

## PAKISTAN'S COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CVE) OVERTURES – AN UNFINISHED TASK!

Dr. Shabana Fayyaz\*

### **Abstract**

*Violent Extremism has a history to itself and has caused inhuman manifestations – Genocide, Mass Killings, and Live deaths across the world. In the present age of digital connectivity and its manipulation, illicit money flow, fungible borders, misuse of religion, racial identity, and ethnic groundings have all contributed to the furthering of Violent Extremism at the national, regional and global levels. Force-based counter-terrorism response mechanisms serve as one of the critical mediums for restoring the nation-state's sovereignty and territorial integrity and also led to the international coalition of forces, WOT (War on Terror), following the 9/11 WTC Attacks in the United States. Parallel to this, CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) implies the conception, policy formulation and implementation through the non-kinetic steps. Ideally, this task requires a healthy partnership between the state and society, which remains an ongoing effort for most states. Pakistan is also faced with multi-faceted and multi-layered Violent Extremism (VE) trends that question its basis of formation and necessitate a proactive and holistic CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) policy. This research study deliberates upon the responsive mechanism of the state versus violent extremism and highlights the gaps and challenges. In doing so, 'Spectrum Matrix – P<sub>3</sub> (Perception, Policy and Practice)' is proposed and employed as a methodological lens to analyse Pakistan's CVE (counter violent extremism) enterprise. The central argument is that Islamabad CVE is a work in progress, and across the board, 'state-society' ownership remains an uphill task. The paper dwells upon the inter-connected parts focusing upon one part of P<sub>3</sub> – Spectrum Matrix: P<sub>1</sub> – Perception and Conceptualization of Violent extremism; P<sub>2</sub> – Policy following the Understanding the Ecosystem of the VE, and; P<sub>3</sub> – Practice and analysis of the counter-violent extremism (CVE) 'perception and response' from the Islamabad end. The final takeaway of this research endeavour is Islamabad's strive to have a comprehensive counter-violent extremism (CVE) posture, which remains an open-ended pursuit. An inclusive and proactive CVE policy based on a 'deliberation-designed-delivered mechanism' – a final product of a trust-based 'State – Society'*

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*equation is the only way to ensure sustainable peace and prosperity within and beyond Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Violent Extremism, CVE (Counter Violent Extremism), Mechanism, Pakistan.

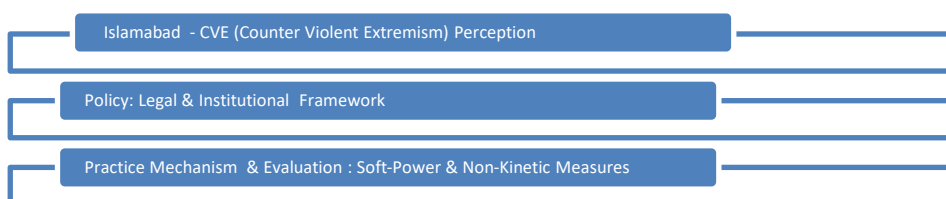
## Introduction

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the rise in violent extremism by reportedly nine-fold.<sup>1</sup> Pakistan is one of the five countries that accounted for 72% of the deaths in 2015. Yet it is pertinent to highlight that, even though countries like Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, etc. are at the highlight when it comes to violent extremism, the “developed world” too is facing this challenge, which mostly goes unnoticed. One example to justify it is the rise of white extremism, xenophobia and racism. The point is that violent extremism has hit the world on the spot regardless of religion, race or citizenship. Over the last three decades, terminology of radicalisation, extremism and terrorism has shaped world politics. Similarly, to mitigate the impacts and effects of terrorism and violent extremism, the concept of counter-violent extremism played a vital role in policies and international relations. The Global war on terror in post 9/11 attacks introduced hard power to the world by over-militarising Afghanistan. The United States, plus several other significant states, preferred opting for the complex power to curtail and contain terrorism and violent extremism trends. Within a decade or so, security thinkers and practitioners in the West and beyond concluded that hard power is not the solution; instead, it is essential to counter the radical mindset, which hard power cannot do alone. CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) is a soft approach to counter-terrorism. Countries worldwide have developed their own CVE approaches based on countering the violence either through hard power, soft power or amalgamation of both. The critical point is that no one model solely explains the perception of Violent Extremism, its contextual imperatives and the policy response on the part of the state (here, Pakistan). The CVE policies in Pakistan cannot be understood without understanding a complex gamut of the historical, religious, economic, political and ideological issues that have shaped a militant mind frame – A complex problem requires a Clear and Collaborative Policy (CVE), an uphill task!

Pakistan played a crucial role in the War on Terror (WOT)<sup>2</sup> for one reason or another, and, being the neighbouring country to Afghanistan, faced repercussions in the form of furthering radicalisation and polarisation tendencies,

often leading to violence against fellow citizens and beyond.<sup>3</sup> Following force-based exemplary high-risk military and intelligence-based operations (IBOs), terrorism was reduced to the maximum a couple of years back. However, soft-power policy approach and practice in the form of ‘rehabilitation, de-radicalization and counter-violent extremism’ remains an unfulfilled objective to date. To dwell more deeply into the complex web of the threat of Violent Extremism and the CVE policy from the state end, the following methodological prism is proposed:

### **Spectrum Analysis termed as P<sub>3</sub>: Perception; Policy; Practice - CVE Policy – Pakistan**



Following the above-tabulated research analysis mode, a need to envision, prepare and pursue proactive CVE policies specific to the contextual realities (ecosystem) of the target areas and groups - the religious, cultural, ethnic and geo-political – is stressed. The CVE policymaking calls for long-term generational thought processes and practices. An upshot of the present research study is to have an indigenous, inclusive and sustainable CVE fostering healthy ‘State and Society’ partnership in proximity with the ground realities of Pakistan.

