

2

Pakistan's Security and the Civil-Military Nexus

by Shuja Nawaz

Pakistan's geostrategic location makes it a critical part of any evaluation of regional security policies, especially reassessments of the situation in Afghanistan. From a Pakistani perspective, any threat analysis must take into account not only the fighting inside Afghanistan but also the major military and economic power to the east: India. Pakistan fears that a hegemonic India would dominate South Asia and bring Pakistan under its thrall. The long-simmering dispute over Kashmir and memories of three major wars with India—including one that led to the breakup of Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh—still rankle Pakistani minds. The recent Indian elections that returned a stronger Congress Party to power offer some hope of stability in the Indo-Pak relationship, but the weight of history remains heavy.

But today another dangerous conflict is consuming Pakistan, one that may yet become a serious threat to the future of the country as a unified entity. Pakistan faces an internal war against radical Islamists who have established a foothold in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and who have begun to extend their influence and violent activity into the settled areas of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and key parts of the hinterland.

THE PRESENT FIGHT AGAINST ISLAMIST MILITANCY

Suicide bombings and other attacks have been rising dramatically. In 2007, attacks against the military accounted for 47% of suicide attacks, with attacks against the police accounting for another 20%.¹ These have shaken the military establishment.

Pakistan's public overwhelmingly supported a powerful military response, especially against Taliban sympathizers in the Swat and Malakand regions. But operations against the Taliban in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas bordering Afghanistan had been sporadic at best before the invasion of South Waziristan by 30,000 Pakistani army troops late in 2009 that managed to dislocate the headquarters of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (the TTP or Pakistani Taliban). Meanwhile the Afghan Taliban, who use the FATA's territory as a sanctuary in their war against the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan, remain untouched by Pakistani military action. One reason may be political calculation: Pakistan does not wish to anger Pashtun nationalists who may come to power again in Kabul. Beyond that, Pakistan's military lacks the forces and equipment necessary to fight against both its internal Taliban and also the Afghan Taliban—and the military continues to exert great influence over foreign policy relating to both Afghanistan and India.²

Indeed, Pakistan's army has dominated the country's political landscape for more than half its life as an independent state. Extended periods of military or quasi-military rule have stunted civilian institutions and inhibited the growth of a free political system. Since the 1950s, Pakistan's army has been at the forefront of foreign policymaking, beginning with a military pact with the United States in 1954.³ The ensuing military-to-military relationship between the Pentagon and Pakistan's army, despite its ups and downs, has tended to overshadow the civilian relationship between these two on-again, off-again allies. General Pervez Musharraf's turnabout after 9/11, when he threw his support behind the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan against his erstwhile friends the Taliban, was only possible because he was concurrently president and army chief. Pakistan's general public has consistently opposed the U.S. invasion, and the presence of American and foreign forces in Afghanistan. Islamic-leaning groups oppose it on religious grounds, while others regret the blowback effects of a war that has spawned a domestic Taliban movement, strengthened the attraction of al-Qaeda for youth, and fostered a violent insurgency that introduced suicide bombings to Pakistani society.

Pakistan's army, once the most popular national institution, lost its position of respect and dropped in popularity below journalists and lawyers after Musharraf used the threat of the military's coercive power to summarily dismiss the Chief Justice of Pakistan's supreme court in 2007.⁴ When this move was overturned by the Supreme Court, Musharraf resorted to a second "coup" by removing the Chief Justice again in November 2007. However, he overestimated his power.

After Musharraf resigned as Chief of Army Staff and appointed General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani in late 2007, he lost his ability to manage Pakistani politics at will. Kayani proved that his primary loyalty was to the army and the country before Musharraf by distancing himself from his former chief and forbidding army officers from meeting all politicians, including Musharraf. The return of former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif and the subsequent "neutral" position taken by the army in the 2008 elections spelled the end of Musharraf's power. Having lost the army's support, he finally resigned in August 2008. Again, the army's acts of commission and omission were key to that change.

The new army chief, General Kayani, has publicly proclaimed his desire to take the army back to its professional roots. He declared 2008 the Year of the Soldier and 2009 the Year of Training to make up for lost attention to the army's fighting fitness during Musharraf's tenure.⁵ He also sought the removal or return of army officers inducted into the civil government and other positions by Musharraf. Some 1200 officers had been parachuted into key slots in ministries, parastatal enterprises, and educational institutions during the Musharraf regime. Kayani also briefed the new civilian government of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) on the country's major security threats and sought its guidance on how to proceed. The army was once again inserted into the battle against insurgents in FATA and the NWFP; unprepared for such warfare, it faced a steep learning curve.

