

**RESEARCH PAPER****Understanding the Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: A Case Study of the PML-N Regime (2013-18)****Dr. Sharaf Ali**

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**\*Corresponding Author:** Shaarif.ali@uog.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

This Paper aimed to re-assess the changing dynamics of the Civil-Military relations during the period of the PML-N regime (2013-18). This Paper provided a review of the significant developments in the Civil-Military relations during the aforesaid period. This study has mainly relied on the descriptive and case study research methods i.e. for achieving the objectives of this research. The results of the study provided that the Civilian leadership of the PML-N regime simply failed to gain any extra room for changing the traditional dynamics of the civil-military relations i.e. in favor of the democratically elected civilian leadership. Rather, the PML-N regime directly involved the military for overcoming the politico-economic and governance issues which obviously lead to sustain the traditional stronghold of the military i.e. in the politics of Pakistan. This study recommended that the political leadership shall have to change their own mindset first, and later, they have to devise a serious plan/strategy to bring the pre-requisite changes in the internal structure of the political parties i.e. for strengthening the base of democracy which serves as the actual source of strength for the civilian leadership. Additionally, for the purpose of gaining/enhancing the base of their legitimate power, the civilian leadership needs to focus on improving the overall quality of the governance as well.

**KEYWORDS**

Overseas Pakistanis Ministry, OPF, Children of Overseas Pakistanis, Contribution, Education, Scholarship, Seat Reservation

**Introduction**

Pakistan has experienced multiple decades under direct military rule and it has not been able to adopt a sustainable and strong democratic system of government due to the parochial role of the military in the politics of Pakistan (Rizvi, 2004; Shah, 2003). The Pakistan military traditionally claims itself as the chief protector of the national integrity and sovereignty, the de facto guardian of the national interest, and the sole conciliator between the major political stakeholders in the politics of Pakistan (Ahmed, 2009; Waseem, 2007; Cloughly, 2008). Traditionally, the historical patches of the civilian rule were routinely found plagued with the dog fight between the government and opposition benches, power struggle between the various state institutions, and the strained center-province relations. The aforesaid problematic conditions normally lead to the autocratic system of governance decorated with the policy level mismanagement and political corruption which usually resulted to make the civilian government unpopular among the general masses, hence, creating the opportunity for the military intervention in the politics of Pakistan (Wolf, 2013, April 1). Over the course of history, the military has been successful in fostering a general perception among the public that the civilian political leadership is incompetent for running government or the state affairs in general.

**Literature Review**

According to the views of Schumpeter (1942), There existed a widely accepted version of democracy which essentially necessitates an effective electoral system only. In

simple words, he believed that a particular state can be ranked as a democratic state if, at least, it maintains an effective electoral system i.e. for choosing their representatives for running the affairs of government. This is the minimalist approach for democracy.

Hadenius (1992) provided that there existed multiple theoretical versions of the 'democracy' i.e. as a core concept of politics and political science. According to him, conceptually, the word 'democracy' is understood as a state level institutional arrangement/form of government which is governed through the elected representatives chosen by the general public by following some transparent institutional mechanism ensuring the equal opportunity of political participation for every adult citizen of the state.

According to Brettschneider (2006), conceptually 'democracy' as a political system depends upon at least three core values: Sovereignty of the electorate, equal opportunity to participate in the electoral/political process, and the basic sense of liberty.

According to the views of Dahl (1971), and Diamond (2008), although, the aforesaid three core values of democracy are considered as the essential functional features of any democratic system of government but the scholars disagree regarding both the mode and means of the implementation of the aforesaid principles of democracy. To overcome the aforesaid difficulty about the conceptual understanding of the democracy, it would be wise enough to imagine a spectrum representing the various levels of democracy adjusting the whole range of the possibilities i.e. from the minimalist to idealist versions of democracy.

Croissant et al. (2010) claimed the basic beliefs of the minimalist version of democracy essentially included the constitutional guarantees about the fundamental rights, a definite electoral mechanism ensuring the universal adult franchise, a governance system based on the rule of law, the supremacy of the elected civilian leadership in decision making, and the civilian control on the military forces. According to him, the civilian control over the armed forces works as a *sine qua non* for any democratic system of government. Some scholars are of the view that without achieving complete civilian control over all of the state affairs democracy is simply impossible.

