



NATIONAL COUNTER-TERRORISM AUTHORITY (NACTA)'S COUNTER-EXTREMISM POLICY GUIDELINES

POLICY
BRIEF

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Youth Development Foundation (YDF)

Lahore | Islamabad | Multan | Karachi | Canada

Table of Contents

1 BACKGROUND

01

2 CVE POLICY GUIDELINES AND
IMPLEMENTATION

02

3 SUCCESSES

03

4 CHALLENGES

04

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

05

SUMMARY

The third policy brief is based on the NACTA's Countering Violent Extremism policy guidelines and its implementation. These guidelines were developed with wider consultations with the key stakeholders identified various drivers of extremism and well thought strategies to counter the challenges holistically. Federal and provincial governments have taken concrete steps towards countering extremism at all levels. It briefly shares the key achievements such as adoption of an inclusive process for development of guidelines and launching an app to report hate speech by the citizens as well the challenges it is facing such as weak technical and financial support from the federal government and lack of trust by other stakeholders. It also delineates the way forward in order to strengthen the NACTA by equipping with right human and adequate financial resources.

BACKGROUND

In 2009, Federal government created a body through an executive order on bringing together counter-terrorism efforts in the country. Additionally, it was also tasked to work as think tank, conduct research, propose measures to counter extremism, and develop a comprehensive strategy and plan against terrorism in the country⁽¹⁾. Parliament passed NACTA Bill in 2013 to provide legal cover to the mandate and operations of the authority and placed this under the Ministry of Interior⁽²⁾. In 2014, NACTA made a focal point for the development of National Internal Security Policy (NISP) that also outline the need for constructing a national narrative on extremism and terrorism. It advised NACTA to hold wider consultations with key stakeholders including religious leaders, academia, media and educational institutes⁽³⁾. On December 24, 2014, federal government developed a consensus policy document “National Action Plan (NAP)” outlined 20 action points that also includes various steps to check and counter extremism in the country⁽⁴⁾. There had been a critique on the NAP as this were only pointers that needed an elaborative strategic guideline and actions.

In 2018, NACTA formed the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines formulated after an inclusive and multidisciplinary process by holding 34 rounds of discussions with 305 stakeholders⁽⁵⁾. Religious leaders, civil society organizations, legal experts, academicians, civil and military bureaucracy and officials of federal and provincial departments participated in various discussions and significantly contributed towards formulation of policy guidelines. NACTA developed these guidelines backed up by country's legal and policy framework. National Internal

Security Policy 2014-18, 1973 constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, National Action Plan, and National Counter Terrorism Act 2013 were considered prime while drafting the policy guidelines. Based on wider consultations with key stakeholders, a set of drivers of violent extremism were identified. The drivers include gaps in the service delivery, capacity of local police stations, service outcomes in health and education, weak capacity of law enforcement agencies, economic opportunities, region specific reasons, erosion of community living, and cultural erosion⁽⁶⁾.

CVE POLICY GUIDELINES AND IMPLEMENTATION

The guidelines discussed various drivers of extremism that includes weak rule of law and service delivery, ineffective local governments, and lack of trust by the local people. It also proposed to strengthen the local governments to effectively deliver services, and restore trust of the people by establishing grass root governments. Federal and provincial governments have taken steps in direction aim at addressing various drivers of extremism in the country. In 2018, the federal government through 25th constitutional amendment approved a bill on merging federally administrated tribal area (FATA) to Khyber Pakh-tunkhwa (KP)⁽⁷⁾. In 2019, Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) held elections on 16 provincial assembly seats in newly merged districts⁽⁸⁾. Guidelines also called for futuristic development planning approach for those geographic regions that remained least developed in the country's history. In this regard, Punjab government announces developing separate development budget for the South that will enable utiliza-tion of allocations without deviating funds to another regions⁽⁹⁾. Prime Minister Imran Khan has recently inaugurated the South Punjab secretariat in Multan that places 16 provincial departments at people's disposable for effective and efficient service delivery⁽¹⁰⁾. Similarly, federal government also announced a PKR600 Billion package for Southern Baluchistan⁽¹¹⁾.

Under the guidelines, a local assessment was also proposed to find out the problems and solutions that help desist extremist narrative. This closely link with the overall NACTA mandate of conducting research on drivers of extremism and propose solutions accordingly. In 2019, NACTA has launched its first journal of terrorism research that covers wide range of issues including extremism in the country⁽¹²⁾. With support of a foreign donor, a think tank based in Islamabad designed a comprehensive research on CVE that connects various public and private sector universities' faculty. It was also proposed by the stakeholders to form local structure at all levels of administration to conduct localized assessments, design citizen engagement projects, and perform dispute resolution. At the moment, District Peace Committees are working in each of the district with mandate to ensure peace and harmony and resolve local conflicts. Recently, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Religious Harmony approved establishing Interfaith Harmony Councils at all levels of administration to support peacebuilding process and provide a resistance to divisive narratives in the country⁽¹³⁾.

