

## Critical Evaluation of the National Action Plan (NAP)

Abdul Basit

### Abstract

After the Army Public School (APS), Peshawar attack in December 2014, Pakistan chalked out a National Action Plan (NAP), a 20-point counterterrorism roadmap, to root out extremism and terrorism. NAP— notwithstanding its inherent gaps—was a comprehensive document and covered various aspects of Counter-Terrorism (CT) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in Pakistan. On the kinetic front, operation Zarb-e-Azb (Sword of the Prophet) was extended from North Waziristan to other parts of former FATA-region, Balochistan and Karachi. For non-kinetic measures, the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA)—Pakistan’s central counterterrorism body—was made functional. Against this backdrop, this article will critically analyze NAP’s implementation in Pakistan to point out additional steps needed to improve CT and CVE measures in Pakistan. While implementing NAP primary focus remained on hard measures hence soft interventions did not get the due attention. Therefore, Pakistan needs a smart approach by balancing its hard and soft CT and CVE policies to achieve sustainable peace and security.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Counter-terrorism, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), extremism, radicalization, internal security, National Action Plan (NAP)

### Introduction

Pakistan turned a page in its fight against terrorism when the National Action Plan (NAP), a 20-point counter-terrorism framework, was devised

and implemented in the aftermath of the Army Public School (APS), Peshawar attack in December 2014.<sup>1</sup> NAP offered a comprehensive CT and CVE roadmap with the notable exception of de-radicalization and rehabilitation of repentant militants.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this oversight, terrorist attacks have significantly declined across Pakistan over the last several years. Moreover, the command and control systems and infrastructure of various terrorist groups have also largely been dismantled.<sup>3</sup>

While that may be so, the twin challenge, albeit less intense, of extremism and terrorism persists in qualitatively different forms and shapes.<sup>4</sup> Not only major anti-Pakistan terrorist groups such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), have disintegrated but some of their splinter groups have banded together to form new groups like the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK).<sup>5</sup> Likewise, extremist trends in Pakistan have seen participation of females and educated youth of urban middle and upper middle classes galvanized by new extremist ideas and narratives.<sup>6</sup> Given this evolving nature of extremist and terrorist

---

<sup>1</sup> Ahmed Rashid, "Viewpoint: How Peshawar massacre changed Pakistan," *BBC News*, December 13, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35051628>.

<sup>2</sup> Shuja Nawaz, "Countering Militancy and Terrorism in Pakistan: The Civil-Military Nexus," *United States Institute of Peace*, October 2016, p.3, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR393-Countering-Militancy-and-Terrorism-in-Pakistan-The-Civil-Military-Nexus.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> "Decline in terrorism," *Dawn*, January 2, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1525816>.

<sup>4</sup> "Terror attacks drop but Pakistan not out of the woods yet," *Dawn*, January 30, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1531454>.

<sup>5</sup> Asad Hashim, "Pakistani Taliban down but not out, says ex-spokesman," *Al-Jazeera*, April 4, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/exclusive-ehsanullah-ehsan-pakistan-taliban-spokesman-200403075526508.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Intiaz Gul, "Women's Role in Recruitment for ISIS/Islamist Networks in Pakistan," *International Annals of Criminology*, Vol. 56, Special Issue 1-2, (Nov 2018), pp. 79-92; C. Christine Fair and Ali Hamza, "Women and Support for Terrorism in Pakistan," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 30, Issue 6, (July 2018), pp. 962-983, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2018.1481313?journalCode=ftpv20>; Amira Jadoon and Sara Mahmood, "Militant Rivalries Extend to Female Recruitment

landscape in Pakistan, continuous revision and re-adaptation of NAP should have been envisioned at the time of its formulation.<sup>7</sup> NAP is heavily focused on kinetic aspects of CT and CVE, while the focus non-kinetic aspects (soft-approach) is still lacking.<sup>8</sup>

The current internal security situation in Pakistan marks absence of violence rather than sustainable peace owing to the fact that terrorism and terrorist are symptoms of deeper structural malaise, which still remain unaddressed.<sup>9</sup> Hence, a strategic review of NAP is warranted keeping in view the requirements and challenges of existing security environment. Moreover, the kinetic and non-kinetic aspects of CT and CVE should be balanced to achieve sustainable peace.

Against this backdrop, this article will examine the achievements and challenges of NAP to propose additional measures to plug existing gaps. Rather than writing a point-by-point score card of NAP as done by Zahid (2016) and PIPS (2015), this article will adopt a qualitative-analytical approach to evaluate NAP.<sup>10</sup> It has relied on ten interviews of experts and

---

in Pakistan,” *Combating Terrorism Centre*, September 14, 2017, <https://ctc.usma.edu/ctc-perspectives-militant-rivalries-extend-to-female-recruitment-in-pakistan/>; “Jihadi glamour: TTP launches women magazine,” *Dawn*, August 2, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349061/jihadi-glamour-ttp-launches-womens-magazine>.

<sup>7</sup> Author interview Tariq Pervez, former National Coordinator NACTA, May 7, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Farhan Zahid, “Pakistan’s CVE Programme: An Overview of Challenges and Achievements,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 9, No.6, (June 2017), pp-11-16.

<sup>9</sup> Author interview with Adnan Rafiq, country representative United States Institute of Peace, May 7, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> For details see, Farhan Zahid, “Counter Terrorism Policy Measures: A Critical Analysis Of Pakistan’s National Action Plan,” *The Mackenzie Institute*, July 19, 2016, <https://mackenzieinstitute.com/2016/07/counter-terrorism-policy-measures-a-critical-analysis-of-pakistans-national-action-plan/>; “Comprehensive Review of National Action Plan,” *Conflict and Peace Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (Jul-Dec 2015), pp. 9-151, [https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Final\\_A-PIPS-Research-Journal-Final-vol-7-no2.pdf](https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Final_A-PIPS-Research-Journal-Final-vol-7-no2.pdf).

policymakers who were involved in formulation or implementation of different aspects of NAP, media reportage, author's own observations and published secondary sources such as book chapters, journal articles and research reports.

