

Pakistan: civil-military relations in a praetorian state

Abstract for chapter 6

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The role of the Pakistan military has undergone major changes during the fifty years of independence, gradually expanding its role to become an important actor in the decision-making process and by directly assuming power.

The author plots this gradual rise of the military by examining the military heritage and identifying the material benefits to the military. He notes the degeneration of the political institutions and the conflict between the political forces and military rule, as well as the post-withdrawal civil-military relations.

He concludes by stating that the civilian government needs the support and the blessings of the military to stay afloat, declaring that the military's preponderant role in the polity is thus assured.

Keywords

Islam, military, Muslim League, praetorian state

PAKISTAN: CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN A PRAETORIAN STATE

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Pakistan can be described as a praetorian state where the military has acquired the capability, will, and sufficient experience to dominate the core political institutions and processes. As the political forces are disparate and weak, the military's disposition has a strong impact on the course of political change, including the transfer of power from one set of the elite to another. Such an expanded role is at variance with the traditions and temperament of the military at the time of independence in 1947.

The Pakistan military inherited the British tradition of civilian supremacy over the military, aloofness from active politics, commitment to professionalism, and assistance to the civilian authorities with respect to law and order and national calamities. Its role expanded gradually. At first, it emerged as an important actor in the decision-making process, especially in defence and security affairs. In 1958 General (later Field Marshal) Mohammad Ayub Khan, Chief of Army Staff [COAS] from 1951 to 1958, overthrew the tottering civilian government. He ruled under martial law until June 1962, when a new presidential constitution was introduced which civilianised military rule through co-option of a section of the civilian elite. In March 1969, General Yahya Khan, COAS from 1966 to 1971, took power after Ayub Khan's resignation in the wake of mass agitation against his rule. Yahya Khan abolished Ayub's constitution and ruled the country under martial law until December 1971, when he was forced to hand over power to a civilian leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, following the surrender of the Pakistani troops in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to India.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was temporarily successful in asserting the primacy of civilian government. He enjoyed popular support in the early stages of his rule while the military's reputation had declined dramatically owing to the East Pakistan debacle. However, Bhutto's assertion of civilian supremacy did not prove durable for three major reasons. First, his efforts to personalise power rather than work towards

establishing viable participatory institutions and processes eroded his popular support. Second, in their determination to dislodge Bhutto, some of the opposition leaders made it clear in the later stages of anti Bhutto agitation in 1977 that they would not challenge the military in the event of his overthrow. Third, by 1977 the military had recovered from the shock of 1971. When the senior commanders found that the Bhutto regime was discredited and could not survive without their support, they retrieved the political initiative.

This was accomplished when General Zia ul Haq, COAS from 1976 to 1988, staged the third coup in July 1977, and governed under martial law until 1985. During this period he tailored a political system and carefully stage-managed partyless elections to ensure the continuity of his rule after the termination of martial law. When Zia ul Haq died in an air crash in August 1988, the military allowed the constitutional process to become operative, facilitating the holding of elections and transfer of power to an elected leader, Benazir Bhutto. However, the military monitored the elected government's actions and periodically commented on its performance. Differences developed between the military commanders and the civilian government over the government's performance, which was considered unsatisfactory. The military joined with the president to dismiss the government in August 1990.

In addition to the privileges of exercising power, other considerations which impel the senior echelons of the military to maintain interest in politics include overall political stability, the size of the defence budget, security and foreign policy, professional interests, especially the autonomy of the military in its internal affairs, and corporate interests, including the privileges and benefits for military personnel, especially senior commanders.

The Heritage

The military was organised on modern lines by the British. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the three armies of the presidencies of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras were amalgamated and put under the Commander-in-Charge of India. The Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force were organised as independent forces in 1928 and 1933 respectively; much of their expansion took place during World War II. The British emphasised the principle of civilian supremacy over the military and the military's aloofness from politics. They did not let the nationalist movement in India impair military professionalism and discipline, and the military was kept away from the nationalist struggle. The formation of the Indian National Army by Subhas Chandra Bose and the naval strike of 1946 could not be described as concerted efforts to dislodge the British as these were confined to a section of the armed forces

and took place under exceptional circumstances. The armed forces as a whole remained loyal to the government.

