

Decolonizing Political Thought: Plato's Justice and Civil Military Relations in Pakistan

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Abstract

This research study employs Plato's theory of justice to critically evaluate the civil military relations in Pakistan, which have long been marked by institutional imbalance, periodic military intervention, fragile democracy and recurring political instability. For Plato, justice arises when the spirited, appetitive, and rational elements of the soul—as well as their corresponding social classes—function harmoniously without interference or role-transgression. By applying this classical concept of functional harmony to contemporary governance, this research study evaluates civil military disequilibrium that disrupts the institutional order. Further, through the integration of de-colonial perspective, this research also examines how colonial legacies have shaped governance structures, institutional hierarchies, and the distribution of power between military establishment and civilian authorities. By combining classical philosophy with de-colonial critique, this research study seeks to reinterpret political theory in a way that is responsive to Pakistan's historical context, local realities, socio-political struggles, and contemporary challenges, by challenging the dominance of Eurocentric colonial frameworks.

KeyWords: Democratization, Decolonization, Greek Philosophy, Civil Military Relations, Pakistani Politics

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Introduction

Plato's theory of justice, as presented in *The Republic*, offers a perfect picture of a society where every class fulfills its assigned task and is organized according to a strict functional order. Pakistan is a suitable case for Platonic justice analysis because of its repeated military interventions, political unrest, and deteriorating democratic institutions, all of which lead to an imbalance in the allocation and use of power. Originally intended to serve as an auxiliary force to defend the state and preserve its sovereignty, the military has frequently taken the role of ruler. It has accomplished control through direct interventions through coups in 1958, 1977, and 1999, as well as through influence over foreign and security policy, and indirect manipulation of democratic processes. Because of the military's hegemony, parliamentary sovereignty has been undermined, civilian institutions have been weakened, and there remains a lingering imbalance. Plato believed that every class or organization should mind its own business and refrain from interfering with others. A violation of this concept is demonstrated by the military's engagement in Pakistani policymaking, the economy, the media, and judicial matters. However, the military elite, which is educated in strategy, leadership, and coercive force rather than philosophy or democratic ideals, frequently controls administration in Pakistan. This role inversion hinders the state's moral advancement, diminishes accountability, and creates structural discord.

To Plato, humans are for society and society is for humans. This is the basic assumption of Plato as both are essential for each other. As far as man is concerned, three basic forces are found in human souls, desires, spirit and reason. This proportion can be different and vary from person to person, but all humans have these three basic instincts in their souls. However, one attribute is always predominant than others. Apparently, most people are driven by desires which can be lust, corporal or material pleasures. Next comes the spirited part which represents courage, glory, fame and recognition. In the last part, very few people possess reason and wisdom. They are dominated by sharp intellect as compared to majority who have desires and appetite. So, justice according to Plato in individual is that reason should rule human soul and other two instincts should follow it. Then, spirit or courage should moderate and have balance between reason and desires. So, one can say that if reason is ruled in individual, he is doing justice with himself. From justice to soul, justice in state or city occurs. After having the classification of soul and finding justice in it, Plato finds justice in a polis or state. Since there are three forces in human souls, men in a state will be organized and arranged in a way that their

basic harmony of soul should not be disturbed. The people possessing desires comprised majority of the working class of the state. The few people having reason, should rule the state as they know how to settle the affairs better with their knowledge and intellect. With the division of souls and their roles in a state, there comes the function of specialization and division of labor. Plato highlights that social justice is the basic principle of a society, consisting of different types of men who have combined under the impulse of their need for one another, and by their combination in one society, and their concentration on their respective functions, have made a whole which is perfect as Plato demonstrates that "the power of each individual in the State to do his own work, then appears to compete with the other political virtues, wisdom, temperance and courage" (Plato, 1982, p.146). Hence, Justice is achieved when each person performs his duty in a state for which he is best suited as per his natural inclinations. With the implications of justice and Plato's idea, order, stability and harmony can be achieved not only in the functioning of individuals but also in running the affairs of state so that people become happy and state can make the lives of people better. As Plato highlights that "philosophy is the subject of enquiry, state must be constructed on principles of communism, ruled by philosophers, and the contemplation of the idea of good takes the place of the social and political virtues" (Plato, 1982, p. 5). On one hand, each human should do his duties and on the other hand, state institutions should be doing their prescribed jobs assigned to them so that justice could be done by achieving development, and public welfare.

