

# Counter-Terrorism And Counter-Violent Extremism Policies Of The PML-N Government (2013-2018) And Role Of The PPP As The Main Parliamentary Opposition: An Analysis

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## Abstract

This paper examines the scourge of terrorism and violent extremism in Pakistan. In addition, it aims to shed light on the state's policies for addressing and fixing the issue of religiously motivated violence. Pakistan has been in the grip of terrorism and violent extremism since September 11, 2001 (9/11, henceforth). Pakistan presumably provides a fertile ground for terrorism and violent extremism due the state's ambivalent attitude towards religious groups. A spate of horrific terrorist attacks hit Pakistan just before the 2013 general election. As a result, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N, henceforth), which came to power following the 2013 elections, was able to implement measures aimed at combating violent extremism and terrorism. It was only with the support of the parliamentary opposition, especially of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP, henceforth), that military operations and anti-terrorism and extremism policies were implemented. The PPP emerged as the second largest party in parliament as a result of the 2013 General Election, and it provided significant cooperation to the PML (N)-led federal Government on the issue of terrorism. Specifically, this study aims to analyze the PML-N-led Government's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies for curbing extremism, religious militancy and terrorism in Pakistan. It will also discuss the role of the PPP, the main opposition party in parliament (2013-2018), in countering violent extremism and terrorism in Pakistan. Methodologically, this study is based on secondary sources (published reports, newspaper and journal articles, etc.), and is occasionally reinforced with primary sources (interviews with politicians).

**KeyWords:** Counter-terrorism, Counter-extremism, PML (N) Government, Pakistan Peoples Party, Military Operations, National Internal Security Policy (NISP), National Action Plan (NAP)

## Introductions

Scholars have pointed out that “religiously motivated violence has become a pervasive element of modern conflicts. “Holy terror,” killing in the name of God, constitutes a major driver of violent conflicts today” (Treverton, Gregg, Gibran, & Yost, 2005). This phenomenon—religiously motivated violence—pervades the world, so Pakistan is no exception. Terrorism is one of the most daunting challenges faced by Pakistan, especially in the last two decades. Terrorism-related violence has not only devoured seventy-five thousand Pakistani lives but it also incurred a loss of around \$123 billion in the War on Terror (BBC, 2018). It is apt to note here that Pakistan had continually been facing a large-scale violence in one form or another since its inception in 1947, but the Soviet invasion and the subsequent proxy war in Afghanistan, provided a real impetus to religious radicalism and terrorism. The former Pakistani ambassador Touqir Hussain has rightly observed that “the radicalism spawned by the Afghan jihad and coopted by Pakistan would not only rock the region but radiate far beyond” (Hussain, 2005). There is also an impression in Pakistan that it seriously underestimated how much damage would be done by the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan, the 9/11 attacks on the United States, and the subsequent U.S. War on Terror (WoT) inside its territory.

The upsurge in terrorism-related violence after 9/11 has had a devastating effect on Pakistan's already precarious security situation. Attacks by terrorists were particularly savage in Pakistan in the run-up to the 2013 general election. The 2013 General Elections saw the Pakistan Muslim League (N) rise to power as the country's largest party with 182 seats, while the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) rose to second place with 48 seats and remained the country's primary opposition party. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) both won 32 seats in Parliament. Mr. Nawaz Sharif of the PML (N) became Prime Minister of Pakistan for the third time on June 01, 2013, while Syed Khursheed

Ahmed Shah of the PPP became the leader of the opposition during this term. As has already been noted, Pakistan endured significant losses in terms of lives, economic possibilities, and infrastructure during the PML (N) government's tenure from 2013 to 2018. Over 81,000 people have died as a result (Khan, 2015). Schools, hospitals, and other public buildings in Pakistan have been damaged because of the country's role in the War on Terror.