A logical follow up to the decision to partition India and establish the independent states of India and Pakistan was the division of the British Indian military. Military personnel were given the option of joining the armed forces of either country, with one exception: no Muslim from the area that became Pakistan could opt for India and a non-Muslim hailing from the area that constituted independent India could not opt for Pakistan. The division of arms, weapons and equipment proved a more complicated affair. However, the whole task was completed in a couple of months.

Despite the vicissitudes of partition, the military in Pakistan reorganised itself quickly. It adopted five major strategies to overcome its initial problems. First, a large number of British officers was retained on contract. Second, competent officers were given accelerated promotions. Some non-commissioned officers were promoted to the commissioned ranks. Third, a large number of released personnel was called back. Suitable personnel of the armies of the princely states that acceded to Pakistan were also absorbed into the Pakistan Army. Fourth, the regiments with common traditions, common class composition and common recruiting areas were amalgamated. Fifth, the gaps were filled by fresh recruitment (Rizvi 1986:30-34). These measures were coupled with continued emphasis on centralisation, hierarchy, discipline, and *esprit de corps*. Professionalism, training in Pakistan and abroad, and the principle of civilian primacy continued to be the hallmark of its organisation.

The military in Pakistan views itself as the guardian of independence and territorial integrity against external and internal threats. Its training program aims at producing servicemen dedicated to national values and state symbols and who are prepared to make sacrifices for their professional ideals. There is a strong emphasis on the ideological foundation of leadership. Leadership traits as enunciated in Islam are emphasised in the military. These include, *inter alia*, faith and trust in Allah alone, a firm belief in the basic principles of Islam, piety, humility, honesty, bravery, selflessness, forgiveness, competence and steadfastness. Islamic ideology, values and history constitute an integral part of the training program (Army General Headquarters 1990).

The Gradual Rise of the Military

What helped the military most to maintain its professional disposition was Pakistan's syndrome of insecurity, which is due mainly to the strained relations with India dating back to the early years of independence. The Pakistani elite viewed India's policies as a threat to Pakistan's security and survival as a nation-state. A strongly

held view was that India wanted to subdue, if not dismantle, the Pakistan state. Perceptions of India based on antagonism and fear influenced Pakistan's domestic politics and foreign policy.

Pakistan became more security conscious in the post Bangladesh period because India had clearly demonstrated its military superiority in defeating Pakistan in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war. Pakistan was reduced in size and it suffered from a crisis of confidence. The power balance in South Asia, which already favoured India, further tilted to its advantage as New Delhi embarked on a massive military expansion in the 1970s. Moreover, despite the restoration of peace through the signing of the Simla Accord in 1972, mutual distrust and conflicting national aspirations often disrupted dialogue between India and Pakistan.

Pakistan's national security policy was also shaped by Afghanistan's irredentist claims on Pakistani territory and intermittent troubles in the tribal areas. India's support for Afghanistan's policy towards Pakistan was a source of further concern. As Pakistan joined the US-sponsored defence alliances in the early 1950s, the Soviet Union retaliated by openly supporting Afghan territorial claims on Pakistan. The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 and the intensification of the civil strife in Afghanistan exacerbated Pakistan's security problems and led it to seek support from the West and from Muslim countries.

These security compulsions had several important implications for civil-military relations. For one, defence requirements enjoyed top priority in Pakistan. Whether the government was under a civilian or a military leader, Islamabad always allocated the largest percentage of its national budget to defence. When it functioned, the national legislature underlined the need to maintain a strong defence posture and supported the high budgetary allocations for defence. General Zia ul Haq argued that defence was not merely important in its own right 'but the economic prosperity of a country depended on the military's capability to defend its geographical frontiers' (*Dawn* 6 February 1987). He further maintained that the armed forces guaranteed a secure environment for national development in industry, agriculture, education and allied fields (*Pakistan Times Overseas Weekly* 28 February 1988).

