

Pakistan's Future Wars: Tackling Terrorism Within

DHRUV C KATOCH

Pakistan faces multiple internal and external challenges, each of which has a bearing on the security situation within the country. For the most part, these challenges have been aggravated by Pakistan's economic, governance and policy-delivery deficits, which have been a constraint on strategic resource-allocation and decision-making.¹ Writing on the issue, Sherry Rehman, Chair of the Jinnah Institute and Vice President of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), has categorised Pakistan's challenges as deficits in governance and service delivery, which, in turn, have affected the state's ability to execute policy change. Pakistan's demographic profile is also a cause for serious concern. With a burgeoning population, and a median age of just 23 years, the state lacks the capacity to absorb the increasing workforce in meaningful labour. Unemployment levels, which stood at 5 percent in 2007-08, increased to 6 percent in 2012-13 and are set to spiral further. With 1.7 million entrants yearly to the workforce, lack of employment opportunities have the potential to further fuel unrest in the country.²

Pakistan also faces challenges on the economic front, compounded by a persistently low tax to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio, increased debt servicing, untargeted subsidies and financing of bleeding Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs).³ Natural disasters, which have visited Pakistan in the last decade have worsened the economic situation as have the ongoing military operations in various parts of the country, and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons. Urbanisation too is taking its toll. There is an annual increase of 3 percent in the country's urban population, which currently stands at about 38 percent and is set to reach 50 percent by 2050, primarily due to the erosion of

livelihood opportunities in rural areas. This too could lead to social unrest which, in turn, could potentially aggravate the security situation within the country. This article aims to analyse the security challenges Pakistan is likely to face over the next decade, in the above context.

External Challenges

Pakistan's security perceptions have been largely influenced by the state of its relationships with India and Afghanistan. Historical legacies have made India the primary focus of Pakistan's security paradigm, leading to the Pakistani establishment seeking military parity with India to address its security concerns. To avoid a two-front scenario, Pakistan's foreign policy focus has been on keeping Afghanistan under its sphere of influence. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its aftermath, resulted in the growth and spread of militant groups, which Pakistan used as tools of its foreign policy to keep Afghanistan within its sphere of influence. The developments following 9/11 have added to Pakistan's sense of unease, with a new threat emanating both from its western borders as well as from a changed domestic security situation, which now occupies centre-stage in Pakistan's security calculus. Pakistan, hence, faces a three-threat scenario – the third arising from a changed domestic situation.⁴

Animosity in the India-Pakistan relations is a historical legacy, which has festered without resolution since independence in 1947. Four wars during this period have not led to conflict resolution, and the relations between the two countries remain frozen, despite periodic efforts to reduce hostility between the two neighbours. Pakistan's intransigence over the Kashmir issue remains the major stumbling block, to which has now been added Pakistani support to cross-border terrorism within India.

The threat to Pakistan's western borders got amplified post the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. While Afghanistan does not have the military capability to pose a conventional military threat to Pakistan, the fallout of political instability and the internal conflict within Afghanistan, which has serious repercussions on Pakistan's neighbouring provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), and Balochistan. Besides the above, the status of the Durand Line continues to bedevil the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan as the line finds no acceptance in Afghanistan.⁵ Pakistan's desire for retaining leverage over the Afghan establishment also results in strained relations between the two countries.

Internal Security Challenges

Pakistan's internal security concerns stem from issues relating to calls for secession, ethnic and sectarian conflict, radicalism and terrorism. In the period from 2003 till December 13, 2015, some 59,577 people have been killed in terrorism-related violence in Pakistan⁶.

