

*A Twenty-point Recipe of Peace - the National Action Plan to Pakistan: Context, Analysis and Evaluation of Successes and Pitfalls*

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**Abstract**

A twenty-point recipe of the National Action Plan (NAP) has become a core strategy to counter terrorism in Pakistan after the devastated terrorist attack on Peshawar Army Public School on December 16, 2014. Since the NAP's establishment, counter-terrorism efforts have had highs and lows and diverse consequences. This paper attempts to critically scrutinize its achievements and pitfalls in order to establish an understanding of the NAP's efficacy and effectiveness as of countering-terrorism strategy framework in Pakistan. It outlines the current challenges facing by the NAP due to the ineptness and incompetency of the institutions of government of Pakistan. These critical analyses would assist to policy makers in order to formulate all-encompassing counter-terrorism policies to effectively root out extremism/radicalization and sectarianism. Lastly, this study endorses the need of utmost will and commitment by the concerned authorities in order to offset the ongoing atrocities in Pakistan.

Keywords: Counter-terrorism, Extremism, NPA, Peace, Pakistan, Sectarianism, Twenty-point

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## **Introduction**

Since 9/11, international society has radically changed and its socio-political and economic institutions have become diffident and rickety. Every country has been directly or indirectly and visibly or invisibly affected by the unstoppable wave of terrorism. Thousands and millions of innocent people have lost their lives in the name of religious, sectarian, xenophobic violence and all other kinds of inhumane social discriminations and practices around the globe. More or less, every nation on this earth has unanimous commitment to counter terrorism by using all available means. Among them, Pakistan is one of the leading frontline states that has been fighting against terrorism and also undoubtedly the biggest victim of it.

On 16 December 2014, the Tehrik-e-Taliban conducted a terrorist attack on the Army Public School (APS) in the North-Western Pakistani city of Peshawar. This was the deadliest terrorist attack ever to occur in Pakistan, killing 149 people, including 133 school children, ranging between eight and eighteen years of age (Khan & Wei, 2016). Since then, the Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharif, publicly addressed and recognised Pakistan's longstanding inconsistency on the matter, vowing an end to the distinction between "good and bad Taliban". His political rhetoric was dominant; 'a line has been drawn between terrorists and the whole nation' (Gugler, 2016).

The PM delineated his twenty-point National Action Plan (NAP) where he assured to eliminate the mind-sets of terrorism to defeat all kind of extremism and sectarianism and to supplement the ongoing anti-terrorist offensive in North-Western Pakistan. A week after the noxious attack the government of Pakistan with a unanimous consensus of all Pakistani political parties and military leadership of the country established a roadmap of the NAP with core objectives to curb and root out terrorism and extremism in the country. However, this paper intends to analyse by using qualitative research principle to what extent has or has not Pakistan achieved any of the goals of the NAP? In particular, the study would scrutinize the progress and challenges of the NAP also it would examine on which area/points of the NAP where the government of Pakistan still needs to expand its effort to clamp terrorists and sectarian violence and killings in Pakistan.

## **Socio-economic Cost of Militancy and Sectarianism**

According to South Asia Terrorism Portal (2016), human cost of terrorist violence in Pakistan from 2001 to 2016 is around 61,461 casualties, which includes 21,532 civilians, 6,647 security forces personnel, and 33,282 terrorists or insurgents since 2001. Since the inception of sectarian killings in 1989, in 3,045 incidents 5,305 people have been killed and 9,974 were injured seriously. Whereas, over 1.8 million people are still displaced by insurgency, counter-insurgency and other related violence in Pakistan (IDMC, 2016). In this ongoing war all kind of infrastructure has awfully destroyed, for instance just in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province over 800 schools are destroyed. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2009, the Sri Lankan cricket team was attacked in Lahore, injuring six players and killing eight Pakistanis including six policemen and two civilians (Giulianotti & Klauser, 2012). Since then, there has been no single international sports event conducted in Pakistan.

