
Human Trafficking, Religious Indoctrination & Radicalization

Introduction

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime adopted on 15th of November 2000, states that Human Trafficking shall mean:

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”

The UN Protocol continues on asserting that the consent of a victim of human trafficking shall be irrelevant where any of the aforementioned means of coercion and deception have been used - Recruitment, fear, and profit. Evidently, transnational movement is not a necessary condition for human trafficking – victims could be moved within the boundaries of their own country, region or city.

Despite the fact that the definition of trafficking of persons usually limits the notion of exploitation to sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, servitude and trafficking of organs, this article will unveil the phenomenon of grooming individuals, mainly in South Asia, through religious indoctrination, their subsequent radicalization and potential involvement in terrorism, and demonstrate how such sequence of events corresponds to the criteria of the UN Protocol.

It is crucial to indicate that the convention on human trafficking adopted in 2002 by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – the regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of the South Asian countries – interprets human trafficking merely as the enforced movement of women and children with the intention of their commercial sexual exploitation. Therefore, the SAARC Convention is not simply inadequately formulated, but also has a considerably restricted scope of action. Despite all civil society campaigns and NGO activists who fight for a strengthened legal framework, till present day no South Asian countries have ratified the UN’s Palermo Protocol, although India and Sri Lanka have signed it.

Such legal environment generates multiple loopholes in the criminal justice system, which in return makes it vulnerable to manipulations and abuse. This paper will first explain the links between terrorism and organized crime, of which human trafficking is a subsection. Afterwards it will aim to illuminate the dark matter within the realm of human trafficking itself and give a profound overview of its intersections with radicalization and religious

Indoctrination, while simultaneously analysing the legal tools utilized in overcoming these challenges and their inherent strengths and weaknesses.

Organized Crime - Terrorism nexus in South Asia

The nexus between organized crime and terrorism has been widely recognized by law enforcement bodies, political actors, scholars and the international community. Yet, oftentimes this dangerous relationship converts into one of symbiosis, where drawing the line between the two appears to be tricky. Terrorists and criminals frequently work side by side, assisting each other's activities in order to strengthen their own capacities and fulfil their goals. For instance, terrorist groups become involved through direct or indirect channels in human trafficking, human smuggling, sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, drugs trade, arms trade and the illicit trade of natural resources, for financial and material profits. Through such activities, they facilitate the erosion of the State apparatus and contribute to undermining the political stability and socio-economic development, which further prolongs and preserves the necessary conditions for organised criminal groups to prosper and grow bigger. In addition, organised criminal actors might adopt terrorist strategies, such as the gradual exercise of sustained attacks, pressure and violence, to accomplish their objectives and protect their illicit businesses. The main differentiation between the actions of the two groups is the fact that unlike terrorists who deliberately challenge State authority and seek political or ideological change through deployment of terror, organised criminal actors' ultimate goals are financial gains.

The South Asian region is of paramount importance due to its variety of resources that comprise of both natural resources, human capital and politico-economic power, all of which, if handled successfully, would collectively contribute to a positive state of stability and security. However, the subcontinent demonstrates more regress than progress in its overall development since the presence of violent extremism, potentially leading to terrorism, continuously drags the region into a decline.

As the internationally renowned expert on terrorism studies Martha Crenshaw argues:

“Terrorism is a form of political action. It cannot be taken out of specific historical contexts or treated as a generic phenomenon. It is a strategy rooted in political discontent, used in the service of many different beliefs and doctrines that help legitimize and sustain violence. Ideologies associated with nationalism, revolution, religion, and defence of the status quo have all inspired terrorism”.

In countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and to a limited degree in India and Bangladesh local conditions have contributed in expanding the playground of terrorist groups, where they avail opportunities to recruit followers and run activities without being disturbed. The perilous blend of poor State governance, corruption, porous borders and weak criminal justice system has induced an atmosphere of lawlessness where terrorists engage in illicit endeavours such as trafficking of human beings, drugs, arms trade and extortion, driven by a desire for financial profits as well as honour, revenge and (political) ideology.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) region of South Asia is probably the most susceptible to accommodating the junction between terrorism and organised crime. Afghanistan has been

disrupted and thrown into a socio-economic and political turmoil by over three continuous decades of conflict, commencing with the anti-Soviet War, which began in 1979. Since then, Afghanistan has become an embodiment of a “*Failed State*”, commonly ruled by chiefs of tribes, warlords and numerous violent non-state actors, such as the Quetta Shura Taliban, (also known as Afghan Taliban). Its neighbour Pakistan has become a key factor in its domestic affairs—the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) has been alleged of providing sanctuary to a mélange of terrorist organizations, such as the Taliban, Haqqani network and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Apart from these Afghan terrorist groups sustained by the Pakistani State, the Tehrik-e Taliban, or TTP (also referred to as Pakistani Taliban), is an effective operating terrorist group, which conducts violent actions against Pakistan and funds its activities via criminal acts.

The AFPAK region provides a favourable milieu where both criminals and terrorists cooperate and flourish. The rule of law is weak or non-existent and illicit economies have originated over time. Support by State actors further increases the space in which these organizations operate. For instance, the Taliban has a history of collaborating with the Haqqani network in order to fulfil their goals, where the network might be branded as a terrorist organizations, but is also functioning like an organised crime group.

Acknowledging the link between Organized Crime and Terrorism, the UN Security Council has attempted to address it through various legal instruments and actions. For example, in 2001, the Council adopted *Resolution 1373*, demanding from all Member States to domestically criminalise terrorism and the processes that encompass its financing. Since that time, the counter-terrorism bodies entrusted by the Council with implementation of *Resolution 1373* (2001) have generally considered the nexus between terrorism and organised crime as falling within their scope of competence and action. In 2014, the UN Security Council adopted *Resolution 2195*, “*Threats to international peace and security*”, urging the international community to improve its understanding on the issue and see the nexus between organised crime and terrorism as a threat to international security and development.

However, such legal tools are tackling the symptoms rather than the root of the problem. They are not devoting efforts to exploring the channels and mechanisms that lead people towards and alongside the path of terrorism and criminality. In vulnerable areas throughout the world, the accumulated discontent among certain sections of the population could let terrorism and/or organised crime appear as an inviting opportunity. Alienation and lack of adequate integration, both backed up with the rise of right-wing extremism have charged the air with discriminatory, violent and prejudiced sentiments. Altogether with the absence of appropriate State action that engages with suitable counter-tools and drivers, such as education, financial aid and medical help, such scenario could lead unfortunate and vulnerable individuals to pursue inclusion, recognition, status and wealth through terrorist means. Once labelled deviants, these groups of people are already a social outcast, enabling others to easily identify, radicalise and recruit them as terrorists.

[The Role of Indoctrination](#)

When discussing the conventional forms of human trafficking, academics agree that both victims and perpetrators of trafficking in persons predominantly operate in regions of impoverishment, violence and political volatility. Victims often carry certain major features such as poverty, young age, limited education, lack of work opportunities, lack of family

support (e.g., orphaned, runaway, homeless, family involved in illicit/terrorist activities), history of previous abuse, mental health issues, and living in vulnerable areas (e.g. areas with high crime). Traffickers in general terms target helpless individuals, who live in unstable regions. War-torn States create the “desired” conditions where thousands of displaced persons become a perfect prey once they already lack safe and secure shelter, reliable guardians and opportunities for positive development. The social class stratification exacerbates these conditions and leaves those individuals into a Catch-22 situation, where the only channels towards advancement remain the unlawful and violent ones.

Taking terrorism in Pakistan as a case study, it has been observed that terrorist organizations mainly originated as a result of the State supporting other terrorist groups in its neighbouring countries. Consequently, the country became a hotbed for Muslim Jihad and the training of Jihadis. However, the toxic religious atmosphere in Pakistan cannot be explained entirely through the existence of Jihadist training camps on the peripheries of its borders. Alongside its frontiers with Afghanistan and India, and within Pakistan itself, the State hosts a big number of Madrassas.

