

## EVOLUTION OF THE CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONSHIP IN PAKISTAN IN THE POST-COVID ERA

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### 1. *The background of military dominance*

The military has played a dominant role in Pakistan since the formative phase of the state. The influence of the military emerged during the first ten years of independence, in the context of a bureaucratic-military-political alliance, then gradually turning into an exclusive control by the army from the second half of the 1950s. The state has been ruled by military regimes for about half of its history, and even when the government was formally governed by election-backed regimes the army has always exercised a supervisory role. Continuity is therefore the main characteristic of the role played by the military in Pakistani politics. At the same time, the military has shown flexibility in adapting to different circumstances and their political opponents over the decades. Since the first military coup in 1958 the army has experimented with a variety of political strategies and civilian-military relationship models, ranging from the all-military regime to the hybrid regime<sup>1</sup>.

The analysis of democracy's failure in Pakistan has seen a division

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<sup>1</sup> On the history and evolution of the Pakistan Army, see S. COHEN, *The Pakistan Army*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989; C. DEWEY, *The Rural Roots of Pakistan's Militarism*, in D. A. LOW (ed.), "The Political Inheritance of Pakistan", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991; K. L. KAMAL, *Pakistan. The Garrison State*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1982; C. FAIR, *Fighting to the End. The Pakistan Army's Way of War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014; H. A. RIZVI, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, New York, Palgrave McMillan, 2000; A. SHAH, *The Army and Democracy. Military Politics in Pakistan*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 2014; S. NAWAZ, *Crossed Swords. Pakistan its Army and the Wars Within*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2008.

of labour between historians and political scientists<sup>2</sup>. While the former have emphasised the long-term factors that hindered the evolution of elected institutions, with particular emphasis on the colonial legacy, the latter have highlighted post-1947 institutional imbalances as crucial explanations. Among the pre-1947 factors are the weak popular base of Pakistani nationalism especially in the country's largest province of the Punjab, and the continuity between the colonial political culture and the "government by decree" approach adopted by the early Pakistani administrators. A further crucial issue in Pakistan's troubled state-building process has been the ambiguity between the idea of the Islamic state supported by religious parties, and that of the nation-state supported by secular politicians. These factors must be analysed vis-à-vis Pakistan's growing obsession with security that became dominant in the public debate since 1947. Military weakness and geographical isolation evidenced by conflicts with India and border clashes with Afghanistan have set the stage for the prominence of military needs on the government's agenda. This was demonstrated by the early contacts between Pakistani authorities and the governments in London and Washington in 1947-1948 aimed at obtaining arms supplies. Interestingly, at the time there seemed to have been no fundamental disagreements between the civilian and military elites with regards to security requirements. In a radio speech in October 1949, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan made this point clear by stating: "The defence of the state is our first consideration. It dominates all other government activities". Such a view was shared by a wide civil-military circle, as indicated by similar statements by other authorities in the following years. Liaquat Ali Khan's successor Muhammad Ali Bogra declared in August 1953 that he would rather "starve the country than allow a weakening of its defence"<sup>3</sup>. As a result, in the decade 1947-1958,

<sup>2</sup> I. TALBOT, *Pakistan: a Modern History*, London, Hurst & Company, 1988; A. JALAL, *The State of Martial Rule: the Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990; F. SHAIKH, *Making Sense of Pakistan*, London, Hurst & Company, 2009; M. TUDOR, *The Promise of Power: The Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Pakistan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013; L. ZIRING, *Pakistan: The Enigma of Political Development*, Boulder, Westview, 2013; P. OLDENBURG, *India, Pakistan and Democracy*, London, Routledge, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> I. TALBOT, *Pakistan: a Modern History*, cit., p. 118; H. A. RIZVI, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, cit., p. 62.

Pakistan spent on average over 60% of its budget on defence, peaking at over 73% in the financial year 1949-1950<sup>4</sup>.

