

Why Pakistan Does Not Have a Counterterrorism Narrative

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Why Pakistan Does Not Have a Counterterrorism Narrative

Abstract

This article argues that not only has the counterterrorism (CT) commitment in Pakistan been ad hoc in recent years, but that the country's articulation of a softer type of CT response has been rhetorical at best. The research further highlights that Pakistan's attempts to craft a scientifically structured counter narrative are neither traditional nor within the country's current CT capability. The article's arguments are analyzed through a guiding framework based on the compiled works of various strategic communication experts, and helps illustrate the narrative landscapes of al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban as explored and pitched vis-à-vis the state's counter-narrative paradigm. The findings also probe the national mindset of Pakistanis amenability and appeal for terrorism. The result of this research posits an underlying question as to how then does Pakistan move forward in coping with increasing terrorist threats within its borders while simultaneously developing a coherent and fully functional counter terrorism effort in the future.

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“It seems that everyone is talking about narrative these days... Yet, for all of this interest in narrative, there is little consensus about what it is and how it is used.”¹

Steven R. Corman

Introduction

Pakistan has been at war with terrorism for over a decade resulting in over 55,000 citizen deaths, half a million injured, and a loss of over one hundred billion dollars to the national economy.² Despite these heavy costs, it is ironic that the Taliban and their affiliates still enjoy the support of key political elites and certain sections of society.³ One reason for this heightened state of chaos is the highly charged religious discourse experienced in Pakistan over the meaning of the term jihad and its relationship within society.⁴ In fact, most Pakistanis draw distinct boundaries between the forms of violence attributed to their affiliations with various schools of jurisprudence and confessional doctrines. Analogously, the youths in the poor and upper-middle classes throughout the country tend to view the world through a strict black and white lens, developing their radicalized beliefs from the clash of civilization paradigm. They embrace radicalism

“not necessarily because they understand the underlying ideology or comprehend the religious principles, but due to the fact that such ideas

¹ Steven R. Corman, "Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communication," in Sarah Canna (ed.), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Method and Strategies* (Lexington Park, MD: NSI, Inc., 2011), 40, available at: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/files/attachments/95226/ucounterviolentextremismfinalapprovedforpublicrelease28oct11.pdf>.

² "Fatalities in terrorism violence in Pakistan 2003-2014," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, available at: <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/casualties.htm>; Mariana Baabar, 'Pakistan suffered \$103 bn loss due to terrorism,' *The News*, 3 October 2014, [http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-33273-Pakistan-suffered-\\$103-bn-loss-due-to-terrorism](http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-33273-Pakistan-suffered-$103-bn-loss-due-to-terrorism).

³ "Arshad Mehmood: Hanged, then buried by crowds of well-wishers," *Dawn.com*, 21 December 2014; Yasser Latif Hamdani In the cross hairs of the extremists *The Hindu*, April 28, 2014 <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/in-the-cross-hairs-of-the-extremists/article5953707.ece>; Wasif Khan, "Extremism and mainstream Pakistan," *Dawn.com*, 17 December 2012; Farida Shaheed, The occupation of mainstream cultural space in Pakistani society by politico-religious parties and groups, paper read in National Conference – Extremism, its impact on society: implications for women, 18-19 August 2009, National Commission on the Status of Women, Islamabad, p.16

⁴ Moonis Ahmar, "Sectarian conflict in Pakistan: some lessons from The Irish experience," *IPRI Journal* 10:1 (Winter, 2010): 50-76.

have become popular in the society and are not challenged by an alternative discourse.”⁵

Also, there are clear divisions among political parties concerning the definition of terrorism and how best to counter its expansion. Some support a general war on terror, but concurrently hesitate to categorize the subsequent violence as a result of terrorist's ethnicities. Similarly, prevalent literature characterizing Pakistanis as both simultaneously sympathetic and rejecting terrorism confuses the overall discussion and exacerbates the tension seen within the general population. The result is a multitude of conflicting viewpoints that makes it impossible for society to develop a cohesive narrative in order to counter the growth of extremism and fight terrorist activities within the country.⁶ This absence of a unifying national counter narrative limits Pakistan's ability to effectively fight terrorism within its borders, and creates an adverse effect outside of the country's sovereign territories.

This article attempts to investigate the factors that explain reasons why a country like Pakistan that suffers enormously from terrorism, still continues to possess no cohesive response to counter the ongoing violence. Two reasons posited for Pakistan's inability to contend with this situation are: 1) that the counterterrorism (CT) effort itself has been an ad hoc commitment throughout the country until recently, and in certain segments of society has been rhetorical at best, 2) the crafting of a scientifically structured counter narrative—reckoned as part of a soft dimension of CT—involves specialized skills that are neither available nor find cultural amenability for assimilation within the country. The article outlines a guiding framework that draws upon expert works—the scientific knowledge elaborated later—as a means to highlight defined and structural aspects of a narrative paradigm.

