



# PIPS Policy Brief Counter-Violent Extremism

Working Group 4

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## Implementing National Action Plan

### Summary

- This brief summarizes the findings of the fourth working group's meeting on Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE), which discussed the implementation mechanism of National Action Plan (NAP), the country's counter-terror plan announced in January 2015.
- A brainchild of all stakeholders, NAP can be evaluated against government's performance on counter-terror front.
- To standardize progress on NAP, a proper implementation mechanism of NAP be charted, including indicators and benchmarks against NAP points, besides adding new points.
- Lacking any long-term measures and impact, all the success marked by NAP may prove temporary.
- NAP should be revised afresh, dividing into Counter-Terror (CT) component, dealing with issues having more immediate affect; and Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE), having more long-term results.
- Civil institutions should be strengthened on NAP: Parliament's oversight role shall be strengthened, the Prime Minister should take the ultimate lead on NAP, the police should be given operational-level counter-terror role, and NACTA shall serve as coordinating body of NAP.

### Background

On April 10, 2017, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) convened meeting of fourth working group on Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE), discussing how best to implement government's own National Action Plan, so as to eradicate militancy from the country, with full involvement of all stakeholders.

This was the fourth in a series of 10 planned meetings on CVE; the first working group, which met on March 20, 2017, deliberated about the mechanism for shaping a religion-based narrative that counters those of extremists; the second, which met on

### Group members (arranged alphabetically by last name)

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March 27, 2017, discussed the mechanism for reintegrating militants willing to shun violence and denounce *takfeer* (the practice of declaring fellow Muslims out of creed of Islam); the third group, meeting on April 3, 2017, pondered upon the need for a national dialogue to address critical politico-philosophical issues in the country, especially those producing extremism, and whether a revised social contract could provide answers.

The themes of these working-group meetings are largely driven from the CVE model PIPS proposed in 2016. A group of scholars, experts, and practitioners had, in a series of meetings, brainstormed over different components of a Pakistan-specific CVE model, one of them about reintegrating and rehabilitating militants.



One of the proposed suggestions was to effectively monitor and implement National Action Plan, a multi-point roadmap the government announced in January 2015 in the wake of the terror attack in Army Public School in Peshawar. What was unique about NAP was that it reflected the state's will of taking militancy seriously. Any illusion that militancy is not a Pakistani problem was laid to rest. To judge the government against militancy, it was best to review their performance on the NAP, their own brainchild.

PIPS has been following NAP quite closely. In mid-2015, the organization's *Conflict & Peace Studies* journal compiled articles on most of the points of NAP. Similarly, the institute's *Annual Security Report 2016* had special sections dedicated to NAP, along with experts' opinions. Taking those forward, the fourth working group, which met on April 10, 2017, explored further how good the NAP has been implemented and how can the plan be further implemented effectively.

### Key considerations

- Participants in the working group shared their **observations on different points of National Action Plan (NAP)**. Below are the key observations:

	<b>Point</b>	<b>Observations</b>
1	<i>Implementation of death sentence of those convicted in cases of terrorism.</i>	<p>There have been several halts followed by resumptions in death sentences.</p> <p>Critics question about any direct relation between the decline in terror attacks and resumption of death penalty, saying such penalties reflect that the entire counter-terror policy is focused on hard approaches.</p>
2	<i>Special trial courts under the supervision of Army. The duration of these courts would be two years.</i>	<p>After their expiry in January 2017, the tenure of the military courts have been re-extended, this time, by inserting some conditions such as of allowing the accused to engage lawyer.</p> <p>Largely, though, the details of the proceeding of the military courts are kept in darkness.</p> <p>A group member argued that by reviewing against their sentences, the military courts have not been allowed to function as they were supposed to, and that if civilian courts are given same powers and scope, they too can deliver sentences against the terrorists.</p>
3	<i>Militant outfits and armed gangs will not be allowed to operate in the country.</i>	<p>Some group members were confident that the state has vowed to confront all shades of militant groups. There was realization on part of the state, some members said, of doing away with the past policy of condemning those who attack inside Pakistan and condoning those who attack outside Pakistan. When asked if that is so, it was suggested the state has its own timeline to take care of.</p> <p>But several contested the notion, saying the government has not been successful in curbing the activities of banned outfits. For one, several groups still operate under different names.</p> <p>This inconsistency was further blatant on groups attacking outside Pakistan. A member suggested if the government has seriously abandoned the old policy, it should show progress in the investigations in Mumbai and Pathankot terror incidents, which were allegedly carried out by groups based in Pakistan.</p>
4	<i>NACTA, the anti-terrorism institution will be strengthened.</i>	<p>NACTA launched its website. The portal provides list of proscribed organizations.</p> <p>NACTA is run as subsidiary of interior ministry, as opposed to being under the PM, as was originally conceived.</p> <p>A member argued NACTA should have been made into providing strategic guidance and serving as central node of all intelligence bodies, rather than carrying out day-to-day implementation. For one, NAP's own implementation can be handed over to NACTA.</p>
5	<i>Strict action against the literature, newspapers and magazines promoting hatred, extremism, sectarianism and intolerance.</i>	<p>The country's existing laws are sufficient in cracking down on hate speech, provided law-enforcement agencies are trained and equipped to do that.</p> <p>On the other hand, there were wide reports of hate material being freely available; on the other hand, there are anecdotes of police cracking down on material thought to be fueling hate merely because of their title.</p>

