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WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS: A MARRIAGE OF COUNTER TERRORISM AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

■ INTRODUCTION

On August 15, 2021, Taliban fighters, displaying their white flags, took control of Kabul's entry points and, within hours, occupied the presidential palace. Despite having assured American allies and advisors that the Taliban could be resisted, President Ashraf Ghani abruptly fled the capital, thereby facilitating a chaotic and ignominious conclusion to the United States' military engagement in Afghanistan. The international community witnessed what many termed "Saigon 2.0," as U.S. air forces departed hastily, abandoning Afghan partners, American citizens, and allied personnel to the newly installed Taliban regime.

This research highlights a critical gap in the post-2001 counterterrorism literature. Since 2001, the United States and its Western allies have invested over USD 1 trillion in intelligence gathering, security infrastructures, and capacity-building initiatives as part of the so-called Global War on Terror (GWoT). While the American-led NATO alliance publicly framed these measures as a strategy to counter the asymmetric capabilities of jihadists and to stifle their expansion in rural Afghanistan and Iraq, this study contends that GWOT's military and intelligence failures expose a deeper structural deficit in Western diplomatic and defence policies. Specifically, this deficit is traced to a lack of sociocultural awareness and grassroots community engagement in theatres of jihadi violence – Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen – ultimately undermining local goodwill and cooperation.

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As a result, the United States and NATO were unable to cultivate constructive public opinion or community support for their kinetic military activities, which ranged from ground operations to drone and aerial warfare. Civilian casualties not only eroded any nascent legitimacy Western powers may have had but also helped to create new adversaries, overshadowing the neutralisation of the existing ones. Accordingly, this research sought to explore and develop an alternative community-driven counterterrorism strategy that integrates the business studies concept of social entrepreneurship (SE) to disrupt and diminish jihadist violence, whilst also creating social value in the affected communities.

Drawing on literature in terrorism studies, counterterrorism theory, and social enterprise, we develop an innovative framework that underscores SE as a vital yet underexplored instrument for countering radicalisation and its ideological underpinnings. Indeed, within communities directly governed by jihadists – such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen – or amongst displaced populations susceptible to jihadi ideology, SE emerges as a promising approach to supplement kinetic military and intrusive intelligence responses through local engagement, resource mobilisation, and collaborative problem-solving.

■ FAILURE OF THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM (GWOT): A SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ANALYSIS

Since the events of September 9/11 and the onset of the Global War on Terror (GWOt), jihadism – understood as a socio-political movement employing violence in pursuit of its aims – became central to international relations and security discourses and retains an important role in security dynamics in 2025. In scholarly and policy circles, jihadist violence is mostly attributed to religious motivations rooted in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Islamic revival movements, notably Wahhabism and Salafism. This paper, however, argues that jihadism has evolved over a much longer historical arc. This arc begins with the age of European imperialism and British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent, as well as British involvement in resistance and independence movements across the Middle East during Ottoman rule. Over the past two centuries, this political rejection of imperialism has consolidated into a structured phenomenon that fuses identity politics with extremism.

In the modern era, jihadism operates as a branded, hybrid form of warfare – one that coalesces religious, political, economic, and social objectives, alongside information and proxy warfare tactics. Despite extensive efforts (itself branded as GWOt) to arrest its expansion, recent developments illustrate the resilience and enduring quality of such movements: the Taliban has reclaimed Kabul, Al-Qaeda continues to operate in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq, and the so-called Islamic State (Daesh) persists in perpetrating political violence across Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States.

Among the most notable shortcomings in existing counterterrorism strategies is the insufficient engagement of local communities – those directly affected by radicalisation and jihadist violence – thereby hampering the containment of new recruits and the neutralisation of jihadist information campaigns. This paper seeks to address the conceptual gaps in the studies of terrorism, international security, intelligence studies and war studies, through adopting an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawn from business studies – in the form of organisational science and marketing theory – and political science, thereby critically evaluating how management and entrepreneurial concepts can provide more effective and community-located responses to jihadism.

This research draws on multiple qualitative data sources and approaches. We conducted semi-structured interviews with counterterrorism officials and community members, focus groups with security experts, and then analysed appropriate content using NVivo. We quantitatively analysed figures around defence expenditure and casualty rates to provide verifiable, contextual evidence that supplements our multi-method qualitative design.

Interview transcripts were systematically coded, recurring concepts identified, and participants' perspectives and experiences compared. The focus groups add a collective dimension, capturing interactive reflections on radicalisation, community cohesion, and social entrepreneurship. Word-frequency analysis and thematic modelling further enrich the content analysis.

This multi-method qualitative design enabled us to triangulate insights across techniques, reinforcing the robustness of our conclusions. We chose this design to capture and enrich our varied data-gathering approaches that we needed to explore the complex phenomenon of jihadist terrorism, and to develop a conceptual model for understanding social entrepreneurship as a viable counterterrorism strategy. We decided against an approach testing quantitatively driven hypotheses, as this would have posed additional challenges in measuring community perceptions of radicalisation and responses to it.

One of the key findings of this study is the relationship we identify between the “winning hearts and minds” approach in counterterrorism operations and social entrepreneurship (SE) as a possible counterterrorism strategy. Drawing on interview and focus group data, our research positions SE as a community-based mechanism for addressing complex social issues – such as jihadist terrorism. We do this through the thematic analysis of textual evidence. Although social entrepreneurship, as both a framework for organisational design and a mode of business transaction, has gained considerable visibility since the 1990s (Dees 2007, 2017), its principal applications have traditionally centred on fostering social transformations (Yunus 2007; Zahra et al. 2009), rather than being used to consider or address security-related challenges.

In this regard, the study integrates insights from the extant management sciences and social entrepreneurship literature to understand the evolving and complex

threat posed by jihadist groups to their local societies, and those societies targeted by jihadists. Our findings suggest that social entrepreneurial perspectives provide novel analytical tools for understanding the organisation, management, and operational dynamics of such groups, while simultaneously enabling policymakers, security practitioners, faith leaders, and local communities to identify, confront, and counter processes of radicalisation and political violence through collaborative engagement.

