

SECTARIAN MILITANCY IN PAKISTAN: ORIGINS AND THREATS TO INTEGRITY

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Abstract

For the last three decades or so, Pakistan has been a severe victim of sectarian violence. Although the roots of sectarian violence in the Pakistani society could be traced to various political developments in the country and the region, such as, Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization process, Iranian Revolution and the anti-Soviet Afghan war, during the late 1970s, the dangerous phase of sectarian menace began after the 9/11 incident when the domestic sectarian militant organizations established their links with international terrorist groups, e.g., Al-Qaeda and then the self-styled Islamic State (IS), and started playing the role of a facilitator as well as becoming the part of global Jihadism. Against this background, the paper analyzes the origins of sectarianism in Pakistan and threats which it poses to the integrity of the country. In the concluding analysis, the paper argues that the violent extremist ideology that creates ideologically-motivated committed terrorists may be countered if Pakistan reorients its strategic policies vis-à-vis its eastern and western neighbors – India and Afghanistan – by discouraging the use of proxies for pursuing its strategic interests in the region.

Keywords: Pakistan, sectarianism, violence, Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda

Introduction

Pakistan has been witnessing a severe resurgence in sectarian violence for the last three decades or so. Being a predominantly Sunni majority state, Pakistan is also an abode of the second largest Shia population, which comprises 15-20 per cent of the total population. However, Pakistan's violent sectarian discourse is mainly controlled by the Sunni-Deobandi militants, following the Takfiri ideology that not only emphasizes upon the strict interpretation of Islam, but also declares those Muslims non-believers who do not follow such an interpretation.¹

The roots of sectarian violence in the Pakistani society could be traced to various political developments in the country and the region during the late 1970s. The sectarian conflicts in Pakistan have been seen as a legacy of the anti-Soviet Afghan War and General Zia's Islamization policies, which gave birth to the Sunni-Deobandi activism with the establishment of a large number of Deobandi madrasas, which not only provided fresh recruits for the Afghan war, but also the ideology to sustain that

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¹ Takfir is an act of a Muslim excommunicating another person or group, where the target is usually apostatized before is being executed. According to Olivier Roy, "The proponents of Takfir usually support jihad as a permanent and individual duty, for the very reason that there is no longer a true Islamic ruler or even a true ummah that could call for Jihad." [Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (Lahore: Alhamra, 2004), p.244].

war, and at home, created an anti-Shia narrative. Previously, the Iranian Revolution in February 1979 gave Shias in Pakistan a political confidence. As a result, Pakistan has experienced repeated bouts of sectarian violence in the following decades.

The matter of the fact is that the menace of sectarianism could be handled during the initial phases, particularly after the Iranian Revolution, and more during the Afghan War in which the Deobandi madrasas were used for the so-called Afghan Jihad. However, with the opening of another war theater in Kashmir in the late 1980s, after the end of the Afghan War, the formation of Taliban in 1994, and the mainstream political parties' alliance with the religio-sectarian parties, such as, Pakistan Peoples' Party's (PPP) political alliance with the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) and Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) alliance with the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), this menace was allowed to flourish. Consequently, Pakistan witnessed the worst form of sectarian violence during the 1990s. However, as the paper argues, the dangerous phase of sectarian menace began after the 9/11 incident when the domestic sectarian militant organizations established their links with international terrorist groups, e.g., Al-Qaeda and then the self-styled Islamic State (IS), and started playing the role of a facilitator as well as becoming the part of global Jihadism.

It is ascertained that the continued sectarian violence has greatly threatened Pakistan's integrity as the society has been deeply fragmented on sectarian identities. Although since 1990s, various governments, both civilians and military, in Pakistan, have taken stern actions against the sectarian militant outfits, the menace of sectarianism could not be eradicated, and the production of hardcore militants continued to rise.

Against this background, the paper analyzes the origins of sectarianism in Pakistan and threats which it poses to the integrity of the country. In the concluding part, the paper argues that the violent extremist ideology which produces ideologically-motivated committed terrorists may be countered if Pakistan reorients its strategic policies vis-à-vis its eastern and western neighbors – India and Afghanistan – by discouraging the use of proxies for pursuing its strategic interests in the region.

