



MONITOR

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The Lahore Attack and Subsequent Punjab Operation

The terrorist attack on Lahore's Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park on Sunday, March 27, 2016, resulted in the loss of 76 innocent lives. The heinous crime is yet another indication of the momentous task facing Pakistan to completely eradicate terrorism, along with the fact that this is a generational struggle in which every segment of the State, Government and Society will have to play its part.

Even while Pakistan fights this complex war, and in the process it has to make difficult choices such as limiting civil liberties at times, it must not forsake the principle of maintaining the rule of law. The response to the Lahore Attack, under which a series of Military-led operations were conducted across Punjab, has apparently raised confusion and perhaps compromised the Constitutional requirements of rule of law and supremacy of the elected Government.

The impression of a disjointed response by the elected Government and the Military leadership to the Lahore Attack not only contributes to the confusion in the aftermath of such tragedies, but also undermines the cause of eradicating terrorism. This has created the dangerous impression at a critical time that the elected Government that holds executive power is not really in-charge and that the operations against the terrorists are not under a unified system led by the elected leadership. This was the impression presented in a number of media commentaries at that time.

The following key points may be considered in this regard:

1. In the aftermath of the attack, it seems as if there are two parallel national security regimes that are operational in the country. Through March 27-28, 2016, the Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, and the Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Raheel Sharif held two separate meetings each. The ones led by the Prime Minister saw the absence of any representation of the Military leadership, and vice-versa.¹



The Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, MNA addressing the nation from the Prime Minister House on May 28, 2016 in the aftermath of the Lahore terror attack

1. **First Meeting held by the Prime Minister:** On Sunday, March 27, 2016; 'Meeting lasted for four hours'. Meeting also attended by Federal Minister of Interior, Chaudhary Nisar Ali Khan, MNA, and Federal Minister of Finance, Revenue and Privatisation, Senator Ishaq Dar. For details, please see: http://pmo.gov.pk/press_release_details.php?pr_id=1397

Second Meeting held by the Prime Minister: On the morning of Monday, March 28, 2016 at Lahore; on the occasion, the Prime Minister stated that 'I want more proactive coordination between Law Enforcement and Intelligence agencies. Provinces should speed up intelligence-based operations against terrorists'. The meeting was also attended by the Chief Minister of Punjab, Mr. Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, MPA; Federal Minister for Interior, Chaudhary Nisar Ali Khan, MNA; Provincial Minister for Law, Rana Sanaullah, MPA; DG IB; Chief Secretary, Punjab; Home Secretary, Punjab; IG Punjab and other senior Government officials.

For details, please see: http://www.pmo.gov.pk/news_details.php?news_id=511

First Meeting held by the Chief of Army Staff: On Sunday, March 27, 2016; 'COAS directed concerned comds and Int agencies to commence operation'. Meeting also attended by DG ISI & DG MI. For details, please see: <http://www.geo.tv/latest/103005-Army-Chief-orders-action-against-culprits-of-Lahore-suicide-attack>

Second Meeting held by the Chief of Army Staff: On the morning of Monday, March 28, 2016 at the GHQ; 5 Operations carried out in Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan. After the meeting, the news started making rounds that the COAS had emphasized that no 'joint action' will be conducted, as in the past, with the police and the provincial intelligence agencies.



The Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, MNA chairing a meeting to review strategy after the Lahore terror attack in Lahore on March 28, 2016

2. Based on the facts leading up to the operation and since the launch of the operation, there is a persistent and widespread impression that the Military-led operations in Punjab have not been undertaken after consultation with the elected leadership, and were unilaterally ordered by the Army.² Further credence is given to this impression by the tweets issued by the DG ISPR, Lt. Gen. Asim Saleem Bajwa, on March 27, 2016, stating that the '*COAS directed concerned comds [commanders] & Int [Intelligence] agencies to commence ops [operations] asap [as soon as possible] to find linkages and perpetrators of the Lhr [Lahore] suicide attack*'.³
3. Further signs of a disjointed approach, and perhaps the Military leadership unilaterally undertaking the operations, reside in the inability of the representatives of the Federal Government and the Provincial Government of the Punjab to effectively negate the reports of a Military-led action.⁴ Even the Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, only referred to platitudes such as continuing the war against terrorism till its logical conclusion during his address to the nation of March 28, 2016, without referring to the operations undertaken in Punjab. The DG ISPR on the other hand, has not chosen to mince any words by saying that '*operations are being carried out in Punjab; operations have already begun...Intelligence agencies, along with army troops are carrying out the operation*'. The one thing that remains common across the responses given by civil-military leadership is that the oblique justification of the operations is given in the National Action Plan.
4. Although NAP was referred to while justifying the Military-led operation,⁵ an overview of the NAP shows that it only states that '*there will be zero tolerance for militancy in Punjab*', which in no way automatically sanctifies the Military-led operations in Punjab.

2. For details, please consider the following news headlines:

- i. [Army Chief orders counter-terrorism operations in Punjab](#), The Express Tribune, March 29, 2016
- ii. [Army kicks off Punjab-wide operation against militants](#), Samaa News, March 28, 2016
- iii. [Military gives go ahead for Punjab Operation after Lahore Carnage](#), Dawn, March 28, 2016
- iv. [Did Army Chief consult PM on Punjab Operation?](#) The News, March 29, 2016

3. The concerned tweet issued by the DG ISPR at 11:29PM on March 27, 2016 can be accessed at:
<https://twitter.com/AsimBajwaISPR/status/714157312982847488>

4. The line toed revolved around describing the procedure in undertaking such operations, where the Provincial Government takes stock of the threat, and orders either the police, the paramilitary forces, or the Army to take action on a case-to-case basis.

5. Article 147 of the Constitution (Powers of the Provinces to Entrust Functions on the Federation); Article 245 of the Constitution (Requisitioning of the Armed Forces in Aid of Civil Power); Section 2 & 3 of the Protection of Pakistan Act, 2014; Section 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 (Calling in of Armed Forces and Civil Armed Forces to prevent terrorism), and Article 11EEEE (Special Powers of Detainment and Formation of JIT) of the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act, 2014



The Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Heritage, Senator Pervaiz Rashid and the Director General of the Inter-Services Public Relations, Lt. Gen. Asim Saleem Bajwa conducting a Press Conference on the capture of RAW Agent Kulbhushan Yadav in the Press Information Department, Islamabad on March 27, 2016

5. Even if Military-led operations had to be undertaken, why was the constitutionally prescribed procedure of requisitioning of Armed Forces and Civilian Armed Forces not followed, as is being done in Sindh, for instance?
6. Why was the meeting of the National Security Committee (NSC), '*the principal decision-making body on matters of national security*', not convened after the attack, to decide upon a coordinated approach?

The supremacy of rule of law and constitutional requirements should not be compromised in our fight to eliminate terrorism from our homeland. The erosion of the rule of law in the past has been at least partially responsible for the rise of such outlaws as the terrorists and we should be under no illusion that terrorism can be effectively combated with a weak rule of law.