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Contemporary Digital Age and Dynamics of E-Jihad in the Muslim World: Case Study of Pakistan

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Abstract

Cyber space or technology is used to share data or information with unlimited audience. So, sophistication of cyber space has created a global network, where information can be shared or accessed while sitting at home, office or cafe. It has been used by business entrepreneurs to expand their business, researchers to access requires data and information; media houses to increase their TRPs and government bodies to maintain their policies and records. Meanwhile, the coin always has two sides. Thus, beside positive uses of internet; cyber space has been used by terrorist and criminal gangs for the propagation of their thoughts or to increase their working capacity. It also generates space for financing, training and incitement for terrorist organizations. Meanwhile, internet is used as a mean to access and exploit the mind of young individuals by propagating the Jihadi literature. The use of cyber space to enhance radical thoughts has created challenges for states like Pakistan in war against terrorism. So, this paper is an attempt to examine the dynamics of E-Jihad in Muslim world in the context of changing communication means that have been used by terrorist in contemporary digital age. The used methodology to explore the topic is qualitative research methods followed by case study of Pakistan.

Keywords: Radicalization, Cyber Technology, Terrorism, Pakistan

Introduction

Last three decades have introduced numerous changes in world politics, e.g. United States emerged as a sole Super Power after the collapse of Soviet Union, the growing influence of globalization and multinationals have shifted world into global village, the concept of interdependence among states or economic bodies have increased cooperation among interacting partners and beside state entities non-state actors have gained more significance in world politics. Among all mentioned changes sophistication of cyber space in IT industry has introduced a significant shift in the field of communication. The growing speed of internet and 3G/4G era has replaced

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the traditional means of communication and connects the world as a global village. Where information at one part of world can be seen or searched at other part of world. The friend and family can be connected through live or audio calls via Skype, Imo, Viber, Whatsapp, Facetime, Oovoo and Talky (Zak, 2017). Meanwhile, business or other official letters can be mailed or sent to other relevant parties within seconds through Gmail, hotmail, Polymail, Postbox and Yahoo mail.

Thus, based on the use of internet experts have divided cyber space into three layers. The upper social layer used by individuals or citizens around the world to connect with friends, relatives and social forums. Second the logical layer used by government bodies and business enterprises to run their business and make the flow of things/information easier. Third layer is cyber persona components or dark layer used by criminal gangs and terrorists organizations to organize illegal activities (Lai, 2012). This layer has threatened the security and peace of numerous states all around the globe.

Pakistan being an ally of United States in war against terrorism has faced the growing challenges of cyber radicalization also known as E-Jihad in the contemporary age. Although, Pakistan has banned violent religious organizations in state and introduced dozen of military operations to counter the terrorist groups in physical geography of Pakistan (Alam, 2012). But the cyber links of extremist groups in Pakistan with global terrorist organizations have shifted the focus of law enforcement agencies to cyber security as well and Pakistan has introduced cyber laws to counter the increasing influence of terrorist organizations in cyber space. So, this paper is an attempt to examine the dynamics of E-Jihad in Muslim world generally and in Pakistan particularly; in context of changing communication means that have been used by terrorist organizations in contemporary digital age. The used methodology for the paper is qualitative research approach followed by case study of Pakistan.

Defining of Cyber Terrorism

There have been general confusions about;

- What cyber terrorism is?
- What is difference between cyber terrorism and E-Jihad?
- E-Jihad and cyber terrorism are two different terms or they are two sides of same coin?
- Which cyber attacks can be defined as acts of terrorism and what can be defined as E-Jihad?

Cyber terrorism is usually associated with the posting of video messages, audios, hate speeches or written messages that promote an individual to harm him/herselves or another individual. It also includes an attempt to hack or destroy sensitive government documents or posting of violent videos and images by criminal gangs or terrorist organizations to promote fear factor in individuals.

