

Coups in Khaki and Other Colours

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ABSTRACT Prolonged periods of military rule in Pakistan have enabled the military to penetrate all structures of the Pakistani state. Political parties, the judiciary, bureaucracy, and the media – today all have their share of pro-khaki elements. Therefore, a military coup d'état is no longer the only way to unseat a democratically elected political leader who may have differences with the Army. Indeed, if former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had completed his term, he would have become the first elected PM to do so; he was also well placed to win a second consecutive term. With his disqualification, Sharif's political career may be over, but, the real loser is democracy in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, when elections were held on schedule in Pakistan after a five-year period of civilian rule—a first in Pakistan's 70-year history—many commentators felt that democracy had finally come to Pakistan. However, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's disqualification by the Supreme Court on 28 July 2017 was a clear reminder that the 'deep state' remains in the driver's seat in Pakistan and in that country, coups d'état can come in

different colours other than the military's khaki. It had been predicted that in the elections due in 2018, Nawaz Sharif was likely to get a second consecutive term, thereby creating history in Pakistan. This would have been a major boost for elected civilian rule, and for Nawaz Sharif. And so it happened that the third time after being elected, his stint as PM was cut short abruptly, still making history, though of a different kind.

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NAWAZ SHARIF'S POLITICS

The first time Nawaz Sharif took over as prime minister was in 1990, following the snap polls provoked by Benazir Bhutto's dismissal, less than two years into her term, by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. The provision used to unseat Bhutto was Art. 58-2b of the Constitution which had been introduced by Gen. Zia ul Haq and gave the president absolute authority to dismiss the elected government, dissolve the House and order fresh elections, if he believed that the government was not functioning in accordance with the Constitution. The president, an ex-civil servant turned senator and then later elected president, was widely seen as an establishment person; in other words, someone close to the Army.

Nawaz Sharif's political career had been promoted during the Gen. Zia period in the 1980s under the benign gaze of the Army. His family business (Ittefaq Foundries) had suffered under PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's nationalisation drive and he was among the young leaders who were identified for grooming into politics. He first became finance minister of Punjab in 1982 and then chief minister in 1985, under the tutelage of Gen. (ret'd.) Ghulam Khan, the governor of Punjab.

In the 1990 elections after the sacking of Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif's anti-PPP coalition (IJI) had been cobbled together with the tacit backing of the ISI. Less than three years later, relations with the Army Chief Gen. Abdul Waheed Kakar (whom he had appointed in January 1993 after the sudden death of Gen. Asif Nawaz Janjua) started going downhill. President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, part of the 'deep state', again obliged and sacked

Nawaz Sharif in May 1993 under the same provisions (Art. 58-2b) of the Constitution. Nawaz Sharif fought back and in what was at that time an unexpected judgement, the Supreme Court reinstated his government. This was a difficult pill for the establishment to swallow and Gen. Kakar engineered a compromise under which both the re-instated PM Nawaz Sharif and President Ghulam Ishaq Khan stepped down from their respective positions in July 1993.

The second time Sharif was elected PM was in February 1997. Before the end of that year, he replaced Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen. Jehangir Karamat after cutting short his tenure with a handpicked chief, Gen. Pervez Musharraf. The 1998 nuclear tests had enhanced his popular standing. Encouraged by this, PM Nawaz Sharif responded positively to then Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's peace overtures, leading to differences with the Pakistan Army. The Lahore peace initiative in February 1999 was derailed by the Kargil war. Under pressure from the US and advice from China, the Pakistan Army was obliged to withdraw. By that time, this had irretrievably damaged the relationship between Gen. Musharraf and PM Nawaz Sharif. Sharif realised it, and the failed attempt to replace Gen. Pervez Musharraf led to his ouster in the coup of October 1999. Nawaz Sharif was arrested and convicted for 'kidnapping, attempted murder, hijacking, terrorism and corruption'. Amidst rumours that his life sentence would be converted into an execution by a military court, the US and the Saudi regime intervened and he was allowed to go into exile after stiff financial penalties and an undertaking that he would not engage in politics for 20 years.