Economically, Pakistan has suffered a loss of US\$118.32 billion in the last fifteen years (Pakistan Revenue, 2016). According to Trading Economics (2016), external debt in averaged US\$50,697.07 million from 2002 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of US\$72,978.00 million in 2016 with US\$22,281 million upsurge. Manufacturing cost has been drastically increased and there is huge declining in Foreign Direct Investment. Also, tourism industry has destroyed due to lingering militancy and lost US\$44 million. Only in Swat, it has shut down more than 855 hotels, including 405 restaurants in the valley, and around 40,000 people became unemployed in the hotel industry (Fahad, 2015). The World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2015 ranks Pakistan at 125 out of 141 countries based on travel and tourism sector trailing behind Gabon, Algeria, and Cameroon (WEF, 2016). In consort with other negative impacts, for instance social, political, and psychological the militancy has spread like a contagion into settled areas of Pakistan.

### **The National Action Plan at a Glance**

Pakistan has struck in various social, political, and economic crises due to prolong militancy/Talibanization and sectarianism. Due to inconsistent and incompatible efforts by previous governments were failed to bring all political powers and stakeholders on one page to have a unanimous political consensus against terrorism. The NAP is a late awakening on part of the government towards the mounting and existential threat of terrorism and sectarianism within the country. Yet, due to law enforcement agencies and public pressure the government has implemented the NAP with limited resources. The following is a comprehensive and consolidated list of twenty points of the NAP (NACTA, 2016).

1. Enforcing executions for convicted terrorists.
2. Establishing of special trial courts under the military.
3. Ensure no armed organization/militias are allowed to operate in the country.
4. Strengthening the anti-terrorism institution, National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA).
5. Countering hate speech and extremist materials.
6. Elimination of all sources of financing for terrorists and terrorist organisations.
7. Ensuring against re-emergence of banned organisations under another name.
8. Establishing and deploying a dedicated special anti-terrorism force.
9. Taking effective initiatives to halt religious extremism and protect religious minorities
10. Ensuring registration and regulation of religious seminaries.
11. Ban on glorification of terrorism and terrorist organisations through print and electronic media.
12. Administrative and development reforms in FATA with immediate focus on repatriation of IDPs.
13. Dismantling communication networks of terrorists and terrorists' organisations.
14. Immediate actions against exploitation of internet and social media for terrorism.
15. Zero tolerance for militancy in Punjab and in every part of the country.
16. Taking the enduring operation in Karachi to its rational conclusion.
17. Authorizing of the government of Baluchistan for political consensus and reconciliation.
18. Dealing decisively against sectarianism.

19. Development of a comprehensive policy to deal with the issue of Afghan refugees.
20. Refurbishment and reforming the criminal justice system.

### **A Critical Analysis and Evaluation of the NAP's Successes**

By using a qualitative research norm, the paper attempts to analyse and evaluate the achievements and drawbacks of the NAP. This section of the paper scrutinizes the NAP's achievements. Shortly implementation of the NAP, the government abolished the six-year moratorium on the death penalty of the sentenced insurgents and terrorists (#1), which had been in effect since 2009. Until January 2016, Pakistan has executed 332 convicted criminals and militants and some other cases are in courts. Conversely, international human rights groups, European Union and United Nations Secretary General have criticised and protested over re-introduction of the death penalty (Buchanan, 2016). Rationally, Pakistan is an Islamic country and it is justifiable to execute the penalty, because Islamic law '*Sharia*' permits death penalty in the case killing innocent people. In fact, this penalty has positive impact on the Pakistani society and admissible to compensate the grievances of hundreds and thousands of effected families by extremism and sectarianism.

