



Strategic Analysis:
A Monthly Journal of the IDSA

[January 2001 \(Vol. XXIV No. 10\)](#)

Sharif Vs. Musharraf: The Future of Democracy in Pakistan

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Abstract

The military coup by General Musharraf in October 1999, has yet again raised the issue of whether democracy has a future in Pakistan. The death of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1988 and the successive governments that came to power through elections thereafter, gave rise to hopes that Pakistan had taken fledgling steps towards the establishment of a democratic order, even though the military drove the governments from the back seat. This hope seemed to acquire certainty with the advent of Nawaz Sharif's government with a two-thirds majority. However, the military coup of October 1999 showed the frailty of Pakistan's experiment with democracy. Democracy has been unable to take roots in Pakistan due to weak political institutions and because of its deeply feudal structure. Even if the political process is restored by the military regime, it will be quite a few decades before democracy acquires unshakeable roots in Pakistan. The present article gives an overview of hopes and frustrations pertaining to democracy in Pakistan.

Introduction

Does democracy have a future in Pakistan? The military coup by General Musharraf in Pakistan on October 12, 1999 raised this question once again. Field Marshal Ayub Khan, General Yahya Khan, and General Zia-ul-Haq, through their long and turbulent periods of military dictatorships, had led the world to believe that Pakistan was not fit for democracy. [1](#)

The death of Zia-ul-Haq in August 1988, and the behaviour of Pakistan's military brass in the post-Zia period, however, gave rise to hope. The military leadership in the post-Zia period not only allowed elections to be held but also kept a low profile in the day to day functioning of the elected governments. The military was conscious of the fact that Pakistan's image had been razed to the ground by long spells of dictatorship, particularly when in neighbouring India democracy was making rapid strides.

The military chose to take the back seat, although it could not afford to sacrifice its vital interests by not keeping a keen eye on the way the country was being run. Under the system which came to be known as the 'Troika', the military became one of the pillars of the power structure, the other two being the President and the Prime Minister. The 'Troika' ran the government in Pakistan from the time of the death of Zia-ul-Haq to the time of the election of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister in March 1997.

During both the regimes of Benazir Bhutto (1988,1993) and the first regime of Nawaz Sharif (1990), the military drove the government from the back seat, in collusion with either the President or the Prime Minister, depending

on convenience. When Nawaz Sharif came to power for the second term in March 1997, he came with a massive two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. He invoked that majority to undertake a major step towards the consolidation of democracy. With the unanimous support of the National Assembly, he passed a resolution on April 1, 1997, repealing the Eighth Amendment to the constitution. In one stroke, he deprived the President of his power to dismiss the elected governments. The impact of this resolution was felt most brutally by the army. It was the army which had used the power of dismissal of elected governments in collusion with the President thrice since 1988. [2](#)

The army had seen the writing on the wall. The power and perquisites which the army was used to since 1958 could not be allowed to go. The army, with careful deliberation, started making a case for its pro-active role in the governance of the country. The first hint was thrown by Jehangir Karamat, the then army chief, in a speech at the Naval War College on October 5, 1998. He made a case for the establishment of a National Security Council in which the armed forces should have a key role. [3](#) He had to pay the price with his dismissal, and replacement by General Pervez Musharraf.

General Musharraf, soon after taking charge, started preparing for the Kargil operation. Kargil was meant to serve a double purpose. On the one hand, it was meant to be the Pakistani Establishment's latest strategy to snatch Kashmir and destabilise India. The Establishment now comprised the army, the ISI, and the entire jihadi apparatus, with the silent support of the political class. On the other hand, it was a signal to the political class within Pakistan that it was the army which called the shots in all vital matters. That is why Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister was not fully apprised of the magnitude and seriousness of the Kargil operations. When Nawaz Sharif ordered withdrawal of troops from Kargil on the basis of an agreement with President Clinton, the army took it as an affront, even though it complied with the orders. [4](#)

The seeds of discord between Sharif and Musharraf were sown. As a pre-emptive measure, Nawaz Sharif dismissed General Pervez Musharraf on October 12, 1999. The army retaliated and took over the political reins of the country.

