Impact of Civil-Military Relations on Foreign Policy of Pakistan

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‘Our objective should be peace within and peace without. We want to live peacefully and maintain cordial relations with our immediate neighbours and with world at large. We have no aggressive designs against anyone. We stand by the United Nations Charter and will gladly make our contribution to the peace and prosperity of the world.’

The Quaid’s statement regarding foreign policy of Pakistan.

Quaid-e-Azam laid the solid foundation of the foreign policy. As the foreign policy of a state reflects its designs to move in the world. Our foreign policy clearly reflects the commitment of peace. With unique strategic location in South Asia, surrounded by frontline states like ever hostile India in the east, Iran in the west, China in the north and Afghanistan in the north-west Pakistan has always been considered as pivot for the regional and international powers for the implementation of their policies. After its emergence in 1947 in bipolar world, it started its journey by joining Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and it tackled Indian propaganda against Pakistan for being a monstrosity. It extended relations with Islamic countries and bravely championed their causes. Special ties were cultivated with neighbor Iran, and further with Turkey and Saudi Arabia. India’s exponent designs to engulf Kashmir were not acceptable by Pakistan. Afghanistan enmity was also another factor together with former U.S.S.R’s love affair with India and increasing economic crisis compelled Pakistan to tilt towards U.S.A but the big power always showed a cold shoulder in the hour of need and the defense pacts with it proved to be elusive. Though this relation persists in many terms and Pakistan has a prominent position in American policy. Security concern due to hostile neighbor India and unfriendly Afghanistan has always governed foreign policy of Pakistan. Pakistan is currently having major alliances with all regional and international organizations. To maintain its territorial integrity Pakistan was compelled to prefer security over strengthening its institutions and economy. On the other hand the impact of external and internal threats on civil-military relations in a state is major determinant of the nature of this interaction. In Pakistan, military has always tackled the internal and external security threats either in form of India’s four time hegemony against Pakistan or the menace of terrorism in the state since the last decade which erupted soon after Pakistan became the non NATO ally of the U.S in its war on terror.

Approaches regarding the foreign policy analysis are interlinked with the one of international relations. In all perspectives of the field of international relations, foreign policy is mentioned as an important determinant. This fact cannot be denied that a state is
the central pivot of foreign policy. While shaping the foreign policy that is in turn its strongest strategy to move in the international realm of affairs different approaches are applied. But the dynamic nature of foreign policy is hereby interlinked with the transient nature of international relations. The foreign policy takes different shaped and is redefined according to the indigenous policies of the state and largely depends on the political situation of a country. Civil and military powers and the type of regime strongly influence the foreign policy of a country. The current study aims at defining the goals of the current era where the civil and military elite have set a new trend and provided a space mutually in all foreign policy making decisions in the best interest of the state. Either the foreign relations with Western powers are examined or the regional interaction of the country is assessed, Pakistan has emerged with a new strategy and policy determinants to maintain the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state.

Foreign policy of Pakistan has been redefined and reshaped regarding the security concerns in different eras. Indian conspiracy to bifurcate Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh was aided by the Soviet Union and other countries. Indra Gandhi had been wishing to sink the Two Nation Theory down in Bay of Bengal since long. For her the tragic episode of Dacca fall was like dream came true. With dawn of 21st century when Pakistan had gained the status of a nuclear state. In aftermath of 9/11, an international conspiracy with wider plot was hatched by the U.S and its allies to dismember Nuclear Pakistan. The goals were to destabilize, de-Islamize and denuclearize Pakistan. Pakistan passed through the darkest period of its history as terrorism paralyzed the infrastructure of the state and more than seventy thousand Pakistani civilians and soldiers shed their blood in terrorist attacks. 118 billion $ financial loss along with a social trauma whole nation suffered with, are the irreparable damages which Pakistan had to bear. This was the time armed forces of Pakistan as always bravely tackled the terrorists as well as external hatchers of this disaster.

