

Desecuritization, Resilience and Terrorism: JRSP, Vol. 58, No 4 (Oct-Dec 2021)

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Desecuritization, Resilience and Terrorism: Towards a Comprehensive Approach on Counter-Terrorism in Pakistan

Abstract:

Terrorism has evolved over the years as multi-layered and decentralized threat for the states, implying that the counter-terrorism initiatives and strategies need to be revamped beyond the traditional security-laden perspective. Terrorism is essentially a criminal act, which has implications but is not limited to national security, as highlighted in Pakistan's national discourse and policies. Yet it has been securitized, as an imminent threat without due regard for a proportionate and multi-faceted response. This paper points towards the absence of resilience from the counter-terrorism strategy and policies while stressing on building a linkage between desecuritization, resilience and counter-terrorism to address the diverse social and political drivers and implications of terrorism.

Introduction

Pakistan has been playing a critical role in combatting terrorism since 9/11, consequently, it has been among the worst-hit country by terrorism. Despite the improvements, Pakistan remains the most impacted country by terrorism in 2019 according to the Global Terrorism Index produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace. More than 70,000 citizens including 6,900 security personnel have perished due to terrorism and inflicting the loss of US\$123 billion to the state. Although the recent trends show a decline in terrorist incidents, however, many of the terrorist groups have regrouped and their support base remains intact. It is worth emphasizing that terrorism is a multi-systemic phenomenon. Terrorist movements, actors, and events are rooted within a deeply complex and highly networked co-existing system that interact at different levels to support and enable violent narratives, actions, and outcomes. They can pose significant challenges and threats to the function and viability of multiple nested and interconnected systems.

Terrorism, in Pakistan, has been linked with national security and eventually led to the securitization of terrorism. The threat from terrorism

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has been discussed in terms of its implications for national security, law and order and negative impact on infrastructure. The social aspect of terrorism has been focused rhetorically with lesser attention within counter-terrorism initiatives and even lesser in the narrative building. This has resulted in a more militaristic response within the counter-terrorism initiatives. This paper emphasizes the need for desecuritization as a basis of counter-terrorism initiatives, along with efforts to build resilience within society, since the authors believe that it is the social response and resilience that can counter-terrorism in long term. Moreover; the purpose of this research study is to broaden the horizon of counter-terrorism efforts while acknowledging the importance of kinetic measures.

Securitization of Terrorism

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies conceptualizes security as a process of the social construction of threats, which is comprised of the securitizing actor and an audience. The securitizing actor declares a particular issue as urgent and pose it as a threat to the survival of the referent object while the audience legitimizes the use of extraordinary measures for the neutralization of the threat. The theory of Securitization specifies the politics of securitization in which actors securitize an issue by presenting it as an existential threat and by dramatizing the issue as an absolute priority (Weaver, 1989). Hence, an issue is securitized when it is constructed into a threat. According to Weaver, “something is a security problem when elites declare it to be so” (Weaver, 1998) and in the same manner, that problem is securitized when it has been declared as a security problem and it is accepted as a problem by the audience.

Securitization is a process that involves certain determinants such as security, securitizing actor, referent object, specific audience and speech act (Adiong, 2009). After the incident of 9/11 and the United States-led War on Terrorism (WoT) in which Pakistan become the frontline ally of the US, the issue of terrorism has been prioritized as one of the most critical concerns. Hence; due to the international environment terrorism in Pakistan was presented as an existential threat. It was labelled it as a security issue which required, extraordinary measures to deal with it. However; how far the society in Pakistan has understood it as a threat is debatable. Nonetheless, terrorism was securitized in Pakistan.

Terrorists use violence to generate fear in the society to achieve their objectives; that is why counter-terrorism measures are more focused on the use of force. However; to understand the root cause of the phenomena, it is pertinent to assess the causes of antagonism in the mind of terrorists at the individual level. (Khan, 2005). Even if terrorism is to be dealt with in the realm of the national security problem, it has to be taken as a systemic security problem in which individuals, state and system all play their part. Hence; an integrated approach is required in which there is a need to address the economic, societal and environmental factors. These factors are

as important as political and military factors (Buzan, 1981) because they could establish the fault lines which serves as enabling factors and motivation to employ terrorism.

Towards a comprehensive counterterrorism approach in Pakistan

Pakistan has as discussed earlier, shown considerable achievement with respect to the decline in terrorist incidents over the last few years, however, the support for terrorist elements, their narrative and extremist ideology remains intact. The kinetic measures have achieved what was intended, that is reduction in violent incidents, it is high time that the non-kinetic measures are brought to the centre of the counter-terrorism approach. For a comprehensive approach towards counter-terrorism, resilience has to adopted as part of larger strategy. Resilience aids in short term prevention of immediate violence and long-term efforts to reduce underlying issues (Bourbeau and Vuori, 2015). Building resilience is a dynamic process for which an issue has to be desecuritized and considered a societal issue.

