

Civil-Military Relations in Post 2013 Pakistan

Abstract

In May 2013, Pakistan held landmark national elections. For the first time in the country's post-independence history a government had served its full-term in office and was removed not at the point of a bayonet, but through defeat at the ballot box. Despite inheriting challenging economic and security legacies, commentators saw the return to power of Nawaz Sharif for the third time as representing the opportunity for further democratic consolidation and the rebalancing of civil-military relations. Two and a half years later, these expectations have failed to materialise as the army has entrenched itself further in the political process. This paper will provide both a theoretical and historical context for these contemporary developments. In the course of its analysis, it will reflect on Pakistan's political culture, and the institutional barriers to consolidating democracy. It will conclude with a brief reflection on Pakistan's future democratic prospects.

In May 2013, Pakistan held landmark national elections. For the first time in the country's post-independence history a government had served its full-term in office and was removed not at the point of a bayonet, but through defeat at the ballot box. Despite inheriting challenging economic and security legacies, commentators saw the return to power of Nawaz Sharif for the third time as representing an opportunity for the rebalancing of civil-military relations which would consolidate democracy in Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif had first emerged on the political scene in the 1980s as a protégé of the former Zia martial law regime in alliance with the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad(IJI). He was however to be removed twice from office, firstly in a 'Constitutional coup' in 1993 and six years later in a military coup led by Pervez Musharraf because of disagreements with the army.¹ The subsequent years saw Nawaz Sharif further burnish his democratic credentials when he signed the Charter of Democracy with Benazir Bhutto in London in May 2006. Seven years later on the eve of the national polls, he had projected himself as a strong proponent of civilian control over the military. In a television interview on 5 May, he agreed that the Prime Minister, 'will be the army's chief boss.'² This statement would have raised eyebrows in Rawalpindi as it threatened the army's traditional oversight of relations with India and Afghanistan. Moreover, the army was sensitive to public criticism in the wake of the Osama bin Laden affair. The incoming Prime Minister matched rhetoric with action when he assumed personal control of the foreign and defence portfolios.

The assertion of civilian supremacy however failed to occur. Beset with deteriorating health, engulfed in the corruption claims of the 'Panamagate gate' scandal, Nawaz Sharif currently cuts a forlorn figure.³ On 11 July just two days after his return to Pakistan from 40 days in

¹ For details see, I. Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History* (London: Hurst, 2012); *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Hurst, 2009).

² *Dawn* (Karachi) 6 May 2013.

³ The revelations in the Panama Papers first sparked a row between the PML-N and PTI on 4 April 2016. See *Dawn* (Karachi) 5 April 2016.

London following a heart operation and convalescence, posters went up in thirteen cities calling for General Raheel Sharif the Chief of Army Staff to take power. And form a government of technocrats.⁴ The banners set off fevered speculation because of events in Turkey and the emergence of another source of tension in civil-military relations concerning the possibility of the army having a formal role in the management of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.⁵ Aside from General Sharif's reported commitment to formal democracy however an outright military take-over appears unlikely given the marked movement in its favour in the past 18 months. This is the result not just off the weaknesses of the PML-N government, but the successes in the military operations against anti-state terrorists in North Waziristan. The army's grip on those aspects of foreign and security policy that it regards as important remains unchallenged by the elected government.

The shifting balance was symbolised by the replacement of Sartaj Aziz, a close aid of Nawaz Sharif, as the country's national security adviser by Nasser Khan Janjua a recently retired general.⁶ The possibility of civilian initiatives in national security and foreign policy areas had already been limited by General Raheel Sharif's growing international presence as a self-styled 'soldier statesman.'⁷ General Sharif had been appointed Chief of Army Staff in November 2013. His international stock rose because of his changing the army's focus from an Indo-centric strategic approach to greater emphasis on internal counter-insurgency. When he visited Washington after the launching of the counter-insurgency Zarb-e-Azb operations in North Waziristan in June 2014, he received the red carpet treatment and was awarded the Legion of Merit. When substantive issues were discussed, with Washington in both 2014 and 2015 whether relating to Afghanistan, nuclear issues, or international terrorism, it was the Chief of Army Staff, rather than the Prime Minister and the Ministry of foreign Affairs who took the lead.⁸ Indeed in the absence of a foreign minister, it increasingly seemed that General Sharif was playing this role. His visit to Moscow in June 2015 was hailed as paving the way for a new relationship between the countries. In October he visited Riyadh where he mended fences with the Saudis following Parliament's earlier refusal to provide active support for the Saudi-Arabian led intervention against the Houthi offensive in Yemen. When General Sharif visited London for three days in January 2015, he was received by David Cameron in Downing Street.⁹

The army's stock has risen along with that of its Commander. Military operations in North Waziristan and the Khyber Agency received popular support as they led to terrorist attacks falling to their lowest level since 2006.¹⁰ The army regained the prestige that had been lost following the Musharraf era and the Abbotabad affair. The Pakistan Taliban was still capable

⁴ The posters were put up by an obscure political party, The Move on Pakistan Party headed by the Faisalabad businessman Mohammad Kamran. Earlier in February it had put up banners asking General Sharif not to retire at the end of his tenure in November,

⁵ The army has in fact already created a special division to protect the infrastructural projects that will flow from Beijing's projected \$46 billion investment.