Pakistan's army is a conventional force, poised to defend its eastern borders against India. India makes Pakistan's military nervous not only due to the size of its army (over 1 million strong), but also because of the emergence of a new doctrine called Cold Start that would allow it to move rapidly and without warning into Pakistan.⁶ Pakistan's counter-strategy rests on an offensive-defensive approach that involves a massive riposte into India at a point of Pakistan's choosing, enough to seriously hurt the invader. Pakistan's poison-pill defense rests on its nuclear weapons, while India's doctrine eschews first use of its own

nuclear weapons.⁷ Pakistan had a purposefully ambivalent position on the use of nuclear weapons until November 2008, when President Asif Ali Zardari reportedly also eschewed first use as an option in an interview with an Indian news agency. In the absence of peace or at least an entente with India, Pakistan is constrained to maintain a large conventional force. But the internal insurgency along its western border has caused Pakistan to alter its stance.

Pakistan moved troops into FATA in 2002 after the U.S. promised to reimburse the costs associated with these operations; in 2008, it redeployed the equivalent of six infantry divisions—which comprise its strike force against India—from its eastern border to its western frontier.⁸ These forces have been involved in supporting the U.S./NATO effort to seal the western border with Afghanistan against Taliban fighters. They have also been battling insurgents inside Swat, Malakand, and the FATA. In the full-scale assault against militants inside Swat and Malakand in the summer of 2009, the army had some 52,000 troops deployed, moving infantry soldiers from other divisions on the Indian border. In addition, Pakistan deployed a brigade of the Special Services Group, the Pakistani commandos, and nine wings (regiments) of the Frontier Corps.⁹ Over 1,300 military deaths and thousands of other casualties proved demoralizing to the army.¹⁰ Moreover, Pakistan's conventional army has had to adapt to unconventional warfare on the fly. It is ill equipped for this war.

The United States has provided financial support to assist Pakistan in covering the costs of moving its forces into FATA, but little effort has been made to give it adequate equipment. There is a lack of modern night-vision devices to monitor the border, and a dearth of helicopters to carry troops rapidly and engage a mobile militant force that strikes across a vast area. Pakistan needs to beef up its forces in the region, but faces a serious problem since it does not have any more forces to spare from the eastern border so long as the Indian threat remains.

Political and economic engagement of the people in FATA, and a clearer national consensus on the nature of the Pakistani state, remain key elements in the fight against militancy inside Pakistan. The responsibility for this rests in civilian hands. It is critical that the civilian government keep the military engaged in discussions on national strategy—so the military plays its role, but does not become the sole instrument of power against militancy. Pakistan must not jeopardize the effectiveness of its military in this process, or it risks losing the one institution that has managed to survive the degradation of Pakistani society under successive periods of autocratic rule.

HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

In order to understand the nexus between Pakistan's army and civil society, one needs to delve into the country's history. Soon after gaining independence in August 1947, Pakistan went to war with India over the Kashmir. Pakistan's fledgling civilian government was still in a chaotic state. Only the military was organized, relatively speaking. Though it took the lead in guiding the military operations, civilian political decision-making was weak and, in the minds of many soldiers, unsatisfactory.

When the war ended in stalemate, a number of disgruntled officers felt that the civilians had "lost" it for Pakistan. A coup was planned but discovered by authorities; a number of officers and civilians were tried and convicted in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case in 1951.¹¹ The army chief at the time, General Muhammad Ayub Khan, was newly installed in his position and felt he had to deal severely with the conspirators.

However, over time Ayub developed a similar view about the inability of civilian leadership to run the country effectively. By 1954, he had already penned a blueprint for a new system of government for Pakistan, with himself at the helm.¹² It took another four years before he overthrew then-President Iskander Mirza in October 1958 and became Chief Martial Law Administrator and President. This solidified the divide between the army and civilians, and laid the foundation for recurrent military interventions.

