

Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: A Case Study of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf from General Elections (2018) to Senate Election (2021)

Abstract

Civil-military relations in a democratic state should be conducted smoothly within the framework of civilian supremacy. There is plethora of writing on the civil-military relations in Pakistan blaming the military for all the wrong doings and evils in the state. It holds the military responsible for civil regime change in the country while ignoring all political instability created by politicians. Little literature is available on the current period starting from 2018 onwards presenting a contrary picture of civil-military relationship; therefore this study attempts to assess the dynamics of current civil-military relationship in Pakistan. Uneasy and tense civil-military relations in past derailed the democracy in the country many times but the state was also unable to attain the fruits of its independence. Though during the era of Asif Ali Zardari and Nawaz Sharif, democracy found opportunities to flourish and for the first time in the history of the state two democratically elected governments completed their consecutive tenure and the third elected government came into power peacefully. During this era Pakistan was able to cope with the grave internal and external security challenges because civil and military leadership mostly remained on the same page. Due to better understanding of the both elite; Pakistan won the war on terror. A new chapter of civil-military relations started with a great pace in 2018 when Pakistan Tehrik-e Insaf came into power. The current study will investigate, explore and analyze the civil military relations from 2018 onwards. The hypothesis of this study is that during the above stated period under discussion, civil-military relations improved and brought about positive results in Pakistan. Therefore, it is significant to explain how the civil-military relationship has improved and why both civil and military top brass leadership took all the major political parties on board regarding discussion on all important internal and external issues. Civil military relationship in Pakistan has been in writing by many historians but there is dearth of work on the period under discussion and therefore the current study has analyzed the nature of civil-military relationship in Pakistan during the era of current government. Hopefully it will provide a clear picture of well coordinated civil-military relations in Pakistan.

Introduction

Balanced civil-military relations constitute an important determinant of national security policy. These are vital in both peace and war time for the stability of the state. During peace time, this relationship helps in enhancing the stability of the state during peace time and during war time; this kind of relation strongly influences the consequences. While discussing the concept of civil-military relation, the principle of civilian supremacy gains the most important place. In recent era where a major shift in socio-political changes has taken place at both regional and global level and new trends in civil-military interaction have emerged. Old traditional limits between civil and military institution have faded along with all old approaches urging for legal and formal aspects which restricts the military to its subordinate role as a state institution in crafting the national security policy. In recent scenario the military stands as an equal stakeholder in all security issues.¹

In Pakistan right after its inception, a semi civilian and non-elected government remained in power from 1947 to 1958. During 1958-1962 tenure, the country experienced the direct military rule and it adopted a new shape in which the military President strengthened its hold through an elected government. A major change took place when Pakistan passed through another spell of two years of direct military rule from 1969 to 1971 casting its dark shadow. A civilian President came into power by making a democratically elected government from 1971 to 1977, but the process of democratic consolidation was unable to give fruitful results due to slow pace. During 1977 to 1985, direct military rule in the state was witnessed while the same military President changed the form of government in 1985 and the newly elected government continued to work under his control till 1988. A transition period of eleven years of four consecutive governments from 1988 to 1999 neither could support the process of democratization, nor help to restrict another military rule from 1999 to 2002. The era under military control further weakened the institution of democracy. Same military ruler took camouflage in

