

Radicalization of Educated Youth in Pakistan: Traits, Narratives and Trends

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Abstract

Around 64 percent of Pakistan's population is below the age of 30 years, which is expected to rise to 230 million by 2030 and 280 million by 2050. This makes youth the most important demographic group in Pakistan. In recent years, growing radicalization among the country's educated youth has raised new counter terrorism and extremism challenges. Educated youth's quest for significance, self-worth and the desire to serve a higher purpose in life have pushed a radical fringe towards militancy. Religious-political parties, missionary organizations and modern Islamist networks have, intentionally or unintentionally, facilitated movement of vulnerable youth from non-violent to violent-extremism. Social media has also lowered entry barrier of youth's participation into militancy. This paper has defined and conceptualized radicalization of educated youth in Pakistan's context and identified main traits that account for it. The second section details major narratives, such as Ghazwa-e-Hind, Caliphate and the Black Flags of *Khorasan* which militant organizations have exploited to radicalize the educated youth. The final section offers some policy recommendations to overcome radicalization among the educated youth.

Key terms: Youth radicalization, Pakistan, Caliphate, Ghazwa-e-Hind, Khorasan, Education

Introduction

Pakistan has the largest population of young people ever in its history, making it one of the most youthful countries in the world and second youngest in South Asia. Of the 207 million population, around 64 percent is below the age of 30 years, and 29 percent is between the ages of 15-29

years.¹ This youth bulge is projected to continue at least for the next three decades and can either be an asset or a liability depending on how effectively this segment is integrated in the society.² So, youth is the most important demographic group in Pakistan and also the most impressionable.

Radicalization of educated youth is dangerous because militants with higher education are better positioned to plan sophisticated attacks, infiltrate elite government and military circles, and facilitate increased connections between Pakistan-based groups and transnational jihadist groups.³ Deprived and confused youth, particularly those who cannot find answers to their problems are most vulnerable to extremist propaganda. There is a lot of ambiguity on several issues in youth's mind and there is no one to answer them.⁴

The vigilante killing of Mashal Khan, a journalism student of Mardan's Abdul Wali Khan University on fake blasphemy charges in 2016, recruitment of Naureen Laghari by the Islamic State (IS), a student of Liaqat Medical College Hyderabad, to target Sunday Easter services in Lahore in 2017, and the targeted killing of a college professor by his student over alleged "anti-Islam" remarks in Bahawalpur in March 2019 underscore the extent and depth of youth radicalization among Pakistan's educated youth. Similarly, the cases of IS-inspired militant cell, Saad Aziz

¹ "Pakistan currently has largest youth population of its history: UNDP report," *The News*, May 3, 2018.

² Raheem ul Haque, "Youth Radicalization in Pakistan," Peace Brief, *United States Institute of Peace*, February 26, 2014.

³ Madiha Afzal, "University education and radicalization in Pakistan," *Livemint*, April 16, 2018.

⁴ Madeeha Anwar, "Pakistan's Emerging Threat: Highly Educated Youth Gravitate to Radicalization," *Voice of America*, May 6, 2017.

network, and Al-Qaeda (AQ)-linked Jamaat-ul-Ansar Al-Shariah (JAS) — involving educated militants from colleges and universities— indicate the ingress of global jihadist groups in Pakistani universities and higher education institutions.

Barring a few studies, majority of the research on youth radicalization has not defined the phenomenon in Pakistan’s context. Particularly, radicalization of educated youth is a data-scarce subject in Pakistan as much of it is assumed rather than demonstrated. Moreover, the bulk of the existing research on the topic is survey-based rather than an in-depth examination of various emerging trends of educated youth’s radicalization in the country. Radicalization is not a static but a dynamic phenomenon, so such survey-based studies have a shelf-life notwithstanding their important insights into the subject-matter. Therefore, a fresh examination of the ideological narratives that underpin radicalization of educated youth, their traits and trends is warranted.

A Survey of Existing Literature on Youth Radicalization in Pakistan

Research on youth radicalization in Pakistan has debunked the madrassa-militancy, poverty-terrorism and illiteracy-radicalization arguments.⁵ Winthrop and Graff have demonstrated that (growing) religiosity is a poor predictor of radicalization in Pakistan. Religiosity is often conflated with radicalization in Pakistan.⁶ Similarly, conservatism, opposition to liberal

⁵ Moeed Yusuf, “Radicalism Among Youth in Pakistan: Human Development Gone Wrong?”, *Pakistan National Human Development Report (NHDR) 2015, United National Development Pakistan (UNDP)*, November 2014, 12.

⁶ Rebecca Winthrop and Corinne Graff, “Beyond Madrassas: Assessing the Links between Education and Militancy in Pakistan,” Working Paper 2, Centre for Universal Education, *Brookings Institute*, June 2010, 16.

ideas, support of *Shariah*, females wearing *hijabs* and men sporting beards in large numbers tell us very little about youth radicalism.⁷

Aamir Rana has found that majority of Pakistani youth (92 percent) considered religion an important factor in the life. At the same time, 79 percent of them did not consider that the Pakistani Taliban were serving Islam and 85 percent believed suicide terrorism was prohibited in Islam.⁸ The simultaneous embrace of Islamic identity and rejection of Islamist militancy indicates that an individual's religiosity does not tell us much about radical attitudes.

Aisha Siddiqa has discovered that educational backgrounds of youth have no causal link with radicalization in Pakistan. Youth absorb radical ideas because they become part of the popular culture without necessarily understanding their underlying message and also due to the fact that alternative discourses are not available.⁹ Siddiqa makes an important distinction of hybrid religious and socio-political attitudes in which people are moderate in one dimension and conservative in the other.¹⁰ Radicalism, Siddiqa opines, is a by-product of a popular culture in which social, political and religious conservatism have been normalized cutting across educational and socio-economic divides.¹¹

⁷ Abdul Basit, "Countering Violent-Extremism: Evaluating Pakistan's Counter-Radicalization and De-radicalization Initiatives," *IPRI Journal* 15, No. 2 (Summer 2015), 47.

