

Domestic Challenges for Pakistan’s Foreign Policy during Nawaz Sharif’s Third Prime Ministerial Term

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan’s significance in global politics can’t be ignored in view of being its status as the only Muslim nuclear power in the world. It is at the forefront of two contrasting avenues of global posture i.e. Global War against Terrorism in Afghanistan and cross-regional connectivity venture of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Despite Pakistan’s significance and relevance in world politics, the opportunities for Pakistan’s foreign policy at the external front are met by some severe challenges at the domestic front. Minimum measures of transparency and accountability with the added lack of checks and balances in Pakistan’s foreign policy can be highlighted by the lack of consistency and sustainability in the democratization process. This paper is an attempt to highlight the domestic challenges for Pakistan’s foreign policy during the third term of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. It will examine the domestic challenges in view of state of security, role of Nawaz Sharif as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, role of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and institutional imbalances in Pakistan’s foreign policy during Nawaz Sharif’s third term.

Keywords: *Pakistan, Foreign Policy, Domestic Challenges, Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Institutional imbalances,*

Introduction

Pakistan is a major power in South Asia and the Muslim world. It is an integral player in shaping the bilateral nuclear anarchy in South Asia. It is a major partner in China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is one of the most ambitious cross-regional connectivity ventures in the world right now. It is also at the forefront of global war against terror, supporting and sharing its experience and knowledge of combating different forms of terrorism with great powers. In spite of the relevance and significance of Pakistan’s positioning in world politics, the opportunities for Pakistan’s foreign policy at the external front are met by some severe challenges at the domestic front.

The process of democratization in Pakistan has not been consistent and sustainable in character. Moreover, it affected the transparency and accountability in state policies due to lack of checks and balances. Foreign policy in Pakistan can’t be analyzed without analyzing the lack of transparency and accountability in institutional policies at the domestic front. Moreover insecurity, the debacle of statesmanship, politics triumphing professionalism and institutional imbalances are few elements which are going to be analyzed with referencing to examining the domestic challenges for Pakistan’s foreign policy during Nawaz Sharif’s third term as Prime Minister.

This paper is an attempt to highlight the domestic challenges for Pakistan’s foreign policy during the third term of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. It will examine the domestic challenges in view of state of security, role of former Prime

Minister Nawaz Sharif as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, role of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and institutional imbalances in Pakistan's foreign policy during former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's third term.

Conceptual Framework

The realpolitik of world affairs is a combination of hardcore selfish realities shared among states and ambitious libertarian goals shared amongst individuals or groups. States are stronger as compared to individuals when it comes to the possession of means of violence. States have to cater to national interest. The governments try to represent both the national and the public interest in their domestic and foreign policies. The synchronization of national interest with the public interest is the test of prudence for any country's leadership in the presentation of foreign policy framework.

Foreign policy lays down the principles on the basis of which a state wishes to strengthen its image in world politics. It is state's engagement with other states through negotiations and agreements, with the intent to strengthen its internal situation, overcoming domestic needs, and constraints in the international arena. According to Dr. Hassan Askari Rizvi, a famous Pakistani political scientist, "A credible foreign policy is based on the inner political and economic strengths of a country and the positive relevance of the country to other states, especially its immediate neighbors" (Rizvi, *Foreign Policy Dilemmas*, 2016). In today's world, a state with strong internal institutions and stable political system at home can exert considerable influence in international relations for the maximization of its interests.

Pakistan as a state is a part of the above mentioned selfish reality wherein its government has to make diplomatic decisions in consideration of balancing both national and public interest. The challenge of making policy both in the domestic and external environments provides both opportunities and limitations. Pakistan's foreign policy during Nawaz Sharif's third term as Prime Minister had faced both domestic and external challenges ranging from dealing with leadership crisis to balancing institutional imbalances; from avoiding political instability to improving weak economy; from seeking regional cooperation to reducing hostile relations with neighbors; from engaging in global war on terror to carrying out homeland military action against radical militant Islamists; from making alliances with great powers to becoming part of great powers rivalry; from seeking support from international institutions to diminishing the trust deficit regarding its role in securitizing international milieu etc. The manner in which the Nawaz government dealt with these challenges is going to have an impact on the future prospects for Pakistan's image in the international politics.

This research paper tries to highlight the significance of domestication of foreign policy. This research paper would focus on the foreign policy cum diplomatic challenges faced by the Nawaz Sharif Government since 2013.