However, Pakistan's strategy during the first decade of independence went beyond military build-up. The broader goal was to build a set of foreign relations that could compensate for its perceived weakness. Such ambition would naturally be directed towards the United States, against the background of London's diminishing influence in the region. In their contacts with Washington, the Pakistani representatives stressed the alleged anti-communist nature inherent in Pakistan's Islamic culture and the state's historical vocation to project military power towards West Asia. Therefore, the relationship between military and politicians in Pakistan during the formative phase was one of both cooperation and competition, in an attempt to strengthen the country and find its place in the framework of the Cold War. However, given the largely military nature of US interests in Pakistan, it was only natural that the military would become the primary beneficiaries of Washington's political and economic support<sup>5</sup>.

The obsession with security also explains the military's attitude towards domestic politics. Beyond support for a strong central state, the military has developed a distrust of all expressions of regional, ethnic or linguistic autonomy. This attitude, in turn, has fuelled a distrust of professional politicians due to their provincial bases of influence. Interestingly, the military's criticism of the political class was underpinned by the belief that only the army represented what is typically referred to as the "true spirit" of the Pakistani citizen. The overwhelming recruitment of army personnel from rural areas – especially from the Punjab – has fuelled a stark binary opposition

<sup>4</sup> H. A. RIZVI, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, cit., p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> P. M. MCGARR, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945–1965*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013; R. J. MACMAHON, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan*, Columbia University Press 1994; D. KUX, *The United States and Pakistan: Disenchanted Allies, 1947-2000*, Washington, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001. See also, D. ABENANTE, *Le relazioni civili-militari negli anni formativi dello Stato pachistano: l'influenza dei fattori nazionali e internazionali*, in D. ABENANTE (ed.), "“Democrazie difficili” in Europa, Asia, Nord Africa e Medio Oriente: competizione partitica, conflitti e democratizzazione”, Trieste, Edizioni Università di Trieste, 1999, pp. 139-167.

between an idealised, honest and naïve peasant society and the corrupt urban elite, which is at the heart of the public discourse of the military<sup>6</sup>.

Yet the political strategy followed by the military over the years has been remarkably flexible, moving from direct involvement in politics to behind-the-scenes control of the government. From 1958 to 2008, the Army alternated between three strategies; firstly, the attempt to create a non-partisan political system, as in the case of the Basic Democracies of Ayub Khan in 1959 or under Zia-ul-Haq in 1977-1988. Second, the “king’s party” model as during the 1965 and 2002 elections; thirdly, the acceptance of party elections, with the aim of acting as a political intermediary in a fragmented political scenario.

The military’s attitude towards Islam has also evolved over time. Since 1947, the military has recognized the role of Islam as the basis of national identity and has sought to integrate religion into official propaganda. Yet the interpretation has changed considerably over time. The vision of the military has swung from the modernist conception of Ayub Khan (1958-1969) and Pervez Musharraf (2001-2008) to the ultra-conservative one of Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988). Therefore, there seems to be an important difference between the Pakistani case and that of other military and hybrid regimes such as Egypt or Turkey. While in the latter cases the military seems to have maintained greater ideological coherence, in Pakistan they have adopted various models of Islam-state relationship, depending on the circumstances and personal beliefs of their leaders<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. *The evolution after the 2018 general elections*

The analysis of the military’s political strategy is all the more relevant to understand the evolution after the 2018 elections. The elections saw

<sup>6</sup> See I. TALBOT, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, cit., pp. 152-153; C. DEWEY, *The Rural Roots of Pakistan’s Militarism*, cit.. According to recent research, about 75% of Pakistani army cadres came from just three districts of the Punjab: Rawalpindi, Jhelum and Campbellpur. See S. COHEN, *The Pakistan Army*, cit., p. 44; H. A. RIZVI, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, cit., pp. 37-38.

<sup>7</sup> On the issue, see F. SHAIKH, *Making Sense of Pakistan*, cit.; A. M. WEISS, *Islamic Reassertion in Pakistan: Islamic Laws in a Modern State*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1986.

Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf (Pakistan Movement for Justice, PTI) prevail, partly due to the political support it received by the military establishment. These events must be placed in the context of a political evolution that saw the military clash with the two main parties, the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The army has entered into conflict with both parties' leaders Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto over the last twenty years. Therefore, the PTI was supported by the military because they saw it as a useful alternative to mainstream parties. Furthermore, the political message of the PTI was in many ways akin to the vision of the military. Since its foundation in 1996 it has always proposed a pro-state agenda against any centrifugal tendencies. The fact that the PTI has its own regional stronghold in the two strategic provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkwa and the Punjab has added more relevance to the organization in the military's eyes. In particular, the party was viewed by many as useful ally for maintaining law and order in the frontier region bordering Afghanistan. Moreover, the PTI has conducted a political propaganda fiercely critical of the corruption of mainstream politicians and dynastic politics, especially with reference to the PML-N and PPP, which was favourably viewed by the army. Finally, the PTI had an attitude that combined an emphasis on modernization with a conservative approach in the social sphere and a defence of Islamic values that were also appreciated by the military.

Despite the support of the armed forces the PTI was able to prevail in the 2018 elections winning a slim majority of 31.8% of the votes. At the same time, the PML-N and the PPP maintained considerable strength, obtaining respectively 24.35% and 13.03% of the vote, and managed to maintain their traditional strongholds of Punjab and Sind<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, the election confirmed that Islamic parties maintain a significant influence in Pakistani society, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkwa and Baluchistan. These organizations were represented by the coalition of religious parties Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), and by the Tehrik-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). Collectively, the Islamic parties obtained nearly five millions votes

<sup>8</sup> *Results: Pakistan elections 2018*, "Al Jazeera" (<https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2018/live-results-pakistan-election-day-2018/index.html>); *Pakistan Election Summary*, <https://pakelection.pk/>; M. CORSI, *Pakistan 2018: General Elections and the Government of Imran Khan*, in M. TORRI and N. MOCCI (eds.), *Reacting to Donald Trump's Challenge*, "Asia Maior" Vol. XXIX/2018, 2019, Viella, Roma, pp. 357-375.

at the elections. The combination of the former two factors resulted in a fragmented political scene, in turn forcing Imran Khan to form a broad coalition with various smaller regional parties. This development exposed the government to instability, due to the various pressures coming from its regional allies, especially from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) in Sind<sup>9</sup>.

The fate of Imran Khan's government was also linked to the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. The first case of COVID-19 in Pakistan occurred in February 2020, followed by a rapid spread of the virus across the country. In May 2020, Pakistan ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in the world for the number of COVID cases. This led the government to close borders, suspend international flights, and ban all meetings, except those of religious nature. However, the prime minister rejected the proposal to impose a national lockdown<sup>10</sup>. The country's economy was hit hard by the consequences of the pandemic: the inflation rate rose to a record 14.6% in January 2020, standing at 9% in 2021. The country's GDP fell by 0.4% in the same year<sup>11</sup>. Generally, the government's response to the emergency was considered largely ineffective by large sectors of public opinion. According to many observers, the premier's communicative approach regarding the pandemic tended to minimize the extent of the risk, inducing the population to underestimate the dangers to their health. In particular, the government expressed opposition to the imposition of a general blockade, as according to the prime minister this would have excessively damaged the country's economy. However, this approach was criticized by many independent observers and created tension between Imran Khan and the non-elected sectors, especially the armed forces<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> M. CORSI, *Pakistan 2020: The PTI Government Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic*, in M. TORRI and N. MOCCI (eds.), "Asia in 2020: Coping with COVID-19 and Other Crises", "Asia Maior" Vol. XXXI/2020, 2021, pp. 443-444.

<sup>10</sup> M. TORRI and N. MOCCI (eds.), *Asia in 2020: Coping with COVID-19 and Other Crises*, cit., pp. 447-450.

<sup>11</sup> M. TORRI and N. MOCCI (eds.), *Asia in 2020: Coping with COVID-19 and Other Crises*, cit., pp. 450-451; *Pakistan may fall into a recession due to COVID-19: World Bank*, "The Express Tribune", 18 April 2020 (<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2196221/pakistan-may-fall-recession-due-covid-19-world-bank>); S. SHAQEAT, *Pakistan in 2021: End of the Innings for Imran Khan?*, "Asian Survey", Vol. 62, Issue 1, January/February 2022, pp. 178-179.

