

## PAIGHAM-E-PAKISTAN AS A COUNTER EXTREMISM NARRATIVE

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### Abstract

*Pakistan has faced issues of religious radicalization, extremism and terrorism for decades; religious intolerance has not only transformed the social fabric of this society but has also divided its people into sectarian identities. Pakistan has adopted both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to deal with these menaces of extremism and terrorism. On one side, the state has opted for kinetic options such as security operations to eliminate terrorism but it always comes back in some other form or place. On the other side, to eliminate this threat of violence, the state has opted for the use of non-kinetic approaches such as narratives and development/ education projects in the pockets of areas and social strata breeding extremism. This paper considers Paigham-e-Pakistan (Message of Pakistan) as an attempt to answer narratives of extremism, hatred, and intolerance and uproot them from the very foundations they claim to derive from religion. It aims to replace these divisive narratives with ideas of enlightenment and peace derived from the very same religion. This research is an attempt to understand the Paigham-e-Pakistan as a counter narrative document and to illustrate its importance within the Pakistani society.*

**Keywords:** *Radicalization, Paigham-e-Pakistan, Counter-narrative, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and De-radicalization.*

### Introduction

The phenomenon of extremism is not new in Pakistan. It has a long history that starts with the early 70's with the Pan-Islamist movement of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, followed by augmentation in the Islamization movement of Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980's. The Islamization period of Zia-ul-Haq aggravated religious sensitivity within the country.

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However, the tragedy of 9/11 and launch of the War on Terror (WoT) propelled this religious sensitivity into the completely different and more lethal realm of terrorism. The WoT has cost Pakistan \$118 billion<sup>1</sup> and 60,000<sup>2</sup> lives so far. Given this ever-increasing economic and human cost, Pakistan is in dire need of a counter-narrative to terrorism and extremism that will stem the flow of violence. Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) experts recognize two main approaches to counter extremism and terrorism: kinetic approaches such as defensive and offensive frameworks, and non-kinetic approaches including ideological, communicative, political and social approaches to countering violence.<sup>3</sup>

The fundamental importance of counter-narratives in fighting terrorism and extremism is generally accepted and established so much so that the United Nations has added counter-narratives to extremism as part of their guidelines for countering terrorism. In that regard, on May 24, 2017 the Security Council adopted the UN Resolution 2354.<sup>4</sup> The 2354 UN Resolution, while focusing on countering terrorist narratives, illustrates “Comprehensive International Framework to Counter Terrorists’ Narrative,” as a new way forward to deal with the extremist narratives. This comprehensive strategic agenda urges member states to develop counter-narratives to terrorism and extremism, which provide positive alternatives to individuals vulnerable to narratives of division and hate. The UN center on “Counter-terrorism Implementation Task Force Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism that Leads to Terrorism,” has been tasked to define difference between counter-radicalization and de-radicalization efforts. The counter-radicalization pertains to countering the conditions that may lead some individuals towards violence. However, de-radicalization implies engaging with already radicalized individuals and aims to re-integrate such individuals back into the society.<sup>5</sup> So in that regards, counter-radicalization is a short-term solution that deals with conditions in which individuals are inclined towards the route of

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<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, “War on Terror’ has Cost Pakistan \$118bn: SBP,” *DAWN*, November 19, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Mushahid Hussain, “Trump’s Afghanistan Policy: The View from Islamabad,” *CNN Online*, August 23, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/22/opinions/>

<sup>3</sup> Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Bridget Garnham, Katerina Agostino and Gilbert Caluya, “Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review,” *Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre*, Defence Science and Technology Organisation, Edinburgh, Australia, (2011), [www.dtic.mil/](http://www.dtic.mil/)

<sup>4</sup> UN Resolution 2354, “Comprehensive International Framework to Counter Terrorist Narratives,” (S/2017/375), May 2017. <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/news/2017/05/25/>

<sup>5</sup> Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force.(n.d.). First Report of the Working Group on Radicalisation and Extremism that Lead to Terrorism: Inventory of State Programmes: United Nations.

terrorism. Whereas, deradicalization deals with that philosophy which may create a ground to rehabilitate such individuals who have opted to exercise violence, acts of terrorism. Counter-radicalization is a pre-emptive measure while de-radicalization is a post-hoc attempt at bringing back people from the verge of violence. A comprehensive counter-narrative should address both these aspects.

A comprehensive study of existing counter-narratives to terrorism is offered by the EU Parliament's *Countering Terrorist Narratives Report*. The report lists the recent counter-narrative approaches adopted at the global level and also within the European Union in the light of which it makes policy recommendations. The report describes that governments need to carry out disruption of propaganda, readjustment of message dissemination strategy, adoption of a comprehensive campaign and designing of messages to effectively counter terrorist narratives.<sup>6</sup> Another region-specific study of counter-narratives is offered by the workshop organized by *The Hidayah* and *The Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation* (JCLEC) on "South East Asia Collection of Counter-Narratives for Countering Violent Extremism" in Semarang, Indonesia from March 21-23, 2016. The report of the workshop indicates that the following steps are important to establish a successful counter-narrative to achieve the countering violent extremism aims in the South East Asian region.