Under the NAP, establishment of the military courts (#2) is a big hope and positive addition to the current corrupt judicial system of Pakistan and called it another strike against terror and success for the nation (Iqbal, 2015). On January 5, 2015, the parliament amended the constitution and passed both bills of the 21st Constitutional Amendment and the Army Act Amendment, providing the constitutional authorisation for military courts for two years to for the immediate trial of criminals and terrorists (Abbasi, 2016). This parallel judiciary system has reduced the burden of conventional courts and accelerated trials and persecution of violent crimes. Though, there some criticism on the methods of persecution (i.e. incomplete witnesses, and rush to convict,) and they might not fulfil judiciousness of justice. Apart from shortcomings of the system, the military courts has been playing a vital role in order to execute the NAP in a right direction.

The NAP also ensures that no armed militias are allowed to function in the country (#3). The Pakistan government has formally declared 212 outfits so far as proscribed organisations (AFP, 2016). Also, for countering hate speech and extremist material (#5), the provincial governments were directed by Islamabad to curtail the circulation of hate-material disseminated by proscribed organizations. Marvi (2015) articulates that the menace of global terrorism is often attributed to hate speech and radicalisation, among other factors. Thus, 2,337 cases were listed for hate speeches and material and 2,195 persons were detained while 73 shops were sealed (The News, 2016). Parallel to this, loudspeakers' usage for hate speech, 9,164 cases were registered, 9,340 persons were arrested and 2,452 pieces of equipment seized for misuse of loudspeakers for violating the Sound System Ordinance 2015 (Khattak, 2016). Indisputably, these positive initiatives and developments are light at the end of the tunnel and give a considerable courage and motivation to people affected by terrorism in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the NAP calls for a ban on airing the glorification of terrorism and the jihadist elements in print and electronic media (#11). The militants who are challenging the state have freely distributed writings containing rejection of

Pakistan's institutions and explaining their false justification to fight it (Rehman, 2016). Therefore, the NAP promises a strict action against media that promotes sectarianism, hatred, or incites violence. Thus, the Information Ministry and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority has been advised for strict implementation of ban on glorification of terrorism in media (Dawn, 2015). A significant number of terrorism experts and scholars enunciate it a great commitment by the government and the security agencies to monitor the activities of the banned outfits and their leadership carefully to restrict their movement (Dawn, 2015).

In combating militancy and radicalization, it was also essential to choke all kind of source of financing and funding for terrorists and terrorist organizations (#6). Therefore, measures to choke domestic and international funding and freezing accounts of terrorists' financial networks and terrorist organizations are also included in the NAP. The central bank has frozen almost Rs.1 billion of 126 accounts linked to proscribed organizations. Law-implementation offices have additionally recuperated Rs.251.2 million being exchanged illegally through "*Hawala*" (Ashraf, 2016). Along with these actions, we have also witnessed some hopeful initiatives taken by the National Accountability Bureau and concerned authorities to curb scapegoats and terror financiers.

In order to stop radicalisation and growing militancy it is indispensable to dismantle their hatcheries, therefore, the NAP required to register and regulate religious seminaries '*Madrassas*' (#10). A uniform registration and data form system was developed by NACTA and Ittehad-e-Taneemat-e-Madaris Pakistan and shared with stakeholders for registration and regulation of Madrassas (Tanoli, 2016). In 1947, Pakistan had less than 300 Madrassas. By 1988, it had less than 3,000 but now we have around 26,000 registered ones. Estimates on unregistered Madrassas vary from 10,000 to 15,000 (Khan, 2016). Under the NAP, over 250 madrassas shut down countrywide, 167 suspected seminaries additionally 72 unregistered madrassas in Sindh, 13 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and two in Punjab, also have been closed (Haq, 2016). Indeed, it shows a little progress, however, it is courageous to move towards ultimate objectives of the NAP.