<sup>12</sup> *The coronavirus outbreak may hurt Imran Khan's political future*, "Al Jazeera", 8 April 2020 (<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/4/8/the-coronavirus-outbreak-may-hurt-imran-khans-political-future>).

A particularly controversial aspect was the prime minister's reluctance to impose containment measures on religious congregations, including everyday prayers in mosques and large initiatives of religious organizations. This was obviously a very sensitive matter in Pakistan given the relevance of Muslim religious practices. The matter was made more complicated by the fact that various Islamic religious authorities openly declared their opposition to containment measures, inviting believers to disregard them. The problem was a difficult one for Imran Khan to manage, due to the place of religious symbols in his political discourse, and the privileged relationship he enjoyed with some Islamic organizations. According to various sources, the first major outbreak of COVID-19 in the country has been caused by the annual congregation of the religious missionary movement called Tablighi Jama'at in Raiwind in June 2020, which has gathered some 80.000 people<sup>13</sup>. Although the government eventually made the decision to prohibit religious gatherings, Muslim authorities in many parts of the country reportedly did not take any steps to enforce the rules or even encouraged believers not to abide by them<sup>14</sup>. In early 2020, as the rate of infection rose very rapidly, the government was criticized for its handling of the crisis. The rise in COVID cases prompted various provincial authorities, starting with Sind in March 2021, to declare local measures of emergency with the support of the army, in apparent disagreement with the federal government<sup>15</sup>. The dissatisfaction of the military with the ineffectiveness of the government response and its poor ability to communicate became apparent as the situation evolved, and led the army to take over the management of the emergency. In April 2020 a National Command Operation Center was formed, officially based on a civilian-military collaboration, although its control was clearly exercised by the military. This was indicated by the fact that the contact tracing operations were conducted directly by the military intelligence services<sup>16</sup>. The application of national emergency measures and the vaccination campaign have contributed to bringing the

<sup>13</sup> M. CORSI, *Pakistan 2020: The PTI Government amidst COVID-19 Pandemic*, cit., p. 447.

<sup>14</sup> International Crisis Group, *Pakistan's COVID-19 Crisis*, "Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°162", Karachi/Islamabad/Brussels, 7 August 2020, pp. 6-8.

<sup>15</sup> *Provinces seek army's assistance to enforce Covid SOPs*, "Dawn", 26 April 2021 (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1620418>).

<sup>16</sup> *Pakistan deploys army in 16 cities to enforce COVID-19 precautions*, "Reuters", 26 April 2021 (<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/pakistan-deploys-army-16-cities-enforce->



infection rate under control. Yet, the measures have been hampered by widespread resistance in some sectors of Pakistani society to vaccinations, considered by the most conservative groups as against Islam<sup>17</sup>. In fact, according to various observers, although emergency measures and vaccinations had contributed to the reduction of infection rate, the demographic structure of the population had also played a relevant role<sup>18</sup>. The health and economic consequences of the pandemic have greatly contributed to diminishing the popularity of Imran Khan's government and to undermining its relationship with the military. However, his political decline was the result of several factors, both internal and external.

First, Imran Khan's inability to keep the promises made to his regional allies played a very important role. This led to the breaking of the alliance with the MQM-P, and with other minor organizations, and to their withdrawal from the ruling coalition in early 2022. Moreover, the government and the military have clashed on a number of other issues, including the crisis in Afghanistan and Chinese investments in the country. After the withdrawal of US forces from Kabul, the fall of the Ghani government and the takeover by the Taliban in August 2022, Imran Khan made no secret of supporting the political developments in the neighbouring state. The day after the Taliban entered Kabul, the prime minister declared that the Afghans had "broken the chains of slavery"<sup>19</sup>. In the following weeks, other spokespersons of the government made statements in favour of a normalization of relations with the new Afghan regime. However, compared with the government's optimistic approach, the military's reaction was characterized by much greater caution. Despite the well-known and consolidated relations between the Pakistani army and the Taliban, which date back to the 1990s, the military has consistently maintained a line of confidentiality on its Afghan agenda, in order not to compromise relations with Washington. Hence, Imran Khan's open

covid-19-precautions-2021-04-26/); *Pakistan using intelligence services to track coronavirus cases*, "Al Jazeera", 24 April 2020 (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/24/pakistan-using-intelligence-services-to-track-coronavirus-cases>).