Based on this input, potential elements required to compile a narrative, are sought from the frequently used strategic communication by the terrorist groups, and are composed in the form of a narrative. The phenomenology of terrorism in Pakistan is then analyzed within the framework of scientific knowledge precepts and the identified militants' narratives. Analysis of these specific narratives is beyond the scope of this article, but the question of how Pakistan copes with the terrorism threat despite an absence of a counter

⁵Ayesha Siddiq, "Red Hot Chilli Peppers Islam – Socio-Political attitudes amongst Youth in Elite Universities in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi," *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, 12, 13, 25, available at:

http://pk.boell.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Red_Hot_Chilli_Peppers_Islam_-_Complete_Study_Report.pdf.

⁶ Muhammad Amir Rana, "Perceptions of extremism," *Dawn.com*, September 8, 2013, available at: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1041383>.

narrative is fully addressed. Finally, this article's conclusion details all salient findings from this research and puts forth a few policy recommendations for future debate.

The Guiding Framework for Narrative Development

Writings by Steven Corman, Jeffrey Halverson, and various other authors denote the key aspects of the scientific knowledge used in the sphere of narrative construction for this article.⁷ Their theoretical rendering stands out in the contemporary scholarship as intellectually robust in its attempt to address key terrorism challenges. Accordingly, this intellectual resource creates the foundation and has been used as the standard framework to weave together the various narratives used throughout in this paper.⁸

A narrative, theoretically defined, is a coherent system of interrelated and sequentially organized stories—sequence of related events—that share a common rhetorical desire to resolve a conflict by establishing audience expectations according to the known trajectories of its literary and rhetorical form.⁹ More importantly, it is a system of stories that share themes, forms, and archetypes (See Figure 1).¹⁰ The stories comprising these narratives are inspired by real events rooted in the geo-contextual history and popular traditions of the targeted country. According to Corman, every story in a narrative need not have exactly the same characteristics; however, they relate to one another in a way that creates a unified whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.¹¹

Figure 1: Narrative Elements

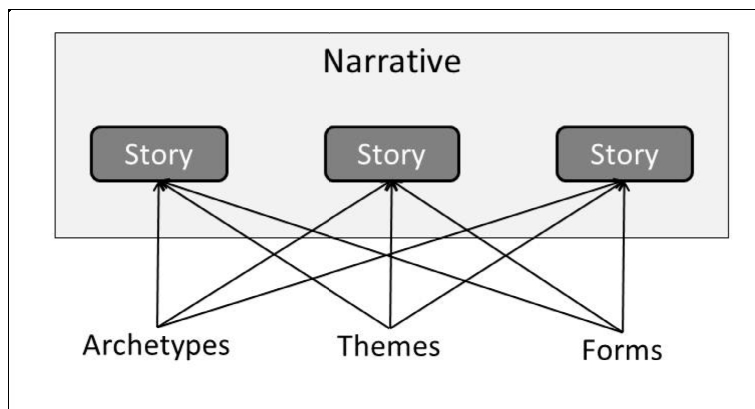
⁷ Other authors include H. L. Goodall, Rachel Briggs, Sebastien Feve, and Alex Smith.

⁸ Rachel Briggs and Sebastien Feve, "Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism" *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* (July 2013): 6; Corman, "Understanding The Role Of Narrative..."

⁹ Alex P. Schmid, "Al-Qaida's Single Narrative and Attempts to Develop Counter - Narratives: The State of Knowledge," *The International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT)* (January 2014), available at: <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/Schmid-Al-Qaida's-Single-Narrative-and-Attempts-to-Develop-Counter-Narratives-January-2014.pdf>; Halverson, Jeffrey, H. L. Goodall and Steven Corman, *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2011).

¹⁰ Corman, "Understanding The Role Of Narrative."

¹¹ Ibid.



Some narratives, whose stories are widely known and embedded in a culture and consistently retold over time, rise to the level of master narratives.¹² These are also understood as trans-historical chronicles.¹³ A few examples include the Battle of Badr, the French Revolution, the Pakistan movement, and the Afghan Jihad to name a few.

Conversely, counter-narratives are “attempts to challenge extremist and violent extremist messages, whether directly or indirectly through a range of online and offline means.”¹⁴ These narratives are aimed at individuals, groups and networks further along the path to radicalization, whether they be sympathizers, passive supporters or those more active within extremist movements. These targeted programs explicitly deconstruct, delegitimize and de-mystify extremist propaganda in order to achieve a number of aims. These aims range from the de-radicalization of those already radicalized to the sowing of seeds of doubt among ‘at risk’ audiences potentially being exposed to or seeking out extremist content.”¹⁵

In a real time environment, both narratives and their counters assume a competitive character with each proponent—the terrorists and governments—striving to maintain strategic audience support.¹⁶ This support, in the particular case of terrorists, is to win over newer constituencies for recruitment and fundraising in support of their physical activities.¹⁷

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Youssef Aboul-Enein, "Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism," *Small Wars Journal-Blog Post*, July 7, 2011.

