

Role of Pakistan Police in Counterinsurgency

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Introduction

Police infrastructure in Pakistan is one of the most poorly managed organizations in the state. It is aptly described as ill-equipped, poorly trained, deeply politicized and chronically corrupt.¹ It has performed well in certain operations but overall that is a rare phenomenon. Arguably, the primary reason for this state of affairs is persistent governmental failure to invest in law enforcement reform and modernization. It is ironic that despite frequent internal crises in the country since its inception in 1947, ranging from ethnic confrontations and sectarian battles to sharp rise in criminal activity and growing insurgencies, this sector was never given top priority by the policy makers – both political and military. Hence, poor police performance in counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency is not surprising. At the same time, the fact that police succeeded in 1990s in challenging some religious militant groups in Punjab and defeated an insurgency like situation in Karachi, however, shows that in circumstances where political support was present and resources were provided, police demonstrated its potential to deliver.

Since the 9/11 attacks and the consequent US/NATO military action in Afghanistan, Pakistan's North West has come under increasing pressure of militant and terrorist organizations operating in the area. Pakistan's deficient law enforcement capacity in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and adjacent North West Frontier Province (NWFP) helped Pakistani Taliban and other terror outfits to expand their area of influence in the region. Controversial and haphazard Pakistani military action in the area lead to more instability and limited resistance in FATA has now turned into a growing Pashtun regional insurgency. As evident from the developing turmoil in the Swat district of NWFP, army action can only provide a breathing space to state and it is police and law enforcement action that can truly help the state re-establish its writ in the area. A timely police action can be more effective in quelling emergent insurgencies. My research into the 2007 Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) crisis in Islamabad, where a strong military operation in 2007 led to hundreds of deaths, also establishes that: a) an effective police action in time (2004-05) could have avoided the later bloody clash, and: b) police lacked authority and permission of the state and its important institutions to actively and legally pursue the militants in the mosque (during 2004-07 timeframe).²

A comparative study of police role in counterinsurgency campaigns in Malay and Cyprus by Dr. James Corum insightfully concludes that nearly all major counterinsurgency campaigns of the 20th century have relied heavily on indigenous police as well as military forces.³ [This study is relevant

¹ David Rohde, "THREATS AND RESPONSES: LAW ENFORCEMENT; Pakistan's Police Force Struggles to Find the Resources It Needs to Combat Terrorism", *New York Times*, September 30, 2002.

² The interviews were conducted in June 2008 and author perused police record of the cases that were registered against the Red Mosque militants in earlier years.

³ James S. Corum, "Training Indigenous forces in Counterinsurgency: A Tale of Two Insurgencies", March 2006, Strategic Studies Institute, available at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/PUB648.pdf>

to the Pakistan case due to some important commonalities between the FATA/NWFP insurgency and the Malayan and Cypriot cases of 1950s.]⁴ In another valuable study titled *Best Practices in Counterinsurgency*, Dr. Kelev I. Sepp provides a list of successful counterinsurgency measures emphasizing significance of the role of police.⁵ He gleaned his lessons from closely studying 17 insurgencies and considering aspects of additional 36 insurgencies. His recommended measures include steps such as: “Police in lead; military supporting”, “Police force expanded; diversified” and “Focus on population, their needs and security” clearly establishing the centrality of police role in successful counterinsurgency operations.

Hassan Abbas explores major problems faced by Pakistan police force to analyze the dynamics influencing its overall performance. Abbas makes recommendations for the reform of the police department, especially in the context of rise in militant activity and growing insurgency in different parts of the country. The paper also provides a short bibliography of important books and papers on Pakistan police for further research.

Analyzing Factors that Hinder Effective Policing in Pakistan

Historical Factors – Outmoded Law: Groomed as an imperial force tasked to coerce rather than protect citizens in the aftermath of the 1857 uprising against the British, Pakistan inherited a police infrastructure founded on the Police Act of 1861 – a framework that provided for an authoritative, unaccountable, and oppressive police force. A mere glance at its provisions shows that it is out of touch with the requirements of a modern and democratic state. Unfortunately Pakistan continued with these laws till 2002, when finally a new reform oriented police order was promulgated but even the new police order has been amended many times since, damaging its original intent and spirit. Its implementation largely remains an unaccomplished task. Over a period of 60 years, around two dozen commissioned reports on reform of Pakistan police were produced but it was very rare that any of their recommendations were implemented.⁶ Interestingly, India continues with 1861 Police Act in many parts of the country amid demands for change and reform.⁷