### **Part One: P<sub>1</sub> – Perception - Violent Extremism**

Defining violent extremism remains a contested subject at the academic, policymaker and policy practitioners' planes. In the case of Pakistan, violent extremism is a complex tapestry of religious, political, social, cultural and geo-economic polarisation with a history to it. One can say that “it involves violence or threat of violence” against the general public.<sup>4</sup> Such binaries have led to gross incidents of violence, claiming human loss and endangering law and order. Here, the role of external influences, whether in the name of competing for religious, cultural, ethnic outlooks or hostile neighbourhood, has also impacted the violent extremists' mindset and behaviour.

Here, one must note that understanding the subject of *Violent Extremism versus Terrorism* needs a bit of clarification, specifically from the

policymaker's end. David A. Lake discriminated against the two, maintaining that “violent extremism provokes the target in doing the act”; on the other hand, terrorism “indigenises the capabilities of both the terrorist and the target.”<sup>5</sup> Jason Leigh furthers on the same concept that violent extremism is the ideology and terrorism is the act.<sup>6</sup> He further argues that since there is no single definition of violent extremism, and it could be defined per the context as per UNODC, it presents many challenges while integrating it into a framework or judicial policy since most of the definitions incorporate the “physical acts of terror” in their definitions.<sup>7</sup> Just like terrorism and radicalisation are not the same thing, similarly violent extremism and terrorism are not the same thing. Instead, terrorism is just the manifestation of the ideology built in violent extremism. Both achieve their goals through violence, yet the aim or purpose behind terrorism is to spread fear, and the purpose behind violent extremism is the manifestation of the beliefs and perceptions that have evolved.

The process by which individuals may become violent extremists is now known as radicalisation. Scholars have drawn on the social-psychological distinction among beliefs, feelings, and behaviours to disaggregate the radicalisation process.<sup>8</sup> Parallel to this, an academic input stresses that the gaps and shortcomings in the concept and definition of violent extremism can be attributed to the need for more empirical data regarding what works and what does not.<sup>9</sup> This point also comes out very clearly in this research study: academics need access to the respective departments' evaluating mechanism of the CVE or CT policy. Thus, one has to rely more on the interpretative and exploratory analysis medium.

To begin with, the Author's off-record conversations with the vast array of Pakistan's personnel involved with the CVE and CT policymaking and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the civil society stakeholder's registers.

Radicalisation and violent extremism are a gradual process. It can stop at any particular step. Radicalised individuals may or may not become violent. It is a process that can follow numerous tracks – Lone wolf attacks, group activity, violent protests, and so on. Motivations and circumstances can affect the process of violent extremism. Social networks are critical in the process of extremism or radicalisation – that has been religion, ethnic, economic and social marginalisation, sectarian basis, etc. The role of ‘peer pressure’ and ‘ideology’ – remains critical.

The lethality of Violence as a means to achieve one aim is well understood by most stakeholders in formulating the CVE or PVE (Preventing Violent Extremism) policies in Islamabad. At the conception level, Violent extremism involves tactics aiming to uplift the status of one group or strata of society while demeaning 'others' based on gender, religion, culture and ethnicity. As a result, Violent Extremist outfits destroy prevalent social, cultural, and political systems and replace them with exclusionary and ideologically driven modes of governance structures, questioning the integrity of statehood. An accomplished security practitioner, Tariq Parvez clearly explains the conceptual categorisation of terrorism within Pakistan (i.e., the typology of terrorism: Militancy in the name of Religion [MITNOR]; sub-nationalist Militancy; Ethno-political Militancy).<sup>10</sup> Parallel to this, a stream of pronouncements from the highly placed Islamabad's and provincial Political and Strategic stalwarts continue to situate violent extremism and terrorism as an externally generated security threat. This perception reflects the ignorance of the contextual parameters of Violent Extremism in the country and, as a result, has failed to define a national counter-extremism narrative.<sup>11</sup>

