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Pakistan's Prime Minister Has Been Sent Packing. So What's Next?

By Michael Kugelman

For Nawaz Sharif, the third time was definitely not the charm.

On July 28, Pakistan's Supreme Court disqualified the Pakistani prime minister, thereby preventing him from serving out his full term, which was scheduled to end next year.

Sharif has served as Pakistani premier two other times, and in both cases, he was forced out prematurely. In 1993, he lost his job after the Pakistani president—a largely ceremonial position today, but a powerful one back then—dissolved Sharif's government. Six years later, he was overthrown in a military coup. This time around, Sharif was dismissed after a long investigation stemming from revelations in the Panama Papers that Sharif's children harbored offshore assets.

And yet, it's not the Panama Papers that sent Sharif packing. Rather, the Supreme Court cited Articles 62 and 63 of the Pakistani Constitution—clauses instituted by military dictator Zia ul-Haq in 1985. They stipulate that any lawmaker deemed

dishonest or untruthful can be removed from power. In its ruling, the court declared that Sharif had failed to disclose his employment with a Dubai-based company owned by his son when submitting his paperwork to contest the 2013 elections, which propelled him into power for his third term.

In a nation as divided as Pakistan, reactions to the Supreme Court judgment have been predictably split. Supporters of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, as well as occupants of Pakistan's small liberal sphere, have denounced the verdict as arbitrary and unfair. He was booted from power not because of corruption charges, they note, but rather for failing to declare \$2,700 in monthly income from a side gig (income Sharif insists he never received). Surely, so the narrative goes, other Pakistani officials—both in government and the military—have committed far more egregious transgressions. So why have they not been held accountable? Some opponents of the Supreme Court decision believe the Supreme Court—perhaps with the tacit approval of the powerful Pakistani military—engaged in inappropriate judicial overreach.

However, many others—particularly members and supporters of the main opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), as well as anti-corruption proponents and common citizens around the country—take a very different view. This is democracy in action, they declare: An elected official held accountable for misdeeds and forced to pay the ultimate political price—a refreshing change from all the Pakistani leaders who have done very bad things and eluded justice. Many Pakistanis are convinced that Sharif and his family are corrupt, even if corruption isn't the reason he was ousted.

In effect, the Supreme Court has delivered its verdict. But within the court of public opinion, there's a major split as to whether the verdict represents selective justice or justice served.

There are two clear winners. One is the PTI. This party, led by cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan, accused Sharif of vote rigging in the 2013 election and had called for his ouster practically from the day he took office. "Go Nawaz Go," a ubiquitous rallying cry, has been the constant soundtrack for the party's advocacy. The PTI's core objective has been achieved, and with flying colors.

The other winner is the Pakistani military—an institution that has often sparred with Sharif. In recent years, it has taken issue with his relatively conciliatory position toward India, and with his desire to put Musharraf on trial for treason. The army may not have orchestrated Sharif's ouster, but it certainly won't shed any tears now that he's gone. Additionally, with civilian officials caught up in transition matters for at least several weeks, the military should be able to consolidate its already-formidable influence in state affairs. And it could enjoy an added bonus: Sharif's intended replacement, his brother Shahbaz, is believed to be the more pro-military sibling.

In short, the Pakistani military now finds itself in a familiar position—firmly ensconced in the catbird seat.

The good news? A smooth, peaceful transition of power is in order. The PML-N has already announced its plan: Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the petroleum minister and a legislator with close ties to the Sharif family, will serve as interim prime minister while Shahbaz Sharif goes through the process of getting elected to parliament (in a parliamentary system like Pakistan's, the premier must be a legislator). That process should be a formality, given the PML-N's strong legislative majority. Once Sharif becomes a parliamentarian—likely within the next two months—he will formally take office and serve out the remainder of his brother's term while the party prepares for national elections next year.

It's in the current transition period that Pakistan's democratic progress will be thrown into the sharpest relief. In decades past, if a civilian leader was abruptly removed, the expectation would be that the army would swoop in to restore order. Yet today, no serious observer of Pakistan expects the military to seize power. Of course, given the deep clout that the military already enjoys behind the scenes, it has no need to take power directly—and likely no desire either, given the arguably unprecedented nonsecurity policy challenges, such as severe water shortages and a serious energy crisis, that afflict present-day Pakistan.

Not only should the PML-N serve out its term, but it could also—to the horror of its bitter PTI rivals—be well positioned to compete strongly in next year's election. Indeed, Sharif's ouster does not automatically put Imran Khan on the fast track to the prime ministership—far from it.

Admittedly, the PML-N does face some difficult days ahead. It must pick up the pieces from Sharif's ouster and restore party unity. On the eve of the verdict, a key PML-N official, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar, expressed deep unhappiness about the party's direction. He threatened to resign, before abruptly changing course. Additionally, the PML-N faces fresh legal challenges. The Supreme Court has called for a criminal investigation of Sharif's children—and ordered another probe to look into the financial assets of Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

And yet, consider the PML-N's rivals. The once-mighty Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which ran the previous national government, fared poorly in the 2013 elections and is now a shadow of its former self.

