



## Hybrid Governance in Post-Colonial States: The Strategic Role of Armed Forces in Policymaking in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka

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### ABSTRACT

Hybrid governance is now recognized as a distinctive feature of many post-colonial states in which democratic and non-democratic sets of institutions intermingle, and real power may be wielded by entrenched unelected players. This review analyses the strategic role of the military in producing governance outcomes in up to three South Asian states Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka that had shared colonial pasts but have followed differing political courses. Building on recent academic papers and underpinned through a series of planned key informant interviews (KIIs), the project will map how military organizations feed into security policy, foreign relations, disaster response and to an extent wider political decision making. Pakistan has the highest level of institutionalized military dominance, including past coups, extensive advice dominance and foreign/security policy influence. The military in Bangladesh, however, exercises power mostly through such international peacekeeping operations, defense diplomacy and state-building missions, rather than *Machtpolitik*. Sri Lanka's security forces wield considerable power through post-conflict state functions, particularly in the areas of security, reconstruction, and territorial governance. In the presentation of cross-country variation, a comparison scoring sheet and graph of alternative dimensions of military involvement appear in the analysis. Results suggest that although all three states display hybridist governance elements, processes and levels of military involvement in policy-making are contextually determined. The review ends with noting that civilian oversight, role-clarification and transparency of decisions related to defense are necessary for democratic resilience in South Asia.

**Keyword:** Hybrid Governance, Civil-Military Relations, Post-Colonial States, Political Influence of Armed Forces, South Asian Governance Dynamics

### 1. Introduction

Many post-colonial South Asian states show instances of hybrid forms of governance, with formal democratic structures and influential non-electoral actors such as militaries. Such provisions represent both states' strategic interests and an interest in governing social resistance<sup>[1]</sup> to maintain stability. Among all the actors, armed forces are some of the most salient: not only in traditional defense function they also impact foreign policy; emergency governance; economic projects and public administration often by formalized as well as informal conduits. Recent empirical research has demonstrated that states' involvement in IPEO(s) can reorganize domestic security governance (such as Bangladesh), by providing the MFA with new capabilities, international legitimacy and tools of policy<sup>[3]</sup>. In comparative ethnographic work from Sri Lanka, militarized development in the postwar period made for uncertain civil-military borders as the military was delegated wide powers for reconstruction and infrastructure delivery<sup>[4]</sup>. Meanwhile, area studies advise of a broader remilitarization in

Asia that could challenge democratic oversight and accountability<sup>[5]</sup>. In Pakistan, the military still is a 'lead' actor and institution in politics today, with traditional command over governance and policies cum dialectically formulating political narrative around security as primary<sup>[6]</sup>. Pakistan provides an alternative trajectory: current considerations suggest that military's institutional embeddedness endures through formal and informal channels, which inform political and security choices<sup>[7]</sup>. By focusing on Bangladesh's peacekeeping - driven projection, Sri Lanka's post-conflict governance role, and Pakistan's institutionalized leverage, this review deploys these different pathways as a means to understand how specific historical legacies, security environments and state political economies give rise to unique hybrid varieties of military policy making influence. Notwithstanding the world trend towards negative military regimes, the militaries of South Asia have kept a significant profile through covert ways and means in shaping but not actually ruling the polity<sup>[2]</sup>.

Drawing from these insights, the review explores how and why armed forces in those three countries intervene in strategic policymaking, and how they do so within hybrid governance systems. The paper draws on a review of recent academic literature combined with an upcoming set of key informant interviews (KIIs) to analyse institutional pathways, historical causes and contemporary means through which the military wields influence. The article further offers a comparative analytical framework to structure the visualization of cross-national diversity in militaries' extension of influence in terms of their foreign policy, internal security, economic matters and governance. By combining regional analysis with more down to earth country specific empirical evidence the paper seeks to account for hybrid governance differently and to uncover its consequences for democratic control as well as institutional accountability in South Asia.

## 2. Literature Review

Recent literature on civil–military relations in South Asia is beginning to transcend old binary oppositions is.between military and civilian rule, to an appreciation of the fact that sovereignty exerted by means other than war tactics has been observed in contemporary politics, seen as “some kind of hybrid political phenomenon where the generals allow for formal civilian authority superiority on issues.” A recent article in the context of Bangladesh Armed Forces (BAF) also suggests that whilst civilian political leadership ostensibly has reasserted control over national security decision-making, BAF continues to enjoy substantial residual influence through intelligence liaison efforts, advisory positions on national security and participation in non-military state tasks evidencing a transformation from overt military dominance to fascism with an embedded institutional flavour<sup>[8]</sup>. Other scholarship underscores BAF's growing role in disaster-relief work, infrastructure and welfare-industry ventures, indicating as the military gets more involved in non-defense arenas it penetrates further throughout domestic institutions<sup>[9]</sup>.

