

Media Strategy for Countering the Daesh Threat

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Abstract

Daesh, a Sunni militant organisation based in the Middle East, has attracted militants from Asia, Europe and the West. Daesh's multifaceted media strategy has been instrumental in the spread of extremist ideology, and advancing the outfit's global reach. The rising profile of Daesh, in particular, the outfit's links with other terrorist organisations is a source of concern since it could prove to be detrimental for international peace. Daesh presence in Afghanistan raises fears that it may become a regional threat. Pakistan cannot isolate itself from these security developments, and needs to employ countermeasures to thwart any potential threat. Pakistan's counterterrorist drive is a deterrent against extremist factions. However, to counter an extremist ideology, a counternarrative based on rational views needs to be adopted. The country's media needs to play an active role in promotion of balanced ideological ideas. This paper analyses Daesh's media strategy; the terrorist outfit's radicalising tactics; the role of media in spreading such an ideology; and thoughts on formulating a media strategy for countering extremism.

Key words: Daesh, Extremist Ideology, Technological Prowess, Sectarian Strife, Media.

Introduction

Terrorism has plagued the international environment.¹ Every state, irrespective of its size, geography and political standing has encountered terrorism in one form or another. There have been more than 800 attacks on educational institutions since 2007 [in Pakistan], in

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¹ Muhammad Zubair Iqbal, "The TV-Terrorism Relationship: Investigating the Symbiosis Notion," *Strategic Studies* 35, no. 2 (2015): 89.

addition to attacks on private citizens, businesses, military and police targets.² The March 22, 2016 terrorist attack in Brussels killed 40 people and injured more than 200.³ Daesh, a militant outfit based in the Middle East was behind the attack. Daesh's goal is to widen the divide/hatred between Muslims and non-Muslims. The terrorist outfit's ideology is based on the narrative that there is an inherent conflict between the West and Islam.⁴ Its access to world regions is reflective of the organisation's technological prowess. According to the Recorded Future, there were 60,000 pro-Daesh Twitter accounts in September 2014.⁵ Thus, this transnational terrorist group is well-equipped and can access the world through digital technology (cyber terrorism).⁶ Global/technological networking has introduced new degrees of vulnerabilities as well as insecurities.

In the current era of Information Technology (IT) to counter terrorism, the use of military force alone is not sufficient, rather, technological expertise is required. Media being a powerful tool has gained considerable importance. States and non-state actors use it to further their objectives. Through social networking sites, a larger audience can be reached. Extremist groups pump propaganda material onto the Internet, and online affiliation with groups like Daesh becomes a click away.⁷

² Ayesha Razzaque, "The Bubble of Security in Pakistan," *News on Sunday*, February 7, 2016, <http://tns.thenews.com.pk/bubble-of-security-in-pakistan/#.WBqLYy197IU>.

³ Editorial, "Terror in Brussels," *News International*, March 23, 2016, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/107332-Terror-in-Brussels>.

⁴ Justin Hienz, "After Brussels Attack, Why Daesh is Losing the Battle and Winning the War," March 22, 2016, *Security Debrief Blog*, <http://securitydebrief.com/2016/03/22/why-daesh-is-losing-the-battle-and-winning-the-war/>.

⁵ Staffan Truvé, "ISIS Jumping from Account to Account, Twitter Trying to Keep Up," *The Recorded Future Blog*, September 3, 2014, <https://www.recordedfuture.com/isis-twitter-activity>, quoted in Alberto M. Fernandez, "Here to Stay and Growing: Combating ISIS Propaganda Networks," Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World (U.S.-Islamic World Forum Papers, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2015), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/10/combating-isis-propaganda-fernandez/is-propaganda_web_english_v2.pdf.

⁶ Sarah Lowman, "The Criminology of Computer Crime," in *Digital Crime and Digital Terrorism*, 3rd ed., eds. Robert W. Taylor, Eric J. Fritsch and John Liederbach (New Jersey: Pearson, 2014), 66.

⁷ Noureddine Miladi, "Why is Daesh Propaganda Not Shut out of the Internet?" *Daily Capital*, January 27, 2016, <http://dailycapital.pk/why-is-daesh-propaganda-not-shut-out-of-the-internet-dr-noureddine-miladi/>.

