



*Report on Panel Discussion on*  
**“ANALYSING THE CURRENT STATE OF PAKISTAN’S POLITICS, MILITARY  
AND SOCIETY”**

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**Chairman:** Amb Vivek Katju, Former Secretary West, MEA

**Speakers:** Dr. Suba Chandran, Director, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Dr. Shalini Chawla, Senior Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies, Prof. Savita Pande, Professor, South Asian Studies Division, JNU

The Centre for Air Power Studies organized a panel discussion titled “**Analysing the Current State of Pakistan’s Politics, Military and Society**” on **09 September 2014** at the **Centre for Air Power Studies**. The discussion comprised of three substantive topics which covered important facets of the recent developments in Pakistan. The discussion was chaired by Amb Vivek Katju, Former Secretary West, MEA. In his opening remarks, he laid out the canvas for organizing the event to analyse the current imbroglio in Pakistan. He further argued that the saddle in Pakistan required careful assessment and evaluation not only because Pakistan’s perennial interest to India, but also because of it being India’s pivotal interest. He emphasised for the need to investigate the importance of civil-military relations in Pakistan. He further stated, that the relation between Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistani Army have been very difficult in the past few months, and highlighted the continuing issue of Pakistani Army to combat terrorism and the social fabric of Pakistan which has been a major challenge, along with the downslide in the economy. He recommended that careful analysis of the developments in Pakistan would provide valuable inputs to the new government in India for policy deliberations.

## **Dr. Suba Chandran, Director, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies**

The first speaker, Dr. Subha Chandran, laid the groundwork for the recent political imbroglio of Pakistan. Addressing his topic "*Understanding the Political Imbroglio*", the speaker highlighted the struggle for power and status quo. He attributed that Nawaz Sharif and his party- PML hankered to preserve the status quo and ensure that the present Parliament continues its term. To a large extent the other political parties of Pakistan have also endorsed the preservation of the existing status quo barring the PTI under the leadership of Imran Khan. The speaker further identified three important developments that upset the status quo in the last few months

- 1) Return of General Musharaf and his trial.
- 2) The Hamid Mir affair, which was very significant, especially, visit of Sharif to Hamid Mir was seen by the military as a conspiracy to malign its public image.
- 3) The failure of the talks between Nawaz Sharif and the Taliban, and,
- 4) The military being upset with Sharif's decision to visit India during the oath taking ceremony of Prime Minister of India- Narendra Modi.

Given the recent scenario of Imran Khan and Qadri's opposition to Nawaz Sharif, the three key questions that the speaker focused upon:

a) *Is it a struggle between the institutions for political supremacy by the Parliament and the military?* The speaker agreed that there was a struggle for political supremacy and bolstered his argument that the military was trying to cut the powers of the Prime Minister and wants the Parliament to continue irrespective of who is in power.

b) *Could the current imbroglio be defined as the struggle by the Parliament by different political parties?* The speaker admitted that there is a struggle between the political parties and came stronger from Imran Khan and his party but there is little evident of struggle by any other political party. He further stated that the political parties did not want either the military or Imran Khan as an ally, and have extended their support to the present Nawaz Sharif government.

c) *Is it a struggle between the civil society and the elected governance, new set of norms and new sets of regulations?* The speaker emphasised that the Tahir Qadri movement is seen as a civil society movement

by the speaker. A section of civil society and the media supports Imran Khan and the media is highly polarized in its support to Imran Khan.

It appears that there is an understanding between Sharif and the Pakistani Army. As far as Indo-Pakistan relations go, according to the speaker, it still remains a question mark.

### **Dr. Shalini Chawla, Senior Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies**

The second speaker in the panel discussion, Dr. Shalini Chawla spoke on "*Military's Soft Coup*". She began by stating that Pakistan has again come close to direct military intervention through its contemporary domestic developments. The speaker cited several reasons for the prevention of direct coup by Pakistani military:

1) Military is viewed by her as not interested in direct intervention, and the army believes in compromise, as it does not want to face public ire over internal problems such as faltering economy, misgovernance and the ongoing power crisis.

2) The military coup will further bring international disapproval, thus, leading to US sanctions and also sanctions from the IMF and the World Bank. The army's decision not to step in direct power is suggestive of some changes in the Pakistani politics with parliamentary unity and no violence. The speaker stated that though the army is capable to de-stabilise the civilian government, it cannot overthrow it.

