



Likely Impact of Current Developments on the Pakistani State and its Army

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Summary

To many people Pakistan is a state beyond repair. Its institutions are weak and its Army literally owns the state. But recent events give indications of a possible turn-around and a more stable future. India has very little leverages in shaping a peace-ful, stable and friendly Pakistan but its own progress can make Pakistani society, fearful of being left behind, force a change in the state's policy orientation.

Pakistan suffers from limited capacities in all fields, particularly in its institutions except the army (often and rightly used synonymously with its military), which has prevented it from developing and behaving like a normal modern state. The problems it faces are too many and too well known to bear repetition. Yet it is neither a failed state nor is it on the verge of becoming one. In fact the trends are mixed leaning on to the positive side. Pakistan will not turn into a democratic, prosperous and stable state overnight. There are far too many critical uncertainties. But given time, and save for a wild card, it is likely that Pakistan will stabilise and become more democratic wherein its army will find returning to barracks a better option. The argument presented here is based on certain assumptions as listed below:

- The Army is perhaps the only functioning institution in the country and therefore capable of articulating Pakistan's vision and view point. It will cede the extra-constitutional space that it occupies only if the political system becomes stronger.
- Political parties, while being distrustful of the army, have often sought its help in dislodging their opponents from power and coming to power themselves. Yet, there is no love lost between the army and the political parties.
- Political parties, mindful of the army's proclivities, are incapable as yet of taking bold policy initiatives in foreign or security policy.
- People at large have come to rely on the army to keep Pakistan together despite having lost the wars that the army dragged the country into.
- People do not want the army to meddle in politics and blame it equally along with the political class for Pakistan's plight.
- Religious parties do not have a large support base and without the army's tacit or open support are incapable of mounting a serious electoral challenge. The mainstream parties continue to enjoy the people's support even if not their confidence.
- The Army consumes a disproportionate share of economic resources of an economically stressed state and the people are aware of it though presently incapable of doing anything about it.
- The Army's paradigm is India centric and will continue to be so because it justifies its importance in Pakistani state and society.
- It is not only Pakistani army which harbours anti-India feelings but the state as a whole.
- Americans understand the power structure in Pakistan and are playing it to meet their goals in the region but do not necessarily prefer the army over the political leadership.

- Empowered judiciary will be a check on political adventurism.
- Significant sections of the Pakistan army leadership and other establishment players come from the same background.
- The sum of all these prevailing factors will ensure the continued salience of the army in Pakistan.
- Despite an increase in overt religiosity among the rank and file of the army, Pakistani military leaders are rational players. They are unlikely to cross a point beyond which their country's interests will be mortally hurt.
- The 18th Amendment to the Pakistani constitution will make future army takeovers more difficult by delegitimising the doctrine of necessity.
- There is jealousy about India at one level, but also satisfaction that not all things are really going well in India.
- India does not have any direct leverage to shape a peaceful, stable and friendly Pakistan.

The rare unanimity displayed by political parties to usher in the 18th Amendment to Pakistan's constitution bodes well for that country. It will satisfy the political aspirations of provinces and empower them politically and economically while at the same time testing their abilities to provide better governance with enlarged responsibilities. It will also make military coups harder to stage by delegitimising the doctrine of necessity. It is true that tampering with the constitution was to be treated as high treason even in the past but that did not prevent the Pakistan army from staging coups. How are things different this time? Security and external issues have been exclusive preserves of the military any way.

For one, bread and butter issues and development are greater challenges today than in the past and there is no military solution for these. Secondly, substantial powers having been delegated to the provinces, because of which all political parties have become effective stakeholders, the army will now have to tread harder on provincial toes and there is likely to be a simultaneous resistance from all provinces, a challenge not faced by the army before. Thirdly, the judiciary will find it difficult to justify abrogation of the constitution. Fourthly, political stability will lead to the emergence of capable leaders in due course. Fifthly, Pakistani people would not like to be left behind in a globalised world. And lastly, Pakistani society has realized the dangers of militancy. There is a growing realization that militancy has complicated relations with neighbours and impeded growth.