Daesh – A Brief Overview

‘Daesh is the pejorative Arabic acronym’ for insurgents who hold parts of Syria.⁸ It is formed from the initial letters of the group’s previous name in Arabic – ‘*al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa al-Sham*.’⁹ In December 2015, then Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the UK would join France in calling the group Daesh rather than ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).¹⁰ Levant refers to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine.¹¹ He said, ‘Frankly, this evil death cult is neither a true representation of Islam, nor is it a state.’¹² Daesh sounds similar to an Arabic verb that means to ‘tread underfoot’, ‘trample down’, or ‘crush something.’¹³

Daesh’s emergence is primarily linked to the Middle Eastern crisis.¹⁴ During the wars in Iraq and Syria, the sectarian strife within the Muslim population intensified. In the post-Saddam era, the Shia regime’s oppressive and exclusionary policies¹⁵ against the Sunni population provoked a Sunni backlash. In Syria, the country’s Sunni population opposed the Shia (Alawite) regime; the anti-government protests have plunged the country into a civil war.¹⁶ The friction between the two sects was exploited by outside actors. The instability provided fertile ground to extremist factions. The most prominent of these was Daesh,¹⁷ whose motive is to establish caliphate system primarily in Iraq and Syria, and in general all over the world.¹⁸ Daesh has control of the city of Raqqa, Eastern Syria and cities of Mosul and Tikrit, Western Iraq (Sunni majority areas).¹⁹ But its membership is not limited to the Arab world, rather, fighters from the West

⁸ “U.S. Says Prepared for Military Solution to IS in Syria,” *News International*, January 24, 2016, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/93414-U.S.-prepared-for-military-solution-against-IS-in-Syria>.

⁹ Faisal Irshaid, “ISIS, ISIL, IS or Daesh? One Group, Many Names,” *BBC.com*, December 2, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27994277>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Carter Center, *Overview of Daesh’s Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine ‘Dabiq’*, report (Atlanta: Carter Center, 2015), https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/dabiq-report-12-17-15.pdf.

¹² Irshaid, “ISIS, ISIL, IS or Daesh?”

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Kashif Mumtaz, “The Middle East in a Flux: How Should Pakistan Respond?” (issue brief, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Islamabad, 2015), 144.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Hussain H. Zaidi, “Daesh: Rhetoric and Reality,” *News International*, November 22, 2015, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/74732-daesh-rhetoric-and-reality>.

¹⁸ Masood ur Rehman Khattak, Manzoor Khan Afridi and Husnul Amin, “The Emergence of Islamic State: Implications for Pakistan and Afghanistan,” *Spotlight on Regional Affairs* 34, no. 10 (2015), <http://www.irs.org/spotlight/spo2015.pdf>.

¹⁹ Mumtaz, “The Middle East in a Flux,” 144.

and Asia have also joined.²⁰ ‘More than 20,000 foreign fighters from over 90 countries, including around 3,400 fighters from the U.S. and other Western countries are fighting alongside the terrorist group.’²¹ The unrest in Middle East since 2011 has claimed 250,000 lives²² (and displaced about 11 million)²³, thus, badly impacting the regional security landscape.

Terrorist outfits which have pledged allegiance to Daesh, include East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM),²⁴ Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU);²⁵ and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) linked groups like Jamat-e-Ahrarul Islam and Tehreek-e-Khilafah.²⁶ Daesh’s global outreach, in particular, the recruitment from various quarters of the world have raised fears of a global threat.²⁷ The Muslims living in other regions/countries are victims of its extremist ideology. The prime target of Daesh are the marginalised and disaffected Muslims in the West whose social isolation at times makes them unbalanced and vulnerable to extremist ideology. Another negative impact which has added to the sufferings of Muslims is that every Muslim irrespective of his liberal and balanced outlook is being judged with an extremist lens. The fear of ‘Islamic radicalism’²⁸ has intensified; and the perception that terrorists are ‘evil Muslims’²⁹ has strengthened. As a consequence, visa policies have become even more tighter and difficult for the Muslims world over.

Perceptions about Daesh in Pakistan

Pakistan has been battling terrorists for more than a decade (lost over 80,000 people³⁰); and has committed its maximum resources in the global

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Khattak, Afridi, Amin, “The Emergence of Islamic State.”

