

Communications and Outreach Strategy, 2022

National Counter Terrorism Authority

Government of Pakistan

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A. Introduction

NACTA is mandated under Section 4 of the NACTA Act, 2013:

“(b) to coordinate and prepare comprehensive National Counter Terrorism and Counter Extremism strategies, and review them on periodical basis;

(c) to develop action plans against terrorism and extremism and report to the Federal Government about implementation of these plans, on periodical basis;

(e) to carry out liaison with international entities for facilitating cooperation in areas relating to terrorism and extremism;”

Since its creation in 2008, NACTA has been instrumental in informing national policies on countering terrorism as well as extremism and has played a key role in helping build state capacity to ensure a coordinated response to these challenges. To better inform and engage the stakeholders on various initiatives undertaken at NACTA and strengthen the societal consensus against extremism, a dedicated Outreach has been established with the aim to:

“design and implement NACTA’s outreach strategy and reach out to key stakeholders, think tanks, civil society organizations, NGOs, institutions of learning and experts to build partnerships in promoting peace and tolerance”

The Outreach Branch has been working to engage various segments of the society and highlight CT/CE initiatives being taken at NACTA. It is now at a stage where a need for strategic communications and outreach strategy is felt to better organize the expanding work at the Branch to enhance and measure its cumulative impact. This is in line with the overarching policies formulated by the government, including the National Security Policy, National Internal Security Policy (2014 & 2018) and the draft Countering Violent Extremism Policy 2022.

B. Background

South Asia has seen the rise of extremism at an unprecedented scale since the onset of the 21st century. Pakistan has also suffered immensely from these tendencies that pose a serious threat to social cohesion, peace and harmony in the country.

Article 9 of the Constitution of Pakistan clearly states that “No person shall be deprived of life or liberty save by law”. The State is responsible for protecting its citizens by all means. Hence, it is a prerequisite for the state to have appropriate legislation and policies in place to guard its citizens. Given the challenges faced by Pakistan due to its geopolitical position and resultant ideological, religious and

ethnic strife, thousands of citizens have lost their lives and property as a result of terrorism and extremism. While the nation has won hard-earned peace after great sacrifices by disrupting and dismantling organized terrorist networks, greater efforts are needed to make this sustainable.

A key requirement for sustainable peace is to maintain and strengthen societal consensus against extremism and mobilize social forces that espouse a peaceful, progressive and prosperous Pakistan. This has become even more important after the recent developments across the western and eastern borders of the country with a real potential for spill over. It is therefore imperative to adopt a proactive approach to anticipate and counteract these threats through comprehensive communication and outreach strategy.

The Outreach and Communications Branch at NACTA provides an ideal platform to take lead in this regard. The following plan is therefore put forward to develop the aforementioned communications and outreach strategy:

C. Methodology

This document is an outcome of extensive discussions with relevant officials and experts within and outside NACTA, as well as a thorough literature review of strategies adopted by relevant organisations in comparable countries. The consultative process started with brainstorming within the Outreach and Communications Branch and then expanded to include key officials at NACTA heading its various branches. Key strategic communications experts with experience in designing and leading communications plans in Pakistan and abroad were also consulted. Finally, several case studies and available literature from open sources were reviewed. The intent is to have consensus within NACTA on the proposed strategy and for this to be well informed by the global best practices and experiences around the world. This remains a live document in this regard and can be updated in the light of new developments, challenges and ideas going forward.

D. Aims & Objectives

The strategy aims to enhance NACTA's outreach and visibility in the public domain and also strengthen the narrative against extremism in the country. This will be achieved through the following means:

- 1) Informing various stakeholders including the public about NACTA's counter-extremism efforts
- 2) Disseminating the message of tolerance and peaceful coexistence within the society
- 3) Disseminating cutting-edge research being carried out at NACTA

- 4) Coordinating and supporting efforts by various governmental and non-governmental organisations to counter violent extremism in all forms.

