beginning as early as the 17th century, South Asian Islam was shaped by an aggressive reformist movement. The roots of this movement can be traced back to a Sufi scholar, Imam Rabbani Ahmed Sirhindi (1564-1624), who sought to bring Sufi practice more in line with the Islamic Shari'a. Sirhindi's reformist movement was continued by Shah Waliullah (1703-1762), a north Indian Sufi master who studied in Mecca and Medina alongside fellow reformist Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792). After Shah Waliullah's death, his son Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824) assumed leadership of his movement, gradually incorporating more aggressive and violent concepts. The reformist movement began to fracture in the 19th century with the establishment of the Deobandi and Barelvi sects, followed by the Ahl-e-Hadith (Wahhabi) sect in the early 20th century. These sects are dominant forces in Pakistani Islam today.

Important Similarities and Differences between the Sects

Each of the three Sunni sects in Pakistan was created for the expressed purpose of protecting true Islamic practice from perceived external or internal threats. As a result, Pakistan has experienced sectarian discord since the time of partition, which has grown more intractable and violent over the past decade. Though there is significant ideological overlap between the sects, each diverges sharply on important issues, as outlined in the table below.

Sect	*Ahl-e-Hadith*	*Barelvi*	*Deobandi*
Date Established	1920	1880	1857
Ideological Exclusivity[1]	Most Exclusive	Least Exclusive	More than Barelvi, less than Ahl-e-Hadith
Membership Base[2]	Urban, Educated	Rural, Less Educated	Urban, Educated
Madrasa Network[3] (% of total madrasas)	Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Arabia (>5%)	Tanzeem-ul-Madaris Ahle Sunnat-wal Jamaat (30%)	Wafaq-ul-Madaris (65%)

The Deobandi and Barevli both recognize the Hanafi *fiqh*, while the Ahl-e-Hadith reject all mainstream legal traditions. However, the primary division between the sects involves the practice of Sufi mysticism. While the Deobandi retain some Sufi traditions, they are defined by a fierce opposition to the 'spiritual excesses' of Sufism, such as artistic expression, observance of festivals and holidays, and the veneration of saints and shrines. The Ahl-e-Hadith likewise reject the mystical traditions of Sufism, which are defended by the Barelvi sect. While the Barelvi form a majority in Pakistan, the Deobandi controls a much larger network of mosques and madrasas and are more able to project their influence throughout the country.

Appendix B – Summary of the National Action Plan (NAP)

The following section outlines each of the twenty points of the National Action Plan. Because a number of these points were attempted by the government prior to the announcement of the NAP, a brief description is included that summarizes the progress both prior to and following the announcement of the NAP. In addition, the past and present implementation has been ranked on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being ineffective and 5 being completely effective) by an unnamed senior official who is both well-informed on current realities and who was formerly involved in countering al-Qaeda's influence in Pakistan.

1. Execution of convicted terrorists will continue. (Rating – Past: 3 / Current: 4)

In 2008, Pakistan had imposed a moratorium on the death penalty, which was officially lifted in March 2015, as part of the implementation of the NAP. When the NAP was initially announced, it was estimated that there were more than 3,000 convicted terrorists awaiting execution.[75] By December 31st, 2015, 326 people had been hanged, as per a statement released by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan further stated that over 8000 convicts are awaiting capital punishment on death row.[76]

Perhaps the most high-profile example of this point was the recent execution of Mumtaz Qadri, who had famously murdered Salman Taseer, the Governor of Punjab who stood up against the country's blasphemy laws. Despite his status as a folk hero—over 100,000 people gathered to mourn at his funeral—Qadri was executed in February 2016.[77] The high profile execution may indicate that the government is more willing to take unpopular stands against militants, although it may have also been an attempt to deter future assassinations of elite political figures.

2. Establishment of special trial courts for two years to expedite the trial of terror suspects. (Rating – Past: N/A / Current: 4)

In January 2015, the Pakistan parliament adopted the 21st Constitutional Amendment in an unopposed vote, which enabled military courts to try civilian terrorist suspects. Though the government quickly established 11 military courts, the amendment was quickly challenged as being unconstitutional. After several months of deliberation, the Supreme Court ruled in a 11-6 decision in August 2015 that that amendment was legal. Since then, military courts have concluded the trials of 64 people, finding the defendants guilty in 40 cases. Out of these, 36 people have been sentenced to death and 4 have been given life sentences. 8 civilians convicted by military courts in secret trials for their involvement in terrorist activities have been hanged.[78]

3. A commitment to ensure that no armed militias are allowed to function in the country. (Rating – Past: 4 / Current: 4)

According to an internal report from the Ministry of the Interior released in April, 2015, a database of armed militias was being prepared in coordination with relevant agencies and provincial governments[79], as a precursor to implementing this initiative.

