

Pakistan's Self-Defeating Army

Rajesh M. Basrur and Sumit Ganguly
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Rather than serve as a bulwark against chaos, the Army has helped destabilize Pakistan. For far too long, the myth that Pakistan's army is the only thing holding the country together—and keeping the terrorists at bay—has held sway in Washington. Now two bills making their way through Congress suggest the United States is finally starting to reconsider these assumptions. Both bills would set benchmarks that Pakistan has to meet in order to keep qualifying for U.S. economic and military assistance. But the two measures don't go far enough. Pakistan will never be saved from the threat of religious extremists until it fundamentally restructures its deeply dysfunctional government. And that will require addressing the overwhelming influence of the military on Pakistani politics.

In four critical ways, the Army has undermined constitutional governance in Pakistan ever since Mohammed Ali Jinnah led it to independence some 60 years ago. First, repeated coups have ensured that civilian governments never developed firm roots. Second, successive military rulers, in attempts to boost their legitimacy, have promoted religious radicalism, either directly (as in the case of Zia ul Haq, who did this over the span of a decade) or by marginalizing mainstream political parties and allowing the religious right to fill the vacuum (Pervez Musharraf's strategy before his ouster last year). Third, the Army became and remains a parasite feeding on the body politic by extracting "rent" in the form of land, bureaucratic appointments and other spoils of office in exchange for supposedly keeping Pakistan safe.

Finally, in a misbegotten quest for "strategic depth" against India, the Army has promoted the radicalization of Afghanistan, which has now spilled back onto its own territory and spun out of control. All of these missteps point to the same conclusion: rather than serve as a bulwark against chaos, the Army has helped to destabilize Pakistan. There's only one way to turn things around today: demilitarize Pakistani politics.

Doing so won't be easy. While there is significant popular support for democracy in Pakistan, the country's mainstream civilian parties have hardly distinguished themselves in their brief periods at the helm, and the current government of Asif Ali Zardari is no exception. Still, the military bears most of the blame for blocking the evolution of a true democratic process. And such a process—for all its inevitable flaws and inefficiencies—is the only way Pakistan will ever get a government truly responsive to the needs of its ordinary citizens, and one likely to crack down on the Taliban, which most Pakistanis disdain.

So how can Pakistan's government be "civilianized"? Useful lessons can be drawn from the democratization of other Praetorian states. The first thing to recognize is that depoliticizing the Army won't mean weakening it. Pakistan's senior officers must know that they have never been less popular than they are today; returning to their barracks for good would be the best way to revive their prestige.

This process has in fact already begun. It was started by the Army itself in early 2008, when the new chief of staff General Ashfaq Kayani forbade officers from holding civilian posts in government. But much more needs to be done. Parliament

and the prime minister must steadily assert themselves to limit the Army's involvement in internal affairs. The military will resist. But the recent victory of the lawyers' movement—which forced the government to restore the Supreme Court's former chief justice, who'd been deposed by Musharraf—shows that civilians can take on the generals and win. Over time, the civilian government must shift national-intelligence functions from the military to a civilian organization, curb the reach of the infamous Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) and strip the military of its responsibilities for maintaining security inside Pakistan, giving that duty to a paramilitary force governed by the ministry of Interior (as in neighboring India). Such a step was critical to the transitions from military to civilian government in Chile in 1990 and Indonesia in 1998.

Pakistan's nuclear infrastructure, meanwhile, should be split into military and civilian components, both under civilian authority. And most important, civilians must begin making critical national-security policy decisions. Implementation should still fall to the military, which should also retain a voice in defense policy—but not the final one.

While some of the generals are likely to object to any reduction in their powers, it's in their own interests to accept a fundamental change. Letting the Army maintain a degree of autonomy regarding its internal functions should also help bring it around. And Washington can contribute by demanding reforms of the sort outlined above. Contrary to popular belief, the U.S. has a great deal of leverage over Pakistan thanks to the enormous amounts of aid Washington disburses (likely to total \$7.5 billion over the next five years). Making these changes may still seem like a tall order. It is. But Pakistan's problems at this point are massive in scope—and so must be the solution.

Basrur is associate professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Ganguly is a professor of political science and is director of research at the Center on American and Global Security at Indiana University.