1. A counter-narrative should be multi-dimensional such as peace narratives should enhance inter-faith, inter-ethnic harmony and should work on religious and ideological narratives.
2. Counter-narratives should be established according to the requirements of the respective culture, audience and the context of respective society. One-size-fits-all modelling may not help in counter narrative aims.
3. Counter-narratives to religious extremism should promote indigenous interpretations and scholarship rather than religious scholarships from far off regions.
4. Counter-narrative should be multi-dimensional, multi-sectoral and propagated through multiple platforms.
5. A counter-narrative building organization should provide a forum for open discussion and engender dialogue.
6. A counter-narrative should also accommodate the role of family relationships, as family structures are highly significant in the South East Asian cultures.

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<sup>6</sup> Alastair Reed, Haroro Ingram, and Joe Whittaker, *Countering Terrorist Narratives*, (Brussels: Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 2017), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/>

7. Credible messengers should be identified for psychological and emotional counter-narratives.
8. Counter-narratives should include inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue which is particularly significant in the religiously diverse South East Asian context.
9. Counter-narrative should also take into consideration the South East Asian Diaspora communities.<sup>7</sup>

Alex P. Schmid's work on "Al-Qaeda's Single Narrative and Attempts to Develop Counter-Narratives," explains the global efforts to counter Al-Qaeda's toxic narrative. It delineates the state of existing knowledge on counter-narratives and counter-narrative models currently operational in different parts of the world. The study also provides a conceptual road map as a way forward in the form of a "pro-active alternative narrative." According to Schmid, usually most of the counter-narrative approaches have adopted reactionary or defensive lines. These models should opt for pro-active approach and rather than just focusing on an alternative narrative should build bridges between the extremists' philosophy of us vis-à-vis them.<sup>8</sup> According to Usman Asghar the extremist groups use this phenomenon of us vis-à-vis them to create differences between the followers of their agenda and those who negates their philosophy. In other words, this phenomenon provides recognition to their followers.<sup>9</sup> Mainly, Schmid's work emphasized on involvement of all the stakeholders in counter-narrative irrespective of their identity and grouping.<sup>10</sup>

While the efficacy of counter-narratives in fighting terrorism is well established in contemporary research, there are still numerous challenges in developing an effective counter-narrative. Another report published by the Danish Institute for International Studies titled "Why counter-narratives are not the best responses to terrorist propaganda: Challenges, risks and alternatives," argues that counter-narratives approach is accompanied with serious challenges and risks. It is because whenever any state tries to provide a counter-narrative to a terrorist or extremist narrative, they adopt a policy of direct criticism or rejection by rejecting or ridiculing the extremist philosophy. This direct engagement

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<sup>7</sup> The Hidayah and the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC) on "South East Asia Collection of Counter-Narratives for Countering Violent Extremism," in Semarang, Indonesia from March 21-23, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Alex Schmid, "Al-Qaeda's "Single Narrative" and Attempts to Develop Counter-Narratives: The State of Knowledge, " The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) -The Hague, 2014, <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/>

<sup>9</sup> A Telephonic Semi-Structured Interview with Muhammad Usman Asghar, Lecturer at National Defence University, January 5, 2021, Islamabad.

<sup>10</sup> Schmid, Al-Qaeda's "Single Narrative" and Attempts to Develop Counter-Narratives.

with the extremists' narrative enhances risks of confrontation and may involve authorities in trying to fix or ridicule the extremists' philosophy and this imbalanced debate may lead the counter-narrative towards rejection by the audience.<sup>11</sup>

As far as studies related to counter-narratives in Pakistan are concerned, there is a plethora of newspaper articles, but a serious dearth of scholarly undertakings on the subject. Centre for Peace, Security and Developmental Studies' Ousama Khurshid Khan argues in his article "De-Radicalization in Pakistan," that a comprehensive counter-narrative is an essential component of any de-radicalization strategy for Pakistan. However, he refrains from delineating what shape such a narrative ought to take.<sup>12</sup> A tangentially related research by another Pakistani scholar discusses the conscious cultivation of Brailvi Islam as an alternative to the more rigid Deobandi brand of Islam, however it failed when the Brailvi school of thought itself turned extremist in the matter of blasphemy related issues.<sup>13</sup>

Another, significant work has been done by Muhammad Usman Asghar. He has conducted a critical discourse analysis of Paigham-e-Pakistan and has provided a thematic analysis on the Islamic themes which have been mentioned in the Paigham-e-Pakistan. Asghar, has declared Paigham-e-Pakistan as a significant step towards developing a counter-narrative in Pakistan.<sup>14</sup>

Realizing the importance of counter-narrative for successful deradicalization attempts, the Pakistani government opted to introduce Paigham-e-Pakistan (*message of Pakistan*) as a unanimous Fatwa (Fatwa is an authoritative legal ruling by competent religious authorities as per Islamic Religious Jurisprudence).<sup>15</sup> In that regards, the government of Pakistan approached various religious scholars (Muftis) to issue a *Fatwa* on the basis of their religious knowledge against the misinterpretation of various religious concepts by the terrorist and extremist groups. This

<sup>11</sup> Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, Karin Ingrid Castro Møller, "Why Counter-Narratives are not the Best Responses to Terrorist Propaganda: Challenges, Risks and Alternatives, Copenhagen," The Danish Institute for International Studies, 2017, <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/>

<sup>12</sup> Ousama Khurshid Khan, "De-radicalization in Pakistan," Islamabad, Center for Peace, Security and Developmental Studies, <http://www.cpsd.org.pk/>

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Suleman, "Institutionalisation of Sufi Islam after 9/11 and the Rise of Bareilvi Extremism in Pakistan," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, vol. 10, No. 2 (February 2018):6-10; International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26358994> (Accessed on January 10, 2021)

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad Usman Asghar, "Critical Discourse Analysis of Paigham-e-Pakistan (Unanimous Fatwa): Counter-Narrative to Religious Extremism in Pakistan," *NDU Journal* (2020) :31-45.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Fatwa includes several religious concepts such as *Jihad*, *Takfir*, and *Haram* (illegal).

