SPdC

Interactive Dialogue Series

Nexus between Intolerance and Violent Extremism

Position Paper No.1

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SOCIAL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

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Nexus between Intolerance
and
Violent Extremism

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Introduction

Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC) is undertaking a series of informed and interactive dialogues, on various topics covering a range of the drivers of violent extremism (VE) in Pakistan. The aim of the project is to increase understanding of violent extremism related issues among government representatives and different stakeholders, besides increasing the capacity of civil society to organize and advocate for countering violent extremism (CVE).

One strategy for doing so is bridging the gap between practitioners who grapple with its ubiquitous manifestations, and analysts who theorize societal trends without necessarily interacting with those engaged in VE. Such interactions provide the otherwise infrequent opportunity for civil society stakeholders to network and develop linkages, which necessarily precede developing a shared understanding and consensus on related issues.

The project involves holding four interactive dialogues and develop position papers on the following topics:

1. Nexus between intolerance and violent extremism
2. Unemployment, youth and violent extremism
3. Institutional/governance failure and violent extremism
4. Linkage between corruption, elite impunity and violent extremism

Each of the four dialogues will lead to a follow-up meeting with relevant stakeholders and dissemination of key findings by publishing position papers on all four identified topics. The project culminates with the convening of a provincial level conference where policy recommendations for CVE will be presented.

The first dialogue on "Nexus between Intolerance and Violent Extremism" was held in Karachi on October 12, 2019. The position paper is a summation of the perspectives of a small number of educators and educationist associations, youth organizations and youth representatives, government officials of relevant ministries, key media persons, and NGOs and CBOs working with youth, culture, minorities and progressive politics.

Background

Tolerance and understanding of diversity of ideas and cultures is integral to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Specifically, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 commits Member States to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". The goal aims to foster intercultural dialogue, culture of peace and non-violence and prevent violent extremism through global citizenship education and supporting free, independent and pluralistic media. The goal has 23 indicators and 12 targets – specific to the issue under consideration are targets 16.1, 16.2.1, 16.2.2, 16.2.1, 16.3, 16.6 and 16.6.1. Pakistan is a signatory to the SDGs – a commitment which revalidates the moral imperative on Pakistan's state and society to counter violent extremism. The UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2178/2014 condemns violent extremism, and calls on Member States to support efforts to adopt longer-term solutions rooted in addressing the underlying causes of radicalization and violent extremism, including by empowering youth. Equally important is the National Security Council Resolution 2242, on women, peace and security which commits Member States for gender analysis of drivers and impacts of violent extremism.

Pakistan has been riven by violent extremism, causing immense damage to its social fabric, economy and functioning of state. It has seen a staggering loss of life, the tally between 2002 and 2017 being a loss of about 25,000 civilians and 7700 security personnel. According to Pasha (2018)[1], the estimated total cost of terrorism to the country up to 2017-18 is $251.8 billion. The devastation and suffering have cut across provincial boundaries, ethnicity, class, location, religion and gender.

The root causes of violent extremism are complex, multifaceted and intercultural. After years of trying to isolate single dimensional triggers that push people towards VE – including education levels (madrassah-centric approach), poverty, unemployment, injustice, to psychological and even ethnic profiling, there is a realization that the silo-approach is self-defeating. An understanding has evolved that violent extremism is the product of historical, political, economic and social circumstances which in some instances impacted during the regional and global power politics and political environment. Studies indicate that extremism refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to further radical, ideological, religious or political

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aims. VE views can manifest in connection with range of issues including political, religious and gender issues. Whereas, the classification system developed by Tariq Pervez in (2015)[2] helps us in distinguishing the presence of the violent forms and the changing tends of violent extremist organizations (VEO) in Pakistan into three main categories : MITNOR (militancy in the name of religion), sub-nationalist groups (in Sindh and Balochistan), and ethnic political groups (in Karachi).