⁸ Muhammad Amir Rana, "Radicalisation in Pakistani Youth," *Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, accessed May 30, 2019, <http://www.searct.gov.my/featured-articles/59-radicalisation-in-pakistani-youth>

⁹ Aisha Siddiqa, "Red Hot Chili Pepper Islam—Is the Youth in Elite Universities in Pakistan Radical?" *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, September 15, 2010: 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 25.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 14.

Moeed Yusuf has examined youth radicalization as process along a radical continuum which has different stages instead of treating it as a set of characteristics and behaviours. These stages are never neatly distinct and an individual may move back and forth between different stages, may never move from pre-radicalization to actual radicalization or may never progress beyond a particular level.¹² Yusuf posits that in Pakistan's context education alone is a poor predictor of someone's radicalization. His findings categorize most of the Pakistani youth in pre-radicalization stage on the continuum and outlines frustration with poor socio-economic conditions, lack of governance, weak writ of the state and politico-ideological environment created by state's pro-militancy policy for regional interests in Kashmir and Afghanistan as main causes of youth radicalism.¹³

Farhan Zahid has detailed the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of educated militants in Pakistan. His analyses have focused on pro-Islamic State militants of Saad Aziz network involved in assassinations of noted social worker Sabeen Inam, the Vice-principal of Jinnah Medical and Dental College Debra Lobo and the attack on the Ismaili Shia community in Karachi.¹⁴ Militants involved in this network were from affluent, urban backgrounds and had degrees from the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Sir Syed University of Engineering and

¹² Moeed Yusuf, "Radicalism Among Youth", 5.

¹³ Yusuf, "Radicalism Among Youth", 14.

¹⁴ Farhan Zahid, "Radicalisation of Campuses in Pakistan," *Counter Terrorists Trends and Analyses* 9. No. 11 (November 2017): 12-15.

Technology (SSUET) and the University of Karachi. These militants were tech-savvy, over-ambitious and self-radicalized.¹⁵

A similar but more expansive analysis by Huma Yusuf has discussed trends driving youth radicalization at campuses, such as university-based student cells of militant organizations. According to Yusuf, urban Islamist institutions like Al-Huda, Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) and Tanzeem-e-Islami (TI) have contributed to youth's spill over into violent-extremism.¹⁶ According to her, given the absence of youth-specific strategies in Pakistan's counter-terrorism and extremism framework, educated youth's radicalization is likely to continue.¹⁷

Finally, Raheem ul Haque holds promotion of closed and homogenized self-identity in Pakistan's national narrative as the main cause of youth's radicalization. Haque sees this permeation of militant ideologies forming a pyramid, whose top is occupied by terrorists, middle by religious-political organizations and the bottom by missionary Islamist outfits. In tandem, they create an enabling social environment for growth of radical tendencies among the youth.¹⁸ The lack of alternative narratives and world views coupled with a distorted historical curriculum that glorifies militant jihad and limited employment opportunities also push youth towards radicalization in Pakistan.¹⁹

¹⁵ Farhan Zahid, "Tahir Saeen Group—higher degree militants," *Conflict and Peace Studies* 7, No. 2 (July-December 2015): 151-161.

¹⁶ Huma Yusuf, "University Radicalization: Pakistan's Next Counter Terrorism Challenge," *CTC Sentinel* 9, No. 2 (February 2016): 4-8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Haque, "Youth Radicalization".

¹⁹ Ibid.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the radical ideological narrative shaping educated youth's worldview in Pakistan as well as characteristics and major trends prevalent among them. The conclusion offers some policy recommendations as well. The paper has utilized published primary and secondary sources like profiles of prominent radicalized youth, book chapters, journal papers and newspaper reportage. Interviews of subject experts and government officials have also been conducted to enhance the analysis. The terms radicalization and extremism have been used interchangeably though there exist subtle distinctions between them.

Defining and Conceptualizing Traits of Educated Radical Youth in Pakistan

Haque defines youth radicalization in Pakistan as, “an exclusive Islamic identity—meaning youth identifying through their religious identity over nationality—combined with a broader movement comprising of militant, religio-political and missionary organizations.”²⁰

For Siddiq, youth radicalism in Pakistan is “the tendency to be exclusive vis-à-vis other communities on the basis of religious beliefs.”²¹ Siddiq upholds that this may not be manifested in behaviour but in extreme forms could lead to militancy, which she describes as “latent or passive radicalism.” It exists as a worldview and attitude in which the individual develops a bias against “the religious other.”²²

²⁰ Haque, “Youth Radicalization”.

²¹ Siddiq, “Red Hot Chili Pepper Islam”, 23.

²² Ibid.

Yusuf defines it as, “youth perception on religiosity, their exclusionary thinking, religious intolerance, a level of sympathy for—at least lack of active opposition to—Islamist violence among pockets, an us vs them conception of the world, and frustration with conditions in the country.”²³

Haque’s classification of various radical agents on the radicalism continuum as loosely-coupled, bridge and encapsulating models are quite instructive in conceptualizing educated youth’s radicalization in Pakistan.²⁴

The **loosely-coupled model** facilitates interaction between the sympathizers, supporters and militant organizations in a shared space. Generally, worship places, religious congregations, community platforms and educational institutions are targeted by militant organizations for potential recruits. The recruiters look for vulnerable youth who come here in search of spirituality, to atone for past sins and serve a higher purpose in life. Missionary organizations and modern Islamist institutions such as Tableeghi Jamaat (TJ), Tableeghi Ijtima (TI), HT and Al-Huda have allowed for such interactions between political and militant activists with lower level sympathizers.²⁵

The **bridge model** comprises of those institutions and organizations which close the distance between aspiring jihadists and militant organizations.²⁶ In Pakistan’s context, religious-political parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and its students wing Islami Jamiat-e-Talba (IJT) as well as Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Fazal-ur-Rehman (JUI-F) and Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Sami

²³ Yusuf, “Radicalism Among Youth”, 14.

²⁴ Haque, “Youth Radicalization”.

²⁵ Haque, “Youth Radicalization”.

