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Former Pakistani president charged with treason

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The Supreme Court of Pakistan is set to try a former president for treason... the first time this has happened in the country's history. The charges against Pervez Musharraf relate to actions he took in 2007 under his military rule. Pakistan's army has governed the country for just under half of its sixty-six year history, but Musharraf is the first military leader to be held accountable for his actions. So why is this unprecedented move being made now and what are the implications for governance in Pakistan?

When Gen. Raheel Sharif took over as Pakistan's Army Chief recently, pundits were quick to point out his lack of political ambition.

There's good reason for this: Pakistan's turbulent history has been defined by military take overs.

The last Chief of Army staff appointed by a Prime Minister ousted him in a coup in 1999.

That Prime Minister was Nawaz Sharif, during his second term in office, and the Army chief was Pervez Musharraf.

The following decade saw some of the most turbulent times in Pakistan's history, and has left an indelible mark on how Pakistan is governed.

Today, banned from taking part in politics and retired from the military, Pervez Musharraf is holed up here, at his Islamabad estate awaiting trial on charges of High Treason. If convicted he could face the death penalty.

But how did he get to this point? The latest episode in the Musharraf saga began earlier this year.

After nearly five years in exile, the former Army Chief returned to Pakistan intending to lead his party into the general election.

But almost immediately, his plans were scuppered; he was apprehended and put under house arrest.

The charges relate back to his time in office.

In 2007, after his bid to secure a third term as President was challenged, he made a series of authoritarian moves that would later come back to haunt him.

He declared a State of Emergency, suspended the Constitution and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court – sparking protests across the country.

But there was more turmoil to come:

Former Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto had also been in exile but came back to Pakistan in late 2007, to prepare for elections to be held early the following year.

But on 27th December, Bhutto is assassinated at a rally in Rawalpindi.

Musharraf's days in power were numbered.

It wasn't long before the newly elected government - which included Nawaz Sharif, the man Musharraf had overthrown – sought vengeance.

On 18th August 2008, under immense pressure, Musharraf resigned from office and fled the country the following year.

Whatever the outcome of the impending trial, Musharraf's mark on the political and military landscape in Pakistan is indelible.

Staunchly patriotic but authoritarian by nature - qualities some will say are ideal for the military, but harder to digest in politics.