Balochistan

In Balochistan, Pakistan is confronted with the longest civil war in its history. Islamabad's exploitation of natural resources in the area, combined with repressive state-run policies, have led to five armed uprisings in the region since the territory was annexed by Pakistan in 1948. The current armed uprising in the state started in 2003⁷. Surprisingly, while the Baloch insurgency remains Pakistan's biggest internal security challenge, the conflict attracts very little international attention. The Baloch demands are mostly for full independence, but in a few cases, vary from greater autonomy to increased royalties from natural resources and provincial revenue. A number of militant groups have sprung up in the area, the prominent ones being the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), led by Hyarbyar Marri, the Baloch Republican Party (BRP), led by Brahmdayh Bugti, the grandson of Akbar Bugti, and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) led by Dr Allah Nazar. Insurgency has seriously impacted the Turbat, Panjgur and Awaran areas and to a lesser extent, the Gwadar, Khuzdar, Mastung, Kharan and Kalat areas. State control in the Dera Bugti, Barkhan and Bolan areas is tentative despite the huge presence of security forces. The Pakistani national anthem is not sung in many schools and buses play pro-independence songs.⁸ The portrait of Balaach Marri,⁹ wearing a Baloch cap and holding an assault rifle, is almost ubiquitous in Baloch bazaar stalls and shops across Pakistan's southernmost province.¹⁰ The BLA remains the most active amongst the Baloch insurgent groups, several of whom are fully armed and are fighting for independence. According to Baloch Khan, a BLA commander, the BLA hosts 25 camps in Pakistan's Balochistan region, and they also rely on "many other units conducting guerrilla warfare in urban areas".¹¹ Among the operations claimed by the BLA are the June 2013 bombing of the house where Muhammad Ali Jinnah spent his last days, the May 2015 attack on the convoy, in which Mr Mamnoon Hussain, the son of the President of Pakistan was travelling and a host of other attacks. The BLF led by Dr Allah Nazar, has also carried out many attacks, especially on those working on the highway road to Gwadar's deep water port. A part of the China-Pakistan economic corridor, the road is perceived by the Baloch people as a demographic

invasion, which will alter the fragile demographic balance in the region by attracting foreign workers while local families are displaced.¹² As of now, tribal loyalties are giving way to nationalist fervour for an independent Balochistan. A large part of the Pakistan Army remains engaged in suppressing the population, and this conflict is likely to see a spurt in the years ahead.

Secession, ethnic conflict and terrorism are some of Pakistan's security concerns.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan

An offshoot of the war in Afghanistan, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is an alliance of militant networks based in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, whose avowed aim is to impose *Sharia* law and form an Islamic caliphate in Pakistan. In recent years, it has extended its base to the southern portions of Punjab province. Formed in 2007 under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud to unify opposition against the Pakistani military, the TTP aims to overthrow the Pakistan government. Dominated by the Mehsud tribe, it is a coordinated coalition of militias rather than a unified fighting force. Historically, the TTP has maintained close ties to the Afghan Taliban and the Al Qaeda. The Pakistan military launched operation Zarb-e-Azb to flush out the TTP and their supporters from North Waziristan, which continues till date. As a result of the military operations, the ability of the TTP to carry out coordinated attacks on the Pakistani state stands severely degraded, but the group is far from being wiped out. After Mullah Fazlullah became the group's leader in 2013, the TTP has also had internal fissures. In February 2014, a group under the lead of Maulana Umar Qasmi broke away to form the Ahrar-ul-Hind. Later, in May, the Mehsud faction of the TTP defected to form the Tehrik-i-Taliban South Waziristan led by Khalid Mehsud. Then, in August, four of the seven tribal districts formed a separate group called Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, led by the Mohmand Agency Commander Omar Khalid Khorosani, but rejoined the TTP in March 2015. In the same month, Asmatullah Muawiya, the commander of the Punjabi Taliban, announced that his faction was ending their armed struggle against the Pakistani state.¹³ The *Dawn* newspaper has also reported that the group's spokesperson Shahidullah Shahid along with five TTP chiefs had announced their allegiance to the Islamic State (Daesh) and would be their lead fighters in Pakistan. The five chiefs are Saeed Khan from Orakzai Agency, Daulat Khan from Kurram Agency, Fateh Gul Zaman, who heads the TTP in Khyber Agency, the TTP's Peshawar Amir Mufti Hassan and the TTP's Hangu

chief Khalid Mansoor. Their stance on Mullah Omar, widely regarded as the Amirul Momineen (leader of the faithful), was not elaborated upon. How this decision is viewed by Mullah Zazlullah, who owes allegiance to Mullah Omar, is to be seen¹⁴.

While the TTP appears to be in disarray for the present, it remains a powerful force and Pakistan would find it extremely difficult to militarily defeat the organisation. The operations of the Pakistan Army have merely displaced the militants from their operating bases in FATA, and they would simply slip back in, once the Pakistan Army leaves. It is unlikely that the Pakistan Army can hold on to those areas for a long duration, as it lacks the capacity to do so. Further attacks from the TTP on the Pakistan military establishment and on the civil population too in 2016 and the coming years can, thus, be expected.

