# COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| **Keywords:**<br>Counter-Terrorism (CT), Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), Pakistan, Radicalization, Security, Rehabilitation Programs, Community Engagement<br><br>**Corresponding Author:**<br>**Syeda Amina Gillani,**<br>BS Political Science, International Islamic university Islamabad<br>Email:<br>aminagillani310@gmail.com | The issue of terrorism and violent extremism is a great security threat in the world, particularly in Pakistan, which has been battling with various extremities. This paper examines two approaches to combating this issue: Counter-Terrorism (CT) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). CT employs aggressive security-based measures to disaggregate militant groups. CVE focuses on prevention and community collaboration to address the causes of radicalization. The history of Pakistan, such as the Afghan Jihad and the events that struck it after 9/11, demonstrates the complexity of the situation in the country in terms of extremism. The article indicates that a strategy based solely on security measures is weak and advocates a balanced approach that incorporates both CT and CVE. It also underscores Pakistan's success through its military achievements, aftercare facilities, and school transformations, demonstrating the need for community participation and adherence to international standards. In brief, the article argues that we need a long-term policy to integrate safety aspirations with human rights, effective governance, and societal inclusion to strengthen society against extremist ideas. |

## 1. Introduction

Terrorism and violent extremism remain among the most persistent and complex challenges confronting states in the twenty-first century. These phenomena threaten not only national security but also social cohesion, democratic governance, human rights, and economic development. In response, governments across the world have developed a range of strategies broadly categorized as Counter-Terrorism (CT) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). Counter-terrorism refers primarily to coercive, security-oriented measures such as military operations, intelligence gathering,

policing, surveillance, and legal enforcement aimed at preventing terrorist attacks and dismantling militant networks. Countering Violent Extremism, by contrast, focuses on preventive, non-coercive, and long-term strategies designed to address the underlying drivers of radicalization, reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies, and promote social resilience through education, community engagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration. This paper argues that while CT measures are indispensable for immediate security and disruption of terrorist networks, they are insufficient on their own to ensure sustainable peace. CVE approaches are essential to complement CT by addressing the root causes of extremism such as political grievances, social marginalization, economic deprivation, identity crises, weak governance, and ideological manipulation. A purely militarized response risks short-term success but long-term instability, whereas an integrated CT–CVE framework offers a more comprehensive and durable solution. The case of Pakistan provides a particularly instructive example of the CT–CVE debate. Pakistan has been at the forefront of global counter-terrorism efforts for more than two decades, facing diverse forms of extremism including religious militancy, sectarian violence, ethno-nationalist insurgency, and transnational terrorist networks. Although Pakistan has achieved significant gains through large-scale military operations and intelligence-led policing, the persistence and resurgence of militant violence in recent years highlight the limitations of an overly security-centric approach. This opinion paper examines the evolution of CT and CVE in Pakistan, evaluates their achievements and shortcomings, draws lessons from international experiences, and proposes a balanced strategy that aligns security imperatives with human rights, governance reforms, and social inclusion.

## 2. Conceptual Framework: Counter-Terrorism vs. Countering Violent Extremism

Counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism are often used interchangeably in public discourse, yet they represent distinct, though complementary, approaches. Understanding this distinction is crucial for effective policy design.

Counter-terrorism focuses on acts of violence and the actors who perpetrate them. It includes military operations against insurgent groups, arrests, targeted killings, surveillance, intelligence collection, border control, financial tracking, and prosecution under anti-terrorism laws. CT is typically reactive, responding to immediate threats, and prioritizes state security. Its success is often measured in terms of reduced attacks, killed or arrested militants, and dismantled networks.

CVE, on the other hand, is preventive and people-centred. It seeks to stop individuals from becoming radicalized in the first place or to disengage those already influenced by extremist ideologies. CVE strategies include educational reform, promotion of critical thinking, counter-narratives, community policing, youth empowerment, economic inclusion, psychological counselling, religious dialogue, and rehabilitation programmes. Success in CVE is harder to measure because it involves social attitudes, behavioural change, and long-term resilience rather than immediate security outcomes.

The relationship between CT and CVE should not be viewed as a binary choice. Instead, they operate on a continuum. CT is necessary to neutralize imminent threats, while CVE is essential to prevent the regeneration of those threats. An imbalance—either excessive reliance on force or exclusive focus on soft measures—can undermine overall effectiveness.

## 3. Historical Roots of Violent Extremism in Pakistan

### 3.1 Afghan Jihad and Militarization of Society

The roots of violent extremism in Pakistan can be traced back to the late 1970s and 1980s during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan became a frontline state in

the Cold War, hosting millions of Afghan refugees and serving as a hub for mujahideen training, funding, and ideological mobilization. The conflict led to the proliferation of weapons, militant networks, and religious narratives that glorified armed struggle. While these dynamics served short-term geopolitical objectives, they also created long-term security vulnerabilities.

