

Terrorism: Major threat to Pakistan's National Security

Abstract

In the new literature on national security, internal factors are equally and sometimes more important than the traditional factors. The state of Pakistan at the moment has a stronger challenge to its security from the internal factors as compared to external. Pakistan faces multi forms of terrorism, no other country in the world is entangled in this problem as the Pakistan of today. Ethnic terrorism which led to the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 resurfaced again on the question of linguistic differences in the some parts of the country but has been brought under control with the mainstreaming of ethnic political parties. Nationalist terrorism has mainly been witnessed in province of Balochistan at regular intervals and mainly revolves around the issues of exploitation of resources and threat to the political identity and culture of minorities sub-nationalities. Sectarianism in Pakistan was an extended version of rivalries between Northern Alliance and certain Sunni factions in Afghanistan and an aftermath of Iran & Iraq war, Jehadi terrorism which emerged in the post 9/11 scenario is by far the most serious threat to Pakistan so far because of its role as the front line state in war against terrorism. The tension between ultra conservative and moderate followers of Islam is mounting and weakening the state structure. It is beyond the capacity of a single person or a one time effort to eradicate the deep rooted problem from the society. An institutional mechanism with wide ranging participation on regular and permanent basis is the only way to fight this menace.

No doubt for centuries national security has been the basic and paramount concern of the nation states. While achieving enduring security has remained to be the most cherishable reward for states, over the years the concept of security has developed and considerably changed. Since its inception, Pakistan has been facing the challenge of national security. Traditionally, the threat to Pakistan's security has been external. However, today it can be arguably asserted that the major threat to national security in Pakistan emanates more from internal sources rather than external. The most serious threat facing Pakistan at the moment is

posed by terrorism and the focus of our national efforts to ensure lasting security should be addressed to these internal factors.

Pakistan is facing the menace of terrorism in multiple forms. Pakistan at present is facing the most unique, difficult and gruesome faces of terrorism. No other country in the world is so deeply entangled in this problem as the Pakistan of today. All text book categories of terrorism confront Pakistan.

Pakistan had the first taste of ethnicity in the very early period of its being when the whole eastern wing agitated on the question of one national language – Urdu. The discontent established itself into a political movement and led ultimately to the unfortunate events of 1971 resulting in dismemberment of the state. The political struggle organized on ethnic lines gave a harrowing display of ethnic terrorism when militant organization like Mukti Bahni started eliminating West Pakistanis and specially the Punjabis. In the recent history of ‘New’ Pakistan, ethnicity emerged again in the wake of language riots. This time in the province of Sindh where Urdu speaking urbanites of Karachi and Hyderabad clashed with native Sindhis. The quest of Mohajirs – migrants in the wake of partition – for a parallel political identity as the fifth sub nationality along with the native Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtuns and Balochs lead to large scale bloodshed and terrorist activities. The ethnic terrorism took hold of major urban cities for nearly a decade in late 80s and 90s but it has subsided for the time being partly due to rejuvenated economic activity and mainstreaming of the ethnic groups but mostly due to political stability giving enough economic and political space to the major players.

Sub nationalists who like to call themselves nationalists have been fighting for a proper identity and recognition within the federation. Their main fears and apprehensions emanate from the pre-dominant role of Punjab in military and civil bureaucracy. They are frustrated by the prospects of facing permanently the majority of one province. They feel threatened about their value system,

traditions and culture. They also agitate against the use of their resources by other regions at cheaper costs. The poverty around them frustrates them and the advantaged amongst them successfully point their fingers to the other provinces to turn their gaze that way. The centre and its power corridor on the other hand take this insistence on rights as a kind of revolt against the centre and the rejection of federation. These strained relations have led the extremists amongst the nationalists/sub nationalists to take up arms against the centre quite regularly and sometimes against the state itself. The sub nationalist terrorism has been emerging intermittently since military operations in Pakistan in 1960s. Governments of the day have been pointing at the external backing of both these types of terrorism. Pakistan on the whole has done fairly well to withstand the ethnic and sub nationalist terrorism even when fanned by external hands and the state structures have been able to work regularly and formally even in the face of these threats.

