



NATIONAL ACTION PLAN: A ROAD TO PEACEFUL PAKISTAN

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In the wake of the US war on terror, Pakistan has borne the brunt of terrorists attacks that have killed more than 70,000 people including women and children. Not only has Pakistan suffered in terms of losing precious lives, it has also sustained economic losses in its fight against terrorism that has risen to \$126 billion in 2017-18, which is more than what the country has suffered in its wars with India. No other country, not even the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, can claim to have suffered such tremendous loss, both in terms of lives and money.

Following the vicious terrorist attack on the Army Public School in December 2014 which resulted in the death of 149 people including 132 school children, Pakistan clamped down hard on the terrorist networks in the country through sustained counterterrorism operations, as part of the National Action Plan (NAP). These military operations, significantly, Operation Rah-e-Rast and Operation Zarb-e-Azb have substantially improved the overall security situation in the country. Continuous intelligence based operations and the stringent measures introduced under NAP including the establishment of military courts, the re-institution of the death penalty, new cybercrime laws, the renewal of the Afghan Refugee Registration, the revival of the Pakistan Automated Fingerprint Identification System (PAFIS), and the establishment of the Integrated Border Management System (IBMS) to check cross border infiltration of terrorists have today significantly eradicated terrorists, their networks and safe havens in the country.

To fix loopholes and strengthen the judicial system, a holistic approach was taken towards legislation for strengthening Pakistan's anti-terrorism efforts. Special military courts were established through the 21st amendment in the constitution of Pakistan for the purpose of speedy trials and to protect the judges who prosecute the terrorists. Eleven military courts were established and 388 cases have been transferred to these courts and their decisions have been forwarded to the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of Pakistan for his approval of the award of death sentence.¹ Military courts in Pakistan have sentenced 186 terrorists to death and issued verdicts for more than 300 terrorism-related cases.²

Another milestone achieved by NAP was strengthening of National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) - an anti-terrorism institution established by the parliament in 2013 with sole mandate of countering extremism and terrorism in country. Regrettably, it remained un-effective until it was made part of NAP. Following the zero tolerance policy after the APS attack, NACTA pursued its mandate and jurisdiction with unparalleled vigour and scribed the policies addressing the state's goals in countering terrorism. A special budget of Rs. 1545.5 million was allocated in 2016-17, and in 2017-2018 Rs. 1643.019 million was demanded, however only Rs. 530.839 have been released. A Joint Intelligence Directorate has also been staffed in NACTA for the purpose of enhancing coordination and intelligence sharing mechanism among the provinces.³

NAP has also taken a rigorous stance in dealing with the matter of sectarian violence, religious intolerance and extremism. As a result, 1373 cases were registered after 2014 regarding hate speech and publication of literature inciting religious sentiments. Around 2,566 persons were arrested against 1373 cases and 70 shops were sealed. Moreover, 19,895 cases have been registered pertaining to misuse of loudspeakers, 20,679 persons were arrested and 8,759 pieces of equipment have been confiscated.⁴ Sectarian violence surged in the country in the last two decade, sacrilegious and hate speech were the main causes of creating sectarian violence. NAP ensured the misuse of loudspeaker would not be tolerated and fiery speeches were banned. It is the fruit of NAP that in 2012, 185 sectarian attacks were recorded while in 2018 only two attacks were witnessed on the mainstream.⁵

¹ The sun has set on Pakistan's military courts — here's why it should never rise again, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1306792>, Mar 06, 2017.

² More than 180 convicts sentenced to death by military tribunals in Pakistan since 2015, March 18, 2018 <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/03/18/more-than-180-convicts-sentenced-to-death-by-military-tribunals-in-pakistan-since-2015/>

³ Directorate Office of NACTA.

⁴ Cultivating Peace National Action Plan, NACTA Report, 21 March, 2018.

⁵ Ibid.

Steps have also been taken to check terror financing. Before the inception of NAP, there was no robust mechanism available to monitor terrorist funding activities. Terrorist could freely manipulate huge funds received by their sympathizers and stake-holders. They could receive huge sums of money through charities, NGOs, and international fund transfers, narcotics trade, and extortion. In an effort to overcome this drawback, NACTA took an initiative to choke the funding activities of terrorist and established a Countering Financing of Terrorism (CFT) in every province and it became an integral part of investigations. Furthermore, HUNDI/HUWALA transactions were also monitored and 919 cases were registered, 1209 persons were arrested and Rs. 1489.918 million was recovered. Another 426 cases were registered and 574 were arrested under money laundering charges.⁶

NAP took effective measures to counter the re-emergence of proscribed organizations. Until now, 66 organizations have been declared as illegal and 4 are under observation, while 7,966 individuals have been placed under section IV of Anti-Terrorism Act 1997. The government has so far frozen 4,962 accounts with over Rs. 93,980 million.. Over 2,052 persons are also facing travel restrictions.⁷

NAP provided a strong mechanism to establish skilled anti-terrorist force in all provinces with an aim to reduce the burden from the police and to combat terrorists. Presently, out of 7200 sanctioned force, 6,038 security personnel are working all around Pakistan in different provinces.⁸

Effective steps have also been taken to promote pluralism and diversity. The federal government has directed all the provincial governments to protect the lives and honor of all non-Muslims minorities. Their shops and places of worship are now secured by Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA's), and all discrimination and biasness have been expunged from the curricula.