Desecurtizing Terrorism

The international environment and implications of the war on terrorism became the catalyst for securitization of terrorism. However, terrorism did not remain limited to law-and-order issues, it had spillover effects on the society, with serious implications in the ideational sphere. Terrorist elements, using religious and cultural narratives comprising of reductionist interpretations were soon able to muster support for their ideology and acts among people. The securitized terrorism did not facilitate government with the suitable response for social implications of terrorism, since it restricted decision making within a limited decision-making structure, excluding various social and political actors.

The securitization theory, itself insists that security “should be seen as negative, as a failure to deal with issues in terms of security” (Buzan, Waever and Widle, 1998, p. 32-33) and promoted desecuritization. To desecuritize terrorism, the focus should be on threat management through involving society and citizens in counter-terrorism, particularly by building and promoting resilience. Burton and Lain (2020) argue that natural disasters, climate change, biological, chemical and nuclear weapons also pose serious threat and disease such as Covid-19 has resulted in over a million deaths. However, these do not call for securitization of issues as threat perception or fear among the public was not created nor these issues were discussed in terms of security. This implies that framing of an issue is the key aspect. Terrorism, in Pakistan, has been securitized due to its framing as a security threat, which can be countered through military means and centralized command. Whereas, it needs to be stressed here that terrorism needs to be dealt with not only as a security issue but a larger social problem, requiring inclusive response by the state and society, hence desecuritization is important.

There is lesser debate in the literature on desecuritization and practically it is not easy to accomplish since the desecuritizing actors are likely to be the same who have securitized the issues. Nonetheless, Copenhagen school does talk about various processes that can be initiated for desecuritization. Ole Waever, (2000) points out that is important not to define issues in terms of security. In case an issue has already been securitized, as in the case of terrorism, it is important to avoid creating a security dilemma. In the case of terrorism, the focus has been on defensive measures, which largely meant military means. It is important for desecuritization that terrorism is taken as a societal and law-and-order issue, without being an existential threat. This can be done through policy initiatives and alteration in the official language, which avoids instilling threats and fear of terrorism among the public.

Another option of desecuritization is to take measures to move the issue back from security to normal politics, which naturally shifts the emphasis towards the role of the societal sector. (Burton and Lain, 2020). On one hand, policy initiatives are required to relegate decisions making from solely from the central governments and law enforcing agencies to local authorities and police. On the other hand, society and community-based initiatives must be introduced which focus on building an understanding of terrorism and resilience towards terrorism. The whole of Pakistan is not facing a similar form of threat from terrorism. Local authorities and police are more knowledgeable about local communities and can keep better intelligence of neighbourhoods and vulnerable groups. However, the availability of resources at the provincial and local levels remains an issue, along with a lack of competence and training.

Society Based Approach

The society-based approach has emerged as an alternative to strategic thinking dominated by national and military security. The unprecedented variety of threats, particularly emanating from non-military means have overshadowed the traditional military threats. The Copenhagen school in its approach towards security identified society as a major focus depicting collective identity and interests of people. Buzan stressed that international security now focused on “how human collectivities relate to each other in terms of threats and vulnerabilities” (Buzan, 1997). The state and societies had become interdependent now and their security was not separate or independent from each other. However, when a society-based approach is desired, desecuritization is necessary, since the framing of threat and threat perception will have to change. This is not to say the military means become irrelevant; however, military means should not lead in the name of narrowly defined national interest.

It is argued here that as the study of terrorism highlights that it has affected the social fabric of society, and is not only a law-and-order issue.

Traditional military means to counter-terrorism or securitizing terrorism as an imminent threat does not address the social and individual implications of terrorism and its ideology. Understanding terrorism involves analysis and understanding of how complex multilevel factors such as individual, family, community, national, and transnational interact with “multiple co-occurring systems, including psychological, educational, social, cultural, local, economic, legal, political, institutional, media, environmental, and global systems” (Grossman, 2021). This interaction leads to conditions that facilitate and legitimize the use of ideologically based instrumental violence. Consequently, efforts to counter terrorism have to develop an inclusive approach, taking society, individuals and state institutions together in tackling the issue.