Historical Contextualization

The founding father of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah delineated the objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy in 1948, in the following words as;

“Our foreign policy is one of friendliness and goodwill towards all the nations of the world. We do not cherish aggressive designs against any country or nation. We believe in the principle of honesty and fair play in national and international dealings and are prepared to make our utmost contribution to the promotion of peace and prosperity among the nations of the world. Pakistan will never be found lacking in extending its material and moral support to the oppressed and suppressed peoples of the world, and in upholding the principles of the United Nations Charter (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2016).”

Any state in the world would ideally want to establish its foreign policy on the aforementioned objective goals. The fact of the matter is this that not all states can. No matter how much they aspire to operationalize these policy principles in strategy; the selfish ground realities of world politics do not always allow them to follow such aspirations. Pakistan's formation as an independent state in 1947 was not as a result of a natural peaceful resolution of the separation of British Indian held subcontinent. It resulted as a result of hasty prejudiced decolonization process. The terms of the separation were not met by the Indian side in terms of division of resources. The 1948 war between Pakistan and India over the dispute of Kashmir territory further galvanized this fact that in view of its defense, Pakistan has to look for resources outside its territory. Pakistan's leadership at the time of its nascent development realized this fact that they have to keep in view the stark harsh realities of world politics. The domestic vulnerabilities in terms of weak defense and economy, with the added factor of military dictatorship seeking support and legitimacy both at the domestic and external fronts led the policy makers to approach an alliance with a great power at the period in time. Pakistan at that time realized that it had to take a clear firm subjective position in the bipolar world, leaving behind its neutrality stance and overcoming its vulnerabilities by joining the alliance umbrella of one of the two super-powers.

From there on, Pakistan joined US led block in world politics by becoming an alliance member of the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1955, to overcome its asymmetry with India in sub-continent (Ahmad, 2007) (Mazhar & Goraya, 2011). Although this alliance had a negative impact on its relationship with some major Muslim countries such as Egypt and Indonesia, yet Pakistan was still able to garner the support of another major Muslim neighborly state i. e. Iran. The alliance didn't stop the outbreak of 1965 Indo-Pak war nor was it able to stop the dismemberment of East Pakistan in 1971 (Sattar, 2010). In the aftermath of the fall of Dhaka in 1971 and the return of civilian government under Z. A. Bhutto, Pakistan revisited its diplomatic policy of alignment with the Western block during Cold war and opted out of both SEATO and CENTO pacts. Pakistan entered the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) alliance in 1979, in order to demonstrate its neutrality or non-alignment to the cold war bipolarity existing in between USA and USSR (Ahmad N. , 1979) (Rizwan, 2009). It resulted in the betterment of its relation with the Muslim world and a falling with the US led western bloc. The end of Bhutto's

regime in the latter half of 1970's led to the return of another military dictatorship in Pakistan under Zia ul Haq wherein Pakistan joined the US led Western block once again due to the USSR invasion of Afghan war. At the end of Cold war and beginning of Post-Cold war scenario, Pakistan was once again bewildered by US abandoning it to deal with the debris of Cold war in South Asia in general and Afghanistan in particular. The nuclearization of South Asia in 1998 and the fall of twin towers in New York on Sep 11, 2001 again led to the reemergence of Pakistan at the center of attraction for major world powers which was opportunistically cashed by the dictatorial regime of Musharraf seeking legitimacy and support.

At present, Pakistan is at the cross-roads of its history in making. The role of leadership and state institutions is of paramount importance in this regard. Pakistan's response to the changing tides of world politics is going to decide the future of its image and position in global affairs.

Structuralization of Pakistan's foreign policy

Following are the actors, roles and institutions involved in the formulation of Pakistan's foreign policy at the domestic front during Nawaz Sharif's third Prime Ministerial tenure. They are:

- Prime Minister and his cabinet
- Foreign Minister
- Prime Minister's advisors on Foreign Affairs
- National Security Advisor to Prime Minister
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Diplomatic missions abroad
- Military Bureaucracy

Contemporary Domestic Challenges for Pakistan's Foreign Policy

A successful foreign policy relies on the nature of its alignment with diplomatic initiatives employed by a state. The non-alignment in between foreign policy and diplomatic initiatives lays down the path for gradual decline of any state in the international arena of politics. The ground for aligning foreign policy with diplomatic initiatives lies in the comprehension and balancing of domestic environment with the external environment. The first and the foremost primary source of developing the foreign policy at home is the Foreign Office.

