



## Troika politics and governability crisis in Pakistan (1988-1999)

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### Abstract

This article is an attempt to look at the third democratic experiment from 1988 to 1999 in Pakistan's political system. In this period Pakistan had gone through four general elections. Both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif had two terms each. But no political consolidation took place during this democratic rule of 11 years. Both the leaders had to compromise with military-bureaucratic alliance. During this period a crisis of governability had emerged in Pakistan. The findings would be based on the vivid arguments of prominent scholars. The paper also presents the Troika power politics system in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Troika politics, governability, eighth amendment, mujahids, hegemony

### 1. Introduction

From 1988 to 1999 the era known as third democratic phase in the Pakistan's history. The restoration of democracy in Pakistan in the last quarter of 1988 after the 11 year long brutal rule of General Zia-ul-Haq, which ended suddenly and unexpectedly with his demise in a mysterious air crash. This time Pakistan was ruled by civilian governments, alternately headed by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto and Pakistan Muslim League (PML) leader Nawaz Sharif, who were each elected twice, but they could not strengthen the Pakistan political system in other words no political consolidation took place during the 11 years of democratic rule.

The restoration of democracy had coincided with a steady decay of political institution, social conflicts and economic mismanagement. According to Sayyed Vali Reza Naqvi, a crisis of governability had emerged as a concomitant of the democratization process because of a combination of law legitimacy and law effectiveness of the country's political leadership<sup>[1]</sup>.

The period, 1988-1999 was ostensibly democratic in nature but the troika politics and the musical chair of Prime Minister was tangibly engineered by the military establishment in collaboration with civil bureaucracy. The power politics between PPP and IJI, led by PML of Nawaz Sharif was in fact the extension of ideological war between Bhutto and Zia, orchestrated by civil-military establishment<sup>[2]</sup>.

The sudden demise of Zia-ul-Haq in an air crash on August 17, 1988, ushered in a new era in the political history of Pakistan. It was an era of hope and suspicion. Hope in a sense that it would bring long awaited democratic, social, economic and political changes in Pakistan. The suspicion part provided the sense of thinking as to who was the main pillar of strength that molded the whole stream of events. It was the Civil-Military bureaucracy, for sure, that proved to be the main mold of events during this democratic era.

There were certain foreign policy goals, such as Kashmir, Afghanistan and the Nuclear Issue. In fact, the civil-military bureaucracy looked towards these goals through the 'India-centric' prism<sup>[3]</sup>. They molded the internal and external

affairs only to achieve the aforementioned goals through what so ever cost they had to pay for, either in the form of internal disorder or through 'behind-the-scene' moves of political instability in Pakistan. In fact the anti-India stance in foreign policy was a 'life saving boat' for the military-centered establishment. Owing to this perception, we might very well judge how pre-planned were the depositions of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif respectively.

Benazir first came to office December 1988, and Ghulam Ishaq Khan, chairman of the senate, became the president. Like her father, she came to power unexpectedly as a direct result of Zia's death in an air crash. Benazir was extremely intelligent, had strong contacts abroad (especially in the United States) and was the PPP's undisputed leader. However, she inherited two grudges.

One went back to 1972 when her father had nationalized the industries, the heart of Sharif family's industrial empire. This set the Sharif family against her, and their distrust was shared by the entire Pakistani business community. The second grudge was that of the army. Its people doubted her professional competence, were intensely suspicious of her since she was not part of the establishment, and feared that she might seek revenge for her father's death<sup>[4]</sup>.

Thus, only after behind-the-scene compromises, did Benazir Bhutto assume the office of Prime Minister. On assuming power, Bhutto was quick to concede that she had not emerged as a 'free agent' on the Pakistani political scene, and had to make major compromises to form the government.<sup>5</sup> She showed pragmatism and flexibility on accepting the office of Prime Minister, giving the impression that she understood the bargaining, compromises, and consensus-building that politics entails. Appeasing the military, she agreed to let General Aslam Beg continue as the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and to give a direct role in foreign policy to the military by retaining Sahibzada Yaqoob Ali Khan, who had been elected senator on the IJI ticket, as foreign minister. She consented to remain as nominal head of the defence committee, not interfere in the internal affairs of the military, retain a large budget for the armed forces, and let the military handle an independent Afghan policy<sup>[6]</sup>.

She also agreed to support the candidacy of Ghulam Ishaq Khan as president, and said she would abide by agreements that had been signed by the interim government with the IMF in an ill-conceived manner <sup>[7]</sup>.

The military had agreed to the 1988 elections, hoping that the PPP would not be able to sweep the polls. For 11 years under General Zia-ul-Haq, a generation of military officers had been indoctrinated against the PPP, which they believed presented a security threat. They perceived Benazir Bhutto as anti-establishment, so there was a perception that a party had come to power whose leadership had inspired against the military from exile abroad. Thus, mutual distrust and hostility existed between Bhutto and the military elites <sup>[8]</sup>.