²² John Davison, “Syrian Pro-government Forces Retake Key Town in West Ahead of Planned Talks,” *Reuters*, January 24, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-latakia-idUSKCN0V208S>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ayaz Ahmed, “Is Daesh a Threat to Pakistan?” *News International*, December 17, 2015, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/82316-Is-Daesh-a-threat-to-Pakistan#sthash.jxnZMAv9.dpuf>.

²⁵ PICSS, *Annual Security Assessment Report – 2015*, report (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, 2015).

²⁶ Ibid., 38.

²⁷ Theresa May, “We Must Work Together to Defeat Terrorism” (speech, UK Government, London, June 18, 2015), <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretary-we-must-work-together-to-defeat-terrorism>.

²⁸ Ghazi Salahuddin, “Our Battle of Ideas,” *News International*, December 6, 2015, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/79925-our-battle-of-ideas>.

²⁹ Conn Hallinan, “Terrorism: Then and Now,” *News International*, April 2, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/109710-Terrorism-then-and-now>.

³⁰ Khattak, Afridi, Amin, “The Emergence of Islamic State.”

War on Terror (financial resources of approximately \$ 100 billion).³¹ The ongoing military operation ‘Zarb-e-Azb’ is a unanimous politico-military initiative launched against the terrorists.

With regards to Daesh, a number of statements have been made by the government officials. Some portray it as a Middle East phenomena, while some see it as an emerging threat in the region. Pakistan’s Interior Minister while speaking at the United Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. said: ‘I can say with confidence that Daesh only exists in the Middle East. It absolutely has no presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.’³² While the Foreign Secretary, Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry is reported to have told the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs that ‘Daesh poses a threat to the country, and the government is alert to the threat.’³³ The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Raheel Sharif during his visit to Washington, D.C. in November 2015 said, ‘Daesh is a global threat and needs a global response.’³⁴

Given Pakistan’s strong military and the ongoing counterterrorist operations, it can be speculated that foreign terrorist groups like Daesh will not be able to establish footholds in the country.³⁵ However, in a transnational world, broadband inter-connectivity, free flow of information and the geographical access have led to the ‘death of distance’³⁶, and provided an ideal ground for criminal activities.³⁷ The Internet is being employed by various terrorist groups to spread extremism, recruit members³⁸ and ‘plan campaigns’.³⁹ Daesh claims to have recruited people from the West and Asia,⁴⁰ which shows that the outfit through its propaganda tactics has made inroads in the minds of many.⁴¹ As claimed by the Balochistan government, Daesh has links with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Ahl-e-Sunnat WalJammat (ASWJ).⁴² The Ismaili bus attack in Karachi

³¹ Ibid.

³² Mumtaz, “The Middle East in a Flux,” 144.

³³ Ibid., 145.

³⁴ “Zero Tolerance for Daesh in Pakistan: DG ISPR,” *Dawn*, November 20, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1221026>.

³⁵ Mumtaz, “The Middle East in a Flux,” 145.

³⁶ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Cyber Power” (essay, Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Cambridge, 2010), quoted in Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power in the 21st Century* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2011), 3.

³⁷ Grant Wardlaw, “The Future and Crime: Challenges for Law Enforcement” (paper presented at the 3rd National Outlook Symposium on Crime in Australia, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, March 22-23, 1999), http://aic.gov.au/media_library/conferences/outlook99/wardlaw.pdf.

³⁸ Carter Center, *Overview of Daesh’s Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine, ‘Dabiq’*.

³⁹ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Cyber Power”, 9.

⁴⁰ Mumtaz, “The Middle East in a Flux,” 144.

⁴¹ Miladi, “Why is Daesh Propaganda Not Shut out of the Internet?”

⁴² Mumtaz, “The Middle East in a Flux,” 145.

