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**Relationship between Bad Governance and Military Takeover:  
An Analysis of Military Coup of 1999**

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**Abstract:**

This article explores the relationship between the poor economic governance on the part of government and the resultant military takeover in Pakistan. Over the years, the military in Pakistan maintained a tradition of imposing martial law in the country. To the surprise of many, all these martial laws have been peaceful, and hardly the army has come across any resistance from the masses. What it argues is that poor governance in Pakistan by civilians provides an opportunity to Pakistan army to impose martial law and take over the country. And it is for this reason that people welcomed even the dismissal of their elected government. In October, 1999 General Musharraf removed the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, on the same pretext; poor economic performance that worked to the advantage of the military dictatorship. The research employs a case study approach and data has mainly been collected from secondary sources including books, research articles, reports and newspaper articles.

**INTRODUCTION**

*“There are armies that guard their nation’s borders, there are those who are concerned about protecting their own position in society, and there are those who defend a cause or idea. Pakistan army does all the three” (Cohen, 1984).*

Civil-military relations in developing countries are at the heart of a central concern of democracy. However, the relations in Pakistan have been turbulent throughout the history, it has also been an uneasy relationship in the process of historical growth with frequent military interventions. Interestingly Government in Pakistan is a pendulum swinging back and forth between democratically elected civilian politicians and military rule (Chengappa, 1999). Pakistan Army, since independence, has maintained the habit of hampering the political process time and again through coup d’état, the scourge of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to make its presence felt (Ibrahim, 2009). After eleven years of hide and seek with democracy, Pakistan once again returned to military rule

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with the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Pervez Musharraf taking over power from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on October 12, 1999 in a bloodless coup. By the time the elected government was sent packing, in Pakistan for more than 25 out of its 53 years of existence, the military was in power. Thus, when the Army took charge of the government in Pakistan for the fourth time in October 1999, most foreign political observers were not surprised. However, interestingly unlike the previous military coups in Pakistan, the Government of General Musharraf did not impose martial law in the country. The constitution of 1973 was not abrogated. Moreover, the coup left Pakistan as the only state in South Asia with a military government in power (Hossain, 2000).

Managing the coercive power of the military, making sure that those who govern do not become tyranny to the governed is the central focus of civil-military relations. However, in Pakistan military has come to identify itself with the state rather than see itself as just one of the key components of a constitutional state (Aziz, 2008). The argument may carry weight; however certain variables and factors are certainly at work in the background to explain military intervention. Making military intervention a dependent variable, three broader independent or intervening variables- Internal, External, and International divided further into Structural and Situational factors (Bhimaya, 1997) have triggered coups in Pakistan. This is the Corporatist Approach to highlight military intervention in Third World Countries (Hossain, 2000). Based on Principal-Agent relation, the Agency Theory has also been applied by many to explain the 1999 Musharraf takeover in Pakistan (Hussain., 2010). Both the civilian and the military are rational actors and their interaction is strategic. So long as the two institutions share common goals, they enjoy cordial relations. But tension arises once their interests and preferences diverge. This often causes the military to shirk, the extreme form of which is a coup, especially when there is the absence of an oversight regime (Feaver, 2003).

S. E. Finer seemingly offers a more comprehensive set of generalizations on why the military intervenes in the politics of developing countries, including Pakistan. According to him, the dynamics of military intervention depend on the factors of “disposition” and “opportunity” (Amin, 2007). In a developing world where the military has traditionally remained part of decision making and involves itself in civil matters with the consent and approval of the civil authorities always disposes itself of intervening. Still, they wait for the right opportunity to come. When the opportunity comes, the military takes over the country. In Pakistan’s case, that opportunity has been found time and again in the shape of poor governance on the part of democratic governments. When the government fails to perform, and the people's opinion turns against it, the army cashes on such a situation.

Apparently, Nawaz Sharif's immediate provocation for sacking General Musharraf and precipitating the political crisis was the clash of interests between the two-state institutions. Before his departure for Sri Lanka to attend the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Sri Lankan, the COAS had made some moves that affected the interests of the Prime Minister (Chengappa, 1999). However, two factors added fury to the fire. When Karamat left service in October, 1998, Nawaz Sharif's act of commission was to antagonize the army with the replacement of Lt General Nasim Rana, the DG-ISI, by a new officer, Lt General Zia Uddin. More importantly, this was reportedly done without active consultation with the new COAS, namely General Musharraf

(Chengappa, 1999). The Kargil factor proved to be the last nail in the coffin. There was a difference of opinion between PM Sharif and General Musharraf over the military withdrawal from Kargil (Chengappa, 1999). This helped the rift to widen.