Ayub's regime lasted over ten years. During that time, he managed to co-opt the civil service and large portions of the pliant political elite. But deep fissures developed between Pakistan's haves and have-nots. Ayub was also unable to manage the noise and disarray of political Pakistan. As a result, when popular protests grew against his rule in 1968 and 1969, he could not withstand the pressure. In an extra-constitutional move, he was persuaded by his favorite army chief General A.M. Yahya Khan to hand power over to Yahya rather than the Speaker of the National Assembly, a Bengali from East Pakistan.¹³

Yahya's ill-fated tenure lasted less than three years, as discontent in East Pakistan led to civil war in that distant province and war with India, resulting in the breakup of Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh. Yet again, a rigid military system of decision-making did not allow political dialogue to take place concerning the grievances of East Pakistanis against the West Pakistani ruling class. The loss of East Pakistan and military defeat at India's hands temporarily reduced the public's respect for the military, and forced Yahya to resign in December 1971. This allowed a civilian Martial Law Administrator

to emerge in the form of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the populist leader of the PPP. Bhutto also took over as President, and eventually formulated a new constitution that made him Prime Minister with extraordinary powers; the President was reduced to a figurehead.

It soon became clear that a civilian regime succeeding a military regime would be reluctant to drop most of the powers of its predecessor. Bhutto acquired enormous powers, creating a gap between the center and the periphery, and leading to an insurgency in Balochistan as Bhutto dismissed provincial governments at will and the center took over management of the provinces' natural resources.¹⁴ Political opponents were not allowed to function; private businesses and schools were nationalized in the name of "Islamic socialism."

Gradually the military started asserting itself. The 1977 elections brought the political opposition to the streets to protest what they felt were rigged elections. Bhutto turned to the army to impose order, and there was pushback from the middle ranks. The senior commanders went with Bhutto initially, but when they found their brigadiers and colonels balking at the use of force against civilian protestors, they changed their minds. In July 1977, Bhutto was overthrown by his own handpicked army chief, General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq. History was repeating itself, but with a vengeance. Bhutto was not only removed from power, but over time accused and convicted in a criminal case, and hanged in 1979.

Zia ruled with an iron fist for ten years before dying in an August 1988 airplane crash that has never been satisfactorily investigated. He used his position as Chief of Army Staff to bend the political system to his will, and further exacerbated this manipulation with Islamic rhetoric. In the process, he tried Islamizing the army, thus laying the basis for many of the problems Pakistani society would experience in the decades that followed.¹⁵ The educational system was also Islamized and undermined, as were other major national institutions. Near the end of Zia's tenure, there was some resistance even among the ranks of professional army officers, who resented the fact that the general population was losing respect for the uniform.

Zia also took on the mantle of an Islamic warrior, fighting a jihad against the ungodly Soviet Union in Afghanistan. In the process he helped create the mujahidin (Islamic warriors), and the *madrasas* that would recruit more warriors for that cause. By becoming the conduit for U.S. covert assistance, he made the Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) a major force in Pakistani and regional politics, a position that it maintained into the 21st century.

Zia's successors allowed civilians to re-enter politics, but within limits. Foreign policy on Afghanistan and India, nuclear issues, and defense matters in general remained in the hands of the military. The new army chief, General Mirza Aslam Beg, saw his role as a "referee," even helping gather money from businessmen to pay off politicians; he was especially devoted to fending off the return to politics of Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of the former Prime Minister. The ISI head at the time, Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul, also worked to set up an opposition alliance to Bhutto—and groomed a young Punjabi businessman named Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif to take the lead in opposing Bhutto.

The following decade saw repeated changes in government, as Bhutto and Sharif exchanged places twice at the helm as prime minister. Sharif found it difficult to deal with successive army chiefs, including Beg's successor General Asif Nawaz, General Abdul Waheed (who dismissed both Sharif and his opponent President Ghulam Ishaq Khan), and General Jehangir Karamat (whom Sharif forced to resign over a perceived difference of opinion about the creation of a national security council). Sharif picked a relatively junior general, Pervez Musharraf, to head the army in 1998, thinking that his lack of a tribal base in Pakistan would make him more pliable (Musharraf's family came from northern India). But Sharif failed to understand the intrinsic power of the military high command. After Musharraf orchestrated a conflict with India in the frigid wastes of Kargil in northern Kashmir, the army and Sharif were on a collision course. Needless to say, the army had the muscle. When Sharif tried to remove Musharraf from office while the army chief was on an airplane returning from Sri Lanka on October 12, 1999, Musharraf's generals were ready and quickly upended Sharif instead. Pakistan was once more under military rule.

