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Civil-Military Dynamics under Farooq Leghari: Presidential Authority and Military Influence in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the relationship between presidential power and military influence in Pakistan during the presidency of Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari (1993–1997). Leghari's time in office saw the enforcement of the 8th Amendment, which empowered the president to dissolve the National Assembly and to appoint the service chiefs. This made him an important player in civil–military relations. This research uses Rebecca Schiff's Concordance Theory and Morris Janowitz's Convergence Theory to find out how far Leghari tried to strike a balance between civilian and military interests. His choice of General Jahangir Karamat as COAS, the establishment of the Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS), and the sacking of Benazir Bhutto's government suggest not only attempts at institutional concordance but also partial convergence of civilian and military roles. However, with the passage of the 13th Amendment and intensified conflict with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, a political deadlock arose. The military leadership offered mediation to defuse the situation, but Leghari opted to resign in December 1997. According to the article, Leghari's presidency was a transitional phase between presidential dominance and parliamentary supremacy in Pakistan's evolving civil-military relations.

Keywords: Civil-Military Relations, Military Influence, Politics, Farooq Leghari, Presidential Authority, 8th Amendment, 13th Amendment, Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, CDNS

Introduction:

Civil–military relations have been one of the most important features of Pakistan's political history. Since independence, the armed forces have emerged as the most powerful institution in Pakistan. Weaknesses of civilian political structures, frequent constitutional failures, and the underlying security crisis provided the military with repeated opportunities to intervene directly and indirectly in the civilian setup. According to Hasan Askari Rizvi, the military has been able, by means of its interventions, to institutionalize its dominance, with which it has exercised influence over constitutional mechanisms and civilian governments that have restricted the growth of parliamentary democracy. (Rizvi, 2000, 45-49) In Pakistan's political system, the military was positioned as the final arbiter of power.

The promulgation of the 8th Amendment to the 1973 Constitution in 1985 marked a turning point in civil-military relations. This amendment altered the parliamentary



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democracy by granting the president extensive discretion in exercising power. The president was empowered under Article 58(2)(b) to dissolve the National Assembly (Hussain & Salyana, 2022). Moreover, the 8th Amendment empowered the president over military appointments; likely the Article 243 empowered the president to appoint the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and the chiefs of the army, navy, and air force, significantly enhancing the presidency as a constitutional forum between the civilian government and the armed forces. According to Hamid Khan, these clauses indeed raised the office of the presidency as a “bridge between civilian governments and the military establishment, enabling the armed forces to secure their institutional interests, without proclaiming any overt martial law” (Khan, 2009: 408–412). As a result, the president was a major player in civil–military relations, particularly at the time of political crises.

Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari’s presidency (1993–1997) took place under this constitutional framework. In 1996, he appointed General Jahangir Karamat as the Chief of Army Staff, which was one of his earliest and significant usages of presidential power. He made this choice despite, earlier objections from Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari (Kalyar, 2013, p.68). Hasan Askari Rizvi notes that this appointment highlighted the constitutional power of the president in military-related appointments. Article 243 empowered the president to make such appointments (Rizvi, 2000, pp. 382–383). Leghari later used Article 58(2)(b) to remove Bhutto’s government in November 1996. This incident is one of the most important exercises of presidential power under the Eighth Amendment. According to Khan, this step showcased the discretionary authorities of the presidency to dissolve the assemblies and alter the political order in the name of stability (Khan, 2009, p. 412).

The creation of the Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS) at the behest of President Farooq Leghari during the Malik Meraj Khalid interim government was a major attempt to formalize civil–military consultation mechanisms. Through the formation of this body, Leghari envisioned a more organized platform for military and civilian leaders to address pertinent national security issues, thereby limiting the need for informal channels of influence (Hussain, Salyana, & Faiz, 2021). However, researchers have argued that despite the CDNS appearing to strengthen institutional dialogue, it also risks legitimizing the military’s entry into civilian space (Shafqat, 1998, pp. 221–223). The CDNS has a dual character that embodies the paradox of Leghari’s presidency. On the one hand, it is an effort to manage civil–military relations through constitutional and institutional means. On the other hand, it has bolstered military influence on politics, which has hampered Pakistan’s democratic progress throughout history.

