

## Defeating Terrorism in Pakistan – What Will It Take?

by  
Pervez Hoodbhoy

The sensibilities of Pakistani society stand in danger of being overpowered by the public media's morbid fascination with death and suffering, and its refusal to condemn religious terrorism. Watched by old and young alike, gut-wrenching scenes of blood and gore are normal fare on Pakistani television channels. Over the years, such "political entertainment" has displaced other entertainment forms like dramas and musical performances.

Today's breaking news could be a suicide blast in some Hazara or Shia neighborhood, shrine worshippers blown up, a dozen college students gunned down, a massacre of mountaineers, or the discovery of mutilated and beheaded corpses somewhere. Breathless reporters rush about excitedly describing the carnage, panic, and anger while cameras dwell over separated limbs and pools of blood. And then – incredibly – a silky haired model glides across the screen singing a shampoo ditty. Shortly the blood and gore resumes.

Still more grating is the anchor and the familiar panel of "experts" who fill the screens every evening. You need not hear them to know what they will say. They will tell you that this is the work of some foreign hand because, by definition, a Muslim can never kill another Muslim. Have these ignoramuses not studied history? Not too long ago, many of those introduced to us as "senior analysts" once proclaimed that suicide bombers were uncircumcised, and hence terrorists had to non-Muslim. Of course, no analyst had actually inspected the body parts but he still said with the confidence of one asserting the roundness of the earth. Fortunately, now that the terrorists openly say who they are, this claim has not been heard in a while.

The mainstream media's cover-up for terrorists is scarcely hidden. As just one example, over 120 Hazara Shias were killed in a suicide attack in January 2013. Dawn and Express Tribune, and probably other English language newspapers as well, carried banner headlines of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi having accepted responsibility. But Urdu newspapers like Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt – which have much wider outreach – carried only tearful tales of suffering. Rather than name LeJ, they simply referred to "namaloom afraid". This steadfast refusal to point a finger at religious terrorism is amply reflected in the choice of words used in editorials: rarely is the correct term "dehshat gard" used for terrorist; instead "shidat pasand" is commonplace. The latter invention was not, until recently, recognizable as an Urdu word. But then surely one must not hurt the feelings of our terrorist brothers!

Our political leaders are scarcely better. Cricketer Khan blames every act of terror as a response to the drones or as a reaction to America's invasion of Afghanistan. It made no difference when the blood-thirsty Pakistani Taliban proudly announced their suicide bombers had blown up two of his MNAs. Like other PTI'ers, these men too had climbed the anti-drone wagon but obviously that didn't do them much good. Nawaz Sharif is

equally predictable as he makes his usual appeal for dialogue with the Taliban. But what he will talk to them about? That they should not shoot 15-year girls who want to go to school? Various other leaders at various levels speak about "zero-tolerance for terrorism" fully knowing that they have no strategy, mean nothing, and will do nothing.

The ready toleration of terrorism is so widespread across Pakistani society that one despairs. It seems as though a collective death wish dictates national behavior. As long as a terrorist claims that he fights for Islam, every atrocity against Muslims escapes rigorous condemnation. Thus, soldiers fighting the TTP are quietly buried without honors and without being justly celebrated for fighting the nation's enemies.

How were we brainwashed into this? Can tragedy be averted and, if so, what will need to be changed? What might be a suitable manifesto of change?

**First**, Pakistan desperately needs peace. This means that it must turn inwards instead of outwards, and devote its fullest attention to ending its raging internal wars. The sixty-year long conflict with India lies at the very core of Pakistan's problems today. It has achieved little beyond creating a militarized Pakistani security state which uses force as its first resort even when dealing its own people. The army's role must be limited to defending the people of Pakistan, and to ensuring that their constitutional and civil rights are protected. Attempts by the army to solve Kashmir militarily have bled the country dry and left it dependent on foreign aid. The creation of various armed religiously charged *lashkars* was conceived by our generals as a low-cost way of bleeding India. Enjoying nuclear protection, these armed groups proliferated across the country. But they have become a mortal threat to Pakistan's peoples, particularly the religious minorities. Even their mentors are now scared of them.

**Second**, Pakistan needs economic justice. This demands a social infrastructure providing decent employment, minimum incomes, and rewards according to ability and hard work. In rural areas, where old structures of land ownership remain intact, sweeping land reforms are urgent. India abolished feudalism upon attaining independence but the enormous pre-Partition land holdings of Pakistan's feudal lords were protected by the authority of the state. The land reforms announced by Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto were hardly serious. No agricultural tax is paid to the government because many in parliament own vast tracts of land. On the other hand, even in the urban areas there is gross inequality—mothers commit suicide in the shadow of five-star hotels because they cannot feed their children. Pakistan needs a social contract. This is a commitment that citizens shall be treated fairly and equally by the state and, in turn, shall willingly fulfill basic civic responsibilities. But today Pakistanis are denied even the most fundamental protections specified in the Constitution. The poor suffer outright denial of their rights while the rich are compelled to buy them. Rich and poor alike feel no obligation to fulfill their civic duties. Most do not pay their fair share of income tax, leading to one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in the world. The military is landlord and capitalist, owning vast assets that have no relation to national defense. Most countries have armies but, as many have dryly noted, only in Pakistan does an army have a country.

**Third,** Pakistan must shed its colonial structure of governance and recognize the cultural diversity of its peoples. Different historically constituted peoples must want to live together voluntarily, and see the benefits of doing so. A giant centralized government machine sitting in Islamabad cannot effectively manage such a diverse country. The passage in 2010 of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which enhanced provincial autonomy, was a positive step. As in India, Pakistan has to be reorganized as a federation where provinces and local governments hold the critical economic and social powers, with defense and foreign affairs held in common. In particular, Islamabad's conflict with Balochistan urgently needs resolution using political sagacity rather than military force. Blaming India is convenient but cannot change reality—the Baloch are angry for good reasons.

**Fourth,** the country's education needs drastic revision in the means of delivery and content. Money goes some way towards the first – better school infrastructure, books, teacher salaries, etc. But this is not enough. Schools teach children to mindlessly obey authority, to look to the past for solutions to today's problems, and to be intolerant of the religion, culture and language of others. Instead, we need to teach them to be enquiring, open-minded, creative, logical, socially responsible and appreciative of diversity.

To conclude: the way forward for Pakistan lies in building a normal nation rather than an ideological one. It should be held together by mutual interests and seek economic development rather than spend its energy in exporting jihad across its borders. On 14 August 2012 General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani admitted that the internal threat had become more serious than the external one. But this turned out to be just lip service. To use the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and other "friendly lashkars" against the TTP is the army's latest tool. But this cannot be a solution. In fact it is generating new problems that will be still harder to solve. A "Naya Pakistan" must uproot the infrastructure of jihad that the army helped create.

In the longer term, Pakistan must aim towards creating a sustainable and active democracy; an economy for peace rather than war; a federation in which provincial grievances can be effectively resolved; elimination of the feudal order; and creating a tolerant society that respects the rule of law. The mullah's call for violence must be recognized as a "root cause" for terrorism at the same level as poor governance, poverty, illiteracy, and a badly failed justice system. His hate speech must be forbidden. Appropriate use of force against terrorists – as well as major changes in governance, education, and the political structure – is essential. Although religion will certainly remain an important part of its social reality for the foreseeable future, Pakistan must seek new roots that lie beyond it.

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*The author teaches physics and mathematics in Islamabad and Lahore.*