Spanning over three sections, the article first describes the pre and post-NAP political and security environments in Pakistan to illustrate how the landscape has evolved since the APS attack. Then, achievements of NAP have been outlined which have contributed to massive decline in terrorism and restoration of law and order across Pakistan. The final section mentions key challenges along with policy recommendations to further enhance and improve the scope of NAP.

### **Context and Security Environment when NAP was Created**

The comparison of pre and post-NAP political and security environments is necessary to ascertain the issues which are missing from NAP and need to be incorporated. The comparison will also enable us to understand points that have been completed or have become redundant and should be removed from NAP.<sup>11</sup>

Created in the after math of the APS attack, NAP called for immediate and demonstrable action against the perpetrators.<sup>12</sup> There was immense public

---

<sup>11</sup>In the context of this discussion, it is equally important to consider how the National Internal Security Policy (2019-2023) corresponds to NAP. NISP (2019-2023) builds on both NAP and NISP (2014-2018) by removing points which have been achieved or became redundant and includes new points keeping in view existing political and security environment as well as continuing with ongoing long-terms measures such as madrassa reforms, countering hate speech etc. The main thrust of NISP (2019-2023) is to shift the policy focus from kinetic (as terrorism has considerably declined and terrorist groups have been dismantled) to non-kinetic measures to achieve sustainable peace and stability.

<sup>12</sup> Anup Kaphle, "Pakistan announces a national plan to fight terrorism, says terrorists days are numbered," *Washington Post*, December 25, 2014,

pressure on Pakistan's top political and military leadership to bring the perpetrators to justice and eliminate militancy in Pakistan so that such a tragedy does not happen again.

At that time, TTP operating out of North Waziristan region dominated Pakistan's militant landscape. Though TTP was past its peak already, it was capable of launching large scale, multiple coordinated attacks across Pakistan. The group was the go-to place for radical recruits who wished to join militancy.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, TTP's ideological narrative was unchallenged and it influenced, if not dominated, the political discourse of that era.<sup>14</sup> A case in point is the former TTP chief late Hakeemullah Mehsud's letter to the Pakistani ulema, in the run up to 2013 general elections, seeking their input on the Islamic status of democracy as a system of governance in Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> Ahead of the 2013 elections, TTP targeted election rallies of secular-liberal Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Awami National Party (ANP) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) for supporting military operations in the former FATA region.<sup>16</sup> On the

---

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/12/24/pakistan-announces-a-national-plan-to-fight-terrorism-says-terrorists-days-are-numbered/>.

<sup>13</sup> Author interview with Muhammad Feyyaz, a PhD scholar at the Belfast University working on terrorism in Pakistan, May 8, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Saba Imtiaz, "Taliban's letter to Malala Yousafzai: this is why we tried to kill you," *Guardian*, July 17, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/17/taliban-letter-malala-yousafzai>; On August 15, 2012, TTP wrote a four-page letter to Pakistan's religious scholar mentioning that their militant struggle was not just to end Pakistan's counter-terrorism alliance with the US but it was also against democracy in Pakistan. For details see, Abdul Basit, "The US withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implication for Pakistan's Militant Landscape," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 4, Issue 10, (October 2012), pp. 10-13.

<sup>16</sup> Imran Kazmi, "Attacks on MQM, PPP in Karachi; five killed," *Dawn*, April 28, 2013, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1025539/attacks-on-mqm-ppp-in-karachi-five-killed>; "Pakistani Taliban target ANP leaders during election campaign," *Guardian*, April 14, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/14/pakistani-taliban-target-anp-leaders>.

contrary, center-right political parties such as Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUIF) were spared for favoring negotiations with the militants.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned above, prior to the formulation of NAP, Pakistan's political parties were divided between pro-operation and pro-negotiation camps.<sup>18</sup> This divisive political atmosphere created a lack of political ownership and consensus needed at the national level to counter militancy and discredit extremist ideologies.

Finally, the military operations conducted before the formulation of NAP in Swat, South Waziristan and other areas were reactive in nature and lacked an institutional framework. Moreover, these operations were ad-hoc in nature, exposing Pakistan's fire-fighting approach to CT.<sup>19</sup> Also, the pre-NAP phase of counter militancy in Pakistan focused on kinetic responses and non-kinetic measures were lacking or missing altogether.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> M. Ilyas Khan, "Pakistan election: Taliban threats hamper secular campaign," *BBC News*, April 5, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22022951>.

<sup>18</sup> Zahir Shah Sherazi, "TTP willing to talk under guarantee from Nawaz, Fazal and Munawar Hasan," *Dawn*, February 3, 2013, <https://www.dawn.com/news/783368/ttp-expresses-will-to-hold-talks>; "Nawaz forms 4-member committee for peace talks with TTP," *Express Tribune*, January 29, 2014, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/664867/nawaz-forms-4-member-committee-for-peace-talks-with-ttp/>; "PTI chief urges govt to allow opening of Pakistani Taliban office," *Dawn*, September 25, 2013, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1045342>.

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Feyyaz, "Why Pakistan Does Not Have a Counterterrorism Narrative," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 8, No. 1-2, (Spring/Summer 2015), pp. 63-78.

<sup>20</sup> Masood Ur-Rehman Khattak and Muhammad Mushtaq, "Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2001-2014): An Analysis," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1. (2015), pp. 29-46.

## Existing Security Environment in Pakistan

Since January 2015, Pakistan's political and security environment has evolved significantly, rendering certain points of NAP redundant.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, some points such as creating Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs)<sup>22</sup>, operationalizing the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and military courts have been completed or elapsed.<sup>23</sup> Still other points, such as border fencing with Afghanistan<sup>24</sup>, madrasa reforms and countering hate speech are ongoing.<sup>25</sup>

Pakistan's existing militant landscape is a complex and over-crowded space where a plethora of militant groups with similar and opposing ideological

---

<sup>21</sup> For instance, merger of former FATA region with KP, creation of military courts, establishing Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs) at the provincial level as well as registering and issuing mobile SIM card using biometric system have been completed and should be removed from NAP. While points like social media monitoring for preventing and countering violent extremism, de-radicalization and rehabilitation programs for repentant militants, among others, should be included in the revised version.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Perito and Tariq Pervez, "A Counterterrorism Role for Pakistan's Police Stations," *United States Institute of Peace*, August 2014, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR351-A-Counterterrorism-Role-for-Pakistan's-Police-Stations.pdf>; "Senate panel for enhanced role of provincial CTDs," *Express Tribune*, January 17, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2139472/1-senate-panel-enhanced-role-provincial-ctds/>.