To bridge the conceptual gap in understanding jihadism's broad and complex impact upon societies, we employed a theory-building method that supported the creation of a typology of social enterprises (SE) applicable to a number of different threat vectors. This typology frames modern jihadist terrorism as a socially embedded phenomenon institutionalised within identified Muslim communities during two pivotal eras: first, in the Afghan war from 1979 to 1996, and second, following the 2001 attacks on New York and Washington (Hoffman and McCormick 2004; Michaels 2013; Sageman 2014). The typology we propose centres around three counter-jihadi enterprises – (1) Counter Terrorism Citizenship (CTC), (2) Counter-Narrative Enterprise (CNE), and (3) Jihadi Neighbourhood Watch (JNW). A detailed examination of these three enterprises follows.

■ COUNTER TERRORISM (CT) APPROACHES AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP (SE): TRANSLATING SE INTO A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

From our contextual discussion, we argue that there is a *prima facie* case for the relevance of SE in the context of counter-terrorism (CT). There remains a gap, however, around how communities and policymakers could apply social entrepreneurial thinking and frames to counterterrorism initiatives. There have been a small number of studies in Iraq (Desai 2011), Bangladesh (Chowdhury 2011) and the Philippines (Cañares 2011), where SE has been used as a tool to change the dynamics of society. The limitations of these studies were that they examined these societies in a post-conflict period and therefore amount to studies in reconstruction. Our research extends this approach further and examines whether SE can be used as a proactive tool used to de-radicalise society before the initiation of significant political violence and the escalation that follows. Consequently, SE also has the traction to enrich our understanding of the psychological aspect of jihadi terrorism.

Abrahms (2018) argues that terrorism can be examined through social, psychological, and organisational approaches, but the approaches with the greatest traction have been to view terrorism through psychological lenses. Similarly, Crenshaw (2000), Post (2013) and Sageman (2014) approach terrorism as a psychological snapshot of radicalised and totalising political ideologies like jihadism. In addressing the social and psychological drivers of jihadism, SE has a potential relevance for both the theory and practice of counterterrorism. In order to build the theoretical link between SE and

counter-terrorism strategy, insights from the two broader approaches of the global war on counter-terrorism must be drawn: the militarised approach and the policing and counternarrative approach (Ahmad 2010; Aljunied 2011; Larsdotter 2014).

The harder approach to counterterrorism focuses its operations on mostly kinetic routes, including aerial attack (extrajudicial killing), physical engagement by military or militarised forces, intrusive surveillance technologies, advanced intelligence and interrogation techniques, amongst others. The militarised approach is premised upon the physical dismantling of the infrastructure and logistic lines of terrorist groups (Kirkby 2014). On the other hand, the policing and counternarrative approach is more diplomatic in its orientation, seeking to understand polarisation (albeit this is contested) and curtail ideologies of hate and intolerance by promoting education and a counter-ideology of tolerance and peace (Kirkby 2014). Where this has not been universally applied to fringe groups and beliefs, it has attracted considerable criticism as essentially Islamophobic manifestations. The policing and counternarrative approach is more focused on defeating the terrorists by promoting a counter-ideology to de-radicalise society and split opposition thinking and action into a smaller section of hardline activists and a larger group of relatively neutral but passive support. These approaches have aimed to amplify alternative or countervailing theological positions that have resulted in some level of alienation (Aljunied 2011). This approach also tends to try and incentivise those outside the highly energised and ideologically driven groups to disarm and to constructively rejoin mainstream activities within society.

Our research extends this policing and counternarratives approach by arguing that social entrepreneurship can be unique in the context of counter-terrorism by promoting the logic of social value and social restructuring. It advances both policing and counter-narrative approaches by positing that social entrepreneurship (SE) offers a distinctive avenue for counterterrorism, predicated on the generation of social value and the restructuring of societal norms. As discussed previously, SE is a mechanism for value creation designed to address persistent social challenges. In a parallel sense, terrorism can be viewed as a long-standing social issue comparable to the systemic problems of inadequate education or widespread poverty that SE seeks to address in the business realm. Research into the root causes of radicalisation, political violence and terrorism has often observed the soft causal links between poverty, limited educational opportunities, and susceptibility to monocausal or totalising explanations and violent radicalisation (Sandler 2009, 2011, 2013). The same factors that can cause economic stress in a society can also coalesce into religious and political radicalisation.

Moreover, Piazza (2006, 2009), in his foundational work on the social dimensions of religiously inspired violence, underscores that communities which endure prolonged jihadi terrorism frequently move towards more generalised violence. The exposure to prolonged political violence essentially moves the tolerance to

violence and mainstreams such behaviour. If we extend Piazza's conclusions fractionally, we would see in societies such as Pakistan and Afghanistan that these structural variables of violence are exacerbating the risk of radicalisation, rendering young Muslims particularly susceptible to recruitment by jihadi organisations, and there is good evidence to support this point. Accordingly, this research argues that to proactively counter the jihadist threat, it is critical to employ de-radicalisation strategies – namely, counter-narratives grounded in social entrepreneurship – to safeguard vulnerable societies from the pervasive influence of jihadi terrorism.

Logically, then, SE, with its underlying innovative social value creation activities, can be used to provide common goods, thus alleviating poverty and providing access to education, which may provide the foundation to counter radicalising narratives and instilling greater constructive loyalty to a local society (Seelos and Mair 2005). We do not seek to dismiss all those who find sympathy in radicalised narratives as uneducated, gullible or ignorant, more that there is a strong correlation between impaired access to economic markets and education and susceptibility to radicalisation including the acceptance of political violence as a tool for the struggle against the state and involvement in transnational terrorism by claiming jihad as a way of life (Abadie 2004; Piazza 2006, 2008, 2011). Figure 1 below represents this relationship in a conceptual model, which is also theoretically grounded in the literature of terrorism, SE, and CT. Figure 1 shows a conceptual model that attempts to socially ground a social enterprise that can produce social value and help to assist in deradicalisation. The basic premise of this frame is derived from institutional social entrepreneurship and local entrepreneurs acting to build a network of ties and develop a program for social innovation to counter jihadism.

