

Civil military relations: The Role of Military in the Politics of Pakistan

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Introduction:

Democracy is apparently an attractive concept for the masses and the scholars of political studies. Democracy is a political system whereby the citizenry can hold governments accountable for their policies and prevent an abuse of power. Democracy can promote economic growth, human rights and protect people from the cruelties of an autocratic regime and from the effects of social and economic disasters. Democracy encourages the governments to be alert to the needs of their citizens and to promote, therefore, the health, education, and overall well-being of the population, which enriches the life of the people by promoting peace, both between states and within them. Moreover, it helps the people in the developing societies to learn from one another through public discussion, thereby facilitating the definition of needs, priorities, and duties, and enrich the lives of citizens by recognizing their dignity as human beings. This brand of democracy can be found in the most developed democratic societies. Developing democracies like Pakistan suffered a lot due to the continuous interference of undemocratic forces in the political process. Civil and Military bureaucracy as well as some political parties disrupted the democratic process time and again for personal gains.

Pakistan unfortunately was deprived of its founding father, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the man responsible for the creation of the state, soon after independence. The next line of leadership was not prepared yet to take the responsibility to keep Pakistan on the democratic path. They were not well prepared to accomplish the task of formulating a functional constitution for the newly independent state for the next nine years after independence. The formulation of constitution did not guarantee the respect for law and it always remained open to amendments, even if the latter were opposed to democratic rule.

Moreover, the landed aristocracy along with the British trained civil and military bureaucracy further helped to disrupt the democratic process in Pakistan. These factors further strengthened the aristocratic colonial structures of the military institutions in Pakistan. The military jealously guarded its institutional hierarchy against political process. Furthermore, the political leaders could not manage to divide the centralized command system of the Punjabi dominated military. Therefore, Pakistan experienced intermittent phases of military rule and democracy after almost every decade.

Despite the adoption of the constitution in Pakistan, the military continued to intervene in the political process of the country. Within two years of the introduction and adoption of the first constitution by the constituent assembly, Martial Law was imposed in the country by Field Marshal Ayub Khan in 1958. He handed over the government to General Yahya Khan from 1970 to 1971. After the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971, democracy returned to Pakistan for a short while under the leadership of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which was once again overthrown by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977. Zia ruled the country for more than a decade.

Democracy did return to Pakistan after Zia's death in a plane crash in 1988 but could not function smoothly during the 1990s due to ever-present military involvement in Pakistani politics. During 1990s, Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto ruled the country alternatively but no one completed their full term in office for five years, while the political process was hampered time and again. In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf took over the government in a coup d'état against Nawaz Sharif and thus derailed the democratic process in Pakistan for the next nine years. After the 2008 general elections, democracy has again returned to the country but still defense and foreign policies are controlled by the armed forces.

Within this context, the thesis attempts to respond to some central questions: Why did Pakistani military participate in politics? What has been the contribution of Pakistan's civil institutions in countries political process and military coups? What is the military's perspective about its role in the democratic system? And what are the international factors involved in the facilitation of military coups?

To answer these questions and to gain in-depth understanding of the military's complex role in Pakistan's politics this thesis is divided into four parts. The first part deals with the historical experiences of Muslims in combined India, before and after British colonization. The second part discusses the role of Pakistan's civil institutions in the country's political process. The third part explains the military's perceptions about its role in the country's politics. The fourth part discusses the role of international community in Pakistani politics. In order to respond to the above queries, it would be useful to discuss the theoretical parameters of the thesis.