

**Report on Expert Views
Ideas, Culture and Terror in Pakistan**





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1. Introduction

The Center for the Study of Gender & Culture organized interviews of leading experts, intellectuals and activists in Lahore on the topic of 'Ideas, Culture and Terror'. These interviews were conducted as part of a project on Combating Radicalization Tendencies in the Punjab, implemented by the Center in partnership with Heinrich Böll Stiftung – Pakistan/Afghanistan and Auswärtiges Amt (AA) – German Foreign Office.

The initial idea in the project had been to conduct a meeting of experts. However, given the profile of experts and the brief time-frame of the project (December 2009 to February 2010), it proved impossible to organize an event to suit the busy schedules of all experts. Therefore, the project plan was amended to organize separate interviews of 12 eminent experts. This revised format allowed greater freedom to explore individual views around the topic. The experts were selected for their leadership and representation of a range of professions in public and private institutions. They included journalists, artists, historian, architects, professional educationists, and social and human rights NGOs (experts and institutional current affiliations listed in Annex). The interviews were conducted on the basis of a semi-structured questionnaire designed by the Center to investigate growing radicalization and its connection with ideas and culture. However, individual meetings with the experts expanded from the specific questions (which are indicated in the headings of the sections in the report below). 11 experts responded in individual meetings, while one addressed the questionnaire via email.

The questionnaire and individual discussions focused on the main traits of the ideologies that a growing body of radical fundamentalists and terrorists adhere to across the country. Considerable attention was also devoted to their increasing inclination towards fundamentalism in Pakistani society. What emerged as a consensus view was that radicalization is indeed a visible phenomenon, and it is appropriate to term it “terrorist” for it operates by a culture of fear at multiple levels. There was also extensive discussion in almost all meetings on the role of violence, gender and culture within the context of radical ideologies. Women's rights were extensively discussed, as they were considered by most to be primary victims of radicalization. These and other views of the experts are reproduced in the eight sections below.

While individual analyses of the history, nature and spread of radical terror differed among experts, there was complete unanimity on two points. First, that radical terror does indeed include a realm of ideas or ideologies, and therefore countering radicalization requires development of a similar realm. Priority areas (from politics to history to public administration to culture), mechanics (universities, schools, youth), and dissemination channels (scholarship, television, print media) may be variously identified, but there is no doubt that such development is required. Second, that scholarship and the rigorous development of relevant ideas to counter radicalization is gravely lacking in Pakistan at present. The little research that does exist is generally scattered, and mostly not adequately supported.

Finally, there was complete agreement by experts (with varying emphases) on the need for locally grounded, “home-grown” development in this regard. Some experts specifically excluded any international role, others advised such a role but with extreme caution. In all cases, it was argued that self-analysis is necessary to solve problems which are, by and large, self-created. It is the hope of the Center that such an analysis may be facilitated by presenting this report and related project publications.

Disclaimer

This report attempts to present a picture of the views expressed by the experts. As may be expected in such an endeavor, diverse analyses and viewpoints emerged in the views of leading experts. Due to constraints of length, however, it has not been possible to reproduce all the opinions which often differed from one another, and so the editorial team of the Center has sought to offer a balanced but concise representation. The editorial team bears all responsibility for the accuracy or otherwise of representation. However, the views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the Center or its editorial team.

2. Background – History of Islamization in Pakistan

Experts generally agreed on some common features of the background to the current radical violence in Pakistan. Most traced this to Pakistan's independence in 1947, when religion was used as an ideological tool by the mullahs and feudals. The Quaid-e-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was a liberal democrat with secular views, as apparent in his August 11 address when he assured equal citizenship and position to non-Muslims. However, his early demise left the role of Islam in Pakistan as uncertain and undefined. After his death, a series of measures took place to “Islamize” Pakistan, or give it an exclusively Islamic identity. The introduction of the Objectives Resolution began a process of religious intolerance (against minorities and other sects), which has been systemic since then. The Resolution set the tone for future politics. In the 1950's and 60's, Field Marshall Ayub Khan posed as a liberal democrat, but ultimately succumbed to pressure by adding the word “Islamic” to the Republic of Pakistan. Subsequently, the “liberal” government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto declared Islam as the state religion and the parliament of the time declared followers of the Ahmedi sect as non-Muslims.

Experts felt that the military rule by General Zia-ul-Haq was the period of most intense Islamization. Pursuing the hereticization of Ahmedis, Zia passed a law by which Christians and Hindus could greet with “Salam” but not Ahmedis; they were also forbidden to call their place of worship “masjid” (mosque) or use terminology deemed Islamic. Since Zia's time, persecution of Ahmedis has only increased: many members of the sect have been assassinated. Nobody who has killed an Ahmedi has ever been punished in any way. Employees (even senior, respected ones) have been victimized or even fired over allegations of being an Ahmedi. Pakistani citizens are only allowed to obtain passports by signing a declaration stating their belief that Ahmedis are not Muslims. Many other Islamization measures were taken under Zia's dictatorship, from religious reforms of educational curricula to 60 separate amendments to fundamental principles of the country's Constitution. Zia introduced Sharia courts to ensure that no laws were “repugnant” to the principles of Islam as defined and interpreted by appointed jurists, while also enacting the Hudood laws to “defend” Islamic principles. Through all of these measures, an Islamic “lobby” was strengthened, and it became increasingly difficult to challenge reforms made “in the name of Islam”, even when the reforms could be shown to be un-Islamic in themselves.

A critical factor in the growing religious identity, or Islamization, of Pakistan has been the country's political instability and long periods of authoritarian rule. Military and civil bureaucracies have exerted unchecked power, often in collusion with a feudal system, and democratic institutions like the parliament have been blackmailed with the threat of martial law. As a net result, Pakistan became increasingly ideological and “Islamic” over the years, largely backed by the state, and the same Islamic ideology has been used for strategic purposes. As a strategic paradigm it had become a vested interest by 2000.

However, since 2001 there has been a notable shift in the state policy and support of “Islamization”. The government of General Pervez Musharraf reversed the policy in its alliance in the United States' “war on terror”. However, experts felt that Musharraf's politics were exposed as duplicitous after the Lal Masjid incident in Islamabad and the reactions to remote attacks by United States drones in the tribal areas. The Pakistan Army, they felt, was ideologically trained to fight on the slogan of Allah-o-Akbar (God is Great) and could never kill a fellow Muslim, “anyone who wears Allah's scarf on his head” as one expert put it. Even in recent army action in the district of Swat (North-West Frontier Province), the provincial government (Awami National Party, considered “liberal, secular”) complained that before commencing the action the army announced their plans at least a month in advance, giving important terrorists ample warning to relocate. Experts felt that any one in a key position will never support such action for fear of being removed or even killed. This element of fear is visibly prevalent at all levels and prevents meaningful change. For instance,

the former Minister of Education, General Javed Ashraf Qazi surrendered 6 billion Pak Rupees from the education budget as he could not utilize the funds for regulating madrassahs because of fear of the Islamic lobby. Many experts also felt that the current government of the Pakistan People's Party (generally considered "secular") is also not liberal in its actions, going back to the original government of Zulfikar Bhutto which succumbed to religious pressure regardless of secular beliefs and manifesto promises.

Under these circumstances, experts felt that democracy in Pakistan had become "a sham", with duplicity as common as fear of uncontrollable religious backlash. This has been true even during the "secular" government of General Pervez Musharaf, the parliamentary leader of the opposition was a Maulvi at the same time as "enlightened moderation" was being advocated. Recently, a Constitutional Reforms Committee headed by a senior PPP leader, Senator Raza Rabanni, approved the continuance of Sharia courts.