Second, security pressures were often cited by the military governments to deflect demands for political participation and suppress dissent. The standard official argument was that there were serious threats to Pakistan's territorial integrity and the opposition groups should not make political demands. The military regimes also raised the spectre of linkages between external adversaries and dissident groups within the country who were alleged to be serving the cause of the 'foreign masters'.

Third, the maximum possible allocation of resources to defence facilitated modernisation of the armed forces. The military also benefited from Pakistan's decision

to join Western-sponsored pacts in the 1950s as well as by the reinvigoration of Pakistan-US relations after the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. The new weapons, military hardware, and extensive training that the three services obtained under these arrangements improved their professional disposition and gave them greater confidence.

And finally, these developments served to accentuate the imbalance between the disciplined, cohesive and self-confident military and the weak and fragmented political institutions. The military grew in stature and continued to enjoy respect in society. The reputation of politicians declined and the political institutions degenerated over time. They were unable to control the military. 'It was too powerful for civilians to tamper with and virtually ran itself without outside interference' (Cohen 1987). It was therefore not surprising that when the military decided to displace civilian governments in 1958, 1969 and 1977, it faced no opposition and many groups welcomed the assumption of power by the military.

The Political Institutions and their Degeneration

Pakistan introduced a parliamentary system of government at the time of independence, under the interim constitution of 1947. This system was maintained in the 1956 constitution which the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan approved after about nine years of deliberations. However, it was not long after that the decline and degeneration of the civilian institutions set in, making it difficult to sustain the principle of civilian supremacy over the military.

Pakistan faced a serious crisis of political leadership within a couple of years of attaining independence. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a charismatic leader who led the independence movement, died in September 1948, just thirteen months after independence. His lieutenant, Liaquat Ali Khan, partially filled the gap but he was assassinated in October 1951. There was thus insufficient time for these leaders to establish and legitimise participatory institutions and processes. This was in contrast to what occurred in India where Jawaharlal Nehru led the country from 1947 until his death in 1964. Although Nehru's personal appeal was more powerful than the political institutions he established, the fact that he insisted on developing institutions and processes provided a firm foundation for the political system and guaranteed civilian supremacy.

The Muslim League of Pakistan failed to transform itself from a nationalist movement into a national party which could lead the way to democracy and political stability. Given its weak and divided leadership, the lack of a clear socio-economic program, and the absence of procedures to resolve its internal problems, the Muslim League was not instrumental in nation building. The roots of these

problems can be traced back to the pre-independence period. Founded in 1906 mainly by a Western-educated Muslim elite, the Muslim League could not establish a popular base among the Muslims of South Asia until 1939-40, and functioned as a popular mass party for only seven to eight years. As a result, it could neither bring forward a group of leaders who had sufficient experience of working together at the popular level as members of a party, nor evolve procedures to resolve internal conflicts and aggregate diverse interests. It relied heavily on the towering personality of Jinnah, and soon after his death the Muslim League began to become disunited and lose direction. Other political parties, established mostly by those defecting from the Muslim League, suffered from similar discord, indiscipline and weak organisation. They were neither able to bring forward a national alternative to the Muslim League nor evolve a broad-based consensus on the operational norms of the polity, and thus failed to produce a coherent government.

The interim and permanent constitutions of Pakistan adhered to democratic and participatory norms but when it came to putting these into practice the political elite floundered and often engaged in a free-for-all power struggle. The sole objective of the ruling party was to hold on to power at any cost, while the opposition groups sought to dislodge them by any means. Such conditions were bound to compromise the ability of civilian governments to assert their leadership over the military, and the military consequently had ample freedom to deal with its internal affairs and consolidate its position. Political leaders also attempted to cultivate the military so as to strengthen their own positions vis-à-vis their adversaries.