Now we turn to Pakistani Politics in terms of its civil-military relations. From the above discussion, there are two points needed to pay attention. First is, political parties and military is not doing its relevant function and hence creating disharmony. Second, if theory of justice is applied and military and political parties do their jobs that are their specifications, Pakistan can achieve stability, prosperity and growth. The problems of Pakistan such as instability, corruption, underdevelopment and low growth are basically due to the institutional imbalanced power structure between civilians and non-civilians. Pakistan is facing numeral challenges since its inception. From the constitution making to refugees issues, from Kashmir war to issues of representation between two different wings of country, from religious extremism to terrorism, from lack of infrastructure to language issues, from regional rivalries such as India and Afghanistan to weak political parties and strong military to join hands with West, Pakistan's institutional balance is disrupted. Political parties are not playing their roles and then join military to get power as Plato describes "wealth, i said, and poverty; the one is the parent of luxury and indolence, and the other of meanness and viciousness, and both

of discontent" (Plato, 1982, p.133). Pakistan's political parties are not having strong ideological basis, grassroots level organizations and effective decision making. Moreover, elites, capital and feudal background, and overpowered non-institutional forces are also ruling the country directly or indirectly, hence not playing their roles and interfering with each other businesses which has been creating great havoc in the nation. Plato's theory of justice is applied and put forward as a cure for all diseases existing in Pakistan. They need to stick to one basic principle that is to perform their own lawful, and constitutional duties and let others play their roles which are assigned to them as they are best fitted and suited for it, then, Pakistan can get order, harmony and growth. Thus, this research study questions dominant power structures, and Eurocentric colonial tendencies by reclaiming alternative indigenous perspectives, re-centering knowledge, and promoting inclusivity.

Research Questions

This research paper is exploring and examining the following questions, issues and problems related to civil-military relations.

- What are the factors, obstacles and hindrances in stopping Pakistani political parties to unite against military?
- How could these factors be analyzed, sorted out and overcome so civilian supremacy be achieved?

Literature Review

A lot of literature on civil military relations have been written and reviewed internationally as well as nationally. Following are some of the reviews and scholarly analysis.

Samuel P. Huntington is an American political scientist and academician, who extensively writes on civil-military relations. *The Soldier and the State* is well-known book written by him. His main idea is objective control, where armed forces cede professional autonomy while maintaining political neutrality. Military leaders should be independent from politicians in pursuing military activities; while politicians should define strategic objectives for national defense, having clear line between them.

Similarly, Morris Janowitz is also an American sociologist and military expert who elaborates civil-military relations. He incorporates that military belongs to society that form an organic whole, which should not be a separate entity. This could be done by civilianization of the military or militarization of society; however, military would retain essential differences. If we see both theories, Huntington provides theory for separation, whereas Janowitz favors

integration of both. The former writer tries to control the differences; the latter endeavors to diminish the differences. However, both theories are for developed nations like USA and have nothing to do with third world countries where issues are more complex.

In addition to it, another scholar and political scientist, Rebecca L. Schiff proposes concordance theory in her book *The Military and Domestic Politics*. She accentuates that there should be an agreement among three social institutions which are military, politicians and citizens. This can be achieved by social composition of the officer corps; the political decision-making process; and the method of recruiting mutually. This way, military threat could be minimized if politicians and military form an agreement on basic rules of the game. But the powerful army will never step back from their power, they have in third world countries.

Paul Staniland, a professor of Political Science with expertise in civil-military relations of South Asia, highlights that strong political culture and robust political institutions are bulwark against non-institutional forces. Further, he comments on Pakistan's colonial legacy and questions that, since political institutions are weak in civil military equation, then, why does not they become strong, starting with strong political parties so they can compete with all-powerful military by emphasizing the separation and aloofness of military from politics

Furthermore, Ayesha Siddiqi being a political scientist, and critic of military establishment, maintains that state is inherently bureaucratic, and vulnerable to army interventions by having a narrative of protecting against external enemy and internal threats posed by incompetent and corrupt leaders. She says army being an arbiter uses the patronage bait in a political structure where local elites are playing dominant roles. Hence, no political party and leader can come into power without army's help, and becoming military's client.