4. Strengthening and activation of NACTA. (Rating – Past: 1 / Current: 1)

The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) was created in 2009 for the purpose of coordinating efforts among various counter-terrorism agencies (see Section 4). To some extent, the proposed functions of the NACTA overlap with those of the National Crisis Management cell of the Ministry of the Interior, but with the incorporation of a think tank to aid in the development of strategy. NACTA remained dormant until December 2014, when its chief, Hamid Ali Khan, convened the first meeting to plan implementation of the NAP. Since that time, though, Khan has resigned, and NACTA has yet to take any significant public action.

In January 2016, the government resisted a resolution passed by PTI Senator Azam Swati seeking an additional Rs2 billion for NACTA to "facilitate its operations and fulfil the requirements of national

security."[80] According to Farhatullah Babar, a Senator from the Pakistan Peoples Party, NACTA currently has no office building, and only has 5 officers for 33 sanctioned posts. Sen. Babar added that, under the law, NACTA's board of governments must meet at least once a quarter, but they had not met once in the past year.

5. Countering hate speech and extremist material. (Rating – Past: 4 / Current: 4)

In 2009, Pakistan adopted a new education policy, which included a provision to remove 'controversial material against any sect or religious/ethnic minorities' from teaching materials.[81] In November 2013, the government ordered the Ministry of Information Technology (MoIT) and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to take strict action against anyone found propagating sectarianism via social media or mobile phones.[82] Social media was to be monitored for controversial statements that could lead to sectarian conflicts, and measures were taken against those who spread such content.

By October, an official tasked with monitoring the progress of the NAP stated that roughly 9,400 firebrand speakers had been arrested on charges of inflaming sectarian hate. Around 6,504 cases against religious leaders have been registered in Punjab, 1,647 in Sindh, 1,286 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 47 in Balochistan.[83] A recent report by the Ministry of Interior and Narcotics revealed that 2,337 cases of hate speech were registered, 2,195 persons were arrested, and 73 shops were sealed. Likewise, 9,164 cases were registered, 9,340 persons arrested and 2,452 pieces of equipment were confiscated for misuse of loudspeakers. In addition, these laws have led to the arrest of a leader of JUI-F, Mufti Kifyatullah, for "inflammatory speech"[84] and the launch of an international hate-speech campaign in 45 districts of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.[85]

6. Choking financing for terrorists and terrorist organizations. (Rating – Past: 3 / Current: 3)

In March 2010, the parliament passed the Anti-Money Laundering Act which was intended to provide the legal framework for countering money laundering and terrorist financing.[86] In September 2012, the State Bank of Pakistan issued tough regulations to stop money-laundering and to combat terrorism financing by ensuring that their regulations met international standards.[87] By the time of the NAP's implementation, most of the requirements of the new regulations were already in place.

By March 2015, 64 cases of money laundering had been identified, 90 arrests had been made, and Rs75.8 million had been recovered.[88] In a report by the Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, it was revealed that with regards to persons arrested so far under the NAP on the charge of terror financing, five persons had been arrested in Sindh, four in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 28 in Gilgit Baltistan. Because more than half of Pakistan's economy operates on the black market, its financial system leaves much to be desired and is largely inadequate to the task of stemming terrorist financing.

7. Ensuring against the re-emergence of proscribed organizations. (Rating – Past: 2 / Current: 4)

In January 2015, it was announced that Pakistan would ban Jamaat ud-Dawa (JuD) and the Haqqani Network, two major organizations that had previously been left off of Pakistan's proscribed list.[89] Soon afterward, Hamid Ali Khan announced that this point would not be implemented, and official documents showed no change in the status of these organizations.[90] In December 2015, an updated list of proscribed groups was presented before parliament, with only one new group added: ISIS.[91] According to official figures, 8,195 persons have been included in the fourth schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act (which restricts a person to their residence) and the movement of 2,052 people has been restricted.