The Military Coup

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his brother and Punjab Chief Minister, Shahbaz Sharif, and the ISI Chief, General Khwaja Ziauddin, were taken into "protective custody" of the army. In a television address to the nation on October 13, General Musharraf said that the armed forces had "moved in" as a "last resort" to prevent "any further destabilization" but did not spell out what kind of government would be installed. He did, however, warn "outside forces" (a possible reference to India) against taking advantage of the prevailing situation in Pakistan.

General Musharraf put the blame squarely on Nawaz Sharif's government for misgovernance of the country. He said: "You are all aware of the kind of turmoil and uncertainty that our country has gone through in recent times. Not only have all the institutions been played around with and systematically destroyed, the economy too is in a state of collapse." [5](#)

He said the armed forces were facing incessant public clamour, across the political divide, to redress the fast deteriorating situation in the country. "These concerns were always conveyed to the Prime Minister in all sincerity, keeping the interest of the country foremost. My singular concern has been the well being of the country alone." [6](#)

And then, General Musharraf addressed the real issue, namely, that Nawaz Sharif was trying to weaken the army. Musharraf stated: "All my efforts and counsel to the government it seems were of no avail. Instead, they now turned their attention on the Army itself. Despite all my advices (sic), they tried to interfere with the armed forces, the last remaining viable institution—our concerns were conveyed, in no uncertain terms, but the government of Nawaz Sharif chose to ignore all these and tried to politicize the Army, destabilize it and tried to create dissension in the ranks." [7](#)

As if to remind the people of Pakistan that their future was safe only in the hands of the armed forces, the army chief said: "Dear brothers and sisters, your armed forces have never, and shall never, let you down. Inshallah, I request you all to remain calm and support your armed forces in the re-establishment of order to pave the way for a prosperous future for Pakistan. May Allah guide us on the path of truth and honour." [8](#)

In the next few days, the army took steps to consolidate its hold over the country. On October 13, all the four provincial governments were dismissed. On October 14, the troops took control of the Parliament building to prevent the holding of the National Assembly session on October 15, as requisitioned by the opposition members earlier.

As expected, General Musharraf proclaimed a state of emergency in the country on October 15. Spelling out his priorities, he said that top priority would be given to economic revival, national integration, and good governance. General Musharraf appointed himself the "Chief Executive", suspended the constitution and parliament, and ordered that the President act only under the orders of the Chief Executive.

The army, in effect, proclaimed martial law in the country. The term "martial law" was not used in deference to the concerns of the international community, in the proclamation and an accompanying Provisional Constitutional Order. According to this Order, the courts were barred from issuing any order against the Chief Executive and any person exercising his powers. No judgement could be pronounced by the Army Court tribunal against the army chief or any authority designated by him. Fundamental rights not in conflict with the proclamation or any further orders would continue to be in force. [9](#)

This proclamation was issued by General Musharraf "in pursuance of the deliberations and decisions of the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces and Corps Commanders of the Pakistan Army." The accompanying order stated that despite the suspension of the constitution, Pakistan shall, subject to the orders of the Chief Executive, be governed "or nearly as may be, in accordance with the constitution." [10](#)

The proclamation issued by General Musharraf was similar in terminology to the one issued by General Zia-ul-Haq on July 5, 1977, except that the words "martial law" were omitted. While General Zia appointed himself Chief Martial Law Administrator, General Musharraf confined his title to Chief Executive. The period for which the military rule would continue in the country was not indicated though the proclamation made it clear that the takeover took effect from October 12, the day Nawaz Sharif was ousted. The complete military dictatorship had thus established itself once again.

Nation's Response

Ironically, the dismissal of Nawaz Sharif's government seemed to be welcomed by several quarters in the country, even if it was by the military. Under the cover of a two-thirds electoral support, Nawaz Sharif had tended to accumulate so much power with himself by molesting institutions, individuals, rules and conventions, that people heaved a sigh of relief at his ouster.