²⁶ Ibid.

ul Haq (JUI-S) have acted as conduits and political guides for aspiring radical volunteers to different militant organizations like the Afghan Taliban, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). These organizations are part of the broader Deobandi mosque-madrassa network, comprising of missionary and charity organizations. More radicalized individuals and factions from these organizations have gravitated towards radical-militarism as well.

The **encapsulating model** denotes creation of an entire social network to constitute a large organization. Such organizations comprise of missionary outfits that disseminate the ideological narratives, charity arms which deliver social goods and services to win sympathies of the society, political wings that participate in politics and the militant arms which engage in militancy.²⁷ Groups like Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) fit in this categorization.

For instance, JuD comprises of a preaching arms with the same name. It has a network of academies, madrassas and mosques as well as a humanitarian relief NGO, the Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation (FIF). The group has a political party, the Milli Muslim League (MML), as well.

Similarly, JeM has a chain of mosques and madrassas spread throughout Pakistan, particularly in south Punjab. The organization has a charity arm Al-Akhtar Trust and its own flagship publication Zarb-e-Momin to disseminate its ideological narrative. JeM was closely linked with influential Deobandi madrassa Jamia Binoria in Karachi as well. The founder of Jamia Binoria, Mufti Nizam-ud-Din Shamzai, was JeM chief

²⁷ Ibid.

Masood Azhar's mentor and helped him found the militant outfit after his release from Indian custody.²⁸

Traits of Educated Radical Youth

Given weak causal links of madrassa education, poverty and religiosity with radicalization, the traits outlined by Gambetta and Hertog (2016) might elucidate radicalization of educated Pakistani youth: i.e. disgust, cognitive closure, in-group and out-group distinction and simplism. Arguably, personality traits determine (or are correlated to) political attitudes and perceptions.

a) Disgust

It refers to exclusivism, conservatism, rejection of innovation and a puritanical approach to politics, culture and religion. Majority of the issues related to disgust are linked with notions of religious morality and purity. In this frame of mind, outsiders are deemed to have a corrupting influence.²⁹

Purity and orderliness are the main concerns of the Islamists. Notions like “*takfir*” (excommunicating Muslims from Islam) are invoked to purify the Muslim community.³⁰ For instance, Islamic State's massacre of the Yazdi community in Iraq after declaring the self-styled Caliphate in Iraq in June 2014. Disdain for modernity as Westernism, secularism as an anti-thesis to Islamic norms of politics and governance and rejection of innovation as “*bid'ah*” are other examples of disgust.

²⁸ Farhan Zahid, “Profile of Jaish-e-Muhammad and Leader Masood Azhar,” *Counter Terrorist Trend and Analyses* 11, No. 4 (April 2017): 1-5.

²⁹ Deigo Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 130.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 131.

The discourse of Muslims' decline and poor state of affairs in South Asia was divided between the modernist and the traditionalists. The modernists like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan advocated embracing science and technology and learning English to rise again as a community. He was founder of the Aligarh movement and created a university with the same name to promote scientific learning, critical thinking and a culture of research. He also advocated the need to rethink, revive and restructure the religious ideas, practices and identity.³¹

The opposing view was of the traditionalists like Maulana Shibli Numani, Maududi and others who termed learning of English, science and technology as adoption of Western culture. The traditionalists were disgusted with these notions and advocated reverting back to ways of Muslim forefathers to regain the lost glory. The traditionalist founded *Deoband* madrassa and *Nadwatul Ulama* to restore *Shariah* system.³² In 1947, Pakistan inherited this debate between modernists represented by British trained bureaucracy and traditionalists represented by the traditional *Ulema*. This polarization has continued in Pakistan in one form or the other.

b) Cognitive Closure

Cognitive closure refers to quest for order, structure and certainties. It encompasses "intolerance of ambiguity," a notion introduced in connection with authoritarianism. Moreover, it constitutes a very narrow

³¹ Fatima Sajjad et al., "De-radicalizing Pakistani Society: the receptivity of youth to a liberal religious worldview," *Journal of Peace Education* 14, No. 2 (2017): 4.

³² Fatima Sajjad et al., "De-radicalizing Pakistani Society".

and intolerant view entailing political conservatism, hierarchical and authoritarian vision of social order.³³

The cognitive closure provides traditionalists with a unity of mind and purpose. It reduces a complex world full of chaos, disorder and disruption into neat structures allowing them to rationalize their message with articulation.³⁴ Traditionalists hate a world in flux where room for diverse and multiple identities and co-existence of competing narratives is possible. To evade this complexity, they evoke the tradition of earliest forefathers (*Salf Salihin*) as the purest form of Islam and emphasize on puritanical interpretation of *Quranic* texts and the Prophetic tradition of *Ahadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad).

Militants' rejection of *Sufi* Islam as *bid'ah* and stress on literalism underscore this trend in the Pakistani context. Likewise, opposition to women's inclusion in public sphere and incorporation of minorities in the mainstream by granting them equal rights are seen as conspiracies against Islam and Pakistan. The slogan of "Islam in danger" or "war on Islam" are invoked to block any efforts that can challenge this closed and tunnelled mindset.

c) In-group and Out-group Distinction

This trait relates to an introvert and strong communal bonding whereby any outside intrusion whether in the form of ideas or people is strongly resisted. All kinds of externalities are deemed negative and are perceived to have a corrupting influence.³⁵

³³ Gambetta and Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad*, 132.

³⁴ Ibid, 133.

³⁵ Ibid, 134.

