

# Emerging Situation in Pakistan

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**CLAWS RESEARCH TEAM**

Pakistan has been going through a turbulent phase. Although the elections in 2013 saw a change in government through the ballot, the elections took place under the shadow of guns as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) prevented 'secular' parties from having a level playing field. Nawaz Sharif succeeded in gaining a modicum of control by replacing both the Chief Justice and Army Chief, after they had completed their terms. His appointment of General Raheel Sharif as the new Army Chief was meant to be a master stroke, aimed at consolidating his position vis-a-vis the Army. But fissures have now appeared and today, the government and the Army do not appear to be on the same page. They differ on the issue of tackling the TTP. The case against General Musharraf has also pitted the Army against the political leadership and judiciary. The attack on Geo TV journalist Hamid Mir and the accusation by Geo TV that the Director General (DG), Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was personally involved in the attack has further vitiated the atmosphere. More significantly, for the first time, there is a dissonance between the Army and the religious political parties like the Jamaat, which have traditionally acted as the stooges of the Army and the ISI. These developments assume salience at a time when the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is pulling out of Afghanistan and the Taliban led by Mullah Omar, have started distancing from the ISI.

## **Military-Civil Relations**

The Pakistan Army was apprehensive of Nawaz Sharif coming to power due to his past run-ins with the previous five Army Chiefs. It is expected that Nawaz Sharif will not toe the line as cautiously as his predecessor, but in a scenario where he does choose to go against the Pakistan Army, especially in matters related to India, the probability of the Army asserting itself remains strong.

There is, however, a perceptible decline in the power wielded by the Army. The writ of the Army is no longer sacrosanct as evidenced by the following:

- The decisions of the Army are being discussed and criticised openly in the media as the opinions of the masses can no longer be suppressed. In a bid to influence these opinions, the Pakistan Army went to the extent of launching its own TV channel which was financed by money generated from smuggling. It failed terribly when the Jang-Geo network exposed the same.
- The Army's policy on Baluchistan and its affinity to some Islamist groups is being questioned now. It is also highly unlikely that the Pakistan Army is capable enough to suppress the Baluch separatists and the TTP.
- Politically, some prominent parties are resisting the temptation to warmly embrace the Army. In the recent past, the current Pakistan government representatives have repeatedly stated that the Army is under civil control. These statements are indicative of the Army's declining writ, but that notwithstanding, the Army remains the most important player in Pakistan today.
- The Pakistan Army has also shown new signs of assertion and manipulation, especially in the recent case when it strategically looped in Imran Khan to voice highly influenced opinions against Geo TV. This was also followed by protests by allied political parties that are desperate to break the ice with the military.

There is also concern over the ever-growing threat to the crucial pillars of the Pakistan society, namely, the judiciary and media. Authors within Pakistan have constantly brought out the exploitation of the judiciary and audio-visual media by radicals. It, thus, appears that Pakistan is on a downward slope and the military, though challenged and not as strong as before, continues to interfere in, and assert authority over, civil matters.

## **Reasons for Discord Between Civil and Military**

**General Musharraf Issue:** Reeling under serious allegations, General Musharraf's case could not be brushed under the carpet by the Army and judicial action was expected to showcase the prevalence of some degree of rule of law in Pakistan. The Pakistan government backtracked on promises made earlier to help Musharraf leave the country after he was indicted and this marked the first big crack in the civil-military relationship under the new chief. The problem does not seem to be progressing any further because while no one expects Musharraf to be hanged or even go to jail, he cannot be let off either.

**Baluchistan:** The multiple problems of human rights infringement and militancy have been simmering in Baluchistan for quite some time. While Nawaz Sharif has been saying the right things, there is yet no change evident at the ground level. The militancy continues in the area and most political initiatives are still-born, while rampant human rights violations by the Pakistan Army continue.

**Taliban:** The Taliban pose an ever-increasing threat to Pakistan. Sharif is keen to pursue talks with the Taliban owing to the threat to personal safety and the backlash of an attack in Punjab. However, the Army Chief is of the view that attacks by the Taliban need a firm response which has become another reason for the civil-military discord.