⁶ *Dawn* (Karachi) 23 & 26 October 2015.

⁷ See the article published in the *Wall Street Journal* 'Powe5ful General Eclipses Pakistan's Civilian Leader', *Wall Street Journal* (New York) 22 October 2015.

⁸ For comment on this see for example an editorial in *Dawn* on the eve of Nawaz Sharif's second visit to the Whitehouse in October 2015. *Dawn* (Karachi) 20 October 2015.

⁹ On General Sharif's growing importance in foreign affairs see, Zahid Hussain, 'Another Sharif in Washington', *Dawn* (Karachi) 11 November 2017.

¹⁰ *The Nation* (Lahore) 17 June 2015.

of atrocities, as was seen however at the time of the Peshawar School Massacre in December 2014.¹¹ The fall-out from the tragedy which claimed the lives of 132 children attending the Army Public School was the passage of the 21st Constitutional amendment. This further institutionalised the army's presence in public life with the establishment of military courts for offences relating to terrorism.

The army's successful operations in FATA were increasingly contrasted with the foot dragging by the government in addressing aspects of the twenty point National Action Plan which accompanied the 21st Amendment to the Constitution and was designed to root out terrorism. Critics claimed that little or no progress had been made with such issues as stopping religious extremism, regularising and reforming madrassahs and preventing banned outfits from operating under different names. Further tension arose when the Army took the unilateral decision to undertake counter-terrorism operations in the Punjab in the face of resistance by the Punjab Government in late March 2016. This action followed the Easter Sunday suicide bomb attack in Gulshan-i-Iqbal Park Lahore which left 78 people dead.

Much analysis in Pakistan on the 'unequal coalition' between civilians and the army has focused on the short comings of the Prime Minister and the damage to democratic consolidation resulting from the impetuosity of his main protagonist, Imran Khan. Before turning to the events since May 2013, this paper will set the current phase of civil-military relations in a theoretical and a historical context.

Theorisation and Contextualisation of Civil-Military Relations

The emergence of an institutionalised predominance of the military in the Pakistan state has been understood in terms of the concept of 'praetorianism.' The latter flourishes according to the classic theories of Finer and Huntington in circumstances in which polities lack shared values which create a sense of legitimacy and effective institutions for reconciling and implementing demands.¹² According to the latter's understanding of order and stability in post-colonial states, poverty, regional, linguistic and religious group conflicts do not of themselves create instability. It occurs when institutions are too weak to cope with conflict over scarce resources which results from the demands of newly emergent groups that are not socialised into the system and do not have their wants absorbed. Military intervention takes place in the context of a free for all, as sectional interests override a conception of a national interest, or public good. In the absence of moral constraints, the military can intervene in the name of order, in conditions in which it controls the instruments of force. K.B. Sayeed most clearly adopted this model of analysis for the 1958 coup. He depicted Pakistan at this time as being, 'very much like Hobbes' state of nature where every political or provincial group fought against every other group...Pakistan needed a desperate remedy for this malady. And

¹¹ For a perceptive analysis of the context of the Peshawar School Massacre see, Imtiaz Gul, 'Chain of Terrorism', *The Friday Times* (Lahore) 19 December 2014.

¹² S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1962); S.P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957); *Political Order in Changing Societies* 2nd ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

martial law was the Leviathan which emerged to maintain law and order and public good at the point of the sword.’¹³

The Muslim League’s institutional decay is understood by Pakistan based scholars in terms of corruption and the dominance of landlord interests.¹⁴ The premature deaths of Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan are also seen as dealing crippling blows. The latter’s assassination in October 1951 occurring when he was on the point of reactivating the party.¹⁵ The Muslim League’s longer term weaknesses, must also be acknowledged. These arose first from the inherited bureaucratic tradition in the future Pakistan areas which privileged law and order over political representation.¹⁶ Second from the fact that the party was a latecomer in these areas. Its breakthrough from the mid -1940s onwards depended more on accommodating the interests of landed elites than on mass mobilisation.¹⁷ The Muslim League’s weak institutionalisation encouraged factionalism and clientalistic politics.

The Muslim League’s decay undoubtedly strengthened the state’s reliance on the army and bureaucracy for the exercise of power. Administrative solutions, rather than strengthening political representation were the preferred responses to the mass refugee crisis following Partition and the precarious geo-political context resulting from Pakistan’s disputed borders, its being surrounded by three of the world’s top four military powers and its being, ‘haunted by a history of wars with India.’¹⁸ This has created the existence of the variously termed ‘garrison’ and ‘insecurity’ state in which, the army has benefited from the diversion of scarce resources from the ‘political economy of development.’¹⁹ Liaquat Ali Khan spelled out the priority of building up the armed forces in a national broadcast on 8 October 1948: ‘The defence of the State is our foremost consideration... and has dominated all other government activities. We do not grudge any amount on the defence of our country.’²⁰ In fact the years 1947-50 saw up to 70 per cent of the national income being allocated to defence.²¹ These resources were augmented when the country entered a Cold War driven regional defence organisation sponsored by the United States.

According to one writer this was ‘crucial’ when the Governor-General Ghulam Muhammad dissolved the Constituent Assembly on 24 October 1954 and, ‘provided... the necessary

¹³ K.B. Sayeed, ‘The Collapse of Parliamentary Democracy in Pakistan’, *Middle East Journal* 13, 4 (Autumn 1959), pp. 389-90.

