# An Appraisal of Pakistan's Legislative Response to Counter Terrorism after 9/11 from Human Rights Perspectives

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#### Abstract

Counter terrorism laws must respect fundamental human rights and freedoms because countering terrorism and respecting human rights are complementary to each other and not contradictory. However, like some other states, Pakistan's counter terrorism legislative response indicates an opposite phenomenon. After every major terrorist event Pakistan, disregarding the human rights values, made its laws more stringent and for this purpose it adopted a novel model than criminal justice system model to counter terrorism. However, the analysis of Pakistan's counter terrorism laws suggests this approach to be counterproductive.

Keywords: Terrorism, Law, Human Rights, Pakistan

### Introduction

The problem of terrorism is not a new one. A number of States have been facing terrorism and the United Nations always had to deal with it. The UN General Assembly Resolution 3034 (XXVII) of 1972 expressed deep concerns "over the acts of international terrorism" occurring with increased frequency (Concolino, 2007). However the 9/11 attacks, historically important not only because of its scale but also by the choice of innocent victims, has changed the world dramatically and it was argued that nothing would be the same as were before September, 2001 (Chomsky, 2002). On the eve of 9/11 attacks, terrorism was subject to criminal penalties under domestic law and international conventions, however, after 9/11 a bitter debate started as to the legal status of its perpetrator, the legal regime for bringing to justice those who were responsible for it and the required legal means to counter further terrorist attacks. The question was raised that whether the 9/11 attacks were an act

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of war? A crime? A hybrid of both which could not be dealt with by the existent law? (Kamolnick, 2011)

United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on 12 September, 2001 to condemn the 9/11 terrorist attacks and for bringing to justice the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors, called for international cooperation (GA Res., 2001). Following the suit, the United Nations Security Council also asked all the States to work jointly in order to bring to justice the culprits, abettors and sponsors of the crimes committed (Res.1368, 2001). Shortly after, another resolution was adopted by Security Council in its 4385th meeting which required all the States to work together for preventing and suppressing terrorist acts by implementing the international conventions relating to terrorism (Res. 1373, 2001). Security Council established a Counter-Terrorism Committee to monitor the implementation of the resolution.

While adopting counter terrorism policies, in accordance with UN General Assembly and Security Council's resolutions, member States faced a complicated issue i.e. to provide a sufficient equilibrium between preventing and punishing terrorism on one hand and the protection and respect of human rights on the other (Rehman, 2010). The United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy adopted by member States in September 2006, stated that protection of human rights for all and the rule of law is the fundamental ingredient of anti terrorism strategy. It also recognized that effective anti terrorism measures and protection of human rights are not contradictory goals but complementary and mutually reinforcing (Res 60/288, 2006). But, the measures adopted by the states to counter terrorism themselves posed serious threats to human rights and rule of law which prove to be counterproductive to anti terrorism efforts both at national and international levels (OHCHR). The study focuses on the anti terrorism legislative response of Islamic Republic of Pakistan; not only because the global war on terror, after 9/11 has moved to its streets and cities (Awan, 2013) but also it is an appropriate case study when one analyses anti terrorism policy as Pakistan's history is rife with policies to combat terrorism in different shapes. In response to different terror and violent movements, it was argued, State of Pakistan needed latitude from the normal legal procedure (Kennedy, The Creation and Development of Pakistan's Anti-terrorism Regime.

1997-2002). Pakistan's governmental machinery acquired increased power to combat terrorism but only at the cost of human rights and in disregard of various UN General Assembly and Security Council's Resolutions and other international legal instruments.

#### What is Terrorism?

Confusion among policymakers and academia as how to define the terrorism has been a recognized fact. There was always a need to reach to a universally or generally agreed upon definition of terrorism, however, the 9/11 attacks intensified this need. A common and overwhelming obstruction to an agreed upon definition has been the subjective application of the term according to where the interest of those who define it lies. For example 'terrorism' has been referred to protestors in Tunisia, Thailand and Libya, to US invasion on Iraq, to US drone attacks in Pakistan, to Syrian rebels overthrowing the government, to Syrian government's retaliation against the rebels, and to Wikileaks founder, Julian Annsange. United Nations General Assembly has been struggling to adopt Comprehensive Convention against Terrorism but the lack of consensus among the member states on the definition of terrorism is an obstacle in its adoption ((OHCHR)). The lack of generally agreed upon definition has left vacuum for states to define terrorism in way that fulfill their political and strategic interests and counterterrorism policies are shaped accordingly (Richards, 2014) which renders the war against terrorism "selective, incomplete and ineffective" (Zeidan, 2004). From legal point of view, the powers of the state may go beyond limits, if the terrorism is not clearly defined (George, 2004), hence, posing challenges to human rights.