Origins of Sectarianism in Pakistan

Pakistan, perhaps, is a unique case study where the State has used Islam as a binding force in order to keep the diverse entities united by formulating a coherent national identity. Although Pakistan's founding fathers were secular, their struggle for the partition of India along religious lines compelled them to adopt Islamist rhetoric as a part of their effort for nation-building.

In this regard, in March 1949, the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan adopted the 'Objectives Resolution', which institutionalized the role of Islam in the Pakistani politics. According to the Objectives Resolution:

Whereas sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone, and the authority which He has delegated to the State of Pakistan through its people for being exercised within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust...

Wherein the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice, as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed...

Wherein the Muslims shall be enabled to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accord with the teaching and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunna...²

The Objectives Resolution strengthened the role of the Islamists in Pakistan's politics. These Islamists initially opposed the creation of Pakistan. Now they emerged as the champion of making Pakistan an Islamic entity, where all the laws would be formulated according to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The Islamists growing power could be seen during the Anti-Ahmadia movement in 1953 that led to severe riots in Lahore and other cities of Punjab. As a result, the first Martial Law was imposed in Lahore. Again, in 1974, anti-Ahmadia riots broke out, and the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto succumbed to the orthodox Sunni political parties' pressure, which led to the second amendment in the 1973 Constitution in September 1974 that pronounced Ahmadis non-Muslims. Consequently, the Pakistani State relinquished its neutrality by narrowing down the definition of a Muslim, thus, undermined the national unity and set a dangerous precedent by increasing the vulnerability of other minor sects of Islam. The Sunni fundamentalists considered this apostasy verdict by the State a success and started struggling to expel the much larger Shia minority from the Muslim identity of Pakistan.

The late 1970s witnessed two important external developments in the geo-politics of the West Asian and the North-West regions, bordering Pakistan. These developments had simultaneously affected the internal dynamics of the Pakistani State by accelerating the sectarian activism of both the Shias and the Sunnis. The first development was the Iranian Revolution in February 1979; while the second one was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan December 1979. The Iranian Revolution not only boosted the confidence of Pakistan's Shia community, which now became more organized and united, but also "gave [them] a new sense of identity."³ The Revolution was considered a major ideological threat by the conservative Arab authoritarian regimes of the Middle East. In order to counter the emerging threat, the Arab regimes attempted to build a Sunni fundamentalist wall outside their borders. Consequently, the gulf between the Shias and the Sunnis increased and led to the revival of, in the opinion of Olivier Roy, "a conservative neo-fundamentalist Sunni Islam."⁴

On the other hand, the Afghan War further sharpened the divide between the Shias and the Sunnis, as the latter got the state support from the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia for not only waging the so-called Afghan Jihad against the Soviets, but also countering the Shia uprising in Pakistan. The US-Pakistan-Saudi Arabia nexus had helped train and equip the Afghan and Pakistani Sunni Mujahideen. In order to continue the supply of indoctrinated and committed Mujahideen, Deobandi madrasas, which played a pivotal role in sustaining the Afghan War, were promoted. This not

² See the text of the Objectives Resolution (1949). Also quoted in Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California, 1961), pp.142-143.

³ Frederic Grare, "The Evolution of Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan and the Ever-Changing Face of Islamic Violence", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* (London), Vol.30, No.1, p.129.

⁴ Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p.107.

only strengthened the Sunni orthodoxy, but also encouraged anti-Shia sectarian militancy in Pakistan.

