CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN PAKISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

Lieutenant General (R) Asad Durrani

Military is a part of civil society in fact its reflection but it still stands apart in all social orders. The reason is simple: the force of arms has played a significant if not the decisive role in all ages. History, though wrongly, reads like a narrative of wars. "To serve" in some societies is understood as service in the armed forces, and an "officer" is the one who has commanded troops. Many of the great captains of war–Alexander, Chengez Khan, Saladin, Napoleon–were warriors and at the same time leaders of their people. Even in modern times, some of them like Ata-Turk, De Gaul and Eisenhower, after they doffed their uniforms, were called national leaders by their grateful countrymen. In Pakistan, too, the military has a special status, but for different reasons.

Most of the region that today constitutes Pakistan has so often been trampled and traversed by marauding and transiting armies, that the people here have learnt to live and bear with the superior force. The area is fertile with a prosperous agrarian culture. The cost of conflict has therefore been always heavy. Compromise and submission were thus a more pragmatic modus vivendi than defiance and resistance. In fact, some of them from the less affluent areas found joining ranks of the foreign forces a beneficial pursuit. After the creation of Pakistan, there was yet another reason to concede a special status to the military.

Carved out from British India at the time of its liberation from colonial rule, Pakistan shared a number of succession problems with its larger twin, today's India. Thus born in a state of insecurity, in the eyes of its people the armed forces of Pakistan were not only the guarantor of national security, but also a symbol of its sovereignty. Military leaders, like Zia, even assumed the role of guarding the nation's "ideology". They may have been inspired by the Turkish armed forces who consider themselves to be the custodians of the country's secular character. Unlike in Turkey, though, our armed forces did not acquit themselves well in defence

of their country. Their larger than life role, however, did encourage them, as in Turkey, to influence national policies, even take over political power. In both places, the coup makers were assured of the peoples' support, or at least of absence of any mass resistance.

The civil-military relations in Pakistan are quite naturally an upshot of all these factors, but are most crucially affected by the Army's periodic, and consequently ever-deepening, involvement in the country's politics.

Factors Affecting Civil-Military Relations

One reason that the people of Pakistan, in large numbers if not in majority, welcome a military takeover is because they believe they had not been served well by the civil society institutions. That helps the Army restore calm and order in the short term. If in the long run, the military too comes up short, there are good grounds for that as well. Civil affairs are complex requiring sustained work and patience. Army on the other hand is trained to achieve specific goals within a laid down time frame. But indeed there are other more profound reasons.

Military is part of the state apparatus, the so called "establishment". It is therefore inclined, also due to its own lack of capacity, to work through other institutions of the state. The masses thus continue to get the same deal, except that they now direct their ire towards the military. The civil bureaucracy too, although it is frequently shunted around when the politicians are in power, has grounds to grudge under the military rule. Its more lucrative jobs are often taken by servicemen.

The military is also not suited to wield political power. Unity and the chain of command are its essential ingredients. Politics on the other hand has to be more accommodative, and therefore needs a pluralistic approach. When the military takes over, it faces two problems right at the outset: it lacks legitimacy and it needs some form of public participation. It therefore undertakes abnormal measures to resolve these anomalies; finding creative judicial and constitutional solutions, holding referenda with little credibility,

cultivating pliable political forces as well as manipulating elections. This process obviously has to be constantly monitored and adjusted, and often requires damage control, even course correction. In due course military rule seems like an extended exercise in crisis management.

Minorities and smaller units are affected in a strangely perverse way under the military regime. In a conventional political system, such groups and regions have a modicum of representation. Military rulers make extra efforts to woo them but end up acting patronisingly and are thus resented by any self–respecting people. Here again, those who collaborate with the military are either unpopular or with little standing. In smaller regions and communities, this can alienate the people to a greater degree than elsewhere.

