

Pakistan's Example of the Way Forward in Egypt

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Brief Analysis

Pakistan's successes and stumbles suggest that the United States should enhance its involvement with Egypt in order to help manage the reemergence of a civilian-led democracy.

Pakistan's track record offers several parallels to this month's military takeover in Egypt, including both cautionary tales and potentially useful strategies for transition. From the aftermath of the 1977 coup to the peaceful transfer of power following elections this May, Washington (and Cairo) can glean several lessons from Islamabad's efforts to implement true civilian rule against the persistent prospect of state failure.

LONG EXPERIENCE WITH COUPS

Like Egypt, Pakistan is geographically large, with a big population and high poverty rate. And in both countries, colonial experience bequeathed Western-style bureaucracy and military forces. Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has been ruled by the military for the majority of its existence. Even now, with a civilian government, the military is a major player, retaining apparent veto power over the nation's foreign and defense policies as well as control of its nuclear weapons.

The military is assisted by Pakistan's civilian bureaucracy, particularly its intelligence and security forces. The scope and reach of this military-bureaucratic elite defies definition; it often resembles the rumored Turkish "deep state." For example, the resident *New York Times* correspondent was expelled during this year's elections for unspecified "undesirable activities," despite protests to the country's political leadership.

Pakistan has undergone three "military eras." The first was from 1958 to 1971 -- Gen. Muhammad Ayub Khan initially seized power, later handing it to Gen. Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan in 1968 due to ill health. In 1971, after Pakistani forces lost control of the territory that became Bangladesh, Yahya Khan ceded power to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a civilian politician who was subsequently elected prime minister under a new constitution in 1973.

The second military era began in 1977, when Gen. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq took over from Bhutto after disputed elections spurred months of street protests. He remained in power until 1988, when he was killed (along with the American ambassador) in a still-mysterious plane crash.

The third military era lasted from 1999 to 2008. Prior to this period, the office of prime minister was held by several politicians, including Benazir Bhutto (Zulfiqar's daughter) and Nawaz Sharif. In October 1999, however, Gen. Pervez Musharraf overthrew Sharif after the prime minister tried to replace him as head of the army. Musharraf was eventually forced to give up power in 2008 after Benazir Bhutto's party won elections, though she herself was assassinated before the vote took place.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Of these military takeovers, Pakistan's 1977 coup most closely resembles the recent events in Egypt. At the time, the Pakistani military was commanded by Zia-ul-Haq, whom Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto had promoted to army chief because he was not perceived as a threat. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party had become the country's best-organized political group, and he had also established a paramilitary unit under his own control.

On July 4, 1977, Zia ordered his forces to temporarily detain not only Bhutto and his senior colleagues, but also the country's motley collection of opposition leaders, including Islamists, conservatives, and members of regional factions. The new martial-law administration justified its intervention by naming the coup "Operation Fair Play" and claiming it wanted to quell social unrest. Zia also appointed technocrats as government ministers while promising early elections, but it soon became clear that Bhutto would likely win any new vote. Accordingly, the former premier was rearrested and prosecuted for ordering a 1974 political killing, and eventually found guilty and hanged.

When the coup occurred, the Pakistani population was initially quiescent. Political activists lay low and, once party leaders were released, devoted themselves to election campaigning rather than confronting the military. The takeover itself involved classic coup methods: airports were closed, international telephone and telex lines were cut, and newspapers went silent, then confined themselves to government communiques and sycophantic editorials. Technological and social changes have made such techniques impossible today; in fact, they would likely enrage the mass of ordinary Pakistanis who would otherwise want to keep their heads low. Although domestic and cell phone connections rely on government assent, satellite telephones, while not common, operate outside state control. Moreover, the Pakistani media is now vigorous in asserting its independence; the government no doubt guides reporting on some subjects, but not to the point of full control.

LESSONS FOR EGYPT

Unique domestic factors aside, Egypt's military leaders would be foolish to ignore the experience of other militaries in ruling a country and transferring power to civilians, along with the associated accoutrements of elections, parliaments, and rule of law. Their first realization should be that armies are trained to fight battles, not administer countries; concentrating on their security role may cause governance to suffer, and vice versa. Second, although military elites confer high status on themselves, such respect has to be earned with civilians. Poor administration and corruption can quickly damage the military's reputation. Third, properly timing a political transition is very difficult; allowing even a little political activity creates its own momentum. Indeed, the Egyptian military already mishandled the first post-Mubarak transition.

Moreover, Pakistan's recent history shows how the personal qualities of -- and lingering contempt between -- military and political leaders can impede a stable transition. For example, President Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's widower, had most of his powers stripped by the national assembly in 2010 and could face corruption charges again this September, after his term ends and his immunity is lifted. For his part, Prime Minister Sharif is renowned for his limited attention span and has accrued vast wealth, raising questions about his own business

probity. And Musharraf hugely overestimated his popularity by returning to stand in elections this year. Ignominiously defeated, he is now under house arrest and could be tried for treason by Sharif, the prime minister he overthrew in 1999; his army links may be the only thing saving him from execution. Similar problems could rear their head in Egypt, where military leaders are likely contemptuous of some of the politicians with whom they must now work.

U.S. POLICY

As with Egypt, the United States has a long history of cooperation with Pakistan, particularly its military-bureaucratic elite. For example, the ill-fated 1960 U-2 spying mission over the Soviet Union was launched from a CIA facility at an air base in Peshawar. In 1971, national security advisor Henry Kissinger flew from Pakistan to China on a secret mission to open diplomatic relations with Beijing. And during the 1980s, Pakistan was the main U.S. partner in supplying arms to the mujahedin in neighboring Afghanistan, forcing the withdrawal of Soviet forces.

Such cooperation has also had negative consequences, however, including the emergence of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda, the decision to sometimes turn a blind eye to Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons, and an often awkward relationship with India, the regional power. U.S. relations with Pakistan's political leaders are currently vexed by the CIA drone strikes against terrorist targets close to the border with Afghanistan, which have outraged the populace because of civilian casualties and apparent abuse of Pakistan's sovereignty.

Nevertheless, Washington has repeatedly worked with Islamabad (as well as Pakistan's generals in nearby Rawalpindi) to ease political transitions over the years. It has always been hard work, but Pakistan has experienced significant periods of civilian rule, which is therefore easier to depict as an ideal (the same cannot be said for Egypt, whose experience with civilian rule was very brief and negative). The success of the process is best illustrated by Pakistan's peaceful postelection transition last month, from a government led by one party to a new administration led by an opposition party. On the other side of the ledger is the perception that Pakistan is no longer a U.S. ally (given the assumed help it gave to bin Laden during his years of hiding there) and sometimes seems on the verge of becoming a failed state, the first with a nuclear weapons arsenal. These factors suggest that the United States should work to maintain and even enhance its involvement with Cairo in order to help manage the reemergence of a civilian-led democracy in Egypt.

Simon Henderson, the Baker fellow and director of the Gulf and Energy Policy Program at The Washington Institute, was the BBC correspondent in Pakistan at the time of the 1977 coup. ❖

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