As the ultimate victim of terrorism, Pakistan has felt the negative effects of rising radicalism and extremism. Pakistan thus wants to eradicate terrorism despite several setbacks. In light of this, the PML (N) government established anti-terror and anti-extremism policies in an effort to reduce the threat posed by terrorism, militancy, and extremism in Pakistan. As the largest opposition party in Pakistan's Parliament, the PPP was instrumental in helping to defuse the crisis. It offered policymakers alternate options for dealing with terrorist threats, extremist ideologies, and insurgencies. As of 2018, Pakistan's war on terror had cost the country a total of \$126.79 billion; it also lost over 70,000 lives, of which 8,000 were security personnel (Pasha, 2018). Security strategy, military operations in tribal areas, and the Karachi operation, all of which had the support of the PPP as the country's major opposition party in Parliament, helped reduce annual losses from terrorism (The Express Tribune, 2015). So, Pakistan has borne the brunt of religiously motivated violence and/or terrorism both in terms of money and human lives. There needs not to be any confusion about the religiously driven violence in Pakistan, yet there exists a great deal of confusion about the causes and nature of the post-9/11 violence. A few conceptual clarifications are therefore in order.

## Terrorism and Extremism: Definitions of the Term

One must first gain an understanding of terrorism before developing effective strategies to combat it. Terrorism encompasses a wide

range of factors. Around the globe, it is understood in a wide variety of ways and is expressed in a wide range of forms. Reports indicate that there are over two hundred different ways to define terrorism. In contrast, Schmid and Jongman conducted a content analysis on more than 90 definitions in their study. Based on their analysis, they determined that, across all definitions of terrorism, 84% feature some concept of violence, 65% have political purposes, 51% entail spreading fear and terror, 21% involve indiscriminate deaths, and 17.5% involve victimizing people. The hallmarks of terrorism are outlined by this content analysis (Schmid & Jongman, 1988). There is still no consensus on the definition of terrorism despite the fact that hundreds of billions of dollars are spent on countering and eliminating it (Schmid, 2004). Each individual, group, and nation experiences terrorism uniquely. Terrorism is a concept whose meaning is socially constructed (Matusitz, 2013). In other words, “terrorism is an objective reality and a subjective interpretation” (Karaffa, 2012). Simply put, terrorism is a different thing for different people. This paper employs the following definition of terrorism for better understanding of the phenomenon: “Terrorism is a politically motivated tactic involving the threat or use of force or violence in which the pursuit of publicity plays a significant role” (Weinberg, Pedahzur, & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004).

So is the case of extremism. In their definitions, Peter T. Coleman and Andrea Bartoli highlight the fact that extremism is a multifaceted phenomenon, despite this fact being obscured by its seeming simplicity. Activities (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, behaviors, tactics) of an extremely unusual nature. To put it another way, it's a very extreme sort of conflict involvement that only appears in war zones. However, in any given context, determining who or what qualifies as “extreme” and who or what constitutes “the norm” is inherently contentious and political (Coleman & Bartoli,

2012). Polarized ideological beliefs and actions that foster a sense of superiority over others are the root cause of extremism. It is also caused by the clash of state ideology with popular belief, by economic and social inequality, by the gulf between the world's superpowers, and by the divergent goals and violent actions of these countries (Sial & Anjum, 2010). Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies has pointed towards the threat posed by extremism and terrorism by noting:

In Pakistan, religious extremism threatens social cohesion and feeds into terrorism. Left unchecked, this problem can damage Pakistan beyond repair, though it is already responsible for some of the long-running internal security challenges such as religious and sectarian polarization and the persecution of minorities, etc. Extremism's inherent tendency for anarchy and hostility for democratic dispensation makes it all the more alarming (Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2021).

This evidence suggests that extremism, in many cases, leads to terrorism, and it feeds on hostility towards “out-group” and on distaste for democracy and pluralistic values. The role of political parties thus becomes more important in countering terrorism and violent extremism. The next section deals with the role of political parties in addressing the issue of terrorism and extremism.

### **Karachi Operation, 2013: Response of PPP as Opposition**

The worsening situation of law and order in Karachi in 2013 triggered a campaign against terrorist violence that year. Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was the ruling party in Sindh province, and the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N)-led federal government gave them full permission to act against terrorists with the help of federal forces such as Pakistan Rangers. The Rangers were vested with enormous powers. Also, an apex

committee was formed to oversee these operations. Security forces apprehended over a thousand individuals on terrorism related charges. The operation was not without its detractors and critics.

