

# Comparative Appraisal of CVE Initiatives in Pakistan and Singapore

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## Abstract

*Violent extremism is the most serious threat amongst the numerous drivers of terrorism that is damaging the tolerant cultural and religious ethos of the Pakistani state and society. It is also understandably having a negative impact on the development and progress of the entire nation as a whole. This paper seeks to analyze the phenomenon of violent extremism and the factors leading to it with particular reference to the case studies of Pakistan and Singapore. The critical review includes a comparison of the Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives in Pakistan and Singapore. It attempts to highlight the lessons Pakistan can draw from Singapore, so as to meet the formidable challenge of CVE at home. It is argued that a smart and proactive CVE program built on a "whole of nation/ community approach" similar to the highly successful model of Singapore can assist Pakistan in consolidating its CVE gains and filling in the gaps that continue to persist.*

**Keywords:** *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), Terrorism, Radicalization, Singapore, Pakistan.*

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## 1. Introduction

Violent extremism is a complicated phenomenon that is defined and examined by analysts and policy makers in a number of ways. The US Department of Homeland Security for instance describes violent extremists as, “People who advocate or engage in violent acts motivated by ideology in order to further political objectives.”<sup>1</sup> The Homeland Department further goes on to describe the causes of extremism as, “the spread of beliefs and narratives that capitalize on grievances, place blame and justify the use of violence against those judged guilty, are all aspects of radicalization that lead to violent extremism.”<sup>2</sup>

The terms "violent extremism" and "terrorism" are also often used synonymously. Academics and researchers typically perceive radicalization and radicalism as separate from extremism and terrorism. Schmid for instance distinguishes between radicalism and extremism as, “Radicals are typically open-minded egalitarians, while extremists are closed-minded supremacists”.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, radicalization carries both positive and negative meanings. However, this does not preclude radicals from becoming extremists or terrorists since radicalization can result in extremism.<sup>4</sup>

The steps taken by the governments and civil society organizations to limit, prevent, and ultimately address the underlying causes of violent extremism is referred to as countering violent extremism. The balance between the kinetic (hard) and non-kinetic (soft) sides of counterterrorism is provided by CVE measures,

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<sup>1</sup> “Countering Violent Extremism,” *US Department of Homeland Security*, <http://www.dhs.gov/topic/countering-violent-extremism>

<sup>2</sup> White House, *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Home Land Security Report, 2011), 1, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/empowering\\_local\\_partners.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/empowering_local_partners.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Alex P. Schmidt, “Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?” *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague* 5, no. 5 (May 2014), <https://icct.nl/publication/violent-and-non-violent-extremism-two-sides-of-the-same-coin/>

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Amir Rana, “Litterateurs’ Response to Extremism in Pakistan,” *PIPS Research Journal Conflict and Peace Studies* (April 2010), <https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/120.pdf>

which are believed to be essential for long-term counter-terrorism and counter-extremism efforts. The primary objective of any CVE policy is to counteract and preferably prevent extremist thoughts and beliefs from taking hold over the society at large.

The primary objective of this article is to compare and contrast the CVE methods/ models of Pakistan and Singapore and to determine whether Pakistan can implement and utilize the successful features of the Singapore's CVE model. This research is organized into three main parts. Theoretical framework of the overall research will be discussed in the first section. The second section discusses the history, drivers, and causes of violent extremism in Pakistan and the subsequent CVE programs and policies undertaken by the Pakistani State. The third and final section of this article analyzes the challenges of violent extremism in Singapore, its CVE policies and strategies and the lessons that can be learnt.

Before we move on to the CVE initiatives in Pakistan and Singapore, it is important to first discuss the theoretical framework that will be utilized in this research.

## **2. Theoretical Perspective**

### **2.1. General System Theory**

General systems theory was created by German philosopher Niklas Luhmann. According to Luhmann the systems theory is "the method by which researchers apply system analysis to comprehend the structures and ways by which to reconstruct the societal system".<sup>5</sup> General systems theory can be used to analyze and examine the interpersonal, inter-group, and international relations systems. The postmodern paradigm, which includes the systems theory, has contributed a new viewpoint to literature by allowing us to view the State or the world from a

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<sup>5</sup> Niklas Luhmann, "The World Society as a Social System," *International Journal of General Systems* (1982): 131-138.

perspective that focuses both on individuals and the prevailing systems.