During last two decades, some radical Muslim organizations like TTP and ISIS have also shifted their focus on social media publications and video message to support their violent acts and radical thoughts by propagating the meaning of Jihad. Jihad literally means 'struggle against one's evil inclinations' as cited by Ibn Nuhaas and narrated by Ibn Habbaan, "The best Jihad is the word of Justice in front of the oppressive sultan" (Kareem, 2011). However, the classical and somewhat radical writers have associated Jihad with holy war against infidels and this thought has been followed by radical groups like TTP, ISIS and Al-Qaeda to fight the government or state bodies for implementation of Sharia or Islamic laws. Initially, the message or Fatwas were sent through electronic or press release, e.g. Osama Bin Laden's fatwa entitled "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places" or Ladenese epistle appeared in the London-based Arabic paper Al-Quds Al-Arabi in 1996 (CNN, 2011). His second fatwa reached Al Quds Al Arabi by fax in 1998 (CNN, 2011).

In 2001, the US led war against terrorism and invasion of Afghanistan to counter the growing influence of Bin Laden in radical groups. Pakistan being an ally of the US also joined war against terrorism and soon took lead in the killings of Taliban that have been once trained by CIA and ISI. Thus, in response Taliban militants started filming their attacks and killings and posted them to the Internet, hoping to create fear in the local audiences about group's impending return to power and foreign ones of the war in Afghanistan's ultimate futility. Though posting their videos and images; the Taliban has relied on cyber technology for over a decade in the name of propaganda and public relations. The growing influence of terrorist groups for financing, recruitment or running terrorist business through social media has only taken root in the last few years, in parallel with the rise of ISIS. Just as terrorist organizations in the Middle East have made Facebook pages, Telegram channels, and Twitter accounts, the Taliban has expanded the breadth and depth of its outreach to the international community in general and the news media in particular (Bodetti, 2016). The events and other activities were published in Arabic, English, Pashto, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu through Telegram, Twitter and WhatsApp pages.

Meanwhile, article propagated by Islami quotes and Quranic verses were often published to brainwash the teachings of Jihad in young Muslims.

Although, countries like Pakistan, the US, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt have formed cyber laws and other strategies to counter the growing influence of terrorist groups in cyber space but the strategies have not been implemented successfully in some states due to certain factors. Among these states, Pakistan being an ally of US in war against terrorism and neighboring state of Afghanistan also formed numerous strategies to counter terrorism but the strategies have not worked yet due to crime terror nexus; shift of terrorist activities and Jihadi literature from physical to cyber space and weak cyber policies. Therefore, before understanding the growing influence of terrorist group in cyber sphere of Pakistan, it is important to understand the origin of terrorism in Pakistan.

Terrorism in Pakistan

A close look at the history of terrorism in Pakistan brings out that extremist waves are not something new for the State of Pakistan (as shown in figure 1). The Mullahs and Islamic scholars played an important role in the independence of Pakistan. Even in 1980s, when Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the Phenomenon of "Holy Jihad" was amalgamated by the religious scholars with the logic to counter the "infidel Communists" in Afghanistan (Malik, 2008). More than 30,000 young Muslims were called from Saudi-Arabia, UAE and other Arab states. Jihadi training camps and Islamic Madrasses were formed in Pakistan to train these Muslim mujahidin. The specialized madrasses and training camps were financially sponsored by Saudi-Arabia and UAE, with curriculum and basic frame work set by the US. Some of these madrasses were aimed to train Mujhadinees and some of these madrasses were used to produce jihad literature to assemble public opinion in support of Jihad and Mujahedeen's (Malik, 1996). The significant organizations formed as the Islamic training centers within Pakistan were the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) in 1985, Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan (SMP) was formed in 1991 and Lashker-e-Taiba (LeT) was formed in 1987 (Afzal, 2010).

Figure 1: Factors behind rise of terrorism in Pakistan



Meanwhile, the arrival of Afghan refugees in Pakistan during Soviet-Afghan war of 1979; the Iranian revolution of 1979 and its impact on Pakistani Shia community also enhanced sectarian violence and terrorism within Pakistan. The Afghan refugees started settling near the border areas of Afghanistan and to earn the financial resources they formed gunsmith shops. Some of the individuals started opium or arms smuggling across Pak-Afghan borders (Jones, 2002). On Southwestern borders of Pakistan, the 2,500 years of continuous Persian monarchy in Iran under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was replaced by the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The revolution was supported by Shia ideology of Islam that immediately started affecting the Suuni states in neighbors of Iran. The Shia population in Pakistan also started opposing the policies of States. In 1977, General Zia ul Haq introduced certain policies to promote the Sharia in Pakistan but instead of leaving positive impact the laws started shattering the bond of unity between Sunni-Shia communities within State. The most prominent laws introduced by Zia were Islamic Sharia law; the laws of Zakat and Usher Ordinance (1980) based on the Sunni jurisprudence and were resisted and criticized by Shia communities and leaders (Haggani, 2006). Once Sunni-Shia sectarian lines became defined and