Growing inequalities have also been cited as critical drivers of violent extremism. The UNDP report finds "People get pulled into radical and violent movements through well considered manipulation and accompaniment (socialization) processes." The report goes on to highlight that groups and individuals practicing violent extremism share a number of characteristics including, "A lack of tolerance for multiple narratives that challenge their fundamentalist belief system; and a related and violent disregard for civic discourse, culture, scientific or rational thought, human rights, due process, and for the traditional and modern embodiments of law and authority."[3]

It further says that the lack of political inclusion, limitations on freedom of expression and shrinking civic space are considered primary drivers of radicalization and violence. In response, it suggests building blocks to address its theory of change, including increasing civic spaces; supporting dialogue with alienated groups; promoting gender equality; engaging with youth in building social cohesion; promoting diversity and respect for human rights in schools and universities, and working with the media to promote tolerance.[4]

The costs inflicted on society by non-violent extremism are equally visible, though not quantifiable, and are harder to address as they have become entrenched into the social fabric. These are often inflicted by those not easily identifiable as either terrorists, criminals or extremists. Analysts have sporadically drawn attention towards everyday forms of intolerance which enables people to passively observe violent acts without intervening or collectively objecting; the bystander also offers a public endorsement. This is starkly illustrated in cases of blasphemy charge related lynching, such as that of student Mashal Khan inside a university in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and the killing of Christian couple Shama and Shahzad in Punjab who were burnt alive, in both cases, while others watched and cheered.

Lack of political inclusion, limitations on freedom of expression and shrinking civic space are considered primary drivers of radicalization and violence.

The World Bank (2018) through its research finds that "Acting preventively entails fostering systems that create incentives for peaceful and cooperative behaviour." The report delineates "Exercising tolerance as acknowledgement of difference and disagreement… is fundamental to democracy. Agreement or consensus may be a desired end – if only to resolve conflict – but it is not a democratic imperative. Tolerance is the tool that helps us democratically manage the dynamics of any plural community or society."[5]

The historical trajectory of Pakistan's decline into intolerance has been well documented by scholars and researchers. There has been a nascent shift towards looking for solutions and there are many government as well as civil society initiatives though their efficacy has not been critically tested yet.

A 20-Point National Action Plan (NAP) was framed by National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA)/Ministry of Interior (in consultation with the stakeholders) to address the root cause of terrorism and extremism in the holistic manner. It spelled out the specifics for the counter-terrorism drive in the country and was approved by the Parliament in December 2014. There has been much debate about the performance of NAP as NACTA – a primary implementing entity – remained underfunded and the holistic framework was said to be imperfect in addressing extremism. Nevertheless, "NAP has registered significant improvements in overall law and order and internal security situation in the country, including a discernible downward trend in terrorism incidents."[6]

Paigham-e-Pakistan is yet another initiative countering terrorism, extremism and sectarian narrative, which was launched by the government in January 2018. The document was endorsed by the religious scholars of all school of thoughts and it exclusively looked at extremism through the lens of religion. The document says that declaration of jihad involving physical combat and waging war is the prerogative of the state, and "such initiatives of an individual or group shall be deemed interference in the state authority, and … shall be considered as acts of rebellion against the State…" [7] Another government initiative is the Madrassah reform. Efforts have been made to curtail radical religious influences by reforming or regulating the madrassas, but these efforts have struggled to gain much headway. However, an amendment to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Societies Registration Act 1860 was made in 2017 which mandated madrassahs to get registered under the law.

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Civil society organizations have also stepped into the realm of CVE. Areas that have predominantly been focused are: de-radicalization of individuals, madrassah reforms and developing counter narrative. One such example is PAIMAN Alumni Trust, which has successfully integrated de-radicalization into the peace building programs. Having network connections in FATA/KP, it identifies radical youth and engages with them.

Intolerance and Violent Extremism: Understanding the Linkage

The collective understanding iterated through the dialogue process is that efforts to counter violent extremism must intrinsically counter non-violent extremism. Since there is yet no established causal link between when extremism pivots from non-violent to violent, interventions must respond to this reality and accordingly span the entire spectrum of violent as well as non-violent extremism. While it is difficult to identify causality and determinants of what causes intolerance to find violent expression, it is evident that tolerant communities that practice pluralism, value diversity and safeguard right to dissent, have effective safety valves against VE.

Intolerance is defined as the unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, behaviour or social groups that differ from one's own. The problem of intolerance is hence a result of how a society handles those outside the mainstream, who challenge norms in various ways; and the usual prescribed solution is diversity, tolerance and respect for those who differ. Dissent refers to the holding or expressing of opinions at variance with those commonly or officially held. The issue of tolerance in society is, therefore, inseparable from how it manages dissent.

In Pakistan, the state often has contributed in generating intolerance by not brooking dissent. By suppressing civic rights and freedoms including freedom of expression and freedom of association, the state signals the prescription for dealing with those who do not conform to consensus. It uses national security as a marker for conformity and threatens those who do not conform to it.