Individuals with a high cognitive closure like groups with impermeable boundaries. In-group prejudices and negative attitudes to out-group can push people to carryout violence against any perceived or real threat.³⁶ This mindset generates a constant sense of fear and insecurity that “Islam is in danger.” This type of introvert culture which closes the doors on flow of fresh ideas and information generates conspiracy theories.³⁷

Cognitive closure is positively linked with aggressive actions against the out-group. The high need for closure predisposes people to see inter-group relations in “us vs them” way that encourages competition.³⁸ For instance, Islamists reject Western culture and defend their in-group keeping it doctrinally or at least culturally pure. *Salafist*'s preference for ‘*al wala wal bara*’ (disavowal and loyalty) which command loyalty towards community of pure Muslims and rigidly dismisses social contact and cooperation with everyone else.³⁹

d) *Simplism*

It pertains to a black-and-white conception of the world seeking simple and unambiguous answers. This outlook exists on binaries of good-and-evil, right-and-wrong, Muslims vs non-Muslims etc. A cursory view of militant organizations’ literature and manuals reveal their penchant for simplism.⁴⁰ Over-simplification in one’s beliefs can lead to ideological extremes. This trait is particularly high among suicide bombers who are

³⁶ Gambetta and Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad*, 134.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 147.

indoctrinated with the belief that they are martyr-heroes who are glorifying Islam with their sacrifices and will get paradise and 72 virgins in return.⁴¹

Islamists propagate the over-simplistic notion that revival of *Shariah* and Caliphate will automatically fix several complex issues ailing the Muslim world. They do not offer operational details of how the *Shariah* system will work and how a consensus will be created within multiple Islamic schools of thought who qualitatively differ with each other in their interpretation of *Shariah*. Likewise, different militant groups fail to explain how non-state violence will create a unified global Caliphate when the global jihadist movement is internally divided between AQ and IS and various militant organizations in different parts of the world have suffered internecine and infighting.

Narratives Driving Radicalization among the Educated Youth in Pakistan

Ideological narratives cut across the literate, semi-literate and illiterate divide among the youth in Pakistan. These narratives appeal to different youth groups for different reasons. As radicalization literature indicates that there is no fixed template that predicts process of radicalization. Likewise, there is no fixed or linear trajectory that outlines possible route to radicalization. In fact, there are multiple pathways and one person's entry into and trajectory towards radicalization may bypass several stages of pre-radicalization while there could be several others who may never progress beyond a particular point or stage on the radicalism continuum. Similarly, an individual may entertain ideological extremism but may not exhibit tendency towards behavioural violence, while others could be

⁴¹ Ibid, 148.

ideologically less extreme but due to their trigger happy nature may indulge in physical violence.⁴²

The ideological indoctrination of an individual or a group of individuals would qualitatively differ across geographical and social contexts. For some, revenge for the lost relatives in drone strikes or counter-terrorism operations may become the reason to join militancy, while for others, narratives could be the medium helping them in overcoming their identity issues, such as an urge for belonging, self-worth, empowerment and atonement from the past sins. So, what is more important is to know how these narratives are conveyed and by whom.

Generally, narratives are framed in a way to be emotionally appealing, easy to understand as well as short and crisp. Long and difficult theological discourses throw people off. In the age of social media, people's attention is very short, so the message has to be conveyed eloquently in a short period of time. It should appeal to aspiring radicals' wishes, aspirations, fears and expectations and more importantly provide them with answers to questions buzzing in their minds. Also, narratives should propose a solution to existing problems.

The most prevalent narratives that different militant and radical groups in Pakistan have used to recruit educated youth are: *Ghazwa-e-Hind*/Anti-Indian, Caliphate, the Black Flags/Banners of *Khorasan* and anti-Americanism.

⁴² Yusuf, "Radicalism Among Youth", 5.

a) *Ghazwa-e-Hind*

The narrative of *Ghazwa-e-Hind* refers to an eschatological end of times discourse describing the final battle that will occur in Al-Hind (the Indian Sub-continent) in the jihadist propaganda. Groups like JeM, AQ and its affiliate Al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent (AQIS) have used this narrative to exploit local conflicts like Kashmir to attract recruits for anti-India and pro-Kashmir militancy.⁴³

A famous Pakistani televangelist Zaid Hamid has also popularized the *Ghazwa-e-Hind* narrative in his video speeches and television programmes. He is quite famous among a segment of Pakistani youth who follow him on social media and consume his YouTube videos. Several Facebook pages having thousands of followers have been created in the name of *Ghazwa-e-Hind*.⁴⁴

The concept of *Ghazwa-e-Hind* is based on three *Ahadith* of the Prophet Muhammad which point to a final apocalyptic war that will take place in India. They speak of the conquest of India as follows:

- i) It was narrated by *Thawbaan* that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “There are two groups of my *Ummah* whom Allah will protect from the Fire: a group who will conquer India, and a group who will be with

⁴³ Husain Haqqani, “Prophecy and the Jihad in the Indian Sub-continent,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Hudson Institute, March 27, 2015.

⁴⁴ Amber Rahim Shamsi, “Will the real Zahid Hamid please stand up?” *Express Tribune*, May 9, 2010.

‘*Eesaa ibn Maryam*.’ Narrated by *an-Nasaa’i* (no. 3175) and Imam Ahmad in *al-Musnad* (37/81), *Mu’sasat ar-Risaalah* edn.⁴⁵

- ii) It was narrated that *Abu Hurayrah* said: The Messenger of Allah promised us that we would conquer India, so if I am martyred I will be among the best of the martyrs, and if I return then I am *Abu Hurayrah* the freed (protected from hellfire).⁴⁶
- iii) “Some people of my *Ummah* will invade India and Allah will enable them to conquer it, until they bring the kings of India in chains, and Allah will forgive their sins. Then they will return to *ash-Shaam* (Syria) and they will find ‘*Eesa ibn Maryam* in Syria.” Narrated by *Na’eem ibn Hammaad* in *al-Fitan* (p. 399).⁴⁷

b) *Caliphate*

The Caliphate narrative has been around in Pakistan militant landscape since the 1990s but it was popularized by Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) after 9/11 when the group started spreading its tentacles in the country and furthered by the Islamic State of *Khorasan* (IS-K) after its emergence in 2015.⁴⁸ The revival of Caliphate has been promoted as a way out of current predicaments that ail the Muslim world, in general, and Pakistan, in particular. It refers to the thirty years rule of four rightly guided companions of the Prophet Muhammad; Abu Bakr (632–634 CE), Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–644 CE), Usman ibn Affan (644–656 CE) and Ali ibn Abi Talib (656–661 CE).