Some of the salient effects on civil-military relations of the military's frequent forays into politics can be summarised as follows:-

- This creates an oligarchic structure, with the military and its collaborators at the top of the pyramid. They get increasingly isolated from the rest of the people, and are held responsible for all that is wrong in the country.
- The fault lines in the polity proliferate. To the existing divisions are added: those between the civil and the military bureaucracies; between those who collaborate with the military rulers and those who oppose them; and the regions and minorities who do not feel genuinely represented.
- The Army gets the blame, not only for the wrongs it commits but also for those that it did not (more on it later in the paper). A few of its acts, like its welfare and commercial projects that otherwise might have escaped public notice, come into the limelight and are cited (its "corporate interests" for example), wrongly in my view, as some of the military's motivations to hang on to power.

- Since ultimately the military rule cannot provide the relief that the common man expects, over time the masses have come to regard the Army, along with the politicians, the bureaucracy, the feudal elite and the entrepreneurs, as yet another ruling class.

Implications for National Security

National security was never a 'military only' concept. In primitive times and societies, brute force could provide a minimum of security for a community to survive. But to prosper, physical protection merely ensured one of the conditions for the development of civilisation. Even during the Middle Ages, when mobilising large bodies of arms was a relatively simple affair, Greek, Roman, Egyptian or Mongolian armies depended upon sound administrative and political systems relevant for those times.

Now that warfare is a much more complex and expensive affair, without a developed economic and technical domestic base, no meaningful defence capability is sustainable. And indeed, since modern war has become so destructive and its effects felt beyond areas of conflict, good diplomacy has taken on the role of a country's first line of defence. A robust security structure is therefore anchored to the three pillars of domestic, foreign and defence policies. As argued above, military rule erodes at least one of them, the domestic pillar.

When in power, the military initially resists the temptation to increase defence spending, but later succumbs to it, probably under institutional pressure. That, however, is not the real damage that the military's exclusive status, in or out of power, has caused. (In absolute terms, the defence budget in any case is not a huge amount.) A more fundamental problem is that with the military immune to civilian or outside control and oversight, a good part of this amount is spent on institutional whims, no new or unconventional ideas are developed or encouraged to improve the existing defence system (ours is an expensive model), and one fails to get the right "bang for the buck".

The most serious damage that the Army's special status in our power matrix has done is that the civilian decision makers have either abdicated their responsibility towards formulating security policies, or distanced themselves from policies that did not work. At times, they picked up the courage to change or modify an existing policy. But when it did not create the desired effect, either due to a half-hearted attempt or because the change was not well considered, they made the Army a convenient scapegoat for any botched efforts. There is a fairly widespread, in fact universal, impression that security policies were the military's exclusive domain; a forbidden territory for all others. That, however, is not the whole truth.

The first elected government after Zia's death took office in December 1988 with Benazir Bhutto at its head. That was the time that the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was nearly complete. The new government, legitimately and correctly, asked for a policy review since the situation had qualitatively changed. Some elements in the military were certainly opposed to it, but not due to any reservation against a civilian government's prerogative to direct a core security policy. It was because they regarded themselves as the custodians of a legacy, especially the one that had succeeded (the miracle of the 20th Century had taken place, and the Soviets had withdrawn). Ultimately, the review was done and it did some good to our post-Soviet Afghan policy.

The resistance in Indian–held Kashmir erupted in early 1990. The same government very wisely decided to take all political parties into their confidence. There was no opposition by the military establishment, which willingly contributed to all such briefings and discussions.

Later that year, another government, this one led by Nawaz Sharif, was elected to power. The new prime minister was keen to promote friendly relations with India and believed, contrary to the existing perception, that it could be done without the resolution of the Kashmir issue. He took the initiative and reached out to Narasimha Rao when the latter was elected to lead the new Indian government in 1991. The attempt was aborted, not because the Army came in the way, but because a sound frame-work had not

been worked out before launching the peace process. When it was done, in 1997 during Nawaz Sharif's second tenure, the forward movement did become possible.

It is generally believed that during her second term in office, Ms. Bhutto took a hard line regarding India under Army pressure. It was in fact the opposition led by Nawaz Sharif that in her first stint relentlessly blamed her for being "soft" on India and out to "roll-back" our core policies, on Afghanistan, on Kashmir and on the Nuclear issue. When returned to power, she wanted to prove her detractors wrong and became recklessly aggressive. In the process she courted a number of disasters. An attempt to revive the Kashmir issue in the UN came close to creating an embarrassing showdown, and was barely averted by the timely intervention of a few friendly countries.