Musharraf's nearly nine-year tenure saw the military enter civilian life in force. Over 1,200 senior military officers were inducted into the administration, educational institutions, and corporations. The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan gave Musharraf a chance to become a much-needed ally of the United States, shades of the Zia era. Politics was stunted and became a directed system under Musharraf's rule, as he unwittingly recreated the patronage networks of the Ayub era. He proved to be an inept politician, and eventually had to make a deal with the exiled Benazir Bhutto to return to Pakistan, with the idea of running the country jointly while keeping Sharif at bay. Bhutto's assassination and the return of Sharif from exile in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, put an end to Musharraf's scheme. He had to resign in 2008, allowing Bhutto's widower, Asif Ali Zardari, to take the presidency.

The effects of military rule remained, however. Zardari was reluctant to shed the extraordinary powers of his predecessor, and the political system remained in turmoil. A weak coalition of the PPP and an array of opportunistic parties found it difficult to make bold changes in the relationship with the military, and between the Center and provinces in terms of sharing assets and resources. A strong Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz group) government in the Punjab checkmated it at various junctures. Meanwhile a wary military watched with an eagle eye from the sidelines, stepping out of the shadows every now and then to restore balance in the system without actually entering the political arena. But the betting began on when it might enter the political arena yet again. Watching all this was Pakistan's biggest benefactor and ally, the United States.

THE U.S.-PAKISTAN ROLLER COASTER RELATIONSHIP

Though the United States sees itself as standing for democracy and freedom, it has acted in Pakistan over the decades in a shortsighted manner, making alliances largely with the military to advance its own strategic interests. First, it strengthened the hands of the army by increasing its size and heft in the 1950s via the Baghdad Pact against the Soviets. The U.S. looked the other way as martial law was declared by President Iskander Mirza in October 1958, and then as he was overthrown by Ayub Khan later that month. The U.S. decamped from the scene after the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, when Pakistan expected the U.S. to assist it. Pakistan then turned to China as its new best friend.

The U.S. returned a decade later, as Yahya Khan played a role in opening the door to China. America sided with Yahya Khan in the 1971 conflict with India, even though he continued his policy of repression in East Pakistan.

During the elder Bhutto's period in power (1971-77), the relationship began to sour because of Pakistan's quest to keep up with India's move toward nuclear weapons, among other reasons. The U.S. kept its distance from Zia ul-Haq and imposed sanctions on Pakistan, isolating it—especially the military—as the U.S. cut its training programs for Pakistani officers. But the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 forced the U.S. to come to terms with Pakistan's dictator in order to use Pakistan's borderland as a staging ground for the covert guerrilla campaign against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. A decade later, the Soviets exited Afghanistan in ignominious defeat. Soon after General Boris Gromov's 40th Army tanks trundled back into Soviet Uzbekistan on February 15, 1989, the United States packed its bags and left the region. It left in place a "Kalashnikov culture" of political

violence and drug running, which had emerged as a major business during the Afghan campaign. Another period of U.S.-Pakistan separation ensued.

Meanwhile Afghanistan fell into civil war and a cycle of destruction that allowed pan-Islamic militancy to emerge. Al-Qaeda found a ready home in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, and attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. In response, the U.S. attacked Afghanistan and ousted the Taliban. Former American allies, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani, turned against the U.S. following its invasion of Afghanistan. A new phase of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship opened up. Though Musharraf had been a political pariah after his 1999 coup, he suddenly became President George W. Bush's indispensable ally, and assistance began flowing to Pakistan's military to help seal the border with Afghanistan. The United States ignored Pakistan's political system yet again, paying no attention to the demands of Benazir Bhutto and others to pressure Musharraf to restore civilian rule.

Pakistan's entry into the anti-Taliban war spawned a homegrown militant movement in the border region: the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP. This militancy entered the North-West Frontier Province, and violence even hit the hinterland. Indeed, TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud was blamed for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto on her return to Pakistan in December 2008.¹⁶ The U.S. government made some amends by eliminating Mehsud in August 2009 via a Predator strike in South Waziristan.¹⁷

“THE FAULT ... LIES NOT IN OUR STARS...”¹⁸

The Bard was right. While it is easy for Pakistanis to blame external forces for their woes, and the imbalance between the military and civilians, the fault indeed lies inside Pakistan itself. Shortsighted military and political leaders have found it expedient to use external alliances and purposes to justify military rule, or to allow corrupt governments to continue. Successive civilian governments allowed or helped the military to rise up the ladder of influence in Pakistan.