The exiled opposition leader Benazir Bhutto blamed Nawaz Sharif for provoking the military coup against his own government. Ms. Bhutto said Nawaz Sharif had sought to politicise the army and the army had therefore risen against him. "Ever since Nawaz Sharif took over, he sought to dismantle democracy," said Ms. Bhutto who was in London. [11](#)- "The people believe that the man is violating every rule of law and there is no one to stop him. The armed forces had to protect themselves as an institution," said Ms. Bhutto in an interview with Sky TV. [12](#)

Ms. Bhutto had gone to the extent of defending the army in the hope that the army would allow her to return home without letting any harm to come to her. She was under warrant of arrest because of the corruption cases launched by the previous government. The Lahore High Court had sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in April 1999. Unfortunately, however, the military regime rejected her plea for a safe passage, for the reason that a pardon to her could harm the army's image of neutrality.

People on the streets of Karachi greeted the ouster of Nawaz Sharif who had been blamed by the city's influential ethnic party, the MQM, for persecuting its supporters. "The cruel and fascist ruler has gone," said Javed Akhtar, a supporter of MQM. "We have seen pressures from successive governments, but Sharif was ruthless," Akhtar said. ¹³ "Now at least our boys will be safe and there will be hope for bringing peace to the city," said another MQM supporter Khalid Mehmood. ¹⁴ Farooq Sattar, an important MQM leader held Sharif's government responsible for what happened. The ousted Prime Minister went "too far in his authoritarian rule," he said. ¹⁵ Residents in several neighbourhoods were said to have distributed sweets, while people played pro-MQM songs. Many parents whose children were in jail kissed the soil and offered special prayers after the army chief wrested power from Nawaz Sharif.

The most significant, however, was the attitude of the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) which is a multiparty alliance of political and religious parties including the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of Benazir Bhutto, the Movement for Justice of Imran Khan and Karachi based Mohajir Quami Movement. The GDA welcomed the dismissal of Nawaz Sharif's regime and backed the seven point agenda of Pervez Musharraf on October 21. The GDA took this position after its meeting in Lahore on October 20 under the chairmanship of the veteran politician Nawabzada Nasirullah Khan. The GDA statement said: "The Nawaz Sharif government had paralysed each and every institution of the state through conspiracies", and expressed the hope that the new regime would launch a "ruthless" accountability drive to root out corrupt politicians. ¹⁶

An exception to the general political welcome accorded to the military coup was the Jamaat-I-Islami. In a statement issued on October 15, the Jamaat while urging the armed forces to give priority to making "corrupt rulers" accountable, criticised Pervez Musharraf's decision to declare a state of emergency and said that it could not support the martial law and the suspension of fundamental rights. Making a point about its own agenda, the Jamaat said: "Whatever is happening in the country is because it never had a chance to have a real Islamic system." The statement issued by Jamaat's Secretary General, Syed Munawar Hassan, further said that the Jamaat would continue its struggle for an Islamic revolution in Pakistan. ¹⁷

The reaction of even the Pakistan Muslim League headed by Nawaz Sharif was not as violently critical of the military takeover as would have been expected. The PML in a statement issued on October 21, demanded the immediate release of Nawaz Sharif as well as the restoration of democracy. But, briefing the reporters after a meeting of the senior party leaders, Raja Zafarul Haq, the former religious affairs minister said that the Pakistan Muslim League wanted to avoid a policy of confrontation with the army. He also demanded that the party be given immediate access to the detained former prime minister. Despite repeated questions from reporters, Raja Zafarul Haq refused to condemn the army's action and simply described it as "regrettable".

A week later, the PML-N found itself in disarray with leaders unable to determine the next course of action. There were reports of widespread defections from the party. Several closed door meetings in Islamabad amongst party leaders produced little in terms of strategy. According to a report of October 28, the former Interior Minister, Chaudhry Shujaat told media persons in Islamabad that the army takeover "maybe a good thing", and there was consensus in the party not to take on the army in a head-on confrontation over the coup. A senior PML-N leader and former minister Mr. Abdul Majid Malik even condemned the appeal made by Hasan Sharif, the son of Nawaz Sharif, to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to save his father. Malik said that he could have appealed to America and England but "to appeal to the Indian Prime Minister is an insult to us." ¹⁸

