

## **Police Reform in Pakistan A Victim of Foreign Security Aid?**

*Paul Petzschmann*

### **Abstract:**

My very brief note will provide a survey of recent police reform efforts in Pakistan. Since the beginning of police reform efforts under the Musharraf government, Pakistan has been confronted by a rapidly deteriorating security situation. There are a number of competing explanations for this, not all of which have received the scrutiny they deserve. While 'talibanization' has been the main focus of attention, there are also suggestions that the militarization of policing and the police reforms themselves are partly responsible for a break-down of law and order. These hypotheses deserve further scrutiny.

### **Keywords:**

Pakistan, Police Reform, Security

### **The Institutional Context**

According to the Constitution of Pakistan, Authority over the Police is exercised concurrently by the central government and the four provinces. Yet these constitutional provisions do not fully correspond to reality on the ground. Policing in large swaths of Pakistan, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the Northern Areas, for example, is directed centrally through political agents and other executive figures. In addition, a plethora of military intelligence and para-military policing agencies constitute a parallel structure to the civilian security forces. Overall, these paramilitary forces, such as the Pakistan Rangers and the Frontier Corps are almost equal in number to regular police forces and are frequently deployed on internal security duty, most prominently during the Red Mosque Operation in Islamabad in July 2007 and in the city of Karachi but also in policing parts of Balochistan. These forces have been accused of drawing funding away from the provincial police.

Civilian security forces Pakistan number only about 350.000 for a population estimated at 172 million. This amounts to one police officer per 477 citizens. The strength of 16 million city of Karachi, the commercial hub and notoriously crime-ridden city is only 29.000 police. Lahore, with its 10 million inhabitants only has 25.000 police. Mandated strength is rarely reached, especially in rural areas where much of the crime occurs. Police are frequently used for guard and VIP duty, further diminishing the effectiveness of an already overstretched force. Similarly, the human resource challenges to Pakistan's police force are well-known. Being a

police-officer is a profession with a low status compared to the army or the elite civil services corps, the District Management Group (DMG). Earning only around 8000 Rs a month (100 \$), low-ranking police officers are recruited from the poor and often illiterate sections of society. There is no standardised system of training, hiring, promotion and transfer.

This under-resourcing of the police as an institution and of police officers individually has obvious implications both for the policing as a public service. Firstly, due to shortage of funds it is common practice for the police to charge for their expenses. Allocations for investigations, for example, fall substantially short of actual costs. It is therefore not uncommon for the police to ask plaintiffs to make up the shortfall by, for example, providing money to pay for transportation of officers to and from a crime scene. Needless to say, this severely limits access to police services for the poor. Similarly obvious is the incentive for officers to engage in corruption. Several Transparency International Reports have characterised the police as 'the most corrupt institution in Pakistan.' A recent survey revealed that 59% people had paid bribes to the police.

### **Attempts at Reform**

Since 1947 successive governments have attempted to reform the Police. Under the Musharraf Government a new Police Order replaced colonial legislation and introduced a number of changes to the service. On paper at least, Pakistan has thus become the country with the most progressive police legislation in South Asia. The Police Order 2002 provided for increased parliamentary and judicial accountability, separation of management, human resource and investigative functions as well as civilian oversight of police operations. It provided for the establishment of oversight bodies at the national, provincial and district levels. Public safety commissions and Citizen-Police Liaison Committees (CPLC) were to ensure accountability to and liaison with the general public. Specialist branches were to fulfil the various investigative and operational functions, including research and development, education and training, auditing and accountability. A separate and independent prosecution service was to be created to provide additional checks on the police

Eight years on most of these reform initiatives are regarded as having failed, not least by members of the police services themselves. Several factors are cited as reasons for failure:

Frequent amendments by the Musharraf government in response to political pressures from the provinces saw planned accountability measures watered down. The compositions of the Public Safety Commissions were changed to reflect preferences of government while the plan for independent complaints authorities was dropped entirely.

Lack of political will and of resources meant that seven years after its promulgation most of the new institutions have not been created. Most rural areas have not constituted either public safety commission or CPLCs.

The simultaneous decentralization reforms, introducing elected officials at the local level have multiplied hierarchies and left local police officers more amenable to political interference by politicians.

