

## **CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES**

### **PAKISTAN POST ELECTIONS: WIND FOR CHANGE OR LULL BEFORE STORM**

**16 MAY 2013**

#### **SEMINAR REPORT**

#### **General**

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) organised a seminar on, “Pakistan Post Elections: Wind for Change or Lull before Storm” at the CLAWS Seminar Hall. The seminar gathered noted experts on the subject to discuss various aspects of the elections that were held in Pakistan in May 2013. The seminar was chaired by Ambassador Satish Chandra (Retd). The panelists were Capt (IN) Alok Bansal, Senior Fellow, CLAWS who deliberated on the election results and Dr Sushant Sareen, Senior Fellow, VIF, who provided an analysis of the elections. The seminar was attended by serving officers from the Armed Forces, veterans and members from the strategic community, media and other think tanks.

#### **Opening Remarks by the Chairperson: Ambassador Satish Chandra (Retd)**

Elections have just concluded in Pakistan and the results have not come out completely. Results are still awaited on some seats. There can be perhaps a timely corrective to the very enthusiastic responses emerging within India following the elections. Nawaz Sharif did better than expected; optimistic elements had suggested his winning around 100-110 seats but he won 126. The degree of how well he has done is coloured by the fact of how badly the others have done- the PPP has won 31, Imran Khan's party-29 and the Independents have won around 30. Therefore, there is a tremendous distance between him and others. He will be able to form a government with the support of the Independents. However, this is not a massive mandate that he had in 1997 where he had won a two-thirds majority by winning 147 out of 207 seats. Today there is no national party in Pakistan with substantial representation in all provinces. Last time it had been the PPP. This time the PML (N) has won seat in all provinces, with an overwhelming majority in Punjab (118 out of 126). The Islamic parties, namely the Jamaat-e-Islami and the J-u-I (F) have primarily won in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Commentators in Pakistan have stated that both PML (N) and PTI carried forward the Islamist agenda they had taken on. The secular parties, the ANP and MQM, suffered drawbacks with the ANP getting wiped out and the MQM's seats being reduced by 50 per cent from 35 to 18. This was mainly due to the fact that this was not a free and fair election with the TTP making it clear that it would attack secular parties. In the violence that followed, 130 people were killed and countless were wounded. People were warned not to cast their votes. The implications of this election

are many. In terms of the government formation, the question is whether Sharif would go it alone or take on allies. If he chooses the latter, then who will be those allies? The question of civil-military relations remains critical in Pakistan at all times. Sharif's relations with the military have not always been good and he wants to be in charge. The linkages with terror groups ensured good showing by the PML (N) on many seats. Therefore, as regards fundamentalism and terrorism, what Sharif's policy will be, remains a question mark.

### **Capt (IN) Alok Bansal, Senior Fellow, CLAWS**

These elections have been very significant as for the first time in Pakistan's history, a fully elected democratic government has been replaced through the ballot. However, these elections have also been most violent. The Taliban threatened the "secular" parties like the ANP, PPP and MQM, but this threat was not so uniform leading to the other parties to resort to tremendous pre-poll rigging. Countering the threat, MQM blatantly rigged the elections in many places. The Pakistan Election Commission withheld results in many places and has called for re-elections. The ANP could not resort to such means as it lacked the muscle power and the overwhelming dominance in certain pockets that the MQM possessed. Consequently, it was adversely affected in terms of the outcome of the results. For the PPP there was much contrast from the results in 2008. In Punjab, it won only two seats from the southernmost Punjabi districts, leading to a virtual north-south divide in the province. It became totally marginalised in KPK and came second in some constituencies of Baluchistan, which touched Sindh.