What explains the lack of general criticism and condemnation of the strangulation of democracy in Pakistan, not to speak of violent and organised demonstrations and protests? It could not be merely the fear of the strong hand of the army in a country which had fought a valiant all party struggle for the restoration of democracy during Zia ul Haq's time. In the immediate context, it was the excesses of Nawaz Sharif's authoritarianism which had led the people and the political class to welcome his dismissal, with a sigh of relief. In the context of Pakistan's history, however, the nation as a whole had got immunised to the choice between democracy and dictatorship. Even the best of democratic leadership elected with overwhelming electoral support had behaved as the worst dictators, such was the grip of a deeply feudal mindset over the behaviour of the Pakistani political class. For the

people of Pakistan therefore, the choice was not between democracy and dictatorship in the institutional sense, but between bad governance and good governance, whosoever delivered it.

The Legal Battle

Fourteen days after his ouster from power in the military coup, i.e., on October 26, Nawaz Sharif was presented before an investigation team of civil and military experts for his role in denying permission to a PIA plane carrying Musharraf and 200 passengers to land at Karachi airport on October 12. These investigations were meant to be a prelude to the framing of charges against Sharif and others meant to be eliminated by Musharraf from his political path. The expectation was that besides the plane hijacking case, Nawaz Sharif would also be investigated for his role in trying to create fissures in the Pakistan armed forces and trying to politicise the command structure of the army

The case was finally framed on November 10. Nawaz Sharif and four others were charged with attempted murder, hijacking and criminal conspiracy. The defendants in the case, which was registered at the Karachi airport police station on the midnight of November 10 included Nawaz Sharif, his adviser on Sindh affairs–Ghous Ali Shah, former police chief of Sindh–Rana Maqbool, former PIA chairman–Shahid Khakan Abbasi, and former Director-General of Civil Aviation–Aminullah Chaudhry. The case brought back memories of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who was charged with conspiracy leading to the killing of the father of a politician, and after a farcical trial whose results were foreknown, was sent to the gallows by Zia-ul-Haq on April 4, 1979.

The military regime was quick in adopting the necessary means and methods so that Nawaz Sharif could be convicted as soon as possible. The first important step in this direction was to get the former chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to turn approver. It was reported on November 24 that Aminullah Chaudhry had turned approver and agreed to give evidence against his co-accused Nawaz Sharif in the treason and hijacking case. Aminullah Chaudhry stated that Nawaz Sharif had ordered him not to let the plane carrying Pervez Musharraf and 200 other passengers land at Karachi on October 12, 1999. Chaudhry in turn asked for pardon under the code of criminal procedure. [19](#)

The next important step taken by the military government was to amend the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 on December 2. Under this amendment, the anti-terrorism court would henceforth be able to hear cases under several additional sections of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), bringing under its purview offenses like hijacking and criminal conspiracy. The court was also enabled to award death sentence for abetment if there was no express provision for its punishment. [20](#)

On December 8, a chargesheet was filed against Nawaz Sharif and six others in Karachi. The chargesheet accused Sharif of waging war against the state, attempt to murder, hijacking, kidnapping and criminal conspiracy. The offense of waging war against the state which was not mentioned in the original FIR carried the death penalty. Conviction for hijacking too could lead to a death sentence. [21](#)

The chargesheet was submitted in the court of Justice Shabir Ahmed of the Sindh High Court who was appointed to a special Anti-Terrorist Court (ATC) to hear the case against Sharif and his associates. Ahmed, a Sindh High Court judge, was appointed to the ATC on December 7, after the military government had changed the law recently requiring Anti-Terrorism Courts to be headed by a High Court judge. Earlier, the Anti-Terrorism Court was headed by a lower ranking sessions judge, who adjourned the case to give the government time to appoint Ahmed. [22](#)

Finally, on January 18, 2000, more than three months after Nawaz Sharif was overthrown, the Anti-Terrorism Court formally began proceedings against him on the charges of kidnapping, attempted murder, hijacking and terrorism. All these charges carried the death penalty or life imprisonment. The accusation of treason was not among the charges filed against Nawaz Sharif, at least to begin with. [23](#) The prosecution concluded its case by February 19. Out of the 54 witnesses who had been listed by the prosecution when the trial began, 26 actually gave evidence and the rest were dropped. [24](#)

