

CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES (CLAWS)

SITUATION IN PAKISTAN

Conference Hall, CLAWS, New Delhi
29 May 2014

RT Report

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. 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 term. His appointment of General Raheel Sharif as the new Army Chief was 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 on the issue of tackling the TTP. The case against General Musharraf has also pitted the army against the political leadership and judiciary, with the army is unhappy with the treatment of its former chief in the courts. The attack on Geo TV journalist Hamid Mir and the accusation by Geo that DG 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 Jamaat, which have traditionally acted as the stooges of the Army and the ISI. After Hakeemullah Mehsud was killed, the Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami, Munawwar Hussain called him a Shaheed. He went on to say that the army personnel fighting "America's War" could not be called as Ghazis or Shaheeds. His remarks expectedly drew a sharp rebuke from the Army. Although, he was subsequently replaced as the Amir in an election, the fissures between the religious parties have only increased, as the religious parties have often accused the army of hindering talks with TTP. These developments at a time when NATO is pulling out of Afghanistan and Taliban led by Mullah Omar has started distancing itself from ISI assume salience. Issues were discussed in the RT in the above backdrop.

Military Civil relations in Pakistan

The Pakistan Army remains apprehensive of Nawaz Sharif, as in the past too he has had run-ins with five previous army chiefs. It is probable that Nawaz Sharif will not act like his predecessor Asif Ali Zardari, who chose to adhere to the power equations. However, while the possibility exists that he might just throw caution to the wind, act on his own accord and assert his authority as Prime Minister, over the military, it is more likely that he will be circumspect and act in accordance with the Army or at least in a manner that will not antagonize the Army. 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. The opinions of the masses can no longer be suppressed. The Army went to the extent of

launching their own channel but failed to do so when the Jang-Geo network exposed the same.

- The army's policy on Baluchistan and its affinity to some Islamist groups is being questioned. It lacks the capability to suppress Baloch 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. It showed 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 protest by allying political parties who are desperate to break the ice with the military.

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

Reasons for Discord between Civil and Military

Gen 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 existence of some degree of rule of law in Pakistan. The Pakistan government backtracking on promises made earlier to help Musharraf leave the country after he was indicted marked the first big crack in the civil-military relationship under the new chief. The problem does not seem to progress any further because while no one expects Musharraf to be hanged or even go to jail, he cannot be let off as well.

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 is fostering in the area and most political initiatives are still born while human rights violations by the Pakistan Army continue rampant.

Taliban: Taliban poses an ever-increasing threat to Pakistan. Sharif is keen to pursue talks with the Taliban because of the following reasons:

- **Personal Safety:** With a background of the threats towards him, his family and the Muslim League when they were about to hang the culprits of GHQ attack, personal safety cannot be taken for granted.
- **Political Constituency** being right wing conservative.
- **Backlash into Punjab:** Nawaz Sharif cannot afford to have Taliban even touch Punjab and Sind, as all major investments will suffer.

Talks: The Army Chief is of the view that attacks by Taliban need a firm response. However, the government is in favour of talks to achieve peace, which remains a point of discord.

Visit to India: There was a view that Nawaz Sharif's visit to India was a show of his power and authority not just in his own country but across South Asia in dealing with his own Army and that

he returned to Pakistan as a stronger PM. However, there was a counter view that the delay in accepting the invitation was because of the Army's apprehensions, and that the decision to come to India was taken only after the Army gave a go ahead for the same and that his talks and his itinerary in India were dictated by the Pakistan Army itself.

Divisions within Pakistan Muslim League: In Nawaz Sharif's dealing 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 PM is more inclined to the other group which includes the Defence and Information Ministers. This group is of the view that they should exercise authority wherever they need to even if it means sidelining the Army.

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. In fact this is one of the major reasons for the Pakistan government to initiate talks with the Taliban as 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 TTP and Lashkar-e-Taiba. 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 Kahn 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 unclear though.

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 population. As of now, the Army's capacity to defeat the Taliban remains suspect. As the Taliban lacks the capacity to defeat the Pakistan Army, we are looking at prolonged conflict in the region, which is perhaps the reason why the Government prefers the dialogue route to conflict termination.

Impact of the drawdown of ISAF forces in Afghanistan on Pakistan

US President Barack Obama's visit to Pakistan on 24th-25th May 2014, which took many by surprise, followed by his recent announcement that US will maintain 9800 post 2014, completing the withdrawal only by 2016, accentuates the importance of the visit. Obama's announcement that the US would continue to deal with countries from where terror is emanating leads to the inference 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 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 have to stand guard for the safe movement of the troops. Pakistan will expect 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 view expressed by the discussants however was that the US is unlikely to share its state of the art equipment with Pakistan. However, the final equation that develops between the US and Pakistan will be of concern to India.

