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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Civil-Military Relations of Pakistan from 1947 To 2022****Muhammad Shahzad Qaisar**

Visiting Faculty Member at IIUI & National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences

gondalshahzad820@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This research paper critically examines the evolution of civil-military relations in Pakistan from 1947 to 2022. It has analysed the persistent imbalance between civilian authority and military influence within the state's political framework. The study explores how historical legacies, institutional weaknesses, and geopolitical dynamics contributed to the military's intervention in governance. Through a chronological and analytical approach, the paper highlights key political transitions, constitutional developments, and major military regimes that have shaped Pakistan's civil-military equation. It also examines the implications of these relations on democratic consolidation, policymaking, and national security. Employing both qualitative and historical methods, the research integrates primary and secondary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural and ideological factors sustaining military dominance. Ultimately, the paper argues that the enduring contest for power between civilian institutions and the military has deeply influenced Pakistan's political stability and democratic trajectory.

Keywords: Civil-Military Relations, Political Framework, Political Transitions, Constitutional Developments, Democratic Trajectory

1.1. Introduction

Civil-military relations in Pakistan have been a defining aspect of the country's political landscape, influencing governance structures, institutional development, and policy formulation since its inception. The relationship between civilian authorities and the military establishment has been marked by periodic interventions, political engineering, and struggles for supremacy. From the early years of independence, the military positioned itself as a stabilizing force amid political instability, and over time, it emerged as a dominant player in national affairs. The military's involvement in governance has shaped Pakistan's trajectory, often determining the fate of democratic institutions and policy directions¹. A stable and functional civil-military equation is essential for ensuring democratic governance, where elected representatives exercise authority while the military remains within its professional domain. However, Pakistan's history demonstrates a recurring pattern of military influence over civilian affairs, often justified on grounds of political mismanagement and security concerns.

From the beginning, the newly formed state struggled with political instability, economic challenges, and governance issues, creating a vacuum that allowed the military to assert itself. The early deaths of key leaders, including Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, left a leadership void that weakened civilian supremacy. By the late 1950s, political

¹ Shah, A. (2014). *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*. Harvard University Press.

fragmentation and inefficiency led to the first military coup in 1958, with General Ayub Khan justifying his takeover by arguing that military rule was necessary to restore order and efficiency. His regime introduced a bureaucratic-military model of governance, side-lining political parties and restricting democratic participation². Even after Ayub Khan's resignation in 1969, General Yahya Khan continued military rule, which culminated in the disintegration of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, an event that significantly altered civil-military dynamics.

Following the secession of East Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto emerged as a civilian leader, attempting to reassert political control over the military. While his tenure was marked by efforts to curtail military influence, his eventual removal through a military coup in 1977 by General Zia-ul-Haq reinforced the cycle of military intervention in politics. The military's involvement in the Afghan-Soviet war further expanded its power, linking it with global strategic interests and securing its influence over national security and foreign policy³. Despite Zia's death in 1988 and the subsequent return of democratic rule under Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, the military retained substantial control over key state matters.

The late 1990s saw another coup when General Pervez Musharraf overthrew Nawaz Sharif's government in 1999. Musharraf's tenure reflected a blend of military governance and controlled democracy. His alignment with the United States in the post-9/11 "War on Terror" further consolidated the military's role in shaping foreign and security policies⁴. The return to civilian rule in 2008, with the PPP coming to power, marked a formal transition to democracy, but tensions between civilian governments and the military remained a defining feature of governance.

The election of Imran Khan's PTI in 2018 was widely perceived as facilitated by the military. The split eventually culminated in Khan's ousting in April 2022 through a parliamentary vote of no confidence, marking another significant shift in civil-military relations⁵. The events leading to his removal, including the changing dynamics within the military establishment and public perception, reflected the evolving nature of civil-military relations in Pakistan. Despite attempts by successive civilian governments to assert their authority, the military has remained a key player in shaping political outcomes, reinforcing the complexity and persistence of this relationship in Pakistan's governance structure.

1.2. Key Phases of Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan (1947–2022)

1.2.1. 1947–1958: Early Challenges and the First Military Coup

The formative years of Pakistan (1947–1958) were marked by an unstable political environment, weak institutional structures, and the increasing influence of the military in state affairs. The newly created state faced many challenges, including the partition crisis, refugee

² Shafqat, S. (1997). *Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: From Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Benazir Bhutto*. Westview Press.

