

## Why Understanding Terrorism as a Process is Indispensable

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### Abstract

*This contribution explores a less pondered puzzle in the study of political violence, specifically the imperviousness of terrorism to resolution. It particularly asks why terrorism reemerges in contexts where it is considered eradicated, or why armed groups keep fighting against the odds of winning. Or for that matter, why do many terrorist campaigns transform into broader insurgencies rather than non-violent political struggles? Put simply, why does terrorism persist despite sustained efforts against it? Among a range of other important causes, the central thesis of this article is that the flawed anatomy of counterterrorism endeavours saliently accounts for this anomaly. It argues that the countervailing efforts can become substantially more holistic, hence effective if the terroristic phenomenon is understood by the concerned as a historically, spatially, culturally and contextually grounded process rather than an isolated coming-from-nowhere pariah. The article draws on multidisciplinary literature to identify a set of empirical processes, critically explains their dynamics and concludes with reflections on the implications of this research.*

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Process, Counterterrorism, Persistence of Terrorism, Indigenous Context, Political Violence.

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## **1. Introduction**

Why does terrorism reemerge in contexts where it is presumed to have been eradicated? Why do armed groups keep fighting when it seems like the balance of power has turned against them?<sup>1</sup> Or why do terrorist campaigns transform into broader insurgencies rather than assuming non-violent modes of political struggle? These and other similar puzzles are less pondered in the study of political violence, specifically terrorism. Arguably, one potential answer to these questions lies in the assumption that the way we respond to terrorism determines the range of possibilities of our failure or success.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, the central thesis of this article is that the flawed anatomy of counterterrorism endeavours saliently accounts for this anomaly. The nuance implicit in the postulation is that the anatomy of counterterrorism endeavours ought to be more complex than ordinarily understood as a mere means of eliminating or reducing violence. The latter aim is understandably important because governments are primarily keen to control violence as the key output of their interventions.<sup>3</sup> This predisposition which is equally popular across developing nations, struggling democracies specifically, bestows itself the unchallenged claim of a self-contained strategy to address the problem of political violence.<sup>4</sup> Ironical as it may seem, it is precisely this mindset that largely prevents

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Staniland, "Armed groups, ceasefires and surprises, blog", *Paul Staniland* (blog). Dec 5, 2024, <https://paulstaniland.com/blog-2/>.

<sup>2</sup> Richard English, *Does counter-terrorism work?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Feyyaz and Brian J. Phillips, "How Do Militant Organizations Respond to Counterterrorism? Introducing the LIVE Typology, with Examples from Proscription in Pakistan," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, (August 2024): 1–17, doi:10.1080/09546553.2024.2385015.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Jackson, "The Ghosts of State Terror: Knowledge, Politics and Terrorism Studies," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 3 (2008): 377–92, doi:10.1080/17539150802515046, 2015, "The Epistemological Crisis of Counterterrorism," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 8, no.1 (2015): 33–54. doi:10.1080/17539153.2015.1009762; Rabea M. Khan and Sarah Gharib Seif, "Editors' Introduction: Decoloniality, Criticality, and Abolition - Can Critical Terrorism Studies Remain 'Critical'?", *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 17, no. 4 (2024): 819–29, doi:10.1080/17539153.2024.2413237.

the governments from knowing the pernicious changes their so-called violence-reducing efforts generate in the political and economic context.<sup>5</sup>

One of the foremost reasons for accruing these outcomes is the problem-solving praxis derived from somewhat reductive definitions and assessments of terrorism.<sup>6</sup> These measures entice due to their potential to suppress violence, nevertheless, leaving the underlying causes of the conflict unresolved and hence, the chances of terrorism recurrence.

Such approaches have, therefore, been challenged by scholars and experts in the field. This article goes beyond the existing arguments to posit that any meaningful resolution of terrorism is critically implausible unless the policymakers, academics and practitioners embrace terroristic phenomenon as inherently processual and realign countervailing practices accordingly.