The Sectarian Divide

While schisms between the Sunni majority and Shia minority in Pakistan have always existed, they got accentuated post 1979 when Gen. Zia ul-Haq began “Islamising” Pakistani politics to legitimise his military rule. Thousands have died since then, in Shia-Sunni violence across Pakistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan took place at this time, and US arms and Saudi funds allowed Gen. Zia to mount a proxy war in Afghanistan with the Mujahideen who were drawn largely from the youth educated at religious schools called *madrassas*. As Sunnis comprised about 75 percent of the population of Pakistan, most of the Mujahideen were Sunni, who were able to establish radical Sunni groups such as the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP)¹⁵. Shia fighters, too, joined the *jihad* against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, although their bands were smaller. They received help from Iran where the Islamic revolution earlier in 1979 had boosted Shia confidence. The growth of Shia militancy led to the establishment of militant groups such as the Tehrik-e-Jafria. The Sipah-e-Muhammad (SSM) was formed in 1993 to counter attacks by the SSP. Tit for tat attacks are now carried out by rival groups, resulting in numerous killings. Efforts to curb sectarian conflict were initiated by President Musharraf, in 2002, when the worst offending groups were banned. However, that initiative, along with others launched before it, manifestly failed.¹⁶

Over the past 20 years, Sunni and Shia extremists from both groups have attacked each other all over Pakistan, mostly in Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Shias have suffered far more in the attacks by Sunni groups, mostly by the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), widely seen as the armed wing

of the SSP¹⁷. Sectarian violence will continue to fester in Pakistan, adding to the overall security concerns the country faces, especially as the Shia community comprises about 20 percent of the population of Pakistan.

Karachi Fissures

The roots of the violence in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and also its financial capital, can be traced to the early 1980s when Gen Zia-ul-Haq promoted the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) under Altaf Hussain's leadership to counter the political influence of the PPP in Sindh. The 'Language Riots' of 1972 had already alienated the local Urdu speaking community and the support given to the MQM during Gen Zia's regime in the next decade, added fuel to the fire. Ethnic violence to an extent was contained by the turn of the century, but the city remained divided on ethnic lines. Thereafter, sectarian conflict took centre-stage in Karachi, with militant organisations such as the SSP, TTP and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) becoming increasingly active in terrorist activities by forming small bases within the city's limits. Political violence returned to the city after May 2007 when around 50 people lost their lives in a standoff between pro and anti-judiciary protesters. Since then, the city has been engulfed in flames, and targeted killings have increased substantially. 'Sector commanders' of political parties' militant wings and extremist religious entities were deployed in every major area of the city, and territories were held hostage in the name of ethnic nationalism. With Imran Khan's political party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) entering the political cauldron, a new dimension was added, and the MQMs' vote bank diminished considerably in areas once considered its stronghold. As of now, the government has come down hard on all perpetrators of violence, with operations being conducted under the aegis of the security forces, which has led to some measure of stability. Whether the situation can be so maintained on a permanent basis has to be seen. It would require an apolitical police force, military and intelligence agencies working in sync to counter militant wings of political parties and religious extremist elements rather than full scale use of military force. That would remain the defining challenge in the coming years.¹⁸

Radicalisation

The Islamisation of Pakistani society started soon after the birth of the nation, as the nation was created as a homeland for India's Muslims. Gen. Zia gave a fillip to 'Islamisation' through school curricula and other means, which promoted the spread of individual exclusivist identities among Pakistani youth and adults.

Political and religious groups within Pakistan have further encouraged such trends to serve their own ends as a result of which a majority of the Pakistani population sees religion rather than the state as their primary identity. This has increased the youths' propensity to radicalisation, leading them to accept or at times even justify violence conducted against other groups in the name of Islam. Organisations such as the Jamaat-e-Islami (JUI), endorse situation specific violent *jihad*, such as in Pakistan's policy in Kashmir or Afghanistan, but groups such as the TTP and the LeJ call for violent *jihad* to achieve Islamic goals. The Pakistani military's historical practice of selective support for certain militant actors in order to support regional policy objectives in Afghanistan and India has helped build a resource base for not just militant but also non-militant organisations serving bridging or encapsulating roles. As a result, 232 religious organisations and militant groups exist in Pakistan, most headquartered in Punjab and Lahore. Some militant groups operate openly in the country — establishing parallel educational or training institutions, collecting or extorting financial donations, and distributing published materials and media. The state's education system also facilitates these groups, who are often able to fill a vacuum left open by low levels of public education provision. The strength of these organisations leads to better marketing and recruitment, enabling them to draw youth from lower ends of the radicalisation "pyramid" upward toward active militancy.¹⁹ This situation is unlikely to change unless serious reforms are carried out in the state's education system and in society in general.