(May 2015) was a manifestation of Daesh's reach in Pakistan.⁴³ The university students involved in the attack were influenced by Daesh ideology. Maulvi Abdul Aziz, in an interview said:

We want a caliphate across the world, including Pakistan. The caliphate is the solution to the problems. These Arab *Mujahideen* have started the process of creating a caliphate, and we think this is good news for the Muslim *Ummah*. God willing, if their order continues, we will see it flourish all over the world.⁴⁴

A five-year road map published by Daesh refers to the region where Pakistan and Afghanistan are situated as 'Khorasan', the old name for Iranian, Central Asian, Afghan, and Pakistani territories.⁴⁵ Daesh elements have been found in Nangarhar, Helmand and Ghazni provinces in Afghanistan.⁴⁶ The Afghan President Ashraf Ghani views Daesh as 'a greater threat to Afghanistan than Taliban.'⁴⁷ Their presence in Afghanistan is a source of concern for Pakistan since a nexus between it and other regional terrorist groups could pose a security challenge. In a failed attempt, Daesh targeted the Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad, Afghanistan.⁴⁸ The likely Daesh-TTP nexus⁴⁹ could be detrimental for regional peace, while anti-state elements and regional actors opposed to Pakistan's elevation might employ terrorism as a 'tool to tackle Pakistan.'⁵⁰

Daesh's Media Strategy

In an age where media has an important role in dissemination of information, social networking sites are being used as tools to influence public opinion and for propaganda purposes.⁵¹ Daesh's multilayered media strategy is pivotal to the organisation's propaganda and recruitment tactics.⁵² Reportedly, 4.570 million videos of Daesh are on YouTube.⁵³

⁴³ Zahid Hussain, "The Looming IS Threat," *Dawn*, July 15, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1194492>.

⁴⁴ PICSS, *Annual Security Assessment Report – 2015*.

⁴⁵ Khattak, Afridi, Amin, "The Emergence of Islamic State."

⁴⁶ PICSS, *Annual Security Assessment Report – 2015*, 40.

⁴⁷ Hussain, "The Looming IS Threat."

⁴⁸ Editorial, "ISIS Attacks Again", *News International*, January 14, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/90118-Isis-attacks-again>.

⁴⁹ PICSS, *Annual Security Assessment Report – 2015*, 36.

⁵⁰ "TTP, Daesh Nexus with Indian Support Threat to Pakistan Security," *Frontier Post*, January 22, 2016, <http://epaper.thefrontierpost.com/article/370490/>.

⁵¹ Miladi, "Why is Daesh Propaganda Not Shut out of the Internet?"

⁵² Carter Center, *Overview of Daesh's Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine 'Dabiq'*.

⁵³ Miladi, "Why is Daesh Propaganda Not Shut out of the Internet?"

Each day, Daesh produces up to 90,000 tweets.⁵⁴ According to the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), James Comey, ‘Daesh has been issuing statements in almost two dozen languages.’⁵⁵

Their online English magazine *Dabiq* (end times) is notorious for the spread of extremist ideology.⁵⁶ The magazine is published by the ‘Al-Hayat Media Centre’ and is named after a village in Northwest Syria.⁵⁷ Each issue of *Dabiq*, begins with the quote: ‘The spark has been lit in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah’s permission – until it burns the crusader armies in *Dabiq*.’⁵⁸ The narrative promoted by *Dabiq* has an emotional as well as religious connotation. It tries to link Daesh caliphate with the founding of Islam.⁵⁹ For instance, in Daesh’s call, ‘To re-establish the caliphate, they claim that a small group of fighters is, through divine support, taking on armies, acquiring land, fulfilling the ‘Islamic Vision’ of creating an Islamic state, and defending the Muslim *Ummah*.’⁶⁰ The concept of *Hijrah* (migration for the sake of Allah), *Jihad* (holy war) and *Ummah* (whole community of Muslims) are being projected to attract people. The hidden agenda is to provoke religious sentiments, justify violent acts and instigate hate. Daesh states, ‘The Muslims in the West will quickly find themselves between one of two choices, they either apostatise and adopt the *kafir* (unbelievers) religion propagated by Bush, Obama, Blair, Cameron and Hollande in the name of Islam ... or they perform *hijrah* (migration) to the Islamic State; and thereby, escape persecution from the crusader governments and citizens.’⁶¹ The extremist outfits ‘targeted demographics’⁶² are politically alienated, disgruntled masses, who are victims of unjust practices and social isolation.