The speaker disagreed that civilian supremacy has surfaced in Pakistan, and also that democracy has succeeded in Pakistan. Sharif, according to the speaker, remains a weak Prime Minister as there is a compromise between him and the Army that has led to the emergence of a fragile government in Pakistan. In a way, soft coup of military has taken place with the support of the mass movement without any violence and the military has managed to get civilian leadership to agree to its terms and conditions. The recent attack on the Karachi airport triggered the most muscular response by the military establishment against the Taliban in the form of Operation Zarb-e-Azb. The speaker reiterated in particular that the operation succeeded in driving Pakistani militants into Afghanistan rather than eliminating them. She further identified three points to define the purpose of the muc talked about military operation:

a) An attempt by the military to show the Pakistani society that they could do what the civilian government failed to do.

b) A projection to the West, especially, to the US that they are making aggressive attempt especially at a time of the drawdown of the US focus from Afghanistan.

c) There is an acute political crisis going on in Afghanistan. Hence an operation in Waziristan is an attempt to de-stabilise Afghanistan for Pakistan to have its own proxies in Afghanistan. By doing so, Pakistan will be able to de-stabilise the efforts as the new Indian government which intends efforts in Afghanistan.

The views of the speaker provided a useful comprehensive overview of the events in Pakistan, and she opined that there are no possibilities that Pakistan army would stop supporting or seeking support for the strategies from selected militants' which are claimed to be their "strategic assests". This fact will always remain in Pakistan as the bottom line.

To conclude, she said that there could hardly be a satisfying ending in Pakistan, whether it is political crisis or a military action within Pakistan claimed to be conducted to establish peace and security. There will always be a spiraling impact attached to it. In an optimistic note the speaker stated that the change in Pakistan can be seen only if the ruling elites can alter the "strategic calculus".

**Prof. Savita Pande, Professor, South Asian Studies Division, JNU**

The third speaker talked about "*Reading the Ethnic Faultlines*" in Pakistan. The speaker highlighted the need to understand the evolution of Pakistan since the time of its existence, post the display of soft coups and the recent developments in Pakistan. Debating on the root causes for the current crisis, the speaker stated that the present coup had debunked the democratic theory in Pakistan. Few contextual factors were given importance by the speaker in order to understand the ethnic faultlines in Pakistan. The most significant of them was the existence of a sectarian divide in Pakistan that has overpowered even the ethnic conflict. Shias in Pakistan according to the speaker are bearing the brunt of the sectarian divide, who otherwise traditionally, has been the elites of Pakistan that included prominent leaders of Pakistan. Punjab, on the other hand, has been shielded with such divide due to an unwritten alliance between Nawaz Sharif and the Sunni sectarian militancy in the region, thus, resulting in least attacks in Punjab.

The speaker noted important complementarities to understand the roots of ethnic conflict in Pakistan, and highlighted that Pakistan was divided into four provinces based on ethnic identities. The different ethnic identities were balanced by social federalism, but failed when a constitutional attempt was made to merge it into one province. The problem for the failure according to the speaker was that the constitution defined a religious minority but not ethnic minority. The state has also tried to impose

religious nationalism as a result of which there is constant contradiction in the state between the ethnic conflict existing in the society and the religious fundamentalism imposed by the state. However, the fear expressed by the speaker was that it had given rise to crime terror nexus that operates throughout Pakistan and is maximum in Karachi.

The state of Pakistan today is a mix of ethnicity and existence of extreme militarized society. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and federal provinces are essentially Talibanised. The speaker brought out the issue of Sindhi ethno-nationalism. She asserted that when Pakistan came into existence, the Muhajirs ruled along with the Punjabis. Over the period of time, the Muhajirs became a minority and the situation worsened when in late 1980s there was an inflow of Pashtuns in the region. Hence, there is a trilateral ethnic conflict taking place in Karachi between the Muhajirs, the Phakthuns and the Sindhi nationals.

## **Discussion**

Main points highlighted in the discussion were:

- 1) By targeting Musharaf and the Army, Nawaz Sharif had targeted the credibility of the institution of Pakistani army which infuriated the Army.
- 2) Democratic institution in Pakistan would remain weak and would continue to function under the shadow of military dominance.
- 3) The Pakistani Army controlled its fiefdom entirely and was trying to preserve its own turf which includes Pakistan's security and those elements of foreign policy which the army considers critical.
- 4) The Kashmir issue was not related to its status but the territory disposition of Jammu and Kashmir.
- 5) The panel and the Chair hoped the discussions would yield to India's security concerns and its new government will address the external dimension of Kashmir issue which comes from Pakistan.

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