Pakistan's foreign policy challenges start from home primarily marred by leadership crisis and institutional imbalances, leading to political and economic instability. The analysis of domestic challenges in the formulation of Pakistan's contemporary foreign policy can be characterized by the performance of former Prime Minister's Muhammad Nawaz Sharif's Government regarding the following factors and variables given below:

- State of security in Pakistan

Domestic Challenges for Pakistan's Foreign Policy during Nawaz Sharif's Third Prime Ministerial Term

- Nawaz Sharif as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan
- Role of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Institutional Imbalances in Pakistan

State of Security in Pakistan

The traditional school of security advocates that the state's security comes first before anything else in the formulation of policy, both domestic and external. Carrying on with this realist assumption, any critical assessment of Pakistan's contemporary foreign policy cum diplomacy should first be analyzed in the light of the present state of security in Pakistan and its impact on the following spheres of state life. They are:

- Political stability
- Economic progress
- Homeland/Internal Security

Political stability for any government is quite necessary in order to focus on policy making process instead of keep focusing on maintaining power and control. In the absence of political stability, political survival as compared to public policy formulation becomes the most important agenda for any government. In this regard, Nawaz Sharif's government started governing the country since 2013 and has been able to present four budgets till the government was removed through a court order of Supreme Court regarding the involvement of Nawaz Sharif in Panama scandal. The fact of the matter is this that for most of the time, former Prime minister's government had to focus more on maintaining political power than exercising it for the development public policy as had been exemplified by countering the 'Dharna politics of D-Chowk' during the latter half of 2014, meddling with the aftershocks of Model town incident in Lahore 2014 and the Panama papers scandal in 2016 (Haider, 2014) (Dawn, 2016) (The News International, 2016). The former Minister for Information Pervez Rashid blamed one major political opposition party for wasting nation's two precious years (GEO URDU, 2015). In other words, he was trying to say that the failure of government regarding lack of implementation of public policy resides with the politics of opposition parties. Opposition on the other hand blamed government for its incompetence and corruption. One way or another, government has been unable to focus on public policy issues due to political instability.

On the economic front, Nawaz Sharif promised economic progress. Domestically economic experts initially lauded the economic reform introduced in the year 2013 by the government (Bukhari & Mallet, 2013). The drop of oil prices, introduction of privatization policies, increase in foreign remittances and increase in tax revenue collections helped a lot in government's cause in strengthening economy. International economy monitoring agencies such as Bloomberg had also lauded the economic performance of Pakistan from 2013 to 2015 (Dunyanews, 2015). The year 2016 was not showing positive integers for the state of economy in Pakistan. The economic debt of Pakistan had accelerated from 68452 million dollars in 2015 to 69558 million US dollars in 2016 (Trading Economics, 2016). Although the

government claimed that the economic growth rate for the 2015-16 had been 4.7 %; independent economic experts and analysts questioned the growth rate authenticity in statistics (The Express tribune, 2016). An independent think tank has estimated the growth rate to be 3.1 % as compared to 4.7 % for the year 2016 (The Express tribune, 2016).

Pakistan's economy relies largely on the productivity received from the agriculture sector. In the year 2014, the figures related to growth product in the agriculture sector were alarming, showing a growth rate of mere 2.12 pc as compared to the target of 3.8 pc (Kiani, 2014). The government's official statistics regarding the 2015-16 fiscal year claim the negative agricultural growth rate percentage to be 0.2 %, which again has been contested by an independent think tank including members such as Dr. Hafeez A. Pasha, correcting the negative agricultural growth rate to be 2 % as compared to 0.2 % (The Express tribune, 2016). In crux, Nawaz Sharif's government's lack of seriousness regarding the economics statistics did not only negatively affected the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but also the Gross National Happiness (GNH), resultantly creating a huge divide between the rich and the poor (Bokhari, 2016).

In lieu of homeland/interior security, Pakistan has been suffering from the negative effects of global war on terror since September 11, 2001. Afghanistan as a neighborly state is a terror quagmire affecting Pakistan's interior security due to porous nature of the border both countries share. Pakistan's domestic civilian security structures are not strong enough to deal with neo-existential security threats emerging at home.