Political Manipulation: Since early days of Pakistan, police has been used as a tool by political as well as military rulers of the state to suppress dissent and to marginalize opposition politicians.⁸ The professionalism of the police forces was further tarnished when in 1990s many senior police officials

⁴ In both cases, the effectiveness of counterinsurgency campaign was depended upon success of the government in winning support among the disaffected segments of a major ethnic group. Secondly, the training, professionalism, and leadership of the security forces in these cases played a central role in the government’s ability to win civilian support. At the beginning of each of these conflicts, the respective police and security forces were undermanned, underpaid and inadequately trained for conducting counterinsurgency. In the Malayan case, which was more successful of the two, success largely depended on government’s ability to recruit, retrain, and reorganize the indigenous police force.

⁵ Kelev I. Sepp, “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency”, *Military Review*, May-June 2005, 8-12, available at: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/sepp.pdf>

⁶ These included the Police Commission headed by Mr. Justice J.B. Constantine between 1961 and 1962, the Police Commission led by Maj. General A.O. Mitha that ran from 1968 to 1970, a one man committee of Mr. G. Ahmed in 1972, the Foreign Experts Committee composed of Romanian Police Experts in 1976, the Police Reforms Committee chaired by Mr. Rafi Raza, also in 1976, the Police Committee headed by Mr. Aslam Hayat in 1985 and finally the Police Reforms Implementation Committee, under M.A.K. Chaudhry, in 1990. Not one of the major recommendations put forward by these committees was put in place until 2002.

⁷ For details of the Police Act 1861 and its use in India, see Maja Daruwala, G.P Joshi, Mandeep Tiwana, “Police Act 1861: Why we need to replace it?”, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative”, July 2005, available at: http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/papers/advocacy_paper_police_act_1861.pdf

⁸ For some details, see, *Authoritarianism and Political Party Reform in Pakistan*, International Crisis Group Asia Reports N°102, September 28, 2005.

became known for their affiliations with one of the two major political parties (Pakistan Peoples Party and Muslim League) and their transfers and promotions were dependent on political changes in the country. In the most recent such instance, within hours of the removal of Mr. Shahbaz Sharif as the chief minister of Punjab, the top layer of the police leadership (including some of the most respected and professional police officials) in Punjab was relieved of its duties and officers close to Governor Punjab Salman Taseer were appointed. During this massive police overhaul, a major terrorist act was committed in Lahore against the visiting Sri Lankan cricket team and though a few junior police officials lost their lives saving the cricketers, a dozen or so terrorists were able to escape from the scene unscathed exposing police incompetence.

Structural Problems: Primary law and order responsibilities in the four provinces are vested in their provincial governments, whereas in the realm of criminal law and procedure both central (federal) and provincial legislatures can make laws with the centre's legislation taking precedence over provincial law. Capital police in Islamabad, and four provincial police forces largely act independent of each other, but the senior command positions are filled from the ranks of the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP) cadre, a central career service from which officers can be stationed in any part of the country. A disconnect between senior police leadership and junior officers (who belong to provincial police services) has developed overtime as officers who rise through ranks very seldom get senior command positions. PSP is seen by critics as an elitist group which is resistant to change and reform in order to keep its hold over the police structure and avoid accountability. Besides this lacuna, there is no standardized system of hiring, transfers and promotions in the four provincial police departments creating various disparities.

Thana Culture and Disregard for Human Rights: The conduct of police towards ordinary citizens is aptly illustrated in the *thana* culture. Thana is the word used for a police station in the local Urdu/Punjabi language. The term "*thana* culture" is used to signify the abuses committed by police during interrogations in police cells, corruption by the force, and the fact that the powerful and influential segments of society can get away with any crime. Pakistani newspapers are frequently filled with stories of police high-handedness. These are mostly reports of torture in police stations committed to force alleged criminals to confess to some undetected crime. There are also stories of faked police encounters (extra-judicial killings) that result in the elimination of "undesirable" elements of society.⁹ The phenomenon of unlawful search, seizure, and arrests is also quite widespread. This arrogant police attitude is rapidly becoming the norm in Pakistani society and instead of providing safety, the police image and presence creates fear and insecurity in the public. Another view is that the high rate of crime has motivated an ill-equipped police force to resort to killing as an easier way to get rid of criminals than undergoing the arduous task of prosecution and sentencing.¹⁰