<sup>23</sup> Amir Wasim, "Military courts cease to function today," *Dawn*, March 31, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1472947>.

<sup>24</sup> Ayaz Gul, "Afghan Border Fencing to Be Completed by 2020, Pakistan Says," *Voice of America*, November 5, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/afghan-border-fencing-be-completed-2020-pakistan-says>; Mariana Babar, "Pakistan, Iran agree on border fencing," *The News*, July 19, 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/500638-pakistan-iran-agree-on-border-fencing>; So far, Pakistan has fenced 9,00 kilometers of its border with Afghanistan and built 223 forts. Work on the remaining 300-kilometer border fencing and 610 forts is expected to be completed in 2020. Likewise, border fencing with Iran is in its incipient stage and so far 30 kilometers of border has been fenced.

<sup>25</sup> Saad Sayeed, "Pakistan plans to bring 30,000 madrasas under government control," *Reuters*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-madrasas/pakistan-plans-to-bring-30000-madrasas-under-government-control-idUSKCN1S517Z>.

narratives have respectively cooperated and competed with each other.<sup>26</sup> Not only terrorism and terrorist groups in Pakistan continuously evolve but at a rapid pace as well. Between 2014 and present, these militant groups have splintered, merged, re-splintered and re-merged.<sup>27</sup>

Zarb-e-Azb (Sword of the Prophet) operation launched in North Waziristan against TTP—in the aftermath of the Jinnah Airport attack, Karachi in June 2014—was further expedited and expanded following the formulation of NAP.<sup>28</sup> Zarb-e-Azb dislocated and disintegrated TTP resulting in emergence of new militant groups such as Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) and Hizb-ul-Ahrar (HuA).<sup>29</sup> Likewise, the nationalist-separatist insurgency in Balochistan declined and evolved due to a host of security operations and reconciliatory policies.<sup>30</sup> Government's carrot-and-stick approach forced some Baloch militant groups to move to

---

<sup>26</sup> Amira Jadoon, "The Militant Landscape, Tactics & Pakistan's War on Terror," *Pakistan Politics*, September 10, 2018, <http://pakistanpolitico.com/the-militant-landscape-tactics-pakistans-war-on-terror/>; Farhan Zahid, "Jihadism in South Asia: A militant landscape in flux," *The Middle East Institute*, January 8, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/jihadism-south-asia-militant-landscape-flux>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Haji Mujtaba, "Pakistan army launches big operation after airport attack," *Reuters*, June 15, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-airstrikes/pakistan-army-launches-big-operation-after-airport-attack-idUSKBN0EQ0F720140615>.

<sup>29</sup> Jon Boone, "Isis ascent in Syria and Iraq weakening Pakistani Taliban," *Guardian*, October 22, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/22/pakistani-taliban-spokesman-isis-pledge>; Greg Myre, "Pakistan Weakens Militants, But Can It Defeat Them?" *NPR*, March 28, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/03/28/472061152/pakistan-weakens-militants-but-can-it-defeat-them>; Rob Crilly, "Despite school atrocity, the Pakistani Taliban is weakening," *Al-Jazeera*, December 17, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/12/17/despite-school-atrocitypakistanastalibanisweakening.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Abubakar Siddique, "Balochistan's Separatist Insurgency On The Wane Despite Recent Attack," *Radio Free Europe*, April 18, 2019, <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/pakistan-balochistan-separatist-insurgency-on-the-wane-despite-recent-attack/29889887.html>.



Afghanistan and Iran, while others have surrendered to Pakistani security forces availing the amnesty.<sup>31</sup>

Due to the onset of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—flagship infrastructure project of Chinese Belt and Road Initiative—Balochistan has formed the geographical nucleus of both jihadist and Baloch militant groups.<sup>32</sup> Hence, it is unsurprising that in the last few years major terrorist attacks in Pakistan have been reported in Balochistan targeting Chinese nationals and CPEC projects. Few cases in point are the PC Gwadar attack (May 2019)<sup>33</sup>, assault on the bus of Chinese engineers (August 2018)<sup>34</sup> in Dalbadin and the Chinese consulate attack in Karachi (November 2018).<sup>35</sup>

Besides, the organizational makeups of most of the Pakistani militant groups have transformed from vertical-hierarchical structures to cell-form horizontal structures.<sup>36</sup> Zarb-e-Azb and previous military operations destroyed terrorists' infrastructure across Pakistan making it difficult for

---

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Zafar, "Renouncing violence: Amnesty plan unveiled for Baloch insurgents," *Express Tribune*, June 27, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/910498/renouncing-violence-amnesty-plan-unveiled-for-baloch-insurgents/>; Saleem Shahid, "500 Baloch militants surrender, abandon armed struggle," *Dawn*, April 22, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1328539>; Gul Yousafzai, "Pakistan says over 300 Baloch separatist militants surrender," *Reuters*, December 10, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-militants/pakistan-says-over-300-baloch-separatist-militants-surrender-idUSKBN1E40L1>.

<sup>32</sup> Author interview with Farhan Zahid, Pakistan-based researcher of terrorism and political violence in South Asia, May 5, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> "5 people killed in Gwadar PC hotel attack; army concludes clearance operation," *Dawn*, May 12, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1481840>.

<sup>34</sup> Mohammad Zafar, "Six injured in suicide attack on bus carrying Chinese engineers in Dalbandin," *Express Tribune*, August 11, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1778389/1-least-six-injured-balochistan-suicide-attack/>.

<sup>35</sup> Imtiaz Ali and Asim Khan, "Terror attack on Chinese Consulate in Karachi foiled; 3 terrorists killed," *Dawn*, November 23, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1447192>.