Another major form of terrorist threat facing Pakistan emanates from the sectarian terrorism. Since long, Pakistan has been a victim of the violence by sectarian motives, the recent years have witnessed a high rise in both the frequency and lethality of the sectarian violence. "Domestic terrorism in Pakistan, much of it associated with Islamist sectarianism, has become an increasingly serious problem affecting major Pakistan's cities".¹

Sectarian terrorism in Pakistan has been an offshoot of some historical and some regional rivalries. There are four different schools of thought in Muslims of Pakistan i.e. Barelvi, Deobandi, Ahle Hadith and Shias. The first three are commonly grouped as Sunni but their thinking and its expressions are wide apart. The difference between Sunni and Shia thinking and intra Sunni faction have been historical but they have generally co-existed peacefully. The prolonged Iraq-Iran war and then post Afghan Jihad rivalries between Northern Alliance, pre-dominantly Shia and orthodox Sunni backed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, had adverse impact on sectarian harmony in Pakistan.

The main source of recruitment for Jihad in Afghanistan had been Deo Bund and Ahle Hadith madrasas which got undue patronage from Zia govt. and finances from Saudi Arabia and some international agencies. These two groups aligned themselves with anti Shia forces in Afghanistan in late 1980s, and all along in 1990s. The battle in Afghanistan raged in the towns of Pakistan as well when there was pointless and ruthless killings of Shia's and then by Shias in large number. The country virtually had a blood bath on this account during the period 1985-1990.

Sectarian terrorism has affected all parts of the country in varying degrees at different points in time. The northern areas and southern Punjab were the worst sufferers with sporadic strikes in major urban centres as well. The decade of 1990s has been the worst on this account. It did pose a serious threat to the internal security of the country but it has lost its sting due to two major reasons; one the people of Pakistan refused to get divided on sectarian lines and the fissure remained restricted to the fanatics and the extremists with the vast majority remaining detached, unsympathetic and rather antagonist to this approach. Secondly, the emergence of a far grave phenomenon of Jehadi terrorism overshadowed rather watering down the sectarian terrorism.

Taking it as a national security concern the government of Pakistan need to overcome and address the genuine grievances of these sectarian groups. The groups involved in terrorist activities should be banned by the government, other groups to be brought into dialogue with government.²

It is the emergence of Jehadi terrorism, which is posing a real threat to the national security of Pakistan. The epicenter of Jehadi terrorism is Afghanistan. Initially, it was directed towards infidles and occupation forces but gradually it had to turn towards Pakistan, because of its alliance with the West in the War on Terrorism. The Jihad of 1980s, against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan

degenerated first into fighting on ethnic lines and ethnic terrorism and then to sectarian terrorism with the arrival of Taliban on the scene. The Taliban took upon themselves the so called divine duty of enforcing Islamic order with the force of arms. Their narrow, myopic and ultra orthodox view of Islam is a force of regression and decadence. When the resistance moment against American occupation of Afghanistan started engulfing Pakistan also, the perpetrators of Jehadi terrorism were out to chastise the Muslims of Pakistan. The march of Jehadi terrorism towards Pakistan has refueled the sectarian terrorism as well and we have been witnessing the most lethal combination of these two evil forces. "The scene in Pakistan resembled a jungle in which every one was fighting at times everyone else. The terrorists were making money by drug trafficking and gun running, so they were heavily armed. Their operations endangered the very existence of the state, and no one put an estimate even remotely how many people were killed in this fighting".³

Military means cannot be the only solution to eradicate terrorism as causes of terrorism can be social, political and economic. The roots of Jehadi terrorism can also be found in social, economic and political factors. Looking at the present economic, social and political conditions in Pakistan it is inconceivable that there are going to be no Jehadi elements in the country.⁴

The Jehadi terrorism and its combination is threatening the national security of Pakistan on both the external and internal fronts. 'The acquisition of nuclear war heads by India and Pakistan threatened to make their resolved conflict over Kashmir go ballistic'.⁵ On the external front the vital freedom movement in Kashmir has been undermined. Though the freedom movement in Kashmir is essentially different from the Jehadi terrorism as it is against the occupation forces of India and not to enforce a particular doctrine, but Indians have got a golden chance to malign it by drawing analogies with the Jehadi terrorism. Resultantly forcing Pakistan to be more flexible than it is due on the issue of Kashmir.