With a history of certain political steps, authoritarian rule, ineffective democracy, and a culture of fear of religious action, experts felt that there has been progressive Islamization of Pakistan. However, most also expressed that this did not automatically translate into militancy: going to the mosque does not mean that a person supports terrorism. They felt largely that people having religious views may be labeled "conservative" but not necessarily as "extremists" (although one expert disagreed, claiming that for anybody who goes to the mosque the Maulvi will always hold a sympathetic appeal – 90% of people agreeing with this ideology and condoning terror pray regularly behind a Maulvi). In any case, what the state-backed and by now popularly supported Islamic ideology does do is to make extremism easier to tolerate even if violent acts are not condoned. While some among the experts felt that the problem was in fact one of religious ideologies, others referred to the strategic paradigm of the country as the key.

Experts felt that the results of such an Islamic ideology were evident when the Taliban took over Kabul city. The Taliban, they felt, brought the city to their own socio-economic level, with no conception of modern amenities. Their interpretation of lived Islam is based on the middle ages, and that is what they ensured in Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan they controlled. They promoted a regressive interpretation of Islam based on an "honor code". Likewise, their notions of a political system are rudimentary, with no conception of pluralism or nationalism, and their worldview is isolationist. It was generally expressed that Taliban are a class of warlords who acquired political power by building militants and eroding local tribal culture. It is a misconception that they brought law and order, they ruled because of brutality. The misperception exists because they merely filled in with authority and control when there was a social and a political void and the writ of the state didn't exist. Their projection of "law and order" was based on rigid interpretations of absolutist Wahabi/ Salafi thought, and the ideological cover allowed them to pursue justice and punishment systems based partly on medievalism and partly on the pattern of contemporary Saudi Arabia. The same, experts felt, could be expected if the Taliban were to control parts of Pakistan, as the group here subscribe to Deoband school, which is associated with the same absolutism professed by Taliban in Afghanistan. Already, the Taliban have attempted to replicate the same code in the tribal areas and parts of NWFP. They were significantly strengthened, however, through funding.

This brief review, generally agreed upon by the experts interviewed, offers a backdrop in which to read the views expressed in response to more contemporary concerns, below. However, one expert traced a different narrative, which is useful to summarize as a counterpoise to the main argument indicated above. The expert pointed out that there are several ideologies terrorizing Pakistan and the whole world, not just one. The first such is the ideology of modernism and liberalism: the modernity project that began with the Renaissance in Europe. It was this project that societies like ours encountered as victims of European colonization. Our societies were shaken by the modernism that had completely uprooted their traditional order, the trauma of

a dominant global power (Muslims) finding themselves defeated and colonized. The response to this domination produced the second set of ideologies, which can be seen in this view as reacting to modernism. One set analyzed the defeat as due to European power in science and technology, and therefore sought to regain our position by obtaining their science and technology, by adopting their modernity – this was a nationalist response. Another response analyzed the defeat as a punishment for “straying from the path”, and therefore sought to regain our position by reverting to a “pure” Islam – this was a fundamentalist response.

Nationalism and fundamentalism can thus both be seen as ideologies responding to European colonization and modernity. In this view, fundamentalism is “part and parcel of the modernity project”, which itself is linked to the Reformation and Protestantism. Nationalism produced the modern nation-state of Pakistan, which has become a postcolonial state with corruption and injustices. For the majority of people their own state has emerged as the principal oppressor: unjust, undemocratic and exploitative. The average person sees salvation either in the escape route to the Gulf or the West (which are idolized as just, democratic and free societies) or in expressing anger at a state that has strayed from the path of “pure” Islam.

The convergence of these (and other related) ideologies, for this expert, have produced the young Muslim who is angry with the West as the invading superpower that dislodged Islam. He sees the Pakistani state as an enemy agent of an imperialist West. Puritanism is sought as a solution to straying from the “pure” path, and is enforced violently against Western nations, the Pakistani state, and fellow Muslims and non-Muslims in Pakistan. In addition to this we have a military, fired by both nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism, with a mission of jihad (holy war) to regain the lost power of Muslims. Further complications are added with the Baloch, Sindhi and Pathan (provincial ethnicities) nationalisms, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and American promotion of Islamic jihad against them, and now the Saudi factor of oil money backing Sunni (majority sect) puritanism against Shia (second sect) and, by implication, against Iran (where Shias are a majority). All of this is mixed with criminal mentalities and activities that increase as the state weakens. This other narrative also offers a useful backdrop to the subsequent report.

3. Ideologies of Terror

Building on this backdrop, experts were asked whether they could discern a common ideology or common ideological features among the fundamentalist forces presently terrorizing northern Pakistan and across the country. Only two of 12 experts interviewed believed that a single ideology informed all fundamentalist forces in the country. The majority held that the ideologies varied, but all had many common features and aims.

History and Influence

It was generally expressed that the forces are led by organizations who are dominated by the Wahabi school of thought, which has become pervasive recently. Historically Wahabism has its roots in Saudi Arabia, and it preaches a form of radical orthodoxy that was not shared by many Muslims beyond that region. The severity and inflexibility in Wahabism, it was felt, has led to a selective application of Islam inclined towards extremism and violence. Wahabism was introduced to the country in the 1970s, with expatriate Pakistanis being influenced when they went as labor to Saudi Arabia. Over time, Islam became synonymous with Arabism, although the former is a broad religion and the latter more of a cultural notion. In Pakistan Zia encouraged this blend, including during the Afghan resistance to Soviet occupation (also referred to as Jihad or holy war). At that time there were about 35,000 Arabs fighting in Afghanistan, and Arabisation was one of the consequences. Infusion of Saudi money through the Pakistan Army (and the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, or ISI) facilitated this trend through the 1980s, with mushroom growth of this thought through funded mosques, madrassahs, political parties and other Salafi groups in Pakistan.

This long period of Saudi financing has created a momentum for a political Islam in Pakistan, using the orthodoxy to direct social, economic and political activities. Along with state support, this resulted in a gradual seeping of the ideology into society. Piety was deployed as a significant factor in making legal and political reforms acceptable, especially during Zia's rule. The middle class were especially susceptible to Zia's conservative Islamic ideology, particularly in the Punjab. In the north of the country, the influx of money was decisive to lure deprived populations. Zia's regime laid the foundation for terror, and the trend of relying on religiosity continued after the Soviet departure. Since then, experts felt that the United States has certainly not helped matters with its policies.

This political history of Pakistan's Islamization is important to place contemporary ideology of terrorists in perspective. The contemporary ideology, it was generally expressed, has no single classification as it is based on several sects and different types of Islam. But it certainly goes beyond only religion, and that is where fundamentalist forces who may not share a common ideology do have a common agenda for power and economics under a religious facade. Ideology is being used for power. Religious cover is being used also by an anti-liberal intelligentsia, which has combined with the prevalent patriarchal culture in a lack of democratic governance. One expert noted, "militant groups have a localized vision of power. There used to be no coherence in their ideology. But a national coherence has emerged after the Lal Masjid incident."

Experts voiced apprehension that the common features of terrorist ideologies are now shared by a population living under the influence of the clergy. Two features of this influence were pointed out by experts. One is the clerical concern that the amended 1973 Constitution never incorporated the Sharia (Islamic law). Even the Federal Sharia Court established by Zia accepts the 'modern state' theory that the state will punish only violations of the law and not violations of piety (*Amr bil Maruf and Nahi an Al-Munkir*). The Federal Sharia Court even allows the continuing of old British Raj laws not repugnant to Islamic law. The clergy has never accepted this lack of Sharia, and their concerns have seeped into Pakistani society.

