



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

The need for an assessment of the National Internal Security Policy and subsequent National Action Plan of the government of Pakistan became evident as the heightened military action under Operation Zarb-e-Azb entered its second year. This report is based on conversations with civil and military officials and politicians inside Pakistan and on focus group sessions with leading civil and military thinkers, including retired officials, members of the media, and members of the police force. Much remains unclear due to the lack of transparency in operations of both civil and military institutions and the absence of active parliamentary oversight or questioning of operations.

A key element of the review was the ability of the military and the civil government to work together effectively at both the federal and provincial levels. As a corollary to this, it was important to see the opportunity for the central government to assert its supremacy. This report focuses on the civil-military nexus, especially in the context of the Apex Committees at the provincial level, and identifies areas that demand attention if the National Action Plan is to succeed.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*Shuja Nawaz*

## Countering Militancy and Terrorism in Pakistan

### The Civil-Military Nexus

#### Summary

- Pakistan resides in an unsettled and hostile neighborhood and faces an existential challenge from domestic forces of sectarian and ethnic militancy and terrorism.
- Many of Pakistan's domestic problems are related to poor governance and the imbalance of power and operational ability between civil institutions and the military.
- Shortsighted policies of successive civil and military governments and a dynastic political system have hobbled efforts to develop a strong, stable polity and economy.
- Civil and political institutions remain weak and dysfunctional; a well-organized and disciplined military continues to dominate key strategic sectors related to foreign policy and security and currently retains control over the Afghan border region.
- Recent military operations to clear the northern border regions abutting Afghanistan of terrorist bases have had some success, but the effort inside Pakistan remains unfinished.
- A well-defined objective and longer-term timetable are needed for the use of the paramilitary Rangers in Punjab and Sindh. Karachi may be the test for these efforts.
- Governance would be strengthened with better coordination and collaboration between civil institutions and the military.
- Greater willingness by the military to bring civilians into their military campaign planning processes and to train and assist civil institutions (particularly the police force) in growing into their roles and responsibilities would bolster security.
- The central government should establish a clearer vision and a process for decision making related to antiterrorism and antimilitancy efforts; devote more resources to its security institutions; and better organize its relationships with individual provinces.
- Parliament should play a more active role in defining and measuring the success of efforts to counter terrorism and militancy.
- Civil society must play a more active and informed role in this process.

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## Introduction

Pakistan's battle against militancy and violent extremism will decide the future of this critically placed country of two hundred million people, armed with nuclear weapons and situated in one of the toughest neighborhoods in the world. Instability inside Pakistan not only has repercussions for the country itself, but also affects major countries such as China, India, and Iran, as well as its western neighbor Afghanistan. The internal battle also has implications for Pakistan's important and long-standing relationship with Saudi Arabia and the United States. Over the past two years, Pakistan carried out a widely publicized battle against the forces of militancy and terrorism, led primarily by the military in the border areas adjoining Afghanistan. Other operations in Karachi (see Box 1, Karachi) and limited efforts in Punjab have been launched as well. Both civil and military leaders have periodically proclaimed a civil-military nexus in this

### Karachi: The Litmus Test

The balance and collaboration between the civil institutions and the military in fighting militancy and terrorism is being tested most publicly in Karachi, the largest city of Pakistan with a population approaching twenty-five million<sup>a</sup> and a microcosm of Pakistan at large. Karachi is the gateway for Pakistan's economy and the location of the headquarters of its major enterprises. It is also a battleground for different political parties seeking funding through legal and illegal means, often through their militant wings. The military believes that there is a nexus between this corruption and terrorism and has tried to assert control over this megacity while working with a recalcitrant provincial leadership.

Soon after taking office, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Karachi to put his own imprimatur on the shape of the campaign that he entrusted to the military.<sup>b</sup> The provincial government, led by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), holds constitutional authority to request the federally controlled Sindh Rangers to help restore order in the city.<sup>c</sup> On the surface, a delicate balance is being maintained.<sup>d</sup> But, as on the national level, this is empty rhetoric. The Rangers see their task as not only providing temporary safety for the citizens of Karachi, but also to remove the sources of militancy and terror, including the removal of political sponsors of militant groups.

In interviews, Karachi Corps Commander Lt. Gen. Naveed Mukhtar denied that the military is seeking to remove the individual leaders of political parties.<sup>e</sup> But the military has brought corruption charges linked to terrorism against government officials and political leaders in the provincial government—most prominently, former PPP minister Dr. Asim Hussain—who are accused of funding the activities of militant wings of their parties. The military also put a stop to Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) chief Altaf Hussain's regular telephonic broadcasts from London to mass gatherings of his followers. This has restricted the MQM's ability to operate in the public space. The central government of Prime Minister Sharif might welcome the removal of its rivals but also secretly fears the enhanced power of the military if it succeeds in this aim.

The director general of the Rangers, Major General Bilal Akbar, believes that Karachi needs a "permanent, formal system" of policing that is both "modern and professional." In the meantime, he sees the Rangers filling the gap for the civil authorities.<sup>f</sup> Senior police officials interviewed indicate the same but also bemoan the police's relative lack of resources, training, and equipment. The total for all twenty-five million persons in Karachi is only some thirty thousand policemen, some eight thousand of whom are deployed for VIP protection duties.

For the time being, the Rangers-led approach appears to have worked, reportedly cutting crime rates despite some high-profile killings.<sup>g</sup> The Rangers spoke about how locals now routinely inform the Rangers of illegal activities either directly or through hotlines that have been established for that purpose. Senior police officers concur in some of the positive assessments. But the military will need to show results in building the police force and actively involve them in the planning and execution of their joint operations so they can eventually take over. As elections draw near in 2018, the PPP and MQM will begin to assert their positions forcefully and may well prompt an open clash with the army as a result. If that happens, Karachi will suffer, as will Pakistan as a whole.