¹⁴ Briggs and Feve, "Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism," 6, 49.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nissen, Thomas Elkjer, "The two 'New Blacks'; Social Media and Narratives and their relations to MoE," in *Strategic Communication in Counter Terrorism: Target Audience Analysis, Measures of Effect, and Counter Narrative Baseline Report* (Ankara, Turkey: NATO COE DAT, June 2014).

¹⁷ Ibid.

In order to contest or counter the militants' narratives, experts advocate two methodological approaches. The first is narrative coherence and the second is narrative fidelity. The former is a methodical instrument used to assess communications based on whether a militant's stories (or implied stories) make sense structurally. It considers factors like whether the sequence of events is consistent, the actors and their actions are plausible, and whether the resolution occurs as it should. Narrative fidelity, on the other hand, involves assessing whether the stories "ring true," or whether they are plausible with respect to the [factual] experiences and values of the audience.¹⁸ Invariably, all narratives by interest groups are based on facts that will, however, have elements of subjective manipulation blended into it to plead for sympathy and support. This view is unanimously shared by leading scholars of strategic communication, presupposing the terrorist's expertise in this field or the investment of a great deal of time by them to represent the enemy with the utmost negativity.¹⁹

This article departs a bit from this popular standpoint arguing that rather than twisting stories as a norm, it is also the phenomenology of perception of terrorist leadership—their experiential insight to accord meanings—about a grievance that is relied with equal emphasis to advance a narrative.²⁰ For example, the verses extremists most frequently cite from the Quran deal with themes of victimization, dishonor, and retribution rather than those carrying offensive undertones, which shows close integration with the rhetorical vision of Islamist extremists.²¹ The exercise to establish infidelity of a narrative therefore needs to account for this aspect appropriately.

Non-State Actors and Their Narrative Landscape

Notable terrorist groups operating in and from Pakistan include al-Qaida Central, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Islamic Jihad Union (IJU),

¹⁸ Corman, "Understanding The Role Of Narrative."

¹⁹ Thomas Koruth Samuel, "Reaching the Youth: countering the terrorist narrative," *Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-terrorism*, 2012, 31; Valentina Bartolucci and Steven R. Corman, "The Narrative Landscape of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb," 2014, available at: <http://csc.asu.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/csc1401-aqim-narrative-landscape.pdf>.

²⁰ Silvia Stoller, "Phenomenology and the Post structural Critique of Experience," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17:5 (2009): 707-737; Travis Morris and John P. Crank, "Toward a phenomenology of terrorism: implications for research and policy," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 56:3 (October 2011): 219-242.

²¹ Jeffrey R. Halverson, R. Bennett Furlow and Steven R. Corman, "How Islamist Extremists Quote the Qur'an," *Center for Strategic Communication* 1202 (July 9, 2012), available at: <http://csc.asu.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/csc1202-quran-verses.pdf>.

East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), reneged Kashmiri groups, autonomous Taliban groupings, the Baloch Liberation Army, and many others.²² This organizational and interest-related diversity creates a narrative landscape of terrorism in Pakistan that is not monolithic. This variety emanates from the kaleidoscopic uniqueness of Pakistan, which the terrorist groups use according to discrete choice and interest.

The repeated mention of Pakistan in historic statements and video messages by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri suggests the organization gives the country a relatively high degree of importance.²³ This ensues from several underpinnings. First, al-Zawahiri aspires to create a future jihad in the southern Russian Republics, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan to unite a nuclear Pakistan and the gas-rich Caspian region.²⁴ Furthermore, Pakistan offers al-Qaida an asset that is not available elsewhere. This is due to this country's reliance on a particular portrayal of Islam to justify its existence, as well as its policies. By that measure, Pakistan allows Islamic opponents to claim any action construed by them as "un-Islamic," thereby making the country directly vulnerable to moral attack.

Events such as the 2007 siege of the Red Mosque in Islamabad provided al-Qaida ample opportunities to prove its point.²⁵ For instance, al-Zawahiri uses the storming of the Red Mosque as a platform to accuse the West of conducting an "anti-Islam crusade," and to create a rallying cry to fight the U.S. backed Pakistan government and its military.²⁶ The ideological nature of Pakistan also makes the country a suitable Islamic refuge for al-Qaida and the persecuted Muslims that further enhance its significance.²⁷ The other non-Pakistan groups such as IMU, IJU, and ETIM determine their respective narratives—mostly in the form of media statements—depending upon the type of alliance associated with al-Qaida, the Afghan Taliban, or local organizations. Their narratives are further driven by the perceived wrong associated to the State of Pakistan. The native groupings articulate their

²² C. Christine Fair, "Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: Implications for Al Qaeda and Other Organizations," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27:6 (2004): 489-504.