Socio-political history, external as well as internal threat environment, strengths and weaknesses of the civilian political institutions strongly shaped the nature of civil-military relations in the state. Since its inception, Pakistan has had a bitter history regarding this relation due to a number of reasons. The chief reason for the above has been the primacy of the military at the cost of civilian institutions of the state. It was all due to unusual security environment in the region. This state institution has history of four direct military coups in 1958, 1969, 1977, and 1999. According to Askari “military used to maintain a very professional, disciplined, task oriented cohesive profile along with a strong esprit d’ corps and was always viewed as inevitable for the survival of the state.” It held the reins of the country for 33 years out of 71 years of independence. But for the rest of the time, it had powerful influence in the national politics with all major national security and foreign policy decisions taken by the military leadership.

Authoritative control of military over the foreign policy was experienced during military rule of Gen Ayub Khan, Gen Yahya Khan and Gen Zia-ul-Haq. In 1999 Gen Musharraf controlled the reigns of the state. Amidst 9/11 episode he took a bold step regarding foreign policy when he decided to become non NATO strategic ally of the US IN War on Terror. The ruling Party Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-e-Azam(PML-Q) supported the
Military elite in all foreign policy matters till the regime change in 2008. However he compelled the civilian part of the state to stay on his crafted page to support the US administration. His policy dragged Pakistan in the darkest era of history in terms of security concerns. According to the Rational Choice Approach both civil and military elite provide a space to each other in policy making decisions for the best interest of the country. Both consult each other and take mutual decisions in this regard. An emergence of new pattern in civil-military relations in Pakistan was witnessed during last decade of democracy (2008–2018). New trend of hybrid relation was set strongly during this era that got more strength during the current civil government of Pakistan Tehrik-e –Insaf. It is rested on granting the military a dominant role regarding the decisions on national security and critical foreign relations, mainly including Afghanistan and India policies. Though in last decade there were many conflicting factors, Memogate was the most triggering factor between the civilian and military leadership but military did not went for a coup and decided to remain on back. Nawaz Sharif during power in 2013–2018, ambitiously tried to pacify relations with India. In this effort even he did not hesitate to use backdoor channels which irked the military leadership because it just wanted to adopt systematic way to mend the relations. To achieve sustainable peace with hostile India military elite advised Nawaz Sharif to move in consultation with military counterpart which he totally ignored. Dawn Leaks was not matter of any disagreement over foreign policy rather it was a matter of internal strained relations between civil and military establishment.

Though Zardari also made blunders in start but he took back step and let the military to lead in foreign policy matters. Kashmir remained an important factor in soaring the relations between Pakistan and India. The current premier Imran Khan and COAS Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa have presented the Kashmir Issue on international forum with unanimous consent and strategy applauded at international level.

Imran Khan came into power after general elections in 2018; he inherited many domestic as well as foreign policy issues including the individual key relations with important countries. New PM showed peace overtures towards India but it ignored. Recognizing the fragile economic condition of the state he did. Mending ways with Afghanistan and the US was more favorable for the newly elected government in collaboration and full consultation of the military.

The glaring example of cordial relation or in other words the troika of CIA, Pentagon and Washington DC is inevitable for successful foreign policy of the U.S. Pakistan has followed the same pattern and the coordination of ISI, GHQ and Islamabad is a new horizon in the realm of affairs. Geo political importance of Pakistan for the regional and international actors has made it the most important state of South Asia. The National Security Council (NSC) and Defense Cabinet Committee (DCC) proved their antagonistic role, either we talk about disintegration of East Pakistan or Kargil war. Both these bodies were used like paper boats in different eras as the civil military relations remained at soaring point. In current era NSC and DCC have established an effective decision making and sharing mechanism. The NSC provides a legal framework to military for its role in security and foreign policy. While DDC was established to enhance the civilian guidance in security and foreign policy.
Currently the main concerns of Pakistan in foreign policy are to maintain peace with India, to further extend its strategic ties with China, to play its key role in Afghan peace talks with Taliban and to implement an effective external agenda for economic uplift of the state. It is well said there are no permanent friends or foes in international relations but Pakistan is lucky to have cordial relations with all-weather friend China and Islamic states. Being an atomic power is a heavy weight to be carried on for a state like Pakistan. Democratic renaissance since 2008 general elections and the security concerns provided a historic opportunity to the civil and military top brass to establish coherence and cohesion in foreign policy-making of Pakistan. The civil military leadership has recognized fully the need to approach the foreign policy targets through the phenomenon of integration of opinion and mutual decision making. Both civil and military leadership are at full zeal to implement new approach towards U.S.A, improving state ties with Iran and Afghanistan, and in playing crucial role in the Muslim world. U.S.A has strategic interest in this region and has its own policies with China, Afghanistan and India while its policies with these countries had negative impact on policies with Pakistan like in past but during the recent tenure of elected government both civil and military leadership have adopted strong policies which compelled the U.S Administration to change its old notion and tone towards Pakistan and fully recognized its importance in the region.

