

CPEC security developments in 2016

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There has been relative improvement in the country's overall security situation in 2016 that boded well for the security of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as well. However some major attacks by Islamist and sectarian militants groups, mainly in Balochistan – the province that holds a pivotal place in the CPEC due to hosting Gwadar Port – raised concerns about the security of those working on different corridor projects.

In 2016, at least two terrorist attacks apparently targeted Chinese nationals engaged in CPEC-related projects, one each in Karachi, and Rohri, interior Sindh. On May 30, a Chinese engineer, his driver and a private guard were injured on the National Highway in a bomb attack claimed by the little-known Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army, reportedly opposed to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.²⁸⁶ In Rohri (Sukkur), a low-intensity bomb exploded at a tyre shop on the premises of a petrol station; the bomb was placed in a bicycle. Some reports said a Chinese engineer's vehicle was the intended target, who remained unhurt. Two people were reportedly injured in the blast, a claim that the police denied.²⁸⁷

However, on the whole, military operations in North Waziristan and Khyber agencies and also in Karachi and parts of Balochistan have significantly damaged militant's networks and operational infrastructure. Secondly, since the attack on army public school in Peshawar in December 2014, which had killed over 100 children, federal and provincial governments have been more vigilant and have increased surveillance against the

militants. Thirdly, government evolved and announced National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism early 2015, which, though being implemented partly, has been exerting significant pressure on the extremist and militant groups in the country.

This article reviews the measures taken by the federal and provincial governments as well as security institutions in 2016 to provide security for successful implementation of CPEC projects and of those working on them, including the Chinese nationals.

5.1 The Special Security Division (SSD)

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) director general in his message on New Year's Eve described arrangements made for the security of the CPEC as one of the major successes achieved by Pakistan Army in 2016; alongside successful tests of various missiles and the military operation *Zarb-e-Azb*. The message explained that during the year arrangements for the actualization and security of the CPEC and raising of a Special Security Division (SSD) and Task Force-88 for its maritime security were successfully carried out.²⁸⁸

Pakistan Army has taken a leading role in the establishment of the SSD for the protection of Chinese engineers, project directors, experts and workers employed on various Chinese-funded projects across Pakistan. The SSD was initially planned, in the year 2015, to have a force of 15,500 troops comprising six infantry brigades with each brigade having three infantry

units. Apart from that, a special, dedicated intelligence unit was also planned for the SSD.

The new Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa has also vowed, like his predecessor, that foolproof security will be provided for CPEC and that army would render necessary "assistance to the Balochistan government for capacity-building of law enforcement agencies and provide security for projects in remote areas."²⁸⁹

However, despite achievement of many of its linked objectives – as stated in the ISPR message – the broader goal of development and deployment of the SSD troops was not fully achieved in 2016. That was mainly due to issues linked to finance, smaller provinces' concerns about their share in the CPEC – that partly affected the deployment of the developed SSD components – infrastructure/logistics, equipment, and the required diverse input and participation from various sections of security and law enforcement institutions.

According to the plan, the anticipated total strength of the SSD is to be raised to around 32,000, at second stage, including over 13,000 troops raised by 2016, and the remaining to be raised from different other forces in different regions, mainly from the following (work on developing these units started in 2015 and continued in 2016):²⁹⁰ Paramilitary FC: 12 wings, a total of 5,500 troops; the Rangers

(paramilitary): no specific number announced yet; Police: 3,000 men from CT or special units; Levies: 1,000 troops; Karakorum Force (KKF): 400 troops; and FWO (Frontier Works Organizations): 12 units.

