**[Impact of a weak police command](https://www.dawn.com/news/1769551/impact-of-a-weak-police-command)**

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IN 2001, the National Reconstruction Bureau was tasked with reforming the governance structure in the country. It took it up at the district level, as the entire edifice of governance revolved around this vital administrative unit and had a direct bearing on people’s daily lives. Its two important components were district administration and police. The NRB decided to draft two laws on local government and police. Recognising the police’s significant role as the state’s coercive arm, a separate think tank consisting of experienced senior police officers who had worked at several command levels was notified to work on the police law.

The objective was to establish an institution with significant authority, free from external influences, while ensuring operational autonomy, accountability, and strong connections with the people they served. It was crucial to strike a balance among these three potentially conflicting requirements. To achieve this, the law introduced a comprehensive framework consisting of public safety commissions, a police complaint authority, and clear guidelines for the police’s relationship with the district government. These provisions were based on modern and democratic best practices.

Implementing these changes faced resistance from various players in the governance structure who were accustomed to wielding control rather than serving. The concept of governance through consent instead of force was alien to these stakeholders. These reforms represented radical but necessary steps towards creating a more accountable and people-oriented governance system. However, there were attempts to obstruct its enactment, as some parties raised concerns about the jurisdiction of legislation by the federation. Despite this, the federal government notified the Police Order, 2002, on Aug 14 that year.

Recognising the potential risks of political and external interference compromising the police command structure, the think tank was diligent in strengthening the police department, achieving this by redesigning and upgrading the command arrangement of the police forces. The new structure granted complete operational autonomy to the police command, empowering them to function more independently. Notably, the supervisory officer at the division level was repositioned as the regional police officer, who was upgraded to the rank of additional IGP with additional administrative and operational autonomy. The heads of big cities were also given enhanced powers and autonomy to effectively address the increasing law-enforcement challenges arising from rapid urbanisation and a fast-growing population.

The focus should be on implementing genuine police reforms that emphasise merit-based promotions and the fair assignment of duties.

To bolster the Central Police Office, senior staff officers were introduced, and the police command was granted the authority to reorganise the force into specialised units. To reinforce their powers, the head of the police department was designated as an ex-officio secretary to the government, providing the police financial autonomy.

This redefined role led to the creation of numerous new positions across all command levels, resulting in accelerated promotions for officers. The redesigned command structure also facilitated effective communication between the police leadership and the government at the provincial and national levels, enabling their active participation in policy matters. To achieve this, a powerful platform called the National Police Management Board was created within the National Police Bureau at the national level.

The responsibility to activate and make this platform relevant lay in the hands of the police leadership, granting them a significant voice with far-reaching impact on government policies and the criminal justice system. This platform offered a channel for an institutional response to any major security threat, conveying the collective voice of police commanders across the country. Overall, these developments strengthened the police’s capacity to engage effectively with the government and contribute to national security and policymaking.

Timely implementation of the police law in its true spirit could turn around the criminal justice system. Vested interests, unfortunately spearheaded by the political leadership, campaigned against the police law, which was projected as the creation of a dictator. To weaken the structure, political governments interfered with the placement of the officers against command posts in violation of legal provisions. Repeated judgements of the superior judiciary, particularly on the premature transfer of senior commanders, continue to be breached. The [oft-quoted transfers of six police chiefs](https://www.dawn.com/news/1578608) of the largest police force in four years is a world record.

The focus should be on implementing genuine police reforms that emphasise merit-based promotions, fair assignment of duties, and a system that ensures experienced and capable officers are appropriately placed. By establishing a reformed police force, we can address the root of the problem and create a more effective and accountable law-enforcement system. Contrary to this necessary process, our leaders have sought to suppress any dissent by the police leadership and manipulate the police for political gains, and for that a concerning trend has emerged where junior officers are routinely appointed to senior positions. Arbitrary and premature postings at the command level, along with the placement of junior officers, has become the norm, significantly under­mining discipline and severely compromising the command and control of the armed uniformed police forces. Therefore, their capacity to maintain peace and order has diminished, exposing the country to a recurrent cycle of violence and terrorism.

To deal with critical situations beyond the control of an internally weakened civilian police, the political governments rely on the armed forces, which has significant political implications. To ensure civilian democratic control over law enforcement, it is essential for all major political parties to come to a consensus on certain fundamental issues. Dependence on the armed forces, even for tasks like collecting electricity bills, highlights the urgency of such reforms.

Against this backdrop, complaints by these political parties about the establishment’s interference are not seen to carry weight. Their incompetence and failure to effectively manage the state’s affairs become an open invitation for the establishment to intervene as it believes it cannot remain a passive spectator when stability is jeopardised. It is imperative to address these challenges and work towards strengthening the civilian democratic control over law enforcement to fulfil the fundamental duty of maintaining order and peace, without distracting the attention of the armed forces from external threats in a dangerous world.

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*Published in Dawn, August 11th, 2023*