The general system theory is used because it gives researchers a theoretical framework for examining the arrangement and reconstruction of societal systems. This paper aims to use this theory for understanding and explaining the interpersonal, inter-group and institutional/organizational relations in order to determine the adaptability and effectiveness of the measures taken for CVE in Pakistan and Singapore.

## **2.2. Theory of Rationalization**

Max Weber, a German academician who developed the theory of rationalization claimed that modern society (although his focus was the Western world) is exponentially rationalized. He asserted that theoretical rationalization gives the understanding about how the world operates and/ or should operate. It necessitates the use of logic, an understanding of social setting and the capacity to give meaning to symbolic arrangements.<sup>6</sup> Kalberg simplifies formal rationality by asserting that this type of rationality consists of how individuals make judgments based on ‘universally applied rules, regulations and laws’. According to him, theoretical rationalization necessitates that “people be able to give sense (logically) to a world that may appear chaotic”.<sup>7</sup>

Theoretical rationalization is a brain-based intellectual process, whereas substantive rationality is connected to an individuals’ personal beliefs, their particular set of values and is what enables them to function in society throughout the course of the day, particularly when they have to make decisions. Through the theory of rationalization, scholars can examine how human behavior fits into the larger context of meaning and reason. This theory has the potential to explain the

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<sup>6</sup> George Ritzer, “The McDonaldisation of Society,” *Journal of American Culture* 6 (2008): 100- 107.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Kalberg, “Max Weber’s Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Process in History,” *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no.5 (March 1980): 1145- 1179.



choices, decision and action made for CVE in Pakistan and Singapore and to comprehend the institutions in the societies of both countries.

### **3. Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan: Challenges and Counter Initiatives**

#### **3.1. Background**

Since its independence, Pakistan has seen different but interlinked ethnic, sectarian and religious tensions that have occasionally escalated into violence. Internal and external entities for certain vested interests, often covertly support the ethnic and religious radicalization in Pakistan by providing both a narrative and funding. However, for its own part, Pakistan worked with the US in the latter's goal to counter the advancement of communism in Afghanistan, which inadvertently contributed to the first substantial rise of violent extremism in the country. Following the Soviet-Afghan war debacle, the broader effects of 9/11 attacks, Pakistan's compulsion to participate in the US 'War on Terror' as a front-line ally and the recent rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan have had an immense toll on the country.<sup>8</sup> Both the intensity and the scope of violent extremism have constantly been on a rise.

#### **3.2. Challenges for CVE in Pakistan**

Pakistan confronts multiple challenges from the global, regional and internal environments. Some of these are a product of intolerance, extremism, militancy and terrorism from domestic circumstances, while others are influenced by its past interactions with regional and extra-regional powers.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, economic crisis, political instability, weak leadership, sectarianism, competition among provinces and illiteracy are important factors contributing to Pakistan's internal

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<sup>8</sup> S. Karamat, M. Muzaffar, and A. S. Shah, "Politics of Religious Extremism in Pakistan: An Analysis," *Review of Economics and Development Studies* 5, no. 2 (2019): 315-322.

<sup>9</sup> Ehsan Mehmood Khan, "Internal Security Strategy for Pakistan," *San Analysis PIPS* (January 2011).

security issues.<sup>10</sup> Pakistan is approximately a nation of 240 million people who represent a variety of religious, regional and national identities. Intersection between these diverse socio-religious groups often generates friction that leads to societal intolerance and inter-communal conflicts.

### ***3.2.1. International and Regional Dimensions***

Pakistan's societal structure is being disrupted by the revival of ethnic and religious violence by terrorist organizations and their affiliations to inimical foreign agencies which is negatively impacting the country's economy and growth. The escalating ethnic unrest has consistently provided fertile ground for hostile foreign forces to worsen the security situation, as was the case with East Pakistan's secession and the ethnic conflicts in Sindh and Balochistan. Additionally, Yemen, Syria, and other Middle Eastern nations that are prone to sectarian violence, wherein the sectarian proxies of Iran and Arab states continue to fuel and sustain the decades long conflicts, have also negatively affected Pakistan. Recently, three dossiers have been shared with UN by Pakistani government on the evidence of Indian intervention in Balochistan, Karachi and the Newly Merged tribal Districts (NMDs), erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), fueling ethnic and religious violence.<sup>11</sup> All of this has contributed to the rise of terrorism and violent extremism in the country.