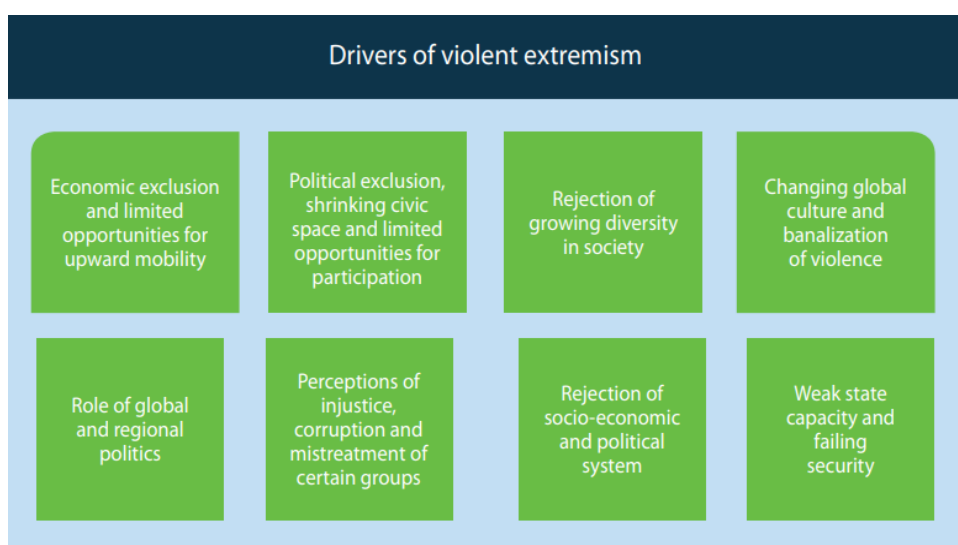
In contrast to this, Late President Pervez Musharraf, in his address to the International Seminar on Global Terrorism on 31 August 2005, remarked, "I feel the number one cause is political deprivation, political alienation, leading to hopelessness, and sense of powerlessness, which then leads on to these (Violent Extremist ) terrorist acts".<sup>12</sup> This was a very critical reflection and understanding of the prevalent complicated dynamics of the Violent Extremism that does have an internal character. Following the terrorist incident at the Peshawar APS (Army Public School) in 2014<sup>13</sup>, Former Prime Minister M Nawaz Sharif observed: "It is time for us to unite and fight against the radicals ... [whether] they be inside or coming from the outside. I direct and authorise my armed forces and law enforcement agencies to eliminate the enemy wherever it is with the full force of the state."<sup>14</sup>

## **Part Two: Policymaking (P<sub>2</sub>) & Spectrum Matrix of the VE in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, religion (Islam) continues to be misused as a base of growing extremism and violence. Parallel to this, Pakistanis joined the ranks of the violent radicalised groups, being economically marginalised and feeling socially and politically disempowered, too. The Geopolitical dynamics also imprint the radical violent outfits' modus operandi. Following the former Soviet Union invasion of

Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan, backed by the USA, Saudi Arabia, and China, became a launching pad, a recruiting zone for Mujahedeen fighting the ‘Godless Russians’ in Afghanistan. This role set in motion the mushrooming of religious seminaries, the flow of refugees, the supply of illegal weapons, the upsurge of sectarianism, and promoted a narrow and orthodox worldview. For instance, in 1971, there were only 900 Madaris in Pakistan, but by the end of the Zia era, there were as many as 8,000 registered and as many as 25,000 unregistered Madaris. Parallel to this, General Zia’s Islamization project impacted public education, political set-up, institutional framework, financial system, and legal imperatives - creating voids and fissures within the state and society. The decade of the 1980s was a significant watershed in consolidating religious rights and enhanced their influence on social norms in the country. In the 1990s, the government was dented by incidents of faith-based violence and sectarian and ethnic strife. Thus, Pakistan had been facing the issue of Violent Extremism and Terrorism before the event of 9/11. Joining US-led WOT initiated an era of complex and interlinked threats of both VE and terrorism at home and beyond its frontiers. As a result, the security landscape became complex - witnessing a surge in suicide attacks, internal displacements and economic losses.

Given the ever-changing nature of the global security landscape, the debate about the genesis and the significant determinants of Violent Extremism still needs to be more conclusive. Here, UNDP’s<sup>15</sup> comprehensive approach explaining the drivers of violent extremism is very relevant in the case of Pakistan’s VE scenario, too, as described below:



UNDP also emphasises that violent extremism is not only due to the policies of the states but also highly influenced by the complex global “political, economic and social” conditions at the global geopolitical level.<sup>16</sup> The risk of violent extremism is enhanced where they are linked with intersectional inequalities, and these are the same inequalities that motivate and mobilise the people. Poverty and unemployment also play a vital role in associating oneself with extremist organisations. Likewise, exclusion at the political level and limitation on freedom of expression leave people feeling isolated and push them towards violence-prone extremist networks. Since the world has become more digitised, violence is no longer questioned based on ethics and morals. The media, at times, play a role in manipulating and pulling individuals towards a violent extremist group or their ideology. There have been several instances where lone-wolf actors attacked the public after being influenced by pro-violence extremist influencers on online platforms.

Pakistan is faced with the multi-dimensional threats of violent extremism at the domestic, regional and international levels. Pakistan's context-specific drivers of violent extremism are the strong foothold of the transnational linkages, especially in border areas. Terrorist organisations like Fitna Al Khawarij, BLA, IS-K, and Al-Qaeda manipulate the vulnerable mindsets based on the existing fault lines at the domestic and regional and call to adopt violent means as the ultimate solution to the “injustice at all levels”. The porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan makes the border crossing for non-state actors easier. Sectarianism, intolerance, economic slowdown, misgovernance, corruption, injustice and neighbourhood tensions can be considered the fundamental drivers of violent extremism. Following the outbreak of the WOT in Afghanistan, Pakistan witnessed the influx of Afghan migrants during the US-led “Operation Enduring Freedom” in this scenario. Islamabad's partnership with the USA also acted as a driver for furthering the anti-US and anti-state sentiments at the public level specifically as there exists close strong religious, cultural, social, ethnic, and ideological ties between the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan. This moment was cashed very well by the extremist militant outfits.<sup>17</sup> This alliance (that is, Pak-US) deeply shook the social fabric of Pakistani society and posed a grave challenge to the government of Pakistan both internally and externally. The resistance grew so much that people from all sectors of life, including the Madrassah and college or university students, joined ISIS and Al-Qaeda and played the role of recruiter within the society. Fitna Al Khawarij and many other violent extremist groups germinated in this context. They misused Islam to attack state functionaries,