Madrassas are Islamic seminaries, which teach Islamic-related subjects such as the memorization and interpretation of the Quran, the principles of Islamic Jurisprudence and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad. The national curriculum was Islamized during the 1980s under General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, a military ruler who promoted Pakistan’s Islamic identity in order to fasten together the mixture of different tribes, ethnicities and languages. The majority of madrassas in Pakistan are Sunni, following the doctrine of the orthodox Deobandi sect. Although the madrassas came into existence to fill the gap in the education market of the region, while the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan was ongoing, these institutions became more involved with teaching violent religious extremism rather than secular studies. Seemingly (mainstream) education has never been a priority in Pakistan, evidenced from the fact that only about half of the population can read and write, far below the ratio in countries with similar per-capita income.



The madrassas offer almost no instruction beyond the memorizing of the Koran, creating a widening pool of young minds that are sympathetic to militancy and violent extremism. Credits: NY Times

“Education in Pakistan was left to the dogs,” - Pervez Hoodbhoy, a physics professor at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad and an outstanding critic of the government’s failure to oppose the spreading Islamic militancy and promote educational improvement initiatives.

With few avenues for advancement and conditions of despair and neglect, religious schools find a void that needs to be filled. Notably, Saudi Arabia has a history of funding many Madrassas, especially those that promote Wahhabism. Saudi Arabia’s initial aim, when started providing help in the mid-1980s, was to counteract the aid the (Shiite) Islamic Republic

of Iran was delivering to the Shia minority in Pakistan, with generous supplies of financial capital in order to expand the number of conservative Sunni Madrassas. Other Saudi Madrassas, specifically those in Afghanistan refugee camps, provide an interpretation of Islam that combines Pashtun ideologies with Deobandi views, which is exactly the hallmark of the Taliban. Benefactors from Saudi Arabia provide the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide. This matter of fact highlights an often ignored aspect in the conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan, namely that the violence is to a high extent financed by wealthy donors across the Arabian Sea, who hold extremist and radical views, and whose governments are reluctant to confront them. For instance, members of the charity ring Jamaat-ud-Dawa, part of the Pakistani militant outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba, which carried out the 2008 Mumbai attacks, travelled to Saudi Arabia searching for donations for new schools at extremely inflated prices, where the purpose was siphoning off the excess money to fund militant operations.

The Madrassas are considered by many families in Pakistan as the only realistic option towards access of education for their children, especially among those who come from poor backgrounds, since these Madrassas provide food and shelter for their students. Poverty has helped in expanding the enrolment in these “*educational*” establishments, since they prove the successful strategy of generating loyalty and unconditional obedience through the alleviation of the aspects of deprivation.

The local Deobandi teachers travel across the region and try to convince parents that their impoverishment is a direct consequence of their family's deviation from the true path of Islam. They attempt to convince the parents that the optimum way to redeem their sins, is through devoting the lives of their children to Islam. The teacher proposes to educate these children at his Madrasa and subsequently promises to find them employment in the service of Islam. The notion of ‘*martyrdom*’ is often part of the discussion, as the family is assured that if their children are martyred, both they and their family will reach the desired salvation, everlasting glory, hero worship, honour, social recognition and God's benevolence during their corporal life on earth. A monetary payment is additionally offered as a compensation for their ‘*sacrifice*’ in the name of Islam.

