



Department of International Relations
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**PAKISTAN'S RESPONSES TO TERRORISM:
NEED FOR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

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FIRST WORKING SESSION

Understanding the Terrorist Threat: Defining Terrorism in Pakistani Context

Ishtiaq Ahmad

Although terrorism has been the main problem and its victims have been common Pakistanis in recent years, it remains a very controversial issue in the country. Unlike Pakistan, societies elsewhere were quick to evolve near-consensus regarding the enormity of the threat terrorism poses and the steps the government should take to combat it effectively. However, it is only recently that in Pakistan the perceptual gap about the threat of terrorism and counter-terrorism strategy between the state and society has started to narrow down. It is true that terrorism is one form of politically-motivated violence; it is such an emotive and sensitive issue that attempts to define it would raise controversies the world over. It may not be possible to achieve complete consensus across the world regarding the threat terrorism poses and the ways to combat it. Therefore, Pakistan should not be treated as an exception in this regard. Yet in Pakistan's case, the situation has been more worrisome at least until recently when the gap between state policy and public perceptions regarding terrorism was dangerously wide. Indubitably there is a historical context that why such gap existed for so long in Pakistan and why an unprecedented terrorist spree continues to occur across the country since the last few years.

The national controversy that persisted since independence about the founding ideals of Pakistan; the qualitative shift in the country's religious elite from pacifism to militarism since the 1970s, especially in the backdrop of Afghan Jihad; Zia's Islamization drive and Pakistan support to jihad in Kashmir and Taliban regime can be cited as major factors for underpinning societal attitudes to terrorism in the country marked by noticeable sympathy for Taliban. In fact, the obvious tilt of public opinion against Taliban is only a year-old phenomenon and it occurred not because the state or government made a

conscious bid to rally the people around on its War on Terror policy but because Taliban crossed all limits in imposing their extremist will on the people and exercising their terrorist agenda in the country.

As for the widely-held perception that Pakistan's polices have been relatively more tolerant of terrorism or terrorists—the issue under this session seeks to explore—it has to be seen within historical context, which has created such a perception in the minds of people in the first place and led to grave national confusion about what terrorism is, how serious a threat it poses to Pakistani state and society, what are its internal and external manifestations and sources, and what terrorist motivations are, so on and so forth. When there has long been a sheer absence or lack of clarity on these basic questions in a society, how can we expect a consensual definition and understanding of terrorism in a short span of time? Even if we presume that the majority opinion has effectively turned against the Taliban, and even if there now exists extensive global scholarship on the definitional issue of terrorism, there may never be a consensus on defining terrorism. Albeit at least some near consensus does exist today among scholars on the main features of the definition of terrorism. Terrorism is considered as largely politically motivated violence. It is a deliberate and organized activity whose immediate aim is to instill fear among people and it targets unarmed civilians. It is terrorism's psychological effect that makes it different from other politically-motivated acts of violence; namely, war and guerrilla warfare. Apart from the fact that terrorism is mainly aimed at civilians, the dispute is regarding the perpetrators—with the state preferring only the inclusion of non-state actors. However, since in the existing international state structure only the state has the right to use force, it is but natural that the label of terrorism is assigned to non-state actors alone.

In Pakistan's case, despite entailing all the above elements, the issue of terrorism has some inherent complexities. The main problem arises from the question which is often asked: Is the country fighting its own or someone else's war? The essential backdrop to this again pertains to the circumstances surrounding Pakistan's U-turn regarding Taliban

after 9/11 and its decision to join the US-led War on Terror in Afghanistan and the region. Then there is a related problem of state waging a war against the very non-state actors with which it has had a strategic link in the past. Of course, the dilemma faced by Pakistan is no different than faced by the United States and the rest of the international community, which waged the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. In Pakistan's case, however, such link allegedly transcends the period of Afghan jihad with consequent manifestation in the 1990s uprising in Kashmir and the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan and its more recent reflections visible in the country's alleged soft outlook on Afghan and Kashmir-specific insurgent groups.

In chalking out a definition of terrorism, we must keep in mind its deliberate and organized nature, largely political motivation behind its employment, the potential to cause huge human and material loss and instil widespread fear and, above all, the fact that its perpetrators are primarily non-state actors. This is at a time when the society has by and large witnessed the horrors of terrorism. Yet the disagreements regarding whose war the country is fighting and over yesterday's allies becoming today's enemies continue to affect people's perceptions. These perceptual disagreements have prevented the society to achieve the same level of clarity on terrorism as a menace, with no legal and moral justification, as has been realized in other terrorism-stricken Muslim countries like Indonesia. However, a promising development has taken place in Pakistan in the last one year or so, in fact, simultaneously with monumental surge in the terrorist activities and the consequent shift in the public opinion. This development is the issuance of edicts by several leading *ulema* declaring terrorism as un-Islamic. Before that, the killing of unarmed civilians, such as those of Israelis by Palestinian suicide attacks, was popularly considered as morally justifiable. This was contrary to mainstream perspectives on terrorism, which argue that there is no moral or legal justification for killing unarmed civilians. According to this perspective on terrorism, largely adhered to by the international public opinion now, the pretext that some conflicts remain unresolved does not give an individual or a group the right to kill any civilians in response to some specific policies practiced by the respective states.