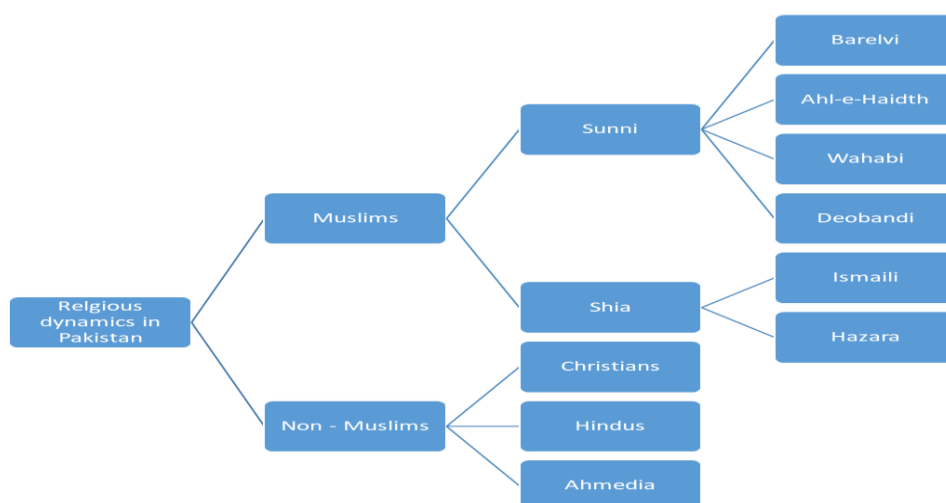
innocent civilians, and minorities and became entrenched with the Violent Non-State Actors (VNSAs) within and beyond Pakistan.

## Religious Dynamics of Violent Extremism in Pakistan

Religion has played a vital role in the history of Pakistan. It was the primary driving force behind the partition of the subcontinent and the country's creation. To begin with, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was very clear and vocal about the role of religion in Pakistan. In his very first address to the Constituent Assembly, Quaid observed:

*“You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other places of worship in the state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed - that has nothing to do with the business of the state.”<sup>18</sup>*

Unfortunately, Quaid's vision has never been fully implemented. Religious-based fissures have inflicted deep scars on the sects within the Muslim population (that is, the Sectarian dimension), between Muslims and Christians and also among the other minorities in the country. Pakistan has a population of over 96% Muslims, with two significant sects: Sunni and Shia.<sup>19</sup> Most of the Sunni population follows the Hanafi school of thought, categorised into two further sub-sects: Deobandi and Barelvi. The Wahabis and Ahl-e-hadith are the other sub-sects of the Sunni school of thought. The rest of the population follows the Hanbali, Maliki or Shafi School of thought. The Shia follows the Jafferi school of thought. The following diagram shows the complex religious dynamics in Pakistan:



Source: Author's Illustration



General Zia's regime is considered to be the root cause of sectarianism and religious violence in Pakistan. He followed his stringent view of reinforcing Pakistan's social, political, and economic institutions in an authentic Islamic character, using the Hudood ordinance, Shariat courts, Zakat and Usher ordinance.<sup>20</sup> These steps signalled that the state was an initiator and propeller of the religious extremism in the country. General Zia enforced the religion as per the Sunni Fiqah, such as the modification of Islamic Studies school books and the implementation of the Nizam-e-Mustafa, which made Zakat compulsory to all Muslims irrespective of sectarian belief and practice. This step was felt as an attack on the Shia Muslim's freedom and embarked sectarianism in Pakistan. As a result, the Shais formulated the Sipah-e-Muhammad to counter the dominance established by Sunnis.<sup>21</sup> Following the Iranian revolution, its revolutionary government provided material and moral support to the militant Shia elements in Pakistan. This was paralleled with the Saudi government, which extensively funded religious seminaries and specific organisations to enhance Wahhabism in Pakistan. This resulted in extreme Sectarian clashes in the country, where it became a pitch between the externally stimulated Sunni versus Shias militancy.<sup>22</sup>

Parallel to the sectarian clashes, minority communities have borne the brunt of mob brutality, bomb attacks, arsons, lynching and other forms of violence at the hands of the violent extremists in Pakistan.<sup>23</sup> Last year saw another tragic incident of religious extremists-led mob attacks on the Christian community lives, churches, and companies in Jaranwala (Punjab Province). As always, the stated reason was the Act defiling the Quran by the two Christian men. Public media sources from the place of the incident maintained that local clerics of some mosques were giving vocal calls through the loudspeakers instructing Muslims to assemble for an 'attack upon Churches and the Christian populace'.<sup>24</sup> This incident and past series of religious-based violence calls for effective governance and judicial justice, plus the need to invest in the inter-faith dialogue on sustainable grounds. Reactive and cosmetic CVE is always short-lived.

One of the very critical analyses of the prominent reasons for violence against Christians: first, "Christians are agents of the West, so if anything happens in the West against Islam, they are first to bear the price; second, socially, the majority of Pakistani Christians are from low caste background, and as a result, they are treated as second class citizens, thirdly, historical relationship of Islam and Christianity in the West contributes to the social status of Christians".<sup>25</sup> The

following table gives a brief snapshot of the violent extremist attacks that have led to fear, marginalisation and lawlessness in the country.