Internally, the Zia regime's Islamization program which was based on the Sunni interpretation of Islam, added fuel to the Shia-Sunni divide. The Zia regime imposed its Islamization program uniformly on the entire Muslim population of Pakistan, thus, greatly enraged the Shia community. In response to Zia's policies, the Shia minority in Pakistan formed Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh Ja'afria (TNJF) in March 1979 as a religious pressure group with an objective to protect the rights of the Shias in a Sunni majority state. Moreover, after the imposition of Zakat and Ushr Ordinance in June 1980, the politically-charged Shias launched mass protests. In July 1980, the Shia demonstrators seized Islamabad for two days, while demanding the renunciation of the Ordinance. As pressure enhanced, the Zia regime reversed its decision and granted the Shias an exemption from giving Zakat under the Sunni fiqh. However, this infuriated the Sunnis, who were worried about the increasing power of the Shia minority as well as State's weakness of bowing down to the Shia demands by granting them religious autonomy. The Sunni extremist groups also thought that this would also damage their objective of declaring Shias as non-Muslims.

The Shia assertiveness compelled the Sunni extremists to form the SSP in 1985 to counter the increasing influence of the Shias in the country. Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, the founder of the SSP and the vice-president of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), Punjab, publically demanded the declaration of Shias as a non-Muslim minority.⁵ Another reason behind the creation of the SSP was the internal socio-economic fabric of Jhang, where a clash of interest arose between Sunni businessmen and the feudal Shia landlords, who were also very active in politics.⁶

By mid-1980s, Pakistan was ready to witness an unending cycle of sectarian violence that caused thousands of killings of the common people and leaders of both sides. Although the major triggering factors, such as, Zia-ul-Haq, war in Afghanistan and Ayatollah Khomeini, in promoting sectarian rift in the Pakistani Society disappeared by the late 1980s, the monster of sectarianism continued to grow, as with the closure of the Afghan theater, the battle-hardened Mujahideen were diverted to another war theater in Kashmir in order to teach a lesson to arch-enemy India.

It is true that the political instability in Pakistan during the 1990s, the democratic governments of PPP and PML-N could not effectively deal with the sectarian monster, which took a new turn with the formation of Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan (SMP), a Shia militant group, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), a dissident faction of the SSP, in 1994 and 1996 respectively. On the other hand, the civilian governments continued to oblige to the Military Establishment's policy of supporting Jihadis in Kashmir which had close links with the home-based sectarian organizations.

The growing nexus between the Jihadi and sectarian outfits has also promoted sectarian violence in Pakistan. The linkages between militants active in Kashmir and Afghanistan, on the one hand, and those within Pakistan, on the other hand, are not

⁵ Grare, p.130.

⁶ Independent sources and police records confirm that the SSP was established by a group of 18 businessmen from Jhang in consultation with Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi with an objective of seeking sympathies of the majority Sunnis against the Shia feudal lords. [Muhammad Amir Rana, *A to Z of Jehadi Organizations in Pakistan* (Lahore, Mashal Books, 2004), p.194].

surprising, since these Jihadis share the same madrasas (seminaries), training camps and, often, operatives.⁷ According to Zahid Hussain, a renowned journalist, “most of the LeJ cadres were also involved in Pakistan’s proxy war in Kashmir.”⁸ It becomes obvious that the LeJ cadre had been enjoying the patronage of Pakistani State for pursuing strategic interests in the region, and in return, was given a free-hand to continue its sectarian agenda in the country. Hussain further views that the two [LeJ’s involvement in Kashmir and sectarian terrorism in Pakistan] were intertwined. The civilian governments of PPP and PML-N took various measures, including the promulgation of Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, to combat the sectarianism, but given the Military’s support to regional Jihad, those efforts failed.⁹

During the 1990s, the frequency of sectarian violence continued to increase in Pakistan. The radical Islamists formed Taliban in Afghanistan in 1994. By 1996, the Taliban took control of Kabul and formed their government. The LeJ, which was also formed in the same year, had close links with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. These links were established when LeJ leader Riaz Basra fled Afghanistan in 1994 and took shelter there. He returned to Pakistan from time to time, and was involved in several acts of sectarian violence. Although the organization was banned by the government on August 14, 2001, and Basra was killed in a police encounter at Mailsi, district Vihari, Punjab, on May 14, 2002, the LeJ has continued to operate as a deadly terrorist group, particularly after joining hands with the Taliban on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border and Al-Qaeda in the wake of the sudden strategic shift in the Pakistani State’s policy vis-à-vis Taliban regime in Afghanistan in the post-9/11 scenario.