Literature Review:

Historians and political scientists have analyzed civil–military relations in Pakistan with great scholarly works. The military has emerged as the most powerful actor in political affairs. Jalal (1990) asserts that the failure of the political institutions of Pakistan led to the crisis of legitimacy, which enabled the army to intervene more than once, thus institutionalizing a praetorian state. Hasan Askari Rizvi (2000) also suggests that with the army acting as the ultimate player in political disputes, the parliament’s power was destabilized and a pattern of intervention was established. The constitutional mechanisms governing civil-military relations were shaped by the wider structural conditions, rather than the practices of democracy.

The Eighth Amendment to the 1973 Constitution (1985), which shifted the balance of power in the political system, has attracted the focus of a lot of scholars. According to



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Hamid Khan (2009), the article 58(2)(b), which empowers the president to dissolve the National Assembly, and article 243, which empowers him to appoint the service chiefs, made the office of the president the most significant center of power. Rizvi (1998) points out that these provisions permitted the army to interfere indirectly in the political arena by making the presidency out to be a constitutional check against civilian supremacy. In the same way, Mohammad Waseem (1994) argues that the presidency, after the Eighth Amendment, became the principal institutional link between civilian leaders and the military.

The use of presidential discretion has grown the topic of Farooq Leghari's presidency (1993–1997) within this constitutional framework. As cited by Rizvi (1998), Leghari's dismissal of Premier Benazir Bhutto in 1996 shows the enduring capacity of the presidency to intervene in parliamentary politics under Article 58(2)(b). Lawrence Ziring (1997) described the appointment of General Jahangir Karamat as Chief of Army Staff by the president, despite the objections of Benazir Bhutto and Asif Ali Zardari, reflects the constitutional authority and power of the presidency to define and determine military leadership. Moreover, according to Shafqat (1998), the establishment of the Council for Defense and National Security (CDNS) institutionalized a consultative mechanism between civilian and military elites but also blurred the distinction between political authority and military influence.

Although there is plenty of literature available; however, there is still a gap in the assessment of Farooq Leghari's presidency. A lot of the writing on presidential powers has focused on the constitutional provisions or the political consequences of actions. These are rich descriptions but little theoretical engagement. There is a great need to make a systematic application of civil-military relations theory to this period. Rebecca Schiff's Concordance Theory, emphasizing an agreement among political and military institutions, and the Janowitz Convergence Theory, which emphasizes a gradual overlap of civilian and military roles in governance, could provide useful perspectives for further investigation. This article tries to plug this gap by looking at how Leghari's presidency reflected attempts for concordance as well as convergence of civilian and military elites, and why these were not easily sustained.

Theoretical Framework

The study of civil–military relations has seen a development of several frameworks explaining the workings of armed forces and civilians. Samuel Huntington, for instance, refers to “objective control.” By this, Huntington means that military and political spheres should be separate from each other (Huntington, 1957, pp. 80-85). But, scholars like Rebecca Schiff and Morris Janowitz have offered models appropriate for states with strong linkages between civil and military roles. In Pakistan, where constitutional engineering, political instability, and military hegemony have shaped the governance, these frameworks provide more nuanced tools of analysis. Consequently, we apply Schiff's Concordance Theory and Janowitz's Convergence Theory in this study to evaluate the impact of presidential authority and military influence during the Farooq Leghari era.

Rebecca Schiff's Concordance Theory states that stable civil–military relations do not require separation but rather consensus among the three partners: the military, political elites, and society (Schiff, 1995, pp. 12–15). The harmony among these groups in deciding what the officer corps will be, the process for making political decisions, and the position of the military in governance leads to stability. If this perspective were applied to Leghari's presidency, it would be seen as an effort at concordance through the



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appointment of General Jahangir Karamat to take over as Chief of Army Staff. Even as it drew objections of various kinds, it was ultimately subsumed into acceptance by civilian authority.

Morris Janowitz's Convergence Theory adds another dimension to the analysis by stressing the gradual overlap of both civilian and military roles in modern governance (The Professional Soldier, 1960, pp. 418-425). Two good examples of this convergence were the Leghari presidency. His constitutional authority under Article 243 to appoint service chiefs positioned the presidency in a manner that directly affected the military command structure, aligning political leadership with military priorities. Next, the CDNS demonstrated convergence by officially bringing the military into policymaking beyond defence, thereby blurring the political and professional military divide. These measures brought to the fore the presidency's mediating role between civilian and military elites. However, the subsequent rollback of presidential authority, via the Thirteenth Amendment, exposed the structural limits of such convergence when parliamentary leaders stepped in to limit presidential discretion.