<sup>17</sup> *Receiving coronavirus vaccine permissible under Islamic law, Pakistani clerics say*, "Arab News", 22 March 2021 (<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1829866/pakistan>).

<sup>18</sup> M. CORSI, *Pakistan 2020: The PTI Government amidst COVID-19 Pandemic*, cit., p. 450.

<sup>19</sup> *Afghans have broken 'shackles of slavery', says Pak PM Imran Khan after Taliban seize power*, "The Times of India", 16 August 2021 (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/taliban-has-broken-shackles-of-slavery-pakistan-pm-imran-khan-says/articleshow/85368058.cms>).



support for the Taliban government alarmed the country's military leaders. A second element of tension arose from the government's management of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Despite the original consensus between politicians and the military on the strategic nature of the project - the value of which was estimated at around 57 billion dollars - since its rise to power the PTI has assumed a critical position. As early as 2018, various government officials had expressed concerns about the possibility that the project would yield excessive control of Pakistani infrastructure to the Chinese government. The criticism was mainly directed at the previous prime minister Nawaz Sharif under whose government the agreement was concluded. Such concerns were not unprecedented, having been expressed also by international observers<sup>20</sup>. Such criticism, however, irritated the country's military leaders and according to media sources, the attitude of the new prime minister led the Chief of the armed forces General Javed Bajwa to plan a mission to Beijing in September 2018, in order to reassure the Chinese counterpart of Islamabad's willingness to keep its commitments<sup>21</sup>.

The growing tension between the government and the military has added to the protest of the opposition front. The latter had coalesced from September 2020 on an alliance named the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). The group was formed on the initiative of various heterogeneous forces, including the PML, the PPP and some Islamic parties. Two main aspects marked the emergence of this group. The first was the front-line role played by one of the main Pakistani clerical organizations, Fazlur Rahman's Jamiat-ul-ulama-i-Islam (JUI-F). Both the PTI and the JUI-F have their stronghold in Khyber Pakhtunkwa, and therefore there was strong competition between them for consensus in the province. The second relevant aspect was the rise to the forefront of the "third generation" of Pakistani leaders, represented by Bilawal Bhutto and Maryam Sharif, respectively Benazir Bhutto's son, and Mian Nawaz Sharif's daughter. The fragmented nature of the opposition front, however, prevented it from putting the government in real trouble, until the latter came into conflict with the military. In fact, in 2021 the

<sup>20</sup> *Economic corridor-CPEC could turn Pakistan into China's 'client state'*, "DW.com", 14 November 2016 (<https://www.dw.com/en/economic-corridor-cpec-could-turn-pakistan-into-chinas-client-state/a-36384662>).

<sup>21</sup> *Is new Pakistani PM Khan backtracking on China's economic corridor?*, "DW", 18 September 2018 (<https://www.dw.com/en/is-new-pakistani-pm-khan-backtracking-on-chinas-economic-corridor/a-45539991>).

divisions within the ranks of the opposition resurfaced. Besides the divisions between the various parties' agendas, which represented mainly regional or sectarian interests, one major element of disagreement among the opposition forces became the strategy towards the army. While the Islamic parties openly criticized the involvement of the armed forces in politics, some of the major parties were reluctant to enter into an open conflict with the powerful military<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, the repositioning of the armed forces towards the PTI government was a decisive factor contributing to the political crisis that occurred with the no confidence vote at the National Assembly in April 2022. Paradoxically, despite the fact that the crisis was mainly linked to civil-military relations, Imran Khan's was the first government in the history of Pakistan to be deposed through a transparent parliamentary procedure<sup>23</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

