**Mainstreaming terrorism**

**[Imran Malik](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/imran-malik)**

November 16, 2021

“Reconciled” terrorist groups like the TTP, if at all, will pose serious problems for Pakistan. They might adopt a new strategy with the following contours.

One, such groups will exploit the extremely polarised Pakistani society which is wracked by rampant, violent, religious and sectarian extremism and militancy. Two, they will try to neutralise the hostility of the GOP, the military, intelligence agencies, LEAs and the nation towards them by feigning negotiations. A ceasefire gives them credibility, time and space to recoup and forestall debilitating military, political, intelligence, media and informational campaigns against them. They will want to portray themselves as misguided people who are returning to the right path now.

Third, they will want to get accepted, reintegrated and assimilated in society with the least number of them being brought to justice. They will expect to get all their cases of terrorism, sedition, treason, waging war against Pakistan, working for its enemies etc to be condoned. Four, once settled down, they will expand their tentacles to engage other religious extremist elements in society, join or incorporate them to become a viable force once again. They will see this as a temporary setback only, an interlude in the pursuit of their larger, ultimate aim of enforcing their version of Shariah in Pakistan.

[Pakistan logs 10 Covid deaths, 270 fresh cases in 24 hours](https://nation.com.pk/17-Nov-2021/pakistan-logs-10-covid-deaths-270-fresh-cases-in-24-hours)

Five, they will seek local/domestic financial support and political cover. If they manage to get an ingress into Pakistan’s body politic, by joining existing political elements/parties with militant and extremist leanings, they will be poised to get into the corridors of power in good time.

This will create the most dangerous concoction of political power backed by ruthless, violent, armed militant cadres and give them unmatchable clout in the country. They will thus be in a position to hijack the nation’s narrative and direction. Six, they will gain vital time and space to re-group, reorganise, re-energise, rearm, recruit, refit, re-equip, refinance, retrain to re-emerge in a far deadlier avatar than before.

Groups like the TTP could follow such a strategy at the behest of their erstwhile benefactors/handlers who will make a re-appearance at the right time; the war for Pakistan’s soul is far from over.

[Sheikh Rasheed’s elder brother passes away](https://nation.com.pk/17-Nov-2021/sheikh-rasheed-s-elder-brother-passes-away)

The Afghanistan-Pakistan Region (APR) is afflicted with the scourge of terrorism as a whole. It is epitomised by Terrorism Central, a macabre collection of ferocious terrorists from the larger SCAR. It comprises of IS, TTP, JuA, IMU, ETIM, remnants of Al Qaeda and other minor groups of their ilk.

It will require a regional approach and strategy to destroy this potential threat to the entire region. It is thus imperative that Terrorism Central be engaged as a whole and vanquished, destroyed, dissipated and exterminated comprehensively, at the earliest. The strategy ought to isolate Terrorism Central, lay siege to its various groups, deny them contacts/links to their benefactors/handlers, weaken and then destroy them piecemeal.

Therefore, it becomes imperative for Pakistan to tackle the TTP as a subset of Terrorism Central and within the regional ambit at three overlapping levels—regional, bilateral with Afghanistan and domestic.

[Govt to table 22 bills in Parliament’s joint session today](https://nation.com.pk/17-Nov-2021/govt-to-table-22-bills-in-parliament-s-joint-session-today)

At the regional level, CRIPT—China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey—and Afghanistan’s neighbouring CARs must get together to evolve a regional Counter Terrorism (CT) strategy. It will essentially be a strategy of concentric circles, centred on Afghanistan, (Afghan Campaign and the Waning US, by this scribe, The Nation, 07 October 2012).

The innermost circle will be restricted to the APR. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan should bilaterally coordinate their efforts at eliminating the TTP as a part of the overall regional CT strategy. Currently the Afghan Taliban are mediating between the TTP and Pakistan. If the TTP does not submit to the combined writ of the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan, then force must be used to destroy it. CRIPT should get involved directly, if required.

The second circle will encompass all of Afghanistan’s neighbours. They must seal their borders with Afghanistan and block all cross-border insertions of men, weapons, arms, equipment, explosives and all such materials destined for Terrorism Central. Thus, Terrorism Central is to be isolated, denied succour from its external patrons, weakened and destroyed piecemeal.

[EU aims at reinforcing global security with new defense strategy](https://nation.com.pk/17-Nov-2021/eu-aims-at-reinforcing-global-security-with-new-defense-strategy)

The third circle could include India and generally the GMER. Russia and China must use their clout to ensure that these peripheral countries do not provide any direct or indirect sustenance to Terrorism Central on the instigation of western powers.

They must not aid, reinforce or support Terrorism Central in any manner—regardless of their compulsions. Finally, on the diplomatic front all regional countries must launch their respective diplomatic initiatives at the global level to isolate Terrorism Central and then exterminate it before it destabilises the region. The US-led West will use Terrorism Central to do so to delay, disrupt and destroy China’s BRI-CPEC and to deny Russia access to the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean. CRIPT and the CARs must preempt such efforts.

On the domestic front the GOP must bring this issue to the Parliament, get support from the entire political spectrum and then evolve a whole of the nation approach to deal with the situation. Pakistan’s Armed Forces and intelligence agencies should be given the mandate to do everything necessary to eliminate the threat posed by the TTP, including coordinating efforts with the Afghan Taliban, CRIPT and CARs if required. Special military courts must be re-established to deal with the terrorists. The trials should be time barred. All “reconciled” terrorists must be banned from taking part in politics. Any political party that enrols former terrorists ought to stand permanently proscribed and their leaders be penalised under the law. Pakistan’s media must be employed to create the environment for such a strategy to succeed. The National Action Plan must be revived, rehashed and implemented.

[Man killed, two injured in Bahawalnagar road mishap](https://nation.com.pk/17-Nov-2021/man-killed-two-injured-in-bahawalnagar-road-mishap)

Pakistan, as a whole, has bled and suffered in more ways than one in this unending WOT. The nation needs closure to its sufferings. Terrorists who threaten it must be exterminated without fear or favour.

The GOP must realise that operating within a regional approach and strategy with the support of the entire nation has a far better chance of success than a lone, maverick, egoistic one!

Imran Malik

The writer is a retired brigadier of the Pakistan Army. He can be reached at im.k846@gmail.com and tweets @K846Im.