The vast majority of Pakistanis voice regret that they don't live under Sharia (however that may be defined). While the Taliban punish under the rubric of marufat (violations of piety – shaving the beard, not saying prayers, etc.), the Pakistani state continues to punish only on munkirat (violation of coded law). The clergy continue to favor the Taliban position, which is being accepted by more and more Pakistanis.

The second influence of the clergy in favor of radical forces like the Taliban regards the conception of jihad (holy war). This is a new consensus, led by the clergy, that jihad is a private enterprise and can be engaged in by non-state actors. Here, the Pakistani state itself supported this by deploying non-state actors against the Soviet Union and India. This view has also seeped into Pakistani society, creating the conditions to condone radical ideologies.

Experts felt that a truly shared ideology among radical groups would have been more dangerous, as that would have united them. However, as one expert put, the use of religion for exercising power is itself a uniting ideological feature. Most groups are criminals involved in drug smuggling and kidnappings for ransom, legitimizing their illegal activities under a religious facade. In the areas of Bajaur (tribal areas) and Swat (NWFP) many work for drug barons, and

some are claimed to receive support from the intelligence agencies of the state. There is a chain of drug dealers in Swat, Bajaur, Karakoram Highway, Hunza (Northern Areas), borders with Afghanistan and tracing a route through Central Asia. The groups operating this trade are not ideological in the traditional sense. However, they do take full advantage of radical religious ideologies for their agenda.

The link between criminality and radicalism extends beyond economic gains and to political power. Many of these groups were instrumental in defeating the Soviet Union, and now want to do the same to USA. They constitute an international confederation which believes in global dominance of resources, absolute control of populations, pan-Islamism, porous borders, and elimination of opponents. Such groups, it was expressed by one expert, “are supportive of nuclearization of the Muslim world, as they aim to control the weapons and establish imperial control. We fear more destruction unless the whole mindset changes.”

Main Ideological Features

Radical Islamic fundamentalism is a phenomenon that has emerged across the world, not just in Pakistan. Globally, it focuses only on legal and political aspects of Islam, ignoring other equally important tenants of the religion. In Pakistan, it has allowed a primarily political, militant struggle to acquire a religious face. Since the Afghan resistance was termed “jihad”, the religious ideological aspects have only increased since then. Recent anti-American sentiment has fed the wave of religiosity.

Thus, experts felt that the common ideological features of radical fundamentalist groups in Pakistan are driven by political goals of power under a broad umbrella of religiosity and piety. The religiosity itself is mostly shallow, and the focus is entirely on appearance, legality, and politics. What has emerged as a common feature among the various groups, regardless of sectarian differences, is a narrow view of Islam enforced through brutal means which can enhance political power. This view includes a broad unity on patriarchal, anti-women and anti-democracy cultures. It also encompasses a shared antipathy to the West and to modernism. Contemporary rights of women (see next chapter), expressions of culture, and education are all denied. Finally, the use of brutality and violence combine with a total disregard for human life and fundamental human rights. These common features are enough to encourage the perception that Islam and the sword have always gone together, that terrorism a religious obligation, and that rational reasoning is unnecessary.

By contrast to a purely political view, one expert related jihadism, wahabism, fundamentalism, etc. as integral to the global project of modernism. In this view, pre-modern ideologies take a firm stand against extremism (whether Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or Christian), and drew on their respective scriptures and traditions to ascribe a middle path. Contemporary extremist and violent ideologies are all products of modernism, and the expert advocated revival of tradition and pre-modern ideologies to oppose modern fundamentalism.

Global Ideological Networks of Terror

These shared ideological features are emerging globally and, experts generally expressed, are at least partly motivated by global policies and politics, which are strengthening Muslim identity. This ideology of power and terrorism now has a presence everywhere, and even in the US it continues to affirm and enforce religious beliefs. It may be said to be part of a worldview of a certain minority.

Islamic globalization is a worldview at different levels. At the global level it envisages a clash between the mini-world of Islam and the rest of the world. The former is seen to comprise three parts: 54 Islamic majority states, the minority Muslim populations (e.g. China, Russia, the Balkans and India), and finally Muslim expatriates in the West. Linking them all is a transnational Islamic network, which mutually influences and reinforces Islamism. At the regional level, Islamic globalization is driven by the unstable setting due to the Gulf war, the Iran/Iraq war, India/Pakistan war, the Afghan and Kashmir jihads, and the Iranian revolution. These instabilities have given rise to militancy, madrassahs, etc. and feed global connections.

At the national level, the global and regional dynamics have played a role in forming the internal policies of Pakistan as part of Islamic globalization. The civil and military conflict has been a key factor in the national interplay, largely through a contest of legitimacy. While the constitutional source of legitimacy lies in a mandate of people, the Pakistan Army has supported a divine source of legitimacy by encouraging Islamism in politics to counter politicians and as a defense against India. The support for a divine legitimacy in Pakistan has turned into a quest to “purify” Islam, and along the way historical cultural practices such as basant (spring festival) and mehndi (henna) have been demonized as Hindu.

However, experts were largely unanimous in the view that this global interplay of Islamism is a perspective limited to a certain mindset and a small segment of people. It is far from universal, and even mainstream religious parties and the main schools of Islamic thought do not subscribe to it. Most consider it as too literalist, male chauvinist and a cause of serious gender issues. Rather, the global ideology of radical terrorists is considered as based on misplaced religious arguments truncated for self-purpose. Even in Pakistan, there may be pockets of more or less acceptance (possibly related to ethnicity in part) but it has not spread all over Pakistan.

4. Women and Radicalization

Experts were also asked about the affect on women of these common features of ideologies of terror, and whether they saw a common response to this affect. In large part, the experts felt that women have emerged more empowered and emancipated in contemporary times, partly due to the introduction of an industrial economy. This change from previous, highly patriarchal social organization threatened earlier power structures and ideologies. Many of these reactionary ideologies have joined forces with radical Islamist ideologies, and are united in blaming the West for the collapse of an earlier structure perceived as stable.

Whether for this reason or others, there was a consensus of views that women have been made the mainstay of religious discourse, especially regarding their appearance and behavior. As one expert summed up, radical Islamist policies are “excruciatingly anti-women, striving to abolish their identity and push them towards darkness”. Experts offered numerous examples, for instance radicals' support of multiple marriages, child marriages, rigid behavioral codes, and a focus on external appearances. Radical approach in this regard is aggressive and dogmatic, and amounts to an attack on the freedom of expression and thought when you force people to change their identity. It was felt that women are bound to suffer further diminution in status if the Taliban enforce their Sharia with the consent of an intimidated population. The Taliban blow up girls' schools as a token of their intent to enforce the agreed anti-women aspects of the Sharia. Experts cited the instance of 'sympathetic' threats to girls' institutions from local devotees of the Sharia last year in Lahore. It was pointed out that this view of the Sharia is not imported from outside but is fashioned within Pakistan by a powerful clergy, often in league with the militant organizations patronized by the state. Under the hudood laws of evidence, women are disadvantaged together with non-Muslims (a woman's evidence is generally considered equivalent of half that of a man).

The ideological consensus of radical Islamists against women is shown by the fact that women have been the first victims on whom “Islam” is imposed. Many main injunctions of Islam are overlooked and compromised while all the focus is on observing purdah (veiling), which is not enforced by scholars of the dominant religious school (Hanafi). Throughout Pakistan's history, women's human, legal and social rights have suffered, mostly in the form of inheritance rights. Women are considered inferior physically, intellectually, and socially, and therefore even in their humanity. This targeting of women is a common orthodox mindset, not limited to one sect.