It was only after Gen. Musharraf's decline that democracy was restored and both Sharif and Benazir Bhutto were able to return from exile in 2007. The Saudis took the view that if President Musharraf was going to permit elections in which Benazir Bhutto could be allowed to participate, the same courtesy should also be extended to Nawaz Sharif. After Benazir Bhutto's assassination in 2008, PPP won the national elections and his party briefly joined the PPP-led coalition as a part of efforts at restoring democracy and impeaching President Musharraf. Finally, in June 2013, Sharif was elected PM for the third time.

As in the past, when he had handpicked Generals Kakar and Musharraf, this time too he appointed Gen. Raheel Sharif as the COAS in November 2013. However, differences would soon emerge. The Army had to dissuade him from going after Gen. Musharraf, whom he wanted tried for treason, and he later blamed the Army for encouraging Imran Khan's agitational politics, aimed at weakening the PML (N) hold in Punjab. (Punjab is the largest province which accounts for 183 seats in the 342-member National Assembly.)

The so-called 'Panamagate'¹ was already unfolding when relations with the Army worsened with the Dawnleaks² incident in October 2016, for which the Army held Sharif's office responsible (Panamagate and Dawnleaks will be discussed in more detail in latter sections of this brief). Sharif's trusted Information Minister Pervez Rashid took the blame and resigned. After a prolonged enquiry, his Adviser Tareq Fatimi too had to go. In 2015, differences on policy approaches towards India and Afghanistan had become more pronounced. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise visit to Lahore on 25

December 2015 to wish him on his birthday had not gone down well. His willingness to cooperate in the investigation into the Pathankot attack was resisted successfully by the Army. Sartaj Aziz's portfolio was downgraded to foreign policy adviser when Lt. Gen. (Retd) Janjua became the National Security Adviser. In any event, Afghanistan and India policies have traditionally been the preserves of the Army.

Nawaz Sharif also wanted to claim credit for the projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to ensure his re-election in 2018. In November 2016, he appointed Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa as COAS after Gen. Sharif retired. However, this did not help matters and differences continued to grow. A consecutive second term in 2018 would have strengthened Nawaz Sharif considerably. He could have pushed for policies that could make the Army uncomfortable. This was the backdrop against which the Panamagate trials unfolded.

'PANAMAGATE'

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) released 11.5 million confidential documents on 3 April 2016, from the Panama-based law firm Mossack Fonseca. These contained information covered by the attorney-client privilege of confidentiality, relating to some 214,488 offshore entities and bank accounts worldwide. Of these, eight pertained to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his sons Hassan and Hussain, and his daughter and political heir, Maryam. These files revealed four properties purchased by the Sharif family in London in the Knightsbridge area, in the 1990s—which is hardly a secret in Pakistan.

Immediately, opposition leader Imran Khan (Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf) dubbed it 'Panamagate' and demanded the prime minister's resignation. He also demanded the setting up of an empowered Inquiry Commission.

PM Nawaz Sharif agreed to set up a Judicial Commission under a sitting or a retired judge. Then came the demand that the terms of reference be drafted in consultation with the opposition. On 10 May, COAS Gen. Raheel Sharif met PM Nawaz Sharif and urged him to resolve the matter. His intervention was given credibility as the Army leaked a story that more than six officers (including a lieutenant general, a major general, and three brigadiers) had been sacked on grounds of corruption. The two generals dismissed were later identified as Lt. Gen. Obaidullah and Maj. Gen. Ejaz Shahid; the corruption allegations were related to their tenures with the Frontier Corps. In addition, half a dozen JCOs were also dismissed. While there was no official confirmation, the news was widely circulated. It came alongside a statement by the COAS that "across the board accountability is necessary for the solidarity, integrity and prosperity of Pakistan"; he also cautioned that the war on terror cannot be won unless "the menace of corruption is uprooted". The media commended the action taken by the Army and suggested that the judiciary hold political leaders similarly accountable.