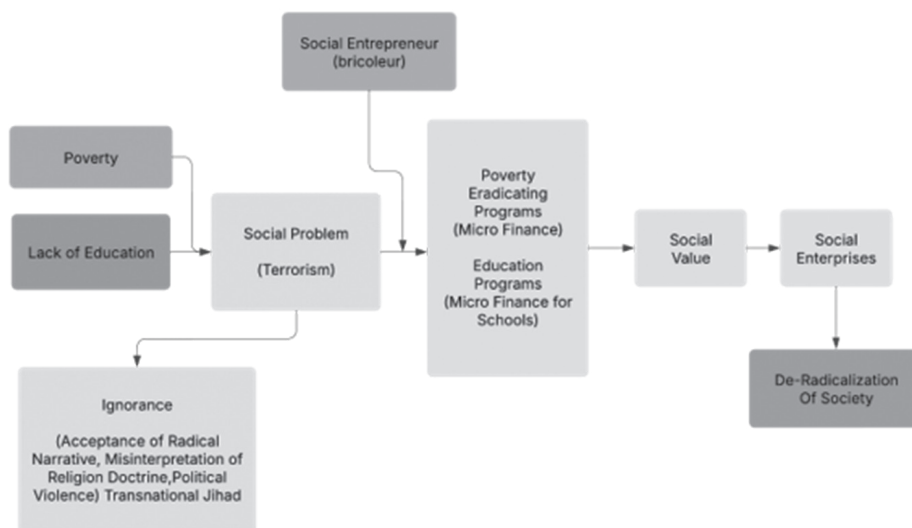


Figure 1. Social enterprise model for counterterrorism

Table 1. cont.

Word	Length	Weighted Percentage (%)
Terrorism	9	1.08
Jihadi	6	1.03
People	6	1.03
Violence	8	0.99
Counter	7	0.96
Issues	6	0.90
Religious	9	0.89
Control	7	0.89
Jihadist	8	0.84
Institution	11	0.83
Global	6	0.81
Community	9	0.70
Organisational	14	0.68
Political	9	0.68

Table 1 suggests that words (and therefore constructs) like ‘social’ (counted 59 times, with a weighted percentage of 1.6) are an important consideration in the impact of radicalised violence. Social, society and development all appear far more frequently than government-backed militarised options. As noted earlier in this piece, SE are peculiarly well suited to development challenges and social concerns. By cross-examining the counted words and removing the repetitions and triangulating with the social entrepreneurship literature, we are able to present a consolidated and thematic framework of SE within security studies below in Figure 3. The content analysis work suggests that jihadism is a socially grounded phenomenon, which ties in with our observation that there is a far older historical arc, and which tends to rely on radicalised narratives and key social actors to draw support and engage in jihadi violence. Thus, the countervailing force of social enterprises should also be true for counterradicalisation.

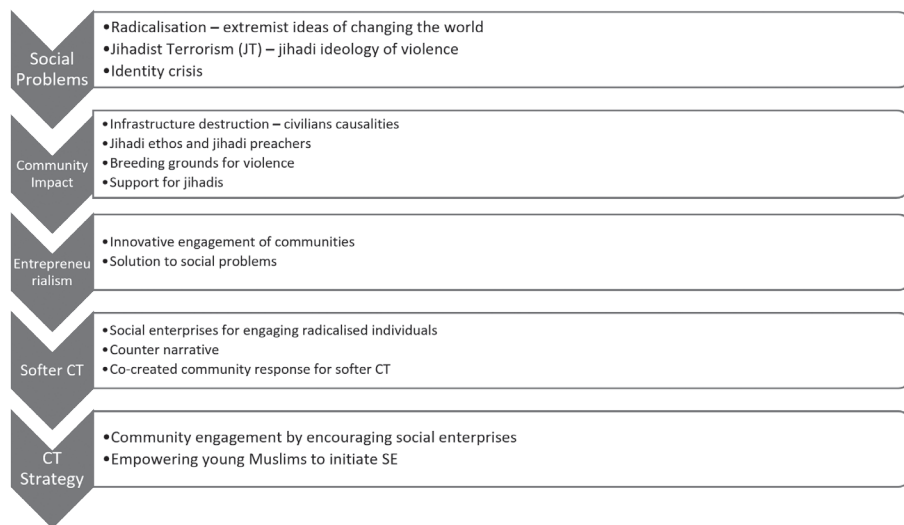


Figure 3. Thematic SE framework for Jihadism

■ IN SEARCH OF COUNTER-JIHADI SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Social enterprises are organisations whose primary business pivot is around using social issues and concerns to create business value and solutions (Germak and Singh 2009; Zahra et al. 2009; Newth and Woods 2014; Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano, Sánchez-García 2016;). Often operating beyond the immediate capacity of state institutions, social enterprises function as self-driven initiatives designed to tackle entrenched social problems for the betterment of society. Grounded in entrepreneurship, innovation, and marketing principles, these ventures devise, refine, and implement strategies that generate sustainable social value and foster transformative change (McGowan and Westley 2015; Carraher, Welsh, and Svilokos 2016). Generally, social enterprises combine the following characteristics:

1. Social purpose – designed to create social impact and social change and therefore to solve a social problem.
2. An enterprise approach – promotes the formation and growth of businesses. Utilises risk acceptance, entrepreneurial and innovative approaches to address social problems. Would be market-led and the strategic orientation results in the creation and maintenance of a sustainable business model.
3. Social ownership – promotes overall public good and stewardship.

Within security studies, the discourse and relevance of SE for counter-terrorism, as well as emergent themes on SE, are suggestive of the focus which respondents provide to SE as a counter-terrorism approach. To be more specific, within the jihadi discourse, the first highlighted theoretical concept is that of a 'social problem'. Scholars like Yunus (2007), Zahra et. al (2009) and Dees (2017) are of the view that a mandatory criterion

for establishing a social enterprise is the presence of a social problem. This is beyond the control and resources of the state, and in most cases this problem belongs to the tertiary sector where the state prioritises investing in comparison to other national issues (Dees 2007, 2017; Defourny and Nyssens 2010; Davie 2011).

In the past, the SE framework has been used in countries like the Philippines (Cañares 2011) and Iraq (Desai 2011) to initiate community-empowered infrastructure development in the aftermath of civil wars and violence. However, to date the SE framework has not been thought about in the context of a security study discourse, particularly within the context of jihadist terrorism. The current research finds and provides evidence of the relevance of SE in formulating and implementing countering responses in the form of non-kinetic measures like engagement strategies. The SE frame reinforces engagement measures that can beforehand identify, locate, and neutralise a jihadi tendency.

The findings point to the fact that softer counter-jihadi responses are aimed at engaging vulnerable individuals who can join the jihadi arena; however, these engagements are reactive and have become popular in the counter-terrorism discourse since the September 9/11 events. The American and European initiatives have focused on the Muslim diaspora (Vidino and Brandon 2012) and examined vulnerable individuals who can join the jihad, but despite these measures, the upsurge of jihadi terrorism is an undeniable fact (De Goede and Simon 2013; Butt and Tuck 2014). Thus, the present research proposes that a useful prescription in this chain of evidence is to address jihadist terrorism at the grassroots level of society. Thinking broadly about the jihadi threat as an institutionalised phenomenon grounded in the basic rubric of society and containing this threat through social enterprises will engage jihadism as a social problem which can be solved by breaking the ideological chain of organised and branded terrorism.