The first half of this research paper aims to deconstruct the Paigham-e-Pakistan as a counter-narrative document. Secondly, this research will explore what kind of impact Paigham-e-Pakistan has made on deradicalization efforts of Pakistan? This research study applies the theoretical understanding of the Aristotleon narrative building and the Model of Communication for Counter Narrative explained by Qatar International Academy for Security Studies (QIASS) and the Soufan Group to deconstruct the Paigham-e-Pakistan as a counter narrative document. Accordingly, Paigham-e-Pakistan will be analyzed using the basic communications model of message, medium and messenger. However, to find the impact of Paigham-e-Pakistan on deradicalization efforts in Pakistan the approaches of Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Bridget Garnham, Katerina Agostino and Gilbert Caluya have been adopted.

The research has adopted an analytical research design and qualitative data collection methods have been opted. Further, to address the vacuum in existing literature on deconstruction of Paigham-e-Pakistan as a counter narrative document, semi-structured interviews with Academics, Religious Scholars, Researchers and political representatives were done. The sampling of interviews followed purposive approach for the selection of respondents. However, due to COVID 19 pandemic all interviews were done on telephone and were conducted during January 1, 2021 to January 16, 2021.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Narrative is derived from the word “Narratology” and is considered as a theoretical understanding in several fields of the study, including sociology, anthropology, political science, organizational studies and communication. According to some scholars, narratives are sentences that explain certain events and incidents that had occurred in the past.<sup>16</sup> Further, for some, narratives are used to explain your own version of reality. However, many scholars of narrative studies use Aristotle’s debate on “Rhetoric” to deconstruct the meanings and impact of narratives. Aristotle presented the persuasive triangle to assess the effectiveness of a narrative. He argued that a narrative must be evaluated along the three dimensions of Ethos, Pathos and Logos.

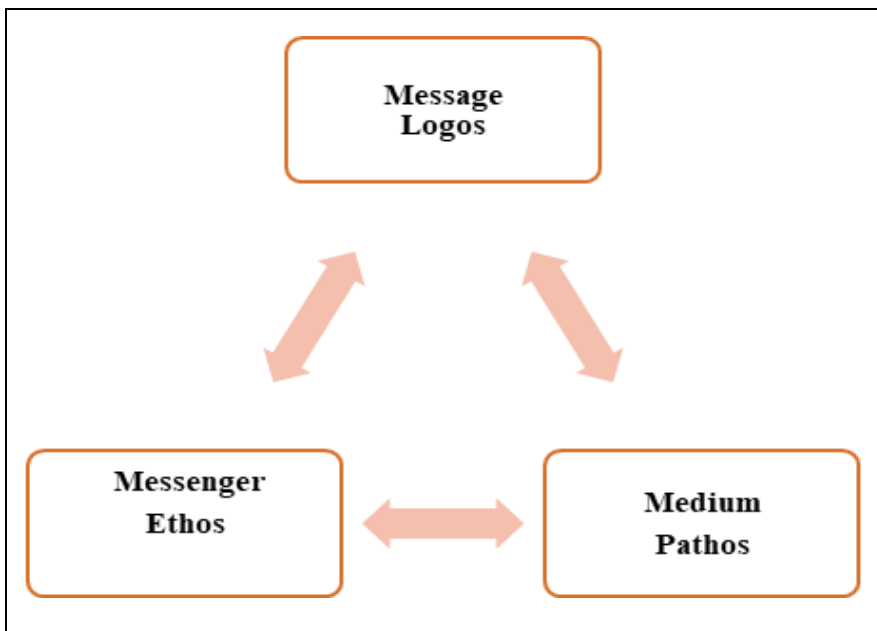
Ethos are impressions and reputation or character of the messengers. When we are aiming to deconstruct any specific narrative it is important to see the impact of the writer or speaker’s personality, character, credibility and authority among the people. Further, he explains that the writer/speaker of narrative must not only have credibility while

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<sup>16</sup> M. Egudo and M.C. Mitchell, A Review of Narrative Methodology, (Edinburgh: DSTO Systems Science Laboratory, 2003)

producing that narrative but also maintain the same credibility while delivering the narrative. Pathos refers to emotions, as according to Aristotle, the audience's response towards any narrative or counter narrative is actually determined as per the state of mind in which they are and in which they will respond to the narrative. In that regards, he says that emotions should be taken into account while generating a narrative in two aspects: first, what the target audience are feeling before the dissemination of narrative and second where you want to take them emotionally with your narrative or where they stand after receiving your narrative. Lastly, Logos reflects credibility of the content or narrative itself. In that context the narrative must be logical and understandable.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 1: Aristotle's Persuasion Triangle**



Parallel to the Aristotle's persuasive triangle the model of QIASS and the Soufan Group suggests that a basic communication model relies on selection of the right medium, a strong message and a credible messenger. Since counter-narrative is a discursive practice, its success can be determined by examining its effectiveness across these three components of successful communication. The criticality of choosing the right medium, message and messenger for a successful counter-narrative is established

<sup>17</sup> A report on "The Power of Aristotle's Persuasion Triangle," *Strategy and Storytelling*, December 27, 2017, <https://strategyandstorytelling.com/blog/>

by a comprehensive study of counter-narratives. This project included intelligence, law enforcement and counter-terrorism experts who travelled around the world gathering data, studying terrorist organizations and interviewing former and current extremists as well as authorities and other stake-holders involved in counter-terrorism.<sup>18</sup>

To deal with the complexity of humanly constructed narrative that includes self-reporting and personal biases, the QIASS model of communication has been used for the deconstruction of Paigham-e-Pakistan. The bridging of Aristotle's persuasive triangle theory and the QIASS model of communication helped to draw a clear understanding of Paigham-e-Pakistan as a narrative. This theoretical and strategic modeling may assist to not only deconstruct the Paigham-e-Pakistan but may also assist to evaluate its effectiveness as a counter narrative.

