



PAKISTAN FACING THE CHALLENGE OF DERADICALIZATION

FRANCESCA MANENTI



CENTRO STUDI
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by Francesca Manenti

Ce.S.I. - Centro Studi Internazionali
Via Nomentana, 251- 00161 Rome (Italy)
Tel.: +39 06 85 35 63 96
Web: www.cesi-italia.org
Email: info@cesi-italia.org



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Methodological Note

This paper aims to present the new approach adopted by the Pakistani authorities to effectively address the challenges to internal security, arising both from the Taliban insurgency and from the presence in the country of a new responsiveness to international jihadism. In particular, the goal of the publication is to analyse the state of the art of the National Action Plan (NAP), the first anti-terrorism and deradicalization policy program formulated by the Government of Islamabad, to assess the critical factors that still affect its full implementation and possible challenges deriving from the transformation of the national radical panorama.

To this end, the report will address two fundamental issues: first, it will analyse the effort put in place by the Pakistani authorities to curb the internal security crisis, distinguishing between counter-terrorism operations (first chapter) and NAP (second chapter); secondly, it will focus on the specific case of radicalization in Punjab, in particular the evolution of the phenomenon within the province and the spreading of the trend at the national level will be outlined.

The report has been inspired by the visit to Pakistan paid from 24 to 28 April 2017 by the delegation of Ce.S.I. - Centro Studi Internazionali, led by the President, Prof. Andrea Margelletti, with the participation of Gabriele Iacovino, Director of the Institute, and Francesca Manenti, Analyst of the Asia and Pacific Desk.

During the visit, which took place between the cities of Islamabad and Lahore, the analysts of the Institute had the opportunity to meet representatives of Institutions, think tanks and the Pakistani academic world, in order to get a complete picture of the current situation of internal security as well as of the efforts to counter violent extremism and to discuss possible development trends. The ideas that emerged have been reworked and incorporated in an organic framework that highlights the challenges that Pakistan is facing to find a systemic solution to a phenomenon that has caused huge losses in human, economic and development opportunities in recent years.

Ce.S.I. gratefully acknowledges all those interlocutors who agreed to meet its delegation and made the exchange of ideas at the base of this report possible. The Institute expresses its gratitude to the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) and the Pakistan Study Center of the University of Punjab for hosting the delegation, managing the agenda and organizing the visit.

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Introduction

Almost three years after the bloody bombing of the Army Public School in Peshawar, occurred on 16 December 2014, in which 143 people were killed, Pakistan is pursuing a structured effort to try to eradicate the terrorist threat from the country. The strong emotional impact caused by the attack, in fact, has pushed the Pakistani authorities to start a campaign of total intolerance towards any form of terrorism directed against the State, thus giving up the pragmatic approach used in the past against the Taliban insurgency and the network linked to al-Qaeda, which had pushed some among security forces to use part of them as an instrument of influence and destabilization in the region.

The need to elaborate a new strategy, which tackles such a diverse reality as radical Islamist militancy, prompted the government to rethink the approach adopted so far to counter the insurgency in the country. If in the past the effort was entrusted exclusively to the Armed Forces and was essentially based on counter-terrorism operations, starting from 2015 the government tried to play an active role in this process adopting a structured program of anti-terrorism and deradicalization, the National Action Plan (NAP), in order to face the threat in all its aspects. The Armed Forces' combat operations continue to be the most effective tool to deal with the Taliban, while the government's policies aim to reduce the space available to the radical narrative that is at the basis not only of the militancy but more generally of the forms of violent extremism that afflict internal security.

However, in a country like Pakistan, where the complexity of the social fabric overlaps with economic discrepancies between urban and rural areas and in which the central authorities still struggle to take charge of the provision of services on a national scale, many critical factors are to be faced. These difficulties, historically rooted in the Pakistani system, are further exacerbated by the deep transformation of the jihadist-based radicalism and the effects it provoked in the country. As happened in other parts of the world, in fact, even in Pakistan the evolution of the extremist message is creating new radicalization environments. They are no longer necessarily associated with basic economic-social hardship, but the extremist message is also spreading among the more educated social classes, that look at accepting the jihadist project as a new instrument of opposition to the conventional system.

1. The evolution of Taliban insurgency and the Pakistani Armed Forces' response to counter-terrorism

Since the war in Afghanistan, and in particular after the official birth of the Pakistani Taliban (Teherik-e-Taliban Pakistan- TTP) movement in 2007, the management of the threat to national security, represented by the militancy's activities and the jihadist network inside the country, was exclusively a competence of the Armed Forces. Indeed, it was particularly the Army that has been coordinating the counter-terrorism effort in the last decade. In addition to the usual patrol activities and raid against specific targets, in the main settlement regions of the insurgency such as the Tribal Areas (Federally Administrative Tribal Area - FATA or Tribal Agencies) and the North West of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Army carried on four large-scale counter-terrorist operations: Rah-e-Rast (path to Righteousness) and Rah-e-Nijat (path to Salvation), in 2009; Zarb-e-Azb (Sword of the Prophet) and Khyber-I, both started in 2014 and concluded respectively in 2017 and in 2015.