The civilian governments frequently relied on the army for the restoration of authority in law and order crises and in coping with natural calamities. These operations helped to enhance the image of the military and exposed the weakness of the political leaders. Senior commanders were able to get firsthand knowledge of the politicians' inability to manage their affairs. These situations provided the military with useful experience in handling civilian affairs. The experience also provided the military with the impression that it could perform the job when the civil governments failed and that the civilians were surviving because of the military's support. Three periods of martial law – 1958, 1969, and 1977 – were preceded by law and order disruptions and serious legitimacy crises for the existing governments. The military thus never had any problem in justifying its assumption of power while blaming the displaced governments for political chaos, misadministration and corruption.

The military's strength is also a result of its strong ethnic and regional cohesion. The Punjab provides the majority of officers, followed by the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the tribal areas. The army consists largely of Punjabis and Pakhtuns (Pathans). These two groups have not only developed strong mutual ties

but have also established links with the civilian bureaucratic elite, most of whom have a similar ethnic background. In fact, only two COAS in Pakistan's history have come from outside the Punjab and NWFP areas. These were General Mohammad Musa (from Baluchistan but not a Baluch) and General Mirza Aslam Beg (an Urdu-speaking refugee from Uttar Pradesh, India, who settled in Karachi-Sindh). The traditional Punjabi-Pakhtun composition of the army has been a major source of grievance for Sindhis and Baluchs, who are under-represented in the army and virtually absent from the higher echelons. This ethnic cohesion has, however, enhanced the military's efficacy in politics. Moreover, the military chiefs were given extensions which enabled them to further consolidate their hold over the armed forces. Field Marshal Ayub Khan, COAS from 1951 to 1958, was given two extensions; General Mohammad Musa, COAS from 1958 to 1966, had two full terms of four years each; and General A.M. Yahya Khan, COAS from 1966 to 1971, extended his tenure after assuming power in 1969, but had to resign after Pakistan's military debacle in East Pakistan in December 1971; General Zia ul Haq, who enjoyed the longest tenure of any COAS – from 1976 to 1988 – died in service in an air crash in August 1988. Those who did not get extension included: Lt General Gul Hassan (December 1971 to April 1972, forced by the civilian government to resign), General Tikka Khan (1972 to 1976), and General Mirza Aslam Beg (1988 to 1991). They served under civilian governments. General Abdul Waheed (1993 to 1996) retired after completion of his normal tenure, although the civilian government offered to extend his tenure by one year.

Material Benefits to the Military

The military has become a ladder to lucrative jobs after retirement in almost all states that have witnessed the ascendancy of the military to power. Ayub Khan relied on this strategy after assuming power in 1958, and distributed the rewards of power to his colleagues in the military. General Zia ul Haq resorted to this strategy in a more consistent and extensive manner. It was during his rule that the higher echelons of the military emerged as the most privileged caste in Pakistan.

The Zia regime was quite generous towards its colleagues in the three services. The budgetary allocation for the defence services rose at a faster pace than during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's period from 1972 to 1977. The army, especially its higher echelons, received a number of material benefits such as jobs before and after retirement, absorption in the Fauji Foundation (a welfare cum industrial organisation for the welfare of ex-servicemen), assignment in the Gulf states, allotment of agricultural land, and parcels of land for construction of houses in cantonments and urban centres, along with facilities for loans. A number of officers who had

been given residential plots in various housing schemes at cheap rates sold them to civilians at exorbitant prices.

Still another material benefit the Zia regime offered to military personnel was the appointment of military officers to top civil jobs, leading to what Finer (1978: 84) describes as the 'military colonisation of other institutions' whereby 'the military acts as reservoir or core of personnel for the sensitive institutions of the state'. Military officers were assigned to the civil administration and to semi-government and autonomous corporations. A 10 per cent quota of civil jobs was reserved for military personnel and a system of regular induction into the elite group of the Central Superior Services was introduced. The groups most commonly selected for induction included the District Management Group (formerly the CSP), the Foreign Service of Pakistan, and the Police Service of Pakistan. This has caused bitterness among civilian counterparts who joined these services after tough competitive examination.

