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Issue Brief

Is NAP Really Working?

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It is now more than one and half decade that Pakistan is fighting the problem of violent extremism and terrorism which cost the country n irreparable loss of more than 60,000 lives. Almost two years ago in 2014, the government of Pakistan came up with the idea of a National Action Plan (NAP) after the vicious attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. The plan was the beginning of a good start to eliminate and root out terrorism from the country.

However, the policy outputs or the problematic areas identified in the NAP are neither innovative nor new. They have been there since 2001 or even before that such as FATA reforms, registration of Seminaries. So, the success or inadequateness of NAP was dependent upon its true implementation and the criteria used in implementation and involvement of stake holders.

Unfortunately, after the announcement of NAP, the government has failed to actively implement the true mechanics of NAP. The major cause of this poor implementation is the political rhetoric over the past two years. The torpid performance of the NAP in most sensitive areas like revamping and reforming criminal justice system; strengthening and activation of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA); FATA reforms; establishing Joint Intelligence Directorate for dismantling terror infrastructure; choking terror financing; dismantling radical ideologies leading to extremism and terrorism; regulating and monitoring foreign funding of seminaries; effectively deactivating proscribed organizations/sectarian networks and reforming seminaries curriculum, has put a question mark on the professed outcomes of this plan.

There are many reasons behind this cloudy performance of the government. First, the government was unable to define the timeline for the implementation of some aspects of NAP. Besides the issue of timeline, the government was also unable to assign specific responsibilities to federal and provincial governments clearly. This issue left the institutions in confusion on sharing responsibilities among federal and provincial governments and hence resulted in weak integration and poor coordination.

Much talked about seminaries registration and funding control system has not been implemented as the government is not backed by reliable data listing particularly details about teachers who are working for the promotion of extremist agenda. No details about the foreign funding to the seminaries have been made public and this results in raising the question marks on the efficiency of NAP. The final result on this issue is that even after two years, progress on this objective remains stunted and negligible. Even

the official number of the 26,465 seminaries registered¹ did not have any futuristic policy plan. Although, in the recent meeting in October 2016, the Prime Minister asked the authority to speed up the process. but what does speed up actually means is not clearly defined.

NACTA is still struggling to survive. The meeting of board of governors is required to be held every quarter, but the meeting only happened once in the past two years, and that too without any solid conclusion. This shows that NACTA stands nowhere in the priority list of the government.

Furthermore, revamping of criminal justice system is the basic need of the hour, but the government never took it on the serious note. The interior minister stressed on this revamping during a meeting with secretary interior, that too after one and half year after the launch of National Action Plan. He directed the National Counter Terrorism Authority to look into the issue of justice system under its mandated National Action Plan with the objective of introducing reforms in the criminal justice system.² Once again, NACTA is suffering from the issues of finances, trained personnel, and hence, is unable to give policy output on the this broad and important aspect.

Under National Action Plan, the government objective of controlling hate speech is also not clear. On one side, the government is defending its performance in the form of loudspeakers ban and ban on printing of hate speech literature, whereas, such cosmetic measures will not be of any benefit in the long run. We need to stop the hate speech coming from the platforms of proscribed organizations as well. Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), a proscribed group, holding a rally in the heart of Islamabad on October 28, 2016 shows that the government is unable to dismantle the ideological network and platform of the active proscribed organizations in Pakistan.³

Beside the civilian government, the military stands as a symbol of success over the past few years. The military has run many operations and demilitarized the no go areas successfully. Their performance can be judged from the dramatic decrease of almost 50 percent in violence-related casualties in Pakistan between 2012 to 2016. At the national level, these efforts have gained immense public support which clearly indicates that Pakistani society is trying to come out of this mess.

Last but not least, National Action Plan needs some revision not in terms of new policy options, but in terms of political will to implement the available options on ground. For serious implementation of all

¹ http://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/web/user_files/File/QuettaInquiryCommissionReport.pdf

² <http://www.dawn.com/news/1260953>

³ <http://www.dawn.com/news/1292947>

the 20 points of the Plan, these points must be sub-divided into plans and each points must have clear policy options and directives for implementation so that a tussle in institutions on implementations is avoided. Secondly, only military hard power is not a final solution to violent extremism in Pakistan. There is a dire need to build a national narrative based upon a mix of hard and soft power known as smart power to stabilize the society in long term.