Chapter 1

Military Takeover and the Internal Politics in Pakistan

Introduction

On the afternoon of 12 October 1999, Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan, dismissed General Parvez Musharraf, Chief of Army Staff (COAS), who had been in Colombo to attend Sri Lanka's 50th Independence Day celebration, and appointed ISI Chief Ziauddin to replace him. Later, the PIA flight PK805 carrying General Musharraf was denied permission to land at Quaid-i-Azam International Airport in Karachi on orders from the Prime Minister. The control tower instructed the pilot to go to Mumbai or Nawab Shah in Sindh, but the aircraft had insufficient fuel and had to circle over Karachi.

Soon after the announcement of Musharraf's dismissal, the Army went into action and occupied the government buildings and broadcasting station. This seemed to confirm rumors that the Army had prepared an action plan in case of an emergency. Flight PK805 finally landed at Karachi, apparently with only enough fuel left for 7 minutes. Nawaz Sharif was taken into custody by the Army and asked to resign. He refused. The next day General Musharraf made a speech on TV and declared that he had completed a takeover of the government, a reluctantly taken action, he said, that was the only way to avoid political chaos.

Many people support this takeover because, if nothing else, it brought an end to Nawaz Sharif's corrupt government. But all agree that the future is by no means clear, and the public harbors many fears about the prospects for their country.

This article aims to elucidate the background of the military takeover, the political role of the Army in Pakistan, and the significance of democracy for the political situation in Pakistan.

1.1 Behind the Political Takeover

The political change of October 1999 was largely welcomed in Pakistan even though it meant the collapse of the democratically elected government. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, in Pakistan the Army, as an institution, is more trusted than the government, the bureaucracy or capitalist organizations. In Pakistan society, the big landowner system still prevails and land ownership affects even the adult franchise. Just after the political takeover, several editorials presented the view that there had not been real democracy in Pakistan, indicating the strong grip that land owners hold. In a country where real power is held by landlords and capitalists closely linked with them, the Army is seen as an elite group independent of this system of land ownership. In a political crisis the army rises up like a champion of justice or social reformer to exterminate vicious politicians. In this sense, the political change instigated by General Musharraf is similar to the coup by General Ayub Khan in 1957. The latter referred to his own coup in terms of "social reform" and "revolution" and was enthusiastically supported by the people of Pakistan.

A second reason for the popular acceptance of the takeover is the fact that Sharif's Government itself had already lost the trust of the people. At its outset his government was strongly supported by

the voters, and his Pakistan Muslim League (PML) gained two thirds of the seats in the legislative assembly. Sharif's first priority was to have been to clean up corruption, but this turned out to be a promise used only to overthrow his political enemy, Benazir Bhutto.

Let us then examine Sharif's policy and it's results to see how he lost popular support during his two years in office.

In March 1997, Nawaz Sharif took office with an absolute majority in the legislative assembly (134 of 217 seats), a first in the history of Pakistan. He pledged to wipe out corruption, eradicate poverty, curb population growth, promote education and rebuild the economy. First, he established the Accountability Committee and started to expose corruption by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and her family. He finally succeeded in freezing the Bhutto family's bank account in Switzerland. Ex-Minister of Investment Zardari, husband of Benazir Bhutto, was charged in the Murtaza Bhutto murder case. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), which should have been the largest opposition party, was thus decisively damaged both politically and socially.

After beating back its political enemy, the Sharif government started to strengthen its institutional base. Firstly, a 13th amendment to the Constitution abolished the 8th amendment, which had given the President the right to dissolve the Assembly. The right to dissolve the Assembly was a powerful tool of last resort for the President and was used to drive all the prime ministers after Zia-ul Haq from office before completion of their term. This new amendment thus stripped the President of effective power and also robbed the Army of a route to indirect political influence through the President.

Secondly, a 14th amendment to the Constitution prohibited MPs from changing parties, rooting out a practice whereby MPs changed parties for bribes. With this, the PML had a secure, absolute majority in the Parliament.