* Dr Mhuammad Saleem(Major), Free Lance Anchor, Lahore

** Dr Kalsoom Hanif, Department of History, LCWU, Lahore

*** Rao Shahid Mahmood Khan, Social Media Department, IUB, Bahawalpur

**** Dr Naem Qazi, GHQ, Rawalpindi

¹Rizvi, H.A. 2014

form of a military president with an elected government in 2002 till 2008.²

During 2009-2012, two triggering factors were created by PPP government against the Military. It made a strong effort to control the armed forces but the military aborted this attempt and protected its own institutional interests. A form of inter-institutional disharmony was witnessed.³ PMLN government repeated the same mistakes during 2013-2018. Many such episodes are seen in political history of Pakistan where weak institutions, enslaved judiciary, a fragile political system and inefficient political leaders were the major contributors in derailing the democratic governments. The political leadership gained maximum personal interests while ignoring the electorate. National interest was always compromised and bad governance compelled the military to interfere by taking control directly or indirectly. Self-resilience of Pakistan was pledged in hands of foreign powers by this inefficient political leadership for decades. The democratic era from 2008-2018 is replete with many dark episodes of nepotism, corruption and favoritism in political picture of Pakistan as well. On the other hand, 'hybridized relations' a new term has also emerged strongly in this era in which both institutions cooperated with each other.

Rational Choice Approach by Civil Military Elite: A new horizon

Huntington and Finer find a prominent place in civil-military relations studies for many decades. Realism approach dominated in this field of study. During post-Cold War era, a new trend in civil-military relations emerged by applying rational choice approach. It finds its roots in empirical approach.⁴ Like other state institutions Military has its own rational tendencies in the political system as it stands as a core stakeholder. This approach argues that, 'all actors maximize their benefits by opting different course.'⁵ This is done after full assessment of the cost and effectiveness of all available options, and then choice is made and opted. There is no political ideology working as a driver behind this process neither it is fixed. Rational decisions are the best options to avoid any civil-military rift. It can be helpful in bringing the divergent views of the two elite, closer to a mutual agreement. Same approach was applied in past, as evident from statement of DG ISPR, Athar Abbas in 2008, "Due to many internal and external security challenges, the Army did not impose martial law at that time and applied rational approach." He also added that the top most priority of the military leadership was to eradicate terrorism and insurgency from the state.⁶ Both military and civilian establishments are responsible to safeguard the sovereignty of the state. In any case of any rift or difference of opinion, the best way was adopted by both these institutions to achieve this target.⁷

Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI)

Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI), the current ruling party of Pakistan has become one of the three major political parties of the state and in terms of its representation it is the largest political party in National Assembly as a result of 2018 general elections. It was founded in 1996 by Imran Khan. He made it with a motive to establish Pakistan as a welfare state. Party could win a single seat in elections of 1997 and 2002 as well. It remained in opposition during Musharraf rule and later it also boycotted the 2008 general elections. Imran Khan strongly accused malpractices in election procedure. PTI was successful to gain vote bank of PML-Q after the end of Musharraf presidency which was a big blow for the decline of this ruling party. On the other hand disqualification of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani in 2012 also favored PTI and a larger PPP vote bank from Punjab and Khayber Pakhtunkhwa shifted towards this emerging platform. It gained 7.5 million votes in 2018 elections. During 2014 Azadi March and sit-ins in Islamabad, this party raised the strong slogan of "Tabdeeli Arhi Hae."⁸ In 2018 elections PTI was able to receive 16.9 million votes. It was the highest number of votes for any party to receive in general elections in political history of Pakistan till then. Imran Khan the founding chairman of PTI became third consecutive democratically elected Prime Minister of Pakistan and made coalition government in centre and in Punjab and PTI government in Khayber Pakhtunkhwa.⁸ In Baluchistan it appeared in power by making coalition government and in Sindh it has been working as the most powerful opposition.⁹ The party moves with main aim to make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state and

² Siegaafried O. Wolf and Seth Kane, 'Democratic Ambitions under Praetorian Stress - Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan', in *Democracy under Stress: Civil-Military Relations in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Paul Chambers and Aurel Croissant (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies, 2010), 171-200.

³ National Strategy Paper, 2012, 17; Pakistan Army Green Book (2011):85-93.

⁴ Anthony Forster. "New -Civil Military Relations and its Research Agendas", *The Quarterly Journal*. no.2 (April 2002):75-85.

⁵ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996),65-80.

⁶ Interview of Athar Abbas.

