

POLICY BRIEF

A Critique of Countering Violent Extremism Programs in Pakistan



A Critique of Countering Countering Violent Extremism Programs in Pakistan

By Rashad Bukhari and Qamar-ul Huda, Ph.D.

Executive Summary

■ During the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, coalition forces – particularly the U.S. military – acknowledged that eliminating terrorism through a military response is impossible. Moving from a kinetic military approach, strategists, policymakers, and counterterrorism experts focused on countering violent extremism (CVE) practices and the use of civil society to put those practices in motion.

■ In Pakistan – a frontline state in the war on terrorism – CVE policies and programs are still fundamentally controversial, misunderstood, and heavily criticized by local human rights groups and religious leaders.

■ Pakistani state institutions and civil society organizations have implemented a variety of CVE programs, but there have been no measures of the programs' effectiveness, and in fact some critics believe the programs are doing more harm than good.

■ Pakistan's public, media, NGO community and religious communities believe CVE is a politically motivated tool for foreign powers to use to destabilize the country and weaken civil society.

■ Pakistani CVE programs that privilege religious figures and their organizations not only exaggerate their influence, but also harm their legitimacy. People stigmatize these leaders and organizations for receiving foreign funding for CVE initiatives.

Continued on next page

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Background	3
CVE Measures by Pakistani State Institutions	4
CVE Initiatives by Civil Society Organizations	8
Critique of CVE's Premises and Programming	10
Civil Liberty Violations	15
Pitfalls and Opportunities	16
Policy Recommendations	17
Endnotes	18
About the Authors	20

COVER: Suspected militants and their weapons are presented to the media by Pakistani paramilitary forces in the Khyber Agency tribal area in March 2017. Pakistan's military launched an anti-terrorist operation after a series of extremist attacks killed dozens of people across the country. (ABDUL MAJEED/AFP via Getty Images)

Executive Summary *Continued from previous page*

- Pakistan's national strategy to confront terrorism needs to establish a task force to assess, monitor and evaluate its efficacy in preventing violent extremism. The strategy also needs to incorporate human rights, youth, the education of women, social work, health care, and the religious sector.
- The Pakistani CVE national strategy would also benefit from increased collaboration with international researchers and from evaluations of different CVE strategies' effectiveness.



Pakistani religious leaders participate in a workshop on countering violent extremism (CVE). Attendees at the 2019 gathering in Islamabad included imams, Sunni and Shiite scholars, madrasa teachers, and other educators. (Photo courtesy of Qamar-ul Huda)

Background

In 2011, the White House released its long-awaited policy paper, "Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States," and a strategic implementation plan¹ to outline and encourage a broader approach to countering violent extremism (CVE). Moving away from confusing, highly charged terms like "Islamofascism," the Obama administration sought to tackle the violent extremist actors, their networks, ideology, propaganda, messaging, recruitment, technological capabilities, and social and economic causes, and focus on long-term methods to disrupt these groups. Civil society, as represented by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), is considered a key player in defeating violent extremism.

The field of CVE has its share of disagreements on definitions of terms, including the term "violent extremism." However, the essence of violent extremism is a mobilization that aims to elevate the status of one group, while excluding or dominating others based on markers, religion, tribe, gender, culture and ethnicity. In pursuit of these goals, violent extremist organizations destroy existing political and cultural institutions and supplant them with alternative governance structures that work according to the principles of a totalitarian and intolerant ideology. The

nature of violent extremism requires the use of force to gain power, subordinate any dissent, and cause chaos to achieve its political aims. Violent extremists use a deadly combination of local grievances and rehearsed narratives to attract followers into a complex, insular, cult-like worldview.

One operating principle of CVE theory is to encourage behavioral changes and empower civil society members to address intolerance and hatred when it arises in the community. Through information sharing, webinars, and educational workshop programs, CVE is meant to engage all stakeholders in the community, including religious leaders, media, the government, and the private sector, to push back against violent extremism.

In Pakistan, government and civil society organizations have aggressively pursued a CVE agenda, but is it working? Have we identified the problem correctly or even framed the issues wisely?² Can vague ideas on the radicalization process and interjecting CVE counter-messaging in intensive training programs have effective, quantifiable impact? When the authors conducted CVE training workshops with the madrassa community, mosque imams, and a wide variety of civil society groups in Pakistan, participants asked them if the responsibility of countering violent extremism lies with civil society members

and educational institutions – especially madrassas – or with law enforcement agencies and the military. The authors were questioned numerous times on the efficacy of these efforts. The authors also heard concerns that identifying radical behavior puts the community at risk from the violent extremist organizations.

This policy brief examines key problems of CVE and its framework in Pakistan. It introduces and assesses some of the measures Pakistan has taken in the context of the larger understanding of CVE and examines the disconnect between the official Pakistani narratives of CVE and how it is understood by civil society members. This brief also makes recommendations for improving the implementation and evaluation of CVE programming.

CVE Measures by Pakistani State Institutions

Pakistan has paid a mammoth economic, social, and political price during the war on terrorism. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan (2017-2018), incidents of terrorism cost the country's economy \$126.79 billion over 17 years.³ A Brown University report, "Costs of War Project," noted that war-related violence killed 65,000 people in Pakistan in 17 years, including 23,000 civilians, 9,000 security personnel, and 90 U.S.

contractors.⁴

Pakistani efforts to combat violent extremism resemble the widely described notion of CVE, with the overall goal of stopping those most at risk of radicalization from becoming terrorists. CVE can be understood as "a realm of policy, programs, and interventions designed to prevent individuals from engaging in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups."⁵ The Pakistani state's CVE efforts are in accordance with the White House Strategic Implementation Plan for CVE, which recommended that law enforcement and other agencies "foster community-led partnerships and prevention programming through expanding community-based solutions."⁶

The CVE measures that Pakistani civil and military establishments have used since 2009 fit into three broad categories: militant deradicalization and rehabilitation programs, drafting reforms and updating laws, and national security policy measures.

