

IPRI STUDIES

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The incompetent political leadership, weak political parties and weak institutions had provided space for governance to civil-military bureaucracy. This led to derailment of democracy and alternate civil and military supremacy. Now that socio-political environments have improved, healthy civil-military relations are witnessed.

Key Words: Civil, Military, Bureaucracy, Security, Leadership.

One of the accepted norms in a democratic set-up is healthy civil-military relationship where an elected civilian government enjoys the overall control of the military. However, in the past sixty-five years, control over governance in Pakistan has oscillated between the two, a decade of civilian supremacy followed by a decade of military rule. The reasons for this periodic shuffling are to be found in incompetent political leadership, weak political parties and institutions, rising power of civil-military bureaucracy, serious security threats to the country and frequent use of military in aid of civil power.

Incompetent Political Leadership

Soon after independence there was a leadership void. Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation and the first Governor-General, died just one year after the establishment of Pakistan and his right hand lieutenant, Liaquat Ali Khan, who was the first Prime Minister, was assassinated in 1951. About the rest, the Quaid had ruefully remarked that “he

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had false coins in his pocket.”¹ Consequently, initially several of the ministers in the cabinet were not elected politicians such as A.M. Malik, Ghulam Muhammad and Zafarullah Khan.² Similarly, in 1954, there were as many as nine members of the Prime Minister’s cabinet, who did not have a seat in the Parliament, including Commander-in-Chief of the Army General Muhammad Ayub Khan.³ “The cabinet and other high political appointments [held by bureaucrats] reflected a paucity of talent among the politicians.”⁴

As against the Indian example, where the constitution of the country was framed within two years of independence in 1949, Pakistan took nine years to finalise its first constitution in 1956. The delay in framing the constitution allowed the Governor-General to continue his authoritarian rule for seven long years (1947-56), when the country in its early life needed healthy democratic traditions. In addition, the first general elections in the country, which were due in 1951 were held after a lapse of almost quarter of a century in 1970. This further strengthened the non-democratic and authoritarian tendencies providing space to civil and military bureaucracies to assume a dominant position in governance..

Weak Political Parties

“For any healthy constitutional and political system to function smoothly, strong and well-entrenched political parties are essential. ...Unfortunately, political parties in Pakistan have failed to develop into strong vehicles of national political will.”⁵ The All-India Muslim League, which had piloted the movement for Pakistan during 1940-47, was not a well organized political party. Most of its leaders belonged to areas which became part of the Indian Union and as such had no political base in Pakistan. Of those who belonged to areas in Pakistan, most belonged to feudal and landowning classes and were thus by their very nature inimical to a democratic polity. Their incompetence

¹ Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 853.

² I.H. Qureshi, *A Short History of Pakistan Book Four: Alien Rule and the Rise of Muslim Nationalism* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1967), 229-30. Jinnah’s first cabinet included A.M. Malik, who was a medical practitioner, Finance Minister Ghulam Muhammad was a former civil servant, and Foreign Minister Zafarullah Khan was a lawyer. They had practically no political following.

³ In 1954, besides the Governor-General Ghulam Muhammad, who was a bureaucrat, the cabinet had nine members who did not have a seat in the Assembly, i.e., Iskandr Mirza, M.A.H. Ispahani, H. Rahimtoola Col Abid Hussain Shah, Sardar Mumtaz Ali, Ghulam Ali Talpur, Dr. Khan Sahib. Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and General Muhammad Ayub Khan, Commander-in-Chief of the Army.

⁴ Hamid Yusuf, *Pakistan: A Study of Political Developments 1947-97* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1999), 34.

⁵ Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 852.

and constant wrangling for power, instead of cooperation and mutual accommodation, led to ceaseless infighting. For instance, as early as 1953, a clash between the leadership of the Punjab and the central government led to the imposition of Martial Law in Lahore, the provincial capital.⁶ Even during the last decade of civil supremacy (1988-99), the fight between the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) resulted in repeated dissolution of national and provincial assemblies and dismissal of prime ministers and their cabinets even by a civilian President.⁷ Finally, it ended with the peaceful military takeover in 1999.

Weak Institutions

Pakistan, like India, had inherited governing institutions established by the British, but there was a difference. While India got its institutions intact, Pakistan had to start from scratch. There was no established parliament, no civil secretariat, no supreme court, no central bank and no organised armed forces. There was a paucity of competent parliamentarians. The proportion of the Indian Civil Service officers who opted for Pakistan was small. The same was true of the higher judiciary. Unlike other institutions, the proportion of Muslims in the Indian Army was comparatively substantial, i.e., 33 per cent. This is also one of the reasons why the armed forces of Pakistan assumed greater importance right in the beginning and were better established than other institutions of the state.