The strength of the Afghan army will be challenged in the days post withdrawal, but the Afghan National Army (ANA) will be able to hold on to cities and central capital towns or provinces. The critical problem remains financing the ANA. The desertions and ethnic clashes are however expected to continue for a short while at least. Four major security or capability gaps in the securing Afghanistan are air support, intelligence, equipment refurbishing and special operations to hit back at the Taliban. Keeping the above in mind there will be resurgence in Afghan Taliban violence which has recently been exhibited by hitting unpredictable areas, kidnapping etc, all of which has accounted for a 24 percent increase in violence in the country already but it should eventually settle down. Pakistan has reacted by offering help in assisting the forces to maintain law and order till the elections which have been met by rather strong demands by the Afghan Army to stop firing in 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. Reconciliation process, if any can be expected in a discontinued and non-focused manner and will hugely depend on how the military vs Taliban situation plays off. A stalemate in such affairs would guarantee resurgence, which will be torturous and long drawn.

Pakistan's Approach towards withdrawal of ISAF Forces

Pakistan's foremost priority will likely be to block Indian influence on the new government or at least keep it secondary to their own interests. Pakistan will also try to prevent ganging up of Pashtuns across Pakistan-Afghan border. To achieve the same Pakistan is trying to communicate to the Afghans to keep away from issues regarding 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 CAR and curb Indian influence as also 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 it being a democratically led government or a military backed one. It is for the people of Pakistan to determine the form of government they wish to have. While a view was expressed that India must not endeavour to build constituencies in neighbouring countries, the alternate and dominant view was that constituency building is important. 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 served a limited utility, 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 by the recent visit of Pakistan Premier Nawaz Sharif to India. Even though the entire meeting was shrouded in secrecy, media has continuously pitched the Samjhauta issue v/s the Mumbai attacks as the latter has had great impact on the psyche of Indians, even more than the attack on India's parliament. Post-visit the discussion on Article 370 within India has intensified. The over exposure of the issue in media and the subsequent statements made by J&K Chief Minister will have a negative, multiplier effect as these raw opinions are 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. On the issue of trade, the view was that trade does not dictate political ties otherwise India and China would have better relations than China-Pakistan. Also, past initiatives regarding FDI, 24 hour truck movement, etc have never seen the light of the day. Even if trade ties improve, their impact on political ties will be limited. However, trade does give you a certain leverage which dealing with the country that you have strong trade relations with rather than a country with no such relations at all. As such, trade should be encouraged. Nothing constructive will be achieved by withholding visas or disrupting trade to achieve political goals.

India's Proactive Doctrine has been viewed with alarm by Pakistan and is believed to have led to Pakistan developing battlefield nuclear weapons. It was opined that India's nuclear doctrine has been well articulated and that the use of nuclear weapons by an adversary would elicit a response in conformance with the nuclear doctrine. The issue of No First Use (NFU) was also discussed. There was a view that NFU was not appropriate in the Indian context, especially in relation to countries that India has been repeatedly in conflict with. The more dominant view however was that our doctrine is adequate as it sends out a very strong signal about Indian intent when response is required.

An interesting observation concerned leverage. It was stated that even though US invests heavily in Pakistan it still does not enjoy the leverage China enjoys without having such relations. Hence establishing leverages is important. Pakistan can only leverage its geographical importance in relation to India if India conforms to Pakistani plans. For example, IPI pipeline is not viable unless India agree, the CASA 1000 agreement is on the verge of collapse and even the TAPI pipeline is not viable till India is a part of it. This leverage should be used by India while dealing with Pakistan.

India needs to let go of legacy attitudes while dealing with Pakistan. While a conventional conflict with Pakistan appears unlikely, the dilemma of 'talks vs terrorism', will continue. Talks between diplomats on both ends should be encouraged and even though there might not be a solution to the issue, it will certainly ease tensions between both countries. India also 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 peace talks, border talks, border management, trade and military affairs.

Afghanistan-Pakistan relations could well revive after the drawdown of US forces and that will amount a greater threat to India. India should continue to invest in infrastructure development in Afghanistan as it will leave a permanent mark in the country. Partnering with like-minded countries will be beneficial for Indian interest especially in the current situation where US is withdrawing its troops. With respect to India deploying armed forces for protecting its assets in Afghanistan and for support to the government there, the dominant view was that it would not serve India's national interest.

China's easy access to Afghanistan through Pakistan borders and its existing presence in Baluchistan are causes of concern for India especially post withdrawal of US forces. Recently China has bagged the tender for a copper mine, the work on which will start post the withdrawal by US. The ANA will in all likelihood be able to secure most parts of the country, and it would be beneficial to India to invest in Afghanistan.

In Iran, the Chinese have already started grabbing major projects in Chabahar and Indian influence in the port city is required urgently otherwise India shall be out of the important Iranian City which shares its border very close to Afghanistan. The Iranians are also worried about the military nexus between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

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. With respect to terrorism emanating from Pakistan, India needs to work on building a doctrinal approach to deal with the situation.