

## CRITICAL ANALYZING THE POLITICAL NARRATIVE BUILDING AND ROLE OF THINK TANKS IN PAKISTAN

### **Inayatullah Magsi**

Lecturer, Department of Allied Subjects, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi and  
Ph.D. Scholar, Pakistan Study Centre, University of Karachi  
Email: inayat.magsi@smiu.edu.pkDr.

### **Dr Shahid Hussain Kamboyo**

LLM (Judicial Studies) scholar Singapore Management University Singapore  
kamboyoshahid@gmail.com

### **Dr. Syed Shameel Ahmed Quadri**

Assistant Professor Political Science, University of Karachi  
Ishameel2007@gmail.com

### **Dr. Syed Shuja Uddin**

Assistant Professor, Department of IR, Federal Urdu University Arts, Science and tech  
dr.shuja.ir@fuuast.edu.pk

### **Abstract**

The National Narrative reflects national goals at both the broad strategic and operational levels. It offers a framework for the state and the public to achieve national objectives. It consists of the strategic decisions made by the country's leaders, which steer the nation in a specific path. As story construction follows constructivism, the country is supplied with a constructed worldview to imagine and pursue. To disseminate a narrative, intelligentsia, university, think tanks, and the media are globally intertwined with governmental apparatus. However, a detailed study indicates that this severe activity is not codified in Pakistan. The role of academics, think tanks, and the media, which may be referred to as "knowledge keepers" of society, has not yet been realized in Pakistan due to policy and implementation deficiencies. The 'power bearer' state cannot independently develop and spread the national narrative. The paper analyzes and exposes various shortcomings in the role of academics, think tanks, and the media in story construction, and recommends ways to enhance their skills. Only a well-planned collaboration between 'power holders' and 'knowledge holders' could give the country with an acceptable and effective national story.

**Keywords:** National Narrative, Think Tanks, Pakistani Media, Academia

### **Introduction and Critical Evaluation of Research:**

National Narrative looks to some as a jargon, to others as a cliché, and to others as a political slogan, but in core it is a profound idea upon which the national leadership strives to accomplish 'something'. In reality, all national narratives emphasize both inland and offshore socioeconomic features. Based on the underlying themes, they are sometimes referred to as "social narratives," which are adopted by a group, and other times as "national narratives," which serve as the foundation for a nation's socio-cultural development. Positions of national narratives,

culture, identities, and values are confused or overlapping in the extant literature. National narratives, which may alter with the passage of time, are not only an account of a country's past; rather they relate to the future of the nation either implicitly or overtly and serve as a cause for the population to follow the policies and directives offered by the government. The idea of dynamic narrative is based on the notion that what identifies us as a country is not an objective reality, but rather a public narrative formed and changed by tales and perceptions. There is an astounding array of views and tales that have formed and altered narratives throughout time, and the inherent flexibility of terms such as 'liberty' and 'unity' enables the construction of a number of 'strategic narratives,' as is seen in the case of the United States. When a country modifies its demographic composition, society, and interactions with other countries, the national narratives may be altered, created, or forgotten. In a nutshell, the national identity aids in the construction of a national narrative and raises people's awareness of shared values and traits, which enables a country to survive, thrive, advance, and aspire to be the greatest among other countries. Continuous, evolving, and fundamentally reliant on the domains of time and location, narrative construction is a process that has existed throughout history. After the 'scientific revolution,' the phenomenon of 'strategic' story-building emerged. Prior to the 1200s, narrative construction was primitive throughout the agrarian centuries. Governments, institutions, and even the business sector and entrepreneurs are becoming participating in the development of strategic narratives. It is therefore reasonable to argue that the essence and function of tale and people are intertwined. It is more formal at the governmental level, but its informal presence may be seen in the most fundamental unit of every society — the family. The traditions, values, ethos, goals, aspirations, and purposes of family, tribe, and country form the foundation of all tales, and there are countless factors that influence the process, the most significant of which is the human person in different positions - the Creators of National Narratives. This leads us to the conclusion that story creation is a heuristic process involving prominent people who want to communicate their knowledge with society. Feldman claims that national narratives may be formed in accordance with a similar structure and are often highly structured, which can be very dominating and stay mostly unchanged even when particular tales vary. Other current academics, such as Yadgar, address the intricacy of national narratives composed of myths, secondary narratives, symbols, metaphors, and images. It is widely considered that the international and domestic perspective of a state, which continually changes, also contributes to the formation of a National Narrative, as do the concepts of identity, ideology, history, culture, geography, and foreign policy. It is the story that generates diverse policy directives for all aspects of national authority. It is the same story that is expressed by the state in its internal and exterior operations. As a form of expression, narrative is universal. It is prevalent in all eras, locations, and societies; it is entrenched in the history of humanity and is pervasive.

