

ROLE OF MILITARY IN POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN PAKISTAN: 1947 TO 1958

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Abstract

It was made clear at the time of inception of Pakistan by the founding father, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and Pakistan's military officers that the military would remain aloof from politics. This study investigates that why this "aloofness" of the military in politics could not be maintained from 1947-1958. The study takes two factors responsible for the active role of the military in politics_ security threats from India and Afghanistan to Pakistan in the early years after establishment of Pakistan and failure of political parties in Pakistan to evolve a democratic political structure and deliver according to the demands of the masses. The current study will discuss the role played by Pakistan military in politics and society after analyzing security threat and failure of political parties to deliver that provided a vacuum to the military to become a major decision maker in Pakistan politics and society.

Keywords

Pakistan Military, Political Parties, Security Threat, Law and Order, Masses.

Introduction

The military has been the most powerful actor since inception of Pakistan, having the capacity to set the direction of change in political landscape¹. The role of Pakistan military in politics and society that it achieved along with time was not envisaged at time of independence. Though military was the formidable tool of

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the British rule in South Asia, but it worked under civilian leadership and never interfered in politics. The aloofness of military from politics was accepted as the chief principle of organization of military in Pakistan. But, along with time, the role of military in Pakistan expanded and the military established its authority in politics through policy making by remaining in the background, martial law, setting of the civilian regimes in which the real reins of power were in hands of military officers and penetration in civilian institutions². The current study investigates that what were the reasons of expansion of role of Pakistan military in politics and society. This study takes two factors for the expanded role of the military in politics and society security threat from hostile neighbors (India and Afghanistan) and political failure of the political parties to evolve democratically and delivering according to the wishes of the masses .

Pakistan was established on the basis on ‘Two-Nation Theory’, which was vehemently contradicted by Congress in India. The leaders of India never accepted Pakistan sincerely. India’s role in Kashmir dispute, its military action in Junagarh (1947), annexation of Hyderabad (1948) and occupation of Goa convinced Pakistan that India would make every effort to reunite the sub-continent. Furthermore, hostile borders with Afghanistan another source of constant troubles for the nascent state. Therefore, Pakistan became security conscious and from 1948-1959, average 59.51% of total expenditure was spent on defense. This helped Pakistan military to develop into a highly professional and efficient force.

Pakistan came into being in very unfavorable conditions. Some key problems faced by the nascent state were refugee crisis, inadequate administrative system, and insufficient system of communication. Government of India Act, 1935 was adopted by Pakistan as the interim Constitution in 1947³. Although Parliamentary system was adopted, but Governor General wielded special powers and the central government enjoyed over riding powers on

provinces. Survival of Pakistan was the first concern of the political elite from start, therefore democratization was not the major concern of the state. While Pakistan was facing formidable administrative and humanitarian problems, the founder of the nation, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, died in September 1948. Majority of post-Jinnah politicians were local and regional personalities and did not enjoy influence on nation level, therefore, politics in Pakistan became localized and regionalized. Because of this, political parties failed to follow a coherent approach in early years of Pakistan⁴. Muslim League failed to transform itself from a nationalist movement into a well organized political party⁵. Furthermore, Muslim League and other political parties failed to follow democratic rules in politics and totally ignored to improve the machinery of the state to control natural disasters and maintain law and order which provided more vacuum to the military.

Pakistan military was called for help for the civilian authorities on numerous occasions to deal with natural disastrous and situations related to law and order. This helped the military to emerge as a powerful decision maker in issues related to defense and politics. The current study will discuss at first security dilemma of Pakistan and then the failure of political parties to deliver and finally extended role of Pakistan military will be discussed on the basis of the aforementioned two factors.

