**[CVE policy outline](https://www.dawn.com/news/1766160/cve-policy-outline)**

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PAKISTAN has been gripped by the menace of violent extremism (VE) since 1979, and has sought to counter it primarily through kinetic means. Thousands of terrorists and extremists have been killed and captured, yet the virus of extremism continues to incubate and there has been a noticeable increase in the number of violent extremists.

For a long time, ‘countering extremism’ remained a missing link in our counterterrorism policy framework. The National Internal Security Policy (NISP-I, 2014-18) was the first to incorporate the term ‘extremism’, citing it 37 times.

It acknowledged that non-traditional threats from extremism had not only impacted the peace index, economic stability and social harmony, as well as instilled a sense of insecurity, they had also negatively impacted the state of fundamental human rights and the country’s image.

NISP-I was based on the idea of a ‘Comprehensive Response Plan’ — a composite process based on dialogue with all sections of society, which also included infrastructure development, rehabilitation of victims of terrorism, creating a national narrative, reconciliation, reintegration, and legal reforms.

The National Counterterrorism Authority (Nacta), in consultation with the other institutions supporting NISP, was supposed to design, develop and implement a National De-Radicalisation Programme. NISP-I identified the use of religious rhetoric to motivate gullible youth to commit suicide missions.

The National Counter-Extremism Policy Guidelines 2018 were formulated through a multidisciplinary and cross-functional process stretching over 34 rounds of deliberations among more than 305 stakeholders.

The NCEPG identified six major areas for policy intervention, including: the rule of law and service delivery; citizen engagement; media engagement; integrated education reform; reformation, rehabilitation, reintegration, renunciation; and promotion of culture.

NCEPG is the first-ever policy guideline that clearly defined ‘extremism’ as having absolute belief in one’s truth with an ingrained sense of self-righteousness. This entrenched sense of righteousness enables the holder of the belief to develop a judgemental attitude towards other people’s beliefs, which is followed by intolerance.

CTDs need generous allocations.

NISP-II (2018-23), recognising the success of the hard measures carried out in the wake of the adoption of NISP-I and NAP, prioritises the effective undertaking of soft interventions to consolidate the gains made during the preceding five years. NISP-II notes with concern the rise in incidents of VE on educational campuses. It rightly points out that Pakistani security challenges cannot be resolved through administrative actions and developing counter-narratives alone. The deeper, structural socioeconomic drivers must be addressed as they create a sense of deprivation and act as a breeding ground for VE.

According to NISP-II, inadequate application of the writ of the state and violations of human rights are crucial drivers of extremism. The growth of exclusionary identity discourses around gender, religion, sect, and ethnicity has also contributed to the rise of extremism.

NISP-II rightly points out that minimum national standards must be set for madressahs, as well as the public and private education sectors. At least four per cent of GDP is recommended to be allocated to education. Curriculum reforms and training of teachers on how to prevent the growth of VE on educational campuses has been highlighted.

NISP-II advocates a comprehensive national narrative against extremism predicated on the celebration of diversity and acceptance of the plurality of thought. It urges that steps be taken for the implementation of Pemra regulations pertaining to hate speech, fake news, racial prejudice and the glorification of terrorism and terrorist organisations. Ten per cent of the content is to be earmarked for public service messages, to be used to share messages against extremism.

To effectively combat extremism, it is imperative to reconsolidate the security apparatus, including the role and functioning of Nacta, as well as CVE measures into short-, medium- and long-term plans. To prevent and counter extremism, Nacta must be legally and operationally linked to the provincial counterterrorism departments.

The cyber-policing capabilities of CTDs need generous allocations. Madressahs and campuses should be other top priorities. The surveillance of proscribed persons and organisations should also be made stricter and more realistic. Without building the capacity of preachers, teachers, parents, social workers, women and police to sniff out the virus of extremism, defeating miscreants may remain an elusive dream. The antidote to extremism is education; let us start with bringing 22.8 million out-of-school children to our schools.

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