Comment

A review of National Internal Security Policy (2013-18)

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Pakistan's federal government announced the internal security policy 2013-18 on February 24, 2014. This was the first time that a political government announced its vision of internal security.

The federal interior ministry had been assigned the task of formulating the new policy and came up with the first draft which was presented to the federal cabinet in December 2013. The cabinet suggested changes to address neglected issues. A revised draft was presented to the cabinet on February 24 this year.

1. Key features of the policy

The policy has three major elements: dialogue with all stakeholders; isolating terrorists from their support bases; and enhancing deterrence through capacity-building to enable the security apparatus to neutralize threats to internal security.

This three-pronged approach appears to be built on two threat scenarios. First, internal threats are weakening national political, economic and psycho-social potential. Second, protracted internal conflict and weakening national power are shaping the environment for external aggression.

The policy framework to implement this approach is based on two components —soft and hard. The former entails research and understanding, and winning of hearts and minds. The hard component consists of a composite deterrence plan (CDP). The policy draft describes the soft approach at length but the CDP in a brief manner.

The National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA) will implement both components. For the soft part, the body is to develop a national narrative and

facilitate a dialogue to strengthen tolerance in the country. NACTA will develop de-radicalization, reconciliation and reintegration programs. It will bring madrassas into the educational mainstream, develop a youth engagement strategy and undertake a comprehensive review of the legal framework.

The responsibility of crafting and implementing the CDP will lie with NACTA. Some major initiatives under the CDP would establish a composite arms control regime, regulate the movement of Afghan refugees (the draft describes Afghan refugees as a major factor in terrorism inside Pakistan) and create a directorate of internal security, a joint intelligence directorate and a rapid response force. The focus would also include cyber security, curbing terrorism financing, capacity building and reorganization of counterterrorism departments in the provincial police set-up.

NACTA will answer directly to the prime minister. This could help remove dichotomies, especially where these concern legal obstacles to coordination between ministries and agencies. Even so, there is no guarantee that the relevant agencies will be bound to share intelligence with NACTA.

Besides NACTA's capacity constraints, the implementation and monitoring mechanisms are missing. Serious questions have been raised about how a counterterrorism body can intervene to develop a national narrative, bring madrassas into the mainstream and deal with issues such as militants' reintegration into society, the promotion of democratic values and social cohesion.

It appears that the government's internal security vision is based on an approach that engages militants in talks and builds shields to guard major urban centers. The initial steps taken thus far, or the ones that the government appears to be serious in taking, relate to countering urban terrorism. These measures include the establishment of a rapid response force and a joint intelligence directorate.

2. Comparison with previous government's approach

Although the coalition government led by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) (2008-2013) had not announced a national internal security policy, it

developed approaches to address the critical security challenges. The key challenge for the PPP-led government was to take political ownership of the war against terrorism in Pakistan and get public support for military operations against the militants, mainly in FATA and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. That was not an easy job considering that the people's religious sensitivities had been exploited by militants through their media and publications and there was also a general disapproval among the masses for the US-led war on terror.

The PPP-led government's approach was based on countering terrorism and it did not try to institutionalize the responses to threats. Former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani announced the formulation of a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy based on political engagement and economic development, backed by a credible military element.

One of the important aspects of the previous government's approach was the ownership of the war against terrorism. The government had declared the war on terror as its own war in an effort to influence the public opinion against the militants.

In this perspective, the PML-N government deservedly claims the credit to formulize the first internal security policy by conceiving the challenge in a longer-term perspective.

