Civil-military imbalance and its policy implications

Pakistan has suffered the negative political and policy-making consequences of military coups since the late fifties. Repeated military interventions have not only created a civil-military divide but also twisted the entire concept of national security. Even before 1958, the military had arrogated to itself the role of the state's defence, both physical and ideological. It remains wedded to that concept to wit even as its power has declined over the past few years. The problem with the military's unilateral and linear view of what is good for Pakistan is that it runs against the diversity of people that came together under a single flag in 1947. This divide has played a negative role in many areas and done immense harm to the very idea of Pakistan as a nation-state. Pakistan is situated in a tough neighbourhood and cannot afford the reflection of the civil-military fault-line in the formulation of its security policy. But that has happened and the state's strategic options have steadily reduced. On the civilian side this has resulted in apathy and an abdication by the civilian principals of their primary role in security policy formulation even during periods of democratic rule. Today, as Pakistan faces multiple external and internal challenges and threats, the despondency that informs the Pakistani state and society and makes it more difficult for the state to formulate a response, is largely underpinned by this divide. It is ironic, however, that despite this divide being the biggest security threat to Pakistan, not much quality work has been done in this area which could (a) develop a theoretical bases for the problem; and, (b) make some projections on the basis of the theoretical understanding of it. This panel discussion seeks to address the broader issue of civil-military imbalance, its impact on policy-making and a prognosis for the future. We will try and attempt to answer four broad questions, though the panellists may not necessarily confine themselves to these questions:

1. Is there a difference in how the civilians and the military perceive Pakistan's national interest?
2. If yes, how does it impact national security strategy and other policies flowing from it?
3. Can Pakistan expect to have a coherent policy, given various internal and external threats, if the civilian governments and the military leadership view those threats and the responses to them through different prisms?
4. Has the military's power declined in the past five years; if so, does it provide the civilian government to become more proactive or does it create a vacuum at a crucial stage in Pakistan's life?

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