- a. Khawaja Amer, "Population Explosion: Put an Embargo on Industrialisation in Karachi," *The Express Tribune*, October 6, 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/614409/population-explosion-put-an-embargo-on-industrialisation-in-karachi/>.
- b. Interview, Aftab Sultan, director general of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), October 2015. Sultan's term as director general of the IB was extended for the third time by the prime minister in February 2016.
- c. "Sindh Assembly Adopts Resolution Seeking to Curtail Rangers' Powers," *Dawn*, December 30, 2015, [www.dawn.com/news/1226757](http://www.dawn.com/news/1226757).
- d. Interviews, director general of Pakistan Rangers and other officials.
- e. Interviews, Karachi Corps Commander Lt. Gen. Naveed Mukhtar, Karachi, 2015–2016.
- f. Interview, Major General Bilal Akbar, Karachi, 2015.
- g. Zahid Gishkori, "Crime Rate in Karachi Has Halved Since Start of Operation, Claim Rangers," *The Express Tribune*, April 27, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/876803/crime-rate-in-karachi-has-halved-since-start-of-operation-claim-rangers/>.

struggle to regain control of its territory and polity. But although civil and military leaders often state that they are “on the same page,” the results indicate a gap. It is possible that they are looking at different books.

If Pakistan fails to follow through on its promised war against violent extremism, it will invite pressure and interference from powerful forces in the region. This could create conditions of external conflict with a growing and extremely powerful, and also nuclear-armed, India to the east, and an Afghanistan emerging from its decades-long internal wars but now with a large army of some 350,000 that may be tempted to assert its influence in the porous border region. Iran, too, would not countenance unrest on its border with the Pakistani province of Balochistan, a traditional hotspot in Pakistan-Iran relations.

Internally, the failure of the state to assert control over its own territory will continue to spawn the growth of numerous religion-based militant organizations, supported by internal and external actors. A Lebanon-like situation could emerge in Karachi and elsewhere, with open interference in sectarian conflict from external forces, especially Saudi Arabia and Iran. The end result could well be sectarian, ethnic, and rural-urban fights that could challenge the ability of Pakistan’s five hundred thousand-strong military to effectively control these internal wars in the absence of adequate and effective civilian structures and policing capacity.

Pakistan’s immediate enemy appears to be within the country. Its survival depends on a clear victory, changing the landscape that nurtures organized militancy, and changing its ideological narrative by removing the overwhelming influence of Islamic extremists from its education and political system. Pakistan must also build a strong and viable economy to bolster its security. The campaign will be long and arduous, and cannot rely on military might alone; it will rest importantly on the ability of Pakistani political leaders and civil society to muster support from the general population to reshape the country’s priorities and recast the socio-political compacts that have defined the country since independence in 1947. It is in Pakistan’s interest and that of its allies to ensure that the centripetal forces of geography and codependence, that have held the country together until now, triumph in this struggle. A stable and growing Pakistan will be key to stability and development in the region as a whole. There is some evidence to support a cautious optimism about Pakistan’s recent efforts to regain its balance, but the battle for Pakistan has only just begun.

## Searching for a New Security Strategy

From its birth, Pakistan has been in a state of conflict and hostility with a much larger and increasingly more powerful India to the east. A series of wars resulted, often short and with unclear outcomes, except the comprehensive defeat and dismemberment of what was then united Pakistan in 1971. Yet, India was unable to dominate or subdue a much smaller Pakistan after the birth of Bangladesh. This ability to thwart an enemy with a military that was on average two to three times the size of Pakistan’s forces was seen as a victory inside Pakistan and fueled its effort to maintain an impregnable defense against India’s growing military power in the region.

The U.S. National Intelligence Council scenarios posit the growth of the Indian economy from seven times the size of Pakistan in 2012 to sixteen times its size in 2030.<sup>1</sup> A growing economic pie allows India to increase defense spending while using a smaller proportion of its gross domestic product. Economics does not favor Pakistan in the long run, unless it changes its domestic strategy to one of economic growth and development and can create a more powerful polity, based on a clear and widely supported national ideology.

The attacks by Saudi terrorists on mainland United States on September 11, 2001, guided and supported by the Afghanistan-based al-Qaeda group of Osama bin Laden, produced a

rapid reaction and invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001. A fresh influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan ensued. Pakistan's military dictator du jour General Pervez Musharraf aligned with the invading forces and created a backlash from extremists on both sides of the border. Over time, he moved Pakistani forces into the border region known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and granted the United States access to Pakistani airbases and land and air routes into Afghanistan in return for U.S. funding through the Coalition Support Fund, which provided reimbursement for Pakistani military expenditures in moving troops into the region.

This injection of the Pakistani army into FATA upset the balance of power inside that tribal society, which had been treated by Pakistan as a buffer against Afghanistan along the disputed Durand Line. The assumption that the fight against militancy in the borderlands could be contained to that territory and would not affect the rest of the country proved incorrect. Musharraf may well be seen as the unwitting creator of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which formed in 2007. The sudden and heavy military presence disrupted the delicate societal balance inside FATA's tribal culture and produced ill-thought peace agreements between the military and militant tribal leaders. The Pakistani Taliban turned their guns on the tribal leaders, or *maliks*, killing hundreds of them, and also used the growing Pakhtun population of Karachi, a magnet for internal migrants, to consolidate their position in that key city.

A confused soldiery was asked to fight its own people while ostensibly supporting foreign efforts against the Afghan Taliban. Yet, Pakistan maintained surreptitious links to some elements of the Afghan Taliban, who did not overtly fight the Pakistani state and in return benefitted from sanctuary inside FATA and Balochistan—even while they attacked Pakistan's coalition partners in Afghanistan.

It was not until Musharraf was succeeded as chief of army staff by General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the former head of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, that an effort was made to clarify to the rank and file of the army the nature of the conflict against fellow Pakistanis. Kayani portrayed the fight as one not against fellow Muslims but against those who committed *shirk*—those who deviated from the true path of Islam toward extremism.<sup>2</sup> This led to the battle against militancy and extremism within Pakistan today.

## Drafting a New National Security Policy

In October 2008, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani took pride in pulling together a joint resolution of Parliament to declare war on terrorism after an on-camera session.<sup>3</sup> But no follow-up actions were taken to implement the resolution's objectives. Indeed, some members of the Islamic parties sounded a different note in their commentary after the resolution was passed.