3. Framework and conceptual gaps

i. As far as the policy draft is concerned, the document reflects a defensive approach. It is largely silent on the threats persisting in FATA and Balochistan and focuses primarily on securing the urban centers. Although the government is talking to the Taliban, its written 'dialogue policy' is silent on the peace initiative.

ii. The dialogue component of the document, apparently conceived in a broader perspective, is too general. It talks about dialogue with all stakeholders for madrassa reforms, militants' rehabilitation and de-radicalization, etc.

iii. A primary feature of the announced security policy is related to isolating the terrorists. The concept of a terrorist is not clear in the policy document. Does it mean the Taliban with whom the

government is engaging in talks? Does it signify an attempt by the government to detach the Taliban from their support bases through peace talks?

iv.　There is a disconnect among the civil society, the political parties and the security apparatus. A collaborated approach to deal with the major challenges on the terrorism and extremism fronts should be given primacy.

v.　The internal security challenge for Pakistan has its regional and global dimensions but the policy does not try to touch upon this critical aspect of the challenge.

vi.　The policy tries to give a holistic approach but does not offer solutions. A defense analyst rightly pointed out that the policy "touches various subjects but completes none" (Khan, 2014).

vii.　An English-language newspaper sums up the debate on conceptual gaps in the policy thus: "the real test of the proposed NISP lies in its implementation. Terrorism, insurgency and extremism are non-traditional security threats that require an altogether different solution." (*Daily Times*, 2014).

4. Functional gaps in the policy

i.　The major gaps in internal security responses still exist, which include a lack of coordination among different agencies and departments. The dichotomy in coordination among law enforcement departments and intelligence agencies has not been addressed.

ii.　 The role of the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) defined in the policy also includes law enforcement. The ISI is an intelligence gathering body and not a law enforcement agency (Khan, 2014).

iii.　At the same time, incorporating existing responses in a comprehensive policy also remains to be done. Even some functionaries and specialized agencies are not under the command of the interior ministry (Yusaf, 2014).

iv.　The policy has been conceived in an urban terrorism perspective, and its features are not different from Western policy frameworks. The interior ministry has not consulted the provinces. The government has not even discussed the policy in parliament.

v.   The policy draft also sheds light on international liaisons for which NACTA would be responsible. It notes that the UK and US governments are keen to develop dedicated counterterrorism bodies in countries with higher radical tendencies. Many countries have taken similar steps. But it might create functional overlaps and coordination issues, further weakening the traditional security mechanism. Another troubling aspect is that when foreign assistance and collaboration stops, overlapping institutional functions would become a huge burden for the government.

vi. About establishing new institutions, security expert and former police officer Tariq Khosa believes that an attempt to raise a new counterterrorism force in a province under the bureaucracy instead of the police command is unwise (Khosa, 2014).

vii. The policy does not address the issue of monitoring and evaluation of the different initiatives.

The internal security policy is a beginning but parliamentary intervention could improve it.

5. An alternative policy option

NACTA has been declared the focal organization for internal security. As mentioned earlier, the policy framework is narrow and assigning NACTA all the important tasks including political and operational interventions gives the impression that the government is not serious in dealing with the challenge and believes that the alternative discourse, i.e. talks with the Taliban, would provide the remedy for the entire problem.

Gaps exist in the regional strategic approach. The policy fails to address the dichotomies in internal security challenges and regional interests. These critical challenges require an institutional mechanism to synchronize the civil-military contribution in the formation of a national security policy in order to remove the gaps.

At the same time, the decision-making mechanism on critical regional challenges linked with internal security is completely absent.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had taken a decision that could have provided that mechanism. That decision was the establishment of the Cabinet Committee on National Security (CCNS). The prime minister was to head the CCNS while the top military brass was to have a status equal to the civilian members on the committee. The office of a 'civilian' national security adviser was established to make this new body functional.

Experts believe that the CCNS could strengthen and deepen the consultative process between the political government and the military provided the committee functioned regularly and the civilians looked at security and defense affairs in a more professional manner.

Secondly, it would have started the process of civilian ownership of foreign and security policies in a country where defense and security affairs, including key foreign policy areas, have been off-limits to civilian governments.

The Pakistan Security Report 2013, released by Pak Institute for Peace Studies, has suggested that the key objective of coordination must be to connect both political responses and operational strategies and to evolve a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to keep an eye on the performance of different institutions and departments. That would be helpful in reviewing and amending the strategies in the context of the changing nature of threats.

References

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