However, still, we cannot say for sure that the confusion which has recently characterized societal attitude towards terrorism in Pakistan has given way to a new understanding of the phenomenon where terrorism is not defended on moral or legal grounds by the majority of public opinion. Perhaps the same is the case with some other controversial issues related to terrorism. For instance, the popular notion that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Since this notion basically confuses the goal of freedom with the means of terrorism. The fact is that terrorism is an activity rather than a goal. Likewise, non-state terrorism cannot be justified as merely responding to state terrorism. Since in most instances of current terrorist activities the initiative has been largely in the hands of terrorist organizations and the states are mostly responding to it. In Pakistan's case as well, the security operations in Swat and South Waziristan occurred when Taliban pursuing their extremist ambitions and terrorist agenda left no option for the state but to launch a decisive military operation against them.

DISCUSSION

Dr Naeem Ahmed (University of Karachi)

Dr. Ahmad has raised some points from Pakistani context that deliberate upon political violence, political motivation, and also material and human loss. One also needs to distinguish between the movements which are recognized by the UN for the right of self determination and those which are not. The liberation movements in Kashmir and Palestine may not be declared as terrorist movements in particular reference to UN resolutions. So, we need to distinguish between these two kinds of movements.

Aimal Khattak (Sustainable Development Policy Institute)

We usually talk about perceived threats and real threats, but I want to add another dimension to it, which is the manipulated or engineered threats. Since 9/11 we note that some states have manipulated some threats, which, unfortunately, have been converted into real threats. Understanding the Pakistani phenomenon, there are supposed non-state

actors which in reality are either sponsored by the State or at least it is tolerant of them. They are free to carry out terrorist activity in Pakistan. The perception that now the Pakistani state has turned against these non-state terrorist actors which it created is not true. The truth is that the State is still engaged with these non-state actors, but the difference now is that the government has adopted a selective approach—that of good Taliban and bad Taliban—and then there are references to Malakand, Bajawar, and Waziristan operations. But one cannot trust the seriousness of these as hard core militants, the masterminds, main leaders—those who are the trainers and those who have indoctrinated ordinary Swatis and Wazirs and Mehsuds—were not arrested or eliminated.

Dr. Khadim Hussain (Bahria University)

While explaining terrorism in the Pakistani context, we look at three basic issues technically. Whether you are talking about terrorism. Whether you are talking about insurgency. Or, whether you are talking about Talibanization. The complexity comes from the fact that the security threats are posed to the rest of the world and states of the region. If we look at the problem in the context of Pakistan we see that a conscious approach has been adopted to construct a mindset through education, through media and through policy statements and policy perpetuation, which has resulted in privatized and institutionalized violence and its use for political purposes by the State.

This means that this process of Talibanization is not a temporary or transitory act. In fact, it has substantially influenced and transformed the whole society by emulating a particular culture and a particular social institution. To understand this process, we must look into the whole historical development of Pakistan. This means that the policy adopted by the state of Pakistan all along is a permanent feature, which needs to be taken up on a very fundamental level—by the constitution of Pakistan, by the security establishment of Pakistan and by all those who decide with respect to all the issues relating to the support to non-state terrorist actors within as well as in states of the region. By which I mean we have adopted a mindset which is permanent and on the other hand,

have this worldview of engineered and manipulated threats from the states in the region to the east and the west.

Dr. Said Alam Masood (Peace Activist)

Dr Ahmad says the whole of Pakistan is a victim. But I differ a bit. Pakistan no doubt is a victim but prime victim is the Pashtun. This policy is leading to the elimination of Pashtuns, with the survivor being Arabized. He mentioned that terrorism started in Afghanistan war. But we should also mention that it started with our “strategic depth” policy. Terrorism going on in the country is basically a culmination of Mullah-Military alliance, which gave birth to a child called terrorist. Al-Qaeda, Afghan Taliban, Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba—all are terrorists. We should not exclude few organizations. This policy of “pick and choose” shows us a clear contradiction. We see that operations occur in some areas and against some terrorists, but not others, and there are no operations in Punjab. As for the operation in South Waziristan, if we call it an operation, we will be betraying the whole world and our conscience.

Dr. Sarfaraz Khan (Director Area Study Centre, Peshawar University)

In Pakistan, we carry multiple identities—in terms of ethnic identities, in terms of provincial administrative identities and in terms of ideological identities: Bareilvi Muslims, Deobandi Muslims, Wahhabi Muslims etc. Again, Pakistani state policies and Pakistani societal perceptions are different too. The struggle between civilians trying to control the state and those in uniform denying civilians the right to rule the state—this division has to be taken into consideration too, if we are trying to trace the Pakistani context of terrorism. And, certainly, these identities which we have are affecting our understating of terrorism and our response to terrorism too.

