



## PAKISTAN'S INTERNAL SECURITY CHALLENGES **WILL THE MILITARY COPE?**



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The greatest challenge that the new Pakistan government faces is on the national security front. The inability of the Pakistan army to meet internal security challenges effectively is a particularly worrying factor. Fissiparous tendencies in Balochistan and the restive Gilgit-Baltistan Northern Areas are a perpetual security nightmare. Karachi remains a tinderbox that is ready to explode. The Al Qaeda has gradually made inroads into Pakistani terrorist organisations like the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Harkat-ul-Jihad Al-Islami (HuJI), Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) and the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and while it is still far from forming an umbrella organisation encompassing all of them, it is moving perceptibly in that direction.

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has consolidated its position in North Waziristan

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*Views expressed are author's own.*

despite the army's counter-insurgency campaign and appears capable of breaking out of its stronghold to neighbouring areas. Only concerted army operations launched with single-mindedness of purpose can stop the TTP juggernaut.

Over the last decade, the deteriorating internal security environment has gradually morphed into Pakistan's foremost national security threat. The Pakistan army and its intelligence arm, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate gained considerable experience in aiding, abetting and fuelling insurgencies and terrorism in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s and in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and other parts of India since 1988-89.

Having concentrated solely on preparing for a conventional war with India, the army had no worthwhile experience in fighting insurgencies successfully and has expectedly failed to deliver, particularly in ground operations in the picturesque Swat Valley.



## I COUNTER-INSURGENCY CAMPAIGN: CHALLENGES GALORE

As the Pakistan army's previous operational expertise lay in creating and fuelling insurgencies and not in fighting them, it failed to sense that it was creating a Frankenstein monster at home by encouraging fundamentalist terrorism abroad and failed to fight the scourge effectively for almost 10 years. Large parts of Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa and FATA have been under Taliban control for many years. The challenge to Pakistan's sovereignty in Swat and Buner was addressed with brute force only after the Taliban appeared to be on a triumphant march to Islamabad. The insurgency in South Waziristan was tackled on a war footing after years of procrastination, but the writ of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) still runs in North Waziristan. The civilian administration continues to place its trust in the false hope that it can sign durable peace deals with the Taliban – a tactic that has failed in the past.

The army has been facing many difficulties in conducting effective counter-insurgency operations even though it has deployed more than 150,000 soldiers in the Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa and FATA, and has suffered over 15,700 casualties, including over 5,000 dead since 2008. Total casualties including civilians number almost 50,000 since 2001. Casualties in Operation Al Mizan were particularly high. Special Forces units of the Pakistan army, the elite SSG, are also directly engaged in fighting the militants. Sometimes the army is seen to be unwilling to conduct high-intensity counter-

insurgency operations due to apprehensions that fighting fellow Muslims would be demotivating in the long run. Many soldiers, including officers, are known to have refused to fight fellow Muslims. Several cases of fratricide have been reported. Questions are now being raised about the army's lack of professionalism in counter-insurgency operations and its withering internal cohesion. General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the COAS, was asked some hard questions by junior officers when he went around the country to pacify agitated officers after the US Navy SEALs had taken out Osama bin Laden in a spectacular operation.

The army's convoys have been repeatedly ambushed; it has faced numerous terrorist strikes in the shape of suicide attacks and bombings; many of its personnel (especially Pushtun soldiers) have deserted as they do not wish to fight fellow tribesmen; and, many soldiers have been captured by the militants in humiliating circumstances. While some of these soldiers were later released by the militants for a large ransom, some others were killed. Soldiers are routinely overstaying leave or going AWOL (absent without leave) and even regular army battalions have seen their morale dip to worryingly low levels. There have been some reports of soldiers disobeying the orders issued by their superior officers. Complicating the issue further is the fact that the army has been gradually Islamised since General Zia ul Haq's days and the early converts to the Jihadi way of life are now coming into positions of command. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that a once proud professional army appears to be headed inexorably downhill.