In addition to it, Hassan Askari Rizvi, a civil military analyst, says that dearth of well-organized political parties and competent leadership are the main causes of military rule. To great extent, this analysis is accurate and could be used to find a way out to solve civil military puzzle. Further, he examines that weaknesses of the civilian and political institutions and their inability to cope with diverse demands on the political system, make it convenient for senior commanders to expand their role. The armed forces are more organized than civilian institutions and are characterized by "their centralization, hierarchy, discipline, inter-communication and esprit de corps" (Rizvi 20). Moreover, Muhammad Waseem, another political scientist from Pakistan, says that the problem lies in the pre-colonial period. State had over-developed structure with strong military

bureaucracy and weak political institutions. This argument has merit because we need to look at the root cause and base, before suggesting a way forward.

Thus, a lot of scholarly reviews are available about civil-military relations as this paper has explored to a great extent. Western model seems to be inapplicable on third world countries and most of them are not giving a reasonable way forward on how to solve civil-military puzzle. While, Pakistani writers have more detailed approach as they have first hand experience of it. The application of Plato's theory of Justice in civil military relations of Pakistan, makes this research a valuable addition to existing corpus of critique.

Analysis

The civil–military relations in Pakistan have been interpreted through institutional, historical, and strategic lenses; however, a philosophical reading grounded in Plato's political thought offers a deeper framework. Plato's propositions in *The Republic*, particularly his concept of the ideal state governed by philosopher-kings, the tripartite division of society, and the supremacy of reason over force—provide theoretical grounds to examine authority, legitimacy, and governance. Central to this analysis is the concept of decolonization, understood not only as the formal end of colonial rule but as the dismantling of colonial epistemologies, and power hierarchies. In Pakistan, the colonial legacy of a centralized bureaucracy and a militarized state apparatus remained largely intact after independence. Plato's insistence on moral education and intellectual cultivation of rulers contrasts sharply with the colonial inheritance of coercive governance structures. Further, Plato assigns the guardians (analogous to the military) the role of protecting the state, strictly subordinated to philosopher-rulers who govern through reason and justice. In Pakistan, however, the military has transcended its guardian role, assuming decision-making authority reserved for civilian leadership. This inversion represents a breakdown of Plato's ideal hierarchy, where the rational element (civilian political leadership) fails to assert supremacy over the spirited element (the military). Consequently, Plato's theory becomes a diagnostic tool to expose how legitimacy grounded in coercion undermines the moral foundations of the state and perpetuates authoritarian tendencies. Thus, this research argues that genuine decolonization requires more than institutional reform; it demands a reorientation of political philosophy by restoring civilian rational

authority, cultivating ethical political leadership, and redefining military's role within constitutional limits.

According to Plato, the state's governing class—those with wisdom and the capacity to rule—is represented by the logical aspect of the soul. The warriors or soldiers are in charge of upholding the law and defending the state. The producers who run the economy represent the appetitive portion, which is defined by desire and material wants. When spirit upholds reason and appetite submits to both, justice reigns. Injustice and social disorder result from any upheaval, such as when warriors seize control of the government, or desire overrides reason as Plato sadly enunciates that "I proclaim that justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger" (Plato, 1982, p.31).

It has been a constant phenomenon that people are complaining of not having a democracy in Pakistan due to tense civil-military relations. Pakistan has seen three direct military takeovers that cause contradictory thoughts as some people argue that military have political ambitions for power; while others pin point weak political institutions with fragile political parties. Government has never been smooth and functional in Pakistan. Local, provincial and political bodies are part and parcel of public service where financial, political and administrative matters are handed over to selected officials to solve issues. There is no denying that military rulers, whenever they revived local governments, tried to get legitimacy to prolong their rules and to bypass political class whom they deem incompetent, and corrupt. Similarly, when politicians come to power, they ignore local institutions as they do not want to devolve and share power to third tier of governance. In democracy which is considered to be the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, four attributes should be present: free and fair elections, universal participation, civil liberties and responsible government. The main focus should be on stability of party system as it promotes stability of whole system and to avoid democratic collapse. Party must have organization, survival, efficiency, adaptability, autonomy and cohesion. It should have proper roots in society and established organization structures. For first 11 years after independence, parties could not set up strong institutions for number of reasons and this vacuum is filled by military takeovers. After Ayyub Khan's downfall, Bhutto exercised civilian supremacy over military, but he doesn't empower civilian institutions which caused his demise. In 1990s, Pakistan People Party and Pakistan Muslim League, Nawaz competed for power at the expense of democracy where politicians joined hand with military while behaving undemocratically, when