The fate of present campaigns in non-Western countries with particular reference to Pakistan, guided by misleading presumptions, indicates that a lack of systematic scholarly input has left policymakers and practitioners to design counterterrorism strategies without the benefit of theory and a systematically explored empirical knowledge.<sup>7</sup> For certain, terrorism will not end soon. Nonetheless, a transformative process, informed by theory, and historical and situational patterns, can address this gap. The remaining article elaborates on the argument by exemplifying a sample of macro-meso processes. It begins with illustrating terrorism governing mindset globally and a brief overview of the current state of militancy in Pakistan.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard English, *Does counter-terrorism work?* 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Jackson, "The Ghosts of State Terror."

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Victoroff, "The Mind of the Terrorist: A review and critique of psychological approaches." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no.1 (2005): 3-42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002704272040>.

## **2. Terrorism Governing Mindset and Pakistan's Militancy Changed Landscape**

The predominant paradigm (worldview) governing counterterrorism choices is based on the securitised view of terrorism, considering the phenomenon an exceptional security challenge that demands extraordinary responses.<sup>8</sup> This approach manifests in the technologically driven degrade and destroy campaigns against the adversary, typically characterised by the war on terror (WOT)-led Western models.<sup>9</sup> The military hubris has suppressed international violence directed mainly against the West. However, it has not only failed but proved starkly counterproductive for the Afro-Asian regions, where this framework has been frequently practised by foreign and national governments against epicentres of terrorism.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the principal deficiency of WOT underpinning is its actor, organisation and event-centric orientation, which is in sharp contrast to the militants' strategic approach, which has become increasingly more complex and culturally informed.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars such as Carolin Goerzig have empirically found that learning among terrorist organisations is more profound when they face pressure, as in the

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<sup>8</sup> Lee. Jarvis, "Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, and Critique: Opportunities, Examples, and Implications", *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 12, no. 2(2019): 339–58, doi:10.1080/17539153.2019.1575607.

<sup>9</sup> Asfandiyar Mir, "What Explains Counterterrorism Effectiveness? Evidence from the U.S. Drone War in Pakistan", *International Security* 43, no.2 (2018): 45–83, doi: [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00331](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00331)

<sup>10</sup> Stig Jarle Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift: Fault-lines of the African Jihad*, (London: Hurst Publishers, 2019), 1-2, 70, 78-80; Carter Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan: A History*, (Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Shannon C. Houck, Meredith A. Repke, and Lucian Gideon Conway, "Understanding What Makes Terrorist Groups' Propaganda Effective: An Integrative Complexity Analysis of ISIL and Al Qaeda," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 12, no. 2 (2017): 105–18, doi:10.1080/18335330.2017.1351032



case of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which ‘learned tactically from Al Qaeda and strategically from counterterrorism.’<sup>12</sup> Brian Phillips has similarly emphasised that the ending of a terrorist organisation is not necessarily “inevitable just because repression is overwhelming.”<sup>13</sup> Military campaigns in Pakistan have just done the same. Almost following in the footsteps of global trends of failure to understand the dynamics of abating and surviving violence,<sup>14</sup> the operations have been mistaking temporary decline and the cross-border displacement of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) and its surrogates as the “long-lasting abatement.”<sup>15</sup> In reality, this entire gamut of instances, especially Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014, has invariably induced a learning curve among militant entities to resurrect. In the case of TTP and its affiliates, this could not have come at a better time when some terrorism scholars appreciated their decline.<sup>16</sup> Their transformation was remarkably instructive.<sup>17</sup>

Realising past mistakes of political terrorism that sought to destroy the state and its political system to bring about a revolution, this militant movement has radically revised its politico-military strategy to remodel itself into a pro-people insurgency.<sup>18</sup> The Taliban have come full circle in significant ways, in reverse order, as a corrective to enhance political relevance and alienate the population

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<sup>12</sup> Carolin Goerzig, “Terrorist Learning in Context – the Case of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 12, no. 4 (2019): 629–48, doi:10.1080/17539153.2019.1596623; Stig Jarle Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Phillips, “The Life Cycle of Terrorist Organizations,” *International Advances in Economic Research* 17, no.4 (2011):369-385; Stig Jarle Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*, 79-80.