²³ Amil Khan, "Pakistan and the narratives of extremism," *USIP Special Report* 327 (March 2013).

²⁴ Youssef H. Aboul-Enein, "Ayman Al-Zawahiri's Knights under the Prophet's Banner: the al-Qaida Manifesto," *Military Review* 85:1 (January/February 2005), available at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_mOPBZ/is_1_85/ai_n14695417/.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid; Hussain, Zahid, *The Scorpion's Tail* (New York: Simon and Schuster, November 2010), 119.

²⁷ Ibid.

narratives based on the outlook of a particular issue—for example, jihad against the State, sectarianism, anti-faith beliefs, anti-U.S. sentiment, anti-India rhetoric, and anti-democracy movements.

The narrative categorization, accordingly, spans multiple types to include master narratives, and several general narratives that can be bifurcated into national, episodic and meta—or sectorial—narratives. These have been adduced from a careful review of existing sources to include statements by al-Zawahiri and TTP leadership, motivational literature, visual material, transcripts, media releases, websites and social media expositions operated by militants. Identified below are the summarized and collected texts from the above sources. The texts presented retain the original spirit of the messages. Discretion has been used to contextualize pieces of texts where they seem fitting to make the narrative intelligible.

Al-Qaida's Narrative on Pakistan

Conventionally, al-Qaida has a global narrative built around the American-Zionist-Crusaders war framework against Islam, which has its regional denominations propounded by al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).²⁸ In the case of Pakistan, al-Qaida has enunciated several narratives engendering different persuasions. Altogether these can be reckoned as a unifying framework of explanations that provides Pakistanis portrayal of a reality that resonates with their historical experiences, memories, religious reverence, national sentiments and larger grievances against the State. Oddly however, in building the master narrative on Pakistan, al-Qaida fundamentally departs from its popular rhetoric—American-Zionist-Crusaders—by grounding it instead in the history of partition of British India and the Kashmir issue. Conceptually, it challenges the very basis of creation of Pakistan and envisions resolution of a conflicted situation by dispensing with democracy in favor of *Khilafat* (vice regency). There are two interlaced variants that flow from this master narrative. They employ the American-Zionist-Crusades underpinning, besides integrating religion, political system and nuclear status of the country. All of the narratives are fairly realistic and are not easy to challenge.²⁹

²⁸ Bartolucci and Corman, "The Narrative Landscape of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb."

²⁹ Mansfield, Laura, *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri*, (New Jersey, TLG Publications 2006), 284, 326-334; Aymen Al-Zawahiri, Al-Subah wal Qandeel, (trans) *Maula Abdul Samad, Idar-e-Hateen*, 16, 26, 179-180, 183-187.

- 1) **Master Narrative.** Muslims who struggled in India aspired for a separate homeland where their integrity and rights were protected. The country was hijacked by the Western backed secular community who assumed its leadership. The creation of Pakistan was the work of this irreligious elite installed to further western interests. Hence, this was not the Pakistan that was sought by South Asian Muslims. It was and still is an un-Islamic State that function on the basis of an un-Islamic constitution and diseased political system that contravenes the fundamental dictates of sharia. Corrupt ruling elites of this rentier state have been exploitative and are the U.S. stooges. Promises to make Pakistan an Islamic state have been a farce that also obstructs the liberation of Kashmir. If you do not want to support us, at least accept our argument in order to stop helping the corrupt rulers, and to help topple their government in order to establish Khilafat.
- 2) **Variant I.** In the war on terrorism, Pakistan is the principal base and vanguard of crusaders against Islam on the subcontinent, South Asia and the Middle East. The country's leadership is exerting to prove its loyalty more than others to the United States in this war. The Pakistan army is corrupt, and its officers and men should not heed to unethical orders of their leaders.
- 3) **Variant II.** India, which is allied with the United States and the Jews, is the candidate in the modern American-Zionist-Crusader's war against Islam designed to neutralize Pakistan's nuclear program, to weaken jihad in Kashmir, and to divide Pakistan. Jihad against Russia was decreed by the Pakistan clergy. Jihad against the United States should also be viewed as a duty according to sharia. Hence, Muslims are obligated to help the Mujahedeen—the knights—who are engaged in jihad in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Besides, it is the responsibility of every Pakistani to expel crusaders from their land.

Taliban National Narrative

The Taliban national narrative generally draws upon al-Qaida's central theme of the American crusader—termed by TTP as the world's biggest crusade. This narrative is coupled with a few similarities, but maintains individuality

by embracing developments and events prevailing at the national scene.³⁰ Structurally, it is more thematic compared to singleness of thought in the narratives crafted by al-Qaida. Distinct features of this narrative consist of:

- 1) The Pakistan state is un-Islamic, murderous, and is the enemy. The Pakistani government is an apostate and a U.S. protégé that usurps the people's power.
- 2) The Taliban are the knights of Tawhid and Jihad.
- 3) Democracy is kufar and needs to be replaced by sharia dispensation.
- 4) Being heretics and sinners, Shias are kafir.
- 5) The war on terror is a persecution of tribal Muslims by the Pakistan army and will be avenged.
- 6) The media is dajal—the false messiah—and is engaged in misleading the masses.