pronounced the militant organizations like Lashker-i-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Sipha-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) openly started targeting the individuals from opposite sectarian groups (Dotani, 2011). The collapse of Soviet Union and proliferation of Soviet weapons to Muslim Mujihadeen also enhanced the role of religious extremist in politics of Pakistan. The ethnic and sectarian killings were at peak in late 1990s.

Meanwhile, the September 2001 brought another shift in Pakistan's foreign policy. The US territory was hit by four terrorist attacks and thousands of individuals lost their lives. In response US attacked Afghanistan to counter the terrorism or Osama's hideouts in Afghanistan. Being led on geographically important position and neighboring state of Afghanistan, Pakistan was asked to join the US led war on terror. President Bush clearly warned Pakistani leadership as 'being with us or against us'. Keeping the international and the US pressure in mind, President Musharraf of Pakistan decided to join the war on terror and it brought serious consequences for the overall security situation in the Pakistan. As the decision bought hostility and resistance from the Arab fighters as well as Taliban based in Afghanistan, they started to promote militant activities against Pakistan. This further exacerbated terrorism, ethnic conflicts and sectarianism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, erstwhile FATA and some other parts of Pakistan as a direct result of Musharraf's decisions. The organizations were banned by President Musharraf in 2002, started working under different name on settled agendas. Currently, following terrorist organizations are working in Pakistan.

Terrorist Organization in Pakistan

Al-Qaeda

Al Qaeda is a global terrorist organization, formed in 1988. It worked in the form of decentralized networks. Many of its leaders have been caught or killed by Pakistan or US army. The last one to be killed in 2013 was Osama bin Laden, the founding father and most wanted member of Al-Qaeda. The organization was formed against the US imperialism and the goal of Al-Qaeda was to organize global jihad of political Islam against the western non-Muslim powers. The US war weaken the hold of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan but, it is thought to be extinct in Pakistan as Al-Qaeda has joined hands other militant organization and working indirectly in Pakistan rather than organizing direct retaliation (Hussain S. E., May 17,2010).

Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

Tehreek-e- Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was formed by Baitullah Mehsood in 2007 with the coalition of seven militant groups (Yusuf, 2012). It is a sovereignty bound organization working in Pakistan. Although it is separate from the Taliban groups in

Afghanistan but it seeks the same objective to over throw the Pakistani state and impose Islamic law. Moreover, it has links with Al Qaeda and other militant groups. Currently the group has changed its strategies and forms an alliance with criminal organization and cyber space to influence its audience (Hussain, 2012).

Lashker-e-Taayba (LeT)

Lashker-e-Taayba (LeT) was formed in 1990 and also known as 'Al-Mansoorian' which means, 'army of the Pure'. Different sources consider LeT to be one of the well-organized Islamic militant group in South Asia. The objectives of LeT include establishment of Islamic rule over Jammu Kashmir and Pan-Islamism in South Asia (Kushner, 2003).

Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP)

Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) is an extremist Sunni (Deobandi) militant organization that was formed in 1985 Christin, 2004). It came into power after Iranian Revolution in 1979 to counter the growing influence of Shia leadership. The organization soon took lead in killings of Shia scholars and leaders

Lashker-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)

Lashker-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) is a militant off shoot of the Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) that was formed by Riaz Basra, Akram Lahori and Malik Ishaq in 1996, when they broke away from SSP. It has strong ties with Al Qaeda and Taliban as some of its members travel and reside on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border-land (Yusuf, 2011)

Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM)

JeM literally means 'the army of Mohammed' is another important sectarian militant organization formed by Maulana Masood Azhar, a famous leader of HUM in March 2000. The basic aim of JeM was to expel Indian forces from Jammu and Kashmir. It is considered as lynchpin of Al-Qaeda (Agha, 2013).