### FAITH-BASED VIOLENCE – 1997 – 2024 - Pakistan

Year & Place of Incident	Targeted Community
Shanti Nagar Incident (1997) - Khanewal	Christian
Gojra Incident (2009)	Christian
Joseph Colony Incident (2013) - Lahore	Christian
Kot Radha Kishan Incident (2014) – Kasur	Christian
Youhanabad Incident (2015) - Lahore	Christian
Jhelum Factory Attack (2016)	Ahmmaddiyya
Incident (Faisalabad 2018)	Christian
Nangana Sahib Incident (2020)	Sikh Girl/Christian Community
Sialkot Incident (2021)	Srilankan Christian – Factory Manager
Jaranwala Incident (August 2023)	Christian
Sargodha Incident (2024)	Christian

**Source:** Author’s Illustration Based on the Published Media Accounts

### Geo-political Dynamics of Violent Extremism in Pakistan

Pakistan remained at the centre of the Cold War amongst the superpowers. Due to its “security needs”, Pakistan decided to support the USA. Because of its unique ‘geo-strategic’ position, the positives have been outwitted by the negatives at many junctures in our history. The state or the regime misusing religion to justify its survival introduced and backed specific violent extremist organisations and institutions that don’t believe in national borders. “Religion defines the character and must reshape the world map - a blanket theme used by the violent non-state actors (VNSAs), be it in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and so on. The neighbouring states, particularly (hostile ones) have a record of exploiting the extremist’s perceived ‘injustices’ and aiding them directly or indirectly through third-party actors - very accurate in the case of Pakistan. This was the same time when religious parties also influenced national policy, as they were receiving considerable funds to motivate and train the mujahedeen against the infidel communists. Not only this, Madrassahs were formed all over Pakistan, which not only provided free education but also trained the students. Most of the madaris followed Deobandi or Bareilvi fiqqah. Due to the socio-political influence and the economic conditions, most people considered it better to induct their children

into Madaris. Later on, some of the madaris posed a threat to the government – the Lal Masjid case in particular.

Islamabad remained opaque about how to disengage for the best interest of its people after the Russians left Afghanistan. There were thousands of trained Mujahedeen of Pakistani origin with no war to fight. So, these people looked inside to put one's house in order – ensure Islamic Order through all means. In the same vein, with the onset of the WOT, Pakistan opened its border for the Afghan refugees, with the majority of them settled in Baluchistan and KP. Both provinces have close religious and cultural similarities, and the people of Pakistan wholeheartedly opened their homes to them.

Instead of the earlier discussion, a rational query is: How has Pakistan's state responded to the challenge of violent extremism and pursuing CVE? This leads us to the third part of the present study:

### **P3 – Practice of the CVE Policy (Spectrum Matrix Analysis)**

In the case of Pakistan, to analyse the success or failure of the CVE policies, an 'impact analysis framework' that can clearly explain the parameters or indicators of curtailing and containing violent extremism is missing; each institution has ways and means of assessing the CVE steps, and most of the time, adhocism prevails. The need to have a baseline for measuring CVE activities for effectiveness remains a distant goal. Contextualising CVE in the case of Pakistan, a multi-pronged strategy that can stop terrorist organisations from growing, deprive them of a social support base available in the form of supporters and apologists, build resilience in the community against extremist propaganda, especially in the vulnerable and at-risk segments of the population, and; stop youth recruitment is a long-term project.<sup>26</sup> That is CVE policies and programs remain misunderstood and face severe criticism by indigenous human rights groups and religious leaders. Though a stream of CVE measures is conceived and implemented by the government and civil society organisations, there have been no measures of the program's effectiveness or impact analysis, raising concerns about the fundamental nature of CVE programs.<sup>27</sup>

To begin with, Pakistan's CVE and CT (Counter Terrorism) posture evolved to be a front-line state in the WOT spearheaded by the United States. Most of the time, kinetic operations were undertaken (to date) as the timeframe for neutralising and de-radicalizing the Terrorist outfits and Extremist support

structure is shallow. CVE based on the soft-measures requires time, commitment and strategy based on ground realities. As time moved on, complex and diverse brands of violent extremist networks and activities in the KPK, Sindh, Punjab, and Baluchistan – further clouded the internal security landscape of the country. Does Pakistan have a comprehensive CVE policy? Half Yes and Half No. However, Perception (P<sub>1</sub>), Policy (2), and Practice (3), along with the Spectrum Matrix - exhibit a dotted pattern. This signifies a range of CVE Policy Overtures.

The Late President General Musharraf first attempted to counter the extremists' narrative in the OIC Summit Conference in Malaysia (2002) through the "Enlightened Moderation" medium.<sup>28</sup> Theoretically speaking, the concept of 'Enlightened Moderation' entailed a wide array of ideas and the goalposts: "Islam as an enlightened religion, the teachings of Islam are moderate and how we (Pakistani Extremists) need to align with modernity, and how the whole world needs to come together to avoid a clash of civilisation".<sup>29</sup> However, this idea failed to materialise immediately as its counter-narrative of 'Jihad' against the US and all of its allies was quite famous, and the anti-state actors held sway within and beyond the country as well. Secondly, no practical actions were taken afterwards to ensure the continuity of this narrative. Pakistan's CVE posture initially followed two pathways: de-radicalization and counter-radicalization. De-radicalisation included (i) the Swat Program and (ii) the Punjab Program. Counter-radicalisation measures included Madrassa Reforms, National International Security Policy 2014, National Action Plan 2014, Counter Terrorism Operations, and Pakistan Protection Act 2014.<sup>30</sup> Political leadership was often left quite behind in this process, either by choice or otherwise. In the case of Swat, the Pakistan army launched a rehabilitation program for the radicalised youth (Fitna Al Khawarij) in Swat.<sup>31</sup> Similar programs were launched in Punjab under the supervision of the CTD (Counter Terrorism Department). In contrast, other programs were launched in collaboration with the NGOs and discontinued on the pretext of lack of resources in the case of Punjab. One of the most accomplished experts, Qamar-ul-Huda, opines that resources and political will are critical for a sustainable commitment to CVE impact analysis, including donor's accountability and stresses that Pakistan must create a National CVE Task Force to assess the work done and lay down the foundation for a long-term policy.<sup>32</sup>