The 2015 report published by Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) regarding the state of security in Pakistan suggests that there has been a decrease in terrorist and suicide attacks in Pakistan by 49% and 35% respectively as compared to the previous year (Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2015). The report and many independent security experts have lauded the results delivered as a result of the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) initiated in response to the deadly attacks on Army Public School in Peshawar in 2014. But there are still lots of challenges to go forward with regarding improving the state of internal security in Pakistan. In the year 2016, 286 citizens have already been killed in terrorist attacks and 133 security personals have lost their lives in pursuit of terrorists (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2016). As long as the civilian security structures are not made strong to take over the domain of internal security from the armed forces of Pakistan, the objectives of NAP will be far from being achieved. The role of political administration is of immense significance in this regard.

In crux, the state of security for the former Prime Minister's Sharif government in the year 2016 highlighted immense challenges in political, economic and internal security affairs with reference to moderating foreign policy of Pakistan in international relations.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan

Nawaz Sharif during his third tenure acted as the Foreign Minister as well as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The only precedent that a former Prime Minister assumed the dual role of both Prime Minister as well as that of the Minister of

Domestic Challenges for Pakistan's Foreign Policy during Nawaz Sharif's Third Prime Ministerial Term

Foreign Affairs was exhibited by Zulifqar Ali Bhutto during 1970's era (Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, 2016). Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was being assisted in handling foreign affairs by i. e.

- Sartaj Aziz (Advisor to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs)
- Tariq Fatemi (Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs)

There are three assumptions probably providing some insight into why Nawaz Sharif had taken dual responsibility of Premiership as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs. One, in lieu of the security predicament, he wanted to lead from the front in the international arena fighting the case for Pakistan's stability and progress. Second, Prime Minister in wake of civil-military tension at the domestic front wanted to keep this ministry to settle any internal disputes or keep an eye on institutional imbalances. Third, Prime Minister's family background shows that they believe in the centralization of power instead of decentralization of authority.

The following objectives regarding foreign policy of Pakistan were being laid down by former Prime Minister cum Foreign Minister Nawaz Sharif in 2013, given below (Malik, 2013):

- Developing peaceful and strong relationship with neighborly states
- Working on Afghan led solution for regional peace and stability
- Improving ties with India
- Strengthening ties with China
- Increasing trade engagement with EU
- Developing good relations with US

In the year 2017, Pakistan has strained relations with 3 out of 4 of its neighborly states including India, Afghanistan and Iran. Pakistan relations with US at present are a story of allegations, demands and mistrust between the two states. Pakistan's strong relations with China at present are its core strength in South Asian politics in particular and global politics in general.

Furthermore, Prime Minister cum Foreign Minister Nawaz Sharif had spent 688 million rupees on foreign visits (Pakistantoday, 2016). Prime Minister had lived at least every fifth day of his tenure on a foreign visit making him one of the most travelling political rulers in the world (Dunyanews, 2016). The dividends of his foreign tours have not been able to meet the difficult circumstances of Pakistan.

Additionally, the appointment of two foreign affair advisors with Prime Minister as Foreign Minister has left questions regarding who exactly is leading the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan. Nadeem Afzal Chan, former head of the Public Accounts Committee of National Assembly has remarked regarding the predicament of the absence of a permanent Foreign Minister of Pakistan in the following words; "Someone at this post needs to be someone who understands domestic politics and has experience with foreign policy. Right now you have Fatemi and Aziz and both are technocrats and both are old — what can they

possibly deliver?” (Zahid, 2015). Irfan Shahzad of Institute of policy studies (IPS) opines that “Sartaj Aziz is a brilliant technocrat and economic manager but for foreign policy someone more suitable, a former career diplomat perhaps, would be needed” (Zahid, 2015). Moreover there have been allegations leveled against Tariq Fatemi of using his office to get foreign grant for wife’s non- governmental organization, creating a conflict of interest in terms of personal interest clashing with national interest (Ghumman, 2015).

Riaz Khokhar, former foreign secretary commented on the foreign policy challenges of Pakistan during Nawaz Sharif’s third term in the following words that “Pakistan is facing enormous and complex foreign policy issues and this requires that the country should have a fulltime foreign minister” (Farooq, 2013). He further analyzed that “The prime minister’s responsibility is essentially to lay out a vision and ensure the implementation of his policies...the foreign minister has to do a lot of running around, and even in the context of protocol, it is not appropriate that the prime minister retain the portfolio of foreign minister” (Farooq, 2013).