Musharraf displaced a lawfully elected civilian government that had come into power on the strength of an overwhelming vote by the Pakistani masses (Singh & Singh, 2011). Interestingly the takeover was a walk over for the military despite the fact that a good majority had voted Sharif and his company to the corridors of power. Why no one resisted this radical unconstitutional action? Why no one came out on the roads to show solidarity with the democratic dispensation? Why no one mourned the murder of yet another people's mandate? Instead it was welcomed by the people in Pakistan (Singh & Singh, 2011). The answer lies in some harsh realities.

In democracy, performance, especially on the economic front, provides legitimacy to any elected government and a solid base to stand on. However, in a developing country like Pakistan's elected government becomes more vulnerable to a military coup for being non-responsive to the basic problems and demands of the voters. Once the support base in the masses is lost for under performance, the government's mandate is put into question and the government finds it difficult to resist a coup. For that reason, within the country, hardly a dissenting opinion is expressed. Astonishingly sensible Pakistanis are not unhappy that the army is once again in charge (Wilcox, 1965). Now the question is whether military can dare to displace any government that has been performing to the expectations of the people. And if the military, before taking over the country expects that the people would resist anything unconstitutional, would they still dare to go on with their intentions? The answer may not be clear, but most probably, they would undoubtedly think many times before toppling a constitutional government.

### **PERFORMANCE AND THE QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY**

The concept of "trust" works as an essential bridge between government and people. Malfunctioning by the government causes this trust to break down and so its legitimacy is put into question (Naseer, n.d.). Government exists to be an answer to what people want and demand. Now these wants are multi-faceted like political, social, economic, cultural, legal, and so on. Democracy is best known as a system of accountability; people gauge their elected ones on the basis of performance. Although this performance measurement is highly subjective, people are still informed enough to know the level of performance of their representatives. When people repose trust in government through elections, they are made responsible for keeping this in place through its good works and performance. However, if this trust is not taken care of, people in response do not care if they are in place or displaced.

Democracy has played hide and seek over the years in Pakistan. People have seen none of the government completed its full tenure of five years in 1980s and 90s. They have been dismissed on the pretext of poor performance, corruption, nepotism, and rightly so. People have never mourned this assassination of elected government if it is at hands of either civilian president or military dictator. Again it is not surprising that a government elected through popular vote and dismissed midway through unconstitutional means, has not been able to win the election for the second consecutive tenure. Conversely, the dismissal has received mass approval through sweet distribution and chanting slogans in favor of the decision. They do all this in the hope to have got

rid of an unpopular government whose performance could not pass the test of performance and will have another government elected in the elections who may deliver on people's demands. This hope is tied to every newly elected government, but has never been answered, unfortunately.

Elected for the second time, Nawaz Sharif had to deal with serious issues in governance, not allowing the country to progress and make development. The Benazir Bhutto (1993-96) government had seen the worst kind of mistrust and confrontation among the institutions which almost paralyzed the state. The executive head of the government, Army, Presidency and Judiciary were all at logger's heads and conspired against each other to show its power. Benazir Bhutto's privatization policy was purely a matter of confusion and objectionable loopholes as her party championed the cause of socialism. Still, she had to bear immense international pressure to go for privatization to bring more efficiency. Parliament had become inactive as most of the bills were enacted through Presidential ordinances. Law and order situation had deteriorated throughout the country with tolls of sectarianism rising in Karachi and parts of Punjab. Karachi had almost entered into an era of civil war (Talbot, 1998). Economy of the country had been overburdened with defense budget and non-developmental expenditure. Debt repayments and balance of payment were problems serious enough to destabilize the government. The menace of corruption did not let the government take a breath (Talbot, 1998). It was in such a background that Nawaz Sharif was elected to form government at the center. He was exposed to the most challenging assignment to deal with.

### **POOR ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT IN 1990s**

The decade of 1990 presented a host of challenges to the economy of Pakistan. Although issues like budget deficit, debt servicing, and balance of payment had been there for long, they started hurting the country by the end of the cold war when the system was exposed to a wave of reforms under the guidance and supervision of World Bank and IMF. The rising gap between revenue and expenditure was a source of serious concern that the government failed to fill. In terms of economic growth, the era saw the lowest growth since 1950s. Much of the targets of the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Years Plan could not see the light of the day. GDP growth rate remained around 4 percent against the target of 7 percent. The manufacturing sector registered an increase of 5 percent, falling short by a large margin of the set target. Gross domestic investment dropped down from 19 percent of GDP in 1992-93 to 14.7 percent in 1998. Developmental expenditures were truncated from 7 of the GDP in 1991-92 to 3.6 percent in 1998-99 (Irfan, 2000). This put a halt to the overall development pace of the country.