Earlier in the paper, a mention has been made of how Nawaz Sharif was frustrated in his efforts to reduce tensions with India. Having learnt the right lesson, when re-elected in 1997, he tasked his foreign secretary, Shamshad Ahmed, to forge a workable framework with his counterpart, Salman Haider, the Indian foreign secretary. The two professionals, backed by the desired political will (I. K. Gujral, the Indian prime minister was also equally enthusiastic), produced a formula that has since become famous as the "composite dialogue".

This is not the right place to discuss either its design logic or the way it has been pursued thereafter. Suffice it to say that since the concept has survived many a crisis-- Kargil, the military coup in Pakistan of 1999, and the 2002 Standoff between the two countries, to name a few-- some sound thinking must have gone into it. The more important point to be made here is that it was purely a civilian enterprise. The Pakistani military very correctly stood aside and watched its nascent civilian leadership learn the art of peace making.

There was yet another crucial decision that was taken by a political leader who was in fact encouraged to do so by none other than the then Army Chief. The Indian nuclear tests of May 1998 had created a dilemma for Pakistan, who had the technical wherewithal

to respond in kind. The political and the psychological factors demanded that we too should carry out a few tests of our own. Indeed, these would have been inevitably followed by wide- ranging sanctions that, considering our critical economic situation at that time, would have added to our discomfort. Jehangir Karamat, the COAS at that time, told Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that since the post test situation, internally and externally, would have to be managed by his government, the decision must essentially be his, in consultation with the cabinet.

The abnormal equation between the civil society and the military has resulted in an unusual configuration at the top of our power pyramid. In our political vocabulary it is called "the troika". During civilian periods, the prime minister as the chief executive is indeed one of the components. The Army chief is obviously the other. And the president, who usually enjoys extra influence because the military does not believe that the threat of a coup or judicial oversight were sufficient checks to rein in the elected bodies, completes the trio. The arrangement may have some merit and could also work. It is a misnomer, however, to call it a "troika".

The Russian three horse sleigh, the original troika, was pulled in the same direction. Our troika at the best of times has had a tenuous equilibrium. More often than not it resulted in turf battles. The Army chief has the monopoly over physical force, but it is not usable except in unusual circumstances. In normal times, he must make do with the aura of force if he wishes to influence policies. The president, too, though blessed with extraordinary constitutional powers, cannot flaunt them except in extreme conditions, and then too possibly with the military's tacit cooperation and at some risk of a judicial reproof and reversal. A smart prime minister can function within these restraints; even ride roughshod without transgressing certain limits. Such of them, however, do not join politics or get elected to head a government.

During our last civilian interlude, 1988-99, this uneasy relationship within the so–called troika led to some rather unsavoury conflicts.

All our rulers, military and civilian, prefer a pliable judiciary. They like to take the cover of the law, but hate to be hampered by its finer points. Military rule to start with, needs legitimacy from the Supreme Court and remains dependent upon its goodwill for as long as it lasts. It therefore at times takes extraordinary measures to get rid of difficult judges by asking for a fresh oath, which is a reaffirmation of loyalty in other words. Civilian governments have to follow a more tedious procedure: they depend upon the president for approval of their nominees.

During her first term as prime minister (1988-90), Benazir Bhutto on one occasion insisted that the president was bound by her advice when appointing judges to the Supreme Court. The President, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, had his own interpretation. The disagreement almost caused the country's two top leaders to take the matter to court for adjudication. It was resolved through the mediatory efforts of the third member of the Troika, General Aslam Beg, the then COAS.