By contrast, the PTI is a formidable competitor. Its popularity—at least in the short term—should increase in the aftermath of Sharif's dismissal. One of its core constituencies—the young, urban middle class—is a fast-growing demographic. However, the PTI doesn't boast the national clout of the PML-N. Its bastions are

limited to urban spaces of Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, and to the province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, where it runs the government.

The PTI may be a victim of its own success. It rejects and refuses to emulate a deeply entrenched patronage system that has made older parties like the PMLN so strong. This staunchly anti-status quo position—which taps into deeply held grievances in Pakistan about corrupt and dynastic politics—has helped fuel the PTI's popularity. And yet, it's this very patronage system that best positions parties to win elections in today's Pakistan.

The PML-N may be battered and bruised, but it should live to see many more days—though with a caveat. If legal investigations produce damaging verdicts against PML-N officials or their families, then all bets about the party's political prospects could be off. The PTI could capitalize on such setbacks, galvanize more supporters around its message of clean governance, and conceivably score an upset election victory.

All this inside baseball about Pakistani politics is largely immaterial for U.S. officials, whose attention is consumed by other matters—from the North Korea threat to the raft of scandals and controversies engulfing the White House. And yet, for Washington, Sharif's ouster comes at an inconvenient time. The White House is in the throes of a long, drawn out, yet comprehensive policy review on Pakistan. The sudden shock of an ousted prime minister may throw a wrench in the administration's policy calculations to this point. Still, the fact that the transition should be relatively smooth and efficient will ease Washington's concerns about stability—which at the end of the day is the core U.S. interest in Pakistan.

Overall, Sharif's departure should have relatively little impact on U.S.-Pakistan relations. Thanks to a rapidly growing U.S.-India relationship, and to Washington's increasing impatience about Islamabad's refusal to crack down more against terrorists on its soil, U.S.-Pakistan relations are poised for a period of drift—no matter who is running Pakistan's government. Additionally, because Washington mainly views the relationship through a security lens, one of its key interlocutors in Pakistan is and will remain the Pakistani military. And that's an institution that's not going anywhere.

The takeaway? It's undeniable that Pakistan has been plunged into political crisis. Still, we shouldn't overstate the precariousness of the moment. The country will survive. A smooth transition is all but inevitable. Elections should take place within the next year. And for U.S.-Pakistan relations it will be business, even if a lack of overall business, as usual.

Still, given the realities of an activist judiciary—the Supreme Court disqualified another Pakistani prime minister, Yousuf Raza Gilani, as recently as 2012—it's likely a matter of when, not if, a future Pakistani prime minister suffers the same fate as

Sharif. A civilian leader sent packing prematurely? We've seen this movie before in Pakistan, and another sequel probably isn't far off.

In decades past there were military coups. In more recent times, it's the legal authorities that have orchestrated the ousters. Some read these actions as reflections of accountability and democracy; others lambast them as power plays to eliminate undesirables. There may well be elements of truth to both explanations.

Either way, this much is true: A prime minister has never served a full five-year term in Pakistan. Achieving that milestone could remain sadly elusive for the foreseeable future.

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The unhealed wounds of July 5, 1977

By Raza Rumi

The anniversary of General Zia-ul-Haq's 1977 coup is a particularly difficult time for the Pakistani democrat. The very name given to the coup sounds much like a sardonic smirk echoing through history from the dismal gentlemen in uniform who carried it out: Operation Fair Play. The remembrance of what came after that fateful 5th of July remains painful - for in many ways we are today as utterly helpless as we were all those decades ago in the face of that which General Zia unleashed upon Pakistan and its people.

What is it that made General Zia's time in power so particularly harmful and traumatic for the country? It can be argued that he simply picked the worst strands

already present in Pakistan's history and institutionalized them to maintain his power. This was all done with ruthless disdain for the country's destiny. The official version of Pakistan's past, present and future became a dark and dreary dystopia.

Let us go over the three main wounds that were inflicted upon the Pakistani body politic by the General.

First, and most obvious, the coup cemented the idea that constitutional democracy came at the very end of a long list of other priorities in Pakistan. The parliament elected in 1970 was the very first elected on the basis of universal adult franchise. The controversial elections of 1977 and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's flawed policies were no excuse to end democratic rule in Pakistan - or what was left of it after 1971. That and the subsequent judicial murder of elected Prime Minister Bhutto meant that it would be difficult to establish viable civilian democratic institutions in the country for decades to come. And sure enough, the precedent set by General Zia allowed for what General Musharraf did only a decade after the former's death. Moreover, the very potent threat of unconstitutional putsches and coups continues to haunt the democratic process in Pakistan today. It must not be forgotten that today, just as in 1977, there are political parties and leaders who openly call for yet more intervention in political disputes from unelected and unaccountable institutions of state.