The PML (N) won 124 seats, out of which 116 were in Punjab, 1 in Sindh, 1 in Baluchistan, 4 in KPK, 1 in FATA and 1 in the National Capital Territory of Islamabad. PTI scored big victories in urban areas like Multan and Rawalpindi. Its success in KPK was phenomenal and was mainly due to its declarations like shooting down drones and the resultant support from hardline and pro-Taliban elements. The MQM did not suffer much of a difference from 2008. The media was rife with clips showing its woman supporters filling ballots into the ballot boxes. Imran Khan declared that he would publish a White Paper on the poll rigging. The religious parties definitely did much better, and this time contested separately rather than in alliance as previously, which led to decline in the overall seats won by each party individually.

Nawaz Sharif is trying for rapprochement with other parties to form government in the provinces. According to Pakistan's electoral laws, all Independents have to join some political party within 72 hours of publication of results. There is a high probability that they would join PML (N). PML (Q), which had managed to survive even in Musharraf's absence, however has been sounded the death knell. In Baluchistan, the Pashtun-dominated PMA (Pashtun Mili Awami) Party won three seats, whereas the ANP of Asfandiyar Wali Khan was virtually wiped out winning only two seats as compared to 18 in the last election. Some parties fielded minority candidates like the MQM, which focused on Hindu candidates in interior Sindh. This was because Hindus are more concentrated as compared to Christians who are spread throughout the country.

Regarding the Provincial elections, the PML(N) swept the Punjab Assembly, the next largest party being the PTI. Much was made of Seraiki nationalism and attempts were made to divide Sharif's vote bank by creating a southern BJP (Bahawalpur and Janubi Province). In Sindh, The radicalisation of Karachi occurred in a big way. ANP believed that it had the support of the Pashtun pockets there but it did not exist in reality due to the onslaught of the Taliban, which also forced the closure of many ANP offices. One Hindu candidate won from the PPP. Asif Ali Zardari has already announced the formation of the government there in alliance with MQM, having won around 67 seats. This stratagem would keep MQM away from PML (N) at the federal level and provide a very strong support base in Sindh. The PTI became the single largest party in KPK with 35 seats, and the ANP was reduced from 30 to 4. Sharif has stated that Imran Khan can form the government. PMA emerged as the largest party in Baluchistan while the PPP was wiped out.

The implications of these elections are many. The elections have strengthened democracy, but simultaneously there are going to be serious problems as there are different governments in Punjab and Sindh. Radicalisation of the society will continue as there is no accurate will to counter it. Groups like Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) have supported Sharif. Regarding US-Pak relations, the drone issue will be contested between the governments of Sharif and Imran Khan. Credit must go to Nawaz Sharif that even before the elections he made a statement that there would be an Enquiry Commission on Mumbai attacks and Kargil, with the information being shared with India. Sharif is in a better position than Zardari to improve ties with India as being an industrialist, he understands trade and commerce better. Being a Punjabi, he also has a greater ability to counter the military establishment than Zardari. Certain improvements are possible in trade relations but increasing radicalisation can derail the process.

#### **Dr Sushant Sareen, Senior Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation**

These elections were fairly "free and fair". The use of strong-arm tactics did not materially change the micro-result. Rigging helps in the margin of 3000 to 4000 but not 30000 to 40000 votes. It cannot help in stealing an election. There were mounting suspicions on the role of the caretakers but it was not very material to the results. It was not a level-playing field with the TTP bringing it into the favour of some parties but the result was expected. ANP was going to lose big in KPK where it had become deeply unpopular. The PPP has withered away with no structure, direction and no big figure like Sherpao. Results therefore were not surprising. In Karachi the MQM held its own but was challenged by the force of arms by the Taliban for the last 2-3 years. Rigging was only a question of people overplaying their hand. It remains to be seen how far the centre of politics has shifted to the right. In the past also, there have been changes in the orientation of the people.

Those opposing the Taliban cannot be termed liberal in the classical sense just because of their opposition. There is a conservative wing within the ANP also. It is very doubtful for Centrist parties to recover lost space. One slogan of *tabdili* (change) was present

throughout this election. Change has come in the government but not of the kind bandied about, that is of the system. Forces of status quo have won big this time. PML (N), the party of the status quo, has swept the election; in Sindh, PPP has won, in Baluchistan the nominees of the army have won. Thus, it was a victory for the establishment.