After many years under conditions of little or no contact with the outside world, Madrasa students have a tendency of becoming highly devoted to their masters, where the authoritarian doctrinaire education established on memorization inhibits even the slightest expression of free thought or individual will, and gives a green light to religious fanaticism and incites a desire to confront anyone pointed out as an unbeliever by their teacher. The path following recruitment relies on the age of the child involved, where youngsters (between 8 and 12) are preferred. The Madrassas are usually in remote areas and maintain a limited number of students so that they do not draw significant attention. The juveniles are refused any contact with the outside world and are indoctrinated in sectarian extremism, hatred for non-Muslim and anti-Western beliefs. The recruiting teacher occasionally pays visits to the families in order to glorify them on their progress and reassure the parents that this was the greatest choice made for their children. Teachers at the Madrasa seem to make the decisions of the future of their students, built on their evaluation of the child's willingness to engage in violence and acceptance of Jihadist extremism, in comparison with his usefulness as an active advocate of the ideology or a recruiter.

Such recruitment methods used to lure children from poor disadvantaged areas to join religiously indoctrinated establishment are similar to those grooming processes utilised by pimps when trying to lure women and young girls to leave their families and friends. Often the dependency and trust of those women are gained through showing sentiments of praise and affection. In this case, women do not see themselves as victims, who will be subsequently exploited, rather as going to be with someone who will care and provide for them. This consideration has important implications for the international definition of human trafficking, since the similarities between cases of grooming for the purposes of sexual exploitation and recruitment and radicalization of combatants are noticeable.

Child Suicide Bombers

In Kunduz province, the Taliban increasingly use Madrasas, to provide military training to children between the ages of 13 and 17, in order to deploy them in various military operations. Madrasas serve the Taliban not only through religiously indoctrinating the students there, but also through offering combat training. In an analysis of the profiles of suicide bombers who have struck in Punjab (Pakistan), the law enforcement has reported that more than two-thirds of them had also attended Madrasas. Not only children have suffered disproportionately in military conflicts, they have been also used for carrying out insurgent activities like fighting, espionage and blowing up Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). One of the most chilling factors is the increasing number of child suicide bombers. Children are recruited simply for being children – easily influenced in the righteousness of Jihad and less likely to arouse suspicion.

“The recruitment and use of children in most places, including in Afghanistan, has to be viewed in the context of widespread poverty, lack of opportunity, lack of access to education and employment, and a complete failure of the rule of law” - Charu Lata Hogg, policy and advocacy director of the human rights group Child Soldiers International.

Often the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan coerce parents to give away a child by offering an amount of money greater than an annual salary and often out of fear and impoverishment, families make this agonizing choice of acting in accordance with the Taliban’s wishes. Officials provide frightening accounts of how children are persuaded and offered a path out the drudgery of poverty through enchanting visions of paradise, where rivers of milk and honey flow, in exchange for ending their lives through carrying out an attack. Other times they are told that their mothers and sisters would be raped by the foreign invaders, that the enemy they intend to kill deserves to die, because of being a non-Muslim–, hence the infidels must be destroyed. Some terrorist leaders hang keys around the necks of the children, telling them they will need them to open the gates to heaven after they commit the suicide-attack.

“Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a state should not, under any circumstances, recruit or exploit in hostilities any persons under the age of 18 years” - U.N. Convention on Children's Rights regarding the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Despite the fact that there is no concrete number on how many children are recruited and are currently fighting in Afghanistan, the U.N Task Force gives out estimates for the period between September 2010 and December 2014 of 560 children involved as combatants. In addition, the number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children more than doubled compared with 2014 and reached its highest number ever recorded. In 2015, the Ministry of Justice of Afghanistan reported that 214 boys had been detained in juvenile rehabilitation centres on charges connected to threat to national security, including association with armed groups. Moreover, one in every four civilian casualties in 2015 was a child. Yet, U.N highlights that underreporting remains an issue of grave concern. Another obstacle alongside the deficiency of any appropriate legal tools criminalizing the recruitment and use of children is the absence of rehabilitation programs, which would address the psychological, physical, emotional and educational state of those who have fought or have been trained in armed groups.