On the other side of the battle lines, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) filed a suit in the Supreme Court on November 22, 1999 challenging the army takeover and demanding that the elected government be reinstated. The petition was filed by 12 persons including the former National Assembly Speaker, Ilahi Bux Soomro, the former Senate Chairman, Wasim Sajjad, and the former PML leader in the Senate, Raja Zafarul Haq. The 67 page petition said the "constitutional deviation" of October 12 was "wholly contrary to the constitution, the laws of Pakistan and the principles of democracy." [25](#)

The ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif gave vent to his anguish over the attitude of the Western world in an interview to the Sunday Telegraph of London dated February 27, 2000. Nawaz Sharif accused the West of acquiescing in the overthrow of democracy in Pakistan in the words: "I'm extremely disappointed that the preachers of democracy in the Western world are acquiescing in the one man dictatorial rule. They are indirectly supporting the destruction of democracy in Pakistan." Nawaz Sharif was particularly angered by a personal letter that the British Prime Minister Tony Blair had recently written to General Musharraf expressing "understanding" of the situation in Pakistan. [26](#)

In his testimony before the Anti-Terrorist Court on March 8, 2000, Nawaz Sharif alleged that the military coup of October 12, 1999 was linked to his call for withdrawal of Pakistani troops from Kargil. Nawaz Sharif said that the coup was a "preconceived conspiracy". Elaborating his point, the former Prime Minister said: "I could not give more details on the Kargil issue. But I will tell the court in private about this." He said that his policy on the Kargil issue was meant to "save the nation and its dignity. I saved the nation but unfortunately I could not save myself." [27](#)

Expanding on his defence further, Nawaz Sharif's lawyer argued on March 25, that it was General Musharraf who orchestrated the alleged hijacking for which his client was facing a possible death sentence. As his troops seized power on the ground on October 12, 1999, the army chief refused to allow his plane to land, until soldiers took control of the airport control tower. [28](#)

The judgement came on April 6, 2000. The Anti-Terrorist Court declared the former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif guilty of attempted hijacking and terrorism and sentenced him to two life imprisonment terms of 25 years each which would run concurrently. Judge Rehmat Hussain Jaffery of the ATC who announced the judgement also ordered seizure of all the assets and property of Nawaz Sharif. The judge further directed Sharif to pay Rs 1 million fine for the above charges and Rs 2 million as compensation to the passengers of the PIA plane PK 805. All the six co-accused were acquitted for lack of evidence that they were part of the conspiracy to hijack the plane. The judge acquitted Nawaz Sharif on the remaining two charges of attempted murder and kidnapping. [29](#)

Not satisfied with the "lenient" sentence awarded to Nawaz Sharif, the military regime filed an appeal in the Sindh High Court on April 18 seeking death penalty for Nawaz Sharif on charges of hijacking and terrorism, even as Nawaz Sharif filed an appeal in the same court pleading for acquittal. [30](#) The Sindh High Court admitted the prosecution's appeal seeking conversion of Sharif's life imprisonment sentence into death penalty. [31](#)

The story of the struggle for power in Pakistan was unfolding exactly according to the script written by the traditional power center, that is the army. General Pervez Musharraf had enough reasons to be satisfied with the verdict of the Anti-Terrorist Court, although he would certainly keep trying that the life imprisonment was converted into a death sentence. The Supreme Court ruling on May 12, 2000 that the military takeover in October 1999 was justified under the "doctrine of necessity", further strengthened his position. The Court gave the army a three year deadline to restore democracy. In a decision strikingly similar to the one handed over when the government of the then military strongman, General Zia-ul-Haq was challenged, the Supreme Court while justifying the military coup under the "doctrine of necessity" said that "sufficient evidence of corruption of the former government was presented by the state." [32](#)

It may be noted that the ruling was given by the judges of the Supreme Court who pledged allegiance to the military government in January. This move resulted in the ouster of the then Chief Justice and several other judges who refused to accept the validity of the military government. In January 2000, six out of thirteen judges

of the Supreme Court had refused to take oath under the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO), which was issued by the army. [33](#)