¹⁴ Safdar Mahmood, ‘Decline of the Pakistan Muslim League and its Implications (1947-54)’ *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 15, 2 (July-December 1994), pp. 63-84.

¹⁵ Liaquat reactivated the links between the party and the government symbolising this move by his election as Muslim League President in October 1950.

¹⁶ This has been termed ‘viceregalism.’ Such varied authors as K.B. Sayeed and Allen McGrath see it as destructive of democratic consolidation. For a sustained discussion of viceregalism see Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* pp.54-65; 132-3.

¹⁷ Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History*, pp.54-60.

¹⁸ See Kamal Azfar, *Pakistan Political and Constitutional Dilemmas* (Karachi: Pakistan Law House, 1987), p. 138;

¹⁹ Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan’s Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); K.L. Kamal, *Pakistan: The Garrison State* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1982).

²⁰ Cited in Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p.376.

²¹ Yunas Samad, *A Nation in Turmoil: Nationalism and Ethnicity in Pakistan 1937-1958* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995), p. 128.

means to subdue the opposition and tilt the equilibrium in the centre's favour.'²² The dissolution has been termed a turning point in the 'creeping authoritarianism' which culminated in the October 1958 coup. This period in Pakistan's history has been understood as a crucial moment in the creation of a form of path dependency that has been responsible for Pakistan's subsequent thwarted democratisation, military interventions and post-military withdrawal crises.²³ In this formative era it has been claimed that the League suffered from 'benign neglect' as energies were diverted to bolstering the army and the bureaucracy as Pakistan struggled to consolidate state authority in the wake of the upheavals of partition.²⁴ The dependence on the central bureaucracy as a 'steel frame' for the state exacerbated 'centralising' and 'centrifugal' forces which had only been temporarily eased by a show of unity in the closing stages of the freedom movement.²⁵ Its unravelling was revealed in the Muslim League's rout in the East Pakistan's provincial elections in the spring of 1954 in which it was reduced to a mere 10/309 assembly seats. It never recovered from this blow to its prestige not only in the state's eastern wing, but in national politics. The elite's growing fear of ethnic subversion of state-construction has been linked with the concept of the 'fearful state.' This sees pluralism as a source of weakness rather than strength. By adopting coercion rather than co-option however an escalation of ethnic conflict has inevitably followed with encouragement of further authoritarianism.²⁶

Certainly, the early post-independence period had two long-term, implications. First the institutional weakness of the Muslim League, meant that it was unable to play a similar role in state and nation building to that of the Indian National Congress.²⁷ Second, the emergence of the military and the bureaucracy as the state's premier institutions led to the former increasingly becoming a 'parallel state' with its own distinctive interests. When the army has directly intervened, it has been primarily to protect these, which include autonomy in promotion issues, the absence of civilian budgetary control and oversight and the safeguarding of burgeoning landholding, industrial and commercial interests.²⁸ Coup makers have however cited intervention in the name of the national interest, usually to eradicate corruption and end political instability.

In his first broadcast as Chief Martial Law Administrator on 8 October 1958, Ayub Khan had declared that the politicians had, 'waged a ceaseless and bitter war against each other regardless of the ill-effects on the country, just to whet their appetites and satisfy their base demands.' There had been, 'no limit to the depth of their baseness, chicanery, deceit and degradation.'²⁹ This litany of complaints against civilians has been repeated on subsequent

²² *Ibid.* p. 169.

²³ See, Mazhar Aziz, *Military Control: The Parallel State* (London: Routledge, 2008).

²⁴ This is a major thrust of Ayesha Jalal's argument in *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁵ Samad, *A Nation in Turmoil*.

²⁶ S.M. Ali, *The Fearful State: Power, People and the Internal War in South Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

²⁷ See Ian Talbot, *India and Pakistan* (London: Arnold 2000). Note however that Maya Tudor has recently argued that it was not institutional weakness, so much as the League's lack of an ideological base that explains the different roles of Congress and the Muslim League in the post-independence political process. *The Promise of Power: The Origins of Democracy in India and Autocracy in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁸ For the military's growing entrenchment in Pakistan's economy see, Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (London: Pluto, 2007).

²⁹ Ayub Khan, *Speeches and Statements Vol 1* (Karachi: Government of Pakistan, 1961), p. 2.

occasions. While politicians were not blameless, in 1958, or for that matter at the time of the 1977, and 1999 coups, closer examination reveals that military encroachment was not just the result of a filling of a 'power vacuum' created by the weak institutional moorings of the Muslim League and other political parties. The creation of a military economic empire strengthened both its capacity and motivation for further political intervention. It also encouraged the very nepotism and corruption which has been termed 'authoritarian clientalism' that the army has used to justify intervention in the cause of 'accountability.'³⁰

In addition to institutional and geo-political explanations, another factor that has been viewed as a principal cause of military intervention is the weakness of the middle class. This it is argued, encouraged authoritarianism by enabling the state apparatus to develop an 'autonomous' controlling position in the absence of a strong civil society and a dominant political class.³¹ A weak middle class was also seen as contributing to a state-society divide. The outcome of the latter was a popular political orientation that was either apathetic or extremist.³² Both these outlooks were inimical to democratic consolidation. Finally, military interventions have been understood as 'anticipatory' or 'veto' coups. These have been designed to prevent the triumph of alternative agendas to those held by the military and their civilian supporters.³³