Nawaz Sharif was ousted, Imran Khan, Chairman of Pakistan Tahreek e Insaaf, became happy. Now, after being removed from power, Imran Khan is blaming non-institutional forces. During all their regimes, it seems that Political Parties did not work on creating strong system as Plato sheds light that “no politician is honest, nor is there any champion of justice at whose side people may fight and be saved” (Plato, 1982, p. 221) and “The mistake at present is, that those who study philosophy have no vocation” (Plato, 1982, p.267). Strong person or institution cannot easily leave its space once occupied. Same is the case with Civil-Military relations in Pakistan. As it is strong and influential, we need to work on weaker entities that are political institutions specially parties. The only way to compete with strong is to empower the weaker ones. Military has always an upper hand, compared to political parties, all solutions revolve around the step backing of military from politics, which seems to be unrealistic and utopic. Pakistani thinkers have ignored the other side of the picture. That is weak political parties and behavior of political leaders with undemocratic political culture and their collaboration with military for their power. This research drives attention towards the negligent role of civilian leaders and political parties in inculcating undemocratic culture in Pakistan. After 78 years, Pakistan could not find a solution of such disturbed civil military relation, thus becoming a headache and an obstacle for democracy, so, this research bridges the gap between theory and practice, and helps the politicians and policy makers to learn and implement the prescribed justice given by Plato so that this enigma could be solved for once and for all.

Moreover, Plato delineates that “until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils,—nor the human race, as I believe,—and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day” (Plato, 1982, p.195). Sadly, since it’s birth, Pakistan has been criticized and reprimanded for not having liberal democracy. People have been comparing it with other western countries on their models, without knowing the ground realities of third world countries. Some people want Pakistan to be Islamist, others wish it to be communist or an authoritative country. Today, leaders make the public, emotional sentimental tools. They give speeches with great enthusiasm and make claims of good education, healthy life, eradication of poverty, availability of pure water and basic

necessities of life, and public accept it whole heartedly without knowing the veiled dark realities. Electors only want to fill their pockets with money . Public are the responsibility of leaders but what should we do? If they misuse their ranks and responsibilities. They wants best but they receives worst as our leaders are corrupted and self centered. They are the thieves of public money. On one side, many people are compelled to sleep on roads with hunger because they came from backward areas to get jobs in cities and they are homeless here but on the other hand, politicians who are supposed to be the guardian of public, sleep on their luxurious comfortable beds and eat miscellaneous items at one time. When one leader completes his time of government, his son takes his responsibility after him . The whole family come to political system as Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, his brother Shabazz Sharif and his son Hamza Shabazz likewise the Bhutto family comes into power, which reflects the nepotism and hierarchy in our political system. The election system for political achievement has become notorious for not working for the public betterment except the personal interests. The public should think and use their sacred right of voting on rational basis rather taking inspirations from false illusionary vows of the leaders. Thus, the preference of collective betterment over private interests by the officials can surely move the society towards happiness and prosperity by achieving the real soul of election campaigns. The supporters of favorite parties make hooting, bill boards, pamphlets and banners to show inferiority to their opposite party. Further, fiery speeches are made. The whole atmosphere comes to tension. The political animosity reaches its climax and extremity. All parties try their best to win in the war of competition. They make promises to the masses in processions and meetings to get their favor in order to win the game. In contrast to it, there are some demerits as the degradation of opposite party, loss of moral values and insulting behaviors towards each other by taking votes from the voter as psychological purchases. Pakistan is built on the same colonial model of Western hegemony with the alignment of its classes such as the military, bourgeoisie, bureaucrats, and oligarchs. Unfortunately, the unity of Muslims had lied into pieces. They try to force their views on others by force which produces an atmosphere of fear, suspicion or mistrust. Our government and judiciary only works when there is pressure of Public on them. People who have power can easily hide their crimes to give bribery to Police and on the other hand Police always keeps an eye on this opportunity. So, where we can go for justice if these institutions are exploited? Are they really helpful for

solving the issues or only playing the role of spectators? Why peace is only a dream not an actual reality?

Plato's idea of justice, according to which peace is attained when every class fulfills its assigned job, resonates with the imbalance seen in Pakistan, where the military frequently goes above its mandate and disturbs democratic order. According to the analysis, this mismatch is not only structural but also a leftover from colonial government, when the military was given precedence over civilian institutions as a stabilizing factor. The results indicate that using a decolonized understanding of Plato's justice enables one to imagine a more just political system where the military's function is reinterpreted within the bounds of the constitution and civic institutions are reinforced.

