

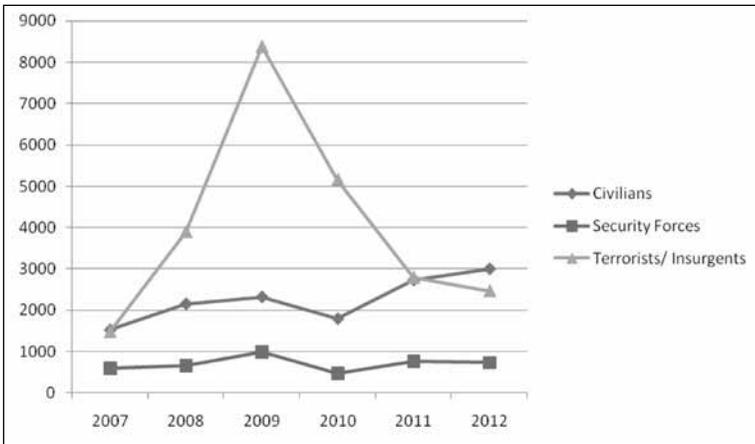
PAKISTAN 2012: An Analysis of Internal Conflict

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The year 2012 remained tumultuous for Pakistan with scores of violent incidents occurring throughout the country as a result of ongoing sectarian and ethnic conflict and raging insurgencies. The year has also seen the Pakistani society become further radicalised. Pakistani think-tanks state that violence levels are showing a downward trend from 2010 levels. This may be true when viewed in the context of the total number of incidents which have occurred in 2011 and 2012. However, when we consider the casualty figures suffered by the security forces, they appear to be remarkably constant for the period 2007–2012. This indicates a worrying trend for the country. Also, civilian casualties have been consistently rising since 2007, except for a slight dip in 2010. The diagram opposite is self-explanatory with respect to the above.

A total of 1,577 terrorist attacks, carried out by militants, nationalist insurgents and violent sectarian groups, claimed the lives of 2,050 people and injured another 3,822 across Pakistan in 2012. If casualties in terrorist attacks, operations by the security forces and their clashes with militants, ethno-political violence, drone attacks, inter-tribal and inter-militant clashes, sectarian clashes, religious/communal violence, cross-border attacks and clashes, criminal gangs' clashes with one another and security forces are counted, the overall figure in 2012 was 5,047 people killed and 5,688 injured in 2,217 attacks and clashes.

The increase in civilian casualties in 2012 could be attributed to mass terror attacks and to sectarian violence which has claimed hundreds of lives. Crime and general lawlessness also added to the substantial number of fatalities inflicted by inflamed sectarian passions, especially in Karachi and interior Sindh.



Sectarian Conflict

Sectarian violence continues to remain a critical threat to Pakistan’s internal security and stability. Despite repeated government bans, sectarian groups were visibly becoming more active and defiant across the country, particularly in Karachi, Quetta and South Punjab. Some of them including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) exhibited strong ideological and operational nexus with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Al-Qaeda. The TTP also claimed responsibility for many attacks on the Shia community in 2012. The number of sectarian-related terrorist attacks and clashes increased phenomenally in 2012, compared to 2011. Members of the Hazara Shia community bore the brunt of frequent targeted killings in Baluchistan throughout 2012, mainly by the banned LeJ.

The genesis of the sectarian conflict in the country can be traced to the question ‘Who is a Muslim’ which has plagued Pakistan since its inception. The persecution of the Ahmadiyya on their being branded non-Muslim is now being extended to the Shia community. In this conflict to assume control of the Muslim identity, external factors too have played a significant role. The success of the Islamic revolution in Iran lent a fillip to Shia interests in Pakistan, while Saudi Arabia supported Sunni groups through massive funding and ideological backing.