There has been less theorisation of the transition to democracy in Pakistan than of the causes of military intervention. Democratic transition in social science theory has been conceptualised in terms of 'transformation', 'transplacement' and replacement.'³⁴ Although early studies did not always define clearly the distinction between democratic transition and democratic consolidation, subsequent works have linked the nature of the transition with the prospects for consolidation. A recurring argument is that the more consensual and less violent the transition, the better the prospects for consolidating democracy.³⁵ This does not fit the Pakistan case however where the management of a return to barracks has not resulted in violence or crisis as in some other parts of the world, but the outcome has been the façade of civilian government, rather than a fully-fledged democratic transition. We shall turn briefly to two Pakistan examples. First the civilianisation of the Zia martial law from 1985 and second the transition to democracy in 1988. The latter was hailed at the time as great a breakthrough as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) led government's completion of its full term in office in 2013.

Zia in December 1985 lifted martial law and appointed the softly spoken Sindhi Muhammad Khan Junejo as Prime Minister. Differences soon appeared between them over the speed of allowing formal parties to be created. Junejo also displayed unexpected independence when

³⁰ Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History* p. 93.

³¹ The influential writer Hamaz Alavi understood the Pakistan state's autonomy in terms of the Marxian concept of Bonapartism. See his article in H.Gardezi and J. Rashid, *Pakistan: The Roots of Dictatorship: The Political Economy of a Praetorian State* (London: Zed Press, 1983).

³² M. Kamrava, *Politics and Society in the Third World* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 45.

³³ Ayesha Jalal, for example, concludes her analysis of the background to the 1958 coup by maintaining that the political processes in the provinces had been curbed, but not entirely crushed during the consolidation of state authority around its non-elected institutions. The Army stepped in to counter the threats which still remained on the eve of national elections. Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule*, p. 99&ff. See also Kalim Siddiqui, *Conflict, Crisis and War in Pakistan* (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 130-1. For more general discussion on veto coups and veto regimes see, Christopher Clapham, *Third World Politics: An Introduction* (London Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 155-6.

³⁴ Huntington classically developed this categorisation.

³⁵ Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* p. 291.

he pressed for the return to the Army of officers who had served for three years or more in the civil bureaucracy.³⁶ This was at a time when most National Assembly members were so intimidated by Zia that they preferred to sit and freeze rather than to muster up the courage to ask for the air-conditioning to be turned down.³⁷ The primary reason for the breach in relations was the different approach to Afghanistan. Junejo in order to facilitate a rapid Soviet pull-out was prepared to accept an agreement which left Najibullah's Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan still in power in Kabul. Zia and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) were concerned about the need for 'strategic realignment' and wanted to see an interim *mujahideen* coalition government in power in advance of any settlement. The President demonstrated where power still lay in Pakistan through his dismissal of the Prime Minister and the dissolution of the Assemblies on 29 May 1988.

The restoration of democracy and the victory of the PPP, led by Benazir Bhutto in the 1988 elections, raised immense expectations of a new era in Pakistan politics. *Dawn*, the leading English language newspaper, floridly recorded that 'the long night of authoritarianism is over and the warm sunshine of a new dawn of democratic renewal bathes the national horizon and lights the path ahead.'³⁸ Despite the struggles of the multi-party Movement for the Restoration of Democracy in the early 1980s, democracy 'emerged' following the voluntary withdrawal of the military after the sudden death of President Zia-ul Haq in August 1988. The post-Zia military elite exerted power behind the scenes by brokering a deal which ensured the unity of the anti-PPP political forces led by Nawaz Sharif. Thus the PPP could not sweep the polls. It enabled the military to dictate the terms under which the youthful Benazir Bhutto took office. These 'understandings' rested on the assurance that the defence budget was sacrosanct and the army retained a veto in vital foreign policy and security matters. The armed forces were enabled to enforce this veto through their allies in the bureaucracy led by the President Ghulam Ishaq Khan.

The so-called 'constitutional coups' of the 1990s occurred when either Benazir Bhutto or her rival Nawaz Sharif threatened the army's institutional interests. While their dismissals were publicly justified in terms of corruption and failures in law and order, their falls from grace in 1990 and 1993 were linked with disputes over army service matters.³⁹ Both leaders made things easier for the army by their zero sum game approach to politics.⁴⁰ When in power they used authoritarian measures to weaken opponents. The new democratic era ushered in the politics of patronage and confrontation rather than principle and consensus. The military position was also strengthened by its ability through the security services to influence election outcomes. Claims of executive influence were not mere paranoia as seen by the later admission of the Chief of Army Staff Aslam Beg that the political cell of ISI had received Rs 140 million from the Habib Bank during the 1990 elections.⁴¹ Throughout the decade, the Prime Minister remained the least powerful in a troika comprising also of the President and the Chief of Army Staff. The Pakistan Army in these circumstances was able to enjoy the

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 263.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Dawn Overseas Weekly*, week ending 14 December 1988.

