



ISLAMABAD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

5th Floor, Evacuee Trust Complex Sir Aga Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad

Tel: (92-51) 9211346-9, Fax: 9211350

Website: www.ipripak.org, Email ipripak@ipripak.org

Press Release

Panel Discussion - National Action Plan: Imperatives and Impediments

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- The National Action Plan (NAP) is an important security document, and significant efforts have been made under it, but lack of ownership has created impediments in its full and effective implementation.
- The Prime Minister should directly lead the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) as terrorism and sectarianism are main threats to the country.
- The Parliament and Provincial Assemblies should regularly debate and discuss progress on NAP.
- Policymakers need to fulfill the governance gaps that are giving space to anti-nationalist forces that, if ignored, may take root in Pakistan.
- The Criminal Justice System needs serious attention and reforms.

These were some of the conclusions drawn and recommendations put forward by the Panel Discussion on *National Action Plan: Imperatives and Impediments* organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute, here in Islamabad today.

In his welcome address, **Ambassador (R) Abdul Basit, President IPRI**, said that during the past three years, there has been a significant decrease in terror attacks in Pakistan. However, there are areas such as social mobilization, regrouping of terror outfits under new names and terror financing which remain key challenges. He outlined that the purpose of the discussion was not only to revisit NAP and review its implementation, but also to identify problem areas and solutions.

Giving an overview of NAP's rationale and the status of implementation of each of its 20-points using the Traffic Light Methodology, **Ms. Aasiya Riaz, Joint Director, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT)**, highlighted that while NAP is a landmark blueprint for combating terrorism and violent extremism in Pakistan (achieved through rare

consensus of otherwise bitterly opposed political forces besides being a civil-military agreement), the country is not out of the woods yet. She outlined that one major issue in this regard is lack of consensus on differentiation between terrorist groups; and lack of a holistic policy on counter-terrorism and national security. Ms Riaz pointed out that another major problem with NAP is the relative opaqueness about its monitoring with there being no clarity on who is chiefly responsible for oversight and implementation – NACTA, National Security Advisor, or the Prime Minister’s Office. She also said that the role and work of the apex committees at the federal and provincial levels for coordination remain non-functional, with neither being proactive in sharing implementation status. ‘Of all the 20-points, revamping of the Criminal Justice System has been the biggest failure under NAP due to continuing lack of initiative by provincial and federal governments in this area,’ she stressed. ‘For NAP to work, piecemeal approach will never work. Policy and institutional reforms need more commitment, especially by the leadership,’ she concluded.

Throwing a practitioner’s light on the interplay of internal and external dimensions impacting NAP, **Lt. Gen (R) Khalid Rabbani HI (M), Former General Officer Commanding, XI Corps** pointed out that the issue of terrorism in Pakistan has become an issue of two square meals - about survival for basic needs. ‘When we see the tribal areas as ‘elaka-i-ghaer’, how can any real development be brought to those areas. People in the tribal areas lack basic facilities, and what is worse, their traditional systems of justice have been forcibly replaced by a broken criminal justice system isolating the communities further,’ he said. Lt. Gen (R) Rabbani stressed that the government has given space to anti-nationalistic rhetoric to fill the vacuum created by the lack of good governance. According to him, people of these areas are being led astray by false information given by external actors at the very grass-roots level. He urged that a whole-of-nation approach is needed to root out terrorism and negative, anti-nationalist elements. ‘Only good governance, especially judicial reforms, will change things in Pakistan,’ he said.

Discussing the way forward for NAP, **Mr. Tasneem Noorani, Former Secretary Interior and Commerce, Government of Pakistan**, shared that though NAP was put together hastily, it was formulated by practitioners with experience, and is an important security document which even after years, is being discussed threadbare, unlike any other policy instrument in the country. He lamented that a critical impediment to its implementation is the lack of dedicated funds. He also pointed out that sub-committees formed for evaluating and implementing each NAP point are chaired by busy dignitaries who are unable to give enough quality time. Mr Noorani recommended that NACTA should report directly to the Prime Minister, with the Ministry of Interior (MoI) as the coordinator. He also recommended that the ‘MOI needs to be more empowered, e.g. by making it the HR Division of the police service. The provincial Counter-Terrorism Departments should have a more professional cadre with easy mobility from one province to the other. Restoration of Executive Magistracy should be expedited in order to strengthen the District Administration for more effective pre-emptive measures, and the concerns about tribal areas’ administration and Afghan refugees need attention on a fast track.’