The recent militarization of many parts of the country have added to this targeting of women. Experts were agreed that women have suffered the most and been subjected to an extreme form of social control in an already patriarchal culture. In many areas, as such as Waziristan (tribal areas) it is as if women do not exist: they have been made invisible and their basic needs like health and education are ignored. In places influenced by the Taliban and other radical groups, women are barred from economic and political activities (even voting) and even bought and sold in some revived practices (Valval).

This ideological unity against women is not restricted to the tribal areas or parts of NWFP, however. Experts pointed out that the recent bill on harassment of women at the workplace was opposed by mainstream religious parties (Jamat-e-Ulama-e-Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami). Initially they had even objected to a woman heading political parties, but then accepted on the pretext that the state was yet to be Islamic. The same influence of the radicalized extremists that has allowed people to accept jihad as a private enterprise, has also seeped into popular views on women in Islam. Experts generally felt that radical extremist views form the epicenter of violence, and the waves of their ideologies emanate from there and spread to the rest of the country. All over, men are now stiffening their anti-women attitudes and women are generally accepting these limitations to their freedom of movement as “acceptance of Islam”.

None of the experts felt that any movement was taking place to address the vanishing rights and the subjugation of women. They felt that the only resistance visible was by NGOs and women's movements, but these were a minute fraction in main cities who raised their voices but were not enough to affect radical ideologies.

5. The Spread of Radical Terror

Experts were asked about whether these elements of radical ideologies were being spread across Pakistan and, if so, how? They also commented on the uptake of these ideological features among people of Pakistan and the real possibilities of it becoming more widespread.

Causes and Mechanisms

Most of the experts responded that radical ideologies were not universal at this stage, but were being widely and actively spread across the country. Madrassahs (seminaries) are powerful media to promote and spread this ideology; areas like Bahawalpur and DG Khan in the Punjab have several madrassahs. Experts agreed that at one point the state was encouraging these madrassahs and that now it is reaping the consequences of this support because the situation has gone out of control and has become an international threat. Liberal versions of the Sharia (including through an 'inclusive' Federal Sharia Court) have resulted in madrassahs becoming the guardians of extreme versions of Sharia. The madrassahs are spread all over Pakistan and are more influential where the writ of the state is weak, which now includes most of the country's territory. The stated number of these madrassahs is 20,000 but many researchers think they could be double that number. Saudi financing has been crucial in their rise², along with unofficial charity in the form of donations and zakat (alms). As long as the funding keeps flowing this ideology will spread, as it is very difficult to ascertain and control where the money is used.

Experts generally felt that the influence of the clergy and madrassahs is aided by cultural regression in the Muslim world. Generally people are becoming inclined towards conservatism, as evident by more and more women wearing burkah (complete veil). The average person is not well versed with Islam and are therefore brainwashed into a clerical version of Islam as a panacea. The lower middle class is particularly susceptible to accept this for lack of education and an overly religious environment. Even non-religious sections in the middle classes are inclining to these views as reactions against America, the

west and modern values. The growing support is also partly due to reactions to global policies and politics, not only in Pakistan. Global grievances are played upon by clerics and madrassahs in their quest for power.

Successive governments in Pakistan have not helped. Governments have done little in the northern part of the country, which has created a social and political vacuum. A "purer" version of the religion adds to the varied interests to appeal to all classes of people. Educated people and even the elite are coming into direct grip of this ideology, and the less that objections are voiced to religious violence (possibly from fear), the more the violence gains acceptance. A notable development has been regarding radicalization of views and appearances among women in urban areas. The Al-Huda movement has played a major role in influencing women, offering a radical brand of orthodoxy as "religious empowerment" and often exploiting people by instilling fear. A sizeable number of educated women believe have joined this movement. The net effect is that women are kept captive and barred from professional lives through segregation, the main tenet of Al-Huda. The younger middle class appears more inclined towards this ideology in the name of divinity, and all either accept it or refuse to condemn it out of fear of backlash. Across the Punjab, even in Lahore, fewer and fewer women are visible on the streets and becoming more and more passive in their private and public lives. Both Al-Huda and the Jamia Hafsa (women's seminar attached to the Lal Masjid in Islamabad) target the middle class.

1. Secret Saudi funding of radical Islamic groups in Australia, 'National Observer- Australia and World Affairs, September 22, 2007

While madrassahs and clerical elements started spreading these ideological features, the middle classes (both women and men) are increasingly latching on in an environment of religiosity supported by the state. The main tool for spread among them is through literacy, whilst illiterate populations are being influenced through the electronic media. Lately, this trend has increased and is seeping into the modern professional class. The last annual Raiwind Ijtimah (gathering) of religious parties outside Lahore attracted such a large number of participants that it had to be divided in two sessions. The Tableeghi Jamaat (proselytizing mission) in Lahore – with a slogan of piety – participated in the Ijtimah with three hundred and fifty thousand people, including strong representation from educated middle class professionals. Experts felt that Wahabis and the Jamiat-e-Ahle Hadees have a strong following from the Punjabi commercial middle class as well as in Karachi. In rural areas the message given to the people is distorted and it influences them as they are vulnerable and uneducated. Clerics term poverty as Allah's punishment, and they are coerced into donating to religious groups. Small farmers and rural traders are also increasingly accepting these ideologies and becoming more conservative. In both rural and urban areas, religious groups often fill in the social gap left by the state, for instance in relief provision and education, enhancing their appeal.

Economic deprivation was cited as one of the main causes for the spread of radical ideologies. Even when a church is burnt there is some economic end to it. Religious sentiments are used and exploited at every level and it is always about some stake of claim on resources. Experts mostly expressed that the fabric of society has to be rebuilt so that the gaps that these religious organizations fill and entice people with can be closed.

In voicing these views, experts all agreed that the reasons for this increasing inclination need to be studied further. What also needs to be analyzed further is the extent to which radical ideological features have penetrated into all levels of the society, especially outside big cities. For instance, to what extent have ignorance and poverty facilitated support of religious groups? And, to what extent has the state's failure to provide social services like health and education allowed these groups to entrench themselves and encourage fundamentalism. This, it was expressed, explains the loss of hope among the youth which draws them to exploitation by these religious groups. Some experts referred to the recent events in Swat in the same light, as the result of people being drawn to jihad in the face of the state's failure to fulfill its responsibilities.

Agents of Terror

Regarding who is most involved in spreading these ideologies, the consensus view of experts was that the answer is complicated. There are perpetual dynamics of national and global power struggles, with several actors working at different levels and with the increasing power of the Taliban and the clergy to intimidate in the name of religion. There was general agreement, however, that the state is seen to be in retreat. It is clear that the modern state and the Sharia cannot coexist, and the Pakistani state is responding by transforming itself into a pre-modern mould. This transformation is producing agents who spread ideologies of terror across the nation.

The first mode of spread is through educational institutions. The Jamat-e-Islami placed a number of people in the education sector and the army, which bore fruit in Zia's time. The Islamization agenda of Zia was implemented by these agents and, in turn, strengthened them. The same process has rebounded to the present times, as the young educated class that was influenced in the 1970s are now working in different sectors in mid-level and high positions. Across the education sector, Islam has become a source of reference on all subjects over the last two decades, which is detrimental to academic growth of students and freethinking. Second, the confusion and duplicity in successive governments motives have added fuel to the situation, mostly through the media. As a result of government policies, the media has also shown an inclination to radical ideologies, and both electronic and print media have contributed through numerous religious channels and programs, articles in Urdu publications, etc.