<sup>36</sup> Author interview with Farhan Zahid.

these groups to maintain large-scale organizational presence.<sup>37</sup> The cellular structures hamper the operational capability of these militant groups to carry out large-scale terrorist attacks on mainland Pakistan.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, cell structures have provided some tactical advantages to militant groups as well. Terrorist groups operating in cell formations are difficult to detect and penetrate.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, if one or a few cells come under the radar of the security agencies, it does not affect the operations of other cells. Sometimes, different cells of the same militant group are not even aware of each other's presence.<sup>40</sup> Also, cell-formations alleviate the need for centralized communication with the main leadership and provides greater operational freedom and flexible decision-making.<sup>41</sup>

On the ideological front however, the Islamic State (IS)'s Caliphate, Al-Qaeda's Ghazwa-e-Hind and the Black Flags of Khorasan and the Taliban's emirate narratives have created a fierce competition for winning over new recruits, resources and ideological supremacy.<sup>42</sup> These extremist narratives have created new fault lines in addition to exacerbating the existing ones.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the scope of these ideological narratives is broad unlike the

---

<sup>37</sup> Sameer Lalwani, "Actually, Pakistan Is Winning Its War on Terror," *Foreign Policy*, December 10, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/10/actually-pakistan-is-winning-its-war-on-terror/>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Tom Keatinge and Florence Keen, "Lone-Actor and Small Cell Terrorist Attacks: A New Front in Counter-Terrorist Finance?" *Royal United Services Institute*, January 2017, [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201701\\_op\\_lone-actor\\_and\\_small\\_cell\\_terrorist\\_attacks.1.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201701_op_lone-actor_and_small_cell_terrorist_attacks.1.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Brian A. Jackson and David R. Frelinger, "Understanding Why Terrorist Operations Succeed or Fail," *Rand Corporation*, 2009, p.12, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/2009/RAND\\_OP257.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2009/RAND_OP257.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "Islamic State Enters Al-Qaeda's Old Hotbed: Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Connections Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1, (2017), pp. 37-49, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.16.1.03>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

parochial focus of the most extremist narratives of the past. Consequently, due to this globalization of extremist narratives in Pakistani militant landscape, events and developments in the Middle East affect behaviors and agenda of terrorist groups in Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> Particularly, developments in Syria and Iraq have a direct fallout on the sectarian conflict in Pakistan<sup>45</sup>.

Social media has also been pivotal in redefining Pakistan's militant landscape opening new avenues for the terrorist groups. Social media has become an integral part of terrorist groups' tool kit.<sup>46</sup> Radical individuals who are tech-savvy with sharp social media skills are of great importance to terrorist groups. Despite being uprooted from their hideouts in the former FATA region, Balochistan and other parts of Pakistan, these militant groups have been able to maintain virtual presence through active digital footprints. Social media has eliminated physical barriers for disseminating ideological propagandas, engage with new potential recruits and plot new attacks.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, social media's deeper penetration has rapidly increased the pace and flow of information resulting in a lower threshold for radicalization.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Ali Alfoneh, "Shia Pakistani Fighters in Syria," *The Atlantic Council*, April 26, 2017, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/shia-pakistani-fighters-in-syria/>.

<sup>45</sup> Shahzeb Ali Rathore, "The Saudi-Iran Factor in Pakistan's Sunni-Shia Conflict," *Middle East Institute*, May 30, 2017, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/saudi-iran-factor-pakistans-sunni-shia-conflict>.

<sup>46</sup> Ariel Victoria Lieberman, "Terrorism, the Internet, and Propaganda: A Deadly Combination," *Journal of National Security Law and Policy*, Vol. 9, No. 95, (January 2017), pp. 95-124, [https://jnslp.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Terrorism\\_the\\_Internet\\_and\\_Propaganda\\_FINAL.pdf](https://jnslp.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Terrorism_the_Internet_and_Propaganda_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Kiran Hassan, "Social Media, Media Freedom and Pakistan's War on Terror," *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 107, Issue 2, (March 2018), pp. 189-202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2018.1448339>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Finally, a generational shift has also taken place among the militant groups in Pakistan. Since the 1980s, people from different parts of the world came to Pakistan and Afghanistan for training and participation in militancy. This new generation of Pakistani militants is more violent, tech-savvy, and overly ambitious. Most recruits of this new militant generation are college and university educated youth from middle and upper middle-class segments of urban areas.<sup>49</sup> This new generation of militants has no past baggage and possesses a qualitatively different worldview from their predecessors. It takes keen interest in developments taking place in Syria and Iraq rather than staying invested only in local and regional conflicts.<sup>50</sup>

### **NAP's Achievements**

#### ***Decline in Terrorism***

Since NAP's implementation, incidents of political violence, terrorism and insurgency and resultant casualties have declined significantly across Pakistan (See Chart 1 & 2).<sup>51</sup> All no-go areas in Karachi, Balochistan and the former FATA regional have been eliminated and the writ of the state has been restored.<sup>52</sup> As mentioned above, terrorist groups and their infrastructure has largely been destroyed, forcing them to flee to

---

<sup>49</sup> Madeeha Anwar, "Pakistan's Emerging Threat: Highly Educated Youth Gravitate to Radicalization," *Voice of America*, May 6, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/pakistans-emerging-threat-highly-educated-youth-gravitate-radicalization>.