8. Establishing and deploying a dedicated counter-terrorism force. (Rating – Past: 4 / Current: 4)

Punjab: In October 2013, Prime Minister Sharif sanctioned the formation of an anti-terrorist force in Punjab.[92] The Punjab government intended to recruit and train 20,000 corporals in four increments, with the first increment expected to start operating by the end of 2014.[93] A three-member team of Turkish police officials,

all holding PhD degrees in different spheres of policing, was designated to assist with the restructuring of the Punjab police around 15 disciplines.[94]

Kyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK): In October 2013, a special meeting of the KPK cabinet, headed by Chief Minister Pervez Khattak, approved the establishment of an anti-terrorism task force led by the Inspector General of Police and consisting of representatives from all law enforcement and intelligence agencies, including the Army, Frontier Corps and Frontier Constabulary.

Sindh: In June 2009, officials announced the creation of a 1,000-member special police force, mandated to counter terrorist activities.[95] Officials said the force—known as the 'special protection group' or 'rapid response force'—was mandated to counter terror threats mainly in Karachi, and a total of 1,000 policemen were selected for specialized training.

Balochistan: In January 2013, the provincial government set up a new force for conducting operations that involved cases of terrorism, targeted killings and kidnapping.[96] In October 2014, the Chief Minister of Balochistan stated that 1,000 members of the police, Anti-Terrorist Force, Balochistan Constabulary, and Levies received special training from the Pakistan Army and were thus in a position to fight terrorism.[97]

9. Taking effective steps against religious persecution. (Rating – Past: 3 / Current: 3)

In the wake of the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti (the Minister for Minority Affairs) in 2011, the government took steps to improve religious freedom and tolerance, by establishing a Ministry of National Harmony and appointing a special adviser for minority affairs.[98] In 2012, the government added four additional seats for minorities in the National Assembly and the Senate, and placed a five percent quota for minorities in federal government jobs. In November 2014, Prime Minister Sharif approved the formation of a national commission on minorities to promote religious tolerance and harmony in the country. The commission would prepare a policy on inter- faith harmony and review laws, executive instructions, and procedural practices of the government or government agencies.[99]

In May 2015, the country's first National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) was authorized to operate and was granted massive powers, including the power to conduct inquiries and take actions on its own accord. However, there were significant delays in beginning operations.[100] In early 2016, the chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari acknowledged discrimination against religious minorities and called for action against religious persecution.[101]

10. Registration and regulation of madrasas. (Rating – Past: 2 / Current: 2)

The Societies Registration Act of 1860 was amended in 2005 to make madrasa registration with the government obligatory. Madrasas were required to file a declaration stating that they would not teach or publish any material that spread militancy or hatred and would file a copy of their audited accounts on an annual basis.[102] In October 2010, the National Madrasa Oversight Board (ITMD) and the Minister of the Interior signed an accord formalizing collaboration on a number of central issues including uniform curriculum standards and the introduction of contemporary subjects in the madrasas, madrasa registration, and standards for awarding madrasa degrees.[103] While madrasa reform was not fully enacted, these efforts represented a promising step forward in madrasa-government relations. A total of 8,656 schools registered with the government following this deal, bringing the total number of registered madrassas to 14,656.[104]

In March 2015, NACTA head Hamid Ali Khan, admitted that this point was too time-consuming, and would no longer be implemented as part of the NAP.[105] However, in a January report released by the Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, it was revealed that a total of 190 madrasas across the country were shut down, including 167 madrasas in Sindh, 13 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and two in Punjab. The report went on to state that 190 madrasas were receiving foreign funding.[106]

11. Ban on glorification of terrorism and terrorist organizations through print and electronic media.

(Rating – Past: 3 / Current: 4)

In 2001, an amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Act (1997) declared the glorification of any banned organization a penal offense.[107] In November 2007, Musharraf promulgated two separate ordinances—the Press, Newspapers, News Agencies and Books Registration Ordinance and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority—to impose curbs on print and electronic media.[108] In the amended ordinances, a new section was inserted that restricted the publication of certain material, including: any material statements and pronouncements of militants and extremist elements and any other thing, which may, in any way, promote, aid or abet terrorist activities or terrorism, or their graphic and printed representation based on sectarianism and ethnicity. Similarly, Section 20 of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulation Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance was amended to bar TV channels from broadcasting similar material.

This section of the NAP has been tasked to the Ministry of Information, which has supposedly begun to develop a national narrative on counter terrorism and secured the support of some media outlets.[109] On November 2, 2015, the aforementioned PERMA issued a directive that prohibits broadcasters from covering the activities of 72 different outlawed groups, including JuD, Falah-i-Insaniat Foundation, and LeT.