An Anti-Terrorism Law was also established. The main, ostensible purpose of this law was to calm the sectarian violence between the *Shi'i* and *Sunni*, violence which was intensifying particularly in Karachi City. This law provided for the establishment of an Anti-Terrorism Court, which was independent of the existing court system (and which was where, ironically, General Musharraf brought charges against Nawaz Sharif). As the new law and court undercut the authority of the existing judiciary system, they brought the Government into confrontation with the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah charged Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif with contempt of court. Sharif responded by raising questions about Shah's qualification for Chief Justice because his appointment by former Prime Minister Bhutto had not followed the seniority rule. From October to December 1997, tensions were high with President Laghari attempting to mediate. General Karamat, COAS at the time, was called back from a visit to the Middle East, and there was talk of the military taking action. Finally the President resigned and the Chief Justice was to take a leave of absence until the end of his term, Ajmal Mian being appointed as acting Chief Justice. The army did not act at this time.

Within the government, an atmosphere built up in which confronting Sharif could mean dismissal, and opinions opposing the Prime Minister were seldom voiced. Constitutional amendments 13 and 14 enabled Sharif to contend that he was acting with the strong support and mandate of the nation.

Unlike Bhutto, who had built good relations with the Army, Nawaz Sharif preferred to exclude the influence of the Army in government and to control it through intervention in personnel matters or through divisive tactics. It can be said that he tried to bring the Army under his control. But

on the other hand, General Karamat is rumored to have planned a coup three times during his term. He never carried out those plans, reportedly because he did not want to repeat the mistakes made by Zia-ul Haq and others. But in October 1998, he said in a speech at the Naval War College in Lahore that, unlike economically powerful countries, Pakistan could not afford to engage in policies to stir up sectarian violence, destabilize the political situation, or jeopardize the peace and order of the country. Five days after this speech, he was forced to resign as COAS. General Parvez Musharraf was appointed his successor, superseding the first candidate, Chief of General Staff General Ali Qui Khan, as well as the second, Quarter Master General General Khalid Nawaz. General Ziauddin was appointed ISI chief. Ali Quli Khan and Khalid Nawaz resigned from the Army. Appointment of General Ziauddin as ISI Chief was seen as a key element of Sharif's strategy to rein in the army[1].

After this, confrontation between the Army and the Government was out in the open. The gap widened further in May-July 1999 over the military clash with India at Kargil, Kashmir. Sharif decided to withdraw Pakistani troops after a visit to Washington and discussions with President Clinton, a decision the Army could not swallow. Then in August, a Pakistani Navy plane was shot down in Indian territory. The Army insisted on retaliating, but Sharif was firmly opposed. Criticism of Sharif for taking his policy cues from the U.S. spread not only in the Army but among the general public as well. Soon after that, ISI Chief General Ziauddin visited the U.S. and discussed the Afghanistan issue with Assistant Secretary of State Mr. Inderfarth. After his return, Sharif expressed anti-Taliban opinions, creating more bad impressions domestically.

At the same time, cases of bankrupt of capitalists and politicians were on the increase, and capitalists and landlords who never paid their electricity or gas bills were coming under public criticism. Also, an increase in electricity rates and in the transport scheme and housing scheme both of which cost 2 billion Rupees, met with strong public opposition. On 7 September 1999, nineteen political parties from all over the country, including MQM (Muttahida Qaumi Movement), ANP (Awami National Party), and TI (Tehriq-i-Insaf), joined in an anti-government alliance and lead a strike in Sindh[2].

Relations between the Sharif Government and the MQM had been worsening. The MQM used to make coalition with the PML in the early days of Sharif's government, but in 1998 it dissolved its ties with the PML. (Basically Sharif Government was quite depressive against MQM). In the name of security control, Sharif brought the Province of Sindh under the direct rule of the federal government. Ironically, with Sharif's development of an aggressive policy against sectarian and ethnic conflicts, these kinds of violence increased. In September 1999, at the final stage of the Sharif government, a big rally was held, lead by MQM, and sectarian violence was intense. But after 12 October 1999, the situation became calm. The Karachi police and security officers at foreign missions in Karachi regarded it as just a lull in the storm; developments would depend very much on the policies of General Musharraf[3].

Just after the military takeover, MQM leader Farooq Sattar said that Sharif's action which was conducted in Musharraf's absence was a betrayal to the General who had maintained a stance loyal to the elected government. The MQM as a political party could not accept military government but, he suggested, would take a wait-and-see attitude for six months to a year[4].