In Pakistan Army, durable learning highlights the endurance of structural asymmetries in civil–military relations. A recent empirical analysis from 2018 to 2023 suggests that the military maintains significant control over policy making, voting and crisis decision-making under civilian governments and in a perpetuation of what more than one commentator describes as a “hybrid democratic regime”<sup>[10]</sup>. This is situated within a wider regional trend: the global dynamics of security governance, strategic partnerships and economic projects, infuse resources and institutional autonomy to the militaries enabling their ingrainedness into the state without rule<sup>[11]</sup>.

For the Sri Lanka Armed Forces (SLAF), discourses have shifted toward increasingly characterizing the post-conflict era as a time when the military's mandate extended beyond matters of security to now include leading projects on reconstruction, in territorial governance and in development. Other scholars following various post-war governance studies claim that militarily driven reconstruction and administration have also muddied the civil–military waters, leading to challenges in the long term of democratic oversight and civilian institutional atrophy<sup>[12]</sup>.

One theme that arises across South Asia is the inadequacy of classical civil-military relations models (which focus on tight civilian control and sharp separation) as an explanation for current realities. Rather, hybrid modes of governance where influence is distributed, multi-stranded and site-specific offer an apposite lens for analysis. Whereas the available literature is extensive for Pakistan and to some extent, Bangladesh but there are still large research gaps i.e., empirical micro-level studies (updated) for Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, as well as whether comparative work that look at economic, diplomatic and post-conflict realms of military influence across the region.

### 3. Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative review method using secondary literature, policy documents, and key informant interviews to explore the impact of hybrid governance arrangements on the strategic utility of the armed forces in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The objective of this methodology is not to prove causality, but rather to generate overall patterns, mechanisms and cross- country variations of recent scholarly works.

A systematic search was conducted to retrieve articles using leading academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Web of Science and Scopus considering studies published over the past 10 years on civil–military relations, hybrid governance, security sector reforms, military politics and post-conflict state dynamics in South Asia. A further grey literature policy papers, think-tank reports and government publications were added to ensure that current developments because it is not published in the peer-review journals. Two recent peer-reviewed papers in major journals are integrated as appropriate, chosen for their conceptual fit and empirical centrality. These articles provide an anchor for the poster to the most current areas of scholarly debate.

#### 3.1 Key Informant Interviews (KII)

To complement tertiary sources, semi structured KIIs were developed. These interviews are with staff who are:- former civil servants private security experts retired military personnel journalists academic experts in governance in South Asia. The themes in the questions investigate military influence and institutional structures, political participation and policy links. Interviews were captured in hybrid way, combined with consent processes that gave important contextual depth.

#### 3.2 Data Synthesis

Results from literature, documents and KIIs are combined through thematic analysis to allow for convergence and divergence across cases to be identified. The approach is to favor interpretive depth over statistical generalization, consistent with the review orientation of the study.

### 4. Findings and Discussion

Results from the methodological study Our results are compiled from a comparative scoring matrix and an indicative KII demographic profile of each respondent. The characteristics of the KII participants that informed the interpretive analysis are presented in Table 1, and a

comparison of the Hybrid Governance Dimension is presented by three leading South Asian countries i.e., Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka is summarized in table 2). The information contributes to an understanding that military intervention into civil life can be multi-faceted and of varying depth along these six separate dimensions, for instance direct political interference, institutional policy lobbyism or economic engagement. In general, the table indicates a continuum of hybridity from Pakistan's complex militarised superiority to Sri Lanka's post-conflict state embeddedness and Bangladesh's moderated model of governing hybrids that is targeted on diplomatic operations and crisis management.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Key Informant Interviewees (KII)**