The Pakistan army has been forced by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), headed for many years by the late Baitullah Mehsud, to wage a three-front "war": against the TTP and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in South Waziristan; against the anti-Shia Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) in the sensitive Darra Adam Khel-Kohat area of Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa and the Shia-dominated Kurram Agency of FATA; and, against the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-Shariat-e-Mohammadi

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(TNSM), headed by Maulana Fazlullah, and the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) in the Swat Valley of the NWFP. The TTP's cadre base is over 20,000 tribesmen and Mehsud commands about 5,000 fighters. Mangal Bagh Afridi leads Lashkar-e-Islam (LI), a militant group that has refrained from joining the TTP and is independently active up to the outskirts of Peshawar. Meanwhile, radical extremism is gaining ground in Pakistan and the scourge of creeping Talibanisation has reached southern Punjab.

## II MILITARY & THE TALIBAN: FAILED PEACE TALKS

Though it has flirted with peace deals with the militants, the army finds it impossible to meet the demands of the TTP and the TNSM. According to the late B. Raman, a noted counter-terrorism expert, these include the suspension of all military operations in the tribal areas; the withdrawal of army posts from the FATA; the release of all tribals arrested under the Anti-Terrorism Act; the release of Maulana Abdul Aziz Ghazi and tribal students arrested during the commando action in the Lal Masjid of Islamabad in July 2007; and, enforcement of the Sharia in the tribal areas.

Stung to the quick by a series of Taliban successes in "liberating" tribal areas and under pressure from the Americans to deliver in the "war on terror", in the initial stages the Pakistan army employed massive firepower to stem the rot. Helicopter gunships and heavy artillery were freely used to destroy suspected terrorist hideouts. This heavy-handed firepower-based approach without simultaneous infantry operations failed to dislodge the militants but caused large-scale collateral damage and served to alienate the tribal population even further. Major reverses led to panic reactions including the hurried negotiation of "peace accords" that were invariably broken by the militants.

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On September 5, 2006, the Government of Pakistan had signed a "peace accord" with the tribal leaders of Waziristan (and probably the Taliban as well, though the government denies this) in the North Waziristan town of Miranshah. The salient points of this rather surprising agreement included the following:

- The Government agrees to stop air and ground attacks against militants in Waziristan.
- Militants are to cease cross-border movement into and out of Afghanistan.
- Foreigners (understood to mean foreign jihadists) in North Waziristan will have to leave Pakistan but "those who cannot leave will be allowed to live peacefully, respecting the law of the land and the agreement".
- Area check-points and border patrols will be manned by a tribal force. Pakistan army forces will withdraw from control points.
- No parallel administration will be established in the area. The law of the Government shall remain in force.
- The Government agrees to follow local customs and traditions in resolving issues.
- Tribal leaders will ensure that no one attacks law enforcement personnel or damages state property.
- Tribesmen will not carry heavy

weapons. Small arms are allowed.

- Militants will not enter agencies adjacent to this agency (the agency of North Waziristan).
- Both sides will return any captured weapons, vehicles, and communication devices.
- The Government will release captured militants and will not arrest them again.
- The Government will pay compensation for property damaged and deaths of innocent civilians in the area.

The terms of the Miranshah peace accord were humiliating for a proud professional force to swallow. The accord is reported to have led to the payment of large amounts of money for “damaged property” – sums that went indirectly to the militants. The US and its NATO allies were taken completely by surprise by the accord that allowed the militants to make peace with the Pakistan army and gave them the freedom to use the NWFP and FATA areas close to the Afghan border as safe havens to attack the US and NATO forces. The militants soon broke the cease-fire as well as the peace accord. Other similar peace agreements were also signed. In October 2007, the Pakistan Government entered into a peace agreement with the terrorists in the Swat Valley as militancy there was spinning out of control. This accord too did not last long. All these accords clearly showed that the Pakistan army and the Musharraf-led government of the day had no clear strategy to counter the growing menace

of Taliban-al Qaeda insurgency in the NWFP and FATA. The government and the army were groping in the dark and hoping that something would work out.

