Proposed
Policy Recommendations

by
The Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies (CPGS)
at the eve of

Two-Day International Seminar on

Countering
Violent Extremism
Global Action Plan

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Message of the President CPGS

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The scourge of terrorism and violent extremism continues to threaten the world. Our task to counter this scourge is thus unfinished. The complex challenges of terrorism and violent extremism defy simplified solutions and need a comprehensive approach. A piecemeal effort will not eliminate this scourge. A uni-dimensional approach or a short term solution focused exclusively on operational and political counter-measures will not produce the long-term and durable results. We as a comity of nations, this is our responsibility to act prudently and sincerely against the menace of violent extremism.

As a Pakistani citizen and a public representative, today I see that in the past fifteen years we have given huge sacrifices in blood and resources. We have lost more than 50000 precious lives of men, women and children, which include more than 10000 defence and security personnel. Our social and physical infrastructure has suffered colossal damages; and the full potential of our economy has been stunted. I see that Pakistan has sacrificed far more than any other nation in fighting against forces of terrorism and extremism.

But beyond suffering and sacrifices, Pakistan fulfills its international obligations, particularly its commitment to implement the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, with great responsibility. Pakistan is party to eleven universal and two regional counter-terrorism instruments. At the national level, we have enacted the Pakistan Arms Ordinance, the Surrender of Illicit Arms Act, the Terrorists Special Courts Act, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Control of Narcotics Substance Act, the Anti-Narcotics Force Act, the Pakistan Madrasah Education Board Ordinance, and the Anti-Money Laundering Bill. We are a member of the Asia-Pacific Group on Money Laundering, and party to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and its Additional Protocol on Terrorist Financing.

As a Pakistani citizen and a public representative, I assure the world that Pakistan will continue to adhere to its commitment to strengthen mutual cooperation in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. And, I am equally confidant that international community recognizes Pakistan's efforts and role in combating the forces of evil and terror.

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Background

Violent extremism remains a potent threat to international peace and security. Over the past decade, the understanding of how and why individuals engage in violent extremism and terrorism has evolved and become more nuanced, as have the ways and means to prevent these threats. Aside from debates around definitional differences, Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) falls precisely into realm of policy; carefully premeditated programs, and calculated interventions (kinetic, non-kinetic, and sometime both) designed to prevent individuals from engaging in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups.

Since violent extremism has become a global phenomenon and is not associated with a single ideological, cultural, political, religious or ethnic entity, therefore while devising a comprehensive CVE strategy, multilateral consensual efforts are required to effectively counter it. To understand the underlying causes of violent extremism at a broader level, five main issues that are at the heart of the contemporary debate on countering violent extremism must be acknowledged. These are:-

- ➢ The 'us vs. them' approach, or the cultural, ideological, religious and racial bases for violent extremism, which have given rise to hatred, religious fanaticism and racism leading to violent extremism and jet-black terrorism.
- ➢ Underdeveloped regions and poor governance (e.g., lack of rule of law, democratic values, justice, and provision of services), which have turned various regions into breeding grounds for violent extremism.
- ➢ Competing powers and the quest for regional and global dominance (pre-emptive wars, proxy wars, state sponsored terrorism, covert operations for geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic objectives etc).
- ➢ Political instability in the Middle East and Africa and rise of transnational terror outfits (ISIL, Boko Haram), which have brought the entire world, especially Europe, face to face with unprecedented vulnerabilities and challenges. The most recent among these is ongoing refugee crisis in the Middle East and Europe.
- ➢ The role of multi-lateral institutions (especially of the UN) in tackling the problem of violent extremism.

Keeping in view the above cited fundamental issues and to initiate a productive and objective debate over ways and means to counter violent extremism, the Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies (CPGS), Islamabad, has compiled certain policy recommendations that may provide a better framework for at least understanding the basic causes for violent extremism, and subsequently help in formulating a comprehensive and systematic response to deal with the menace.

Globally, there are hundreds of counter extremism programs. In many countries, practitioners focus on strengthening communities to reduce their vulnerability towards radicalization. However, there remains a need to understand and tackle this menace at global level and synchronize international efforts in an effective way to achieve the best results possible. The purpose of this policy paper is to propose mechanisms and strategies to address the gaps in the international efforts to counter violent extremism. These policy recommendations hope to be amenable to all state parties, and productive in forwarding the debate in this context by incorporating global best practices of countering violent extremism, and keeping in view the heterogeneous behaviour and social realities of UN member states.

Proposal

i) Considering the dangers that are posed by acts of violent extremism to the international peace;

ii) Believing violent extremism and the consequent acts of terrorism are a grave danger to the global peace and security;

iii) Emphasizing upon states to increase international cooperation in information sharing, coordination, capacity-building of states for countering violent extremism;

iv) Reiterating the UNSC resolutions stating that terrorism should not be associated with any religion, nationality or civilization (S/RES/ 1963, 1989, 2129, 2161, 2178, 2195, 2199);

v) Emphasizing that the sheltering, training, financing, travel and/or support of any known violent extremists may be subject to strict legal controls as adopted by all the member states of the UN;

vi) Reaffirming the ban on violent non-state actors, individuals, organizations and their affiliates, wherever they may be located.

In reference to Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, CPGS recommends that;

1. Garnering support to combat violent extremism under the umbrella of a global venture will require a centralized effort from an international body (not a state or states in isolation) that can lend the venture prestige, direction, and continuity. UN as a custodian body of international peace and security must come forward to lead this global venture.

2. There should be increased support and coordination among states, so as to better understand the phenomenon of violent extremism, and better coordinate strategies against the threat it poses to international peace and security under the umbrella of UN.