Faced with growing protests, on 18 May 2016, the government agreed to set up a Joint Committee with the opposition to finalise the terms of reference for a Judicial Commission to be headed by the Chief Justice. Meanwhile, PM Nawaz Sharif went to London for six

weeks for a heart surgery. On Sharif's return to Pakistan on 9 July, Imran Khan raised the ante even as the Joint Committee continued to debate the terms of reference. In September, Sharif called for countrywide demonstrations which would converge in Islamabad to create an indefinite lockdown in the capital from 30 October onwards. In response, the government imposed Sec. 144,³ setting the stage for a confrontation.

There was an eerie similarity with the 2014 protests, when Imran Khan launched the Azadi March from Lahore on 14 August, alleging widespread rigging in the 2013 general elections and calling on Nawaz Sharif to step down. Khan was joined by the cleric-turned-politician Dr Tahirul Qadri (Pakistan Awami Tehreek) who had then just returned from Canada and the two planned to undertake a sit-in in Islamabad around the parliament and government complex until the government conceded. Within a week, the protestors began camping in the Blue Zone in Islamabad. However, it was soon clear that public sympathy for the protests was waning. PTI's senior leader Javed Hashmi split from Imran Khan and accused him of acting at the behest of the Army. Media called it a "soft coup" even as the Army backed off and began to urge 'restraint' and 'dialogue'. The sit-in in 2014 sputtered on for 120 days and was finally called off by Imran Khan on 14 December after the terrorist attack at the Army Public School in Peshawar in which more than 150 children were killed. PM Nawaz Sharif, it would seem, had won the round.

Sharif's success was largely due to the fact that the civilian intelligence agency (FIA) had picked up evidence of the role played by the DG

(ISI) Lt. Gen. Zaheer-ul-Islam of colluding with the PTI demonstrators to discredit the government. COAS Gen. Raheel Sharif was in a difficult position. He had to distance the Army from the actions of DG (ISI) who was sent packing but meanwhile, he also ensured that PM Nawaz Sharif would not humiliate Gen. Musharraf and allow him to go on a self-imposed exile abroad. Once again the Saudi regime stepped in, this time in support of the Army, and reminded PM Nawaz Sharif of his 1999 IOU.

This time around in 2016, the Supreme Court stepped in to diffuse the situation created by Imran Khan's call, and on 28 October, announced the setting up of a five-member bench to take up a clutch of petitions filed by opposition politicians, seeking PM Nawaz Sharif's disqualification on grounds of corruption. It provided Imran Khan with a face-saver and he called off his protests. On 1 November, the Supreme Court asked both the government and the opposition to provide the bench with the two sets of terms of reference. The five-member bench was reconstituted after the retirement of Chief Justice Zaheer Jamali in January 2017 and the hearings were concluded on 23 February.

On 20 April this year, the Supreme Court came out with its 540-page-long judgement, declaring a split verdict with two of the judges, of the view that the PM Nawaz Sharif should be disqualified. Justice Asif Saeed Khan Khosa, reading from his dissenting opinion, began by quoting from the movie, 'The Godfather' – "Behind every great fortune, there is a crime". Justice Khosa is the son-in-law of the former Chief Justice Nasim Hassan Shah (who had restored Nawaz Sharif's government in May 1993 following its

dismissal by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and earlier, as a newly appointed member of the bench, Justice Shah had supported the majority judgement that had upheld the execution of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto) and also likely to become the chief justice in early 2018. He was supported by Justice Gulzar Ahmed. The majority view supported by Justices Ejaz Afzal, Sheikh Azmat Saeed and Ijaz-ul-Ahsan found the evidence insufficient and recommended setting up a six-member Joint Investigation Team (JIT) to examine the issue and submit a report within 60 days.