Conclusion

According to Plato, a just spirit is regulated by desire, guided by reason, and upheld by courage. When applied to a political institution, it suggests that the pursuit of the common good is necessary for a just state to exist. In Pakistan, thymos (spirit) predominates over logos (reason) as seen by the dominance of security discourse, the suppression of opposition, and the prioritization of honor and nationalism above speech. Plato would contend that instead of fostering peace, such a situation leads to tyranny or oligarchy, in which the spirited side, unbridled by reason, takes control. However, there are significant limitations to directly adapting Plato's paradigm to a contemporary democratic state. Popular sovereignty, the separation of powers, and democratic accountability are the cornerstones of modern governance. Therefore, rather than being taken literally, the application of platonic justice needs to be understood normatively and metaphorically. Instead of emulating Plato's political model, we should concentrate on the fundamental idea of functional harmony and the perils of institutional usurpation. By encouraging distinct institutional boundaries, highlighting the need of civilian administration, and cultivating an ethical-political culture among both the ruled and the rulers, Pakistan might profit from the Platonic ideal. Reform, education, and the development of civic virtues are necessary to fortify civilian institutions. According to Plato, justice encompasses not only laws but also the ethos and structure of the state. Plato's philosophy of justice, in conclusion, offers a convincing analytical framework for assessing the disparity in Pakistan's civil-military interactions. The military's domination in civilian affairs and the frequent violations of

institutional roles reveal a basic unfairness in which hierarchy and coercion takes place. Even while the Platonic model needs to be modified for democratic settings, its essential thesis—justice demands that authority be concentrated where wisdom and legitimacy are greatest and that every institution contributes to the whole while staying within its moral bounds—remains relevant. Only then will Pakistan be able to make progress toward a stable and just political system.

Pakistan needs strong political parties, viable civilian institutions and competent political leaders to compete military. Furthermore, once Pakistan have robust civilian institutions, it can easily move towards democracy. This research incorporates the uplifting of political institutions, which seems to be only realistic and plausible solution in the long run if Pakistan is to be a democratic country. To sum, if we see reality with the factual analysis, we are in a position that comparatively, internationally, regionally and nationally, Pakistan is lag behind in democratic dream. Our economy is run by IMF, world Bank, USA, Saudi Arabia, China and UAE. We never stood on our feet. Our feudal and tribal leaders keep on extracting resources while not improving exports, industry and business environment for foreign investment. Pakistan inherited weak parties and strong military with bureaucracy. Political parties had no organization and national appeal. They uses Islam for getting fake fame. Just after independence, Pakistan fought war with India. Also, Afghanistan was claiming Pashtun territories that threatened Pakistan's survival. As a result, non-institutional especially military had to assume bigger role by increasing its military budget, thus undermining democracy. After that, 1965 war, separation of Bangladesh and Cargill war, further deteriorated relations with India, making strong military and weakening political parties. After 9/11, Musharraf was empowered as a front-line soldier. It is all about American interest. Pakistan has also been great recipient of America's help. It received aids, military hardware and weapons. As a result, democracy was sacrificed and military was supported. Similarly, after Afghan Jihad, culture of Islamization especially, extremism and religious fundamentalism is sprouted in Pakistani society, made people intolerant and violent, thus eroding semblance of democratic values. The major problem in Pakistani politics is the severe civil-military relations. The conventional literature says that military should step back from its powerful position but this issue could only be fixed in the long run if we turn our attention on how to make political parties and institutions more strong, competitive and democratic. Internally, Pakistan is losing its resources by its own hands, as political turmoil,

ethnic resentments, poverty, class disparities, terrorism, religious extremism, failure of law enforcement agencies, and the government's lack of management in policy frameworks that bring disenchantment and economic pressure in public. Powerful authorities and elites are steering the wheel of economic progress according to their own created directions and interests rather than running the country through national interests. Such people are like coiled serpents who are capturing national treasures and those who rebel against such exploitative manipulative acts, these serpents sting them with their bitterest poison. The roots of Pakistan are gradually tearing apart. To move the engine of Pakistan's train to get ahead, it is required to fill its fuel first which is national and political unison. If we want to save our beloved country Pakistan, be compassionate to help and uplift its sufferers through equal distribution of money and to work hard from shoulder to shoulder and hands in hand despite binaries, to bring the sinking ship to shore. There should be strong adherence to national culture by excluding the politics of polarity and raising the rhetoric of resistance for liberation. Thus, no outside force can rescue Pakistan if its people are not well-knotted and nationally integrated to combat all odds.

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