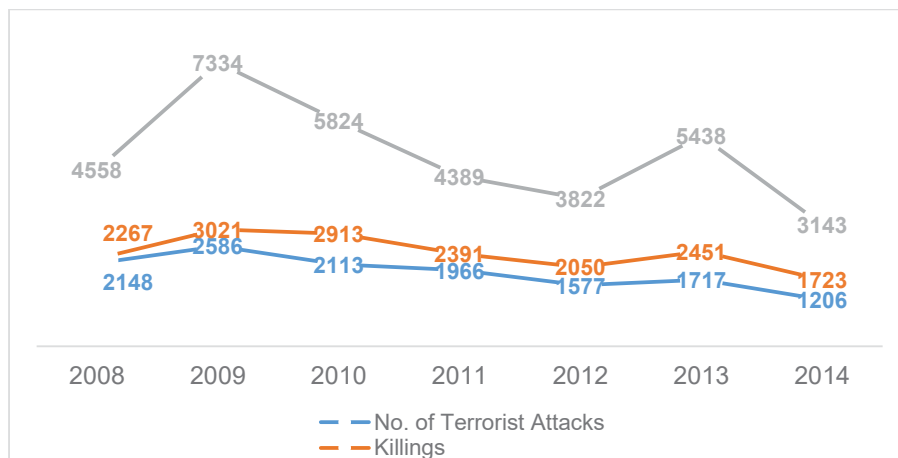
<sup>50</sup> Abdul Basit, "Threat of Urban Jihadism in South Asia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (March 2018), pp. 1-5, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CTTA-March-2018.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> "Decline in terrorism," *Dawn*, January 2, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1525816>.

<sup>52</sup> Kamran Yousaf, "Operation updates: Army restores writ of the state in tribal belt," *Express Tribune*, April 4, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1078374/operation-updates-army-restores-writ-of-the-state-in-tribal-belt/>; Ambreen Ishrat, "Karachi notebook: No more no-go areas?" *Dawn*, April 19, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1176755>; Mohammad Zafar, "No no-go areas left in Balochistan," *Express Tribune*, March 22, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1933854/1-no-no-go-areas-left-balochistan/>.

Afghanistan (TTP and its splinter groups) and Iran (Baloch separatists).<sup>53</sup> One measure of improving security situation in Pakistan is the return international cricket,<sup>54</sup> limited revival of tourism<sup>55</sup> and increasing foreign direct investment from China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).<sup>56</sup>

**Chart 1: Terrorist Attacks and Casualties in Pakistan (2008-2014)<sup>57</sup>**



Source: Data compiled from Pak Institute for Peace Studies' Pakistan Security Reports (2008-2014)

<sup>53</sup> Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, "On the Taliban, Pakistan, and Islamic State: An Interview With the Former TTP Spokesman," *The Diplomat*, April 20, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/on-the-taliban-pakistan-and-islamic-state-an-interview-with-the-former-ttp-spokesman/>; Zia Ur Rehman, "The Baluch insurgency: linking Iran to Pakistan," *Norwegian Peace Building Resource Centre*, May 2014, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/180927/31c68a20991b5a98b0dece4fd929c9c8.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Ali Chughtai, "International cricket returns to Pakistan," *Al-Jazeera*, October 31, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/10/international-cricket-returns-pakistan-171030123517481.html>.

<sup>55</sup> "Foreign tourists in Pakistan up 70% in 2018," *Gulf News*, November 17, 2019, <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/foreign-tourists-in-pakistan-up-70-in-2018-1.67891432>.

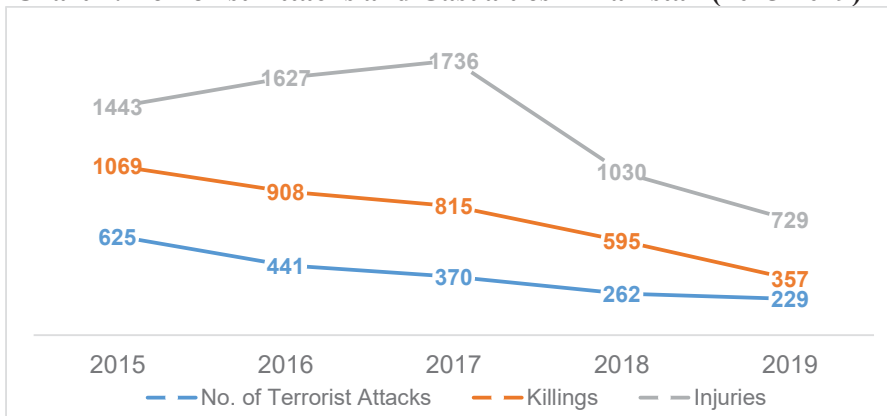
<sup>56</sup> Sabrian Toppa, "Why Young Pakistanis Are Learning Chinese," *The Atlantic*, November 14, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/11/pakistan-china-cooperation-cpec/568750/>; "Saudi Arabia signs \$20bn in deals with Pakistan," *BBC News*, February 18, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-47274672>; "UAE to invest \$5bn in oil refinery project in Pakistan by end of 2019: report," *Dawn*, October 4, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1508944>.

<sup>57</sup> For details see, Pak Institute for Peace Studies' Pakistan Security Reports at <https://www.pakpips.com/publications#1512730923805-d52fde57-07fa>.

As per (*Chart 1*), 2009 was the most volatile year in Pakistan with 2,586 terrorist attacks accounting for 3,021 killings.<sup>58</sup> Since then, however, terrorist incidents and casualties have slumped in Pakistan through to 2014. In a span of six years (2008-2014), the number of terrorist attacks halved from 2,148 in 2008<sup>59</sup> to 1,206 in 2014.<sup>60</sup> Still, the number of terrorist attacks in 2014 is quite high— 3.30 attacks per day.<sup>61</sup>

However, following the implementation of NAP and operation Zarb-e-Azb, terrorism has decreased by 48 percent from 1,206 attacks in 2014 to 625 attacks in 2015 (*See Chart 2*).<sup>62</sup> Likewise, the number of casualties dropped from 1,723 to 1,069, showing a 38 percent decline.<sup>63</sup> In the coming years, both attacks and casualties have continued to drop further resulting in 229 attacks and 357 killings in 2019 (*See Chart 2*).<sup>64</sup>

**Chart 2: Terrorist Attacks and Casualties in Pakistan (2015-2019)<sup>65</sup>**



Source: Data compiled from Pak Institute for Peace Studies' Pakistan Security Reports (2015-2019)

<sup>58</sup> "Pakistan Security Report 2009," *Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, January 2010, p. 3, <https://pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/sr2009.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> "Pakistan Security Report 2008," *Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, January 2009, p.3, <https://pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/sr2008.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> "Pakistan Security Report 2014," *Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, January 4, 2015, p.7, <https://pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/sr2014.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> "Pakistan Security Report 2015," *Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, January 3, 2016, p.8, <https://pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/sr2015.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> "Pakistan Security Report 2019," *Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, January 4, 2020, p. 20, <https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/sr2019.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> For details see, Pak Institute for Peace Studies' Pakistan Security Reports at <https://www.pakpips.com/publications#1512730923805-d52fde57-07fa>.