The establishment of the JIT was unprecedented in Pakistan's judicial history. The outcome of a split verdict, it was hailed by some as a positive move that reflected an independent judiciary. After all, it was the first time that a sitting PM was being subjected to an investigation. Both PTI and PML(N) declared victory with the split verdict and welcomed the JIT, though some cautioned that in the final analysis, it would weaken PM Nawaz Sharif as he and his family were going to be subjected to frequent appearances before the JIT. The calculated leaks resulted in a trial by media. The six-member JIT team included officials from the Federal Investigation Agency, National Accountability Bureau, State Bank of Pakistan, Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan, and interestingly, an officer each from the ISI and the Military Intelligence. The JIT was headed by Wajid Zia, the Addl Dir Gen of the FIA. Brig Nauman Saeed (ISI) and Brig Kamran Khurshid (MI) were the two military officers. The same two officers had also been part of the enquiry team into the Dawnleaks episode months earlier; the team had laid the blame for the leaks at PM Nawaz Sharif's office.

The ten-volume report, submitted to the Supreme Court on 10 July, highlighted irregular movements of large sums of money in the form of loans and gifts between offshore entities in Saudi Arabia, UAE and UK. It recommended the re-opening of a number of earlier cases and initiated a set of new enquiries as no conclusive judgements regarding corruption charges could be reached. The Supreme Court bench reconvened and this time, reached a unanimous verdict, disqualifying PM Nawaz Sharif and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar (whose son is married to Nawaz Sharif's second daughter). The bench directed the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to initiate cases against both of them, together with Hassan, Hussain, Maryam and her husband, Capt. Safdar. Further, NAB is to complete its task within six months, before the elections next year.

A JUDICIAL COUP D'ETAT

Ironically, after all the investigations, the disqualification verdict was in fact based on a technicality. The five-member bench disqualified PM Nawaz Sharif for having violated Article 62 of the Constitution which specifies that any member of Pakistan's National Assembly must be "sagacious, righteous and non-profligate, honest (sadiq) and upright (ameen)". Nawaz Sharif was found to have failed on the last two criteria. It also put him in violation of the Representation of Peoples Act that provides for a code of conduct for elected representatives. Among others, this law requires a candidate to be "of good character and is not commonly known as one who violates Islamic injunctions, has adequate knowledge of Islamic teachings and practices obligatory duties prescribed by Islam".

Incidentally, Articles 62 and 63 were introduced by Gen. Zia ul Haq in 1985.

The verdict was based on the JIT discovery that PM Nawaz Sharif had been Chairman of Capital FZE, a Sharjah-based entity, from 7 August 2006 to 20 April 2014, receiving a monthly remuneration of 10000 Dirhams. Sharif failed to disclose this in the declaration of assets he filed for the 2013 elections. The Supreme Court had therefore judged Nawaz Sharif to have failed at being "honest and upright" and therefore "disqualified" to be a member of the National Assembly. The defence lawyers had pointed out that the company belonged to his son Hassan, that Nawaz Sharif had never drawn any remuneration, and the remuneration was "notional" and needed for the visa, when Nawaz Sharif was in political exile in UAE between 1999 and 2008. The Supreme Court interpreted differently; the amount was technically a "receivable" and therefore "an asset" that should have been declared. Clearly, the judgement had been reached before, only the sentence was being read out after the trial concluded.

Undoubtedly, the NAB will uncover many more skeletons, pertaining to actual money laundering and corruption, which could lead to imprisonment and fines. For the moment, Sharif has been placed on the Exit Control List which bars him from travelling abroad until the NAB completes its proceedings. The NAB has been directed by the Supreme Court to file references pertaining to the London properties, Azizia Steels, Hill Metal Establishments, and 16 other offshore entities. Against former Finance Minister Dar, the reference is for possessing assets disproportionate to the declared sources of income. Justice Ijaz-ul Ahsan, who was part of

the five-member bench, has been tasked to monitor the NAB process. The NAB has asked for the JIT report, including the classified Volume 10 that contains details of the mutual legal assistance requests made by the JIT to authorities in UAE, UK, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Luxembourg and British Virgin Islands.