Imbricated forms of intolerance create fertile conditions for individuals and groups to transit into violent extremism. Violence is used to ensure

Tolerant communities that practice pluralism, value diversity and safeguard right to dissent, have effective safety valves against VE.

conformity with or punish transgression from an ideal that cannot tolerate variation from itself.

In this way, how VE groups deal with who they consider heretic or serving opposing interests connects to how society responds to minority sects or the structural environment, which is in turn partly influenced by how authorities respond to those who propound political beliefs that challenge official narratives.

Practical Issues

The pattern of state/dissent interface is mirrored by society/non-conformism interface. A range of youth and civil society actors pointed some of the ways in which intolerance manifests itself beyond violent extremism:

- Clustered ethnic, sect-based neighbourhoods with little or no integration;
- Restrictions on inter-marriages, stunted social cohesion;
- Exclusion of youth from educational options;
- Discrimination in recruitment and promotions in jobs;
- Limited opportunities for youth, including in finding accommodation, mentorship, social polarization and economic disparities;
- Joining identity groups, often based on othering; and
- Fertile ground for intensifying intolerance into actual violence.

During the discussion, Karachi was seen as an important vantage point to examine the problem of violent extremism in Pakistan. As a microcosm of the country, Karachi shows that religious extremism is just one of the forms of VE to contend with; ethno-political conflict and sectarian division are also forms of VE that have shaped the politics and societal dynamics of the city.

The joint military/police security operations in Karachi in September 2013 onwards were successfully able to substantially reduce the incidents of violence. This demonstrated that the state has the capacity to act when it wants but raises questions about when the state does not act, because it highlights that it is not a matter of whether it can or not, but whether it wants to or not. However, while symptoms were addressed such as crackdown on criminal gangs, crime networks and various configurations of VE actors such as the Taliban, the primary causes – feelings, grievances and mindsets that drove VE – are still intact and can

Ethno-political conflict and sectarian division are also forms of VE that have shaped the politics and societal dynamics of the city.

be manifested again. Intolerance still festers under the surface. The case study (presented in Box-1) highlights the dilemma of how to reintegrate former VE actors, and how current methods can create future problems.

Box-1: Reintegration

Many VE actors have exited political or Islamist group formations but have not exited criminality. In the case of Lyari, experts pointed towards signs that drug mafias were now enmeshed in mosque ownership politics in the area. Those associated with 'enforcement wings' of political parties have become mercenaries. As VE groups splinter, there is no organized passage for followers to adjust back into society.

The issue of reintegration of VE actors should have been extensively discussed in provincial assemblies and national parliament: instead, opaque and arbitrary decisions were made. Many VE actors were able to re-brand themselves to appear neutral and philanthropic and manage to contest local and national elections.

Sipah-e-Sahaba, an extremist sectarian outfit is said to have made a labour wing in Orangi Town and are helping disenfranchised working class. Jamat-ud-Dawa was reported to be running English language schools and a fire brigade service in Karachi, in addition to all the philanthropy work they are doing in Lower Sindh. As a result of the outreach and influence of sectarian groups, target population of these groups (such as Shias) are ghettoizing in response and segregating their living arrangements and even their funeral arrangements.

Reintegration of militants represents a specific challenge, even as we acknowledge that the mainstream is intolerant and problematic in the first place. In Swat, there are de-radicalizing centers for religious militants, but in the rest of the country, mainstreaming is initiated without de-radicalizing. In Landhi (Karachi) there is a rehab center for extremists, but there are too many to be rehabilitated and not enough places. It is a weighty question to deliberate as to what to do with such people, given that jails and detention centers are already full.

Participants were of the view that reintegration is not an ultimatum and not a binary, that they must either be jailed or killed, or alternately given law-making positions. They can be integrated into society by giving them livelihood options, but without giving them positions or space to influence and shape lives of others and change wider society.

Structural Issues

Participants in the dialogue underscored that the problems stem from the nation-state model which prescribes that a single country have a single nation and a single identity. By not understanding Pakistan as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country, peace-building and nation-building became binaries, one versus the other, creating friction between two processes which should have converged instead of conflicting.

Historic developments continue to impact and shape the current policies in the country. Pakistan's sectarian violence is linked to the Middle East and to regional politics, and cannot autonomously address sectarian violence without considering what the Gulf countries or Saudi Arabia is doing, or what Iran does in response. Violent extremism, therefore, cannot be addressed only within the national context. Pakistani state's politics are permanently in reactive mode. It needs to decide its own strategic interest and not get boxed in between Saudi Arabia, Iran, China and India and their national interests.