Such policies have enabled the military to penetrate important civilian sectors and expand their influence in the society. Material gains have also encouraged the senior commanders to maintain interest in politics so as to protect and increase these privileges. This has resulted in what Heeger (1977:242-262) describes as the 'de-mystification' of the military. The Pakistan military is no longer considered a neutral power broker among feuding political groups. It is now viewed as one of the contenders for power, a powerful actor deeply entangled in ongoing political controversies.

The Political Forces and Military Rule

Despite the military's repeated intervention in politics and the long spells of martial law, military rule has faced a crisis of legitimacy in Pakistan. However, if the military leadership could not obtain the much coveted legitimacy for its extended role, the political elite was unable to counterbalance the military's dominant role, and an adversarial relationship developed between the two. The political leaders, bitter at the loss of power, questioned the military's right to rule, while the military leadership regarded political leaders and parties as opportunist, corrupt and disruptive.

The bitterness in political circles intensified during Zia's rule because politicians were subjected to greater restriction during this period than during the two previous periods of military rule. Zia made no secret of his contempt for politicians and political parties, especially those who questioned his policies. He imposed a ban on political parties in 1979, although groups which supported his military regime, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Muslim League (Pagaro Group), and some orthodox religious groups, were allowed to engage in low-key political activity.

The major goal of the Zia regime was to prevent dissident political groups from joining together to launch a national movement. The state apparatus was effectively used to contain political activities and to manipulate the weaknesses and differences between political parties. Whenever politicians attempted to establish coalitions, the central government would adopt measures to counteract them. The press was prevented from publishing the views of politicians in opposition to Zia. Restrictions were imposed on the movement of politicians; detention without trial, house arrest, and restrictions on travel outside the city or province of residence were quite common, and consequently discouraged leaders from interacting with each other. Political leaders were also often kept under surveillance by the intelligence agencies, which dissuaded many from establishing contact. Activists at the middle and lower levels were periodically arrested under martial law regulations.

The efficacy of the political forces was further undermined by their internal disharmony and organisational problems, which the government was able to manipulate to its advantage. Thus coalitions and united fronts created by the political parties to press their demands were often short-lived (Rizvi 1989:255-268).

Zia withdrew martial law on 30 December 1985 and restored a carefully tailored constitutional system that civilianised his regime, facilitated the co-option of a section of the civilian elite, and provided adequate guarantees for the entrenched position of the ruling generals. Zia continued to exercise the initiative in the political system through four major means. The military government did not revive the original 1973 constitution, but introduced amendments which drastically altered its character and greatly strengthened the position of the president vis-à-vis the prime minister and parliament. Further, the incorporation of martial law orders and policy decisions in the legal-constitutional structure of Pakistan under the Indemnity Law placed checks on the powers of the civilian courts and reinforced the position of the president. Also, the constitution was amended to allow President Zia ul Haq to continue to serve as chief of army staff after the restoration of civilian rule, making it possible for him to maintain the army as his exclusive preserve and giving him a relatively free hand to deal with military and defence affairs. And finally, Zia appointed as prime minister a little-known and weak leader, Mohammad Khan Junejo, whom he could control. While addressing the joint session of parliament on the eve of the withdrawal of martial law, Zia ul Haq declared that the 'new order' did not represent a departure from the policies of the martial law period: 'It is no rival or adversary of the outgoing system. It is, in fact, the extension of the system in existence for the past several years' (*Muslim* 31 December 1985).

Zia-ul-Haq jealously guarded his powers and wanted Junejo and other civilian leaders he co-opted simply to 'carry out orders' or undertake 'public relations jobs', rather than share power as equal partners. These leaders were often frustrated

because of their inability to play an autonomous political role. Their frustration was accentuated by the fact that they needed the support and blessings of the president and the military to ward off challenges from the parties which stayed outside the civilianisation process and described the civilian government as a façade while Zia ul Haq continued to rule. As the civilian leadership of the post-martial law period discretely tried to distance itself from Zia to play an autonomous role, Zia dismissed the prime minister and dissolved the parliament in May 1988, thereby undoing the system he himself had created. His attempt to co-opt a new set of leaders came to an end when he died in August 1988.