Inadequate Training and Investigation Facilities: Torture has often been used as a tool by police to elicit confessions because they lack other, more sophisticated means of investigation to prove a crime. For instance, Pakistan's forensics capabilities are highly rudimentary. Till late 1990s, there was only one major laboratory in the whole country (located in Rawalpindi) with a handful of experts. In the last few years, four additional laboratories were established (in each provincial capital) which is a significant improvement but still highly insufficient to meet the demands. Surprisingly, due to economic crisis and budgetary limitations, the new government has very

⁹ Many of these activities are documented and mentioned in the annual reports of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, an independent body lead by renowned human rights activists. These reports are available online at: http://www.hrcp-web.org/hrcpDetail_pubArchive.cfm?catId=173

¹⁰ Hassan Abbas, "Policing Pakistan: A Quest for Justice", *Lawyers Without Borders Newsletter*, August 2004.

recently decided to discontinue funding for the establishment of the National Forensic Science Agency (NFSA) headquarters, and its main laboratory at Islamabad.¹¹

A new police academy in Islamabad for PSP officers became operational in 2005-06, while all provinces maintain and run their separate training schools for junior ranks.¹² It is instructive to mention the standards at one of these training schools in Punjab. In Manawan Police Training School, where 800 recruits are currently undertaking a 4 month long basic training course, there are neither any beds nor any heating arrangements. There are only 12 toilets in the facility and no provision for showers. Worst still, no medical facilities are available to these recruits and according to a media report 30% of the recruits routinely missed their training schedules due to illness.¹³

Lack of funds and Corruption: According to Transparency International's "Global Corruption Barometer 2007", police is the most corrupt public sector agency in Pakistan.¹⁴ Pakistan has only 350,000 police personnel for a population of around 172 million people: around one police officer for 477 citizens and in the prevailing circumstances police frequently provide guard and VIP duties, further diminishing its overall capacity.¹⁵ Earning around 100 dollars salary per month, the low-ranking officers can hardly make two ends meet. In my recent interview with a chief of police in an important and major city of Punjab, the officer maintained that according to his estimate around 20 percent of his force is directly involved in crimes and the fact that he arrested many police officials under his command substantiated his claim.¹⁶ Acknowledging the obvious linkage between very low salaries and police corruption, the law minister of Punjab government very recently committed that his government would increase the salaries of police officials to make them more lucrative and declared that "once handsome salaries are provided, there will be zero tolerance for corruption!"¹⁷

Reasons for Police Failure in Pursuing Terrorist and Militant Organizations:

1. Lack of coordination between police and military run intelligence agencies (Inter-Services Intelligence, Military Intelligence, and even Intelligence Bureau under military rulers). Trust deficit between civil and military agencies also play a role in this context.
2. Poor data collection capability on crime and criminals including militant organizations is a significant hurdle. In many instances, banned militant organizations continued with their publications and in some cases wanted criminals and terrorists changed their party affiliations (hurriedly joining groups that were not under government scrutiny after theirs were banned) and the police remained clueless. Here the police was also handicapped as many militant groups were producing "freedom fighters" for Kashmir and Afghanistan and had working relations with elements in the intelligences services, and hence many police officials were reluctant to go after such elements thinking that they might be the assets of some "other state institution."¹⁸

¹¹ "Govt Stops Funding to Forensic Agency", *Daily Times*, February 15, 2009.

¹² Website of National Police Academy Islamabad: <http://www.npa.gov.pk/>

¹³ "Manawan Police Training School: Recruits train in harsh weather, poor sanitation", *Daily Times*, December 31, 2008.

¹⁴ "Report on the Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer 2007", *Transparency International*, December 6, 2007, 22, available at:

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¹⁵ "Pakistan: Police Weakness Mars Fight against Extremism", *Oxford Analytica*, February 5, 2009.

¹⁶ Interview with a senior police officer in Punjab, June 2008. For corruption estimates in police department in Punjab alone, see Shahnawaz Khan, "Crime watch: Lahore Traffic Police needs to be pulled up", *Daily Times*, April 3, 2006;

¹⁷ "Elite Force along Punjab borders, Sanaullah tells PA", *Daily Times*, February 14, 2009.