However, it is clear that Nawaz Sharif will fight back because what is at stake is nothing less than his legacy. The uncertainty is compounded because of lack of clarity about whether his disqualification is permanent or for a finite period. Article 63, also introduced by Gen Zia, provides for disqualification of an elected member for five years, on grounds of ‘contempt of court’ (this was used to dismiss PM Yousaf Raza Gillani in 2012) but Art 62 does not specify any time frame. Nawaz Sharif is also considered to be among the richest men in Pakistan today, with a personal wealth estimated at US\$1.4 billion. Any split in the family could lead to potentially embarrassing disclosures which would jeopardise the holdings and therefore, he needs to keep the extended family together.

Sharif’s political acumen has been in evidence in the manner in which former Petroleum Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi has been appointed interim PM. Initially, it was suggested that Abbasi would only be PM for 45 days while Nawaz’s younger brother Shahbaz Sharif resigned from his position as Chief Minister of Punjab, got elected to the National Assembly and took over as PM. This made Abbasi’s elevation acceptable to the old guard since it was seen as a short-term appointment.

Abbasi, too, is an entrepreneur who was working in the US when his father Air Cmde

(ret'd) Khaqan Abbasi—who was minister in Gen. Zia’s Cabinet—was killed when a freak rocket hit his car on the road between Rawalpindi and Islamabad in April 1988; the Ojhri ammunition depot had blown up, causing six hours of devastating fireworks. Later Abbasi was chairman of PIA and in 2003, set up Air Blue, Pakistan’s largest private airline. He is seen as a Nawaz loyalist.

Shahbaz Sharif is serving his third tenure as chief minister of Punjab. His first term coincided with his elder brother’s second term as PM, from 1997-1999. In 1999, he too went into exile, returning to Pakistan in 2007. His second term was from 2008 to 2013, when PPP won the national elections. He was re-elected in 2013 and is widely seen as a capable administrator who is in good terms with the Army. While he has kept away from the Panamagate scandal, there are questions against him regarding the Hudaibiya Paper Mills case. He has also ensured that Punjab remains a Sharif stronghold. With reports surfacing about his move to Islamabad, there was speculation about who would take over the seat in Lahore. There was talk that Shahbaz’s son Hamza who is a member of the provincial assembly was a likely candidate to take over as CM. Nawaz was concerned because this would mean that the reins of power would move decisively to another branch of the Sharif family. Soon enough, rumours appeared about senior Punjab ministers expressing unhappiness about Hamza’s elevation together with reports that PML(N) members felt that Shahbaz should stay on in Lahore to preserve the Sharif stronghold for the 2018 elections. This is a valid concern. In addition, Shahbaz was also a trusted interlocutor to engage with

Rawalpindi, a role that is crucial but one that he could not have played if he had moved to Islamabad. With 209 seats in a 342-member National Assembly, Nawaz Sharif can call the shots in Islamabad as long as the PML (N) rallies behind the family. Shahbaz's move is now in abeyance and Abbasi is likely to stay on as PM until the elections. Nawaz's clever manoeuvring has ensured that opposition to Abbasi's elevation has been diluted. Another indicator that Abbasi is staying is the expansion of the Cabinet to ensure that all groups are now stakeholders.

Former Interior Minister Chaudhri Nisar Ali remains out, having announced just a day before the judgement that he would be quitting. As the Interior Minister, not only was he close to Nawaz, he was often also his intermediary with the Army brass. In recent months, he had been unhappy at being excluded from the group of advisers planning the Panamagate defence. Reports of his differences with Maryam Sharif have also surfaced. He has been tightlipped about his future plans. There are rumours about discontent within the Sharif household if Shahbaz's wife, Tehmina Durrani's tweets are an indicator. Nawaz's wife Kulsoom Sharif has filed her nomination for the bye-election for NA-120, the family seat in Lahore.⁴ For the moment, Nawaz Sharif has managed to keep Lahore and Islamabad under his control but the establishment will certainly try to weaken his grip in the months to come before the elections next year.