### ***3.2.2. Domestic Predicament***

In Pakistan, a number of local factors have also contributed to the rise of radicalization and extremism. For instance, in the Zia era, sectarianism rose concurrently with the process of Islamization, which caused Shia-Sunni sectarian

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<sup>10</sup> Naveed Safdar, "Internal security threats to Pakistan," (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, 2004), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36694928.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Pakistan hands over dossier on Indian interference and terrorism in Pakistan to UN Secretary General* (Pakistan: Government of Pakistan, January 06, 2017), <https://mofa.gov.pk/pakistan-hands-over-dossier-on-indian-interference-and-terrorism-in-pakistan-to-un-secretary-general/>

conflicts.<sup>12</sup> Madaris, at the time, were urged to preach, promote and encourage the Afghan Jihad struggle against the Soviets with full assistance and support of the US, Saudi Arabia, and Gulf States, thus encouraging militancy and injecting religious extremism in the society. Over time, students at these madaris went on to participate in the war in Afghanistan and after the war either joined or created a number of terrorist organizations.

The events that unfolded in NMDs after 9/11 when the US invaded Afghanistan are another major cause of radicalization and violence. The majority of the Taliban from Afghanistan, Central Asia, as well as the leadership of Al-Qaeda managed to escape and establish new bases in the NMDs. They went on to pose a major challenge to the Pakistani military and the society at large as they gained a strong foothold in the region. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerged from this intersection between Al-Qaeda fugitives, Taliban relegates and local extremist sympathizers. The TTP would go on to pose the most significant terrorist threat to the Pakistani society. As a strong proponent of violent and extremist ideology with a radical interpretation of Islam, the TTP has long strived to impose its repressive ideology and its very restrictive version of sharia law on Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> The group continues to pose a serious threat to the Pakistani youth and has remained fairly successful in recruiting young people from marginalized communities, particularly from the NMDs.

In the beginning, the majority of terroristic violence was primarily initiated by Deobandi Sunni groups, primarily Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and its lethal faction Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). In the prevailing terrorist landscape, two of the most eminent extremist groups are Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the local

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<sup>12</sup> Safdar Sial and Tanveer Anjum, "Jihad, Extremism and Radicalization." *PIPS Research Journal Conflict and Peace Studies* (April 2010), <https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/119.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Haris Nawaz, "Finding a solution to TTP," *The Nation*, January 4, 2023, <https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Jan-2023/finding-a-solution-to-ttp>

branch of ISIS, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). Both of these groups, appear to have taken the lead from SSP and LeJ, and are dominating the prevailing terrorist landscape of Pakistan. Despite being predominantly from Deobandi background, many former LeJ militants have reportedly joined the Salafi movement of ISKP and have substantially contributed to the terroristic activities of the group in Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> ISKP notoriously claimed responsibility for the March 4, 2022 attack in Peshawar that targeted a Shia mosque and claimed 60 innocent lives.<sup>15</sup>

Extremism by a group that was long thought to be of moderate Barelvi sect is also becoming increasingly concerning. Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) has thus far been involved in a number of agitative acts of sectarianism and religious extremism since it gained prominence in 2017. Its supporters are especially rallied around protests for alleged desecration of the Holy Quran and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The tragic mob lynching of a factory manager from Sri Lanka on December 3, 2021 after he was falsely accused of blasphemy is the most violent result of TLP's extremist mindset so far.<sup>16</sup> Similar other instances and threats thereof have been witnessed all over the country, suggesting that a new chapter in the nation's sectarian and extremist violence has tragically begun.

### **3.3. Pakistan's Initiatives to Counter Violent Extremism**

In the context of Pakistan, CVE can primarily be described as effective challenging/countering of radical narratives that militant and radical groups propagate in order to promote intolerance resulting in extremism and violence.

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<sup>14</sup> International Crisis Group, *A New Era of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan* (South Asia: International Crisis Group, 2022), 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> Saifi Sophia and Saleem Mehsud, "ISIS claims responsibility for blast killing dozens at Shia Mosque in Pakistan's Peshawar," *CNN*, March 5, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/04/asia/pakistan-peshawar-blast-intl/index.html>

<sup>16</sup> M. B. Shah and E. Hannah, "Man tortured and killed in Pakistan over blasphemy," *The Guardian*, December 3, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/03/pakistan-sri-lankan-man-priyantha-diyawadana-tortured-killed-alleged-blasphemy-sialkot>

Over the past nine years, the government of Pakistan, through NACTA and the Armed Forces, has started numerous CVE initiatives to reconstruct and rebuild the societal systems in accordance with the General System Theory (outlined earlier), including deradicalization and rehabilitation programs, the introduction of a national narrative, madaris reforms, policies and notable legal measures.