Thus although the Sharif Government was formally a democratic one, people did not consider it democratic in fact, seeing it rather as a dictato-

rial government elected through a democratic process. People wanted change. When, then, foreign media sensationally reported this political change as a "coup d'etat", there was confusion of sorts among some journalists and intellectuals in Pakistan. The military takeover was indeed an unconstitutional change of Government. Normally when the prime minister and the government lose the support of the assembly, the opposition parties can present a no-confidence bill, but in this case, the opposition parties could not play their proper role. If the Army can be viewed as having played the role of the opposition parties, it may perhaps be said that this political change was at least one way of changing the government without bloodshed.

1.2 Evaluating Nawaz Sharif

As we saw in the previous section, Sharif's policy of concentrating power in himself as Prime Minister was, in addition to his corruption, a big cause of the short life of his government. Although the issue of corruption can not be ignored, it is important to note that Sharif carried this out according to constitutional processes. His policies can be called despotic, but they can also be understood as an effort to make Pakistan independent from military influences. Generally speaking, in most countries the Army cannot resist civilian control. As we have seen, General Karamat did not go through with his coup plans because he believed he should respect the Prime Minister, who was in office through democratic procedures. It was not only EU and Commonwealth countries that condemned Musharraf's takeover, but some Pakistani intellectuals and journalists and such human rights organizations as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan as well. This was because General Musharraf suspended the Constitution, undercutting democracy. It is important to note that in Pakistan not a few people hold the view that there are no circumstances that justify military rule[5].

We can point out as well several positive achievements of the Sharif government. Relations with India—for example, the "bus diplomacy" started in February 1999 and the Lahore declaration—being a case in point. At their Lahore meeting in February 1999, Sharif and Vajpeyee reached agreement on several points. They concurred that Kashmir is a core issue not only for Pakistan and India, but also for the regional security of South Asia, and that the issue should not drag on into the twenty-first century. It was agreed that negotiations over Kashmir should be held behind closed doors because the issue is such an emotional one for the people of the two countries, and negotiators were appointed from both sides. These back channel talks had started in March 1999, but because of the fighting in Kargil, were suspended at the end of April.

After the takeover, many newspaper articles and editorials appeared arguing that the nation of Pakistan was waiting for a leader who would not be like Sharif or Bhutto. But the reality is that it is very difficult to find the right leadership now in Pakistan and Musharraf is taking pains to show a clear direction. There is no strong national leader and PML and PPP are the only powerful and nation wide political parties.

Nawaz Sharif was on the right track insofar as he had tried to make politics in Pakistan independent of Army influence, but due to his corruption and dictatorial policies, he lost his legitimacy and in the end, his post itself.

1.3 The Army and Religious Parties

When news of the political change in Pakistan broke, the international community expressed concern over the fact that an Islamic country with nuclear weapons had come under military rule[6]. There may be no reasonable reason to

assert it is unreasonable fears, but at least we can say, the relationship between the Pakistan Army and religious parties is not so strong. There are three main Islamic parties in Pakistan, Jamaat-i-Islami, Jamiatul Ulama-i-Islam, and Jamiatul Ulama-i-Pakistan. In the election of 1997, Jamaat-i-Islami boycotted the vote, Jamiatul Ulama-i-Islam obtained two seats, and Jamiatul Ulama-i-Pakistan, not even one. These parties are not powerful force at present[7].

There are people not only in PPP but in PML who recognize that the military takeover was unavoidable. In fact, every political party wants to see corruption curbed first and then a reconvening of the Assembly and a return to democratization through fresh elections[8]. The biggest religious party, Jamaat-i-Islami, has almost the same stance toward the Musharraf Government. Party representative Qazi Hussain said in a speech at Peshawar on 18 October 1999 that Jamaat-i-Islami demands of the military government accountability among civilians and military, politicians and bureaucrats, and the establishment of an institutional system to maintain it. But Qazi Hussain opposed Musharraf's political leanings toward modernized Islam and his consideration of Turkey as a model for a future Pakistan . For Qazi Hussain, Pakistan should be moving toward an Islamic revolution[9].

