**Eliminating Terrorism**

**Both, for terrorism as well as counter-terrorism, support of the people is of overwhelming significance.**

[Air Marshal Ashfaque  Arain (Retd)](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/air-marshal-ashfaque-arain-retd)

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The term “Terrorism” was first used in the 1790s to explain the dreadful acts employed in carry­ing out mass executions of opponents by the revolutionaries of the Ja­cobin party during the French Revolution. Though initial us­age implied violence by a state against its domestic oppo­nents, the 20th century saw a change in the term to describe violence, aimed directly or indi­rectly at governments to influence policy or topple an existing regime. De­spite many efforts, there is no universal­ly accepted definition of terrorism; pri­marily because of differing perceptions of various countries based on their own security dynamics. Currently, terrorism generally includes attacks on civilians or noncombatants with seemingly random use of violence to create fear or panic to intimidate a population or compel a gov­ernment to do or not to do something. Terrorist activities yield not only hu­man and physical losses but also gener­ate an array of psychological, social, po­litical, and economic damages in target countries. When societies bear losses of terrorism, the need for security increas­es, forcing the governments to allocate larger shares to Law Enforcement Agen­cies (LEAs), only at the cost of social and economic expenditures.

[Israeli Air Force finalizes preparations for possible attack on Iran](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Apr-2024/israeli-air-force-finalizes-preparations-for-possible-attack-on-iran)

Despite great work by academics and military theorists in developed coun­tries, analysis of terrorism in the de­veloping world has often suffered from generalization or oversimplification, re­sulting in response actions leading to temporary successes only. Unveiling the causes and motivating factors as well as strengths and weaknesses of both, the terrorists and the state are impor­tant for formulating workable policies to effectively counter terrorism. Under­standing the reasons which lead people to resort to terrorism can greatly help in eliminating the menace. Since the phe­nomenon itself is complex, its causes can be multiple such as economic de­privation, poverty, unemployment, in­equality, injustice, and identity conflicts including religion, ethnic, cultural, stra­tegic, and institutional etc.

Viewing from strategic, operational, and tactical level perspectives, the ter­rorists have certain strengths and advan­tages. As they have no base, terrorists enjoy the advantage of secrecy, endur­ance, and independence from formal communication and lines of supply. They also have the advantage of initiative in the selection of target, time, and mode of attack. Since their real identity and intent are secret, they can easily merge with the local population, and wait for an opportune moment. These terrorists are not unified hierarchical organisations, rather they operate through networked organisational structures. The system mostly operates in cyberspace connect­ed through the internet. They maintain dispersed but interconnected nodes that resemble self-synchronizing swarms of self-regulating but collaborative cells.

[CM Maryam’s reforms brought healthy change in health dept: Muhammad Saleem](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Apr-2024/cm-maryam-s-reforms-brought-healthy-change-in-health-dept-muhammad-saleem)

Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA), in­cluding military and police, have hier­archical structures and are technologi­cally sophisticated. They are, therefore, dependent on robust communication systems and lines of supply, both sus­ceptible to disruption. In addition to be­ing easily discernable from the general public, LEAs also remain short on num­bers when compared to the vast areas they are required to monitor and con­trol. Being reactionary, LEAs have to re­main alert 24/7, making them suscepti­ble to fatigue and exhaustion. Since the battle against terrorism is long, there­fore in times of relative calm, the LEAs can fall prey to complacency. The failure of the policymakers to fully understand ground realities, results in inappropriate policies and allocation of suboptimal re­sources and equipment.

The terrorists neither control any de­fined territories nor maintain estab­lished channels of communication. Thus, they can neither be deterred with the threat of overwhelming use of force nor can the threats be communicated. Addi­tionally, instead of being deterred by the use of disproportionate force, the terror­ist may in reality prefer an overwhelm­ing response from LEAs, as it is likely to radicalise the population and increase their potential support base. An elusive leadership makes it difficult to know what terrorists value the most thus mak­ing target identification difficult.

[Abducted minor girl rescued within 12 hours](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Apr-2024/abducted-minor-girl-rescued-within-12-hours)

Both, for terrorism as well as counter-terrorism, support of the people is of overwhelming significance. The terror­ists merge with the population and hide in and among the people. LEAs there­fore face a challenge in differentiating between the enemy and the people. The slightest error could lead to collater­al damage and public hostility. The ob­jective therefore cannot be to takeover and control territory, but to isolate ter­rorists from the population to weaken them and create conditions to negotiate a political settlement.

Since terrorists are not deterred through brute force, the focus should therefore be on deterrence by denial; de­nying terrorists accomplishment of the benefits of their actions. Seeing futili­ty, they are likely to abandon their vio­lent acts. This necessitates more focus on measures aimed at frustrating their planning, operations, and goals as com­pared to punitive actions. This can be achieved by compelling them to move and hide by putting pressure on their so­cietal network and sponsors, demoral­izing their personnel, and denying the achievement of their aim.

[Six illegal constructions demolished in LDA operation](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Apr-2024/six-illegal-constructions-demolished-in-lda-operation)

As terrorism has a much wider array of factors, it must therefore be addressed in the context of a bigger plan. In addi­tion to security measures, consideration must be given to political, economic, and social factors that breed the move­ment. Only a whole nation approach with counter-terrorism actions within the confines of domestic laws is likely to yield success. Any other approach may reduce the acts of terrorism temporari­ly, but would not ensure long-term sta­bility and invite the return of the prob­lem. Public support will always remain crucial in the elimination of the menace.

**Air Marshal M Ashfaque Arain (Retd)**  
The writer is a retired Air Marshal of the PAF who served as Pakistan’s Air Advisor at New Delhi from 2002-06. He can be reached at ashfaquearain@yahoo.com