Militant Deradicalization and Rehabilitation Programs

In September 2009, the Pakistani military regained control of the Swat district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which was captured by the Pakistani Taliban in the summer of 2007. Considering the large number of teenagers among the militants



apprehended during the operation, the military decided to initiate a rehabilitation program to give the detained militants a second chance at a normal life. Later, the program was expanded to Punjab and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

While the FATA rehabilitation

center focused on the rehabilitation of detained militants, in Punjab the program rehabilitated those militants who surrendered to the government voluntarily and renounced militancy. The majority of those rehabilitated militant fighters in Punjab belonged to jihadist organizations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-

Muhammad, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. The Mishal Center in Mingora, a center working on preventing violent extremism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, worked exceptionally closely with families that had connections to militants to ensure that deradicalization and rehabilitation efforts were available to former fighters.⁷

These rehabilitation programs⁸ had four parts. First, psychological counseling gave former fighters perspective on their one-dimensional understanding of their worldviews or grievances. The counseling sessions were conducted in both group and individual settings. Second, the former fighters used counseling sessions to express their personal pain of abandonment, alienation, abuse, and disconnection from family or tribe and society. Counseling also allowed the abducted teenagers, who were trained to be suicide bombers, to acknowledge the criminal act imposed upon them. Third, rehabilitation and reintegration efforts provided a “corrective path” by giving former fighters mainstream religious education, vocational training, and education in other topics such as literature, mathematics, science, poetry, history, and art. Fourth, the practice was disseminated through 10 rehabilitation centers established in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab (though one center in Punjab was shut down because of lack of funding).⁹

Approximately 411 militants completed training in three batches of the Militant Rehabilitation Program in Punjab in 2011-2012. However, the program temporarily ceased its operations in 2012.¹⁰ By the end of 2017, about 2,500 former militants went through the deradicalization program.¹¹ There has yet to be a rigorous study on

the efficacy of deradicalization programs that examines the recidivism rate, reintegration success, and the former militants’ ability to navigate their environment.

Of course, the deradicalization program targeted detained militants and those sectarian extremists who surrendered to security forces. This model cannot be generalized and applied for working in broader communities.

Drafting Reforms and Updating Laws

Reform efforts have been mostly directed (with minimal success) at Pakistan’s religious educational institutions, called madrassas. Madrassa reform – which is part of Pakistan’s National Action Plan (NAP) and its National Internal Security Policy – has been a contentious issue in Pakistan’s struggle against home-grown extremism and terrorism. Madrassas have been accused of supporting and educating extremists’ interpretation of religious ideology. The religious schools deny this vehemently, noting that madrassas have functioned for centuries in the Muslim world as legitimate institutions imparting rightful religious education.¹²

The anticipated madrassa reforms include three main changes: All madrassas should register with the government so that necessary data is

available for their performance audits; madrassas should include worldly, non-religious subjects like science and mathematics in the curriculum; and madrassa teachers should be trained in modern pedagogical techniques instead of relying on memorization and rote learning. Reformers hope that these changes will bring some critical thinking and analysis to the madrassa students and, through inclusion of modern subjects and improvement in their pedagogy, make students competitive in the job market.

So far, no significant development has been achieved on serious madrassa reforms. On Aug. 29, 2019, Pakistan’s Madrassa Oversight Board¹³ agreed with the government proposal to register all madrassas with the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training,¹⁴ ensuring complete autonomy to the Madrassa Board. This would be the first step toward a larger reform program. However, the Madrassa Board has declined to share data on seminaries, teachers, and students with any law enforcement and is instead demanding that the federal ministry create regional centers for madrassas to register locally.

The Pakistani government initiated several activities in order to better understand trends within public educational institutions. The Pakistan Peace Collectives, which were under the supervision of the Ministry of

“The plan included acting against hate literature and hate speech, protecting minorities, registering madrassas, choking terrorists’ financing, making reforms in FATA, acting against sectarian organizations, and safeguarding cyberspace from radical ideologies,”

Information but then transferred to the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) in 2018, were designed as a strategic communication center to provide research, analysis, and training support to various government departments.¹⁵ Alongside these initiatives, the Pakistani government ensured that NGO charities, philanthropies, and foundations were being vetted for illegal violent extremism.¹⁶ Additionally, the government created a hotline for anyone to report hate speech and radical preaching. The Pakistan Peace Collectives program continues to engage university students on CVE awareness programs by creating university courses on conflict resolution.

According to NACTA, Islamabad has banned approximately 73 jihadist and militant organizations.¹⁷ The government also gave law enforcement agencies more leeway in fighting terrorism. For instance, the Anti-Terrorist Act of 1997 was amended once in 2014 and again in 2015 to provide law

enforcement more powers to address suspects and networks of terrorism. Similarly, the Protection of Pakistan Act was passed in 2014 with a two-year sunset clause.¹⁸ The act provided sweeping powers such as “shoot suspects on sight,” “enter and search without warrant any premises to make any arrest,” remand suspects for an extended period, and prosecute suspects on the basis of digital evidence.¹⁹

In 2014, Pakistan passed the 21st Constitutional Amendment to establish military courts for two years to expedite the judicial trials of hardcore terrorists and execute them swiftly. This was done to compensate for the inherent weakness of the slow-moving criminal justice system that failed to try and convict the terrorists. Human rights and civil society organizations criticized the use of military courts to prosecute civilians facing terrorism charges. The establishment of military courts had closed-door hearings so that civil rights groups could not access court transcripts because it was heavily steeped with national security issues.

Nevertheless, regardless of public outcry the government extended military courts for another two years²⁰ after parliament passed the 28th Amendment Bill.

National Security Policy Measures

Using the U.S. Directorate of National Intelligence and Department of Homeland Security as a model, the Pakistani government established the counterterrorism authority NACTA in 2009. However, the government took four years to pass the bill in parliament²¹ to make it operational.

NACTA was mandated to do research and develop strategies, policies, liaisons, and action plans to counter violent extremism specifically and all types of terrorism generally in Pakistan. NACTA established a CVE wing, developed a national counterextremism policy guideline, and developed a mechanism for monitoring the NAP. One of its major contributions was collaborating with The Islamic Research

Institute of International Islamic University (IIU), which launched a CVE national narrative in January 2018. In cooperation with eminent clergy IIU rolled out “*Paigham-i-Pakistan* (The Message of Pakistan).”²² The document includes more than 1,800 signatures of religious leaders and scholars representing all Islamic denominations in Pakistan. The document features a unanimous *fatwa* (religious decree) against terrorism, suicide bombing, and any individuals issuing the call for jihad (considering such a call only a state prerogative), along with many other related proclamations.