³⁹ Benazir Bhutto had attempted to influence the army's selection board to extend the term of Lieutenant-General Alam Jan Mehsud, the Lahore Corps Commander. Nawaz Sharif differed with the President over the choice of army chief in January 1993. He had earlier differed with General Aslam Beg over the Gulf War and the army's intervention in Sindh in May 1992. Beg had openly questioned the Foreign Office's pro-western line to the backdrop of public sympathy for Saddam Hussein.

⁴⁰ For an in depth analysis of civil-military relations during Pakistan's 1988-99 democratic interlude, see Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* chapters 10 & 11.

⁴¹ *Dawn* (Karachi) 2 February 1997.

best of both worlds in that it exerted influence behind the scenes without the responsibility of power and the drawbacks this brought. These include the risk of international sanctions with its economic consequences and loss of access to cutting edge military technology and training; and at a domestic level, a diminishing prestige as a result of the army's involvement in corruption and reliance on political clients to bridge the gap in regime legitimacy. The army's prestige as we have noted declined during the Musharraf era.

Four implications emerge from this theorisation and contextualisation of civil-military relations in Pakistan. First, weak political institutionalisation has created the conditions for military intervention. Second, each successive intervention has further entrenched the army's position. In more recent times it has preferred to exert power behind the scenes, rather than directly, although it will not hesitate to intervene if its core institutional interests appear threatened by civilian encroachment. Third, regional factors complicate the rebalancing of civil-military relations. Finally, the task of dismantling military influence is long term. Commentators have been prone to elide democratic transformation with democratic consolidation. The latter cannot result from a single 'breakthrough' election or be achieved in a parliament. Bearing these points in mind, we turn now to the course of civil-military relations since the May 2013 polls.

Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan since May 2013

Civil-military relations in the first months of Nawaz Sharif's return to power were dominated by the issues of Pervez Musharraf's trial for treason for imposing the emergency on 3 November 2007 and by the issue of peace negotiations with the Pakistan Taliban. Bringing Musharraf to justice could be seen as a vital step in democratic consolidation because of its demonstration effect for those considering military intervention in future. The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) had campaigned on the platform of bringing peace to Pakistan after the mounting terrorist attacks during the previous parliament. Negotiation was seen as the way forward, rather than military action. The government saw a normalisation of the security situation as important for restoring economic confidence amongst investors. It would also increase space for the civilian input in defence and foreign policy. We have seen this ambition was signalled by Sharif's holding the defence and foreign portfolios. Mindful of the dangers of stepping on the military toes, the Prime Minister sought cross-party support for his peace initiatives with the Taliban.

He was prepared however to branch out with respect to overtures to India. These were in keeping with his reputation from the 1990s as an 'industrialist' Prime Minister who was aware of the peace dividend arising from improved relations with New Delhi. None of these initiatives had their intended consequences, but were rather counter-productive to the rolling back of military power. They were rapidly followed by mounting political crisis arising from alleged claims by Imran Khan that the 2013 polls had been rigged. Nawaz Sharif survived the crisis but with his power severely dented. Regional and internal security developments further swung momentum in favour of the army under its new chief Raheel Sharif.

The army could not be seen to be above the law, so it was reluctantly reconciled to its former chief Pervez Musharraf being put on trial for treason because of his violation of the Constitution. The manner in which Nawaz Sharif pressed on with this, however added to the tension. It appeared that he was not only pursuing a personal vendetta, but was using the case to tarnish the army's carefully cultivated public image. General Raheel Sharif, who had replaced Ashfaq Parvez Kayani as Chief of Army Staff on 29 November 2013, publicly

voiced his displeasure stating that the army would, 'resolutely preserve its own dignity and institutional pride'. His statement came amidst disquiet at what senior officers, including the corps commanders saw as the public humiliation of Musharraf by the statements of the Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and the Railways Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique. With hindsight it has become clear that this was not the right issue, or time around which to roll back military influence.

If the fight over Musharraf was unnecessary, the elected government's attempt to control trade policy with India was a legitimate aspiration. The military objection, purportedly on behalf of those commercial interests which would suffer from trade liberalisation, was self-interested in that if Sharif's policy had succeeded it would have increased civilian 'space' in the strategic area of Indo-Pakistan relations. Nawaz Sharif's postponing of a decision in March 2014 to grant India Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trade status until after the Indian general elections was widely interpreted as a result of military pressure.⁴² The Prime Minister had earlier signalled his intention for increasing bilateral trade in a meeting that his special envoy Shaharyar Khan held in New Delhi in July 2013 with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. In return for MFN status, Pakistan would get restrictions on some 250-300 items lifted, including such products as textiles, cement, sports goods and surgical instruments. There were discussions on customs procedures and the central role of the border post at Wagah in the opening of trade. Hopes that Sharif would complete the policy of trade normalization, attempted by his predecessor Asif Ali Zardari, proved overly optimistic. Sharif made a further attempt when he attended Narendra Modi's inauguration in New Delhi on 26 May 2014. But their initial expressions of goodwill were followed by escalating ceasefire violations along the line of control and a renewed focus on the Kashmir dispute in both countries which put the Sharif government on the back-foot regarding the military establishment. The events revealed again that increased democratic consolidation in Pakistan is dependent on a normalisation of relations with India. This was unlikely in the context of an increasingly belligerent Modi Government.

