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## QUETTA ATTACK AND BEYOND: HOW EFFECTIVE IS PAKISTAN'S COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY?

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The suicide bombing outside a government hospital on August 8, 2016 in Quetta that killed over 71 people and injured several others was yet another terrible attack on the Pakistani government and its institutions. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) splinter group, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), has claimed responsibility for the bombing which occurred at the gates of the building housing the emergency ward.<sup>1</sup> The attack reinvigorated focus on the National Action Plan against Terrorism (NAP), which was strategized as a response to the Peshawar attack in December 2014. Following the attack, a high level meeting was held to review the various aspects of implementation of NAP and a task force was constituted to monitor its progress.<sup>2</sup>

However, NAP is not the first step taken by the Pakistani government to counter terrorism. Over the years, multiple agencies have been created by different governments who have tried to deal with the menace but none of them have

yielded any effective result. For example, the incumbent government launched the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) in February 2014. It is a 64-point plan which focused at length on developing programs to de-radicalize, reconcile and re-integrate; and (briefly) on enhancing deterrence through capacity building to enable the security apparatus to neutralize threats to internal security. Following the NISP, the Pakistan Protection Act (PPA) was enacted in July 2014 which gave the military and the paramilitary forces extra judicial powers to prosecute terrorists since the former focused more on the 'soft' approach to countering terrorism.

The implementation of this plan was to be done through the already existing National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) which was set up by the government in 2010. It is headed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan and together with the Ministry of Interior (MOI), is



mandated to coordinate and interact with the provincial representatives and relevant provincial law enforcement agencies to formulate and monitor the implementation of the national counterterrorism.<sup>3</sup>

However, post Peshawar attack, the public outrage against terrorist was at its peak. There was an impression that the NISP was too long and implementation required too much time.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) was introduced with the aim to eliminate terrorists using coercive force in the shortest possible time. NACTA is the instrument of implementation for NAP as well.

So far, NAP has shown mixed results. Although the reports suggested that Pakistan witnessed 7 percent reduction in incidents of terrorism and 25 percent reduction in deaths from acts of terrorism from 2013 to 2014, the country still has the fourth highest fatalities from terrorism in the world.<sup>5</sup> The performance evaluation of NAP has been limited to the volume of arrests and raids conducted.

There are severe capacity gaps in the effective implementation of the National Action Plan. First, there is a horizontal division of power between the fifteen ministerial sub-committees and the apex committees at the national and provincial levels. Thus, there is a lack of centralized mechanism which acts as a major hurdle. The various committees gradually became non-functional as the chain of command

was not clear, nor the goals and duties clearly demarcated. Out of the 15 ministerial committees, 11 are under the MOI which is step beyond its capacity and mandate.<sup>6</sup> Second, NACTA had been dormant since its inception;<sup>7</sup> caught amidst turf wars over information sharing between the intelligence agencies and the MOI. Moreover, the board of governors and the Prime Minister are statutorily required to meet once every quarter. Yet, they had not convened a meeting in the last one year until the recent Quetta attack.

In accordance with NAP, the six year moratorium on the country's death penalty was lifted and the constitution amended to allow military courts to try those accused of carrying out attacks.<sup>8</sup> Hangings were initially re-instated only for those convicted of terrorism, but in March 2015 they were extended to all capital offences.<sup>9</sup> More than 300 executions were recorded during the year, most for murder and others for rape, attempted assassination, kidnapping, and terrorism-related charges. However, the vast majority of the people hanged before the start of Ramadan (9 June 2015) were given capital punishment for crimes unrelated to terrorism. Moreover, the volume of arrests indicates that NAP is making an impact, but these numbers are deceptive. For example, on May 28, 2015 NACTA's national coordinator told the Parliament that 49,000 suspects have been arrested after December 2014, but only 129 belong to the TTP.<sup>10</sup>

One of the major objectives of NAP was pulling the plug on terrorism financing. In the April 2015 NAP Implementation Report, the government claimed to have frozen 120 accounts of proscribed organizations, adding that the amount of money frozen as a result is Rs10.3 billion.<sup>11</sup> However, sources in State Bank reveal that those accounts were frozen over more than a decade, and not due to NAP.<sup>12</sup>

The Federal Intelligence Agency has sole jurisdiction over money-laundering cases. However, this is a deeply flawed system due to weak institutional structures and poor capacity. There is a clash between the provincial law enforcement and the FIA due to institutional limitations. They both hamper the others ability to curb terrorism finance related cases. Most of the terrorism cases are under the provincial police jurisdiction and FIA investigates only a small portion of these cases<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, the information sharing and collaboration efforts between the federal and provincial departments are weak, resulting in the NAP not achieving its objective.