After establishing jihadism as a socially grounded issue and using SE as an engagement frame, the next aim is to explore community motivation in addressing jihadi violence. SE-based engagement needs to bring forth community innovation in solving a social problem (Germak and Singh 2009; Dacin, Dacin, and Matear 2010; Brück, Naudé, and Verwimp 2011; Choi and Majumdar 2014). As such, if the community decides to solve a pertinent, socially grounded issue like racial discrimination through SE, a resolution can be found in the literature, which provides evidence of community innovation. This claim of the research is also grounded in the societal and communal damage incurred by jihadis.

A careful look at jihadist terrorism reveals that jihadi attacks on civilians destroy infrastructure and aim to inculcate fear within the community; they also present a violent identity of Muslims (Fishman 2008, 2009). By understanding jihadist terrorism as a social problem and solving it by delivering social value, SE can bring forth a counter-narrative enterprise and engage communities to deliver a social value response. It can lead to the rebuilding of social and economic infrastructure and identity, thus hindering the future penetration of jihadi ideas. The SE scholars point to the fact that if a problem has the ingrained potential of delivering social

value (de-radicalisation, peaceful society, non-violent struggles), social enterprise can become sustainable within counter-jihadi terrorism. We believe that countering jihadist terrorism through SE can take the shape of a counter-ideological narrative, watch hood or faith training and counter-branding using political agendas of jihadis; as well, a comparison between the jihadi and Muslim identity can lay the sustainable foundation of future enterprises in countering jihadis (Piazza 2006, 2008; Corner and Ho 2010; Minto-Coy 2012; Germak and Robinson 2014; Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano, and Palacios-Marqués 2016).

■ THE MARRIAGE OF COUNTER TERRORISM AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A WAY FORWARD

To lay the framework of SE formation and address jihadism through engagement, the research borrowed the theoretical approach of SE as proposed by Nyssens et al. (Nyssens, Defourny, and Adam 2023). It is important to keep in mind that jihadist terrorism is a social issue of Muslim communities, grounded in the social rubric of society. This is due to jihadi institutionalisation via an organisational approach and branding, as the number of disadvantaged people is rising in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen. The number is also increasing in other Muslim communities in Europe, America, the Middle East and South Asia. Each terrorist act brings forward two facts: first, the perpetrators of the attack are Muslims (Post, Sprinzak, and Denny 2003; Snow and Byrd 2007), and this damages the overall identity of Muslims around the world (Mythen, Walklate, and Khan 2009; Spalek 2014). Secondly, those who are involved in acts of jihadism are radicalised in society and remain a part of society (Piazza 2009; Rogan 2006). This is damaging in the long term; radicalisation and extreme ideas grounded in society serve as a permanent recruiting narrative of jihadi violence.

Our proposed framework is premised on jihadist radicalisation and terrorism being a social issue. Such radicalism is grounded in the social fabric of society. We argue, from the basis of our empirical and secondary source analyses³ that the extent to which community-based responses can help to empower communities impacted by radicalisation is underplayed in the literature. The received theoretical premise in policy circles and much of the security studies literature is that militarised forces can control jihadist terrorism and neutralise it for a shorter period. Nevertheless, a classical counterinsurgency operation aims to build supportive communities in which hearts and minds are won over. This requires a socially grounded SE response to both comprehend and respond to socially damaging issues, such as jihadi violence. Consequently, the three pilot enterprises are developed by the research as a starting point to use SE as a counter-frame of jihadism and jihadi violence.

³ Defence-related spending, emergency and relief services costs and the state's expenses in the reconstruction of public infrastructure.

■ IDEA ENTERPRISE: COUNTER JIHADI NARRATIVE

The SE has the currency to propose a counter-narrative to initiate a reversal strategy of jihadi ideology. The SE can also challenge the underlying jihadi ideology by uncovering the branding intentions of jihadis to create value and meaning in their actions. The research framework suggests that counter-narrative SE will co-create the counter-ideology from those masses of society who are on the verge of falling prey to jihadis. The process of establishing of the idea enterprise and grounding constructs is reported in the conceptual map in Figure 4.

Application: The young Muslims who are the potential targets of jihadis will be exposed to an ideologically driven counter-narrative from theological debates and practices of Islam. The social enterprise can be created now to engage religious figures, social and community leaders and young Muslims to propose an ideology challenging jihadis. The respondents of fieldwork inform that few jihadi scholars are preaching jihad, but there are many in Muslim communities who oppose self-proclaimed jihadi ideology and know the real essence of jihad. From our point of view, within the construct of the idea enterprise and winning the war of ideas, these scholars can be used to propose a counter-narrative. Therefore, a value co-creation process can be created for a counter-narrative; the argument is that jihadis are able to achieve success by means of modern organising (Franchised Approach of Al Qaeda – Hellmich 2012), marketing (Hezbollah Marketing Strategy, Branding Terror – Beifuss, Bellini, and Carnus 2013) and innovation tactics (IS's Online Jihad and Jihadi Magazine in more than one language – Melki and Jabado 2016; Pokalova 2016). The breeding ground for jihadis is effective to use and implement extremist ideas, like using ex-communication to kill someone (Management of Savagery) anywhere in the world; extremism is a soft and slow process of converting one into a violent jihadi. Accordingly, to counter their ideas, a counter-narrative (see Table 2) is constructed by our research for further validation of SE within a security studies discourse.

Our research finds that an SE approach would be highly relevant to the modern historical examples of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Syrian Civil War and the recent revolution, continued jihadi insurgency in Pakistan and the Libyan conflict in 2011. The findings of the interviews with Pakistani counter-terrorism officials suggest that once security forces can clear and control the area, the next logical step is then to win the hearts and minds of the local community for the permanent closure of jihadi pockets and influence. Within this context, social entrepreneurship acts as a de facto state agent in the contest to win hearts and minds and to initiate an optimised counter-radicalisation response, thus bringing society back to a less-radicalised course. Accordingly, our research presents a typical counter-narrative (Table 2), encapsulating the following elements to challenge jihadi ideology and branding logic.