<sup>14</sup> Stig Jarle Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Becker, “Why Violence Abates: Imposed and Elective Declines in Terrorist Attacks,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no.2 (2015): 215–35, doi:10.1080/09546553.2015.1011799.

<sup>16</sup> Khuram Iqbal and Sara De Silva, “Terrorist lifecycles: a case study of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 8, no. 1 (2013), 72-86; Abbas, *The Return of the Taliban*, 184-85.

<sup>17</sup> Antoni Giustozzi, *The Taliban at war*, (London: Hurst, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> For more details on political terrorism, read Paul Wilkinson, *Political terrorism*, (London: Macmillan, 1974), 36-37.

from the state to cultivate cultural acceptance and effect mobilisation.<sup>19</sup> They have cast their campaign into relativism, among other domains, by more sharply engaging the social, ethnographic and intersubjective spaces. Especially, the Pakistan Taliban now weave their public messaging, narratives, commentaries, and discourses into ethnonational grievances and themes of everyday local politics and ostensibly avoid targeting civilians.<sup>20</sup>

The same holds true for the Baloch militants. Distinctively departing from the previously more violent and politically divided uprisings, the current movement has integrated a whole-of-society (ethnicity) political approach, particularly by eliciting the active involvement of the Baloch diaspora in Europe and North America.<sup>21</sup> The social acceptance of the clandestine movement's political aspirations has grown enormously. The curious lacuna is the government's unmoved strategic thinking, which becomes more apparent when viewed in light of the following section.

### **3. Significance of Understanding Terrorism as a Process**

Terrorism as a process develops under a specific environment and bears a peculiar anatomy. Several reasons can be advanced to underline the significance of approaching the terroristic phenomenon as a process.

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<sup>19</sup> Abdul Sayed and Tore Hamming, "The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan After the Taliban's Afghanistan Takeover," *CTC Sentinel* 14, no. 4 (2023): 4-12.

<sup>20</sup> Amira Jadoon and Sara Mahmood, "Fixing the Cracks in the Pakistani Taliban's Foundation: TTP's Leadership Returns to the Mehsud Tribe," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 11 (2018); Shahid Ali and Raj Verma, "The Taliban-TTP Nexus And Pakistan's Rising Security Challenges," *Middle East Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12787>; Muhammad Feyyaz, "Governing terrorism," *Express Tribune*, December 4, 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Seema Khan, "Claiming Agency from a Distance: Baloch Diasporic Resistance to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Ethnopolitics* (2024): 1-21, doi:10.1080/17449057.2024.2429273.

It first requires underscoring that “terrorism is not a fight between peer competitors”, strategic thinking as pursued in military planning is unsuited to address a terrorism problem.<sup>22</sup> It is organic to larger social structures, operated and influenced by multiple actors and undergirded by complex historical, psychosocial, cultural and sociopolitical processes.<sup>23</sup> Focusing on how to contain non-state violence without a thorough engagement with these aspects that actually created the conditions of possibility and persistence for such violence is unlikely to yield the intended outcomes.<sup>24</sup>

On the contrary, the statist imagery more often perceives non-state violence straightforwardly as a security challenge and a variance to its authority that it aspires to reclaim.<sup>25</sup> The vast amount of social and political activity that this discourse generates focuses, by design and default, on the “response to acts of political violence and not the violence itself.”<sup>26</sup> The official discourse's particular interest is to construct a "monstrous enemy" to authorise a new threat perception phenomenally endangering national security and solicit emergency powers to deal with it.<sup>27</sup> Part of the blame for this predilection rests with the long-term scholarly tendency that neglects the purview by approaching “political violence as an

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<sup>22</sup> Audrey Cronin, “How and why do terrorist campaigns end,” in *Illusions of terrorism and counter-terrorism*, ed. Richard English (Oxford: The British Academy, 2015), 112-14.

