[**Fighting terrorism**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1741753/fighting-terrorism)

[Muhammad Amir Rana](https://www.dawn.com/authors/363/muhammad-amir-rana) Published March 12, 2023

The writer is a security analyst.

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COMPREHENDING the nature of a terrorist threat is essential for countering or physically eliminating it, as well as for preventing its recurrence. A terrorist threat comes from a complex system of ideology, organisational decision-making, coordination, quality of human resources, logistics, target selection, and execution of the plan. Countering a threat requires sufficient understanding, a higher level of vigilance, and ample resources.

During its decades-long fight against terrorism, Pakistan has successfully developed a functional response and action system to counter terrorism-related threats. However, as the nature of threats keeps changing, it requires immediate readjustments in policy, surveillance, and operations. If the countering mechanism is less flexible, there are chances that the terrorists will eventually breach the safety valves. Data shows that a tough battle is going on between the terrorists and counterterrorism forces in Pakistan, and, so far, the security forces have the edge.

This is so despite the fact that the militants have intensified their terror onslaught in recent months. In February alone, the TTP and other religiously motivated terrorist groups carried out 19 attacks in the country, which claimed 23 lives and wounded 79 people. However, the security forces eliminated 49 militants in counterterrorism operations, besides arresting 44 suspected militants in 11 search operations conducted during the month. Those suspects who were detained separately and released after preliminary investigation are not included in these 44 arrests. The TTP and similar groups launched 14 attacks in KP, four in Balochistan, and one in Karachi.

Meanwhile, in the same month, nationalist insurgent groups perpetrated 10 attacks (Baloch insurgent groups perpetrated nine attacks and a Sindhi insurgent group carried out one attack), which claimed 12 lives and wounded 33 people. It seems that the security forces had killed more militants, compared to the losses they suffered at the hands of the militants, which could be interpreted as an effective response. Still, the militants’ strength is intact, and despite their human and physical losses, they are maintaining the momentum of their terrorist activities.

LEAs need to focus on curtailing the financial supplies of the militants.

This is a clear indication that religiously motivated militants and nationalist insurgents do not have recruitments in short supply, and have enough logistical and financial support to sustain their operations. Hence, restricting their financial and logistical support is critical to combating terrorism and preventing new recruitments.

There is no doubt that the militants’ strength largely lies in Afghanistan. The TTP uses Afghan soil and has the full backing of the Taliban regime. Baloch insurgents are also using Afghan and Iranian soil. But the Taliban regime repeatedly denies the claim that Afghan soil is being used against Pakistan. Most official and independent assessments, however, indicate otherwise.

For instance, a recently released US State Department report has warned that the TTP aims to push the Pakistani government out of KP and establish the Sharia by waging a terrorist campaign against the military and the state. According to the report, the TTP uses the tribal belt along the Pak-Afghan border to train and deploy its operatives. The group draws ideological guidance from Al Qaeda, while elements of the latter rely partly on the TTP for a safe haven in the Pakhtun areas along the Pak-Afghan border.

The report by the State Department has categorically noted that “this arrangement has given TTP access to both [Al Qaeda’s] global terrorist network and its members’ operational expertise”. The report identifies the Islamic State-Khorasan as another group that poses a significant threat to Pakistan, and is composed primarily of former TTP members, the Afghan Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

Apart from threatening the security of the bordering regions, the TTP is gradually increasing its footprint in other parts of the country too. It has become quite active in Balochistan. Similarly, a group of three TTP militants, equipped with explosives and weapons and bags of food, stormed the Karachi Police Office last month.

The attack signalled the intention of the TTP to try hard to regain the operational strength they had had until 2015, when they were able to frequently launch major attacks and could engage the security forces for days through coordinated gun-and-bomb attacks. Large-scale attacks boost the morale of the terrorists and build pressure on state institutions. However, police commandos and paramilitary soldiers cleared the building by killing the terrorists in an hours-long operation and foiled the plot of the terrorists. Three security personnel and a civilian lost their lives.

The probability is high that the TTP will continue to attempt similar attacks in Pakistan, which would require intelligence agencies and security forces to be extra vigilant.

Despite all the successes achieved against terrorism, law-enforcement agencies need to focus on curtailing the financial supplies of the terrorists. It is also crucial to enhance the capacity of the Counter-Terrorism Departments. Terrorists generate financial resources through criminal activities, including extortion, cyber fraud and protection money that they collect from influential business people and politicians. This is one of the weakest areas of the CTDs despite their visible progress on the kinetic front during the last few years. The issue is one of focus. Combating terror financing requires a scientific approach, technological skills, and effective coordination among the law-enforcement agencies. Federal bodies, especially Nacta, provide training to improve capacity. However, more attention needs to be paid to improving coordination and to changing the professional environment of the CTDs.

The CTDs are a special and dedicated force, but still follow the practices of normal policing. They focus more on improving the muscular posture of the agency rather than converting it into a smart force. The mindset behind establishing a national CTD is the same, despite thinking about improving the investigation techniques, analysis skills, and understanding of the whole phenomenon of terrorism. The CTDs are performing better at the operational level, and a national body could harm their abilities. They will find an excuse to shift the burden onto each other, as logistically quick, centralised responses to neutralising a threat are almost impossible to develop. Nacta has to focus more on developing early warning systems, data processing, and coordination rather than gaining muscles.

*The writer is a security analyst.*

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