The NAP emphasis to dismantle communication networks of terrorists and terrorists' organisations completely (#13). Undeniably, it shows a great commitment of the government and the security agencies to monitor the activities of the banned outfits and their leadership carefully to restrict their movement within the country (Dawn, 2015). Around 98.3 million illegal cell phone SIM cards had been blocked for dismantling communication networks of terrorists (The News, 2016). Also, another concrete step the government has taken to register all SIM cards in circulation and tally them against the user's National Identity Card number, thereby digitally tracking SIM usage. As of March 10, 2015, 57,335,550 SIM cards have been registered (Ashraf, 2016). Remarkably, "Pakistan witnesses 80% decline in terror attacks" (Gishkori, 2016). Above noted statistics shows a positive consequences of the NAP, however, they are not enough to claim the ultimate triumph.

Another important aspect of the NAP has gained some considerable success is to support ongoing operation in Karachi to its logical end (#16). In recent months, the Rangers (a paramilitary unit) have targeted the headquarters of political and religious parties allegedly involved in urban terrorism, extortion, kidnappings, and turf warfare

(Ahmed, 2016). A total of 69,179 criminals, 890 terrorists, 676 proclaimed offenders, 10,426 absconders, 124 kidnappers, 545 extortionists and 1,834 murderers were also apprehended and 16,306 weapons seized during the Karachi operation. As a result, terrorism incidents came down by 74%, murder and target killing incidents declined to 94%, ransom acts 89% and extortion by 95% in Karachi (Dawn, 2016).

### **A Critical Analysis and Evaluation of the NAP's Pitfalls**

Along with few achievements the NAP has also some serious drawbacks. Under the NAP, NACTA, the anti-terrorism institution's strength (#4) is still controversial and has not achieved any major goals. Since its inception, no significant efforts have been made to activate the almost inactive NACTA under the protection of the NAP (Janjua, 2016). Mukhtar (2016) argues that PM Nawaz Sharif has failed to activate NACTA and there is no coordination mechanism among the institutions in order to counter terrorism. And its turf issue needs to be resolved at the earliest otherwise it would bring irremediable harm to our counter-terrorism efforts. Senator Sehar Kamran criticizes NACTA and call it 'directionless', 'continues to remain dormant' and had failed to move beyond papers (Kamran, 2015).

Another important aspect of the NAP is ensuring against re-emergence of banned organisations under another names (#7). In this regard, military, political, and religious seminaries agreed to ban proscribed organizations and assured that these organizations would be prevented from re-emerging (Tanoli, 2016). On the contrary, progress on this front is minimal, as nearly 60 banned outfits still operate openly, and have contested local body elections under different names also violence by banned outfits increases 34% this year (Tanoli, 2016). Moreover, there is substantial criticism over the government actions of political victimization and categorized as a witch hunting in the name of terrorism. Certainly, no one is above law, yet, the government and security agencies need to be vigilant in arresting people without proper evidences or homework done before.

Establishing and deploying a competent counter-terrorism force (CTF) (#8) for eliminating terrorism is also an important component of the NAP. Since, terrorism is not considered a 'regular' or 'usual' crime, and therefore, it needs to be dealt separately through special anti-terrorist, and counter-terrorist forces (Zahid, 2016). In this regard, the NAP has failed to provide guidelines for the establishment of specialized CTF. In fact, Pakistani law enforcement forces are conventionally trained to combat crime, not terrorism. To some extent, some police department in provinces have established counter-terror department, which have been taking on some measures to curb terrorism (The Indian Express, 2014). However, this burden of fighting terrorism within the county is still on the shoulders of the armed forces.

For taking effective initiatives against religious persecution and protect religious minorities (#9), the NAP has been proved unsuccessful so far. According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) violent attacks on religious minorities rose significantly in 2014 as the government of Pakistan failed to ensure protection of religious freedoms (HRW, 2016). Phelim Kine criticised the Pakistan government for failing at the most basic duty to protect its citizens and enforce rule of law and inept to stop the rising toll of killings and repression of religious minorities (HRW, 2015). In fact, a great number of both domestic and international peace studies experts and scholars

accused the ineffective policies of the government to control the long lasting religion persecutions in the country.