Pakistan's Security Problems

Pakistan emerged as an independent state as a result of Muslim nationhood that was contrary to the claim of Congress that it was the only party representing all people of India regardless of religious affinities. The demand of a separate state was vehemently opposed by Congress and the pre-independence hostilities between Congress and Muslim League transformed into active distrust and enmity in post-independence period. The Congress opined that Pakistan would collapse in front of the formidable problems that it inherited⁶. India's role in Kashmir dispute, its military action in Junagarh (1947), annexation of

Hyderabad (1948) and occupation of Goa convinced Pakistan that India would make every effort to reunite the sub-continent⁷. Because of geo-strategic location of Kashmir, it could be used economically and militarily cripple Pakistan, therefore occupation of Kashmir was taken very seriously by Pakistan. Moreover, the division of the state into two parts separated by one thousand miles of Indian territory posed grave problem to policy makers in Pakistan.

Pathan tribes living in the north-western frontiers of sub-continent, were source of incessant trouble for the Colonials. But, the religious ferment present in idea of Pakistan provided brotherhood between Muslims living in Muslim majority areas in middle and south of sub-continent and these Pathan tribes. Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan travelled extensively in these areas to install sense of unity and nationalism. Pakistan succeeded in winning the loyalty of majority of Pathan tribes except a few, especially, the Fakir of Ipi along with his tribe and followers who vehemently defied the central government and its authority. When Afghanistan became aware of the fact that the British would have to leave sub-continent and Pakistan was about to become a reality, the Afghan government proposed a separate state for the Pashtoon tribes living in NWFP and some regions of Baluchistan, but, surprisingly, the Pashtoon majority areas of Afghanistan were not included in the hypothetical state. The second option was that the Pashtoon majority areas should unite with Afghanistan. The anti-Pakistan campaign got full vigor in Jashan-i-Kabal in 1950, when Afghan Air Force dropped anti-Pakistan leaflets and Pukhtunistan flags were hoisted. After this, the Afghans raided Pakistan territory⁸. Afghanistan and Pakistan troops clashed and Pakistan Air Force and Army attacked Afghan-backed militias. The main diplomatic tension arose when Afghanistan objected and forbade Pakistan to include NWFP in One Unit of West Pakistan. Pakistan took this Afghan demand as clear interference in country's internal

matters. However, these issues were resolved to some extent on the mediation of Shah of Iran.

There were seven prime ministers and eight cabinets during 1947-58 in Pakistan. Despite of unbridgeable hostilities, all the political parties were convinced that only strong armed forces could guarantee Pakistan's survival in the face of hostile neighborhood. Liaqat Ali Khan said in 1948 that defense of state dominates all other governmental activities. Prime Minister, Mohammad Ali Bogra, said in 1953 that he would prefer to starve the country than weaken its defense. The decisions of different governments to improve defense of the country won the support of National Assembly. National Assembly severely criticized the government when it endeavored to introduce measures of retrenchment in armed forces, and the government had to cancel its decision. During the period from 1948-1959, average 59.51% of total expenditure was spent on defense⁹. Therefore, Indian and Afghan threat became grave security concern for Pakistan and significant factor in internal politics and foreign policy of Pakistan.

Failure of Political Parties to Evolve Democratically

The pre-independence and anti-colonial politics in the colonies was built around the personal charisma of strong personalities like Jinnah and Gandhi in sub-continent, Sukarno in Indonesia and Nkrumah in Ghana. The death of the founding father in these countries usually left unbridgeable vacuum in post-independence period¹⁰. Pakistan began to live as an independent state under the most unfavorable circumstances¹¹. There were only a few states that faced plethora of problem at the start of their independence as Pakistan did¹². The most crucial problems were the weak democratic political system, dearth of trained officials to run administration, economic troubles, inadequate means of communication, small middle class and highly heterogeneous society. Pakistan was creation of Jinnah, but at the time of birth, it was not a healthy baby¹³. Pakistan suffered by several disadvantages during the early days after its independence. The early death of the

founding father and assassination of the able prime minister were considered as origin of political misfortune of the country¹⁴. Some countries were fortunate as they possessed a number of quality gifted statesmen at the time of independence, but Pakistan was not one of them¹⁵.