To thwart such malicious designs, Muslims need to give up their shortsightedness and see the world with a broader perspective. Muslim countries need to focus towards internal development, and strengthen their economic muscle. Extremist narratives are based on violence.⁶³ The

⁵⁴ Alex P. Schmid, “Challenging the Narrative of the Islamic State” (paper, International Centre for Counter-terrorism, Hague, 2015), <http://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Carter Center, *Overview of Daesh’s Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine, ‘Dabiq’*.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁰ Rashad Hussain, “A Strategy for Countering Terrorist Propaganda in the Digital Age” (press release, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., 2015), <http://www.state.gov/r/cscc/releases/243877.htm>.

⁶¹ Carter Center, *Overview of Daesh’s Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine, ‘Dabiq’*.

⁶² Ibid., 1.

⁶³ Mohammad Ali Babakhel, “A Counter-Narrative,” *Dawn*, January 7, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1231248>.

ideology promoted by the extremist groups including Daesh is, in reality, hurting Muslims.

Proposed Media Strategy to Counter Daesh/Extremism

To counter the threat of terrorism, the use of military force is essential, but to attain long-term success, the extremist ideology needs to be defeated.⁶⁴ President Obama has elaborately made this point:

We have to prevent it from radicalising, recruiting and inspiring others to violence in the first place. And this means defeating their ideology. Ideologies are not defeated by guns, they're defeated with ideas – a more attractive and compelling vision.⁶⁵

The coercive approach to dismantle terrorism in the past has not been successful. The situation in Afghanistan speaks for itself; terrorism has not been eliminated and the country continues to battle militancy. In the words of Omar Hammami,⁶⁶ ‘The war of narratives has become even more important than the war of navies, napalm, and knives.’⁶⁷ Extremist material is appealing. For instance, Daesh’s vision of creating an ‘Islamic state, and defending of Muslim *Ummah*’ carries a magnetic pull. At times, such radical narrative becomes even more powerful than the state narrative, e.g. the narrative on drone attacks and state justification. The deaths (estimated 2,428 to 3,929) and the collateral damage caused due to the drone attacks,⁶⁸ prompted anti-state sentiments, and empowered (indirectly) the extremist narrative. To counter such nefarious agendas, a counternarrative based on rationality is required. State institutions, the media and the intelligentsia should draft such a national narrative, especially in Pakistan.⁶⁹

The argument that Muslims are allowed to use violent means can be countered through religious teachings. The Quran emphasises, whoever

⁶⁴ Danish Khan, “Making a New Social Contract,” *News International*, April 2, 2016. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/109709-Making-a-new-social-contract>.

⁶⁵ White House, “Remarks by President Obama at the Leaders’ Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism,” (press release, White House, Washington, D.C., 2015), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/29/remarks-president-obama-leaders-summit-countering-isil-and-violent>.

⁶⁶ Christopher Anzalone, “The Evolution of an American *Jihadi*: The Case of Omar Hammami,” *Combating Terrorism Center*, June 21, 2012, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-evolution-of-an-american-jihadi-the-case-of-omar-hammami>.

⁶⁷ Fernandez, “Here to Stay and Growing.”

⁶⁸ Catherine Shakdam, “Tracking Pakistan’s History of Supporting Terror, with and without Help,” *Mint Press News*, January 20, 2015, <http://www.mintpressnews.com/tracking-pakistans-history-supporting-terror-without-american-help/201311/>.

⁶⁹ Babakhel, “A Counter-Narrative.”

kills an innocent person, it is as if he has killed all of humanity. And whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all of humanity.⁷⁰ Daesh atrocities, including the killings of women and children nullify the organisation's claim of defending Islam and Muslims.⁷¹ As part of this narrative, the concept of *jihad* is wrongly manipulated. The media needs to expose the lies and the destructive consequences such extremist ideologies reinforce. It should be pointed out that *jihad* is a 'holy struggle' against evil and 'the conquest of self,' whereas targeting of civilian population and the use of violence are cowardly acts;⁷² that terrorists involved in such heinous crimes are 'inhumane fanatics.'⁷³

Daesh's message 'to defend Sunni Muslims from Shia aggression,' has widened the sectarian divide. Pakistan, a Sunni majority country, is home to 20 per cent Shia population.⁷⁴ Concerted efforts are needed so that peace between the two sects prevails. Lectures and talk shows of religious scholars highlighting the true essence of Islam could be useful in creating harmony and understanding between various sects. In this regard, the media should play a constructive role, and act as a bridge among the various groups/and sects. Ideas instigating polarising views should not be projected. The practice of supporting one sect over another by media channels should also be discouraged.