The decision of the Pakistan Army not to assume power after Zia's death facilitated the holding of general elections in November 1988 which brought Benazir Bhutto to power. Several factors explain the military's decision to abide by the constitution. Despite the military's repeated intervention in politics, a sense of professionalism and discipline is still evident in the officer corps, although this would not prevent them seizing power if they perceived it to be necessary. Second, since Zia had already announced that general elections would be held in November 1988, a military takeover would have been difficult to justify in a politically charged environment. Any postponement of elections would have reinforced the impression that the military was the major obstacle to the restoration of a democratic system. Third, the senior commanders were conscious of the fact that the military's reputation had suffered through repeated involvement in politics, and especially because of Zia's eleven-year rule. Stories circulated about the acquisition of wealth and lucrative civilian assignments by senior active duty and retired officers. The failure to dislodge Indian troops from the disputed Siachen Glacier in Kashmir, and the April 1988 explosion at the ammunition depot in Rawalpindi were often cited as clear proof of the decline of professionalism in the army. With criticism clearly focused on their involvement in domestic politics, senior commanders felt that a decision to honour the constitution would help restore their reputation. Fourth, General Beg, as the new COAS, could not be sure of the support of the army's senior echelons. Although he had been vice COAS since March 1987, Zia, as COAS, had kept the army as his exclusive preserve by appointing his favorites to key positions. (Some of them died with Zia in the plane crash.) Beg, an Urdu-speaking 'Mohajir' immigrant from Uttar Pradesh, facing a majority of Punjabi and Pakhtun senior commanders, needed time to take stock of the situation and to consolidate his position. Fifth, the political situation in the aftermath of the plane crash was peaceful and stable; all major political parties and groups supported the constitutional transfer of power. The situation was thus not conducive to staging a coup. Any attempt to re-establish military rule at this stage would have been premature and would have encountered resistance from political circles.

The 1988 decision to allow a constitutional transfer of power to take place reflected a realistic assessment of the situation by the senior commanders. However, the military did not abandon interest in the political process as it impinged on its professional and corporate interests.

Post-Withdrawal Civil-Military Relations

The army chief continued to be a key figure in the power structure, who interacted with the civilian government headed by the prime minister directly or through the president. An extra-constitutional power triangle, locally known as the *troika*, developed. It comprised the president, the prime minister, and the army chief; they met frequently to discuss high policy on foreign affairs, security issues and domestic matters. The prime minister was the weakest in the triangle, for three major reasons. First, the constitutional amendments introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1985, known as the 8th amendment, weakened the position of the prime minister and tilted the balance of power decisively in favour of the president, who was given discretionary power to dismiss the prime minister and dissolve the elected National Assembly if he felt that 'a situation has arisen in which the Government of the Federation cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and an appeal to the electorate is necessary' (Article 58(2)(b) of the Constitution). Second, the political forces continued to be weak and divided, which made the task of political management extremely difficult for the prime minister. Third, the army chief represented the most powerful and entrenched institution in the body politic. In January 1997, while the National Assembly was dissolved, the president created the National Security Council to formalise the 'advisory' role of the services chiefs and the chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee which placed an 'advisory' institutional constraint on the elected assembly and the civilian government. The military favoured retention of the power of the president to dismiss government because the senior commanders could persuade the president to do so, thus saving them from directly removing the government.

The military commanders are of the view that if their interests can be protected from the outside, there is no need for them to step in. Moreover, with growing ethnic, linguistic and religious polarisation, increasing civil violence, and socio-economic pressures, the direct assumption of power by the senior commanders could drag them into the ongoing controversies and undermine their reputation. The army's direct involvement in the maintenance of law and order in Sindh, especially in Karachi, during 1992-94, showed the hazard of such operations. The senior officers are thus reluctant to involve themselves directly in civilian affairs.