### How is terrorism defined in Pakistani Law?

Sec. 6 of the Anti Terrorism Act, 1997 defines terrorism so broadly as to include any act of violence or its abetment (Kennedy, The Creation and Development of Pakistan's Anti-terrorism Regime, 1997-2002) and is seen as blanket cover available to the government of the day (Shabana, 2008) to call anyone terrorist and try him in special court. In 1999 the government in quest of powers introduced a new offence as an act of terrorism by the name 'civil commotion' by amending section 7 of ATA, 1997 which included, amongst other, the labor strike, go-slow and lock out, etc which had

nothing to do with terrorism but through which, according to Senator Aitzaz Ahsan, government wanted to suppress all the expression of opposition.

Consequence of having such wider and unequivocal definition of terrorism is that it is for the government, rather than law courts, to determine that whether a particular activity falls under the ambit of terrorism, and by doing so the government may try innocent civilian under special and stringent procedure in which they do not have the protections available to them under the normal criminal justice system. Otherwise, if the strategic interests demand, the government may label the terrorists as criminal and gangsters not to be tried under terrorism laws. This scenario worsens in the countries like Pakistan where political interference in police and law enforcement agencies is a routine business. For example, on one hand commander of Punjabi Taliban seems to have been granted amnesty hence not to be tried in military courts after his announcement to abandon militancy although he was involved in more than a dozen terrorist attacks (Mir, 2015) while on the other hand, Imran Khan and Tahir-Ul- Oadri, the leaders of different political parties were charged under Anti- Terrorism Act when they staged political protests in Islamabad in 2014. In December 2014 there were 130 cases pending in Anti Terrorism Courts in twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi out of which according to court officials only 20 cases were relating to actual incidents of terrorism. The rest of the cases were related to crimes such as kidnapping, aerial firing, mishandling of government officials (Asad, 2014).

# **Legislative Response to Counter Terrorism**

The 9//11 attacks drastically changed the counter terrorism policy of Pakistan. Musharraf government was asked to comply with US "interpretations of causes of, and remedies against" terrorism and he "bowed" to the pressure (Kennedy, The Creation and Development of Pakistan's Anti-Terror Regime, 1997-2002). Pakistan joined the Global War on Terror and thus had to change its anti-terrorism laws accordingly. Before the 9/11, Pakistan mainly relied on Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) of 1997 which had replaced the Suppression of Terrorist Activities (Special Courts) Act of 1975. ATA aimed at prevention of terrorism and sectarian violence and

providing for "speedy trials of heinous offences," for which it established special anti-terrorist courts with a rigid time-frame to adjudicate the terrorism related cases. Musharraf government increased the number of anti-terrorism courts in country to cope with the increasing incidents of terrorism \_ by the end of October, 2001 there were 41 anti-terrorism courts in length and breadth of Pakistan. Anti-Terrorism Amendment Ordinance, 2001 inserted section 21-H in ATA which, contrary to the principles of criminal justice, permitted extra judicial confession as admissible evidence before the Anti-Terrorism Courts. The government amended the ATA which introduced military personnel not below the rank of Lieutenant Colonel as one of the three members of Anti-Terrorism Court which were to function till November 30, 2002 (Ahmed, 2015). Although the amendment was introduced on the pretext that the existing Anti-Terrorism Courts were not delivering the results, the amendment was strongly agitated by human rights activists and Supreme Court Bar Council which was of the opinion that the it violates the Liaquat Hussain's judgment wherein Supreme Court of Pakistan held that trial of civilians by military courts as unconstitutional (DAWN, DAWN, 2002). As the law and order situation in the country could not be controlled and lifeline of the reconstituted ATCs was near to end government further amended the ATA in November 2002. The amended law authorized the government to put the name of persons and organizations suspected to be involved in terrorism on fourth schedule. The person and organizations whose names were put to the schedule were required to submit a bond or security of good behavior failure of which entailed detention.

In response to escalating terrorism in the country ATA was further amended in January 2005 which enhanced the punishments for different offences falling under the definition of terrorism. The maximum punishment for directing, from within the country or abroad, terrorism activities were enhanced from seven years of imprisonment to life imprisonment. Abduction and kidnapping for ransom, amongst other offences, were also brought under the jurisdiction of Anti-Terrorism Court, though there seems no reason why such offences could not be tried in ordinary courts functioning

<sup>5</sup> Preamble of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997

under criminal justice system of the state. The Act also empowered the government to impound the passport of the persons who are accused, not convicted, of offences under ATA.