12. Administrative and development reforms in FATA with immediate focus on return of IDPs.

(Rating – Past: 3 / Current: 3)

In May 2014, KPK Governor Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan set up a FATA Reforms Commission (FRC) to frame strategic objectives for FATA for the next 25 years.[110] In October 2014, the Political Parties Joint Committee on FATA Reforms (JCFR) met with the government's FATA Reforms Commission to discuss their 11-point reform recommendations for the tribal areas, which included "amending Article 247 of the Constitution, enacting the election of local bodies, increasing development work, separating executive and judicial powers in FATA, and other urgent recommendations".[111]

In November 2015, the new Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif constituted a high-powered committee to finalize reforms for the tribal areas. The prime minister charged Sartaj Aziz, his adviser on foreign affairs, to lead the five-member committee to determine whether FATA should be merged into Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa as a provincially-administered tribal area (PATA) or made a separate province of the country.[112]

13. Dismantling the communication networks of terrorist organizations. (Rating – Past: 3 / Current: 3)

In early 2015, the government initiated a program to register the SIM cards of all mobile phone users into a database in an effort to counter terrorists' use of cell phones. The initiative concluded in May 2015, with a total of 75.5 million SIM cards re-verified and 27.5 million blocked.[113]

14. Tangible measures against abuse of Internet and social media for terrorism. (Rating – Past: 3 / Current: 3)

In 2008, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Ordinance was implemented, which banned cyber-crimes including: cyber terrorism, hacking of websites, cyber stalking and criminal access to secure data.[114] The next year, however, the ordinance was left unattended and lapsed. In December 2015, the National Assembly passed the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, which outlaws a host of online speech acts, including political criticism/expression and obscene or immoral messages on social media, and allows the government to remove any electronic speech.[115] However, Senate Chairman Raza Rabbani has explicitly told the government that the controversial bill will not be passed unless made acceptable to all stakeholders.[116]

Separately, over 250 social media accounts involved in facilitating terrorist communications have been shut down by a top security agency, and 933 URLs and 10 websites of terrorists organizations were blocked by the Ministry of Information Technology (MoIT).[117]

15. Zero tolerance for militancy in Punjab. (Rating – Past: 4 / Current: 4)

While many of the active militant groups in Punjab had long been banned, they were still active and operational at the onset of the NAP. In January 2015, Interior Minister Nisar Ali Khan announced that 95 proscribed militant organizations were operating in Punjab alone.[118] Local law enforcement finally began to take action later in 2015, questioning over 900,000 people and arresting forty "hard-core" terrorists.[119] According to one report, about 1,132 hardcore elements have been identified in Punjab and 649 persons were arrested for facilitating hate speeches. Recently, officials arrested 42 suspected militants with alleged links to the ISIS, according to the Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah. Sanaullah added that those arrested include the purported ISIS Islamabad chief Amir Mansoor, his deputy Abdullah Mansoori, and the group's chief for the province of Sindh, Umar Kathio.[120]

16. Taking the ongoing operation in Karachi to its logical conclusion. (Rating – Past: 2 / Current: 4)

The 'operation' against criminal elements in Karachi was initiated in September, 2013, after the federal cabinet empowered the Rangers (a paramilitary border security force), with the support of police, to lead a targeted advance against criminals already identified by federal military and civilian agencies for their alleged involvement in targeted killings, kidnappings for ransom, extortion and terrorism in Karachi.[121] Some 31,336 alleged criminals were arrested in several targeted operations conducted by police and Rangers personnel, according to one report.[122]

As of January 2016, the Ministry of Interior reports that targeted killing in the city had been reduced by 53%; murders by 50%; terrorism by 80%; robberies by 30%; extortion by 56%. In addition, 69,179 criminals, 890 terrorists, 676 proclaimed offenders, 10,426 absconders, 124 kidnappers, 545 extortionists, 1,834 murderers were arrested during the operation. 16,306 weapons have been seized during the operation.

17. Empowering Balochistan government for political reconciliation with complete ownership by all stakeholders. (Rating – Past: 3 / Current: 3)

In October 2008, President Asif Ali Zardari approved the recommendations of the reconciliatory committee for Balochistan that included rebuilding, reconciliation and re-allocation of natural resources as part of a strategy to resolve all of the long-standing issues in the province.[123] In November 2009, Parliament approved the Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan package, which contained a series of constitutional reforms economic measures and administrative change for Balochistan.[124] However, by 2011, the government had implemented only 15 of the 61 proposals contained in the package.