Meanwhile, formation and functioning of different units of the SSD will vary in each province/region: in Balochistan, FC will serve as the main tier, supported by army, police and Levies; in Sindh, Rangers will be the main tier force, supported by army and police; in Punjab, police will serve as main tier with support from army; in KP, army will serve as main tier with the support from police; and in Gilgit-Baltistan, too, army will serve as the main tier and will be supported by local law enforcers.²⁹¹

An official document of the Ministry of Interior submitted with the National Assembly on September 2 – in response to a written question posed by MNA Dr Shahida Rehmani of the Pakistan People's Party – said that Pakistan had successfully raised the SSD to ensure four-layer security of those working on the CPEC-linked projects.²⁹² According to the document, as reported in media, the SSD, consisting of 9 composite infantry battalions and 6 civil armed forces wings had been successfully raised at the cost of over Rs23 billion and was commanded by Major General Abid Rafique. "The government has also spent Rs5.8 billion by raising 6 SSD wings of civilian armed forces with the minimum strength of 4,502

security personnel in all the four provinces," it said.²⁹³ Further details read like this:²⁹⁴

"The government raised three SSD wings of Punjab Rangers consisting of 2,190 and an SSD wing of Frontier Corps of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa consisting of 852 security personnel. Similarly, it raised a wing of FC Balochistan with strength of 730 personnel and Sindh Rangers consisting of 730 personnel. Over 6,300 security personnel are guarding around 3,800 Chinese workers engaged in 176 small and mega projects in Punjab... Around 2,000 security personnel have been deployed for security of over 700 Chinese engineers working on 19 projects in various districts of KP. Around 3,200 security personnel are guarding 600 Chinese workers engaged in eight projects in Balochistan. Over 2,640 armed personnel have been deputed for security of over 1,140 Chinese workers working on 103 projects in the Sindh province. Over 439 police personnel are guarding around 900 Chinese engineers working on six mega projects in the ICT [Islamabad Capital Territory] and over 1,270 security personnel deputed on security of 1,700 Chinese workers engaged in around 15 projects...667 security personnel are guarding 13 Chinese workers engaged in a project started years back in FATA."

However, the federal and provincial governments had not finalized and agreed upon a set of ToRs for the deployment of

the specially developed CPEC security force by October 2016; a newspaper report during that month quoted an official of the Interior Ministry as saying that the ToRs for the deployment of the SSD for the CPEC security will be finalized within a week.²⁹⁵ "Even Punjab's reply is not very much clear on the issue of ToRs," the report claimed an official of the interior ministry said while briefing the meeting on the progress review of the CPEC, chaired by Federal Minister Planning, Development and Reform Ahsan Iqbal.²⁹⁶ In September, too, a report claimed that administrative issues for the deployment of the SSD remained to be sorted out, as "the provinces had not responded to the letters written to them on the rules of engagements of the armed forces in the execution of the CPEC projects."²⁹⁷ The provincial input is required because CPEC security is responsibility of federal as well as provincial governments.

Yet another report claimed that there were differences between the army and the federal government on SSD's working ToRs. Reportedly, the differences pertained to the role of army in its proposed ToRs, "which the government thought could expand military's influence on law enforcement agencies at the cost of civilian administration's authority."²⁹⁸

5.2 Navy's Task Force-88

On December 13, an International Maritime Conference on the CPEC was held

at Gwadar to commission the special "Task Force-88" of Pakistan Navy. The force was established to protect Gwadar Port and its sea lanes against conventional and non-traditional threats.²⁹⁹ Ships, Fast Attack Craft, speedboats, planes for aerial supervision and drones are part of the TF-88 besides marines who will be deployed at sea and around Gwadar for security operations.³⁰⁰

Earlier, in November, the 4th Pak-China naval exercise was held to promote maritime security with a special focus on thwarting any challenges to CPEC security. Also, Pakistan Navy has raised a Coastal Security and Harbour Defence Force for "tackling threats along the coast and stationed a Force Protection Battalion at Gwadar for protection of Chinese workers."³⁰¹

5.3 Other developments

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah told a Chinese delegation on December 24 that Sindh was raising a special force of 2,000 ex-army men for the security of Chinese workers in the province. He apprised the delegation led by Foreign Ministry Director General for External Security Liu Guangyuan of the newly recruited 4,000 policemen who were being imparted special training by the army and would also be assigned the security of the Chinese workers of CPEC projects. More than 150 policemen were already deployed

to protect 800 Chinese working on Thar energy project.³⁰²

Similarly, the Punjab government set up Special Protection Unit (SPU) to ensure the security of CPEC, its installations and the work force and foreign experts working on various development projects in the province. Inspector General Punjab Police Mushtaq Ahmad Sukhera revealed this while speaking at the passing out parade of SPU and Punjab Constabulary, at Police Training School, Rawat, on September 23.³⁰³