The first two operations, launched in May and June 2009, targeted the Taliban militancy in the Swat valley (and in particular the formation Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi - TNSM) and the group of the TTP in the tribal agency of South Waziristan (linked to the Mehsud tribe, which expressed the first two leaders of the group, Baitullah and Hakimullah Mehsud). Both campaigns inflicted sizable losses on the two groups. Nonetheless, the strong rooting within the local population and the historic synergy with the al-Qaeda network have allowed the militancy to recruit new supporters and reorganize, thus bring forward their own agenda. The heterogeneity of the Pakistani Taliban movement, in fact, has always allowed the insurgency not to get crystallized in a rigid monolithic structure, but, on the contrary, to adapt to the changing security context and to evolve together with it. Being formed by militants for whom the tribal bond has a greater value than any political or power constraint within the group has meant that the TTP has always been composed of tribal units, aggregated first around the leader of their own tribe and only after around the group's emir. This was particularly evident following the death of Hakimullah Mehsud, son of former emir Baitullah and last leader of the Taliban movement belonging to the founding tribe. His successor Fazlullah, an outsider to the traditional enclaves of Taliban power (since he originates from the Swat valley, and not from the FATA, and belongs to the Yusufzai tribe), who has never been recognized as a legitimate leader by the whole group.

Fazlullah's lack of charisma has led several units to take distance from the TTP and create new independent factions, each formed by men loyal to the same commander and that enjoy a relationship of pragmatic collaboration with the Taliban movement in the name of the same agenda.

The partial disintegration of the group, therefore, did not result into the disintegration of militancy, but in the budding of new realities determined to carry on their struggle against the authorities of Islamabad. This malleability, which allows the group to be a sort of wide-meshed net, has been one of the decisive factors in consolidating the relationship between the Taliban and the collaboration with all that universe of jihadist realities that have taken shelter in the country for long. Since 2001, with the beginning of US military operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan (in particular the Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) has become a safe heaven for the al-Qaeda's leadership and its closest circle, as well as for fighters from Central Asia and Chinese Xinjiang, connected to the jihadist organization and involved in guerrilla warfare against international Forces. The operational synergy between the Pakistani Taliban insurgency and the international jihadist network has become more and more rooted over time and has further worsened the already precarious internal security conditions. The terrible attack against the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, in September 2008, which caused more than fifty victims and about 270 wounded, seems to have been realized thanks to the contacts of the former leader of TTP, Baitullah Mehsud, with the network at that time led by Bin Laden.

Faced with the persisting threat of internal insurgency, the Armed Forces responded by launching the operation Zarb-e-Azb (15 June 2014) and subsequently Khyber-I (October 2014) to try to definitively eradicate militancy from the Tribal Areas, respectively from North Waziristan Agency and Khyber. Under the command of the former Army Chief of Staff, Raheel Sharif, the campaign led to the killing of some 3,400 militants and the destruction of more than 830 shelters¹, used by the insurgency as logistical outposts for conducting attacks throughout the country. Although the results achieved in terms of reclamation of the areas from the presence of the militants are indisputable, the success of these counter-terrorist operations has always been tactical and linked to the need to neutralize the threat in a specific area rather than to a national strategy. Under the military pressure exerted by the Pakistani Army, in fact, TTP, independent Taliban groups (Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Lashkar-e-Islam, Said Sajna militia) and jihadist realities have left the strongholds in the Tribal Areas to find refuge in the areas nearby. In particular, in addition to disperse in the urban centers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the militants have exploited the porosity of the border with Afghanistan to find refuge in the eastern provinces beyond the border. In these areas they created new logistic hinterlands from which to continue recruiting and hitting targets in Pakistan. Out of the 441 terrorist attacks recorded in 2016, about 62% was caused by the Taliban and the jihadist groups, and was concentrated mainly in the border areas of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In contrast to the national average, according to which in the last year there has been a decrease in losses due to attacks of about 28%, the number of victims has increased in both areas. This increase, however, took place unevenly in the two provinces: compared to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,

¹ Data provided by the Pakistani authorities met by the delegation during the visit to Islamabad in June 2015.

where the increase amounted to around 5%, in Balochistan attacks of militancy led to an increase in the number of victims of 63% compared to the previous year².

In order to try capitalizing on the operational successes obtained with Zarb-e-Azb and giving an effective response to the new spread of the insurgency's network in the country, in the first months of 2017 the former Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, authorized the launch of a new counter-terrorism operation, called Radd-ul-Fasaad (Elimination of Strife). Led by the Army, but carried out in collaboration with the Air Force, the Navy, the Rangers Corps, the frontier Corps³ and the Public Security Agencies, the operation combines the efforts of all the bodies responsible for internal security, both military and civilian. Moreover, unlike the previous ones, Radd-ul-Fasaad is not limited to a specific geographical area, but extends across all five provinces of the country, both in urban centers and border areas. Indeed, it aims at eradicating militant cells still present in the country and securing the borders, in order to neutralize the threat coming from abroad. The multidimensionality of the operation and the authorities' efforts to efficiently trace the networks linked to the various militant groups show how the Pakistani government is changing its approach of fighting terrorism. Radd-ul-Fasaad, in fact, represents the operational arm of a broader strategy aimed at inserting counter-terrorism activities led by the Army in a more structured political umbrella. In this way, the national authorities can conduct a coordinated effort, in order to try to effectively respond to the terrorist threat across the country.

² Source "Pakistan Security Report", Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)

³ In the Pakistani system the Frontier Corps are part of the Ministry of the Interior.