In my view, one particular group is more of a victim to terrorism than others, and I am referring to Pashtuns as an ethnic group and a democratic secular political force. One brand of people, with certain policies and having a sort of appearance, is less vulnerable to terrorism. There are certain political parties, when they come out on the roads for

processions, there are no bomb blasts but when others come out there are. So, it is a political divide too that must be added to the understanding of terrorism. To bridge this gap, probably the most appropriate place where this debate should take place is our national Parliament, where still a lot of confusion and power-play is happening. Over the years, various Pakistani regimes have come up with anti-terrorists laws. If we collect all of them and try to find what actually our various regimes mean by terrorism, we can conclude simply that the definition of terrorism according to Pakistani context is very complex, because it is a very divided society.

Ayaz Wazir (former ambassador)

How are we, the people of FATA, treated within our country? If you are given an identity card of Waziristan, you will not get admission in any place, you don't get your passport and at different places you receive discriminatory treatment. It started with me eight years back, my house was burnt and an attempt on my life was made by my own people. Many tribal elders were killed and nobody said a word. But when terrorism reached Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, only then the need for understanding it was felt. I personally feel that the trouble of FATA can be addressed to a greater extent if we look into the difficulty faced by the people there. Primarily, Frontier Crimes Regulations, which was imposed by British in 1909, is still the law. The state policy that promises change only when peace has been achieved is flawed, as the problem in FATA is essentially due to denial of change and lack of any developmental activities and opportunities. It must be understood that peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan is inseparable. The policy of distinguishing between terrorism on both sides must be given up.

Brig (retd) Saad Muhammad (former Military Attache, Pakistan Embassy, Kabul)

We like to blame others, especially external intelligence agencies for de-stabilizing Pakistan. I think the problem lies within. Terror in Pakistan is built on a violent brand of religion, creed, and by the state. We lack governance; we have corrupt rulers of civil and military; including the judiciary. We have illogical security doctrine which lacks public support. Therefore, the conflict between the society and the state occurs.

If we look at our previous track-record, both the government at the center as well as the provinces did not act to address the rising insurgency problems in FATA, Dir, Swat, and Bunir—problems which could be sorted out by police action or, at best, using paramilitary forces. But, due to our delay, the problems have become so huge that massive military operations had to be launched to restore the writ of the government. The remaining pockets of terrorism had to be eliminated with force. The government needs to create an environment in which the political process can take place. We as a state are soft for terrorism; it is because the state is using non-state actors, who use terror as an instrument of policy. We have a very soft visa regime in which anyone can obtain Pakistani visa, travel here, live here. Most of the terrorists live here illegally and we, as a state and a people, tolerate them. Our police and judicial procedures are apparently terror-friendly. While innocent people are given death sentences; people for minor crimes are put behind bars for 20 to 25 years. Most of the terrorists are granted bail on the first appearance to the court.

Lt Gen (retd) Asad Durrani (former DG, Inter Services Intelligence)

In his introduction, Dr. Ishtiaq talked about confusion, which is likely to continue. The definition is absolutely right, as pointed out: targeting non-combatants to achieve political objectives. However, when you look at this definition a little more deeply, then the U.S will emerge as the biggest terrorist. Not only in Hiroshima and Nagasaki or with reference to some operations in Afghanistan, a classic illustration of terrorism can be made. If this is what terrorism is, then it is a technique of fighting war. Even the states use it among themselves. The non-state actors have no other way but to target non-combatants because the combatants are well-protected.

Muhammad Zubair (University of Peshawar)

To understand the phenomena of terrorism in Pakistani context, the perception in the settled areas of Pakistan is that there is a shift in the policy of the state of Pakistan towards these terrorists group. But if you happen to belong to tribal areas, you will see

this shift in public perception has not taken place. Most people of tribal areas still think that the state is sponsoring and patronizing terrorist organizations. If you are not attacking the government of Pakistan, you are a good Taliban; if you are, then you are a bad Taliban. And if a good Taliban turns bad (acts against the will of the government), then a new Taliban group is created to counter it. The current example of this unfortunate reality is that of the Abdullah Group, which is being sponsored to counter Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. These extremist groups have their jails, justice systems and their own revenue collection mechanisms. And I have never seen any news in the media about the Abdullah Group. I believe as long as Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan and Kashmir doesn't change, I don't expect that official support of Taliban will ever end. There may be some change in the public perception about terrorism, but to say that the State is no more patronizing terrorists is not true.

Salma Malik (Quaid-e-Azam University)

What I think is that we don't really have a clear policy on terrorism. Here I am not distinguishing between civilian and military regimes. Even though the present civilian government has a democratic mandate, its actual performance is no different from the military-led regime of General Musharraf. If we look at previous civilian governments' performance on the issue, they also supported militants and used them. There are two questions to consider: first, how can we be sure about the type of policy a government follows and, second, what are the long-term implications of our counter-terrorism policy?