Experts were of the view that in examining VE, the initiating factors may have been different, and there may be little point in excavating those drivers – we now need to look at drivers and factors perpetuating an existing propensity, even if they are at odds with the initial ones.

There is also no collective understanding of how violent extremism is understood and perceived. The state apparatus and security discourse use the concept differently from how society does. Within society also, people's experiences and encounters with VE also varies. What the majority may see as VE, certain communities may consider it differently. For instance, in urban areas, the Jirga or the Wadera system are seen as systemic and overt violence, but those living under it may consider it as a survival imperative. Many people from the erstwhile FATA region say joining the Taliban was also a survival compulsion for them. Therefore, it is important to not only counter violent extremism but to prevent it by ensuring justice, respect for diversity, tolerance and inclusive development. Socio-political environment that encourages strengthening tolerance is a pre-requisite for diversity and inter-cultural harmony.

Box-2 uses the academia and state of higher education to illustrate how structures and expediencies intersect under narratives of security to increase surveillance and perpetuate conformity for a demographic best positioned to bolster and embrace change: the educated youth.

By not understanding Pakistan as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country, peace-building and nation-building became binaries.

Box-2: Linking the Evidence: Case study of the Academia

Experts pointed out that campuses cannot become centres of knowledge without free expression of thought, academic freedom and right of free association.

Currently, there exist no culture of public debate on important national security and social issues in universities. A collective action by students generally leads to repercussions by either the Rangers present on campus or disciplinary action by university administrations. Students need permission and NOCs and tangle with bureaucracies even to celebrate cultural events and are refused permission for book fairs in universities; Karachi University is a case in point. As a result of which, there are no new ideas and knowledge production, by either students or teachers. Academics themselves point out that teaching has become mechanical where slide presentations are taught, not ideas. Professors cannot veer from HEC-approved methods and topics. The threat of being labelled anti-Pakistan or anti-Islam is a clear and present danger. According to a participant from the academia, the Higher Education Commission privileged teaching of sciences, medicine and engineering over humanities and social sciences which teach questioning of state and society structures, as a way of reigning in critical thought.

Meanwhile, in continuation of General Zia's policies from the 80s, those declared as Hafiz-e-Quran get accelerated placement, madrassah graduate can get equivalence as MA and enrol in PhD programs. As they get promoted into decision-making positions, academics stated they carry forward their worldviews. Islamic study departments and Islamic history departments are often politicized as supporters of particular fiqhs.

Student unions would be critical in creating exposure to different thoughts and engaging in intellectual deliberation with dissenting ideas. If there is no environment for difference to emerge and for people to learn to deal with difference and dissent, tolerance cannot be practiced. As a result, the capacity to deal with violence is diminishing. Because of de-intellectualization, only coercive tools are left.

Direction of Change

Area experts and practitioners proposed directions from which change could emerge to address the issue of intolerance and violent extremism. These directions could be the bedrock of future dialogues and discussions, to develop concrete catalytic aims and strategies.

Secularism

Some participants felt that we cannot fix things till we introduce secularism. According to them, without separation of religion and state, official structures will continue to privilege one group of belief system over another, allowing discrimination and persecution of minorities and weaponization of differences and laws such as the blasphemy issue.

Other participants pointed out that the secularism prescription needs to be re-examined, given the case of increasing virulence and discrimination in India under PM Modi, which shows if intolerance and communal sentiment runs through society, constitutional change cannot stop or rectify it. Secularism can and does take many forms in different countries; there has been no concerted effort to propose what a Pakistani secularism could look like. Such a conversation should be encouraged so we can have a localized model or proposal which corresponds to Pakistan's unique social and political realities.

Student Unions

The participants unanimously felt there should be rights of association and right to free expression in universities, and associations and student unions should be allowed. Otherwise, peace education, civics, human rights in curriculum – all of this will make no difference, until students find a way of being exposed to conflicting viewpoints, learn to consider them, debate them and then tolerate them in practice. Participants wanted to let students have the tools through which they can legitimately question the injustice and debate all forms of challenges including the state-society disconnect.

Teaching/Education

Teaching Constitutionalism

Participants were unanimous that the Constitution and constitutionalism need to be formally taught as a part of the curriculum at the tertiary level. While Pakistan Studies is already a part of mandatory syllabus, it is qualitatively different from the civic education being proposed here. Democratic governments require public understanding and support for ideas that undergird it. Knowledge and understanding of constitutionalism will enable students to think and act effectively on issues of governance and become committed to the maintenance and improvement of constitutionalism.

