

How to Neutralize the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement by Addressing Grievances

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POLICY BRIEF

Executive Summary

The advocacy of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement is based upon extrajudicial killings, festering trust deficits during counter terrorism operations in the erstwhile FATA region and perceived human rights abuses against the Pashtun people.¹ The inability to address these concerns has resulted in strong anti-army sentiments within its ranks. While undoubtedly a peaceful, nonviolent movement advocating for the rights of the Pashtuns, senior leaders of the PTM have been involved in hate speech with criminal elements amongst its ranks attempting to attack the Pakistani armed forces.² The following strategies need to be implemented to neutralize the movement:

- Criminal elements in the PTM involved in hate speech and violence must be identified and tried as per the PPC Act XLV of 1860.
- The PTM's ethnic grievances must be addressed through dialogue and reconciliation instead of coercion.
- The civilian government must establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address the issue of transparency as demanded.³
- The HRCP's independent, non-partisan findings can result in a better understanding of the grievances expressed.
- Access to foreign and domestic journalists must be allowed for greater coverage of the exact scope of Pashtun grievances in the erstwhile FATA region.
- The PTM's senior leadership in the parliament must be pressurized to address criminal elements within the movement's ranks.

Issue to be analyzed

Pakistan has historically confronted numerous security threats from Non-State Actors, which have had a bearing on its territorial sovereignty and internal security. The ideological motivations and operational capabilities of groups such as, the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Baloch Nationalists, require a holistic examination to understand grievances and devise comprehensive and tangible strategies to neutralize, integrate and diffuse them.

¹ Madiha Afzal, "Why is Pakistan's military repressing a huge, nonviolent Pashtun protest movement?" *Brookings*, February 7, 2020, accessed December 23, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/07/why-is-pakistans-military-repressing-a-huge-nonviolent-pashtun-protest-movement/>.

² "13 PTM activists booked over hate speech," *Dawn*, February 11, 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1533711>.

³ "PTM leader detained by Pakistan government in violation of human rights," *Rights Watch (UK) briefing*, January 28, 2019. https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/assets/downloads/PTM_1.pdf.

Analysis

The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement was founded in May 2014 by students at the Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan.⁴ It started as a pressure group advocating for the removal of landmines in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas by the Pakistan security forces during anti-terrorism operations.⁵ Its former name was the MTM or the (Mehsud Tahafuz Movement) led by veterinary sciences student, Manzoor Pashteen. The PTM has demanded equal rights for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas against indiscriminate use of force on innocent Pashtuns by the law enforcement agencies.

The extrajudicial killing of Naqeebullah Mehsud in 2018 by the Senior Superintendent of the Sindh Police Rao Anwar resulted in the PTM translating itself into a nationwide campaign to defend Pashtun rights.⁶ While initially advocating for the rights of the ethnic Pashtuns affected by Pakistan's war against the Tehrik I Taliban Pakistan, its focus has shifted to forced disappearances, perceived human rights abuses by the Pakistan Armed Forces on ethnic lines and discrimination from other ethnic groups such as the dominant Punjabis since 2016.⁷ The narrative of the Pakistan government and Armed Forces on the other hand has been that the PTM continues to foment discord along ethnic lines and are following a foreign agenda.⁸ These contrary narratives and lingering trust deficits need to be addressed through dialogue for an everlasting political solution.

The PTM believes that its advocacy is peaceful resistance within the framework of the constitution of Pakistan. There is evidence that the movement's members have been engaged in violent confrontations with agencies, which includes attempts to attack military posts.⁹ Minister of National Assembly, Mohsin Dawar and Ali Wazir have also issued controversial remarks against other groups such as *Punjabis*, which demonstrates that ethnic tensions have been stirred by senior members of the PTM leadership. Currently, Pakistan has ethnic parties such as the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party and the former Baloch National Movement, active in the

⁴ Sarah Eleazar and Sher Ali Khan, "Anatomy of a political moment," *Himal South Asia*, June 15, 2018. <https://www.himalmag.com/pasteen-tahafuz-protection-movement-rally-manzoor-pashteen-pakistan-rights/>.

⁵ "Why is Pakistan's Pashtun Movement under attack?" *Al Jazeera News*, January 28, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/28/why-is-pakistans-pashtun-movement-under-attack>.

