

Pakistan: A Martial Show

Written by Mohammad Ali

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MOHAMMAD ALI, DEC 29 2007

Pakistan came into being out of a nationalist cause; the ethnic Muslim minority felt that its rights would be better preserved and served under a separate democratic setup, rather than among an overwhelming majority of Hindus. Great Britain also wanted a buffer state between the Muslim belt and India to save the Sub-Continent (which contained a quarter of the world's population) from the effects of 'Islamization' and to ensure that it never emerged as a challenging power to British ambitions in the East (the Middle East, Hong Kong, Burma and Japan to name a few).

The Sub-Continent was divided according to the electoral results of the 1946 elections, the area where the Muslim League won majority seats, constituted Pakistan. One might assume that since the basis of a country coming into being is democratic, it would inherit a democratic culture and it would continue to be a democracy. Unfortunately that didn't happen, owing specifically to one institution, the Military.

In 1947 Gen. Gracy was Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Pakistan. The first challenge for the young army was to brace itself against the Indian advance in Kashmir. Mr. Jinnah, the democratically elected head of state ordered Gen. Gracy to counter the Indian army's mobilization. He flatly refused, saying that he still took orders from the British imposed Viceroy of India, not the Governor General of Pakistan.

The episode proved important as young indigenous officers had seen how they could challenge authority of democratic institutes to serve their own interests.

This was the seed of a poisonous ivy which would engulf Pakistan ever after. Following General Gracy, there were twelve Military Chiefs prior to Gen. Musharraf. One died mysteriously during his tenure, two were prematurely retired by suspecting Prime Ministers and out of the remaining nine, five have been the De-Facto Presidents of Pakistan (three for a little more than ten years each and two for a few months) primarily as a result of string of coups against the democratic Governments.

There have been a number of common patterns with regards to these military takeovers. Firstly, there is a roughly ten year cyclic period. Pakistan came into being in 1947. General Ayub ruled from 1958-1969. General Zia ruled from 1978-1988. General Musharraf ruled from 1999-2007. Ironically they all coincide with either the beginning or end of a Republican Presidential term.

All military dictators have given concessions to the US and its allies in return for strong military assistance. Gen Ayub, during height of cold war, gave bases to American U-2 spy planes in return for 100 plus F-86 fighters & generous aid to the Army. General Zia turned Pakistan into a base of operations for the CIA against Afghani fighters during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in return for F-16's, Combat helicopters and missile defense systems. General Musharraf once again acceded to American Intelligence and Military and provided air and ground bases for the American Invasion of Afghanistan in return for U.S. \$70 million a month military assistance and political support.

As long as these dictators have served the White House well, there has been minimal pressure on them from the international community. Each one of them has carried out a personal agenda , suppressing democratic movements and strengthening their rule via active military intelligence agencies in virtually every Governmental institute and society.

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Each one of them have had a dismal human rights record. They arrested, killed, abducted or exiled anyone and everyone from civil society raising a voice of concern. These include prominent writers, poets, actors, democratic workers, labor and student unionists, journalists and lawyers.

They have played havoc with the country's constitution to suit to one man rule. They have shaped Military and society alike to suit their own ideals.

Gen Ayub abolished provinces and states and turned Pakistan into one unit under his direct rule. He appointed trusted generals as Governors of the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Their atrocities were so grand that it resulted in thousands of deaths, political instability and eventually it's breakaway from Pakistan.

General Zia 'religionized' the military to an extent that it's motto during his time was converted to Emaan (Faith), Jihad (Holy War) and Taqva (Piousness) Fi Sabilillah (For the sake of Allah). Services book club printed thousands of volumes of Jihadi text, the whole fight in Afghanistan was fought in the name of religion. This resulted in elements of the military sympathizing with religious and Jihadi groups and turned Pakistan into a safe haven for them; they later emerged as Al-Qaeda & Taliban. He amended the constitution so that he could dismiss elected assemblies at his will, which he exercised in 1987.

General Musharraf also played havoc with the constitution in place, suspending it twice, abolishing all fundamental, constitutional and human rights of a nation of 160 million. He marginalized the Balouch and Psthun ethnicities via military operations in minor provinces. Divided the society with his newfound 'moderate' and 'hardliner' Muslim themes. Intelligence agencies unleashed illegal abduction operations which resulted in the infamous "Missing Persons" case of hundreds of people abducted by agencies and "disappeared".

Moreover, the democratically elected leaders, especially sitting Prime Ministers have been removed from the national political scene by the military covertly or overtly, during the coups or during the tenure of dictatorships. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali was shot (1953), Opposition Leader Miss Fatima Jinnah was strangled to death, (1966) Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto hanged (1979), Prime Minister Junejo removed (1987), Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif exiled (1999), opposition leader and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto shot (2007). All these cases remain unsolved to date; there has been no pressure from the outside or inside to hold a fair or international investigation. The Grand Masters in Washington are simply not bothered.

This leads to a simple equation for any Military Commander. As long as he can exploit the interests of the White House and serve them well, he can not only conduct coups, but rule the country and share the spoils of power with the corrupt top brass.

The question is why is it happening so very often? We might have to consider countless parameters of this equation, but a few according to my understanding are listed here.

The intelligence machinery in democratic states is usually under civilian watch, as is the case with the D.S.T. in France, R.A.W. in India or with the CIA & US Senate. In Pakistan, the infamous ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) is a subset of the Military. Governed and operated specifically by the Pakistani Army. Since in Pakistani politics the Military is a stake holder, it therefore serves the military's interest of remaining in power. Unless the ISI and tens of other intelligence agencies like it i.e. the M.I. (Military Intelligence), I.B. (Intelligence Bureau) and Paramilitary FIUs (Field Investigation Units) etc. are properly "Civilized", the recurrence of coups won't be stopped easily.

The superior rights of military personal should be abolished. In the amended constitution of Pakistan, amended off course by the military, no Military officer is answerable in a civilian court; no military authority (which have, in the name of defense and personal welfare accumulated nearly 20% of country's 796096 sq. miles of territory) or military cantonments, are answerable to Metropolitan or Civilian governments. Hence the top brass specifically enjoy benefits of a vast array of real estate schemes, minting millions.

Corporate ventures of the Military which range from Banks, Financial Services, Heavy industries, Commercial

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hospitals, Dairy products, Arms & Ammunition Exports need to be put under civilian check and balance or abolished altogether.

17 Constitutional amendments which resulted in exceptional powers for the Military must be rolled back.

The international stance, especially from the EU and US as well as from China (another friend of military dictators), should be zero-tolerance towards dictators.

The people of Pakistan should have access to free media & an independent judiciary which can keep a check on the excesses of military, keep people informed and provide them relief.

This might seem somewhat demanding, but these are merely a few things which provide the military with a huge leverage over civil society, and unless they are rolled back, there will be one military dictator after another until this country falls apart and breaks up into a myriad of radical ethnic states, turning South Asia into another war-torn Africa. This is something I fear is just around the corner.

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About the author:

I am a LUMS(Lahore University of Management Sciences) alumni. LUMS has been the focal point of current pro-democracy, pro-judiciary and anti-dictatorship student movement in Pakistan.

My generation of students have learnt a lot during this movement. After decades of depoliticising of student bodies by previous military dictatorship, we all are born-again democratic workers.

Currently I live and work in Islamabad.