### **Government Public Expenditure**

It has been seen in Pakistan over the years that government got bigger without getting better. Data shows that public expenditure in Pakistan as a percentage of GDP had risen from 18 in 1980 to 21 percent in 1998. Ironically government in Pakistan rose in size but shrunk in capacity and effectiveness. Much of the increase in government spending was due to rise in public sector employees besides a large number of cabinet ministers who thrived on tax payer money. Of the total expenditure, if the share of non-developmental spending gone up, developmental expenditure came down from 25 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 1997 (Haq, 1999). With such

statistics, what is left for socio economic development was quite inadequate so one could see the rising levels of poverty and other indicators quite unimpressive.

Public spending failed to touch the lives of ordinary masses. They are subject to inefficiencies, open to waste and corruption on the part of public servants. All this badly affected economic growth and human development indicators which are important for a developing country like Pakistan. If South East Asian states are researched upon, one can reach to the conclusion that not the expansion of government, but increasing the capacity and effectiveness of the government is desirable. The government of Nawaz Sharif failed to meet this criteria. Public non-developmental expenditure remained very high which put serious pressure on the economy, they were never consumed in a fair, effective and transparent manner. Much of such spending was wasted in corruption besides not meeting the standard criteria.

### **The Dilemma of Fiscal Indiscipline**

Pakistan had been living well beyond the revenue it generated in 1990s. Hence, to meet this rising gap, it switched over to borrowing from banks. This borrowing fell beyond the capacity of the state to retire through its own resources. The dilemma was that the borrowing and economic progress were not synchronized with the balance heavily tilted in favour of the former. This led to a heavy debt burden which bred other evils. Moreover, Pakistan had to face serious budget deficit which remained 6 percent of the GDP in 1998. Pakistan's non-performing loans stood at 29 percent, which was too high even in South Asia of total advances (Haq, 1999).

Fiscal indiscipline proved a curse to a weak economy like Pakistan. Many economic ills such as rising debt liabilities, interest rates, and macro-economic instability were attributed to the country's fiscal indiscipline especially during Nawaz Sharif's second tenure (Haq, 1999). This fiscal dilemma captivated the banking sector in the country instead to finance the budget deficit and bail out the incapability of the public sector enterprises. Worse enough, the government came to the protection of loan defaulters. The pressure from the government to write off loans given to large corporations and reschedule others caused many banks to sink in a deep financial crisis. All this had a terrible effect on country's overall economic outlook. The quest for proper governance could nowhere be seen.

### **The Issue of Public Debt**

The government was found quite efficient in gathering huge stocks of public debt in 1990s. By the end of 1997, public debt stood at 91.2 percent of the total GDP. This was very high figure as compared to other South Asian countries (Haq, 1999). Public debt rose from Rs.802 billion in 1990 to Rs.2971 billion in June 1999. Economists had already threatened that public debt in Pakistan crossed the safe limits when Nawaz Sharif was about to complete his first year in government. By 1999, public debt in Pakistan had touched the all-time highest point (Rais, & Anwar, 2012). To meet the budget deficit issue, the Government had to seek to more and more loans from internal and external sources. External debt in Pakistan in 1998 was 19 percent higher than it was in the 1980s. Debt from foreign countries increased from 20 billion dollars in June, 1990 to 43 billion dollars in May, 1998. Domestic debt also kept rising and exceeded 40 percent of the Gross Domestic Product by the end of 1997 (Haq, 1999).

The situation in Pakistan regarding public debt servicing was quite worrisome. Debt retirement exhausted 60 percent of the revenue receipts in 1997-98. Interest payment on debt had been the largest head in central government budget expenditure. Even on certain occasions, it exceeded the defense budget (Haq, 1999). Public debt is a burden whose weight always crush a weak economy. Growth is hit so badly that it touches ground dust. Pakistan was exactly experiencing the same dilemma. Given the above statistics, one is wondered if there was any system of governance to address country's pressing problems. It looks that the government did not have any vision, planning, and team of economic managers to save the drowning ship of hopes people had from the civilian Government.

