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Issue Brief

National Action Plan: The Need for a National Narrative

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The Pakistan has been struggling to get rid of the violent narratives which it acquired as a product of changes both at national and international level. These narratives gave birth to several types of radical ideologies that resulted into extremism, sectarianism and terrorism. In order to eliminate them all, Pakistan launched a series of military operations, and rehabilitation and de-radicalization programme. Despite these stern actions confusion about how to deal with terrorists prevailed until the inhumane Army Public School Attack united the nation. As a result the government announced National Action Plan, NAP.

Any action is an expressed priority, so is NAP. It seeks to lift moratorium on execution of terrorists, establish military courts, and wipe out armed militias in the country. It embodies the political will to stop re-emergence of proscribed organizations, religious persecution, sectarian violence and glorification of terrorism. It aims at countering hate-material and introducing madrassa reforms. It also aims at bringing reforms in FATA, implementing reconciliation process in Baluchistan, devising a policy for Afghan Refugees and reforming the criminal justice system.¹In a broader sense, the National Action Plan is a daunting undertaking which seeks to address the issues in the national religio-ideological discourse, fix vexing administrative bottlenecks and solve problems in the socio-political milieu of Pakistan.

The government put this undertaking into action by implementing NAP. It did secure success on some fronts. According to Strategic Survey 2015 around 3,000 intelligence operations were launched leading to 37,666 arrests and detention of 725 people between December and May 2015. Between December 19 to July 31 2015, 195 people were executed after the lifting of moratorium on death penalty.²Several notorious sectarian terrorists were either executed or killed including Saif-ur-Rehman Kurd, the mastermind behind Hazara Shia killings in Quetta, and Malik Ishaq, Chief of a banned group, Lashkr-e-Jhangvi. Moreover, terrorist communication network was dismantled by blocking 98.3 million SIMs and by completing biometric verification of the SIMs working in Pakistan.³The government's efforts brought down terrorism in the country by 70 percent⁴and 80 percent in Karachi.⁵

The progress on NAP conveys a sense of achievement where "hit and kill" policy proved productive but it does convey a sense of ambiguity where it enters the domain of the national-ideological discourse and mechanism of institutional implementation. It may not be unfair to say that NAP, as an addendum to Zarb-e-Azb, appears to be a model of success but as a charter to fight extremism falls short of expectations. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif expressed his dissatisfaction over the progress of NAP as it was not being implemented fully.⁶ Chief of Army Staff, General Raheel Sharif also expressed his concerns

over implementation of NAP and called for " re-energizing the National Action Plan in true letter and spirit and achieving discernible results".⁷

It was this lack of clarity that made Punjab Police efforts against hate material debatable when the courts released arrested book-sellers and publishers.⁸The same puzzling approach seemed to be working in the search operations against madrassas when the people were arrested mainly for not proving their identity and released later. As a result of lack of clear-cut definition of extremism, the extremist outfits maintain their place in the minds of the people and continue to spread hate contents on various forums. Some ninety five banned groups are reported to be working in Punjab⁹ and many of them continue to work in the garb of charity. Some English and Urdu periodicals including Jarrar, Taiyyibaat, Zarbe-i-Taiba, Zarb-e-Momin, *Al-Qalam* and Ghalba-e-Islam are still propagating extremist contents. Surprisingly, sympathizers of these outfits managed to appear in TV talk shows.

NAP also seems to be less effective in dealing with the extremism emerging in educated youth of the country. One of the perpetrators of Safoora Goth Incident, Saad Aziz, was a graduate from a leading business school of the country, Institute of Business Administration Karachi. His sectarian leanings were visible in a magazine, *Al-Rashideen*, that he edited and published in the capacity of a member of a students society at IBA.

Ambiguity also prevails on the mechanism of institutional implementation of NAP. After the announcement of NAP, fifteen subcommittees and apex committees were formed. Functions of these committees are somewhat incomprehensible. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Interior Minister, said that the sub-committees were framed for "consultation to devise a cogent anti-terror policy".¹⁰Muhammad Balighur Rehman, Minister of State for Interior Affairs, linked their formation to monitoring of execution of NAP.¹¹On the contrary, Rustam Shah Mohmand who contributed to the drafting of NAP, has lamented that these committees had to meet fortnightly for assessing the progress of law-enforcement agencies but this procedure was not being followed.¹²A progress report on both, sub-committees and apex committees has not been made public yet.

The reason behind this ambiguity is lack of unanimity on defining extremism and terrorism and devising a clear approach on how to deal with them. This confusion will keep clouding the minds of nation, providing violent extremist organizations the ground to publicize their work and creating an atmosphere that would make the presence of existing laws ineffective and unproductive. The confusion would

prevail as long as a national narrative on defining extremism and terrorism is not formed and a clearer set of guidelines is not devised.

Ideas become dangerous only when they find a facilitating environment. They can lead to violent acts when the administrative bottle-necks are not cleared. They remain immersed as dark clots in the socio-political milieu when fundamental rights are delivered slowly and deliverance of speedy justice is hampered. They can be dealt with effectively if the existing institutions such as police and civil justice system are made efficient. If they are to be countered, a culture of peace, harmony and welfare must be built. To this end, Pakistan has to devise a national narrative strong enough to unite all the strata of nation without leaving any ambiguity about extremism and terrorism and on how to deal with them.

Notes and References:

- ¹ The transcript of NAP is available on
http://nacta.gov.pk/Download_s/Presentations/National_Action_Plan_NACTA_Pakistan.pdf
- ² <http://hrctp-web.org/hrctpweb/who-has-been-executed/>
- ³ Mian Baqar. "Govt napping while army picks up speed". Pakistan Today, December 30, 2015.
<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/12/30/national/govt-napping-on-nap-while-army-picks-up-speed/>
- ⁴ Tim Craig, "In Pakistan, a prime minister and a country rebound – at least for now", The Washington Post, December 8, 2015.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-pakistan-a-prime-minister-and-a-country-rebound--at-least-for-now/2015/09/07/4661049e-5173-11e5-8c19-0b6825aa4a3a_story.html
- ⁵ Mian Baqar. "Govt napping while army picks up speed". Pakistan Today, December 30, 2015.
<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/12/30/national/govt-napping-on-nap-while-army-picks-up-speed/>
- ⁶ <http://video.dunyanews.tv/index.php/en/mustwatch/29836/NAP-not-fully-implemented,-PM-Nawaz-expresses-dissatisfaction>
- ⁷ Sayed, Baqir Sajjad. "Progress on NAP found far from satisfactory". Dawn, May 28, 2015.
<http://www.dawn.com/news/1184691>
- ⁸ Intikhab Hanif. "'Post-hate' against 'hate'". Dawn. May 23, 2015
<http://www.dawn.com/news/1183713>
- ⁹ Khawar Ghumman. "95 banned groups active in Punjab". Dawn. Jan 15, 2015
<http://www.dawn.com/news/1157108>
- ¹⁰ Azam Khan and Aamir Saeed. 2015. "Fighting terror: institutional structure in the context of NAP". Conflict and Peace Studies.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.