NACTA also established a department dedicated to identifying proscribed organizations and persons tied to countering terrorism financing, propaganda, and cyber analysis. To disseminate its findings to the public, NACTA published its first “Pakistan Journal of Terrorism Research” in 2019.

Following the terrorist attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in 2014, in which the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan killed 132 students, an All Parties Conference agreed on the 20-point NAP²³ to curb terrorism and its root causes. The plan included acting against hate literature and hate speech, protecting minorities, registering madrassas, choking terrorists’ financing, making reforms in FATA, acting against sectarian



Mourners place lighted candles beside photographs of loved ones in Peshawar. The 2016 ceremony marked the second anniversary of the December 2014 attack on The Army Public School when Taliban militants attacked the Peshawar school, killing 151 people, mostly children. (ABDUL MAJEED/AFP via Getty Images)

organizations, and safeguarding cyberspace from radical ideologies.²⁴ Adnan Rafiq, head of the technical team responsible for formulating the National Internal Security Policy (2018-2023) commented, “NAP as a prescription has been successful in tackling symptoms to an extent, but not the disease itself.” He clarified, “While a lot of steps were taken during the last five years to achieve the objectives set forth in NAP, these were mostly disjointed, conceptualized and implemented in silos with little strategic coordination.”²⁵

The National Internal Security Policy 2014-2018 attempted to be a comprehensive approach but was not implemented to its fullest. Then the government approved a new policy valid

for 2018-2023 that included three elements: dialogue with all stakeholders, isolation of terrorists from their support systems, and enhanced deterrence and capacity of the security apparatus to neutralize the threats to Pakistan’s internal security.²⁶ But the policy, which included a roadmap to the goals set to enhance Pakistan’s internal security, has not yet been implemented.²⁷

CVE Initiatives by Civil Society Organizations

Since 2001, several national and international NGOs have conceived and implemented CVE projects in Pakistan with financial support from international donors. Here are a few relevant examples:

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies²⁸ has focused on monitoring terrorist incidents in order to document the geographical and types of violent extremism to inform policy initiatives and promote awareness of the growing incidents in country. The institute promotes an evidence-based approach to the resolution of national and international conflicts. Its scope is divided into two areas: research and analysis, and advocacy. The institute publishes an annual security report to illustrate the progress or regression of terrorism in the country. In 2016-2017 the Pak Institute launched a project titled “Reconstruction of the National Narratives and Counter Violent Extremism Model for Pakistan” and conducted a series of consultative discussions with religious clerics, scholars, policymakers, law enforcement officials, parliamentarians, social activists, and retired civil servants. Following this initiative, the institute published reports summarizing the discussions and recommendations.²⁹ The Pak Institute has led the national dialogue on specific needs for a strategic CVE model for Pakistan; its director, Muhammad Amir Rana, explained, “Although CVE around the world continues to evolve, three components are considered vital in its modeling: intellectual responses to critical ideologies; education reforms and cultural revivals; and rehabilitation and reintegration of extremists/militants.”³⁰

The Peace and Education Foundation³¹ has been one of the leading NGOs engaging religious communities and religious schools for over a decade. With capacity-building programs for madrassa teachers, imams, and interfaith communities, the foundation has been consistently training these leaders to be aware of conflict, biases in curricula, resolving local and interpersonal conflicts, and ways to improve upon inclusivity. They claim to have trained more than 20,000 madrassa teachers and imams, which is an extraordinary achievement for any single NGO, in the fields of peace building and conflict resolution. In collaboration with international peace-building experts, the Peace and Education Foundation developed a peace education textbook for madrassa schools which is directed at reconciling sectarianism based upon religious principles.³² With the intense cooperation with the Madrassa Board and prominent scholars, the foundation rolled out specific training manuals for madrassa teachers to enhance their capacity in implementing the Peace Education Textbook. In addition, the Peace and Development Foundation and The Media Foundation played crucial roles in working with madrassa students and religious leaders to heighten their capacity in peace building.

The Paiman Alumni Trust, based in Islamabad and with several offices in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has

been working with mothers of militant fighters and with female leaders as a way to disrupt and discourage young men from radicalization. Female involvement in CVE was a neglected area before Paiman’s activities. Paiman has a PVE (prevention of violent extremism) project in more than 66 districts in Pakistan empowering female activists, teachers, scholars, legislators, and others. Paiman’s work has received praise from global stakeholders like Women Against Violence Europe, former Ambassador Swanee Hunt’s Inclusive Security NGO, and the U.N. Center of Counterterrorism.³³

Development Alternative Inc.,³⁴ a prominent development organization, has been working with different local civil society organizations to build capacity and further CVE projects in different areas of Pakistan for many years. The Development Alternative Inc. model is particularly interesting because it engages religious and community leaders in cluster areas (selected union councils in South Punjab and Sindh districts) through local community organizations. The organization develops consistent, multilayered, and gradually developing programs in specifically selected area for a long-term impact. It is assumed that consistent engagement with one sector of the community will trigger social change. However, no broad-based evaluation is yet available to see the effects of this approach.

Other CVE initiatives by civil society groups include advancing

“Among the major concerns raised about CVE in Pakistan are that its premises and assumptions are imported; theories of radicalization are applied broadly; religious communities are over-targeted; and select religious figures or organizations are prioritized. ”

public awareness campaigns on radicalization and sponsoring peace rallies. For instance, The Jinnah Institute, a private think tank based in Islamabad, organized a peace march to promote peaceful coexistence, religious harmony, and tolerant values.³⁵ International organizations like Community World Service Asia and Norwegian Church Aid continue to implement peace-building projects through local partners in Pakistan.

Critique of CVE’s Premise and Programming

The threat of terrorism exists within Pakistan’s territory and on its eastern and western borders. Yet U.S. terrorism experts routinely criticize Islamabad, stating that Pakistan is doing either nothing or not enough to prevent violent extremism, and there is no return on Washington’s investment in the country’s security. Others claim that the Pakistani military’s interest in receiving aid dampens its enthusiasm for disrupting the growth of violent extremism.³⁶

And herein lies the problem: The CVE programming in Pakistan was inspired by and imported from the global CVE industry. There was never a rigorous indigenous debate on preventing violent extremism – neither in academia nor in think tank research, the media, or policy circles. CVE initiatives, often funded by international governments and donor agencies, have given rise to national security concerns in Pakistan. Critics of CVE programs in Pakistan also want proof that CVE programs work. After a decade of CVE projects costing millions of dollars, critics in Pakistan are demanding to see results. There has yet to be a comprehensive credible evaluation or a large-scale assessment of the CVE programs in Pakistan. There has not been a national summit on CVE, similar to the one conducted by the White House in 2014, to bring all stakeholders together to share information and best practices or cultivate a new generation of CVE practitioners.