E. Scope

Several institutions at the federal and provincial levels are involved in countering violent extremism. NACTA appreciates and commends the role played by government officials as well as the civil society in turning the tide of these nefarious activities in our homeland. To avoid duplication of efforts and add further value to the common objective of defeating Violent Extremism, NACTA has defined the following scope for intervention:

- Primarily, through its Outreach and Communications strategy, NACTA aims to ‘strengthen societal consensus against extremism through positive messaging’. This means building a narrative against extremism by highlighting the trans-cultural values of tolerance, peaceful co-existence, harmony and acceptance of diversity. This also traces the roots of these societal values within the social, cultural and religious fabric of Pakistan and highlights traditions epitomised by local art, festivals and cultural practices that bring people together. Through such locally rooted positive messaging, NACTA intends to contribute towards a society free of hate and extremism.
- Secondly, NACTA is the only government institution having statutory mandate to develop expertise in the area of countering extremism. This includes developing institutional linkages within the country as well as abroad to ensure the exchange of knowledge and ideas and help inform policies to counter extremism. NACTA therefore, through its Outreach Branch, aims to serve as a hub for facilitating knowledge exchange, leading to practical collaboration among various stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, working for the same cause.
- Lastly, NACTA has come a long way in developing its research expertise, epitomised by the biannual journal being published by the organisation. It is important to amplify the impact of this research by increasing its reach and wider dissemination among relevant stakeholders. The Outreach Branch, through this strategy, aims to effectively support the R&D Branch in achieving this.

E1. Communications and Outreach Branch

Given the scope mentioned above, the mandate given to the Branch and the overlap/interconnection between the outreach and communications activities, NACTA will rename Outreach Branch as “Communications and Outreach Branch”. This will ensure that the importance of strategic communications is officially recognised and the structure better represents the activities Branch is entrusted to undertake.

F. Strategic Plan

The following constitutes the strategic direction and actions that NACTA shall employ to achieve the aforementioned objectives:

F1. NACTA as a hub of Preventing & Countering Extremism

Establishing sustainable peace and preventing extremism necessitates a ‘Whole of the Nation’ approach. This means that joint efforts from all stakeholders of the society are required. NACTA being the specialised Authority responsible for leading and coordinating such efforts must provide a platform where all relevant stakeholders can exchange ideas, share knowledge, coordinate their activities and develop synergies to achieve mutually agreed goals.

NACTA, therefore, needs to act as a **national hub** to coordinate soft initiatives aimed at preventing and countering extremism in all forms. In this role, NACTA can bring together the governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including business community, and help develop synergies required to have a greater societal impact. The following initiatives shall help NACTA become the nerve-centre of response to the said challenges:

F1.1 Ideas Contest on Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism:

NACTA shall invite proposals from the civil society for projects intended to prevent or counter-extremism and select those it finds potentially most effective in dealing with the problem. It will then provide institutional support to these initiatives that may include, but is not limited to, mobilising finances, establishing connections with relevant government departments, participation by NACTA officials and finding ways for the government to officially adopt or scale up the initiative. A Committee of Experts comprising senior NACTA officials and leading relevant experts will be set up to select the most innovative, practical and impactful peacebuilding ideas.

It is observed that many useful P/CVE initiatives cannot be sustained due to lack of government ownership or long-term commitment. Ultimately, the NGOs and diplomatic community can only incubate and pilot peacebuilding projects and eventually, these have to be driven by the government to have a lasting nationwide effect. NACTA aims to be that critical link that makes this happen for the most effective of such pilot projects conceptualised and implemented by non-governmental partners.

F1.2 Committee of Experts

A Committee of Experts, as mandated under the Act, will be established to evaluate and select ideas for further support. The composition of the committee, its mandate/TORs, criteria for selecting projects,

mode of support and frequency of meetings will be decided by the Communications and Outreach Branch after consultations with key officials at NACTA.

F2. Convening at NACTA

Another key aspect of being the national hub of efforts for preventing extremism include convening conferences, seminars, roundtable discussions and other events aimed at sharing knowledge, brainstorming, showcasing achievements and learning from the experience. The following activities will be undertaken to achieve this:

F2.1 Annual National Conference and Peace Festival

NACTA shall convene an annual National Conference on Peace that will bring together key academics, analysts, activists, government officials, parliamentarians and members of the international community to assess the state of affairs, analyse trends, share knowledge and recommend solutions for ensuring sustainable peace in the country.

