

Civil–Military Dynamics and Pakistan’s Afghan Policy under PML-N (2013–2018)

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the foreign policy of the Afghan state under the spell of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government after the general elections of 2013. This article discusses the Afghan Ghani government, the growth of Pakistan's political Gandhism, the Kosovo-911 diplomacy, the soft contacts, the civil- military Counter-Terrorism (CT) Cooperation 2013-2018, and the policy drawbacks. This section attempts to show how Policy PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) caused civil-military discord and structural subtle rivals to lose Pakistan's Afghan policy. This policy further dwarfed the global geopolitics and the domestic political asymmetries.

This article focuses on the policies regarding Afghanistan and other relations with the Afghan government and other parties under the government of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML N) after the 2013 general election. Reviewing the policies adopted by Pakistan and Afghanistan (both the Ghani government and the new Ashraf government) during the period of 2013-2018 and the bilateral/diverse diplomacy, the civil-military relations, mutual anti-terrorism policies, and other policies, and finally the policies to counter Pakistan-India rivalries, the article posits that there were Pakistan-India rivalries, civil-military relations, and other factors that placed structural boundaries on the policies of PML N regarding Afghanistan.

Keywords: Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations; Pml-N Government (2013–2018); Afghan Foreign Policy; Ashraf Ghani; Civil–Military Relations; Counter-Terrorism Cooperation; Regional Security; South Asian Geopolitics; Durand Line;

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Political Transition in Pakistan and Afghanistan

Elections in Pakistan at all levels were held for the first time in the country's history just prior to the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Party winning its majority to signal the democratic progression of the country on May 11, 2013. The political party Pakistan People's Party was first in control of the five year government with their tenure from 2008-2013 ^[1]. The People Muslim League-Nawaz manifesto indicated economic enhancement, development of relations.

Concurrently, parallel to the above, were the developments in Afghanistan. It was in 2014 that the presidential elections were held in Afghanistan, and amidst the Taliban-led insurgency, the security situation was extremely precarious ^[2]. Ultimately, and after another contentious round of elections, Ghani was declared the winner of these U.S. mediated elections which formed the National Unity Government (NUG) ^[3]. In the NUG, Ghani took the presidency and Abdullah Abdullah became the Chief Executive. In these elections, Ghani's focus was on the attainment of peace and regional cooperation and development, especially with the Afghan- bordering country of Pakistan ^[4].

Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations under the PML-N Government

As PML N came into power, they articulated a very structured pragmatic regional policy which came to the encapsulation, "Countries will change friends, but never neighbors." The importance of the peace in Afghanistan has always been a talking point in relation to Pakistan's internal security and Pakistan's grand strategy of trying to reach the Central Asian region ^[5]. The landlocked nature of Afghanistan only solidified the economic relation, as Kabul needed to use the ports of Pakistan to trade internationally. Notwithstanding, bilateral relations have had a history of complications and mistrust, which have only gotten worse post-U.S. operation on Osama bin Laden (2011) ^[6]. The political class and wider public in Afghanistan began to perceive Pakistan as a supporter of the Taliban, garnering and increasing the support of alleged Pakistan's conspiratorial Taliban ties. Pakistan has declined such accusations and continues to underscore the cost of fighting terrorism that Pakistan has had to carry ^[7].

Ashraf Ghani's Visit to Pakistan (2014)

In 2014, Ashraf Ghani visited Pakistan for the first time. Under President Hamid Karzai, relations between the two countries were strained, but Ghani's visit represented a diplomatic reevaluation, in part, due to the need for Ghani to see Pakistan for his influence in facilitating Taliban talks. He met extensively with Pakistan's civilian and military leaders and talked about cooperation on the war on terrorism, border security, and trade integration ^[8].

Pakistan's friendly diplomatic hospitality extended to Ghani represented and promised to the institutions on Ghani's side a sustained diplomatic hospitality. The two countries saw the terrorism on Pakistan's border to be a shared problem and promised to take covert actions to terrorism in relation to the transit of the border ^[9].

Military-to-Military Engagements

A factor of considerable importance during Ghani's visit was the military outreach. In

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this regard, Afghan Army Chief General Sher Muhammad Karimi attended a meeting with the Pakistan Military Chief at General Headquarters, Rawalpindi. Both sides exchanged views on intelligence sharing and counter terrorism collaboration. Pakistan military leadership acknowledged, in a manner more than operational of the sacrifices, the range of allegations of sponsoring of terrorism in Afghanistan. These engagements sustained, if only momentarily, the optimism for the bilateral cooperation on security [10].

Ghani's Endorsement of Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Efforts

In the presence of Pakistan's Army Chief General Raheel Sharif, President Ghani offered Pakistan's Army Chief General Raheel Sharif the counter terrorism sacrifices. Peace and stability in Afghanistan, he stated, were in Pakistan's foremost interest. He supported the Afghan led, Afghan owned peace initiative. U.S [11]. officials also noted Ghani's outreach as a chance to advance bilateral relations, and welcomed his outreach. Even with the external pressure, especially from India, Ghani focused on the engagement with Pakistan, which he believed was the key to Islamabad's cooperation and real negotiations with the Taliban [12].

