**[Why Pakistan?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1680247/why-pakistan)**

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MEDIA comments after every act of terror — like the [Peshawar mosque carnage](https://www.dawn.com/news/1678238) — criticise the security agencies and their purported bonhomie with extremist groups, and blame the powerful body of ulema for its muted criticism of religiously motivated terrorists. While all these factors may have helped terrorists in their business of killing, a major phenomenon conducive to violent extremism is the gullibility of a large section of Pakistani Muslims who respond with enthusiasm to any group that pretends to act in the name of religion, even if its modus operandi is barbaric.

This phenomenon is practically unique to our people. In contrast, we notice the absence of such gullibility in most other Muslim countries. In recent years, few Muslim countries, from the sprawling archipelago that is Indonesia to tiny Morocco in North Africa, have been victims of wholescale massacres like the massive Peshawar blast earlier this month. Unfortunately, terrorist attacks are again on the increase in Pakistan and are being carried out by militant groups such as the so-called Islamic State’s Khorasan chapter and the TTP.

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The post-2003 wave of murderous bomb blasts in Iraq is over, and even though acts of terror still do hit Syria occasionally, mass killings there are absent. Exceptions include Taliban-ruled Afghanistan — where it will take time for things to settle — and the rump state of Somalia. In Egypt, bomb attacks on Coptic churches and tourists have decreased. As for the huge land mass inhabited by the Turkic people of Central Asia, the threat of religiously motivated acts of terrorism is seen as much lower there than in this country. The same holds good for the Caucasus, Turkey, Iran and the sheikhdoms.

Uzbekistan, ruled by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, needs special mention. Under Islam Karimov, political dissidents were reportedly dipped in boiling liquid. Shocked beyond belief, one traumatised mother, whose son died after he was allegedly subjected to this barbarism, wrote to the British ambassador, who informed his government and the issue went viral. Uzbek ‘mujahids’ may have realised that their own country was hardly the place which could serve as a base for launching a world revolution, as the first victims would be their own people. The only country that came to their minds was their neighbouring state.

Unfortunately, terrorist attacks in the country are increasing again.

Initially, Afghan Taliban fighting the Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani cliques welcomed Uzbek warriors for their fighting prowess, but the latter forgot that Afghans fight for their country and jealously guard it against potential rivals. They slaughtered the British in the 19th century, humiliated the Russians in the 20th and made the US flee in the 21st after two decades of a costly and futile war.

To their Uzbek comrades the Afghan Taliban made clear that they would not be given any territory to operate and the overall command and control would be the Afghan Taliban’s.

Disappointed, many Uzbek fighters came to a country whose hospitality and notions of pan-Islamic fraternity amazed them. Its mountainous northwest provided safety, besides freedom of movement because until recently Pakistani laws didn’t operate there. Down below in the plains, the madressahs are reported to have given their Uzbek guests free board and lodging because their talk of fighting for Islamic causes fascinated their hosts. The Uzbeks then decided to pay their hosts for their gracious hospitality by [blowing up](https://www.dawn.com/news/1111397) Karachi airport in 2014.

Proudly did the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) display on its website the photos of its “martyrs” and declare that its “martyrdom ope­ration” was rev­e­nge for “the late­­st full-scale bom­bardment and night atta­cks” by the Pak­istani military.

Listening and succumbing to controversial narratives in the name of religion is in our genes. In a scholarly article by Sikandar Hayat in *A History of Pakistan*, compiled by Robert D. Long, the writer dwells on the tragedy that followed a fatwa. According to the latter, after the end of Mughal rule, India was no more Darul Islam (abode of Islam or peace); it had become Darul Harb (abode of war) and it was incumbent upon Muslims to leave the country. Many among the believers obeyed this religious edict, sold their homes at throwaway prices and headed towards Afghanistan. As was to be expected of a foreign country, they were denied entry. Many of the hapless died while others returned home as paupers.

This gullibility is a societal problem and cannot be scratched out by security agencies or by the state: society alone can reform itself. The basic drawback is lack of enlightenment — which can only be achieved through universal education free from retrogressive control.

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