The military commanders attach such importance to their professional and

corporate interests and make sure that the civilian leadership works towards their protection and advancement. They have a direct stake in foreign and defence policies, especially on Afghanistan, India and the nuclear issue, and want their perspectives to be accommodated; any major shift should be made in consultation with them. The military commanders do not want civilian interference in the internal affairs of the services. They jealously guard their autonomy pertaining to postings, transfers and promotions of service personnel, the disbursement of defence expenditure, training, and related affairs. Defence expenditure is another important interest. They are opposed to any unilateral cut in defence spending by the civilian government. Similarly, service privileges and perks, which have increased tremendously during the period of direct military rule, and absorption of ex-servicemen in civilian jobs are their permanent interests. They expect a civilian government to maintain a minimum measure of socio-economic stability and a functional participatory political order. Any serious crisis of governance on the part of the civilian government threatens the military's interests because a society in turmoil and crisis cannot sustain its professional and corporate interests. Therefore, the military cannot be expected to support a government that has lost credibility, for any reason, and is confronted with street agitation.

No civilian government of elected assembly since 1988 has completed its normal tenure of five years. Civilian governments have been dislodged by the president with the full backing of the top brass of the military when governments developed differences with the military and lost credibility at the popular level. Benazir Bhutto, who assumed power in December 1988 with the consent of the military top brass, soon developed differences with them in her enthusiasm to assert civilian primacy. This, coupled with her political and economic mismanagement, serious conflicts with the Punjab government led by her adversary, and mishandling of the ethnic problem in urban Sindh, weakened her popular base, making it possible for the president to remove her from office in August 1990. Her successor, Nawaz Sharif, known for his pro-military disposition, ran into difficulties with the military in a little over two years. The developments that really undermined his position included insufficient attention to socio-economic problems and serious charges of financial impropriety and economic mismanagement, not to speak of extremely strained interaction with political adversaries and the confrontation his government developed with the president. He was removed by the president in April 1993, in the same way Benazir Bhutto was dislodged. Later, the Supreme Court restored his government, declaring the president's dismissal order unconstitutional. However, the power struggle between the president and Nawaz Sharif, especially the latter's attempt to install a government of his own choice in the Punjab, created such confusion and uncertainty that the top brass forced him and the president out of

office in July 1993. An interim civilian government was appointed and new elections were held, which brought Benazir Bhutto back to power in October. During her second term, Benazir Bhutto avoided conflict with the military, but her political and economic mismanagement, including complaints about corruption in the higher echelons of the government and misuse of state resources, surpassed that of her first term. The handling of the ethnic problem and confrontation with the superior judiciary undermined her rule. These factors alienated the military, which joined hands with the president to remove her from office in November 1996.

In all these dismissals, the president acted in consultation with the top brass of the military, and there is enough evidence to suggest that the latter had come to the conclusion that the time had come to get rid of the civilian government. On all these occasions, troops took control of all the major government installations, including the prime minister's office and residence, and radio and TV stations. In the case of the 1996 dismissal of Benazir Bhutto, the airports were closed and mobile phones were turned off. It was a coup-like operation on all these occasions, and the interim prime ministers were selected in 1993 and 1996 with the consent of the army.

The role of the Pakistan military has undergone major changes during the fifty years of independence. Its traditions emphasised aloofness from active politics and the primacy of the civilian leadership. The military gradually expanded its role, however, first by becoming an important actor in the decision-making process, and then by directly assuming power. It has, by now, become the most powerful political force in the political system. Its role has changed from direct governance to influencing the nature and direction of politics from the background.

The military prefers *role* over *rule*. If its professional and corporate interests can be protected adequately from a distance, it will not be tempted to step in directly and establish military rule once again. Much depends on how the political leaders perform the task of political and economic management. The civilian government faces two major constraints on its ability to assert its primacy. First, the regional security environment, marked by tension and conflict, increases the importance of the military in the decision-making process. Second, the political forces continue to be fragmented and weak, and often tend to disregard the democratic norms. The growing ethnic-linguistic divide and religious-sectarian cleavages, and the proliferation of sophisticated weapons in the society, have made governance an extremely delicate task. The civilian government needs the support and blessings of the military to stay afloat. The military's preponderant role in the polity is thus assured.