⁴⁵ Hasan refers to a *Hadith* which is reliable but whose narrators have not attained the highest degree of accuracy but they are known for their trustworthiness. Such a *Hadith* is also devoid of both anomaly and defect.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Declan Walsh, “Allure of ISIS for Pakistanis Is on the Rise,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2014.

In the 1990s, anti-Shia militant groups such as *Sipah-e-Sihaba* Pakistan (SSP) and *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ) used the Caliphate narrative not as a system of governance but as an ideological tool to attract young Pakistani Sunnis and justify militant violence against Shias.⁴⁹ So, framing of the Caliphate narrative was very narrow and explicitly anti-Shia.

After 9/11 and with the advent of HT in Pakistan's religio-political landscape, Caliphate was promoted as system of governance whose adoption would revive Muslim world's lost glory. HT always presented itself as a political party and its framing of the Caliphate was pan-Islamist, not sectarian in nature. HT's utopian concept was to bring about a revolution in Pakistan through a bloodless coup and then export this revolution to other parts of the Muslim world. HT explicitly targeted educated young men and women in colleges, universities and higher educational institutions. HT attracted a large number of educated youth in its fold and penetrated Pakistan's security institution and bureaucracy as well.⁵⁰

The arrival of IS took the Caliphate narrative to a whole new level. It was presented as a global concept and the narrative expanded from anti-Shia to anti-*Sufi* militancy as well.⁵¹ Moreover, while *Deobandi* militancy underpinned the Caliphate narrative in the 1990s, the post-2014 narrative was spearheaded by *Takfiri-Salafism*. From 2014 to 2018, IS urged the young men and women to pledge oath of allegiance to the self-styled

⁴⁹ Abbas Rashid, "The Politics and Dynamics of Violent Sectarianism," *The Transnational Institute (TNI)*, December 1, 1996.

⁵⁰ Muhammad Amir Rana, "Hizbut Tahrir in Pakistan: Discourse and Impact," *Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, October 2018.

⁵¹ Umair Jamal (Lecturer of International Relations at the Forman Christian College), interviewed by author, Pakistan, May 20, 2019.

caliph Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.⁵² However, after territorial losses in Syria in 2019, IS declared a new *Wilayah* (province) in Pakistan and appointed a former Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commander Dawood Mehsud as its new emir.⁵³ In this new phase, the Caliphate narrative has urged its supporters and sympathizers to take revenge for the lost Caliphate in Iraq and Syria.⁵⁴

c) *The Black Flags of Khorasan*

As a concept, *Khorasan* is an apocalyptic vision that drives many Sunni radical groups around the world with a belief that at the onset of the End of Times, an army of the *Mujahideen* (Islamist fighters) carrying black flags will rise from Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁵⁵ This narrative has been supported by a saying of the Prophet Muhammad narrated by the classical Hadith scholar *Ibne Majah* (570-632), which talks about the carriers of black banners or flags from the land of *Khorasan* representing true Islamic believers towards the End of Times. He reported that the Prophet said, “If you see the Black Banners coming from *Khorasan* go to them immediately, even if you must crawl over ice, because indeed amongst them is the Caliph, *Al Mehdi* [the Messiah] ...and no one can stop

⁵² Abdul Basit, “IS Penetration in Afghanistan-Pakistan: Assessment, Impact and Implications,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, No. 3 (2017), 19-39.

⁵³ Ayaz Gul, “Islamic State announces Pakistan province,” *Voice of America*, May 15, 2019.

⁵⁴ Jeff Seldin, “IS Claim Video Shows Reclusive Leader, Calls for Revenge,” *Voice of America*, April 29, 2019.

⁵⁵ Asif Ullah Khan, “Why Khorasan is Such a Potent Call to Islamist Arms,” *The Wire*, February 24, 2017.

that army until it reaches Jerusalem.” It is worth mentioning, though, that some Islamic scholars contest the authority of the *Hadith*.⁵⁶

Because of this *Hadith*, jihadists believe that Afghanistan-Pakistan region is the place from where they will inflict a major defeat against their enemies in the Islamic version of the Armageddon. This army of the *Mujahideen* will help revive the global Islamic Caliphate and Muslims will once again become the global leaders. Ultimately, according to this utopian vision, this movement will lead to the End of Time (Day of Judgement) as a result of a battle between ‘good and evil forces’ where the latter will be defeated, and God’s judgment will prevail.⁵⁷

d) *Anti-Americanism*

Pakistan features among the countries with highest levels of anti-Americanism in the world at all levels of state and society. The transnational allure of anti-Americanism is particularly appealing to college and university students in Pakistan. A Pew Survey of August 2014 showed that 59 percent of Pakistanis had negative view of the US.⁵⁸ Pakistani youth across all segments of society believe that US has betrayed Pakistan and the former has abandoned the latter after its objectives were achieved.⁵⁹ The US intervention in Afghanistan and war in Iraq are also highly unpopular among Pakistan’s youth.

⁵⁶ Mohamed Bin Ali, “Jihad’ in Syria: Fallacies of ISIS’ End-Time Prophecies,” *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*, July 30, 2014.

⁵⁷ Colleen Curry, “See the Terrifying ISIS Map Showing Its 5-Year Expansion Plan,” *ABC News*, July 3, 2014.

⁵⁸ “A Less Gloomy Mood in Pakistan,” *Pew Research Centre*, August 27, 2014.

⁵⁹ Madiha Afzal, “Of Pakistani Anti-Americanism,” *Brookings Institute*, November 19, 2013.

Both local and global militant groups have exploited the anti-US sentiments in Pakistan in their recruitment campaigns.⁶⁰ The US is framed as the ultimate evil which is leading the war against Islam. The US drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan, Navy SEALs operation in Abbottabad to kill Osama Bin Laden, NATO helicopters' attack on paramilitary Frontier Corps' (FC) check post in Salala and killing of the two Pakistanis by a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) contractor, Raymond Davis, in Lahore have created a deep seated mistrust of the US in Pakistan.⁶¹

In Pakistan, there are several conspiracy theories about American troops' presence in Afghanistan. For instance, Pakistanis allege that under the garb of war on terror, the US is after Pakistan's nuclear programme.⁶² The continuous concerns raised from different American quarters about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons and their potential theft by the militant groups have only strengthened the anti-US conspiracy theories.⁶³

Emerging Trends from Radicalization of Educated Youth

a) Students Cells of Militant Organizations

Three factors explain increasing levels of radicalization and recruitment at college and university campuses in Pakistan. First, as madrassas faced increased scrutiny from the government under the National Action Plan

⁶⁰ Hassan Abbas, "How Drones Create More Terrorists?" *The Atlantic*, August 23, 2013.