Nawaz Sharif's Visits to Afghanistan and Diplomatic Outreach

In 2015 Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif underwent a diplomatic visit to Afghanistan to strengthen ties and reinforce Afghanistan's stability. Accompanying him on this visit were Afghan military and civilian officials and were a part of the joint meetings with President Ghani and Chief Executive of Afghanistan Abdullah. The joint meetings were surrounding Afghan economic cooperation and fostering Afghan stability in regards to counter terrorism [13].

Both the Taliban and the Ghani other joint government officials agreed on devolving field misunderstandings with cooperation and counter terrorism collaborations. The visit counter terrorism collaborations with Afghanistan and with the Taliban and further enhanced relations outside of with Afghanistan [14].

Resetting Bilateral Relations: Aspirations and Constraints

Nawaz Sharif saw the prosperity of the Afghan economy as a prerequisite for the economic development of Pakistan. This led to the development of the Sharif Doctrine. Pakistan Sharif doctrine emphasized the importance for stability of Afghanistan for the economic development of interconnected South and Central Asia. To this day the Afghan policy of Pakistan continues to be a policy of the shadow of the Pakistan military. On the one hand Sharif's civilian government sought the economic development of Afghanistan, but the military's influence permeated the Afghanistan stability policy [15] [23].

These differing positions negatively impacted the ability of the Sharif government to implement an Afghan policy of their choosing. With the Afghanistan policy of the Pakistan government, influenced and guided by the Pakistan military, policy precedents Afghanistan, regarded as a military strategy [16]. They led the Sharif government to adopt a doctrine they intended to create, the Sharif Doctrine, but were in truth, led by the policy military policies of Pakistan but rectified, carefully documented, and named,

The Sharif Doctrine ^[17].

Civil–Military Relations and Afghan Policy

The Afghan policy of the PML N was formed when Nawaz Sharif was the Prime Minister of Pakistan and had the backing of the majority of the Parliament; however, he seemed to have gone against the wishes of some institutions with his efforts to rework the disposition of Pakistan in the region, plagued with border governance issues, conflicts in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas, and the continuing dispute over the Durand Line ^[24]. One of the main causes of the lack of trust and the border irritations was the Afghan government's refusal to recognize the Durand Line ^[18].

Policy Implications and Regional Pressures

During this time, Pakistan's Afghan Policy was being shaped concerning the geopolitical influences, especially from the US and China. Pakistan, was being pressured from Washington to take firm steps against the terrorism problem, while from Beijing the expectations were about trans-regional stability and the be of the Belt and Road Initiative ^[19]. Managing these competing influences was difficult for Pakistan's leadership. The region requires Pakistan to pursue a more cohesive and independent foreign policy, focusing primarily on cooperation and minimizing zero-sum geopolitical competition ^[20].

PML-N's Foreign Policy Achievements

Notwithstanding the structural limitations of the PML N government, expanding diplomacy and humanitarian aid were noticeable achievements. Islamabad increased the trade facilitation of Pakistan, issued scholarships to Afghan students, financed Afghan transit trade, and hosted millions of Afghan refugees. For the first time, Pakistan's military, under parliamentary sanction, carried out operations that reduced the level of violence terrorism in the country. These programs represented efforts at meeting the twin objectives of security and regional collaboration ^[21].

Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations: Structural Challenges

Although Pakistan and Afghanistan have extensive historical and cultural connections with each other these relationships have always been turbulent because of global political rivalries, proxy wars and border conflicts. The geopolitical turbulence Afghanistan experiences because of the Soviet Cold War Invocations, United States interactions, and the Taliban are the global political issues affecting Afghanistan and Pakistan relations the most ^[22].

Furthermore, issues on the relations of the two countries such as the trade of illegal drugs and the influx of refugees have a crippling social and economic impact on both countries.

Diplomatic Engagement under Shahid Khaqan Abbasi (2018)

Afghanistan is historically an ally of Pakistan. However, in order to decelerate rising strain relations in the Pakistan–Afghanistan relationship, Prime Minister Pakistan Shahid Khaqan Abbasi travelled to Afghanistan on June 2018. Both sides once again

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recommitted to discussing, regional interconnections and counter terrorism collaboration, and counter terrorism related regional memberships ^[23].

Subsequently, the Afghanistan Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) was created, which Afghanistan and Pakistan compromised as the foundation for mutual non-interference and for the establishment of a framework for dialogues and relations for the international world ^[24].

Conclusion

There sustained efforts during the PML N era to reframe Pakistan's Afghan policy through diplomatic efforts, economic engagement, and counter terrorism cooperation. Islamabad and Kabul during this period fostered diplomatic exchanges that to an extent positively shaped Islamabad and Kabul relations, albeit with cautious optimism/ Islamabad's policy towards its immediate Afghan neighbor is informed by a plethora of factors, including, but not limited to, the deeply entrenched distrust, border and territorial disputes, rivalries and disputes in the international realm, and tensions between the military and civil branches of governance. This article of the paper posits that the Afghan peace process is inextricably tied to Pakistans internal governance system, and more importantly, its articulation of a coherent, consistent, and ultimately civil foreign policy.

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