A Peace Festival shall also be organised annually that will showcase the contributions received by NACTA through its various competitions. The festival will focus on the exhibition of creative arts to spread the message of peace.

F2.2 Biannual International Partners' Meeting

NACTA shall convene international development partners working on peacebuilding in Pakistan on a biannual basis. This help with the following:

- i. To help map the efforts being made against extremism.
- ii. To provide a platform for sharing information on key peacebuilding initiatives in the country supported by the international development community. It will help avoid duplication of efforts, allow cross-pollination of ideas and foster collaboration among these stakeholders and NACTA.
- iii. To mobilise greater support for the ideas selected by the NACTA's Committee of Experts.
- iv. To mobilise financial support for NACTA's initiatives.
- v. To follow up on the ideas developed during NACTA's convening events, including the annual flagship conference.

F2.3 Biannual Government Stakeholders Meeting

NACTA will convene key government officials involved in PVE at Federal and Provincial levels. These include personnel at Ministries/Departments of Information, Education, Religious Affairs, Finance, TVET, Police, Prisons, FIA, Youth Affairs, Women Development and other state institutions. The

participants will be briefed on the PVE initiatives and presented with key ideas/projects/initiatives where their support is needed. This will help achieve the following:

- i. To provide a platform for relevant government officials to convene and share knowledge.
- ii. To solicit their support for the adoption/scaling-up of initiatives selected by NACTA's Committee of Experts.
- iii. To foster collaboration amongst governmental stakeholders, and with NACTA on PVE.
- iv. To discuss and develop recommendations for policy action required to ensure sustainable peace.

F2.4 Peacebuilding Component in Training Programs

NACTA will also lobby for the inclusion of a mandatory component/module in the training programs of all government departments on preventing extremism so that a 'whole of the government' awareness and expertise can be developed. The 'specialised training programs' (STPs), 'mid-career management courses' (MCMCs), 'strategic leadership programs' (SLPs) and other refresher and professional courses organised by these departments will be targeted for this purpose.

F.2.5 Print/Electronic & Social Media Influencers Meeting

Key media influencers such as editors, advertising agencies, beat reporters, columnists, talk show hosts, morning show hosts and analysts will be convened biannually to share NACTA's work and solicit their support in spreading the message of peace.

Similarly, NACTA will convene social media influencers to share the work it is doing and solicit their support in spreading its message against extremism and terrorism.

Social Media Groups will be created for continued engagement with the influencers and they will be invited to various public events organised by NACTA.

F3. International Linkages

NACTA is the lead government organisation mandated with developing international linkages to learn from international experience of dealing with similar challenges and showcase the achievements made and work done in this regard in Pakistan. NACTA shall, therefore, actively seek membership of international fora, sign MoUs with international organisations, participate in their proceedings and events and effectively create pathways for forging international alliances in the fight against extremism. The Committee of Experts shall be consulted where needed to guide this process and help create the content needed for presenting Pakistan's case at global fora.

Some relevant international fora include:

- i. World Peace Forum
- ii. Paris Peace Forum
- iii. Munich Security Conference
- iv. Global Security Forum
- v. Nanjing Peace Forum

F4. Media Campaigns

Efforts will be made to enhance the capacity of federal and provincial Information Departments, as well as media firms and advertisement agencies to incorporate efforts in their messaging to prevent extremism. NACTA shall organise specialised workshops for personnel in these organisations to sensitise them to the urgency of counter-extremism/terrorism measures and also help develop the skillset and expertise required to develop and run effective media campaigns in this regard.

NACTA shall also develop various media campaigns on its own and in collaboration with these partners to sustain consensus against extremism. The following channels will be used to achieve this:

F4.1 Print, Electronic and Broadcast Media

NACTA will engage closely with the print, electronic and broadcast media personnel to train them and also develop TVCs, songs, dramas and ads against extremism. Following steps will be taken in this regard:

- (i) NACTA will take steps to use 10% time mandated for free public service messaging on electronic and broadcast media to spread the message of peace.
- (ii) NACTA will develop links with and use radio channels to disseminate its message.