General Kayani persuaded the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government in 2009 to agree on a major move against entrenched TTP and foreign fighter positions inside South Waziristan<sup>4</sup> but failed to follow up with similar action in North Waziristan, where, among others, the bases of the Afghan Taliban's Haqqani network were located. He had assembled a force of some forty-thousand in North Waziristan after a successful operation against the local Taliban and other militants in Swat and Malakand. But despite promises to his U.S. partners, he failed to launch an operation there, largely because he wished to get a national consensus and public support for such a new campaign. He also feared opening a new front that might extend deep into the Pakistani heartland.

During its five years in power, the coalition led by the PPP was reluctant to take the lead in the battle against terrorism, deferring to the military. The successor Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government took the first steps toward establishing a national

security plan. In the waning months of his tenure, General Kayani pushed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to expedite creation of a national security policy.<sup>5</sup> This task was entrusted to the prime minister's close confidant, Interior Minister Chaudhary Nisar Ali Khan. The minister commissioned the drafting of a policy and sought to bring the provincial chief ministers into the process, but it is unclear if he got any substantive input from them. On February 26, 2014, he presented an eleven-page summary document, the National Internal Security Policy 2014–2018 (NISIP), before the National Assembly for debate. According to this report, Pakistan's "internal security environment is dominated by non-traditional threats of extremism, sectarianism, terrorism and militancy....no single state agency is capable of dealing with such threats on its own."

The NISIP laid out the scope of the internal threats and the policy objectives of the government plan to counter them. Significantly, it listed the need for a broad-based approach to fighting terrorism and militancy and presented ideas for strengthening civilian institutions. However, it failed to create the symbiotic relationship between the military's counterinsurgency operations and the counterterrorism approach that the civilians were emphasizing.<sup>6</sup>

The NISIP named the Ministry of Interior as the lead ministry for implementing the policy and outlined an ambitious plan of action but did not identify the resources available, nor the distribution of duties and responsibilities for the NISIP among governmental bodies and between the federal and provincial authorities. It also avoided the issue of educational reform and the need to control and integrate Islamic seminaries that were seen as a potential breeding ground for sectarian divisions and extremist violence. In interviews for this study, a senior general said that a paper prepared by the army on a counterterrorism strategy was not reflected in the final NISIP. A senior member of the drafting team of the NISIP was not aware of the military's input.<sup>7</sup>

By November 2013, the army had a new chief, General Raheel Sharif (no relation to the prime minister), who pressed the prime minister for action in North Waziristan following attacks on troops stationed there. The prime minister chose instead to engage the TTP in a dialogue; but these so-called peace talks failed to get off the ground. The delay in giving the army approval to launch military action produced some unhappiness among military leadership, and this unhappiness was magnified nationwide after a brazen attack on Karachi airport on June 8 by militants associated with the TTP. Some twenty-eight persons were killed, and the paramilitary Sindh Rangers were called to clear the airport.<sup>8</sup>

The military had been preparing for action in North Waziristan for some years. The air force had been updating its target lists over time.<sup>9</sup> A week after the attack at Karachi airport, they sprung into action. On June 15, 2014, the military announced a "comprehensive operation against foreign and local terrorists" in North Waziristan, Operation Zarb-e-Azb. Although military statements suggested this was carried out "on the directions of the government," inside accounts from the military high command indicate that the operation was launched unilaterally.

Zarb-e-Azb dominated the local airwaves and newspaper headlines, supported by a high-pitch military information campaign and restricted access to information and to the scene of the operations for local and foreign media. But there were few opportunities for the public to understand the details of what was being done and the relationship between the actions of the military inside FATA and the actions being taken by the civilian authorities in the rest of the country. Periodic meetings between the civil and military leaders were reported briefly, largely through the shorthand tweets from the military PR outfit. Parliament did not appear to seek, nor was it granted, regular briefings or reports on the ongoing operations. Against this backdrop, it was not surprising that the general public was not fully engaged in the effort against militancy and terrorism.



***None of the suggestions made in the NISP for coordination of intelligence and joint planning by civil and military organizations have been visibly implemented.***

## **A Forced Change**

When institutional systems are not in place, policy becomes reactive and event-driven. None of the suggestions made in the NISP for coordination of intelligence and joint planning by civil and military organizations have been visibly implemented.

A seminal and tragic event occurred on December 16, 2014, when a group of gunmen penetrated the walls of the Army Public School in Peshawar Cantonment, the heavily fortified military area in the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and killed 140 persons, including a large number of young students. The massacre shook Pakistani society at its core, raising questions about the ability of the TTP and its affiliates to strike soft targets seemingly at will and also about the failure of the military to protect even those areas under its direct control.

The political system responded with a sense of alarm. Prime Minister Sharif announced that leading political parties had reached a consensus on a new National Action Plan (NAP). The NAP was an ambitious list of objectives, but like the preceding NISP, it lacked the clarity of focus needed for such an important task and failed to set management responsibility on any person or entity in government, or to establish benchmarks for success.<sup>10</sup>

Parliament passed three laws, introducing a civil-military hybridization in the legal system:

- Amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Act allowing the Rangers to be called in aid of civil power;
- Protection of Pakistan Act, giving special powers to the authorities to hold any person, often for rolling periods; and
- Amendment of the Army Act, allowing the military to set up courts for proceedings against terrorists via speedy trials.<sup>11</sup>

The government ceded some of its antiterror activities to the paramilitary Rangers in both Sindh and Punjab and gave cover to the military authorities to detain all suspects for virtually indefinite periods under the sweeping powers of the Protection of Pakistan Act. Military courts were also authorized to conduct highly secretive and speedy trials, including for civilians whom the military considered to be terrorists. This expansion of military law to cover civilians, the parallel courts run by the military, and the widening of their power of detention created a virtual though undeclared martial law throughout the country. Rather than enhancing the central government's stature and reputation as an activist against terrorism and militancy, the outsourcing of policing and legal measures to the military reflected a weakness of purpose and ability.