⁷ Anthony, Heath. *Rational Choice and Social Exchange: A critique exchange theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976),3; Green, Donald P., Shapiro, Ian. *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Application in Political Science*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996) ,34-55.;

⁸ ;The Pathans Suits', *magazine.outlookindia.com/*.

⁹ Voting positions :PTI won more popular votes than PPP. 'The Express Tribune'.28 MAY,2018

erasing any type of religious discrimination from the state.¹⁰ It supports Islamic democracy and strongly advocates its anti-status quo movement. It has been bashed for its attempts to snub media freedom.¹¹

PTI Government in the time of Challenges

Right after controlling the reigns of the power, newly elected government of PTI had to face grave issues like inflation, poverty, injustice, internal and external security threats. Due to its unique strategic importance and geographical location Pakistan has faced grave issue of security since its inception. Its riches have compelled the regional as well global powers to entangle with Pakistan. While political instability in Pakistan is decades old notion which was always a valid point for Pakistan army to interfere in internal realm of affairs either in form of direct or indirect coup. Though civilian supremacy has always been a favorite form of government but Pakistan has experienced four long military coups.¹² During the era of military coups the civil government remained responsible for this military action. The repeated military intervention created a rift between the civil and military elite resulting in a continuous unseen standoff between the two institutions.¹² Civil-military relations in Pakistan experienced a bumpy road long travel till 2008. Military elite took a new turn during 2008 general elections and preferred to support democracy in the country and this initiative led both civil and military elite to remain on same page to tackle the greatest menace of terrorism in wake of war on terror and other grave issues faced by the state. Nawaz Sharif era 2013-2018 witness sourness in civil-military relations. Imran Khan came into power with commitment to eliminate the decades old ills which have destroyed the economic structure of the state. It has kept strong hold on the core issues of corruption and ills practices of the political leadership in past. Political inefficiency of the corrupt leaders in past resulted in fragility of democracy. Military has repeatedly shown its commitment that it would stand with elected government to stabilize the political system of the state. It would not compromise on the security and national interest of the country. Despite of propagandas of the opposition to hide their past practices which destroyed the socio-economic condition of the country, the current government is taking all steps to eradicate the root of these issues and the military support it fully by endorsing its decisions or a consensus is developed on national policy matters before their implementation. Keeping in view all the sensitivity of main issues faced by Pakistan Imran Khan has found it best to implement rational approach towards the military in best interest of the state.

Civil-Military Relations in Imran Khan (from General Elections 2018 to Senate Election 2021)

The newly elected government came into power to overcome the blunders of the past in civil-military relations, though rational choice approach was the main commitment of both civil and military elite. The term of being on 'same page' both civil and military elites compromised in a way or another. Both leaderships have committed to facilitate further development of civil-military relationship so that it will not hamper the process of flourishing democracy, human resource development, nation building and good governance.¹³

Opposition has repeatedly indirectly alleged that the military has supported the PTI in general elections of 2018 to hold power through back doors but the military and civil top leadership are moving ahead with a common goal of well being of the state by sharing a most successful path to tackle all the grave challenges in twenty first century.¹⁴

Imran Khan since capturing the reins of power has nurtured a cordial relation with top military brass. An unprecedented exemplary reception of the newly elected prime minister Imran Khan by the Chief of Army Staff at GHQ was witnessed as a victory for the new civilian government in the state. PTI was fully supported by Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), Mutahida Quami Movement (MQM) and Muslim League Quaid-e-Azam league (PML-Q) were the supporting tools of PTI and it became possible due to silent support by the military. It was cordial civil-military relations which led Army to diffuse Maulana Fazal ur Rehman's sit-in in 2019 at Islamabad. It was the sheer trust of Imran Khan who stated that in case of Fazal ur Rehman's sit-in and his aggressive approach towards toppling down the government, military fully supported Imran Khan and further added that he was honest enough not to be afraid of army and did all decisions independently regarding foreign policy.¹⁵ Either it was a coward surgical strike of India when armed forces of Pakistan gave a humiliated defeat to India by dropping the fighter jet of India and Wing Commander Abhi Nandan of Indian Air force was arrested. Prime minister sent a goodwill gesture of peace by sending the arrested pilot back to India. At that time Major General Asif Ghafoor stated that civil and military leadership was on same page in case of any

¹⁰ Michealson, Marcus (27 March 2012). 'Pakistan's dream catcher' *Qantara.de*.