Constitutional Context and Presidential Authority

The promulgation of the 8th Amendment to the 1973 Constitution in 1985 redefined the equilibrium of power between state institutions. As a result of this amendment, Article 58(2)(b) was inserted, which allowed the president to dissolve the National Assembly if the president thought that the government was not able to function according to the provisions of the Constitution. This provision converted the president into a political arbiter who could remove elected governments at will (Hussain & Gohar, 2025). The amendment created indirect military interference through presidential discretion, rather than provocation of a direct coup.

Furthermore, Article 243 of the 1973 Constitution under the 8th Amendment empowered the president to appoint the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) and Chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Staff. Hasan Askari Rizvi explains how this power made the president the supreme civilian authority over the armed forces, at least in constitutional terms, giving him a decisive role in the appointment of the military chiefs (Rizvi, 2000, pp. 180–182). The Constitution mandates the president as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The designation may largely be symbolic, but it reinforced the office's position in civil–military relations. Mohammad Waseem argues that the constitutional arrangement has effectively positioned the presidency at the critical intersection of political and military authority. The president was not just a ceremonial head of state but was structurally empowered to balance the competing civilian governments and the military. The presidency was thus able to act as an arbitrator and a power broker between the democratic institutions and the armed forces. (Waseem, 1994, pp. 312–314).

Analysis of Farooq Leghari's Presidency (1993–1997)

Farooq Leghari exercised considerable control over military appointments by virtue of the 8th Amendment to the Constitution during his presidency. In January 1996, when the tenure of General Abdul Waheed Kakar was over, the Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, as well as Leghari, initially pressed him for an extension, which he refused (Kalyar, 2013, p.67). The President, Leghari, then exercised his constitutional power to appoint General Jahangir Karamat as new Chief of Army Staff. Lawrence Ziring (1997) comments that this decision was not one that Benazir Bhutto or Asif Ali Zardari had liked, but was accepted, ultimately, by the civilian and military actors, which shows how important the



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presidency was in mediating elite consensus (pp. 527–530). In a theoretical way, this episode was an instance of concordance, as elite agreement on military leadership ensured temporary stability.

In November 1996, President Farooq Leghari dismissed the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto under Article 58(2)(b) of the Constitution. The justification on the official level was on the basis of corruption, the law and order situation in the country, and the paralysis of state institutions in the country. Hence, it is one of the most controversial uses of presidential power in Pakistan's constitutional history. It was shocking because Leghari was an extremely loyal member of the party (PPP) that he acted against. Initially, his relations with Prime Minister Benazir were cordial; she had tremendous faith in him, and his election as president was cheered by the Pakistan People's Party. Leghari may have always been loyal to the PPP, but at this juncture, he was following the principle "I love my country, not my government" (Hussain & Gohar, 2025). As Hasan Askari Rizvi (1998) notes, the military tacitly supported the move but allowed it to take place constitutionally. This reinforced the presidency as a substitute for actual military intervention (pp. 98–100). As a consequence, the episode has revealed both the fragility of institutional trust as well as the decisive role of the military, which shapes the results from the background.

Civil-Military Relations and the Role of CDNS

The Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS) was created in the caretaker government of Malik Meraj Khalid in early 1997, at the behest of President Farooq Leghari. The CDNS was designed as an institutional mechanism aimed at incorporating military leaders formally into the consultative process on national security, governance, and reducing dependence on informal mechanisms. According to Shafqat (1998), this initiative sought to regularize civil–military dialogue (pp. 221–223). Although it suggested the possibility of concordance and even convergence by bringing the military more formally into policy areas other than defense, it also legitimized greater military involvement in civilian affairs, raising constant concerns of democratic decline.

The formation of the CDNS in January 1997 was one of the most striking attempts by President Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari to institutionalize civil–military consultation during a time of political turbulence. After the dismissal of the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in November 1996, President Leghari sought to introduce an organized mechanism for incorporating military leadership into national decisions without lending itself to blatant military action. On January 5, 1997, the caretaker Prime Minister, Malik Meraj Khalid, was called by the president for urgent consultation, and the next day, President Leghari announced the establishment of the CDNS. The council consisted of 10 members, including the President, Prime Minister, Defence and Interior Ministers, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), and Chiefs of Army, Naval, and Air Staff. It was set up intentionally to have a combination of civil and military leadership. The Principal Secretary to the President served as the council's secretary (Belokrenitsky & Moskalenko, 2013, p. 346). The first meeting of the CDNS was held on 8 January 1997 at Aiwan-e-Sadr, with major agenda items including accountability of corrupt politicians and bureaucrats and approval of scheduled general elections on 3 February 1997 (The Dawn, 1997).