As per the views of Croissant et al. (2011), the nature of civil-military relations becomes the cutting edge defining criteria for treating any system of government/state as democracy i.e. where the elected civilian government can exercise full control over its armed forces without any covert or overt resistance from the leadership of the armed forces. They have further defined the term 'civilian control' as the constant political formula according to which the elected civilian leadership possesses the exclusive authority to take both the policy making and policy implementation oriented decisions. They further provided that, on the other side some level of dysfunctional democracy is equally possible i.e. in which the military leadership tends to control the basic decisions about the nature of political policy structures, and the civilian leadership hardly possesses any potent role in the state level policy decisions, additionally, it is also quite possible to categorize the nature of civilian control in various degrees e.g. weak, mild, moderate, strong etc.

Dahl (1989), Kohn (1997), and Bland, (2001) were of the view that the basic nature of the challenges to the power structures controlled by the democratically elected civilian leadership may be represented in two different formats which can be named as: formally institutionalized prerogatives and the informal contestation. They maintained that the formally institutionalized prerogatives include the formal legal privileges/entitlements through which the military leadership becomes able not only to exclusively control its internal affairs but it becomes in a position to encroach upon an essential role in the general state affairs i.e. related to the foreign, economic and political affairs.

According to Wolf (2016), the supremacy of the democratically elected civilian or military leadership i.e. in the decision making apparatus of some democratic state can be

evaluated on the basis of their respective dominance in the five key areas of the state affairs naming: public policy, elite recruitment, military organization, internal security, and national defense.

Mehmood & Chawla (2021) observed that the military is usually found to be overtly involved in destabilizing the civilian governments in Pakistan, if the civilian governments fail to comply with the demands of the military. In light of the aforesaid premise, they studied the main incidents which irritated the military leadership by making them compelled to interfere in the matters of civilian government during the period of PML(N) regime (2013-2018). The study concluded that the theory of the balance of power is not applicable to the case of Pakistan as the military as institution over powers the position of parliament in Pakistan.

Janjua (2021) explained the effects of the various environmental factors i.e. socio-political culture, governance structure, quality of democracy, institutional values of military etc. upon the existing nature of the civil-military relations in Pakistan. He suggested that there existed a n intellectual and ideological gap between the civilian and military leadership of Pakistan, and there is a need to bridge the aforesaid gap through the intellectual and institutional reforms. He recommended that for the purpose of gaining/enhancing the base of their legitimate power, the civilian leadership needs to focus on improving the overall quality of governance; and the military leadership should consider to adopt the ethos of voluntary subordination to the civilian leadership i.e. as is this case in most of the developed and developing countries.

### **Material and Methods**

This study mainly aimed to review the civil-military relations during the last PML-N regime (2013-18). Keeping view of the nature and objectives of the study, this study has employed case study research methods. Further, for achieving the purpose of this research the researcher has primarily used the secondary data sources, and accordingly, the researchers have conducted a systematic literature review of the relevant published material i.e. Books, published reports of the various think tanks, periodicals, research journals, news reports etc. This research is mainly based on the works of Wolf (2010; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016) and Croissant (2009; 2011; 2013). After conducting an extensive and systematic literature review, the researchers have presented the relevant facts in the form of results/discussion and conclusion i.e. by adjusting those facts according to the scope of this research.

### **Results and Discussion**

The following lines would help to provide an assessment of the role which the military had played during the PML-N regime (2013-18) i.e. according to the analytical framework provided by Wolf (2016) and Croissant (2010; 2011).

#### **The Role of Military in the domain of ‘Public Policy’**

The control of the civilian on the public policy processes means that the democratically elected civilian leadership solely takes decision about the nature, scope and content of the policy oriented decisions by exerting effective control over the means to supervise the administrative implementation of their policy oriented decisions (Croissant et al. 2011: 957). All of the public policy issues are considered as significant for evaluating the degree of civilian control i.e. on the public policy matters, it becomes critically important if

the military enjoys any sort of influence on the public budget making process (Croissant et al. 2011: 140). In the context of Pakistan, the public policy sphere does not directly affect the business interests of the military in general that's why the civilian leadership still enjoys some level of control yet (Wolf, 2013). Historically speaking, the key areas of public policy in Pakistan, especially, the foreign and defense policy are traditionally considered as the domain of the military (Pattnaik, 2000; Wolf and Kane, 2010: 180). Even the civilian leadership has always considered defense oriented expenditure as top priority of the state (Bhutto, 2009; Rizvi, 2003). Traditionally, the civilian governments have accepted the military as main stakeholders in all of the important areas of public policy including the economic and financial policy. The military enjoys an unwavering position in all of the policy circles where it can not only control the vital state institutions, but it can also manipulate the behavior of the political and civilian leadership also. For example, the military manages to get her in-service and the retired officers appointed in the executive positions in the various important institutions/ministries (Rizvi, 2003).