<sup>23</sup> Eamon Murphy, *The Making of Terrorism in Pakistan: Historical and Social Roots of Extremism*, (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Harmonie Toros and Ioannis Tellidis, “Editor’s Introduction: Terrorism and Peace and Conflict Studies: Investigating the Crossroad,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 6, no.1 (2013): 1–12, doi:10.1080/17539153.2013.765697.

<sup>25</sup> Jason Frank, *Rethinking the roots of terrorism*, (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

<sup>26</sup> Marie Breen Smyth et al., “Critical Terrorism Studies—an Introduction,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no.1 (2008): 1–4, doi:10.1080/17539150701868538.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2005).

outcome, as a discrete event in its own right, coming out of nowhere and relatively disconnected from history.”<sup>28</sup>

The attitude impedes the inside view of a social phenomenon at the expense of “wider social, historical, and often mundane milieu in which it is situated”, thus elides the alternative representations of reality and dimensions of life from the analytical view.<sup>29</sup> The experts encourage the stakeholders to approach terroristic violence as a form of conflict rather than an act, a method or strategy because most terrorism is born in conflict zones rife with systemic pathologies.<sup>30</sup> The conflict approach habitually begins with a multi-level, multi-dimensional and longitudinal perspective to understand its root causes, stages entailing the historical and cultural structure of violence, the actors involved, and the role of normative institutions, conditions, and relationships.<sup>31</sup>

Understanding terrorism as a process is also essential because militants want the strategic momentum generated by “strategic terrorism” to trigger processes e.g., shift in the balance of power, provocation, subjective disorientation, alienation and mobilisation, which they hope to exploit to gain political effects.<sup>32</sup> One example is the flurry of reactions and hysteria caused by feelings of sudden

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<sup>28</sup> Lorenzo Bosi, “A Processual Approach to Political Violence: How History Matters,” in *The Cambridge History of Terrorism*, ed. Richard English (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 106.

<sup>29</sup> Marie et al., “Critical terrorism studies”; Pamir Sahill, “The Terror Speaks: Inside Pakistan’s Terrorism Discourse and National Action Plan,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 41, no. 4 (2017): 319–37. doi:10.1080/1057610X.2017.1284448.

<sup>30</sup> Wilkinson, *Political terrorism*, 129-30; Richmond, Oliver P, “Realizing Hegemony? Symbolic Terrorism and the Roots of Conflict,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26, no. 4 (2003): 289–309, doi:10.1080/10576100390209322; Franks, *Rethinking the roots*, 84-85, 193-96; IEP- Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global terrorism index: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, 2024, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/>.

<sup>31</sup> Wilkinson, *Political terrorism*, 129-30; Franks, *Rethinking the roots*, 84-85, 193-96.

<sup>32</sup> Peter R. Neumann and M. L. R. Smith, “Strategic Terrorism: The Framework and Its Fallacies,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no.4 (2005): 571–95. doi:10.1080/0140239050030092; Audrey Cronin, *How terrorism ends: understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 5, 117-22.

vulnerability and insecurity among the public in the wake of every major terrorist act and over and/or inaction by the state actors. In particular, the exploitation of social media in each such instance can potentially elicit a healthy chunk of recruits for terrorists/militants.<sup>33</sup> Further, the prolonged existence of terrorism, civil war and insurgency spawn their own ecosystems in a society like cancer. It embeds violence into the value systems and discourses of affected societies through socially mediated transmission processes which in time get normalised and accepted as part of living culture e.g., vigilante justice, tactical terror, paramilitarism, pogroms, deepened penchant for extra-judicial measures etc.<sup>34</sup> In essence, short-termism cannot cure these solipsistic proclivities. Alternatively understood, terrorism as a process does not correlate with its efficacy i.e., its psychological and social fallout will not disappear with its failure or success.<sup>35</sup>

