

[Op-Ed](#)

Hybridised civil-military relations

The military has now assumed institutional role in governance, security and economic management, thus, not leaving any rationale to stage a hard coup

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Throughout the 70-year history of Pakistan, democracy has suffered the most. The country experienced either martial laws or intermittent phases of defective democracy. The latter comprised rigged elections, controlled media and compromised civil and political liberties. Though the character of civil-military relations (CMR) was ‘proto-democratised’ during 1947-51, whereby politicians and political parties struggled to survive in the nascent republic, it ‘bureaucratised’ under the civil bureaucracy that controlled Pakistan during 1951-58. The military acted as junior partner in this period as far as national politics was concerned. It, however, assumed the principal position in Pakistani politics and polity through its first coup in October 1958.

From 1958 till 1971, the contours of civil-military relations reflected a ‘militarised’ character where military means were employed to silence dissident political parties and politicians. Ironically, however, the dilemma of Pakistani politics and democracy, for that matter, only consolidated when a section of politicians, civil bureaucracy and the judiciary rationally allied with the military regime and provided it much needed political, constitutional and legal legitimacy.

Little wonder, from Muslim League (Council) of the Ayub era to Muslim League (Quaid-i-Azam) of Musharraf era, the presence of the King’s party on Pakistan’s political landscape has reflected, on the one hand, the self-centred politicians and, on the other, blatant disregard for democracy and people’s mandate. It becomes pertinent to mention here the bitter fact that the majority of Pakistani politicians do not like to visit their constituencies after they are elected. It is due to such personalistic politicians and parties that Ayub, Zia and Musharraf were able to ‘civilianise’ the regime. Noticeably, however, civilianisation here does not mean democratisation; rather, it implies softening the regime as militarised relations with the society become counterproductive from the medium to the long run.

The Bhutto era of the 1970s is conceptualised here as ‘Bonapartised’ type of CMR, where power and perks were predicated on the personalisation of politics and the state machinery. The establishment of the Federal Security Force (FSF) is a case in point. Moreover, Bhutto’s effecting the organisational structure of civil bureaucracy and the military proved cosmetic at best and ill-planned and unintelligently executed, at worst. Thus, he failed to establish an oversight mechanism, a prerequisite for establishing civilian control over the men on horseback. Consequently, not only was his government toppled in a coup in July 1977, he lost his life, too.

From 1977 until now, the military has successfully guarded its principalship of the state, if not society, and staged two coups (1999, 2007) to protect the military-guided 'state' system. During the 1990s, contrary to certain scholarship that viewed it as 'decade of democracy', the civil-military equation was dominated by the military in terms of 'presidentialised' type of civil-military relations whereby President Ishaq, who basically was a bureaucrat and close aide of General Ziaul Haq, and President Leghari, a pro-militablist politician, toppled four civil governments from 1988-99. During this era of civilian circularity, both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto compromised and, paradoxically, confronted the army top brass. Both failed to control the army due to two main reasons: one, the powerful military constrained their choices structurally as well as institutionally; two, both lacked the strategic vision and elite consensus to put Pakistan on the path of democratisation.

During 2008-2013, according to recent literature such as "Democratic Transition and Security in Pakistan" edited by Shaun Gregory, Pakistan is believed to have achieved a milestone by successfully transitioning from a military regime to a democratic civil government. I am very sceptical of this viewpoint. In my view, under the Gillani (Zardari) government, the military asserted itself institutionally and did not allow the civil side to take control of the domestic and foreign policy. Indeed, the then prime minister, Yousaf Raza Gillani, was sacked by the country's apex judiciary that worked in strategic understating with the military. Moreover, I have categorised civil-military interaction during 2008-2013 as 'proto-hybridised', which shaped into 'hybridised' category during the current civil dispensation (2013-18).

In a hybridised type of civil-military relations, the military, for the first time in Pakistan's history, is able to have a permanent presence/position on the Cabinet's Committee on National Security (CCNS), has military courts (in non-martial law times) and apex committees, which work as a parallel structure vis-a-vis provincial cabinets. Moreover, the GHQ continues to hold its control over the country's foreign/security policy. Importantly, the civil side of the government took all of the above-mentioned measures, i.e. military courts, to appease the military in a manner where the latter does not stage a coup. However, the latter did stage a 'hybrid' coup in terms of getting a judicial role in the so-called Panama Papers case, which was decided in July 2017, against Nawaz Sharif whose third tenure as prime minister was cut short by the country's judiciary, strategically backed by the militablist establishment. In addition, earlier this year, the Sharif's party, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), witnessed defection and, consequently, loss of government in Balochistan, which highlights the individual interest of politicians, on the one hand, and the outreach of powers-that-be whose distrust of Nawaz Sharif and his daughter, if not the brother, is no longer a secret.

Moreover, the Sharif government (2013-2017), in the military's perspective, was found to have been interfering in foreign policy, i.e. normalisation with India as well as economic policy i.e. control of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Significantly, the military has now assumed institutional role in governance, security and economic management, thus, not leaving any rationale to stage a hard coup.

To conclude, it is posited that this mutually reinforcing hybridisation negates democratic transition as well as the transformation, in some radical ways, of state institutions in Pakistan. Instead, it points to consolidation of 'defective democracy' where the civil-military elites rule,

while the public suffers. According to a recent report, 60 million Pakistanis are drinking arsenic polluted water whereas half of the 200 million plus population is living on a dollar a day. In order to survive as a stable society and welfare state, Pakistan's civil-military elite need to prefer larger interest of the state and the society now than ever through the promotion of democratic values, equitable redistribution of resources, women and minority empowerment, eradication of poverty and, overall, correcting the otherwise hitherto incorrigible civil-military relations. Until this materialises, Pakistan is, in terms of the mode of governance and typology of civil-military relations, most likely to oscillate between 'hybridised' and 'militarised' structure of imbalanced relations, with 'hybridised' democracy adding more problems to the system, than providing solutions for betterment.

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