One legal instrument that recognizes the recruitment process of combatants is the Hague-Marrakesh Memorandum on Good Practices for a More Effective Response to the Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) adopted in 2014. It explores the phenomenon of individuals who travel abroad to a country other than their country of residence or nationality to engage in, undertake, plan, prepare, carry out or otherwise support terrorist activity or to provide or receive terrorist training to do so. It further touches upon the impact of FTFs on providing strategic expertise and financial aid, alongside with facilitating the influx of recruits and arms and promoting violence back to their state of origin. However, its obvious shortcoming is that this Memorandum simply lays out a set of good practices that addresses the processes of radicalization to violent extremism, recruitment and facilitation, travel and fighting, and return and reintegration, without having any binding power to secure their implementation and regulation in the countries where these issues occur. There is no obligation to adopt these strategies, since according to the Memorandum any legal actions are based on the sovereign decision of each country according to its legal system, priorities, needs and circumstances.

Another instrument that appears more legally binding under the framework of International Humanitarian Law is the International Criminal Court's Child Soldier Provision. It prohibits the recruitment or use of children under 15 by parties to a conflict, "*Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities*, is considered a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), to which Afghanistan is also a signatory. Those who commit, order, assist, or have command responsibility for war crimes are subject to prosecution by the ICC or national courts. What, though, becomes problematic is the three-year perpetrator/victim gap created by the Rome Statute that renders this demographic group invisible at the ICC. Soldiers older than 15 are not considered "*child*" soldiers in terms of being the subject of the crimes enlisted in the Provision and are therefore also not recognised as victims in front of the ICC. At the same time, combatants aged between 15 and 17 fall outside of the prosecutor's jurisdictional reach, since Article 26 of the Rome Statute prohibits the prosecutor from investigating and prosecuting individuals who commit crimes when they are under the age of 18. The outcome is a legal vacuum where a 17 year-old soldier becomes neither a victim nor a perpetrator of war crimes. This statutory gap provides a dangerous legal outlet, where armed groups recruit and use individuals between the ages of 15 and 18, because they

become technically, legally invisible before the court, which in return makes their activities neutral in front of the ICC.

Fortunately, recognising such cracks in the legal framework the U.N adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession, *The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*, which Afghanistan ratified in 2003. According to it, it is forbidden for non-State military groups to recruit or use in hostilities, individuals under 18 years of age, under any circumstances. The Optional Protocol also places obligations on governments to “take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use, including the adoption of legal measures necessary to prohibit and criminalize such practices”. Military forces and governments also have an obligation to ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict.

However, these legal provisions address only *fait accompli* situations, where individuals have been long time radicalised and have been involved in direct terrorist fighting as part of an armed group. The difference with the Human Trafficking Protocol is that the intention to commit an offence of human trafficking or incite someone to commit an offence are also considered punishable by law. The offence is drawn widely enough to encompass any offence committed by aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring an offence of trafficking.

The leap between radicalization and actual engagement in terrorism is vast, yet, without attempting to find a solution and deal with the former, all strategies applied to the latter will be futile. Efforts must be concentrated on intercepting and ceasing the link while it is still a foetus.

Social Media Influence

The processes of radicalization and indoctrination has multiple layers, and revealing what is under those layers displays a complex picture, where numerous social factors are involved, such as group identity, individual roles, socio-economic status, political and religious beliefs, motivations and predispositions. Radicalization appears to be an extremely fluid phenomenon, one where change is the benchmark. Modern technologies additionally move forward the groups’ objectives and facilitate the mechanisms of radicalization. Information sharing helps disseminating extremist beliefs across the globe at a faster pace. Social media is an important instrument in the radicalization of individuals and their subsequent recruitment as terrorists. It seduces its users with an assurance that under its wing they will find understanding, recognition and a sense of purpose. Terrorist groups are increasingly taking advantage of social media to lure marginalized young individuals, indoctrinate them with extremist ideologies and encourage them to carry out terrorist operations, such as ‘*lone wolf*’ attacks. Internet blogs, chat rooms and applications provide the practical skills and know-how to users, for whom the only necessity is to make a quick browsing or ask for additional information, and most likely also receive an immediate answer.