This was not the only time that the president and the prime minister sought the Army's intervention to resolve a deadlock that was threatening to paralyse the functioning of the government. During the second tenure of Nawaz Sharif, the Army Chief, Jehangir Karamat, was recalled from a foreign trip to help resolve a standoff between the Prime Minister and President Farooq Leghari over the conduct of the Chief Justice, Sajjad Ali Shah. This time, however, the efforts proved futile and both the President and the Chief Justice resigned from their respective offices. That episode will remain as one of the most benighted spots in our history, as it followed a raid on the Supreme Court by the prime minister's supporters.

On yet another occasion an army chief's intervention resulted in both the president and the prime minister abdicating their posts. Nawaz Sharif in his first stint locked horns with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan to get more political space. General Waheed Kakar, the then COAS, initially tried to arbitrate a less drastic outcome, but the Prime Minister insisted that the crisis could only be resolved if the two antagonists resigned to make way for fresh elections.

Nawaz Sharif in fact remained uncomfortable with all the presidents (except for Rafiq Tarar who was practically a family member) and the army chiefs with whom he had to share the burden. Rather than by a troika, he believed that the country was best run like a Karachi donkey cart: one animal to take the load and the other(s) to play the act. Benazir Bhutto, though probably nearly as obsessed with unbridled power, acted more pragmatically. In her first tenure, she did make a few ham-handed attempts at clipping the military's wings. She insisted on having as head of the ISI a person not recommended by the Army Chief, and asserted, strangely, that though the president could appoint a service chief, his retirement was the prime minister's prerogative. But in her second term, she decided to keep the Army in good humour. Her recipe to pre-empt presidential wrath by getting a loyalist installed in that office, however, did not work out. The second time around, she was dismissed by her own former deputy, Farooq Leghari.

Pak-US Relationship

The raison d'etre of the Pak-US relationship was the security concerns of the two countries, even though these did not ride in tandem. Pakistan was looking for an ally powerful enough to countervail its imbalance vis-à-vis India. The US, having failed to woo India–the bigger and therefore the more preferred choice–to become a cog in the anti–communist ring in the region, found merit in forging a security link with Pakistan. That resulted in a close working relationship between the two militaries, and though not intended to do so, affected civil-military relations in Pakistan.

I do not believe that the US or its military ever encouraged, even tacitly, the Pakistan Army to take over political power. But whenever the latter did, its special rapport with the US defence establishment proved helpful. After necessary noises about the democracy in Pakistan having suffered yet another setback, the more mundane considerations–the Soviet threat, its occupation of Afghanistan, the nuclear factor, etc–persuaded American leadership to maintain a "policy of engagement" with Pakistan's military rulers. It was also not too painful. The hegemonic powers like the US find it more convenient to work with leaders of client states who

are not constrained by institutions like a parliament, or for that matter by public opinion.

That however created a problem on the Pakistani side. People here at the best of times have been suspicious of American intentions and critical of their policies. As they got disenchanted with the military regime, they cursed the US for acting as its prop and started seeing their own Army as a tool of American imperialism. After the US led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 and the role played by the military led government in Islamabad in the events that followed, most Pakistanis believe that their Army was fighting an American war.

The US aid to Pakistan has always had a heavy, if not a dominant, defence component. Presently, two third of the American overt and covert aid is meant for the military. Since most of it is for the hardware and almost none of it serves to build up indigenous infrastructure, it has led to, like it did in the past, a dependency relationship. The Pakistani military would get addicted to high-tech equipment, will remain reliant on the US' supply line and will therefore obstruct any effort to change the nature of relationship, even when a course correction becomes necessary. It now has implications beyond civil-military relations, more grievously for the national security.

A Possible Prescription

In our civil-military equation, the balance has been in favour of the coercive force. The mere fact that it has ruled the country directly for over half of its existence, and wielded disproportional influence for the rest, places the onus of damage control on the Army. And to be fair, it did try; not so much to improve the civil-military relations, but to save the national security interests from the vicissitudes of our erratic politics.