Among the major concerns raised about CVE in Pakistan are that

its premises and assumptions are imported; theories of radicalization are applied broadly; religious communities are over-targeted; and select religious figures or organizations are prioritized. Moreover, foreign funding of CVE initiatives raises suspicions about the programs and about the NGOs carrying them out.

Accepting CVE funding from international donors stigmatized local NGOs and put them at risk within their own communities. Pakistan never initiated a national dialogue to design an indigenous strategy that would include an extensive monitoring or assessments of CVE effectiveness. Finally, critics say, CVE programs do not provide accountability for human rights and civil liberties violations, and there is yet an accountability of the thousands killed or disappeared.

Problems with CVE Framing and Radicalization Theory

The CVE premise is based on an understanding of terrorist profiling that indicates a

process of radicalization leading to violent extremism and terrorism. According to this theory, religious ideology – or a radical interpretation of it – plays a crucial role in this process, which is said to be identifiable at different stages. Hence, it can be interrupted and corrected through constructive and corrective interventions. That’s how the notion of working with people “at risk of violent extremism” and “vulnerable youth” or even “vulnerable communities” emerged and grew in the CVE domain. For some analysts, the role of extremist religious ideology is akin to a “conveyor belt” that mechanically pushes an individual into terrorism.³⁷

However, a Transnational Institute report notes that this approach over-emphasizes individual belief and downplays social and political circumstances that give rise to political violence.³⁸ That is to say, ideology in itself is not a core fundamental reason for radicalization. Instead there is a complex combination of social, political, economic, structural, identity, tribal, and psychological factors making some individuals more susceptible to extremist ideas.

Marc Sageman, a leading academic, forensic psychiatrist, former CIA operations officer and author, suggested that governments should “stop being brainwashed by this notion of radicalization. There is no such thing. Some people



Karachi religious students take their final exam at the largest Islamic Jamia Binoria seminary in June 2013. More than 2,000 students took their final examinations at the madrassa where hundreds of Pakistanis and foreigners study. (ASIF HASSAN/AFP via Getty Images)

when they’re young acquire extreme views; many of them just grow out of them. Do not overreact – you’ll just create worse problems.”³⁹ Sageman says there is little empirical evidence for such a “conveyor belt” process. He emphatically states, “It is the same nonsense that led governments a hundred years ago to claim that left-wing political protests led to violent anarchy.”⁴⁰

Most CVE experts believe that corrective interventions must involve tapping into religious language, wrongly assuming a causal link between religion and terrorism. This approach is not only inconsistent with evidence, the Transnational Institute report states, it also could cause “greater harm by

manipulating and criminalizing religious belief.”⁴¹

Another key issue is the vague, inconsistent definitions of and interchangeable use of “radicalization,” “extremism,” “violent extremism,” and “nonviolent extremism” in discussions of CVE programs. This terminology does not take into account culture, region, tribal affiliations, gender, religion, class grievances, or social and political grievances. This vagueness hinders the accurate assessment of perceived terrorist threats and makes measuring the programs’ effectiveness nearly impossible.⁴²

Over-Targeting Muslims and Prioritizing Religion

CVE programs in Pakistan, as well as in most Western countries,

focus exclusively on Muslim communities. Critics of CVE claim that this focus reinforces the assumption that Muslims require specific interventions to avoid violence that other groups do not. It has therefore stigmatized young Muslims as being “especially worthy of suspicion.”⁴³

Once a community is suspected of harboring extremists and promoting extremist ideas, that community is usually subject to surveillance. Thus, religious communities wrongly accused of harboring violent extremists become suspicious of CVE programs. They complain that the programs reinforce negative identities of Muslims and that they are being supervised with a foreign agenda, through foreign funding, without creating any sense of ownership among the local communities. They think that these national and international media and foreign-funded research projects are creating negative perceptions of their communities by making generalizations based on few examples and implicating the whole community, ignoring the historical local traditions of peaceful dissent with notions of coexistence and mechanisms for conflict resolution.⁴⁴

In Pakistan, CVE programs focus heavily on religious communities because CVE practitioners believe that the antidote for religious radicalism is co-religionists who promote a peaceful alternative.

However, this cooperation with Muslim community leaders often puts those leaders in a difficult position. Community members become suspicious of the leaders, wondering if they are working as government agents. Suspicions and conspiracy theories undermine sites of worship, educational institutions, social service charities, and community centers. Muslim leaders selected to enforce CVE interventions are stuck between desiring a secure homeland and becoming a pariah.⁴⁵

Specific religious communities attend CVE training workshops to take part in conversations on terrorism, counterterrorism, peaceful resolution to conflicts, and similar topics. Whether it is the designers of the CVE program or the NGO partners, the trainers gradually ask participants to change their mindset, attitudes, behaviors, and worldviews to bring peace to society. Behind closed doors, feeling resentful and frustrated, religious participants question why they are a part of a social engineering project or why should they partake in a risky experiment for a thin disbursement of funds from donors in foreign countries. Although many religious leaders agreed to work as peace advocates in their communities, others openly opposed these programs, calling them a Western conspiracy.⁴⁶

In Pakistan, religious leaders are very familiar with the

consequences of overstepping national security lines. This fact is often lost on CVE experts, who wrongly regard them as independent actors, free to assess or implement programs in their institutions. The dynamics become even more complicated in sectarian-driven conflicts where these stakeholders must be more prudent in choosing who to meet and cooperate with. To provide a veneer of protection to religious leaders, CVE training workshops are marketed as conflict prevention or peace-building workshops. Facilitators focus on generic root causes of grievances, drivers of exclusive in-group thinking, extremists’ narratives, and how religion can transcend “irrational violent actions.” But whether the trainers are local or international, some of the workshop content appears to be disconnected from reality.⁴⁷

Besides national security concerns, CVE designers do not factor in the social-economic conditions in which these religious leaders live. Imams and schoolteachers are dealing with food insecurity and access to clean water; they told the authors that “children are scared to attend schools because of Taliban retribution.” Tribal and urban religious leaders are operating among warlords, militias, organized crime, competing militant groups, tribal fiefdoms, infectious diseases, and prevalent human trafficking – conditions where trauma is plentiful and mental health