CDNS was sought to be framed as an advisory organ to "the federal cabinet on the preparation of defence policy, its coordination with foreign and domestic policies, and other matters of national security and stability". This would make it a broader organ than the pre-existing Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC) by explicitly enmeshing



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service chiefs and the CJCSC into an already standing presidency-led forum (The Nation, 30 Jan 1997; Dawn, 5 Feb 1997). In this way, the CDNS went beyond the DCC conception and allowed a direct role of the military in political and policy matters. Most political parties received the move with suspicion, slammed the council as a parallel government, and “supra-constitutional”. The Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) was the only party who were cautiously in favour of it. Sartaj Aziz believed that such a body could act as a forum of consultations to lessen the application of 58(2)(b) (Aziz, 2009, p. 157). Yet, the opposition parties took it to signify a tool through which Leghari wanted to make sure that the president would still exercise oversight even if Nawaz Sharif came to power after elections (Anjum, 2001, p. 1449).

From a theoretical view, CDNS’s establishment can be explained through Rebecca Schiff’s Concordance Theory. According to Schiff, civil–military relations remain stable when there is consensus between military, political elites, and society on decision-making functions and the military’s role in governance (Schiff 1995, pp. 12–15). Leghari’s effort was to create such an elite consensus through the institutionalization of dialogue between the military and political leaders in an advisory setting. The agreement was shaky, as the political parties that mattered the most did not approve of the forum, meaning that there was a lack of political acceptance. Morris Janowitz’s Convergence Theory explains the dynamics behind the phenomenon. Embedding military leaders in everyday talks about governance, accountability, and elections—issues that go far beyond operational defence—reflected a structural fusion of civilian and military roles (Janowitz, 1960, pp. 418 – 425). Despite this agreement, the CDNS was superseded by Nawaz Sharif as soon as he took power with a significant parliamentary majority and proceeded to stop meeting (Rizvi, 2000, p. 225).

Rifts Between Leghari and Sharif

Nawaz Sharif’s victory with a two-thirds majority in the 1997 General Elections prompted the PML-N government to clip presidential powers. The 13th Constitutional Amendment repealed Article 58(2)(b) of the Eighth Amendment, which allowed the President to dissolve the National Assembly (Waseem, 2006, p. 312). This amendment considerably diminished the president’s influence in parliament. Prior to this, President Farooq Leghari had attempted to institutionalize civil–military consultation through the creation of the Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS). The president also used the powers under the Eighth Amendment to appoint the military leadership and strengthen the presidency in civil–military relations. Nawaz Sharif did not accept the CDNS, as he viewed it as an extra-parliamentary body that impacted the parliamentary sovereignty (Rizvi, 2000, p. 189). As such, Leghari’s push to extend presidential powers and formalize civil–military linkages brought him into conflict with Sharif’s newly empowered parliament.

After the judicial crisis of 1997, during which Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah became embroiled in controversy, the rift between President Farooq Leghari and PM Nawaz Sharif deepened. Leghari is said to have sided with the chief justice against the government, which severely strained his relations with Sharif. Along with it, the 13th Amendment that eliminated the president’s will-making power under Article 58(2)(b) and Sharif’s abandonment of Leghari’s proposition of institutionalizing civil–military consultation through the Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS) further demoted the president. As a result of these developments, Leghari became politically isolated as a confrontation ensued (Rizvi, 2000, pp. 382–383; Shafqat, 1998, pp. 221–223).



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In 1997, during the institutional deadlock, the military leadership attempted to mediate between the President and Prime Minister. In 1996, General Jahangir Karamat was appointed by President Leghari as Chief of Army Staff. He established his position as a neutral arbiter and stressed the need for a constitutional formula instead of intervention. As noted by Rizvi (1998, pp. 98-100), military leadership officiated reconciliation but did not openly interfere. This was because of their calculation that Sharif's parliamentary majority was overwhelming. Furthermore, the limits placed on presidential authority meant that interference was not necessary as well. Repeating this effort again does not bring back the trust of Leghari in Sharif. On 2 December 1997, President Farooq Leghari resigned, thus ending the presidential dominance that had characterized the Eighth Amendment (Belokrenitsky & Moskalenko, 2013, p. 346).