In Pakistan either the civilian or the military alone cannot manage the troubled political system so they have committed to pursue cooperation and work in harmony while staying in their own domains along with respecting each other’s institutional autonomy. In recent era the cordial civil-military equation has much positive impact on foreign policy matters.

While dealing with all foreign fronts the civil and military leadership have perfect compatibility and the consequences of reshaped foreign policy have been applauded both at regional and global level. Talking about the hostile India which has waged four wars against Pakistan since its inception, recently has humiliated itself in the whole world when Pakistan Air Force hit fighter plane of India entering in Pakistan. Military establishment and the civil government had same narrative in this regard. It was a great defeat of India while on international level Pakistan was appreciated for its good gesture of sending the Indian pilot back. Pakistan respectfully averted Indian aggression. Foreign office of Pakistan promptly and firmly coordinated with the P5 of Security Council and other countries to disclose the hegemonic designs of India.

Pakistan has been an important player during the wars of superpowers (former U.S.S.R and the U.S) in Afghanistan. So the motherland has to adhere a very strong foreign policy in which cordial relations of the two institutions will provide further current on foreign fronts. In last two democratic governments and during the tenure of sitting government the pace of collaboration of the two institutions has exceeded. Though Pakistan is still passing through a financial slum but the foreign diplomacy is at its peak. Not only has the civilian leadership rather the military top brass also aided the process of betterment by visiting many regional and international countries. The premiers of many
states have visited Pakistan and showed their full confidence in extending their relations with Pakistan.

Pakistan has been a prey to conspiracies of regional as well as international powers after it became nuclear state. Foreign policy of Pakistan clearly depicts the commitment to maintain peace in the region and the world but the agenda of the enemies has been to present Pakistan as a failed state politically as well as economically. The joint resolution of civil-military leadership is to enhance the foreign relations for the betterment of the state. In recent era Pakistan has gained success in becoming strategic partner of Saudi Arabia. Foreign office is working effectively. In international relations the body language of the executive clearly narrates the strength of the government.

Before discussion on Afghanistan once again it is worth mention here that the foreign policy of Pakistan with the super power America was never at equity in its 71 years history. But a prominent change has been observed during recent era when both the military and civil leadership has refused to be used by this power at cost of its own security and sanctity. The hardcore president Donald Trump had warned Pakistan a few months back regarding its counter terrorism efforts and to cut off military aid. He has totally reverted its stance and recently stated that Pakistan has the key to peace in Afghanistan. This is one of the biggest achievements of Pakistan on foreign fronts. As Pakistan is playing its prominent role for establishing successful peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Trump has also requested Pakistan to play its key broker role for a peace deal.

Again in Yemen crisis the foreign policy was quite natural and responsible as all-time friend Saudi Arabia asked Pakistan to send its military troops to Yemen but the then civil government discussed with military establishment and in the parliament and the common consensus in this regard was not to send troops to Yemen. But Pakistan added by offering to play role regarding peace negotiations.

China is all weather friend of Pakistan in truest sense. As it was national commitment of the civil and military leadership to make nuclear bomb without considering any super power. Likewise the completion and implementation of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become international commitment. During the years when terrorism had caste its darkest shadow on the whole state, China moved forward with its gigantic project which will prove to be a fate changer and would be a source for economic uplift of Pakistan. That is the reason it was chief of army staff (COAS) of that time who took whole responsibility of the security of the project. Now China feels freer in further investment in further in Pakistan.