### *National Consensus on CT and CVE*

Prior to NAP, a divided public opinion and the lack of political support hindered Pakistan's efforts to devise a comprehensive CT policy.<sup>66</sup> Resultantly, not only Pakistan's CT policy was ad-hoc, but the results also remained less than ideal. Following any military operation, terrorism subsided for a short period of time only to re-emerge with even greater ferocity.<sup>67</sup> Generally, people considered terrorism as the negative fallout on instability in Afghanistan and reaction to Pakistan army's decision to deploy troops along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border on America's behest.<sup>68</sup>

The APS attack and subsequently NAP marked a turning point in Pakistan's fight against extremism and terrorism. The attack, termed as Pakistan's 9/11, shook the entire nation.<sup>69</sup> NAP not only bridged the civil-military divide on CT and CVE, but also eliminated the political differences between the vying political parties.<sup>70</sup> Even the most ardent supporters of negotiations with TTP namely JUIF, PTI and JI had to change their longstanding political stance in the face growing public anger. Consequently, NAP provided the much-needed public and political

---

<sup>66</sup> Muhammad Feyyaz, "Why Pakistan Does Not Have a Counterterrorism Narrative," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 8, No. 1-2, (Spring/Summer 2015), pp. 63-78, <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1409&context=jss>.

<sup>67</sup> Author interview with Farhan Zahid.

<sup>68</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos: Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Threat to Global Security*, (London: Penguin, 2009).

<sup>69</sup> Carmen Fishwick, "Peshawar school massacre: This is Pakistan's 9/11 – now is the time to act," *Guardian*, December 19, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/19/peshawar-school-massacre-pakistans-911>.

<sup>70</sup> Shahid Ahmad Afridi, "Pakistan's Counterinsurgency: Military and Civilian Approach," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, (Autumn 2016), pp. 21-37, [http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2-shahid\\_ahmad\\_afridi\\_SS\\_Vol\\_36\\_No.3\\_2016.pdf](http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2-shahid_ahmad_afridi_SS_Vol_36_No.3_2016.pdf).

ownership to the top political and military leadership to go after the terrorist groups.<sup>71</sup>

Public support and political consensus are the most essential components of any effective CT and CVE framework.<sup>72</sup> In a country like Pakistan, with a meager resource-base, allocating funds for resource-extensive CT operations in the former FATA region, Balochistan and Karachi required a string public buy-in.<sup>73</sup> Without public support and political backing, it is difficult to mobilize public funds over a long period of time. NAP provided that public buy-in and political backing.<sup>74</sup>

### *Institutional Framework for CT and CVE*

NAP has provided a functional institutional framework for CT and CVE in Pakistan.<sup>75</sup> Though there is still considerable room for improvement. Prior to implementation of NAP, there was widespread confusion among various government and security institutions stemming from overlapping institutional mandates, sluggish bureaucratic system as well as lack of cooperation and coordination. The APS attack itself was partly a result of this lack of coordination. On August 28, 2014, an intelligence-based threat alert was issued to different government departments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa about a possible attack on an army-run educational

---

<sup>71</sup> Author interview with Ihsan Ghani, former National Coordinator NACTA, May 8, 2020.

<sup>72</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (London: Praeger Security International, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> Author interview with Farhan Zahid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Author interview with Tariq Pervez.



institution.<sup>76</sup> However, this warning was ignored resulting in one of the most devastating terrorist attacks in Pakistan's history.<sup>77</sup>

In the aftermath of NAP, NACTA has been made functional as the main coordinating agency to oversee the overall implementation of CT and CVE policies.<sup>78</sup> Presently, NACTA is spearheading various CVE initiatives being implemented across Pakistan.<sup>79</sup> Various committees implementing different points of NAP at the provincial level submit their reports to NACTA every month.<sup>80</sup> After six months, a detailed review of the submitted reports is carried out.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, NACTA has created a CVE-wing under its organizational setup and formulated National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines as well as national narratives to counter extremist ideologies.<sup>82</sup>

In the war against terrorism intelligence sharing is of vital importance. Sharing of intelligence among different LEAs puts the security machinery a step ahead of the enemy. For this purpose intelligence Wing (IW) of NACTA plays pivotal role since it works as a bridge between various LEAs.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> "Warning of Peshawar attack was issued on August 28," *Geo Tv*, December 22, 2014, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/76943-warning-of-peshawar-attack-was-issued-on-august-28>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> "Strengthening Nacta," *Dawn*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1435280>.

<sup>79</sup> Author interview with Mohammad Ali Babakhel (Director General, NACTA), May 7, 2020.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> "National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines Pakistan," *National Counter Terrorism Authority*, January 2018, <https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NCEP-Guidelines.pdf>.

<sup>83</sup> "Joint Intelligence Directorate," *National Counter Terrorism Authority*, <https://nacta.gov.pk/joint-intelligence-directorate-jid/>.

## Challenges and Policy Gaps

### *Evidence-based and Data-driven Approach*

Different policy areas under NAP such as countering hate speech, extremism and terrorism require an evidence-based and data-driven approach.<sup>84</sup> Empirically driven policy initiatives are necessary to make informed policy decision keeping in view the magnitude of the problem, available resources, manpower and timelines.<sup>85</sup> Sometimes, a policy can be segregated into different phases if resources are scarce and manpower is less or not trained enough. Also, knowing what is achievable versus what is desirable is critical for efficient policy outcomes.<sup>86</sup>

Most of the work on terrorism and extremism in Pakistan is anecdotal, event-driven and episodic, barring few exceptions.<sup>87</sup> Hence, most deductions and conclusions are simply assumed rather than empirically substantiated.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, due to the advent of social media and globalization of extremist narratives, terrorism and extremism evolve at a rapid pace.<sup>89</sup> Hence, keeping abreast with these changing dynamics is critical for policymakers. CT and CVE frameworks should be flexible and adaptive, so they could be revised according to changing requirements.<sup>90</sup>

Investing more in Research and Development (R & D) will go a long way in creating a concrete foundation for future policy-formulations in CT and

---

<sup>84</sup> Author interview with Ihsan Ghani.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Author interview with Adnan Rafiq.