National Internal Security Policy 2014-2018 (NISP 2014 – 2018), launched on February 25th, 2014, was Pakistan's first National Security document. The federal cabinet approved the 64 points in the policy in 2014. The scope was

defined to be focused on internal security. The need for developing a national narrative was highlighted in the report to counter non-traditional threats with the help of religious scholars, the intelligentsia, educational institutions, and the media.<sup>33</sup> The aim was to protect Pakistan's national interests by addressing security concerns and promoting inclusiveness and cooperation. NISP, 2014-2018, envisioned soft and complex steps to achieve this. The hard one was curbing terrorist financing and the repatriation and registration of Afghan Refugees, and the Soft steps included Dialogue, isolation of terrorists, and deterrence development.<sup>34</sup>

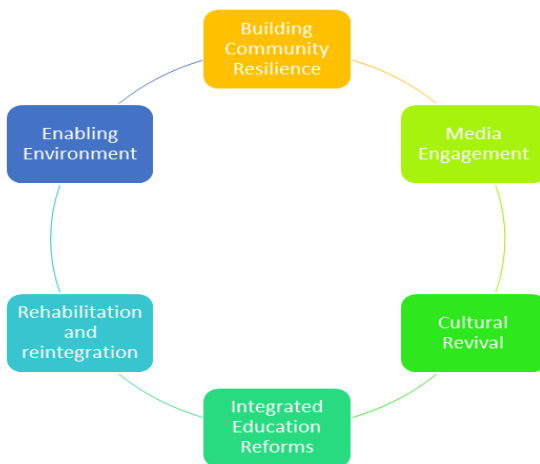
## Major Themes

- **Policy Framework:** Focuses on dialogue, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and deterrence through a Comprehensive Response Plan (CRP) and Composite Deterrence Plan (CDP).
- **CRP:** Comprehensive Response Program: Involves dialogue, infrastructure development, rehabilitation of terrorism victims, and promoting a national narrative against extremism.
- **CDP composite deterrence program:** Aims at enhancing the capabilities of law enforcement agencies, transitioning to a proactive security approach, and synchronising national efforts.
- **Implementation Measures:** These include infrastructure development, rehabilitation programs, integration of madrassas into mainstream education, legal reforms, and capacity building.
- **International Cooperation:** Emphasizes diplomatic efforts to foster cooperation in countering transnational threats like money laundering and organised crime.
- **Protection:** Ensures the protection of citizens' lives, property, and fundamental rights.
- **Reconciliation:** Strives for peaceful resolution of disputes with hostile elements while upholding the rule of law.
- **Modernization:** Focuses on modernising and coordinating various law enforcement and security agencies to combat security threats effectively.<sup>35</sup>

On the legal front, various bills were passed to counter violent extremism. The most important was the **National Counter Terrorism Authority Bill (2013)**, which revitalised the National Counter Terrorism Authority. The first significant step taken by NACTA was the publication of the National Internal Security Policy

in 2014. NISP was based on three main components: Dialogue, Isolation and deterrence.<sup>36</sup> However, the attack on the APS School changed the dynamics of the policy and Pakistan's approach towards countering violent extremists. After years of lessons and learnings from the war, Pakistan introduced the National Action Plan with 20 agenda points. This was the first-ever plan for close coordination between provinces, law enforcement agencies, civil society, NGOs and local authorities. The government's decision to set up the 'Military Courts' instead of strengthening the existing legal system, particularly the criminal justice system, was an apparent deviation from the recommendations proposed by the National Internal Security Policy.<sup>37</sup> Banning the buying of Sims without a valid Pakistan CNIC did put a bar on communication among terrorists. The mobile phones were the primary source of communications between the radicals and Terrorist organisations. 2015-17, around 98.3 million Sims were blocked, and a proper biometric system was introduced for Sim verification.<sup>38</sup> Various other steps were taken, such as raising the Counter Terrorism Force, Madrassah, and implementing education reforms, which were discussed and put into action. FATA reforms and reintegration of FATA, repatriation plan for the Afghan refugees, reconciliation within Baluchistan, and operations in Karachi are a few highlights.

The Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 was also amended over time and introduced more stringent measures that aligned with the evolving nature of terrorism. The formulation of the Punjab Sound System (Regulation) ACT 2015 and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act of 2016 were introduced to control hate speech. For example, the ACT has strict regulations against sectarian hatred and incitement to hatred, raising money for terrorism, funding for terrorism and money laundering, printing, publishing and distributing material that supports terrorism or any act of terrorism.<sup>39</sup> Later, NACTA formulated the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines (NCEPG), the first ever document that was not formulated in haste and by one authority. Instead, it was formulated in consultation with around 305 stakeholders in 34 sessions. A steering committee deliberated upon the recommendations of the consultative sessions. A sub-committee was also formed, and the recommendation was translated into a policy framework.<sup>40</sup> The NCEPG was a comprehensive document based on the following pillars:

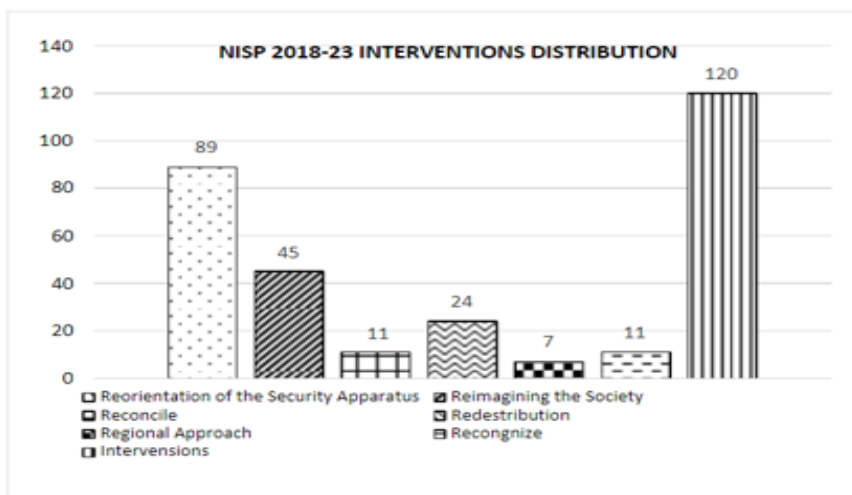


Source: Author's Illustration.

### NISP 2018-23

A comprehensive framework of soft and hard components based on a six-pronged strategy. The policy outlines one hundred twenty objectives, ranging from hard power to soft power, judicial to administrative reforms and from legal to executive measures. She envisaged **Administrative** (strengthening the ability of the state to respond to security issues), ideological (challenging the ideological underpinnings of exclusionary narratives), and **Socio-Economic** (addressing the deprivations that create a breeding ground for security challenges to emerge).<sup>41</sup>

### Distribution of Planned Interventions in NISP<sup>42</sup>



### Themes of NISP 2018-2023

- **Encouraging Militant Disengagement:** Implement transparent mechanisms and alternative livelihood programs to encourage militants to renounce violence.
- **Support for Affected Families:** Prioritize support for families of militants and children affected by violence, especially in high-risk areas like FATA, Baluchistan, KP, and Karachi.
- **Redistributive Measures for Marginalized Groups:** Expand redistributive measures to uplift marginalised groups, focusing on education, health, and skill development to reduce disparities and provide social safety nets.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Pursue regional collaboration to address common security challenges, enhance research capacity, and collaborate with global partners to promote peace.
- **Diplomatic and Economic Relations:** Enhance diplomatic and economic relations with neighbouring countries, emphasising geo-economic cooperation and preventing attacks from Pakistani soil.
- **Investment in Research Excellence:** Establish research cells and centres of excellence, invest in research at universities to comprehensively address extremism and insecurity, and inform evidence-based policy-making.<sup>43</sup>

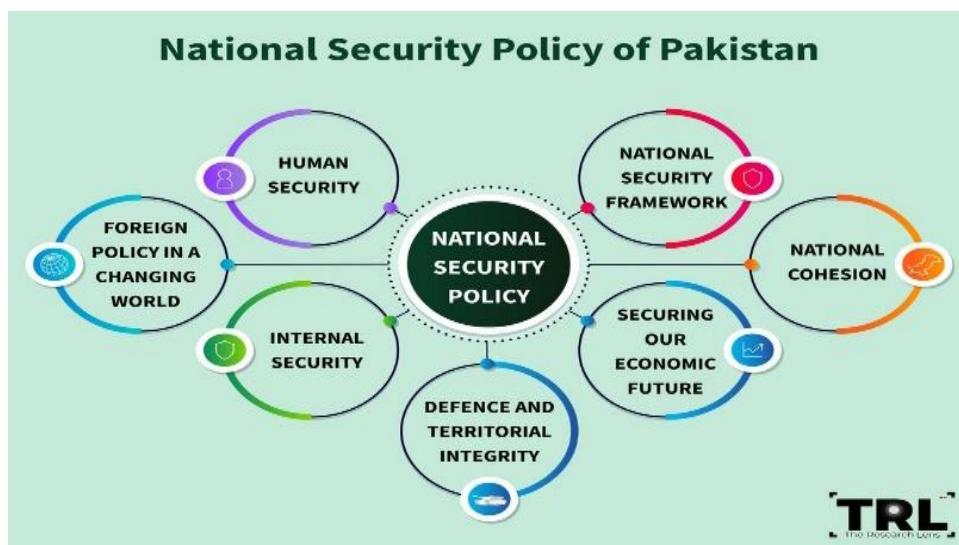
Importantly, this policy envisages formulating a national cyber security strategy, establishing a civil-military cyber command force, strengthening the cyber-crimes wing at FIA and the cyber security wing at NACTA, and creating public awareness about cyber security threats. Here, gaps remained in the ownership issues due to approval by the previous regime for political reasons; it needed to be more robust adoption and focused more on political gain than addressing security issues, which led to limited effectiveness.<sup>44</sup>

