

01 September 2021

Securitising the “Un-secured”: Perspective on the Evolving Security Paradigm in Pakistan

Author: Saman Rizwan*

Key Points:

- The new conception of security calls for the broadening of its traditional scope since it greatly restricts the paradigm of threats primarily dealing with military conflicts. In the contemporary scenario, national security is no longer fixated on the principle of self-help as newer threats continue to emerge in the security landscape.
- So far, Pakistan’s conception of security remains embedded in its traditional understanding, which has only emboldened a military-centric view. The prevalence of “military guardianship” lies at the centre of the political structure.
- The fixation on security is highly rigid, which tends to bring in its fold the non-traditional threats and gradually become inextricably linked with national security. Over time, the military has institutionalised power and continues to do so, making it hard for civilian apparatuses to compete with their centralised narrative.
- After taking power in 2018, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf, continues to claim that the civil-military imbalance has reduced significantly unparallel to the tenures of other civilian governments. Under the current government, the trends of securitisation are rather prevalent in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) workings and how the Covid-19 pandemic is addressed.
- The over-militarised response employed by the military establishment against traditional and non-traditional nature disrupts the balance of the state structures. Most importantly, the civil and military elite need to move away from a conventional realist view of security as they ought to view issues in continued linearity.

Since the inception of Pakistan, the security narrative remains primarily influenced by traditional security challenges. More recently, however, security agendas around the world have been increasingly framed concerning broader economic, social, political, and environmental demands. A visible shift has occurred in the traditional concept of national security, which majorly focused on guarding core values of national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. However, globalisation has accelerated, replacing the states’ centrality on notions of traditional security and threats. In the case of Pakistan, the national security discourse is determined mainly by the military establishment, due to which the lines become increasingly blurred in differentiating threats of traditional nature from non-

traditional ones. This paper draws upon the prevalent security narrative in Pakistan and how the concept is undergoing a gradual redefinition.

CONCEPT OF SECURITY

In the aftermath of the Cold War, scholars have made many calls for adopting a new conception of security and broadening its traditional scope. Notably, Richard Ullman was the first scholar to advocate the extension of the security concept, including other threats ranging from natural disasters and diseases to environmental degradation.¹ This new approach critiques the traditional conception of security as intricately linked with external challenges, particularly the military threats posed by rival states. Critics of the conventional

* Saman Rizwan is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research.

¹ Benjamin Miller, “The concept of security: Should it be Redefined?” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001): 13-42.

concept argue that contemporary threats are either domestic or transnational. In a different notion, the state itself acts as a threat to its citizens.² Military conflicts primarily arise from problems of domestic legitimacy, such as revolutionary challenges that threaten the legitimacy of elites and political regimes or from challenges posed by ethno-nationalists to state's legitimacy and boundaries.³ In the contemporary scenario, national security is no longer fixated on the principle of self-help as new threats have emerged in the security landscape.⁴ We are now witnessing how terrorism, extremism, pandemics, and a financial crisis have the potential of creating transborder security implications.

In Pakistan's context, the conception of national security is influenced by the military's view of security. Pakistan is seen as a national security state that continues to be threatened by outside enemies, particularly by India and at times also by Afghanistan, Iran, or America.⁵ Thus, the military defines the whole paradigm of security, which contextualises these quandaries concerning the states' historical frictions, geography, and an insecure region with shifting greater power geopolitics. The concept of security within Pakistan is primarily based on the idea of territorial security, the genesis of which traces back to the nineteenth-century conception of security.⁶ The country's longstanding rivalry with India has led the policy elite to interpret its national and regional environment through the lens of national security. Pakistan's national policy and identity rely primarily on territorial reclamation of the disputed Kashmir territory due to the conflictual historical past.⁷ Such a security imperative has provided the military elite with a foundational basis to remain dominant while simultaneously altering the state's response mechanisms to policy matters through which issues related to economy or health are securitised.⁸ Therefore, how the state employs mechanisms for addressing these challenges is naturally skewed toward the traditional notion of security.

Interestingly, the state is genetically programmed to establish such apparatuses. The prevalence of "military guardianship" lies at the centre of the

² Ibid., 19.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mustapha Kamal Pasha, "Security as hegemony," *Alternatives* 21, no. 3 (1996): 283-302.

⁵ Ahmed Rashid, "The Situation in Pakistan" *Asian Affairs*, no. 3 (2010): 367

⁶ Munawar Mahar, Going Smart, *The News*, 2021, accessed online at <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/622314-going-smart>.

⁷ Hoo Tiang Boon, and Glenn KH Ong. "Military dominance in Pakistan and China-Pakistan relations," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* (2020): 84, 85.