¹¹ Hussain, Zahid (1 August 2019). 'After a year, PTI is authoritarian, not populist' *Asian Age*. Retrieved 11 May 2020.

¹² ALtaf, Hina, 'History of Military Interventions in Political Affairs in Pakistan' (2019). CUNY *Academic Works*

¹³ 'Civil-military relations'. Jahangir Ashraf Qazi, 'Dawn', January, 2019.

¹⁴ www.express-tribune.com. Retrieved on 15 January 2019.

¹⁵ 'Daily Jang', 15 Feb 2020.

foreign aggression with same motive of maintaining peace in territory and the region.¹⁶

Establishment has proved itself to be one of the influential stakeholders in power politics of Pakistan. Most of the times it exercises its power in the greater interest of the state but it occasionally displays its power show to send a strong message to political elite to toe its line in foreign policy and security matters which are taken as threat to civilian government. Under the umbrella of national interests, establishment has often overstretched its powers in past that was taken as grave threat to political governments. In past military elite used to dictate civil government and contrary to it politicians smashed reasons of failures on establishment, tried to conceal their failures under harsh criticism on military. But recent era has been moving under the umbrella of rational approach where both leaderships try to reach a consensus over national interest's issues. COAS has provided full support in need of hour to control many issues. Regarding economic uplift of the state and development projects, he has accompanied the Prime Minister in many crucial foreign visits. Even before the formal visits of the Prime Minister, COAS himself remained active in making environment more favorable for Pakistan. Earlier visits of Imran Khan to Saudi Arabia, UAE and West are glaring examples. At times PTI government has shown reservations regarding its trust on the military reflecting some tension with military as in National Assembly on 12 Feb, 2020; advisor of PM on finance Dr Hafeez Sheikh stated that no civil government in 70 years could complete its tenure. COAS General Bajwa stated that military was not interested in any type of interference in political matters and it also urged that PTI government will complete its tenure and military kept itself aloof from all types of Law framing, Electoral reforms and NAB matters.¹⁷ China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a gigantic project of China for the economic integration of the region has become fate changer for Pakistan. This flagship project of China is based in Pakistan and showing positive consequences as it is heading towards completion of its megaprojects. Army is controlling and providing full logistic support and protection for the completion of this fate changer plan. This involvement of the military shows a complete mutual trust of two institutions of the state. CPEC projects needed strict security requirements due to ongoing terrorism in the state since the inception of this mega project. Military established its special security unit in this regard and the military could build up its administrative role legally in administrative system but it chose to move rationally.¹⁸ Lt Gen Asim Saleem Bajwa was appointed as chairman of CPEC Authority and advisor to Prime Minister on media. After the matter of allegations of corruption against him when he presented his resignation; it was the Prime Minister Imran Khan who openly showed his full trust on him and did not accept it by stating that due to any such conspiracy without any solid proof against him could create a rift between civil and military elite.¹⁹