<sup>87</sup> Muhammad Feyyaz, "The discourse and study of terrorism in decolonised states: the case of Pakistan," *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, Issue 3, (2016), pp. 455-477, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17539153.2016.1192261>.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Author interview with Farhan Zahid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

CVE. For instance, developing expertise on how terrorist recruitment, propaganda dissemination and communication takes place on different social media platforms and how this can be countered is one area where attention is required in the near future, especially keeping in view the evolving terrorist landscape and their changing preferences.<sup>91</sup>

Likewise, radicalization of educated youth of middle and upper middle-class segments of the urban areas is another area where policymakers should pay close attention. In the last few years, incidents such as Abdul Wali Khan University student Mashal Khan's lynching<sup>92</sup>, Liaquat Medical College student Naureen Laghari's online recruitment as a suicide bomber by IS for targeting Easter Services in Lahore<sup>93</sup>, calls for systematic introspection of why and how a fragment of Pakistan's educated youth is being drawn into religious extremism and ethno-nationalist separatism.

### ***De-radicalization and Rehabilitation***

When NAP was formulated, it covered almost all aspects of CT and CVE in Pakistan with the notable exception of de-radicalization and rehabilitation of repentant militants. De-radicalization and rehabilitation strategies constitute reformative components of CVE and CT policymaking.<sup>94</sup> People's reason to join terrorism are as diverse as the

---

<sup>91</sup> Rober Graham, "How Terrorists Used Encryption?" *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 9, Issue 6, (June 2016), pp. 20-25, [https://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CTC-SENTINEL\\_Vol9Iss614.pdf](https://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CTC-SENTINEL_Vol9Iss614.pdf).

<sup>92</sup> Warda Imran and Madiha Nasir, "10 months on: A timeline of brutal lynching of Mashal Khan," *Express Tribune*, February 7, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1628444/1-10-months-timeline-brutal-lynching-mashal-khan/>.

<sup>93</sup> Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan Probes Detained IS Female Suicide Bomber Who Planned to Assault Christians," *Voice of America*, April 17, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia/pakistan-probes-detained-female-suicide-bomber-who-planned-assault-christians>.

<sup>94</sup> Author interview with Farhan Zahid, Pakistan-based researcher working on terrorism and political violence in South Asia.

phenomenon itself. Everyone is not ideologically motivated, some people take to terrorism due to identity related issues such as search for a sense of belonging and purpose or struggle for recognition.<sup>95</sup> Others join out of revenge, anger and frustration against the system. For them, terrorism is a form of catharsis and a power trip. Likewise, some take to militancy for socio-economic reasons, thrill factor or simply peer pressure.<sup>96</sup>

So, a deeper understanding of recruitments patterns and their underlying reasons of different extremist and terrorist networks in Pakistan would better inform policymakers how to reform repentant militants who are not ideologically motivated and willing to leave the life of militancy.<sup>97</sup> Generally, there are three phases of a militant's lifecycle: a) entry, b) transit, c) and exit.<sup>98</sup> At each stage, a militant's underlying motivation to join or leave militancy could change and evolve. So, the factors which might motivate or compel him to join militancy is different from what keeps or push him to leave it.<sup>99</sup>

De-radicalization and rehabilitation allow policymakers to target less ideologically motivated militants who were involved in minor offences to leave militancy.<sup>100</sup> This is done through psychological screening where each militant's trajectory to radicalization is reconstructed and then his

---

<sup>95</sup> Malini Subramanyam, "Motivation leading to radicalization in terrorists," *Forensic Research & Criminology International Journal*, Vol. 6, Issue 4, (2018), pp. 301-307, <http://medcraveonline.com/FRCIJ/FRCIJ-06-00221.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> Rex A. Hudson, "The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?" *Library of Congress*, September 1999, <https://fas.org/irp/threat/frd.html>.

<sup>97</sup> John Horgan, "Deradicalization or Disengagement?" *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 2, No. 4, (2008), <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/32/html>.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Sam Mullins, "Rehabilitation of Islamist terrorists: Lessons from criminology," *Dynamics of Asymmetrical Conflict*, Vol. 3, Issue 3, (January 2010), pp. 162-193, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2010.528438>.

counseling and rehabilitation is carried out in line with the recommendation of the psychologist.<sup>101</sup> Later, religious scholars and motivational speakers as well as education and vocation training modules are employed for reforming and rehabilitating the repentant militants.<sup>102</sup>

In 2009, Pakistan army started de-radicalization and rehabilitation centers in Malakand division as pilot projects which were to be emulated by the political government at the national level.<sup>103</sup> Similar initiatives were launched in Punjab and the former FATA region. However, these programs were discontinued due to lack of funding or other political reasons.<sup>104</sup> A comprehensive national level de-radicalization and rehabilitation initiative is still needed. A re-evaluation of NAP should consider including de-radicalization and rehabilitation components.<sup>105</sup>

### *Non-kinetic CVE Aspects*

While states and governments defeat terrorist groups, it is the societies that prevail over extremism. So far, the major thrust of NAP's focus has been on kinetic aspects of CT and CVE.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, various military operations have been pivotal in bringing down terrorism and dismantling terrorist

---

<sup>101</sup> Arie W. Kruglanski, Michele Gelfand, and Rohan Gunaratna, "Detainee Deradicalization," *Association for Psychological Science*, January 2010, <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/detainee-deradicalization>.

<sup>102</sup> Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," *Rand Corporation*, 2010, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND\\_MG1053.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG1053.pdf).

<sup>103</sup> Selina Adam Khan, "Deradicalization Programming in Pakistan," *United States Institute of Peace*, September 2015, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/194057/PB193-Deradicalization-Programming-in-Pakistan.pdf>.