18. Dealing firmly with sectarian terrorists. (Rating – Past: 4 / Current: 4)

In January 2016, Pakistani officials arrested members of Jaish-e-Muhammad, including its leader, Maulana Masood Azhar. Pakistani authorities have also shut down several religious schools run by the Jaish-e-Mohammed in the province of Punjab.[125]

19. Formulation of a comprehensive policy to deal with the issue of Afghan refugees, beginning with the registration of all unregistered illegal refugees. (Rating – Past: 3 / Current: 3)

In May 2014, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) successfully delivered new Proof of Registration (PoR) cards to about half of a total of 1.6 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan.[126] In July 2013, the federal cabinet approved the extension of the Tripartite Commission Agreement governing the voluntary return of Afghans and the validity of the PoR cards until the end of 2015.[127] This point was quietly

excluded from the NAP in March 2015. However, in January 2016, it was reported that 25 centers had been established in the country for the registration of Afghan refugees.

20. Revamping and reforming the criminal justice system to strengthen counter-terrorism departments including granting of powers to the provincial CIDs to intercept terrorist communications. (Rating – Past: 2 / Current: 2)

Prior to the enactment of the NAP, Pakistan's criminal justice system was struggling to deal with the challenge of processing terrorism cases. The operation in Karachi alone had collected 5,000 alleged terrorists and criminals, most of whom were supposed to be tried by four anti-terrorism courts.[128] In addition to the problem of processing a high quantity of cases, frequent threats to witnesses and prosecutors made it difficult to ensure convictions on these cases. The 2014 Protection of Pakistan Act sought to address this concern by ramping up security for witnesses, prosecutors, and other relevant judicial personnel.[129] Although these pressing problems remained after the announcement of the NAP, few notable reforms have been undertaken.[130]

**Although only a fraction of the twenty initiatives outlined in the NAP show signs of progress since the NAP was announced, more will surely follow as the government facilitates synergies between items that have not previously existed.

Notes

[1] For more on Sufism as a conservative tradition, see Mark Woodward, Muhammad Sani Umar, Inayah Rohmaniyah, and Mariani Yahya, "Salafi Violence and Sufi Tolerance? Rethinking Conventional Wisdom," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 6 (December 2013).

[2] "South Asia Fatalities," South Asia Terrorism Portal, last updated November 8, 2015, accessed November 17, 2015.

[3] *Global Terrorism Index 2015* (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015).

[4] Tariq Parvez, *National Counter Terrorism and Extremism Strategy* (Lahore: Institute for Policy Reforms, 2015).

[5] The Global Terrorism Database is an open-source database that tracks systematic data on terrorist events around the world, including the date, location, weapons used, number of casualties and group responsible.

[6] Arif Rafiq, Sunni Deobandi-Shi'i Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: Explaining the Resurgence Since 2007 (Washington, DC; Middle East Institute, 2014); Ashley Tellis, *The Menace that is Lashkar-e-Taiba* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

[7] Milos Popovic, "The Perils of Weak Organization: Explaining Loyalty and Defection of Militant Organizations toward Pakistan," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 38 no. 11 (November 2015): 925.

[8] Christine Fair, "Lashkar-e-Tayiba and the Pakistani State," *Survival* 53 no. 4 (September, 2011); Tellis, *The Menace that is Lashkar-e-Taiba*; Joshua White, *Understanding the Taliban: Assessing Religious Categories of Analysis* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2012).

[9] Mufti, *Religion and Militancy in Pakistan and Afghanistan*, 43.

[10] Jeffrey Dressler, *The Haqqani Network: From Pakistan to Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2010).

[11] Muhammad Amir Rana, *The Impact of the Islamic State on Pakistan* (Oslo: NOREF, 2015).

[12] Jon Boone, "Pakistan church bomb: Christians mourn 85 killed in Peshawar suicide attack," *Guardian* September 25, 2013.

[13] Lawrence Franklin, "Pakistan: ISIS Plans Terrorist Campaign against Christians," *Gatestone Institute* September 22, 2015.

[14] Sara Mahmood, *ISIS in Afghanistan: A Growing Threat to Pakistan?* (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2015).

[15] M. Ahsan, *ISIS 'Leadership Struggle' against Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban* (International Relations Insights & Analysis, 2015); Harleen Gambhir, ISIS Global INTSUM (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2015); Nikita Malik and Eleanor Beevor, *South Asian Militant Groups and Global Jihad in 2015* (London, Quilliam Foundation, 2015).

[16] Max Taylor, *Conflict Resolution and Counter Radicalization: Where do we go from here?* (Copenhagen, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2012).

[17] *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* (Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development, 2009); Alex Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2013).

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