⁸ Ibid., 85.

political structure. Most of the security arrangements have been undertaken mainly by the military - from establishing a response mechanism against India's hegemonic design in the region, conducting security operations in the northern areas, overlooking the security parameters of the multibillion-dollar-CPEC project, to the appointment of military officials on civilian positions.

POLITICAL CULTURE OF MILITARY GUARDIANSHIP

The inclination to preserve a continual presence within the existing structures demonstrates the mindset of "military guardianship" within the military elite of Pakistan. In the civil-military literature, the notion of guardian military is a longstanding one as it explores the institution's role in the politics of developing countries.⁹ Under this paradigm, the military amplifies its role by adhering to securitisation processes, in which threats to the status quo are framed and dealt, with a security-centric approach. According to Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, "security is a uniquely powerful discourse that moves issues from the realm of the political to a realm above politics, implement emergency measures that violate the normal political rules of the game".¹⁰ Extraordinary measures are then employed by the guardian to counter the prevailing threats. Over time, the military further dominates these processes to normalise security narratives for constructing truths as deemed fit by the guardian while simultaneously rationalising the securitisation methods.¹¹ This conception of "military guardianship" is critically discussed by Koonings and Krujit in their volume *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy*, in which the guardian justifies its disposition based on two principles: "birthright principle" and the "competence principle". Both these principles appear relevant to Pakistan. The former considers the sacrifices made by armed forces during the formative years and in the absence of which the nation might not have survived. In contrast, the latter constructs itself on the belief that the military is the only institution competent to address issues about the states' national interests and is well equipped to distinguish between matters that might fall under the domain of national security.¹² In short, it appears

⁹ Hans Daalder, *The Role of Military in the Emerging Countries* (Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1969).

¹⁰ Scott Watson, "The 'human' as referent object? Humanitarianism as securitization," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 1, (2011): 4.

¹¹ Abdul Basit, "Time to Break Pakistan's Security-Only Mentality," *The National Interest*, November 3, 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/time-break-pakistans-security-only-mentality-18281>.

¹² Kees Koonings, *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy* (London: Zed Books 2002): 19.

that the military guardian has an ultimate say in the workings of the state.

Such interventionist practices reduce the space for alternative discourses and majorly reflect the discursive dominance of the military establishment. Notably, the military retains and protects its monopoly on the status of “security actor”.¹³ This specific narrative is empowered by fixating the emerging circumstances in a nationalistic manner, which ultimately legalises the military’s dominance and secures their positioning as guardians of the state and its interests.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EVOLUTION OF PAKISTAN’S NATIONAL SECURITY FROM 2008- 2021

Surprisingly, the non-traditional threats are gradually becoming a part of the traditional security paradigm, as they are inextricably linked with national security. In Pakistan, however, violence is not epiphenomenal. Since 2001, terrorism has resulted in 80,000 deaths and has incurred economic losses of around US\$ 106.78 billion¹⁴ while instigating potent damage to Pakistan’s heterogeneous cultural and religious ethos. Unsurprisingly, the overall management and the supervision of the related terrorism response mechanisms remained in Pakistan’s military hands. Besides, the establishment is now broadening its sphere of influence, which will be discussed by comparing the military’s role in combatting terrorism, employing kinetic measures in the wake of the Army Public School (APS) attack. The undertaken security arrangements to guard the economic interests associated with the CPEC and the responses employed to counter Covid-19. High salience is given to national security, and the specialisation of the domain by the military institution proves advantageous in positioning itself as the custodians.¹⁵ Over time, the military has institutionalised power and continues to do so, making it hard for civil apparatuses to compete with their centralised narrative. The next section of the paper discusses the evolution of the national security narrative to highlight the lopsided structuring of the paradigm by the military establishment starting from the first democratic setup in 2008 under Pakistan People's Party (PPP); Pakistan Muslim League- Nawaz (PML-N); and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴ Yunas Samad and Asad Ullah Khan, “Emerging Counter-Extremism Strategy,” *Strategic Studies* 36, no. 2, (2016): 92. Accessed online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48535949?seq=1>

¹⁵ T.V Paul, *The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015): 79,80.

Pakistan People’s Party: 2008 – 2013

The state capacity was challenged by terrorism and insurgencies, which took an ascendance after 2007, targeting the Southwestern province of Balochistan in which separatist groups were targeting military and paramilitary installations and personnel. In countering the growing insurgencies, the role of civilian policymakers remained limited as the dominance of the army in the political processes was deeply entrenched. During the PPP’s five-year tenure, the ruling government fundamentally abandoned the responsibility to formulate a counterterrorism policy and internal security strategy. Soon after coming to power in June 2008, the Army Chief was seen as the “principal for application of military effort”, with all the military operations taken in tribal regions to fall under his command.¹⁶ Later, however, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani regretted the earlier stance of his government wherein the PPP was in favour of launching a military operation in North Waziristan. However, the then military chief General Ashfaq Kayani was reluctant to carry it out.¹⁷ After the Abbottabad raid, as the military came under widespread criticism, the PPP government had a clear pathway to formulate the country’s security policies. Yet again, the government left it on the military to deal with the emerging security challenges,¹⁸ demonstrating the civilian apparatus’s inability to establish security policies. The vacuum was time and again filled by the military establishment, presenting themselves as the frontline defenders of the state’s national interests.