Third, the trading community is an important backbone of this ideology. For instance, traders from the old city in Lahore give funds to mosques, madrassahs, religious parties and radical groups. One expert cited the example of a large private airlines, Shaheen Air, which provides only religious reading material to passengers, for instance articles on reading the Holy Quran, qualities of a Muslim, fazeelat (divine blessing), etc.

Fourth, experts felt that the feudal system and the “establishment” are accomplices who have been fueling these trends for decades in their own quests for power. India abolished its feudal system through land reforms, and as a result their public service sector flourished. However, the feudal system in Pakistan is still strong, for example in blocking education. The same feudals tolerate and encourage clerics, who become their local voice. The vast majority of people in rural areas are victims, working as laborers and deliberately kept away from empowering education, and these are the people who are the biggest audience of this ideology. The establishment has colluded with this power structure, to the extent that when a cleric dies, even the President and the Prime Minister condole the death. Senior officers in the civil and military bureaucracies are also sympathizers and supporters of this thinking, which can encourage favorable policies.

Fifth, the influence of foreign powers cannot be ignored. Aside from Saudi financing of religious parties and even extremist groups, other countries like Kuwait are financing the construction of mosques, mostly in northern areas. These structures are ostentatious compared to the simplicity and poverty of the area, and are creating centers of religious power. There is now evidence of conversions and affiliations with radical ideologies because of monetary benefits.

Conditions of Spread of Radicalization

Despite the fact that the majority of people are rational, and these radical ideologies have not spread universally, experts noted that the present condition of societal and state break down results in grave danger of further spread. It was pointed out that although poverty is a main cause for accepting extremism, it is the collapse of the social structure that creates conditions which encourage extremism. In an atmosphere where there is general acceptance of such behavior, all the above factors form a dangerous combination.

In addition, the already strong presence of people sympathetic to this ideology is dangerous. Much of this can be attributed to the Taliban's tactics of fear to ensure a following. For instance they enter a village, round up those accused of “bad” characters and kill them in public. One expert related seeing a video of such executions with another twist: dead bodies of persons hanging from trees dressed in what appeared to be Western images (striped shirts, silk scarves, cigarettes stuck in nose, mouth and ears, and faces painted in different colors), thus symbolizing immorality with the West and garnering political support. Such tactics are only increasing the possibilities of spread of radical ideologies. One expert also referred to the possibility of radicalism's spread in Pakistan in case the Americans pulled out early from Afghanistan and the Taliban re-established rule in Kabul.

The last national elections saw an encouraging trend against religious parties (who had garnered 11% of the vote during the Musharraf's 2002 elections). The bulk of Pakistanis are still opposed to political expression of religious ideologies. Even where radicalism is spreading in the NWFP, people voted for secular parties like PPP and ANP. However, the failure of the current coalition government in meeting expectations can cause disillusionment. Religious parties are playing to this with welfare programs, relief services, free education and large volunteer bodies. If the coalition government does not meet expectations, there is a possibility of religious backlash.

An important factor in the spread or control of radical ideologies was felt to be the actions of those opposing such ideologies. There was a tremendous public outcry against the televised incident of Taliban flogging a girl in Swat. However, this was not the only such incident, and people were aware of such realities earlier and since, and there has been little outcry against other such instances. The label of religion instantly gives legitimacy, and people take time to see through it. While public outcry may not be expected to a great extent, a small section of the civil society and intelligentsia have always resisted such ideologies. They are joined in condemnation by some elements of clergy, for instance some Barelvis (a school of thought) and even Deobandis who are not Wahabi legally or ideologically. Religious sentiment was especially split after the murder of Dr. Sarfaraz Nacemi, a religious leader and scholar, about nine months ago in Lahore. Many religious elements condemned the act, and this defined extreme intolerance of the Taliban.

6. Radicalization in the Popular Mainstream

Experts also gave their views regarding evidence of radical ideologies in the popular mainstream (education, television, newspapers, etc.). The varied views reflected that it is difficult to appreciate the uptake of radical ideologies given the intimidation and fear by radicals.

Education emerged as a significant carrier of this ideology, with many experts believing that messages of hatred and intolerance come through our curricula. University students have been almost trained to become bigoted and narrow-minded. Although some changes were made in 2003-05, there remains a great need to revise the curricula, especially in Urdu literature, in history, and in Pakistan Studies- much of the current matter seems to have the same outlook as the madrassahs. Islamiyat in English and Urdu medium schools is taught in a rigid and non-flexible manner even in private schools, let alone madrassahs. During General Musharraf's government, public sector textbooks were only partially cleansed of hate messages, and education remains in the hands of people who by and large sympathize with the Taliban. Many English-medium private institutions remain liberal, but they form a small percentage of the system and cater only to the elite. One expert working in the education sector felt that even if the education did not promote extremism, it also does not prepare or equip someone to deal with it.

The media is another channel promoting the conservative views of the predominant intelligentsia. Most experts felt that media played a negative role in promoting radical ideologies, as it is inherently pro-jihad and anti-American. The media promotes an honor-based ideology and argues for an honor-based foreign policy. While the Urdu media is becoming increasingly conservative, even the English press does not favor an alternate ideology. Recent competition has encouraged all media, English and Urdu, press and electronic, to sensationalize issues for popularity, at times even projecting the Taliban as heroic in popular television shows such as Capital Talk. Journalists have recorded interviews with Taliban fighters (and one expert wondered why the Army could not reach the Taliban if journalists could) rather than condemning them to anonymity. Rather than humiliating the Taliban as criminals, and showing captured Taliban fighters tied and sitting on the floor like common criminals, the media continues heroic projections. The sympathetic coverage of the Lal Masjid incident and similar instances has had repercussions in attracting a following to radical elements. It was felt that public opinion has been molded without regard for implications, and the media's role was perceived largely as more negative than positive.

Television shows were perceived as the most effective medium in this regard, with their outreach to millions of people. Channels are now filled with religious programs and talk shows which propagate all manners of ideologies, radical and moderate alike. Even quiz shows increasingly include only Islamic questions. Some programs and talk shows underlining conservative messages are becoming more and more popular and given more and more time. Many do not advocate extremism per se, but for instance glorify the Taliban though their system of "justice" at the expense of state mechanisms. On the other hand, there is no channel dedicated to culture as there is not enough material to show people.

The media has also built up icons like Junaid Jamshed (former pop singer) who have had a major effect on encouraging orthodoxy in society. Commentators like Zaid Hamid, known to have said on television that the Taliban were Pakistan's friends but we have chosen to join hands with USA, are also promoted. One expert cited the 2008 example of the popular talk show 'Alim Online' on the country's most widely watched Urdu channel (Geo TV). The show's host, Amir Liaqat (former State

Minister for Religion) agreed with a panel that members of the minority sect of Ahmedis were allowed to be killed for religious reasons. Nobody was brought onto the panel to dispute this, and in the following fortnight three prominent members of the Ahmedi community were assassinated across the country. The owner of the channel, Mir Shakil-ur-Rehman, commented that the ratings of the program increased since that show was aired.

While there was general agreement that the media has been promoting radical religiosity, there was disagreement among experts regarding its present status. One view was that the trend has reversed under the PPP-led coalition government, and there is no longer evidence of it in popular mainstream. It was also pointed out that the media played a key role in condemning the video of the flogging of the girl in Swat and was responsible for the decline in the wave of extremism. In this view, it was held that the media is an effective medium that may be used better to counter radical ideologies.

Finally, one expert held that there is no evidence that radical ideologies are being spread through education and media. Even the madrassah curriculum does not include hatred for other religions or violence, and need not be demonized. However, certain elements among the clergy teach and promote hate.

7. Resistance to Radical Ideologies

Experts were also asked to identify the main resistance and alternatives to radical ideologies. Differing views were expressed in this regard.