There were certain initiatives on the part of Benazir Bhutto that antagonized the military and widened the gulf between the civilian leadership and military elites. The last of the Soviet troops left Afghanistan in February 1989, but the struggle in the neighboring state did not end. Rival factions fought for control of the provinces and the Marxist Najibullah government remained in place in Kabul. Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), under the leadership of Lieutenant General Hamid Gul, had sustained its assistance to the various Afghan fundamentalist orders but they were prevented from taking strategic Jalalabad, which remained under Najibullah's control <sup>[9]</sup>. Wali Khan, the leader of ANP, condemned the operations of the ISI, declaring that they had prolonged the war and inflicted even greater hardship on both the Afghans as well as the people of the Frontier provinces <sup>[10]</sup>. In May 1989, against the advices of the COAS, Benazir dismissed the powerful ISI chief, Lieutenant General Hamid Gul, and replaced him by Lieutenant General Shams-ur-Rahman. General Hamid Gul was considered not only the creator of IJI, but also the key strategist in the Afghan war during Zia's years <sup>[11]</sup>. This decision not only widened the gulf between Benazir and military elite but also angered her coalition partner ANP which broke with her government.

Later in the year another conflict surfaced which not only antagonized the military but also the President. Admiral Sirohi was to retire as chairman in November 1991 upon completion of his three years term. The issue was constitutional, as to who had the power, the President or the Prime Minister, to appoint the chief of the services and the chairman of JCOSC.

Apart from the constitutional problem there were also some political problems. The Pucca Qila incident of May 1990 gave surge to Karachi turmoil which had long lasting impacts on her government and the deteriorating relations between the civil and military administration. There was a severe military crackdown mostly on the Mahajirs. The targeting of the MQM by the army was believed to have been ordered by the Prime Minister, although she denied all such accusations. As a consequence of the army crackdown, MQM also broke with the PPP and joined with the IJI. <sup>12</sup> Instability in Sindh also promoted the Sindh leader, G.M. Syed, to renew his call for an independent or autonomous Sindhu Desh <sup>[13]</sup>. Owing to the political chaos and establishment-oriented goals, Ghulam Ishaq Khan dismissed the Benazir's government using his power under the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment.

The 1990 elections were held in which IJI and its coalition partners, MQM and ANP got 155 seats against 45 seats of PPP. Nawaz Sharif became the Prime Minister with a strong government. This time again the Prime Minister was caught

in tussle with Ghulam Ishaq Khan. Although Nawaz Sharif was considered as a protégée of Zia-ul-Haq in terms of his Islamization programme and support granted by the military establishment, yet the power politics brought him in direct conflict with the president and army establishment <sup>[14]</sup>.

It was not Benazir or the PPP that threatened Nawaz Sharif and the IJI government, but rather the country's traditional power source, the higher military and bureaucratic institutions. The incident that sparked the final confrontation between the Prime Minister and the President was the appointment of a new COAS, following the sudden death of General Asif Nawaz on 8 January 1993. The president chose Lieutenant-General Abdul Waheed Kakar, but the manner of his decision angered the Prime Minister, and he reacted by calling for the repeal of the President's Eighth Amendment powers. A desperate move, the maneuver was orchestrated to draw the broadest popular support, but it also destroyed Nawaz Sharif's ability to work with Ghulam Ishaq <sup>[15]</sup>.

The plot thickened when the widow of the late General Asif Nawaz claimed that he had been poisoned, and appeared to accuse Nawaz Sharif of the deed. Benazir maneuvered herself into a more advantageous position. Ingratiating herself with the President, Benazir called upon Ghulam Ishaq to dissolve the IJI government and call midterm elections. Benazir promised to support Ghulam Ishaq in his quest for another term as president if he removed her rival. <sup>16</sup> Nawaz Sharif, somewhat belatedly, recognized the folly of his campaign against Ghulam Ishaq, and tried to outmaneuver Benazir by announcing his party's support for the president's candidacy. Nawaz Sharif's incredible performance, however, was too little and too late <sup>[17]</sup>.

On 18 April 1993, Ghulam Ishaq again used his power under the Eighth Amendment to dismiss the Prime Minister and his government as well as to dissolve the National Assembly. Nawaz Sharif immediately appealed to the Pakistan Supreme Court to reinstate his government. The Supreme Court surprisingly responded in favor of Nawaz Sharif and declared the President's action illegal and unconstitutional. Following a round of intense negotiations, it was General Abdul Waheed Kakar who intervened and engineered an agreement between the two. Thus on 18 July 1993 both Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Mian Nawaz Sharif simultaneously resigned their respective positions.

The 1990 decade soon witnessed the third phase of the troika politics in Pakistan. Benazir became the Prime Minister for her second term in October 1993. The PPP government was also found in Sindh and Punjab apart from the centre. This time Benazir Bhutto seemed to be more secure when it was announced that the PPP candidate for President, Farooq Leghari, had defeated his PML rival, Wasim Sajjad. Leghari's victory heralded a new era in Pakistani politics wherein the head of government and the head of state were expected to work in concert with one another. <sup>18</sup> But as mentioned earlier the military establishment continued its back door politics and engendered the anti-government tactics, the moment it felt that the ruling junta has deviated from the military-oriented foreign policy goals i.e. Kashmir, Afghanistan and Nuclear issue <sup>[19]</sup>.

