



MONITOR

Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan

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Quetta Blast: Civil-Military Relations in the Aftermath of a Tragedy

Almost 70 people lost their lives, most of them lawyers, on August 08, 2016, when a bomb ripped through a civil hospital in Quetta, in the wake of the arrival of Mr. Bilal Anwar Kanshi's dead body after the target killing of the leader of Balochistan's legal community earlier in the day.¹

Quetta blast brings us face to face with another heinous reminder that Pakistan is facing more than its fair share of security-related challenges, which are perhaps unique only to our case. Existing in a hostile neighborhood, with frayed regional relations, and a raging militancy amidst the larger context of proxy warfare, necessitate an enhanced role for not only the Armed Forces, but for the intelligence agencies who remain our first line of defence against the enemy's nefarious designs, both seen and unseen. We, as citizens of this nation, stand proud of the services rendered in this regard, and duly recognize that in this line of work, recognition for achievements is hard to come by, whereas criticism for failure is easily made.

However, this does not mean that accountability of the intelligence agencies, and criticism directed at them at public fora amount to actions that necessarily damage our national interest. Therefore, Mr. Mehmood Khan Achakzai's question of whether Quetta Attack was an intelligence failure, and if so, his demand that the Premier should initiate accountability of the concerned officers, was certainly not an unreasonable demand.

Unfortunately, it seems that his comments in the National Assembly attracted the wrath of not only the Interior Minister, who categorically stated that such remarks were 'unacceptable',² but also the Prime Minister who stated in his address in the National Assembly on August 10, 2016 that '*intelligence agencies are working day and night to defeat designs of the country's enemies*'.³

This however was not where the reaction stopped. The Election Commission of Pakistan also sought a reply from the Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party's (PMAP) Parliamentary Leader over a disqualification petition filed with the institution against his allegedly anti-Pakistan remarks.⁴

PILDAT believes that the incidence of such terrorist attacks does necessitate robust soul searching and fresh look at the effectiveness of the intelligence agencies, which will not only result in an increased public confidence in them, but will also strengthen them. In fact such accountability, certainly at the Cabinet and at the Parliamentary level, should regularly and institutionally take place for Pakistan to avoid incidents such as the GHQ attack, Mehran base attack, raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Quetta, the APS Peshawar Tragedy, etc., to name a few unfortunate and damning incidents in a series of security-related threats that surround us.

It is not just ironic but reflects a deep institutional malaise in Pakistan that that while military remains in charge, and also wants to be seen to be in-charge⁵ () questions on institutional accountability that come with authority, have not become an established norm until now.

1. For details, please see: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1276183>
2. For details, please see: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1276668>
3. Ibid.
4. For details, please see: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1277700>
5. Consider the COAS chairing a security meeting at the headquarters of the Southern Command on August 08, 2016, in the aftermath of the Quetta Attack, even though Chief Minister of Balochistan, Sardar Sanaulah Zehri, MPA, was also present in the meeting.

In a very pertinent analysis, daily *Dawn*, in its Editorial of August 11, asked the following:

'After more than a decade of near-total control of security policy and a dominant hand in the security arrangements of the province, why is Balochistan's intelligence apparatus unable to detect a plan as sophisticated as the one that unfolded in Quetta on Monday? Surely, it is not unpatriotic to ask if everything possible is being done before deaths occur, and not after'.⁶

Implementation of the National Action Plan: Still a Thorny, Public Issue

The Quetta Attack brought to the fore the latent civil-military friction with regards to the implementation of the National Action Plan, with the contention yet again spilling out into the public, with the Military leadership initiating public criticism of the elected Government.

Although a Press Release was not issued by the ISPR this time around, as on November 10, 2015, major newspapers quoted the COAS as saying '*Unless all prongs deliver meaningfully and all inadequacies are addressed, remnants of terrorism would continue to simmer, and long term peace and stability would remain a distant dream*' in the aftermath of a security meeting held at the GHQ on August 12, 2016.⁷

Incidentally, the GHQ meeting came a day after Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif chaired a meeting in Islamabad, which concluded with formation of a Implementation and Review Committee, to be led by the National Security Advisor, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Nasser Khan Janjua, to oversee implementation on NAP.