The kind of change in KPK was not very surprising if PPP and ANP were to be removed from the scene. Jul of Fazlur Rehman could come about strongly but that did not happen. Nobody knew whether the voting pattern would be along the traditional dynamics of politics or would go against it. The local politics of Punjab constitutes the real politics. The voting there is done based on the following order-ideological vote, candidate vote, development work done by the candidate or the opponent in the constituency and the *biradari* factor. The unique feature is that of *dhara* politics, which is based on the local alliances and rivalries. In a particular tehsil, winning does not matter; what matters is that the number of seats won has to be greater than that of the local rival in the area of concern.

The voting turnout was 40-45 per cent traditionally, but this time it was 60 per cent. This was no revolution at the ballot box however. The main electoral protests were by the urban young crowd which though earlier de-politicised had taken a sudden fancy to politics, felt that they would win, but were eventually surprised by the nature of politics. Mainly supporters of Imran Khan, their support to him was not that advantageous as number of posh colonies and people are limited in Pakistan. The loyalty to party candidates is very strong and non-transferable; therefore, any alliance system is of no use.

The Independents were expected to do well as most influential politicians were fighting as Independents. Which side they would join would determine share of seats especially in the reserved category which is based on the representation in assemblies rather than percentage of votes. In Pakistan the system is bizarre as in many places the results were announced even when the polling was going on. Changes need to be made to the system. There would be fresh elections for 10-12 seats as Sharif and Imran Khan have contested and won from 2-3 seats while others have also won from mulPTIle seats.

In Punjab, the PPP has lost big. The kind of alliance it had with MQM would have cost it heavily but the fact that this has not happened comes as a surprise. There had been a lot of anger directed at the placation of the MQM but the degradation was already manifest. The PPP swept the rural areas but lost ground. The only place Zardari's byzantine intrigues and adeptness worked was in his bringing in of electable candidates. This was tried in Punjab also but in the end those electable were brought in who were opposed to the PPP. There was a great miscalculation by Zardari that PPP's vote bank was unshakeable and there would be a cutting off Right-wing votes by the PTI. Disgruntled PPP voters voted for the PTI. Others voted for Sharif for stopping Imran Khan and knowing that the PPP had no chance.

Governance was a major issue as was the power crisis. In Sindh, however the latter was not as severe as due to the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment Sindh keeps its own gas and does not give it to Punjab. PPP knew that it did not have much of a chance but as kingmaker, it could hold the balance of power without actual power but it did not work out that way. There could a major crackdown possible to restore peace in Sindh and to end the MQM's monopoly especially when the judiciary is against it, army is unhappy with it and Sharif not well disposed towards it. Zardari thus may jettison it. The calculations of Fazlur Rehman failed as well, with the establishment favouring Achakzai over him. His attempts to bring about a grand *jirga* and bring TTP into accommodation are now over. The degree to which Sharif has mellowed and matured over the years can be determined but his obstinacy remains. The question is whether there is enough political capital in India to reciprocate his overtures. He would not precipitate any action against the military and conflict is in-built in the framework existing right now.

### **Q & A Session**

- What happens to the Taliban now?
- What is the role of the military? Why is it keeping so quiet and why has it not created any ruckus during elections?
- Can Sharif put the army 'in its place'.
- Sharif won because there was no alternative and therefore people did not have much of a choice. What will Iftikhar Chowdhuri do now with all the legal cases and hurdles? Is this democratic transition stable? What will be the impact on the use of drones? Is Sharif is an out-and-out opportunist. His overtures to India are based on opportunism. He has been an Army appointee.
- What does radicalisation exactly mean? What will be the relations between Punjab and Sindh.

### **Response from the Speakers**

There is no clarity in policy on the Taliban. The Army reactions to the Taliban are coloured by their experiences with them. It is wanting to fire guns from civilian shoulders. Kayani has stated "it is our war and we will fight it". The policies of the PTI and Jul will count, as will the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan. Taliban have increased their space, will utilise the lull to regroup and become stronger. Impact of operations against the Taliban would have to be seen. Everything is in the realm of speculation.