Narratives and subsequent policies are created, established, and pursued based on the necessity to make choices, which is the result of constrained rationality, since people at the helm of affairs have limited knowledge and must make decisions under time and political limitations. This circumstance causes them to strike a balance between intellect and emotion, or logical and irrational shortcuts, and as a result, they have the capacity to frame problems, drawing the attention of their audience to certain facts and interpretations of situations. They force individuals to perceive what they want them to, which is a shortcoming of constructivism. 11 In order to provide credibility to their chosen policy solutions, it is crucial to shape the audience's view by

means of a Narrative Policy Framework. Studies indicate that the creation/formulation of a certain story is beneficial when the policy/decision maker employs or targets the underlying beliefs of an audience in order to tie individual tales to an intelligible "grand narrative." Hitler's strategic narrative of a "Grand German Empire" and China's current strategic narrative centered on the Belt Road Initiative are famous instances of narrative-driven politics. Therefore, it is essential to have a complete Narrative Policy Framework in order to construct/frame a narrative that is recognized nation-wide and assists in coordinating the activities of all the stakeholders towards the achievement of one shared objective. Effective Narrative Policy Frameworks include the following four components: 1) one, settings, relates to the context of policy making, including socio-economic and institutional factors, two, characters, containing at least one actor, who can be either a hero or a villain, the one who leads the narrative (Quaid-i-Azam or Nelson Mandela or Osama Bin Laden), and three, a plot, a common story arc in which a hero faces difficulties from a villain, resulting in victims suffering or facing a tragedy.

Other states and intra-state entities (individuals/institutions) play the roles of heroes and villains in the strategic story construction, four, moral, which relates to the policy problem's origin and proposed solution. Pakistan was carved out on the map of the globe based on a strategic narrative centered on sentiments, sufferings, and ambitions, which was perfectly acceptable to all strata of the population. There were competing narratives, but the better story, supported by relentless deeds, prevailed, and Pakistan appeared on the international map. Since then, there has been a persistent rivalry between the narratives of Pakistan and its internal and foreign adversaries. Due to its intrinsic variety in identity, culture, geography, and foreign policy, Pakistan has long sought a great national narrative to move its state and society forward. Pakistan has always faced obstacles in constructing a national narrative that would unify the many parts and bring about the much-desired and necessary internal stability. Pakistan's creation of an all-inclusive national narrative for its social superstructure and state apparatus was hampered by its poor administration, mostly impudent and self-centered political leadership, internally weak political parties, and widespread corruption. Pakistan is a multilingual and multiethnic federation that is susceptible to manipulation by elites with vested interests. The fast shifting internal governance behaviors are also ascribed to the lack of a strong national narrative, resulting in a sudden transition from democratic to military government, as well as the regional and international economic and security scenario of cooperation and confrontation. National narratives have always emphasized political point scoring and short-term motivations. Political slogans, short-lived ephemeral hyperbole, and narratives based on emotion and event are pervasive across Pakistan.

Numerous actors, participants, and contributors who assumed responsibility for constructing the story remained myopic and promoted the aforementioned causes. Due to the constant change in the regional and international environment and the emerging shifts in the international liberal order, which have now been compounded by the most recent offshoot of a new technology, namely Artificial Intelligence, the need for a properly framed national narrative is essential. When added to the increased global dimensions of the corona epidemic, the issue becomes more complicated and murky. To secure economic development and security, Pakistan need a new strategic narrative aimed at protecting its national interests. The new national narrative must contain long-term strategic goals to resolve current schisms in national identity, division of resources, political discourse, economic growth, governance difficulties, civil-military interactions, and regional and international perspective. To answer these crucially essential