PILDAT recognizes that the Elected Government appears to be unable to display the proactive leadership that is particularly required with regards to the implementation of the NAP. For example, there is no clear indication of the progress achieved by the various Committees formed by the Prime Minister to implement the NAP. Additionally, the Federal Government has also not yet brought a comprehensive package to reform Pakistan's justice system, which necessitated the 21st Constitutional Amendment leading to the formation of Military Courts. It is hoped that the latest Implementation and Review Committee formed by the Premier is also not an eyewash measure, but actually leads to meaningful progress.

However, the military leadership has shown an unfortunate inclination to sit publically in judgment of the performance of the Elected Government, which, to say the least, certainly violates the Constitutional and institutional role and space of military. The result is Pakistan has to suffer at the hands of de-facto two parallel national regimes in place, with the military

throwing its weight around as the senior partner reprimanding the elected Government publically at will as and when it pleases. Consider, on the other hand, the irony, that elected Government bears down with full force against even a question of accountability of military led-intelligence agencies against political veterans such as Mr. Achakzai demanding this in the publically mandated Parliament.

Despite this de-facto position, a civilized system would demand that differences in opinion and strategy are tackled inside official fora, in this case most-pertinently the National Security Committee that is very casually bypassed as Prime Minister and COAS meet frequently for one-on-one meetings. Even these official meetings offer an opportunity to be on the same page. One is sympathetic to and demands institutionalization of national security decisions through consultations but one is also compelled to ask what purpose is served, other than unfortunate attempts to humiliate elected leadership, when the military leadership, consistently and rightly proud of serving and maintaining the discipline of a fine national institution, resorts to public criticism instead of working within the system to build and strengthen it?

COAS' Interactions with Foreign Political Leadership

The COAS held the following meetings during the month of August 2016 as a part of his foreign visits:

- i. August 03, 2016: COAS arrived in Urumqi, China, for a daylong visit. Along with meeting Chief of General Staff of the Peoples Liberation Army, Gen. Fang Fenghui, the COAS also met the Party Secretary of the Xinkiang Province, Mr. Zhang Chun Xian.
- ii. August 17-18, 2016: COAS arrived in Malaysia for a two-day visit. Apart from the military leadership, also met the Defence Minister of Malaysia on August 17, 2016.

Apart from these, the GHQ also remained a must-visit, with the following foreign political dignitaries calling on the COAS:

- i. August 05, 2016: Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan, met the COAS at the GHQ.
- ii. August 25, 2016: US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Olson and Commander of [Resolute Support Mission](#) and U.S. Forces Afghanistan General John W. Nicholson called on the COAS at the GHQ.
- iii. August 29, 2016: Saudi Defence Minister and Deputy Crown Prince, (who is commonly referred to as the most powerful person in the contemporary Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) Prince Muhammad bin Salman, called on the COAS at the GHQ.

6. The complete Editorial may be accessed at: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1276686>

10. For details, please see: <http://nation.com.pk/national/13-Aug-2016/sloppy-nap-hurting-gains-against-terror-coas>



The Saudi Defence Minister and Crown Prince calling on the COAS at the GHQ on August 29, 2016.

Apart from this on August 25, 2016, the COAS also called the Afghan President, Dr. Ashraf Ghani, on telephone to express solidarity in the aftermath of the attack on the American University in Kabul the same day.

This brings the tally of COAS' in-country meetings with foreign civilian dignitaries to 77, with 33 foreign visits since his appointment in November 2013.

Premier-COAS Interactions

For the month of August 2016, a total of three meetings took place between the Premier and the COAS, the details of which are as follows:

- i. On August 09, 2016 in a meeting held at the Prime Minister House to review implementation of the National Action Plan.⁸
- ii. On August 11, 2016, during another meeting to review the implementation of the National Action Plan.⁹
- iii. On August 24, 2016, during the third consecutive meeting to review implementation of the National Action Plan, with the Prime Minister announcing the formation of a Implementation and Review Committee of the National Action Plan, with the National Security Advisor as its Convener.¹⁰

In all three meetings, the Federal Minister for Defence, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, MNA was absent, while the National Security Advisor, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Nasser Khan Janjua was present.

8. The Press Release issued by the Prime Minister Office in this regard may be accessed at: http://pmo.gov.pk/press_release_details.php?pr_id=1492

9. The Press Release issued by the Prime Minister Office on the occasion may be accessed at: http://pmo.gov.pk/press_release_details.php?pr_id=1495

10. The Press Release issued by the Prime Minister Office on the occasion may be accessed at: http://pmo.gov.pk/press_release_details.php?pr_id=1512