Nawaz Sharif regarded a peace dialogue with the Taliban as vital to economic revival. He anticipated that its endorsement by all the major parties would provide cover from military opposition. The talks nonetheless added to the other frictions with the army. The Army Chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani warned him against a 'surrender' strategy in the face of a list of 30 Taliban demands, including the imposition of the *Sharia* and the military's withdrawal from the tribal areas. The government in its offer of unconditional talks had initially referred to the Taliban as 'stakeholders.' The army was also angered by the continuing Taliban attacks which claimed the lives of senior officers, most notably Major General Sanaullah Khan Niazi. Nawaz Sharif for his part realized that once a military action was launched, he would become more reliant on the army.

Violence preceded the talks and accompanied them, despite a proclaimed Taliban ceasefire. An army colonel and captain were killed in the remote town of Chilas early in August 2013.⁴³ Just a matter of days earlier, suicide bombers had targeted a compound of the ISI in Sukkur. On 10 July, President Zardari's security chief, Bilal Sheikh, was killed in a suicide bombing in Karachi. The suicide bombing of All Saints Church which claimed over 70 lives in September 2013 was termed by *Dawn* as an attempt to kill Jinnah's Pakistan. There were

⁴² *The News International* (Rawalpindi) 21 March 2014.

⁴³ *Dawn* (Karachi) 8 August 2013

further Taliban attacks on military checkpoints in the Bajaur tribal region and at Fateh Jung in the Punjab. The army launched retaliatory air strikes aimed at militant bases in North Waziristan. The brazen Pakistan Taliban assault on Karachi airport on 8 June 2014 finally tipped the balance from dialogue to military action.⁴⁴

The North Waziristan military 'Zarb-e Aza' operation which was formally announced by Inter-Services Public Relations in June 2014 was politically owned by the Prime Minister, despite the capital he had invested in the peace process with the Taliban. The action nonetheless further increased the army's role in security matters and public standing. It coincided with the increasing forceful attitude to the Taliban threat held by the new Chief of Army Staff, Raheel Sharif. The retaliatory Peshawar School massacre was a sign of the growing pressure on the Taliban. It also, as we have seen, brought the army further into public life following the 21st Constitutional Amendment.

The government's weakening power vis-à-vis the military also was linked with the political furore over its electoral success. Imran Khan from the outset vociferously claimed that the May 2013 elections were rigged. Such accusations have accompanied most of Pakistan's polls. The PPP alliance issued a report in 1990, for example, on *How an Election was Stolen*. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s 2,000 page 'White Paper' issued in late August 2013 criticised media bias, especially the premature declaration of a PML-N victory when only 15 per cent of the count had been completed; the favouring of PTI opponents by caretaker Governments in Sindh and Punjab; polling day rigging including stuffing of ballot boxes, impersonation and multiple vote casting. The document alleged that at polling station 246 of NA-68, the seat where Nawaz Sharif was elected, 540 per cent of the total registered votes were cast.⁴⁵ Imran Khan's criticisms of the conduct of returning officers (who were judges) led him to a brief appearance before the Supreme Court. There is again evidence for the Punjab and national governments being run like a royal court with a continuing family firm approach, involving not just his brother Shahbaz but also other loyalists such as the Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, (whose eldest son Ali Mustafa Dar married Sharif's daughter Asma Nawaz in 2004.) Other parties however also expressed misgivings. The PPP 'White Paper' checked results in 272 polling stations and found 'severe irregularities' in 177 of them. Nonetheless its leaders accepted the outcome, albeit with 'serious reservations'.⁴⁶ International observers, including the EU team head by Michael Ghailer, highlighted some irregularities, but not on a scale which would have affected the outcome.

Imran Khan's role in the protests about the rigging which has threatened Pakistan's democracy remains controversial. He strenuously denied that he was a military cat's paw, despite the dramatic claims of the former PTI President Javed Hashmi.⁴⁷ The latter on 5 April 2015, claimed that the PTI's 126 day public protest in Islamabad was inspired by General Shuja Pasha, the former chief of Inter-Services Intelligence.⁴⁸ Imran Khan's actions, if not sinister, were reckless and along with Nawaz Sharif's stubborn pursuit of the former military ruler Pervez Musharraf on treason charges, threatened the hoped for rebalancing of civil-military relations in Pakistan.

⁴⁴ For details see *Dawn* (Karachi) 9 June 2014.

⁴⁵ *Dawn* (Karachi) 22 August 2013.

⁴⁶ *Dawn* (Karachi) 28 September 2013.

⁴⁷ *The News International* (Rawalpindi) 1 September 2014.

⁴⁸ *Dawn* (Karachi) 6 April 2015.

The PTI leader in a speech at Bahawalpur on 27 June 2014 warned of a ‘tsunami’ march to Islamabad if key questions relating to the 2013 polls were unanswered. The march was to become known as the *Azadi* March. At the end of May, in a separate development, Dr Tahirul Qadri, the politician and sufi leader based in Canada, had met the PML-Q leader Chauhdry Shujaat Hussain in London. They agreed a Ten point Agenda to achieve a ‘real democratic government’ warning that if the PML-N government did not meet their calls for ‘electoral reforms’, it would have to ‘face consequences.’⁴⁹ The government’s response to these threats escalated tensions to such an extent that a military coup appeared possible. On the eve of Dr Tahirul Qadri’s return to Pakistan, the Punjab Police had become involved in an eleven hour stand-off with activists from his Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) party over the removal of barriers outside the Minhaj-ul-Quran headquarters in Model Town Lahore. Ten PAT workers died in the police action which ended it. The brutal operation led to calls from PTI and PAT for the resignation of both the Punjab Chief Minister, Shahbaz Sharif and the Home Minister Rana Sanaullah.⁵⁰ There was further violence at Islamabad airport when Dr Qadri’s flight from Dubai was diverted to prevent his protest motorcade through the Punjab. Awami National Party (ANP) and PPP were significant absentees however from the multi-party conference, PAT hosted in Lahore which called for Shahbaz’s resignation and the investigation of the Model Town episode by the Supreme Court in place of the judicial commission set up by the Lahore High Court.