Unlike the previously invoked Article 245 under which fundamental rights were suspended, the new laws and the invocation of Section 147 of the constitution allows access to the Supreme Court for habeas corpus petitions (petitioning of the Supreme Court in the cases of persons who have been picked up by the authorities to produce the petitioner in court and establish the reasons for their detention). During the review of the draft amendments to the Army Act in January 2015,<sup>12</sup> former law minister and PPP leader Aitzaz Ahsan raised the issue of provisions giving the military courts jurisdiction over those who "wage war against Pakistan and its armed forces" and whether this might apply to Baloch nationalists. The language was amended by adding "using the name of a religion or a sect," thus confining it to groups like the Taliban and the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. A sunset clause was also added, with the courts' tenure set to expire in January 2017. The role of the Interior Ministry as the "competent authority" and the Law Ministry as the "advisory authority" was also defined with regard to the structure of military courts.

According to Mr. Ahsan, "We have to ask ourselves one question: are we in a state of war? If yes, then military courts are justifiable." He believes this is true today, citing the Latin dictum *Jus ad Bellem* (right to war) and the evidence that there were 1.9 million courts martial

instituted by the allies in World War II. Others see gray areas, including the use of the term “enemy alien” for insurgents in FATA.<sup>13</sup> Aside from military-manned “special tribunals” to deal with terrorism-related cases, responsibility for other elements of the NAP and the order of priority within this broad agenda was not clarified. Given the devolution of political power to the provinces following the 18th Amendment, the real action ultimately takes place in the provincial capitals and by their officials and local police in conjunction with their military counterparts. But it was not clear who would provide the funding for these operations, especially at the provincial level, following the devolution of power from the center, and the nexus with the military was not clearly spelled out.

Two broad areas require consideration by the military as it proceeds to exercise its newly enhanced powers: First, the need for transparency in the cases tried by its Judge Advocate General Branch. Little information is currently shared, and this could lead to legal problems, especially if the Supreme Court decides to offer a judgment on all the military trials in a single verdict.<sup>14</sup> Second, the issue of penetration of Pakistani society (civil and military) by extremist religious ideology poses a potent threat. Unless the education system can be purged and the activities of militant religious groups curbed in the public sphere, the polity and system of laws risk being undermined from within. The military has reportedly taken some steps to curb the activities of some religious organizations in its ranks.

Despite its shortcomings, the NISP was a major step forward to outline the challenges facing Pakistan and identify the tasks ahead. If properly debated in civil society fora, and if the results of those exchanges had been synthesized, the NISP could well have laid the basis for a major shift in public understanding of and sustained support for this important initiative. But the key agency tasked with coordinating much of the work of the NISP, the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), was not yet fully operational as of early 2016 (more than a year after the launch of the NAP), and there was no clear coordinator within the central government for the media and public policy debates necessary to garner public support. NACTA’s role in the NAP remained passive and minimal (see Box 2, NACTA).

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### **The Emerging Role of NACTA**

The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) is one institution that might be able to take on an important role and help coordinate civil and military actions against terrorism and militancy. After a delayed formation, NACTA gained a new coordinator in August 2015 and initial funding to begin to shape its mandate. Some funds have been released for it to hire staff and set up a bare-bones secretariat, but the 2016 federal budget allocates only a small proportion of the funds requested and required.<sup>a</sup> Moreover, the relatively lower pay scales and ranks of its members may place it at a disadvantage to other government agencies, especially the much bigger, better staffed and equipped agencies of the military. NACTA also continues to reside in the Ministry of Interior, constraining its ability to coordinate across government.

The current head of NACTA, Ihsan Ghani, a former Navy officer who transferred to the police service and has had a wide range of experience (including as inspector general of police and head of the Intelligence Bureau three times in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), has outlined a broad and ambitious agenda for action since taking office in August 2015. He has been allocated a thirty-five-person staff and a board that is supposed to meet quarterly, though the board had not met until late 2015 when Mr. Ghani was interviewed for this study.

NACTA has a Joint Intelligence Directorate (JID) component that is envisioned to be eight hundred–men strong once it is fully staffed. But the JID will be primarily in military hands, and NACTA itself will have only three hundred staff at maximum. The military is averse to working under the Interior Ministry and would prefer to work with the prime minister’s office. Yet most donors, including the United States and the United Kingdom, seem to favor a civilian face of NACTA and are trying to direct resources toward it.

Ghani sees NACTA’s role as not just to provide security alerts, but also to conduct research and craft policies, and to garner support for police work among the public by effective use of the media. NACTA plans to establish deeper links with local and international think tanks working on counterterrorism, countering violent extremism, deradicalization, conflict resolution, and stabilization. A key element in his deradicalization efforts is the creation of a strong base of police officers with sound academic and field experience.<sup>b</sup> At the top of his list of twelve items is seminary reform, given the deep roots of sectarianism, militancy, and terrorism in the educational system of Pakistan and the increasing role of religious schools.

The success of NACTA will depend not only on the quality of its leadership and staff, but, perhaps more importantly, on the provision of financial and political support. This support is required if NACTA is to become an active participant in the implementation of the NAP, as well as a direct resource for the Cabinet Committee on National Security (CCNS)—which in theory is the central body to review Pakistan’s security issues, domestic and foreign. But the CCNS has not been meeting regularly, nor does it, or the National Security Advisor, routinely connect with NACTA.

- a. In 2015–16 NACTA had been allocated Rs 1.06 billion. It had requested Rs 1.8 billion for 2016–17 but the current budget only indicated an allocation of Rs 109.42 million. Some administrative expenses may be hidden in the Ministry of Interior funds. See Qadeer Tanoli, “NACTA Assigned Only Rs 109.42m in Budget,” *The Express Tribune*, June 5, 2016, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1116544/just-fraction-nacta-assigned-rs109-42m-budget/>.
- b. Interviews, Ihsan Ghani, Coordinator for NACTA, October 2015 and February 2016.