### ***3.3.1. De-radicalization and Rehabilitation Programs for Ex-Militants***

Pakistan's CVE initiatives include a number of engagement and deradicalization programs. A youth rehabilitation program was launched under the supervision of the Pakistan Army after the defeat of TTP in Swat. Similar programs were also launched in some parts of Punjab through Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in coordination with various non-governmental groups.<sup>17</sup>

Following the conclusion of the 2009 military operation Rah-e-Rast against the TTP in Malakand Division, Pakistan Army also initiated a program for jailed militants, namely, De-radicalization and Emancipation Program (DREP).<sup>18</sup> At the Rastoon Center, militants were treated, the Sabawoon Center concentrated on de-radicalizing teenagers (suicide bombers) and the Mishal Center collaborated with the militants' families that then went through a specially designed deradicalization program in coordination with a local NGO, Hum Pakistan Foundation (HPF).<sup>19</sup>

A related initiative was also taken up by CTD Punjab in 2011 with the support and assistance of the Technical and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA), which provided technical and vocational training to more than 300

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<sup>17</sup> Abdul Basit, "Countering Violent Extremism: Evaluating Pakistan's Counter-Radicalization and De-Radicalization Initiatives," *IPRI Journal* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 46-64.

<sup>18</sup> Basit, "Countering Violent Extremism."

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Amir Rana, "Swat De-Radicalization Model: Prospects for Rehabilitating," *PIPS Research Journal Conflict and Peace Studies* 4, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 6-11.

former members of banned militants and sectarian outfits.<sup>20</sup> Following the Rah-e-Rast and Rah-e-Nijat military operations, two additional programs were also initiated in the remote districts of Bajaur, NMDs and Tank of the KP province.<sup>21</sup> The Bajaur Center released 47 Ex-Taliban fighters in October 2013 after completion of their vocational training course under the Navi Sahar program.<sup>22</sup>

### ***3.3.2. CVE related Reforms and Legislation in Pakistan***

In January 2018, the Government of Pakistan through the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and the Islamic Research Institute (IRI) took another set of measures by launching a national narrative, ‘Paigham-e-Pakistan’ (PeP).<sup>23</sup> PeP was a joint declaration and a decree (Fatwa) of Pakistan’s leading Ulema-o-Mashaikh from all religious schools of thought against terrorism, suicide bombing, self-proclamation of jihad, sectarianism, violent extremism and accusations of blasphemy. The document was signed and endorsed by more than 1800 Ulema-o-Mashaikh. PeP to date, is the only document of its kind and represents a substantial landmark in the country’s effort to counter and prevent violent extremism. Its full impact on the society and its true potential is yet to be realized.

In order to address violent extremism at the provincial level, the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has recently established a Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism (CECVE). CECVE is a research institute that will help prevent, monitor, and counter violent activities,

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<sup>20</sup> Saba Noor, “From Radicalization to De-Radicalization,” *Counter Terrorists Trends and Analysis (CTTA)* 5, no. 8 (August 2013): 16-19.

<sup>21</sup> Zali Zulfikar, “De-radicalization centers set up in Bajur and Tank,” *Dawn*, January 21, 2012, <https://www.dawn.com/news/689745/de-radicalisation-centres-being-set-up-in-bajaur-tank-2>

<sup>22</sup> “Rehabilitation & integration: 47 ex-militants freed after receiving vocational training”, *The Express Tribune*, October 13, 2013, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/617202/rehabilitation-integration-47-ex-militants-freed-after-receiving-vocational-training>

<sup>23</sup> Rashid Bukhari, “War of Narratives,” *Dawn*, September 29, 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1712541>

hate speech and violent extremism in the province of KP.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, in August 2019, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) and a consortium of five madaris boards, Ittehad Tanzeemat-e-Madaris Pakistan (ITMP), signed the first successful Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to bring about the much need madrasa reforms. A Directorate General for Religious Education (DGRE) was subsequently founded in September 2019 along with 16 regional offices.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, 10 new educational boards for madaris were established that had registered more than 5000 madaris till May 2021.<sup>26</sup> The 2019 consortium represents an important step forward and its impact on the society at large will become evident in the years to come.