Apart from nexuses among militants, it is also important not to ignore the political dynamics of sectarian violence in Pakistan. Many of the banned sectarian organisations have political outfits and take part in electoral politics, whether with different names and independent candidates or through alliances with mainstream political parties. Religious education in Pakistan is also divided

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along sectarian lines. There are five religious education boards (Wafaqul Madaaris) catering to educational needs of Bareilvi, Ahle Hadith, Deobandi, Shia and Jamaat-e-Islami madrassas.

Sectarian-oriented curricula and publications of madrassas are considered a key factor in the promotion of sectarianism in Pakistan. The administrative side of the problem, or how local administrations deal with issues involving different sectarian groups, such as disputes over mosques, routes for Ashura and Eid Milad-un-Nabi processions, allotments of plots for religious purposes, etc also have their role to play in either fomenting or controlling such discord especially when it spills on to the streets.

Ethnic Conflict

The highest number of terrorist attacks as manifestations of ethnic conflagration in the year for any region in Pakistan occurred in Baluchistan. As many as 474 terrorist attacks killed 631 people and injured 1,032 others in different parts of Baluchistan in 2012. About 79 percent of these attacks were carried out by Baluch insurgent groups mainly Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), Baluch Republican Army (BRA) and Baluchistan Liberation Front (BLF).

Ethnic unrest in Pakistan has been witnessed primarily in Baluchistan and Sindh, which is already an ethnic battleground among the Sindhis, Muhajirs, Pakhtuns and Punjabis. Ethnic issues have assumed economic and political aspects as well, with the Baluch even resorting to an armed insurgency aimed at achieving independence from Pakistan.

In 2012, the incumbent government tried political options to resolve the Baluchistan conflict by giving concessions to Baluchistan in the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, announcing a special 'rights' package for the province and introducing some clauses of the 18th Constitutional Amendment that envisage addressing the issues of Baluchistan. However, widespread concerns about the implementation side of these initiatives including the issues of insecurity, absence of good governance, civil bureaucracy's relations with democratic governments, province-centre relations, and economic recession etc still remain.

During the entire year, there were no imminent signs of a halt in the Baluch insurgency. Rising sectarian violence and Taliban attacks further added to insecurity in Baluchistan. This indicates that much remains to be done to stem the rising tides of violence. Comparing the operational strength and capabilities of the Baluch insurgents, militants and violent sectarian groups operating in Baluchistan with the security forces and law enforcement agencies including the FC, police, levies and Baluchistan Constabulary, it is apparent that the latter continues to lack in terms of training, equipment and resources in order to maintain law and order in the province. This accounted for casualties being incurred by them while dealing with the insurgents, while also allowing a greater impunity on part of the insurgents to attack and inflict losses on the people in general.

Insurgency

The same needs to be said for the various arms of the security forces deployed in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in 2012. Terrorist casualties had increased in the years that the army had conducted operations, and began to fall as the frequency of operations ceased. This trend was observed in 2012 also. The Pakistani Taliban, who shot to prominence after the formation of the TTP in December 2007, continued their attempts at intimidating the Pakistani forces to refrain from resorting to military operations through their wanton acts of terror, mostly through suicide bombings. The *raison d'être* behind the very birth of the TTP had always been related to this concept of practicing combined warfare by different groups so as to put pressure on the army, which would be conducting operations in one agency, to reinforce defences elsewhere.

The security forces have suffered their share of fatalities because they have largely been under-equipped, ill-armed and also because they are often the calculated target of reprisal killings. Kidnappings, beheadings and deliberate attacks on the members of the army, paramilitary and police have become rife in FATA and KPK, which have attained notoriety as Pakistan's badlands. Such tactics have served to create an atmosphere of fear and terror in general, besides serving as a retort to the counterinsurgency (CI) operations being carried out in those areas.

In 2012 also, no comprehensive strategy regarding the effective and decisive way to deal with the insurgency could be adopted. Of note however, was the Army Chief's speech on Pakistan's Independence Day and passing of the 'Fair Trial' Bill

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by the National Assembly that constituted some of the positive responses to counterterrorism in 2012.