Both important institutions of the state have fully recognized that only a symbiotic relation can be fruitful at full extent. Effective foreign policy and strong stance on foreign fronts have made Pakistan to present Kashmir issue in much better position at international level in current era. As foreign policy is a response not a reaction so the effective tools are smartly used to get success on all fronts. Pakistan still needs a far
better policy to tackle its current security, economic issues and foreign policy challenges. Foreign diplomats are given regular briefings regarding Pakistan’s economy and security. Pakistan is using smarter diplomacy with Iran too and recent visit of premier ended with more economic agreements and joint communiqué regarding the Kashmir issue. Economic relationships are getting stronger with side support of establishment. The current premier of Pakistan is having full confidence of the military leadership on all platforms.

The proof of this support is in form of visits of high officials from GHQ to Saudi Arabia, U.A.E and Qatar before the Pakistani premier’s official visits. This is a turning point in civil-military history of Pakistan where the military is playing its crucial role both on external and internal fronts.¹¹

Some recommendations regarding the foreign policy to make it more effective and practical include a strong comprehensive vision of civil and military leadership though it has been achieved at much extent in recent era. Despite of the fact that in domestic policies the civil and military elite have clear differences but regarding foreign and security policies both are on same page. Need of the time is to devise more effective ways to remove all disagreements which are created over the adoption of right strategy to achieve set goals of foreign policy. An unseen power struggle which strongly worked in past and even in recent era of democracy (2008-2018) it was witnessed, needs an end. Through practice of Rational Choice Approach both civil and military leadership have benefited the state in international level but decade’s long ideological difference between the two institutions needs an end. The continuity of policy of Pakistan in last four decades has been witnessed due to power struggle between the two institutions where civilian leaders used to present this issue on international level as a foreign policy and democracy concern of the state to grab a leverage while the international world and media have portrayed this situation more drastic than the reality to for their own pursuit.

In West more likely this relation was exploited in past to keep strong check on Pakistan in terms of its own political interests and nuclear program of Pakistan. West tried its best to keep the military away from foreign policy issues and interests but the recent era is contrary to their objectives as military has strong hold on it. Pakistan is entrapped in a vicious cycle of geopolitics and it cannot afford a state within state so the best strategy has been adopted by the recent democratically elected governments to collaborate with the military both at indigenous and international level to pursue its national security and foreign policy. The world has now recognized Pakistan with its new image where peace has been resumed and military has performed its powerful role both at regional and international level. Either it was to raise voice for the oppressed nations or to extend military help to create peace in troubled states or was it to gain economic ties with big powers and inclusion in internal forum. Pakistan has successfully achieved these foreign policy goals. The success in this regard is outcome of the balanced and cordial relation of civil and military establishment.

Despite of all recent positive developments in civil-military relations causing great impact on foreign policy of the state this fact cannot be denied that whenever military overthrew the civil governments in Pakistan and interfered in domestic politics which ultimately had
strong influence on foreign relations as well, Pakistan had to suffer in different perspectives. Strong need to re-balance this relation in best favor of civil government can thwart the chances of military coups in future. Rational Choice approach is strongly favorable for the state like Pakistan, where the hybrid form of CMR will be helpful further to support the national and foreign policy matters. Regardless of the fact that parliamentary nature of government with strong democracy is powerful enough to control the national and foreign policy matters but a cordial nature of civil-military relation has far more positive impact in shaping and maintaining the foreign policy in the ever changing political and economic world.

The fructification of this strong interaction can be enhanced by more measures including, in interaction with the U.S both the civil leadership and the establishment should adopt a more forthright position. New options should be used for coping with our current economic, military and diplomatic pressures. As it is clearly evident that the phenomenon of ‘regionalism’ is the new trend and the proactive states are setting new goals in foreign policies. Pakistan should prioritize its foreign policy goals by pacing with the rapidly changing international political and economic environment. As Pakistan is blessed with unique strategic location and rich in natural reserves, it should recognize its value at this high time to take its new flight to make the land peaceful and to nullify the impact of the label of failed state. Both the civil and military institutions need more cooperation and interaction to achieve all goals on regional and international fronts as dreamt by the father of nation.
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Notes and References

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