Suspected militants and their recovered weapons are presented to the media by Pakistani paramilitary forces at a security compound in the Jamrud area of the Khyber Agency tribal area on March 3, 2017, during the ongoing military ‘Operation Radd-ul-Fassad’ (elimination of violence). Pakistan’s military announced the launch of a nationwide anti-terrorist operation days after a series of bloody extremist assaults killed dozens of people across the country. (ABDUL MAJEED/AFP via Getty Images)

resources are scarce. In addition, militant recruiters are attempting to infiltrate their communities, and local religious leaders have repeatedly requested additional security. CVE training workshops may not be their highest priority, but these religious leaders will go through the motions of attending a CVE workshop to satisfy someone above them.⁴⁸ CVE programs should be aware of the limitations of religious leaders and have realistic expectations of their ability to reduce radicalism.⁴⁹

Seeking Interpretations of Religion

CVE policymakers and implementers cautiously discuss whether reinterpreting religion, particularly Islam, can amplify “moderate” peaceful voices to drown out violent extremist propaganda. The premise is that radical jihadist narratives of violent extremism are being normalized as the sole response to grievances and to bring change to society. Therefore, it

is crucial to counter this wave with mainstream, nonviolent religious positions. The CVE industry, i.e., governments, NGOs, analysts, trainers, and multilateral organizations moved swiftly – without deep reflection or questioning – to support and privilege certain religious leaders and scholars to stand against violent extremism.

In Pakistan, CVE initiatives financially support certain religious scholars and their

“The assumptions in these CVE projects revealed enormous misunderstandings or ignorance of exactly what this entails. International and national CVE donors, Pakistani NGO implementers, policy advisers, and established teams from U.S. and U.K. government agencies were entirely focused on strategic communications to interfere, manipulate, and disrupt the extremists’ propaganda.”

organizations to develop and promote counter-narratives, and to use scriptural and other textual teachings on nonviolence and good citizenship. In 2007, long before the “Paigham-i-Pakistan” fatwa against terrorism became the national narrative, Dr. Tahir-ul Qadri published a 500-page book titled “A Fatwa Against Terrorism and Suicide Bombing” in English, Urdu, and Arabic. The book had the approval of the Islamic Research Council and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University, Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, as well as other major international Sunni juridical institutions.⁵⁰

Many other notable scholars like Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, Khursheed Ahmad Nadeem, Dr. Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, and Dr. Noor ul-Haq Qadri, to name a few, followed suit by writing and preaching how violent extremists are modern day *Kharijites* – anarchical secessionists – who must be rejected in favor of following traditional Islamic

peace narratives. Portraying al Qaeda, the Taliban, and ISIS as infidels was not just intellectually courageous; these leaders required extra security because of their bold initiatives. Pakistani religious scholars meticulously revived the historical jurisprudence on the unlawfulness of killing, destroying religious and public property, and Islamic legal nuances of understanding legitimate rebels being oppressed by an authoritarian state versus the deviation of anarchist nonbelievers.⁵¹

Brave as that stance is, it does not eliminate or reduce the threat of violent extremism. Nor do we know if these scholarly, theological, scriptural, ethical, moral condemnations hinder recruitment or diminish the ranks of terrorist groups. Religious scholars and leaders naturally used their reference point of theology to defend their tradition, but this should not be understood as appropriate CVE practice.

The overwhelming majority of CVE projects in Pakistan are founded on producing alternative narratives or “relevant” interpretations of Islam to discredit extremist ideology. The assumptions in these CVE projects revealed enormous misunderstandings or ignorance of exactly what this entails. International and national CVE donors, Pakistani NGO implementers, policy advisers, and established teams from U.S. and U.K. government agencies were entirely focused on strategic communications to interfere, manipulate, and disrupt the extremists’ propaganda. However, the implications of these actions – such as governments or CVE experts assuming the authority to shape religious thought per their needs and wishes – are mostly overlooked in the enthusiasm of creating new narratives.

Many other countries are choosing the same path in their CVE efforts. For example, the British policy of Prevent⁵² has

involved funding “mainstream” imams and Muslim scholars to promote interpretations of Islam that differ from those of “extremists.” As is also noted by the Transnational Institute report⁵³, the U.S. State Department’s CVE program has sought to promote local Sufi traditions in Africa to counter Wahhabist interpretations of Islam. And, in 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama’s senior counterterrorism advisor John Brennan stated an official position on Islamic theological questions, such as the meaning of jihad⁵⁴. In these ways, “governments are taking on the role of ‘de facto theologians,’ implicitly adopting an official interpretation of Islam.”⁵⁵

Critics say this approach undermines secular principles of neutrality and non-intervention in religion. Ironically, some international organizations like Development Alternative Inc. that uphold these secular principles support local organizations in engaging religious leaders under their CVE projects in Pakistan while demanding that their local partners avoid religious terminology or references in their documentation, proposals, or reports.

Such duplicity is the result of the incompatibility of CVE strategy with secular principles. The late Pakistani human rights activist and U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Asma Jahangir pointed out in

her 2008 report on the United Kingdom:

*It is not the Government’s role to look for the “true voices of Islam” or of any other religion or belief. Since religions or communities of belief are not homogenous entities it seems advisable to acknowledge and take into account the diversity of voices. The contents of a religion or belief should be defined by the worshippers themselves.*⁵⁶

Undermining Trust in Civil Society

In Pakistan, practically every NGO organization and community leader highlights the importance of change. Inspiring shifts in the cultural, religious, and political attitudes of targeted communities has been a stated goal of most CVE programs. With their talk of change, NGOs implementing CVE programs – whether sponsored by the Pakistan government or by international donors – risk falling under suspicion of contributing to ethnic, religious and sectarian conflicts. NGOs with CVE funds are questioned on how they were able to access those funds and how much of these funds are used for CVE. This suspicion undermines the credibility of the NGO sector as a whole, because if the public is unable to tell which “grassroots” voices are authentic and which have been sponsored by the government

for counterterrorism purposes, they are likely to lose trust in both government and civil society.⁵⁷

The Transnational Institute report goes as far as to say that “CVE dissuades dissent, stifles transparency, facilitates stigmatization, undermines secularism, and reinforces gender-stereotypes. For all the problems evident when CVE is executed in good faith, the authors warn against abuse, arguing that the ‘extremist’ label can be applied to legitimate political activities including protests, demonstrations and direct actions.”⁵⁸

Civil Liberty Violations

CVE policies were shaped and seen as effective preemptive measures to halt violent extremism before it has clearly manifested. However, based on a threat perception, these policies provide governments with some kind of justification to target political opponents, protesters and activists; bypass judicial procedures; and violate basic human rights. According to human rights activist Amina Masood Janjua, there are more than 5,000 reported cases of enforced disappearances in Pakistan.⁵⁹ Such disappearances began during Pervez Musharraf’s presidency, after the start of the global war on terrorism, and are still occurring.