BASIC FAULTLINE

The 'deep state' has always worked with a King's party and Pakistan has always had

politicians willing to oblige. The tradition goes back to the 1950s when Gen. Ayub Khan encouraged the establishment of the Republican Party which was wound up a few years later. Gen. Musharraf had encouraged Ch Shujaat Hussain to set up PML (Q) to wean away Punjab during Sharif's exile; during the 1980s, Gen Zia had helped form the PML (F) under Pir Pagara and later Nawaz Sharif himself had been a beneficiary of the establishment's support. On the Sharifs' return from exile though, the PML (N) was able to successfully reassert itself in Punjab on the understanding that while Shahbaz would manage the province, the elder brother would target Islamabad. This is why in 2008 when the PPP won the national elections, partly on account of the sympathy vote generated by Benazir Bhutto's brutal assassination weeks before the polls, Shahbaz became the PML (N) chief minister in Punjab while Nawaz took on the role of the leader of the Opposition after a brief coalition period. The strategy paid off and in 2013, Nawaz Sharif won a solid victory to become PM for the third time. As his relations with the Army deteriorated, Imran Khan's PTI emerged in the role of the King's party. However, Khan is also under investigation by the Supreme Court and more recently, has been dragged into a fresh controversy with his party's MP Ayesha Gulalai Khan alleging that he had been harassing her and sending her obscene text messages. She has since resigned, though no charges have been filed. Demands have been raised to set up a probe committee in the parliament.

The judiciary in Pakistan has also toed the establishment line, though with a few notable exceptions. The Supreme Court legitimised Gen. Ayub Khan's coup d'état as a 'revolution'

and subsequently, the ‘doctrine of necessity’ was invoked to justify Gen. Zia and Gen. Musharraf’s coups d’etat. Bhutto’s execution decision was approved by the Supreme Court though with a split bench of 4/3. During the 1980s, the sacking of the Junejo government was successfully challenged and while the decision was declared unconstitutional, his government was not restored. This decision came after Gen. Zia’s death. Given this record, it is clear that the 1993 decision of the Supreme Court restoring the Nawaz Sharif government was a departure from the established pattern.

This time, the composition of the JIT, with a representative each from the ISI and the Military Intelligence, with neither having any expertise in financial matters, made it clear which way the decision was to go. No doubt, a more cogent and consistent defence could have helped Nawaz Sharif but would not have changed the outcome.

The irony is that the opportunity to do away with Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution did arise in 2010 but Nawaz Sharif was reluctant to go along with it because of opposition from his Islamist partners. At that time, there was a bi-partisan desire to turn back some of the provisions introduced by Pakistan’s military dictators. The 18th constitutional amendment in 2010 did away with Article 58(2) which had been introduced by Gen. Zia in 1973 as the eighth amendment. This was the article used to initiate a number of soft coups d’etat, including the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto’s government in 1990 and Nawaz Sharif’s government in 1993. Incidentally, it had been repealed earlier in 1997 by PM Nawaz Sharif during his second

term (thirteenth constitutional amendment) but was reintroduced by Gen. Musharraf (17th amendment) after the military coup d’etat in 1999.

Following his disqualification, Nawaz Sharif began his 280-km-long journey to Lahore in August by road, along the GT Road, punctuated by PML(N)’s political rallies. This is his political heartland and he used this slow return home to mobilise his support base. He has been openly critical of the judiciary and the military in his speeches; the gloves are off. His campaign aims at energising the people that his disqualification is “a mark of disrespect for their vote”. It is likely that he will continue his protests with marches to other cities like Faisalabad, Multan, among others. Some see this as a deliberate act of provocation.