The PTI supported the PAT demands, but kept a discreet distance in the run-up to its *Azadi* March. Just a week before its departure for the capital, Imran Khan declared its aims were Nawaz Sharif’s resignation and the holding of early elections which would rid Pakistan of ‘one-family rule.’⁵¹ This claim was based on the view that the Punjab and national governments even more than in earlier times were being run as a ‘family involving not just his brother Shahbaz but also other loyalists such as the Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, (whose eldest son Ali Mustafa Dar married Sharif’s daughter Asma Nawaz in 2004.) There was also the grooming of his daughter Maryam Nawaz Sharif for a future leadership role as chairperson of the Prime Minister’s Youth Programme.⁵² This political approach, together with reliance on a coterie of bureaucrats reflected Nawaz Sharif’s mistrust of party members, following the bruising experience of the defections to the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PMLQ) in the Musharraf era. Imran Khan had a point however that such an approach did not facilitate the much needed improvement in governance required if democracy was to be truly consolidated.

PAT supporters commemorated their fallen comrades in ‘Martyrs Day’ on 10 August. Dr Tahirul Qadri used the occasion to declare that 14 August 2014 would be the day of his ‘revolution march’ to Islamabad to topple the government. This was the signal for the arrest of PAT activists across the Punjab and a lockdown of Lahore, as police manned all exit and entry points. A visibly agitated Nawaz Sharif appeared on television to report that he had requested a Supreme Court commission to investigate alleged irregularities in the 2013 general elections. This could not however prevent the PTI from condemning the blockade and

⁴⁹ *Dawn* (Karachi) 1 June 2014.

⁵⁰ *Dawn* (Karachi) 18 June 2014.

⁵¹ *Dawn* (Karachi) 6 August 2014.

⁵² When the Lahore High Court order her to resign following a complaint of nepotism by a local PTI leader, she was made head of the increasingly powerful Strategic Media Communication Cell, operating from the Prime Minister’s office. See, *Dawn* (Karachi) 2 November 2015.

agreeing a four point agenda with PAT regarding the Azadi and Revolution Marches.⁵³ The PPP also condemned the closure of roads with containers in Islamabad and Lahore making Punjab a 'police state.'⁵⁴ Police barricades were eventually removed to allow the PAT procession to move off to Islamabad. The PTI march proceeded separately to Islamabad where it was joined both by participants from Peshawar and a delegation from the Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) which had agreed to take part at the last moment.

The mounting economic costs and the failure of attempted dialogue with the two camps led to Nawaz Sharif appointing General Raheel Sharif as a 'mediator' in the August 2014 crisis in Islamabad. The move did not break the deadlock, but revealed that whatever its outcome, the Prime Minister would thereafter be greatly weakened in his ability to assert civilian control over the army. Indeed, the violence of Saturday 30 August when PTI and PAT activists battled police as they moved towards the official buildings in the 'Red Zone' momentarily raised fears of a coup.⁵⁵ Two days later, protestors broke into the headquarters of Pakistan television and only vacated the building when the army intervened. The Prime Minister fought back with the calling of a Joint Session of Parliament in which opposition parties joined the government in condemning the violence and the extra-constitutional demands of the protestors in Islamabad.

The highly effective army public relations unit (Inter-Services Public Relations) encouraged the view that General Raheel Sharif overrode colleagues who wanted the army to step in amidst the chaotic scenes in Islamabad. The reality was that by this stage, the initiative had already passed to the military with respect to key elements of security and foreign policy. There was no need to bear the cost of formal responsibility following a coup. In addition to FATA, the army dominated security policy in Balochistan. The limited civilian influence seen in the Zardari era continued post-2013. Indeed with Gwadar's growing importance to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor linking it to Kashgar via a network of roads, railways and gas and oil pipelines. Commentators termed the signing, during the visit of the Chinese President Xi Jinping in April 2015, of 51 MOUs regarding infrastructural development worth \$45 billion a 'fate changing' visit. Less remarked upon, but certainly also important, was the army's formal announcement on 21 April that a new 10,000 strong 'Special security Division' force, consisting of 9 army battalions and of six Rangers and Frontier Corps, would be created to protect the development projects to be carried out along the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor and the Chinese workers associated with them.⁵⁶ While the step was necessary to re-assure the Chinese it represented a further increase in the military footfall in Pakistan.