F4.2 Collaboration with Telecommunication Companies and PTA

NACTA will develop institutional linkages with PTA and telecommunications companies to develop and launch SMS campaigns to disseminate its message and develop other collaborative projects.

F4.3 Social Media

Social media has emerged as an important medium for shaping perceptions and behaviour. NACTA will work on enhancing its social media reach and develop social media campaigns to counter extremism. Following steps will be taken in this regard:

- (i) NACTA will design social media campaigns and take lead in running these to sustain social consensus against extremism and terrorism. This may include developing bespoke content, curating content from the public and sharing content developed by other organisations.

- (ii) NACTA will actively work on increasing its social media following and engagement.

F5. Awareness Raising Workshops

NACTA will provide a platform to organise awareness raising workshops for a range of government and private sector personnel. Already, NACTA has collaborated in past with several international development organisations to deliver specialised sessions on preventing VE to parliamentarians and government officials. These efforts will be enhanced and expanded. Also, lectures at various institutional fora such as universities, press associations, bar associations, chambers of commerce and other influential networks to raise awareness and share knowledge about the state of extremism in the society.

- (i) NACTA will initiate a ‘Peace Awareness Series’ under which such lectures and workshops will be organised. Experts of national and international repute will be engaged to deliver the sessions along with the eminent in-house experts at NACTA itself.
- (ii) NACTA will extensively engage with business community to develop greater local stakes in counter extremism efforts. Business community has the biggest stake in peace in the country and must join hands and contribute effectively towards building sustainable peace.

G. Narrative Building & Content Development

NACTA will take lead in translating the need for developing a strong narrative against extremism into specific messages. These will then be conveyed in various forms, including audio/video materials and disseminated through the channels described above. The following principles shall be followed in developing the content needed to build the required narrative:

- (i) An editorial board consisting of key officials at NACTA, particularly from Communications and Outreach Branch will be established to review and approve all content shared by NACTA.
- (ii) Various campaigns (such as essay, short film, slogan, wall murals, photography and poster making competitions) will be used to engage citizens, especially young people involved in developing content.
- (iii) NACTA will use positive messaging, in line with the approach and principles laid out in this strategy to guide the process of creating and disseminating content. This will focus on using various discursive forms to inculcate the values of tolerance, peaceful coexistence, acceptance of diversity and rule of law and highlight relevant examples and concepts inscribed in our culture, religion and traditions to strengthen these values.

H. Key Audiences

NACTA has a nationwide mandate, however, it makes sense to prioritise some audience groups for its outreach and communications efforts to maximise impact. Given the initiatives identified above, the following audiences are critical for NACTA to engage with:

- (i) **Government Officials and State Institutions:** As the Centre of Excellence for specialist skills and knowledge on countering extremism, NACTA is responsible for providing input and sharing insights in these areas with a variety of government officials and state institutions such as national and provincial assemblies. This builds on NACTA's responsibility to help formulate and implement public policy in these domains.
- (ii) **Civil Society Groups:** Many initiatives to counter extremism and build a narrative against it are implemented by non-governmental organisations. These organisations retain the experience of working on the ground and are also a good source to understand the underlying trends and the success and failure of various peacebuilding approaches. It is therefore important that NACTA remains closely engaged with civil society groups with a stake in peacebuilding in the country.
- (iii) **International Community:** NACTA appreciates the positive contribution of the international development community in strengthening the Pakistani state to counter extremism and terrorism. It, therefore, needs to maintain close contact with key development organisations as well as focal persons of concerned countries to foster collaboration and also facilitate knowledge sharing on world best practices.
- (iv) **Youth:** While Pakistani society can be segmented in many ways, a particular focus on youth is critical in sustaining societal consensus against extremism and terrorism. Not only it will have the long-lasting impact, but it also is needed due to the demographic realities of the country. With over 60% of the population under the age of 30, youth comprise the segment that is not only in majority but whose perceptions and world view is bound to shape the kind of society we are living in.
- (v) **Women:** From households to workspaces and from inspiring a new generation as mothers to community leaders, women's role in peacebuilding is increasingly being realised all over the world. NACTA will focus on tapping the potential that women have in building sustainable peace as a key audience group for its messaging.
- (vi) **Business Community:** There is dire need to involve the business community in building sustainable peace in Pakistan. It is, therefore, worth including this as a key target audience. NACTA will reach out to the chambers of commerce as well as the senior executives and CSR/marketing departments of large corporations to raise awareness and develop collaboration to Prevent extremism in the country.