⁶¹ Hussain Nadim, "Neither Friend Nor Foe: Pakistan, the United States, and the War in Afghanistan," Working Paper, *Lowy Institute*, September 2017.

⁶² Michael Kugelman, "Four Pakistani Conspiracy Theories That Are Less Fictitious Than You Think," *War on the Rocks*, March 25, 2014.

⁶³ Sabrian Tavernise, "US Is a Top Villain in Pakistan's Conspiracy Talk?" *New York Times*, May 5, 2010.

(NAP), militant organizations shifted their attentions towards college and university campuses. Second, IS has focused more on cities thus further enabling recruitment and radicalization of educated youth.⁶⁴ In the age of social media, militant organizations look for college and university educated youth who could run their propaganda operations on the Internet, recruit people and raise funds online. Third, inclusive recruitment strategies by IS have lowered the entry barrier into militancy for several educated youth in Pakistan.⁶⁵

According to Farhan Zahid, jihadist cells linked with different militant organizations have been discovered in different reputed institutions and universities such as University of Karachi, Punjab University (PU), International Islamic University (IIU), NED University of Engineering and Technology, Institute of Business Administration (IBA) and Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), among others.

After 9/11, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) faced internal dissections for not taking a clear stance on US intervention in Afghanistan.⁶⁶ JI's student wing, the Islami Jamiat-e-Talba (IJT), in University of Karachi led by Atta ur Rehman formed a pro-AQ militant faction *Jandullah*. This faction was involved in a series of attacks on security forces and government installations in Karachi.⁶⁷ Rehman was a student of statistics at University of Karachi. Likewise, the mastermind of the Mehran Naval base attack in

⁶⁴ Yusuf, "University Radicalization", 1. Cities offer more lucrative targets to militant outfits and increase the security maintenance costs for the security agencies. Moreover, terrorist attack in the cities attract immediate media attention.

⁶⁵ Madeeha Anwar, "Pakistan's Emerging Threat: Highly Educated Youth Gravitate to Radicalization," *Voice of America*, May 6, 2017.

⁶⁶ Ali K. Chishti, "How Jandullah became Al-Qaeda," *The Friday Times*, November 14, 2014.

⁶⁷ Saad Rasool, "IJT and Educational Militancy," *Pakistan Today*, September 21, 2013.

May 2011, Shahid Khan, was also a former member of IJT and a prominent leader of the organization. He was a working journalist and held a masters in Political Science degree from the University of Karachi.⁶⁸

Similarly, two brothers, Dr. Akmal Waheed and Dr. Arshad Waheed, hailing from JI's Pakistan Islamic Medical Association (PIMA) were arrested in 2004 on accusations of treating AQ and *Jandullah* militants.⁶⁹ The Waheed brothers recruited a large number of the IJT activists from different educational institutions of Karachi and moved them to South Waziristan. They were arrested and released by Pakistani authorities in 2006 after which they moved to South Waziristan. In 2006, Arshad was killed in a US drone attack, while Akmal moved to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with his family where he was sentenced to three years in prison for communicating with senior AQ members.⁷⁰

In 2013, another AQ linked cell of International Islamic University (IIU) students was busted in Islamabad. The cell was active since 2007 and carried out a number of terrorist attacks in collusion with Al-Qaeda, including the assassination of former minister for minorities and the Pakistan People Party (PPP) lawmaker Shahbaz Bhatti.⁷¹ It was led by Abdullah Omar, a student of Sharia Law at IIU and son of a former military officer Colonel Abbasi. He was assisted by two brothers Hammad

⁶⁸ Ziaur Rehman, "Taliban Recruiting and Fundraising in Karachi," *CTC Sentinel* 5, No. 7 (July 2012), 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Drone deaths underline IJT's Jihadi Links," *The News*, November 22, 2014.

⁷¹ Asad Haroon, "Al-Qaeda presence in Islamabad and has Sleeping Cells, says a report of government of Pakistan," *Dispatch News Desk*, February 19, 2014.

Adil and Adnan Adil who were also students of IIU's *Shariah* Law department.⁷²

Likewise, another AQ linked nine-member cell was neutralized in Lahore's Punjab University in 2013. Once again, the nexus between IJT and AQ surfaced.⁷³ The post-arrest investigation revealed that AQ members were hiding in Punjab University's hostel with IJT's help.⁷⁴ Six of the nine arrested militants were suicide bombers, two collaborators with expertise in information technology and IED production, as well as the coordinator of the cell. The cell members held their meetings on campus.⁷⁵

In 2015, a self-initiated pro-IS cell of university student was dismantled in Karachi following the attack on a bus of Ismaili Shia community in Safoora Chorangi in which 46 people were killed. The ringleader of the cell, Saad Aziz, was a graduate of Pakistan's famous business school, the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), and hailed from an upper-middle class family. Other members of this cell such as Azhar Ishrat and Allure Rehman, were engineering graduates from SSUET and the University of Science and Technology (NUST). Another cell member, Hafiz Nasir held a master's degree in Islamic studies from University of Karachi.⁷⁶ This cell was also involved in targeted killing of noted social

⁷² Farhan Zahid, "Al-Qaeda's Islamabad Cell," *Centre for Research and Security Studies*, January 28, 2015.

⁷³ "Al-Qaeda suspect arrested from PU hostel," *Pakistan Today*, September 17, 2013.

⁷⁴ Ali Usman and Asad Kharal, "Punjab University: Consensus against IJT grew from al Qaeda man's arrest," *Express Tribune*, December 4, 2013.

⁷⁵ Asad Kharal, "Startling Revelations: Nine Al-Qaeda suspects arrested," *Express Tribune*, September 11, 2013.