Second, the coup enabled General Zia's regime to tie Pakistani foreign policy so intimately with armed non-state actors that today's civilian and military leaders, even with the best of intentions, cannot easily change course. Contemporary Pakistan stands in a disastrous diplomatic position vis-a-vis at least three of its neighbours in both its east and west. The contours of General Zia's strategic thinking can still be clearly seen in our predicament today.

Third, perhaps most unfortunate, was the wholesale mutilation by the Zia regime of Pakistan's social fabric and religious discourse. The policy which the General called "Islamisation" led to anything but that outcome: it simply gave unprecedented and previously unimaginable power to cynical religious leaders who combined stubborn conservatism with virulent fundamentalism. This understanding of religion and its place in Pakistani society permeated every aspect of life, beyond the overt political sphere. The educational sector, spirituality, sciences, arts, culture, languages, clothing, tastes and consumption patterns of Pakistanis were refashioned during the Zia era to fit into a fundamentalist mould. Today, as Pakistani society struggles desperately in its search for a "counter-narrative" to the violent lunacy of the Taliban and the Islamic State group, it is inevitable to trace the difficulty back to the genies unleashed deliberately and methodically during the 1980s.

In short, General Zia-ul-Haq was far more than a mere dictator looking to perpetuate his power. What he unleashed was a wholesale project of right-wing social transformation. Each of the three wounds described above, far from having healed,

remains raw, fresh and ready to burst open.

On this 5th of July, Pakistan's state and society continues to slog through the desert of authoritarianism, militarism and fundamentalism where Zia-ul-Haq led it.

The Impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on the Domestic and International Policy of Pakistan

On July 19, Dr. Hasan-Askari Rizvi participated in a SAIS South Asia Studies Roundtable, "The Impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on the Domestic & International Policy of Pakistan," in Washington, DC.





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When successful, the processes of community integration and civic promotion begin with the individual and, alongside support from Federal, State, and municipal programs, advance collectively, often through socialization with informal groups and professional and

cultural associations. However, due to regional, organizational, and programmatic differences, the catalytic potential of civil society organizations is underutilized. Partnerships with local, regional, and national civil society organizations will advance community integration, promote the concept of citizenship, and highlight pathways to achieve the “American Dream.”

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MEDIA REVIEW

In Pakistan, a Probe and a Power Play

Cyril Almedia

“So goes another Pakistani political crisis, simultaneously bewildering and familiar.” The author provides context and background on the run up to Prime Minister Sharif’s disqualification. [[New York Times](#)]

The West on Brink of Failing in Afghanistan

Zabihulla Noori

The author describes Afghanistan’s political complexities and social challenges and recommends that “to win in Afghanistan, in addition to training the Afghan security forces, the international community must put pressure on Pakistan to close down the terrorist training camps inside Pakistan and...perhaps most importantly, the international community needs to engage in stabilizing the country politically by listening to all Afghans, making sure that equal distribution of power takes place among all ethnic groups and by holding the government accountable to its citizens.” [[Eurasia Review](#)]

The ummah at war with itself

Pervez Hoodbhoy

The author comments that nation-states within the global Muslim community do not interact on the basis of their faith. Consequently, “it is time to give the OIC a decent burial”. But there is a way to move forward: “creating strong democratic institutions based on equal rights for all citizens, encouraging the participation of women in public life, and respecting equally all Muslim sects as well as other religions, providing space and freedom to individuals and education for all based on science and reason.” [[Dawn](#)]

What is India’s “Cold Start” military doctrine?

India’s January acknowledgement of its Cold Start military doctrine and its “surgical strikes” may work against its interests or be ineffective if its targets know retaliation is coming. Worse, the doctrine “provides further reason for Pakistan to develop ‘tactical’ nukes.” [[The Economist](#)]

40 Years of Zia: How Zia Redefined Pakistan

I.A. Rehman

July 5 marked the 40th anniversary of the 1977 military coup which brought General Ziaul Haq into power. The author looks back at the coup that altered Pakistan's trajectory. [[Dawn](#)]

India: Pervasive Negligence in J&K – Analysis

Ajit Kumar Singh

An analysis of the policies and procedures in place in J&K that failed to protect pilgrims during a July 10 strike leads the author to conclude that "SFs and their political masters must out-think and outmaneuver terrorist formations and their sponsors, rather than pursue belated 'corrective measures' after facing predictable and intermittent reverses." [[Eurasia Review](#)]

'Love Thy Neighbor'

Stephanie McCrummen

A Muslim doctor in an idyllic small town in Minnesota, disillusioned, angry, and feeling betrayed after the U.S. presidential election, considered moving to a different country. Instead, three months after the election, he speaks at community gatherings to dispel misconceptions about him, his family, and Islam and finds his audiences receptive. [[Washington Post](#)]

The Big Sick Movie: A Self-Portrait of Pakistani-American Kumail Nanjiani

Riaz Haq

The author reviews the "The Big Sick," an autobiographical romantic comedy starring Kumail Nanjiani, a Pakistan-American actor, finding much to praise as well as painful stereotypes. [[Haq's Musings](#)]

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