NACTA's content, messaging and engagement will therefore focus on the above-mentioned prioritised audience groups, however, given its nationwide mandate, all segments of the society will be targeted.

I. HR & Technological Requirements

To put this strategy to practice, the Communications and Outreach Branch will be restructured along the following lines:

I 1. HR Requirements

- (i) Director General Communications & Outreach: DG C&O will head the branch and will be responsible for overseeing all activities undertaken by the branch Director General will be assisted by two Directors.
- (ii) Comprehensive expansion plan is attached along with technical requirement as **Annex-A**

I 2. Capacity Building

Communications & Outreach Branch will execute a capacity building program for its team and other relevant officials at NACTA. This will include the following:

- (i) Biannual Capacity Building Weeks: The Branch will dedicate a week every six months for detailed internal planning and discussions on the progress made in the preceding months and develop plans for the next. These will also include dedicated sessions aimed at capacity building of the team members in the following areas:
 - a. Subject Specialist Knowledge: Workshops will be organised to build the team's knowledge on aspects of peacebuilding and countering extremism. These will include lectures by eminent experts in these fields.
 - b. Strategic Communications: Workshops will be organised to enhance strategic communication skills as well as expertise in developing and managing effective media campaigns.

J. Monitoring & Evaluation

In the light of this strategy, an implementation plan will be developed that will not only list the activities envisaged by NACTA but also provide indicators to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of these efforts. While most of the indicators will gauge the output of proposed activities, some will be selected for a deep dive to understand the outcomes. Finally, an approximation will be annually made to understand the overall potential impact of the efforts made by NACTA throughout the year.

K. Implementation Plan & Calendar of Activities

The implementation plan lists the activities included in the strategy along with their tentative timeline, participants, output targets, indicators to measure success and the budget. NACTA will use a combination of its own resources and partnerships with credible national and international organisations to roll out these activities. In the past, Outreach Branch was successful in mobilising resources and forging synergies with relevant organisations to organise some of these activities.

No.	Activity	Interval & Dates	Participants	Output target Indicators	Budget
1	International / National Conference on Peace & Peace Festival	Annually, tentative date: September (World Peace Day); Alternatively, November	Academics, analysts, activists, government officials, parliamentarians, NGOs	Number of participants, Social Media engagement, Number of media reports published, post-conference publication and policy recommendations	
2	International Partners' Meeting	Biannually (May & November)	INGOs, embassies, international development sector organisations,	Number of organisations represented; Number of projects supported.	
3	Government Stakeholders Meeting	Biannually (January & July)	Government officials of federal and provincial departments	Number of participants; number of govt. departments present; No. of collaborations agreed.	
4	Print and electronic media campaigns	Ongoing	Advertising agencies, media houses, corporate sector, ministry of Information and Broadcasting Experts	Engagement numbers; perception change; No. of endorsements by influencers.	
5	Social Media influencers meeting	June	Influencers, ministry of Information and Broadcasting.	Number of participants; No. of endorsements; No. of posts shared/created as a result; perception change achieved.	
6	Print & Electronic Media influencers meeting	June	Influencers	Number of participants, No. of endorsements, No. of pieces of content reflecting NACTA's work or narrative.	
7	SMS campaign	Ongoing	PVE experts, ulema, PTA	Number of people reached.	
8	Peace Awareness Series	Ongoing (as per university calendar and as mutually decided with other networks and partners)	Universities, colleges, Madaris, parliamentarians, Ulema, Journalists, Lawyers	No. of lectures delivered; No of attendees; perception change achieved.	
9	Ideas Competition	Annually (May)	NGOs and Think Tanks	Number of ideas received; No. of presentations made; Amount of funding generated; No. of projects supported by govt. depts.	
10	Essay Writing Competition	Annually (March)	School, College, University and Madrassah Students	Number of essays received; Creativity and effort level	
11	Poster & Photography Competition	Annually (June)	School, college, university and madrassah Students	Number of posters received.	
12	Short Film Competition	Annually (August)	School, college, university and madrassah Students	Number of short films received.	
13	Planning and Training Week (Capacity Building)	Biannually (January & June)	NACTA staff	Number of staff attended, Evaluation (pre and post survey)	