Figure 4. Conceptual map of CNE

Table 2. Counter-narrative and Idea Enterprise

Sr. No	Elements of counter-narrative	Grounding premise	Jihadi challenger
1	Martyrdom operations	Who is a martyr and what is the criteria for establishing a martyr	Have your jihadis fulfilled these criteria?
2	Suicide in Islam	Theological doctrine from Quran and Hadith regarding suicide and its implications	Is suicide allowed in Islam?
3	Religious jihad	Types of jihad, historical evolution, and wars in the early days of Islam, rationale, logic, and purpose of jihad	Which types of jihad you are offering?
4	Leadership and authority	Who will declare jihad, which person is authorized to declare jihad in the modernnation-state system of the world? Who is the legitimate leader of Muslims on earth?	How you choose leaders for Muslims?
5	Religious authority	What is a religious authority in Islam? Who is authorized to practice religious authority?	What is your definition of religious authority? Who allows you to practice this?
6	Religious decree	What is the theological definition of the religious decree?	Who can issue such decree?
7	Defining enemy	How enemy is defined in Islam? With whom Quran allows to wage war?	How have you defined your enemy and waging jihad against them?
8	Conditions of jihad	What are the breeding conditions in which jihad is declared? Who can establish such conditions?	How have you established your conditions of jihad?
9	Branding of ideology	Branded jihad for political goals?	How are acts of jihadism branding jihadi ideology and jihadist groups?
10	Proxy actors	How are finances managed in the jihadi world? Are jihadis proxy actor, forging jihad for their goals that are essentially political in nature?	How sophisticated weaponry and finances used for managing jihadi acts of terrorism?

■ CONSOLIDATION OF COUNTER JIHADI OPERATIONS: JIHADI NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Our textual data analysis and findings suggest that in counterterrorism, a typical counter-jihadi/terrorism strategy is comprised of three phases:

- Clear and hold
- Command
- Control

The first phase supports military or paramilitary counter-terrorism operations, in which the first point of action is to clear the area of jihadis to

disrupt command and control. Interviews we conducted included members of the Special Services Group (SSG), Quick Response Force (QRF) and Counterterrorism Force of the Pakistan Military. These interviews provided a good level of detail about operations to counter activities after an attack, such as the 2014 Army Public School (APS) attack or 2017's Quetta Police training college or a large-scale, counter-terrorism military operation (e.g. Operation Zarb e Azab). The interview evidence showed that the operational logic dictated a first course of action to clear the area by applying a quick-response strategy. The following oral narrative, which came from an operational team that led the APS counter-response, is self-explanatory in terms of the counterterrorism strategy:

It was 16th December 2014, a normal day started with the thoughts of the fall of Dhaka. I was in my base camp, gossiping and discussing the fall of Dhaka and what went wrong that ultimately resulted in the fall of East Pakistan. My mobile phone rang, and the commanding officer told me that my platoon must move to Army Public School in Peshawar, which is under attack by jihadi militants. I asked my platoon to be ready in five minutes and meet at the C1-30. It was an estimated 15-minute air journey from the base camp to APS. These 15 minutes were used for planning; including me, five of the team members had to plan a quick response, and we had only one piece of information: a school had been attacked by jihadis. Without prior intelligence and better knowledge about militants in the school, I said to my team: we know the intentions of militants, they will try to kill everybody to brand their action to be noticed across the globe and degrade the state of Pakistan, but we are clear on one point. There are schoolchildren, and we must rescue them. We will be entering the building from five points; each member will plan and execute with a single instruction – to save as many children as possible before getting hold of the building. We had one clear goal, i.e., control. After that, we could move to the clear and commanding phase.

It was acknowledged by interviewees that there was a very present challenge to consolidate the community after security forces began their clearing phase⁴. This is to establish control of an area and to disrupt the command-and-control lines of jihadist fighters. The key to success resides with the local populace; they must watch and observe the social fabric of society and question whether there is a jihadi element or faction that is trying to regain its foothold. Another significant role for the population is to observe and respond to incidents of

⁴ The clearing phase here is defined as the process of neutralising jihadi threats in war zones like Afghanistan and strategic jihadi attacks in industrialized world e.g., the Manchester attack of 2017. The first measurable dimension of an effective counter-terrorism operation is measured by clearing phase, in which success is determined by the control of territory back from jihadis and identifying sleeper cells in the aftermath of jihadi terrorism.

radicalisation and any resulting extremism. Thus, it is the community response that brings intelligence and challenge to counter-jihadist narratives, whilst also providing often privileged insights into the specific objectives of jihadi groups or agents.

An example of such insight exists in the SWAT valley and FATA of Pakistan, where the jihad of the TTP has been alleged to be funded by Indian intelligence agencies. These jihadist groups were used as Indian proxies against the state of Pakistan: a form of plausibly deniable warfare. The Pakistan army, after regaining control, put this intelligence insight into the local community, in part to challenge the radicalisation with Pakistani patriotism: to push back on the local loyalty to jihadist ideals as an act of disloyalty to the state. The military communicators suggested that these supporters are proxy actors who aim to achieve goals that are international-political in nature (Abbas 2008, 2009; Ahmad 2010). Although this has been suggested repeatedly by counterterrorism officials, there is good evidence that the citizenry in the affected areas remains unconvinced. Locals are suspicious about the motive for this counternarrative and believe the state may be trying to misdirect them. This provides some weight to our findings that counter-radicalisation is heavily dependent upon societal acceptance of counter-narration and that this acceptance leads to some form of action.

There are very similar dynamics evident in Iraq. Despite US and Iraqi efforts, offshoots of the original ISIS grouping still hold considerable sway in the Middle East, including with the moderated form coming to power in Syria recently, and the wider movement is expanding to Asia (Hall 2025). The narrative of American and Iraqi officials does not make sense to the locals (Hussain 2016), but the brutality of ISIS fighters has been experienced by the general public. If the community can be engaged in the establishment of social enterprises, a wider preference for counter-radicalised narratives and actors may emerge.