ATA was amended in 2009 in response to militants occupation of South Waziristan and Swat and establishing their own judicial set ups and FM Radio stations for propaganda purposes. The amendment further widened the definition of terrorism as to include, inter se, preaching and disseminating of beliefs on FM radio stations without the approval of government as well as the 'award of punishment by any organization or individual' not recognized by law. By amending section 21-H of ATA the amendment made the extra judicial confession permissible evidence. Similarly deviating from the principles of criminal justice system and human rights values section 27-A as inserted by the Ordinance in ATA shifted burden of proof to the accused to prove his innocence.

As the law and order situation continued to worsen military operations were started in Swat and FATA in 2009. Legal cover to the military operation was given through the promulgation of the Action (in Aid of Civil Power) Regulation, 2011 which came into effect from February, 2008, giving a retrospective protection to the actions of armed forces and security agencies. The Regulations gave armed forces wide powers; according to section 11, a suspect can be interned "till the continuation of actions in aid of civil power," section 12 provides that internment shall not affect the criminal liability of the person interned, according to section 19(2) statement or deposition of any member of the armed forces before the court shall be sufficient for convicting the accused. Section 14 provides for Human Rights and Oversight Board to be comprised of two civilians and two military officers which is authorized to take notice of any complaint or information of torture or degrading treatment of person interned and to carry out inquiry in the matter and recommend suitable departmental actions against concern official. However, there is no practical example of any inquiry or action against any official despite of innumerable of news in the media of alleged torture and degrading treatment.

The terrorist organizations have become very sophisticated and use modern tools of communications for terrorist activities which could not be dealt with by the existing laws. So the government enacted the Investigation for Fair Trial Act, 2013 which provides for "collection of evidence by means of modern techniques and devices." The Act authorized law enforcement agencies to make video recording of any event, place or person suspected of terrorism; to intercept telephonic communications, SMS, emails, and covert surveillance, etc (section 16) for which a warrant from a judge of High Court is to be obtained. Section 23 of the Act renders the information or material admissible evidence before the court which otherwise would be heresy evidence under the criminal justice system. The Act cannot be considered a good omen for fundamental rights such as right to private and family life, freedom of expression and freedom of movement, etc.

The government amended the ATA in 2013 to incorporate the recommendations of Financial Action Task Force (Uzair, 2016). After the amendment section 110 empowered the government to freeze, seize or detain any property or money of any organization or person suspected to be involved in terrorism or financing of terrorism. It also extended the definition of terrorism in section 6 so as to include attacks on foreign government, or population or international organizations. Terrorism The Anti Amendment) Act, 2013 further extended the definition of terrorism as to include intimidating and terrorizing the public, social sectors, media persons, business community, etc. It also made it an offence to glorify terrorists or terrorist activities by any means of communication.7

Another important development in 2013 was the passage of National Counter Terrorism Authority Act (NACTA) which gave a legal status to NACTA, an authority established administratively in 2009. NACTA was established with the purpose to unify state response to the growing terrorism by "planning, combining, coordinating and implementing government's policy through an exhaustive strategic planning"8 and, inter se, "to receive and collate data or information or intelligence, and disseminate and coordinate between all relevant stake holders to formulate threat assessment."9 However, it has been dormant and formulated no policy till date. Against its current 300 posts only 57 are working and its

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Preamble of the Investigation for Fair Trial Act, 2013

<sup>7</sup> Section 11-W as amended

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Preamble of National Counter Terrorism Authority Act, 2013

<sup>9</sup> Section 4 of the Act, ibid

coordinator has been changed five times just in two years duration (Kamran, 2015).

Despite continuous numerous amendments in ATA the menace of terrorism could not be controlled. It could not deter the terrorist organizations; (Uzair, 2016) because the ATA was a law originally enacted in 1997 while the terrorist threats after 9/11 are completely different from the earlier terrorist phenomena; the reasons, amongst other, are the choice of weapons and choice of targets by terrorist, their financial resources and larger. sophisticated organizations and the widespread insurgencies (Hameed, 2012) which amounts to "war waged against the state by anti state insurgents" (Soofi, 2012). Law enforcement agencies asked for change in counter terrorism strategy and stricter laws because in the current legal system they faced a problem in collection of evidence which could lead to conviction of terrorist.

In 2014 parliament passed the Protection of Pakistan Act which authorizes the law enforcement agencies to shoot a terror suspect who is likely to cause death or grievous hurt. 10 The government acquired broad power to determine the place of custody, inquiry, investigation and trial of the accused anywhere in Pakistan.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore the government may deny disclosing the grounds of detention to the accused, if "the interest of security of Pakistan" demands so:12 Special courts are established for the trial of offences under the Act in which the public may be denied the attendance.<sup>13</sup> The burden of proof lies on the accused to prove his innocence.