After death of Jinnah, regionalism, factionalism and opportunism became the general rules of political system of Pakistan. Quite contrary to Congress in India, Muslim League failed miserably to transform itself into a national political party from nationalist party. The comparative analysis of Congress and Muslim League will suggest that Congress evolved slowly and systematically since its start in 1885 and got new vigor when Gandhi took the leadership. Congress became a platform where diverse groups, ranging from believers in nonviolence to Communists, forwarded their proposals. This provided them valuable experience to settle their difference peacefully in the larger interests of the party. On the other hand, Muslim League, that was established in 1906, could not become a mass party until 1940. Furthermore, majority of political leaders of Muslim League joined the party during 1937-47, especially during 1944-47. Therefore, the political leaders of Muslim League did not find proper time to work together as a progressive political party¹⁶.

Muslim League directed all of its energies towards winning a separate state for the Muslims of sub-continent and did not present a clear economic and political outline to be followed after independence. Islam was envisaged as a cementing force that would cure all the problems that emerge out of diversity like ethnicity, regionalism, sectarianism, factionalism etc. There was little planning involved in solving the problems faced by the nascent state. There was no al-Bairunis or ibn-Khaldun in Pakistan Movement who could have thought about the problems that the country was going to face in future¹⁷. Once Pakistan was established, religious appeal could not be used to overcome differences between different groups and sects that were related to policies of governments regarding creation of jobs or allocation of resources¹⁸. The leaders of

Muslim Leaders were of the view that they could stay in power by simply invoking Islam as they did in pre-independence. But, the elections of 1954 in East Pakistan proved eye opener for Muslim League when the overwhelming majority of Muslim League in provincial assembly reduce to 10 in a house of 309 members¹⁹.

Post- Pakistan social structure was marked by horizontal and vertical cleavages. On horizontal level, regional, linguistic and ethnic differences posed political problems. On vertical level, there was huge gulf between small western elite and illiterate masses. The golden dreams of pre-independence were shattered by cruel realities of disease, poverty and misery²⁰. Joy of independence soon transformed into the necessity of survival²¹. The nascent state had weak democratic traditions as the indigenous culture was still authoritarian because of rural kinship system. Democratic institutions which evolved in post-Industrial Revolution Europe, were alien to Pakistan. The political elite who championed the cause of Pakistan on democratic lines had little experience to run the democratic institutions.

Political parties are considered as pillars on which the structure of nations rests.²² The Muslim League underwent through ideological confusion, organizational incoherence along with crisis of leadership. Political parties in Pakistani lacked trained personnel and resources to undertake scientific research of the economic and socio-political problems. Therefore, stress was on sloganeering and rhetoric which might work well for mobilization purposes but could not prove a substitute to scientifically study problems of the society. Though Muslims of Pakistan could still feel Indian threat, but the unity demonstrated in pre-independence period vanished²³. The leaders of Muslim League neither make effort to win the grass-root support nor it sought technical skills to run the machinery of government. The leaders of Muslim League did not have either the vision or lacked the resources to develop the party on democratic lines. However, the challenge was formidable. The powerful landlords had been in dominating

position in Punjab. There were also periodic serious outbursts of religious nature that caused fissures in society. On the other hand, social structure in East Pakistan was of different nature and required more serious attention. The lower middle classes, despite of their backwardness, were challenging the domination of traditional landowning elite as well as urban based leaders. Ethnic and regional conflicts were emerging between the Punjabis and the Bengalis²⁴.

Opposition is mandatory for healthy democratic system as opposition can promote democratic values through constructive criticism on the government. But, opposition was deliberately discouraged in Pakistan and any opposition to government was considered as enemy of Pakistan. Along with time, centrifugal attitudes emerged within the political parties that culminated in new political parties. But, these new political parties were not established because of ideological conflicts but came into being because of jealousy, personality clashes and desire to gain power. However, factionalism was not merely limited to Muslim League as opponent political parties lacked cohesion too. Opposition to the government and politics of agitation was a salient feature of pre-independence politics in sub-continent. But, this tradition could not be transformed into a healthy and progressive opposition as the politicians who were not happy with the policies of the government applied same methods of agitational politics of pre-independence era in post-independence Pakistan.