Broadcast media relied on military reports to portray one aspect of the struggle: the clearance of militant hideouts in FATA and numbers of militant casualties. The new army chief was lionized by the media, not only for the attack on militants in FATA, but also for pushing for peace in Karachi, reportedly with help from the Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate and elements of civil society. There were some who felt that the entire army's battle was being portrayed as one man's battle. But the peripatetic army chief went out of his way in visiting his troops in the field to encourage their efforts; his face was seen everywhere as the man leading the battle. The civilian leadership, meanwhile, was missing in action. Another critical element missing in the implementation of the NAP was the role of the provincial governments, many of whom were working with Islamist groups in their electoral campaigns and who had allowed the gradual ingress of sectarian and other Islamist militants into their administrative machinery.

## Who Calls the Shots?

From all accounts, in the initial phase of the NAP, as in other aspects of national policymaking and governance, the military has the advantage of organization, preparation, access to resources, discipline, and unity of command, while the civilian side is fractured and often unprepared and slower to respond. The military traditionally takes the largest chunk of foreign counterinsurgency assistance, and it has spread its influence into key areas of foreign and even economic policy (for example, in the newly emerging projects related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). It thus can crowd out civilian efforts. When the military has a different view on any issue, it uses its large and powerful public relation machinery to issue tweets or press releases to promote its views, bypassing the Ministry of Defence that is its titular superior. When decisions are taken at the center, the military is ready to move faster than the civil side.

The inherent advantage of the military in being able to tackle the tasks assigned to it creates a potential challenge for the civilian side. As a senior U.S. official who deals with Pakistan put it, "The military is like a great big tree that does not allow much else to grow beneath its shade." In the interest of efficiency, the military may take on more tasks against militancy and terrorism, but it will need to create partnerships at early stages of planning and implementation with civilian agencies so it can transfer tasks to them to be completed and translated into political actions. The military does not have the skill set for forensics and preparation of legal cases, especially those involving complicated financial dealings; it will need to work with civilian experts and local police on such matters. Otherwise civilian courts will throw out its cases.

For its part, the central government has not set up a clearly visible central coordinating secretariat to handle implementation of the NAP. It is unclear if the central role of the Ministry of Interior that was envisaged in the NISP is understood or even supported by the rest of the government. Currently, the Ministry of Defence does not appear to have an active role in this process. The Ministry of Interior does, and it is primarily the minister who is seen as the public face; yet he does not participate in provincial meetings as a central coordinator should. Except for Punjab, where the ruling party at the center has political control, opposition parties or coalition governments at the provincial level make coordination by the central government very difficult. Provincial governments have different and more localized political objectives largely aimed at preserving their political and economic hold. The result is a cacophony of voices within government and confused messages to the general public.

In contrast, the military has a clear and very steep pyramid of power, with devolved authority at the corps commander level. But the national dialogue on militancy and terror must allow room for debate and disagreement so all aspects of the public's views are shared and understood. This is largely missing today.



Parliament can and should play a role in this regard. There does not appear to be much effort by provincial or national parliamentarians to seek answers to questions about the nature and progress of the NAP. Parliament convenes only when major attacks take place, rather than serving as a proactive forum for investigating issues and crafting guidelines for the government to follow up via public hearings and seeking answers from both military and civilian leaders. Constitutional responsibility properly rests with the elected representatives of the people, but despite lip service from both senior civil and military officials that the government and the military are working in tandem and that the civilians are driving the process, it seems much of the action has been outsourced to the military.

Good governance rests on transparency and accountability. An ambitious target has been set for the military via the establishment of military courts with a sunset clause of two years. It is too soon to cite the effects of speedy trials as a deterrent to violent extremism. The TTP continues to attack soft targets in urban Pakistan; it may have lost its bases in FATA, but clearly has allies in the hinterland that assist these attacks. The relative drop in crime in Karachi is an exception, but whether it is a sustainable situation depends on many factors. On the military side, increased access of civil groups and journalists and analysts to firsthand information on operations in FATA and elsewhere in the country could help build understanding and greater public support for combined civil-military efforts.

## Provincial Apex Committees

A key initial element of the NAP implementation plan was the formation of ad hoc bodies at the provincial level, bringing together military and civilian leaders. The “Apex Committee” format was used during the Musharraf government to bring together the corps commander and the provincial political leadership in Peshawar to discuss issues related to security in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (earlier known as the North West Frontier Province) and FATA. Its revival offered an opportunity to bring together the chief ministers and their senior officials in each provincial capital with the army corps commander and his senior officials, as well as the Directors General Rangers of Sindh and Punjab and the Inspectors General of the Frontier Corps in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, where applicable. On rare occasions, the governor or other leading politicians were invited to meetings. The army chief and the director general of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (DG ISI) participated in some meetings when the chief ministers were also present.

But the minister of interior and heads of NACTA and the Intelligence Bureau were not regulars in those provincial deliberations; nor was the minister of defense, nor even the new national security advisor. In August 2016, the national security advisor was tasked by the prime minister with a review of the NAP; however, he does not have the staff or resources nor the line authority to monitor or shape actions in the provinces. The interior minister immediately clarified in the national assembly that the national security advisor’s work was merely “administrative,” referring to the fifteen committees that the prime minister had set up to monitor the NAP. No details of the remits of those committees were provided.<sup>15</sup> There was no system for consistent and regular reporting to the public on the agenda and outcomes of the Apex meetings. At the national level, a few topics are raised again and again, but without much continuum in analysis. Among these is the request from the military to activate the special courts under the Protection of Pakistan Act and for politicians to take the lead in moving against seminaries, hate speech, and religious scholars known for inciting sectarianism. The federal ministers for interior and finance were asked to review existing laws related to ending terrorism financing and suggest ways of improving them.

At the provincial level, the nature, tone, and content of the discussions varies widely, depending on the issues at the forefront in each province. The site of the meetings also varies. Some are held at military headquarters, others at the chief minister's offices. There is little direct coordination of these meetings' agendas with the announced purposes of the NAP.

