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<http://dawn.com/2012/04/26/role-of-military-in-foreign-policy-receding-says-khar/>

Role of military in foreign policy receding

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Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar said new dynamics were now taking hold in the country.

“I want you to also understand that things have changed in Pakistan,” she told Reuters in an interview. “I think this overbearance of the role of the military in the foreign policy of Pakistan is something which will recede as time passes.”

“I think all institutions in Pakistan are realising that there is a place and role for every institution,” said the foreign minister.

“And it is best to serve Pakistan’s interests that each of the institutions remains within the boundaries of the roles which are constitutionally defined. It’s a new sort of equilibrium.”

Khar, one of a number of rising women politicians in Pakistan, started her political career with a party affiliated with former military dictator General Pervez Musharraf, and eventually rose to junior finance minister. She later switched to the ruling Pakistan People’s Party (PPP).

The foreign minister said the current government’s staying power in a country prone to coups had given it sway and room to manoeuvre, on issues ranging from ties with the United States to trade with India.

“As far as the new equilibrium ... you have consistent four years of democracy, it’s the longest term a democratic government has had in Pakistan,” said Khar, who is from a political family in southern Punjab.

Khar pointed to the reaction to a Nato cross-border raid in November that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers.

A Pakistani parliamentary committee reviewed ties with Washington and demanded a halt to US drone aircraft strikes.

“It is not the first time that foreign policy has been discussed in parliament,” said Khar, in her modest Islamabad office. “But is it not the first time that relations with the United States and other important countries were put on hold until the parliament gave a green signal?”

Khar also said the government’s approach to India suggested Pakistan’s democracy was becoming more robust and the military’s grip on policy had loosened.

In the face of some domestic opposition, the Islamabad government last November vowed to grant India most favoured nation status, which will end restrictions that require most products to move via a third country.

The move was hailed by India and the two countries are now focused on resolving economic issues before moving on to more intractable problems such as the disputed Kashmir.

“Don’t underestimate the importance of what this government did with trade with India. Since 1965 there was no political or military government that could open up trade with India. And it was considered a no-go area,” said Khar.

“And that to me shows, one the maturity of democracy, the maturity of views, and the maturity of the decision-making exercise in Pakistan.”