**Visit to India:** Nawaz Sharif's visit to India was considered to be a show of his power and authority in dealing with his Army to not just his own countrymen but across South Asia. However, one cannot ignore the delay in acceptance of the invitation. The decision was not announced till the Army gave the go-ahead on the same. Many believe that even his itinerary and talks were dictated by the Pakistan Army.

**Divisions Within the Pakistan Muslim League:** In Nawaz Sharif's dealings with the Army, there are divisions erupting within his own party. His brother Shahbaz Sharif and Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan form one group, which feels that the Army shouldn't be pushed beyond a point. The Prime Minister is more inclined to the other group which includes the Defence and Information Ministers, which feels they should exercise authority wherever they need to even if it means sidelining the Army.

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## **Militancy in Pakistan**

It has recently been reported that there is a considerable militant movement along the Indus, from Dera Ismail Khan to Dera Ghazi Khan in south Punjab which is a major cause of concern for the Nawaz Sharif led government. Militancy in Punjab will mean an end to the infrastructure development projects and hurt the inflow of investments in Punjab. Increased Taliban presence in southern Punjab has ominous implications for Pakistan as it could facilitate tie-ups between the TTP and Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT). While some cooperation already exists, it remains at a small scale as of now. In a recent move, the Mehsuds have chosen to part ways with the TTP and have now formed a new group under the leadership of Khan Said alias Sajna. This split has led to the formation of two powerful opposing groups within the TTP. Whether the split was engineered by the military or not is, however, unclear. Despite the split, any operation by the Army against the TTP in Waziristan will face tremendous resistance and will lead to a mass exodus of the population. As of now, the Army's capacity to defeat the Taliban remains suspect. Since the Taliban lack the capacity to defeat the Pakistan Army, we are looking at a prolonged conflict in the region, which is perhaps the reason why the government prefers the dialogue route to terminate the conflict.

## **Impact of the Drawdown of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan**

US President Barack Obama's visited Pakistan on May 24-25, 2014, which took many by surprise. This was followed by his recent announcement that the US will maintain 9,800 troops in Afghanistan post 2014, completing the withdrawal only by 2016. Obama also announced that the US will continue to deal with countries from where terror is emanating. The timing of the visit followed by the announcement accentuates the importance of the visit and it can be inferred that the US will continue to engage with Pakistan in a critical manner.

The withdrawal of forces also concurs with a change of government in Afghanistan. Whosoever comes to power is likely to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement, a move critical to the US' and NATO's post-withdrawal support plans for Afghanistan. An important aspect remains the exit route of soldiers and equipment from Afghanistan. This is likely through two crucial but disturbed routes in Pakistan: Torkham and Chaman. Since both are prone to attacks from Islamists within Pakistan, the Pakistan Army will stand guard for the safe movement of the troops. Pakistan is expecting state-of-the-art equipment from the US in return. The discussion within the US Congress has evoked hostile reactions against Pakistan, which is a new and recent development.

The strength of the Afghan Army will be challenged in the days post-withdrawal, but the Afghan National Army (ANA) can be expected to hold on to cities and central capital towns or provinces. The critical problem is of financing the ANA. Four major security or capability gaps in the security of Afghanistan are air support, intelligence, equipment refurbishing and special operations to hit back at the Taliban. Keeping the above in mind, there will be a resurgence in Afghan Taliban violence which has recently been exhibited by the hitting of unpredictable areas, kidnappings, etc, all of which have accounted for a 24 percent increase in violence in the country already, but it should eventually settle down. Pakistan has offered help in assisting the forces to maintain law and order till the elections, which has evoked strong reactions from Afghanistan. The Afghan Army has asked Pakistan to first stop firing in the east Kunar border area which, in turn, is an effort by the Afghans to aid loyal proxies in that area. Such aid will further ensure continued dominance and disturbance in the area by the Hekmatyar group. The reconciliation process, if any, can be expected in a discontinued and non-focussed manner and will hugely depend on how the military vs Taliban situation plays off. A stalemate in such affairs would guarantee a militant resurgence which will be tortuous and long drawn.