Although Pakistan bandwagoned with the US by joining the “war on terror”, it paid a heavy price for balancing the internal threat. It is true that as a result of the US military campaign in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants, the threat of terrorism penetrated well into Pakistan. Several Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants moved into the ungoverned tribal areas of Pakistan that are adjacent to Afghanistan. Once settled down and strengthened their support base in the tribal region, these militants then also moved to the settled areas of the country where they had used their links with the home-based militant sectarian Jihadi groups. It is noted that these links had already been established during the Afghan War.

It may be observed that a new wave of sectarian militancy has emerged in the aftermath of the 9/11 incident. According to Amir Rana, “The LeJ nexus with Al Qaeda and TTP has not only broadened its ideological horizon but also equipped it with lethal operational tactics. It may not be the LeJ of the 1990s, which was mostly involved in targeted killings, but its new face is extensively lethal in terms of operational capabilities and connections with terrorist groups.”¹⁰ This nexus has also

⁷ Amir Mir, “Sectarian Monster”, South Asia Intelligence Review (SAIR), Volume 3, No. 47, June 6, 2005. (<http://satp.org>). (last accessed on March 13, 2016).

⁸ Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2007), p.96.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Amir Rana, “Epitome of Hate”, *Dawn*, January 13, 2013.

affected the TTP, whose agenda also got 'sectarianized'.¹¹ In February 2014, TTP's breakaway faction attacked the Iranian Consulate in Peshawar.¹²

However, Pakistan's militant landscape has witnessed the introduction of a new ultra-radical violent group, known as the IS, having sectarian tendencies as well. The coming of the IS in Pakistan and Afghanistan not only "has transformed the militant character of the region,"¹³ but also "challenged the theological framework of the Deobandi brand of Islam in the region" by questioning "the ideological basis of the Taliban movement. The group tagged the Taliban movement as a nationalist one, which it believes does not qualify as a caliphate movement."¹⁴

Some scholars view that the IS would not make foothold in Pakistan because of less organized organizational structure in the country as compared to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, which had been considered as the foreign policy tools. In such a scenario, the IS may not gain a physical space in Pakistan.¹⁵ However, the dangerous aspect of the IS is its ideological, which inspires the young and disgruntled militants, and more particularly, the sectarian outfits, who share the sectarian agenda with the IS. These sectarian militants may imitate the IS strategy in Pakistan by targeting the Shias and other minorities. In such an heinous and ruthless terrorist incident in Karachi near Safoora Goth on May 13, 2015, 43 people belonged to the Ismaili Shia community were killed.¹⁶ The Sindh Police claimed that the militants were affiliated with the IS.¹⁷

Threats to Integrity

It is a fact that there were hardly any sectarian clashes between Shias and Sunnis before the Partition in the region now comprises Pakistan. Although the sectarian prejudices had existed, the two communities lived in harmony, as they share same neighborhood, language and culture. After the creation of Pakistan, the relations between the Shias and the Sunnis had largely remained normal. However, one could observe some minor skirmishes during Muharram, a month in Islamic Calendar in which the Shias mourn for the death of Hussein ibn-e-Ali.

Nevertheless, by late 1970s, the politicization and militarization of both the Sunni and Shia groups, have sown the seeds of hatred and animosity in the Pakistani Society, thus, has largely endangered the very integrity of Pakistan. The very first manifestation of the threat to Pakistan's integrity could be seen in the form of Pakistani Society's inclination towards radicalism and extremism. As a result of the growing religious militancy, the very roots of the Pakistani Society, which happened to be very tolerant, are weakening. The society is divided between "us" versus "them", and the elimination of the latter is considered a divine mission by the former.

¹¹ D. Suba Chandran, "Pakistan's Militant Groups in 2015", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Special Report No. 174 (January 2015), p.9.

¹² "Suicide attack at Iranian Consulate in Peshawar kills two", <http://www.dawn.com/news/1089170> (accessed: March 26, 2016).

¹³ Muhammad Amir Rana, "A new direction for IS?", *Dawn*, March 27, 2016.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ For details see: Suba Chandran, p.8.