Two and a half years later, few individuals viewed the same operation as controversial. The level of political discord grew with each passing day, as the PML (N) administration and the Sindh Provincial PPP government were at odds, on the one hand, and a hostile environment existed between the PPP and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), on the other (The News, 2017). The MQM accused both the PPP and PML-N for leaving them at the mercy of both state and non-state actors, so the military operation was more political than military. The PPP-led provincial government blamed the PML (N) for using the operation to target the PPP. Both of the province's major political parties have published statements criticizing the operation, suggesting that it was unjust and politically motivated.

The arresting of prominent politicians of Sindh by Rangers on charges of criminal activities and for providing material support to militants sent shockwaves through the provincial government. In mid-June, PPP leader and ex-president Asif Ali Zardari publicly criticized the military leadership for overstepping their authority (Dawn, 2015). It was clear that the PPP provincial administration in Sindh had concerns which is why they previously hesitated to grant special Paramilitary powers to Rangers in Sindh. The actions of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and National Accountability Bureau (NAB) could be seen in the same light.

The arrest of Dr. Asim Hussain, the former petroleum minister and chairperson of the Sindh HEC for the PPP, has further strained the already tense relations between the PML (N) administration and the ally opposition PPP. The PPP headquarters and the Sindh provincial government both responded angrily to the arrest. Qaim Ali Shah, who was then chief minister, expressed his displeasure with the detention procedure and the reaction of the

central government. Senior PPP leadership smelled a rat, as shown by the statement of a PPP senator Khursheed Shah. He was of the view that the action had generated new suspicions that Pakistan's powerful military is trying to increase its control on the country's largest and wealthiest city while undermining civilian parties, and that this will lead to instability (Hasan, 2015).

According to talks with Lt. Gen. Naveed Mukhtar, commander of the Karachi Corps, the military is not trying to act against any specific political party. On the other hand, the military has filed corruption charges against provincial government officials and political behemoths, which include former PPP minister Dr. Asim Hussain, who was accused of providing money to militant wings of his own party, all in the name of combating terrorism (Nawaz, 2016). New Director General of the Rangers Major General Bilal Akbar vowed that anti-terrorist operations will continue in Karachi until the city was completely safe (Daily Mail, 2015). The PPP administration issued no pro-statement at all. There was an open chasm between the PML (N) administration and the military, on the one hand, and the PPP-led provincial political government and the PML-N led federal government, on the other. Reportedly afraid of being caught up in the military's legal quagmire, many PPP provincial officials have left the country (Nawaz, 2016).

### **National Internal Security Policy (NISP) (2014–2018): The Reaction of PPP**

During its five years in power, the PPP consistently avoided taking the lead in the fight against terrorism, instead passing the responsibility to the armed forces. The PML-N led federal government had to devise a national internal security policy as it is presumed that General Kayani had requested Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to formulate one such policy in his final months as army chief (The Express Tribune, 2013). The prime minister's trusted advisor, Interior Minister Chaudhary Nisar Ali Khan, was tasked with this responsibility. On February 26, 2014, he presented an eleven-page

overview of the NISP, 2014-2018, to the National Assembly for discussion. Although the NISP made suggestions for improved intelligence cooperation and joint planning between civilian and military organizations, none of these measures were taken (Nawaz, 2016). The PML (N) government took all parties on board before coming into power due to the critical, complex nature of the problem of terrorism and extremism and how to combat it.

As for the opposition, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif assured them that any problems would be dealt with through mutual effort. The prime minister said: "Our approach is well thought out, but the policy is not the final word, and any outstanding proposal in this area would be appreciated" (Dawn, 2014). At the time, PPP Opposition Leader Syed Khurshid Shah stated that the government was not in a state of confusion, that the nation was kept up to date on the progress of negotiations between the government and the Taliban, and they were assured that the country's sovereignty would be not compromised come what may (Nawaz, 2016). On March 26, 2014, the PML (N) government announced and debated the issue in parliament. PPP senator Farhatullah Babar denounced the policy of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds." Instead of taking "reflex action" against all terrorists, there seemed to be a policy of good and bad Taliban in place. He clarified the point by giving an example: Just three days before the government announced its internal security policy, Jaish-e-proscribed Muhammad's leader, Maulana Masood Azhar, travelled to Muzaffarabad to attend the book launch of Afzal Guru, with a full-time state security. The banned Lashkar-e-Tayba has resurfaced as the lawful Jamaat-ud-Daawa. The PPP senator mentioned that Rs 60 million was allocated by the Punjab government to the charity of Jamaat-ud-Daawa. He further asserted that the NISP was "a basic cut-and-paste job, done in a haste" and likened it to the Patriot Act, which was by US Congress soon after 9/11. Law enforcement agencies such as the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)