According to one expert, public reaction to the Taliban's brutality and carnage is now setting in, as people started reacting in 2008. However, this trend will take some time to converge and mobilize, as our society lives in denial and lack of self-analysis. When they saw what was happening in Swat, people reacted. Now that Taliban financing is being curbed, their radical ideologies will also be contested from within.

At the state level, there is also a resistance from the three political parties working as a coalition in the Center, NWFP, Balochistan and Sindh: PPP, ANP and MQM. The province of Punjab (containing over 60% of the population) is being governed by a conservative PML-N which counts on the votes of those who would have otherwise voted for the religious parties.

At the civil society level, there is a resistance from "left" elements, human rights organizations, other NGOs, and from among westernized section of the upper-middle class. Although weakened by military domination of society, civil society in Pakistan has always actively resisted the imposition of radical elements. They were the first to respond and organize condemnation of the Swat flogging case. However, the organized civil society as a whole is only represented by a handful of people from main cities and that too belonging to a certain class. Likewise, Pakistani women have for years been compelling activists, with the Women's Action Forum making a significant impact to raise awareness and resist military dictatorship during Zia's regime. Women are continuing to resist on an individual level but again there has been little combined effort. Cultural centers and art schools have also put up resistance. Students studying art and culture are exposed to the importance of culture in society and resist its destruction by radical religious elements, but again they constitute a small fraction of society (about 2 percent).

Some experts referred to resistance to radical ideologies by a few religious academics like Javed Ahmed Ghamdi, Mehdi Hasan, and Allama Farooq. Again, however, the number of such scholars is few and they are not organized the way that radical ideologues are. Even when their programs are televised, they do not get aired at prime time and their impact is nominal and restricted to people who already like them. Progressive religious discourse is restricted to these few people

and to occasional televised shows, while the radical clergy continues to dominate on the television as well as in the much larger audience at the mosque. Other individuals also engage in what one expert referred to as "soft resistance", for instance through isolated scholarship or promotion of tolerant, pluralistic Sufism (mystic Islam).

It was generally felt that the population of the country in general opposed radical extremist ideology existed, falling prey to it through fear, intimidation, media propagation, and other structural reasons (as earlier). Despite their succumbing to religiosity and often radicalism, most people protest extremist methods, coming out to demonstrate against bombings and condemning criminal violence. The vote against religious parties in the last election was a strong demonstration of this opposition. Likewise, the popular reception of the movie *Khuda Ke Liye* ("For God's Sake" – motion picture against violent extremism) sent a strong signal, but was not followed up by similar movies, TV plays and theater. Experts felt that in general people, especially in urban areas, are looking for ways to respond in the absence of a consolidated movement. The youth, however, was noted as conspicuous by its absence, partly because the ban on student unions during General Musharraf's rule restricted their political activity and allowed religious parties to fill the gap. Intellectual response to radical ideologies, it was felt, has been virtually absent. Such a response should have emerged from universities, but nothing has.

As a result of disparate, uncoordinated responses to radical ideologies, no viable intellectual or ideological alternative has emerged. In particular, the call for Sharia with its religious legitimacy has not been challenged, partly out of fear. Some experts maintained that the state continued to survive in its present liberal form only because of foreign economic dependence and amenability to pressure from the US and European Union, who control international financial institutions.

8. The Need for Critical Scholarship

There was little response from experts regarding recent, relevant scholarship that counters radical ideologies. It was pointed out that most highly regarded Muslim scholars reside in the West, and this applies to Pakistan as much as across the Islamic world. However, because Muslims living in the West have been refusing to integrate, these scholars are also not supported. Had the state of Pakistan been internally sovereign and in control of its territory, Pakistani scholars would have contributed critically without fear of being gunned down by the terrorists.

Experts referred to some research by individual thinkers, which does not become part of any united effort and often remains out of the academy, thus even becoming counter-productive. The work that exists is often not disseminated (for instance by leading historian Dr. Ayesha Jalal). In individual capacities people are writing about tolerance, but no thinking has emerged to counter radical ideologies. Nothing has emerged from the Middle East either, possibly because of fear.

Some experts pointed out research by progressive religious scholars, for instance Javed Ahmed Ghamdi and Zahid Rashdi (Ashirya magazine). While their views may be debatable, many of their positions on issues of daily life and culture are an “impressive” response to extremism. Experts supporting this argued for the need for such scholarship which is rooted in tradition and Islamic thought.

Experts also commented on the need for scholarship to counter radicalization in Pakistan. There was a general recognition that there is need for such scholarship as there is little current research and what does exist is scattered on not focused on Pakistan (as above). There was also an understanding that encouraging such scholarship to bring about significant change requires state support through appropriate policies. Politically, the general view was that this requires strong, democratic institutions, with some experts arguing for support to the mainstream political parties believing in constitutional liberalism, friendship with India, etc. Socially, a number of experts emphasized the need to build a humane, democratic and socially just modern setup, as opposed to the current nature of the state, which is not sufficiently equipped to face the challenge posed by the religious extremists. Culturally, experts generally felt that the strong wave of anti-Americanism is important: it is far from being confined to militants, as people generally have reacted negatively to US policies. However, people are generally avoiding self-reflection, with one expert saying, “they have put their humanity on the backburner”.

Nature of Critical Scholarship

As to the nature of scholarship required, experts generally felt that an open and independent intellectual discourse on Islam is necessary, as there is no organized expression in this field. One expert argued that Islam needs to be “re-appropriated”, as extremism was never part of the religion, and that this re-appropriation has not taken place because the liberal intelligentsia knows little about Islam. The clergy, it was felt, avoid debate and emphasize recitation from the Holy Quran to prevail in a discussion, but the liberal intelligentsia needs to be better informed to engage in debates.

On this point, experts referred to a strong Muslim tradition and lead in philosophy, which has long since stopped growing. Over the last eight centuries Muslims made immense contributions to research in the social sciences and physical sciences. But after their victory in Spain and Portugal this development and contribution stopped. In fact, it was felt by experts that Muslim intellectual thought and researchers were then suppressed, and instead of continuing a discourse as before they got involved with fiqh (jurisprudence) and enforcing Sharia. In the last couple of centuries when colonial powers took over Muslim States in Arab countries, a split occurred, with Egypt moving for revival and renaissance and most other nations towards fundamentalism. One of the steps towards rigid orthodoxy was the introduction of the Wahabi school of thought. In the subcontinent, where Sir Syed, Maulana Hali and other played a positive role for Muslim intellectual reform, fundamentalists branded them agents of colonial power. The latter thought took hold, and culminated in Maulana Maududi declaring that once Pakistan is called an “Islamic Republic”, people will be dealt with under Islamic law, obliged to follow the Sharia or be eliminated.

However, growing radicalization is not the only trend in Muslim scholarship. A number of scholars on Islam are evolving a critical and modern discourse, and some (for instance in Malaysia) are relevant to the Pakistani context as well. As such, according to one expert, liberal interpretations do not have to be crafted anew, and there is more a need to emphasize and effectively communicate positive aspects which have been researched elsewhere, for instance on Sufism (mysticism). Similarly, there are some movements for revisionist histories which need to be supported and studied in the appropriate spirit of open enquiry.

In general, however, experts felt that such global scholarship is useful but inadequate. It was largely felt that the scholarship required must be grounded in our own cultural ethos and able to resonate with people's lives and needs, otherwise it is discarded as a foreign imposition. For this, it was argued by one expert that there is a need to review our own traditions and develop from there. In any case, Islam will have to be researched, both the text of the Quran and other writings of authentic religious scholars to address issues of tolerance and respect for diversity.