### **Paigham-e-Pakistan**

Paigham-e-Pakistan's preface sets out with the ambitious hope that this can not only help to develop a peaceful and moderate Islamic society in Pakistan but also present a positive image of Pakistan abroad. It is also conceived as a pathway to the realization of the basic tenets of the Objective's Resolution.

While Paigham-e-Pakistan does stand apart in terms of comprehensiveness, yet such ideological efforts that deconstruct and refute terrorist narratives in the light of Islam are not new at the global.<sup>19</sup> The university of Melbourne compiled a whole list of monumental fatwas that denounce terrorism from scholars and institutions such as Maulana Tahirul Qadri's 600 page fatwa that was endorsed by Al-Azhar University, Egypt; the Amman message in 2004 signed by 200 Muslim scholars from 50 different countries; the British Muslim Forum's fatwa signed by 500 British Muslim clerics; the OIC's International Islamic Fiqh Academy declaration in 2006; the Hyderabad Declaration endorsed by 6000 Muslim clerics in 2008; the New Mardin Declaration in 2010 against ibn e Tamiyyah's fatwa which could not be used to justify Takfir etc.<sup>20</sup> On February 26, 2008, 20,000 ulema of the Darululoom e Deoband termed terrorism un-Islamic.<sup>21</sup> Paigham-e-Pakistan stands apart from these previous fatwas in the fact that it not only denounces terrorism as haram

<sup>18</sup> Qatar International Academy for Security Studies, *Countering Violent Extremism: The Counter Narrative Study* (September, 2013) : 192.

<sup>19</sup> Highlighted by Professor Muhammad Makki, Head of CIPS, National University of Science and Technology (NUST), in a webinar on January 13, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> University of Melbourne, "Fatwas, Rulings and Authoritative Statements against Terrorism in Islam," <https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/nceis/>

<sup>21</sup> "20,000 Scholars Term Terrorism Un-Islamic: Declaration Issued at Darul-Uloom Deoband," Dawn News, February 26, 2008.

as per Islam and an un-Islamic practice but also logically deals with and negates one by one the narratives adopted by terrorists and extremists specifically in the Pakistani context. But if Paigham-e-Pakistan is to stand apart from such previous efforts and have a true impact as a counter-narrative, it would have to be successful on all three counts of message, medium and messenger.

### Message (Logos)

Paigham-e-Pakistan, as the name suggests, is primarily intended to be a message. It is the message of Pakistan to the world that Pakistan is a peaceful nation. This aspect was highlighted by the former foreign minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Asif, at the launching ceremony at President house. He said that this narrative “would become the identity of Pakistani nation as peace loving people in the comity of nations”.<sup>22</sup> Paigham-e-Pakistan is also a message to existing and potential future extremists and terrorists in the society that the path they have chosen to propagate Islam is one that is condemned by Islam itself.<sup>23</sup>

Paigham-e-Pakistan is an ideological counter-narrative that deconstructs and discredits existing extremist ideologies that claim to derive their legitimacy from Islam, using the Quran and Sunnah to justify their vile deeds. Thus, Paigham-e-Pakistan hits at the root of these narratives by using the Quran and Sunnah to prove their actions wrong.<sup>24</sup>

The first important issue that is addressed in Paigham-e-Pakistan is the Islamic way of life as an alternate worldview to the one presented by extremists and terrorists. Islamic way of life is the one based on Meesaq-e-Madina. An Islamic society provides equality of rights for Muslims and non-Muslims. There is no compulsion in religion and no sectarianism or grouping. There is respect for the religion and beliefs of others, and respect for the rights of minorities.<sup>25</sup> Most importantly, there is respect for human life, no matter whether it is Sunni, Shia, Hazara, Christian, Hindu etc. Terrorists and extremists present their own ideal society or Caliphate but that Caliphate is a society of exclusion, while the ideal Islamic society is a society of inclusion, peace and harmony.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in the very beginning Paigham-e-Pakistan challenges the extremist world view based on hatred and discrimination, while presenting an alternate vision of an ideal Islamic

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<sup>22</sup> Samaa Web Desk, “Counter-terror Narrative to Become Identity of Pakistan as Peace-Loving Nation: Khwaja Asif,” *Samaa Online*, January 16, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

society based on tolerance, co-existence and respect for the life and property of others.<sup>27</sup>

The second theme addressed by Paigham-e-Pakistan is rejection of the concept of *Taghut* as applied to Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> Terrorists and extremists justify attacking the Pakistani state and its institutions as they have not established shariah law in the country and thus are considered as “taghut”: the ones who exceed limits and rebel against God. But Paigham-e-Pakistan dismisses this narrative by declaring that “Pakistan is the only country in the world where the most has been done to make laws in accordance with Islam.”<sup>29</sup> Examples of this effort include the Objectives resolution as a preamble to the constitution, the constitutional provision that all existing and future laws shall be in accordance with the Quran and Sunnah, the establishment of Islamic Ideology Council for this purpose and Shariah courts as well as Islamic Research Institute. According to a report by the Council of Islamic Ideology, 1997, as quoted in Paigham e Pakistan, 95 % of laws in Pakistan are shariah compliant.<sup>30</sup>

