

Executive summary

Ever since NAP has been launched, there has been decline in violence in the country. This decline needs to be sustained by simultaneously addressing the much deeper issues, going beyond the militaristic quick fixes. Without addressing those issues, the fear of return to violence lurks behind.

It was in late December 2014 that the Prime Minister, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, responding to the dastardly attack on a school in Peshawar week earlier, rolled out its counter-terror strategy, National Action Plan. What is unique about the NAP is that it galvanized all political parties and military leadership to publicly vow against terrorism, besides bringing out government's counter-militancy efforts in the public debate.

Since then, if gone by the number, there has been a decline in terrorist attacks in the country: According to statistics provided by Pak Institute for Peace Studies' digital database on security, from January 1 to August 31 this year, a total of 471 terrorist attacks took place across Pakistan, which represented a 47 percent decrease from such attacks recorded during the corresponding period of 2014. The number of people killed (752) and injured (931) also posted a decrease of 36 percent and 43 percent, respectively, from corresponding months of previous year. Government claims its efforts have brought down terrorism in the country by 70 percent.¹

While NAP has apparently taken on some issues hitherto ignored in Pakistan's counter-terror approach, much of it is continuation and expansion of the old counter-terror strategies. For one, it would be wrong to say that the government "woke up" only after the APS attack; operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan was launched in June 2014, much before NAP, followed by military operations Khyber 1 & 2 in Khyber Agency the same year. Meanwhile surgical strikes against militants in Karachi have been going on since 2013. By the same token, loopholes in the performance on the NAP, nine months later, appear somewhat similar to the pre-NAP confusion in dealing with militants.

Several observers point out that the country's National Action Plan is too much military-centric, squeezing the space of the civilians.² They argue that military holds the key role in apex committees which steer the NAP implementation. Some political parties have also expressed serious concerns that the paramilitary troops Rangers have overstepped their mandate in Karachi.

Others however believe that while military campaign against terrorists remains at the heart of NAP, government has failed to take some effective steps to reduce appeal of religious extremism and violent ideologies that feed terrorism. In the most recent National Apex Committee meeting held in Islamabad, on September 10, Prime Minister expressed dissatisfaction over the implementation of NAP and directed the federation and provinces to improve coordination so as to produce better results.³

¹ Tim Craig, "In Pakistan, a prime minister and a country rebound – at least for now", *The Washington Post*, September 8, 2015.

² This point is made by some experts. Also see, a report by International Crisis Group: "Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies in Pakistan: Opportunities and Pitfalls", *International Crisis Group*, Asia Report N°271, July 2015, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan/271-revisiting-counter-terrorism-strategies-in-pakistan-opportunities-and-pitfalls.aspx>

³ "NAP success a collective responsibility: Nawaz Sharif", *The Nation*, September 11, 2015

Below are key findings from the expert analyses this report contains on the progress on each of the twenty points of NAP.

1. There is no direct relation between the decline in terror attacks and **resumption of death penalty**. According to the database of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, out of the 195 people executed from December 19 to July 31, only 22 were terrorists; the remaining 173 were common criminals.⁴
2. The details of the proceeding of the **military courts**, established after behind-the-scene debate and dissent, meant to try “jet black terrorists”, are shrouded in secrecy, besides marking a dark spot on the country’s nascent democracy.
3. Although the country has been vowing **to take action against all sorts of armed groups**, including those attacking across the border, the government’s subsequent action and statements suggest lack of clarity on dealing with certain groups.
4. Confusion continues to mar the **functioning of NACTA**, the country’s central counter-terror body: does it fall under the Prime Minister or Interior Minister? Without any board meeting held so far, the organization’s staff lack strategic guidance and its head remain powerless. It has yet to get budget, despite recently made claims by interior minister of releasing it soon.⁵
5. The country’s existing laws are sufficient in **cracking down on hate speech**, provided law-enforcement agencies are trained and equipped to do that. Instead of having any national counter-hate strategy, the government has opted to regulate “public order” and check “systemic” dissemination of hate material.
6. There has been zero conviction in **terror financing**, a subject that stays untouched because of the government’s lack of understanding of the web of militant economy. Even estimates about terror financing are unclear.
7. Without the release of the list of banned outfits in public, it is questionable how the government can stop **emergence of banned outfits**. While the government insists that it has arrested supporters of banned outfits and recovered their material, much of the action was restricted to first few months. Banned groups, despite arrests of their leaders, still carry out public meetings and protest demonstrations.⁶
8. While all police departments in the four provinces have their own specialized forces, they lack coordination, and budget is yet to be released for the much-needed **federal counter-terrorism force**.
9. Action against sectarian militants will create positive atmosphere for religious minorities, but the presence of sectarian mindset, supported by discriminatory laws, still hangs above, creating fears of **religious persecution**.
10. The government has lately taken action against **religious seminaries**, such as by geo-tagging them and asking them to register afresh. The moves, however, largely faced resistance from some religious educational boards and clergy; lately, it was decided in meeting of the country’s political and military