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz: 2013 – 2018

During its election campaign, the party promised to formulate a coherent counterterrorism policy and internal security strategy. Its manifesto clearly articulated that “neither militancy nor terrorism can be countered by mere use of force. This is a problem that has penetrated deep into the vitals of society and therefore needs a well-thought-out, comprehensive, and sustainable plan of action that should include economic, social, administrative, and political initiatives and measures to root out this menace. It is equally important to overhaul and modernise

¹⁶ Raza Rumi, “Charting Pakistan’s Internal Security Policy,” *USIP Report*, May 13, 2016. Accessed online at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/charting-pakistans-internal-security-policy>.

¹⁷ Hafeez Tunio, “New Disclosure: Kayani Wanted Waziristan Operation to be His Decision, says Gilani,” *Express Tribune*, July 12, 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/734474/new-disclosure-kayani-wanted-waziristan-operation-to-be-his-decision-says-gilani/>.

¹⁸ Waseem Ullah, “Pakistan’s Post 9/11 Domestic Security Challenges: Perils and Prospects of National Internal Security Policy and National Action Plan (2005-2015),” (PhD thesis, University of Peshawar, 2015): 147.

the security sector to establish democratic and parliamentary oversight on intelligence services and to achieve better surveillance, improved coordination among intelligence agencies and enhanced capacity for counter-insurgency forces at different levels”.¹⁹ For the first time, Pakistan formulated its NISP in 2014, setting out the objectives of ensuring the state’s writ within the state’s boundaries, defeating extremism, and undertaking counterterrorism measures to protect its citizens from all kinds of threats. Notably, the central government provided a political direction, but the implementation capability was limited due to the power that the military-intelligence apparatus held and the requirement of bringing the provinces on board with the policy’s key objectives.²⁰

The Peshawar APS attack in December 2014 occurred, that forced the state institutions to reiterate their resolve to fight terrorism. This led to the initiation of a massive counterterrorism operation: Zarb-e-Azb, under the ambit of National Action Plan (NAP) given by the government in January 2015.²¹ Terror attacks continued with the same intensity, and the strategy appeared like a “hastily- conceived wish-list” formulated for the consumption of the public as it lacked coherence.²² To a great extent, the counterterrorism policy was militarised, and a major demand of the military was met by the PML-N government without any delay: military courts were given the power to try terrorism suspects, which included civilians. Looking at the demand put forward by military highlights its direct role that the military played in the processes of governance. This weakened the civilian governance infrastructure while denting the criminal justice system of the country further. Formulating such highly militarised or securitised responses provides lopsided outcomes. It directly or indirectly weakened the state’s writ while strengthening the military’s positioning in the political structures.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf: 2018 – Present

Soon after the electoral victory of Prime Minister Imran Khan, the discussions majorly revolved around the civil-military matrix and how it will unfold. At the

¹⁹ Pakistan Muslim League, “National Agenda for Real Change,” PML-N Manifesto (2013): 85–86. Accessed online at <https://pmo.gov.pk/documents/manifesto.pdf>.

²⁰ Raza Rumi, “Charting Pakistan’s Internal Security Policy,” *USIP Report*, May 13, 2016. Accessed online at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/charting-pakistans-internal-security-policy>.

²¹ Mateen Haider, “No Room for Further Debate on National Action Plan in NA,” *The Dawn*, January 2, 2015. Accessed online at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1154649>.

²² “Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies in Pakistan: Opportunities and Pitfalls,” International Crisis Group, July 22, 2015. Accessed online at <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/55af7b434.pdf>.

same time, the ruling government continues to claim that the relations between the two institutions have improved for the first time in Pakistan’s history.²³ Under the current government, the trends of securitisation are rather prevalent in the CPEC workings and how the civilian positions are occupied with retired military personnel.

