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**How to empower Nacta**

Pakistan’s capacity to respond to terrorism and targeted violence depends on its ability to understand these phenomena, and to adapt as they evolve. For that, the National Counter Terrorism Authority, or Nacta, is our best suited institution. Its role in spearheading Pakistan’s FATF compliance efforts cannot be underestimated. However, there is much more that it can achieve.

Nacta must work alongside its domestic and international partners to gather, produce and share information regarding current and emerging threats, and use innovative technologies to better anticipate changes and prepare responses.

Nacta should invest in a multidirectional information-gathering and -sharing infrastructure, focused on four key elements: the National Network or intelligence sharing centers, the provincial Counter Terrorism Departments, the FATF regulatory system, and the “If You See Something, Say something” public awareness campaign.

Intelligence coordination provides law enforcement with resources and training to identify and prevent terrorism, targeted violence, and mass attacks. It facilitates national capacity for identifying, evaluating and sharing leads related to those threats as appropriate. In addition, the Nacta Information Network should be the official system for sharing sensitive but unclassified information between federal, provincial, international and private sector partners.

Through this multidirectional approach to gathering and sharing intelligence and information, Nacta enables all levels of government and the private sector to better understand and prepare for threats of terrorism and targeted violence.

The department should, in coordination with the CTDs, and any other appropriate partners, produce an annual product that evaluates the strategic threat environment within Pakistan related to terrorism and targeted violence, and anticipates future threats. A common baseline understanding of threats within Pakistan will support interagency policymaking, agency prioritizations, resource allocations, and intergovernmental partnerships.

In order to encourage new perspectives and challenge long-standing assumptions, the department will continuously evaluate and measure the impact over time of anticipatory intelligence that appears in Pakistan.

The point of anticipatory intelligence is not to predict who will become a terrorist or attacker, but rather to understand the impact that changes in the world will have on the problem set; the trajectory of terrorist organizations or movements that may influence attackers; or specific adaptations in tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that these actors will undertake.

A strong methodology for evaluating anticipatory intelligence will allow continual improvements in the department’s ability to produce intelligence that highlights emerging trends, changing conditions in the strategic environment, and threats from hostile actors.

Nacta may consult with other departments and agencies, academia and relevant NGOs to fashion a definition of targeted violence that is more precise and actionable for the department’s mission.

Following this process, the new definition will be introduced into the Pakistani legal lexicon, and be employed to further shape the mission of the CTDs and its components and offices as it pertains to targeted violence.

This effort will help build a common understanding of the threat for all people and organizations focused on combating targeted violence, allowing for better discussion, approaches to mitigation and resource allocation.

The current national-level statistics on terrorism and targeted violence in all its forms are not comprehensive. Nacta can work with other departments and agencies and, as appropriate, academic and non-governmental organizations, to determine the best methods of collecting accurate and comprehensive national-level statistics on terrorism and targeted violence, including hate crimes. After determining the best methods, the department can prioritize resources toward the collection of this data and encourage its partners to do the same.

Nacta can improve intelligence-driven operations with increased information sharing to produce and disseminate actionable intelligence that can identify and characterize terrorist and related threats to the nation’s various modes of transportation, including: aviation, freight rail, mass transit and passenger rail, pipeline, highway and motor carrier, and maritime. The department may seek to close gaps between traveler information available within the aviation transportation and maritime transportation systems to facilitate the same level of passenger/crew vetting across both domains.

The department requires a sound understanding of technological advances that attackers will employ, and those that can help counter terrorism and targeted violence. Nacta may conduct risk-based assessments of technological advances in the near, medium, and long term, examining the promise and peril of emerging technologies, including unmanned systems. The department may collaborate with other federal agencies, organizations, and industry partners to share findings and promote awareness of the risks and potential mitigation measures.

One critical purpose of understanding the strategic environment is to leverage the department’s knowledge, including highly specialized knowledge, to support active missions to protect Pakistan. Law enforcement investigations are a critical area into which departmental knowledge about the strategic environment is directly applied.

While personal networks and operational coordination are useful means to share information, Nacta will increasingly supplement these relationships with technology that can share high-volume data – governed by appropriate privacy protections and rules – at a level of speed and accuracy that human networks cannot replicate. These efforts should achieve or beat the “near real-time” information-sharing goals.

Significant work remains to ensure that Nacta reaches its full potential, enabling other adjudicating agencies to have timely access to the information they need to properly vet travelers and immigrants, and identify threats. Nacta can support additional vetting programs, extending its support beyond the current counterterrorism focus and deepening its capabilities through biometrics and advanced analytics. This will improve information sharing to provide greater intelligence and feedback on vetting decisions to those responsible for vetting individuals for access to Pakistan, or immigration benefits, especially from countries which are not friendly with Pakistan.

The department leverages analytical resources to augment its targeting and vetting initiatives to investigate suspect travelers during the visa application process.

Law-enforcement efforts have identified links between terrorist groups and the sale of counterfeit goods and illicit material in e-commerce. Nacta may work to enhance end-to-end visibility into supply chains, implement technological solutions to more effectively segment risk among millions of daily trade transactions, and better align targeting efforts to detect and disrupt these illicit financial operations. This ties into the FATF and grey list ongoing issue for Pakistan.

These are not mere wish lists; Nacta is the premier homeland security organization of Pakistan, and these roles are all suited for this organization. All this lies within reach of Nacta’s capabilities: we just need to support it in good faith.

The writer is a retired inspector general of police and ex head of Nacta.

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