Pakistan could well be seen in a serious fiscal crisis in the late 1990s. People expected that the democracy functional in the country would deliver on what they had voted for. But looking into the conduct of the government, one must accept the reality that they had been living in fool's paradise. The government was found wanting on the notion of good governance. The heavily mandated government of Sharif was reluctant to embark on fundamental reforms to mobilize more and more resources for revenue generation. The country's taxation system was subject to all kinds of deficiencies and loopholes. Some of them are highlighted below:

- First, the civilian government did not collect enough taxes to sponsor its spending. Ironically, tax collection revenue remained stagnant initially and even started declining later.
- Second, tax base remained very narrow as government opted for more indirect taxes than direct, thus allowing big guns to evade. By the late 1990s, there were some 1.5 million people to pay taxes. This much of tax payer was too few to have any sizeable impact on the receipts.
- Third, taxation was not based on equity. Three fourth of the poor had been subjected to taxes through indirect taxation. Over-reliance on indirect taxes causes more harm to the lower income group. Interestingly, tax collection from rich declined by 4.3 percent while the incidence of taxes on poor increased by 10 percent in the late 1990s.
- Fourth, government failed to bring the black economy into the tax net. By 1998, it amounted to 35 percent of the country's GDP. Inefficiency on the part of the government caused serious blow to the overall receipts of the country.

### **The Burden of Debt Servicing, Bankruptcy and Subsidies**

Pakistan had a serious problem with public expenditure consumption in the 1990s. Interestingly, democratic governments in Pakistan put a major chunk of public money into debt servicing, defense, to maintaining a huge army of public employees, to subsidies and payments to loss making corporations. Such spending did not have any remarkable impact on the revenue receipts of the country. Thus, a great deal of public expenditure promoted neither human nor economic development. Moreover, these expenditures were exposed to all kinds of corruption, waste and misplacement. So their ineffectiveness further went down.

The way public expenditure was consumed hit the social sector the worst. For every dollar spent on social sector, defense and debt repayment received 8.5 dollars in 1998. Explicit subsidies accounted for 0.5 percent of the GDP in the same year. If hidden subsidies were included, they would contribute between 3.6 and 7.6 to the total fiscal deficit (Haq, 1999). Data reveals that these

subsidies benefited rich more than the poor segment of society. So, successive governments have found it hard to rid its country.

Large corporations like WAPDA, and Steel Mill had all the issue of deficit budgeting. But instead of taking strong remedial measures to make them profitable, government kept bailing them out by pumping public money into them. Such a protectionist policy on the part of the government made them addicted to be continuously dependent on grants from the state. Their financial capability was worse enough not to discharge their very fundamental financial liabilities like tax and utility bills payment and debt servicing. To worsen the situation further, many such organizations have been insulated from free-market competition by the government.

Making the WAPDA as a case study to make reflections on public sector corporations, one could read its crisis. During Nawaz Sharif's second tenure in office, a special investigative report was published on WAPDA, declaring it to be bankrupt and asking for immediate surgery to make it worth functioning (Sethi, 1997). They asked for a 50 percent tariff hike immediately or injection of Rs.50 billion in subsidy. By 1998 WAPDA's deficit rose to Rs.67 billion (Sethi, 1997). Despite consistent rise in tariffs, WAPDA's deficit kept climbing up. Line losses further added to the crisis which counted for 37 percent (Sethi, 1998). As 30 percent of the WAPDA's annual sale was to the public sector, many of them were defaulters who didn't clear their dues. Despite government's directions from time to time to improve the situation, things went bad to worse. The height of incapability and inefficiency was witnessed the moment government requested Pakistan Army to come to WAPDA's rescue. Virtually WAPDA was taken over by military who started a major operation against the defaulters and power theft. Incapability forced government to surrender voluntarily to the army. People witnessed all this with no surprise. They welcomed men in uniforms, for they knew government lacked the power and energy to exert its authority.

World has seen such large scale organizations shouldering the burden of economy to raise and grow. But the case in Pakistan was different. These corporations had been a burden on country's economy, eating public expenditures one way or the other. This was harmful enough to affect their own health and the overall condition of the economy. Pakistan's economy was subject to all ills, particularly under the democratic regimes of 1990s. Major radical structural reforms were required to enable the economy to stand on its own and start growing. But the government was found wanting to initiate. In certain cases, it was found reluctant to initiate any process of reforms due to political reasons. The government knew that any movement to change the status quo would instigate its vote bank at the ground. On other occasions, it did not have a heart strong enough to embark on a reformative course.