### Frontier Corps

The far less capable and less well-trained and equipped Interior Ministry paramilitary force, the Frontier Corps, is being employed in direct fighting in the Waziristan agencies. However, it has failed to cope with the better armed and better motivated Taliban militants. Perhaps the use of the Frontier Corps instead of the Pakistan army made political as well military sense to the Pakistan GHQ. The Frontier Corps, which numbers about 60,000 men, is manned almost completely by Pushtuns who are naturally trained for mountain warfare, have far better knowledge of the terrain in FATA than the army and have cultural affiliations with the people residing there. The officers of the Frontier Corps are usually taken from the Pushtun cadre of Pakistani armed forces, which is also an advantage.

Raised by the government of the British Raj in the late 19th century, the Frontier Corps maintains control over the tribes in the FATA. It has always been responsible for manning the Pak-Afghan border along the Durand Line. The Pakistan army has put in considerable effort to train the Frontier Corps for counter-insurgency warfare with technical and material support from the United States. As the terrain is mostly mountainous, it is felt that lightly-armed Frontier Corps infantrymen can conduct operations effectively. In the long run, better trained and more suitably equipped Frontier Corps troops, combined with administrative and economic reforms, might well provide the answer to the problem of militancy in FATA.

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### III ARMY DEPLOYMENTS AND EXPERIENCE GAINED

As far as the regular army is concerned, it has moved several combat formations

from the Corps facing India across the LoC and the international border in Jammu and Kashmir to the northwest, besides troops from the two western Corps at Peshawar and Quetta. Three brigades of 11 Corps based at Peshawar and two brigades of the Quetta-based 12 Corps are reported to have been moved to Pakistan's western border with Afghanistan. One brigade each has been deployed in the northwest from 30 Corps at Gujranwala and 31 Corps at Bahawalpur. The internal crisis is considered so grave that even the Strike Corps have not been spared and a total of about nine brigades have been re-located to the west, though not all of these have been rushed headlong into counter-insurgency operations. These include two brigades from the Kharian-based 17 Infantry Division of 1 Corps, Pakistan's army Reserve North. However, this massive re-deployment at the risk of depleting combat strength on the eastern border with India has not really fetched the desired dividends. When fighting formations are pulled out from their operational roles and their primary areas of responsibility, to be employed for secondary tasks, the expectation is always that their absence will be for a limited duration and that they will be employed only to launch surgical strikes that will be followed by quick extrication. On the contrary, these formations are getting sucked deeper into a worsening quagmire on the western border.

While the Pakistan army has conducted a number of successful operations in the NWFP and FATA areas, it has not been consistent in its efforts and has failed to gain the upper hand. For example, the success at Bajaur in end-September 2008 came after several months of poor results in lackadaisical operations. The tactics, techniques and procedures adopted by the Pakistan army have not yielded results that are commensurate with the effort put in. The army's intelligence network is virtually non-existent as humint sources are proving difficult to cultivate. Its ability to undertake operations at night and in conditions of poor visibility is rather limited as it lacks suitable night vision devices,

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hand-held battlefield surveillance radars and other sensors. Its movements are ponderous and easy for the militants to spot as its columns follow the beaten track while the militants know every nook and cranny of the terrain over which they operate.

Many of the army's God fearing soldiers are not convinced that going after their fellow Muslims, even if they are anti-national militants, is a justifiable approach. Deep down in their hearts, many of them would much rather fight the US and NATO troops whom they see as occupiers and violators of their land, their faith and their culture. The army leadership has failed to address this emotive issue with any degree of success. Clearly, at present the army lacks the capacity to fight the insurgents effectively in the NWFP and FATA. It is also completely out of synch with the aspirations of the tribal people inhabiting these areas and is unable to win the battle of hearts of minds that is crucial to gaining popular support. While a few of the tribal chieftains are neutral in the fight between the army and the militants, most of them encourage their people to provide shelter and succour to the militants.