More than 25 shrines across Pakistan have been attacked since 2005.⁷⁵ The terrorist attacks on Data Darbar, Lahore (July 2010) and Abdullah Shah Ghazi, Karachi (October 2010) were denounced and condemned by religious scholars.⁷⁶ These scholars have the expertise to speak at great lengths to promote peace. However, the lack of communication and media training to disseminate their knowledge to broader audiences is a major hindrance. Religious scholars need to be integrated into modern technological platforms and online social

⁷⁰ Hussain, "A Strategy for Countering Terrorist Propaganda."

⁷¹ Shaikh Abdul Rauf, "Defence," in *The Vision: Selections from the Holy Quran*, 1st ed. (Rawalpindi: Aleem Publications, 1987), 270.

⁷² "Terrorism Can't End Terrorism, Dr Aamir Liaquat Tells US Gathering," *News International*, January 24, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/93315-Terrorism-cant-end-terrorismDr-Aamir-Liaquat-tells-US-gathering>.

⁷³ Hallinan, "Terrorism: Then and Now."

⁷⁴ Mumtaz, "The Middle East in a Flux," 145-147.

⁷⁵ Zia Ur Rehman, "Sindh Devises Strategy to Protect Shrines, Sufi Personalities," *Central Asia Online*, March 7, 2013,

<https://afpakwatch.wordpress.com/tag/attacks-on-sufi-shrines-in-pakistan/>.

⁷⁶ Hedieh Mirahmadi, Mehreen Farooq and Waleed Ziad, *Pakistan's Civil Society: Alternative Channels to Countering Violent Extremism*, report (Washington, D.C.: World Organization for Resource Development and Education, 2012),

<http://www.worde.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/WORDE-Report-Pakistan-Civil-Society-Alternative-Channels-to-CVE.pdf>.

networking sites.⁷⁷ Religious programmes/talk shows should be organised, in which, public queries pertaining to religious issues should be addressed. Deradicalisation seminars and lectures on YouTube and Facebook should also be shared.

In the subcontinent, Islam was spread through Sufism. Shrines still play an important ‘spiritual and economic role in the lives of a majority of Pakistanis.’⁷⁸ Pakistani youth should be taught that the Sufi preachings of religion are a testament to the fact that in religion there is no room for violence. Traditional and ‘hypnotic Sufi devotional music’ *Qawwali*, needs to be promoted.⁷⁹

The National Action Plan (NAP) has put a ban on hate speech and extremist material (reference point 5 NAP).⁸⁰ The misuse of mosques in spreading of militant ideas needs to be controlled. NAP has also prohibited the glorification of extremists on media (point 11).⁸¹ Besides, there is also a provision to take action against those who lure youth towards extremism through social media (point 14).⁸² However, to ensure an effective implementation of NAP, the state institutions need to find the support of various segments of society, including teachers, parents, sportsmen and the youth.

To ensure effective dissemination of the national narrative, and its maximum impact, the authenticity and neutrality of a source is important. The Egyptian authorities were successful in countering the radical narrative because their messengers were former Al-Qaeda operatives.⁸³ Imam al Sharif, the former Al-Qaeda operative, a high calibre ideologue and an influential figure for the terrorists was captured by the Egyptian authorities. While in prison, the former terrorist was provided with a congenial environment. Sharif wrote a book titled, *Al-Jami’ fi Talab Al-Ilm Al-Sharif (The Compendium on Religious Study)*. The book rejected extremist ideology.⁸⁴ Later, Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, an Egyptian scholar, known for his militant religious rulings was approached. His book *Fiqh of Jihad* was a deterrent against the Al-Qaeda teachings.⁸⁵ Pakistan should learn from the counterterrorism strategy of Egypt. The books of former terrorist operatives

⁷⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁸ Nadeem F. Paracha, “Upsetting Sufi,” *Dawn*, October 25, 2012, <http://www.dawn.com/news/759390/upsetting-sufis>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Babakhel, “A Counter-Narrative.”