⁷⁶ Sadaf Ayub, "Why does a university-educated student turn to terrorism?" *Dawn*, April 8, 2017.

workers Sabeen Mahmood and Debra Lobo, a US citizen, then working as vice principal of Jinnah Medical and Dental College.⁷⁷

Aziz was member of IBA's religious society Iqra where Rehman introduced him to TI and subsequently to an AQ operative Abu Zar who recruited him in 2010.⁷⁸ In 2011, Aziz went to North Waziristan where he was trained by Ustad Ahmed Faruq, the deputy chief of AQIS and a graduate of Punjab University himself.⁷⁹ On his return to Karachi, Aziz started his own cell and planned attacks with operational autonomy and liberty.⁸⁰

b) Nexus of Religious-political Parties with Militancy

Religious-political parties which in the 1980s and 1990s had links with Afghan jihadist groups and sectarian outfits, intentionally or unintentionally, have served as conduits for conversion of radical youth from non-violent to violent extremism. Right after 9/11, their inaction or confused stance on Pakistan's decision to side with the US in the war on terror and a soft corner for TTP and other such groups encouraged youth from within these parties to switch sides from so-called 'good Taliban' to 'bad-Taliban'.

Jl's links with different militant organizations dates back to the Afghan Jihad when it supported Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami. The Kashmir-focused militant group Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) is considered Jl's militant wing, a charge that party denies. As many as twenty-three

⁷⁷ Nazila Syed Ali and Fahim Zaman, "Anatomy of a murder," *Herald*, September 25, 2016.

⁷⁸ Hussain Nadim, "Pakistan's New Breed of Militants," *Foreign Policy*, June 9, 2015.

⁷⁹ Ustad Farooq was eliminated in a US drone strike in South Waziristan in 2015.

⁸⁰ Sidra Roghay, "The many shades of Saad Aziz," *The Friday Times*, June 5-7, 2011.

most wanted AQ members, including the mastermind of 9/11 attacks Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, were arrested from homes of JI leaders in different parts of Pakistan.⁸¹ As mentioned above, JI's student wing IJT played the role of a bridge in facilitating graduation of several educated radicals into militancy.

Likewise, JUI (F) and JUI (S) have remained political guide and conduits for radical youth towards militancy. For instance, the former deputy chief of TTP, late Waliur Rehman was member of JUI (F) before turning towards militancy.⁸² In 2013, he was killed in a drone attack in Miranshah, capital of North Waziristan Agency.⁸³ Similarly, militant commander and head of his own faction Hafiz Gul Bahadur was previously affiliated with JUI (F).⁸⁴

Likewise, late Maulana Sami-ul-Haq's JUI (S) is well known for its links and support for the Afghan Taliban.⁸⁵ Sami was considered the spiritual father and ideological mentor of the Taliban movement.⁸⁶ Several members of Taliban's *Rahbari Shura* (executive council) studied in Sami's Jamia Haqqania in Nowshera district.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Imtiaz Gul, "Transnational Islamist Network," *International Review of Red Cross* 92, No. 880 (December 2010), 3.

⁸² Mansur Khan Mehsud, "The new, new face of the Pakistani Taliban," *Foreign Policy*, April 30, 2010.

⁸³ "Pakistan Taliban: Senior leader 'killed in US drone strike,'" *BBC*, May 29, 2013.

⁸⁴ Sadia Sulaiman, "Hafiz Gul Bahadur: A Profile of the Leader of the North Waziristan Taliban," *Terrorism Monitor* 7, No. 9 (Jamestown Foundation, April 2009).

⁸⁵ "Father of the Taliban calls on China to aid Afghan peace talks," *South China Morning Post*, October 28, 2018.

⁸⁶ Ali Mustafa, "Who was father of the Taliban?" *TRT World*, November 6, 2018.

⁸⁷ "Mulla Omar didn't study at Haqqania, but many other Taliban leaders did," *The News*, November 3, 2018.

c) *Modern Islamist Networks*

Some missionary organizations and Islamist networks operating in Pakistan's urban spaces have played a bridging role in movement of aspiring radicals from non-violent to violent extremism.⁸⁸ These organizations have provided spaces and platforms for interaction between militant recruiters, facilitators and would-be radicals. Given stark similarities in the worldviews and ideological outlooks of these organizations and militant groups, the more overambitious youth from within these organizations have gravitated towards militancy.⁸⁹ The tussle between the old and new generation within these organizations could also be a reason that the more rebellious and critical youth have defected to militant organizations. The new generation considers the old one as status quo oriented, outdated and complacent.

A case in point is of TI, an urban missionary organization, whose members have joined different militant organization. TI has been in the crosshair of fierce competition between AQ and IS for educated recruits in the main Pakistani cities to spread their networks. TI has long called for establishment of an Islamic Caliphate in Pakistan. For instance, members of Saad Aziz cell had links with TI.⁹⁰ The main financier of this cell Adil Masood Butt, who ran the College of Accountancy and Management Sciences (CAMS) in Karachi, was a former member of TI.⁹¹ Similarly, two

⁸⁸ Author interview with Saba Noor, Lecturer at the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defence University (NDU), Pakistan, on May 5, 2019.

⁸⁹ Mehwish Rani (independent researcher working on extremism and terrorism in Pakistan), interviewed by author, May 4, 2019.

⁹⁰ Farhan Zahid, "Pakistan's Tanzeem-e-Islami and Its Troubled Extremist Links," *Terrorism Monitor* 15, No. 21 (Jamestown Foundation, November 2017), 5-7.