Appendix A

Overview of Select International Counter-Extremism Efforts

To understand strategies to counter extremism and terrorism, a clear understanding of the terms terrorism and extremism are required. The Oxford dictionary defines terrorism as ‘the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.’ Whereas UN Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004) defines terrorism as ‘criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.’

On the other hand, extremism can be defined as a tendency or disposition to go to extremes or an instance of going to extremes, especially in political matters’

Around the globe, different nations have taken measures to counter-terrorism and extremism. To have a better understanding of counter-extremism measures, it is necessary to go through the policies and measures taken by some of the countries.

Saudi Arabia’s PRAC strategy:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia initiated a wide-ranging counterterrorism effort based on non-traditional "soft" approaches to fight the intellectual and theological justifications for violent extremism. This Saudi method consists of three interrelated initiatives aiming at preventing, rehabilitating, and providing post-release care (PRAC) of vulnerable sections of the population. There were many informative workshops and lectures conducted by the Ministry of Education in schools to educate students about the risks of extremism, terrorism, and violence. The Saudi authorities placed banners and billboards all across Riyadh emphasizing the dangers of terrorism. Signs suspended from overpasses and billboards around key routes. "Our religion rejects terrorism," and, "We all say no to terrorism" were prominent phrases.

Algeria’s Civil Accord

Algeria has seen a significant decrease in violent extremism as a result of its deradicalization strategies, in the form of Civil Concorde Law (CCL) and Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation (CPNR). These accords were planned around first, pardons, amnesties, sentence reductions, and the dismissal of charges against anybody who willingly surrendered renounced violence, and surrendered their weapons. Secondly, rehiring or compensating persons who had lost their jobs and careers as a result of the 'national disaster.' Thirdly, measures were taken to avoid the violence from reoccurring by prohibiting

"any person responsible for the excessive use of religion that led to the national tragedy" from engaging in "political activity, in whatever form.

Bangladesh's Hybrid Approach

Bangladesh has adopted a hybrid approach as a blend of counter- and de-radicalization programmes since its target group included both people who had already become radicalised and those who were prone to violent extremist ideology. With the help of the NGO sector, religious harmony was promoted. A society-wide motivating programme was implemented, with a focus on rural madrassas, mosques, imams, and religious leaders with a large local following. Influential personalities from outside the target areas were also recruited to disseminate the program's key messages. Moreover, interactive events with question-and-answer sessions and an 'open floor' for debates were organised to address contemporary topics including Islam and peace, Islam and modernity, Islam and pluralism, Islam and human rights, and the role of imams was among the topics explored.

Indonesia's de-radicalisation strategy:

The Indonesian government adopted a soft approach to properly rehabilitate violent actors, their groups, and families from extreme mindsets. In Indonesia, the de-radicalization effort focused on three levels: ideological, behavioural, and organisational. The BNPT (The National Counter-Terrorism Agency) deradicalization programme was developed in a comprehensive, inclusive, and impartial manner by incorporating numerous government and non-government institutions, levels of society, and relevant stakeholders. The persuasive technique stressed in the deradicalization programme, both inside and outside of prisons, is based on disengagement and constructivism philosophy. Specifically, the notions of identity, norms, structure, and language. These notions are thought appropriate for rehabilitating radical persons at the personal level, such that the individual is more likely to modify their radical ideology (de-radicalization) after enduring a disengagement process. As a result, the effectiveness of the deradicalization effort is projected to gradually demolish terrorist cells in Indonesia.