2. The National Action Plan (NAP) and the critical aspects of the new strategy to combat terrorism

The National Action Plan (NAP) is the strategy to combat terrorism and radical violence launched by the former Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, in the aftermath of the aforementioned massacre at the Peshawar military school claimed by the Pakistani Taliban, in December 2014. In the wake of the indignation that had shaken public opinion on that occasion, in fact, the government wanted to send a signal of marked change in the approach to militancy compared to the past. For this reason, it launched an initiative that would reflect the overcoming of that distinction between "*good and bad Taliban*" which in the past had made the relationship between the Pakistani authorities and the insurgency quite ambiguous. A first signal of greater intransigence towards the militancy occurred in February 2014, when the government announced the so-called National Internal Security Policy (NISP), the first example of a security-focused political program formulated by Islamabad. It was focused on three substantive aspects: the dialogue with the different stakeholders, including representatives of the militancy; the isolation of subjects radicalized by the communities from which they receive support; the strengthening of deterrence by expanding security Forces' powers in the fight against terrorism. Sealed by the Pakistan Protection Act in July of the same year, the extension of the faculties granted to the Public Security Agencies concerned, among other things, the lift of procedural constraints for investigating and detaining in cases of terrorism. Moreover, it adopted legal procedure for reversing the burden of proof and requiring the accused of establishing his innocence for crimes related to violent extremism. Based on a dual approach of repression of the threat and dialogue with the leaders, in order to seek a peaceful solution to the problem of insurgency, the NISP soon proved to be a network with too wide meshes to be able to effectively neutralize a phenomenon as complex as that of the Taliban.

With the launch of the NAP, therefore, the government sought to formulate a more all-encompassing approach, which would give an organic structure to the counter-terrorism, anti-terrorism and deradicalization policies implemented by the authorities. It has been intended to coordinate the efforts of the different agencies committed in the fight against internal insurgency, which were since then disconnected. To this end, the Plan identifies priorities, objectives and methodologies to follow, in order to try to effectively respond to the terrorist threat spreading within the country. In particular, the new Pakistani strategy is structured on 20 points⁴:

1. Implementation of death sentence of those convicted in cases of terrorism.

⁴ <http://nacta.gov.pk/nap-2014/>

2. Special trial courts under the supervision of Army. The duration of these courts should have been two years.
3. Prohibition for any militant outfits and armed gangs to operate in the country.
4. Strengthening of NACTA, the National Counter Terrorism Authority.
5. Censorship of the literature, newspapers and magazines promoting hatred, extremism, sectarianism and intolerance.
6. Choking financing for terrorists and terrorist organizations.
7. Ensuring against the re-emergence of proscribed organizations.
8. Establishing and deploying a dedicated counter-terrorism Force.
9. Taking effective steps against religious persecution.
10. Registration and regulation of religious seminaries.
11. Ban on glorification of terrorists and terrorist organizations through print and electronic media.
12. Administrative and development reforms in FATA with immediate focus on repatriation of IDPs.
13. Dismantling of communication network of terrorists.
14. Measures against the abuse of internet and social media for terrorism.
15. Zero tolerance for militancy in Punjab.
16. Logical conclusion of the operation in Karachi.
17. Empowerment of Balochistan's government for political reconciliation with complete ownership by all stakeholders.
18. Firmly dealing with sectarian terrorists.
19. Formulation of a comprehensive policy to deal with the issue of Afghan refugees, beginning with the registration of all refugees.
20. Revamping and reforming the criminal justice system

After almost three years since its inception, however, the NAP still does not seem to have achieved the desired results. Although, compared to the past, the Plan actually seeks to give greater

coherence to the military-security dimension and the political, judicial and welfare measures (of which first ones are implemented by the Armed and the Security Forces while the latter by the government and the supervisory authorities⁵), its implementation currently presents points of light, but also many points of shadow. In particular, the activities that have registered important successes so far are once again those organized and conducted by the Army and by the security apparatuses: under the NAP, in fact, in the last three years 62,000 combat operations and 59,000 intelligence activities would have been conducted against the militancy, 883 terrorists arrested and 68,000 suspects held⁶. Moreover, the Pakistani authorities have intensified controls on the use of telephone cards⁷, while the Central Bank has frozen bank accounts linked to about 2,000 individuals included in the so-called Fourth Schedule of the Anti-terrorism Act (ATA). ATA was written in 2002 to register persons who had shown inclinations to terrorism, their financiers and facilitators. The police Forces' efforts to monitor cases of hate speech and the publication of propaganda materials about violent extremism also showed a positive trend: data updated to 2016 indicate 1,365 cases registered all over the country, 2,454 persons arrested and 70 shops sealed due to the finding of apologetic literature⁸. In parallel with these activities, the operational successes reported in the aforementioned Radd-ul-Fasaad operation and the consequent dismantling of most networks of contacts linked to terrorist groups have effectively led to an improvement in internal security. Indeed, in the first few weeks since its inauguration (22 February 2017) the operation already counted 200 intelligence activities and 600 arrests of suspected militants across the country.

However, the effectiveness of the Armed Forces' kinetic actions and the operational efforts of the security agencies cannot be found in the initiatives undertaken by the civil authorities. The lack of coordination and cooperation between the different institutions and the skepticism that often affects relations between military and civilian environments make the synergy between them difficult, if not totally inconsistent. On the contrary, this synergy should be the necessary lubricant in the gears of the NAP. The stalemate which NACTA is stuck in is one of the most striking examples of the difficulties in implementing the Plan: the Authority should be the hub and the operational center of the whole system described by the new government's strategy, but it is still struggling to be a fully operational body.

⁵ Among these, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulation Authority (PEMRA) is responsible for monitoring the ban on the apology of terrorism by means of press or internet; The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) are in charge of developing prevention measures against the use of the web and social media for activities related to terrorism.

⁶ Data received from the delegation of Ce.S.I. during the meeting with the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), April 2017

⁷ The authorities would have controlled 140 thousand SIM cards so far.

⁸ Source "Pakistan Security Report 2016" edited by Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS).