were made part of policy formulating bodies, which came as a surprise to him. He insisted that the ISI was a spy agency and not a police force (Dawn, 2014). As part of the NISP framework, the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) was formed and entrusted with enforcing both "soft" and "hard" policies. However, after the Army Public School (APS) terrorist attack in Peshawar in December 2014, there occurred a shift in focus. The government came up with the National Action Plan (NAP) and military operations, namely Zarb-e-Azab and Khyber-4, were started to root out terrorism from Pakistan (PIPS report, 2019).

### **Operation Zarb-e-Azab, 2014: PPP**

#### **Response as Parliamentary Opposition**

On June 15, 2014, the military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan with aim to eradicate terrorist groups from the area. Many terrorist groups such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Haqqani network, al-Qaeda, and Jundallah were active in North Waziristan. The government had no other option than to put an end to the instability and insecurity caused by terrorist attacks, especially on Karachi Airport (Warraich, Khan, & Alam, 2021). The PPP supported the military operation in North Waziristan Agency (The Express Tribune, 2014). The goal of the all-encompassing operation was to take out all domestic and international extremists hiding in North Waziristan and the surrounding areas (Abbasi, Khatwani & Hussain, 2018). The PPP leader Qamar Zaman Kaira remarked in an interview that the operation was a success and law and order had improved since then. As time went by, it became obvious that peace was being established. There was a palpable sense of calm, and we were no longer threatened by the same level of insecurity that had plagued us before (Kaira, 2021). It is clear from this discussion that military operations, reinforced by consensus among political parties, could lead to peace and security, as was the case with operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014).

### **APS Incident and National Action Plan, 2014: Response of PPP as Opposition**

On December 16, 2014, a group of gunmen stormed the heavily fortified APS in Peshawar Cantonment, the capital of KP province. They killed 150 students, many of them children. According to President Asif Ali Zardari, who has declared three days of mourning in Sindh and called the attack “the most barbaric, horrible, and cruel act... in any age and any period,” called the day as a terrible day in the history of the country, and it was only second to the crime committed in 1971, when Pakistan was divided. The entire country must back the law enforcement agencies and the armed forces in their effort to eliminate the scourge of terrorism and extremism. On this tragedy, PPP opposition politician Syed Khurshid Shah said, “We could not endure such loss of life in the future, and the brute who designed this slaughter of innocent children of the country must be given ideal sanctions and perspectives should indeed be raised at every discussion board to force the government to decide source out terrorism from the state.” If government or military authorities suspected that they had something sensitive to disclose with them, an in-camera session would be held, as stated by Senator Raza Rabbani.

The PPP then requested a meeting with the administration to address the country's present security situation (Dawn, 2014). A meeting of all parliamentary party leaders was called for by the Prime Minister, said Information Minister Pervez Rashid, to show the world that Pakistan was united in its fight against terrorism and extremism. During his presentation to the Multi-Parties Conference (MPC) in Peshawar on December 17, 2014, PM Nawaz Sharif called on all political parties to work together and reaffirm their dedication to rooting out terrorism and extremism (Dawn, 2014). On December 24, 2014, the prime minister presented the “National Action Plan” (NAP) to counter terrorism. As stated by the Minister of the Interior, the strategy was developed in the light of the outcomes of the All-Parties Conference. To this purpose, the PPP was

included in a parliamentary committee made up of representatives from all political parties to evaluate the state of affairs in the wake of the Peshawar tragedy, review key legislation and revisions pertaining to terrorism, and implement the committee's recommendations. The Prime Minister presided over the special committee. Some of the other members of the special committee include: Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan; Planning and Development Minister Ahsan Iqbal; Information Minister Pervez Rashid; Defense Minister Khawaja Asif; and Foreign Affairs and National Security Advisor Sartaj Aziz (Dawn, 2014).