The party in power in center tried its best to stay in power and to crush opposition. Repressive measures were used to discourage opposition and silence any dissenting voice. Public and Representative Offices (Disqualification) Act, known as PARODA, was introduced in 1949. Any person guilty of “misusing” public office could be debarred from public life for a specified period. The provincial Governor or Governor General had the authority to refer any case in which some person had been found guilty of “misconduct” in public office to a special tribunal. If the tribunal also found the person as guilty, the guilty could be

debarred from public office by Governor General or provincial Governor for period not exceeding than 10 years. PARODA was used less for punishing the guilty than as a powerful political tool against the opposition as well as the party rebels by the central government. Liaqat believed that PARODA would help him in handling opponents²⁵. However, PARODA weakened the League than strengthen it and PARODA proved a harbinger of decline of Muslim League²⁶.

The provincial ministry of Ayub Khoro in Sindh was dismissed in 1948 on charges of misconduct. He succeeded to be Chief Minister of Sindh for the second time after three years. But, he was dismissed by the central government second time through the use of PARODA. But, when he assured the central government that he would act according to instructions of the central government, he was appointed as the Chief Minister of Sindh for the third time and the ban under PARODA was lifted by the central government. Similarly, Fazal ul Haq was elected as the Chief Minister in East Pakistan when United Front won the elections in East Pakistan. But, he was dismissed a few weeks later by the Muslim League in the center for allegedly making an anti-Pakistan statement in Calcutta. But, when he promised his support to the centre, he was appointed as Interior Minister in the central government and became Governor of East Pakistan on 5th March 1956²⁷.

The Constituent Assembly tried to limit the prowess of the Governor General by repealing PARODA in 1954 and decided to introduce a bill to amend the government of India Act 1935, the Governor General reciprocated by dissolving the constituent assembly and dismissed the Muslim League cabinet²⁸. The new cabinet, famous with title of 'cabinet of talents', was devised by the Governor General. Serving General (Ayub Khan) was also included in the new cabinet. The political chaos could not be resolved even after the introduction of Constitution on 23 March 1956. The Constitution provided unrestrained powers to the president. Pakistan had 4 Prime Ministers in

the almost 32 months lifetime of 1956 Constitution, headed by coalition ministries that had no ideological affiliations. Every ministry remained on average 8 months, and ministry of I.I. Chundrigar remained in office for merely 55 days. Between 1956-58, institutional base of Pakistan became so weak that political parties became an achronism²⁹.

The politicians were shifting their loyalties from one party to another. Affiliation to the political parties was not based on principles but personal gains which proved highly detrimental for the political system of the nascent state. When Governor General, Ghulam Mohammad, dismissed ministry of Nazim-ud-Din in 1953, Muslim League did not object on the dismissal of their leader³⁰, rather six member of the ousted ministry joined the new cabinet under Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra. Chief Minister of Sindh Pirzada Abdus Sattar opposed the idea of integrating various provinces of West Pakistan in one unit, and 74 out of 110 members of Sindh Provincial Assembly backed the decision of the Chief Minister to oppose the One Unit formula. The central government dismissed the provincial ministry of Abdus Sattar and appointed Mohammad Ayub Khoro as the new Chief Minister in Sindh. The same provincial Assembly supported the decision of Ayub Khoro to join One Unit by 100 votes to 4. Although Muslim League was in favor of the scheme of One Unit, but supported the movement of dismembering integrated province of West Pakistan only to bring down the ministry of Dr. Khan in West Pakistan. Similarly, Hussian Shaheed Soharwardy with the support of 20 members of Awami League and the members of Hindu Congress from East Pakistan, decided to walk out from the constituent assembly at the time of finalizing 1956 Constitution because he opined that East Pakistan was not provided with due autonomy. But, when he assumed the office of Prime Minister after six months under the same constitution, he opined that the constitution provided “98 percent of autonomy”³¹.