Established to be a point of coordination and systematization of the information collected for the different security agencies, the Authority currently does not have the technological level and the authorizations needed to become the central core of all the apparatus. Although during the last year there have been some steps forward, the activities carried out so far by NACTA are not adequate to effectively respond to a threat like the internal insurgency. It is sufficient to recall, for instance, that the Joint Intelligence Directorate, the coordinating office between the Authority and the national intelligence apparatus that should represent the beating heart of NACTA, is still being implemented. The lack of a centralized mechanism and the redundancy of agencies charged with monitoring and collecting relevant information for preventing radicalization, create an overabundance of data. This excess jeopardizes efficiency and the result of the efforts put into place to construct a narrative for combating violent extremism.

The competent authorities' technical and structural shortcomings, which sometimes affect the efficacy of their actions, adds to the lack of political will to take responsibility for choices that may be unpopular among opinion public. These trends appear as the two obstacles to be overcome so that the Authority, and therefore the NAP, can express its full potential. This is particularly evident in the inertia with which the authorities are dealing with issues of sensitive interest in the eyes of the public, such as the question of registration and regulation of the madrasas.

2.1 The system of madrasas and their role in the deradicalization effort

The madrasas⁹, the generic name used to identify the religious institutes that teach Islamic religious education, represent an historical reality of the Pakistani educational and social system. Just over two hundreds at the time of independence in '47, today the religious schools are about 35,000 and welcome between two and a half and three million students¹⁰. Most of madrasas are affiliated to one of the five religious education councils (*wafaq*) that manage the inscriptions, exams and texts, each of which expresses a different school of Islamic thought: the Wafaqul Madaris al-Arabia manages madrasas belonging to the Deobandi; the Tanzemul Madaris Ehle-Sunnat, the Bareilvi's ones; the Wafaqul Madaris al-Salfia manages the institutes affiliated to the Ahl-i Hadit school of thought; the Wafaqul Madaris al-Shia, the Shiite schools; the Rabitul Madaris al-Islamiya, founded by the Jamaat-i-Islamiat party, directs madrasas of different philosophical orientation. In turn, these

⁹ Technically, Islamic schools can be divided into three categories, depending on the level of education: the madrasa includes the cycle of studies that falls within the compulsory school (primary, secondary first level and the two-year primary school second level); dar-ul-uloom corresponds to the remaining years of high school; jamia is comparable to university education.

¹⁰ "The Madrasa Conundrum. The State of religious education in Pakistan" by Umair Khalil, researcher of non-governmental organization HIVE.

councils are brought together under the umbrella organization Ittehad-e-Tanzeemat-eMadaris-e-Deeniya (ITMD).

The lack of selection criteria and school fees for students led madrasas to welcome mostly children and young students from rural areas of the country and from families below the poverty line or belonging to the less well-offs of the population. In fact, they often entrust their children to religious schools not because of ideological conviction, but because of the shortage of economic resources for their sustenance. Madrasas, therefore, play not only an educational but also a social role towards the population, sometimes acting as non-governmental organizations and filling in those gaps in the national welfare system that the government cannot cope with. Depending on the funds available, in fact, madrasas offer board and lodging to their students as well as participation in school courses. The latter are mostly focused on the teaching of the Koranic Law and on indoctrinating students with a view of the world specific to the school of thought the madrasa belong to. They usually do not provide curricula on secular or more contemporary subjects. Moreover, with an open enrolment system that is substantially free of formal restrictions, the madrasas can welcome young foreigners, present in the country with documents more or less in order, who are willing to follow the path of indoctrination in exchange for hospitality.

The self-referentiality and the strong fundamentalist ideology that characterizes the indoctrination have sometimes made some of these institutes the ideal incubators for radicalization. Although there is no systematic correlation between madrasas and terrorist groups, social unease and the low rate of schooling due to the limited educational programs often condemn students to unemployment, thus creating a sense of extraneousness of young people to Pakistani society and institutions. Even if the approach of the students to the world of militancy can be completely spontaneous, in some cases the contact between madrasa and radicalized armed environments is more structured and religious institutes act as a true tool of propaganda for radical ideology. A strong incentive to establish this link often results from the devolution of huge funding to religious schools with which wealthy protectors, inside or outside to the country, seek to sponsor a Wahhabi or Salafi interpretation of Islam. In fact, in order to maintain their own structures, the madrasas can rely on the rent of land and properties of which they are registered or on donations, coming from the collection of offers from local communities or from third-party financings. However, these revenues often do not involve bank transactions, but follow more informal paths (for example, through the *hawala*¹¹ network) to reach the coffers of the madrasas, which they are intended to. This makes it particularly difficult for the supervisory authorities to trace the exact origin of the money. The informality and poor traceability of these loans has in the past favored the entry into

¹¹ It is an informal exchange system of money, structured on a network of intermediaries (*hawaladars*) and based on the relationship of trust between them.

the Pakistani territory of flows of money, mostly coming from the Gulf, destined to foment radical proselytism.

The sensitivity of the role that some madrasas played, and still do, in the process of radicalization of the new generations represents an effective critical factor for the central government. Indeed, it has to reconcile the need to adopt solutions that prevent the connivance between some schools and militancy with the interest to safeguard the realities that play a valuable social-welfare role within the country. The delicacy of this balance is confirmed by the slowness with which the government has carried out the reform project intended for madrasas. A first initiative in this direction, in fact, dates back to 2001, when the then President Musharraf promoted the so-called "The Pakistan Madrasa Education Board" (PMEB). The PMEB provided for the creation of a state board of directors in order to ensure the registration and the regulation of religious institutes, as well as the standardization of school curricula with respect to educational programs approved by the Ministry of Education and the implementation of the procedures necessary for effective equality with public schools, as required by the National Education Policy 1999-2010. However, the opposition of the *wifaq* authorities to joining a state registration system caused the initiative to stall. Similarly, in 2005 with the ordinance "Madrassa Voluntary Regulatory and Regulation" the Pakistani government had made a new attempt to reorganize the educational system of madrasas, but the new resistance encountered by the religious administrations had once again led to no results.