The relation between politics and religion has long been a concern in Pakistan. In the struggle for independence, the All-India Muslim League had laid stress on the religious identity of Muslims in its appeal to the Indians in the subcontinent to unify irrespective of social stratum. For the League's leader, M.A. Jinnah, this might have been less religion fervor that a political strategy, but as a result, Islam became the only base for partition of the subcontinent and national integration of Pakistan as a nation distinct from India. Today too Islam provides the biggest raison d'etre for the nation, and Pakistan society still sees itself aiming for Islamic social reform. While pursuing secular government, Pakistan has been continuously trying to keep a cooperative relation with religious forces in the country and at the same time to restrain them.

In September 1998, under the Sharif government, the third Constitutional amendment bill was presented. The main content of 15th amendment bill was that the *Quran* and *Sharia* would be the supreme law in the country. This seemed like to aim at appeasing religious groups, giving rise to concerns in the international community anxious moves toward Pakistan's Islamization. As it turned out, the bill did not pass the Senate. It was essentially less important than the previous two amendments and can be viewed as a conciliatory gesture toward the country's religious forces. Islamization could hardly have been an attractive option for the Sharif government. Moreover, as mentioned before, since General Musharraf would like to model Pakistan on Turkish style democracy, and model himself on Kemal Ata Turk. So his political takeover can not be seen to be linked directly to Islamization.

In fact, Musharraf has ordered *masjid*s to close their *madrassa*s out of concern that they might be training *mujahideen*s, a step that never would have been taken if the education programs at madrassas were purely seen as religious.

1.4 Problems Facing the Musharraf Government

On 15th October, General Musharraf made the announcement to the nation, and explained about his government as following[10]. Musharraf took office as Chief Executive and kept President Rafiq Tarar in office. A National Security Council (NSC) consisting of eight members was set up under the Chief Executive. It included three army persons besides Muhammad Yaqub, President of

the Central Bank, noted lawyer Sharifuddin Pirzada, and Atya Inayatullah, president of the Family Planning Commission of Pakistan.

A ten-member cabinet was set up under the NSC. Shouqat Aziz was appointed to Minister of Finance, Abdus Sattar to Foreign Minister, and Omar Asghar Khan to Environment Minister. Both the NSC and the Cabinet include representatives of NGOs and former IMF staff, all considered good choices.

In his speech of 17th October, General Musharraf referred to such issues as the rebuilding of the federal system, strengthening of local bodies, reconstruction of the economy, collection of debt and a fair system of taxation. General Musharraf blamed the economic crisis on the widespread corruption under the Sharif Government and emphasized repeatedly that he had no choice but to confront the government. He also said that after a one-month moratorium, bank defaulters would be arrested, in what appears to be an effort to gain legitimacy both in the international community and at home.

On 15th December General Musharraf presented his New Economic Policy and spelled out six priority areas for reconstruction and constitutional reform of the country[11].

It is usual way for the Army to claim itself justified in grabbing power and setting up military rule because of its social reform goals. In this regard, the Musharraf Government is no different from the three previous military regimes. But if its reforms do not make progress, the people will cry out against military rule. Some people say that this could happen very soon. Starting the reforms and producing visible results will be the only way the military will be able to justify its rule. Economic aid donor countries have been pressing the Musharraf Government to indicate a time frame for democratization, but he has not done so as yet. Some see the expiration of his term as COAS in the year 2001 as a possible deadline for democratization, while others think that an election will not be held until the expiration date of the term of members of the parliament that has been suspended since 12 October.

Musharraf has yet to respond on this issue, but he announced that elections of local bodies must be held before the end of 2000[12]. Local elections most closely affect people's lives. For the federal government, the issue of local bodies has been a sensitive and difficult one because it can be linked with regionalism. After the political takeover, MQM, a typical regional party, strongly requested General Musharraf to call elections of local bodies and protect these local bodies by mention of them in the Constitution[13]. People in Pakistan hold great expectations for local bodies and are watching whether or not they will be held as promised before deciding what they think of the Musharraf Government. Western countries keep insisting on democratization, but the situation is not so simple. Even if the military government holds completely fair and free elections, without radical land reform, voters in rural area will be subject to influence by their landowners, and vote buying, for example, could occur as before. With the same old structure, the same results can be expected; in other words, another Bhutto, Sharif or the like will end up in power. Radical land reform does not seem a possibility at the moment. Restoring administrative powers to local bodies and looking to regional parties may be more realistic and it may be able to contribute to democratization.