<sup>104</sup> Arsla Jawaid, "Understanding Pakistan's Deradicalization Programming," *United States Institute of Peace*, January 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/01/understanding-pakistans-deradicalization-programming>.

<sup>105</sup> Author interview with Tariq Pervez.

<sup>106</sup> Author interview with Adnan Rafiq.

networks in Pakistan. However, in the absence of equally effective non-kinetic policy, kinetic measures can lose their efficacy over time.<sup>107</sup> Kinetic measures are required to blunt the sharp edge of terrorist threat and buy time and space for non-kinetic interventions to systematically address the underlying structural causes that lead to extremism and terrorism.<sup>108</sup>

In the current scenario, when various terrorist networks have been dismantled in military operations in the former FATA region, Balochistan and Karachi, close attention should be accorded to non-kinetic aspects of CVE.<sup>109</sup> In their current form, these measures still lack a systematic operational approach. Their scope, in line with policy guidelines, needs to be enhanced and expanded.<sup>110</sup> Moreover these initiatives need to adopt a proactive approach to pre-empt extremist propaganda and ideologies. For that, the non-kinetic CVE policies should have an interface with structural reforms under a whole-of-state-and-society approach.

Under the public-private partnership, the government should work with different civil society organizations to strengthen CVE work at the grassroots level.<sup>111</sup> It is important to mention that such measures do not simply operate on goodwill gestures and smartness of ideas. Rather, better

---

<sup>107</sup> “Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies in Pakistan: Opportunities and Pitfalls,” *International Crisis Group*, July 22, 2015, pp.5-8, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/revisiting-counter-terrorism-strategies-pakistan-opportunities-and-pitfalls>.

<sup>108</sup> Author interview with Dayyab Gillani, assistant professor of political science at Punjab University, May 5, 2020.

<sup>109</sup> Saira Bano Orakzai, “Pakistan’s Approach to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): Reframing the Policy Framework for Peacebuilding and Development Strategies,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 42, Issue 8, (January 2018), pp. 755-770, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1415786>.

<sup>110</sup> Author interview with Mohammad Ali Babakhel (Director General, NACTA).

<sup>111</sup> Author interview with Sheharyar Kahn, a consultant working with the Ministry of Interior, Pakistan, May 5, 2020.

service delivery and clean image of the government among the populace lie at the heart of creating space and traction for the government-supported narrative challenging extremist ideologies.<sup>112</sup>

### ***Revising NAP***

When NAP was formulated, it did not flow from any policy framework despite the fact that work on more than half of the points mentioned in it was already underway.<sup>113</sup> In future, whenever NAP is reviewed and re-evaluated, it should be given a policy cover to make it more holistic.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, its focus should be terrorism-specific rather than terrorist-centric. Terrorist actors can evolve and change but the phenomenon of terrorism transcends space and time. Therefore, counter-terrorism reforms and initiatives need to be phenomenon centric as opposed to actor centric.<sup>115</sup> After the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, most of the points included in NACTA relate to the provinces. Therefore, NACTA should be expanded at the provincial level that will improve implementation and coordination<sup>116</sup>.

Prior to revision of NAP, it is critical to devise an elaborate implementation mechanism. Various committees working on different aspects of NAP should also be reconstituted.<sup>117</sup> In a way, the National Internal Security Policy (NISP, 2019-2023) flows from NISP (2014-2018)<sup>118</sup> and NAP. So,

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Author interview with Tariq Pervez.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Author interview with Dayyab Gillani.

<sup>116</sup> Author interview with Mohammad Ali Babakhel (Director General, NACTA).

<sup>117</sup> Author interview with Ihsan Ghani.

<sup>118</sup> Full text of National Internal Security Policy (2014-2018) can be found at NACTA's website <https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/National-Internal-Security-Policy-2014.pdf>.

all the points mentioned in NAP are in NISP (2019-2023)<sup>119</sup>. Either the incumbent government can merge NAP and NISP (2019-2023) and come up with its own policy document or revise the latter in line with current political and security environment.<sup>120</sup>

In the context of ongoing intra-Afghan peace process, various militant groups have already started repositioning themselves keeping in view any possible outcomes of these negotiation.<sup>121</sup> The former spokesperson of Ihsanullah Ihsan has hinted at negotiations between TTP and ISK to cooperate in future. These realignments of various militant groups and changing regional environment should be factored in during the revision of NAP.<sup>122</sup>

## Conclusion

Though terrorist incidents have significantly declined in Pakistan, structural causes still remain. Hence, terrorism is likely to persist in Pakistan but in small pockets as a low-intensity threat. At the same time, extremism has increased despite a steep decline in terrorism in Pakistan. This clearly indicates that kinetic interventions have yielded positive results, but non-kinetic measures are still a work-in-progress. Above all, providing political ownership and adequate funding is critical to get positive results.

---

<sup>119</sup> Full text of National Internal Security Policy (2019-2023) can be found at Ministry of Interior's website <https://www.interior.gov.pk/index.php/downloads/category/32-policies#>.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Asad Hashim, "Pakistani Taliban down but not out, says ex-spokesman," *Al-Jazeera*, April 4, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/exclusive-ehsanullah-ehsan-pakistan-taliban-spokesman-200403075526508.html>.

<sup>122</sup> Author interview with Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Research Fellow at Deakin University, Australia, May 4, 2020.



Pakistan's fight against terrorism and extremism is currently at crossroads. Ensuring continuity of NAP by addressing various redundancies and gaps is urgently needed. It is equally important to enhance the scope of existing non-kinetic measures under NAP. Simultaneously, external factors which have a direct fallout on Pakistan's internal peace and security should be pursued proactively. Any outcome (positive or negative) of the intra-Afghan peace will have a fallout on Pakistan's security landscape. So, providing continuous support for the intra-Afghan peace process to bring the Afghan war to a politically negotiated settlement is necessary for amicable resettlement of Afghan refugees and sustainable peace in Pakistan.

*Abdul Basit is a research fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He can be reached at [isabasit@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:isabasit@ntu.edu.sg).*