The main consequence of the recent developments in Pakistan has been a reassertion of the role of the army in politics. Partly because of the COVID pandemic, and due to the inefficiency of the civilian institutions in dealing with its economic and social consequences, Pakistan saw the weakening of political institutions and civilian decision making and a reassertion of military control. This scenario appeared unlikely until 2020, when there was a widespread PDM opposition in the country, which appeared confident enough to challenge not only Imran Khan's government but also the military. However, the weakening of the PDM and the growing conflict between the military and the government resulted in the military regaining control and power in Pakistani politics. While the military avoided entering into politics directly allowing the crisis to play out in parliament, the military's positioning seemed to have been the deciding factor contributing to the government's crisis. The second most important development has been the strengthening of the Islamic opposition in the country. Already the 2018 elections had seen MMA and

<sup>22</sup> S. SHAQFAT, *Pakistan in 2021: End of the Innings for Imran Khan?*, cit., pp. 174-175.

<sup>23</sup> *Pakistan PM Imran Khan gone after losing no-confidence vote*, "Al Jazeera", 9 April 2022 (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/9/pakistan-prime-minister-imran-khan-no-confidence-vote>); *Imran Khan: What led to charismatic Pakistan PM's downfall*, "BBC News", 9 April 2022 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-61047736>).

TLP winning 5 million votes. Their influence has increased since then, partly because of the political importance of the blasphemy issue, and partly because of the rise of the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, the Islamic parties that were part of the PDM have taken the lead in public criticism of the army, overshadowing the mainstream parties. This has resulted in a further increase of their influence. That said, after the fall of the government, political demonstrations organized by the PTI have indicated that Imran Khan still enjoys great popularity in the country<sup>25</sup>. The fact that the PTI has launched an opposition campaign against the new government will probably contribute to further political instability in the months ahead. Moreover, the breakdown of relations between the military and the PTI means that the former are now in conflict with all the main political organizations in the country, which will continue to make the country's overall political future very uncertain.

**Riassunto** - Il Pakistan è stato governato da regimi militari per quasi metà della sua storia. Dal primo colpo di stato del 1958 l'esercito ha sperimentato una varietà di strategie politiche e di modelli di relazione civili-militari, che includono il regime puramente militare e varie forme di regime ibrido. Anche l'atteggiamento dei militari nei confronti dell'Islam si è evoluto nel tempo. Sin dal 1947 i militari hanno riconosciuto il ruolo della religione come base dell'identità nazionale e hanno cercato di integrarlo nella propaganda ufficiale pur nella diversità delle concezioni. La natura del rapporto tra partiti politici e militari è alla base dell'evoluzione politica recente. Le elezioni generali del 2018 hanno visto prevalere il Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf (PTI) di Imran Khan in larga parte grazie al sostegno ricevuto dall'establishment militare. L'esercito ha scelto di sostenere il PTI come alternativa ai due principali partiti nazionali, la Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) e il

Pakistan People's Party (PPP), con i quali i militari sono stati in conflitto per circa vent'anni. Tuttavia le elezioni del 2018 hanno dimostrato che la capacità delle forze armate di controllare la scena politica è limitata. Il PML-N e il PPP hanno infatti mantenuto le loro tradizionali roccaforti nel Punjab e nel Sind. Nonostante il sostegno dei militari il PTI è riuscito a prevalere alle elezioni solo con una leggera maggioranza. La crisi del governo di Imran Khan tra il 2020 e il 2022 è dovuta a tre fattori principali: le divisioni tra i partiti della coalizione di governo; la cattiva gestione dell'emergenza causata dalla pandemia di Covid-19; la diversa visione del PTI e dei militari della cooperazione economica con Pechino e in particolare del China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Questa situazione ha portato a un conflitto tra il PTI e l'esercito e al voto di sfiducia in Parlamento nell'aprile 2022 che ha estromesso Imran Khan dal potere.

<sup>24</sup> S. SHAQFAT, *Pakistan in 2021: End of the Innings for Imran Khan?*, cit., pp. 176-177.

<sup>25</sup> *Imran Khan: Inside the huge rally in Lahore for Pakistan's ousted PM* "BBC News", 22 April 2022 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-61189745>).