

General

A Round-table discussion on “Pakistan Army’s Counter-Insurgency Experience in NWFP–Pakhtoonkhwa and FATA” was held at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) on 15 March 2011. Mr. Shuja Nawaz, Director, South Asia Centre, Atlantic Council, Washington D.C., spoke on the subject. Lt Gen RK Sawhney, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) was the discussant. The session was chaired by Amb G Parthasarathy.

Opening Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Additional Director CLAWS

The Pakistan Army had been involved in ensuring internal security and stability from the very beginning, though its greater involvement grew during the East Pakistan crisis. It had been involved in tackling insurgency in Baluchistan. Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa and FATA have been facing challenges of insurgency which are serious in nature. Pakistan has been suffering from numerous problems. The fissiparous tendencies that exist in Pakistan have posed a serious challenge to its security.

Amb G Parthasarathy

Pakistan has been facing numerous challenges and insurgency is one of the prominent ones among them. Pakistan has launched counter-insurgency operations in FATA and other regions. The army operations in Lal Masjid and the Swat Valley have had wide ramifications. A large number of women were killed during the army operation of the Lal Masjid where they were enrolled for study. The killings of women have had wide ramifications on internal security. Domestic political situation in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa is fragile. The Haqqani group is involved in fomenting violence in Afghanistan. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a source of concern for Pakistan. Taliban was considered as an ‘asset’ by the Pakistan Army but this group has turned against the state and created security challenges for it. Taliban continues to act against the interest of the army and Pakistan. It is conceived that India has created water problem for Pakistan. It is not true. Indeed, India never violated Indus Water Treaty even during the wars.

Mr Shuja Nawaz

There is a nexus between counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism. FATA and the Swat Valley problems have created serious security challenges for Pakistan. There is growing realisation in the army that the main enemy is within Pakistan. The Pakistan Army has brought changes in its orientation, motivation, thinking and strategy in the last two years to meet these challenges. In fact the Pakistan Army primarily concentrates on tackling the internal problems, while maintaining a defensive posture on its eastern border. There is a major shift in the Pakistan Army’s thinking and it is a real change. The Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) has introduced changes in true sense and its

orientation, thinking and strategy have changed from being primarily India-centric to fighting internal militancy and insurgency. Similar changes have occurred in the Infantry School, the Staff College and National Defence University. In the last two years, every division of the Pakistan Army has created a training site to prepare for operations inside FATA. The Pakistan Army is well-equipped with conventional arms and is able to deal with conventional conflict more easily. Increasingly, it is becoming prepared for low intensity conflict inside its own borders.

Pakistan requested the US for supply of helicopters but the response was much less than expected. The US has only provided a limited number of helicopters to Pakistan since 2001. There is a large presence of NATO/ISAF forces in Afghanistan supported by large helicopter fleets. The Pakistan Army has launched six major and some minor operations against the insurgents and terrorists. In fact, the army operations against the insurgents and terrorists have destroyed the civil-military relationship. The last major operation was Rah-e Nejat in South Waziristan that started on 10 October 2009. Pakistan's government allowed militants to introduce Shariat Mohammadi in the Swat Valley in February 2009. This compounded the problems and only after public opinion rose against the excesses of the militants did the army move against them. The Pakistan Army knows about the existence of the terrorist sanctuaries, which pose a threat to its security. As far as the Pakistani forces are concerned, there are 5,000 troops in South Waziristan and 35,000 plus troops in North Waziristan. The Pakistan Army destroyed infrastructure in the Swat Valley during the operations that needs to be rebuilt. It is a fact that collateral damage took place during the operations in the form of destroyed infrastructure as well as displaced civilian populations. The Pakistan Army used heavy ground and air weapons during the operations because it had identified the targets. Insurgents and terrorists had hidden in fortified bunkers. Various agencies and NGOs are now involved in rebuilding the areas where military operations were carried out. FATA and North Waziristan require constant attention. In North Waziristan and elsewhere in FATA (especially Kurram agency), there is evidence of collaboration between the Punjabi Taliban and the Afghan Taliban.

Gen Ashfaq Pervez Kayani has laid emphasis on professionalism in the army. The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was an immediate cause of terrorism. The creation of the buffer area is the root cause of terrorism and insurgency. Moreover, structural weakness is also an important cause of terrorism.

The Pakistan Army knows the capability of the Indian Army but does not know its intentions. Pakistan continues to fear India because of its size, huge forces, military capability, and economic strength and most of all the deployment of Indian forces near Pakistan's eastern border. India has military capability and economic power. India and Pakistan need to move troops away from the border as a confidence building measure. The water issue between India and Pakistan should be resolved amicably. Pakistan

needs water, especially in the border regions. India can help build confidence in the Indo-Pak relationship by showing “strategic altruism”.

Lt Gen RK Sawhney, PVSM, AVSM (Retd)

FATA is undeveloped, deprived and exploited. This region has been exploited by the successive regimes and as a result problems exist. Pakistan’s eastern border is also undeveloped. The Frontier Corps is one of the important security agencies of Pakistan. However, it is not led by efficient officers. There is no quick solution to the insurgency. The Pakistan Army used lethal weapons against the insurgents and terrorists in the FATA, the Swat Valley and Baluchistan. In fact, it is difficult to distinguish between the insurgents and terrorists. There is coordination among the forces during operations against the insurgents and terrorists.

Discussion

Study is required for understanding the socio-economic situation across the border. The problems in the border areas are closely linked with one another. It is necessary to study the genesis of insurgency in FATA and other regions. Indeed, it requires deep study and analysis of the root causes of the insurgency. It seems that there is an anti-American faction in the army. Yet, there is collaboration between the Pakistan Army and the US forces over Afghanistan. Civil-military relationship is rather weak in Pakistan. Population displacement during operations has adverse impact on internal security. It is also one of the causes of terrorism in Pakistan. Internal disturbances, strife and social tension continue to exist in Pakistan. The Pakistan Army is now not drawing its personnel only from a few regions such as the Punjab but has enlarged its recruitment areas. The enlarged recruitment bases will have an adverse impact on the Pakistan Army. It appears that there is a generational shift in the army. India and Pakistan should start army-to-army contacts as a confidence building measure. The Pakistan Army should change its attitude towards India and vice versa. It is possible but will take time. Gen Kayani is laying emphasis on professionalism in the army. Pakistan needs to look beyond the Pakhtoon issue and think differently about the Taliban and Afghanistan as a whole.

(Report Compiled by Dr Shah Alam, Research Fellow, CLAWS)