Lastly, policymakers, analysts, scholars, researchers and practitioners need to understand that terrorism as a process is unlikely to cease in a short time and at its terminal stages can and will transition into other modes of violent or non-violent processes.<sup>36</sup> This relates to terrorism's "border" and "membership" problems' characterised by its potential to morph into tribal warfare, guerrilla warfare, and organised crime, for example.<sup>37</sup> Resolution of this predicament is impossible

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<sup>33</sup> This writer has seen motivational messages by the Pakistani Taliban enticing the PTM youth during a protest against an alleged firing incident on a peace march in July 2024 in Bannu City.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, "Vectors of Violence: Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War, 1917–1923," *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 3 (2011): 489–512, <https://doi.org/10.1086/660364>; Elisa Dari, "Youth and Violence in Freetown: The Transmission of a Culture of Violence in Post-War Sierra Leone," *Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security* 2, no. 2 (2012), 158–177.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad Feyyaz, *The persistence of terrorism: Exploring global dynamics and the case of Pakistan through a grounded theory lens*, unpublished PhD thesis. (Belfast, UK: Queen's University Belfast, 2022).

<sup>36</sup> Eugene Walter, "Violence and the Process of Terror," *American Sociological Review* 29, no. 2 (1964): 248–257; Cronin, *How terrorism ends*, 8–9.

<sup>37</sup> Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, and Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler, "The Challenges of Conceptualizing Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 4 (2004): 777–94, doi:10.1080/095465590899768.

without sensitivity to these dynamics and gaining empirical visualisation of a terrorism process.

#### **4. Identification, Classification and Anatomy of the Process of Terrorism**

Features of a few processes gleaned from historical examples and theoretical explanations sufficiently illustrate it without claiming that this sample represents them quintessentially.

##### ***Terrorism Generational Process***

This process genre can be empirically viewed in David Rapoport's powerful theory of global waves of modern terrorism, Teresa Whitfield's analytical narration of Basque separatism led by ETA in Spain and Richard English's thesis on Irish militant republicanism.<sup>38</sup> Each spans multigenerational periods. Carefully deconstructed, the process and its bifurcations in these examples develop as a series of temporal sequences operating at different levels and along different directions in a cultural, social and political *climate*. It is predominated and sustained, borrowing from Rapoport, by a specific *energy* that Martha Crenshaw has called terrorism's "own momentum."<sup>39</sup> Energy is not a monolith; its anatomy is diverse and knotty with varying degrees of weight exerted by its constitutive elements — nationalism or self-determination, ideology —revolutionary, populism, nihilism, apocalypse, sacred discourse—strategy, doctrinal literature, technological and communication advancement. The causal attribute may also encompass trans-

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<sup>38</sup> David Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism", in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, Audrey Cronin and J Ludes, eds (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 46–73; Teresa Whitfield, *Endgame for ETA: Elusive: Peace in the Basque Country*, (London: Hurst & Company, 2014); Richard English, *Illusions of terrorism and counter-terrorism*, ed. (Oxford: The British Academy, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (July 1981): 379-399.

historical narratives to preserve heroes' legacies and the cause's transmission across generations, foreign sanctuaries, "political raison d'être" avant-garde, new value systems, despotism and government repression genres.<sup>40</sup> Attitude toward history can also be added to this list which confers a strong self-perception of being the inheritor and custodian of a tradition of armed struggle against a historical oppressor.<sup>41</sup> In short, *Talking to Terrorists* by Jonathan Powell, who played a central role in the conclusion of the Northern Ireland peace process, fascinatingly informs about the unusual nature, expanse and longevity of the terrorism process.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Intercausal Spectrum***

