



“National Action Plan” in Pakistan and State Theory

There is a fundamental problem with National Action Plan. It is neither related to its implementation nor to the conception of policy recommendations included within it, such as building an effective counter-narrative. The problem is deeper. It is related to the popular understanding of the relationship between the state and society, prevalent amongst our intellectual and political elites. It will serve us well to revisit state theory 101.

The question we need to ask ourselves is whether the people decide how the state looks like or the state decides how the people look like. In other words is the state an intellectual entity separate from the society or the masses? Can it think for itself and determine its own course? Is it possible for the state to have different ideals than that of the society? In the relationship between the state and society or the masses and the state who dominates whom? Who guides whom? And who has authority over whom?

It is very important to ask the right questions here so that we arrive at the correct conception of the idea of the state. The state is the executive authority or the power of implementation vested in a set of institutions. But what do these institutions implement? And who decides what these institutions will implement? If the state is an intellectual entity, what constitutes the mind of the state?

The widespread confusion about the relationship between state and society within Pakistan’s political and intellectual elite arises from two factors. Both have to do with ideology. The first factor is the very powerful influence of Western culture on Pakistan’s political and intellectual elite. The idea of state as envisioned by Pakistan’s current elites is the idea of state as envisioned by Western civilization.

Based on the Western paradigm, it is perceived by some sections of the Pakistani ruling elite, that there was an intellectual impact of the regime of General Zia ul Haq and that his state backed Islamization drive actually radically changed Pakistani society, where it wholeheartedly adopted the idea of Islam being a political ideology which must be in political authority. The Zia era and the rapid radicalization of the society under it, exaggerated for the Pakistani elites, the power of state and its ability to shape the minds of the people. Ever since the demise of the Islamist General, the Pakistani elites have been trying to imitate him. Entrenched within the Western paradigm of state and society, they assume that Zia was so successful in radically transforming the society, because he was dependent on state backed Islamization drive. They further assume the same transformation of society could be achieved through state backed secularization drive. So for some sections of Pakistani elite, the Zia era was an example of the powerful role of state as an agent of change. For them it demonstrated that it is the state which decided what the people looked like. So the state is an intellectual entity, and it has a mind of its own. And it can shape the society in its own image. In the Zia era, it was the dictator himself who constituted the mind of the state. And this is why dictatorship is so dangerous, for in a dictatorial state the mind of the state is in fact the mind of the dictator and thus the state and the society becomes an image of the dictator itself.

The problem with some sections of the Pakistani ruling elite is the effect of Western culture on their view of the state. For them the natural state is a secular state. Any state model which deviates from the Western conception of a secular state

is an anomaly or a deviation, from the natural state. So widespread and deep rooted is this belief among the Pakistani elites that it has even come to define their understanding of the relationship between state and society. Based on the Western paradigm, the state is something separate from the masses. It has its own ideals which can be different from the society. It has its own ideology and hence it is an intellectual entity with a mind of its own. It is secular in nature and is defined by secular ideals. Although the civilian political parties should constitute the mind of the state, they are also bound by the secular ideals which define the nature of the state and the role of all institutions within it. If the masses hold ideals different from the ideals of the state, it is the state's responsibility to shape the masses in the image of the state. It is the state which defines what the people look like.

The National Action Plan is the outcome of this erroneous conception of the state. It seeks to change the masses and the society in the image of the state and in particular the image of how the Pakistani elites believe the society should look like. This plan assumes that the state is an agent of change. In the relationship between the society and the state or the masses and the state, it is the state which dominates the relationship, it is the state which guides the society and it is the state which holds the ultimate authority over the masses.

This view is deeply flawed and rather has turned state theory on its head. In its most simple definitions society can be defined as a group of people living together permanently. The permanence of living together means that individuals within the society develop relationships among them. These relationships are what can be defined as the collective whole. Because these individuals live together permanently they have to have a collective agreement on how to manage the relationships which have developed among themselves. So the masses need to agree on ideas about the collective or ideas about relationships prevalent amongst them. These ideas will be the basis according to which the relationships within them would be managed. So ideas are required for economic relations within the society as well as how the social interaction between men and women would be conducted. Ideas are needed to decide as to what would be the role of men and women in the society? How would disputes be settled? What constitutes a crime against the individual and what constitutes a crime against the society? What should be the aim of education system? Who is the enemy and who is a friend? How does the society see itself among the comity of nations? How does it conduct its relationship with the outside world? Once the society adopts a set of ideals which form the basis for management of its economic, social, political, defense, education, judicial and foreign policy relationships it appoints a ruler which manages its relationships according to the ideals the society has agreed upon. This is the basis of the state and its ultimate legitimacy. Authority belongs to the people. They use their authority to appoint a ruler and a state apparatus which manages the relationships within the society according to the ideals already agreed by the society.

The state is not an intellectual entity. It does not have a mind of its own. Its legitimacy rests on the consent of the people appointing an authority and state apparatus to manage their affairs according to certain ideals. Here it is important to note the nature and basis of state authority. The authority of the state is conditional and not absolute. It is conditional to the ideals on which the society has agreed upon. This is why the state is referred to as a political authority. It is an entity which is bound to manage the affairs of the people according to the convictions of the people. There can of course be unnatural states. Where the authority does not rule by the convictions or consent of the people. These would either be states where a foreign

power has usurped authority by force or where a domestic group or individual has forcefully put himself in the position of authority and has taken control of the state. All unnatural states are unstable and eventually give way to stable states where authority is appointed by the consent of the people to rule them according to the ideals in which the people believe in.

Because the state is not an intellectual entity, rather a reflective or passive entity which is bound in its ruling by the ideals in which the people believe in, it cannot be an agent of change. The nature of political power is that it is consensual. So any agent of change which wants to reshape society according to certain ideals or which wants to challenge the existing ideals of the society and replace it with new ones must convince the masses on the new ideals. So we have a case where an entity holds some ideals which are not held by the society. That entity wants those ideals to be adopted by the society and the political authority to govern according to those ideals. The only way to do it is to convince the society to change its old ideals, adopt new ones, and accordingly appoint a political authority to govern by new ideals. Such an entity which has a mind of its own and which wants to reshape the society in its own image is not the state rather a political party. Political parties are the agents of change in the society if they chose to be. If they want, they can adopt some ideals and accordingly through convincing the public on those ideals, they, through the consensual support of the masses get those ideals implemented through the power of the state. This is in fact what happened in the Zia Era. It was the Islamic political parties, not the state itself, that were able to convince the masses on Islam's political nature and the need for Islam to be in political authority. It was a consensual shift by the masses enabled by the state apparatus but achieved through the political forces operating at the time.

The National Action Plan will fail because it assumes that the state is an agent of change when it is not. Moreover what is called as "extremism" by the Pakistani regime are ideals about political Islam held by the masses through conviction. And masses cannot be coerced in to leaving their convictions. That would be turning state theory on its head. As such the Raheel-Nawaz regime is doomed to failure and the Muslims must strive with Hizb ut Tahrir, the Islamic political party working for change, looking forwards to the time when despite the attempts of the tyrants, Islam will prevail.

﴿قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُو إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَى بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ﴾

“Say this is my way, I call to Allah upon awareness, I and those who follow me and Glory be to Allah and I am not from the Mushrikeen.” [Surah Yusuf 12:108]

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Engineer Moez - Pakistan**