**Lawmakers & CT**

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T HE role of parliaments in counterterrorism (CT) and addressing the underlying causes of Violent Extremism (VE) carries significance, which adds credibility.

Parliamentarians enact laws, set policies, allocate budgets, and oversee CT measures.

Representing the interests of communities, particularly of vulnerable groups, they strive to uphold human rights. By monitoring the government`s actions, lawmakers monitor compliance with international obligations related to CT and initiate parliamentary hearings and inquiries.

In South Asia, the political leadership has been the preferred target of violent actors in an effort to disrupt the democratic process.

Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan president Ranasinghe Premadasa were assassinated in 1991 and 1993, respectively. Benazir Bhutto was murdered in a gun and bomb attack in 2007, but a policy of appeasement obstructed CT efforts. Aside from Ms Bhutto, many politicians in this country have lost their lives to violent extremism. Several have survived abortive suicide attacks. Peace accords were signed with militants, but without thorough input from lawmakers, they proved little more than an exercise in appeasement.

To improve responses to terrorism and VE within parliamentary functions, the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism has established partnerships with the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

As terrorism is a multifaceted threat to human security, the state is responsible for protecting the population from it through actions consistent with human rights and the rule of law.

Lawmakers must enact laws, and approve the domestic CT framework and oversight measures. The process increases their political ownership and improves adherence to international good practices. They are in a better position to engage civil society in the formation, development and implementation of a national CT strategy. Parliamentary oversight ensures a balance between CT operations and human rights standards.

Dealing with issues related to extradition, victims of terrorism, mutual legal assistance and terrorism financing, requires a broader understanding. As communityleaders,legislators are well placed to strengthen interfaith dialogue and work with clergy, educationists, and community elders. Such interactions help in preventing VE.

Given their direct link with the public, they can play an ef fective role in preventing recruitment of youth by terrorist organisations.

Ef fective CT measures also require adequate funding; if parliamentarians do not realise that, the CT apparatus may remain underfunded and hence cannot be modernised.

In developing countries, CT laws are prim-arily reactive and their review remains neglected. Terrorists frequently change strategies, making legal amendments inevitable. But owing to a weak communication strategy between parliamentarians and the CT apparatus, appropriate and timely amendments are not made.

In Pakistan, out of a total of 36 National Assembly standing committees, six -defence, foreign af fairs, interior, law and justice, human rights, and religious affairs separately deal with issues related to CT and CE.

Consolidating their efforts is an important concern.

Over the years, 26 constitutional amendments including the 12th, 21st, 23rd, and 25th amendments were made to bridge the gaps in the criminal justice system (CJS), but except for the 25th amendment, the rest had sunset clauses. These clauses were incorporated with the intention of improving the functioning of the Anti-Terrorism Judicial Apparatus; however, reforming the ATJA proved an unfulfilled dream.

Failure to address terrorism through CJS may result in human rights abuses. Thus,revamping the CJS is one of NAP`s priority areas and needs more input from parliamentarians. Ideally, they should make CT laws adaptable to changing dynamics, improve community participation in pre-venting extremism, and play an active role in oversight bodies.

Parliamentarians are in key positions to develop and enact timely legislation to address terrorism, including translating the universal anti-terrorism instruments into nationallegislation.

The Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, which is the principal law dealing with terrorism, sectarian violence and speedy trial of heinous offences, is a pre-9/11 law. Following that event, 87 additions and deletions were made in the law, including 48 made between 201314 alone, which speaks to our reactive approach. Compare this approach with that of Australia which despite not experiencing any significant terrorist attack has enacted 82 anti-terrorism laws, demonstrating a proactive legal response to the changing realities. To prevent and counter terrorism, Pakistan needs to review its CT legal and institutional framework; that is not possible without the active engagement of the country`s parliamentarians.  ThewriterisauthorofPakistan:InBetween Extremism and Peace.

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