Periodic revisions were also made to the pre-911 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) of Pakistan in 2014 and again in 2015 to give Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) more authority and freedom in the fight against terrorism. In 2014, for instance, the Protection of Pakistan Act was passed, which greatly empowered the LEAs.<sup>27</sup> In 2014, 21<sup>st</sup> Constitutional Amendment was also made that established the Military Courts for two years. The term of courts was extended for an additional two years in 2017 following the passage of 28<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill, which was understandably met with criticism from human rights watchdogs. Despite all these efforts there is much that still needs to be accomplished.

### ***3.3.3. Legal Instrument/ Policy Measures in Pakistan***

The government of Pakistan also initiated policy measures specifically related

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<sup>24</sup> "Plan to make CECVE fully functional," *The Express Tribune*, November 15, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2386348/plan-to-make-cecve-fully-functional>

<sup>25</sup> Kasif Abbasi, "Directorate to regulate seminaries set up," *Dawn*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1512734>

<sup>26</sup> Kasif Abbasi, "5000 seminaries registered across country," *Dawn*, May 10, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1622943/5000-seminaries-registered-across-country>

<sup>27</sup> Irfan Haider, "Protection of Pakistan Bill 2014 approved in NA," *Dawn*, July 2, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1116529>

to CVE and a National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) was founded in 2008 with a specialized directorate for CVE but it took another five years for NACTA to become effective owing to the delay in the passage of the concerned bill in the parliament. Another step was the issuing of the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) for the period of 2014-2018, which provided a clear roadmap for the creation of the federal Rapid Response Force (RRF) and Directorate of Internal Security (DIS), for the prevention of cyberspace abuse and modernization of the entire criminal justice system.<sup>28</sup> In order to counter the risks to internal security, the government has additionally strengthened the existing policies with two more NISPs (2018-2023 & 2022-2026). Their subsequent impact on the entire counter terrorism and violent extremism efforts remains to be seen.

The National Action Plan (NAP) similarly was also a significant milestone towards effective CVE initiatives and reforms in Pakistan. It was ambitiously and determinately launched following the horrific attack of TTP on the Army Public School Peshawar in 2014, which claimed the lives of over a hundred innocent children. It unified the nation like never before in its resolve to fight the forces of terrorism and violent extremism. The All Parties Conference (APC), including the government and all opposition parties, unanimously reached an agreement on 20 policy issues for hard and soft counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization measures, as it made a solemn resolve to take action against hate speech, register all unregulated madaris and take steps against all prevailing radical ideologies.<sup>29</sup> In 2021, NAP has been revised and now includes fourteen core points for implementation to effectively tackle the menace of extremism and terrorism,

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<sup>28</sup> Raza Rumi, *Charting Pakistan Internal Security Policy* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Studies, May 2015), <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR368-Charting-Pakistans-Internal-Security-Policy.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), *National Action Plan* (2014), <https://nacta.gov.pk/nap-2014/>



However, NAP has only partially been implemented which in part explains its limited success.

#### **4. Countering Violent Extremism: Challenges and Initiatives in Singapore**

##### **4.1. Background**

After September 11 attacks, under the influence of Al-Qaeda/ISIS ideology, many countries witnessed a major surge in violent religious extremism. The region of South East Asia that are host to a number of conservative belief systems, were no exception.

The Islamic State terrorist group (IS), in particular, actively set out to establish an "East Asia Wilayat". Extremist groups from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines gathered in the Southern Philippines in 2014 after the emergence of ISIS in Southeast Asia.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, Southeast Asian countries had to enact and enforce a number of counter extremism and terrorism policies and strategies. In this regard, strategies and policies enacted by Singapore to counter terrorism and extremism can be considered a benchmark, especially insofar as the social reconstruction in accordance with the Systems Theory are concerned. With major innovations and modifications in its CVE programs and an effective combination of kinetic and non-kinetic measures, Singapore has effectively implemented a noteworthy policy that has yielded tremendous results for the country.