Today the most challenging issue emanates from the Islamic militancy. Pakistan has become a hot bed of various militant organizations, resorting to violence in the name of religion. Since the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union, the militant Islamic organizations have flourished and have been supported by the governments in Pakistan. Therefore their growth was not controlled.

One of the most major damages of the 1980s United States – Afghan War was the support provided to anti modern, extremist and intolerant forces of this region. To defeat the Soviet, the US and Pakistan government provided official support to militant and fundamentalist Islamic groups, which eventually led to religious extremism and sectarianism. This religious radicalism spread out in the other parts of the world also. Those forces became influential which rejected tolerance and secularism.⁶

With the changed regional and global environment, Pakistan drastically needs to change its approach towards the militant organizations. ‘Sponsoring terrorism is like riding a tiger. Pakistan has to pay a heavy price for its support for Taliban. Even though Musharraf demonstrated wisdom by supporting US war on Terror against Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan, the country continues to be caught in a very complex web of terrorist activity, with greater radicalization of extremists groups’.⁷

The bases of this militant challenge operates in the Tribal areas of west of Pakistan and North West Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). These areas mostly comprise of the Pushtuns and ethnic groups which are conservative, have close religious and tribal links with Pushtoon in Afghanistan and anti western.⁸ ‘The Pushtun tribal areas have long been a heaven for displaced Afghans and refugees’.⁹ The hilly and difficult terrain of this region has turned out to be a heaven for militant organizations both foreign and

national. The foreign militants over here mainly are Uzbek, Chechens and Pushtun Afghanis.

After 9/11 incident and also when Pakistan Govt. realized the gravity of the threat posed by the uncontrolled militant elements, the govt. decided to establish the writ of the state in these areas. Pakistan military initiated operations against these forces and had to face stiff resistance. Wana operation which was started by the military became very controversial and has brought about heavy losses to the government forces and has also resulted in heavy criticism of the government.

In Pakistan, minority and separatist movements are common. In the south west of Pakistan is the province of Balochistan which is mostly a tribal area, over there, intermittent gorilla war has been a feature since last two decades.¹⁰ This is another major form of terrorist threat to Pakistan which is of the separatist nature. The largest but the most underdeveloped area of Balochistan currently is the centre of this threat. It is the ethno-nationalist conflict between the government and the separatists for long that these separatists comprising of tribal militants have been indulged in violent acts for more political and economic authority in Balochistan. In Balochistan the various insurgents have adopted various violent tactics to sabotage the system. This problem if not resolved in time has the potential to challenge the national integrity of the state.

Another new form of terrorism which has started to challenge the state is the takeover by the students, of religious seminaries in the capital city Islamabad of a children's library. The students and administration of madrasa lately took over law in their hands abducting women, police men and Chinese nationals on various charges thus creating state within the state. This brought great embarrassment to the government at both national and international level.

President Musharraf has on a number of occasions reiterated that serious efforts are required to 'combat this modern day evil, which threatens to destabilize our societies'.¹¹ Unlike terrorist groups in other countries, the groups in Pakistan involved in terrorist activities and violence are also active in political arena in Pakistan.¹²

Internally, the latest ultra orthodox combine preaches a distorted, tribalistic, ritualistic and dark version of Islam with no light of tolerance, peaceful co-existence, human rights and finer things of life. This deadly combine seeks to impose their version with the use of arms. The most dangerous part is that they can allure the law, befool the young, hoodwink the questioner, and over the skeptic in the garb of divine authority. They are against every institution and manifesto of modern age. Their special focus and victims are the women. They want them to be frightened within home: good only for domestic chores and child rearing. They are moving forward as they see a real chance of seizing power in this country and with their march the whole process of development, all institutions of the country, the way of life, religious beliefs and the state structure are under threat, forcing us to think what else constitutes the national security.

End Notes

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[5/28/2007](#)