### ***Punjab***

The first meeting of the Punjab Apex Committee took place at the corps headquarters in Lahore Cantonment and included the army chief, DG ISI, corps commanders from across Punjab, and the Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif. This high-level discussion focused on the internal security situation. The chief minister emphasized the need for a comprehensive security plan that could be jointly executed by the civil sect and the military. It was not clear who would take the lead, though the army chief assured the chief minister of the army's support. Over time, the focus shifted to changing curricula and on seminaries. Specific actions to restrict the financial activities and fundraising of banned organizations and a crackdown on terrorists and their facilitators and financiers came to the fore in subsequent meetings. Again, no details were shared with the public. Between January 2015 and November 2015, some seven meetings of the Apex Committee were reportedly held in Punjab.

No visible actions have yet emerged against the Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, or other extremist organizations that were once seen as proxies of the state against India in Kashmir. The army chief is reported to have stated privately that actions will proceed against all groups and that "we will go where the evidence takes us." But other than a limited action against a single group of gangsters led by a man named Chottu in Punjab under an operation spearheaded by the Lahore corps commander and named Zarb-e-Ahan, there has been no concerted military push to pursue its stated goals.<sup>16</sup> The previous corps commander also supported the likelihood of military action in Punjab "as and when the time comes."<sup>17</sup> According to him, a list of some eleven hundred potential suspects was gathered in consultations between Inter-Services Intelligence, Military Intelligence, and the police's counterterrorism department. Many of the key suspects were already in jails; the corps commander indicated that within two months, seven hundred had been captured. The military was also concerned about the mushrooming of madrassahs in the province and proceeded to identify through "geotagging" some fourteen thousand. "Finally we went in for five hundred madaris," the corps commander said. The army chief sat in on a meeting of the prime minister with religious leaders in Islamabad to emphasize the importance of keeping the madaris in check. "We'd tell them to start at the top," said the corps commander, while admitting that the "capacity of the Punjab authorities was limited."<sup>18</sup>

As a result, the provincial government was seen to act against the violent sectarian Sunni group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and reports of the killing of their leadership in police encounters appear to indicate that certain groups that incite sectarian hatred and are based in central Punjab have come under pressure. According to Lt. Gen. Naweed Zaman, "This helped turn the tide."<sup>19</sup> Southern Punjabi groups with whom the ruling PML-N is reported to have had electoral alliances are not yet feeling the heat, nor are groups that were affiliated with the Kashmir jihad under the aegis of the military. Reports of intelligence-based operations (IBOs) nationwide and specifically in Punjab indicate that evidence may be collected by both civil and military authorities, but the nexus of these IBOs and counterterrorism operations is hard to establish in the absence of detailed information from the authorities.

Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif favored the concept of "safe cities," starting with Lahore. He supported the raising of a new counterterrorism department entirely on merit with both male and female cadres. The chief minister spoke of improving forensic capabilities of the

Punjab police, enhancements in Sahiwal jail for holding terrorists and militants, and a focus on deradicalization efforts. He spoke of the battle of the “bullet of the gun versus the bullet of economics,” and emphasized the importance of infrastructure to bring private sector investments into Punjab. Further, he hoped that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor would allow the government to fight terrorism with economic tools.<sup>20</sup> This appears to be a good potential strategy, but his ability to implement it may be constrained by both resources and the dead-weight of historical alliances with militant groups, especially in southern Punjab.

### ***Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the FATA***

The inaugural meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Apex Committee took place on January 4, 2015, and included the army chief, the DG ISI, the corps commander of Peshawar, the governor of KP, and the Chief Minister Pervez Khattak. The discussion focused on KP and FATA, progress of Zarb-e-Azb, operations in Khyber Agency of FATA, and the situation of the displaced persons as a result of military operations. Brief reports on all nine meetings of the Apex Committee between January 2015 and February 2016 appeared in local media.

Late in January 2016, the focus shifted to security of educational institutions following the attack on Bacha Khan University in Charsadda. IBOs also figured in these more recent meetings. Resettlement remained an important agenda item in February 2016. The military was keen to set up an improved administration to handle the needs of the people; there appeared to be consensus that the FATA reform process was very slow. This took place against the backdrop of a report from the FATA Reforms Commission with recommendations regarding the future status of FATA. The prime minister set up a new committee, headed by his Advisor of Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, to review the recommendations and suggest actions. There was no public discussion or reporting on progress on this front until July 2016. No clear representation from FATA, in either the reforms commission or the subsequent committee, indicated that the final decision would be taken in Islamabad without ratification by the people of FATA. This is what finally transpired as a new report was produced and released in June 2016 that recommended a merger of some parts of FATA into KP in a gradual process—thus expanding the size of KP instead of creating a new province that might have benefitted from focused attention to its special needs and given the people of FATA greater say in their future.<sup>21</sup>

The army’s point of view will likely continue to play a key role in whatever developments occur, since it has taken effective control of FATA and has a vested interest in preserving the relative calm in the region—albeit without a huge proportion of the population of the two Waziristans back in their homeland.

The current corps commander, who served with 7 Division in North Waziristan in 2008, explained that there were “no instructions about good and bad Taliban. But we did not have the capacity to deal with everyone. Today, I am all out against everyone!”<sup>22</sup> Public doubts remain over the relationship with the Haqqani group, whose leadership and families many believe continue to receive protection in the hinterland. He acknowledged that, at that time (2007–08), “we also held back because we were fighting Muslims. But then we lost good men.” This helped clarify the resolve of the military. “The army was clear” from that point onward; yet, according to the corps commander, elements in society had sympathy for the insurgents, “not due to understanding, but lack of understanding.” The delay in launching the North Waziristan Agency (NWA) operation was also because the “government did not have enough money to support it.” This runs counter to the military’s own data after the Swat operation that indicated that some forty thousand troops had been shifted into NWA. Some Pakistani Rs 88 billion (roughly \$840 million) are needed for resettlement of displaced persons from NWA, according to the corps commander. No details of these expenditures are available.