##### **4.2. CVE Challenges in Singapore**

In December 2001, Singapore authorities uncovered an affiliate and AQ local partner terrorist organization namely, Jemaah Islamia (JI), which had planned to carry out numerous bombing operations in Singapore. In fact, a number of JI bomb plots planned to target foreign embassies in Singapore were effectively foiled by Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD). In 2001, thirteen JI

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<sup>30</sup> Gunaratna Rohan, "Islamic State's Global Expansion: A Renewed Threat to Asia?" *Global Asia* 14, no. 3 (September 2019), [https://www.globalasia.org/v14no3/feature/islamic-states-global-expansion-a-renewed-threat-to-asia\\_rohan-gunaratna](https://www.globalasia.org/v14no3/feature/islamic-states-global-expansion-a-renewed-threat-to-asia_rohan-gunaratna)

members were successfully apprehended, however, it was not until late 2006 that the government was able to effectively dismantle intricate JI terrorist network.<sup>31</sup>

The threat of terrorism nevertheless, persisted both within and outside the region, particularly following ISIS's emergence in 2014 and its active use of social media to spread its erroneous extremist Islamist beliefs. Some of the former ideologically dedicated ISIS members from Southeast Asia returned to their countries from Iraq and Syria. Subsequently, incidents like the suicide bombing in Surabaya, Indonesia, in May 2018, and the five-month armed occupation in the Southern Philippines's city of Marawi in 2017 transpired.<sup>32</sup> Around this time, authorities in Singapore detained a woman for radicalizing an assistant and a Managing Director of a company, who made numerous attempts to join ISIS in 2017.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in August 2018, an engineer was detained after being radicalized by ISIS propaganda.<sup>34</sup>

Beginning in 2017, Singapore faced the greatest threat from terrorism in its recent history. The radicalization of its citizens were eventually attributed to three main sources: social media content, online radical preachers and "influencers" who persuade others to adopt their viewpoint. It is worth noting here that since 1980s, religious communities in Singapore had grown more fervent and forceful which subsequently paved the way for radical extremist ideologies to thrive in some sectors of an otherwise fairly liberal and secular society.

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<sup>31</sup> Gavin Chua Hearn Yuit, "Singapore's Approach to Counterterrorism," *Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point* 2, no.12 (December 2009), <https://etc.westpoint.edu/singapores-approach-to-counterterrorism/>

<sup>32</sup> Faris Mokhtar, "Looking Ahead to 2018: Even as IS weakens, evolving terror threat looms for S'pore," *Today*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/looking-ahead-2018-even-isis-weakens-evolving-terror-threat-looms-spore>

<sup>33</sup> Mokhtar, "Looking Ahead to 2018."

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, *Detention of a Radicalized Singaporean and Suspension of Order of Detention under the Internal Security Act*, (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, September 12, 2018), <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/press-releases/detention-of-a-radicalised-singaporean-and-suspension-of-order-of-detention-under-the-internal-security-act/>

#### **4.3. Singapore's Measures to Counter Violent Extremism**

Singapore's CVE approach is primarily centered on preventing racial and religious strife alongside building social resilience. Building such societal resilience is of foremost importance because Singapore is among the countries with the greatest religious diversity in the world.<sup>35</sup> The government of Singapore released a "White Paper" document in 2003, stating that "Inter-religious and inter-racial relations are severely harmed by terrorism, if committed in the name of a faith".<sup>36</sup> This was an effort to prohibit terrorists' elements from sowing discord between different communities. According to Kalberg, theoretical rationalization compels people to provide meaning to a world that may seem chaotic. Demonstrating great foresight, Singapore rationally set out to develop a complete set of CVE strategies that involve combating extremist ideology, terrorist rehabilitation and reintegration, and community participation.

##### **4.3.1. Countering Extremist Ideology**

Singapore's CVE approach places a strong emphasis on combating extremist ideology since terrorist ideologues routinely disseminate inaccurate and misleading radical ideas. According to terrorist propaganda, to build or defend an Islamic state, Muslims must move to areas of conflict and engage in military jihad against Christians, Jews and all others that oppose their ideology. Additionally, they provided false interpretations of Islamic ideas, stating that declaring infidel or killing of those who disagreed with them and did not share their beliefs was not only acceptable but also a sacred religious duty.