Outlook 2013

Domestic fatalities have continued unabated in the first months of 2013. Death tolls have markedly increased. Since January 1, over 620 Pakistani civilians have died — an average of almost 13 per day. More civilians have lost their lives to domestic violence in January 2013 than in January 2011 and 2012 combined. According to *Dawn*, if current death rates continue, 7,036 Pakistanis will die from violent domestic causes this year — over twice that of last year.

Law enforcement agencies look incapable and ill-equipped to address this persistent predicament, plagued as they are by dozens of other problems. Simultaneously, the political leadership maintains its apathy as ever to find and implement the solution to the deteriorating situation of state security. The sustained violence in Karachi itself has raised fears for elections due by the end of May this year which will mark the first democratically elected transition of power ever in the country, dominated for decades by military rulers. A February 2 editorial in *Dawn* surmised that, “it seems that the state does not have the intention or motivation to lift the lid off Karachi’s boiling cauldron of violence and identify the problems.” The rising trends in violence and the wilful resort to it by any and (almost) everyone wishing to flaunt power and status in the various scenarios that characterise the socio-religious, political and security aspects of Pakistan, coupled with the ready availability of weapons and fighters for the cause, is increasingly leading to the belief that that the methods adopted by such groups to show their power before the elections, and thereby woo, coerce or cow voters, will inseparably involve the barrel of a gun.

The attitude of Pakistan's government and opposition in implementing key reforms to the electoral commission to cement the transition to democracy appears reluctant. The ruling Pakistan People's Party and its main parliamentary opposition, Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League, are farthest from putting aside their political differences and focusing on preventing a perennially intrusive military from disrupting democratic life. An increasingly interventionist judiciary is being largely viewed as bent upon destabilising the political order and opinions

are rising that it must not be allowed to undermine the country's chance for its first peaceful transfer of power from one elected government to another through a credible election.

As regards the provinces, although Baluch nationalists' demands have only been partially addressed in the political measures of the present government, effective and judicious implementation of the 7th NFC Award, the Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Baluchistan package, and the 18th Constitutional Amendment can help reduce the nationalists' anti-federation sentiments and pave way for political reconciliation.

The security forces in FATA need to be better trained and equipped to handle the peculiar nature of the insurgency in FATA which overtime has come to incorporate the various complexities that characterise the social and political landscape of the region. Bitter inter-rivalries among various Pashtun tribes, the alliances of various such tribes with militant groups or their opposition to them, *jirgas*, anti-insurgent *lashkars* raised by the tribes and the sectarian strains of the conflict which are also manifesting virulently need to be firmly addressed by the governments in both KPK and Islamabad. The dynamics of the TTP under the Mehsud leadership as well as other key actors like the Haqqani network and the factions led by the late Maulvi Nazir and Hafiz Gul Bahadur need to be factored in both the government's policy making and CI operations. More importantly, Islamabad needs to clear its mind regarding the exact nature of the relationship it maintains or seeks to maintain with these groups vis-à-vis its perceived interests in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's humanitarian crises caused by three successive years of devastating floods have threatened the lives of millions, which has added to the hundreds of thousands more who have been evicted due to military operations (one tactic adopted by the Pakistani army to minimise collateral damage during CI operations is to vacate entire villages and then commence artillery shelling) and militancy. These challenges have given Pakistan's radical Islamist groups opportunities to recruit and have increased the potential for conflict. Much effort is needed in 2013 to build the federal and provincial governments' disaster and early recovery response, besides a redefinition of their approach to militancy and the wanton use of violence by groups of any affiliation in general. The last appears harder in the present scenario where the ruling coalition will have its electoral interests in mind, perhaps at the cost of national interests. The year 2013 therefore bodes ill for Pakistan, as the trend in violence is less likely to spiral

downwards with an increase in sectarian bloodshed and militant acts especially in FATA and KPK, with the government not acting as a deterrent, but a bystander.

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