Sipah-i-Mohammad Pakistan (SMP)

SMP means 'the army of Mohammad'is a Shia militant group, formed by Mureed Abbas Yazdani to safeguard Shia interests in 1993 (Hussain, 2012). The organization was formed in response of Shia killings by SSP and started hate speech against Suuni scholars and religious leaders.

Tehreek-e-Jafriya Pakistan (TJP)

The TJP literally means, 'the followers of Fiqa-e-Jafriya'. TJP is an off shoot of the Tehrek-e-Nifaz-e-FiqaJafriya. TJP was founded in 1992 and led by Allama Syed Sajid Ali Naqvi (Firdos, 2010).

With the passage of time TTP, Al-Qaeda and Haqani group has gained more significance in Pakistan and other militant groups have started working with them. As,

the groups have adopted the strategies to attract its target through cyber space. Meanwhile the terrorist deals were conducted though code words in mails that have make the communication much cheaper. Even groups like Al-Qaeda and ISSI have largest social pages and twitter accounts, where they post their Fatwas, video massages and other posts to exploit the mind of young generations and to prepare the young ones from online means also known as "E-Jidad"

Means by which Cyber space is used for E-Jihad

The cyber technology is often used by radical groups to radicalize the common public and to promote the cause of extremist ideology. In this approach there are several overlapping factors: propaganda, recruitment, planning, training, financing, online radicalization and cyber-attacks. These factors are discusses in detail below.

Propaganda

In cyber technology there are varieties of channels or sources that the terrorist used for the purpose of propaganda. These sources are commonly called as social connections through internets, like Facebook, Twitters, YouTube, What's up, Messenger, Imo, etc. Many radical groups have formed their online social pages and accounts to propagate the message of Jihad as alternative means to achieve the true assent of life which may be based on propaganda. Propaganda generally takes the form of multimedia communications providing video messages, justification and explanations of different terrorist acts. Cyber technology has the ability to wide spread the terrorist message to the limitless number of audience and large number of people may be affected (Weimann, 2006). The terrorist may use the videos, pictures, voice messages, news, and information relating to the terrorist activities, use and misuse of religion only for the propaganda tactics. Cyber technology also provides the space for editing or altering or fake videos may consider as real via internet, e.g. Taliban that have expanded the breadth and depth of its outreach to the international community in general and the news media in particular (Bodetti, 2016) kept posting the events and other activities on their Telegram, Twitter and Whats App pages in six different languages. Meanwhile, article propagated by Islami quotes and Quranic verses were often published to brainwash the teachings of Jihad in young Muslims. Although, the legitimacy of the propaganda tactics by Al-Qaeda via internet is low but it have great fear factor on the individuals that are concerned with security of state and sometimes left uncontrollable affects for the state.

Online Radicalization

Online radicalization is the process by which terrorist particularly youth adopt extreme political or religious views via internet. After the 9/11, the phenomenon of online radicalization plays a vital role in the promotion of religious polarization and terrorism in Pakistan. Online radicalization constitutes the polarized sectarian literatures and promotes the cause of religious extremist ideology. Political Scientists, researchers and policy makers are continuously neglecting the aspect of online radicalization in Pakistan (Rana, 2005). However, the positing of hate speeches by different Islamic scholars against opposite sects and government policies by calling them infidel politics or non Muslim practices are examples of online radicalization. Another form of online radicalization followed by Al-Qaeda and Tablians in Pakistan is posting of violent videos through their official channels. The videos in which Taliban were kicking the heads of Pakistan army officers after killing them and beheading of journalist became viral and cause serious security debates in Pakistan. Meanwhile, dozens of pages have been introduced on internet that offered online fatwa and question answer sections. Some of these pages promote the urgency of Jihad through online means.