Prognosis

Pakistan is likely to see increased internal turmoil in the years ahead. As of now, Pakistan faces serious security concerns in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA and also in its largest city, Karachi. Violence is gradually also seeping into Pakistan's heartland, Punjab. The job of the security forces is, thus, cut out, as most parts of the country are suffering from an internal security deficit, caused by the action of militant players.

Externally, the country faces the dilemma of addressing its security concerns against India on the east and Afghanistan towards its west. The conflict in the Middle East has added to Pakistan's woes. Though an ally of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan stayed out of the Saudi led war against Yemen, largely to prevent a sectarian blowback back home. Moscow's entry into the war in Syria and the ability of the Islamic State (IS) hold on to its territories has further compounded the situation, which could potentially aggravate the already challenging internal

security situation as the diffusion of the IS and its splinter cells could well spread to Pakistan. A UN report has stated that the Islamic State is presently recruiting in as many as 25 out of 34 Afghan provinces.²⁰ This does not bode well for Pakistan, which finds itself increasingly vulnerable to yet another threat from radical elements.

Pakistan is likely to witness increased turmoil in coming years.

Pakistan's Army has, thus, far managed to contain the militants and preserve the structure of the state. Its efforts over the previous year have led to a decline in incidents of terrorist related violence. However, the ability of the Pakistan Army to sustain such efforts over the years is doubtful, largely due to lack of capacity. Unless political initiatives take place to reduce violence levels, the coming years are likely to see an escalation of violence and the possible unravelling of the state.

Maj Gen **Dhruv C Katoch** is the Editor of *Salut Magazine* and former Director, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi.

Notes

1. <http://www.brecorder.com/supplements/:business-recorder-golden-jubilee-50-years-of-putting-the-economy-first/1181032:five-flashpoints-for-strategic-planners/>
2. Ibid.
3. Pakistan is unlikely to improve its tax collection capacity. Also see Aisha Ghaus-Pasha, "Can Pakistan Get Out of the Low Tax-to-GDP Trap?" available at <http://sjbipp.org/RR/Can%20Pakistan%20Get%20Out%20of%20the%20Low%20Tax-to-GDP%20Trap.pdf>
4. NIDS Joint Research Series No 9, Security Outlook of the Asia Pacific Countries and Its Implications for the Defence Sector, Chapter 10, "Security Threats Confronting Pakistan" by Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, available at http://www.nids.go.jp/english/publication/joint_research/series9/pdf/10.pdf
5. Ibid.
6. Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2015, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/casualties.htm>
7. Zahid Hussain, "The battle for Balochistan". *Dawn*, April 25, 2013, available at <http://www.dawn.com/news/794058/the-battle-for-balochistan>. Accessed on December 16, 2015.
8. Ibid.
9. Balaach Marri was the erstwhile leader of the BLA, who was assassinated by the Pakistan military.
10. Karlos Zurutuza, "Understanding Pakistan's Baloch Insurgency", available at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/cracking-pakistans-baloch-insurgency/>
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.

13. "Deadly Taliban Group Gives up Armed Struggle in Pakistan". *The Telegraph*. September 14, 2014. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/11095213/Deadly-Taliban-group-gives-up-armed-struggle-in-Pakistan.html>
14. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1137908>
15. Sipah-e-Sahaba was initially called Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba (ASS).
16. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12278919>
17. Many analysts argue that the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi – inspired both by Al Qaeda and the Taliban – has now broken away from its parent organisation and is responsible for the use of suicide bombers in many sectarian attacks.
18. Hassan Khan, "Karachi's Three Decades of Violence", available at <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/04/04/comment/karachis-three-decades-of-violence/>
19. Raheem ul Haque, "Youth Radicalisation in Pakistan", available at <http://www.usip.org/publications/youth-radicalization-in-pakistan>
20. Fahd Humayun, "Pakistan's Middle East Problem", available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/19/pakistans-middle-east-problem/>