concerns, all stakeholders must contribute to the development of the new narrative. The question however remains as to how a National Narrative can be constructed for Pakistan and who can play a role in the construction of a National narrative; a narrative that could assist citizens in overcoming the internal vulnerabilities of the state and acquiring and retaining a respectable place in the community of nations. This study aims to address these concerns by concentrating on the role of the intelligentsia, the media, and think tanks, all of which may contribute significantly to the formation of a National Narrative. Building narratives in Pakistan No country agrees on a single narrative; rather, there is always a cacophony of voices that overlap, crisscross, and sometimes oppose as well as support a variety of viewpoints. This argument is supported by the research of George Lakoff, who analyzed the narratives of many nations and discovered internal conflicts. According to Lakoff, conservative and liberal narratives in the United States are essentially distinct while seeming to express the same meanings.

Despite professing a connection with nature, Swedes strive for technological and administrative advancement. Brazilians stress the blending of three races for the national cause, but see images of bodily corruption as a result. When it comes to crafting a single national narrative, Pakistan is no exception to the rule that there are several divisions. The value of intellectuals in bringing uniformity and harmony to existing different narratives and policy formulating circles cannot be overstated. Pakistan has been in quest of a great national story to drive the state and society since its independence, and it is widely believed that the country's previous narratives have failed to establish a resilient society. After independence, Pakistan attempted to embrace conflicting and overlapping paradigms labeled Liberal-modernist, Islamist, and Socialist. The conflicting nature of these paradigms negatively impacted national security, and a new strong narrative is required to compete with the ever-changing geopolitical and economic vicissitudes. As a result, the power-wielding elite of Pakistan centered the Pakistani narrative on a restricted construct centering mostly on the centrality and security paradigm. This approach produced divisions in society and overlooked the cultural variety of Pakistan. Such tales were inadequate to fulfill the demands of ethnic groups such as Bengalis, Balochs, Pashtuns, Sindhis, and Muhajirs, as well as the needs of individuals from other locations. Longstanding divisions in Pakistani society have been exacerbated by the absence of a story and a reaction to hostile narratives. Media, intelligentsia, think tanks, and university are regarded as the first line of defense for every state's intellectual borders. Inadvertently, these defenders of ideological borders stayed entangled in minor matters, so allowing Pakistan's foes to continue their objective to harm the country from inside and outside. Pakistan is one of the few nations founded on a story, a state of ideology. The 'Two Nation Theory' was a powerful, practical narrative that helped unite the Muslims of the subcontinent behind the Muslim League flag. Allama Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of the country, with the strong backing of other leaders of the All India Muslim League, developed this unique story. The writings and speeches of Iqbal and Jinnah reveal a greater appreciation for the narrative's relevance and acceptance. Iqbal asserts that Islam is not a church in reality. It is a state conceived as a contractual organism long before Rousseau ever conceived of such a thing, and animated by an ethical ideal that views man not as an earth-rooted creature, defined by a particular portion of the earth, but as a spiritual being understood in terms of a social mechanism, and endowed with rights and responsibilities as a living component of that mechanism. 19 Consequently, there was an intellectual competition between those who saw Islam as a way of life and those who wanted Pakistan to be a modern Muslim nation. The

'Objectives Resolution, 1949', which is now a large section of Pakistan's Constitution, illustrates the convergence of these divergent viewpoints, opening the path for Pakistan to become a 'Islamic Republic'. Except for the first two to three years, Pakistan's subsequent history is marked by shifting ideological moorings, intensified by modern international and regional geopolitical currents. In addition, Pakistan was enthralled by a regionalist narrative that emerged from the province-based political class.