Although the operation to stamp out crime and terrorism in Karachi was conducted by the para-military Pakistan Rangers, the action was a further factor in the growing popularity of the army and its chief Raheel Sharif. Nawaz Sharif had launched the operation on 5 September 2013, but thereafter had taken a back seat. The Rangers reported in July 2015 that they had conducted nearly 6,000 raids and had arrested nearly 1500 terrorists target killers

⁵³ The 4 points were that the struggle would be constitutional, non-violent, with its purpose of bringing in true participatory democracy and that neither party would tolerate martial law.

⁵⁴ *Dawn* (Karachi) 14 August 2014.

⁵⁵ *Dawn* (Karachi) 31 August 2014. Over 100 were injured in the violence in which the police fired rubber bullets and tear gas.

⁵⁶ *Dawn* (Karachi) 22 April 2015.

and extortionists in a 23 month period.⁵⁷ The most controversial actions were the raid on the Muttahida Qaumi Mahaz (MQM) headquarters Nine Zero and alleged extra-judicial killings of MQM activists. The MQM responded with strikes and intemperate speeches from its leader in exile Altaf Hussain. In one address from London on 1 August 2015 the MQM leader reportedly sought Indian help in Karachi.⁵⁸ The PPP-led Sindh Government of Qaim Ali Shah joined the chorus of protests in June 2015 when Rangers ‘raided’ the Sindh Building Control Authority as part of their anti-corruption drive. The MQM and PPP protests only increased the popularity of the operation which had drastically reduced target killings by 80 per cent.⁵⁹ The Pakistan Army Corps Commander, Lt General Naveed Mukhtar significantly publicly ‘appreciated’ the efforts of the Rangers to ‘bring back normalcy to the city’ the day after the Sindh Government accused the Rangers of ‘acting beyond their authority.’⁶⁰

The Government of Nawaz Sharif emerged relatively unscathed from the Supreme Court judges’ inquiry which was set up in the same month as Xi Jinping’s visit to investigate the alleged electoral malpractice in 2013.⁶¹ After months of wrangling PTI and the government agreed its terms of reference. The 237 page report was critical of some lapses on behalf of the Election Commission of Pakistan, but declared that the PTI submission of systematic manipulation could not be proven.⁶² The PTI received some consolation when the election tribunal de-seated the National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, the PML-N stalwart who had defeated Imran Khan in May 2013 his Lahore NA-122 constituency.⁶³ The re-election against a PTI on 11 October attracted unprecedented attention for a by-election, as it was a trial of strength between the two parties.⁶⁴ Imran Khan did not recontest the seat but campaigned strongly for the PTI candidate, Abdul Aleem Khan. Despite the closeness of the poll, Sadiq’s victory boded well for the PML-N’s struggle against its main PTI rival in the key Punjab province in 2018.⁶⁵ This assessment seemed to be confirmed by the PTI’s relatively weak showing in the Punjab Local Government polls in November 2015.⁶⁶ The PTI was given a new populist cause to exploit however with the emergence of the so-called ‘Panamagate’ scandal.⁶⁷ Imran Khan’s long standing claims about Nawaz Sharif’s corruption appeared to be vindicated. The deadlock in the talks between the government and opposition over the Terms of Reference for investigation into the Panama papers leaks also presented an opportunity for repeating the mass mobilisation of August 2014.

Conclusion

Civil-military relations since May 2013 reveal how difficult it is to dismantle army influence in Pakistan even in the wake of a supposedly landmark election. Unforeseen contingencies

⁵⁷ *The Express Tribune* (Karachi) 10 August 2015

⁵⁸ *The Economic Times* (Mumbai) 4 August 2015.

⁵⁹ *The Express Tribune* (Karachi) 10 August 2015.

⁶⁰ *Dawn* (Karachi) 19 June 2015.

⁶¹ *Dawn* (Karachi) 9 April 2015.

⁶² *The Express Tribune* (Karachi) 23 July 2015.

⁶³ Imran Khan had been confident of victory and immediately raised the claim of malpractice. *The Express Tribune* (Karachi) 12 May 2013. Sadiq accepted the judgement by Kazim Malik and the order for re-polling. The tribunal had put the blame down to failure of the electoral machinery. *The Express Tribune* (Karachi) 22 August 2015.

⁶⁴ See *Dawn* (Karachi) 12 & 13 October 2015.

⁶⁵ Sadiq won by just over 4,000 votes

⁶⁶ In its stronghold of Lahore, the PML-N won 220/274 offices of Union Councils. The PTI captured just 13. *Dawn* (Karachi) 2 November 2015.

⁶⁷ For the PTI’s own assessment that this was a ‘godsend’, see *Dawn* (Karachi) 6 June 2016.

such as the Peshawar School Massacre and the personalities of key protagonists such as Nawaz Sharif, Imran Khan and Raheel Sharif have resulted in a strengthening of military authority rather than civilian assertion. The events viewed from a broader historical perspective reveal that geo-strategic influences along with the path dependency since the early post-independence period have entrenched the military as Pakistan's premier institution. Politicians' responses which often reveal short-termism and a lack of concern for democratic consolidation because of personal self-interest must be understood in this wider context. They are acting in a culture which has not rewarded longer term views. Nawaz Sharif's criticisms of his main rival's irresponsibility was ironic given his similar strong arm tactics and reliance on 'long marches' when he was in opposition in the 1990s. The dismantling of military influence will be a long term project perhaps lasting a generation. It will be vulnerable not only to domestic contingencies, but to developments in neighbouring Afghanistan and India.