Role of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Institutional Imbalances in Pakistan

Each state institute has its own particular task to perform. In Pakistan, the primary professional job of organizing state’s foreign policy lies with Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But there is a catch to this. There is a difference in theory and practice. In theory, this assumption stands as a fact. But when it comes to practice, this assumption is highly questionable. Why? The answer lies in three reasons given below:

- Lack of professionalism in recruitment
- Politicization of foreign policy and diplomatic missions from government
- Securitization of foreign policy and diplomatic missions from military

The recruitment process for foreign office officials starts with the general induction criterion for Central Superior Services (CSS). On the basis of merit and quota system and number of seats available in different departments and ministries of the government, the selected few are given allocations according to their performance in the induction process for CSS, clearing both written and interview stages. After passing out the training process of Civil Services Academy (CSA), all the newly selected for Foreign Services of Pakistan, had to enter for a 9 month diplomatic course in Foreign Services Academy (FSA) (Foreign Services Academy, Government of Pakistan, 2005). After clearing this course, they are allotted their positions in the three divisions of the Foreign Office. These divisions are (Foreign Services Academy, Government of Pakistan, 2005):

- Administrative Division
- Protocol Division
- Political Division

Domestic Challenges for Pakistan's Foreign Policy during Nawaz Sharif's Third Prime Ministerial Term

The whole internal problem with the Foreign Ministry in Pakistan starts from the recruitment process. Candidates without any proper academic background in diplomacy and foreign affairs, getting maximum marks in the CSS exams, can get allocated to the Foreign Ministry. The problem does not only lie with the Foreign Ministry but other ministries as well. Candidates with proper academic backgrounds should get allocated according to the needs of the institutes and ministries.

Over-Politicization and Over-Securitization of foreign policy cum diplomatic missions is another problem in the proper role functionalism of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Historically, both political regimes and military establishments have been guilty of protecting their vested interests in the appointment of foreign diplomatic missions instead of allowing appointments for professional career diplomats at important diplomatic missions in foreign countries. In the present Nawaz government, important diplomatic missions have been given to career diplomats such as Jalil Abbas Jilani appointed as the ambassador of Pakistan to US in 2013 and Abdul Basit was appointed as Pakistan's High Commissioner to India in 2013. The way forward can be in the form of parliamentary checks and balances i. e. the cross verification of credentials while approving the appointment of any high level governmental official, as is exemplified by the US Senate Standing committees and by the parliamentary judicial committee of Pakistan in the appointment of judges to higher courts.

Hussain Haqqani, Pakistan former ambassador to US, and the memo gate scandal in the previous Pakistan People's Party government from 2008-2013 is a classic example of how diplomatic postings can become a nuisance at home and become a source of conflict between the political government and the military government.

The overlapping of authority is quite obvious within the institutions in a political system. Nonetheless, institutes should always try to respect the red lines in a political system. Lt. Gen (retired) Talat Masood, while commenting on the state of collaboration of institution in Pakistan, said that "Institutions are operating as individual entities rather than as a cohesive whole" (Masood, 2016). In this context, the civil-military divide Pakistan isn't something new. 4 Martial law governments, almost making up the half history of Pakistan is a reminiscent of this fact. Military has been able to institutionalize its role in political system (Wolf, 2016). The contemporary state of security has further galvanized the political environment for a tran-institutionalized role for military in the political system of Pakistan. The evidence of this fact can be explained with the examples of military courts and provincial apex committees. Some legal commentators have even called the establishment of military and provincial apex committees as the commencement or mini martial law in Pakistan (The Express Tribune, 2015).

Pakistan's military has been able to impede the dominance of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the development of Pakistan's foreign policy due to the political misgivings and misreading of different regimes, career diplomats prioritizing careers over their professional duties and the institutional securitization of Foreign policy of Pakistan by the Military establishment (Cheema, 2015). The June 7, 2016 meeting, called by the military chief in GHQ, in which two foreign affairs advisors to Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and two sitting ministers of the cabinet were

called to discuss the issues and challenges of foreign policy and national security, reminded us who controls what and why in the realm of foreign policy cum diplomacy in Pakistan (Rizvi, Civil-military interaction and foreign policy, 2016).

Conclusion

Pakistan's foreign policy during Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's third term was being marred by domestic challenges due to state of security, civil-military tensions, absence of a permanent foreign minister and political crises. The absence of clear hierarchy on the leadership front of Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one of the paramount reasons for the foreign policy imbroglio at the domestic front in Pakistan.

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Domestic Challenges for Pakistan's Foreign Policy during Nawaz Sharif's Third Prime Ministerial Term

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