The third point to be addressed by Paigham-e-Pakistan relates to the problems of terrorism and extremism faced by Pakistan. The ulema declare that Quran o Hadees establish that those who declare war against an Islamic state are not only enemies of the Muslims but also enemies of Allah and his Prophet. They discuss war against state with relevance to two concepts: *Khawarij* and *Hiraba*.<sup>31</sup> Paighame-e-Pakistan states that the *Khawarij* was a group that emerged during the reign of Caliph Ali and killed other Muslims in the name of Islam by declaring them kafir, while *Hiraba* means waging war against the society. The ulema declare that extremists and terrorists in Pakistan have been waging war against the state and against society, and killing peaceful non-Muslims and foreigners who enter with the state’s permission and thus such terrorists are the *khawarij* and culpable to the punishment prescribed in the Quran for *Hiraba*.<sup>32</sup>

“Indeed, the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive upon earth [to cause] corruption is none but that they be killed or crucified or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a

<sup>27</sup> Paigham-e-Pakistan Urdu Document, [http://www.paighamepakistan.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Paigham-e-Pakistan\\_Urdu-11-01-2018.pdf](http://www.paighamepakistan.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Paigham-e-Pakistan_Urdu-11-01-2018.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> A Telephonic Semi-Structured Interview with Muhammad Usman Asghar, Lecturer at National Defence University, January 5, 2021, Islamabad.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Paigham-e-Pakistan Urdu Document.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

disgrace in this world; and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment." Al Quran (5:33).<sup>33</sup>

The ulema also address the problem of suicide terrorism which is categorically forbidden in the Quran (*Surah Baqara:195*). As for sectarian violence, it is the state's prerogative to punish elements spreading hate and disunity, and resolve conflicts over mosques and educational institutes, in which religious scholars can also play a role

Paigham-e-Pakistan also addresses the issue of *Qital-fi-sabilillah* (Jihad with sword), which is solely the responsibility of the state and no individual can declare jihad or attack anyone on his own. Moreover, in the light of the Quran and Sunnah war is the last resort and reconciliation is better. The concept of *Amr-bil-Marroof-wa-Nahi'anil-Munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) is also misinterpreted by extremists in the same way. It is only the right of state and its institutions to use force to enjoin good and forbid evil. The ulema declare that a group should not even use religious slogans for political purposes.

Finally, national agreements, pacts, covenants etc should be adhered to. While we must help our Muslim brothers in times of difficulty, we are not bound to help them against a state with whom we have an agreement or pact.<sup>34</sup>

In their Joint communique at the end of Paigham-e-Pakistan which was signed by 1829 ulema, it is declared that the Constitution of 1973 is Islamic and should be respected. All citizens of Pakistan should be loyal to the state of Pakistan. The state needs to make the shariah appellate bench more effective. Declaring the state or its institutions non-Muslim is against the tenets of shariah and these elements need to be suppressed. Thus, the ulema extended unconditional support for operations Radd-ul-Fassad and Zarb-e-Azb as being against khawarij. Any elements that weaken the Islamic state on the basis of religion, sect, ethnicity etc. are against the tenets of shariah and suicide terrorism is haram. Action must be taken against any educational institution private or government that is spreading hatred, extremism, terrorism or sectarianism.<sup>35</sup> Hate speech is not allowed in Islam, only peaceful preaching is allowed. Punishment for blasphemy is state and courts' prerogative, not individuals. No part of Pakistan should be used to harbour or train terrorists. Rights of minorities should be safe-guarded. Attacking women's educational institutions, attacking female students and teachers or attacking women in the name of honour is completely against the spirit of Islam. It is a sin to harm the Islamic Republic of Pakistan or any of its institutions on the pretext of enforcing shariah as Pakistan is an Islamic state so attacking it falls under

<sup>33</sup> QURAN-E-KAREEM, Surah-e-Al-Maidah, Chapter 5, Verse 33, <https://corpus.quran.com/translation>. (Accessed on December 15, 2020)

<sup>34</sup> Paigham-e-Pakistan Urdu Document.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

*Fasadul Arz* and is tantamount to disobedience of the tenets of Quran and Sunnah. (Sahih Muslim, Kitab ul Amara, Tradition number 4768). Killing another Muslim is also a cardinal sin (Surah Nisa 93).

So terrorism in Pakistan is a sin on three counts 1. Suicide. 2. Killing of innocents 3. Rebellion against an Islamic state. Hence the fight of Pakistani security forces against such elements is completely in accordance with the tenets of Islam. This communique was signed by 1829 ulema, who ratified and affirmed it.