In civil-military relations, military elite has always held a strong control over national security and foreign policy matters. PTI government did not hesitate to accept this status of military but in recent era military leadership fully supported Prime Minister in foreign policy matters. In past democracy could never find solid ground in the state to flourish as good governance and democracy both require the proper development of institutions, habits, attitudes, practices of the masses. It is a time taking process. There is dire need of structural and administrative reforms in Pakistan to cope with existing internal and external challenges. This elected government is successfully contextualizing civil-military relations but not at the cost of civilian supremacy. It avoids creating any reservations to the institutional interests of the military. It always admits that the political salience of the military in a security state like Pakistan is indispensable for its betterment. The Prime Minister is committed to transform the old political dispersion into an improved and effective form. People are more aware and they demand for a new just political order and on the other hand there is more empathy between the military and the ruling party that is favorable for strengthening the democratic principle of civil-military relationship. Civilian supremacy could only be achieved when the government is successful in establishing its political authority along with moral power unlike past where political authorities had no moral power and lost their powers within two or three years of assuming office. But the current government is moving forward even by tackling many grave issues. In whole realm of affairs of the state, it has involved the military in a way or other. The current political government is taking all steps to establish their authority to tackle the political assertiveness of different unelected institutions. Pakistan is still paying the heavy costs of failures and deviations of past democratic governance.

But the general elections of July 2018 gave a death blow to 30 years long turbulent democratic rule of PPP and PMLN. The executive and the military have developed a symbolic relationship since start on the basis of mutual trust. Both happily coordinate rather than opposing or threatening power domains of each other. One of the vital reasons behind these healthy relations is that Prime Minister Imran Khan

¹⁶ 'ARY News', 23 Sep, 2020.

¹⁷ 'Daily Jang', 22 Sep, 2020.

¹⁸ <http://link.springer.com>. Retrieved on 20 June, 2020.

¹⁹ 'Daily Jang' 5 Sep, 2020.

had no past clash or reservation against the military. His main motive and focus is the recovery of country's wealth from the strong hands of past political leadership. This motive is never opposed by the military neither it has any objection in it.²⁰ In national security and foreign policy domains the military is strongly able to maintain its mutual will with the civil elite. At points there is a difference of opinion between the two and it must not be considered as a total hybrid kind of relationship as in case of Nawaz Sharif's exit from Pakistan on the basis of deteriorated health issues was not endorsed by Imran Khan who did not want his exit but the court intervention gave a way to the former for departure. Though government has decided to award full term extension to COAS but departure of Sharif shows that still level of difference can exist between the two on the basis of political goals and security issues and the decision is made what is best for the country.²¹

It was civil and military leadership consensus that in consequence of Indian aggression against Pakistan on 27th Feb 2019 and imposition of longest barbaric lockdown in Kashmir on Aug 5, 2019, Imran Khan strongly raised the Kashmir issue on global level and was fully endorsed by global powers even.²² During current era Imran Khan-led government has made exemplary decisions creating a civil-military balance as it has inherited many evils from previous governments and to eradicate them it needs support of military at full scale. Military on the other hand has also changed stance keeping in view strategic transitions on regional and global level so it prefers to rule under the umbrella of civilian regime.

Though civil-military relations have been taken as an issue that does not result in some productive discussion often and the norm of military dictatorship is considered as a disaster to political consolidation but rational approach of current PTI-led government towards military is a wise act to load off decade old political failures and ills of previous regimes.

Strong stance of Imran Khan towards Kashmir Issue has conveyed message to the whole world that Pakistan will never surrender Kashmir and civil-military leadership are on same page. Foreign policy of Pakistan is in strong hands and on global level it has been acknowledged that Pakistan is pivotal to create peace in Afghanistan. U.S has acknowledged that peace in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without Pakistan. Civil and military leadership walks side by side in the whole scenario as both know well that peace in Afghanistan is correlated to peace in Pakistan. Knowing well the fact that Pakistan is surrounded by grave enemies in form of India and Afghanistan and intelligence agencies of India, Afghanistan, the U.S, and Israel have been working in collaboration to dismantle Pakistan but the civil government fully endorses all decision of the military elite regarding security and peace issues of the state. In Parliament and Upper House no such law can be articulated or promulgated that can lead to disaster of military efforts or powers regarding its strategic decisions on security and matters of national interest.²³ Pakistan's foreign policy towards India has never been aggressive but the current government with support of military leadership has repeatedly sent strong messages to India that it can never dare to think about causing any threat to the security of Pakistan. Military stands ready to retaliate its aggressive designs 24/7 but that should not be taken as a matter of inferiority. Like past Pakistan knows well to make unforgettable strike towards India but it never wants to halt peace.²⁴ . Both civil and military top leadership has raised voice against the recent Israeli atrocities on the Palestinians at global level and on the platform of United Nations General Assembly it was the strong voice of Pakistan that threatened the Zionist Israel to silent its arms and a cease fire was announced. Either it is Kashmir or Palestine, Myanmar or Lebanon Pakistan has its strong stance to perform its role as a strong Muslim state.