At the same time as emphasizing research on Islam in a local context, experts were agreed that the emphasis by the clergy on law and theology must be challenged. Most experts commented on the need for scholarship on culture related to Islam. Many referred to the strong, even exquisite, achievements of Islamic civilizations in tangible culture (painting, calligraphy, architecture, poetry, prose, music and so on). It was argued that Islamic civilizations have produced no less art and beauty than any other religious civilization, and we need only look at Islamic history to know that these aspects are part of the religion.

However, culture has been a systematic victim of the new radical Islamization, and cultural activities in general have been suppressed. In Pakistan, religious organizations have termed any form of tangible culture haram (forbidden), music and art in colleges have been banned, and segregation is enforced. Any activity related to entertainment, music or art is labeled anti-Islamic and strictly banned. Drama and theater have weakened considerably, largely because no investment is made and heightened radical religiosity has diminished these forms of expression. Art exhibitions, once common across urban Pakistan, are now far fewer and restricted in expression (often due to depiction of women not wearing dupattas or veils in paintings), and Jamat-e-Islami began to increasingly destroy sculptures and paintings in national institutions such as the National College of Arts. People are generally being made to feel defensive about listening to music, just as they fear openly enjoying cultural expressions in general. This trend has strengthened during Zia's rule, it was argued: in the 1960s and '70s there used to be political right and left wings which have now been replaced by only one Islamic nationalist ideology. The environment used to be fairly liberal with several cultural activities and people could make a choice to attend or not. Now there is a stark absence of cultural programs and information. Even the entertainment news that are reported and printed are mostly related to India. The Wahabi school of thought has no tolerance or respect for individuality, diversity and identity, not even for Shias, Ahmedis or other sects.

Of course, there is a counter-reaction in society as well, for instance with new music bands and artists, etc., who work despite the genuine fear of radical terrorist violence. However, there is no scholarship in this regard to support them or analyze their work academically. For instance, cultural diversity was related as a key element in giving people their identities and expressing their ways of life. But diversity is being radically cut down, as is evident in the case of reducing numbers of the Kalash community (traditionally non-Muslim community in the Northern Areas). Diminishing numbers are a result of rapid, often forced, conversions to Islam. One expert related

evidence of cases where deprived Kalash youth have been given huge sums of money and returned to their communities to forcibly convert people to a radical vision of Islam. This and similar cases need to be analyzed and understood. Such scholarship related to history, lived Islam and culture, it was felt should also concentrate on multiple levels (local, regional and global) rather than on single, isolated issues.

Experts generally agreed on the need for exposure to science, culture, literature, etc. as these are alternative elements that balance against radical ideology. The new Islam is devoid of culture, and a moderate mix of religion and culture needs to be re-invented. Promoting fine art, performing arts, Indian movies, theater, drama and music can fill in the void and bring a much-needed revolution of culture. Other areas include critical political analysis, anthropology, cultural studies, women's studies, human rights, constitutional reforms, and psychological aspect of all these areas should also be addressed.

One issue referred to for further research was to follow the reconstruction of Islamic thought by Allama Iqbal, according to which the Parliament of a Muslim-majority country should decide what is law under Islam. This, it was felt, might be an effective counter to the radical elements, who have made religious edicts the property of clergy in different religious schools. Another issue raised for analysis was the interface between women's rights, legal rights and land rights. There is a knowledge gap and lack of engagement in our system on this critical matter, which radicals are filling against women. Finally, the importance of a speedy justice system was also raised to counter radical ideology and the argument that Taliban are efficient in providing speedy justice. There is a need to critique this "prompt" system advocated by the Taliban while also analyzing and proposing effective reforms of the national judiciary.

Who Should be Engaged in Critical Scholarship?

Regarding mechanisms for such critical scholarship, experts aired different views. A common view regarded reform of the educational system and methods of teaching. The present system has a tunnel view and is not open to progress or independent thinking. Islam has been added as a slogan and most subjects have been "Islamized". It was felt in this view that the school curricula need to be revised and religion disassociated from them. Some experts referred emphasized the need to restructure primary education, especially in public schools, by ensuring accessible quality education under standard policies and by improving teaching methods (mostly by emphasizing teacher training to cover all subjects and ensuring compulsory diplomas for teaching posts).

Experts also generally pointed out that all over the world universities are the hub of intellectual activity and progressive thinking. However, in Pakistan universities are dens of conservatism with uninspiring faculty. Most have been molded by the influence of religion, and discourage creativity and out-of-the-box thinking. "The situation marks the end of education when only the establishment's line is towed", said one expert. Those who contradict this view are considered miscreants and victimized, often removed from positions.

An enduring reform absolutely requires a set-up of enlightened and liberal-minded faculty in institutions, especially for revival of social sciences from a historical perspective. To this end, it was argued by some experts that resource persons can be identified in each university and coordinated to form a group of engaged students. This group can be facilitated by strengthening their knowledge in history or architecture or any other subject, to help them re-think and re-build existing paradigms.

By contrast, a few experts pointed that while academia and scholars have their role and there is need for a dialogue, these concerns do not affect the society at large. The target audience to counter radicalization is largely illiterate or uneducated and so it is doubtful what impact scholarship could have. Scholarly research, in this view, is limited to a select few in a population and needs to be converted and exposed to a larger audience for maximum usage beyond confined scholars and universities. In this view, better communication systems on important issues are the key to counter radicalization, for instance on the contentious issue of financial interest.

While opinions differed on the emphasis on new scholarship and communication, all experts agreed that both elements are needed. Regarding the latter, electronic media (television programs and talk shows, films, etc.) were considered the most effective to make new research accessible to people. More than just communication, it was also pointed out that to counter radicalization it is important to enable people to think freely and make their own choices. However, this requires access to enough critical information, and this information must be made accessible in an understandable form. To this end, many experts advocated close coordination between scholarship and media, such as in the case of Javed Ahmed Ghamdi. There was agreement that the media in general can play an important role and make the greatest difference, as it is the most instantaneous and direct carrier of information to people. People can contribute by working from their particular field whether they are part of the media, government or the universities. As long as there is an ability to explain alternate views, it was felt, it does not matter whether there is a coordinated effort or not.

There was also a view that lasting change must come from the nation's youth, who need to be given a platform to make their choices. Dissemination of material to the youth would help to change their mindset. Bringing out progressive material and circulating to smaller towns making it easily accessible, available and affordable would promote awareness on alternate views.

One expert pointed out that people in Pakistan do not take responsibility and have made a habit of indulging in a blame game. While enjoying the benefits of the society we are part of, we resign ourselves to being mere spectators. Scholarship needs to build on an understanding of why the majority of people have been reduced to inaction. The reason, by this view, is that people do not have the necessary knowledge or understanding of how to act on it. People have been numbed by circumstances, and steps to restructure education, intellectual discourse, the media etc. can remove this uncertainty. It was suggested that organizations like the Center for the Study of Gender and Culture can work in this regard, and that even small efforts to prevent and resist such radicalization should be lauded and built upon. Efforts where humanity asserts itself should be encouraged and publicized. Even if it is not possible to counter global trends, directions in which the whole world is moving, every thinking person at an individual level can adopt a different position and live by it. It was argued that during the Taliban regime there were courageous Afghan women who taught girls from home. Resistance of this type is needed at every level to change the mindset and overcome the values that are being enforced on women. Every one in their area of work can make their own contribution, actors working at different levels be it the policy-makers, artists, writers, or poets can strive in their own way to uphold their values. Women need to be involved as they work best for culture and alternative elements.