The above noted political formula for the distribution of power i.e. between the democratically elected civilian leadership and the military remained intact during the period under study. In 2014, the newly elected PML-N regime in collaboration with the military leadership launched a National Action Plan (NAP-2014) for eradicating the rampant terrorist incidents in the country. In that context, the military (under the label of enhancing the civil-military interaction) also became part of the hybrid administrative forums called the 'Apex Committees' which were ought to be operated at both the federal and provincial levels (Ali, 2023; ISPR, 2015). Through the establishment of the Apex committees at the federal and provincial level, the military leadership assumed an indirect charge of the administrative affairs by overtly encroaching upon the authority of the civilian leadership. During the whole period of the PML-N regime the supreme authority lied with the military leadership and the aforesaid Apex committees were considered more powerful than the federal and provincial cabinets. This was evident from the fact that the frequency of the meetings of the Apex committees was higher than that of the respective cabinet meetings (Rizvi, 2015). Further, the normal agenda items for the Apex committees not only included the security issues but the economic issues also.

Another major policy level development which led to undermining the role of the democratic institutions was that the PML-N regime created military courts through enacting the 21<sup>st</sup> amendment in the constitution of the state. The establishment of the military court i.e. for the trial of the terrorists and militants can be treated as an indication of the traditional incompetence of the civilian leadership for dealing with the major public issues. Further, some political analysts rated the aforesaid development as a 'constitutional coup' which essentially aimed for the betrayal of the democratic leadership of the country (Dawn, 2015).

### **The Role of Military in the domain of the 'Elite Recruitment'**

The term "Elite Recruitment" means the core principle for creating some political regime including: the major rules and processes of recruiting, selection and granting legitimacy to the high political office holders. The who is in charge of this domain becomes the de facto architect of this basic political formula in a particular state (Taylor, 2003). The civilian control over the elite recruitment necessitates that the military should be proscribed from entering into the electoral processes i.e. in the functional context. Further, the civilian control over the rules of competitions stand compromised if the military assumes any kind of role which may result in interfering or influencing the electoral process (Chambers, 2010; Croissant et al. 2011: 140).

Historically, Pakistan has constantly experienced the sheer sort of military influence in the area of elite recruitment and the military leadership has been involved in launching multiple 'electoral projects' at both the national and provincial levels. Over the period, the role of the military in parliamentary politics got enriched because the major political parties

failed to develop working relationships either being part of the government or being part of the opposition (Wolf and Kane, 2010: 176). Traditionally, the political stakeholders from both the treasury and the opposition benches tried to seek the help of the military leadership for settling the scores against their political rivals. Accordingly, the military leadership has been routinely found engaged in extending her favor/disfavor to their political partners (Croissant et al. 2013: 291). Further, for the purpose of getting the desirable electoral results the military leadership manages to dismantle political parties, creates new political parties, pressurizes individual politicians for leaving or joining a particular political party, restricts the electoral campaign of dissenting political party, and openly supports some particular political leader/party (Wolf, 2013: 26).

In light of the above given facts, this fact is quite evident that the dominant role of the military in the domain of the 'elite recruitment' did not change i.e. even during the period under study, and the military leadership had started using her traditional influence in the domain of 'elite recruitment' right from the initial months of the PML-N regime. For example during the famous 128 days long 'dharna' of PTI against the PML(N) regime, it is claimed that the PML(N) regime itself asked the military leadership to play a role for ending the aforesaid dharna, and accordingly, the military leadership quite happily played that role i.e. desirable by the PML (N) regime itself (The Economic Times, 2014).

### **The Role of Military in the domain of 'Internal Security'**

The domain of ensuring strong and sustainable internal security is the third area of coordination between the civilian and military institutions. The concept of internal security entails two basic dimensions. The first dimension of the internal security is the geographic as the main scope of the internal security arrangements is to eradicate the criminal elements originating/functioning from within the state's own territory. The second dimension is indicated with the covert and overt role and responsibilities of various state agencies i.e. for achieving the core objectives of internal security (Chambers, 2010). Since the core objectives and operations of the internal security deals primarily with the domestic security environment, these responsibilities primarily fall within the jurisdiction of the civilian institutions/authority. The civilian authorities can exercise their due control over the aforesaid affairs of internal security only if they are given jurisdiction through granting with them the resources, capacity and moral-legal support (Chambers, 2010; Croissant, 2013: 140).