¹⁶ *Dawn*, May 14, 2015.

¹⁷ *Dawn*, July 2, 2015.

A second manifestation is that despite Pakistani State's banning and cracking down, the organizational network of the militant sectarian groups not only has remained intact and powerful, but also expanded, as one could see the establishment of close nexus between Pakistan-based Deobandi militant groups, particularly, LeJ, Al-Qaeda and the TTP in the aftermath of the 9/11 incident.¹⁸ According to Zahid Hussain, "despite American claims that the Al-Qaeda network has been crippled after the killing of hardcore leadership, the reality is that a new Al-Qaeda has emerged in Pakistan that is largely consisted of local militants and Islamic militants from other countries."¹⁹ The network, Hussain views, has grown in strength due to its alliances with the Pakistani Taliban and other outlawed Sunni sectarian outfits.²⁰ The most frightening scenario for Pakistan is that these groups do not accept its constitution and political system, and call it un-Islamic. They want to replace it with their own version of Islamic Shariah. To achieve this objective, they justify the use of force.

Moreover, this nexus has also increased the lethality of sectarian violence in Pakistan in the post-9/11 scenario by unleashing major terrorist attacks in the country.²¹ While comparing the statistics on sectarian killings in Pakistan during the periods from 1989 to 2001, and 2002 to April 2016, the available data show that the number of casualties has increased after the 9/11 incident. For instance, around 4000 people have killed in sectarian incidents from 2002 to April 2016 as compared to about 1700 people during the period from 1989 to 2001.²²

Third, the rise in sectarian terrorism in Pakistan reflects the State's inability to eliminate the capacity of militant groups. As a result, peoples' confidence in the State to provide them a sense of security has weakened. In other words, the sectarian militant groups have succeeded in disorienting the people by not only spreading horror and terror among the masses, but also by trying to change their attitude towards the State by implicating that the State is incapable of fulfilling the primary security functions.

Fourth, the IS factor would further sharpen the already strained sectarian harmony in Pakistan. Since the IS has a very powerful sectarian agenda in the Middle East, the sectarian fanatics in Pakistan may also become the part of the former's global agenda. Such a link would further enhance the ideological enthusiasm in the sectarian militants of Pakistan. Alarming, the Pakistani Taliban are now not merely trying to overthrow the Pakistani government – they have become the part of the global Jihad."²³ This is evidenced from the Fazlullah-led TTP's support to the IS. In his message, released in Urdu, Pashto and Arabic, on the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha on October 4, 2014, then TTP spokesman, Shahidullah Shahid said:

From the very beginning, when the IS did not exist, we are helping and supporting the Mujahideen of Iraq and Syria. Our group [TTP] had sent

¹⁸ For details see: Zahid Hussain, 'Frontline Pakistan', pp.90-91.

¹⁹ Zahid Hussain, "Al-Qaeda battleground", *Dawn*, June 12, 2012.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ According to an Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)-Military Intelligence (MI) report, submitted to the Supreme Court on 25 March 2013, "The TTP has merged itself with the sectarian outfits." ["Swat Taliban, Afghan Government nexus may give rise to terrorism, SC told", *Dawn*, March 26, 2013].

²² <http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/countries/pakistan/database/sect-killing.htm> (Last accessed: April 10, 2016).

²³ Ahmed Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the West* (London, Penguin, 2012), p. 156.

between 1,000 and 1,500 fighters to the [Middle Eastern] region so far. We are with you in this hard times and will help you as much as possible. We advise you to be patient and determined at such a hard time and stay united, as your enemies stand united against you.²⁴

The TTP's pledge to send its fighters to the Middle East is what Amir Mir views, "a disturbing development for Pakistan as the move shows that after extending its area of influence in the Middle East, the radical militant group is expanding its ideological boundaries to South Asia, mainly Pakistan."²⁵ Although the government has repeatedly denied any support base of IS in Pakistan, the IS activists, according to the *Reuters*, have been spotted in Peshawar distributing leaflets praising the group.²⁶ This means that the Pakistani Taliban have been transforming "from a loose tribal-based structure into a much more organized and sophisticated organization with links across the country and abroad."²⁷ The allegiance of the TTP to the IS, is an effort to help the latter to extend its global reach. This would further create turmoil in the South Asian region and strengthen the anti-US and anti-West forces.