Politically motivated transfers have removed reform-minded senior officers from their positions. As a result reform efforts have not been institutionalized.

The functional separation of the police service has largely failed due to lack of resources and resistance from inside the police who fear the loss of a 'unity of command' in police stations.

### **The Role of Security Aid**

The organizational disarray resulting from this ambitious attempt at reform could not have come at a worse time. Pakistan was and continues to be a primary focus of the US-led 'war on terror' and an important staging area for the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. The police is not only confronting challenges presented by the lack of funds, equipment, training and organization but also growing extremism, social unrest and crime. Security has deteriorated throughout Pakistan with a spate of bombings, shootings, kidnappings and riots in the major cities. Parallel militias and courts have sprung up in Swat and parts of NWFP. Yet international efforts in the 'war against terror' have tended to regard the fight against extremism in Pakistan in military terms alone. Since 2002 the US has given 10 billion \$ in aid to Pakistan, almost none of which has been devoted to policing. A properly resourced police force with its own mechanisms for gathering and processing intelligence could provide not only a more effective but also a civilian answer to the challenge of extremism in Pakistan. Yet the militarization of security questions in Pakistan have arguably had a deleterious effect on efforts directed at the civilian security forces. Worryingly, there are signs of a donor withdrawal from police reform in Pakistan.

Despite of its intention to promote a withdrawal of the military from politics the economic aid envisaged by the United States as part of the 'Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act', does not signal any fundamental change in towards the role of the police. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), hitherto the largest donor in the area of criminal justice and police reform in Pakistan has refused to further engage in projects targeting the police service. In the future ADB will limit itself to the provision of equipment and infrastructure alone, although human resources management has been recognised as an important bottleneck for transforming the police into a more effective institution. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) recently increased 718 million \$ aid allocation

for Pakistan does not so far include any substantial commitments to policing and police reform. A review of British involvement in Pakistan's police reforms, ongoing since 2006, has, to the author's knowledge, not been concluded.

## Outlook

These developments are worrying at the beginning of what many commentators have characterized as a crucial year for Pakistan's future. The onset of civilian rule in 2008 could have presented an opportunity for freeing the police services from the grip of the military. Yet Police reform has been held hostage by the indecision of the new government, the political deadlock between parties and power-struggles between the centre and the provinces. The Punjab and NWFP are bent on abandoning police reform altogether and re-introducing the colonial-style magistracy system. The reasons cited for this were often concerns about a break-down of law and order as a result of what was regarded the organizational turmoil of recent reforms. Even though many officers agree that reform is needed and that some of the objectives of the reforms remained valid, they resent the opportunities for interference that police reforms, combined with some of the decentralization measures, have afforded to local politicians. The police have become once again pawns in the power struggle between political parties at national, provincial and district levels. In addition, centre-province relationships are set to remain tense and could become the nail in the coffin for the Musharraf-era police reforms and indeed hamper any potential successor reforms.

What remains especially puzzling in light of the great international attention the security situation in Pakistan has received is that the reasons for the failure of reform and the situation of the police services on the whole have received little attention. For obvious reasons, no institution in Pakistan has received as much scholarly focus as the army. Recent years have seen yet more publications on an institution that continues to set the parameters for Pakistan's politics, even in times of civilian rule.<sup>1</sup> While the development of civil-military relations is of great significance, the specific role of the police in this equation has been largely neglected. There is little research on its historical development as an institution and its actual operation. The accusation that attempted police reforms and the further 'militarization' of security questions are themselves responsible for a break-down in law and order should give pause for thought. They should stimulate further questions about the relative merits of and trade-offs between military and civilian security sector reform as well as inquiries into the rationale for donor interventions

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<sup>1</sup>Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords. Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008. Mazhar Aziz, *Military Control in Pakistan. The Parallel State*. London: Routledge, 2008.

in this area. It is hoped that current and future contributors to the *Pakistan Journal of Criminology* will continue to address some of them and in this way stimulate a public debate about what 'security' means in the present context and what role the police can and should play in providing it.

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Paul Petzschmann is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) where he is part of a working group on Pakistan and the region. He is mainly interested in civilian security sector reform and is pursuing a project on policing in Pakistan funded by the Norwegian National Research Council.