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PAKISTANI ARMY'S INTERFERENCE IN POLITICS & STATE AFFAIRS: A STUDY IN CONTRAST WITH BANGLADESH ARMY



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This year in the Republic day parade a strong contingent of Bangladesh Armed Forces with 122 members also participated to commemorate the 50 years of 1971 Bangladesh liberation war which was fought by the Mukti-bahini and Mukti-jodhas of Bangladesh against Pakistani forces together with Indian Armed forces. Indian contribution in the Bangladesh war has been acknowledged and well appreciated by Bangladesh. Before liberation, Bengalis of the East Pakistan suffered discrimination and atrocities by Pakistani administration, and once the demand for autonomy was raised after national elections in 1970, the Pakistani army in East Pakistan unleashed a wave of terror and persecution on the Bengali population mainly targeting the academia and intellectuals in a bid to tame them. But it failed to quell the indomitable Bengali spirit for seeking freedom. In fact, the atrocities fueled the demand for separation from Pakistan more strongly than ever. Later, an unprecedented event in the military history about defeat and surrender of 93000 Pakistani forces to the Indian armed forces, has resulted in unforgettable ignominy and shame to Pakistan.

A study of the character and constituent of Pakistani and Bangladesh armies reveal a contrasting picture. Today, while Pakistani army is infamous for its past war crimes and genocide against the hapless population of

Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), now also stands discredited for its support to the terror which it uses as a tacit instrument to unleash a hybrid war against other nations primarily India, Afghanistan and Iran. Pakistani army is the main arbiter of the Pakistan's foreign policy and interferes in all elements of the statecraft of Pakistan. In that, it not only undermines the elected government rather plays its partisan role in the elections. So much so, the incumbent Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government of Pakistan led by Imran Khan Niazi is accused of being a puppet of army hence, it is not surprising that 11 opposition parties of Pakistan recently sought an end to the Pakistani Army's meddling in the politics which Prime Minister Imran Khan is at pains to explain that, his government is a legitimately elected with popular votes of the Pakistani citizens. But, "Lahore Declaration" signed by the opposition parties on 19 Jan 21 has castigated PM Imran Khan's government saying, "the military establishment had stolen the people's mandate in the 2018 election and imposed a "hybrid and inefficient" government on the masses,"¹This accusation strengthens the impression of gross interference by the Pakistani army in civil affairs and the national politics which is considered an anathema for the professional armed forces. The common accusation is that in seventy-three of its existence, Pakistan directly or indirectly has been ruled by the army itself or through a proxy civilian government. In reality, a political party willing to take forward army's agenda, is supported by the Pakistani army to get elected and later it stays in power till it accedes to the Pakistani army's plans. It is observed that Pakistani interference encompasses all elements of the state administration including its judiciary which many believe acts with tacit support of the military and is alleged to have given legitimacy to military coups in Pakistan.² Even the current Prime Minister Imran Khan in his earlier comment in social media (Face book) has alleged that, President Musharaff declared emergency in Pakistan in 2007 to tame the Supreme Court of Pakistan.³The paradox is that same Imran Khan is critical of the existing Supreme Court judge Qazi Faez Isa who is tough against the deep state, has become the target of Imran Khan Government and the army and both

¹<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/imran-denies-interference-by-pakistan-army/article33374686.ece>

²<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18425141>. "Pakistani Chief Justice Iftikhar sat on four pivotal Supreme Court benches between 2000 and 2005 that validated the military takeover by Gen Musharraf, his referendum, his legal framework order (LFO) and the 17th constitutional amendment that gave the president additional powers and allowed him to continue as the army chief".

³<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/pak-army-tries-to-corner-supreme-court-s-tough-judge-it-is-worried-about-2023/story-0YFjzadavRHw7sDrpW5RIO.html>

want to ease him out of the Supreme Court before he becomes Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2023.⁴

Saga of Pakistani Army's Role in Civil Administration

History is a witness to nearly 36 years of covert military rule in Pakistan 73 years after separation from India viz; 1953 – 1971, 1977 – 1988 and 1999-2008. Pakistani army got involved in the state administration quite early on. Initially, it was seen as panacea for the mal-administration and rampant corruption in civil administration and once initiated it sought a role every time in running of the state administration. Mohammed Ali Jinnah who was instrumental in creation of homeland for the Muslims died in Sep 1948 with only 13 months after formation of Pakistan. Thereafter, his trusted lieutenant, Liaquat Ali Khan who assumed the leadership as the Prime Minister of Pakistan was assassinated in Oct 1951 after 13 months of his rule by Major General Major-General Akbar Khan who was unhappy with Liaquat Ali Khan for being less hostile to India. Major General was arrested along with 10 military officers and four civilians for plotting a coup. This is a case of first attempt by the Pakistani army to take over the civil administration.⁵

After assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan, the then Governor General and a former chief Minister of East Bengal, Khawaja Nazimuddin relinquished his post and took over as the Prime minister of Pakistan. Mr. Malik Ghulam Mohammed replaced him as the Governor General of Pakistan and later in 1953, unceremoniously dismissed Khawaja Nazimuddin and for the first time in Pakistani history, two military officers were inducted in his cabinet. General Ayub Khan, the then Commander-in-Chief of Pakistani Army was appointed a Federal Minister of defence in the cabinet, who concurrently held both appointments. At the same time, Major General Iskander Mirza, was given the charge of Minister of Home affairs. With these inductions, a saga of army playing a direct role in the civil administration began in 1953.⁶

In 1956, on ground of deteriorating health, Maj General Iskander Mirza forced Ghulam Mohammad to resign as Governor General and was elected by the constituent assembly as the first President of Pakistan. Maj General

⁴ Ibid

⁵ <https://nayadaur.tv/2020/07/fallen-horses-the-coup-attempts-that-failed-in-pakistan/>

⁶ <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-9772.html>

Iskander Mirza though had been seconded to civil service, was the first Army General to rule Pakistan as the President.

On 07 Oct 1958, Iskander Mirza declared martial law and appointed General Ayub Khan as the Martial Law Administrator who on 27 Oct 1958, declared himself as a Field Marshal and President of Pakistan. The martial law was lifted after 44 months during which the army officers managed the civil administration. General Ayub Khan dictatorship brought in military in politics and civil administration and his military coup set a pattern for several follow-on military coups in Pakistan.⁷ He believed that Pakistan is not ready for the democracy and instead introduced a different form, suiting Pakistani conditions and called it a "Basic democracy ". In Jan 1960, after being elected as the President by this hybrid democratic system, he ruled Pakistan till March 1969 till his retirement which became imminent amidst growing discontentment of the public. (During this period, he retained the dual appointments of President of Pakistan and Commander-in-Chief of Pakistani Army.) Thereafter, he nominated General. Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan as the next President.⁸

Yahya Khan like his predecessor, declared Martial Law and promised to lift it as soon as possible after elections. The 1970 national election became a watershed point in Pakistani history for its failure to transfer power to the winning Awami League front-runner, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the leader of Pakistan People Party (PPP), who swept election in West Pakistan even refused to form Government in coalition with Awami League. This led to the nullification of the elections and civil uprising in East Pakistan with Sheikh Mujibar Rahman led Awami League now demanding full autonomy. This demand did not find favour with the West Pakistani ruler General Yahya Khan who unleashed his forces against East Pakistani population to tame it. The use of terror and genocide of the Bengali academia and intellectuals is a black period of Pakistani history. Later, General Yahya Khan had to face ignominy and shame after Pakistan's loss to India in 1971 war which resulted in bifurcation of the Pakistan and liberation of Bangladesh. General Yahya Khan ruled from March 1969 to till his resignation Dec 71.

After a brief civilian rule marred by protests and unrest, on 5th Sep 1977 General Zia ul-Haq seized power from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Mr. Bhutto though

⁷<https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/566576-first-coup-pakistan>

⁸<https://www.britannica.com/place/Pakistan/Military-government>

had won national election with landslide victory but, army got disappointed with him due to all-round protests for alleged rigging in the elections. Mr. Bhutto was subsequently convicted for treason and hanged to death by the military regime. After Ayub Khan, General Zia had the second longest tenure of 11 years till he died in an air crash in August 1988. Analysts believe that General Zia ul Haq was responsible for the islamization of Pakistan which he used skillfully to strengthen his position as the President.⁹

After death of General Zia ul Haq, there was a brief period of a civilian rule under the leadership of Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan People Party (PPP) and Nawaz Sharif of PML(N). Sharif tried to break the army stranglehold and remove General Mushraff after Kargil 1999 fiasco but, latter with clout and support from the military ousted him, dissolved the assembly and suspended the constitution. Although it was a military coup, he did not declare the martial law instead declared emergency and assumed the total power in himself. In his regime, massive induction of the serving military officers was carried out in the civil administration. The elected Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader, Nawaz Shariff was arrested and later after external pressure was sent in exile. Later, Pakistan came under tremendous pressure from the United States for not doing enough against terrorism especially after September 11 attack on World Trade Center (WTC) in New York and neutralization of Al Qaeda supremo, Osama Bin laden from a hideout in Pakistan¹⁰.