Singapore has put a lot of effort into exposing these false doctrines and

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<sup>35</sup> "The world's most religious diverse country: Singapore," *UCA News*, April 7, 2014, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/the-worlds-most-religiously-diverse-country-singapore/70654>

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, *White Paper on Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2003), [https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/government\\_records/docs/98800442-39b1-11e7-98bd-0050568939ad/Cmd.2of2003.pdf?](https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/government_records/docs/98800442-39b1-11e7-98bd-0050568939ad/Cmd.2of2003.pdf?)

preventing them from gaining hold. The government has collaborated with Muslim scholars and community leaders who are at the forefront of these efforts. A group of Muslim clerics, established the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) in 2002 and volunteered their services to offers religious counselling for terrorist captives and their families.<sup>37</sup> RRG worked together with psychologists and counsellors offering accurate and ratified interpretation of Islamic doctrine.

The Asatizah Recognition Scheme (ARS) was also created at a community level in partnership with a reputable Muslim NGO PERGAS (Association of Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers). It works under the statutory board, the Singapore Islamic Religious Council (MUIS) that oversees matters pertaining to Muslims in Singapore.<sup>38</sup> The ARS was established in 2005 to provide requisite credentials and training to religious teachers and to make sure that religious instruction does not foster societal division or support extremist ideas. In 2017, the ARS made it necessary for all Muslim religious educators to be registered with the concerned authorities.

MUIS has produced texts for Friday sermons at mosques in order to educate worshipers about the perils of religious extremism and the value of developing religious harmony. Additionally, MUIS increased its outreach activities, offering a platform for youth through the Asatizah Youth Network (AYN) where teachers answer questions about terrorism and extremism-related issues.<sup>39</sup> MUIS also announced a number of meetings at designated mosques to offer advice and answer questions concerning exclusivism and armed conflict through trained Asatizah for the benefit of young people on social media.

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<sup>37</sup> Hariz Baharudin, "Self-radicalised Singaporean teenager released from detention under ISA," *The Straits Times*, Jan 4, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/self-radicalised-singaporean-teenager-released-from-detention-under-isa>

<sup>38</sup> Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, *Asatizah Recognition Scheme* (Singapore: Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura), <https://www.muis.gov.sg/ARS-and-IECP/About>

<sup>39</sup> Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, *Risalah for Building a Singapore Muslim Community of Excellence* (Singapore: Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, 2006), <https://www.muis.gov.sg/-/media/Files/OOM/Resources/Risalah-eng-lr.pdf>

In respect of outreach initiatives, the RRG has done much more than just provide counseling to prisoners. It organizes public education exercises for both Muslims and non-Muslims and publishes material that effectively dismantles extreme ideologies and narratives. Additionally, it also operates a Resource and Counseling Center for clarifications on extremist ideology as well as a website with material to challenge and disprove extremist doctrines. The media frequently publishes articles that encourage tolerance, religious moderation, inclusivity and pluralism. The scholars also interact with the locals through speeches and visits to schools.

#### **4.3.2. Community Engagement**

In order to foster communal peace (which given the diversity of Singapore is a crucial undertaking), the Community Engagement Program (CEP) was introduced by the government of Singapore in 2006. The strategy was followed by the July 2005 London bombings, which increased the risk of domestic terrorism and the ensuing spike in hate crimes against Muslims.<sup>40</sup> The CEP strives to unite Singaporeans hailing from various groups and to establish response plans to assist in resolving potential inter-communal conflicts. Additionally, it strives to maintain society's strength and cohesion following a terrorist attack so that people can go about their regular lives in peace and harmony and not target others for their individual identities.

Following 9/11 attacks and the JI arrests, CEP established a number of groups to make their individual communities' networks and affiliations stronger. These groups included (a) religious and ethnic organizations, (b) welfare organizations, (c) educational facilities and (d) trade unions.<sup>41</sup> Another initiative was the foundation of Inter-Racial Confidence Circle (IRCC) in 2002, as a forum

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<sup>40</sup> Asad-ul-Iqbal Latif, "Hearts of Resilience: Singapore's Community Engagement Programme," *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies* (2011): 2.

<sup>41</sup> Latif, "Hearts of Resilience."

to encourage interfaith dialogue and confidence building. A National Steering Committee (NSC) was also set up for giving general direction to IRCCs on how to strengthen communal and religious bonds through events like history trails, interfaith discussions, and numerous other festivals.<sup>42</sup>

MUIS had also launched another program in 2006, namely The Harmony Center to foster broader understanding of Islam and encourage interfaith engagement in and around the country. Approximately 40,000 visitors, many of whom were foreigners visited this Center between 2006 and 2013.<sup>43</sup> Another significant project, the SG Secure national movement, was introduced in 2016 with the goal of educating, preparing and enlisting Singapore's community to help prevent and respond to terrorist attacks by practicing community vigilance, cohesion and resilience. It highlights the common ground necessary to foster respect and understanding of each other's belief systems.