The reform of the madrasas is still a crucial node for the implementation of the NAP and for the success of the strategy to combat extremist violence in the country. Despite its fundamental importance, this process still has many gaps and the central authorities seem to be delaying the adoption of more effective measures to speed up its conclusion. Great emphasis has been given to the registration process, but, since education is a matter of provincial and non-federal jurisdiction, the implementation of the provisions takes place unevenly from province to province. In 2016, Sindh was the only province to have introduced a provision for the registration of madrasas (Sindh Madrasa Registration Bill). According to it, no seminar can be opened without obtaining a permit (No Objection Certificate - NOC) by the competent authorities.

To proceed with the registration of the 3.087 unregistered madrasas (out of a total of about 9.800), the provincial government directly involved representatives of all schools of thought and proceeded with the inspection of seminars not enlisted in the registers. For its part, the provincial government of Punjab proceeded to map the madrasas present on its territory and would be carrying out the registration of the institutes, as well as the inspection of seminaries suspected of having links with terrorist groups in Lahore, in the district of Multan and of Okara. However, the province of Kyber Pakhtunkhwa does not seem to have followed the same approach. Its government, in fact, would have allocated funding of about 300 million rupees to the madrasa Darul Uloom Haqqania in the

city of Akora Khattak, known for its ties with the Taliban militancy and radical groups, in an attempt to normalize relations with the institute.

The inefficiency of the current registration process derives essentially from the lack of a centralized system that sets the modalities and timings for the provincial governments and that supervises its homogenous implementation. Although in 2016 the government managed to sign an agreement for the registration and reform of academic programs with the ITMD Coordination Council, the laxity with which both federal and provincial authorities carry forward the points on the NAP agenda glimpses the absence of a solid political conviction in proceeding in this direction. This appears motivated by the precious social-welfare network that these institutions are able to create in local areas. This makes them not only particularly popular in the eyes of public opinion, but also a useful reality for the government, to be used to fill the deficiencies in the assistance service and public education.

2.2 The deradicalization programs

The incompleteness of a political approach for implementing the strategy against religious extremism can also be found in the lack of national deradicalization programs aimed at former militants or communities, which colluded with the insurgency to facilitate recovery and reintegration into society.

Until now, in fact, the only initiatives carried out in this direction have always been organized by the Armed Forces in collaboration with non-governmental organizations. However, these programs have mostly been locally focused and purposely aimed at the reconstruction and recovery of the communities involved in counter-terrorism military operations. The first deradicalization program was activated by the Pakistani Army in the Swat Valley in 2009, at the end of the military campaign (Rash-e-Rast) conducted in the area, to try to rehabilitate the large number of young people and adolescents captured because of their affiliation with the Taliban. Known with the name of Sabaoon (term that in Pashto indicates the first light of dawn), the program was designed to meet those social and ideological needs that had pushed local youths to join the militancy, so as to lessen the sensitivity to the Taliban by its roots. Aimed at children between 12 and 18, Sabaoon Rehabilitation Centers are structured around four components: civic and religious education; professional courses; psychological support and psychiatric therapy; social care. The positive results recorded in Sabaoon and the desire to give the initiative a wider scope soon led to the activation of similar projects by structure and vocation, but intended for militants of different ages. This resulted in the foundation of Deradicalization and Emancipation Centers for boys between 19-25 years old (called

Rastoon), adults (Mishal), as well as for families of prisoners (Sparley)¹². The latter intend both to create an environment for successfully conduct the rehabilitation process and to ensure that entire families, which until then had sustained themselves thanks to the income insured by the insurgency, can have alternatives. These families, which often have to leave the area they used to live in, in fact, need support both in terms of protection and assistance in the search for new jobs that can guarantee them livelihood. The management and financing of the facilities that host the centers are mostly in the hands of the Armed Forces, who rely on the help of a range of non-governmental organizations, which are part of the civil society (like the Hum Pakistan Foundation - HPF), for carrying out of some activities.

Although they have been successful (there will be more than 2,500 Taliban reintegrated into society), the programs launched in the Swat valley are tailor-made and, in fact, have been designed to solve the critical issues related to the local specific context and to rehabilitate individuals connected with the activities of the insurgency. This approach has made these initiatives non-exportable models, as closely related to specific local realities and created where the rehabilitation and reconstruction programs were functional to the successful completion of military operations. This is what happened, for instance, in the Tribal Agencies, where the Army has started and is carrying on the FATA Youth Package initiative, intended for the reconstruction of the areas involved in the aforementioned Zarb-e-Azb operation. The interventions in favor of the local population and the consequent attempt to create a long-term anti-radical narrative in the area aims at ensuring to the military authorities the control of the new settlements, after the efforts made to reclaim the Agencies from the presence of the insurgency. The FATA Youth Package's initiatives, in fact, include: the inclusion of 14,000 men in the ranks of the Army by 2020; the provision of free education to about 15,000 children in schools run by the Army in the districts of the FATA and the reservation of seats for young people from the Tribal Areas within the Army College; the reconstruction of services infrastructures destroyed during operations; the construction of industrial areas (such as the Bannu-Minshah-Ghulamkhan) and a road network of around 714 kilometers to stimulate local production and trade, as well as create jobs in the area; the provision of specialized training courses for technical professions (43,272 people would have benefited from this type of service).

