

# **Countering terrorism**

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**By Malik Muhammad Ashraf**

There are no two opinions about the fact that terrorism and religious extremism pose existentialist threat to Pakistan and are also maligning Islam, a religion of peace and universal brotherhood. Among the causes for the rise of these demons, the biggest factor is the desire of the self-styled Islamists with distorted view of Islam, to enforce their brand of religion over the majority of the population through brutalizing the entire society. In fact what they are preaching is a dogma whose success here could bring disastrous consequences not only for Pakistan and the South East Asian region but also the entire world.

Therefore, it needs to be stopped in its tracks and resisted through impregnable unity among all segments of the society, military muscle of the state, promoting economic well being of the people of the areas which serve as the breeding ground for terrorists and above all challenging their philosophy ideologically.

Viewed in the backdrop of the permeating situation, the appeal by the prime minister to promote teachings of Sufi saints and Mashaikhs, while addressing a gathering of devotees at the shrine of Pir Karmanwala in Okara the other day, is the right panacea for defeating the dogma of these renegades on the ideological plank. He was very right in highlighting the role of the "Khankahi System" "in the spread of Islam. It is an historic fact that in the Indian sub-continent, Islam spread more through the teaching of the saints and Mashaikh than the sword of the conquerors coming from North. It is an established historic fact that millions of low caste Hindus converted to Islam as a result of the teachings of the saints, particularly belonging to the Chishtia and Suharwardia lineage. They were attracted by the lofty principles of equality of human beings, brotherhood, love and peace preached by these holy men.

The phenomenon of terrorism has had a profound impact on the social, political and economic profile of Pakistan. As a frontline state in the war against terrorism, Pakistan has suffered the most. The war on terror has consumed precious resources which could have been employed to promote the social and economic condition of the people of Pakistan. It has adversely affected the economic activity in the country and kept the prospective investors away. The un-ending spate of suicide attacks on civilian and military targets and the spectacle of charred bodies and extensive destruction of private and public property have profoundly affected the society psychologically.

There was never a greater need to re-propagate the values and teachings of the saints than at present to lift the morale of the people and to deal with the dogmatic onslaught of the terrorists and frustrate the designs of the proponents of this madness. The country is passing through a very critical phase of its history and its future as a sovereign nation will mainly depend on our ability to mount an effective challenge to terrorism in all its manifestations.

As regards dealing with these merchants of death militarily, the government has exhibited an unswerving commitment. The successes achieved by our armed forces against the terrorists and religious extremists in Swat, Malakand and Waziristan, are far greater than the achievements of the Nato forces in Afghanistan despite the fact the Nato forces are far better equipped to deal with the insurgents. They deserve unqualified commendation and gratitude of the entire nation for the sacrifices rendered by them in men and material and the efforts that they are now making for the rehabilitation of the destroyed infrastructure and the development of those areas against all odds. The government has also unleashed a number of initiatives for lifting the economic profile of the tribal regions.

The people of Pakistan, undeterred by the psychological scars inflicted by the flurry of terrorist attacks have also demonstrated in unequivocal terms that they abhor the ways of the terrorists and stand united behind the government and the armed forces to thwart the mechanizations of these heretics.

These endeavours without doubt need to be supplemented by an ideological input that reinvigorates and instills the Islamic values of peace and tolerance among the masses particularly the people of the backward areas like the tribal region, to deprive the terrorists of the ability to indoctrinate the illiterate people with their distorted version of Islam and scuttle their efforts to recruit would-be terrorists. That needs to be done on a sustained basis. No person in his right mind can take issue with prime minister's exhortations in this regard.

The saints and Mashaikhs have millions of followers in the country and so do the Ulema. They can play a very significant role in the fight against terrorism by enhancing the knowledge of the people about Islam and its true message.

The political leadership of the country also owes it to the people to rise to the occasion. They have to shun politics of self-aggrandizement and adopt a national outlook. Irrespective of their political differences and varying perceptions on running the state affairs, they have to stand shoulder to shoulder in tackling the phenomenon of terrorism.

The government efforts to eliminate the scourge of terrorism and religious bigotry need to be supported with honesty of purpose.

The political bickering can wait for better times. We simply cannot afford to lower our guard and allow the enemies of religion and the country to succeed in their nefarious designs. It is a battle for our national survival and to prove wrong the notion that Pakistan is hurtling towards a failed state.