A new counter terrorism force (CTF), which is now a functional part of NAP, has been created in all the provinces. These forces are trained by the military and by counter terrorism experts from Turkey and other countries.<sup>14</sup> The value addition of these forces is questionable, especially as it results in the sidelining of the local police forces. The police forces have quality

information and understanding of the local environment which the CTF essentially lacks. It would be a critical error to ignore the police forces.

According to the Anti-Terrorism Act, the individuals and groups identified in the fourth schedule are prohibited from bearing arms, having bank accounts, and travelling outside their province. However, these lists are not shared with the local police or banks, or are not updated.

However, the most important factor in dealing with terrorism is Pakistan's distinction between good and bad jihadi groups. A list of terrorist groups was updated in line with the UN Resolution 1267 on the NACTA website during John Kerry's visit to Islamabad. Later, the list was taken down as the list included names of the leaders of the Haqqani network, LeT, JD and FIF charity front.<sup>15</sup> It would be impossible to eliminate terrorism from Pakistan if its government continues to support 'select' terrorist groups.

Most of the actions undertaken to counter internal threats were for short term gains and provided temporary relief.<sup>16</sup> Pakistan does not have a consistent counter-terrorism strategy as is evident from multiple agencies trying to do the same job. The government has been unable to properly institutionalize the counter-terrorism policies which were a major impediment in eliminating terrorism from within the country.

Further, lack of coordination between the civilian and the military efforts does weaken the overall process. There was criticism against the military courts being set up, parallel to the judiciary and undermining the existing system. However, prior to this, there were several acquittals of terrorist as the courts failed to prosecute them. Most of the clauses in the Pakistan Protection Act are yet to be operational. The lack of focus on civilian reforms is counterproductive. The government must end undertaking open ended policy planning and execution. Under these circumstances, Pakistan's dedication to fight and eliminate terrorism remains questionable. The success of the counter-terrorism policies appears to be eyewash and earnest effort to eliminate terrorism is yet to be seen.

***(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])***

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sayed Ali Shah, "70 dead as blast hits Quetta Civil Hospital after lawyer's killing," *Dawn*, 09 August 2016, see <http://www.dawn.com/news/1276183>, accessed on 18 August 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad SalehZaafir, "National Action Plan to be monitored," *The News*, 12 August 2016, see, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/141966-National-Action-Plan-to-be-monitored> accessed on 19 August, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Raza Rumi, "Charting Pakistan's Internal Security policy," *United States Institute of Peace*, May 2015, see <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR368-Charting-Pakistans-Internal-Security-Policy.pdf>, accessed on 19 August 2016.

<sup>4</sup> "Revisiting Counter-Terrorism Strategies in Pakistan: Opportunities and Pitfalls," *International Crisis Group*, 22 July 2015, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> "Pakistan," *Global Terrorism index 2015*, Institute for Economic and Peace, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> "No central mechanism for NAP's implementation," *The News*, 06 January 2016, see <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/86810-no-central-mechanism-for-NAPs-implementation>, accessed on 19 August 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Pakistan executed 332 after re-instating the death penalty: report," *The Express Tribune*, 16 January 2016, see <http://tribune.com.pk/1028511/pakistan-executed-332-after-reinstating-death-penalty-report>, accessed on 18 August 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> "NAP report indicates little progress on key fronts," *Dawn*, 3 April 2015, see <http://www.dawn.com/news/1173611>, accessed on 29 August 2016.

<sup>11</sup> "Nacta claims fail scrutiny," *Dawn*, 10 April, 2015, see <http://www.dawn.com/news/1174993>, accessed on 20 August 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Revisiting Counter-Terrorism Strategies in Pakistan: Opportunities and Pitfalls," *International Crisis Group*, 22 July, 2015, p. 17

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> n. 9.

<sup>16</sup> "Most efforts under NAP made for short-term gains," *Dawn*, 25 May 2016, see <http://www.dawn.com/news/1260543/most-efforts-under-nap-made-for-short-term-gains/>, accessed on 19 August 2016.