#### ***4.3.3. Reforms and Legislation in Singapore***

Singapore has relied on clearly articulated laws, policies and procedures to keep peaceful ties intact between the different races and religions of its inhabitants. It has several laws in existence to restrict actions that might cause racial and religious conflict before the religious-based terrorism even emerged. After the passage of Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) in 1990, the government has created Presidential Council for Religious Harmony.<sup>44</sup> The Act specifies that a restraining order may be issued against any religious leader whose conduct creates hate, anger, or antagonism. He/she would also be prohibited from speaking publicly or in writing and from holding public office. The MRHA policies successfully restrained religious activism and disagreements that

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<sup>42</sup> Gavin Chua Hearn Yuit, "Singapore's Approach to Counterterrorism."

<sup>43</sup> Mohamad Salleh, "Muis' Harmony Centre drawing interest from abroad," *Asia One*, January 3, 2014, <https://www.asiaone.com/singapore/muis-harmony-centre-drawing-interest-abroad>

<sup>44</sup> Singapore Statutes Online, *Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act 1990* (Singapore: Singapore Statutes Online, 2020), <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/act/MRHA1990>

typically pave way for violent religious extremism.

Any individual whose deeds or arguments create sense of enmity and hatred between different racial or social groups is subject to prosecution under the Sedition (Repeal) Act 2021.<sup>45</sup> In recent years, several offenders have been charged with crimes and found guilty for denigrating other religions. The Undesirable Publications Act, 1967 forbids the dissemination, importation or printing of materials that incite animosity, hatred, or hostility between groups based on their race or religion.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, other laws have also been used by the government to prevent foreign religious preachers from entering Singapore if they are known to fuel animosity between various religions.

## **5. Conclusion**

The Pakistani government has initiated a number of CVE measures. Yet, there is need to coordinate the efforts for improving implementation process through regular evaluation. The difficulties in implementing CVE measures must be examined thoroughly by Pakistani policymakers and government officials.

Though Pakistan has achieved some success in establishing DGRE (an autonomous body for registration of madaris), it should also establish an organ under DGRE in line with the Asatizah Recognition Scheme (established by the statutory board of Singapore's MUIS). The registration of all religious teachers in Pakistan must be made mandatory under ARS and necessary qualifications and training must be given to ensure that religious teachings do not promote violent or extremist ideologies. However, if any individual is found to be involved in extremist/ violent activities, the registration should immediately be cancelled and he/she should be banned from teaching/ addressing public gatherings or holding

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<sup>45</sup> Singapore Statutes Online, *Sedition (Repeal) Act 2021* (Singapore: Singapore Statutes Online, 2021), <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/SRA2021/Uncommenced/20211212113150?DocDate=20211111#top>

<sup>46</sup> Singapore Statutes Online, *Undesirable Publication Act 1967* (Singapore: Singapore Statutes Online, 2020), <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/UPA1967>

any government or public office.

Extremist and ultra-sectarian forces have long posed a major challenge to Pakistan, as they remain fairly successful in radicalizing and recruiting people, particularly the youth. Pakistan therefore has to invest considerable efforts for bringing forward the volunteer group of influential religious clerics (Ulema-o-Mashaikh) to expose the distorted teachings of Islam, on the lines of RRG working voluntarily in Singapore.

Finally, the religious decree enshrined in Paigham-e-Pakistan should be given full social projection and legal protection to penalize any offenders. The Federal and Provincial governments of Pakistan need to enact legislation on the fatwa sought to counter terrorism and extremism. Moreover, following the example of KP government, the CECVE should also be established in all federating units of Pakistan at the earliest to help prevent violent activities, hatred and extremism.

Pakistan, being the Muslim majority state is quite different from religiously diverse Singapore having 14.3% Muslims population,<sup>47</sup> but the nature of threats from terrorism and violent extremism is quite similar. Pakistan has arguably made relatively moderate progress in the CVE domain, however there is still plenty that needs to be accomplished. Pakistan stands to learn substantially from the proactive, prudent and successful CVE approach of Singapore, since the process of indoctrination by terrorist and extremist organizations tend to significantly overlap.

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<sup>47</sup> US Department of State, *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Singapore* (Washington DC: US Department of State, May 12, 2021), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/singapore/>