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Khurram Iqbal, “Strengthening the National Action Plan and the National Narrative” (paper presented, workshop, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Islamabad, April 13, 2016).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

should be translated into Urdu for the understanding of the common man. Moreover, counterterrorism related courses should also be taught at educational institutions.

The media at times wittingly (or unwittingly) displays acts which could be harmful for society. For instance, the acts of beating or killing someone might improve ratings,⁸⁶ but it could also prompt the tendency of violence. Thus, ethics and accountability standards are needed to reduce sensationalist coverage.⁸⁷ Positive narratives and the examples of young people facing challenges courageously should be projected.

Media needs to project the soft power credentials at the regional as well as international levels. It needs to play the role of an image builder and enhance people's confidence. The government should make an appropriate media strategy so as to reduce the negative impact of international media, especially that of India.⁸⁸ Pakistan's strategic location, dynamic youth force and Armed Forces are its strengths and need projection for domestic as well as international audience.

Journalists have the power to change narratives and influence public opinion.⁸⁹ To ensure professional reporting, journalists require proper training and capacity building to work in conflict-prone areas.⁹⁰ In addition, a government-led strategy is required to ensure protection of journalists. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) report, 28 journalists have been murdered in Pakistan during the period 1992 to 2013.⁹¹

Culture and literature have always been effective tools in making (or destroying) of societies. Allama Iqbal's poetry was a motivating factor for the Muslims of the subcontinent. Literature encourages diversity, enhances creativity, and can also be instrumental in countering radicalism.⁹² Pakistan is a land of poetry, the Indus valley civilisation speaks of its rich cultural heritage. Cultural activities could be useful in promoting societal harmony and peace. The programme 'Revival of Indigenous Cultural Heritage (RICH)' by the Cultural Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (in

⁸⁶ Iqbal, "The TV-Terrorism Relationship."

⁸⁷ Mirahmadi, Farooq and Ziad, "Pakistan's Civil Society."

⁸⁸ Khurshid Khan and Afifa Kiran, "Emerging Tendencies of Radicalization in Pakistan: A Proposed Counter Radicalization Strategy," *Strategic Studies* 32, no. 2 (2012): 39.

⁸⁹ "Training Workshop on 'Conflicts and Terrorism' Starts," *News International*, March 29, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/108705-Training-workshop-on-Conflicts-and-Terrorism-starts>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Abida Eijaz, Bushra Hameedur Rahman, Rana Eijaz Ahmad, Jawad Ashraf Butt, "Challenges and Options for Pakistani Media in the 21st Century," *Journal of Political Studies* 21, no. 1 (2014): 247.

⁹² Ghazi Salahuddin, "Uses of Literature," *News International*, February 7, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/96553-Uses-of-literature>.

collaboration with local organisations) is a positive step.⁹³ Similar endeavours should be undertaken by other provinces as well.

Radio stations established by religious scholars could be critical channels in diluting radical perceptions. Earlier, Mustafa FM and the Madyan radio stations were established in Malakand (by Jamia Subhaniyya Rizvia). However, the radio stations had short lives due to the paucity of funds.⁹⁴

Dramas and movies could also act as deterrence against extremist ideologies. Movies like *'Khuda Kay Liye'* (For the Sake of God) is an example of countering militant propaganda. The movie referred to the narrow interpretation of religion, and how young minds are misguided.⁹⁵ Public interest in the movie reflected the understanding towards a balanced perspective.

Conclusion

Daesh's online access, to all quarters of the world, is reflective of the terrorist outfit's growing influence. Daesh's multifaceted online media strategy has been instrumental in the spread of its extremist ideology. Global actors opposed to terrorism need to study Daesh's media strategy. Pakistan, over the years, has carried out numerous counterterrorist operations. Against the likely growth of Daesh's influence in the region, the ideological mindset it can create needs to be defeated, and for this, Pakistan needs to strengthen its soft power, and develop a strong counternarrative. In this struggle, Pakistan's vibrant media needs to act with more responsibility and play the role of a unifying bridge between the various segments of society. ■

⁹³ "Govt, Organisations Join Hands to Revive Cultural Heritage," *News International*, February 8, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/96703-Govt-organisations-join-hands-to-revive-cultural-heritage>.

⁹⁴ Mirahmadi, Farooq and Ziad, "Pakistan's Civil Society."

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.