Conclusion

Although it was pure coincidence, in India on 13 October, the day following the return of military rule to Pakistan, Vajipeyee of the BJP, victor in a democratic election, took the oath of office as Prime Minister for a second term. The contrast be-

tween Pakistan and India that this highlights might be explained by the different paths these two countries have taken since independence. If Pakistan has clung to authoritarianism, or at least has been unable to establish an ongoing democratic system, the reasons should be analyzed in the historical process of independence[14]. In order to plant the democratic system in Pakistan, the feudalistic big land owning system has to be abolished through radical land reform. The Army might be capable of doing this, but so far, General Musharraf has not shown signs of a will to do so, nor has he indicated what political road he aims to walk down. But he may be looking for a different direction from that taken by both previous military rulers since 1958 and the previous elected rulers since 1988. For one thing, the Army has stepped back from politics since 1988. General Karamat kept completely in the background and never set in motion the coup d'etat plans which were said to have been prepared three times while he was COAS, and in the end he had to accept "forced retirement". He apparently preferred to resign rather than carry out a coup d'etat. Secondly, this change of political attitude in the Army is doubtless linked with the international environment in the 1990's. General Musharraf abandoned this attitude toward the government prevalent in the Army over the last twelve years out of a recognition that the Sharif government had been acting rashly. This view was widely shared by the people, which is why they accepted Musharraf's military takeover. If Pakistan is not to isolate itself in the international community, however, the Army must show a will to democratize the country. Thirdly, the elected governments since 1988 were not approved as democratic one by the people of Pakistan. Rather, this era was seen as one in which big landlords and capitalists made unjust profits and lined their own pockets.

Immediately after the political takeover, the dominant mood was one of welcoming Musharraf's move, but after two months, people were watching and waiting. Regional parties like Muttahida Qaumi Movement, Jamaat-i-Islami, and Awami National Party, and even national parties like PML and PPP, are waiting for Musharraf to show a constructive direction. Pakistan does not seem to expect great things from a Military Authority but is willing to accept military rule as an emergency measure and expecting management during a transition period.

The military takeover damaged Pakistan's standing in the international community, and as a result, foreign economic assistance and investment were stopped. However, some have expressed the opinion that it is possible for Pakistan to move toward democracy. In November 1999, one and a half months after the takeover, a British diplomat residing in Karachi said that if asked for assistance in promoting a democratization policy, even if by the military government, British Government would be ready to help.

As mentioned, at same time, Pakistan and India started out with different type governments. And there is probably no country more critical of, and concerned about, military rule in Pakistan than India. But while India is increasingly confident in itself as a country boasting the largest democracy in the world, Pakistan is still deeply worried about the future of the democratic system and is fumbling about trying to grasp hold of good government. The political events of 12-13 October 1999 showed the very sharp contrast between these two neighboring countries and rivals, with their different features.

Notes:

1. 'The PM who would be King', *News Line*, Oct. 1998.
2. *The News*, 8 Sept. 1999
3. Views expressed to the author by Karachi Police and security officers at the British Deputy High Commission, American Consulate and Japanese Consulate.

4. *Dawn*, 25 Oct. 1999, Pakistan Political Perspective, vol. viii, 11 Nov. 1999, Institute of Policy Studies, pp.47-49
5. The opinion of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan was expressed by Aziz A. Ahmad in Lahore. Asma Jahangir (Chairperson of HRCP), article in *Dawn*, 20 Oct. 1999
6. The nuclear problem is not mentioned in this article.
7. But the fact that Jamaat-i-Islami and Jamaat-ul-Ulama-i-Islam are supporting Mujahideen in Kashmir and Afghanistan is well known.
8. *Dawn*, 18 Oct. 1999
9. *Pakistan Political Perspective*, op.cit., pp.42-46
10. *Dawn* – Internet Edition, 15 Oct. 1999
11. *The Nation*, 15, Dec. 1999
12. *The Nation*, 5 Dec. 1999
13. *Dawn*, 21 October 1999
14. For example, Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, Cambridge U.P., 1995

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