A careful look at jihadist terrorism reveals that attacks, even those that target the Western world, particularly with an explicit statement around non-Muslims or infidels, are tacitly more attuned to the Muslim world (Earle 2017). Terrorism scholars point out that in most jihadi-inspired acts of terrorism, Muslims pay a higher price in these attacks, undermining the central narrative of jihadists (Hegghammer 2011; Jordan 2014; Haer and Banholzer 2015; Janmohamed 2016). A 2011 National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) report found that approximately 82% – 97% of Muslims are affected by jihadi acts of terrorism. Muslim civilians have lost and continue to lose their lives and property; nevertheless, most Muslim countries and state-designated religious scholars have termed jihadist terrorism a barbarian act, one which defames Islam as a religion and Muslims as a civilisation (DeLong-Bas 2008; Aslan 2009; Gregg 2009; Fishman 2016). Shelina (2016), in her ground-breaking work on

young global Muslims, sums up this effect as such: jihadis, with their approach and worldview, first create defamation for Islam in a global world and are the reason for discriminatory laws and practices against Muslims. She goes further and empirically provides evidence that the majority of the world's Muslims reject jihadis and believe that they sit outside of the mainstream of the religious community. This logically leads to the notion that it is not appropriate for Muslims to apologise for jihadists as they do not share the same identity as the rest of the world's Muslims.

Within the Western context and particularly within Western Muslim communities, the social enterprise framework can also be applied in supplement with pre-existing initiatives like the Prevent policy and machinery in the UK. The UK's proactive counter-terrorism strategy funnels those at risk into a state-sponsored initiative, including awareness, support and the active protection of at-risk individuals and communities, actively encouraging non-kinetic forms of de-radicalisation (Heath-Kelly 2013; Lynch 2013; Klausen 2015). Another UK-based initiative that fits within the social enterprise framework is the '3 S' framework of railways in the UK, an elegant case of community participation in national and domestic security. The three S's are "see it, say it, sorted" (Hazebrouck 2020). Although it is coupled with technology, the British Transport Police have developed this framework to include a self-interested community in handling threats and vulnerabilities proactively. The SE can support these efforts by using young Muslims to create SE and facilitating counter-terrorism efforts.

Our findings around social entrepreneurship suggest the establishment of a community-founded neighbourhood watch system, where the local community owns the process and follow-up actions, is a potentially valuable counter-radicalisation facility. Such an enterprise can be positioned to address the challenge of the clearing, controlling and commanding phases of the counter-terrorism operation. It will help to generate community-led intelligence about the local community and will allow people to help vulnerable community members, particularly in relation to their vulnerability to radicalisation, which might include: individuals with favourable ideas to jihadi organisations and attesting jihadi wars, jihadi preachers, and people seeking to prepare for radical actions. The organisation of a counter-jihadi neighbourhood watch initiative has been developed from focus group findings with security officials and local communities and is reported in the conceptual map (see Figure 5 below).

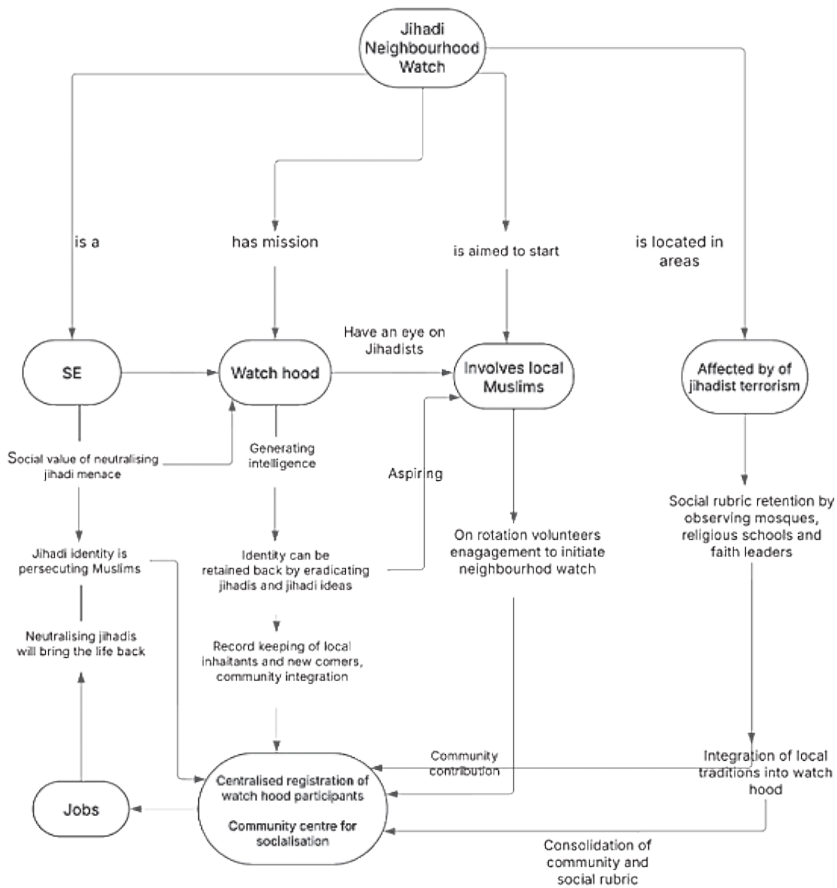


Figure 5. Conceptual map of JNW

■ COUNTERTERRORISM CITIZENSHIP (CTC): A COMMUNITY CT-STRATEGY

The following community-based counterterrorism is a possible blueprint for the kind of social enterprise that we have examined here. The aim of Counter Terrorism Citizenship (CTC) is to establish, within local communities, a citizen-owned enterprise that allows individuals to identify the sleeper cells of jihadist terrorism, as well as individuals looking to recruit young Muslims in jihadist terrorism. Ultimately, the CTC will seek to find avenues to disrupt and curtail radicalising individuals or to report these to state agencies for the purpose of neutralising the jihadi threat to the community. CTC's mission is the foundation of its social programs, guiding decisions to identify aspiring or existing jihadis and looking at how to define the identity of a jihadi for its

proper identification. CTC uses social enterprise as a strategy to create opportunities for citizens through new pro-social behaviors (Bolino and Grant 2016) by removing the identity barriers of Muslims and supporting states' efforts to eradicate terrorism. The community will benefit from its social enterprise in the following ways: as responsible citizens, looking to neutralise jihadi sleeper cells and aspirant jihadis, as identification points of radical jihadi preachers and as an intelligence hub for security agencies, but most importantly, fixing the violent identity of Muslims in today's geopolitical landscape. CTC will achieve supplementary impact by mitigating another critical social problem its clients face, radicalisation and extremism. CTC will benefit the community in developing and implementing preventive strategies for reducing the impact of radicalised approaches and behaviour. The establishment of one such social enterprise, SE, is noted below in our conceptual map (see Figure 6).