³ Aziz, M. (2007). *Military Control in Pakistan: The Parallel State*. Routledge.

⁴ Haqqani, H. (2005). *Pakistan: Between mosque and military*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

⁵ Shah, A. (2014). *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*. Harvard University Press.

influx, economic instability, and the immediate need to establish governance mechanisms. The absence of a clear constitutional framework and the lack of a stable political system contributed to administrative inefficiency, creating opportunities for non-elected institutions, particularly the military and bureaucracy, to exert influence⁶. Pakistan's founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, envisioned a democratic state, but his early demise in 1948 deprived the country of strong leadership. This leadership vacuum led to political instability, characterized by frequent changes in government and a lack of consensus on constitutional matters. The military, initially confined to defence responsibilities, began to assert itself in national affairs, laying the foundation for its future political role⁷.

The civil-military imbalance during this period was worsened by the weakness of political institutions. The Muslim League, which had spearheaded the independence movement, struggled to transform itself into an effective governing body. Meanwhile, the civil bureaucracy, primarily composed of individuals trained under British colonial rule, sought to consolidate power in the absence of a strong political leadership. The administrative framework inherited from British India allowed bureaucrats to exercise significant control over policy matters, side-lining elected representatives. This bureaucratic dominance, coupled with weak political leadership, enabled the military to gradually expand its influence in decision-making processes⁸.

The Kashmir conflict of 1947–1948 and Pakistan's subsequent military engagements heightened the army's significance as a central institution in the state apparatus. The first Indo-Pak war reinforced the perception that the military was the only disciplined and capable institution in the country, leading to its increased involvement in strategic decision-making. General Ayub Khan, appointed as the first Pakistani Commander-in-Chief in 1951, began to establish close ties with the civilian leadership, particularly Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. However, after Liaquat's assassination in 1951, political instability deepened, and successive civilian governments failed to maintain stability. By the mid-1950s, political fragmentation had reached its peak, with frequent dismissals of prime ministers and constitutional crises creating a governance vacuum⁹.

The situation reached a turning point in 1958 when President Iskander Mirza, in collaboration with General Ayub Khan, imposed martial law, effectively dissolving civilian institutions. Ayub Khan, who had been consolidating military influence within the government, soon removed Mirza and assumed full control of the state, marking the first formal military takeover in Pakistan's history. This coup not only disrupted Pakistan's democratic trajectory but also institutionalized military intervention in politics, establishing a precedent for future takeovers¹⁰.

The early years of Pakistan's civil-military relations set the stage for continued military dominance over civilian institutions. The absence of strong democratic traditions, coupled with political instability and bureaucratic control, provided an enabling environment for the military

⁶ Jalal, A. (1990). *The state of martial rule: The origins of Pakistan's political economy of defense*. Cambridge University Press.

⁷ Cohen, S. P. (2004). *The idea of Pakistan*. Brookings Institution Press.

⁸ Siddiq, A. (2007). *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy*. Pluto Press.

⁹ Shafqat, S. (1997). *Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: From Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Benazir Bhutto*. Westview Press.

¹⁰ Shah, A. (2014). *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*. Harvard University Press.

to justify its intervention. The long-term implications of this phase became evident in subsequent decades, as the military continued to wield significant influence over Pakistan's political landscape¹¹.

1.2.2. 1958–1971: Military's Entrenchment and the Fall of East Pakistan

The military's first formal intervention in 1958 marked the beginning of its institutionalized dominance over Pakistan's political landscape. General Ayub Khan's takeover was justified on the grounds of political instability and administrative inefficiency, but it ultimately resulted in the military consolidating power and shaping governance according to its own interests. Ayub's rule (1958–1969) introduced the concept of "controlled democracy" through the Basic Democracies system, which was designed to provide a disguise of electoral legitimacy while keeping real political power concentrated in the hands of the military. This period witnessed the systematic weakening of political parties, the curtailment of civil liberties, and the suppression of dissent, which further widened the civil-military divide in Pakistan¹².

Ayub Khan's Basic Democracies system, introduced in 1959, was a hierarchical structure of local government that allowed the military to maintain its grip on political affairs while giving the illusion of democratic representation. Instead of empowering national political parties, the system relied on local representatives who were indirectly controlled by the central government. The system not only limited popular participation but also ensured that opposition to Ayub's rule remained fragmented. Meanwhile, his economic policies favored industrialization and large business groups, leading to economic disparities between the western and eastern wings of Pakistan. The growing sense of alienation among the people of East Pakistan, who felt marginalized politically and economically, deepened the internal crisis within the country¹³.