Right from the date of its inception, Pakistan is constantly suffering from the menace of political instability and the military has assumed some additional roles related with the infrastructure development and the internal security operations. Most of the democratically elected civilian regimes unhesitatingly invited the military for handling the internal security issues, rather, they have made the option to invite military forces "for aiding" the civilian government as permanent part of the constitution. The aforesaid provision in the constitution of Pakistan has become another main source to legitimize the undue interference of the military in the political institutions. Through using such provisions of the constitution, the political leadership routinely invites the military for their help to restore law and order in the state (Wolf and Kane 2010: 187-188). Over the period the military, through routinizing and ensuring a sustained role in the internal security issues, have started promoting itself as "the sole and ultimate guardian of the internal stability as well as territorial integrity" (Talbot, 2002).

The aforesaid encroachment prone role of the military i.e. in the matters of internal security not only sustained but soared during the period of the PML-N regime. For example, the PML-N regime wanted to settle peace with the militants but the military contrarily decided to extend the campaign and accordingly the military leadership managed to get the PML-N regime aligned with their plan (Haider, 2015; Wolf, 2015). Accordingly, the military showcasing its might over the internal security issues launched a full scale military

operation (named: operation Zarb-e-Azab) in summer 2014 which originally focused on the western border of the country but later the military unilaterally extended the scope of the aforesaid military operation to the whole of country (Zahid, 2015; Ali, 2023). Another example of the military's extended role during the PML-N regime is the military leadership's decision to launch the military controlled security operation in Karachi which aimed to uproot the bases of the violent political/religious groups and the related criminal gangs. The circumstances were quite similar to the operation Zarb-e-Azab, the decision to carry out the corrective measures against the aforesaid criminal elements was primarily taken by the military leadership, and the military leadership informed the civilian government (in the provincial Apex committee) after taking the basic policy decision (Rizvi, 2015).

### **The Role of Military in the domain of 'National Defense'**

The policy domain of the national defense is primarily related with the core functions of the military and conceptually it includes actions ranging from development of the national security policy to the development of the defense equipment and troops (Alagappa, 2001; Trinkunas, 2005). Although the military officials are considered as experts in the formulation and implementation of national defense policy i.e. even in the established democracies, such policies and their respective implementation is conducted under the strict scrutiny and oversight of the democratically elected civilian leadership. Additionally, any such national defense oriented actions could be treated as compatible with the democratic norm of the civilian supremacy only if the actual authority to control the nature, scope, frequency, and time duration of such actions lies in the hands of the democratic institutions i.e. parliament (Croissant et. al., 2010: 958-959).

After the independence, Pakistan military, especially in the context of multiple full scale wars with India (due to the border disputes), had assumed an exclusive charge of the defense policy i.e. particularly related with its neighboring states (Wolf and Kane, 2010: 185). Additionally, the military took the full charge of the state's nuclear program and the civilian leadership has never been provided an opportunity to give any meaningful input for the development and implantation of state's defense/nuclear policy (Waseem, 1994; 2013).

The aforesaid status of the civil-military relation i.e. in the domain of defense policy had not been changed even during the recent tenure of the PML-N regime. For example, in 2015 upon the request of Saudi Arabian authorities, the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif promised the Saudi authorities for considering their proposal of sending the Pakistani troops i.e. to take part in the Saudi-Yemeni war. But the military leadership, via asserting its traditional role regarding the defense policy, straightforwardly refused to send the troops by claiming that such action would disturb the internal security of the state (Alam, 2015). Later, the PML(N) regime had also provided an "NOC" allowing the same army chief to be posted in Saudi-Arabia to head Saudi led coalition forces i.e. right after his retirement from his office (Panda, 2017).

Another example is the creation of an independent CPEC authority i.e. that was created upon the persisted demand of the military leadership (Wolf, 2016). The military leadership managed to push the PML-N regime to create the aforesaid authority as an extension of the NAP-2014 (Daud, 2016; Ali, 2023); further demanding that the aforesaid authority should function on the pattern of the Apex committees (Ghumman, 2016).

### **The Role of the Civilian Leadership in the domain of 'Military Organization'**

The policy domain of the military organization encompasses all decisions about the internal organizational structure of the military i.e. as an institution, and it has two essential aspects. The first essential aspect of the military organization deals with the material resources of the military as an organization i.e. quality and quantity of the manpower, technological equipment, logistic facilities, funding etc. The second essential aspect of the

military deals with the formation of standard principles of policy to be followed by the military i.e. as an organization (Lambert, 2009). The first aspect of the aforesaid quite exclusively falls under the domain of military leadership, whereas, the second aspect generally comes under the ambit of the civilian leadership. Further, the level of civilian control over the aforesaid aspects of the military organization depends upon the extent to which the civilian leadership can play their due role in the aforesaid aspects representing the 'hardware' and 'software' of the military organization (Chambers, 2010).