Meta-Narratives

Articulated by ideologues—not including the Taliban—meta-narratives include narratives on sectarianism, blasphemy and interfaith issues, and are relatively coercive in tone exploiting pro-Sunni sentiments pervading Pakistan.³¹ For example, Shias are sternly told that ‘they are mistaken’. Likewise, any negative comments against the Blasphemy Law are in turn viewed as blasphemous and may result in the death penalty for violators.³² Identically, a great deal of content expressed toward religious minorities often stems from a feeling that they do not respect Islam and Muslims.³³

The State of the Knowledge, State's Counter Narrative, and Phenomenology of Terrorism in Pakistan

The State of Knowledge

The literature on militancy, terrorism, and extremism produced by Pakistani writers generally use the word *narrative* notionally or adjectively when

³⁰ Jihade Pakistan, available at: <http://jihadepakistan.blogspot.com/>; see also: http://jihadepakistan.blogspot.com/2014/09/blog-post_95.html#more; and <http://jihadepakistan.blogspot.com/2012/11/blog-post.html>.

³¹ Christine C. Fair, Neil Malhotra and Jacob N. Shapiro, "Islam, Militancy, and Politics in Pakistan: Insights From a National Sample," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22:4 (2010): 495–521.

³² "No Muslim should attend the funeral or even try to pray for Salman Taseer." This was the pronouncement by a broad alliance of the clergy of Jamaate Ahle Sunnat Pakistan (as well as some select deobandi ulema), which erstwhile represented the large and moderate Barelvi sect. The assassin of Governor Taseer was lionized.

³³ Azhar Hussain, Ahmad Salim and Arif Naveed, "Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan," *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom* November 2011.

characterizing militants' behavior and their hate messages. Practically, the narrative debate in its academic sense is non-existent with the exception of a handful of news reports, reviews, and writings that have used the narrative nomenclature in varied connotations. These encompass analyses of the extremists' narratives, and the factors contributing to the creation of emotional resonance among Pakistanis. It also includes the so-called state narratives depicted in Pakistan media to counter them.³⁴ Apart from an odd piece, this scholarship is generic without scientific treatment of the subject. *Pakistan's Counterterrorism Challenges* edited by Moeed Yusuf claims to break new ground by approaching CT holistically. It rightly identifies the crucial importance of what it calls 'Cyberia', or what aids extremists in pursuing their agendas through exploitation of weakness of the state's response. The writing's accent is on cybercrime and cyber terrorism, but the strategic communication that the chapter on Cyberia engages is limited.³⁵

Tradition and Appeal of the State's Counter Narrative

There have been efforts to respond to the ideological tide of terrorism. First, was the neologism, "Strategy of Enlightened Moderation," that was introduced by General Pervez Musharraf in 2002. Not wholly a counter narrative in the technical sense, it became a buzzword globally, but has now vanished due to its temporary lure being a superficial, over simplistic and apologetic concept.³⁶ Second, was the tradition of generating anti-terrorist rhetoric, by key national figures—government, armed forces and anti-Taliban clergy—who inconsistently ramped up their rhetoric during the run up to military operations and active hostilities in Swat and South Waziristan (2009), and North Waziristan (2014).

These traditions essentially contain policy statements in the form of press releases, televised addresses, key speeches of government officials (in the form of reports), newspaper reports, and interviews.³⁷ Occasionally, liberal members of civil society have also joined this effort. These transitory endeavors can be loosely counted as part of the strategic communication by

³⁴ Shamil Shams, "The Clash of Narratives Swat Military Operation against the Taliban." Working Paper Series # 120," *Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)* October 2011; Ahmed Rashid, "Cry, the beloved country," *New Republic* May 26, 2011; Amil Khan, "Pakistan and the narratives of extremism," *USIP Special Report* 327; Asad Munir, "Narratives on the TTP," *Dawn.com*, July 6, 2013.

³⁵ Khan, Zafarullah, "Cyberia: A new war zone for Pakistan's Islamists," in Moeed Yusuf (ed), *Pakistan Counter Terrorism Challenges*, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 169.

³⁶ Major Irfan Ahmed Malik, Pakistan Army, "Islam, Terrorism and the Strategy of Enlightened Moderation," (Master Thesis: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2005). available at: <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA437501>.

³⁷ Shams, "The Clash of Narratives...Series # 120."

the state and the miniscule segments of society, albeit these attempts have been reactive and fractured in hindsight. A statement prior to the 2009 military operations in Swat by the former Prime Minister, Yousuf Raza Gilani, amplifies this assertion.³⁸ The argument expounded in the statement, only makes a case for endorsing the need for undertaking a military operation without a structured follow up by official tiers.