Similar preemptive policies also led the government to grant law

enforcement sweeping powers.⁶⁰ With this new authority, law enforcement officers in Pakistan have already shot innocent citizens on mere suspicion of a link with terrorist organizations. Steven Hawkins, executive director of Amnesty International USA, said that the international diffusion of CVE frameworks raises the prospects of repressive governments “taking advantage of ‘CVE-mania’” and “using international funds to violate human rights in the absence of appropriate safe-guards.”⁶¹ Amnesty International even stated that: “Brick by brick, the edifice of rights protection that was so carefully constructed after the Second World War, is being dismantled.”⁶²

Lack of Community Involvement

CVE programs are supposed to include consultations with and cooperation from the communities involved to be really effective. This does not seem to be happening because of the top-down strategy applied in such programs. Most of the communities, local leaders, or youths engaged through CVE programs are selected based on criteria of their perceived vulnerability to extremist ideas, already promoting or supporting extremist ideals, and/or their position of influence over the local communities. When communities are asked to participate in programs based on assumptions of their latent



A bomb caused massive destruction at the Pearl Continental hotel in Peshawar. The blast killed 11 and injured at least 50 people in June 2009. The blast left a crater 6 feet deep and 15 feet wide and collapsed the western wing of the hotel. The attack was credited to the Taliban. (PAULA BRONSTEIN/Getty Images)

criminality, any claims of “buy-in” are manufactured. Amnesty International has reported that CVE programs have not been responsive to community input or to insights and critiques from civil rights and civil liberties groups.⁶³

With no input, minimal input, or monopolized input from the community, the transparency and genuineness of CVE programming has little chance to create any ownership of the programs in local communities, even if that is one of the program’s goals.

Pitfalls and Opportunities

With both the U.N. Security Council (2014) and the U.N.

General Assembly (2015) calling for member states to address violent extremism with National Strategy Plans,⁶⁴ there is an urgent need for Pakistani policymakers to vigorously review whether CVE policies and practices are fit for their purpose. CVE measures in Pakistan involve a complicated web of political, social, economic, tribal, legal, provincial, and religious issues, all of which need to be understood in their entirety. Imposing CVE strategies, frameworks, and approaches on a country requires Pakistani counterparts who are experts trained in these areas and capable of ensuring a multitude of issues are factored into any preventative program. CVE training workshops marketed as conflict prevention,

“Attempts to combat the totalitarian and intolerant nature of violent extremist groups require a holistic understanding of local sectarian grievances and structural issues such as energy, access to water, housing, quality of education, healthcare services, and gender justice.”

conflict transformation or peace building are too generic and do not address root causes of grievances, the appeal of extremism, or the realities of terrorism that local communities face. Pretending that peacebuilding approaches are an antidote for implementing CVE soft skills is a misleading presumption. Violent extremism will only be challenged by inclusive and effective multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approaches. Attempts to combat the totalitarian and intolerant nature of violent extremist groups require a holistic understanding of local sectarian grievances and structural issues such as energy, access to water, housing, quality of education, healthcare services, and gender justice. Pakistan has a unique opportunity to build and develop upon its original national strategy plan to be more effective in preventing violent extremism.

Policy Recommendations

Policymakers, strategists, CVE experts, and NGO community leaders can take several steps

to work more collaboratively and make CVE programming in Pakistan more effective:

- There is an urgent need for detailed, formal scrutiny of international and intergovernmental decision making in the field of countering violent extremism. A lack of crucial debates about the impact, legitimacy, and effectiveness of CVE policies creates more problems than solutions.
- Pakistan is a member of the Global Counterterrorism Task Force, Global Community Engagement Resilience Fund, and U.N. Counterterrorism Center. Pakistan needs to become an active leader in these institutions. By doing so, Pakistan will ensure that its researchers, NGO leaders, CVE practitioners, and policymakers have the highest standards from the field.
- Pakistan's national strategy for confronting terrorism needs to be updated with a task force to address the transnational challenges posed by violent extremist organizations. This task force must go beyond security policymakers and military experts and incorporate human rights activists, youth, women, family support groups, and the education, social work, health care, and religion sectors.
- Trust building between governments and communities is crucial to developing and implementing a comprehensive national CVE strategy. Any success in CVE programming at the local level will hinge upon stronger relationships with teachers, youth, and sports clubs, and on integrating religious youths and imams with the broader communities.
- Pakistani CVE programs need to involve community leaders, female leaders, female academics, and activists who already vigilant stakeholders in the civil liberties and human rights community and give them leadership positions in CVE efforts. This would also reduce CVE programs' reliance and focus on religious leaders and communities.

■ It is crucial for Pakistani CVE strategists to institute a clear communications channel between relevant stakeholders at the local, national, and international levels in order to include frontline CVE implementers and practitioners, and above all ensure that there is consistency in strategy, delivery, and messaging.

■ Pakistan's CVE national strategy would benefit greatly from increased collaboration

between national and international researchers, policymakers, and evaluators. Evaluations should be subject to peer review, and raw data should be made accessible to scholars for replication purposes and to conduct cross-program comparisons and improve on prior research. A monitoring-evaluation-learning database, similar to IMPACT Europe's database and the RESOLVE Network based at

the U.S. Institute for Peace, is strongly recommended.

■ Pakistan's efforts to counter online propaganda and coordination among terrorist entities must be taken seriously with adequate funding for research. While counter-narratives and counter-messaging are necessary tools, they should not be considered the only methods of reducing violent extremism. □

Endnotes

¹ Farooq, M., Lamb, R., Mirahmadi, H., & Zaid, W. (2015). *Empowering Pakistan's Civil Society to Counter Global Violent Extremism. The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, U.S.-Islamic World Forum Papers.*

² The authors are aware that the field has adopted the preferred term Preventative/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) to encompass both the preventative and countering cycles of dealing with violence. However, we are using CVE as the accepted term in Pakistan.