The first significant opposition came from East Bengal, when the political elite disputed the central government's authority over the provinces. In 1966, the federal-provincial re-definition of the six-point system was the most blatant manifestation of provincial rights and interests. General Ayub Khan chose a modernist narrative with the implementation of a system of basic democracy, encouraged central authority and rejected provincialism in order to develop the nation's sense of nationality. The conflict between capitalism and socialism led to political unrest as the Pakistani economy began to develop. Subsequently, a wave of Islamic Socialism became the new narrative, and a new Constitution of Pakistan was enacted, recognizing Islam as the national religion. However, the narrative was the internal practice of a political party and lacked national level embodiment, resulting in authoritarianism from 1972 to 1977. Pakistan struggled with the transactional use of religion, which eventually led to extremism and sectarianism. In order to solve Pakistan's issues, a new narrative of enlightened moderation was developed as a remedy for a state afflicted by combative despondency. The vision of a developing society and the notion of enlightened moderation remained the primary directives. Other narratives, such as Jinnah's Pakistan, Naya Pakistan, and Muslim Welfare State, were also constructed to meet the issues and inspire the public. With the emergence of new geopolitical realities and the beginning of the 'Asian Century,' Pakistan's national stability is through a crucial period that calls for a unified front. Post-pandemic, a mysterious new normal necessitates a worldwide reorientation in which the international ideas of realism, populism, multilateralism, and liberalism are all under doubt. 20 In such a situation of anarchy, nationalism emerges as the paramount ideal behind which society and the state might mobilize, abandoning all preconceptions. 21 To attain these objectives, it is vital to integrate the excluded sectors of society with a fair political system and strong government. All stakeholders must be brought on board via good administration, a sustainable democratic culture, a redefinition of national identity, and a culture of constructive dialogues and discussions. Intelligentsia and think tanks, thus, assume relevance in framing/construction of new narratives, since they have the potential to perform research and provide feasible choices outside of any political or institutional biases.

Consider the Think Tanks It is difficult to accurately identify and explain the characteristics of think tanks due to their fluid and distinctive nature, which is a result of the current sociopolitical and cultural climate. Due to the absence of qualifying standards at the academic level, think tanks are also to some extent subjective. James McGann, Ken Weaver, and Donald Abelson define a think tank as "an independent organization devoted to general interests with a defined research team that focuses on research for communicating innovative proposals/public policies via freely accessible communication resources for dissemination of information to a wide audience." It is hardly an exaggeration to refer to think tanks as "weapons in the fight of ideas." Think tanks also play a function in current conventional battles by fostering contemplation and skills and promoting technical innovation and tactics. Similarly to how an army ensures the physical defense of a nation, a think tank guards its core. The significance of think tanks is not determined

by their stance on the right, the left, or the left, but rather by their ability to advance ideas and narratives via evidence-based conversations. Their capacity to promote creativity, based on a political atmosphere, encourages public discourse to give realistic and innovative answers to the world's most intractable problems. In the past, think tanks have made significant contributions, such as when Leo Pasvolosky, an expert from the Brookings Institution, actively participated in offering proposals that helped shape the Marshall Plan. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was instrumental in the passage of the UN Convention Against Genocide by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, as well as the formation of the G20 leaders' group in response to the Centre for International Governance Innovation's (CIGI) proposals for innovation during the 2008 financial crisis.

Royal United Service Institute (RUSI) was created in 1831, and the Fabian Society was founded in 1884, both in Great Britain, which is considered to be the originator of think tanks. 28 In the United States, think tanks were established between 1914 and 1939, whilst the RAND Corporation was established in 1948. There are now over 8,200 think tanks in the globe, with the United States having the highest proportion, followed by Europe, and Asia holding just 22% of the total share. In 1947, the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (PIIA), affiliated with the London-based Royal Institute of International Affairs, was founded in Pakistan. There are roughly 93 think tanks in Pakistan, of which 25 are recognized worldwide. Think tanks serve a crucial role by serving as a link between academics, researchers, and academia (the knowledge) and executives, practitioners, and end-users (the power). This makes them very significant and accountable. In Pakistan, it is believed that the output of think tanks is somewhat limited and at times primitive. There are relatively few think tanks of worldwide renown, and their production has steadily decreased. This is attributable, on the one hand, to a lack of resources and funding and, on the other, to a lack of knowledge and commitment due to unclear research agendas, which are frequently set by donors or derived from popular topics, thereby impeding the formulation of short-, medium-, and long-term policy options. Concerned parties are oblivious to the need of investing in thinking in economies built on knowledge. There is a dearth of coherent, targeted, and objective research since each think tank, being autonomous in its mission, conducts research at its own discretion (usually according to the existing trends/topics), which often leads in duplication of effort. Some of the active think tanks perform according to the directives and needs of their sponsors and funders (a worldwide tendency) and provide policy inputs to the power corridors. Monitoring of the output of think tanks and their involvement at the policy level is similarly limited. In addition, despite his best efforts, the researcher was unable to identify any academic-related state registration requirements for think tanks.