At one time, the military wanted to prolong the caretaker government, as with the Qadri episode. The Bangladesh model that is the formation of the government in conjunction with the army was sought to be adopted. There were lot of reasons because of which elections could be deferred. Army realised that however it could not do that, judiciary buckled down and there was an erosion of cohesion in the Pakistani armed forces. Kayani's equation with his colleagues is different than that of Musharraf, for they are some years his junior. Coups have happened only when corps commanders have been

colleagues or contemporaries. Sharif has a better stake than Zardari as there will be a new Army Chief and a new Chief Justice within a few months.

The army has lost some amount of power, and the country faces tremendous problems. Its abilities are under test in the conflicts it is engaged in. It has realised that it can't get away with a coup. There is a lot of disquiet in the army about the affairs of state. The army had originally planned to play the Independents' card who would be in a large number owing to Sharif's winning around a 100 seats as was predicted. There are doubts whether Sharif would take orders from the army like Gilani. It is not easy to say now. However, both Sharif and the generals are Punjabi.

It is important that Sharif made that statement regarding India. His commitment to improving ties with India has not changed. Trade has to improve first of all. Everyone who have come to power have at some point been army appointees. The Pakistanis consider themselves as belonging to an Arabian geographical extension rather than as South Asians. Only Sharif has stated that they share the same culture with India.

He is following a parallel-track policy with good relations with India at one level and simultaneously maintaining ties with the extremists. The latter is an accident-prone relationship and major blocks will appear. Earlier, Shahbaz Sharif's government in Punjab had funded the Lashkar-e-Taiba from the official budget. The genuine grievances of Sindh have been bottled up because Zardari was in power. Sindhi nationalism was therefore kept in check. There will be major issues now with a Punjabi-dominated government in Islamabad.

### **Remarks by the Chairperson**

There are now different parties forming governments in different provinces. There is no national party. There is no clarity regarding the future course of civil-military relations, the keeping of promises by Sharif, the foreign policy and Indo-Pak and US-Pak relations.

### **Concluding Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv C Katoch, Director, CLAWS**

Pakistan has distorted its history and even claims Mohammad bin Qasim as the first Pakistani. This and other fallacies have serious implications in Sindh as also in the rest of the country and contributes to radicalisation in society.

The noted political scientist and human rights advocate, Dr. C. Inayatullah in his classic, "State and Democracy in Pakistan" argues that one creates the conditions for the other: "As the military became more independent and powerful controlling national politics, its top brass developed an ideology and a set of perceptions to justify their political role. Politics was projected as an irrational, disorderly, inefficient and corrupt method of running the affairs of society compared with the rational, efficient, quick and clean way the military runs itself." The Army rationalised its behaviour on the grounds that it was the "guardian of the state" – a role it unilaterally assumed for itself. A natural fallout of

this pernicious logic was that the military abrogated to itself the right to overthrow civilian governments, if in its view the politicians threatened the independence of the nation or if they meddled in the internal affairs of the military. The civilian governments have not been democrats either and have tended to assume dictatorial powers. This, along with a feudal outlook, leads to patronage and corruption. Over time, the public is agitated, public anger fuelled in no small measure by other political parties, often leading to violence and the crumbling of institutions. The military then steps in to “save the nation” and the cycle repeats ad infinitum. The cycle thus shifts from civil rule to the military one and vice versa. If this theory holds, we could see a resurgence of the military once again within the next 3-5 years.

As of now, the Pakistani military has neither the capability nor the will to defeat the Taliban. It is however, a cogent, professional and competitive force in conventional domain and cannot be defeated by the Taliban. The internal conflict in Pakistan is hence unlikely to be resolved through force but would require political intervention. For a long lasting solution to the conflict in Pakistan, a change in mindsets is required. This would require massive changes in the educational system and would take at least one generation to bear fruition.