“We tried our best to resolve the issue peacefully. What else could be the proof of government’s sincerity and love for Islam other than the fact that it did everything to implement ‘Nizam-i-Adl’? We took the issue to the parliament which approved the peace agreement unanimously, and the president signed the bill without any delay.”³⁹

A recent development includes the promulgation of the National Internal Security Policy 2014-2018 (NISP) by the Ministry of Interior in early 2014. This policy—a step in the right direction—is to be implemented by the National Counterterrorism Authority (NACTA). The policy recognizes the significance of a national narrative in its framework to eradicate extremism and terrorism.⁴⁰ Ironically, what it connotes as elements of this narrative—tolerance, harmony, and the right of the people to make religious, political and social choices—are factually near-replication of the fundamental rights enshrined in articles 2-28 of the Constitution of Pakistan. While such a pluralistic national narrative will be warranted for forging national cohesion, this in no way can be considered a substitute in the narrative paradigm under review that the NACTA should be undertaking to neutralize terrorists’ propaganda.

Phenomenology of Terrorism in Pakistan

Some scholars argue that the state’s Islamic ideology and its so-called strategic discourse does not [or cannot] complement anti-extremism narratives; on the contrary, it favors extremism.⁴¹ This observation should be viewed through the attempts of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88) to re-write Pakistan’s self-understanding as a political entity from a Muslim to an Islamic state.⁴² His reformation drive according to a particular worldview radically

³⁸ Khan, "Pakistan and the narratives of extremism."

³⁹ Nawa-i-Waqt, May 8, 2009, available at: <http://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/Lahore/2009-05-08/page-1/detail-2>.

⁴⁰ Pakistan Ministry of Interior, NISP (National Internal Security Policy): 2014-2018 (Pakistan: MoI, 2014), available at: <http://nacta.gov.pk>, 37-38.

⁴¹ Shams, "The Clash of Narratives...Series # 120."

⁴² Boris Wilke, "State-Formation and the Military in Pakistan: Reflections on the Armed Forces, their State and some of their Competitors," *Research Unit of Wars, Armament and Development Working Paper 2*, (Hamburg, Germany: Hamburg University, 2001).

altered the curriculum, particularly social sciences. The country's leading historians were mobilized in constructing a past for their new nation that would set it apart from the Indus Valley Civilization involving, among other things, the relegation of a diverse but vibrant composite cultural and intellectual legacy to the backdoor.⁴³ This reductionist discourse denied the existence of different cultural variations, and instead focused on producing a polemic essentialism.⁴⁴

Concurrently, there is a pervasive culture of conspiracy theories that have long flourished in Pakistan and that profoundly affect the statecraft.⁴⁵ In fact,

“the entire public discourse is so sodden with ludicrous conspiracy theories they are minimally rational. In part, these conspiracy theories are the work of the army itself, which...has been spreading the line about India's role [in fomenting violence] in an effort to discredit the Pakistani Taliban.”⁴⁶

The only unifying characteristic of these reactions is that they are excuses created to avoid the necessary conclusions—or evoking critical questions—and ultimately provide space for the Taliban to continue their reign of terror.⁴⁷ This practice relies on typical Pakistani psyche rooted in sentimentalism wherein an ordinary Pakistani can be quickly provoked and have a mental set-up that cannot sustain a long and involving rational argument.⁴⁸

The key factor that accounts for this symptom is underlined by the lack of critical thinking and existing education milieu especially Pakistan's public schools and colleges who use textbooks and a curriculum predicated on constructed myths. In essence, the education system—public and private, religious and secular—develops a rigidly authoritarian mindset that desires to dominate the rest of the world, and a belief in the unidimensionality of

⁴³ Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi, “Polarization of Social Studies in Textbooks in Pakistan,” *SAN Analysis* PIPS, December 2010.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Four Pakistani conspiracy theories that are less fictitious than you'd think, available at: <http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/21656/four-pakistani-conspiracy-theories-that-are-less-fictitious-than-you-d-think/>.

⁴⁶ Ahmed Rashid, “Cry, the beloved country,” *New Republic* May 26, 2011; Shams, “The Clash of Narratives...Series # 120.”

⁴⁷ Mukhtar Ahmed, “Taliban Declares New War, Pakistan Responds With Old Narratives,” *New Pakistan* June 10, 2014.