During the first decade i.e. after the independence of Pakistan, the military had faced severe kinds of administrative and organizational challenges (Khan, 1967). The aforesaid foundational challenges were due to the effects of the partition process and the unstable and incompetent civilian governments which simply lacked the general capacity to look after the state affairs. Further, the military leadership had to manage not only the rebuilding of the organizational infrastructure right from the scratch but to provide a constantly needed "aid to the civilian authorities" (Cohen, 1984). Over the course of its history, the military underwent extensive efforts for its organization on its own i.e. without providing any opportunity to the civilian leadership in this regard (Rizvi, 2003). The military considers any act of interference in the domain of military organization as a breach of its institutional norms and reacts to that kind of efforts as threat to the organizational coherence or as an act aiming to destabilize the military organization. In simple words, the military rejects any efforts which may create even a mere impression of civilian supremacy in its internal affairs (Wolf and Kane, 2010: 191).

It is quite evident that the military has never compromised its exclusive jurisdiction over the internal affairs of military organization, and there was hardly any chance of improvement in this regard. Following the traditional norms, the military leadership did not give any room to the PML-N regime as well, and military leadership kept the civilian government as completely sidelined i.e. from interfering into the internal affairs of the military organization. For example, despite the constant budget deficit, the PML-N regime could not put a cut on the defense budget or it equally remained unable to put some institutional checks and balances on the general business activities of the military organization (Wolf, 2016). Another example is the reaction of the military leadership upon the trial of General Musharraf (the ex-army chief) against the charges of high treason in the case of unconstitutional emergency which Musharraf imposed in November 2007. Again the army managed to get her ex-chief fly to UAE (Musharraf, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

In the historical context, the civil-military relations in Pakistan have experienced many ups and downs and the state has constantly experienced an upsurge in the role of the military in politics. Over the course of its history, the military as an institution has successfully managed to resist all sorts of the institutional efforts to establish civilian supremacy i.e. in both the general state affairs and in the affairs of military organization. Further, the military as an institution has not only been successful in extending its institutionalized role in the decision making process at the expense of vital organs of the government i.e. legislature, executive and judiciary, but has managed to install a parallel governance structure (may be called a government within the government) also.

Despite of the ever-existed overarching role of the military as an institution i.e. in the politics of Pakistan, the history has provided the various civilian democratic governments multiple opportunities to consolidate and regain their power but unfortunately each of such opportunities has been wasted by the concerned civilian leadership perhaps due to the lack of capacity or competence. The case of the PML-N regime (2013-18) was not very much different than of the previous civilian governments as it simply failed to achieve the ever-missed civilian supremacy i.e. in the general state affairs. The military successfully managed to sustain its traditional role in the politics and general state affairs under the garb of their

'new' role i.e. in the Apex committees and through the military courts for the trials of the civilians. Despite of the fact that during the period under study the PML-N regime used to take all its critical decisions about the major issues were taken through the 'mutual consultation' in the respective institutional framework i.e. Apex committees, but it was quite crystal clear that the actual authority to take most of the critical policy decisions routinely remained in the hands of the military leadership. Further, in the light of the above noted facts about the nature of the civil-military relations i.e. during the last PML-N regime, it may be fairly concluded that the traditional patterns of the civil-military relations did not change and the control of the military on the state affairs has become not only more strengthened but more institutionalized as well.

### **Recommendations**

Keeping view of the above given facts i.e. about the nature of the potential issues in the political culture viz-a-viz the civil-military relations in Pakistan, it is quite difficult to suggest any simple policy steps other than highlighting the need for a sincere, strong and mature political leadership which should not only be willing to understand the grave impacts of the above noted structural issues in the political system/culture of Pakistan, but they should also be firmly resolved to take the responsibility of implementing the genuine reforms i.e. for the purpose of revamping the above noted structural issues in the political system and governance culture of Pakistan.

This study further recommended that the political leadership shall have to change their own mindset first, and later, they have to devise a serious plan/strategy to bring the pre-requisite changes in the internal structure of the political parties i.e. for strengthening the base of democracy which serves as the actual source of strength for the civilian leadership. Additionally, for the purpose of gaining/enhancing the base of their legitimate power, the civilian leadership needs to focus on improving the overall quality of governance as well.



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