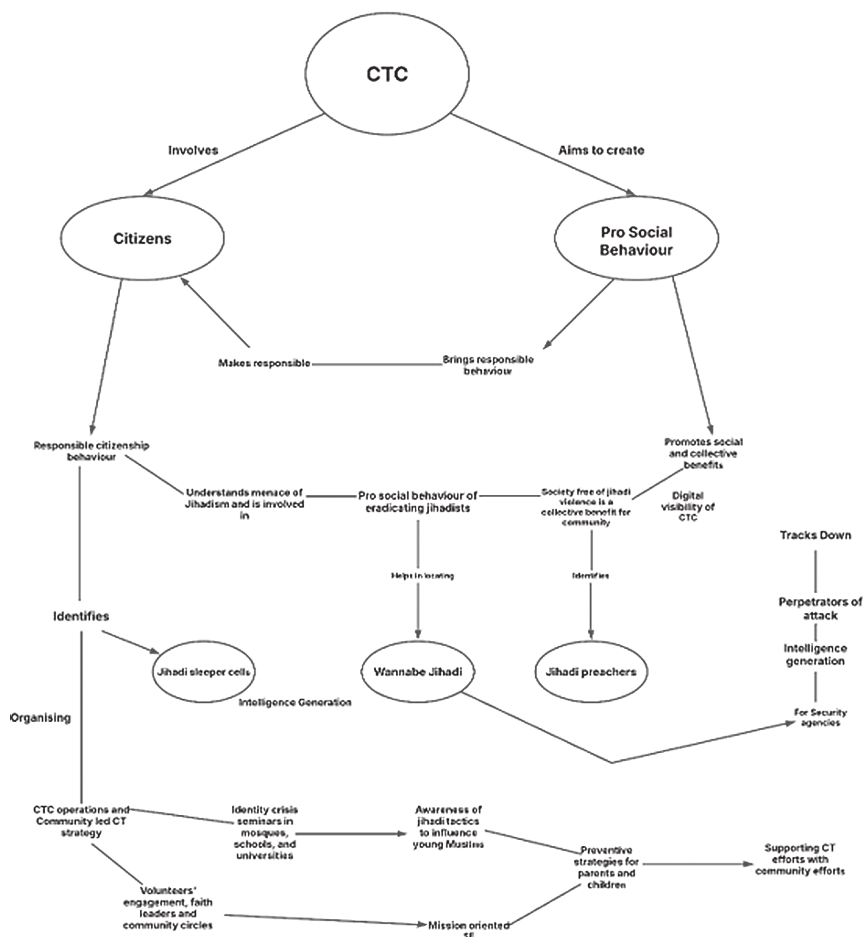


Figure 6. Counter-terrorism citizenship (CTC)

For example, in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, the literacy rate is very low (around 17%); life is tribal in nature, the necessities of life are scarce, and little sustainable knowledge around radicalisation and extremism exists. From focus group evidence, civilians of the area believe that jihadis have made their lives more difficult, damaged their schools and robbed them of the possession of their infrastructure; they also believe that international terrorists like AQ and other groups have made their area popular for the wrong reasons of promoting extreme ideas. To address this problem, this research believes that CTC can begin a mission-centric cooperative enterprise, led and managed by locals, by engaging youth in pro-social and responsible behaviour that can be inculcated and help neutralise and reposition the jihadi threat, which can be promoted by means of CTC. Financially, the social enterprises are self-sufficient, not only covering their own costs but earning a surplus which CTC can use to subsidise literacy, advocacy, microloans, and agricultural and education programs in the various agencies of FATA.

■ CONCLUSION

Jihadi organisations continue to pursue a mission of Islamic hegemony. The current exception to this rule is the new leader of Syria, who has changed his rhetoric, and only time will tell if this is a short-term political expediency or a longer-term repositioning of his and his group's political aims (Walther 2025). Pakistani scholar Syed Abul A'la Maududi, in his book *Al-Jihad Fe Islam*, states that jihad is an Islamic mission; it aims to eradicate injustice in society, and individuals involved in jihad pursue the holy mission of Allah (Maududi 1996). Similarly, Hafiz Saeed, in his book *Al Jihad Al Islami*, narrates the mission of his organisation, which is to liberate the land of Kashmir from Indian infidels (White 2015). Saeed has a long track record in asserting that jihad is the holy mission of humans in this world; humans with jihad are pursuing the will of God and aim to create an ideal Islamic society. Baghdadi, the caliph of ISIS in 2014, while declaring himself as caliph, narrated the same and positioned jihad as the mission of IS warriors. Despite these claims, a majority of Muslims and Islamic states not only condemn this version of jihad, but they go further and propose that jihad has two domains: expansive jihad and lesser jihad. Expansive jihad is the struggle against the selfish human soul; it is a purifying system of cleansing the human soul from personal and social wrongdoing (Azzam 2008; Hegghammer 2011; Crenshaw 2014). Ghazali, a prominent Muslim philosopher, argues that expansive jihad is a social project; it brings harmony to the practising Muslim, helping him leave greed, lust and desires that are damaging to the overall betterment of society (Hillenbrand 1988). While lesser jihad or armed jihad comes from a decision of a state and can be waged by the state and its armies (Shireen Khan Burki 2011a; Shireen Khan Burki 2011b). This was also asserted in 2017 by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, as a religious authority,

who condemned the version of jihad propagated and waged by AQ, IS and other jihadi groups of current times (Dawn 2017). More recently, Mona Sheikh (Sheikh 2025) has described jihad as having morphed into an emergent property of a constellation of conflicts, which has some empirical resonance. This is, in turn, echoed by Mendelsohn (Mendelsohn 2024), who discusses national and regional setbacks for jihadi groups, whilst similarly tracking the persistence of narrative and underlying threat. In other words, counterterrorism efforts have managed to degrade the ability of these groups to hurt their adversaries, but this has not dulled the motivation or planning to execute these harms.

In a local context, the then chief of the army staff of Pakistan – General Qamar Javed Bajwa – declared the success of the counter-terrorism operation and called upon religious scholars to narrate a theological answer to what he described as the fabricated Islamic jihad. He argued that all Muslims had a duty to tell their youths about the real essence of jihad and its importance for society; our society, religious authorities and the state must take up this mission of countering jihadi violence (ISPR-2022). On this point, this current research understands that jihadi violence or terrorism is a social problem; its perpetrators claim the mission to continue acts of terrorism. The research proposes that mission-centred social enterprises must be established to counter jihadism. The social issue at hand is radicalisation and extremism, with the enterprise's mission being to develop a counter-narrative so that the idea of radicalisation and extremism can be tackled with ideas; as a result, the enterprise will deliver social value to the cause of counter-branding jihadist terrorism.