³ Mustfa, K. (2018). *Pakistan sustains \$126.79b loss in war on terror. The News International.* <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/309658-pakistan-sustains-126-79b-loss-in-war-on-terror>

⁴ Iqbal, A. (2018). *War on terror left half a million dead in 17 years, says report. Dawn.* <https://www.dawn.com/news/1444744>

⁵ Polutnik, C., Weine, S., & Younis, A. (2015). *Understanding Communities' Attitudes Toward CVE. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.* http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/STARTResearchBrief_UnderstandingCommunitiesAttitudesTowardCVE_Feb2015.pdf

⁶ Polutnik, C., Weine, S., & Younis, A. (2015).

⁷ Polutnik, C., Weine, S., & Younis, A. (2015).

⁸ For more information on the Sabaoon Rehabilitation Centre, Project Mishaal, and Project Heila see Parvez, T. (2011). *Challenges of Establishing a Rehabilitation Programme in Pakistan. Terrorist Rehabilitation and Counter-Radicalisation: New Approaches to Counter-Terrorism, Routledge.*

⁹ Basit, A. (2015). *Pakistan's Militant Rehabilitation Programme: An Overview. Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, Vol. 7, No. 9, 10-17.* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26351388>

¹⁰ Basit, A. (2015). Page 5.

¹¹ Farhan, Z. (2017). *Pakistan's CVE Programme: An Overview of Achievements and Challenges. International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Vol. 9, No. 6, 11-16.*

¹² Based on conversations with various madrassa leaders.

¹³ *Ittihad Tanzeemat Madaris Pakistan (ITMP) is a conglomeration of Sunni and Shiite madrassa education leaders who oversee their respective educational institutions.*

¹⁴ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, See <http://mofept.gov.pk/ProjectDetail/YzYxNjUwNDktMjgzMio0YmU3LTkxMzItYWRiZWZjNmU4MDM3>

¹⁵ Paracha, S. (2018). *Govt Transfer PPC to NACTA to Counter Violent Extremism. Pakistan Today.* <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/09/29/govt-transfers-ppc-to-nacta-to-counter-violent-extremism/>

¹⁶ "Safer Charity" initiative urges people to use caution and donate to responsible humanitarian organizations'.

¹⁷ See National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA). <https://nacta.gov.pk/proscribed-organizations/>

¹⁸ Haider, I. (2014). *Protection of Pakistan Bill 2014 Approved in NA. Dawn.* <https://www.dawn.com/news/1116529>

- ¹⁹ Farhan, Zahid (2017). Page 14.
- ²⁰ Raza, S. I. (2017). Presidential assent revives my courts for two years. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1324117>
- ²¹ See Pakistan National Counter Terrorism Authority Act 2013. http://www.senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1363071845_127.pdf
- ²² Editorial (2018). "Paigham-i-Pakistan" Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383642>
- ²³ Khan, A. U. & Khan, M. A. (2018). National Action Plan – A Roadmap to Peaceful Pakistan. Institute of Strategic Studies - Islamabad. http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IB_Asad_June_14_2018.pdf
- ²⁴ See The National Action Plan 20 Points. https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/document/papers/National_Action_Plan_20_Points.htm
- ²⁵ Rafiq, A. (2019). NAP: The Way Forward. The News International. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/473066-nap-the-way-forward>
- ²⁶ Niaz, T. (2018). Govt Unveils National Internal Security Policy 2018-23. The Nation. <https://nation.com.pk/01-Jun-2018/govt-unveils-national-internal-security-policy-2018-23>
- ²⁷ Farhan Zahid (2017). Page 15.
- ²⁸ Discover more of the institute's work at <https://www.pakpips.com/>
- ²⁹ PIPS (2017). Reconstruction of the National Narratives and Counter-Violent Extremism Model for Pakistan. Pak Institute for Peace Studies. <https://www.pakpips.com/article/book/reconstruction-of-the-national-narratives-and-counter-violent-extremism-model-for-pakistan>
- ³⁰ Rana, M. A. (2016). Countering Violent Extremism. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1294504>
- ³¹ See Pakistan Education Foundation activities. <https://peaceandeducationfoundation.org>
- ³² Documents accessible from PEF website. <https://www.pef-global.org/peace-islam-textbook>
- ³³ See Paiman Alumni Trust's website <https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/pakistan/peacebuilding-organisations/paiman-alumni-trust-paiman/>; See WAVE <https://www.wave-network.org/wave-network/> and Inclusive Security [www. https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/](https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/)
- ³⁴ For examples of Development Alternative Inc. projects in Pakistan <https://www.dai.com/search?keywords=Pakistan>
- ³⁵ Farhan Zahid (2017). Page 15.
- ³⁶ Curtis, L. & Haqqani, H. (2017). A New Approach to Pakistan: Enforcing Aid Conditions without Cutting Ties. The Hudson Institute. <https://www.hudson.org/research/13305-a-new-u-s-approach-to-pakistan-enforcing-aid-conditions-without-cutting-ties>; Zaidi, S. A. (2011). Who Benefits from US Aid to Pakistan. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 46, No. 32; Fairm C. & Ganguly, S.(2015). An Unworthy Ally: Time for Washington to Cut Pakistan Loose. Foreign Affairs, Vol. 94, No. 5.
- ³⁷ Zeyno, B. (2004). The Road from Tashkent to the Taliban. The Hudson Institute.
- ³⁸ Kundnani A. & Hayes B. (2018). The Globalization of Countering Violent Extremism Policies – Understanding Human Rights, Instrumentalizing Civil Society. Transnational Institute.
- ³⁹ Hasan, M. (2013). Woolwich Attack: Overreacting to Extremism 'Could Bring Back Al Qaeda' Ex-CIA Officer Warns. Huffington Post. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/05/27/sageman-interview_n_3342206.html
- ⁴⁰ Hasan, M. (2013).
- ⁴¹ Kundnani A. & Hayes B. (2018). Page 12.
- ⁴² On the issue of definitions, See Striegher, J. (2015). Violent-Extremism: An Examination of a Definitional Dilemma. Security Research Institute. <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/asi/47/> and Schmid, A. (2012). Countering Violent Extremism: A promising Response to Terrorism. International Centre for Counterterrorism. <https://icct.nl/publication/countering-violent-extremisma-promising-response-to-terrorism/>
- ⁴³ Aziz, S. F. (2017). Losing the War of Ideas – A Critique of Countering Violent Extremism Program. Texas A&M University School of Law Legal Studies Research, Page 17-22. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2913571>
- ⁴⁴ Personal interviews and discussions with religious leaders and other CVE target groups like madrassa teachers, community leaders, and students who attend religious schools.
- ⁴⁵ Urwin, R. (2018). Counter-Extremism Czar Sarah Khan: "There's no such thing as the "Muslim community." The Sunday Times. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/counter-extremism-czar-sara-khan-theres-no-such-thing-as-the-muslim-community-tm9vp2bzn>
- ⁴⁶ Based on personal observations and interviews with participants attending CVE training programs from 2013-2018.
- ⁴⁷ Based on personal observations of CVE workshops from 2012-2017 in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh provinces.
- ⁴⁸ Huda, Q. (2018). Religious Leaders Can't Fight Terrorism with Words Alone. Religion News Service. <https://religionnews.com/2018/08/01/huda-oped/>
- ⁴⁹ Huda, Q. (2019). The Role of Religion to Fight ISIS. The Center for Global Policy. <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/the-role-for-religion-in-the-fight-against-isis/>
- ⁵⁰ Tahir, Q. M. (2010). Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombing, Minhaj ul-Quran International. Dr. Qadri is the founder and head of Minhaj-ul-Quran International, a faith-based organization with centers in 90 countries. As a prolific author, researcher, orator, and former politician, he authored over 500 books and is an expert in Islamic jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, theology, philosophy and several other traditional sciences.