Approximately 32,272 religious seminaries were functional all around the country. To address the issue of illegal seminaries, NACTA in collaboration with Ittehad-e-Tanzim-e-Madariss Pakistan has streamlined the Madrassas. The registration and data forms have been generated to keep record of Madrassas. Islamabad Punjab and Sindh have already carried out 100% geo-mapping (Special software technology that records data with visuals) on agreed parameters, while Baluchistan (80%), FATA (90%), and KPK (95%). Geo-mapping of all places of worships has also been undertaken.⁹

⁶ 426 cases of money laundering registered: NACTA, <https://timesofislamabad.com/03-Feb-2018/426-cases-of-money-laundering-registered-nacta>, 03 Feb, 2018

⁷ Cultivating Peace National Action Plan, NACTA Report, 21 March, 2018

⁸ Cultivating Peace National Action Plan, NACTA Report, 21 March, 2018

⁹ Rukhshan Mir, 100 % Geo-mapping Of Religious Seminaries In ICT, Punjab, Sindh Completed, , <https://www.urdupoint.com/en/pakistan/100-geo-mapping-of-religious-seminaries-in-257202.html>, 08th February 2018.

FATA became a stronghold of the militant organizations like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. Operation Zarb-e-Azb was launched to eliminate these groups and bring reforms in the region. Recent merger of FATA with KPK and abolishment of Frontier Crimes Regulations is a milestone achieved by the all major political parties of the country.

Cellular technology was also exploited by the criminals, terrorists and affiliated organizations. There was no restriction on a person from having a number of Sim cards and the registration process was inadequate to meet the standards. NAP's point 13 deals with dismantling communication network of terrorists. A colossal exercise was conducted and 98.3 million unregistered and illegal Sim cards were blocked.¹⁰ A new system was introduced by the authorities to streamline the Sim card registration process by working closely with NADRA and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. NACTA has also been granted special permission to block mobile services on special occasions.

NAP has also successfully addressed the growing issues of social media and electronic crime. In order to filter the social media and enable a strong vigilance, a special act of 'Prevention of Electronic Crime' was passed in 2016. Federal Investigation Agency and NACTA are now working closely to monitor the internet traffic, monitoring electronic crimes, and trace and shutdown the sites that advocates extremism. Till March 2018, approximately 1447 websites have been blocked which exhibits extremism and hate.¹¹

During the 1980s and 1990s, Punjab witnessed a lot of bloodshed and sectarian violence. The growing Punjabi militias also had deep connections with Al-Qaeda and TTP. It was an alarming situation and required a special attention to protect the citizenry of Punjab and other provinces. NAP has shown zero tolerance to these groups in Punjab, and according to the Punjab Home Department Reports, a total of 91,666 combing operations were conducted between 2014-March 2018 all across Punjab, 400 terrorists were hanged under Pakistan Penal Code, 275 terrorists were killed in encounters with Police/CTD/LEAs, 897 were arrested by Police/Counter Terrorism Departments and 68,957 terrorists were entered in Digital Databank of Police/CTDs.¹²

Metropolis like Karachi was also bleeding at the hands of terrorists and criminals. NAP has worked to bring the Karachi operation to its logical conclusion. The post 2013 era in Karachi witnessed growing peace and stability. In three years only, target killings decreased by 97%, murder rate decreased by

¹⁰ Saad Ahmed Dogar, What has NAP achieved so far?

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1307640/nap-achieved-far/>, January 30, 2017

¹¹ Cultivating Peace National Action Plan, NACTA Report, 21 March, 2018

¹² Directorate office of Punjab Home Department

87%, robberies were decreased by 52%, terrorist activities were decreased by 98%, and the bank robberies decreased by 72%, overall robberies decreased by 52%.¹³

Baluchistan also witnessed a policy shift by Islamabad towards it, since the province was lagging behind in literacy, health and other basic facilities. Terrorists, extremists, separatists and other militants filled this developmental vacuum and started exploiting Baluchistan and curbing the state's writ. In 2009, Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Baluchistan package was launched by the government to ensure Baluchistan's representation in public institutions and fulfil its demands. For this purpose, scholarships have been allocated to the Baluch students, 13,200 Baluch youth have been inducted in the army and many others were inducted in FIA, Utility Store Corporations, Civil Defence Department, Planning and Development Department, Anti-Narcotics Force and Ministry of Defense. A special quota has also been reserved for the Baluch in all employments. In November 2017, a 'Khushal Baluchistan' initiative was launched to improve socio-economic as well as security conditions in the province. Government of Baluchistan has also initiated a dialogue with the exiled Baloch separatist leaders. A large number of separatists have given up their weapons, while their reconciliation and rehabilitation is still in process.

Repatriation of Afghan refugees was also a major challenge for NAP to address. The federal government approved the Repatriation and Management Policy in February 2017 and NADRA was assigned to identify the illegal Afghan refugees and register accurate number of refugees present in country. A tripartite agreement for voluntary repatriation program (the largest program ever recorded by the UNHCR) was also initiated. Till March 2018, 176,000 cases of illegal immigrants were identified and 1.38 million Afghan refugees were recorded and under Tripartite Agreement around 4.3 million have returned to their homes since 2002.¹⁴

NAP is being implemented with full commitment and vigour in coordination with all provinces, security agencies and other stakeholders. The effective implementation of NAP has registered significant improvements in overall law and order and internal security situation in the country, including a nose dive decline in terrorists incidents from a high of 2060 terrorist attacks in 2010 to around 370 attacks in 2017. A lot of sweat and blood has gone into this herculean effort. Ordinary Pakistani citizens have also stood behind their police, military and their intelligence agencies, never faltering in their resolve to defeat terrorists and their twisted ideas. While terrorists have been pushed back and areas reclaimed, efforts to defeat militant mindset have already begun as per the vision of the National Action Plan.

¹³ Cultivating Peace National Action Plan, NACTA Report, 21 March, 2018

¹⁴ Ibid.