The increasing dissatisfaction with Ayub Khan's authoritarian rule led to widespread protests, culminating in his forced resignation in 1969. He handed power over to General Yahya Khan, who imposed martial law once again, reinforcing the military's role as the ultimate decision-maker in state affairs. Unlike Ayub, Yahya did not attempt to establish a controlled democratic system and instead promised fair elections, which were held in December 1970. However, the results of these elections triggered one of the most significant political and military crises in Pakistan's history. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, secured an overwhelming majority in East Pakistan, demanding greater autonomy under the Six-Point Movement. Instead of transferring power peacefully, the military launched a violent crackdown in March 1971, leading to a full-scale civil war¹⁴. The Indian military intervention in December

¹¹ Rizvi, H. A. (2000). *Military, state and society in Pakistan*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹² Jalal, A. (1990). *The state of martial rule: The origins of Pakistan's political economy of defence*. Cambridge University Press.

¹³ Rizvi, H. A. (2000). *Military, state and society in Pakistan*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁴ Sisson, R., & Rose, L. E. (1990). *War and secession: Pakistan, India, and the creation of Bangladesh*. University of California Press.

1971, in support of the Mukti Bahini¹⁵, resulted in a swift defeat for Pakistan. The surrender of the Pakistan Army in Dhaka on December 16, 1971, marked the country's most significant military and political failure, leading to the creation of Bangladesh¹⁶.

The fall of East Pakistan highlighted the dangers of military dominance in political affairs and the consequences of side-lining democratic processes. The refusal of the military leadership to accommodate political demands, coupled with their reliance on coercion rather than negotiation, led to the disintegration of Pakistan's eastern wing. This event severely damaged the military's credibility and forced a temporary shift in civil-military relations, leading to the return of civilian rule under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1972. However, despite the apparent restoration of democracy, the military retained significant influence, and its interventionist role in politics remained deeply embedded in Pakistan's state structure¹⁷.

1.2.3. 1971–1977: Bhutto's Civilian Rule and Military Influence

The aftermath of the 1971 war and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh significantly altered the civil-military dynamics in Pakistan. With the military's credibility at its lowest point following its humiliating defeat, there was an opportunity for civilian leadership to reclaim power and reassert democratic governance. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto emerged as the dominant political figure during this period, assuming office as the President of Pakistan in December 1971 and later transitioning to the position of Prime Minister in 1973 under a new constitution. Bhutto initially undertook significant measures to curtail military power and consolidate civilian rule. Recognizing the need to restructure the military following the 1971 debacle, he dismissed several high-ranking officers, including Chief of Army Staff General Gul Hassan and Air Marshal Rahim Khan, replacing them with officers more loyal to his government. Additionally, Bhutto prioritized the modernization of Pakistan's nuclear program, recognizing it as a means to enhance national security while simultaneously reducing the military's direct role in policy-making¹⁸. Despite these efforts, however, the military retained considerable influence, particularly in areas of internal security and foreign policy.

By the mid-1970s, his government faced growing opposition from religious and right-wing parties, leading to widespread protests and political instability¹⁹. Bhutto's ability to manage civil-military relations was further complicated by his decision to appoint General Zia-ul-Haq as the Chief of Army Staff in 1976. Contrary to expectations, Zia, who was initially perceived as an apolitical and unambitious officer, quickly consolidated his position within the military. As political tensions escalated following the controversial 1977 general elections—marred by

¹⁵ Bengali Resistance Movement

¹⁶ Bass, G. J. (2013). *The blood telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a forgotten genocide*. Alfred A. Knopf.

¹⁷ Haqqani, H. (2005). *Pakistan: Between mosque and military*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹⁸ Haqqani, H. (2005). *Pakistan: Between mosque and military*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹⁹ Rizvi, H. A. (2000). *Military, state and society in Pakistan*. Palgrave Macmillan.

allegations of massive rigging—Bhutto's grip on power weakened. The Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), a coalition of opposition parties, launched nationwide protests demanding Bhutto's resignation. Amid growing political unrest, the military intervened once again on July 5, 1977, when General Zia-ul-Haq staged a coup, overthrowing Bhutto's government and imposing martial law²⁰.

The 1977 coup demonstrated the resilience of military intervention in Pakistan's political affairs. Despite Bhutto's attempts to assert civilian supremacy, his failure to institutionalize democratic norms and his increasing dependence on coercive measures provided the military with the pretext to reclaim direct control. The coup not only marked the end of Pakistan's experiment with democratic governance under Bhutto but also paved the way for Zia's prolonged military rule, during which the military's role in shaping Pakistan's political and ideological framework deepened further²¹.

1.2.4. 1977–1988: Zia-ul-Haq's Martial Law & Military-led Islamization

Zia justified his takeover by citing political instability and the need to restore law and order following mass protests against Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's allegedly rigged elections. Initially promising to hold elections within 90 days, Zia instead consolidated power and declared martial law, postponing democratic processes indefinitely. His rule was characterized by the centralization of authority, suppression of opposition, and the implementation of policies aimed at reshaping Pakistan's political and social fabric through Islamization²².

One of Zia's most defining policies was the Islamization of state institutions and laws. He introduced a series of legal and constitutional amendments to align Pakistan's governance with an interpretation of Islamic principles that strengthened the military's ideological legitimacy. The introduction of the Hudood Ordinances in 1979, which imposed severe punishments based on Islamic injunctions, and the establishment of the Federal Shariat Court reinforced the role of religion in the legal system. These policies were designed to create an Islamic identity for the state and justify Zia's prolonged military rule under the guise of religious authority²³.

Political suppression was a key feature of Zia's rule. The military targeted leaders and activists of the Pakistan PPP, with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto being the most prominent victim. Bhutto was controversially sentenced to death in 1979 on charges of conspiring to murder a political opponent—a decision widely perceived as politically motivated. His execution not only eliminated a key political adversary but also sent a strong message about the military's dominance in Pakistan's political landscape. In an effort to neutralize civilian opposition, Zia

²⁰ Siddiqi, A. (2007). *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy*. Pluto Press

²¹ Shah, A. (2014). *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*. Harvard University Press.

²² Haqqani, H. (2005). *Pakistan: Between mosque and military*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

²³ Jalal, A. (1995). *Democracy and authoritarianism in South Asia: A comparative and historical perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

banned political parties, controlled the press, and imposed strict censorship to curtail dissent. His rule saw the widespread imprisonment and torture of political opponents, alongside the use of intelligence agencies to monitor and suppress resistance movements²⁴.

Zia's rule came to an abrupt end on August 17, 1988, when his aircraft mysteriously crashed, killing him and several senior military officials. The sudden power vacuum forced the military to allow a transition back to civilian rule, leading to the general elections of 1988. This transition, however, did not signal the end of military influence in politics. Instead, it marked the beginning of a new phase in Pakistan's civil-military relations, where the military continued to shape political outcomes from behind the scenes, particularly through intelligence agencies and indirect interventions²⁵. The Islamization policies he implemented continued to shape Pakistan's legal and social framework, while the military's dominance over civilian institutions persisted despite the formal return to democracy²⁶.

1.2.5. 1988–1999: Civilian Governments Under Military Influence

Despite formal democracy, political instability, institutional weaknesses, and military interventions continued to characterize civil-military relations during this decade²⁷. Benazir Bhutto, the leader of the PPP, emerged victorious in the 1988 elections and became the country's first female prime minister. However, her government faced significant constraints from the military establishment, particularly in matters related to defence and foreign policy. The military retained control over Pakistan's nuclear program, relations with India, and the Afghan policy, limiting Bhutto's authority. Additionally, intelligence agencies, particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), played a pivotal role in manipulating political affairs, including the formation of the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) to counter Bhutto's influence. Her tenure was marred by allegations of corruption and administrative inefficiencies, and in 1990, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, with military backing, dismissed her government under Article 58(2)(b) of the constitution.

Nawaz Sharif, supported by the military and establishment, became prime minister in 1990 as the leader of the IJI coalition. His government pursued economic liberalization policies and infrastructure development but was closely monitored by the military. Despite initially enjoying military support, tensions arose as Nawaz sought to assert greater civilian control, particularly over defence policies. His government also engaged in political victimization against the PPP, further deepening political instability. In 1993, a confrontation between Nawaz and President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, who had military backing, led to a constitutional crisis. The military

²⁴ Shah, A. (2014). *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*. Harvard University Press.

²⁵ Siddiq, A. (2007). *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy*. Pluto Press

²⁶ Hussain, Z. (2019). *No-win war: The paradox of US-Pakistan relations in Afghanistan's shadow*. Oxford University Press.

²⁷ Rizvi, H. A. (2000). *Military, state and society in Pakistan*. Palgrave Macmillan.

intervened as a mediator, forcing both Nawaz and Ghulam Ishaq to resign, highlighting the military's role as an arbiter in civilian disputes²⁸.

Benazir Bhutto returned to power in the 1993 elections but once again faced interference from the military and intelligence agencies. While she attempted to strengthen civilian authority, she struggled to gain control over key areas, including defence and foreign policy. The military continued to influence Pakistan's Afghanistan strategy, particularly its support for the Taliban movement in the mid-1990s. Her government faced accusations of corruption, political mismanagement, and economic decline. In 1996, she was dismissed by President Farooq Leghari, again with military endorsement, demonstrating the military's continued influence in shaping political outcomes²⁹.

Nawaz Sharif returned to power in 1997 with a strong parliamentary mandate, enabling him to undertake significant constitutional changes. He successfully repealed Article 58(2)(b), which had previously allowed the president to dismiss governments, thereby reducing the military's indirect power over civilian rule. However, his tenure saw escalating tensions with the military, particularly over his decision to initiate nuclear tests in response to India's tests in 1998 and his approach toward foreign policy, especially regarding India and the Kargil conflict in 1999.

1.2.6. 1999–2008: Musharraf's Military Rule

The period from 1999 to 2008 marked another phase of direct military rule in Pakistan under General Pervez Musharraf. His coup on October 12, 1999, was justified on the grounds of economic mismanagement, corruption, and political instability under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. However, the deeper underlying reason was the civil-military conflict that escalated after the Kargil conflict in 1999. The military, under Musharraf's leadership, reasserted its dominance over civilian institutions, suppressing political opposition while maintaining an outward appearance of controlled democracy³⁰.

Under Musharraf's rule, the judiciary played a controversial role. The Supreme Court, under Chief Justice Irshad Hasan Khan, validated the military coup in 2000 under the doctrine of necessity, granting Musharraf broad legal cover to govern. The judiciary continued to function under military influence until 2007, when Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry challenged Musharraf's authority, particularly regarding his re-election bid as both president and army chief. In response, Musharraf suspended Chaudhry in March 2007, triggering nationwide protests and a judicial movement that eventually contributed to the military's declining grip on power³¹.

²⁸ Jalal, A. (1995). *Democracy and authoritarianism in South Asia: A comparative and historical perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

²⁹ Shah, A. (2014). *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*. Harvard University Press.

³⁰ Rizvi, H. A. (2000). *Military, state and society in Pakistan*. Palgrave Macmillan.

³¹ Grare, F. (2009). *Pakistan: The resurgence of Baluch nationalism and insurgency*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Politically, Musharraf employed a strategy of controlled democracy to maintain his authority. In 2002, he held general elections, which resulted in a military-backed coalition government led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q). While this provided a façade of civilian rule, key decisions remained under military control. Musharraf introduced various political reforms, including the devolution of power to local governments under the Local Government Ordinance 2001. However, his administration also engaged in political repression, suppressing opposition parties like the PPP and Pakistan PML-N.

Internationally, Musharraf's rule was shaped by Pakistan's role in the post-9/11 global order. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, Pakistan became a frontline ally of the United States in the War on Terror. Musharraf's decision to support the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan allowed Pakistan to secure military and economic aid, but it also increased domestic challenges. The alliance led to growing militancy within Pakistan, as extremist groups turned against the state due to its cooperation with the West. The rise of insurgency in the tribal areas and the military's subsequent operations in Waziristan highlighted the complexities of Musharraf's security policies.

Despite his strong grip on power, Musharraf faced increasing political challenges after 2007. The judicial crisis, growing public opposition, and the return of exiled leaders Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif signalled a shift in political dynamics. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007 further destabilized his regime, leading to widespread protests and demands for democratic restoration. The general elections in February 2008 resulted in a decisive defeat for Musharraf's allies, the PML-Q, paving the way for a civilian-led government. Facing mounting pressure, Musharraf resigned as president in August 2008, marking the end of his military rule and the beginning of another phase of civilian governance³².

1.2.7. 2008–2018: Civil-Military Tensions in the Democratic Era

The period from 2008 to 2018 was marked by intense civil-military tensions, as civilian governments under the PPP and Pakistan PML-N struggled to assert control over governance, particularly in matters of national security and foreign policy. While this decade saw the return of formal democracy after General Pervez Musharraf's resignation in 2008, the military remained a dominant force in Pakistan's political landscape, often dictating key policy decisions behind the scenes.

The PPP government, led by President Asif Ali Zardari (2008–2013), faced continuous challenges from the military and judiciary. One of the most significant episodes of civil-military friction during this period was the Memogate scandal of 2011, where the military accused the civilian government of seeking U.S. intervention to curb the military's influence following the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad. This crisis further weakened the civilian government, which was already struggling with governance issues, economic instability, and rising terrorism. Despite completing its tenure, the PPP administration remained largely constrained by the military on foreign policy matters, particularly regarding relations with India, Afghanistan, and the United States³³.

³² Hussain, Z. (2019). *No-win war: The paradox of US-Pakistan relations in Afghanistan's shadow*. Oxford University Press.

³³ Cheema, P. I. (2002). *The Armed Forces of Pakistan*. New York University Press.

During the PML-N government (2013–2018), civil-military tensions escalated further, primarily due to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's attempts to assert civilian supremacy over the military. Sharif's government clashed with the military on multiple fronts, including foreign policy, internal security, and the handling of the Panama Papers case, which eventually led to his disqualification as prime minister in 2017³⁴. A defining moment in this era was the Dawn Leaks controversy in 2016, where the civilian government was accused of leaking information that suggested the military's reluctance to act against militant groups. This led to a strong backlash from the military, further exacerbating tensions³⁵.

The military's role in national security remained dominant throughout this period, particularly in shaping counterterrorism policies. Following the 2014 attack on the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar, the military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb against militant groups in North Waziristan, with minimal civilian oversight. Additionally, the formulation of the National Action Plan (NAP) in response to terrorism further reinforced the military's control over internal security affairs. The judiciary also played a crucial role in enabling military dominance, as seen in the establishment of military courts for terrorism-related cases, a move that was justified as necessary for national security³⁶.

The rise of the PTI during this decade and its relationship with the military also became a focal point in civil-military relations. Many political analysts argue that the military tacitly supported Imran Khan's rise to power, particularly in the lead-up to the 2018 general elections. The PTI's strong narrative against corruption, coupled with its alignment with the military's strategic interests, contributed to its electoral success. The opposition, particularly the PML-N, accused the military of manipulating the electoral process in favour of PTI, reinforcing the perception of the military's continued interference in politics.

1.2.8. 2018–2022: PTI's Government & Military Nexus

The period from 2018 to 2022 marked a significant phase in Pakistan's civil-military relations, as the PTI government, led by Imran Khan, initially enjoyed strong backing from the military establishment. However, by the end of Khan's tenure, this alliance had unravelled, culminating in his ouster through a no-confidence motion in April 2022. This phase was characterized by both cooperation and conflict, reflecting the evolving dynamics of Pakistan's civil-military relationship.

Imran Khan's rise to power in the 2018 general elections was widely perceived as being facilitated by the military. Political analysts and opposition parties accused the establishment of pre-poll rigging and electoral engineering to ensure Khan's victory, side-lining the Pakistan PML-N and PPP³⁷. The military's influence was evident in PTI's ability to form a government despite lacking an absolute majority, as independent candidates and smaller parties were

³⁴ Malik, I. (2020). *The history of Pakistan*. Greenwood Press.

³⁵ Yusuf, M. (2018). *Brokering peace in nuclear environments: U.S. crisis management in South Asia*. Stanford University Press.

³⁶ Cheema, P. I. (2002). *The Armed Forces of Pakistan*. New York University Press.

³⁷ Malik, I. (2020). *The history of Pakistan*. Greenwood Press.

reportedly pressured into joining Khan's coalition³⁸. The PTI government, in return, provided the military with an unprecedented role in governance, appointing retired and serving military officers to key civilian positions, including economic and administrative roles³⁹.

During PTI's rule, civil-military relations were marked by unprecedented alignment in foreign policy and national security matters. The military continued to dictate Pakistan's strategic direction, particularly in Afghanistan, India, and the United States. One of the most notable instances was the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, where Pakistan played a crucial role in facilitating the Taliban's return to power. Khan's government remained largely dependent on the military for diplomatic manoeuvring, especially in managing ties with Washington and Beijing⁴⁰. Domestically, PTI's governance saw increased militarization, with the establishment supporting the crackdown on opposition parties, media, and dissenting voices. However, by late 2021, tensions between Khan and the military began to surface, primarily due to Khan's increasing assertiveness and refusal to align with the military's preferences on key issues. The most notable point of contention was the appointment of the Director-General of the ISI in October 2021. Khan's resistance to the military's preferred candidate and his insistence on retaining Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, who was seen as a key supporter of PTI, signalled a shift in the balance of power⁴¹. This move was perceived as an attempt to interfere in military affairs, straining the previously cordial relationship between PTI and the establishment.

The breakdown of relations became more apparent in early 2022, when the military distanced itself from PTI's governance failures, particularly in handling economic challenges, inflation, and foreign relations. The opposition, sensing an opportunity, united to launch a no-confidence motion against Khan. As the political crisis deepened, the military adopted a "neutral" stance, refusing to rescue Khan's government from collapse. This perceived withdrawal of military support proved decisive in Khan's removal, as dissent within PTI's ranks grew, and key allies defected⁴².

Following his ouster in April 2022, Khan launched an aggressive anti-establishment narrative, a stark contrast to his earlier alignment with the military. His speeches and political rallies frequently targeted the military leadership, blaming them for orchestrating his removal and accusing them of meddling in politics. This shift marked a significant transformation in Pakistan's civil-military relations, as PTI—once seen as the military's favoured party—became

³⁸ Aziz, M. (2007). *Military Control in Pakistan: The Parallel State*. Routledge.

³⁹ Shafqat, S. (1997). *Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: From Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Benazir Bhutto*. Westview Press.

⁴⁰ Fair, C. C. (2022). *In their own words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba*. Oxford University Press.

⁴¹ Rizvi, H. A. (2000). *Military, state and society in Pakistan*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴² Malik, I. (2020). *The history of Pakistan*. Greenwood Press.

its most vocal critic. This period laid the foundation for the escalating tensions that would shape Pakistan's political landscape in the years to come.

1.3. Themes in Civil-Military Relations and Their Impact (2022–2024)

Pakistan's civil-military relations have been defined by a complex interplay between direct military rule and indirect interventions. The military has staged multiple coups, ousting elected governments in 1958, 1977, and 1999, while also maintaining influence through political engineering, bureaucratic control, and strategic policymaking. Even during civilian rule, the military has acted as a key power broker, shaping national security decisions, foreign policy, and even domestic governance. The pattern of military involvement has consistently undermined democratic consolidation, reinforcing a cycle where elected governments struggle to exercise full authority.

The judiciary has played a critical role in legitimizing military takeovers, often providing legal cover for martial laws through doctrines like the doctrine of necessity. Courts have historically validated military regimes by endorsing constitutional deviations, as seen in the rulings that upheld Ayub Khan's, Zia-ul-Haq's, and Pervez Musharraf's coups. While there have been instances of judicial resistance, such as the landmark Judiciary Restoration Movement (2007–2009), the overall trend has been one of compliance, reinforcing military dominance over civilian institutions.

Media has also played a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of civil-military relations. Under military rule, media narratives have often been controlled through censorship, state propaganda, and intimidation of dissenting voices. In recent years, social media has emerged as a battleground, with both pro-military and anti-establishment narratives gaining traction. The military's influence over traditional and digital media has allowed it to steer public discourse, suppress opposition, and justify interventions in governance.

The persistent interference in democratic processes, particularly in elections, has hindered Pakistan's political stability. Military-backed political engineering—such as the formation of alliances like the IJI in 1988 and alleged manipulation of the 2018 general elections—has repeatedly weakened democratic norms. Governance structures remain fragile, with elected leaders often constrained by military pressure, limiting their ability to implement independent policies. This cycle of intervention has prevented the development of a stable civilian-led political order.

The 2022 political crisis, culminating in Imran Khan's ouster, follows historical patterns of military intervention. Like past civilian leaders, Khan initially aligned with the establishment but later found himself at odds with it, leading to his removal through parliamentary manoeuvres rather than a direct coup. The 2024 elections raise critical questions about whether Pakistan is moving toward a break from its historical trajectory or if the cycle of military influence will persist. Comparisons with past interventions suggest that while the methods may evolve, the underlying power dynamics between civilian governments and the military remain largely unchanged.

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