One of the reasons why the PPP government may complete its term is that the army is unlikely to be instrumental in letting Nawaz Sharif gain power which is inevitable if the present government falls abruptly. But then Sharif is likely to come to power in the next

elections because the present government is unlikely to be able to solve the problems that the country faces today mainly due to lack of trust that its present leadership faces with credible leaders sidelined. Zardari is expected to continue wielding power because he controls PPP. The constitutional position he enjoys provides him immunity from prosecution and the party presidentship affords him political control of the government. The Prime Minister, therefore, is not expected to wield great power and in the short term the army will continue to control security and foreign policies. The situation is only likely to change after the next elections unless the Supreme Court decides that Zardari can only hold either of the two offices he presently holds. This is a wild card here. Should that happen, he will be faced with a grave choice either of forfeiting his immunity or the leadership of the party. He is likely to choose the latter option in that case, since his prosecution will result in loss of political power any way. Sharif has been no more democrat than others but hopefully he has learnt his lessons.

As a well known Pakistani commentator has said, the Pakistan army is the best organized group in the country, and a political force unto itself given the gradual destruction or diminution of other institutions like the judiciary, the constitution, the bureaucracy, and the legislature, and the transmogrification of a parliamentary system of government into a highly personalized presidential system. Successive Army Chiefs promised to keep the army out of politics, but some have brought the army to power to fill what they considered to be a political vacuum.

The army has tried to wield this power to safeguard Pakistan's interests to the best of its understanding and capabilities. That it has ended up compromising Pakistan's interests because of its narrow security agenda is another matter. The political class has contributed in no small measure in bringing Pakistan to the present situation. Neither the army nor the political parties have bothered about the needs of the people at large. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the army is more popular than the political parties. Army is popular in so far as it carries out its assigned role of keeping the country safe from internal and external threats. The same army was being criticised loudly for sitting idle and collaborating with the terrorists when Swat and FATA were burning. It is only after the army got seriously engaged in countering the militants that it regained some prestige.

Perhaps the army is trying to over reach itself. It wishes to carve out a role for itself in setting the course of talks between the Taliban and United States and facilitating the exit strategy of NATO forces from Afghanistan. As reported in the press, the ISI Chief has also indicated a desire to be involved in talks with India when he spoke to India's service attachés posted at the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. America is an important player in Pakistan's politics though it is highly unpopular because it is seen as supporting the army. Since 2001, the United States has provided more than \$10 billion in assistance, mostly in military funding, with some amount for economic assistance in the field of education, reconstruction and food distribution. This has produced gains in the war on

terror, but has also empowered the armed forces at the expense of civil society. America is conscious of the fact that the democratic leadership does not have the capacity to deliver at present and its own short term goals are important to be achieved. Being well aware of the power realities in Pakistan, the invitations to General Kayani and Pasha to participate in the strategic dialogue was simply a practical necessity. But by no means can it be considered the America's preferred option. The United States was just being practical or may be it also finds it easier to work with the army. But Kayani becoming the main interlocutor with the United States will go against the army in the ultimate analysis. It will also become unpopular by association. Doing business from the backroom has its advantages. Coming upfront reduces the room for manoeuvre. The Army's tendency to overreach and claim greater space for itself will bring it in conflict with the political establishment going forward.

As regards the third infamous influence peddler in Pakistan, the mullahs, the fact is that Islamist parties have never been popular in Pakistan. They have never fared well in elections on their own except for the MMA in 2002 which was propped up and supported by Musharraf. MMA benefited from the intelligence services' support and electoral manipulation to garner twice the votes it did under civilian rule and become a force in national politics. By preventing the moderate opposition from freely taking part in elections, Musharraf created a vacuum that could be filled only by extremists. In the 2008 elections, the religious parties suffered the most, revealing that even people from Pakistan's badlands voted like anyone else in the world – for those who they thought could provide an honest, efficient government capable of providing security, stability and development. The MMA failed to provide any of these when in power. This is a reflection of peoples' political inclinations. Basically they do not trust the Islamists and still favour mainstream political parties despite their failings.

It is expected that popularly elected (as opposed to appointed) Prime Ministers in future will always be trying to push back the army's influence. But the army will resist and there are bound to be serious tussles particularly over security and foreign policy issues, the turf of the army alone so far. Elements within the army will try to engineer incidents both within and outside the country to bring the focus back on security and its own centrality in the affairs of Pakistan. Trends worldwide would suggest that the political establishment, unless thoroughly discredited, will prevail. Also, the army will have to calibrate its reactions in light of the public response and international acceptance.