As a Message we see that Paigham-e-Paigham fully addresses all the core elements of terrorist narratives logically and comprehensively. Terrorists and extremists claim to derive their authority and legitimacy from Quran and Sunnah. In Paigham-e-Pakistan the ulema deconstruct and refute the false interpretations of extremist narratives through evoking the same authorities of Quran and Sunnah. This is a very effective technique of shaping a counter-narrative and discrediting narratives of terrorism and sectarianism that act in the name of religion by declaring them condemned and liable to punishment in that same religion of peace, Islam. The ulema who drafted Paigham-e-Pakistan extensively quoted Quran and Sunnah with every argument they made and thus their arguments carry a lot of weight.<sup>36</sup>

However, one thing missing in the message formulation of Paigham-e-Pakistan has been pointed out by Dr. Arshi S. Hashmi who criticized the Paigham-e-Pakistan in terms of generation of an effective logos. She said that Paigham-e-Pakistan has completely ignored social and political context of extremism within the Pakistani society. She advised that for an effective message formulation it is necessary that various aspects of socio-political context should also be addressed in a document like Paigham-e-Pakistan.<sup>37</sup>

## Medium (Pathos)

Since a message is inherently meant to be communicated, hence it needs an effective medium in order to reach its target audience. Paigham-e-Pakistan itself acknowledges this need for an effective medium when it recommends that the *Jumma Khutba* (Friday prayer sermon) should be regulated and be made uniform in order to make society united and righteous. The ulema assert in Paigham-e-Pakistan that the *Jumma Khutba* is a great opportunity for the state to disseminate the true face of Islam and rectify commonly existing violent misinterpretations; a medium the state has so far failed to utilize to its advantage. Loud speakers should also not be allowed to be used for hate speech. Nor should TV channels be

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<sup>36</sup> A Telephonic Semi-Structured Interview with Dr. Arshi Saleem Hashmi, Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad, January 16, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

allowed to make a mockery of religion by holding aggressive debates on religious issues.<sup>38</sup> Electronic media should be allowed its freedom of expression within state prescribed limits. Paigham-e-Pakistan also recommends making ethics of disagreement a part of all educational syllabi across Pakistan. This is a tacit acknowledgement of the increasingly rigid views on religion becoming mainstream in our society leading to dogmatism and intolerance which ultimately culminates in a desire to eliminate the opponent through violence rather than agreeing to disagree.<sup>39</sup>

The SDPI policy review report on the gaps and successes of NAP in October 2016 recommended that:

“A well-directed, coordinated and sustained national campaign is needed to create mass awareness regarding terrorism. Counter-narratives should be disseminated through media, literature, curriculum at educational institutions, debates at public forums and sermons in mosques. It would expose the wrong interpretations of Islam by militant organizations and help people deter from joining these militant groups. However, progress on this aspect has been slow.”<sup>40</sup>

This report thus acknowledges that for a counter-narrative campaign to succeed it needs to be effectively communicated through multiple appropriate mediums. This is where Paigham-e-Pakistan falls short. During the time of the Afghan Jihad one could find such narratives everywhere instigating people for Jihad: on TV, radio, cassettes, newspapers, literature, sermons etc. until people were surrounded by the same narrative and prided themselves in contributing to the holy war. The same level of dedication, commitment and funding is needed to counter this widespread support and indulgence for violence. So far no concrete steps have been taken to disseminate the well-structured, well-articulated argument against terrorism and extremism as embodied in Paigham-e-Pakistan, although there were some lukewarm preliminary steps taken such as the Ministry of Interior’s announcement to try to unite the ulema of different sects on a list of topics for Jumma Khutba (Friday prayer sermon) from which each *khateeb* can pick his own topic of choice. The topics would relate to national unity, promotion of peace and tolerance and character-building.<sup>41</sup> The Council of Islamic Ideology also made recommendations to the government to enact legislation based on

<sup>38</sup> Paigham-e-Pakistan Urdu Document.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Annual Report, Sustainable, Year 2016, <https://think-asia.org/bitstream/handle/11540/7745/>

<sup>41</sup> “Govt Moves to Regulate, Monitor Friday Sermons,” The News (Accessed on January 1, 2021)

Paigham-e-Pakistan, which would not only give legal backing to the fatwa but also send a message to the world that Pakistan is serious about countering terrorism and extremism. So far the follow-up on Paigham-e-Pakistan from the side of the government is not effective. The right media need to be picked to spread the sane and sage counter-narrative of Paigham-e-Pakistan to the embattled corners of Pakistan where the problem of radicalization is most severe.

### **Messenger (Ethos)**

For an effective piece of communication, what is being said is almost as important as who is saying it. Also known as importance of the messenger. The need for credible messengers in devising a successful counter-narrative is widely recognized. In the case of Pakistan, due to the highly polarized society and prevailing radicalization and mistrust, it is hard to find messengers who would be considered credible by the target audience. What sets Paigham-e-Pakistan apart from previous ideological counter-narratives is the fact that Paigham-e-Pakistan is the first ever across the board consensus developed on the issue of terrorism and extremism. It is the result of endeavours of the Islamic Research Institute of the International Islamic University in collaboration with *Wifaq-Ul-Madaris-Al-Arabia*, *Anzeem-ul-Madaris Ahle-Sunnat*, *Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al Salafia*, *Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Shia*, *Rabitat-ul-Madaris Al Islamiah Pakistan*. All the major Islamic seminaries of Pakistan were also taken on board such as *Jamia Dar-ul Uloom Karachi*, *Dar-ul-Uloom Muhammadia Ghousia Bhera Sharif*, *Jamia Binoria Karachi*, *Jamiat-ul-Muntazir Lahore*, *Jamia Ashrafia Lahore*, *Dar-ul-Uloom Jamia Haqqania Akora Khattak*, *Jamia Muhammadia Islamabad* and *Jamia Faridia Islamabad*.<sup>42</sup>

Since so many ulema from different orientations and associations have come forward to endorse this fatwa, hence the messenger is credible in this case. However, someone also needs to come forward as that messenger who will disseminate this message to the grass roots level. If the government or the security forces perform that job, they are already the targets of extremism and terrorism and hence a party to the conflict. Hence, this research argues that the ulema who signed this document be now tasked and incentivised to elevate it to something more than just a document and to promote Paigham-e-Pakistan in their sermons, seminaries, rallies, madrassas, syllabi, public speeches and TV appearances. Since terrorism is most commonly attributed to religious misinterpretations, hence persons with religious authority are the most credible messengers. One might argue that such ulema came forward in the past as well and had to pay with their lives for speaking up against terrorism. The answer to that is that after the success of operation Zarb e Azb and Radd-ul Fasaad terrorists are not as strong as they used to be.