⁹¹ "Al-Qaeda financier arrested in Karachi's Defence raid," *Pakistan Today*, September 17, 2015.

other financiers, Sheeba Ahmed and Khalid Yousaf Bari, were also TI members.⁹²

Likewise, members of a neutralized AQ cell in Karachi (JAS) were former members of TI. The leader of JAS, Abdul Kareem Saroosh Siddiqui, is a drop out from University of Karachi's Applied Physics department. This cell was involved in a string of terrorist attacks in Karachi, including the abortive assassination attempt on the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) leader Khawaja Izhar-ul-Hasan and killing of a retired military officer Colonel Tahir Zia Nagi.⁹³

HT has also faced defections of its overambitious members to AQ. In 2016, a splinter of HT, *Saut-ul-Ummah*, was in connection with AQ and its affiliate *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham* to create a similar franchise in Pakistan. However, these efforts did not succeed and this splinter cell was neutralized.⁹⁴ HT primarily focuses on Pakistan's educated youth in colleges, universities and higher education institutions. It romanticizes the idea of the Caliphate as the ideal rule which offers the youth a panacea out of current predicaments. The group operates with great secrecy in Pakistan to avoid arrests and crackdowns.⁹⁵

HT particularly gained notoriety for making inroads in Pakistan's security institutions and bureaucracy. In 2011, a serving officer of a Law Enforcement Agency (LEA), Muhammad Ali, who opposed Pakistan's

⁹² Naimat Khan, "Terrorist moms," *Friday Times*, December 25, 2015.

⁹³ Roohan Ahmed, "What we know about Ansar-ul-Shariah Pakistan," *Sama Digital*, September 9, 2017.

⁹⁴ Jawad R Awan, "Saut-ul-Ummat rings alarm bells in Pakistan," *The Nation*, February 27, 2016.

⁹⁵ Tariq Pervez (former head of Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority / NACTA), interviewed by author, May 15, 2019.

counter-terrorism alliance with the US was arrested with four other officers for having links with HT. In 2003, HT established link with a specialized force unit and in 2009 recruited several officers, including their senior.⁹⁶

In April 2015, Punjab's Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) arrested an assistant professor of the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) for his links with HT.⁹⁷ Similarly, in October 2015 Karachi police arrested Owais Raheel for distributing HT's pamphlets in the mosques of city's elite residential areas like Clifton and Defence.⁹⁸ Likewise, in December 2015, Punjab's CTD arrested three professors and a student from Punjab University on suspected ties with HT.⁹⁹

Conclusion

The radicalization of educated youth in Pakistan is directly correlated to state's pro-militancy policies in the past which fostered a conducive environment for growth of radicalism. A revision of strategic paradigm which has afforded physical and ideological spaces to different militant groups is needed. Mere doctrinal shift in counter-terrorism and extremism policies at the tactical level can deliver temporary respite but for a long-term solution structural reforms are necessary.

The current youth bulge in Pakistan is likely to continue for the next three decades. By 2030, Pakistan's population is expected to rise to 230 million and to 280 million by 2050. Youth is the most important population

⁹⁶ Yusuf, "University Radicalization", 6.

⁹⁷ Sher Ali Khan, "Global connections: The crackdown on Hizbut Tahrir intensifies," *Herald*, February 12, 2016.

⁹⁸ Yusuf, "University Radicalization".

⁹⁹ "Two more PU teachers, student held for links with Hizbut Tahrir," *Pakistan Today*, December 15, 2015.

segment in Pakistan and it will either become an asset or a liability depending on how we develop this human capital. Following recommendations offer some policy areas where focus is needed to curb youth radicalization.

i) Violent vs Non-violent Extremism

The policy discourse on radicalization in Pakistan needs to be expanded from violent-extremism to non-violent extremism. In the light of foregoing analysis, it is quite clear that due to identical ideological outlooks, non-violent extremist organizations such as TI and HT have faced defections of their members to militant groups. Violent and non-violent extremism are two sides of the same coin: one is action-based extremism, the other is value-based extremism. Goals of violent and non-violent extremists are more or less the same. Likewise, both have similar political and ideological narratives. As such, non-violent extremists do not rule out violence, but de-emphasize it as a matter of strategy, not principle. Targeted policy-interventions are needed to plug existing gaps in the operations of these organizations along with initiating a dialogue for internal reforms.

ii) Counter Narratives

Threat of cyber radicalization in Pakistan is real and requires monitoring of cyber communities where extremist narratives are discussed, disseminated and promoted. Militant recruiters easily reach out to students through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and Instagram. There are around 40 million Internet and as many as 32 million Facebook users in Pakistan. Social media has lowered the entry barriers of youth's participation in militancy. Pakistan's counter-extremist responses have to

factor in strategies dealing with dissemination of radical narratives in social media and cyber space.

Pakistan's education system does not equip students with critical thinking to question the sources of information and look for alternative discourses to find their answers. There is a need to build a national counter-narrative and cultivate an environment of open conversations on issues considered taboos in Pakistan.¹⁰⁰ Alternative narratives promoting pluralism, inclusivity and diversity presenting a moderate outlook of Islam should be promoted.¹⁰¹

iii) Evidence-based Research on Radicalization

There is very little data available in Pakistan to carryout evidence-based research on radicalization and de-radicalization and to empirically map the success or failure of de-radicalization initiatives. State should allow rigorous profiling of terrorists that could lead to generalizable conclusions about the process of radicalization in Pakistan.

iv) Liberal-religious Education

Given Pakistan's conservative religious framework any alternative discourse offered in secular framing will be rejected by a large majority.¹⁰² However, if the same message pertaining to pluralism, inclusivity, tolerance, respect for diversity and religious freedom are packaged in a religious framework with quotes from Quran and the Prophetic traditions, such as there is no compulsion in the religion, people are more likely to

¹⁰⁰ Madiha Afzal, "Education and Attitudes in Pakistan: Understanding Perception of Terrorism," Special Report, *United States Institute of Peace*, April 2015.

¹⁰¹ Siddiqa, "Red Hot Chili Pepper Islam", 8.

¹⁰² Fatima Sajjad et al., p. 17.

accept, absorb and adopt such messaging. Secularly oriented counter narratives are bound to fail as seen in the past with former President General (retired) Pervez Musharraf's initiative of enlightened moderation. In 2018, the launch of counter-extremist narrative *Paigham-e-Pakistan* endorsed by more than 1,800 religious scholars is an encouraging step.¹⁰³ There is a need to work on its operational strategy which should ensure its judicious implementation throughout the country.

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¹⁰³ "Paigham-i-Pakistan," *Dawn*, January 18, 2018.