***The primary objective of the military now is a four-phased operation to bring back the temporarily displaced persons; to immediately rehabilitate mosques, roads, schools, electricity, water, and livestock; and to bring back teachers.***

The military operations are largely at the “clear and hold” stages. “Build and transfer” are not yet done in any substantive manner, though some rebuilding activity under the military’s aegis had started in South Waziristan Agency with U.S. and Arab funds and in Miran Shah in NWA. A road network has been created in NWA that serves a strategic purpose for military operations but also promises to assist in the economic revival of the agency. The primary objective of the military now is a four-phased operation to bring back the temporarily displaced persons (TDPs); to immediately rehabilitate mosques, roads, schools, electricity, water, and livestock; and to bring back teachers.

According to the corps commander, phase one for the return of TDPs has been completed. Roads have been built and electricity restored, including installation of solar equipment to assist with tube wells and piped water. The military took the lead, since, according to the commander, the FATA Secretariat did not have the capacity. On the military side of the operations in FATA, Lt. Gen. Hidayat ur Rehman reported that the border had been closed to ingress from Afghanistan in the area adjoining NWA. In the Tirah area, too, and the broader Khyber Agency, successive operations have cleared the militants of the Lashkar-e-Islam, facilitating travel to and from Peshwar in one hour instead of six. According to him, over two thousand IBOs had been conducted in conjunction with the police in KP by the latter half of 2015.

The head of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), Imran Khan, confirmed that there was good cooperation in the Apex Committee.<sup>23</sup> Yet, Chief Minister Pervez Khattak of the PTI sent a long list of demands to the central government in a letter under the heading, “Meeting of [sic] chalking out of strategy to curb the infiltration of militants and their subversive activities.” Acknowledging that “the Zarb-e-Azab [sic] operation and the implementation of the National Action Plan have considerably improved the situation,” he stated that the “incidents of terrorism have decreased considerably” but “extortion has again cropped up” with “98 percent of extortion calls...originating from Afghanistan.” He sought better border management and greater control over operation of Afghan subscriber identity modules and the spillover of cell phone signals into Pakistan from Afghanistan. Further, he asked for an increase of KP police manpower and funding for it.<sup>24</sup> The army corps commander spoke highly of the KP police force, labeling it “strong and brave and ready to act.” But he also stressed that it needed “to be trained and equipped.” Clearly, the full implementation of the NAP in KP has some way to go, and removal of resource constraints will be key to its eventual success.

A critical element in determining the future of FATA and of the fight against militancy in KP and FATA is the ability to engage with the local populations and to bring them into managing their own affairs. The corps commander cited a local saying about the Pakhtuns: “If you force them to go to heaven, they will refuse. If you take their views, they’ll [even] go to hell [for you]!”<sup>25</sup> The speed of the resettlement effort will testify to his own ability to abide by that dictum. What is clear is the desire of the military to retain its control over FATA for the time being.

### ***Balochistan***

The first meeting of the Balochistan Apex Committee took place in Quetta on January 9, 2015, and was chaired by the Chief Minister Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch, assisted by the home minister, the chief secretary, the inspector general of police, and the home secretary. Commander of Southern Command, Lt. Gen. Nasser Khan Janjua and the inspector general of the Frontier Corps (Balochistan) also participated. (General Janjua later retired and was inducted into the central government as national security advisor but ceased to participate in meetings on the NAP.) According to published reports, the meeting focused on cases to be sent to military courts, and an agreement was established to work with clerics to eradicate hate speech and literature. It was also decided that the committee would meet every fifteen days; however, according to the public record, only six meetings took place until February 2016.

The second meeting was bigger and at a higher level, with the prime minister, governor, army chief, Senior Minister Sardar Sanaulah Zehri, DG ISI, federal ministers of defence and railways, minister of state for petroleum, former prime minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, commander of Southern Command, inspector general of the Frontier Corps (Balochistan), inspector general of police, and director general of Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate attending. The prime minister called for executions for those convicted in death penalty cases. It was also decided to move against organizations and seminaries involved in terrorism and to restrict cross-border infiltration. Later meetings added to these issues by focusing on the collection of data on seminaries and Afghan clerics, creation of jobs for Baloch youth, and hurdles in the creation of the western corridor of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that would pass through Balochistan and could potentially benefit its people.

Under the previous military commander of Southern Command, Lt. General Janjua, a concerted effort was launched to change the nature of the dialogue with the Baloch people and especially to persuade the return from exile of some tribal leaders. An effort was launched to buy back weapons from militants and to pay militants to surrender to the authorities. Reportedly, Rs 150,000 (roughly \$1,500) per foot soldier and Rs 1,000,000 (roughly \$10,000) per leader was being offered.<sup>26</sup>

## ***Sindh***

The Sindh Apex Committee was headed by the chief minister and was comprised of thirteen members including, among others, the provincial ministers for information and parliamentary affairs, the corps commander, chief secretary, Director General Rangers, the inspector general of police, divisional commissioner, sector commander of the Inter-Services Intelligence, and joint director general of the Intelligence Bureau of Sindh. It held its first meeting on January 8, 2015, and was briefed, among other things, on the cases of religious and sectarian terrorism. The Sindh government agreed to strengthen legislation on hate speech and extremist material, use of loudspeakers, and monitoring of printers and publishers and SMS (short message service, or text messages on mobile telephones), websites, and social media. The chief minister also asked all departments to suggest cases to be sent to the military courts for expeditious handling, and to crack down on illegal immigrants and Afghan refugees who had sought shelter in Sindh. Some sixty-four terrorism cases were subsequently sent to military courts.<sup>27</sup>

Later meetings focused on establishing an antiterrorism force inside the police and a counterterrorism department. But the military continued to have concerns about the nature of the police appointees, and at one meeting, the army chief asked for the depoliticizing of these appointments by having the Apex Committee approve postings. The committee also decided to launch a comprehensive operation to end terrorism financing networks, and the army chief approved the setting up of a counterterrorism office at V Corps headquarters with an intelligence-sharing cell. The corps commander also suggested the need for computerization of records of seminaries and land records.<sup>28</sup> Later meetings bemoaned the slow progress in implementing many of the earlier decisions of the Apex Committee and especially on the low conviction rates of criminals. The committee was told that slow progress in Sindh was hampering the national effort. An issue frequently arising was the rolling mandate of the Rangers in aid of civil power. They had to be requisitioned for ninety days at a time, and the Sindh government had concerns about their actions, which enveloped political operatives of the ruling PPP.