⁶ Raza Rumi, "Young Pashtuns have shown the mirror to 'mainstream' Pakistan," *The Daily Times*, February 11, 2018. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/199383/young-pashtuns-shown-mirror-mainstream-pakistan/>.

⁷ Azaz Wazir (@AzazWazir), "This is racism, body shaming," *Tweet on Twitter*, January 31, 2020. <https://twitter.com/AzazWazir/status/1223280327604539392>.

⁸ Ahmed Quraishi, "Angry, Bitter and Ignored in Afghanistan," *Daily Pakistan*, February 8, 2019. <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/08-Feb-2019/angry-bitter-and-ignored-in-afghanistan>.

⁹ Farooq Awan, "PTM mob attacks army check post in Waziristan," *The Daily Times*, May 27, 2019. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/401480/ptm-mob-attacks-army-checkpost-in-waziristan/>.

political discourse.¹⁰ Therefore, a deeper understanding of the factors preventing the PTM from becoming politically mainstreamed beyond its senior leadership needs to be examined.

Key policies and actions on part of the government of Pakistan, which have had an impact on the movement and its advocacy, include the following:

- The passage of the twenty fifth amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan by the parliament as well as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly in 2018, as an attempt to merge the erstwhile FATA region into the province of KPK, did not allay PTM grievances. While amendment was passed after sustained protests and pressure by the PTM, serious issues have remained as highlighted by the Minister of National Assembly representing the movement, Mohsin Dawar:

‘The civil bureaucracy enjoyed enormous powers in the region, prompting them to prevent the new system becoming operational.’¹¹

- The Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) was replaced with the FATA Interim Governance Regulation of 2018, which placed a check on the actions of security forces in the region and putting an end to a longstanding demand of the PTM regarding the humiliation of Pashtuns.¹²
- In 2019, Pakistan military issued an ultimatum that the PTM must disarm and surrender, a year after the passage of amendments towards political accommodation.¹³
- In 2019, MNA of the PTM, Mohsin Dawar passed the Constitutional Amendment Bill allowing for an increase from six to twelve seats in the National Assembly for the FATA region, as well as 16 to 24 in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.¹⁴
- In 2020, Law enforcement agencies arrested MNA and leader of the PTM, Ali Wazir and cases were also registered against Manzoor Pashteen and Mohsin Dawar for hate speech against the Pakistan Army and Rangers.¹⁵

¹⁰ “Balochistan govt on verge of collapse after ANP decides to quit,” *Pakistan Today*, December 16, 2020.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/12/16/balochistan-govt-on-verge-of-collapse-after-anp-decides-to-quit/>.

¹¹ Abubakar Siddique, “Pakistan’s Tribal Areas Caught In Limbo Awaiting Integration,” *Gandhara: The Inside Stories From Afghanistan And Pakistan*, January 16, 2020. <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/pakistan-tribal-areas-caught-in-limbo-awaiting-integration/30381219.html>.

¹² Ismail Khan, “Mainstreaming Fata with interim governance law,” *Dawn*, May 31, 2018. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1411061>.

¹³ Salman Masood, Mujib Mashal, Zia Ur Rehman, “‘Time is Up’: Pakistan Army Targets Protest Movement, Stifling Dissent,” *The New York Times*, May 28, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/28/world/asia/pakistan-pashtun-dissent.html>.

¹⁴ “National Assembly passes 26th Constitutional (Amendment) Bill, 2019 unanimously,” *The News*, May 13, 2019. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/470867-national-assembly-passes-26th-constitutional-amendment-bill-2019-unanimously>.

Security dimension

- i. The PTM has demanded the punishment of Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Rao Anwar for the extrajudicial killing of Naqeebullah Mehsud in Karachi, despite the fact that the 2019 Anti-Terrorism Court verdict declared Mehsud to be innocent. The demand remains controversial given that Anwar was suspended in 2018.¹⁶
- ii. The PTM maintains that the deployment of ‘landmines’ in Pashtun dominated areas such as FATA should immediately cease, as it believes that it is targeting innocent Pashtuns.
- iii. The leaders of the PTM claim that, in the previous decade, close to 32000 Pashtuns have gone missing from the erstwhile FATA region.¹⁷ However, this figure has not been confirmed by independent sources.