⁴⁸ Manzoor Ahmed, “Pakistan: Aporia of its Kind,” in *Society* Soofia Mumtaz, Jean Lucm and Imran Anwar Ali (eds.) *Pakistan The Contours of State and Society* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61.

reality.⁴⁹ This representation, in the absence of a state apparatus, regulation, and credible educational institutions is hardly a matter of priority with the state and has been allowed to grow and flourish spawning misperception and irrationality.⁵⁰ The confusion of views by most of the people on the issues such as jihad, extremism, radicalization, and terrorism is a corollary of this structural void.⁵¹

Therefore, despite tremendous human and material loss, countering terrorism has not found strong appeal within political ranks, as well as at the grass roots level. The Pakistani people, contrary to leaders in Islamabad, still believe America's war is against them and not the militants in the tribal areas. Suicide bombings and deadly violence are the subsequent backlash. This confusing narrative has resulted in widespread tolerance for the Taliban among commoners and elites alike.⁵² It is also within this framework that the drone narrative has produced the intense anti-American feelings. Drone attacks are portrayed to the Pakistani people as one of the greatest evils to have ever engulfed the country, largely by the Pakistani media and the country's politicians. The discourse is predominantly based on the assumption that drones are U.S. tools that violate Pakistan's sovereignty, and kill "thousands" of innocent civilians while also fueling militancy. With emphasis solely on civilian deaths and not on militants, this narrative has resonated among wider sections of society.⁵³

A more significant impediment facing the CT campaign in Pakistan is the selective application of the notion of terrorism. For example, the proxy war in Kashmir is a declared jihad whereas violence by the Taliban is selectively viewed as terrorism. The narrative of attaining azadi or freedom for Muslim Kashmiris living under Indian (e.g., Hindu) oppression is crucially important in Pakistani domestic politics and society.⁵⁴ For instance, Pakistan's leaders, civilian and military alike, refer to the militant groups which claim to fight on

⁴⁹ Khadim Hussin, "The Extremist Discourse," *Media and Extremist Narrative and an alternative pedagogy of tolerance*, SAFMA National Conference, Pearl Continental Bhourban, Pakistan, December 28-29, 2013, 12.

⁵⁰ Dr. Nazya Fiaz, "Policy Intervention in FATA: Why Discourse Matters." *Journal of Strategic Security*, 5:1 (2012): 49-62.

⁵¹ Rana, Muhammad Amir and Safdar Sial, *Radicalization in Pakistan* (Islamabad, Pakistan: Narratives, 2012), 13.

⁵² Deedar Hussain Samejo, "Pro-Taliban narrative threatens Pakistan," *Asia Times*, March 2014.

⁵³ Farooq Yousaf, "The Drone Strike Narrative in Pakistan," *The Diplomat*, June 10, 2014.

⁵⁴ C. Christine Fair, Neil Malhotra and Jacob N. Shapiro, "National Survey of Pakistan Democratic Values and Support for Militant Politics: Evidence from a National Survey of Pakistan," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (March 21, 2013).

behalf of Kashmir's freedom as "freedom fighters" rather than as terrorists.⁵⁵ Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is a case in point. It is both nationally and internationally labeled as a terrorist outfit, but due to its well entrenched anti-India rhetoric which goes well with the Pakistani mindset of historically opposing Hindu domination, LeT enjoys a wider acceptance among the populace.

This ideological demeanor is better understood from the prism of nationalism, wherein violence assumes an adapted meaning to serve national ends. Furthermore, the average Pakistanis often relate to, justify, and refuse to unconditionally condemn the ideologies driving violent extremism—even when it directly impacts their lives in the form of suicide bombings or militant attacks.⁵⁶ Similarly, not everyone condemns sectarianism. The same holds true for systematic violence against other religious minorities. The ordinary mindset is also reflected in the belief that too many of the Taliban are basically 'good people', only demanding a just system; they are "our misguided brothers" but brothers nevertheless.⁵⁷ Some go to the extent of calling the Taliban the first line of defense against India, while others call them terrorists.⁵⁸ These observations also explain why religion is so profusely built into narratives by the terrorists. This is due to its potential to emotionally reverberate with an audience that has been raised since childhood on an intellectual diet of state-sponsored messaging presenting Pakistan as an experiment in the service of Islam and its army as the guardian of that Islamic identity.⁵⁹

Coping with Terrorism

While Pakistan has demonstrated a semblance of CT—driven mainly through hit and trial strategy—it has lacked structured input and participation by civil society including higher seats of learning. As a result of the absence of a clear

⁵⁵ Fair, Malhotra and Shapiro, "National Survey of Pakistan Democratic Values and Support for Militant Politics."

⁵⁶ Muhammad Feyyaz, "Multiform youth extremism in Pakistan," Discussion paper PILDAT, July 2013.

⁵⁷ Farida Shaheed, "The occupation of mainstream cultural space in Pakistani society by politico-religious parties and groups, paper read in National Conference – Extremism, its impact on society: implications for women," *National Commission on the Status of Women* (August 18-19, 2009), 16; Yasser Latif Hamdani, "In the cross hairs of the extremists," *The Hindu*, April 28, 2014, available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/in-the-cross-hairs-of-the-extremists/article5953707.ece>.