Federal government announced adoption of single curriculum in primary education⁽¹⁴⁾ and initiated reforms in the religious seminary including registration with Federal Education ministry⁽¹⁵⁾. Higher Education Roadmap on peace and tolerance campuses developed by Punjab Higher Education Commission and 26 public sector universities emphasized on promotion of critical thinking and dialogical exercises, and introduction of curriculum on inter-religious harmony⁽¹⁶⁾. With key stakeholder support, more than 60 students' societies are strengthened at 16 universities that enable these platforms to hold thousands of constructive and positive engagement activities distancing students from divisive and hate narratives. Guidelines also proposed introducing various interventions in the media including victim humanization and deconstruction of violent narratives, post-incident communication strategy, media cell on CVE, and development of online behaviour code of ethics. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) issued instructions to media houses on the responsible journalism and took certain actions that ban TVs and FM stations⁽¹⁷⁾.

SUCCESS

1

NACTA is providing support to federal and provincial governments in implementing 20 points of NAP that has yielded positive results in the form of reduced extremist violence in the country.

2

ATA merger in KP approved through the enactment of the 25th constitutional amendment termed as a historic step towards building sustainable peace in the region.

3

Southern Punjab development funds increased to 33% during the current political government and a secretariat based in Multan is opened to help resolve local issues⁽⁵⁾⁽⁶⁾.

4

Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) issued instructions to media houses on responsible journalism and took certain actions that ban TVs and FM stations.

5

NACTA identified and banned organizations and blocked their funding channels

6

A mobile app "CHAUUKAS" was developed that aim to fight hate speech by providing an easy and safe way for the citizens to report any act of hate speech.

CHALLENGES

1

There is a confusion over NACTA comes under the ministry of Interior or Prime Minister office, though it was placed under ministry but on supreme court direction the directive was reverted.

2

Board of Governors (BoG) is an important component of its management as it approves its core activities, annual budget, any rules, and policies, and providing it strategic vision. Not a single meeting of its board held. In 2018, under the leadership of current Prime Minister, first of its board held⁽¹⁹⁾.

3

Since its inception in 2009, NACTA has been perceived as a non-performing agency which is hampering its smooth functioning and its reputation as a counter-terrorism authority⁽²⁰⁾.

4

Lack of clarity on part of the political government on the mandate of NACTA that could include policy development or coordination amongst law enforcement agencies⁽²¹⁾.

5

There is a lack of infrastructure within NACTA as an entity to deal with emerging issues of extremism with regard to implementation of guidelines⁽²²⁾. More recently, a research journal on terrorism has launched but focus is more on hardcore mechanics than the underlying reasons behind extremism in the country.

6

Lack of sustainable public funding severely hampers its ability to perform its core functions. Historically, there has been very less funding for this agency⁽²³⁾.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Federal government should allocate financial resources and provide trained personnel to beef up the capacity of NACTA to transform this into a centralized counter terrorism agency⁽²⁴⁾.

2

Public policy experts argued that mandated meetings of NACTA BoG should be organized as this will provide a strategic vision and guidelines on countering terrorism and extremism.

3

A vibrant and stronger cooperation and coordination mechanism on information sharing should be developed with security and intelligence agencies.

4

NACTA has initiated its research journal and invited papers for its second volume, a stronger and close coordination is needed with the institutions of higher education to promote research on extremism.

5

Federal government should mandate NACTA to formulate long term policies for countering extremism. NACTA should forge partnerships with other key stakeholders including universities, research institutions, civil society organizations, and donor agencies for adoption of its CVE guidelines, and develop a monitoring and reporting mechanism for tracking progress⁽²⁵⁾.

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- 23: Discussion with Salman Abid, a senior journalist and analyst
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- 25: Discussion with Shahharyar Warraich, a CVE expert and a senior journalist working with The News International

Youth Development Foundation

Youth Development Foundation (YDF) is a not-for-profit and non-governmental youth-led organization that has been working on interfaith harmony, social inclusion, local government, preventing and countering violent extremism (CVE) since 2010. YDF brings together youth from diverse cultural, religious and geographical backgrounds to prevent and counter growing trends of extremism through innovative ideas that lead to demonstrable solutions. YDF has been able to bring positive cultural changes in three Pakistani provinces by directly engaging more than 12,000 young people in the last 7 years. Due to its contribution for positive social change in Pakistan, YDF had the opportunity to present youth contributions in conflict mitigation at UN Minority Forum 2013, Geneva, UNAOC Global Forum 2016, Baku, and NEXUS 2016, New York. YDF has had the privilege to work with USAID, European Union (EU), UKAID, USIP, UN agencies, World Faith, and the Swiss Mission Office and Government of Punjab and Sindh. YDF works with multi-stakeholders including District, Provincial and Federal governments on the promotion of youth-oriented policies and strategies that celebrate cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity. Most recently, YDF is working with the Ministry of Human Rights, Minority Affairs, and Interfaith Harmony on drafting a tolerance strategy for Punjab province and dedicated media campaign to counter discrimination, hate-speech and stigmatization during COVID19.

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