The NAP formwork assures safe and secure return of internally displaced people (IDPs) as an immediate priority and it also calls on FATA reforms and rehabilitation (#12). In 2001, Pakistan army started military operations in order to flush out terrorists from their safe havens and destroy their sanctuaries, in FATA and areas like Swat Valley. Around two million civilians from the conflict zones relocated to temporary camps in safe locations. The government had to allocate a big chunk of special budget for the IDPs, and as a result, all major developmental projects had to be halted due to financial crisis in Pakistan (Fahad, 2015). However, the government's poor strategy and coordination has left relief operations in the doldrums and a large number of the IDPs without assistance (Younus, 2016). Unfortunately, despite of losing homes and properties hundreds and thousands of the IDPs are still displaced without provision of basic necessities of life and their lives and future are at stake.

Undeniably, the NAP has failed to take strict measures against abuse of internet and social media for terrorism (#14) to halt radicalization and militancy in the country. For that purpose, the Ministry of Information Technology has blocked around 933 URLs and 10 websites of militant organizations (The News, 2016; Ashraf, 2016). However, the NAP lacked a clear framework of how to deal with internet and social media misuse. Mukhtar (2016) criticized the government's failure to establish any legal tools such as cybercrime law to deal with cybercrimes. Therefore, the NAP has been continuously failing to curb terrorists and their organization's malicious propagation on the social media.

Under the NAP, the government announced zero tolerance commitment for militancy in Punjab and in other part of the country (#15) and it would be decisively dealt the religious sectarianism with iron hands (#18). Irrefutably, southern Punjab is a source of extremism in Pakistan, a place where sectarian and religious outfits have been nurtured. Some sectarian outfits have lasting support and political association with the mainstream political parties. In the past, the ruling party Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz in Punjab failed to act against militant groups, either afraid of a backlash or constrained by political calculations (vote bank, in other words) (Jaffrelot, 2015). The ruling party in Punjab province had been accused of its suspected support for proscribed militant organizations. Like Sahi (2015) some security analysts believe that due to the Punjab government's soft touch with several sectarian and religious groups, militancy was allowed to spread throughout the province.

The NAP also highlights the issue of reconciliation in Baluchistan (#17). Baluchistan, a bleeding wound of Pakistan, largely neglected and disenfranchised region and unequal distribution of its natural resources caused Baloch rebellion since Pakistan's inception. Afghan and Indian involvement in "the destabilization of the province and patronizing of separatists" has caused a number of tribal uprisings over the last several decades (Grare, 2013). The rebellious movement has died down recently, however, many separatists seeking for reconciliation. For the political solution, the NAP authorizes of the government of Baluchistan for broader political consensus and reconciliation. Zulfiqar (2006) and many other scholars argue that there is clear "dichotomy in dealing with Baluchistan, on one hand, the forces are killing Baloch

youth through the 'kill-and-dump policy' or military operations; on the other hand, the government offers reconciliation. Such dichotomies continue to raise dissatisfaction and dismantling the reconciliation efforts.

The NAP addresses the issue of Afghan refugees and proposed a comprehensive policy to deal with the issue (#19). After terrorists attack on the APS, the government had decided that undocumented Afghan nationals would be registered by the end of 2015. Meanwhile, the government authorised law enforcers to start crackdown against undocumented Afghans and extradite them to their country after completing legal formalities (Ali, 2015). The forceful eviction of unregistered Afghan refugees has been criticized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Afghan government. The mishandling of Afghan refugees would damage Pakistan's soft image that it has earned by hosting over three million refugees for the last three decades, largest by any country (Ghufran, 2016). Arguably, Pakistan should clearly state its policy on Afghan repatriation which is still missing. Otherwise continuing the forceful repatriation policy without providing basic facilities is likely to fail (Ghufran, 2016).