In a separate judgement delivered on July 22, the accountability court sentenced Nawaz Sharif to 14 years imprisonment and barred him from holding public office for 21 years in a corruption case. [34](#)

Playing Games with Democracy

General Pervez Musharraf has been trying his best to prove to the world that he is serious about restoring democracy in the foreseeable future. He has however, not sounded convincing on this score even to the slightest extent. Unlike General Zia-ul-Haq who had announced his intention of holding elections within 90 days when he seized power in 1977, Pervez Musharraf did not make any promise on October 12, 1999. On October 29, when Musharraf met a fact finding team of the visiting Commonwealth foreign ministers, he told them that he could not give any assurance when democracy would return to the country. Talking to reporters after the meeting, he said: "The reason was, I have set myself certain objectives and I am targeting those objectives." [35](#)

However, General Musharraf remained under tremendous international pressure for restoration of democracy and was censured strongly for overthrowing a democratic government, both by the Commonwealth and the SAARC. Two days before the visit of President Clinton, on March 23, 2000, General Musharraf announced that he would hold local bodies elections later in the year throughout the country, as the first step towards the return to "real democracy." Addressing a press conference, Musharraf said that the first round of local elections will be held between December 2000 and May 2001. A second round of local elections—at the district level—will be held in July 2001, effectively putting municipal governments back in power. Justifying his decision, the Chief Executive said, "Democracy starts here at the district and local governments. From here, we will move up step by step to provincial and federal elections in due course." [36](#)

General Musharraf's promise of restoring "real democracy" via the local elections, was seen by many as a gimmick to consolidate his personal power on the same pattern as Field Marshal Ayub Khan had done by holding elections to Basic Democracies in 1962. Musharraf has been at pains to explain that his scheme of holding elections at the level of local bodies was a way of "devolving" power to the people. Faced with general criticism within the country and abroad, he repeatedly promised to hold general elections after first holding local elections in July 2001, as he did during his visit to Thailand on April 3, 2000 as a part of his five-nation South East Asian tour to cement ties and seek foreign investment. [37](#)

The effectiveness of General Pervez Musharraf's commitment to democracy can be gauged from the fact that on July 15, 2000 he issued a decree reviving the Islamic provisions of the country's suspended constitution. It was the second time within two months that Musharraf had met the fundamentalist clergies' demands. In May, he had withdrawn a proposed change to the application of the blasphemy law that human rights groups said was often used to target non-Muslim religious minorities. The decree was considered necessary "to re-affirm the continuity and enforcement of the Islamic provisions" of Pakistan's constitution. Hardline Islamic groups had demanded the restoration of the Islamic provisions of the constitution which Musharraf had suspended after the coup. Among other things, these provisions declare the minority Ahmediya sect to be non-Muslims and prohibit any law that conflicts with Islamic principles. [38](#)

General Musharraf has been making political manoeuvres to provide a cover to fit his definition of democracy, which have not been successful. This is evidenced by the All Party Conference (APC) held in Lahore on August 6, 2000. The conference which was held under the chairmanship of the veteran political leader Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan to present a united front against the military rule was attended by senior leaders from the PML-N, PPP, Awami National Party (ANP), Jamaat-I-Islami and almost all other large or small parties from all the provinces. The APC demanded an end to the process of devolution and local bodies elections. It called for a new accountability process with a fully autonomous National Accountability Board (NAB), not the one that exists today. It demanded the immediate restoration of political activities and rejected any changes whatsoever in the

constitution, thus even blocking the proposed reversal of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments enacted by Nawaz Sharif. [39](#)

Another taste of protest against anti-democratic behaviour of the military regime was administered when almost all mainstream political parties condemned a controversial amendment to the Political Parties Act (PPA) promulgated by the government on August 9, 2000. The amendment provided that convicted persons will not be able to hold party office, throwing the political future of both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif into near elimination from politics. The ordinance promulgating this amendment was issued by President Rafiq Tarar at the behest of the military regime. [40](#)

The latest to join the bandwagon of leaders who have started consolidating their protest movement against the military leadership is the group of expatriate rebels in London. At a largely attended conference on September 1, 2000, Altaf Hussain, the MQM leader, Ataullah Mengal, convenor of the Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement, and Mehmood Khan Achakzai of Pakhtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party, demanded of the army to return to the barracks and hand over the country's governance to the duly elected representatives.