Therefore, even if they have been positive and successful, the initiatives implemented so far are restricted to specific territorial areas, in which the authorities are more interested in starting a controlled reconstruction process, in order to secure the hardly achieved results with the counter-terrorism operations. It is a localized approach, which highlights the lack of a national policy strategy allowing the creation of a unique, centralized deradicalization program, which places the lessons

¹² The other two types of deradicalization programs, known as Python and Heila, would complete the picture. However, detailed information is not available on the two initiatives, which named, but without being explained in detail.

learnt until now into a system, but which also incorporates preventive measures to prevent any new sensibilities to extremist rhetoric.

The current inadequacy of the government's approach to tackle the problem of religious extremism at its roots, however, could, if not frustrate, at least significantly reduce the effectiveness of the strategy for combating terrorism. The activities and the efforts of the Armed Forces undoubtedly contribute to downsizing the physical threat of insurgency. However, the lack of political will to take a step forward in directions that do not receive consensus from a part of the public opinion does not allow the authorities to eliminate the feeling of disaffection and refusal of the institutions that underlies the radicalization process. This dynamic seems to be further amplified by the transformation the universe of international jihadist extremism is facing, after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's Caliphate was established in the Middle East.

In Pakistan, the strength of the narrative and the effectiveness of Daesh's propaganda, on the one hand, and the appeal of the message, more inclusive and less elitist than al-Qaeda's one in the past, on the other, allowed the group to proselytize even outside the environments traditionally more related to the radical phenomenon. In fact, the prevalence of tribal and family ties makes it more difficult for foreigners to penetrate in the FATA or in the rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Otherwise, a new sympathy for Daesh has emerged within the urban centers of other provinces, particularly in Punjab. The revival of the jihadist ideology as a political and value system alternative to state authorities' proposal makes the message of the Caliphate find tense ears within the middle, educated and affluent class, who look at it as the extreme possibility to trigger change within a society that they perceive as a stranger.

3. New spaces for radicalization in Punjab

Counting more than 101 millions of habitants and a GDP of about 160 billions of dollars (respectively equal to about 55% of the population and 60% of the overall national data), the Punjab represents the demographic and economic core of the country. Nonetheless, the province is characterised by strong inequalities and a deep discrepancy in the education level between urban and rural areas. These conditions have created with time a social fracture between the more well off administrative divisions in the North (Lahore and Faisalabad in particular) and those in the South (Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan). The marginalization and the lack of future perspectives have generated among local communities a sentiment of non-involvement in the central government, thus creating a political and systemic vacuum, which has facilitated the budding of pockets of radicalization. The Punjabi extremist panorama is extremely variegated and sinks its roots in the '80s, when the war in Afghanistan, on one side, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, on the other, confirmed the jihadist and sectarian rhetoric inside the region. The militants of the Punjab, known under the name of Taleban Punjabi, were initially enlisted with the mujahidin fighting the Soviets beyond the Afghan border, and then they became a guerrilla force in the Indian Kashmir. The Taleban Punjabi have, at the same time, allied with the more known TTP and the realities linked to al-Qaeda. In the framework of these alliances, they furnished not only operative militants, but also a precious logistic network on which to rely for carrying on attacks outside the strongholds in the FATA and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This jumble group is made of two main souls that refer to the Deobandi and the Wahhabism's schools of radical Sunni Islam. The Deobandi groups, as the historical formations Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI), Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), consider the central government illegitimate as it does not apply the Sharia, and, therefore, they feel the moral obligation to join jihadist groups abroad for fighting the eventual occupation of foreign Forces. They mostly operate in the South of the Punjab, nonetheless, they are partially supported also in some areas in the North. The Wahhabi groups (also called Ahl-e-Hadith) were created thanks to the funds coming from the Gulf, and, in particular, from Saudi Arabia: they are headed by exponents of the medium and intellectual class, which are able to make proselytes inside different segments of the population and have their stronghold in the central areas of the Punjab. Given that the Wahhabi interpretation promoted by the Monarchy of Riyadh preaches a rigid and fundamentalist interpretation of the Koranic precept, the ideology promoted by these formations often deviates towards a more generic Salafism. The main Ahl-e-Hadith network in Pakistan is the one represented by Jamaat-ul-Dawa and its armed branch, Lashkar-e-Toiba (Let). The groups referring to both souls had a special tie with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan at the

end of the '90s and were trained mostly at Zhawar (in the Afghan province of Khost), the training camp ostensibly run by Osama Bin Laden and Jalaluddin Haqqani. The robustness of such tie is confirmed by the fact that many of the Punjabi militants, following the beginning of the war in Afghanistan in 2001, joined the insurgency in the FATA for contributing to the guerrilla against the international Forces beyond the border.