This more imperceptible process is characterised by an interlocking grid of root causes, sustaining or immediate causes, and ending causes. Looking at the process from this perspective highlights that many dynamics remain hidden until terrorist campaigns have developed, which the strategists and planners generally ignore.<sup>43</sup> Theoretically, it can be readily understood as structuralism that accounts for the surface features of an empirical phenomenon.<sup>44</sup> The value of causal pathways also lies in enabling us to view how push, pull and individual factors interact to entice people to embrace radicalism, and extremism, and to enter and disengage from terrorism.<sup>45</sup> John Horgan posits that this portrayal can help in

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<sup>40</sup> Harold Lasswell, "Terrorism and the Political Process," *Terrorism* 1, no.3-4 (1978): 255-63, doi:10.1080/10576107808435412; Rapoport, "The Four Waves", 47-50; Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*. Revised edition (London: Pan Macmillan, 2012), xxiii-iv, 135-142; English, *Illusions of Terrorism*, 127, 130-31.

<sup>41</sup> English, *Illusions of terrorism*, 127, 130-31.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Powell, *Talking to Terrorist: How to end Armed Conflicts*, (London: Vintage, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Tore Bjorgo, *Root Causes of Terrorism*, ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 260-61.

<sup>44</sup> Vivian Burr, *Social Construction*, Third edition. (Abingdon; Routledge, 2015), 12-14.

<sup>45</sup> Matteo Vergani, Muhammad Iqbal, Ekin Ilbahar, and Greg Barton, "The Three Ps of Radicalization: Push, Pull and Personal. A Systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence about Radicalization into Violent Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 10 (2018): 854, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1505686>

practically drawing distinctions between phases of the terrorism process and developing clear policy focuses.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Terrorist Organisations' Life Cycle***

The life cycle of clandestine organisations is an important site for studying the processual nature of terrorism. It spans four distinct phases: emergence, rise, downfall and demise.<sup>47</sup> These phases should not presuppose that their empirical occurrence will unfold as 'clear cut' as their written presentation may sound; these actually overlap. Experts have particularly focused on the emergence and demise of militant organisations to highlight the development of terrorism. Ronald Crelinsten urges that it is not enough to analyse the militant group's motivation, targets, tactics and modus operandi, it is equally necessary to explore the social or political climate that existed before the groups embarked upon terrorism to determine how (or why) terrorism emerges and develops within a society.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the study of a process should start from what the group members were doing before the formation of the group, and look at the operations of those people, groups, communities or institutions – whether subnational, national, international or transnational in their interactive milieus and wider contexts.

Phillips has made similar remarks regarding the erratic ending of a terrorist organisation, emphasising that even if "decline and demise [of armed group] could be certainly assured there is also the matter of how long this might take...since the limit of surviving a group is indeterminate."<sup>49</sup> The disengagement case of the

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<sup>46</sup> John Horgan, "The Social and Psychological Characteristics of Terrorism and Terrorists," in *Root Causes of Terrorism*, Tore Bjorgo, ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 50-51,

<sup>47</sup> Iqbal and De Silva, "Terrorist lifecycles."

<sup>48</sup> Ronald Crelinsten, "Analysing Terrorism and Counter-terrorism: A Communication Model," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 2 (2002): 77-122, [doi.org/10.1080/714005618](https://doi.org/10.1080/714005618)

<sup>49</sup> Phillips, "The Life Cycle of Terrorist."



Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA) in Northern Ireland which was conducted in instalments over nearly three decades after the announcement of the ceasefire in the early 1970s, is a case in point.<sup>50</sup> It is notable that while terrorist organisations form a salient part of the terrorism process, their biological lives starkly contrast with the temporal longevity of a contextual terrorist process which can potentially subsume the life cycles of many individual groups.<sup>51</sup> The insinuation is the hazard of following a group-based response to control violence.

