Strengthening Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Framework: Lessons from Punjab

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Abstract
Pakistan's battle against terrorism is undermined by uneven capabilities across its Counter-Terrorism Departments (CTDs) and an ill-prepared police force. Punjab's CTD shines as a success story, while other provinces falter, and regular police lack critical counter-terrorism (CT) training. Drawing on government reports, academic research, and recent security data, this article proposes two urgent reforms: standardizing all CTDs to Punjab's model and embedding CT training in police promotion courses. These steps are vital to confront Pakistan's escalating terrorist threat.

Keywords: Counter-Terrorism Departments (CTDs), Training, Investigation

Introduction
Pakistan faces a dire terrorism crisis. In 2024, the country endured 1,099 terrorist incidents—a 112% increase from 517 in 2023—resulting in significant loss of life, with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) alone claiming 558 victims (*Global Terrorism Index 2025*). To counter this surge, provincial CTDs were established, yet their performance varies starkly. Punjab's CTD stands out as a beacon of effectiveness, while others struggle with limited resources and training. Meanwhile, the regular police, often the first responders to attacks, remain woefully unprepared. This article examines these disparities and advocates for a cohesive strategy: replicating Punjab's CTD success nationwide and equipping police with essential CT skills.

Punjab's CTD: A Blueprint for Success
Since its launch in 2010, Punjab's CTD has set a high standard for counter-terrorism in Pakistan. Its 1,400-member Counter-Terrorism Force (CTF) operates through three specialized units:
- **Intelligence:** Leverages tools like the 5x5 System AIDE-MEMOIRE and tracks extremist online activity (NACTA, 2022).
- **Investigation:** Applies forensic standards and the PEACE interrogation model (UNODC, 2021).
- **Operations:** Conducts high-stakes missions, including hostage rescues (Punjab Police, 2023).

A rigorous 9-month training program—comprising a 6-month foundational course and a 3-month advanced phase—equips officers with skills in intelligence analysis, crime scene management, dark web monitoring, and Geo-Fencing (CTD

Punjab Training Manual, 2023). Collaborations with the Turkish Police and innovations like Call Detail Record (CDR) analysis enhance its capabilities (Ministry of Interior, 2023). In 2023 alone, Punjab CTD apprehended 21 suspected terrorists, proving its operational strength (*Dawn*, 2023). This well-funded, structured approach offers a stark contrast to other regions.

The Plight of Other Provinces
Outside Punjab, Pakistan's CTDs grapple with systemic weaknesses:

- **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP):** Lacks a dedicated CTD force, relying on minimally trained police. Its Police School of Explosive Handling in Nowshera focuses narrowly on bomb disposal (International Crisis Group, 2023).
- **Sindh:** Relies on ad-hoc workshops instead of a unified training system, hobbling its response to urban threats in Karachi (Sindh CTD Report, 2022).
- **Balochistan:** Recently revamped its CTD but lacks cyber-terrorism expertise (Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2023).
- **Islamabad:** Employs deputed officers with inconsistent training (ICT Police, 2023).
- **Gilgit-Baltistan (GB):** Operates with just 150 temporary staff and no permanent CTD (GB Home Department, 2023).

These shortcomings have dire consequences. The 2023 Peshawar Mosque Attack investigation faltered when untrained personnel mishandled evidence (SATP, 2023). Fragmented efforts across provinces allow groups like the TTP to exploit gaps, amplifying the national security threat (CRSS, 2023).

The Toll of Disparity
The uneven CT framework yields measurable costs:

Challenge	Consequence	Case Study
Operational Breakdowns	Untrained staff hinder investigations.	Peshawar Mosque Attack (SATP, 2023).
Overstretched Military	Weak CTDs force military intervention, draining broader defense resources.	Frequent KP operations (ISPR, 2023).
Exploitable Gaps	Terrorists capitalize on weak coordination.	TTP attacks across Sindh-Balochistan (CRSS).

The *Global Terrorism Index 2025* notes a 45% spike in terrorism-related deaths in 2024, with KP and Balochistan bearing the brunt, underscoring the urgency of reform.

Police: An Achilles' Heel
Pakistan's regular police, distinct from CTDs, are not built for counter-terrorism yet often face it head-on. In KP, officers without CT training struggle to respond effectively (KP Police Annual Report, 2023). Research in the *Journal of Policing* (2022) highlights the need for CT training in promotion courses to prepare senior officers. Without it, police remain reactive, compelling the military to step in and divert focus from national defense (ISPR, 2023). This unpreparedness

weakens Pakistan's security foundation.

A Growing Menace
The terrorist threat is intensifying. KP and Balochistan saw the sharpest rises in attacks in 2024, driven by the TTP's resurgence and cross-border incursions (*The Express Tribune*, 2023). A fragmented system—where Punjab excels, other CTDs flounder, and police lack skills—cannot withstand this pressure. Immediate, unified action is imperative.

Recommendations for Reform
To bolster Pakistan's counter-terrorism capacity, the following measures are proposed:

1. **Uniform CTD Standards:**
   - Replicate Punjab's 9-month training model nationwide, emphasizing intelligence, investigation, and operations (NACTA, 2023).
   - Create a National Counter-Terrorism Academy for consistent training (Ministry of Interior, 2023).
2. **Police CT Training:**
   - Require a one-month CT module in all police promotion courses, covering radicalization, IED detection, and intelligence basics (UNODC, 2021).
   - Integrate CT fundamentals into recruit training for long-term resilience.
3. **Permanent Staffing:**
   - Phase out deputation in favor of dedicated, trained CTD forces in KP, Sindh, and Balochistan (PICSS, 2023).
4. **Enhanced Coordination:**
   - Establish a National Counter-Terrorism Coordination Council to streamline provincial efforts and intelligence sharing (Counterterrorism and Security International, 2023).
5. **Facility Upgrades:**
   - Transform KP's Elite Police Training Centre into a comprehensive CT hub with cyber-terrorism capabilities (World Bank, 2023).
6. **Punjab's Next Step:**
   - Expand deradicalization programs through partnerships with NGOs like PAIMAN Trust (UNDP, 2022).

Conclusion
Pakistan's terrorism crisis demands a robust, coordinated response. Punjab's CTD provides a replicable model that other provinces must adopt, while equipping police with CT training is non-negotiable. Supported by data and expert analysis, these reforms can unify Pakistan's disjointed counter-terrorism efforts into an effective shield. The window for action is narrowing—Pakistan must act decisively now.

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