Therefore, despite the presence of radical realities is a phenomenon that has been present in the area already since the mid-'90s, the Punjab has for long been extraneous to the efforts of the national security Forces for contrasting terrorism. On the contrary, some milieus of the Armed Forces and the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) have sometimes looked at Punjabi groups as a strategic penetration force beyond the eastern border, for destabilizing the Indian rivalry in the contested scenario of the Kashmir. The focus of the Armed Forces on the western territories and on the Pashtun militancy and the consequent exclusion of the Punjabi front from the military campaigns allowed the groups in this area to keep untouched their networks over time and to be able to welcome the militants escaping from the FATA, being them Pashtun of the TTP, Punjabi operative militants coming back or al-Qaeda members. Such following of events led to an impressive increase of attacks in the province starting from 2010. The insurgency's favourite strongholds have become the rural districts of the South, in which a widely spread condition of poverty among the population has created favourable conditions to the taking root of the ideology promoted by the Taliban militancy and, consequentially, to a progressive radicalization of the society. A crucial role in this process has been played by charitable organizations and the numerous madrasas present on the territory. The remarkable influence these institutions had on the public opinion made it particularly complicated for the authority of Islamabad to severely intervene without running the risk of losing the support of a wide portion of community of the area. The territorial contiguity of the Southern districts of the Punjab with the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Balochistan, moreover, has fostered the creation of something like a logistic and operative arch, which the Pakistani insurgency used for easily moving inside the country.

The presence in Punjab of a multiform but structured network connected to the militancy and the jihadist milieus, hence, has since long been a phenomenon that has interested the less developed areas and the more impoverished communities of the province. However, since the past three years the security context of this region has further been compromised by the creation of new radicalization's environments inside the intellectual and more well off class, not only in the South, but also in the big cities in the Northern part of the province. The radical message, increasingly conveyed through the new communication instruments, spreads widely and is especially welcomed by young students of public or private universities, who look at it essentially as a tool for political claim with which to join a cause of international range. In a dynamic society as the one of the Punjabi urban areas, in which the intellectual class is more active compared to other areas

of the country, the persistence of situations that are perceived as the result of the injustice or the inadequacy of the system, like the Kashmir's matter, generates a resentment that foments a sense of antagonism towards the institutions and abroad, which often translates into radicalism. The capacity of recruitment of fundamentalist groups inside universities has experienced a progressive increase, as to render university's environments new poles of radicalization inside the country. This event has taken place also thanks to the increase in percentage of the population interested in higher education (grown from 4,94% to 10,36 in the timeframe 2005-2014).

4. The new trend of radicalization in Pakistan

The case of the Punjab is symptomatic, for its dimensions, of a phenomenon that, in reality, is interesting the urban areas of the entire country. The possibility to easily access contents of jihadist matrix through social medias, the attention devoted for the national political and social context and, in many cases, the sharing of a anti-western and anti-US narrative as interpretation of the different international matters made the Pakistani young university students a basin of recruitment available to extremist organizations. More than being attracted by the Taliban insurgency per se, the recruited university students are fascinated by the jihadist rhetoric and look at terrorism as the possibility for having an active role in the fight against the authorities whose legitimacy is not recognized. The Pakistani young students, in fact, do not adhere to the local insurgency, but are subjected to the charm of the pan-Islamic and revolutionary message proposed by the jihadist organizations.

Moreover, the recruitment inside the universities is facilitated by the presence of student groups linked to radical jihadist parties, such as Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami, whose juvenile group Islami Jamiat Talaba (IJT) has strongholds at the University of the Punjab and at the Quaid-e-Azam University of Islamabad since 1970. The prohibition of establishing political groups or spaces for debate inside universities, imposed during the government of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1984, makes it impossible for school management to arrange useful tools for controlling and counterbalancing the activities of movements that structurally remain informal, but carry on a strict campaign of influence among students. Also known as a kind of moral police force, the members of IJT have many times been responsible for violent episodes inside campuses trying to impose customs loyal to a radical interpretation of Islam. Besides IJT, an intense activity of proselytism inside the intellectual and educated class is unrolled by Hizbut Tahrir (HuT), an international political organization that preaches pan-Islamism, is present in about 50 States and is considered as out-of-law in Pakistan since 2003. Thanks to the lavish funding coming from the international channel, HuT enjoys a wide range of propaganda tools that are able to attract the attention and hit the political and religious sensibility of the most educated and well off classes. It is not by chance, in fact, that many individuals until now detained by security Forces for suspicious ties with the organization were university professors, students, professionals belonging to the middle class, who have adhered to the pan-Islamic project of HuT as an expression of political dissent towards the actual national and international system. The sensibility of the middle and intellectual class exponents for a political discourse wider than the sectarian and anti-Pakistani roots, which characterize the action of the Taliban militancy, make these environments as breeding grounds for jihadist propaganda. Hence, such sensibility could create inside university campuses and among the most educated straits of the population important opportunity windows available to organizations linked to international jihadism for reinforcing the consensus gained inside the country.

In such a context, the consolidation of this tendency could turn Pakistan into one of theatres of competition between the two main sponsor groups of international jihadist terrorism: al-Qaeda and Daesh. If at the international level the organization founded by Bin Laden and nowadays led by Ayman al-Zawahiri has lost prestige in the past years, in Pakistan the rooting of the al-Qaeda network, even if downsized, has reduced the progressive loss of prestige of the al-Qaeda brand and has allowed the leadership of continuing collecting a discrete consensus inside the country. It is not by chance, in fact, that Zawahiri chose Pakistan as the epicentre of that new experiment, known under the name of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), launched in September 2014 as a response to the that-time new born Caliphate of al-Baghdadi. Although AQIS revealed later on to be less efficacious than its leadership hoped for, the Qaedist net seems to find, once again, important support inside the radical milieus present in the country. In a moment in which al-Qaeda seemed to be willing to rise again from its ashes and rely on the young Hamza Bin Laden, the successor designated by the ex Emir as the future leader of the group, for finding its strength once again, the presence of sensible ears among young people and the intellectuals of the Pakistani urban areas could turn into soft underbellies able to give space to this process.