The senior leadership of the Pakistan army has so far been employing a heavy-handed approach to put down rumblings of discontent in Balochistan and the Northern Areas in the past. It has failed to understand that artillery barrages and helicopter and air force bombings of civilian villages and towns are inherently counterproductive. The field commanders must be taught to discriminate between

innocent civilians and armed combatants and must demonstrate concern for senior citizens, women and children instead of treating them with disdain. Success will come only when the army begins to close in with the militants and clears them from key areas systematically while ensuring that sufficient combat units are left behind to prevent the militants from taking over the cleared territory again. One method that can be adopted is to establish an interlinked grid of company-sized 'posts' to dominate given areas, conduct patrolling and strike operations based on hard intelligence and, simultaneously, enable the civil administration to execute development projects and run schools, hospitals, a postal service and banks. And, army or para-military columns must be physically deployed to ensure rear area security and keep the arteries open for supplies and reinforcements. All this is, of course, infinitely more difficult than lobbing 500 kg bombs from the air combined with artillery barrages.

### **Lack of Integrated Approach to Counter-insurgency**

The leadership of the Pakistan army is perturbed that a comprehensive effort is not being made at the national level to fight insurgency in the restive north-western areas. According to Lt Gen Asad Durrani, former DG ISI, "The army, employed on a number of IS/COIN duties, is more or less on its own. The part to be played by the political leadership and to an extent by the civil administration – vital to the entire effort – is mostly missing. In Swat and Waziristan for example, the army is still stuck with rehabilitation, reconstruction, and a large

number of militants... Considering that the "others" have more or less abdicated their responsibility (refusing to take "ownership" in today's terminology), the army – after some initial hiccups – has not done too badly. Indeed, its ability is not limitless."

Another senior retired officer, who prefers to remain anonymous, echoes similar views: "The army's capability... has improved significantly during the last decade. A lot of valuable experience has been gained after conducting a number of large-scale operations. Aspects of 'will' and 'morale' are however equally crucial... Remaining embroiled indefinitely in an insecure environment, and sustaining casualties without undertaking focused time-bound operations is not good for morale. This factor is being mitigated through frequent rotation of units... The army has been conducting operations at the tactical and operational levels, but there has been a state of drift at the national level. It relates to the nation's inability to develop a common understanding on the nature of problem, to correctly understand the contributory internal and external dynamics, to craft a wholesome strategy and have the political will to implement it. If this is achieved, the army will willingly and perhaps effectively play its role. So, it is not the army's ability, rather the national integrated effort and political will that has been floundering. This is a complex problem, needing many elements of national power to play a cohesive and sustained role..."

During his election campaign, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had promised peace talks with insurgent groups like the TTP. However, perhaps after consultations with the leadership of the Pakistan army, he appears to be backing off. "Of course we want to try talks but they are a far off possibility," said a government official recently. "There is so much ground work that needs to be done. And when you are dealing with a group as diverse and internally divided as the Pakistani Taliban, then you can never be sure that every subgroup would honour talks." (Maria Golovnina and Mehreen Zahra-Malik, "Despite promises to talk, new Pakistan PM

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gets tough on insurgents" Reuters, July 23, 2013.)

#### IV CHALLENGES FROM AFGHANISTAN

The fallout of the draw-down of the US-led NATO-ISAF forces by the end of 2014, will pose the most complex challenge to the new government and the Pakistan army as it is an external security threat with internal security linkages. The security vacuum that will be created by the departure of foreign troops from Afghan soil is likely to lead to Taliban resurgence that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF – army plus the police) will be incapable of stemming.

The Karzai government is seen as an obstacle to the realisation of Pakistan army's key objectives in Afghanistan due to its steady rejection of Pakistan's overtures, including the use of its good offices for reconciliation negotiations with the Taliban. India's commitment to a strong and stable Afghanistan and its US\$ 2 billion investment in the country's reconstruction are a cause for concern in Pakistan, particularly among the security agencies. The army resents Afghan calls for military aid from India due to fears of military encirclement – even though the Pakistan army appears to have realised the folly of seeking 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan in military terms. To counter the perceived attempts at encirclement, the Pakistan army and the ISI have begun to reach out to members of the erstwhile Northern Alliance.