Recruitment

The cyber technology is not restricted only to disseminate the sectarian or religious ideology, protected stance in the shape of post or articles or videos, it also helps to search and recruit the likeminded people in one platform and induce the seed of radicalization via internet. "Terrorist organizations increasingly use propaganda distributed via platforms such as password-protected websites and restricted access internet chat group as a means of clandestine recruitment" (Gerwehr & Daly, 2006). "Terrorist propaganda is often tailored to appeal to vulnerable and marginalized groups in society. The process of recruitment and radicalization commonly capitalizes on an individual's sentiment of injustice, exclusion or humiliation" (Denning, 2010). Cyber technology provides an effective medium for the recruitment of the jobless youth and minors, who spend much time on the internet. There are the different tactics that are used by the terrorist organizations which may be in the form of cartoon, short stories, computer games that are mixed with message and ultimate objective is to overcome the fear of death and recruited minors may be fearless about death and suicide attacks (Weimann, 2006). Cyber technology provides the cheap source for the terrorist groups to keep in touch with the limitless audience. In third world countries

like Pakistan it is easy for the religious terrorist groups to make contacts to the each strata of the society via internet and it also helps in the recruitment of the people who not only support the terrorist vision but also help in a scientific way to the terrorists via internet.

Training

Cyber technology provides different mechanism in the form of visual videos, and information that are supported by the training programmers of the terrorist organizations. There is a growing range of cyber technology that constitutes the detailed instructions about the making of different explosive materials and provides awareness about the modern and soft weapons through the use of cyber technology. There are different motivational videos of jihad and training programs for the common Muslims in Pakistan to support the Afghani and Kashmiri jihad. These videos and debates are full of quotes and verses to support the suppressed Muslims of Afghanistan, Kashmir, Syria and to fight against the America supports.

Planning

Cyber technology also provides the space and different connections for the terrorists in the form of planning for the secret missions. In initial phases it organizes funds and financial aid for terrorist groups. There officials pages of Taliban and Al-Qaeda are considered as sole centers to generate millions of aid for radical activities. Meanwhile the use of code language in cyber technology has transformed the terrorist missions in to different codes that are sometime hard to crack in the cyber networks. According to the United Nations report, "The Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes" New York, 2012 says "Many criminal justice practioners have indicated that almost every case of terrorism prosecuted involved the use of cyber technology. In particular, planning an act of terrorism typically involves remote communication among several parties". The cyber technology facilitates the terrorist for secret communication and provides a breeding ground for the recruitment of the different people who helps in the planning of the terrorist attacks. Cyber technology also provides the access to the information of different transnational organizations of the world.

Cyber-Attacks

Cyber Attacks are started as challenge between hackers which slowly turned it into game of money to gain industrial and economic advantages and finally a direct threat to national security of the country. Now, the hackers become the "Key Board Militants" and they have the motives, tools, specific targets, specific affiliations (State & Non-State) and they take actions to fulfill their operations. It is the routine matter for the hackers to attack the governmental machinery websites, bank and data of different intelligence and military agencies of the states. Now states have even start to hire the companies and groups of hackers for their national purpose and to enter in the internet databases of other states. Cyber terrorism is occurred in two forms, Data theft and control of system. The theft of data and its destruction is connected to damage the running system and System control is to physically control the infrastructure like Bridges, war facilities etc. The data theft is the most common method used in cyber terrorism as it involves less risk to system control method. These cyber terrorists also use the IT technology not only for hacking and cyber attacking but also for propaganda through web pages and social websites and spread their agenda and message throughout the globe.

Conclusion

Cyber technology plays a vital role in the promotion of Jihad and terrorism in Pakistan. Online radicalization is the common factor in all visible trends and pattern of sectarianism and in Pakistan. The changing aspects of such trends are different in conventional radicalization but same as in online radicalization in Pakistan. Cyber terrorism has made its place in terrorism quite rapidly and makes the security issues more complex and hard to tackle and to adopt a strong counter cyber terrorism policy and mechanism is highly necessary for every state for its own security. According to a report of MacAfee till the end of September 2013 there were 170 million malwares in the digital world which are causing daily hacking attacks on computers. So, Cyber technology is promoting online radicalization in the Pakistani society and provides the space for terrorism in Pakistan. As, renowned for its patience and resilience, the Taliban is using social media not for the instant gains on which ISIS thrives but as an example of soft power to achieve two long-term goals. First, the Taliban sees itself as a government in exile or state within a state whose legitimacy is visible through al-Emarah: the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan still exists on social media, and, as the militants expand their territory, they can turn their Internet emirate into a reality. Second, the Taliban's limited but targeted broadcasts to audiences in the Muslim and Western worlds can help them in achieving its long-held goal of expanding their control and influence in politics of Pakistan. The government should increase the cyber checks and vigilantly address this issue.

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