⁴ “Militants in minority in Pakistan execution drive, deterrent effect debated,” *Reuters*, July 26, 2015; also see: hrcpweb.org/hrcpweb/who-has-been-executed.

⁵ On September 10, 2015, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar said that the government has committed funding for NACTA. See, “Those challenging writ of state to be crushed: Nisar”, *Samaa Web Desk*, September 10, 2015, <http://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/2015/09/those-challenging-writ-of-state-to-be-crushed-nisar/>

⁶ “ASWJ ends protest in Islamabad as police assures to probe workers killings,” *Express Tribune*, March 6, 2015.

leaders with representatives of madrasa educational boards to form a committee for preparing forms to register madrassas and to evolve a mechanism for register madrasa accounts.⁷

11. Only Punjab has issued a statute **banning glorification of terrorists**, on media. Yet, several militant outfits continue to publish and post material online.
12. Although the government claims to have restored security in parts of **FATA**, nothing practical is done to introduce the long-demanded **administrative reforms**. The counter-militant approach in FATA has been too military-centric, ignoring the fruits of mainstreaming the area.
13. The government claims to have **dismantled terrorist networks**, several of which operated from North Waziristan. Independent observers argue although terrorist networks have been weakened and their capacity to operate hampered but they are not completely dismantled.
14. The government's plan of introducing cyber-crime bill to **monitor internet for terrorist activities**, inflict several restrictions on the regular users, and violators, of the internet. Civil society fears that any such law could be misused in the name of terrorism, not least because there is no comprehensive personal data protection mechanism.
15. That the Prime Minister vowed to end **militancy from Punjab**, to many, showed the government's admission of the presence of militants in Punjab. Questions are asked as to whether the government will ever take on all outfits.
16. Publicly, the **operation in Karachi** has lately been focusing on targeting political players of the town. There are also clear signs that the operation has effectively reduced terrorist attacks and criminal activities in the metropolis. Prime Minister Sharif has frequently deflected political opposition to the operation, saying that it will continue till its logical end.⁸
17. Although NAP calls for the empowering **Balochistan government to pursue reconciliation** policy with the disgruntled Baloch, heavy-handed measures of dealing in Balochistan continue to trickle in the media. To some Baloch nationalists, the approaches are poles apart. The apparent decline in sectarian attacks in Balochistan is owned to provincial and national developments against sectarian groups and their leaders.
18. The government's approach in dealing with **sectarian terrorists** has been oriented around counter-terrorism, without addressing the causes promoting sectarian minds. Several key sectarian militants including leaders have been killed and arrested; meanwhile, sectarian groups are also trying to mark political presence.
19. Despite calls for registering and/or evicting **Afghan refugees**, they hardly had any role in terrorist attacks inside Pakistan.
20. As military courts came to the front, the decision to **reform criminal justice system** took backseat. The country's apex court, however, has kept the right with itself of reviewing military court's decision. Despite some on and off measures to expedite pending cases, the criminal justice system requires meaningful overhaul.

⁷ This was announced by Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar, a day after madrasa representatives met PM and Army Chief. Nisar claimed that the two sides agreed on taking forward madrasa reforms. See: Mian Abrar, "With army chief on table, PM brings clergy on board", *Pakistan Today*, September 8, 2015.

⁸ "Karachi operation will be accomplished at all costs: PM Nawaz", *Express Tribune*, September 11, 2015.