Analytical Discussion

Rebecca Schiff's concordance theory states that the consensus among three partners, the military, political elites, and society, is a prerequisite for civil-military relations stability (Schiff 1995, pp 12-15). In 1997, President Farooq Leghari endeavoured to achieve such concordance through the setting up of the Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS). Thus, a consultative mechanism would allow military and civilian leaders to jointly deliberate on national security and political issues. Although the CDNS represented an effort to institutionalize concordance, it quickly collapsed because it lacked backing from more important players – the endorsement of Nawaz Sharif and his parliamentary majority. It had collapsed, as Nawaz Sharif and his party perceived it as an alternative power center (Shafqat, 1998, pp. 221–223). The judiciary crisis further weakened the president's position as he seemed to have the backing of Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah, whose standing among the political elite was already low. The president's refusal to comply with the ruling party's demand for the sacking of the chief justice not only intensified his rift with the government but, more importantly, weakened his own standing, leaving him ever more isolated. Leghari's effort at bringing about concordance met with only partial success. In the end, his attempt failed due to political mistrust and a lack of elite consensus.

Janowitz's Convergence Theory illustrates how the roles of civilians and military in Pakistan tend to merge even if not designed. In 1996, Farooq Leghari appointed General Jahangir Karamat as Chief of Army Staff (COAS), which was consistent with seniority and convention rather than an extension of a civil-military strategy (Kalyar, 2013, p. 69). The appointment had implications for civil-military relations, nevertheless. By later granting the military a formal advisory role through the Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS), Leghari established a coordination mechanism at the intersection of presidential authority and military influence. The overlap illustrates the sort of convergence Janowitz talks about, the sharing of space between civilian leadership and military elite. However, the arrangement was not strong enough to withstand the advent of the 13th Amendment, which took away the president's discretionary powers and the beginning of the judicial crisis. The limited convergence between civilian and military elite quickly unraveled (Rizvi, 2000, pp. 382–383).

The military's involvement in the last crisis showed how strong the Pakistan civil-military arrangements are and how weak it is. In late November 1997, during meetings between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, President Farooq Leghari, and Army Chief General Jahangir Karamat, differences began to deepen over Sajjad Ali Shah. General Karamat was always urging compromise. He advised Leghari against resignation and warned him that it could lead to an institutional split (Nawaz, 2008, pp.488-89). The



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matter very soon got out of hand when supporters of the PML-N disrupted the Supreme Court proceedings, whereas the Court's rival bench issued contradictory verdicts that intensified the constitutional crisis. The military's involvement seemed to be the last step before everything broke down because of an escalating crisis. Under this deterioration of the environment, on 2 December 1997, President Farooq Leghari resigned from office, nearly a year before the formal expiry of his constitutional term in November 1998.

Overall, we see why both concordance and convergence have failed in the 1990s politics of Pakistan. Leghari's institutional innovations were well-thought-out attempts to systematize civil–military consultation but required political trust that no longer existed after the 13th Amendment and the judiciary conflict; once Sharif's parliamentary dominance repudiated this bargain, the CDNS and appointment-based convergence unraveled, and the presidency was weakened. In more general terms, what this means at an institutional level is that the absence of durable parliamentary safeguards, an independent judiciary capable of engendering legitimacy, and agreed mechanisms for civil–military consultation, ad-hoc constitutional or institutional fixes are unlikely to create lasting concordance or a stable form of convergence.

Conclusion

Farooq Leghari was a transitional president in Pakistan's civil–military relations. He made serious efforts to create a cooperative balance through the mechanics of convergence and concordance. By appointing General Jahangir Karamat and establishing the Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS), Leghari intended to institutionalize an interaction and a mechanism for coordination between the civilian leadership and the military establishment. Even so, these efforts failed due to the 1990s political scene of mistrust, the parliamentary majority of Nawaz Sharif, and the lessening powers of the presidency, leaving insufficient space for such experiments to succeed. His resignation ultimately reflected the collapse of this precarious balance, showing that the absence of political consensus and mutual trust renders it impossible for concordance and convergence to grow in Pakistan.

With the emergence of later events, the logic of Leghari's approach became clear. The collapse of civil–military collaboration gave rise to the coup of 1999, which reflects the threat of ungoverned relationships. If there were true convergence, the reliance on Article 58(2)(b) and the pattern of military interventions could have undergone a significant reduction. The creation of institutional forums such as the National Security Council, which followed Leghari's vision, was reaffirmed. This is because systematic structures for civil–military consultation are crucial for our political stability. In this sense, though his model failed to take root as a short-term strategy, it was in fact pointing to the most viable option for preventing recurring institutional conflict in the country.

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