### **Pakistan's Approach Towards Withdrawal of ISAF Forces**

Pakistan's foremost priority is to block Indian influence on the new government or at least keep it secondary to its own interests. Pakistan will also try to prevent ganging up of Pashtuns across the Pakistan-Afghan border, post withdrawal. To achieve the same, Pakistan is trying to tell the Afghans to keep away from issues regarding the Taliban and let the Pakistan Army and ISI deal with them. This is a new strategy orchestrated by the Army Chief; its success or failure, however, remains to be seen. Pakistan would also like to strengthen economic links with the Central Asian Republics (CAR) and curb Indian influence as also the influence of other regional powers, mainly Iran and Russia, in the new dispensation that emerges in Afghanistan.

### **Indian Options in the Emerging Scenario**

It is important for India to engage with whosoever is in power in Pakistan, regardless of whether it is a democratically led government or a military backed one. India should also make an effort to build constituencies in the neighbouring countries. Today, there are multiple constituencies in Pakistan and it is beneficial to encourage a good opinion about India. Also, no harm can accrue even if the process does not succeed.

While back channel talks with Pakistan will serve limited utility, the talks must be held away from the glare of the media, otherwise the agenda could all too easily be hijacked. India-Pakistan talks evoke huge media attention as witnessed during the recent visit of Pakistan Premier Nawaz Sharif to India where the media went over the top with its analysis, even though the entire meeting was shrouded in secrecy. Post-the visit, the discussion on Article 370 within India has intensified. The overexposure of the issue in the media and the subsequent statements made by the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Chief Minister will have a negative, multiplier effect as these raw opinions are being passed on to the public without being analysed or announced through government channels. Irrespective of the fact that Kashmir was not discussed this time, it has certainly not been put on the back-burner. The issue remains critical and can no longer be discussed in isolation. The attacks in Kashmir may have reduced but they have increased in intensity and have now spread throughout the country. Trade, on the other hand, does not dictate political ties, otherwise India and China would have better relations than China-Pakistan. However, trade does give a certain leverage as compared to a scenario wherein there are no such relations at all. Though the US invests heavily in Pakistan, it still does not enjoy the leverage China enjoys without having such relations. Hence, establishing leverages is important.

Geographically, Pakistan can only leverage its importance if India conforms to such plans. For example, the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline is not viable unless India agrees, and the CASA 1000 agreement is on the verge of collapse; and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline cannot be viable till India is a part of it. This leverage should be used by India while dealing with Pakistan. India's proactive doctrine has been viewed with alarm by Pakistan and is believed to have led to Pakistan developing battlefield nuclear weapons. India's nuclear doctrine has been well articulated, clearly stating that the use of nuclear weapons by an adversary would elicit a response in conformance with the nuclear doctrine. Our no-first-use policy sends out a very strong signal about Indian intent and the course of action thereafter. These doctrines are all the more important while dealing with countries we have gone to wars with and, hence, should be spared from discussions as there is no need to further elaborate or modify them in any manner. While the talks vs terrorism situation will continue with Pakistan, India needs to shed legacy attitudes and must form a comprehensive and concrete policy for matters related to Pakistan. This policy should cut across party lines and should cover in detail India's policy regarding the peace talks, border talks, border management, trade and military affairs.

Partnering with likeminded countries to invest in Afghanistan will be beneficial for Indian interest, especially in the current situation where the US is withdrawing its troops and China is getting easy access through Pakistan. Recently China has bagged the tender for a copper mine, work on which will start post the withdrawal of US troops. India should refrain from deploying armed forces for protecting its assets in Afghanistan or supporting the government there as it would convey a wrong message and would not serve India's national interest. In Iran, the Chinese have already started grabbing major projects, specifically in Chabahar. Indian influence in the port city is required urgently otherwise India shall be out of the important Iranian city which is very close to Afghanistan.

**India should refrain from deploying armed forces for protecting its assets in Afghanistan.**

The status of affairs in Pakistan is worrisome. With the military-civil discord evident under the lurking threat of the Taliban, the strategy adopted by Pakistan to deal with internal and external threats remains to be seen. India should concentrate more on improving its footprint in Afghanistan and Iran which would pay better dividends post US withdrawal from the area.

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The above views were expressed in the Round Table Conference held in CLAWS on May 29, 2014.