Another bone of contention is Pakistan's accusation that insurgent groups like the TNSM of Mullah Fazlullah, are operating out of secure bases in Afghanistan. At present the Pakistan army lacks the capacity to fight these groups across the Durand Line. However, it may have no option but to attempt to do so in case these groups step up their attacks post-2014 and the Afghan government is powerless to stop them. Such a scenario could even lead to state-on-state conflict in the worst case.

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There are approximately 2.0 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan today. Most of them are Pushtoons. Besides being an economic burden, they are seen as a national security threat as the Afghan government does not recognise the Durand Line as the boundary with Pakistan. Though the Pushtoons in Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa are fairly well integrated with the national mainstream, separatist tendencies can come to the fore again. If the post-2014 security situation deteriorates into a civil war four to five years later – a probability that cannot be ruled out – Pakistan will be deluged with hundreds of thousands of additional refugees, further exacerbating the problem. Pakistan is hesitant to back Mullah Omar's Taliban fully because it is unsure of getting its unfettered support if the Taliban comes back to power sometime in the future.

According to Ahmed Rashid, a perceptive observer of the developments in the Af-Pak region, it is necessary "to ensure that Pakistan, which gives sanctuary to the Taliban leadership, cooperates rather than sabotages the transition and the peace process, and allows the Taliban to hold talks with Kabul on their own terms rather than on terms that Pakistan may impose." The Army is unlikely to give up its quest to attempt to exercise full control over a Taliban-dominated Afghan government.

Anatol Lieven of King's College, London, has written: Pakistan's Afghan policy today is essentially an attempt to reconcile the following perceptions and imperatives Anatol Lieven, "Afghanistan: What Pakistan

Wants", New York Review of Books, July 14, 2013, <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2013/jul/15/Afghanistan-what-pakistan-wants/>):

- The need to appease Pakistani Pashtun opinion and prevent more Pashtuns joining the Islamist revolt within Pakistan;
- The fear that if the Afghan Taliban come to full power, they will support the Pakistani Taliban and try to recreate the old Afghan dream of recovering the Pashtun areas of Pakistan, but this time led by the Taliban and under the banner of jihad;
- The belief that the Taliban are by far the most powerful force among Afghan Pashtuns;
- The belief that Pakistan needs powerful allies within Afghanistan to combat Indian influence and that the Afghan Taliban and their allies in the Haqqani network and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami are the only ones available;
- The assumption that sooner or later the present US-backed state and army in Afghanistan will break down, most probably along ethnic lines;
- Pakistan's economic dependence on the USA and on the World Bank and IMF;
- Pakistan's strategic dependence on China, which regards Pakistan as an important ally, but which has also acquired potentially very large economic assets of its own in Afghanistan, and which certainly does not favour Islamist extremism.

## V CONCLUSION

There can never be a purely military or a

purely political solution to an insurgency. A successful counter-insurgency strategy is a dynamic but balanced mixture of aggressive offensive operations conducted with a humane touch and socio-economic development. Political negotiations to address the core issues of alienation of the population and other political demands must also be conducted with the local leadership simultaneously. The tribal culture prevailing in the NWFP and FATA, with its fierce ethnic loyalties and its diffused leadership, makes the task of the army and the government more difficult. The need to follow an integrated approach at the national level is unquestionable. The management of governance, development and security must proceed along parallel lines if the root causes of insurgency are to be successfully addressed in the long-term.

At present the Pakistan army falls short of being truly combat worthy for the nature of sub-conventional warfare that circumstances have forced it to wage in the NWFP and FATA. It needs to address the doctrinal, structural and organisational issues that are hampering its efforts. Shortcomings in morale and motivation also need to be overcome as these form the bedrock of counter-insurgency operations along with tactics, techniques and procedures.

The army would do well to understand, analyse and learn from the counter-insurgency doctrine that the Indian army has so successfully followed for 20 years in Jammu and Kashmir and over half a century in India's north-eastern region. On its part, the Indian army must also study the counter-insurgency campaign of the Pakistan army and learn the right lessons so as to carefully avoid the hazards and pitfalls that the Pakistan army has encountered as insurgencies and terrorism are not going to end quickly in Southern Asia.