⁶ Punjab Chief Minister Mian Mumtaz Muhammad Khan Daultana and Prime Minister of Pakistan Khawaja Nazimuddin, both belonging to PML, were at logger-heads. Hamid Yusuf, *Pakistan: A Study of Political Developments 1947-97*, 52.

⁷ The conflict between President Ghulam Ishaq Khan (1988-1993) and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990) resulted in the dissolution of the National Assembly and the dismissal of the Prime Minister and his cabinet on August 6, 1990. Again differences and confrontation between Ishaq and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (1990-1993) made both of them to resign on July 18, 1993. The differences between President Farooq Leghari (1993-1997) and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (1993-1996) ended with the dissolution of the National Assembly and dismissal of the government on November 5, 1996. Thereafter, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (1997-1999), in a bid to become an authoritarian ruler, is discredited for an assault on the Supreme Court (Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 827), declaring a state of emergency in 1998, allowing establishment of military courts for trial of civilians, amending the Constitution taking away the discretionary powers of the President, preventing the floor-crossing in the assemblies, and introducing the Fifteenth Constitutional Amendment Bill which was "apparently a blatant attempt by Nawaz to introduce dictatorship in the country in the name of Islam" (Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 929). Finally, on October 12, 1999, he sacked the Chief of the Army Staff General Pervez Musharraf while he was officially visiting Sri Lanka. This resulted in a *coup d'état* and dismissal of Nawaz Sharif. (Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 219-249).

Rising Power of Civil-Military Bureaucracy

Pakistan had scarce basic infrastructure at its inception. It had to start from the scratch. But the low level of literacy⁸ made this task very difficult. The country needed competent and a determined leadership to build and nurture democratic institutions. But such a leadership was hard to come by in a rural society in which the political, social and economic life was dominated by the landed aristocracy. The feudal leadership of political parties was not capable of dealing with the multifarious problems faced by the country. It depended heavily on the civil and military bureaucracy.⁹

The result was the bureaucratic elite became disproportionately assertive, steadily increasing their power at the expense of the political elite.¹⁰ For instance, a civil bureaucrat Governor-General of Pakistan, Ghulam Muhammad (1951-55), dissolved the National Assembly in 1954 and the Federal Court justified and validated his unconstitutional act on the basis of the “law of necessity.”¹¹ Another President of Pakistan from the civil bureaucracy, Iskander Mirza (1956-1958), relied on the military to ensure the state’s integrity when the PML President, Qayyum Khan, threatened direct action and the Khan of Kalat declared his secession from Pakistan. In order to deal with the disturbed situation, Mirza took extreme step, abrogated the Constitution, dissolved the legislative assemblies, dismissed the central and provincial governments, banned all political parties and postponed general elections indefinitely, declared Martial Law and appointed General Ayub as the Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA), who in turn removed Iskander Mirza on October 27, 1958 and himself became the President. Thus began the era of military dominated governance. After seven years of instability (1951-58), in which as many as seven prime ministers rose and fell, the military regime put the country on the path of economic and political stability.¹² According to Advocate Hamid Khan, the author of *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, “Ayub’s term of office [1958-69] was the golden era for the

⁸ The overall literacy in West Pakistan was hardly five per cent. Government of Pakistan, *Census of Pakistan 1951*, vol. 1 (Karachi: Census Publications, n.d.), 77.

⁹ Even after six decades of the establishment of Pakistan, Iftikhar Hussain, Minister of Information, NWFP has blamed “feudal, capitalist and tribal systems” responsible for “all social ills and backwardness.” *Dawn* (Islamabad), August 24, 2008.

¹⁰ Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 878.

¹¹ For details see Allan McGrath, *The Destruction of Pakistan’s Democracy* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹² After assassination of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan on October 16, 1951, Khawaja Nazimuddin (1951-53), Muhammad Ali Bogra (1953-55), Chaudhry Muhammad Ali (1955-56), Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy (1956-57), I.I. Chundrigar, and Feroz Khan Noon (1957-58) became Prime Ministers.

bureaucracy, which exercised its powers, unbridled by any political interference.”¹³

Again, after the restoration of democratic governance during 1988-99, the civilian bureaucrat President, Ishaq Khan, prematurely dissolved the National Assembly and dismissed the elected Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, and her Cabinet on August 6, 1990. Later on April 18, 1993 he dismissed another elected Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, his cabinet and the National Assembly. His successor President, Farooq Leghari (a bureaucrat turned politician), also dismissed the elected National Assembly together with the Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, and her cabinet on November 5, 1996. Thus, during 1988-1999, four democratically elected governments¹⁴ were replaced on charges of corruption, inefficiency, security risk, etc. The civil-military bureaucracy has dominated governance owing to the inherent weakness of political parties and their incompetent leadership, resulting in the derailment of democracy thrice, in 1958, 1977 and 1999.