In the wake of the Peshawar school massacre, a twenty-point National Action Plan (NAP) was drawn out to detail a thorough strategy to combat terrorism. After the National Internal Security Policy (2014), this was the second document the government passed unanimously with the involvement of the PPP, the largest parliamentary opposition party. On January 2, 2015, the government conducted another Multi-Party Conference (MPC) in which Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif lauded the PPP and all political parties for their contributions to the making and implementation of the NAP for fighting terrorism in Pakistan. Asif Ali Zardari, the former chairman, Syed Khursheed Shah, the opposition leader, Rehman Malik, the former interior minister, Makhdoom Amin Faheem, Chaudhry Aitizaz Ahsan, Mian Raza Rabbani, Farhatullah Babar, Sherry Rehman, and Farooq H. Naik, all attended the MPC. The constitutional amendment that would allow military courts to operate for two years in the country was also addressed. According to PPP leader Syed Khursheed Shah, the issue of special courts was addressed at a meeting of parliamentary leadership on December 24 (Dawn, 2015), but the issue of military courts was not. The National Action Plan, however, was finalized, and the measure was introduced into the National Assembly. PPP members voted yes on the legislation.

### **Establishment of Military Courts: PPP Response as Parliamentary Opposition**

In a controversial move to speed up trials in instances involving terrorism, the country's political and military authorities agreed on the establishment of military tribunals on January 2, 2015, at the All-Parties Conference (APC). The formation of military courts was one of the 20 issues in the NAP discussed at the meeting and unanimously agreed upon, as a follow-up to the previous APC resolution. An updated version of the law was agreed upon by all parties at the All-Parties Conference. Federal Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid commended Zardari and the PPP for their leadership in negotiating the terms of the planned "National Action Plan" (Dawn, 2015). However, Farooq Naek and Aitzaz Ahsan of the PPP have harshly criticized the revised legislation. Mr. Ahsan argued that the proposed change would not be recognised by the legal community because it was repugnant to long-standing democratic values. He warned against it, saying the bar associations would have a negative response.

The opposition leader in the Senate, Mr. Ahsan, reaffirmed his belief that the goal of establishing military tribunals could be achieved through changing the PAA of 1952. On the other side, Senator Naek claimed that these tactics have previously been employed against politicians (Dawn, 2015). Despite these claims, Zardari of the PPP has emerged as the most vocal supporter of the PML (N) Government, siding with them by accepting the request to create military courts through amending the constitution and ending any further debate on the subject (The Express Tribune, 2015). In an interview, a PPP member and worker said, the timing was extraordinary for the PPP, as legislation for the establishment of military courts coincided with the 87th birth of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the founder of the party; they had to ask the government to delay the vote by a day or two so as to avoid endorsing the creation of a military court on the PPP founder's birthday (Daad, 2021).

As a Sindh MNA, Nawab Yousuf Talpur has also spoken out against the PPP leadership's decision on the military court. On January 6, 2015, Syed Khurshid Ahmed Shah and Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan, the PPP's opposition leaders in the National Assembly and Senate, co-chaired a parliamentary party meeting. Since the leadership has already decided to support bills that would establish military courts, Mr. Talpur argues that the parliamentary party meeting should have been called sooner (Dawn, 2015). Senate Opposition Leader Aitzaz Ahsan described the vote as a "difficult period" in his life. As he defended his party's support for the law, he added, "We have ensured that the bill can't be used against anyone other than terrorists" (Dawn, 2015). The PPP, he said a few days later, merely supported the controversial constitutional reform in order to eliminate violence and terrorism from the country (Dawn, 2015).