Undoubtedly, CPEC is one of the most advanced and largest development schemes of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with an increased potential to influence the power dynamics both regionally and internationally.²⁴ However, in the last couple of years, new armed units have been created within military and civil police domains. Initially, a “Special Security Division (SSD)” was created which comprises of 15,000 troops and consists of Regular Armed Forces and Civil Armed Forces, which lie under the domain of federal paramilitary force within the ambit of the Ministry of Interior.²⁵ The SSD has been set up to provide security to the Chinese projects and to the individuals working on it. Additionally, new forces have been assembled by the Pakistan Army and Navy under the “Task Force-88” to guard and protect CPEC and Gwadar Port against threats of traditional or non-traditional nature.²⁶

This sudden growth of specialised task forces dedicated to guard the development projects is rather questionable and can be attributed to an incremental state of securitisation. More so, with the interior Ministry raising troops to protect CPEC-oriented projects, then setting up of “Task force-88” lays an additional layer to an already securitised project.

The decision to fence the Gwadar Port has received significant scepticism from the local populace as well. Although the Gwadar fencing project is at a temporary halt²⁷, the continuation of the project might marginalise the local communities. Undeniably, such development projects can reduce conflict. However, the probability of ill-planned economic interventions providing counterproductive results is equally high.²⁸

²³ Aamir Yasin, “Improved Civil-Military Relations,” *The Dawn*, January 23, 2021. Accessed online at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1603067>.

²⁴ Siegfried O. Wolf, “The Growing Security Dimension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,” *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, March 10, 2020. Accessed online at <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/growing-security-dimension-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-25316>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ “Special Force set up to Guard Gwadar’s Port’s Sea lanes,” *Dawn*, December 12, 2016. Accessed online at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1301970>.

²⁷ Fawad Yousafzai, “Work on Gwadar Fencing Project temporarily halted, CPEC body informed,” *The Nation*, February 18, 2021. Accessed online at <https://nation.com.pk/18-Feb-2021/work-on-gwadar-fencing-project-temporarily-halted-cpec-body-informed>.

²⁸ Rafiullah Kakar, “Fencing of Gwadar,” *Dawn*, December 26, 2020. Accessed online at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1597883>.

The situation hints at an increased role of the military apparatus in the security domain and in areas of economic development. Such military-driven economic interventions generate issues of legitimacy and will further instigate the element of resentment. Thus, the heightened role of the military establishment in CPEC makes the project increasingly securitised.

Furthermore, the number of military personnel leading civilian institutions has increased dramatically since 2018. Recently, a retired Brigadier was appointed as Director General of the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA).²⁹ As per the rules enacted under the NADRA ordinance 2000, the appointment is only to be made on promotion quota and no contractual appointment can be made. Whereas, in another reshuffle in NADRA, 12 key officers were posted to different positions of authority within the institution. Out of the total, nine officers are retired army personnel.³⁰ Previously, retired General Asim Saleem Bajwa was appointed as the chairman of CPEC Authority which stirred an uproar in the country. The position is now assigned to Khalid Mansoor however, the reasons were not made public.³¹ In 2018, a Major General was named Chairman of SUPARCO, the country's space agency.³² Surprisingly, diplomatic positions that fall under the civil realm are now taking over by retired generals and alike. In this case, it seems that the military establishment is at the frontline not as guardians but as administrators, which again raises concerns about the legitimacy of civilian apparatus.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The civil and military institutions should come together and define their respective spheres of jurisdiction and establish mechanisms to overcome the existing management gaps.
- Important stakeholders must devise a policy for disassociating security from domains that deal with development, health, etcetera. Seeing all issues from a security-centric prism will add to the already intertwined internal and external challenges.

²⁹ S. Khan, "Pakistan: Why is the military taking over civilian posts," DW, February 5, 2021. Accessed online at <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-why-is-the-military-taking-over-civilian-posts/a-56473442>.

³⁰ Shakeel Anjum, "12 key officials of NADRA reshuffled," The News International, June 7, 2021. Accessed online at <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/860588-12-key-officials-of-nadra-reshuffled>

³¹ Syed Irfan Raza, "Asim Bajwa Quits as PM picks CPEC aide," Dawn, August 4, 2021. Accessed online at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1638684>.

³² S. Khan, "Why is the military taking over civilian posts".

CONCLUSION

The existing institutional divisions between civilian and military authorities undermine the government's ability to form a coherent and compelling security narrative. Elected civilians have not been able to either control or formulate a comprehensive discourse due to various factors, including a weak political system, lack of political institutions, dysfunctional political parties, and increased militarisation of the civilian bureaucracy. The over-militarised response employed by the military establishment against matters of traditional and non-traditional nature disrupts the balance of the state structures. There is a need for the civil and military elite to move away from a conventional realist view of security as they ought to view issues in a continued linearity. It is high time that Pakistan redefines and reimagines the otherwise prevalent security discourse. The said broadening of the security understanding amongst Pakistan's elites is also synonymous with the securitisation of non-security spaces. Such a militarised narrative and functioning will eventually lead to higher levels of insecurity and to address those emerging challenges, the role of the military is bound to increase. A paradox of such kind will recur in a cyclic manner.