The Warrant of Precedence, or rank that determines relative seniority in Pakistan's political hierarchy, had placed the military far below civilian ranks at the time of independence.¹⁹ But by elevating the army chief to defense minister in 1954, and then regularly reordering the rank structure, each and every civilian ruler of Pakistan has gradually increased the military's rankings and hence potential power in the overall ruling structure. Interestingly, India

retained the old warrant, and Bangladesh reverted back to it during the rule of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. Pakistan has been moving in the other direction.

The result has been an increasing imbalance in the power structure that will be difficult to dismantle, even if civilian rulers make an effort to do so. A culture of entitlement has been created within the military. The balance between civilians and the military needs to be shifted toward civil supremacy. This must be based on increasing civilian knowledge of the military and its operations; it requires an exhibition of competency by civilian rulers in areas where the military has hitherto played a lead role, such as defense, foreign policy, and nuclear issues.

The economic crisis facing Pakistan also highlights the large drain of resources for defense needs, which consume a substantial portion of its budget. A certain amount of civilian confidence and deftness will be needed to assist the army in changing its orientation from conventional to counter-insurgency warfare, and to reduce its wide economic footprint. Foreign aid to help this transformation will be necessary, since such a change cannot be made overnight and will involve investing in a highly mobile fighting force in place of the current conventional force of 500,000. After an initial spike in spending, defense spending may be able to settle down to lower levels. Further investment will be needed to help retrain demobilized soldiers, and place them in the civilian workforce.

On the external front, civilians need to work with the military to lower tensions with India and ensure that Pakistan's defense remains strong but does not provoke or encourage any external adventures. Pakistan's friends, such as the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and China, can play major roles in this transition by providing Pakistan with a greater sense of security and the economic support for its transition from a military state to a civilian state. A great opportunity exists for the new civilian system to take advantage of the avowed aim of army chief General Kayani to keep the army out of politics. If not, history may repeat itself.

ENDNOTES

¹ "Suicide Attacks in Pakistan 2007," *Patronus Analytical*, Jan. 15, 2008.

² *Editors' note: This chapter was written in late 2009, before such recent events as the arrest in Pakistan of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. It remains to be seen whether these events signal a broader shift away from the situation that Nawaz describes.*

- 3 Under this pact Pakistan began receiving military aid from the United States, ostensibly to fight alongside the “free world” against a potential Communist threat from the Soviet Union. In fact, Pakistan viewed its main threat as India, and the army prepared for battle against that rival more than any threat from the north.
- 4 International Republican Institute, “IRI Index: Pakistan Public Opinion Survey, June 1-15, 2008,” slides 34, 38 (accessed Jan. 20, 2010).
- 5 Ehsan Mehmood Khan, “Kayani Doctrine of Defence Diplomacy,” *Pakistan Observer*, Mar. 24, 2009.
- 6 See Walter C. Ladwig III, “A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army’s New Limited War Doctrine,” *International Security* (Winter 2007/08).
- 7 Statement by Hamid Ali Rao, Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament, First Committee of the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly, Geneva, Oct. 8, 2009.
- 8 Briefing by Defense Attaché at Pakistani Embassy, Washington, D.C., 2008.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 “Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2010,” South Asia Terrorism Portal (accessed Jan. 20, 2010).
- 11 See Hasan Zaheer, *The Times and Trials of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy 1951* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 12 M. Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Masters* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 186-91.
- 13 Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan’s First Military Ruler* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1993).
- 14 For further discussion, see Selig Harrison, *In Afghanistan’s Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1981).
- 15 For more on how shifts in Pakistan’s military contributed to the country’s problems with Islamic militancy, see Daveed Gartenstein-Ross’s chapter in this volume.
- 16 “Bhutto Killing Blamed on al-Qaeda,” *BBC News*, Dec. 28, 2007.
- 17 See Bill Roggio, “Baitullah Mehsud Dead; Hakeemullah New Leader of Pakistani Taliban,” *Long War Journal*, Aug. 25, 2009.
- 18 William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, act 1, scene 2.
- 19 Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars Within* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xxxix.