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Pakistan Faces a Life-Threatening Military Coup

By Liaquat Ali Khan
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Strong signs are indicating that another military coup in Pakistan is in the making. Pakistan remains a fragile democracy despite several successful general elections in the past seventy years. The military generals, senior bureaucrats, and even high court judges, despite their rhetoric supportive of democracy, do not respect politicians or political parties. It is Pakistan's tragedy that each unit of the establishment, be it the military, bureaucracy, or judiciary, believes that it alone can safeguard the interests of Pakistan.

Overconfident generals advocate simplistic models of government founded on the notion of law and order and ignore social and ethnic complexities of the people of Pakistan. Corrupt bureaucracy, obsessed with promotions and kickbacks, implements policies without any sense of obligation. Self-righteous judiciary spins out half-digested theories of constitutionalism borrowed from the West, such as Kelsen's theory of effective government or doctrine of necessity, to endorse military interventions.

Catastrophic Military Governments

In 1962, the military government of General Ayub Khan introduced an ill-advised constitution, purportedly mimicking the U.S. Electoral College, under which 80,000 elected representatives were empowered to choose the President. The system created 80,000 puppets open to manipulation and corruption. The constitution also divided Pakistan into two autonomous units,

pitting West Pakistan against East Pakistan, thus sowing the seeds of future secession of Bangladesh from the Western unit.

In 1971, the military government of General Yahya Khan, a gentleman who enjoyed remaining in a state of whiskey-induced intoxication, invaded East Pakistan, ordered the commission of genocide of local population in a tough law and order policy, only to be defeated by India, a geopolitical rival looking for opportunities to dismember Pakistan. Instead of bemoaning losing Bangladesh, the cheerleaders of the military were inviting yet another general to save Pakistan from corrupt politicians.

In 1977, the military government of General Zia-ul Haq, a religious fanatic, introduced harsh punishments, such as public lashings, to turn Pakistan into a spiritual society. The screams of individuals (whipped in public) amplified through microphones denoted his vision of an Islamic Pakistan. General Zia also introduced blasphemy ordinances opening the way for the persecution of religious minorities, particularly Hindus and Christians, accused of insulting the prophet of Islam. Corroborating with the U.S., Zia also championed the notion of jihad as an Islamic obligation for defeating the enemies (the Soviets) occupying Muslim lands (Afghanistan). This law and order Islamization of Pakistan will sow seeds for the emergence of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

In 1999, the military government of General Pervez Musharraf, a secularist who loved to drink and dance, nudged Pakistan away from Islam. However, the religious forces unleashed by General Zia had solidified to an extent that they were able and willing to take on the armed forces of Pakistan. The 9/11 attacks on the U.S. emboldened the Taliban and al-Qaeda to intensify terrorist attacks in Pakistan. In pursuit of power, General Musharraf turned to criminality, violating laws with audacity and impunity. The massacre of seminarians in Islamabad, the military murder of Akbar Bugti in Balochistan, the cold-blooded assassination of Benazir Bhutto, and the detention of Supreme Court Justices, nothing was prohibited in the maintenance of law and order.

This Coup is Treacherous

A trap has been laid for the dismemberment of Pakistan, like a hidden abyss covered with straws. Already, Pakistan is nearly isolated in the world as its reputation as a terrorist state deepens throughout the world. India and the United States have joined strategic forces to pressure Pakistan to confront domestic religious forces that support the resistance wars in Kashmir and Afghanistan. If the Pakistan military refuses to fight domestic terrorists, while the U.S. bleeds in Afghanistan and India in Kashmir, the charges of state-sponsored terrorism would grow against Pakistan. If the military fights domestic terrorists, a civil war will intensify in all the provinces of Pakistan.

Seeing such an existential threat to the country, the military may overthrow the civilian government. Consequently, like before, political repression will begin and vocal politicians will be arrested, if not exiled. The electronic media will protest but face a choice, either close down the shop or support the military government. Rebel journalists will be detained or they will disappear.

In a political vacuum, the militants fighting for the Islamic state in Pakistan will join hands with the Taliban as the Indian intelligence network covertly enters the battlefield. The civil war will turn bloodier. The movement of independence in Balochistan, supported by some members of U.S. Congress, will gain credibility. India will most probably supply arms, as it already does, to local militants fighting the military. The U.S. might also enter the conflict to dismantle the economic and geostrategic threat posed by the Chinese One Belt One Road initiative, known as CPEC in Pakistan.

The General Whoever leading the new military government in Pakistan will come under tremendous pressure to surrender the nation's nuclear weapons to prevent a threat to international peace and security. If the General refuses to do so, the international press will demonize the General Whoever following the script that painted Saddam, Gaddafi, and Assad as diabolical demons. Stronger the General, the better the script would work.

And thus, a nation-state, called Pakistan, with potentially great promise, will be threatened with an unfortunate extinction. The military needs to engage in consequentialist analysis before it overthrows a functioning democracy, how imperfect it might appear to the generals.