

Unforgotten Story of Terrorism

Poverty is one of the many factors that may lead individuals to become radicalised and commit terrorist acts. After a massacre in a Pakistani school **Mudassir Farooqi** was struck by the impact this had on his own students and colleagues. He is now undertaking a PhD investigating whether social entrepreneurship programs could counter terrorism in vulnerable communities.

The Aftermath

On December 16th, 2014, I sat in my office preparing for a lecture on sociology when a fellow faculty member knocked on my door and entered. She had tears in her eyes and was shaking. I asked her what had happened and she passed me her mobile phone. It was a live broadcast of six gunmen allied with the Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) attacking the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar, the capital city of the north-western province of Pakistan.

The foreign militants entered from the border with Afghanistan, including one Chechen, three Arabs and two Afghans. Their main targets were the children attending a training session on first aid in the main auditorium of the school, which served children aged between 14 and 17 years old. The militants killed 141 people, including 132 schoolchildren. A rescue operation was launched by Pakistan Army's Special Forces wing, the SSG. The SSG neutralised all six terrorists and rescued 960 people. On the 2nd of December 2015, Pakistan security officials hanged four additional militants involved in the Peshawar massacre by order of the court. On the 9th of July 2016, the mastermind behind the attack; Omar Khorasani was killed by a US Special Forces drone strike in eastern Afghanistan.

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Motivation for Change

Since that deadly attack, my life as an academic in Pakistan transformed and my role as a teacher has evolved. Following the attacks, I began to spend a proportion of class time convincing the students that we were safe and that such a tragedy would not happen again. I also took time to reflect on the lives lost in the attack – knowing we will never forget. The trauma of the children taken at the APS School in Peshawar has left a haunting mark on my students and colleagues. Within two days of the massacre, I took leave and travelled straight to Peshawar to meet the families that had suffered on that day. With a Master's degree in Management Sciences and aspiring to start a PhD on counter terrorism, I altered



First year Art and Design student exhibition

Imperial College of Business Studies (ICBS) logo



ICBS Academy building



Imperial Mosque, Lahore, built in the Mughal Era

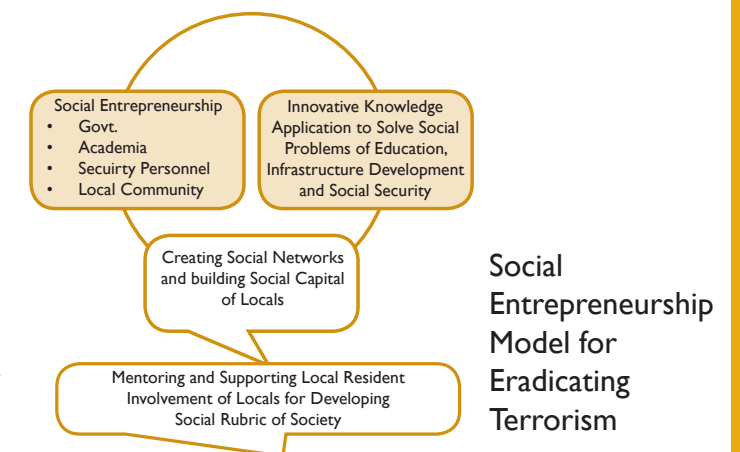
my focus to investigate the cause of the scourge of terrorism. After meeting the concerned families, school administration and security personnel, I came to the realisation that it is the social rubric of a community that safeguards the lives of people. With grinding poverty and a lack of access to knowledge and skills training, a society can neither work towards nor achieve any of its defined objectives for development.

Utilising support from the local community, notably an Afghan national worker, the terrorists entered the school. This worker in particular gave the terrorists specific information about the training session in the auditorium that enabled the attack. The worker was the sole source of income for a family of ten people. Similar to many terrorist attacks, poverty and hardship are clear environmental factors that lead to complicity. In this case, the extra money the national worker earned by providing information about the school led to the deaths of approximately 150 people. Social entrepreneurship may prevent such terrible tragedies in the future by creating economic opportunity and positive change towards the outlook of deprived communities where extremist views often take root.

An Educational Action Plan

I began research into this issue in 2014, and have enrolled this year at the University of Leicester; I am currently working towards a PhD in the use of social entrepreneurship as a way to understand and counter terrorism in south Asia. Social enterprises are the modern day tools to provide solutions to social problems by involving the local community. In cases where society has become radicalised; social entrepreneurship will lay the foundation of building a tolerant society of local people, aided by an established education system that is equipped to counter radicalised views within the society. An extensive portfolio of field work interviewing local people, security officials, rescue and social workers following the Peshawar attack has led to many interested parties investing in

this solution as stakeholders. In my research model I aim to test the extent to which the modern tool of social entrepreneurship can counter violent extremism.



A national action plan is underway in Pakistan to reduce the threat of terrorism by expelling radical jihadists from within poorer segments of the community. The initial field work carried out in my research into the application of social entrepreneurship will help the local community to build role models for a peaceful society (Operation Rah-E-Nijat conducted in 2009 within the SWAT valley expelled radicals and in the post operation period empowered the local community to build a society of tolerance, by providing educational awareness and employment opportunities). The study will also help policy makers to strategize future counter terrorism by implementing measures to create positive role models (e.g. Young Leaders, Educationists and Entrepreneurs), and encourage alternative pursuits for those who would otherwise be sympathetic or attracted to jihadist terrorism. Terrorism itself has no religion, and no national identity, therefore we need to apply modern techniques utilising knowledge-based frameworks within societies to reduce the effect of terrorism across the globe.

Mudassir Farooqi is a first year PhD student in the Department of Politics and International Relations, researching the phenomenon of Islamic Jihad and political violence exploring its causes from history and is also looking to propose counter violence strategy with the help of social entrepreneurship.