<sup>42</sup> Paigham-e-Pakistan Urdu Document.

Secondly, there is safety in numbers. If the 1829 ulema who signed Paigham-e-Pakistan and all the seminaries who participated in its drafting lend their vocal support and not just their signatures to the cause of eradicating extremism and terrorism, then the prevalent tacit support for extremist and terrorist means and methods might die away sooner rather than later.

Moreover, Dr. Hashmi emphasized on the involvement of individuals from political and social structures of the society too. She believes that rather just focusing on the religious side of extremism, the psycho analysis of the society itself is necessary as only then one can understand the behaviours of extremism in the light of socio-political factors. She said that the structural gaps in the society always become a reason to aggravate sentiments of hate and intolerance in a particular group or sect, therefore, just focusing on the messengers from religious groups would not be justified.<sup>43</sup>

### **Significance of Paigham-e-Pakistan**

According to CVE experts Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Bridget Garnham, Katerina Agostino and Gilbert Caluya, the CVE approaches that can be adopted by states are: ideological, communicative, political and social CVE approaches. This section of the paper will provide an overview of existing efforts in Pakistan along the lines of these CVE approaches and will evaluate impact or effectiveness of Paigham-e-Pakistan on these levels.<sup>44</sup>

### **Ideological Approaches to CVE**

Ideological counter narratives acknowledge that since ideology is an important driver of radicalization; hence it can be an important means of deradicalization.<sup>45</sup> Using ideology to counter terrorism and extremism can involve critical and deconstructive approaches that deconstruct and discredit terrorist narratives by evaluating them against the tenets of Quran and Sunnah. Such an attempt was undertaken by Javed Ahmed Ghamdi, Maulana Tahir-ul-Qadri etc. Some argue that these ideological counter-narratives were not really effective because they came from different sects and not the deobandi sect prominently associated with extremism or that such narratives did not reach the grass roots levels of

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<sup>43</sup> A Telephonic Semi-Structured Interview with Dr. Arshi Saleem Hashmi, Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad, January 16, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Bridget Garnham, Katerina Agostino and Gilbert Caluya. "Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review."

<sup>45</sup> Jacobson, M. "Learning Counter-Narrative Lessons from the Cases of Terrorist Dropouts," *Countering Violent Extremist Narratives* (2017): 72-83. The Hague: National Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

radicalization. However, a more grassroots level approach was used by Maulana Sarfaraz Naeemi who was assassinated by the Taliban for his anti-Taliban rhetoric and Maulana Israr Madni, who himself hails from the deobandi school of thought and working at the grass roots level of radicalization.

Another means of countering radical ideologies is by promoting progressive and moderate Muslim points of view. For instance, President Pervez Musharraf tried to promote the Barelvi stream of Islam as a counter-force to the radical Islamic interpretations of the Wahabi and Deobandi schools of thought. This led to the establishment of the National Council for the Promotion of Sufism (NCPS) in 2006. This approach was followed by the succeeding PPP government as well. However, the Barelvi school of thought soon manifested its own radical and extremist side on the issue of blasphemy and khatm e naboowat.<sup>46</sup>

Another means of countering terrorist narratives is via value-based counter-narratives, values that are generally accepted in the society such as ISPR's song that challenged the manhood and bravery of Taliban who stoop to attack and fight children.

In that regards, Paigham-e-Pakistan can be considered as a formal step towards the ideological response to the extremist ideology. Though, ideological responses were generated earlier too but this is the first time when the state has rebutted the extremist ideology in a more effective manner.

### **Communicative Approaches to CVE**

One way of countering narratives of violence is by disrupting the flow of such narratives through censoring and monitoring. This has been adopted by Pakistani authorities by forbidding the media from showing gruesome images which serve the fear-mongering purposes of terrorists, giving air time to terrorists or broadcasting any specimen of hate speech in the Code of Conduct, 2015 by amendments in the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Rules, 2009.<sup>47</sup> ISPR songs, plays, documentaries, dramas, short films and videos that aim to weaken the onslaught of extremist narratives and show the sacrifices of the Pakistani forces also fall under this category. ISPR has even launched a new video-game "Glorious Resolve". However, the weakness of these counter-narratives is that they are coming directly from ISPR wing of the Pakistan army, which is currently a party to the conflict. These counter-narratives should come from a more neutral authority.

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<sup>46</sup> Muhammad Suleman, "Institutionalisation of Sufi Islam after 9/11 and the Rise of Barelvi Extremism in Pakistan."

<sup>47</sup> Associated Press, "Pemra Issues Guidelines for TV Channels," *Dawn*, February 28, 2016.