## 3.2 Post-9/11 Blowback

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, Pakistan joined the US-led "War on Terror." This decision transformed militant dynamics within the country. Groups that had previously operated externally turned inward, leading to the emergence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The insurgency resulted in unprecedented levels of violence, targeting civilians, schools, mosques, markets, and security installations. The Army Public School attack in 2014 symbolized the human cost of extremism and triggered a renewed national resolve against terrorism.

## 3.3 Sectarian and Ethno-Nationalist Violence

Pakistan's extremism problem is not monolithic. Sectarian violence, particularly against Shia communities, has been perpetrated by groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Meanwhile, ethno-nationalist insurgency in Balochistan stems from political marginalization, economic deprivation, and disputes over resource control. These diverse manifestations require tailored CT and CVE responses rather than a one-size-fits-all strategy.

## 4. Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Achievements and Limitations

## 4.1 Military Operations and Security Gains

Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts have included major military operations such as Rah-e-Raast, Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb, and Radd-ul-Fasaad. These operations dismantled militant sanctuaries, restored state control over previously ungoverned areas, and significantly reduced terrorist incidents by the late 2010s. Improved intelligence coordination and urban counter-terrorism policing further enhanced security.

## 4.2 Legal and Institutional Frameworks

The National Action Plan (NAP) of 2014 represented a milestone in Pakistan's CT framework. It aimed to regulate madrassas, curb hate speech, counter terrorist financing, strengthen criminal justice institutions, and eliminate armed militias. Amendments to anti-terrorism laws and the establishment of military courts reflected the urgency of the threat.

## 4.3 Challenges and Criticism

Despite these successes, Pakistan's CT approach faces criticism. Overreliance on kinetic force risks civilian harm and human rights violations, which can fuel grievances and undermine public trust. Weak prosecution, slow judicial processes, and selective implementation of reforms limit long-term effectiveness. Moreover, military success has not always translated into sustainable governance and development in cleared areas.

## 5. Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan

## 5.1 Rehabilitation and Deradicalization Programmes

Pakistan has implemented CVE initiatives such as the Sabaoon, Mishal, and Sparlay rehabilitation centres in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These programmes combine psychological counselling, religious re-education, vocational training, and family engagement to reintegrate former militants, particularly juveniles. Evidence suggests that comprehensive rehabilitation reduces recidivism when supported by community acceptance and economic opportunities.

## 5.2 Education and Madrassa Reforms

Education reform is central to CVE. While efforts to regulate madrassas and integrate modern subjects have faced resistance, they reflect recognition that unregulated religious education can create ideological echo chambers. Promoting critical thinking, civic education, and pluralistic values in all educational institutions remains a long-term priority.

## 5.3 Community Engagement and Counter-Narratives

Civil society organizations, religious scholars, journalists, and youth activists play a crucial role in countering extremist narratives. Community-based dialogue, interfaith initiatives, and online campaigns challenge extremist propaganda and promote peaceful interpretations of religion.

## 5.4 Limitations of CVE Efforts

CVE initiatives in Pakistan remain fragmented, underfunded, and localized. There is no fully institutionalized national CVE framework with clear metrics, sustained budgets, and coordination across provinces. Without scaling up, CVE risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

## 6. International Experiences and Lessons

Countries such as the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Denmark offer valuable lessons. The UK's Prevent strategy emphasizes early intervention through multi-agency coordination. Saudi Arabia's rehabilitation programmes demonstrate the importance of family involvement and economic reintegration. Indonesia highlights the value of community-driven approaches, while Scandinavian "exit programmes" show how social services can facilitate disengagement without coercion.

For Pakistan, these experiences underscore the importance of transparency, community trust, long-term monitoring, and balancing security with civil liberties.

## 7. Conclusion and Way Forward

Pakistan's experience demonstrates that counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism are not competing strategies but mutually reinforcing pillars of national security. While CT has delivered critical gains in reducing violence, it cannot alone prevent the regeneration of extremist networks. CVE offers the tools to address the social, ideological, and economic conditions that sustain extremism.

A sustainable strategy for Pakistan requires strengthening CT operations within a legal and rights-respecting framework, revitalizing the National Action Plan, mainstreaming CVE into education and governance, expanding rehabilitation programmes nationwide, and empowering communities as partners in security. Ultimately, defeating violent extremism is not merely about eliminating militants but about building a resilient, inclusive society in which extremist narratives find no fertile ground.

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