Specialized academic qualifications as a must and relevant past experience as a desirable attribute are not adequately and appropriately reflected in the current assembly of think tanks; rather, only experience(s) and past appointments are used as the primary criteria for joining these crucial forums in the war of ideas.

### **Role of Think Tanks:**

If a nation's inherent robustness is suppressed for too long as a result of an erroneous narrative or misunderstood ideology, the society becomes angry, disillusioned, and alienated, and is finally forced into a psycho-political condition. In this situation, the importance of academics and universities becomes clear. Universities must realize their genuine potential in order to harness the intellectual capacities of humanists, scientists, and social scientists by creating indigenous

inter-disciplinary narratives. Unfortunately, Pakistani colleges lack this feature of creativity and are bereft of discipline-specific tales. This shortcoming renders their academic involvement in identifying and addressing national concerns perfunctory and devoid of national significance. Once a complete and future inter-disciplinary tale is constructed to stimulate the mental faculties of students and researchers, as is done in the West, a contribution to the formation of a national narrative is achievable. When colleges fail to construct and then match their micro-narratives with national goals, they serve little function. De-polarization and de-politicization of educational institutions would be a positive development; nevertheless, the role of youth within a fecund environment of guided self-actualization is the pinnacle of the academic journey, which, incidentally, is absent from our institutions. Higher Education in Pakistan has been unable to foster an atmosphere conducive to the development of higher-level learning abilities, which has contributed to the stagnation of academic output. It is also due to the lack of public-private and state-owned institution-led research in the social and applied sciences. Academic institutions are severely impacted by quality difficulties and public funding. Compared to worldwide patterns of Fulbright scholarships, new researchers are severely impacted by changeable regulations, notably regarding financing and sponsorship. Comparing the United States to India, where 24000 doctoral degrees are conferred annually, only 11991 scholars earned their doctorates from local institutions and 2160 from international universities during the last decade, which is not a very healthy situation.

The media (print, electronic, and social media) play an essential role in educating the public about significant events when the audience lacks firsthand knowledge or experience of the same. It functions as both a source of information and an influencer of public opinion. On the one hand, the media acts as the government's mouthpiece, but on the other, it portrays the popular feelings of the people, therefore improving transparency. It is thus reasonable to suppose that the media's dissemination of knowledge may assist collective change and legitimize governmental activities, culminating in a broader societal transformation. Today, there is no difference between print media, social media, and electronic media. The media in all its forms and expressions is now a one platform with interconnected displays and data. In the 'Arab Spring,' the media's influence was clearly seen, as was its manipulative capacity during the Gulf War. The social media had a pivotal role in establishing the political framework of the Arab Spring, while the electronic media played a prominent part in projecting the American account of the Gulf War. Smart power and Sharp power effectively manipulate the media.

In Pakistan, the media has a significant impact on people's opinions of many national concerns, which are based on unfounded beliefs. Since 1999, when they were given 'freedom of the press,' the media outlets that have proliferated after being granted 'press freedom' have been unable to articulate their answers in a mature manner. The politicization of media outlets and the lack of true checks and balances have led many media channels to deviate from what was truly expected of them. As the fourth pillar of the state, the media's role in perception control and consensus building at the national level has increased in significance. The proliferation of social media as an influencer and creator of 'narrative' poses several challenges to the state. In Pakistan, Facebook use is about 100 percent, while other apps are considerably below 5 percent,<sup>47</sup> but the virulent impacts of false news, cross-linkages with electronic media, and accessibility of smart phones are fully exploited. Thus, it serves as a ready-made instrument for propagating any narrative, whether state-sponsored or anti-state. The recent official narrative of "smart lock down" during the battle

against Corona Virus (COVID-19) is a good illustration of the worldwide reach of the media and its impacts. The Sino-Indian border war - 2020 at Gulwam and its media projection by both India and China are also illustrative of the strength and reach of the media, as well as the impacts they may produce.