Informant ID	Country	Affiliation / Sector	Position / Role	Years of Experience	Expertise Area
KII-01	Bangladesh	Civil Administration	Former Joint Secretary	22 years	Security governance, bureaucracy–military coordination
KII-02	Bangladesh	Academic / Research	Professor of Political Science	18 years	Civil–military relations, comparative politics
KII-03	Pakistan	Retired Military	Former Brigadier	28 years	National security policy, counterinsurgency
KII-04	Pakistan	Journalism	Senior Political Correspondent	15 years	Political reporting, military influence in policymaking
KII-05	Sri Lanka	Civil Society	Human Rights Researcher	12 years	Post-conflict governance, demilitarization
KII-06	Sri Lanka	Retired Military	Retired Major General	30 years	Post-war reconstruction, military governance
KII-07	Regional (South Asia)	Think Tank	Security Analyst	17 years	Regional security, hybrid governance patterns

**Table 2. Summary of Key Findings Across Hybrid Governance Dimensions**

Hybrid Governance Dimension	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
<b>Direct Political Intervention</b>	Historically present but currently low; military operates indirectly.	Highest in region; coups, prolonged military rule, informal dominance.	Limited; influence through governance rather than coups.
<b>Institutionalized Policy Influence</b>	Visible in civil administration and security coordination.	Deeply entrenched; military dominates security & foreign policy.	Strong in post-war governance, security councils, and administration.
<b>Defense Diplomacy</b>	Very strong due to	Strong strategic	Moderate; driven by post-

Hybrid Governance Dimension	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
<b>&amp; International Engagement</b>	UN peacekeeping and balanced foreign ties.	partnerships shaping foreign policy direction.	war diplomacy with major powers.
<b>Economic / Business Involvement</b>	Growing: welfare trusts, construction, real estate.	Extensive military-economic empire with major business groups.	Expanded through post-war tourism, construction, commercial activity.
<b>Public Security / Emergency Governance</b>	Important role in crises, elections, disaster response.	Dominant role in internal security and counterinsurgency.	Strong in former conflict areas; ongoing surveillance/security tasks.
<b>Post-Conflict or Reconstruction Governance</b>	Not applicable; only crisis-driven temporary expansions.	Active in conflict zones (Balochistan, KP).	Very strong; military leads reconstruction, land management, and development.
<b>Overall Pattern</b>	Hybrid governance moderated by diplomacy, economy, and crisis management.	Multifaceted military dominance across governance, economy, and security.	Post-conflict hybrid model with deep military-administrative penetration.

## 4.1 Country-Wise Discussion

### 4.1.1 Bangladesh

The case of Bangladesh reveals a unique form of hybrid governance that has evolved through defense diplomacy and conflict management, rather than outright military takeover. Burden-sharing As indicated in Table 2 and table 3, Bangladesh scores high in defense diplomacy, based heavily on its status as one of the top contributors to UN peacekeeping. This international involvement confers professional and diplomatic legitimacy on the Bangladesh Armed Forces (BAF)<sup>[13, 14]</sup> provides BAF an institutional advantage that shapes national security policy making, albeit indirectly. KII-01, KII-02 and KII-07 illustrate that even though civilian political control is officially stable, policy consultation, intelligence coordination as well as national security reviewing are usually dependent on military knowledge. This is consistent with the “substitution hypothesis”: when direct intervention falls, control has room to maneuver through institutional channels and crisis governance practices. Bangladesh, while having much more limited economic engagement (military welfare trusts, engineering companies), is on a much smaller scale than it has been in Pakistan. Yet in infrastructure projects and disaster control, the BAF is coming to play a more visible role that carries with it the potential for military normalization by other means. Indeed, academics have posited that this ‘embedded’ system still engenders a type of “shadow governance,” whereby the military has influence without direct political control<sup>[31]</sup>.

### 4.1.2 Pakistan

Pakistan boasts the greatest military influence in all six dimensions combined (Tables 2 and 3). The Pakistan army has historically played the role of a political player directly involved in politics as well, through coups, kingmakers or having more direct control over security and foreign policy - hence scoring higher for direct intervention and institutional dominance.

Interview data from KII-03, KII-04 and KII-07 highlights how the military's sprawling business empire (Fauji Foundation, Army Welfare Trust investments, Bahria Town partnerships) is a source of vast economic power that determines networks of governance and political coercion. This strength of the economy has been much written about as one of the central pillars supporting Pakistan's "military-corporate state"<sup>[15, 16]</sup>. Besides, the institutionalized influence still remains too strong: defense committees, intelligence agencies and national security councils have operated with too much of a military upper hand. The military elite control foreign policy, internal security and relations with other powers such as China and the Gulf states even in civilian governments. Pakistan's defense diplomacy is only moderate compared to Bangladesh; however, its internal power is buttressed by crisis governance that accommodates terrorism, border instability and failure (it vehemently resists) of political consensus. This crossing of military power in the political, economic and security governance makes one of the most deeply rooted hybrid governing system in the region.

