

Pakistan X Corps: A Snapshot



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Preamble

Pakistan is the world's 33rd largest country with an area of 881,913 square kilometres (sq km) and has 6,774 km of land borders with India, China, Afghanistan and Iran besides a 1,046-km-long coastline. The sixth most populous country, it is a federal republic, with four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A predominant Muslim country, the major ethnic groups are the Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun, and Baloch. Created by the British on religious lines in 1947, within the country, the Pakistan Army has assumed a dominant role in the national politics due to the absence of a strong political base. The first democratic elections took place only in 1970 which did not result in transfer of power to the legitimate winner. Since then, Pakistan has had military rulers under dictatorship or civilian rule by proxy. Having a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US\$ 312.57 billion, Pakistan spent four per cent of GDP on its armed forces in 2018. In rupee terms, it earmarked 23 per cent of its annual budget for 2019-20 on the armed forces.

Pakistan's strategic location at the transition point of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and South Asia, and as the door to Central Asia, has been exploited by the US and China during the USSR's intervention of Afghanistan, and recently again by China as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan has been able to obtain military equipment and funds from these two countries on this basis to arm its armed forces which are primarily deployed against India.

Evolution of Pakistan Army

The Pakistan Army came into being in 1947 after the division of the British Indian Army between India and Pakistan. The decision to divide the British Indian Army into two dominions was suggested by Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck in the ratio of 70:30 or on basis of the population of India and Pakistan. The Viceroy took the final decision on June 30, 1947.¹ By July 1947, the Defence Department was divided into the India and Pakistan Sections and further sub-divided into three categories of personnel, movable stores and equipment, and installations.² The division of 11,800 officers and 500,000 soldiers was carried out at a scale of 64 per cent assets with India and the balance 36 per cent formed the nucleus of the present Pakistan Army. The initial strength comprised six out of 14 armoured regiments, eight out of 40 artillery regiments and eight out of 15 infantry regiments,³ with approximately 2,300 officers and 150,000 soldiers. Also, Pakistan got seven training institutions which were located within its geographical boundary.

The Pakistan Defence Council which had been raised after independence reorganised the available troops into divisions and felt that in view of the two geographical entities of West and East Pakistan, both wings required to have defence capability independent of each other. The bulk of the resources were located in West Pakistan with troops organised into five divisions and armoured brigades. After the initial reorganisation of divisions in the 1947-48 period, Pakistan began looking for external support to modernise its armed forces.

In 1953, due to the ongoing Cold War, Pakistan was able to get US assistance for making up deficiencies in five and half divisions also referred as the 5^{1/2} Division Plan. Thus, began the US assistance in training, courses and, most importantly, arms and military equipment. Another significant change which led to a major reorganisation of the Pakistan Army came post the 1965 War. The two key lessons derived by Pakistan thinkers were to enhance the complement of the infantry and introduce Corps Headquarters between the General Headquarters (GHQ) and the divisions⁴ as it was not feasible to control the divisions from GHQ.

The Pakistan Army is presently divided into nine corps, with a majority of its formations deployed against India and a token presence opposite Afghanistan and Iran. It has two strike corps, I and II, located at Mangla and Multan respectively. The balance seven (IV, V, X, XI, XII, XXX and XXXI) are holding corps. In addition, the Pakistan Army has the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Army Air Defence Command and Army Strategic Forces Command. In totality, the Pakistan

Pakistan's strategic location has been exploited by US and China for their own interests.

Army has 19 infantry divisions, two armoured, two mechanised and two artillery divisions besides a large number of independent brigade groups and engineer brigades.⁵ It has an active strength of 550,000 personnel with 500,000 reserves.

Pakistan X Corps

The Pakistan X Corps is the largest corps of the Pakistan Army comprising three infantry divisions, Force Command Northern Areas (FCNA), Special Security Division (SSD), 111 Independent Infantry Brigade, 8 Armoured Brigade and an artillery brigade.⁶ Presently commanded by Lieutenant General Azhar Abbas, its headquarters are located in Rawalpindi. It is responsible for the defence of Northern Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK).⁷ All its formations except the SSD are deployed against India. The details of its formations are:

-  **12 Infantry Division:** It was formed in 1948 and is composed of troops received after the division of the resources of the British Indian Army. It is the largest infantry division of the Pakistan Army comprising six infantry brigades and complements of other arms and services, with headquarters at Muree. Its brigades are deployed against India along the Line of Control (LoC) and in PoK.
-  **19 Infantry Division:** The division is considered a specialist in mountain warfare and as per an article published in Global Security, is responsible for the defence of the area between Kel and Jhelum.⁸ The brigades of this division are deployed in PoK and the division headquarters are in Mangla. Some articles have listed the formation now being placed under Pakistan I Corps which has its headquarters in Mangla.
-  **23 Infantry Division:** The division is deployed along the Kotli-Bhimber axis and has its headquarters at Jhelum.
-  **FCNA:** The FCNA is a division size formation responsible for the defence of the northern areas of Pakistan. With headquarters at Gilgit, its five brigades (80, 150, 323, 62, 61 Infantry Brigades) are deployed primarily against India. Its coat of arms is a snow leopard on a black background.

- **SSD:** The SSD is a division size force raised in September 2016 for the defence of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It was primarily raised to guard the assets of, and provide security to, personnel and equipment of the Chinese companies from serious internal threats. It consists of around 15,000 personnel divided into nine infantry battalions and six paramilitary wings.⁹ After the May 2019 attack on a hotel in Gwadar, Pakistan announced raising another SSD to guard CPEC assets. In some articles, the SSD has been indicated as 34 Light Infantry Division with its primary role being as a strategic reserve for operations in Neelum Valley of Pakistan.¹⁰
- **111 Infantry Brigade:** The 111 Infantry Brigade is located at Rawalpindi with its main task being providing security and protocol duties to incoming dignitaries and it is also responsible for the security of the President and the Prime Minister. The formation has been well known for providing troops for coups carried out by senior Pakistan officers to topple civilian governments. The brigade comprises five infantry battalions, two light artillery regiments, an SSG battalion and one armoured regiment.

Conclusion

The division of the British Indian Army took place when the partition of the country became a reality. A large number of units and personnel were, thus, given a new identity overnight. Given the same origin, the stark difference between the Indian Army and its counterparts is amply visible in terms of professionalism, religious indoctrination and apolitical nature. Also, X Corps, being the largest formation within the Pakistan Army, is considered too unwieldy during operations and also entails placing large numbers of resources under one commander. A suggestion by one of the authors has been to bifurcate the formation into two halves with 19 Infantry Division and FCNA under a headquarters located at Gilgit to oversee the northern areas, and X Corps headquarters with the remaining formations as a smaller manageable entity.

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Notes

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