The softer approaches to counter jihadist terrorism, such as engagement strategies, de-radicalisation centres and community engagement are gaining currency in today's geopolitical security environment. However, these initiatives are not delivering the desired results; to fill this gap, we believe that counter-terrorism theory and practice must revisit "the winning hearts and minds approach" to gain more insights from softer approaches to terrorism. Consequently, we interviewed and conducted focus group activities with counterterrorism officials and communities in Pakistan. From many interviews and focus groups, this research found the social enterprise framework to be a potentially strategic frame in positioning a softer approach to counter-jihadism. A process of exploration, discovery and triangulation has resulted in our proposal of three broad types of counter-jihadi enterprises: Counter-Narrative Enterprise (CNE), Jihadi Neighbourhood Watch (JNW) and Counter-Terrorism Citizenship (CTC); these enterprises have the potential to address the growing jihadi threat as a less-militarised and intrusive counter-terrorism response.

The first proposed model is the Counter-narrative enterprise (CNE). This enterprise seeks to deliver its counternarrative mission through developing points of challenge to jihadist propaganda and an alternative narrative to bind in the community. The central premise is to engage young Muslims across the globe to co-create a counter-jihadi narrative within the communities of Muslims. The proposition on

CNE is that engaging youth and co-creating a counter-narrative will create negative publicity for the jihadi narrative and positive publicity for the counter-narrative. New innovative engagements can be positioned by engaging communities in the ideological debate from Islamic theology and history.

The second proposed frame of counter-jihadi enterprises is Jihadi Neighbourhood Watch (JNW). These enterprises aim to develop a sustainable neighbourhood watch system, where young people can be engaged in Muslim communities to initiate self-driven and passive observation of aspiring identity of jihadis, returning jihadis and jihadi preachers. This system can also relocate online sources where cyber jihad is taking place: social media pages, gaming forums, discussion forums, Telegram/Signal and similar encrypted mass-chat, and other internet platforms that are engaged in jihadi radicalisation. JNW has the potential to become a sustainable hub of intelligence generation and engage young minds in counter-jihadi efforts.

The third proposed framework of Counterterrorism Citizenship (CTC) is based on the logic of responsible citizenship behaviour as a strategy to create citizen responses in the context of terrorism. The aim is to highlight the positive utility of pro-social behaviour and addressing jihadist terrorism as a threat to Muslims' overall identity and civil rights. The pro-social behaviour is the grounding premise for the CTC enterprise; it aims to develop a responsible citizenship program that will validate to fellow Muslims what responsible citizenship behaviour means and how this is a means by which to regain the core Muslim identity of peaceful citizens of the globe. The CTC has currency in the jihadi war zones of the world; it is also a useful tool for making countering efforts in Europe and the USA more effective and robust. Our research suggests that CTCs, by empowering Muslim communities to initiate counter-jihadi responses, have a utility as part of a 'softer' strategy. In order to bring the threads of our discussion together, we make the evidence-based suggestion that SE is the next avenue of a less militarised and less intrusive approach to counter-jihadism. There are considerable academic and practitioner insights to be gained from the paradigm of SE as a means by which to reshape and revisit the paradigms around the global war on terrorism.

The implication for security studies and international relations literature is the application of social entrepreneurship within counter terrorism theory. Our proposed social enterprise structures can be used as a means by which to test counter-terrorism strategies and to engage with third sector organisations. The clear utility is in helping to pause the process of radicalisation that is perceived to be the driver of jihadi terrorism, while on the other hand, still laying down a counter-terrorism strategy. This frame can be used by scholars to theorise on exfiltration in any area that is affected by jihadi terrorism, coupled with social enterprises' counter-terrorism theory, can progress further and can lay down rebuilding and de-radicalisation theories in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen.

So far, the data presented by this paper is reflective of the fact that the boots-on-the-ground strategy adopted by the US and its allies has not been effective in Afghanistan and elsewhere. A useful approach may be to engage the local governments and communities to address the challenge of jihadism. The intervention in the domestic affairs of Muslim governments is causing a backlash, creating additional avenues for jihadis to continue recruiting. The case of the drone campaign in Pakistan's tribal belt from 2004 to 2021 reveals that it provided more impetus to TTP, victim families losing their loved ones and therefore joining the TTP to take revenge (Markey 2008; Cachelin 2022). A change in policy involving local support to counter the growth and impact of violent jihadism, as suggested by this research, is a potentially more effective route to contain jihadi terrorism. Policymakers should consider using SE as the broader framework to engage their communities, build up pools of resilience and challenge values and behaviours and thus win the hearts and minds in contested spaces. Jihadist terrorism is unique in its operationalisation and therefore requires a unique COIN strategy.

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WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS: A MARRIAGE OF COUNTER TERRORISM AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Taliban's swift takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 underscores some of the failures in the Global War on Terror (GWOT). This article examines how sociocultural misalignment and reliance on militarised strategies have hampered Western efforts to subdue jihadist radicalisation and violence. Building on extensive interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis, this paper proposes an innovative counterterrorism approach that seeks to leverage social entrepreneurship (SE). By reframing jihadism as a locally embedded social problem, this paper argues that SE-driven responses can sustainably foster civic engagement, counter extremist narratives, and encourage local ownership of security. Three conceptual models – Counter-Narrative Enterprise, Jihadi Neighbourhood Watch, and Counter-Terrorism Citizenship – highlight how grassroots initiatives can challenge extremist ideologies and disrupt recruitment. These models integrate insights from organisational and marketing theory to galvanise de-radicalisation, generate alternative livelihoods, and rebuild communal identity. The findings suggest that SE complements kinetic (military) and intelligence operations by targeting the social and psychological dimensions of extremism, nurturing trust, and minimising civilian harm. Ultimately, bridging business studies and war studies offers policymakers a blueprint for “winning hearts and minds”, whilst seeking to mitigate the cycle of radicalisation. This innovative paradigm repositions counterterrorism as a transformative social enterprise, creating long-term value in affected communities and curtailing jihadist influence more effectively: local empowerment is essential for lasting success.

Keywords: Counter Terrorism; Social Entrepreneurship; Jihadism; Pakistan; War on Terrorism