By the same token, the al-Baghdadi group as well could take advantage of the sensibility of the new milieus for radicalization with the aim of increasing its presence in the country, which is until today fully residual. Despite the interest of Pakistani groups for the al-Baghdadi project led to the creation of a regional branch of Daesh (called ISIS in the Khorasan), now the group has its stronghold in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan (between Nangarhar and Kunar) and enters the Pakistani territory solely for carrying on attacks which had been planned and organised beyond the borders. The affiliation cases of individuals present inside the country's borders still remain a pretty contained phenomenon. Nonetheless, in a moment in which the Daesh's message has increasingly become horizontal and inclusive, in order to facilitate the adhesion to its narrative also by individuals operatively less prepared, the antagonist rhetoric proposed by the Caliphate and the appeal of taking part of an ideological war of global range could push many young Pakistanis to join the informal ranks of the group. The student of the Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (in the province of Sindh), arrested in Lahore on the 17th of April 2017 with the accusation of being part of a network linked to Daesh, could represent the first case of an increasing sensibility among some university young students for the message promoted by the Iraqi Caliphate.

An eventual consolidation of this tendency to radicalization among the middle class could make it harder to apply the strategy of countering violent extremism elaborated by the government until today. The education's level, the availability of financial resources and the net of contacts make this new radicalised individuals potentially able perhaps not to carry on complex attacks as the



ones organised by the militancy, but to infiltrate the different levels of the civilian society and the public administration.

Conclusions

The evolution of the terrorist menace and the budding of new breeding grounds for radicalization inside the country pushed the authorities of Islamabad, in the past three years, to increase their efforts to counter violent extremism. The intensification of the counter-terrorism operations carried on by the Armed Forces and the formulation of the National Action Plan (NAP) led to positive results in terms of reduction of internal instability. Nonetheless, nowadays the kinetic and muscular component managed by the military apparatus results to be more prevailing and performing than the initiatives promoted by the civilian authorities. Nevertheless, the military approach is inevitably calibrated on the priorities of the Armed Forces and, as a consequence, herald of ad hoc choices aimed at maximizing the results prefixed by the top authorities instead of implementing a wider national strategy. The organization of efficient and structured deradicalization programmes but tailored for single provinces is the most evident example of this tendency. The efforts aimed at socially re-integrating radicalized individuals have been concentrated in areas in which military operations were previously carried on.

Given the successes of the Armed Forces, the political component of the NAP appears, on the contrary, still on a trial stage. In fact, many of the points of Plan are still incomplete and the civilian authorities are facing evident difficulties in achieving concrete results. The prevailing of bureaucratic aspects over the substantial ones makes very often muddled a mechanism that should, instead, allow the government to have all the instruments needed for definitively annihilate a dangerous and costly threat, as that of domestic terrorism. The delays encountered in implementing the NAP, on one side, and the lack of political willingness in making choices that could reveal to be onerous in electoral terms, on the other, are preventing the government from addressing the root causes of the problem linked to religious extremism inside the country. Such behaviour could, however, represent a serious factor of criticality for the success of the efforts for contrasting radicalization in the medium-long term. Firstly, because the permanence of social causes that feed fundamentalism inside the country inevitably resizes the operative results of the security Forces: insofar as a determined region could be cleared from the insurgency, the support that the militancy enjoys in the country and the rooting of the widespread net of contacts among the different groups could lead to the formation of radicalization's pockets in other areas, thus creating new breeding grounds for destabilization. Secondly, the procrastination of achieving efficacious results on the subject of contrasting the extremist violence could increase the distrust of the population towards the government and feed that vicious circle for which the resentment and the missed recognition of the central authority create a breeding ground for the rooting of the extremist propaganda.

In this context, a possible spur for the authorities of Islamabad for actualizing in a more systematic manner all the anti-terrorism dispositions as provided by the Plan could come from a more intense collaboration with the International Community and, in particular, with European Countries for which

countering jihadist inspired terrorism represents increasingly more a priority of domestic security. The support of European interlocutors could allow the Pakistani government, first of all, to increase the technical quality of the instruments it possesses for maximizing the efficacy of the measures provided by the National Action Plan. In fact, the European experience in financial monitoring and tracking bank transitions, in managing jails and training prison surveillance personnel could reveal to be precious for incrementing the efficacy of the activity of prevention and rehabilitation, which is, in turn, crucial for reintegrating individuals detained for terrorism in the social fabric in the medium-long term. Besides the technical-training support, the European interlocutors could assist the government of Islamabad in formulating a plan for social assistance reform, able to render the public system a valid and sustainable alternative to the services that madrasas and the charitable organizations connected to them offer. Despite not all the religious institutes are involved in the activity of radical proselytism, the distribution by the government of services in favour of the less wealthy categories could contribute generating a sentiment of loyalty towards the State, which would then enjoy a wider space of manoeuvre for carrying on in a safer and more efficacious manner all the points of its strategy for countering violent extremism inside the country.

Nonetheless, a long-lasting change can be triggered solely by the realisation of the Pakistani authorities that it is valuable to promote the creation of a 360 degrees deradicalization model. In such model the effort of counter-terrorism would go along with the political one in order to solve at their roots those domestic criticalities that generate the ideal conditions for the proliferation of violent extremism. It could be beneficial to formulate a narrative contrary to the one preached by radical organizations and that suggests to the population a series of values, on which to build their identity as citizens, as well as to provide concrete instruments aimed at creating new spaces for integration and social participation. The construction of such narrative could allow the government to become the promoter of a new sense of belonging to the State, of which the institutions of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan are the fulcrum and point of reference.