⁵¹ For more on the Islamic classification of Kharijites, See Madelung, W. (1997). *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. Cambridge University Press.; Donner, F. M. (2010). *Muhammad and the Believers, at the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge University Press.; Kenney, J. T. (2006). *Muslim Rebels: Kharijites and the Politics of Extremism in Egypt*. Oxford University Press.

⁵² Adams, R. (2019). UK's Prevent Strategy 'Biggest Threat to Free Speech on Campus.' *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/27/uks-prevent-strategy-biggest-threat-to-free-speech-on-campus>

⁵³ Kundnani A. & Hayes B. (2018). Page 13.

⁵⁴ Rascoff, S. J. (2012). *Establishing Official Islam? The Law and Strategy of Counter-Radicalization*. *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1, 160-162.

⁵⁵ Saba, M. (2006). *Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation*. *Public Culture*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 326-327.

⁵⁶ Jahangir, A. (2008). *Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development - Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief*. Human Rights Council Seventh Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

⁵⁷ Kundnani A. & Hayes B. (2018). Page 14.

⁵⁸ Kundnani A. & Hayes B. (2018). Page 14.

⁵⁹ Chaudhry, A. B. (2018). *CJP constitutes special bench to monitor missing persons' commission*. *Geo TV*. <https://www.geo.tv/amp/212523>

⁶⁰ Farhan Zahid (2017) Page 14.

⁶¹ Hawkins, S. W. (2015). *Obama's anti-extremism plan lacks human rights safeguards*, *Al-Jazeera*. <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/2/obamas-extremism-plan-lacks-human-rights-safeguards.html>;

Also Editors (2015). *UN HRC: Resolution on "violent extremism" undermines clarity*, Article 19. <https://www.article19.org/resources/un-hrc-resolution-on-violent-extremism-undermines-clarity/>

⁶² Kundnani A. & Hayes B. (2018). Page 17.

⁶³ Based on reports by Amnesty International and interviews with leading human rights and civil rights activists in Pakistan.

⁶⁴ See United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/> and an excellent independent review of national strategies by the Global Center for Cooperative Security, <https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GCCS-2019-National-Strategies-Prevent-Counter-Violent-Extremism-Independent-Review.pdf>



Rashad Bukhari is a consultant, researcher, and development practitioner. As Executive Director of the Peace and Education Foundation, Islamabad (2012-2017), Rashad developed and overseen implementation of a number of educational and CVE-related projects with a wide range of local beneficiaries. He spearheaded the challenging portfolios of educational training for religious and public school teachers, and curricular and pedagogical enhancement of the religious and mainstream schools. His work revolved around promoting tolerance, popularizing human rights, and developing critical thinking skills among the teachers, their institutions, and students. He also served as an Editor of the Common Ground News Service (2007-2012).

Previously, he served at the Islamabad's Institute of Policy Studies and led various research teams on a range of different subjects and was the Assistant Editor of *Maghrib Aur Islam (West and Islam)* in publication since 1996.

Rashad also writes poetry and fiction besides occasional commentary on current affairs. Selected pieces of writings occasionally appear under different categories at his blog: <https://rashadbukhari.wordpress.com/> as well as at other social and mainstream media websites.



Qamar-ul Huda is a non-resident fellow at The Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. He was a founding member of CGP's Conflict, Stabilization, and Development Program. He formerly worked as a senior policy advisor to the U.S. State Department Secretary's Office on Religion and Global Affairs where he focused on policies related to the roles of civil society, religious leaders, and multilateral organizations in preventing violent extremism. He was a director at Hedayah: The International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism based in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. Dr. Huda led the CVE Program at the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP) Academy for Conflict Analysis and Transformation with curricula design, training, and educational workshops. He was a senior program officer at USIP's Religion and Peacemaking Program.

Mr. Bukhari and Dr. Huda co-authored a groundbreaking peace education textbook in Urdu for religious schools titled *Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Islam: A Peace Textbook for Students*. Dr. Huda's *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*, (USIP Press) was translated into Urdu.

Dr. Huda is an Associate Adjunct professor at Georgetown University, has written three books, four toolkits or manuals on conflict prevention and over 50 articles. He tweets at @qbhuda.

Contact

-  For media inquiries, email media@cgpolicy.org
-  To submit a piece to CGP, email submissions@cgpolicy.org
-  For other inquiries, send an email to info@cgpolicy.org

 1776 Massachusetts Ave N.W. Suite 120
Washington, DC. 20036

 (202) 290-3954

Connect With Us



@CGPdc



@Center for
Global Policy



Subscribe



Sign up



Washington D.C.