⁵⁸ Dr. Muhammad Waseem, "Time to change the track," *Media and Extremist Narrative and an alternative pedagogy of tolerance*, SAFMA National Conference, Pearl Continental Bhourban, Pakistan, December 28-29, 2013, 27.

⁵⁹ Khan, "Pakistan and the narratives of extremism."

and comprehensive policy by the government, political leaders have left the task of both the formulation and execution of counter terrorism essentially in the hands of the army leadership.⁶⁰ Other than engaging in rhetoric, the governing elites by and large remained divorced over how the military conceptualized terrorism, and what rules of engagement it followed.

The absence of a consensual CT vision is not the only problem; there also exists a wide gulf between the civilian law enforcement and military efforts to combat terrorism.⁶¹ Although the Pakistani government has instituted a national internal security strategy [NISP] complemented lately with a NAP (National Action Plan) against terrorism, a holistic understanding of the problem is missing from policy and politics.⁶² Intriguingly, the NACTA—the country’s supreme CT coordination body only recently institutionalized under an act of the parliament (No. XIX of 2013)—has yet to assume its envisaged shape due to administrative and capacity issues.⁶³

Apart from the NACTA, at least five strategic and policy research organizations are named in Pakistan that the government funds. Still, little is known about consultation for governmental policy design on issues of national importance.⁶⁴ Viewed in totality, this state of mayhem sufficiently explains reasons of inefficacy of the government’s counter terrorism policy. For instance, government representatives have repeatedly affirmed the decision to fight against the proliferation of terrorism or the threat of terrorism.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, this is a less narrative-based decision-making process and more a political posturing tactic.⁶⁶ Out of the entire lot of the state’s institutions, the military is the most organized and well equipped in terms of its counter terrorist capabilities, yet one has not heard of any counter narrative flowing from them for public consumption other than summaries of routine terrorist activities.⁶⁷ Interestingly, this has occurred while the Taliban, the LeT, and other militant groups have become more media savvy in

⁶⁰ Talat Masood, “Pakistan’s fight against terrorism,” *Defence Against Terrorism Review* 4:1 (2012): 13-30.

⁶¹ Yusuf, *Pakistan Counter Terrorism Challenges*.

⁶² Moeed Yusuf, "Rethinking counterinsurgency efforts in Pakistan and South Asia," *USIP.org*, April 7, 2014, available at: <http://www.usip.org/publications/rethinking-counterinsurgency-efforts-in-pakistan-and-south-asia>.

⁶³ Pakistan Ministry of Interior, NISP (National Internal Security Policy), 85.

⁶⁴ These include Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), Regional Studies Institute, Islamabad, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Institute of Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University.

⁶⁵ Ahmer Bilal Soofi, “Counterterrorism: the legal angle,” *Dawn.com*, 22 April 2014.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ "Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR)," available at: https://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-main_page.

developing their respective narratives.⁶⁸ Unlike the extremist communication efforts, strategic communication endeavors to counter extremism in Pakistan typically do not deploy messages built on Pakistan's narratives corresponding to narratives deployed by terrorists.⁶⁹

Conclusion

The discussion indicates serious gaps in the CT infrastructure of Pakistan including a lack of competence by concerned organs to defeat terrorism through soft countering approaches. The narratives used by Jihadis are largely based on facts, but there are still significant portions that contain elements of fiction. For instance, appraisals through the lens of narrative coherence and fidelity or 'deconstruct, delegitimize, and de-mystify' parameters can or could have exposed deceit and falsehood. There is no evidence suggesting a professional approach based on these methodologies to develop counter and alternative narratives to deal with complexity spawned by terrorism in Pakistan. Hence, there is a virtual vacuum for the terrorist organizations to propagate their narrative at will.

Analysis and marketing on a sustained basis in order to build technical capacity to engage in narrative development is imperative to pull the masses out of the narrative rationality of the extremists to an informed worldview. It needs emphasis that the narrative rationality can trump logical reasoning (especially in the case of conspiracy theories) because it is an alternate way of thinking about the world that has close connections with desires and emotions, and is deeply involved in how we make sense of events in everyday life.⁷⁰ Pakistan at this juncture is ideally cast for such maneuvering by forces inimical to the national and public interests.

Ad-hoc approaches have worked so far with mixed outcomes, but it may not sustain the emerging setting beset by more fluidity and uncertainty. Essentially, no worthwhile peace is likely without a unified stand by the Pakistani citizenry against terrorism and the total ownership of the war by the population. This calls for putting in practice the NISP as soon as possible, and addressing the existing weaknesses in the system. If this is not accomplished, more vulnerable minds will fall prey to the allure of existential attractions propagated by the terrorists.

⁶⁸ Masood, "Pakistan's fight against terrorism," 13-30.

⁶⁹ Khan, "Pakistan and the narratives of extremism."

⁷⁰ Corman, "Understanding The Role Of Narrative..."