Moreover, looking into the composition of Cabinet Ministers, one is wondered if they had any knowledge, vision, and plan to repose confidence in them. Najam Sethi while criticizing Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for choosing his cabinet members says that he could not set up a team of good managers for good governance. With a couple of exceptions, hardly anyone could inspire confidence (Sethi, 1997). Even if some reforms were introduced, they were halfhearted and politically motivated. Such a course of reforms could not bear fruits as they were misdirected and ill-planned.

The government's agenda of privatization could not lead to anywhere. Although the government had setup the Privatization Commission with Khawaja Asif as its head, it did not have anything tangible on the ground to show at the end. Privatization was advisable for loss producing big public corporations like WAPDA, Steel Mill, Pakistan Railway, and PTCL to make them efficient and profitable. With the exception of a few public sector banks, nothing real and practical happened on the agenda of privatization. Ironically, given the pressure from these organizations' labor unions and politically motivated priority list of the government, these bankrupt organizations never appeared on the Commission's privatization agenda. Instead, they privatized soft targets who were already contributing to the national kitty. The privatization process was also criticized for being non-transparent. The government was accused of backdoor deals with awarding bids at lower prices to dear ones (Haq, 1999). Moreover, whatever collected through privatization was not allocated to debt repayment but to fill budget deficit. The agenda of privatization was destined to fail right from the start.

### **Corruption, an Evil**

Corruption is one of the worst manifestations of poor governance. The relationship between poor governance and corruption is deep-rooted that one breeds the other. It produces as many evils as one can count. Successive governments in Pakistan, where corruption has been institutionalized and has taken deep roots have yet to find a way and strategy at the governmental level to bring it to a minimum acceptable level. Everyone agrees that corruption hampers economic and human development, adds to human deprivation and poverty, reduces country's resources, and so its capacity to invest in public good and above all damages government credibility and trust and increases gap between government and its people. But the government has yet to come hard on this evil. If the government in Pakistan is serious about improving governance, it should know that good governance can flourish in a corruption free environment.

Much of the Pakistan's economic and social problems could be attributed to the level of corruption in public sector projects and corporations. In a survey conducted by Transparency International, Pakistan was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in 1997, 15<sup>th</sup> in 1998 and 13<sup>th</sup> in 1999 among the most corrupt nation in a total number of 52, 85 and 99 countries respectively. There was more than Rs.200 billion loss to the national exchequer per annum in the 1990s, thanks to the menace of corruption. In its quest to contain corruption, the government of Nawaz Sharif promulgated the Ehtesab Commission in May, 1997. However, instead of addressing the issue of corruption, it soon became a tool in the hand of the government for victimization on political grounds. The Commission was seriously criticized for its double standards. It eroded the spirit of impartiality by giving wide berth to cases of corruption and misuse of authority before 1990 which involved, one way or the other Sharif's family or its dear ones. The Commission categorically targeted only Ms. Benazir, her husband Asif Ali Zardari, and other party members. While on the other hand, corruption cases against all stalwarts of the ruling parties were withdrawn. Not even a single member of the ruling PML (N) had been summoned for questioning. Such dubious actions on the part of the Prime Minister were deeply provocative (Sethi, 1997). He was playing with the noblest responsibility of the government.

The Ehtesab Cell was headed by Nawaz Sharif's sidekick, Senator Saif ur Rehman. He made the Commission more controversial and political (Sethi, 1997). It seemed that the anti- corruption



campaign had become a cheap propaganda against the opposition political party in the hands of Senator Saif. However, it hurt the ruling political party more than its political rivals. He perhaps was trying to divert people's attention from government's failure on economic and political fronts. Moreover, the Commission remained silent on issue of loan defaulters. Some more than 1000 loan defaulters were responsible for Rs. 140 billion worth losses to the national and provincial exchequer from 1888-90 and 1990-93. The commission did not move on the matter because the list included some big fish from Muslim League including Shehbaz Sharif (Sethi, 1998). This was more victimization than accountability.

## CONCLUSION

Civilian government would face a question of legitimacy if it does not perform well on the governance front. This creates a vacuum that is ultimately filled by undemocratic forces in under developed democracies like Pakistan. Pakistan since independence faced the menace of martial laws and military takeovers. Though there can be many explanations for such unconstitutional acts but serious governance crisis, especially on economic front also caused it. These indicators were too stubborn to improve and this put a big mark on the very legitimacy of the elected government. The result showed that the people's opinion turned against their government and welcomed martial law when it was imposed. People hoped that this could improve the indicators of economic governance.

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