Other Pakistani politicians have used this technique in the past, including Nawaz Sharif. In 2009, he began a march from Lahore to Islamabad to push for the reinstatement of Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chowdhury who had been dismissed by Gen. Musharraf in 2007. President Zardari had promised to reinstate him but was dragging his feet and Nawaz Sharif led a lawyers’ march to press his demands. Halfway through the journey, Gen. Ashfaq Kiyani played a role to get the task done and President Zardari stood diminished even as Nawaz Sharif notched up a political victory.

During the 1990s, both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif used these tactics to mobilise street protests against the government in power and invariably, the establishment has intervened to send an incumbent packing even as a new prime minister is elected amidst reports that “democracy is thriving”. At times,

the establishment has also found it convenient to bring in outsiders as interim prime ministers until the situation is managed (for example, former World Bank Vice President Moeen Qureshi from July-October 1993, former Citibank executive Shaukat Aziz brought in By Gen Musharraf in 1999 as Finance Minister and then made PM after he joined PML(Q) from 2004-07, retired Sharia judge Mir Hazar Khan Khoso from March-June 2013). In 2014, it was Imran Khan who took recourse to this tested technique, weakening Nawaz Sharif, and again in 2016, leading to a decisive outcome.

Recourse to street power may be undertaken in the name of strengthening democracy and peoples' voices but ended up strengthening the establishment, the non-elected centres of authority, the army and also now, the judiciary. The problem with Nawaz Sharif's new agitation is everyone realises he is clearly doing it to save his legacy, especially since his daughter and political heir, Maryam is also being targeted. If there is a rift in the family or cracks in the party, his game will be over. For him, this is unlike the earlier political moves; this time, it is an existential fight.

There have been only three military coups in Pakistan but long spells of military rule each time have created a 'deep state'. This is why coups d'etat in Pakistan come in different colours, not necessarily khaki. This one was a judicial coup, of a judgement reached before the trial was done. There remain provisions in the constitution that come in handy and most of the time, a pliant judiciary is willing to

cooperate. Each of these exercises in dismissing an elected government may be projected as a sign of 'people's will' or 'independence of judiciary' but ultimately strengthens only the military. It provides a convenient ploy for a dominant security establishment to retain a decisive role for itself because others can be gotten rid of on the charges of corruption or for being anti-Islamic. This is why the Army has taken on the mantle of not being merely responsible for safeguarding the territorial integrity of Pakistan but also its ideological frontiers.

Islam is a faith and political Islam can only create a faith-based state. In the case of Pakistan, to create this faith-based state, it constantly has to deny its civilisational and cultural roots. The rootlessness provides a perfect breeding ground for radicalisation. This is the fundamental faultline that runs through Pakistan's polity. It also sustains and preserves its 'deep state'. This is why after 70 years, Pakistan remains internally conflicted and unable to have normal relations with either India or Afghanistan, the two neighbours with which it shares the longest boundaries.

With the recent rallies, the establishment has seen that Nawaz Sharif still packs the political punch in Punjab. It is in no hurry to respond because it has time on its side. The NAB process will gradually gather steam and its progress can be calibrated. Meanwhile, internal weaknesses in the Sharif family and in the PML(N) will be probed and rumours planted. The decks appear loaded against Nawaz Sharif. [ORF](#)

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ENDNOTES

1. 'Panamagate' refers to the legal case filed by political leader Imran Khan against PM Sharif in the Supreme Court following the disclosures in the Panama papers about linkages between certain offshore entities and the Sharif family members.
2. 'Dawnleaks' refers to a news report in the *Dawn* dated 6 October 2016 regarding a high-level meeting in which the civilian leadership warned the military that Pakistan would face international isolation unless the military acted against the militants. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1288350>
3. Section 144 refers to the legal provision under which the assembly of more than five persons is declared illegal if in the opinion of the magistrate, such an assembly will be a 'disturbance of peace' and create a 'danger to human health, life and security'.
4. On 18 September, Begum Kulsoom Sharif was declared elected in the bye-election.



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