The National Action Plan developed the basis for “**Paigham-e-Pakistan**”, created after intense stakeholder engagement and collaborations and formally released in 2018.<sup>45</sup> It was a 22 Point Fatwa or a decree holding signatures from over 1600 clerics from all sects in Pakistan, which was a collaborative effort between the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the Council for Islamic Ideology (CII), with the main point being that there is no place for terrorism in Islam. The reason why it got accepted throughout Pakistan and amongst the clerics was because the Holy Quran and Sunnah built it, and it represents a collective thought



of Islam and the constitution of Pakistan. The Paigham-e-Pakistan not only focused on portraying a positive image of Pakistan but also focused on encountering religious extremism in Pakistan by empowering the nation to have shared values of peace and tolerance.<sup>46</sup> However, the Paigham-e-Pakistan, at times, is based on selective collaboration. There is a need for broader engagement with society rather than relying on the hand-picked sectors. Both Paigham-e-Pakistan and NAP and other legislations focused on countering hate crimes by banning hate speech or banning the person from representing on national or local channels rather than looking into the seeds of violent extremism that needs more understanding. To do so, a national narrative must be built first, ensuring the presence of a compelling and successful counter-narrative.

Amid this scenario, 2022 saw the National Security Policy (NSP) launch to address the loopholes in the earlier security perception and planning. This policy envisioned an inclusive and proactive security perspective. Theoretically, both traditional military threats, emerging non-traditional challenges, and the desire to establish a coherent and inclusive security framework led the government to formulate an NSP that reflects the complexities of the modern security landscape.<sup>47</sup> The following diagram explains the NSP – 2022:



## Concluding Thoughts

- Strategic patience and foresightedness to address socioeconomic disparities are also vital. Equitable opportunities, job prospects, and

social welfare programs can diminish the allure of extremist narratives for those feeling marginalised. Furthermore, mental health support services are essential, offering critical assistance to vulnerable individuals and reducing the risk of radicalisation, specifically among the youth. To date, the roles of Youth, Gender, and Media are not spelt as the front runners versus the ever-increasing tide of radicalization within the country. A multi-disciplinary thought process based on trust and cooperation between the various institutions tasked with the CVE policy implementation is a missing link in Islamabad's CVE overtures is critical.

- Heavy financial commitment to CVE practices is a tough call for the poorly performing economy in the case of Pakistan. However, this situation can't be an excuse not to devise less cost-intensive programs and focus more on 'people-centric' solutions than borrowed ones. Prevalent trends of '– know –' approaches towards Violent Extremism are often misleading. Innovative community responses can be worked out on a self-help basis to deal with the undercurrents of discontent usually manifested in violent extremism. Unless the actual or perceived vulnerabilities are not plugged in by the relevant stakeholders – violent non-state actors, domestic or of international origin- they will surface as a threat to national cohesion.
- Lack of inclusive law enforcement institutions and proactive Legal regimes are deterrents against hate speech and discrimination based on religion, ethnicity and so on. The fact of the matter is that there has been a practice of selective 'Rule of law' - organisations outlawed based on 'hateful speech' exploiting religion (here, Islam) have been mainstreamed and ignored for either political or unstated reasons. The rise of the hard-line religious extremist party, Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan party (TLP) -or the Movement at the Service of the Prophet – remains a case in point. TLP is a far-right religious group formed in 2015, led by the late Khadim Hussain Rizvi. The group rose to political prominence in November 2017 after their infamous Faizabad sit-in, which shut down the capital to protest against the modification to the Election Bill 2017, claiming the amendment to be an act of blasphemy. The changes to the law were quickly reversed, and the government eventually surrendered to the hardliner's demand for the resignation of Law Minister Mr Zahid Hamid. Resultantly, group political status was also restored. Since then, TLP has been spinning its one-sided narration of the socioeconomic dilemmas and cashing vulnerable

youth to guard Islam against others' such as Christians and the Ahmadi community within the country. In this situation, violent extremism is also seen as the only solution to enforce one's worldview.

- Implementing multiple cyber laws and measures is underway in Pakistan. An Indigenous evaluation of the policy practices versus the 'online radicalisation and online cyberterrorism' by the state institutions (also publically documented) remains elusive. Banning and removing the extremist hateful narrative from social websites entails negative consequences at times. New websites do emerge after censorship, carrying forward the victimhood narrative and leading to more radicalisation. This may spiral into more negative public opinion, suggesting that the state's online measures are ineffective. Erin Saltman and Jonathan Russell describe hostile measures (blocking, censoring, filtering, or removing Internet content), positive measures (counter-messaging, which may be specific or general), and monitoring. If delimiting the range of activities that constitute CVE has been a challenge at the general level, it seems online CVE is relatively well-defined.<sup>48</sup>

In crux, an Indigenous CVE based on understanding the diverse human security parameters - political, religious, sectarian, ethnic, social, cultural and economic landscape – remain a work in progress. There is a critical need to invest in building Resilient Communities in a trust-based interaction with the State against Extremism in Pakistan. A holistic community-driven CVE, fused with the Political-Strategic equation, is essential in preventing radicalisation. This, in turn, requires a state and society's long-term commitment towards education based on fostering critical thinking and empathy that will lead to internal cohesion in the country. That is, fostering understanding among different cultures and faiths and promoting interfaith dialogues needs to be more inclusive and proactive than a one-time event. Here, the state's role in the CVE policy should be to regulate public aspirations. Political ownership of the counter-extremism initiatives needs to be enhanced. There is a need to sustainably envisage a 'bottom-up' rather than 'Top-down' CVE mechanism. Unconditional commitment to undertake regular impact analysis (of CVE measures) and to create a "*National CVE Task Force*" to assess the work done for a long-term policy is a signpost of the preceding discussion!

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