	<b>Point</b>	<b>Observations</b>
6	<i>Choking financing for terrorist and terrorist organizations.</i>	Some accounts of militants have been frozen, but overall, convictions in terror financing are close to none.  There seems to be little understanding of terror financing. A task force on terror financing, to be headed by the finance minister, was supposed to be constituted.
7	<i>Ensuring against re-emergence of proscribed organizations.</i>	Banned groups still hold public events; many operate by changing their names merely. Instead of targeting the groups, the government should focus on "banned" individuals, freezing their accounts or denying them weapons or passports, one suggested.  Largely, there is no mechanism for monitoring or reviewing banned outfits. The point was discussed in detail in second working group. (See PIPS policy brief, <i>Reintegration of Militants</i> , April 2017).
8	<i>Establishing and deploying a dedicated counter-terrorism force.</i>	Police departments in the four provinces, despite having specialized counter-terror personnel, lack coordination.
9	<i>Taking effective steps against religious persecution.</i>	In what are read as symbolic gestures, the highest offices, especially the Prime Minister, has been speaking positively of religious minorities in the country. But targeted attacks against Ahmedi as well as Shia continue.
10	<i>Registration and regulation of religious seminaries.</i>	Besides geo-tagging madrassas, a fresh registration drive also started but has stopped by now. Arguably, political parties, including some ally with the government resisted, failing the entire reform process. At least, a member said, action should be taken against 37 madrassas which the government identified are involved in militancy.  The group debated how to progress on madrasa reform and regulation. One argued their students cannot be left on their own, calling for incorporating them somewhere else. Another called for a phased approach of reforms. Abrupt closure, it was said, can be counter-productive.
11	<i>Ban on glorification of terrorists and terrorist organizations through print and electronic media.</i>	The body regulating electronic media has warned media against glorifying militants, including those who attack outside Pakistan. Some channels have been fined too.
12	<i>Administrative and development reforms in FATA with immediate focus on repatriation of IDPs.</i>	The government has announced merging FATA with KP after five years, in line with the recommendation of the government-constituted committee on FATA reforms.  Some quarters are concerned that five years down the road, the situation might change; others call for moving the debate beyond the provincial status of FATA, advising to do away with the contested Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR).
13	<i>Communication network of terrorists will be dismantled completely.</i>	Despite government's claim, the networks of terrorists have not been dismantled completely, evident from the continuing major attacks, which certainly require networking and coordination.
14	<i>Measures against abuse of internet and social media for terrorism.</i>	Civil society fears that the vague language of the Pakistan Electronic Crime Act 2016 could be invoked to infringe upon civil liberties.

	<i>Point</i>	<i>Observations</i>
		The group was told how social media is used by extremists. Very often, they monitor the messages of people on public posts, and then privately message to those who are more extreme in orientation. Extremists criticize democratic system, post fake messages, and instigate people, on social media.
15	<i>Zero tolerance for militancy in Punjab.</i>	Punjab has been the "heartland" of Pakistan, requiring serious attention. Even though the point about Punjab was inserted in NAP, a member shared it took government two more years to accept that southern Punjab is hub of militancy, as Rangers were allowed to conduct operations.
16	<i>Ongoing operation in Karachi will be taken to its logical end.</i>	Members argued that Karachi operation has become victim to politics. There have been many arrests, followed by similar number of releases. Peace in Karachi seems temporary, as root causes around land, politics, ethnicity, are unaddressed.
17	<i>Balochistan government to be fully empowered for political reconciliation with complete ownership by all stakeholders.</i>	Attempts to reconciliation failed with the exit of Chief Minister Abdul Malik Baloch.  As of now, the military is driving force in the province. Civilian government should be strengthened in Balochistan.  However, a member said, lower-level fighters are being reconciled, amid fears that they might take arms again.
18	<i>Dealing firmly with sectarian terrorists.</i>	The government's approach in dealing with sectarian terrorists has been oriented around counterterrorism, without addressing the causes promoting sectarian minds.
19	<i>Formulation of a comprehensive policy to deal with the issue of Afghan refugees, beginning with registration of all refugees.</i>	Despite calls for registering and/or evicting Afghan refugees, they hardly had any role in terrorist attacks inside Pakistan. The year 2016 saw one of the highest evictions of Afghans from Pakistan.
20	<i>Revamping and reforming the criminal justice system.</i>	Nothing has been done to reform the system, leaving the option of military courts open.  Members called for according this point priority, especially by engaging police and fine-tuning the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, especially its witness protection clauses.