In matter of keeping Pakistan in grey list of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for financing terrorists banned extremists groups in 2020, civil and military leadership has committed to pass through the strict process of evaluation and to get Pakistan come out from this list in 2021. Both at provincial and federal level big decisions were taken. 2020 began with the menace of global pandemic COVID-19 which engulfed millions of lives over the world. In Pakistan to tackle this grave threat cardinal decisions were made with mutual consensus and civil-military leadership established National Command Operation Center (NCOC) that was aimed to synergize all national efforts and make vital decisions against COVID-19.²⁵ During the strong outbreak of the pandemic Pakistan Army stood along the civil government on frontline and fully participated in this national cause.²⁶

Recently held Senate elections in Pakistan were won by PTI-led government and the coalition

²⁰ www.sadf.eu.Retrived on 21 Feb 2021.

²¹ www.dawn.com.Retrieved on 5 Sep,2020

²² www.Dawn.com.227th June 2020.

²³ www.senate.gov.pk

²⁴ www.orfonline.org

²⁵ www.fatf-gafi.org

²⁶ <https://ncoc.gov.pk>

opposition in form of Pakistan Democratic Movement(PDM) tried to hit hard by blaming the current government and military's support to make him king as kingmaker itself. It strongly urged that bad governance of Imran Khan and ill policies have resulted in inflation, unemployment, ill treatment of minorities and snubbing of media but the civil-military leadership is on same page to move forward to eradicate the roots of decades old evils while the military above this stance strongly adheres to defend the state from enemies and as well fully guarding the national interest of the country. While Imran Khan has strongly warned the opposition not to take anti-army stance and urged to maintain its sanctity as one of the major institutions of the state.²⁷

Conclusion

The current era of Imran Khan-led government in Pakistan has presented a bright picture of civil-military relations where both elite are committed to do their best for security and national interest of Pakistan. Imran Khan is an honest and bold leader who has not done corruption or political blunders like leaders in past. Though he has been in power for the first time but he has a charismatic approach with the largest vote bank ever and moves with a positive chemistry with military leadership. While military top brass knows well how to support and endorse political decisions on national security and interest and where not to compromise. That is the reason both have tried well in these three years to reach a mutual consensus on all national issues and foreign policy matters. The decades old civil-military approach of military dictatorship or civilian supremacy has taken a new centric route of rational choice approach that will certainly result in best for the state and society. Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan has shown his complete trust on the military and has endorsed the statement that security of Pakistan is in strong hands and any type of threat will be dealt with iron hand. On the other hand the COAS has stated that the current government will complete its tenure and the military is not interested in any type of interference in political matters of the state though it will stand with political elite in better interest of the state. The military is not involved in the domestic politics on one hand and on the other the political elite does not interfere in the security matters how the military moves. This cordiality of the two top brass is in best interest of the country. As the regional and global transitions in economy, security and challenges of twenty first century are hard to be faced by a state like Pakistan which has suffered due to selfish approach of the past political leadership. By keeping in view all these challenges, their consequences and the unique strategic and geographical importance of Pakistan the current civil and the military leadership are making best decisions whose far reaching effects are being witnessed recently. This course will go long by establishing more balance in this mutual interaction.

²⁷ 'Daily Jang'.10 Jan 2021.