A democratic government enjoying popular support and caring for its people cannot be overthrown without putting the country in grave danger. Such a government is always in a position to follow a people centric domestic and a robust foreign policy which strongly assert its national interest. This would result in the army's role becoming less intrusive in matters of the state. A valid question can be asked here- will such a democratic government emerge in Pakistan? The answer is yes, given time and patience. Developments since

2007 suggest that the people wish to see the army disengage itself from politics for all times. One may actually find it rather difficult and unrealistic unless the army itself decides to revert to its assigned task of being defenders of its frontiers and under state's control rather than being controllers of the state.

The judiciary is finding its voice and discovering that it has a back bone. Lawyers' movement and spontaneous public support it enjoyed have made this possible. It is unlikely to willingly lose its new found voice and authority. The doctrine of necessity is likely to be a bad word for it in future. Otherwise it will lose its credibility and authority for ever.

A word of caution is warranted here. It is also important to look at the downside of one's assumptions to build viable scenarios. The Pakistan army feels it is the guardian of the state but it also has its corporate interests to take care of which will make it harder for it to give up power and influence voluntarily. That it has been getting international legitimacy soon enough after every adventure reinforces the self belief in its indispensability. Besides, dynastic politics of Pakistan may make it difficult for a capable leader to emerge in the short run. Even the judiciary may find it expedient to bend to the dictates of a dictator yet again.

That is why it is difficult to predict the only future facing Pakistan in the next decade and beyond. Changes will come but only slowly. There are far too many imponderables and concerns which cloud clear thinking. Baggage of (recent) history, poor state of institutions, yet an articulate and bold media and reasonably vibrant civil society, an army fixated on its own sense of importance and indispensability for not only Pakistan's security but for the survival of the state itself etc. make clear predictions impossible. It can go either way from stability to instability to abyss. But international trends and the aspirations of the people are likely to lead it towards a better future; better than the present at least.

It will be in Pakistan's self interest to run the state by rule of law. The Turkish Armed Forces are gradually yielding ground to the political leadership. A moderate Muslim state with a growing economy and geo-political influence, maturing democracy and a history of military coups behind it may well serve as a popular model for the Pakistani state to follow. Yet, given the current state of affairs, Pakistan is more likely to be following a Chilean model wherein the armed forces have a strong policy role under civilian leadership. This is the price the state had to pay for stability in Chile. And so may be the case with Pakistan simply because the other institutions will take time to organise themselves to play a larger and legitimate role in running the state.

As far as India is concerned, it is not only the Pakistani army which harbours anti-India feelings. Anti-India sentiment is strong in society as well, as a result of its nationalism and contorted history. Pakistani nationalism is built on hating India. This sentiment is unlikely to undergo an appreciable change in the near future. India has very little leverage

to shape Pakistan into a stable, democratic and friendly neighbour. Any attempt to even suggest a way forward will be like showing a red rag to a bull.

However, what might change the paradigm is the peoples' fear of being left behind. It is a great motivator for people to work hard and escape poverty. It is hoped that the fear of endemic poverty and of being left behind will propel Pakistani society to strive for progress and when it sees military competition as the reason for being left behind then it will demand changes in Pakistan's policy orientation. It is the political dispensation that can respond to peoples' demands and it will seek to make the necessary correction.

The quest for parity with a fast growing and strong India could be another strong motivator for Pakistani society. India's rapid economic growth, internal stability and rising international prestige are likely to have a major impact on how informed Pakistani citizens will shape their country's destiny. Envy of India and a strong desire for parity is going to force them to rethink and reorient priorities. But envy can be a double edged tool. It may motivate Pakistan to change course and build a better future for itself or do everything possible to impede India.

Vested interests will try to portray a different picture of India and try to impede it. India's internal fissures will show India in poor light. Our own Lal Garhs and Dantewadas cannot give hope to Pakistanis but a smug satisfaction that alternate choices are hardly any better. Besides, a greater degree of strategic balance may also embolden the Pakistan Army to encourage and support jihadi terrorism against India. The Pakistan Army realizes that India has been able to manage the situation in J&K. But this by no means is sufficient for it to abandon its policy of using militants to keep India unbalanced and to gradually erode its conventional edge by tying down and tiring its army. It will try brinkmanship hence India cannot neglect defence. Any perceived weakness in India's defence potential will encourage the Pakistan army further.

By being a good role model, India can help shape Pakistan's future. Though, ultimately, it will all depend on the people of Pakistan.