- The working group debated the ***need for reviewing the implementation mechanism of NAP:***

Members, while lauding the decline in terror attacks, contested if that is because of NAP. Yet, they all agreed that the gains made are temporary, largely because the efforts made rely mostly on exercising quick force. "Ad hoc measures", it was said, "cannot lead to permanent solutions."

To move towards more lasting outcome, it was suggested that the implementation

mechanism of NAP be reviewed, because it is a counter-terror framework provided by none other than the government itself. Justice Qazi Faiz Isa's report also grills government over its own plan (NAP); the report should be taken forward.

A proper implementation mechanism will also help evaluate observers to judge the state's response. More precise indicators or benchmark could be charted, doing away with the trend of sharing the number of people killed or arrested.

Such a mechanism should also point out the body that can monitor NAP itself. When it comes to NAP, the government has been mostly creating its monitoring bodies.

Even then, confusion persists. Who monitors NAP: Interior Ministry, NACTA, National Security Advisor, or the apex committees?

- The group discussed which ***over-arching institutions*** shall be held responsible on NAP.

Members blamed different civilian or military institution, or both, over failures on the points of NAP with weak progress: Civilian institutions were blamed for foiling counter-terror operations in Karachi and Punjab and for failing to strengthen the criminal justice system. The military was blamed for still living with the old policy of condemning some groups and condoning others, and for driving away the political reconciliation in Balochistan; the legality of apex committees, driving counter-terror efforts in each province, was also questioned.

Largely, however, the group members agreed that the entire counter-terror approach, involving military or paramilitary forces, has been military-driven.

For all the differences, the group called for wresting authorities in different civilian institutions; the group discussed roles of the following specific civilian institutions:

- One, several group members argued that ***parliament*** has not been performing its due role. In response, it was shared that parliament has been asking for questions related to NAP and broader counter-terrorism, but decisions are ultimately taken elsewhere, making parliament look like a mere rubber stamp.
- On bridging the gap, a member suggested that in-camera parliamentary meeting be conducted by the intelligence agencies; another called for bringing NAP-related issues in the parliamentary committee on national security.
- Two, the group also wondered as to why the ***Prime Minister*** has not been taking the lead on NAP. Instead, ever since it was first formulated, the task was left to the military.
- Three, the group shared the same ***police***, which is mocked for inefficiency, can take on militancy, if given relevant powers. Seven of the 20 points directly relate to police. One called for according counter-terror powers to the police.



It was recommended that political appointments in police be stopped, that police be provided with modern equipment, and that their officers be promoted on merit.

- The group also called for ***revisiting NAP beyond the hard approaches only.***

Several members argued that the “militarization” of counter-terrorism policy fails in the long-term, as new militants continue to be produced.

The “hard approach” is made possible not only by the involvement of the military or paramilitary bodies, but also the way NAP is implemented – “capture or kill” policy of the police being an example.

The group called for moving beyond that approach, asking that soft measures be adopted. If possible, NAP be revised altogether, clearly demarcating in soft and hard components. The soft ones should include points drawn against countering violent extremism.

### Recommendations

- The country’s counter-terror plan, National Action Plan, shall be reviewed afresh, dividing into two broader components, Counter-Terrorism (CT) and Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE).
  - The first component, CT, shall deal with the hard approaches of countering militancy, having more immediate effect.
  - The second component, CVE, shall deal with the soft approaches of countering militancy, producing results in the long-term.

#### Counter-Terrorism

- Reforming policing
- Coordination among security institutions
- Acting against armed groups
- Curbing hate speech
- Choking terror finance
- Protecting minorities
- Dismantling militants’ communication networks
- Countering the cyber spaces
- Addressing loopholes in criminal justice system
- Securing borders
- Reforming intelligence

#### Counter-Violent Extremism

- Reforming madrassas
- Banning glorifying militants
- Reconciling politically with different militants especially in Balochistan
- Rehabilitating and de-radicalizing different brands of militants
- Reforming education, re-orientating culture
- Reshaping media strategy
- Countering sectarianism
- Reforming judiciary

#### ***(Sample points that can come under CT and CVE components)***

- For each of the different points of NAP, a proper plan may be charted, laying down their indicators, goals, and responsible institutions.
- Parliament should provide oversight role to NAP.
  - Parliamentary committee on national security shall provide input in drafting National Security Policy (of which NAP is a component).

- The Prime Minister shall wrest ownership of the entire National Action Plan.
  - The PM should hold meetings on a regular basis, discussing the progress on different points of NAP.
- The National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA) shall serve as the coordinating body on NAP.

### Observers

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