The activist Director General Rangers' Major General Bilal Akbar pressed hard for his autonomy and stressed repeatedly, even in public statements, about the importance of proceeding with their efforts "to their logical conclusion." The corps commander also went



public with his statement of intent that the antiterrorism operations would continue until peace was established in Karachi. He spelled out his vision in a forthright statement that went viral in Pakistan.<sup>29</sup> There was no supporting statement from the PPP leadership. Some thirteen meetings were held from January 2015 to January 2016, and additional measures were agreed upon, including increasing the police force by some eight thousand recruits.

There is a visible gap between the provincial political leadership and the military on the one hand and the central government on the other. Reports abound that many provincial leaders of the PPP have decamped to Dubai for fear of being enveloped in the military's legal dragnet. The ability of the provincial government to delay processes and to disrupt operations by transferring police officers and others in key slots should be curbed to facilitate continuity.

## Recommendations and the Way Ahead

The military has declared Zarb-e-Azb largely over. According to the Peshawar Corps commander, "Security forces have presence in 99.2 percent of areas within FATA,"<sup>30</sup> with only a small area bordering Afghanistan unoccupied. The army is now launching so-called "comb-ing" operations (intelligence-based sweeps) in rural and urban KP to eliminate sleeper cells and networks. Zarb-e-Azb has displaced the terrorist networks in FATA and destroyed their training and supply centers, but the leadership escaped to Afghanistan. The terrorist and militant sectarian networks inside Pakistan proper have yet to be dismantled and disarmed, especially in Punjab. Pakistan has taken the first steps in fighting its war within; how well this battle of Pakistan proceeds will determine if this will be a swift victory or a long, drawn-out campaign with an uncertain ending.

The biggest challenge facing the country other than terrorism is the sluggish economy. Pakistan cannot afford to muddle through the next critical decade when its youth cohort will expand at an alarming rate and the job outlook appears bleak. It is said that a budget reflects the values of a country and its society. The 2016–17 budget indicates the lopsided nature of Pakistan's budgetary allocations: defense spending rose from Rs 781 billion in the previous year to Rs 860.2 billion (11 percent), while education rose from Rs 74 billion to Rs 82 billion and health from Rs 11 billion to Rs 12.1 billion.<sup>31</sup>

The government should be commended for coming up with both the NISP and the NAP, which serve as important steps toward a national debate on domestic security threats, and to counter the narrative of the militant groups. However, the strategy needs to cover other key elements, for example education reform, that could pose challenges in achieving its intended objectives.

Establishing sharper terms of reference for the NAP, even at this stage, could help spell out more clearly the relationship of the civilian and military actors in the process of formulating and implementing this strategy. The prime minister should also ask for periodic progress reports and designate the minister of interior to liaise with the provinces and other key entities, including the military, to that end. These reports should be shared with parliament for discussion on a regular basis and later with the public.

The NAP could set up an empowered office, perhaps under the NSA, in the Prime Minister's Secretariat to help coordinate and execute the strategy at the central and provincial levels. NACTA's role needs to be clarified and linked to the NAP in general, perhaps by bringing it under or closer to the NSA in the Prime Minister's Secretariat. A clearer link between the Cabinet Committee on National Security and the work of the national security advisor would facilitate wider buy-in across the national landscape, including from the military.

The strategy should clarify the government's position on not only the continued operation of armed militias inside Pakistan but also the unfettered and often extra-legal

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operations of its own agencies. This would produce greater accountability and help establish public confidence in this effort and in the government's intentions.<sup>32</sup>

The deployment of paramilitary forces for a prolonged period in urban settings could become counterproductive. Recent videos posted by the MQM's social media teams show Rangers' soldiers and noncommissioned officers beating civilians in public in Karachi, actions that hitherto were associated with the ill-trained local police forces. Such counter-propaganda by political forces will make the military's job difficult.

Better training of prosecutors could assist the military in taking cases to their proper conclusion. This is the weakest link in the civil-military nexus. Cases fall apart when poor police work and prosecution leads to dismissal of cases in civil courts.

The military should assist in redirecting counterinsurgency and counterterrorism funding toward civilian efforts so they could be better equipped to take over operations after initial clearing activities by the military. The military also needs to work closely with civilian financial experts and bankers to guide the military in the forensics of antiterrorism cases.

Public support for the military's actions to clean up corruption in the messy political system can become a double-edged sword. In the absence of speedy positive results and transparency, the emergence of broadcast media and cell phone-based technologies can easily muster a counternarrative to the military's messaging.

There must be clear assignment of responsibility and participation of key elements of the state in the NAP's deliberations, including specific roles for the Ministry of Interior and NACTA, the Intelligence Bureau, the Ministry of Defence, and provincial police departments. Commensurate resources should be allocated to these tasks; for example, adequate police forces in Karachi and other key provinces. Further clarity is required on the nature and flow of resources that will be provided from the center to the provinces, which bear the heaviest weight of implementation of the NAP's objectives.

Finally, the role of military intelligence services needs to be examined carefully, especially relative to the civilian Intelligence Bureau, which should be the first line of defense against domestic militancy and terrorism. There does not appear to be any collaborative mechanism set up between the military and civil intelligence agencies. The NACTA's Joint Intelligence Directorate is not going anywhere if the paltry 2016–17 budget allocation for NACTA and its existing staffing are any guide. It is disturbing to hear of instances of lack of coordination even among the military's separate agencies.

Pakistan could well achieve success in its counterterrorism and countermilitancy goals with better focus and better organization of its current disparate efforts to that end. Given the complex urban battlefield, this should be seen as an extended project rather than one that will yield results against the symptoms of militancy and terrorism in the short term. The current actions of both civil and military planners do not indicate a long-term plan to fight the sources of terrorism and militancy; hence, the outlook for the battle against militancy and terrorism remains uncertain.

***Given the complex urban battlefield, this should be seen as an extended project rather than one that will yield results against the symptoms of militancy and terrorism in the short term.***

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## Of Related Interest

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