Terrorism feeds on a matrix of social, political and economic networks, resources, and challenges that are used by terrorists in their recruitment and propaganda strategies. Hence, a multilevel strategy involving governments, communities, law enforcement, civil society, and the private sector has to be developed, based on a whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering terrorism at both individual and community levels. The whole-of-society approach moves well beyond the existing models, as it distances itself from the more securitized focus of law enforcement and intelligence agencies on detecting, disrupting, and pursuing terrorist actors and plots.

Understanding and Building Resilience towards Terrorism

Resilience not only as a character but also as a multilevel, multi-systemic process is particularly to be focused on for effective counter-terrorism. International policymaking has started focusing on resilience as a core feature of counter-terrorism and counter violent extremism strategies in particular over the last decade, so much so that resilience is now considered a “key ingredient to effectively manage terrorism”. We would, in this section, analyse the effectiveness of resilience as a strategy to counter terrorism in Pakistan’s context, by studying the meaning of resilience in reference to counter-terrorism, how is it interpreted for application as a strategy and by identifying measures to enhance resilience in society and state institutions.

The common use of the resilience concept relates to the ability of an entity, individuals, community, or system to return to normal condition after the occurrence of an event that disturbs its normal condition. Resilience in terms of counter-terrorism is used to study that how societies, communities, institutions and individuals should build and transform their counterterrorism efforts on a larger scale. (Walklate, McGarry, and Mythen, 2014) In academic terms, resilience has been used in other disciplines such as psychology and physics, while expanding in terms of usage in other disciplines with conceptual pluralism. (Jore, 2020) Within social sciences, resilience is taken in terms of “empowerment and social

capital” (Manyena, 2006) used to improve the impact of sudden unforeseen events such as crime, terrorism or some natural calamity on the communities, especially on the marginalized groups.

Incorporating resilience as a counter-terrorism approach and strategy implies a change in understanding of terrorism. It takes terrorism not only as a security issue, instead terrorism is considered in a broader perspective with society at the centre and countering terrorism would mean a broader social preparedness and response. However, within the literature on resilience as a strategy to counter-terrorism, there is diversity in understanding and application of resilience towards terrorism. It is important to look at different interpretations of terrorism resilience to understand the meanings attached to resilience for countering terrorism.

Some of the studies have used resilience to terrorism as the capability to comprehend, resist and manage the dangers. This may include identifying an event as a potential danger or terrorist act (including individuals’ inclination towards terrorist ideologies or groups) and having basic knowledge of how to respond. The response needs to comprise of prevention and resistance. This would require some media campaigns, involvement of educational institutions, community centres for creating awareness, along with some basic training for the target population and needs to be a “result of top-down and macro planning”. (Jore, 2020)

Another interpretation of resilience to terrorism is to have the capacity to absorb the shock and transform to function either as before the crisis or in a superior manner. This understanding of resilience is not only focusing on terrorism prevention but more on improved response in case of a terrorist event. The third type of explanation associates resilience in terms of an organized process of management and talks about the organizational and infrastructure preparedness towards terrorism. This is not limited to governmental institutions but the community and civil society as well. Such resilience would conceptualize terrorism as a manageable and expectable phenomenon (Ericson, 2006), which can be countered, prevented and responded to by organizational readiness and taking measures for infrastructure protection.

Some studies take terrorism resilience as not only the capability to bounce back from a terrorist attack but also to bounce forwards. (Aldrich, 2012). This can be achieved through individual and community training programs. Some of the literature takes terrorism resilience as an individual and community’s ability to refrain from extreme ideas. The main idea is to focus on the social factors that may contribute to or prevent terrorism, in the realm of ideas in particular. (Lucini, 2017, p. 91-102). This also includes support for vulnerable individuals who are more likely to be influenced by radicalized ideas or joining the terrorist network. Hence, Terrorism resilience may imply different perspectives but the basic understanding remains acceptance of threat and focus on possible

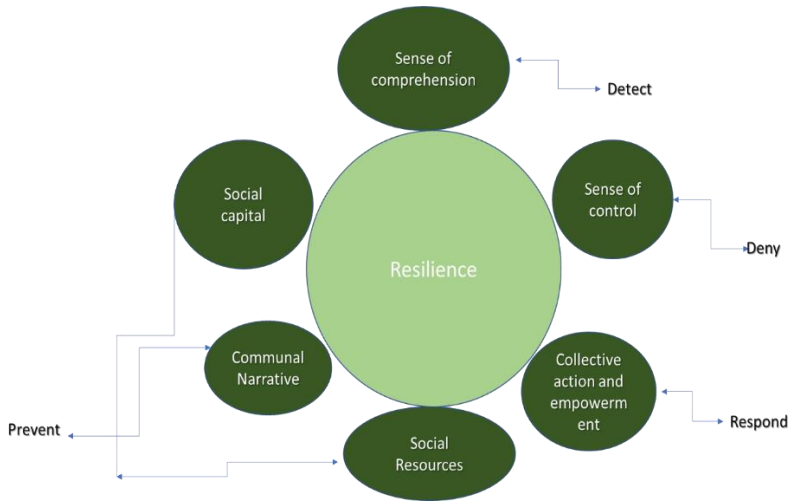
prevention and countermeasures to reduce the impact on communities, individuals and organizational levels.