Benazir Bhutto was viewed with anger and suspicion by the military elite when ever US hinted towards the Pakistan's nuclear program. She was considered as more inclined towards US. Relations with the United States had reached a

new low during the Nawaz Sharif administration. Washington was increasingly wary of Pakistani intentions in the nuclear area and, ever fearful that the country's nuclear weapons capability would only intensify Pakistan-India rivalry. It pressurized Benazir to freeze the country's nuclear programme. Though Benazir declared that she was duty-bound to maintain the country's nuclear programme, yet, she could not satisfy the military junta<sup>[20]</sup>.

Benazir inherited still another tense situation in Pakistan's relations with its adversarial neighbour when the Babri Mosque was demolished by a frenzied mob of Indian Hindu zealots<sup>[21]</sup>. That event had provoked retaliatory assaults on Hindu installations in Pakistan. The incident precipitated a rash of bombings and communal assaults in both India and Pakistan. New Delhi accused Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) for the bomb blasts in Bombay, whereas Islamabad pointed the finger of blame at New Delhi's clandestine service, RAW, accusing it of committing a number of terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The fire that burned a portion of Pakistan's National Assembly building on 9 November 1994 was also attributed to RAW agents<sup>[22]</sup>. The expulsion of diplomatic representatives by each country only heightened tensions, and the massing of troops on their mutual frontier, as well as the recurring skirmishes on the ceasefire line in Kashmir, were not aimed at improving the atmosphere between the two neighbors. Like her father before her, she was denounced for befriending India and it was alleged, even encouraging New Delhi to advantage itself at Pakistan's expense.

Benazir also found herself trapped in a banking scandal. The arrest of Younus Habib, President of the Mehran bank, on grounds that he had diverted huge sums of money to political leaders as well as former high-ranking army officers, ultimately led investigators to the President's House, where president Farooq Leghari was alleged to have personally benefited from the bank's sale of a piece of worthless property<sup>[23]</sup>. Benazir sought to divert attention from herself and her administration by ordering the arrest of Brigadier Imtiaz, the Intelligence Chief during the Nawaz Sharif's administration. Imtiaz was accused of plotting the overthrow of Benazir's first administration, and the Prime Minister sought to demonstrate to her current detractors that she would not hesitate to act against them if they persisted in their tactics to undermine her rule<sup>[24]</sup>.

The two challenges that weakened Benazir Bhutto most were violence in Pakistan's commercial center and largest city, Karachi, and bickering with her brother Murtaza Bhutto, who returned to Pakistan after sixteen years in exile. The ISI had established contacts with Murtaza Bhutto by the late 1980s. When Benazir Bhutto became Prime Minister for the first time in 1988, she did not allow her brother's return to the country in view of her political difficulties. In the 1993 election, Murtaza Bhutto ran against the official PPP candidate in the family's home district. Murtaza Bhutto continued to challenge her in harsh statements leading to what the media described as "the battle of Bhutto's." He failed to divide the PPP significantly but did succeed in creating a media spectacle that distracted his sister from governing effectively.<sup>25</sup> In order to continue the military's charisma in its image as a kingmaker and behind-the-scenes manipulator, the President in collaboration with the establishment dismissed Bhutto's government three years later by using the power of 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.<sup>26</sup>

Nawaz second and more remarkable tenure began on February 17, 1997, and ended on October 12, 1999. This time he was swept into office by a huge majority nearly 50 percent of the vote and 66 percent of the seats. Although, he was the product of establishment and knew how to "work" with it, yet, he failed as miserably as his predecessors to build his own power base and reduce the army's. In his second term, he stripped the President of the constitutional power to dismiss the parliament. He then purged the bureaucracy and freely transferred judges. Nawaz Sharif's most provocative step was an attempt to reduce the army's influence by removing the army chief, Jehangir Karamat, because Karamat had proposed a National Security Council that would include representatives from the services, the bureaucracy, and the cabinet to deal with a wide range of issues. His pro-India stance angered the military establishment utmost since thought in terms of amicable relations with India to enhance the economic cooperation and trade opportunities with India. Nawaz Sharif also met Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Lahore in February 1999. The army, then commanded by General Pervez Musharraf, was upset with the Lahore summit, especially because the original communiqué made no mention of Kashmir<sup>[27]</sup>. Thus to undermine the pro-Indian stance of civilian government, in the words of Stephen P. Cohen, military orchestrated its "India problem" and launched the Kargil episode in 1999. This drama was the final blow to the zero-sum game of the Troika politics in Pakistan from 1988 to 1999<sup>[28]</sup>.

As the head of a power government, Sharif could have tried to forge a democratic compact and equip society to support it. In any case his political culture was in line with authoritarian tradition, but democracy is more complex than parliamentary majorities, supporters in important posts and constitutional amendments. These are only the trappings<sup>[29]</sup>. In sum, during the 11 years of democratic restoration there were four elected governments which took office and all of them were removed arbitrarily. There have been executive judiciary confrontations, dispositions of the chief justice of the Supreme Court and an imminent military takeover, leading to the persistence of a military hegemonic system.

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