3. UN member states should put more 'power to the elbow' to effectively meet the challenges of violent extremism and terrorism, to overcome the lack of international support and cooperation that is preventing counter-terrorism committees established by UNSC Resolutions from effectively dealing with terrorists.

4. "Countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism following a multidimensional approach" and "promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in the context of counterterrorism measures" are two strategic aspects that all states involved must focus on when developing strategies for dealing with violent extremism at national level.

5. It is also suggested that the UN may like to convene an international conference of high-profile Muslim and non-Muslim philanthropists, imams, thinkers, community leaders, and government officials to define objectives and elect an oversight board from within their ranks, with the aim of launching an inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue that would have been started and supported by the UN.

6. The UN must gear up its efforts to examine and enforce the implementation of the various components of its strategies by all state parties, particularly in the context of tackling the financing of terrorism. They may also devise proposals that could contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the implementation by Member States.

7. A global venture that identifies and funds counter-radicalization projects in affected countries would be the first step in reversing the grip of the violent extremist narrative.

8. A clear distinction should be made between 'freedom struggles' and 'acts of terrorism' as well as transparency and fairness in any policies formulated in this context. Unresolved territorial and political issues must not be confused with terrorism or violent extremism. Given that violent extremism knows no borders, disputes such as Palestine and Kashmir have the potential to escalate tensions in the entire region(s), as well as create space that can be manipulated by violent extremists for their own political ends. The UN should extend its fullest support to a regional approach for resolving such regional conflicts.

9. It is also suggested that UNSC develop a comprehensive and consensual proposal for ending the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the Middle East. As rightly pointed out by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Dr Maleeha Lodhi, "Afghanistan stands on the cusp of challenge and opportunity". United Nation's Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) must support and push forward the process of national reconciliation undertaken and led by Afghans themselves.

10. The world is currently confronted with a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions – a global wave of displacement and forced migrations – in Europe, the Middle East and

Africa, in East Asia and elsewhere. These massive human movements are the consequence of conflicts, persecution and poverty. UN must vamp up its global response on an emergency basis to decisively address the issues of displacement and forced migration.

11. The rise of trans-national terrorist outfits like ISIL (DAISH) and Boko Haram have posed unprecedented challenges to global peace and security. The UNSC should act proactively to deal with these groups. Similarly, the supporters, abettors and financers of these groups must be dealt collectively, and with an iron hand.

12. The UN member states should support forces of democracy and pluralism and amplify voices that oppose the exploitation of religion by violent extremist groups for their own political motives. A consensus at the international level is required to deal with hate speech that incites violence. Moreover, the UN should work towards marking a clear distinction between 'free speech' and 'hate speech'.

13. There should be a framework mechanism for the prevention of covert operations by states against other states for the purpose of destabilization and to achieve geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic objectives. Similar arrangements should be erected to discourage states from taking unilateral or preemptive actions against other states under the cover of combating terrorism.

14. At the international level, such a mechanism should have a consultative mandate over the parties, in order to help the member states build their capacity to effectively prevent any sponsorship of transnational terrorism. The UN may perhaps be the most effective platform for the formulation of such a mechanism, as it may then incorporate all its members into its folds. Such a consultative mandate can educate and help the member states to develop an ethics of cultural pluralism and mutual coexistence.

15. The UN should establish an effective counter terrorism consultative body at par with the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) to effectively eradicate this menace across all platforms permanently.

16. The international community should discourage recruitment or individual mobilization for terrorism by supporting local law enforcement programs (capacity building), including information-driven, community-oriented policing efforts, which have proven highly effective in this regard.

17. The UN and international community are urged to encourage and support states to enhance the role of the civil society in development of a counter-extremism narrative. However, it is the prime responsibility of the state to empower its civil society against the forces of violent extremism by bolstering and catalyzing support to community-based

programs and strengthening relationships with communities that may help in evolving the counter narrative. In this vein, role of youth in formulating a counter narrative against violent extremism and terrorism in different communities should be appreciated and promoted on every count.

18.   Use of cyber space for the promotion of terrorism and extremism is a rapidly growing phenomenon. UNSC should initiate a proactive and coordinated response. CTITF's Working Group on 'Countering the Use of Internet for Terrorist Purposes' should gear up its efforts to overcome technical, legal and political challenges in this regard.

Conclusion

Violent extremism is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon usually rooted in diverse underlying factors such as religious, ideological, cultural, racial, ethnic, political and societal misperceptions of differences. These factors, when mixed in a globalized environment pose diverse and complex challenges with complex security dynamics. Extremist groups take advantage of globalization to expand their networks and operations. These groups often target areas marked by ongoing conflicts and tension. They exploit local and regional grievances by effectively using communication technologies to spread their violent ideologies.

Therefore, response to counter these groups should go well beyond the symbolic pageantry of conventions and political summits. It requires a serious and frank discussion at global level that addresses how best to implement and frame the question of violent extremism and terrorism within the lens of social inclusion and effective governance, and acknowledge the troubling disconnect between national interests and global security. The UN, as the custodian body of international peace and security should organize this discussion, so as to design consensual intervention and preventions strategies in a systematic way by adhering to all statues of international law, norms and customs.

Pakistan has been one of the hardest hit victims of violent extremism. Although no Pakistani national was involved in any international conspiracy against the world peace, yet it has been paying the price of this fight with the blood of its people. Despite the challenges, today the world community recognizes Pakistan's successful efforts against countering violent extremism. The Pakistani nation is famous for its resilience in the face of adversity and history will remember Pakistan as a country which defeated the scourge of violent extremism and emerged victorious.