In the aftermath of APS attack, Parliament passed Pakistan Army (Amendment) Act, 2015 and the 21st Constitutional amendment in January 2015. After the amendment in the Army Act trials of terrorists using the name of religion or sect came under the jurisdiction of military court; 14 after a case is transferred to military court by federal government it shall not be necessary to recall a witness or again record any evidence that may have been recorded. 15 21st Constitutional gives constitutional cover to the

<sup>10</sup> Section 3 of the Act, ibid

<sup>11</sup> Section 9, ibid

<sup>12</sup> Section 9 (2)(b)

<sup>13</sup> Section 10. ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Section 2 of Pakistan Army Act

<sup>15</sup> Section 2(6) ibid

trials of civilians by military courts since it was held to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court earlier in Liaquat Hussain v Federation of Pakistan. The amendment as criticized by Senator Farhatullah Babar is another example of violation of the requirements of fair trial as "practice of military courts pronouncing death penalty against unnamed accused by unnamed judges sitting at an undisclosed location and without any mention of charges, the case of the prosecution, the defence plea and disallowing independent observers" (DAWN, NA amends Pakistan Army Act, 2015). The 21st Constitutional amendment and Army Amendment Act were challenged by a number of organizations and human rights activists however, the Supreme Court by a majority of 11 to 6 held them to be valid since they were passed by the parliament. It also held that trial of suspected terrorist was within the constitutional framework and met the principles of criminal justice (International, 2015).

Pakistan had no law to comprehensively deal with the cyber crimes and the terrorists exploited this lacuna as they used modern and sophisticated technologies while committing acts of terrorism, therefore Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act was enacted in 2016. PECA established new offences such as illegal access of data (hacking), interference with data and information systems, cyber related electronic fraud and cyber terrorism (electronic or cyber attacks on critical information infrastructure). It also criminalizes glorification of terrorism related offences or individuals and hate speech. The legislation provided new investigation powers hitherto unavailable such as search and seizure of digital forensic evidence using technological means, production orders for electronic evidence, and other enabling powers which are significant for effective investigation of cyber crimes cases. PECA, when being passed, was severely criticized on the grounds that its language is open to various interpretations, hence, could be abused by law enforcement agencies and the punishment imposed by it are too harsh which do not fit the crimes (Khan, 2016). UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of right to freedom of opinion and expression also conveved his reservations to government of Pakistan on some provisions of the bill which are non-compatible with right to opinion and freedom of expression

(Kaye, 2015). However, all such reservations and criticism fell on deaf ears and the law was passed.

## Concluding Remarks

One thing that becomes strikingly clear is that Pakistan lacks a tangible counter terrorism strategy and has been relying on ad hoc and incident-to-incident response. Pakistan's anti-terrorism laws are a bold departure from normal criminal justice system having no respect, in disregard of UN Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions, for human rights. Although it was emphasized by UN Secretary General, Kofi Anan in 2003 that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are the essential tools to fight terrorism not the privileges to be sacrificed at time a time of tension. However, they proved to be less effective to prevent the incidents of terrorism which have been persistently occurring in the country. Pakistan needs a substantial overhauling of its criminal justice system and national security policy.

If protection of citizens' lives is the ultimate objective the last thing that should be done is to enact the laws that restrict their rights and if administration of justice is the only way for it, judicial system should be strengthened (Uzair, 2016). Military courts under 21st constitutional amendment were established for speedy trials of terrorists but it would have been far better if weak prosecution and investigation would have been reformed as parts of criminal justice system respecting the human rights. It is also to be noted that one important factor responsible for delay in trial of terrorism cases is the overload on anti terrorism courts. The guidelines set by Supreme Court of Pakistan for speedy disposal of cases by anti terrorism courts in Liaquat Ali Case could not be implemented due to this overloading. For example "the data of pending cases before the 14 ATCs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa shows that at the beginning of Dec 2014 around 159 cases were pending and 76 fresh cases were also instituted in that month, taking the number of cases to 236. By the end of December the ATCs had disposed of 52 cases and transferred four cases to other courts, while 180 cases were pending" (Shah, 2015).

Furthermore, no laws can be effective unless there is a political will to implement them across the board which is very visibly lacking in Pakistan. It is very alarming to see that on one hand, the political opponents and human rights activists are charged under anti terrorism laws while on other hand hardcore terrorists are freely conducting rallies, procession and take part in electoral process. What else can better demonstrate the political will of Pakistan than the fact, as observed by the Quetta Inquiry Commission Report, that even the head of an organization which is officially proscribed under Anti Terrorism Act meets with Interior Minister of Pakistan in Punjab House situated in the Red Zone of Islamabad? Where the latter heard and conceded to the demands of the former.

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