¹⁸ See, Hassan Abbas, "Police Reforms: Agenda of Change", *The News*, March 4, 2008.

3. In recent years Special Investigations Group (SIG) under the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) was tasked to a) interrogate terrorists, b) identify and arrest most wanted terrorists, c) detect terrorist financing, and d) coordinate with provincial government in investigating major terrorist incidences but the strength of this group is surprisingly low and insufficient - 37 investigators supported by 13 experts led by a Deputy Inspector General of Police.¹⁹
4. NWFP police was not provided adequate resources despite their persistent requests in 2006-07 when it was apparent to all and sundry that Pakistani Taliban were focused on expanding their influence in various NWFP districts (especially Hangu, Kohat, D.I. Khan and most importantly Swat). The Swat case is even more troubling. According to the district police chief in Swat, Mr. Bangash, around 700 policemen out of a total strength of 1737 deserted when Maulana Fazlullah of Swat threatened local police to give up their jobs or face the wrath of Taliban.²⁰ No counter measures in terms of special incentives for Swat police were offered in response by the provincial as well as federal government.

Lessons from Successful Police Operations

In Pakistan's recent history, two police operations are especially considered effective and successful: a) police operations against elements of Muttihada Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Karachi in mid 1990s, and b) anti-sectarian police operations in Punjab (largely against *Sipah-e-Mohammad* and *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*) in 1997-99. Following factors played a crucial role in these successes²¹:

1. Leadership Factor: The Karachi operations (1994-96) were led by Shoaib Suddle (currently head of Intelligence Bureau) and the Lahore/Punjab operations were spearheaded by Tariq Pervez. Both of these senior police officers are highly respected for their professionalism, competence and integrity. Their motivational leadership played the most important role.
2. Political Support: In both cases political leadership (Benazir Bhutto government in the case of Karachi operations and Nawaz Sharif government in the case of Punjab operations) was fully supportive of the police action. In hindsight, this also led to some violations of human rights norms as officers involved in these actions at times assumed that in the interest of the state they could act beyond what law stipulates.
3. Financial Incentives: Special financial packages were offered to the officials involved – especially in the Karachi operations, where newly graduated PSP officers were transferred en block.
4. Provision of Extra Resources: In both cases, team leaders were provided extra un-auditable resources for gathering intelligence information and investigations.

Recommendations:

1. Police order 2002 should be implemented in letter and spirit and controversial amendments in the law (made in and around 2004) should be discarded with the purpose of reorganizing police into an efficient, professional and politically neutral force. Most importantly, police safety commissions should be empowered to monitor police performance.
2. The Citizens-Police Liaison Committee commonly known as CPLC in Karachi, a non-political statutory institution that was a brainchild of Justice (Retired) Fakhruddin G.

¹⁹ Quoted in a presentation (titled: Terrorism in Punjab) by senior police official Sarmad Saeed (currently Director at the National Police Academy, Islamabad), available at <http://www.sarmadsaeed.com>

²⁰ Figures quoted in GEO TV talk show *Capital Talk* (Host Hamid Mir), February 5, 2009.

²¹ These impressions are based on author's interviews with many colleagues and batch mates who participated in these operations as author was a serving police officer in 1990s.

Ibrahim, should be followed as a model all across Pakistan. Its website amply explains its utility and value - <http://www.cplc.org.pk/>.

3. National Police Bureau (<http://www.npb.gov.pk>) in Islamabad should be upgraded as a resourceful think tank for ideas and research for improving counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capacity of police forces in Pakistan. The excellent work done by this institution in developing the 2008 anti-terrorism manual is a case in point.
4. Specialized counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency training for selected junior and middle ranking police officers in reputed international law enforcement training institutions can be valuable for Pakistan. This can also lead to creation of a new elite police force with specialization to move in and control the regained territory in NWFP. However, this should not be done at the cost of postponing overall reform of the police force across Pakistan.
5. For effective counterinsurgency measures in NWFP, Pakistan police can benefit from modern policing model i.e., “Intelligence led policing”. In this method, the interface with the civilian population is conducted to gain intelligence, which is used to head off criminal (and terrorism related) events. This requires more undercover work than other policing models and requires establishing networks of informants. As discussed in the introduction, local police (with the same ethnic, cultural and linguistic background) is best suited to develop such networks in insurgency infected regions.

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