Legal dimension:

- i. The PTM is of the view that ‘Missing persons’ imprisoned in undisclosed locations must be given access to fair trials.
- ii. On the subject of criminal activities perpetrated by PTM members, the leader of the movement, Manzoor Pashteen has said that if missing persons are involved in crime, they must be penalized as per the constitution.¹⁸
- iii. The PTM maintains that complete details of extrajudicial killings by the law enforcement agencies have not been disclosed, which requires the establishment of a ‘*Truth and Reconciliation Commission*’ to ascertain findings.

¹⁵ “MNA Ali Wazir arrested in Peshawar at Sindh police request,” *Dawn Bureau Report*, December 17, 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1596189/mna-ali-wazir-arrested-in-peshawar-at-sindh-police-request>.

¹⁶ Imtiaz Ali, “Sindh government suspends Rao Anwar,” *Dawn*, Updated January 29, 2018. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1386010>.

¹⁷ Sanjay Kapoor, “Pakistan’s Battered Tribal Regions Set the Stage for New Prime Minister,” *Observer Research Foundation Special Report*, September 2018, p.3. https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ORF_Special_Report_75_Pakistan-Imran.pdf.

¹⁸ Inamullah Khattak, “PTM condemns Manzoor Pashteen’s arrest, announces countrywide protests,” *Dawn*, Updated 28 January, 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1530857>.

Identity Politics:

- i. The PTM is of the view that army controlled areas in Pakistan has resulted in local Pashtun tribesmen and citizens being humiliated by the security forces based on their identity. The group believes such grievances must cease.

Sources have confirmed that some of the politico-economic grievances of the PTM are well founded. These include clearance of mines, resettlement of IDPs, a harsh security environment and livelihood provision. It is difficult to corroborate the exact casualties, IDP figures as well as allegations made by the PTM regarding coercion by the Pakistan security forces. The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission can have a significant impact in allaying the grievances of the PTM.

Recommendations

- The PTM has adopted a two-pronged approach where its advocacy for preserving the rights of the Pashtuns is complimented by threats of violence and hate speech against the Pakistan army.¹⁹ As per the Pakistan Penal Code, Act XLV of 1860, provisions exist which deal with arousing negative sentiments which imperils public order and influences the safety and ideology of Pakistan.²⁰ Criminal elements in the PTM can be put on trial as per PPC Act XLV of 1860.
- The PTM is not a terrorist organization and focuses on peaceful resistance similar to the Bengali language movement which started in 1948.²¹ They must be dealt with dialogue and reconciliation instead of the use of force.
- A Truth and Reconciliation Commission must be established to address the issue of transparency, Internally Displaced Persons, captives, terrorists, criminals, and innocent Pashtuns as demanded.²²
- The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has a key role to play in addressing the PTM's grievances. The HRC's independent, non-partisan findings can allow for a closer understanding of the gravity of grievances expressed and adopt policies which can deal with each issue upon merit.

¹⁹ Social Desk, "PTM Leader Ali Wazir Arrested in Peshawar over 'Hate Speech'." *Express Tribune*, December 16, 2020. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2276221/ptm-leader-ali-wazir-arrested-in-peshawar-over-hate-speech>

²⁰ "Pakistan Penal Code (Act XLV of 1960)," *Financial Monitoring Unit*, December 27, 2020. <https://www.fmu.gov.pk/docs/laws/Pakistan%20Penal%20Code.pdf>.

²¹ Ahmed Bilal Mehboob, "Anti-government agitation," *Dawn*, Updated December 30, 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1525231>.

²² "PTM leader detained by Pakistan government in violation of human rights," *Rights Watch (UK) briefing*, January 28, 2019. https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/assets/downloads/PTM_1.pdf.

- Access to foreign and domestic journalists must be allowed for greater coverage of the exact scope of Pashtun grievances. Testimonies, in person accounts and the exact nature of deployments in the region can provide a better understanding of the current situation.²³

²³ “A bill to further amend the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” *Senate of Pakistan*, May 25, 2018. http://www.senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1528343985_133.pdf.

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