Measures to build resilience

Building resilience requires focusing on factors at both, individual and community levels. However, it does not require fundamental changes in counter-terrorism strategy or additional kinetic measures, rather it advocates for alteration within the existing structures (Chandler and Reid, 2016) with a focus on overall social empowerment and greater self-reliance. It alters the traditional counterterrorism concept with a focus on people and society. It stresses the local response to terrorism, which can be based in communities, organizations or cities. Although terrorism resilience is a relatively new perspective and requires further research, some measures can be taken to create and enhance resilience within communities and individuals towards terrorism.

Some of the measures that may enhance resilience among communities and individuals, can be divided between pre-crisis action and during crisis actions since once a terrorist event takes place planning response afterwards might not accomplish much. Another categorization can be based on the distribution of responsibilities among the public and government, which may require an interlinked but different level of response and preparedness. (Pollack and Wood, 2010). First among the important measures to build terrorism resilience is training and exercise programs for both public and government organizations. These training programs must focus on the government's communication skills towards the public, particularly during crises. Training and exercise programs for creating public preparedness must include crisis response and first aid which can be provided at school and community levels. Voluntary opportunities for specialized forms of training could be created for persons willing and able to serve in "reserve" roles such as in fire-fighting, search and rescue. (Pollack and Wood, 2010)

Government communication skills are important to coordinate and convey the message of strong leadership at the time of crisis. Media and institutions should be involved to convey the government resolve and message to the public. Additionally, publicity of public participation in training programs should also be focused on as it may not only boost morale but also help to provide otherwise uninvolved members of the public with a sense of control over events. These efforts can be reinforced by adopting a long term policy of education-based initiatives. An education-based model for building resilience to terrorism and extremist ideologies that draw on the curriculum materials and community engagement is a prerequisite for creating awareness and crisis response among the youth. The diagram below describes the process and measures for resilience building:



All of these strategies identify building both individual and community resilience as a critical conceptual and practical element in counter-terrorism, along with basic crisis response training for the government organizations. Building communal narratives and sense of comprehension through media and education-based approach, promoting a sense of control, collective action and empowerment through training and exercises; and investing in social capital and resources through community and society-based initiatives can help in detecting, preventing, denying and responding to terrorist elements and incidents. However, all of these measures and adopting resilience as a response to terrorism would imply that counter-terrorism is not limited to the security domain and is desecuritized, along with a focus on a society-based approach for countering and preventing terrorism.

Conclusion

As discussed earlier, Pakistan has improved in terms of decline in terrorist incidents, which can be attributed to the military operations and kinetic measures taken. However, these do not signify lesser support for terrorism or terrorists in Pakistan, since support pockets still exist. The whole of society approach must be adopted with resilience-building as the key strategy to counter terrorism if a long-term solution is to be achieved. There is a need to shift from securitized approaches nourished by “risk society” assumptions targeting entire communities as suspect to a society-based approach. Focus on role of communities in preventing, resisting, or recovering from the influence or impact of terrorists’ ideologies, has to be emphasized.

Societal approach must also include capacity building of government institutions and law enforcement agencies, especially police and rescue services, alongside focus on communities. For any community-based

approach trust is considered a significant factor. It is important to explore that how much or how little communities have trust in government. Also, the reverse question is important, whether and how much or how little governments trust communities. It would mean taking a whole of society approach, where all segments of society including government and its institutions have an equally important role to play based on reciprocal trust. (Grossman, 2021) The training and exercise programs along with media and education-based initiatives must include trust-building initiatives among government and society.

The study of resilience to terrorism and violent extremism needs to move beyond the idea of a specific concept of adversity. Multiple, co-occurring adversities need to be understood and addressed if the complex nature of building resilience to terrorism is to advance both conceptually and empirically. A strong focus on identifying and building the resilience of individuals and communities should not be at the expense of skill and resilience building within governmental systems and organizations involved in countering terrorism. A comprehensive approach to terrorism while desecuritizing would not disregard the importance of kinetic measure, rather would take along government organizations including law enforcement agencies, in its whole of society approach towards counter-terrorism with resilience building a key strategy.

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