Representing the voice of smaller "ethno-linguistic nations" they said that the fundamental duty of the army is to defend the borders of the country. In 53 years of Pakistan's history, the military directly ruled the country for 26 years and remained indirectly in control for the rest of the period. It was during the army rule that the country was dismembered. They concluded by saying: "It is, therefore, vital for the integrity, solidarity and survival of the country that without further delay the army returns to the barracks and the governance of the country is handed over to the duly elected representatives." [41](#)

This trend has been consolidated by the latest move by major political parties in Pakistan, including the PML and the PPP, which have come together under the umbrella of the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy headed by Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan.

The Future

Looking at the history of Pakistan, it would need a very bold analyst to say in definite terms whether democracy has a future in Pakistan. Pakistan has in the last one year been often described as a "failed state", not only by foreign observers but also by serious Pakistani analysts. For a state as large and resourceful, endowed with a sense of history and ideology, as Pakistan, it is not easy to "fail" in modern times. Nor does the international system normally allow a highly strategically located state like Pakistan to collapse easily. [42](#) Another significant reason why the international community would probably ensure Pakistan's survival is due to its nuclear weapons capability. [43](#) But it is not enough that Pakistan merely survives, for a turbulent Pakistan inflicted with repeated onslaughts of military dictatorship, and widespread scourge of religious fundamentalism, terrorism, sectarianism and what is worse, 'jihadism' can be a source of tremendous instability for the whole region, leave alone Pakistan.

Democracy, if it means a political system which allows full and sustained participation of the people, has yet to take roots in Pakistan. The roots of democracy lie in egalitarian social and economic structures, a modernising entrepreneurial elite and a large middle class. It also needs an independent judiciary and rule of law. Pakistani social and economic structures and correspondingly the Pakistani mindset is still deeply feudal. The military finds it possible to repeatedly take over the government because the so-called democratically elected governments in effect tend to behave in utterly non-democratic ways primarily because of the absence or weaknesses in the elements that sustain a democracy. [44](#) While it would not be correct to say that democracy has no future in Pakistan, one can certainly say that it would be quite a few decades before democracy acquires unshakeable roots in Pakistan. The future of democracy in Pakistan, therefore, is clouded by uncertainty.

Endnotes

Note 1: For a discussion on the problem of democracy in Pakistan see Moonis Ahmar, "Where is Pakistan Heading? Implications of the Coup D'Etat", World Affairs, vol.4, no.1, January-March 2000.[Back](#)

Note 2: It has been widely acknowledged that the army played a role in bringing down the governments in power in Pakistan in 1990 (Benazir Bhutto), 1993 (Nawaz Sharif) and 1996 (Benazir Bhutto).[Back](#)

Note 3: Azhar Abbas, "The Creeping Coup", The Herald, May 1999,p.32.[Back](#)

Note 4: In a report which appeared in the Nation on July 6, 1999, it was stated that, "A strange mixture of disbelief, anger, disappointment in the civilian and military segments of the establishment greeted the outcome of the Washington meeting, widely seen as a sign of Islamabad's backing down in Kargil." This withdrawal created a further rift between the armed forces and the political leadership. Pakistan also suffered a total loss of credibility not only amongst foreign countries, but within the country itself. Lt. Gen. (retd.) Kamal Matinuddin, former director general, Institute for Strategic Studies, Islamabad stated that, "Kargil was a fasco that has brought us humiliation and isolated us in the world while eroding our credibility." See News, July 25, 1999. Also M.P. Bhandara stated in an article in Dawn dated July 21, 1999, "Having sleep-walked into a near disaster at Kargil, we halt at the edge of a precipice. We might have won a battle but we lost the war."[Back](#)

Note 5: Asian Recorder, 1999, (New Delhi),p.28552.[Back](#)