Media reported in October that the Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) will provide comprehensive satellite service to monitor the CPEC and help secure those areas which were vulnerable to terrorist attacks and criminal activities. Suparco was reportedly already providing "complete geo sensing of the entire corridor from Gwadar to Khunjerab (Pak-China border)."³⁰⁴

Earlier, a report claimed that Pakistan and China were developing a satellite to monitor the routes of the CPEC. Sindh transport minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah revealed this while speaking at the fourth national conference on space, science and technology, organised by the Institute of Space and Planetary Astrophysics (ISPA), University of Karachi.³⁰⁵

5.4 Challenges and issues

Both Pakistan and China share this concern that some external factors, mainly a neighboring country, posed serious challenges to the implementation and security of the CPEC-linked projects. Pakistan's military and civilian leaders repeatedly expressed these concerns, and indeed attributed some major terrorist attacks to these external actors. For instance, at a CPEC seminar held in Gilgit early September, former Chief of Army Staff Raheel Sharif delivered his sternest warning to external actors looking to destabilize the project and the country. At the same time, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, accompanied by the Chinese ambassador, on a visit to Balochistan, repeated the same message.³⁰⁶ Similarly, Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal was quoted by media as saying in December that "isolated incidents are sponsored from outside Pakistan to break the momentum of the CPEC."³⁰⁷

There are some issues and gray areas which are not only delaying the creation and deployment of the SSD and other forces which are to become part of the SSD, but could also impact the operational effectiveness and coordination. The foremost issue is linked to command and control structure of the SSD to be raised from diverse forces including local ones which lie in provincial jurisdictions. Although an intelligence unit is planned for SSD at federal level, experts believe that it

may not suffice to the required intelligence sources and threat assessment at local level. That could also raise the issue of coordination of the intelligence unit with various provincial-level security structures. Then there are financial and budgetary constraints for an effective maintenance of the required forces and their operations.

To win China's trust for Pakistan's security infrastructure, mainly the one dedicated for CPEC, is also a challenge. Some Chinese companies had proposed to have personal security arrangements, which Pakistan denied due to political, socio-cultural and bureaucratic issues it could entail. Similarly, a leading foreign media house in a recent report said there has been a "clamour among Chinese scholars for an increased involvement of Chinese security firms in overseas projects by the Chinese companies."³⁰⁸ Issued by a leading Chinese think tank, the report urged Chinese companies working on projects in Pakistan to take the initiative and solve security issues on their own. However, according to Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal, that is not advisable for Chinese security firms to enter Pakistan because their appearance could "become controversial in the event of any unpleasant incidents they are involved in."³⁰⁸ Nonetheless, Chinese government vowed full support for Pakistani efforts to provide security to CPEC-linked projects and personnel.

Then there is the issue of gradually exceeding expenditure on special security

arrangements for the CPEC projects. In September, the matter of funding for the two divisions to be raised for CPEC security was discussed by the finance minister and the army chief at a special meeting. A few days later, in an ECC meeting, the federal government decided that the capital cost of all CPEC power projects that are under construction would be raised by 1pc to pay for the running cost of the CPEC security force, and that Nepra should be given a policy directive to include this cost escalation in the tariff given to these plants. The regulator,

Nepra, however objected to the proposition.³⁰⁹

The security expenditures are not one-time expenditures and are expected to sustain for long period of time. Therefore, there is a need to make a sustainable arrangement to fulfill them. Also, Pakistan should do utmost efforts to establish good relations with Afghanistan and evolve and implement a joint mechanism for border security and coordination. Insecurity at Pak-Afghan border could create significant security threats for CPEC projects and workers.