The last of the military courts with a two-year mandate ended on January 7, 2017. The government held multiple meetings with political parties after their term expired to get parliamentary agreement for the extension of special law, despite opposition from a number of human rights organizations and political parties. Senate Opposition Leader Aitzaz Ahsan told reporters in parliament that the PPP is generally opposed to military courts, but that they also feel that terrorists will stay engaged in key cases if they are not used (Syed, 2017). According to Article 175(3) of the Constitution, military courts have the authority to try anyone "belonging to any terrorist group or organisation under the banner of religion or a sect." As the PML (N) government feared that the bill could be used to "arm-twist" or "politically victimize" political parties, they eliminated the terms "using the name of religion or sect" from the revised draught. As far as the PPP was concerned, the government rewrote the document to appease its ally Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam. Asif Ali Zardari, co-chairman of the PPP, said that the meeting was called so that all of the participating parties could come to an agreement on the issue and vote on it as a

bloc before bringing the matter to Parliament. Specifically, he detailed the nine proposals from his party that would expand the authority of military courts. regarding the extension of the military court, Zardari said that his party was “providing recommendations for, not opposing” the legislation (Dawn, 2017). According to PPP Secretary General and Senator Farhatullah Babar, his party is not opposed to the reinstatement of military courts, but they should not serve for more than a year. The PPP insisted that military tribunals be presided over by a session judge of session and assisted by another session. These were the two major concerns the government had with the PPP (Dawn, 2017). A major opposition party in Parliament, the PPP was unable to challenge this constitutional change. Although the PPP views the expansion of military courts as a threat to democracy and travesty of justice, it had to work with the PML (N) Government to rid the country of terrorism, militancy, and extremism.

### **Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, 2017: PPP Response as Opposition Party**

Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad was a concerted national operation aided by local Pakistani law enforcement agencies with the aim of eliminating the terrorist danger and cementing the gains made by Operation Zarb-e-Azb. This operation was led by members of the Pakistani military and police as well as the Pakistani navy and air force. Asif Ali Zardari, leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), had previously predicted that the anti-terrorist operation Raddul Fasaad would be successful. When asked about the worsening law and order situation in Pakistan, PPP NA Opposition Leader Khurshid Shah stated things would be very different if the federal government had executed the National Action Plan (NAP). He stated that the PPP has always raised its voice against terrorism and that the peace-loving masses of Pakistan would back the ground offensive against the terrorists (The News, 2017). As a result of Radd ul Fasaad operation, several terrorist organizations were wiped out

and their sleeper cells were dismantled. They have also been weakened by the removal of remaining terrorists from Lahore, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sehwan Sharif, and from the former FATA (now Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) since 2017. This operation was successful in eradicating foreign extremists' strongholds in the former Tribal Areas of Pakistan. The international community applauded Pakistan's achievements and sacrifices in this operation (Feyyaz, 2020). All these military operations and legislations have suppressed terrorist activities, but have not fixed the problem of terrorism and extremism. It would not be surprising if militant organizations emerge and resume their violent activities, as the state have ambivalent attitude towards religious organizations, which provides a conducive climate for religiously motivated activities—not always non-violent.

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan faces a multi-faceted threat posed by violent extremism and terrorism. There is no denying the fact that the level of intensity of terrorist violence has significantly decreased since 2013, but it would be naïve to think that it has vanished. The credit for this better law and order situation goes to both the PML (N) led federal government and the PPP as the main opposition party (2013-2018). The federal government devised policies, which could not be implemented without the support of the opposition parties, especially of the PPP. So, when it comes to security policy, strategies, and military operations in the former Tribal Areas, the PPP was instrumental in helping to embrace the strategy as the main opposition in the Pakistani Parliament. Even if they strongly disagreed with certain points and proposed different solutions, all of the PPP opposition figures in Parliament had participated and provided their constructive feedback to the government. In all, the PML (N) Government was able to achieve its counterterrorism and counter militancy objectives, but it became possible with the PPP's help and support as the main opposition party. It would have been very



difficult for the central government to implement such policies if a right-wing, Taliban-friendly political party was the main opposition party in parliament. That said, terrorism and extremism still pose a serious threat to Pakistan, but the threat can be contained and ultimately eliminated if the country's government and opposition parties work together towards that end. It is therefore imperative that all political parties, be they in power or opposition, have to come together to rid Pakistan of the menace of terrorism and violent extremism.

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