The final point in the NAP requires to reforming and drastically improving the criminal justice system in Pakistan (#20). Unquestionably, "a reformed and strengthened criminal justice system is pivotal to countering terror threats and containing violent extremism" (ICG, 2015). Experts believe that delay in litigation of criminal cases, the low conviction rate in terrorism-related cases, and also the loopholes in the existing system benefits the terror suspects (Haider, 2016). Therefore, the government need to take adequate initiatives to reform the current criminal justice system besides introducing concrete steps for the sufficient protection of judges, prosecution witnesses, investigating officers, and prosecutors of the special courts in the terrorism-related cases.

### **The Way Forward: Policy Recommendations**

Since the implementation of the plan, some vigorous positive and negative consequences have occurred in the country. Indeed, terrorism and sectarianism yet to be resolved, however, some of the NAP's points have been achieved and some are still are on the paper. Therefore, based on the extensive qualitative findings the paper suggests some essential recommendations to the NAP in order to attain its tangible objectives.

- The civilian government should avoid ad-hocism, and it needs to work on a comprehensive counter-terrorism policy with long term goals addressing the root causes of terrorism.
- The civilian administration should work on enhancing its capacity rather shifting its responsibilities to the military.
- For uncontentious accountability requires impartial treatment with all political and non-political entities by the government and its institutions.



- All political parties and non-political entities should formally dissolve their armed wings and disassociate themselves from militant organizations and disclose their source of funding.
- Reforms in FATA are must but need to be done with consensus and wishes of the locals.
- The IDPs should be timely resettled and rehabilitated and they should be properly taken care of while in camps.
- Terrorism in Baluchistan would need a different strategy as it is different from religious terrorism.
- Pakistan should work with Afghanistan closely in order to develop an all-inclusive strategy to solve the refugees issue in the future.
- For the sake of a competent judicial system, laws regarding terrorism should be sufficiently debated within the Parliament and be implemented and practiced in reality.

## **Conclusion**

On a rocky rutted path, the NAP has had mixed outcomes of success and pitfalls to counter terrorism in the country. In assessing the twenty points of the NAP, Pakistan has done a good work of arresting terrorist and executing them. Strict actions have been taken against literature, newspapers and magazines promoting hatred, decapitation, extremism, sectarianism and intolerance. A substantial funding sources of terrorist and terrorist outfits has been seized. Defunct outfits are not allowed to operate under any other name. Ensured registration and regulation of religious seminaries and ban on glorification of terrorists and terrorist organisations through print and electronic media. In addition, the communication networks of terrorists are dismantled largely and the government has taken measures against promotion of terrorism through internet and social media.

However, establishing and deploying a dedicated counter-terrorism force and ending the religious extremism and protection of minorities are still far from reach to achieve. Also, actions against spreading extremism is still a challenging task to counter terrorism and sectarianism. Moreover, administrative and development reforms in FATA and political settlement and reconciliation in Baluchistan are still in the do list to redefine and solve with comprehensive strategies. Ongoing operation in Karachi has highs and lows, however, it has been sluggishly progressing towards its logical end. Formulation of a comprehensive policy to deal with the issue of Afghan refugees is in progress, however, on ground tactics of dealing with the issue have been criticized and it might worsen the Pak-Afghan relations. Lastly, there are no significant signs of reforms in criminal justice system; in fact, still there is serious civil-military trust deficit.

All in all, the findings of this paper argue that the NAP is an ad hoc policy and it has been haphazardly developed without giving it a rational thought and portrays the emotional reaction to the APS attack. The NAP lacks proper direction, as well as

coordination between the federal and provincial governments. The current plan has put most of the burden of counter-terrorism on the military. From the use of force to administrative and judicial, responsibilities now lie with the army. Also, there a big question mark on the jurisdiction and credibility of military courts due to their controversial role in the judiciary. Indeed there is need of sincere will and commitment to design a proper roadmap to fight against terrorism.

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