Associations and student unions should be allowed.

Teaching Ancient History

Many experts felt this was an important source of resilience because it allowed a gateway to the concept of diversity and multiple loci of identity. Teaching about Sufi saints, and even further back to the Indus Valley Civilization including Moen jo Daroh had given Sindh a more pluralist character but the effect is dissipating since it is not getting reinforced. Factoring in a pre-Islamic past, and a multi-faceted religious past can contour the understanding of diversity and multiple sources of identity, where religion is one of – but not the only source of historical and cultural identity.

Constitution and constitutionalism need to be formally taught as a part of the curriculum at the tertiary level.

Media

Almost all debates on television are on the politics of political parties and government, with little discussion on society, social crises and changing social dynamics, participants felt. News shows are obsessed with politics and entertainment dramas are obsessed with regressive social norms. Space in the traditionally more open Sindhi media is also shrinking. It is becoming like the nationalist and conservative Urdu media now. Journalists openly speak of undeclared censorship and routine self-censorship owing to coercive attitudes and behaviour of authorities. Irrespective, almost all participants felt that broadcast media is an important tool for outreach, more so since it circumvents literacy barriers. They felt the media should be supported and extensively engaged for promoting tolerance.

Dearth of Public Culture

Participants generally observed that there are very few, if any places for people to mingle, hear diverse viewpoints and meet diverse people, debate or even consider different ideas. The same 50-60 people circulate on all TV channels as analysts and commentators, are prominent on Twitter, get invited to and speak at conferences, and travel abroad on interaction opportunities. Stronger public intellectuals are needed, but they cannot be created. Because of this, there is not enough space to create any momentum or any constituency for change.

Also, there is little cross-fertilization of people speaking across different communities. For instance, the public discourse in Gilgit Baltistan or Tharparkar is not reflected in debates and understandings generated in provincial or federal capitals. One solution was to find novel ways of drawing forth their perspectives, like writers who can travel and engage in public discourses and write about them or translate discourses

occurring in other marginalized parts of the country to reflect them in the mainstream.

The nascent trend of literature festivals has immense potential. They are being held at different locales across the country and mobilize a lot of people. It is a way of reclaiming public space; a literary, intellectual space.

Key Messages

Some key messages drawn from the dialogue are presented below.

Plural viewpoints and debate in the public space should be promoted	- Constitution and constitutionalism should be formally taught at the college/ university level - Restoration of student unions should be advocated for - Youth should be provided with platforms for intellectual debate - Broadcast media should be extensively engaged for promoting tolerance based messages
Diversity should be valued and not only tolerated	- Build discourse around diverse identities and plural histories - Raise awareness on the importance of tolerance among public, youth and political forums - Advocate for the utility of public spaces and public forums for dialogue and cultural events - Promote literature festivals, sports and other activities engaging youth

NOTES

[1] Pasha, Hafiz. A (2018), Growth and Inequality in Pakistan: Agenda for Reforms, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Pakistan.

[2] As stated in Douglas Johnston et al (2016), "Countering Violent Religious Extremism in Pakistan", International Center for Religious Diplomacy, 2016. [https://icrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Countering-Violent-Religious-Extremism-in-Pakistan-White-Paper.pdf]

[3] Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity: A development response to addressing radicalization and violent extremism, UNDP, 2016 [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/conflict-prevention/discussion-paper---preventing-violent-extremism-through-inclusiv.html]

[4] Ibid.

[5] United Nations; World Bank. 2018. Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

[6] National Action Plan: A Road to Peaceful Pakistan, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, 2018.

[7] Paigham-e-Pakistan: Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad.

Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC) is a policy research think tank. Since its establishment in 1995 as a private non-profit company, SPDC has made significant intellectual contribution in placing issues of pro-poor growth and social development on Pakistan's policy-making agenda. With a focus on issues related to poverty and inequality, governance, social service delivery, gender, and pro-poor macro-economic policy, it contributes to the national goal of social development through research, policy advice, and advocacy. Being an independent and non-partisan research organization, the centre collaborates and cooperates with organizations working on issues relevant to its mandate both at home and abroad. It determines its own agenda and has successfully maintained its independence and balance between responsive and proactive social sector research. SPDC is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors.