

Indo-Pak Armies in Politics (1947-1977)

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Abstract

The article reviews the history of the armies of India and Pakistan in politics (1947-1977). It describes and compares the political role of both the armies in post-independence politics. The work also sheds light on Pakistan military's involvement in political institutions and causes of military interference in the politics of Pakistan. It highlights the factors which helped Indian political leadership in keeping its army out of the political arena. This research article throws light on the political cultures and infrastructures of armies of both the countries. Moreover, it also evaluates and defines the aspects which encouraged military interventions in Pakistan and discouraged interventionist tendencies in India.

Introduction

Both the countries, Pakistan and India, emerged on the map of the world as independent states on 14 and 15 August 1947 respectively. The partition of Subcontinent divided the British Indian Army into the Pakistan and Indian armies. The Pakistan Army mainly consisted of the Muslim troops, while Indian army was constituted from Hindu, Sikh and other religious minority troops of the British Indian Army. Thus, the British Indian Army was divided on the basis of religion as it played a vital role in the defence and maintenance of law

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and order in the British India. The colonial rulers of India kept the army out of the political arena and military always remained neutral in several affairs and never intervened in politics.

Consequently, "The armies of both countries inherited the British Indian Military traditions of non-involvement in politics."¹ India is counted as the largest democratic country of the world because of the political atmosphere and balance of power among several institutions of state, while Pakistan has been passing through presidential form of government and repeated Martial Laws due to lack of political leadership. Unfortunately, after Quaid's death, political leaders could not maintain the check and balance of power and failed to keep the equilibrium of political institutions. Consequently, military exploited the situation and expanded its influence in the politics which ultimately debilitated the political institutions of Pakistan. On the other hand, the political leadership of India succeeded to keep its military leadership out of the political arena. It balanced the powers between military and politics. Neither military interfered in the political affairs of India nor did the Indian people face Martial Laws and presidential form of government. The Indian political leadership followed the British Indian military traditions of non-involvement in politics. "But in Pakistan the army eroded this tradition by intervening decisively and frequently whereas in India the principle of civilian supremacy remains intact. Their post-independence development, composition, and relationship with the civilian authority have been markedly different. This had a direct bearing upon the divergent roles of the armies of the two countries."²

Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was of the opinion that there was not any role of religion in politics of the state. He prohibited dragging religion in the political affairs of the

1 Veena Kukreja, "Military Intervention in Politics: Contrasting Cases of Pakistan and India", in *Political System in Pakistan: Pakistan India Relations*, Verender Grover, ed., (New Delhi: Deep an Deep Publications, 1995), 523.

2 Kukreja, "Military Intervention in Politics", 523.

state. Jinnah was a sort of secular Muslim and did not want to establish a theocratic state. He only used Islam as a tool to unite Muslim masses of India to gain the aim of a separate Muslim state. Hence, he stressed on democracy being an inherent part of Islam. Jinnah was of the view that military should be an organization which must be free from the religio-political pressure whatsoever. To him religious army could be dangerous for the state, so he wished to organize a neutral army. On the other hand, religio-political leaders like Moulana Maududi and others were totally against the western concept of democracy. Maududi was of the perception that Islam is antitheses of secular western democracy because it believes in the sovereignty of people. In the beginning, first central cabinet of Pakistan had seven ministers and they belonged to different parties. Hence they criticized policies of each other without any solid reason. Their ideologies were contradictory to each other which not only divided Pakistani nation into different religious and political groups but also gave birth to disintegration. Eventually, the people of Pakistan witnessed the end of civilian government in 1958. As far as the balance of powers between the army and the political leadership was concerned, it could not be maintained due to the contradiction in their ideologies and lack of strong political system.

As far as Pakistani military is concerned, it is essentially a defence institution but some of the generals used religion for their personal gains by neglecting the national interest of the state.

India is being considered not only a secular state but also the largest democratic country of the world because of its political culture and certain social environment. The political institutions are stable than the military as all the objects which make the population of India accept democratic system and act on it. India's population belongs to majority of Hindus including Sikhs and other religious minorities nevertheless there is not any official religion of India. Military stays away from political institutions and never

dares to intervene in the political institutions because of strong and mature political system.

“According to the first Constitutional Amendment Act of 1951, the Indian Government claims army to be truly secular.”³ On the contrary, different regiments like Sikh and Gorkha regiments are present in Indian Army even today. The Indian Government made efforts to abolish division of the Indian army on the basis of sect and caste which was adopted by the British for their own political gains. They were of the opinion that such regimentation would provide better results as the people of same caste and creed shall be impressed to show valour in order to bring honour to their caste and creed. Shilpa Bhadoria is of the opinion that “it was a sheer exploitation of divisions (caste feelings) which had prevailed in India to the benefits of the British.”⁴ The division of army on the basis of caste and creed was criticized in Lok Sabha and debates produced demands for and against the creation of new homogeneous regimentation. Indian Government decided reuniting army’s set up but failed. Still Indian political leadership exploits caste based division of the army for their own political interests. This is undeniable fact that if Indian army would have been truly secular it might not have relied on sect and caste system. Still it believes in caste and sect system, hence it cannot be called truly secular but it can be named as pseudo secular institution.

Right after 1947, Kashmir’s predominately Hindu army was absorbed in the national army; whereas Hyderabad’s largely Muslim army was disbanded, rendering nearly 20,000 jobless.”⁵ In fact the meaningful secular state never relies on religion or caste system whatsoever.

The Indian army’s infantry regiments are still based on religion (Sikh regiments) or ethnicity (Gorkha) or caste (Rajputs) in which

3 “Shilpa Bhadoria, *Is Indian Military Secular?*” available at <http://www.legalserviceindia.com/> accessed on 22 November 2009.

4 Bhadoria, *Is Indian Military Secular?*”

5 Omar Khalid, “*Why India is not Secular State?*” available at [Outlook India, fully loaded Magazines. India.com](http://OutlookMagazines.India.com) accessed on November 22, 2009.

members of other faiths, ethnicities and regions are barred. While a bearded Sikh may become Chief of the Army Staff as did General J.J. Singh, a Muslim may not sport beard in any of the armed forces. Only *Jhatka* [Hindi: not properly slaughtered] is served in army messes and *langers* [Hindi: free food] forcing Muslims to become vegetarian.⁶

The Foundation of the British Indian Military

The foundation stone of the British Indian army was laid when the East India Company was established for the purpose of trade on the west coast of India with the permission of Mughal rulers of the era during the early decade of the seventeenth century in 1600 A.D. "It was August 1608 that the first Hector, commanded by Hawkins, anchored at Surat and sought permission to build a factory, trading post and a ware-house for storing goods."⁷ Hawkins was of the viewpoint that company cannot be protected from Portuguese and Dutch without the co-operation of the local people because he faced hostility from them. "Soon he realized that he could not operate effectively without securing the approval of Mughal ruler Jahangeer and he fulfilled all the formalities for gaining the support of Mughal rulers and local people."⁸ It happened first time in the history that 50 Indian horsemen had been hired by Hawkins from Agra for security purpose. With the passage of time, the East India Company enhanced its stations in several areas of India (Bombay, Calcutta and Madras).

The East India Company not only expanded its stations but also introduced its Charter which allowed maintaining troops for the protection of Company against the pirates. Guards and watchmen were appointed as the soldiers of the Company and later these personnel were organized as the *militia* after given some military training. The Company's soldiers belonged to different nationalities. So the British Government classified the British Indian Army into different

6 Khalid, "Why India is not Secular State?"

7 Hassan Askri Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), 34.

8 Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 35.

categories from higher to lower rank on the basis of nationalities. "No Indian was allowed to hold the King's Commissioned Officers (KCO) ranks till 1917. They could not become Viceroy's Commissioned Officers (VCO) and Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO). After the independence of Pakistan and India, highest rank in this category for Indian people was a *Subedar* (major)."⁹ Imperial Cadet Corps was introduced for the sons of the Indian princes and aristocratic families. Only they were blessed with high ranks and key posts. But native Indians were ignored in this category of corps. If they would have joined, they could not remain longer in this corps because of the harsh policies of the British Government. Only a few native Indians joined Imperial Cadet Corps but rest of them were disappointed. The British Government wished to keep away native Indians from this corps.

The Role of the British Indian Army

The British Indian Army had three key functions, (1) to defend India against external aggression especially from the north-west, (2) to control the Pathan tribes, (3) to assist the civil administration (if asked by the civil administration) in the maintenance of law and order. The British Indian Army performed civic duties whenever they were called for the assistance. Nevertheless it maintained its professionalism because the British Government kept army away from the political influence which could affect the professionalism of military. Therefore political leadership of the era could not alter the professionalism of military. The British Indian Army not only remained neutral but also stood sub-ordinate to the civil administration and it is all because of the balance of the powers among army, political leadership and civil administration. Although there was a huge gulf between army and political leadership yet the British Government succeeded to maintain the check and balance of army as well as political institutions. "This fact cannot be denied that this is an army young in years, those responsible for training

9 Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 45-46.

and doctrine in the Pakistan Army insists that their real traditions long antedate the British Indian Army. The official history of the Pakistan Army begins with references to succeeding invaders of the Indian Subcontinent — the Aryans, Scythians, Smites, and Turks. The ancestors of the Pakistan Army's officers and *Jawans* were the men who fought Alexander the Great, who established the first Muslim stronghold in India."¹⁰ They empowered Mughal emperor in conquering nearly whole Subcontinent. "The history of the Subcontinent is in a very real sense their history. They can be justly proud of the role they played in the past in moulding that history and in recent years, the history of Pakistan."¹¹ The British found the qualities of the faithfulness as well as true soldiers in them. They fought and died for defending their own homeland and culture. The soldiers of the Pakistan Army have lost none of the martial qualities of their forefathers. Their sense of patriotism is indeed keener and awareness of their responsibilities is greater.

Division of the British Indian Army

"It was an excruciatingly difficult task since the process of splitting up of the Indian armed forces to create two self-sufficient defence establishments could not be completed in time for the transfer of power."¹² In the beginning, the British government was not in favour of division of the British Indian Army and considered the division as the suicidal for the institution. "Until the very end, and indeed even after transfer of power, Mountbatten continued his efforts to get two sides to accept some sort of common defence arrangement."¹³ Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, the then Commander in Chief was also against the division of the armed forces. Hence, he opposed the idea of the division of the armed

10 Stephen P. Cohen, *The Pakistan Army* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.

11 Fazal Muqeem Khan, *The Story of the Pakistan Army* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1963), 1.

12 Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defense* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 37.

13 Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule*, 38.

forces. "To divide great Indian Army was too difficult task for the British government. No one believed that the division of Indian army could be done in such a short time."¹⁴ "A common defence arrangement based on parity between Pakistan and India was in any case unacceptable for the Congress High Command."¹⁵ But circumstances favoured the division of the armed forces. Therefore, the British Government agreed to divide armed forces. "Division was accepted, whether willingly or reluctantly, by all parties, but when it came to giving it a practical shape, the Indians showed a lack of good grace, that was to prove a great embarrassment to Pakistan in these critical days."¹⁶

Since the partition of Subcontinent, India like Pakistan was dependent on the British officers, who headed all three military services. While Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck actually continued in overall command of both dominion armies for almost half a year following August 15. "Nehru like Jinnah depended on several British governors to serve independent India in their same official capacities."¹⁷ The British officials, who were working in India and Pakistan in several civil and military institutions, utilized the policy of divide and rule and succeeded. Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck issued the secret orders to all the British officers who served India or Pakistan without informing and keeping in confidence the officials of Pakistan. Consequently, India and Pakistan went to war. "The seeds of this conflict were laid in the final map of partition that ceded territory to India in the Punjab which gave its land bridge to Kashmir, and in the spontaneous and horrific breakdown of civil order that led to attacks on Muslim, Hindu and Sikh caravans and trainloads of refugees moving from their homes to the safety of their respective new country."¹⁸

14 Khan, *The Story of the Pakistan Army*, 22.

15 Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule*, 38.

16 Khan, *The Story of the Pakistan Army*, 23.

17 Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule*, 38.

18 Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan Its Army and the Wars Within* (Karachi: Oxford University Press. 2008), 22.

Comparison between the Armies after Independence

“Because of the disparity in size between India and Pakistan, the latter naturally received fewer stores, supplies and facilities. The two dominions shared assets in the proportion of 64:36, which roughly parallel the communal balance.”¹⁹

COMPARISON OF ASSETS

The Pakistan Army	The Indian Army
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pakistan had obtained six armoured regiments at the time of division. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India had been given fourteen armoured regiments at the time of division
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pakistan had been given eight artillery regiments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forty artillery regiments had been given to India
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pakistan had eight infantry regiments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India received twenty infantry regiments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven training establishments had been given to Pakistan out of forty seven. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India had about forty training establishments out of forty seven
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pakistan had about 25% of soldiers which was insufficient according to population of Pakistan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India got about 75% shares of the soldiers on the basis of religion, which includes Hindus, Sikhs and other non-Muslim minorities

SOURCE: Stephen P. Cohen, *The Pakistan Army*.

“The size of the two armies cannot be meaningfully compared in absolute terms; if one takes into account the size of the two armies in relation to their population, it reveals that in Pakistan the military participation ratio is about 0.51 percent whereas in India it is 0.16 percent.”²⁰ There was a shortage of the commissioned officers in the Pakistan Army unlike India. According to Colonel Brian Cloughy, “division on the basis of religion meant that Pakistan received some 30 percent of soldiers, but the mechanics of the split were complicated.”²¹ Pakistan faced deficiency of commissioned officers at the time of partition. It was due to the religious apprehensions of Muslims about the

19 Cohen, *The Pakistan Army*, 7.

20 Kukreja, “Military Intervention in Politics”, 524.

21 Brian Cloughy, *A History of the Pakistan Army: Wars and Insurrections* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

western education that "Pakistan had four Lieutenant Colonels, forty two Majors and one hundred fourteen Captains. First Commander in Chief, General Ayub Khan was promoted to the rank of General from Lieutenant Colonel in less than four years."²² The British Government failed to justify its distribution of assets, resultantly Pakistan could not get suitable share as compared to India.

Military Interventions

As far as military interventions in politics are concerned, these are mostly associated with less developed countries due to their uncertain atmosphere, political and social disorder, lack of leadership, economic crisis, national disintegration and contradiction in the ideas of political leadership. Except India, like Pakistan in a number of newly founded states, military has been involved in political affairs of the state. "Case studies of military interventions in Pakistan illustrate that although the military organization inherited by that country was comparatively less organized and small with greater shortage of commissioned officers than India."²³ Unfortunately, uncertain political atmosphere of Pakistan facilitated replacement of the civilian elites by the military elites. The weak policies of religio-political leaders based on self-interest divided Pakistani nation into sects. This provided a stage for military to intervene in the politics of the state. It also proved to be a golden opportunity for generals to consolidate their position in the political affairs of Pakistan.

Another factor which facilitated the army's rise to power in Pakistan was that the country had no democratic elections for eleven years after independence and democratic values had scarcely struck roots. On the other hand, the electoral process in India during the same period and subsequently, seemed to have a considerable functional significance for the political system as well as for the voters.²⁴

22 Saeed Shafqat, *Civil Military Relations in Pakistan from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Benazir* (Boulder: West View Press, 1997), 24.

23 Kukreja, "Military Intervention in Politics", 524.

24 Kukreja, "Military Intervention in Politics", 531.

“In any case if India had also suffered from military laws and military dictatorship on the pattern of Pakistan, it would have been in three to four separate segments by this day. India is more heterogeneous than Pakistan but the former has been kept one piece by the noise and chaos of its democracy.”²⁵ In Pakistan non-political leaders utilized the non-democratic principle to overtake and gain the power without popular support of the masses, while Indian population had always discouraged military interventions. Political power can be obtained by the democratic process of direct election.

In India the armed forces are seen as the instrumentalities of a democratic government and the forces themselves accept this philosophy unquestioningly, but Pakistan, a typical case of praetorianism, is one of the several Third World countries where military always keeps the contingency plan for a take over ready.²⁶

Military and Politics in India

One of the earliest governmental decisions of Independent India was the abolition of the office of the Commander-in-Chief on August 15, 1947. He, under the British, had been ranked second to the Viceroy. Under the Constitution, the President is the Supreme Commander of the armed forces and the Defence Minister has always been a civilian.²⁷

Many important changes were brought in the administration which empowered the civilian control in India. Such policies were applied in administration that according to those, generals under the Indian Constitution were required to approach the Defence Minister through the Defence Secretary while ranking army officers had direct access to the executive during the British period.

Another eminent administrative change which was made to improve civilian control was the inter-position of politically-oriented Defence Ministry in the decision-making process. The Ministry of Finance had, for many years, been working very closely with the military; now an additional corps of civilian administrators were involved in

25 R.A. Singh, *Military Governance in Pakistan* (New Delhi: Raj Publications, 2007), 24.

26 Veena Kukreja, *Contemporary Pakistan Political Processes, Conflicts and Crisis* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 44.

27 Kukreja, “Military Intervention in Politics”, 524.

the process, scrutinizing military requests for their political implications just as the Finance Ministry looked up to them for fiscal acceptability.²⁸

R.A. Singh defines three major causes, which kept the Indian military leaders away from the political arena:

Firstly, Indian political system and awareness about their constitutional responsibilities, secondly, Indian federalism presents almost insurmountable obstacles to any seizure of power by the military forces. The Chief Ministers of Indian federation are capable of putting up resistance and defeating all military ill designs. Finally, the military professional India was down graded administratively and socially during long era of non-alignment which followed India's independence.²⁹

Military and Politics in Pakistan

In Pakistan military participates in policy-making through the Army Chief who interacts regularly with the President and the Prime Minister either separately or the three meet together. The meetings of these three key players have shaped into an important extra-constitutional arrangement to deliberate on key domestic and foreign policy and security affairs.³⁰ Military is deeply involved in the formation of Kashmir and Afghan policies and wherever they failed, they blamed political leaders. Although, after the independence, Quaid-i-Azam defined the apolitical role of the armed forces when he expressed his view with these words, "Don't forget that you in armed forces are the servants of the people. You do not make the national policy. Its we, the civilians, who decide these issues and it is your duty to carry out those tasks which you are entrusted."³¹

India got highly professional armed set up. Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru planted the seeds of civilian control in his country while Pakistan unlike India could not receive the highly professional military set up. The fact can not be denied that Pakistan got inexperienced but brave

28 Kukreja, "Military Intervention in Politics", 536.

29 Singh, *Military Governance in Pakistan*, 24.

30 Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 190.

31 Kukreja, *Military Interventions in Politics: A Case Study of Pakistan* (New Delhi: NBO Publishers Distributors, 1985), 63.

army and *Jawans* of Pakistan Army were united as well as serious on the security problem of their beloved homeland. The political culture of India differed from that of Pakistan after independence. Pakistan faced lack of political leadership after the death of the founder of the nation Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. On the other side Nehru remained Prime Minister of India for a decade. The death of Quaid-i-Azam left vacuum in politics and political leadership failed to keep army away from the political institutions of Pakistan while in India political leadership succeeded to keep army out of the political arena. Circumstances favoured the Indian politicians in the maintenance of army's balance. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, political environment was unfavourable hence political leaders could not maintain the equilibrium of army's power.

Bhutto and Military

In the political history of Pakistan, the President as well as the Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was one of the greatest political leaders who scaled down the image of military and limited its political role through the constitutional provisions. Bhutto was the politician of democratic skills who reasserted civilian supremacy over the military through the mass support and succeeded to bring Pakistan once again on the path of democracy. He took a number of steps to modify the institutional infrastructure of military. According to the constitutional provisions, Bhutto defined the function of military which belongs to the defence of the state and criticized its involvement in politics. Bhutto restructured the military high command and not only reduced the tenure of Chiefs of the Staff but also decided not to grant the extensions to the services Chiefs by the constitutional process.

The 1973 Constitution made it incumbent upon the military-men to eschew active politics and clearly defined their role as the defenders of the country against external aggression and, subject to law,

assistance to the civil government for the maintenance of law and order, whenever called to do so.³²

The fact can not be denied that Bhutto introduced real parliamentary democratic system in Pakistan. He succeeded to oust non-democratic military elements from the political arena as the Indian political leadership did.

Bhutto was the first politician who gained power through the direct elections. His strongest asset was the popular mass support which favoured him to introduce the democratic reforms in the country. This is unfortunate for the people of Pakistan that political system of the country, which was dependent on several classes, did not allow Bhutto to continue. Nonetheless, he completed his premier tenure for the first time in Pakistan. It was also longest period of parliamentary democracy in the history of Pakistan.

“The irony of fact was that when Pakistan emerged, some secular leaders were active in politics of Pakistan. Unfortunately, they came under heavy pressure from orthodox and conservative Muslims.”³³ As Bhutto was a secular leader who believed in the parliamentary democracy and struggled to run the country on the lines of democracy, but his government was toppled by the military in the name of Islamization. Resultantly, people of Pakistan not only lost their leader but also lost the democratic system for the long term. Hasan Askari Rizvi is of the opinion that:

Bhutto era (December 20, 1971 to July 4, 1977) can be described as an interlude of civilian rule in Pakistan. The military debacle in 1971, Indo-Pakistan war and dismemberment of Pakistan brought the military's image to the lowest ebb. This facilitated the transfer of power from the military commanders to Bhutto.³⁴

Conclusion

The political system of Pakistan and India completely differs from each other. India was fortunate to gain well-organized

32 Hassan Askari Rizvi, *The Military and Politics In Pakistan 1949-1997* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2000), 229-30.

33 S.S. Bindra, *Politics of Islamization: With Special Reference to Pakistan* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1990), 199.

34 Rizvi, *The Military and Politics in Pakistan 1949-1997*, 229.

and enough experienced military officers as compared to that of Pakistan. Incomplete division of Subcontinent as well as insufficient share in resources and military assets, lack of leadership, less number of high rank commissioned military officers were major causes of military intervention which created problems for Pakistan, while India inherited a strong political system because there were more number of high rank commissioned officers and a huge share in the military assets.

Right from the independence, Pakistan military was a secular organization, but it was completely transformed on the religious grounds during General Zia regime. General Zia thought that his officers have religious background so he used Islam to consolidate his own position. Unfortunately, rest of the generals used religion for their personal gains, and neglected national interest which not only affected several institutions of state but also left negative impact on the society.

Indian military remained away from political institutions and never intervened in politics of the state. Indian political system is stronger than its military. Although political system of Pakistan is less powerful as compared to India yet the former does not claim to be a secular state like India.

The Indian government claims that its army is a secular institution, but this claim also proved to be wrong because its military regimentation is primarily based on religious foundations. The Indian military relies on religion whereas a secular organization should not bank on religion from any aspect. Had the Indian military been a secular organization in real sense, it would not have relied on religion.