In 2002, General Pervez Mushraff formally got himself confirmed as a head of the state after a nationwide referendum. In 2007, he sought re-election but, it faced hurdles from the Supreme Court of Pakistan which raised objections on holding of dual appointments of Army Chief and the President of Pakistan. But he bulldozed his way. To remain in power, he declared emergency in the state, dismissed and reconstituted the Supreme Court which now confirmed the legality of his appointments. Thereupon, he resigned as the Chief of the Army Staff and was sworn in as a civilian President. This is a classic case of rule bending, pressurizing and muzzling of the judiciary to perpetuate one's own rule. The military government of Mushraff faced condemnation across the world and he promised to return to the civilian rule as early as possible which he eventually did by conducting national election in 2008 which he participated and lost as a civilian candidate of PML (Q) party.

⁹Ibid

¹⁰Ibid

A careful scrutiny of the military rule is truly a revelation. The military rule may have begun as an attempt to put state administration in order but, once in power, they used religion, adversarial relations with India, terrorism, corruption in civil life, lack of developments in the country as excuses to perpetuate their rule. In that, they terrorized the population, media, judiciary to accede to their dictates and used strong arms tactics to quell any oppositions or criticism of the army which was above any reproach. The analysts opine that the inexperience and ineffectiveness of Pakistani political leaders and corrupt bureaucracy was essentially the reason for the army to move in and interfere in state administration.¹¹ This may be true but, it should not have led to a spate of military take overs in the life of the nation. For example, in Indonesia, after 10 years, its army lost its veto power on the civil decisions.¹² This did not happen in Pakistan.

Civilian Rule: A Façade of Democracy

From 2008 onwards, while a civilian government has been in power but, paradoxically no government has completed its full term mainly because of the army's vigilantism which is actually ruling the state and dictates domestic as well as the foreign affairs of the country. This it finds a convenient way to rule without any accountability. Army finds scapegoats for all its wrong doings. No civil head of state has challenged Army's dominant position. Nawaz Sharif who tried to clip the powers of the army was eased out, arrested for several real and cooked up charges and jailed by the compliant judiciary. Presently, he is staying outside Pakistan. The coalition government led by incumbent Imran Khan of Tahrike-e-Insaaf party has been foisted with tacit support of army. It would stay in power at the pleasure of the army. The day it feels that he is not compliant to the army instructions on national rule he would be eased out of the administration like his predecessors. The army continues to remain as the final arbitrator and is viewed as the kingmaker in Pakistan and policy statements, which should come from civilian elected rulers, continue to be transmitted from army headquarters.¹³ In the international interactions, the foreign government recognizing the army stature in Pakistan prefer to deal with the army than the elected leaders which is indeed disgraceful. The overreach by the Pakistani Army has increased during Imran regime. The digital, print media are under strict scrutiny of Inter-services Intelligence (ISI). The army is

¹¹https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/sa/sa_99chb02.html

¹²<https://www.dawn.com/news/1097757>

¹³<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36700407.pdf>

acting vengefully through abduction, arrest and harassment of the digital media activists who criticize the army. Most of them left Pakistan and remained in exile to escape the atrocities by the Pakistani army.¹⁴

Comparison with Bangladesh Army. In contrast with the Pakistani army, Bangladesh Army which once operated in the Eastern wing of Pakistan has emerged as a through professional and a disciplined force. Why and how this happened is study in contrast. After Independence, it too remained under the military rule first for five years under General Ziaur Rahman who came to power after assassination of the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 Aug 1975 by six mid-level disgruntled army officers and later by General Ershad from 1982- 1990. During army rule, here once again army interfered in the civil administration but, after 1991, with nearly two decades of authoritarian regimes including period of the army rule, Bangladesh experienced a transition to democracy,¹⁵ it soon matured in to a stable democracy with military turning apolitical and a saviour of the constitution. Initially, based on the past experience with Pakistani army, the ruling civilian government was skeptical of Bangladesh army but, over the years, the army has become nonpolitical and is called in only to aid the civilian government in handling the natural crisis situations. As per Academic research, before civilian institutes begin to dominate in the state administration, it takes years for the military role to recede. It can be between 8 to 10 years before military begins to accept civilian supremacy and when it loses its supreme power. In case of Indonesia, it took almost a decade.¹⁶ In case of Bangladesh, it took nearly two decades. But Pakistan even after 73 years is still hassled by army which indeed is sad.

CERTIFICATE

The paper is author's individual scholastic articulation. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished and it has not been submitted for publication / web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

¹⁴<https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/03/pakistans-government-and-military-are-crushing-dissent-on-social-media/>

¹⁵https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2773091

¹⁶¹⁶<https://www.dawn.com/news/1097757>

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