This could create a snowball effect, where the attitudes and behaviours of populations worldwide could be influenced with only one social media status update or a message, which transmits the information quickly and efficiently and connects a great number of users at a global scale. Such a dynamic environment creates a movement of like-minded people, where often a leader is not even needed, because once ideas and objectives are exchanged, individuals easily find supporters with whom to act. Group thinking becomes a very mighty

force and the decision-making equation is simple to grasp. For example, an atrocious event takes place against a certain minority or an individual, and the action is captured as a video or photo, which is later posted on social media and quickly spreads throughout the Internet. Users become outraged, provide their opinion, open a discussion and share links of the video or the images. Individuals, as a response to the accident, want to undertake an action, which most often also resorts to equally violent means.

The perpetrators of the Mumbai 2008 terrorist attacks opportunistically used social media to their advantage in order to send and receive information in real time, watch how the events were unfolding and make decisions of where and how to conduct their attacks, and whom to kill with precision. They were monitoring the social media activity of civilians, who were tweeting the movements of the police, which in return helped them decrease the effectiveness of the operational plans of the law enforcement. Citizens who were hiding were using their social apps in order to inform friends and relatives about their state and to understand what was going on. The terrorists were reviewing these social media applications and if those who were hiding revealed their locations, they were targeted by the attackers.

Conclusion

The alarming threat of trafficking of vulnerable individuals in conflict-affected areas arises for many reasons: desperate economic situation, the breakdown of rule of law, lack of available social services, absence of adequate education and association with radicalised peer groups. In addition to that, people who flee their homes in search for safety, tend to become an easy target in unfamiliar surroundings. Under such circumstances, without an access to the mainstream economy and opportunities for sustainable development, individuals are inclined to search for options that might place them in dangerous situations and lead them towards illegal channels, which are often under the control of traffickers. For instance, before engaging with Jihadist groups, many young Muslims receive their first lessons on radical Islam from Madrassas. These schools create perceptions of a Western crusade against the Muslim world and alienate many young people in order to steer them into the arms of fundamentalists, who want to establish a big support base for extremist and fanatical religious views.

As the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon asserts: *“If conflict gives oxygen to traffickers, human rights and stability suffocate them”*, highlighting the necessity of guaranteeing justice for victims and liability for offenders, via concentrating on human rights protection and promoting political stability. *“We need strategic leadership in ending war – and also in preventing conflicts and sustaining peace,”* added the former Secretary-General, underlining the UN’s responsibility towards its Member States in early intervention and preventive actions.

Until very recently the recruitment of children as soldiers in armed conflicts was not recognised as a form of human trafficking, however, in 2016 the U.S Department of State included this phenomenon in its Trafficking in Persons Report.

The September 2016 United Nations Security Council Action Plan on Fighting Human Trafficking in Conflict also acknowledged that since fraudulently or coercively undertaken



Security Council unanimously adopts resolution condemning in the strongest terms all instances of trafficking in persons in areas affected by armed conflicts. Credits: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

recruitment with the purposes of exploitation defines human trafficking, on that basis child recruitment by armed groups could constitute a form of human trafficking.

The aim of this article was to underline the long and complex process of indoctrination and radicalization that leads to the recruitment and involvement of individuals into terrorist activities.

The aspect of being situated in an armed-conflict zone is also not a necessary prerequisite, since nowadays globalization and social media have made it possible for individuals to be groomed

and radicalised beyond the geographical borders of a country. Prosecuting perpetrators of human trafficking does not eradicate the issue - this is simply a consequentialist approach. Supranational bodies like the United Nations hold the power to solve problems globally, yet politics is a local phenomenon with local dimensions.

Radicalization and religious indoctrination must be perceived as part of the whole process that leads to the recruitment of people by terrorist organizations, and therefore the current focus on securitization should also encompass integration and education. Ignorance, in this case on both sides, breeds radicalism, with terrorism as its outlet.



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