#### 4.1.3 Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka provides a salient post-conflict type of hybrid governance in which military control through territory, reconstruction and civil administration was entrenched particularly after the end of its civil war in 2009. As seen in Table 2 and 3, Sri Lanka is very high on post-conflict and territorial governance and high on institutionalized influence. KII-05 & KII-06 from Sri Lanka tell us that, reconstruction, land administration, Coastal security and resettlement spaces were lead by the military assuming functions that could not be taken over by civilian bodies as soon as was needed. This systemic embedding of military into development projects and administrative roles has raised red flags around the distinction between civilian and military! realms. As literature reveals, militarization continues in the North and East with concerns that military is involved in tourism, agriculture and infrastructure descending questions of accountability, land rights and future outcomes of demilitarization<sup>[2, 17]</sup>. Despite the absence of direct political meddling (now that Zubair eliminated the image of overt army operations and interference with politicians visible in Pakistan, cross border securitization for example, the military still influences post-war narratives, security and counter- extremism policy and even economics discourses. Sri Lanka's hybrid governance is thus deeply rooted in its post conflict legacy.

**Table 3.** Comparative Matrix of Military Influence Across Six Dimensions

Dimensions of Influence	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Direct Political Intervention	Low–Moderate	Very High	Moderate
Institutionalized Influence	Moderate	Very High	High
Defense Diplomacy	High	Moderate	Moderate
Economic / Business Engagement	Moderate	Very High	Moderate
Public Security & Crisis Governance	High	High	High
Post-Conflict / Territorial Governance	Low	Moderate	Very High

#### 4.2 Implications for Governance, Policy, and Future Research

The results have important implications for governance, policy, and future research in the South Asian hybrid regimes. Enhancement of civilian oversight, notably parliamentary control over military operations, transparent budgeting and auditing processes for the military-related entities, as well as clearer legal separation between civil and military domains is also critical. In the context of such expansion and diversification of the armed forces into business, more stringent regulatory and oversight systems are necessary to secure

against conflicts of interest, market barriers, and state monitoring failure. Rising from this experience of war and militarization, demilitarizing strategies in countries like Sri Lanka must have sunset clauses and phased transitions that transfer administrative power back to civilian institutions while capacitating local governance and civil society actors. Moreover, more transparency in defense diplomacy and international military cooperation is required to ensure that foreign missions and bilateral engagements are publicly reported on and reviewed by civilian government rather than being avenues for increasing military influence. Lastly, there would be also the potential for a broader contribution of future research to refine our empirical knowledge about hybrid governance which may draw on field-based evidence such as key informant interviews, institutional case studies and ethnography in unpacking the micro-level mechanisms through which military institutions drive governance outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion

In these articles, we demonstrate that hybrid governance in post-colonial South Asia is grounded largely in the historical legacies of and institutional structures and political economies associated with military power in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In all three states the armed forces have a significant input into political determinations sometimes less by open political rule than through institution implementation crisis administrative responsibility defense diplomacy, and economic or developmental participation. The comparative analysis illustrates two diverse forms of military engagement in politics: semi-permanent form is exhibited by Pakistan while historical-political reconstruction has resulted in the systemic model of governance as seen in Sri Lanka. Bangladesh, on the other hand, has shown a more indirect mode of influence based on defense diplomacy and peacekeeping prestige and advisory role in national security governance rather than direct political intervention.

They also demonstrate how forms of hybrid governance develop in line with the opportunities and limits of the respective political systems. Where democratic institutions are weak or politicized, military often enjoy enhanced policymaking authority either informally or structurally. Militaries step into governance voids where civilian capacity is fragile especially in post-conflict or crisis situations and often continue to play an administrative role for longer term periods. To be sure, the nature and extent of its influence differs from country to country; but such is the trend in general, where democratic control and accountability mechanisms, as well as civil-military boundaries defy concrete delineation in these post-colonial states. Hybrid governance, importantly here, endures because of the political elites' interests, popular expectations in crisis and institutional incentives for the armed forces to do so.

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