After the restoration of civilian rule in December 1988, the first paper sent by the GHQ to the Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, highlighted the need to find broad consensus on major national security issues. It expressed apprehensions that the political parties,

because of the peculiar nature of politics in the country, would exploit any subject, even to the detriment of national security. The latter events were to confirm that it was not too alarmist an assessment.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Ms. Bhutto in her first stint asked for a review of the Afghan Policy. Even though it is the legitimate right of any government, her opposition, led by Nawaz Sharif, raised plenty of hue and cry claiming that she was out to harm the country's core interests. In her turn, she did not act any differently. Soon after the Indian nuclear tests in May 1998, she dared Nawaz Sharif to respond in kind and mocked him to wear bangles when he was seen to be hedging. However, when he finally did order the counter-tests, the lady moaned that the country was now isolated.

The GHQ paper suggested that the government could consider forming a 'national security advisory group' consisting of specialists from public and private sectors, as well as from the political spectrum. The idea was to create a core group to analyse our major security concerns and present to the government various policy options. More importantly, it would be a good forum for the opinion and policy makers of all hues to get familiar with the mechanics of evolving and implementing security policies. Another major benefit that one expected from such a process was that since it would involve the opposition, the latter might resist the temptation to politicise security issues and, when in power, would be well informed about them.

The authors carefully avoided recommending that the government should form a national security council (NSC). With our history of military involvement, the instinctive reaction to this suggestion has always been: "this must be another ploy of the Army to perpetuate its rule by other means". To further obviate such apprehensions, the military has repeatedly said (the concept was presented to other governments as well) that such a body- group or a council- should exclude service chiefs and merely have the chairman of joint chiefs of staff committee (CJCSC) as an ex-officio member. It was thus to be a "civilian" national security body, advisory in

nature, under the aegis of the prime-minister, and with the opposition and the independent expertise generously represented.

All the political parties when in opposition supported the idea enthusiastically. Once in power, none of them wanted to have anything to do with it. The reasons could be many: wish to woo the army when out of power; exclude the opposition from any decision making, when in power; or simply, political paranoia. Mian Nawaz Sharif, who had no compunction riding to political power with the military's support (and more than once), was so rattled as the prime-minister by an annunciation of this concept by his genuinely apolitical army chief, Jehangir Karamat, that the latter was asked to resign.

In the meantime, the original idea has been metamorphosed because on the two occasions that it has been actualised, both the composition and the purpose were different. During the interregnum under President Farooq Leghari (November 1996 to February 1997) a council of defence and national security (CDNS) was created which included the three service chiefs and the CJCSC. The aim was to show that the military fully supported the ouster of a civilian government by the President. And the present NSC, under General Musharraf, is obviously meant to serve as the supreme national council.

Conclusion

Civil-military relations anywhere are essentially an expression of the status that the civil society concedes to its armed forces. The multiple fissures, vertical and horizontal, that exist in Pakistani polity, have conferred a larger than life role to its military. It is varyingly seen as a fire brigade, an arbiter, even as a messiah. But when it fails to come up to expectations, that is often the case since it is not cut out for such tasks, then the same military is dubbed as a predatory class raring to grab power and obsessed with keeping its stranglehold, if necessary, by manipulating its levers from behind the scenes.

The military on its part, as an institution has always been reluctant to play these extra-ordinary roles. Ironically, it is not primarily due to awareness that it cannot, but because of the adverse effects on its culture and ability to perform its primary role. Once in power, however, the effects are far graver. It suffers from all ills of being in total power.

The end product is not only an unhealthy civil-military relationship, but an all pervasive feeling that at the root of all ills was the military (an exaggerated view), and that it had a monopoly over formulation and execution of the national security policy. The Army on the other hand may have tried to stand aside to encourage the civilian leadership to take decisions but has not succeeded in changing this perception. The core security issues have therefore quite often not found the mass support that is the *sine qua non* for their success.

Obviously the need is to create a broad consensus on these issues between the civil and the military. The stumbling block indeed is the great political divide that brings the military to power, and then becomes so useful.

Author

Lt Gen. (R) Assad Durrani is a soldier scholar and has had varied professional and diplomatic experience. He has held the coveted positions of Director General ISI, Inspector General Training and Evaluation and Commandant National Defence College. He also served as Pakistan's Ambassador to Germany and Saudi Arabia.