Below are some critical areas that Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) believes NAP measures should also focus on:

Countering violent ideologies

While military operations and actions taken under NAP have weakened the militants and put them under pressure, comprehensive and concerted counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs are also needed to challenge and reduce appeal of militant ideologies, and rehabilitate repentant militants. The intensity of the extremism issue requires a multifold reintegration framework with broader focus on both violent and non-violent individuals and groups. Such an approach has not been conceived as the state is mainly relying on conventional frameworks of rehabilitation. A creative multipronged reintegration framework is needed whether the state adopts a surgical approach or a political one to tackle the menace of terrorism.

The ISIS inspiration

Pakistan recently banned the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria group. A ban may not reduce the inspiration of the ISIS among Pakistani militants, particularly when many banned groups continue to operate in Pakistan. With regards to future trends of the IS inspiration and influence in Pakistan, a lot will depend on Pakistani state's efforts to achieve security and eliminate militant groups and ideologies. In the short term it means how the ongoing security operations, mainly in FATA and Karachi, proceed and conclude, and how the National Action Plan is implemented by the federal and provincial governments. At the same time, Pakistan will need to enhance border-security and counter-militancy cooperation with Afghanistan where ISIS is increasing its influence; many Pakistani Taliban militants who pledged allegiance to or supported ISIS have also relocated to Afghanistan.

Cross-border terrorist networks

Operation Zarb-e-Azb has pushed a big part of the terrorists' infrastructure to the other side of the border in Afghanistan, mainly in Kunar, Nuristan and Khost provinces. These groups could try to re-establish in FATA in future; they are already engaged in cross-border attacks inside Pakistan. Two things are imperative to respond to the threat: first, political and administrative reforms in FATA, which will not only deny militants a support base but also improve local security structures; and secondly, efforts to evolve some broader joint security mechanism with Afghanistan.

Illegal weapons

Easy availability of heavy weapons in Pakistan is a major challenge for the security forces' counter-militancy drive. According to one estimate, 20 million illegal weapons are in circulation in Pakistan. Sectarian terrorist groups and nationalist insurgents in Balochistan appear to have recently adopted targeted killings as the foremost instrument of terrorism. Easy access to lethal weapons has made their task easier.

Threat perception

Law enforcement departments need a dedicated platform to scientifically monitor the changing behaviors, trends and emerging patterns of terrorist groups. This initiative will help them to broaden their threat perception and evolve effective responses. So far, it has been difficult for law enforcement agencies to think beyond the established threats. Pakistan is a frontline state in the war against terrorism but Al-Qaeda has never been on its threat-perception radar. The same is true for ISIS, which is now transforming local terrorist groups.

Internally Displaced Persons

The repatriation and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from North Waziristan and Khyber tribal regions requires urgent attention of the federal and provincial governments as well as the military leadership. The government needs swift action to not only provide full facilities to the IDPs but also to check undesirable practices and exploitation of the displaced persons by charity organizations in IDP camps. There is a need for making government aid agencies more effective in order to revive and enhance the IDPs' confidence in the state.

FATA mainstreaming

There is an urgent need to speed up the FATA reforms process. In recent months, militants have started efforts to re-establish themselves in parts of FATA, mainly in those agencies where there is less military presence or pressure including Bajaur, South Waziristan and Kurram. Attacks on tribal elders, who are members of government-supported tribal peace committees, have also increased in recent weeks, mainly in Bajaur and Khyber agencies. A review of militants' growth in FATA in past suggests that they took advantage of existing vacuum in political and administrative structures and further weakened them by attacking the tribal elders, who have a key role in political administration. They could do so again in future, particularly when military pressure will be eased, if FATA's political and administrative structures are not mainstreamed or reformed.

Prison security and reforms

This is an important area that is being neglected in the counterterrorism framework. After the jail breaks in Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu and an unsuccessful attempt to breach the central jail in Karachi last year, the need for enhancing prison security has become more pronounced. The jails in Pakistan are not only providing safe havens to terrorists to continue their activities but also serve as recruitment centers for terrorist groups. Jail reforms are also critical because terrorist groups have infiltrated police and prison officials.

Building capacity of police

The police need to be equipped with new technologies and resources but utilizing the available and allocated resources for the force is another critical issue. The operational and technical assistance and capacity building of police is an important area that needs focus. The training programs need to be focused on technology-led policing along with attention to management, intelligence gathering, mobility and connectivity. At the same time, the NAP should prioritize the de-politicization of police, which is the key to making it a professional force.