Military and Politics

Following the colonial military tradition, principle of the civilian authority over the military was set as guiding principle in Pakistan. In the initial years of independence, the role of the military was confined to fields of security and defense and providing assistance to civilian governments in case of need. When Ayub Khan took the charge of the military, he vowed that military would remain away from politics. Furthermore, the Army did not like the use of the troops for police duties to maintain law and order. The senior officers considered that use of the troops in civilian matters would divert the military from regular training of the troops and would prove detrimental for overall morale of the troops. Furthermore, deployment of the troops in civilian matters for a long time, would negatively affect the goodwill between the society and the troops. The reluctance of the military officers to play active role in politics could be witnessed from Ayub Khan's refusal of the proposal of the Governor General Ghulam Mohammad to take the reins of administration in his hands. However, military's role started expanding in non-professional fields despite of hesitation of commanders of military, and military evolved as the most important institution in the decision making process³².

Pakistan inherited huge institutional imbalance at the time of its inception. The military, the bureaucracy and the intelligence services were more systematized and advanced than the political institutions. Moreover, the Interim Constitution, 1947, also reinforced the powers of bureaucracy. Most of leaders of Muslim League were feudal and were driven by peculiar ambition than setting the party on western democratic lines. The military and bureaucracy upheld their professional character discernable by discipline and hierarchy. The Army's role in the politics got new vigor when Pakistan participated in the U.S. backed military alliances in the mid-1950s. This assisted transfers of weapons to Pakistan and Pakistan arm attained valuable training by the Americans which augmented the military's competence. Therefore, the deterioration of the

political system was very different to the growing effectiveness and discipline, of the military³³.

There can be various reasons for expansion of role of military in political process. One important factor was that Pakistan had to face plethora of social, political and economic problems at the inception. Along with establishing a new government, Pakistan had to face with horrific communal riots, undefined borders, hostile relations with India and Afghanistan and war in Kashmir in the early years. In such precarious conditions, military proved its mental in setting refuges crisis, securing the borders of the country and maintain law and order internally. Second, the politicians could not win the larger support of the masses through performance as there was no clear social or economic policy for the advancement of cause of masses. Third, Pakistan military inherited quality training and rich experience in the two World Wars. Therefore, the military was the most cohesive and organized institution in Pakistan. Fourth, military was a rich pool of highly skilled man-power. Their experience to run training centres, ordinance factories, managerial experience and knowledge of modern technology would be a valuable asset for the civilian leadership, especially in a country that was suffering from dearth of experience human resource. Military enjoyed a lot of respect in eyes of the masses as well as the politicians by providing help in nonmilitary fields³⁴.

Hasan Askari divided Military's role in non-military field in the following three categories³⁵,

1. Help the civilian governments in fighting natural calamities.
2. Help the governments to fight particular problems.
3. Help the administration to maintain law and order.

Natural calamities like floods and cyclones caused havoc in East Pakistan. Pakistan army and Air Force helped the administration by undertaking rescue operations, supplying food, providing shelter and medical equipment and restoring the ways of communication. The Army helped fighting locusts in the NWFP in 1951, in Sindh and

Quetta in 1952 and 1954 respectively. Anti-salinity operations were conducted by the Army in Sindh in 1958. Assistance in particular problems included operations by Pakistan military in East Pakistan to cope with food shortages and smuggling when the civilian authorities failed to checkmate smuggling and food shortages. The three operations were 'Operation Jute' (1957-58), 'Operation Service First' (1956) and 'Operation close door' (1957-58). The main purpose of 'Operation Jute' was to stop smuggling of jute from East Pakistan to India. The Army was requested to help the civilian government in fighting smuggling. The 'Operation Service First' was launched in 1956 when the civilian government in East Pakistan failed to control food shortages which were caused by black-marketing and widespread hoarding. When the provincial government failed miserably to handle the situation, Pakistan Army was handed over the supply of the food in markets on 30th June, 1956 and the military officers were given executive and magisterial powers to deal with situation successfully. The army improved the supply of the food in even the remote areas of the province in a short span and prices of the food stuffs were brought down. Pakistan Army was requested to help the provincial government of East Pakistan when the provincial administration failed to halt smuggling of jute, food, medicine and capital flight to India. The Army sealed East Pakistan_ India border and a huge quantity of food, silver bullion and gold and medicine were seized and the perpetrators were arrested and punished by Pakistan Army.