NISP and NAP initiatives by the Pakistani government can also be categorized as communicative approaches to CVE since they sought to disrupt extremist narratives and replace them with integrative and benign counter-narratives. The significance of a strong counter-narrative that deals with radicalization at the levels of individual, organization and socio-political environment is generally accepted by the Pakistani authorities. This is reflected in both the NISP (National Internal Security Policy) and the NAP (National Action Plan) put forward by the Pakistani government. However, such policy recommendations/ plans have failed to materialize in the form of a national-level comprehensive counter-narrative.

The points in NAP which implicitly deal with the development of a counter-narrative are as follows:

1. Strict action will be taken against such literature in newspapers, magazine etc. that promotes sectarianism, intolerance, division, hatred or violence.
2. Print and electronic media will be monitored to prevent glorification of terrorists and terrorist organizations through their reportage.
3. Concrete measures will be taken to prevent the promotion of violence and extremism through internet and social media.
4. Strict action will be taken against elements spreading sectarianism.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting displays on its website some follow-up steps taken in pursuit of fulfilling the goals set out in the NAP. In order to curb hate speech, authorities confiscated around 1,500 books and other hate literature and closed down 71 shops. However, these are hardly impressive figures from all over Pakistan to boast about. Other strict action against hate speech includes 1,961 suspects arrested and 1,893 cases filed against clerics who use their position to spread hate and division. 271 of these suspects have been convicted while 826 cases are still languishing before special courts.

Action has also been used against elements who misuse the loud speaker for hate-mongering. 7,000 cases have been registered so far and 6,855 people have been arrested. 1,482 of them have been already convicted for hate-preaching on loudspeakers.<sup>48</sup>

Paigham-e-Pakistan has highlighted the importance of controlled Friday sermons and has emphasized on the preparation of the list of approved topics for Friday sermons. However, a comprehensive policy is still not being followed on it. In that context the social media can be used as a powerful tool for launching a coordinated communicative and ideological counter-narrative or to disseminate message of Paigham-e-

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<sup>48</sup> Shakeel Ahmed Ramay, "National Action Plan: Implementation Gaps & Successes," *SPDI Policy Review*, October 2016, <https://sdpi.org/publications/files/> (Accessed on January 3, 2021)

Pakistan as campaign. Since media and terrorism have a symbiotic relationship<sup>49</sup>, terrorists often use media, especially social media to spread their message. Thus, the media becomes a strategic tool in the hands of terrorists who use it to disseminate narratives of fear and hatred. According to recent reports various terrorist groups are using social media as tool for recruitment, training and propaganda purposes during COVID 19 pandemic.<sup>50</sup>

### **Socio-Political CVE Approaches**

According to Briggs, “our experience of terrorism tells us that it is best handled through democracy, not in spite of it”.<sup>51</sup> Pakistani governments’ efforts to introduce legal and political reforms in FATA such as the extension of Political Parties Order 2002, reforms of the FATA Tribunal and the Qaumi Jirga in 2011, amendments in the FCR and the Rewaj Act in 2017, extension of jurisdiction of superior courts to FATA in 2018 and now the FATA merger negotiations are some of the efforts to integrate FATA with the rest of KPK. However, these steps are too little too late. As for Paigham-e-Pakistan, it has completely ignored the socio-political underlying causes of extremism and addressed the religious aspect only. As mentioned earlier, Dr Hashmi argues that Paigham-e-Pakistan has only focused on the religious concepts and religious issues of extremism in the Pakistani society and has completely ignored psyche of socio-political aspects, due to which Paigham-e-Pakistan cannot be considered as a comprehensive counter narrative. She further avers that Religious enlightenment for one can be too suffocating for other, enlightenment should not be confined to religious thoughts alone rather it requires a complete process in which society evolves politically, socially as well as religiously. Oftentimes social structures, values and beliefs manifest in aggressive behaviours and eventually lead an individual to a particular sect depending on that individual’s exposure, so whatever is going on politically and socially that is making an individual vulnerable is an important marker to study how and why extremism is flourishing and being accepted/supported by people.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> V Cvrtila, & A Perešin, “The Transformation of Terrorism and New Strategies,” *Političamisaio*, 46:5, (2009):121-139.

<sup>50</sup> Saba Noor, Hira Khan and Dr. Rashid Ahmed, “Role of Social Media in Peace building: Options and Opportunities for Pakistan (A case study of COVID 19),” *International Review of Social Sciences IRSS*, vol 9, Issue 1.

<sup>51</sup> R Briggs, “Hearts and Minds and Votes: The Role of Democratic Participation in Countering Terrorism,” *Democratization*, 17: 2 (2010): 273.

<sup>52</sup> A Telephonic Semi-Structured Interview with Dr. Arshi Saleem Hashmi, Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad, January 16, 2021.

## **Conclusion**

The philosophy of counter terrorism indicates that to deal with the menace of extremism and terrorism a state needs to address grievances, include all people in the political process and should present an alternative vision for a better world. It is imperative to note that addressing genuine grievances and political empowerment comes first. Then a counter-narrative to extremism and terrorism can be reasonably expected to take effect. If the situation on ground is rife with poverty, injustice, deprivation, distrust, mismanagement and corruption then people cannot be expected to survive on narratives alone. The process of alleviating genuine grievances and integrating the pockets of resentful and isolated people back into the mainstream, needs to go side by side with disseminating counter-narratives such as Paigham-e-Pakistan. Counter-narratives also need an atmosphere of debate and transparency in order to promote mutual trust and tolerance. Until this enabling environment is created and the message is disseminated to the grass roots level, words and documents alone would not suffice.