Finally, there was agreement among all experts that a change is not impossible, as the recent lawyers movement proved in taking the establishment by surprise and demonstrating that there is a reservoir of determination in our country which only the right direction. Critical scholarship can help provide that direction provided it is communicated effectively.

9. The Role of International Agencies in Countering Radicalization

A little under half the experts felt that there is no harm in involving international bodies in countering radicalization as long as they are given the role of facilitators and not directors or models, which gives rise to its own issues of legitimacy and credibility. The critical need now is for self-analysis, identification of local issues and grounded solutions within a liberal democratic framework. There was unanimity that any plausible change must come from the local level. International intervention has already caused complications, and over half the experts felt that international role should be minimal or not at all.

The problem with international intervention has been a perception that dictate their own agenda. By implication, any local association with a western agenda or US patronage faces a backlash. However, there is scope for neutral, modern organizations like the Aga Khan Network, or Japanese and Scandinavian countries to play a positive role, if they involve credible NGOs as partners. In partnership, there was a general view that donor agencies have not been able to reach smaller towns, but have always worked through large organizations in big cities. It was felt that there is a need to network with implementing partners in smaller cities and rural areas. At the same time, there was a feeling among many experts that over the last few years even international organizations have significantly softened their stance towards and begun to accommodate religious organizations instead of invest in liberal forces as they used to.

Experts who advocated some role by international bodies referred to engagement in the education sector: facilitation in promoting literacy, awareness and education. Private sector schooling has become a mafia and made quality education an unaffordable luxury for most people. This monopoly needs to be countered through state services at affordable costs, and this is an important arena where international bodies can contribute. They can help involve the public in a dialogue to promote art and culture, and the student seminars organized by the Centre on the Study of Gender and Culture were cited as a positive example. UNESCO's involvement was advocated in improving syllabi, particularly to include human rights in curricula. There was also a view that UN bodies should pressurize the government into prohibiting controversial publications by banned outfits, which often incite hatred and intolerance.

Half the experts, however, were reluctant to affirm a role for international organizations. They felt that in the present context and circumstances there is a reaction to external involvement which is taken as interference and looked upon with suspicion. One expert in particular cited examples of ineffective work by NGOs and international donors, claiming that they were structurally incapable of achieving much and emphasized churning out of reports with no impact. Two experts said that they were not in a position to address this question due to lack of familiarity with their work.

10. Conclusion

The aim of this report has been to summarize, to the extent possible, diverse views of a range of experts on the topic of “Ideas, Culture and Terror”. Each expert's views and the collected views on any one topic may be expanded for even greater insight. However, the brief format above allows certain trends to be highlighted.

All experts expressed apprehension over the present situation of terrorism in Pakistan, and unanimously agreed on attributing it in part to growing radicalization across the country. While individual analyses of causes may have differed somewhat, there was also a common understanding that the current radicalization is a result of a systemic process of Islamization in Pakistan, a process that is in evidence since at least the 1970s if not the history of colonization. There also appeared to be a consensus that terrorists today may not adhere to any one ideology, but that there are common features among them related to their political, economic and cultural agendas. Combined with a trend of criminality (whether local, national or global), these common ideological features are an important but often neglected aspect of terrorism in Pakistan.

These ideological features have been often traced to the recent growth of Wahabism, a puritanical view of Islam emerging from Saudi Arabia, often supported by a global network of financing to mosques, madrassahs and other institutions. In Pakistan, this funding coincided also with the resistance to the Soviet invasion in the name of a jihad. The set of ideologies adopted by various terrorist groups appears to be related to this history of Wahabism, just as their organizational history is. The ideology itself emphasizes puritanism, a reliance on religiosity or piety, and authority of clerics. Women, it was agreed, are the first and primary victims of this ideology, especially through restrictions imposed on their bodies.

This history, it was commonly felt, has involved active complicity of state elements, who are at least equally to blame for the present radicalization. Aside from the state's political/ security agenda, experts were largely agreed that state institutions are partly responsible for radical ideologies spreading across the country. Whether through political duplicity and ambiguity (for instance regarding US-operated drone attacks or the Lal Masjid incident), or by consistently succumbing to clerical pressure on policies, or by continuing to allow economic deprivation, successive governments have facilitated the cause of spreading radicalization. State (or state-monitored) institutions, it was largely felt, are now agents of radicalization: educational bodies, the media, traders and entrepreneurs, the civil-military bureaucracy through its policies, and ineffective regulation of foreign involvement. Amongst other factors, there was agreement that the fear of backlash was a strong component in the spread of a radical mindset across the country.

The spread of fear, it was mostly argued, is buoyed by often irresponsible and one-sided media reporting. People are falling into a radical mindset either through the pervasive and unchecked influence of the radical clergy, or through fear of action against their “impiety”. The fear also hinders any resistance to the spread of radical ideologies. Experts were mostly agreed on the lack of any significant resistance, although different views were expressed on possibilities. However, all experts agreed on the urgent need to restructure the national educational system, from the primary to tertiary levels, both to enhance access and to restructure curricula and teaching methods. It was felt that the lack of critical thinking and absence of independent information in the present system were key factors in the growth of radicalization. There was also agreement on the need to strengthen democratic governance as well as to work actively on poverty eradication.

At the same time, there was a strong and unanimous expression by all experts that countering radicalization was as much a “battle of ideas” as any other endeavor. That is, a clear need was expressed for promoting critical scholarship, including on issues of law and Islamic theology, but also on other key subjects like gender, history and culture. These latter, it was felt, were required in order to counter the tunnel vision of Islam being promoted by radicals, and to “re-appropriate” the local, pluralistic visions of Islam (experts emphasized the need to promote cultural expressions and related scholarship). The argument was for leading intellectuals to engage with religious issues, especially in Islam, from multiple perspectives and challenge the exclusivity of radical clerics to dictate Islamic “perspectives”.

There was also general agreement that such critical scholarship not only needs to be developed locally (drawing on, but not adopting, global research) but also must be effectively communicated to the uneducated majority of the population. Arguments were put forth for coordination with the media as well as exploring other dissemination mechanisms. The initiatives of the Center for the Study & Culture (particularly the website and student seminar series) were appreciated, but a far broader and more extensive set of activities was called for. In all cases, experts generally felt that the role of international agencies, if present, should be limited to facilitation of credible, local partners to develop such scholarship and communicate it.

It was clear from the interviews that these 12 experts felt that the increasing radicalization in Pakistan (which may or may not continue unchecked with present political trends) is far from irreversible. Many pointed to the recent lawyers' and civil society movement for independence of the judiciary as well as against the Swat flogging of a young woman as evidence of positive change and potential. However, they all referred to the need for further, broader and ongoing analysis into, and communication of, various aspects of radicalization and its spread.

The Center for the Study of Gender & Culture has presented this report, and related project publications, as one step in this direction.

Annex - List of Experts

1. Dr. Parvez Vandal: Architect
2. Ms. Sajida H. Vandal: Architect
3. Mr. Shahid Jalal: Artist
4. Mr. Kamil Khan Mumtaz: Architect
5. Dr. Ayesha Jalal: Department of History, Tufts University (USA)
6. Dr. Muhammad Wasim: Department of Political Science, Lahore University of Management Sciences
7. Dr. Murtaza Jafri: Department of Fine Arts, National College of Arts
8. Dr. Muhammad Sohail Umar: Iqbal Academy Pakistan
9. Mr. Imtiaz Alam: South Asian Free Media Institute
10. Mr. Abbas Rashid: Society for the Advancement of Education
11. Mr. Hussein Naqi: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
12. Mr. Khaled Ahmed: South Asian Free Media Institute and The Friday Times (*email response*)