The Army got the first real experience to run administration when anti-Ahmadi riots broke in Punjab. The protestors demanded that Ahmadi should be declared religious minority and very experienced Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Sir Zafar Ullaha Khan, along with other Ahmadi civil and military officers should be dismissed. Private and public property was looted and burnt and houses of the Ahmadi were destroyed. Lahore was the epicenter of anti-Ahmadi riots and the civilian government failed completely before the protestors. The central

government was unable to act decisively when the riots broke out and in a few days, Punjab was ablaze³⁶. The Army was requested to help the civilian leadership and on March 6, 1953, Martial Law was imposed. The Chief Martial Law Administrator was Major-General Azam Khan. Army restored law in a short duration of six hours³⁷. After that, 'the Cleaner Lahore Campaign' was launched by military authorities to give Lahore a better look, street and pavement were widened and health and sanitation facilities were improved. The public witnessed the quick performance of the Army in restoring law and order after the failure on part of civilian authorities³⁸. Martial Law in Lahore provided an opportunity to masses and the military that what could be achieved by speedy and strong measures. The streets of Lahore looked clean for the first time in many years and public could see that when the politicians were busy in their personal politics, strong institution of Army could solve the real problems of the masses that were entirely ignored by the politicians³⁹.

During 1951-58, Pakistan had six prime ministers but one C-in-C of the Army, who was given two extensions, while India had one prime minister and several C-in-C⁴⁰. This prolonged stay as C-in-C, helped Ayub Khan to consolidate his position in military and politics. This was quite contrary to situation in India, where Indian army worked strictly under leadership of civilian authorities. No army chief was given extension in India, and the Indian leadership opined that it was the duty of the civilian authorities to deal with the disasters and calling Army to help the civilian government could encourage dictatorship in India⁴¹. But, the political elite in Pakistan proved to be short-sighted as they relied heavily on military for consolidation of their position in politics. Ghulam Mohammad could never dismiss the first constituent Assembly, if he did not has the support of Army. Ayub Khan had been in close contacts with the political circles since his appointment as C-in-C in 1951. As prime minister in Pakistan was responsible for Defense portfolio from beginning, therefore, Ayub Khan discussed important

matters related to the defense of the country with prime ministers on regular basis. When defense expenditures constituted more than half of the Pakistan's budget, C-in-C became the most important person in the decision maker in Pakistan⁴². Similarly, opinion of the military was regarded as very important by the political elite in Pakistan. Pakistan military and political leadership jointly decided to accept United States military aid and to join SEATO and CENTO. Similarly, it was Ayub Khan who proposed to absorb the various provinces of the West Pakistan and submerge them into an integrated province of West Pakistan. Ayub Khan wrote in his autobiography that while he paced the floor of his hotel in London, he conceived of the One Unit Plan on October 4, 1954⁴³. During presidency of Iskandar Mirza, influence of military increased in decision making. When the Army was busy in anti-smuggling operations in East Pakistan, prime Minister Malik Feroz Khan Noon was pressurized by certain elements in East Pakistan to limit the powers of Pakistan military in the border areas. But, on the behest of C-in-C, the President told the Prime Minister not to interfere in anti-smuggling campaign of the military. On Ayub's behalf, the president imposed Martial Law. Ayub disclosed that he forcefully told the president that he did not have any other option that to impose Martial Law⁴⁴.

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