The life cycle process offers an intriguing example of one particular operational domain - the militants' adeptness in strategic communication. They furnish and publicise justificatory and operational narratives, updates, press releases, critiques, and podcasts for nearly every major phase of their lives. The foremost is the master narratives to justify the existence and resort to violence, which itself constitutes an elaborate sub-process. These messages change to correspond with the life cycle evolution trajectory. The unceasing ideological, political and rhetorical operations of the Cultural Commission of the Afghan Taliban and the development and dissemination of an extensive body of narratives by TTP and its regional chapters, such as Swati Taliban, throughout their campaigns exemplify these processes.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Kacper Edward Rekawek, "How 'Terrorism' Does Not End: The Case of the Official Irish Republican Army," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no.3 (2008): 359–76, doi:10.1080/17539150802515038.

<sup>51</sup> Rapoport, "The Four Waves", 47-50.

<sup>52</sup> For more details, read Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "Sacred Pillars of Violence: Findings from a Study of the Pakistani Taliban," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 13, no. 4 (2012): 439–54, doi:10.1080/21567689.2012.725662; Michael Semple, *Rhetoric, Ideology, and Organization Structure of the Taliban Movement*, (Washington, DC: USIP, 2014); Muhammad Feyyaz, "Why Pakistan Does Not Have a Counterterrorism Narrative", *Journal of Strategic Security* 8, no. 1 (2015): 63-78, "Communication (Un)Savviness and the Failure of Terrorism: A Case of Pakistani Terrorist Organizations", *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 13, no.1 (2019): 24–46, doi:10.1080/17467586.2019.1630745

### ***Social Movements Pattern***

The terrorism process can also be partly located in two established patterns of social movements, the cycles of protest expounded by Donatella della Porta and the relational processes approach by Charles Tilly and Lorenzo Bosi.

- **Cycles of Protest**

della Porta offers a mechanisms-consequences-individual/organisational-agents nexus model that produces a “chain of interactions” — onset, persistence and exit/abandonment of clandestine political violence in a context (Figure 1).<sup>53</sup> The ‘causal mechanisms’ conception is central to her search for locating common processes in the evolution of radicalised global social movements. These mechanisms are transformative as ‘triggering or generative events that as a ‘concatenation’ or ‘relatively abstract patterns of action’ travel from one episode of social action e.g., within each stage to the next to produce a causal system of consequences. Curiously, as evident in the example of OIRA and earlier pointed out by Phillips, the exit can be a fairly stretched and difficult process due to the precipitation of splintering and new recruitment.<sup>54</sup> Overall, her framework relates to the broader protest cycle of a social movement wherein political violence develops above-surface and goes underground as an outcome of radicalising interaction between a social movement and its opponents, the state authorities.<sup>55</sup>

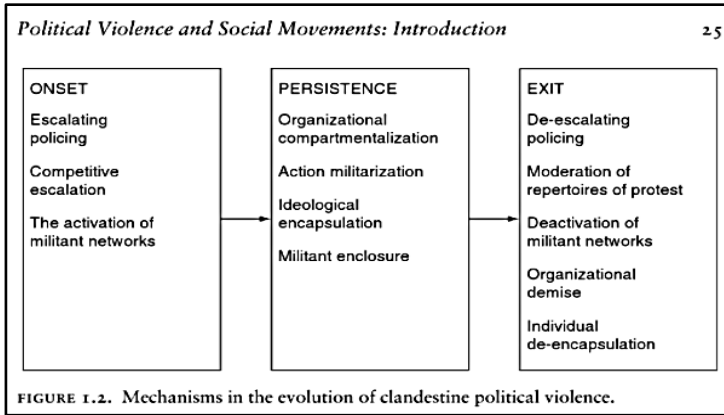
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<sup>53</sup> Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 15-18.

<sup>54</sup> della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, 23-25.