Lastly, the sectarian aspect is also largely linked with Pakistan's relations with Iran, which is perturbed on the continuous killing of Shia population in Pakistan. Iran has long been demanding Pakistan to provide security to the Shias, which have been constantly targeted by the Sunni extremist groups, such as, the SSP and LeJ, whose leadership openly incites the Sunni Muslims to kill the Shias as per their religious duty.²⁸ Hence, Pakistan's relations with Iran are mainly depended upon how seriously the former set out its security policy, which would aim to take on all the militant Jihadi and sectarian groups indiscriminately.

Concluding Analysis

It is a fact that before the 9/11 incident, Pakistan did not critically assess the threat emanating from the home-grown militant extremist groups. Pakistan only evaluated the threat from the sectarian point of view and to deal with it, adopted legal and administrative measures in the form of introducing the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 or banning the militant outfits. However, these measures proved ineffective as the menace of sectarian violence continued to haunt the Pakistani Society. Moreover, these measures also ignored countering the very ideology that provides an inspiration and religious authenticity to the terrorists to carry out the sectarian terrorism as well as attacks on the civilian and military targets.

The sectarian militancy in Pakistan is not going to fade out in the near future because it is deeply rooted in the socio-political structure and the strategic interests of the country. Hitherto, the response of the Pakistan State to counter this threat has been inadequate and ineffective. At present, the prime focus of Pakistan's response is on the use of heavy-handed force to eliminate the sectarian terrorists. Although the on-going military operations, including the Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* and the current one

²⁴ Quoted in Amir Mir, "TTP's support for IS disturbing for Pakistan", *The News International*, October 6, 2014.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ "Pakistani Taliban pledges support to ISIL", *Al Jazeera*, October 5, 2014. Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/10/pakistan-taliban-pledges-allegiance-isil-2014104162057352436.html> (accessed: March 22, 2016).

²⁷ Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink*, p.156.

²⁸ "LJ leader Malik Ishaq detained in Rahim Yar Khan", *Dawn*, February 22, 2013.

Radd-ul-Fasaad, in the FATA have gained some success, and since 2015 the number of sectarian incidents has declined, their efficacy mainly depends upon taking stern policy measures to counterbalance the violent extremist ideology, which promotes terrorism. The matter of the fact is that the discontented individuals and groups have been getting inspiration from the IS.

Although Pakistan has taken strong measures against domestic sectarian outfits, however, still several members of the outlawed groups have been spared because of their overlapping membership in various militant groups that are also termed as 'strategic assets' as they are involved in fighting in the Indian-held Kashmir and Afghanistan. According to Amir Mir, these militants also use the same training camps, resources and to a large extent same ideological inspiration.²⁹ The multiple connections and associations of the militants have been a major impediment in eradicating sectarian militancy in Pakistan.

In order to eliminate sectarian terrorism, Pakistan needs to re-define its strategic policy which requires abandoning the notion of differentiating between 'good Taliban' and 'bad Taliban'. This also requires launching an indiscriminate security operation against all the militant groups which are involved in perpetrating terrorism within and outside the country. Such a shift in Pakistan's strategic policy needs to focus on improving relations with its eastern and western neighbors – India and Afghanistan – by focusing more on cooperation on mutual security issues for establishing peace in the region, and expanding economic ties for the socio-economic development of the region.

Moreover, Pakistan further needs to understand that the sectarian militancy has become a very diverse and complex phenomenon that cannot be countered by eliminating a single group or an individual. It is important to eradicate the terrorist ideology, particularly the Takfiri ideology, advocated by the terrorist groups, which also have links with Al-Qaeda and now the growing one of the IS that aspires for establishing an Islamic Caliphate through global Jihadism. This requires creating a strong counter-narrative against violent extremism and radicalism.

²⁹ Amir Mir, 'Sectarian Monster'.