It is indeed a sad commentary on the elected members of the first Legislature/Constituent Assembly of Pakistan that they could not find a suitable head of state from among their own ranks during 1951-58. All of them came from the civil bureaucracy and thereafter from the military.¹⁵ The civil-military bureaucracy did not have a favourable opinion about the competence of political leaders and often took decisions without consulting them. This adversely affected their training, development and growth in the field of governance. The inability to control the anti-Ahmadiya movement in the Punjab in 1953 was blamed on an inept political leadership. To rescue the city of Lahore where Ahmadis were in a “virtual state of siege” and their properties were being “burned or looted,” General Azam Khan, the Area Commander, was ordered by the Defence Secretary, to impose martial law in Lahore. It was met with general approval of the people. It was demonstrated that the civil-military bureaucracy “would not let politicians or religious ideologues lead the country to anarchy.”¹⁶ The functioning of Martial Law in Lahore laid down the foundation of the supremacy of military bureaucracy and orchestrated the initial rehearsal for recurring imposition of Martial Laws in the country and its acceptance by the people peacefully.

¹³ Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 345.

¹⁴ Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto (1988-90), Mian Nawaz Sharif (1990-93), Benazir Bhutto (1993-96), and Mian Nawaz Sharif (1996-99).

¹⁵ During 61 years (1947-2008) of existence of Pakistan, civil bureaucrats or military generals governed the country for as long as 45 years. These were: Mr. Ghulam Muhammad (1951-55); Mr. Iskander Mirza (1955-58); General Muhammad Ayub Khan (1958-69); General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan (1969-71); General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1978-88); Mr. Ghulam Ishaq Khan (1988-93); and General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008).

¹⁶ Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 120.

Security Threats

The persistence of external and internal threats to its security converted Pakistan into a security state which thwarted the country's march towards democracy. The security of Pakistan was threatened externally from its bigger neighbour and internally from communism,¹⁷ religious extremism, ethnic ambitions, and since September 11, 2001 from terrorism. The first internal threat came to surface through the Socialist inspired Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case (1951), the Anti-Qadiani Movement (1953) by religious parties, and declaration of cessation by the ruler of the state of Kalat (1958). The external threat resulted in Indo-Pak wars and border clashes and threats of war a number of times (i.e., during 1947-48, 1951, 1965, 1971, 1984, 1999, and 2002). Ari Fleischer, a White House spokesman, speaking on December 20, 2002, about the 2002 situation between India and Pakistan said:

the tension reached alarming level...As a result of the intervention of the President, the Secretary of State, and numerous leaders around the world including [Russian] President [Vladimir] Putin and [British] Prime Minister [Tony] Blair, there is now a markedly diminished point of tension.¹⁸

Civil Dependence on Army

From the very beginning the Army remained involved in civil administration. In 1947, it was the Army which was asked to establish civil secretariat in Karachi. They vacated their barracks, renovated them to house the secretariat and the staff which was coming from Delhi. It was the Army which largely contributed in safeguarding the movement of several refugee convoys carrying millions of refugees from East Punjab as well as establishing their camps at Lahore. After the Indian Army had moved into the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and the British Commander-in-Chief of Pakistan Army had refused the orders of the Governor General of Pakistan to send the Pakistani forces into Kashmir, it were the elements of native commanders and units which moved into Kashmir and helped the local population in repulsing or restraining the Indian soldiers from vast areas which now form Azad Kashmir and are affiliated with Pakistan. In addition, the army was frequently called in

¹⁷ The Communist Party of Pakistan was banned in 1950s mainly because of own conservative leadership.

¹⁸ *Dawn* (Islamabad), December 21, 2008. Also see Noor ul Haq, "Indian Quest for Hegemony," *IPRI Journal*, vol. III, no. 2 (2003): 21-48.

aid of civil authorities in all natural disasters, emergencies and other civil functions.¹⁹

Present Situation

Presently, however, the situation is different. Pakistan's political leadership is more mature and political parties are better established. The country has developed a middle class, an active civil society, a vibrant media and an independent judiciary. The majority of Pakistanis are now literate (more than fifty five percent) as against about five percent as per the census of 1951. The concept of National Security Council having the Services Chiefs as its members has now become redundant and overtaken by the Defence Committee of the National Assembly. This Committee comprising seventeen MNAs is required to oversee the "defence and affiliated sectors" and "to identify Pakistan's core defence objectives to enable the country to meet its defence needs and targets." Whenever required, Parliament is getting briefing on security matters from the Service Chiefs and decisions are taken through consensus. Although military enjoys autonomy in its internal affairs, healthy civil-military relations exist. These are witnessed in the nation's fight against terror in the country, especially in Swat and South Waziristan. ■

¹⁹ For instance, the democratic government of PML under Nawaz Sharif asked the military to establish military courts to decide civil cases and monitor the billing of electricity.