Note 6: Ibid.[Back](#)

Note 7: Ibid, p.28553.[Back](#)

Note 8: Ibid.[Back](#)

Note 9: For details, see Ibid.[Back](#)

Note 10: Ibid.[Back](#)

Note 11: Ibid., p.28554.[Back](#)

Note 12: Ibid.[Back](#)

Note 13: Ibid., p.28553.[Back](#)

Note 14: Ibid.[Back](#)

Note 15: Ibid., p.28554.[Back](#)

Note 16: Ibid., p. 28572.[Back](#)

Note 17: Ibid., p.28554.[Back](#)

Note 18: Ibid., p.28587.[Back](#)

Note 19: Asian Recorder, 2000 (New Delhi), p.,12.[Back](#)

Note 20: Ibid., p.29.[Back](#)

Note 21: Ibid., p.45.[Back](#)

Note 22: Ibid., p.45.[Back](#)

Note 23: Ibid., p.126.[Back](#)

Note 24: Ibid.,p.189.[Back](#)

Note 25: Ibid., p.12.[Back](#)

Note 26: Ibid., p.221.[Back](#)

Note 27: Ibid., p.237.[Back](#)

Note 28: Ibid., p.268.[Back](#)

Note 29: Asian Recorder, 2000 p.299.[Back](#)

Note 30: Asian Recorder, 2000, p.333.[Back](#)

Note 31: Asian Recorder, 2000, p.412.[Back](#)

Note 32: Ibid., p.379. For details on the Supreme Court's May 12, 2000 judgement also see Idrees Bakhtiar, "The Return of State Necessity", The Herald, June 2000.[Back](#)

Note 33: Ibid., p. 379.[Back](#)

Note 34: Ibid., p. 506. For details about the verdict see Mubashir Zaidi, "Day of Judgement", The Herald, August 2000, pp.68-69.[Back](#)

Note 35: Asian Recorder, 1999,p.28586.[Back](#)

Note 36: Asian Recorder, 2000, p.267-268.[Back](#)

Note 37: Ibid., p.300 For details and analysis of the Local Government 2000 Plan announced by General Musharraf on August 14, 2000 see Idrees Bakhtiar, "Localising Sovereignty?", The Herald, September 2000,pp.46-50. Also, Aamer Ahmed Khan, "Devolving Destruction", The Herald, September 2000, pp.50-51, where the author criticises the devolution plan and calls it "a blueprint for the destruction of politics." Another Pakistani commentator Zahid Hussain, believes that "General Musharraf's local bodies plan seems clearly designed to create a new power base for the military regime." See Zahid Hussain, "Empowering the Khakis?", Newline, September 2000, pp.50-53.[Back](#)

Note 38: Ibid., p.492 For a perspective on the blasphemy issue see Zaigham Khan, "Blundering on Blasphemy", The Herald, June 2000.[Back](#)

Note 39: Ibid., p.541.[Back](#)

Note 40: Ibid., p.556.[Back](#)

Note 41: Ibid., p.604.[Back](#)

Note 42: However, in the recent past we have seen the three cases of the erstwhile Soviet Union, Indonesia and Yugoslavia where the States were allowed to collapse by the international community.[Back](#)

Note 43: The possibility of Pakistan breaking up could threaten stability within and outside the region particularly if these weapons of mass destruction fall into the hands of smaller groups which are clamouring for recognition or are involved in fomenting terrorism/fundamentalist movements elsewhere.[Back](#)

Note 44: A Pakistani commentator Ejaz Haider writing in the Friday Times states that, "Given the contours of Pakistan's political landscape, it is clear that the growth of democracy, from its outward form to its being

representative in character to finally being liberal democracy in the modern sense, was never an option. The system needs continuity for the democratic experiment to pass through these phases of evolution. Moreover, the element of constitutional liberalism, which gives to democracy its true spirit and which evolved in Europe quite independent of the formal structures of democracy, is a development that takes a long period of evolution. Given that this country has been afflicted with leaders that were handpicked and groomed by the military and did not become leaders through a democratic process, the other option has worse consequences." Quoted in The Times of India, December 8, 2000. [Back](#)