<sup>55</sup> Donatella della Porta, “Left-wing terrorism in Italy,” in *Terrorism in Context*, Martha Crenshaw, ed. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 106-08, 213, 15-18.

**Figure 1: Causal mechanisms of clandestine social movements**



- **Relational / Intra-Process Approach**

The relational or intra-process approach sheds light on the inside layout of interactions and decision-making dynamics after a social movement has become functional. Importantly, the approach counters ahistoricity and brings back the context in relief.<sup>56</sup> Tilly pinpoints it in the ‘interpersonal processes that promote, inhibit, or channel collective violence and connect it with non-violent politics.’<sup>57</sup> This occurs because relational mechanisms change connections among and between groups by altering business relationships. Bosi's illustration helps to understand the fluid nature of these interactions. According to him, the ‘complex webs of sociopolitical relations...are formed and transformed, in a constant state of flux’ which emanate from or are ‘contingent on a complex set of interactions between ...differently situated actors.’<sup>58</sup> More significantly, he further states, ‘the choice of the form of action emerges gradually ...based on the interaction among

<sup>56</sup> Bosi, “A Processual Approach,” 107.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20-21.

<sup>58</sup> Bosi, “A Processual Approach,” 107.

actors when they are faced with strategic dilemmas, rather than on a mere behavioural response to the [complicated] causal factors.’<sup>59</sup>

Bosi attributes a greater role to agency, the individual role, to establish and transform exchanges. He does not dismiss structural conditions in contrast to della Porta who accents agency and structure. That is why Tilly asserts that since terrorism results from the dynamic interactions and relations among political actors – in other words, ‘relationally’, therefore, ‘no coherent set of cause-effect propositions can explain terrorism as a whole.’<sup>60</sup> This manifests in the simultaneous and reciprocal complex causation, feedback, and incremental effects,<sup>61</sup> which makes it difficult to predict interaction patterns.

## **5. Conclusion**

The article has sought to argue that a linear and parsimonious counterterrorism approach is antithetical to the complexity-ridden and deeply convoluted terrorism phenomenon. This is particularly true in countries characterised by heterogeneity, dissension and competing sociopolitical, religious and cultural orders. It is vitally important that the response to terrorism should be as complex as the phenomenon.

This study has illuminated a sample of processes, each with distinct constituents. It demonstrates that process-mindedness imbued with conflict sensitivity can potentially foreground otherwise suppressed causes, actors, voices and institutions driving terrorism. This allows us an expanded scope of analysis,

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<sup>59</sup> Bosi, “A Processual Approach,” 109.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Tilly, “Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists,” *Sociological Theory* 22, no.1 (2004): 5–13, “Terrorism as Strategy and Relational Process,” *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46, no. 1–2 (2005): 11–32.

<sup>61</sup> Tilly, “Terrorism as Strategy.”

thereby enhancing the spectrum of intervention choices. Second, the studied frameworks provide conceptual guidance to conceive a strategic road map to address different dimensions and levels of the militancy problem, critically calling for a wholesome politico-strategic, multiagency and multidisciplinary national and regional architecture. The research also provides a theoretical and empirical basis to build a parsimonious and healthy typology of processes to respond to a range of situations; the present study has sought only a limited number of instances. Besides, while this contribution has hinted at a complex of interactions among the "situated actors" within a relational paradigm, future research should look into situating and elaborating the decision-making dynamics of militant organisations in the South/West Asian context with focus on agency by drawing on existing research on organisational theory and psychological approaches.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, this study has not tested the described processes contextually. An empirical analysis juxtaposing a process with a real-time situation can reveal the policy and social science efficacy of the processual approach. Finally, the extant literature does not offer insight into the terrorism processes from a gender perspective. There is some research on this important topic in insurgency literature, but more work needs to be done to address this limitation of terrorism studies.

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<sup>62</sup> For a good account of these approaches, read Victoroff, "The Mind of the Terrorist."