**Current Situation and Forward Direction:**

It is necessary to recognize, value, and verify the contributions of all strategic story creators, particularly at the state level. Focusing only on knowledge holders, a thorough framework is required for their organization, functions, registration, and oversight. The function of think tanks must be reinvented by removing them from self-referential bubbles, interacting critically with power, and rethinking their societal obligations. Think tanks must have necessary academic credentials (2-3 PhDs, 3-4 MPhils) and appropriate knowledge to guarantee high-quality input and constructive participation. Think tanks with the necessary competence must conduct research on policy, governance, and defense-related topics in order to assist the government and other relevant parties in getting current knowledge, action relevance, and input/output quality. Think tanks should be exempt from restrictive laws, censorship, and smear campaigns and arguments that depict them as elite research tools. This will aid in the dissemination of reasonable and objective research, which, even if it contradicts the national/governance perspective, is likely to aid in the comprehension of the opposing story, therefore facilitating the formation of a narrative acceptable to everyone. Think tanks, which are currently deficient in framing micro-narratives of diverse knowledge streams, must broaden the perspective of academics via trans-disciplinary research in order to provide a research output acceptable to all stakeholders. There is also a need for think tanks to affirm the dignity and relevance of policy research, while re-designing their research methodology to introduce diversity into their organizational structures and meet the policy demands of the complicated world of today. This will aid in creating networks, increasing society's representation, and expanding outreach. Think tanks must play a role in shaping policy agendas by mobilizing expertise and presenting facts to bring about creative change for the propagation and dissemination of narratives. This new position will aid in avoiding groupthink and conformity biases. In order to simplify and de-conflict the research efforts of many think tanks, an apex governing body may be established to de-conflict the duplication of effort while interfering little with the research itself. Think tanks may be organized or divided to do research on certain topics, such as defense, foreign policy, government, and the economics. Later, the apex organization may coordinate the interaction and research of subject-specific think tanks to create a comprehensive answer to any policy problem. Influence of think tanks may be extended beyond boundaries, and engagement between think tanks of other nations is likely to express Pakistan's national narrative in a more academic way, so increasing its acceptance and reach. Thus, academia and intellectuals might serve as ambassadors to propagate a coherent national narrative. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, which desires that the researchers have the greatest number of international publications, must take steps to free itself from excessive dependence, as a greater emphasis on publishing in international journals dissuades the researchers from focusing on their own local issues, as they will attempt to conduct research on international issues with minimal national concerns. Universities must recognize their vital role in constructing micronarratives. They must exploit the abundance of intelligence at their disposal to develop various micro-narratives, which may then be woven into the big national narratives. The students' independent and objective research habits will also pay rewards in the future, since



the same pupils are expected to hold key roles in diverse industries. State should pursue public-private research-based solutions in both the applied and social sciences. Investing in Higher Education and enhancing our Human Development Indices is necessary. Universities and educational institutions are breeding grounds for future leaders. There is a need to protect our future by giving them with the proper catalyst to generate great contributions to the nation-building process. Cognitive advancement in the social sciences and scientific advancement in the practical sciences always contribute to national security as a whole and would support the national narrative with concrete measures.

Media should be encouraged and directed to play a constructive role in nation-building. Their outreach, acceptance, and incorporation into society must be employed as a two-way stream of proclaiming a national narrative and collecting input on particular topics. In order to reach a national consensus on some problems, it is necessary to generate nonpartisan and objective dialogue. Under the guise of free expression, media organizations that purposefully deviate from the national narrative must be held accountable by media regulating agencies. The concept of free expression should never contradict the mutually accepted national direction. Pakistan would be aided immeasurably by the media achieving self-actualization via the application of sound policies, deft management, and a sense of national pride. The pros and drawbacks of the most recent technology must be accurately evaluated, and suitable infrastructure and human resource knowledge must be developed.

### **Conclusion**

Building a national story is a rigorous intellectual and policymaking endeavor. Long term narratives represent the nation's ideology and philosophy, whilst short term narratives focus on policy concerns. Currently, the notion of national security has expanded, and comprehensive security is based on economic stability, social cohesion, political concord, and kinetic factors. Thus, the mixed character of the security environment necessitates a substantial effort in story construction and acceptance. The task for constructing a narrative lies with two entities, namely Knowledge Bearers and Power Holders. In the evolving geopolitical context, where post-pandemic concerns about economic and human security are radically altering international stances, a synergistic union between both organizations is required. Other simmering regional, global, religious, ethnic, and commercial concerns would need a robust narrative from the government of Pakistan, which must be completely supported by action(s) on the ground. The creators of tales have a responsibility to this country, its people, and themselves. Undoubtedly, it is a difficult obligation, but it is very precious if we are able to carry it out.

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