

## Turbulence in Pakistan

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The Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) and former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, was arrested on 09 May 2023 in an alleged land transfer case involving realtor Malik Riaz. He was accused of corrupt practices and was handed over to National Accountability Bureau (NAB). The Pakistan Rangers, who work under the Interior Ministry, Officers usually posted from the military establishment on secondment, broke open the glass of the windowpane and arrested Imran Khan, who was undergoing a biometric process at the court. It is alleged that they beat the security staff and lawyers of Imran Khan. After this incident, massive protests broke out in numerous areas of Pakistan. For the first time, the protestors smashed the main gate of Pakistan Army headquarters at Rawalpindi, raising voices against the establishment. The caretaker government ordered the Pakistan Rangers to control Pakistan's law and order situation, and section 144 has been imposed. Imran Khan's arrest came after he alleged an Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) officer was behind the murder of a renowned journalist from Pakistan. Army rejected these allegations terming them as highly irresponsible and baseless. It is pertinent to mention that Imran Khan has been facing various allegations of corrupt practices since he was ousted from power in April 2023, when he lost the vote of confidence. [\[i\]](#)

Pakistan Army warned the agitators against taking the law into their hands. Pakistan turned out to be the first Islamic country which came into existence after decolonisation-which was gained momentum after World War II. For the last seven decades and a half in Pakistan, there have been only two instances when the establishment played a secondary role when the civil administration was powerful enough to run the state of affairs. The first instance was from 14 Aug 1947 to 21 Oct 1951, and at the end, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan was killed. The other instance was from 20 Dec 1971 to 05 July 1977 when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was at the helm of affairs but was deposed in a military coup. In the rest of its history after independence, Pakistan Army has had the prominent and colossal existence of the supreme establishment governing foreign affairs, defence, internal security and nuclear affairs, and not letting political leadership commune in these matters of national importance. [\[ii\]](#)

From typically twisted civil-military correlations to strategic blunders like funding and backing terrorism in the region or handling democracy by manipulating 'Prime Ministers', the current situation has many sources of origin. Considering the maturation period of the present crisis in Pakistan, the most pertinent question, predictably, is not why, but what now? The establishment is unsure about former Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharif. Also, Imran Khan, whom the establishment orchestrated but now has lost faith in him.

The next course of action depends upon the critical collision of power centres' positionality, robustness and resolution. Firstly, with its coercive power capacity, Pakistan Army has tilted toward Bhuttos and Sharifs. Opposite to this collusion is former PM Imran Khan with support from Islamic conservatism, terrorists and the general public. The direction of the struggle depends on how these two forces move ahead, the calibre of Khan's forces and the ability of the Pakistan Army to counter it. Secondly, Pakistan Army has already stepped into the Punjab part of Pakistan, wherein the rangers have significant powers to influence political life, and these rangers are directly under the charge of the establishment. [\[iii\]](#) Thirdly, the establishment hopes that the enthusiasm of Khan's forces will die with time, Imran Khan will be jailed, and the rest will be taken care of by the election process in Pakistan. This is quite a possibility, but it must be remembered that such political prosecutions could reignite the already volatile movement led

by pro-Imran Khan forces because Khan enjoyed the masses' support. Also, allegedly, Tarik-e-Taliban enjoys the patronage of Imran Khan. In future, there could be a diversification of anti-establishment insurgencies.

The present situation could be seen as an extension of intra-army rivalries in Pakistan. One faction led by Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed, ex ISI Chief is supporting Imran Khan against former Army Chief Gen. Bajwa, present COAS and their political allies. With people on the streets, Imran Khan has few options left to manoeuvre. Whichever direction the situation develops, there are no good options for Pakistan, which is already reeling under economic distress. The choice left is between an autocratic Islamic populist and a corrupt & incompetent military establishment. Both ways, Pakistan will suffer, and it will further affect India.

Pakistan is in crisis, from inflation to political instability, and people struggle to make ends meet. The menaces confronted by Pakistan in this situation are abundant. The military's image as a uniting force and the custodian of the state has been highly doubtful, leading to a loss of public faith in the establishment. This, in turn, could lead to instability and social unrest. The simmering tensions have brought Pakistan, a nuclear-armed country of about 220 million people that has contended with political turmoil for decades, into mysterious space and every so often simmering into violence. The political polarisation and economic crisis have led Pakistan to a dangerous stage, which can become an enduring crisis. Pakistan's future course will largely rest on how its leaders circumnavigate the ongoing situation and whether they can find a way to address the people's concerns and reestablish safety and security in the country.

**Conclusion:** The apprehension of former Prime Minister Imran Khan on corruption charges Wednesday has enraged his supporters. Most of them have taken to the streets in protest. Pakistan's uncertainty is comprehensible, but its options for dealing with it have often been self-defeating and profoundly detrimental to itself. Pakistan's unending, multidimensional crisis shows minuscule signs of lessening, with none of the state's significant institutions indicating any interest or capacity to act together. Meddling with people's fundamental rights will only anger them and escalate an already hopeless situation.

Pakistan is in turmoil now, but once things settle down, it will approach India, so India should be ready with options to respond. Pakistan is now deep into its sort of policy crisis. For India, the question is how this affects relations with Pakistan now and in the long term. India must make strong vigil on LoC and Intelligence Bureau. The foremost apprehensions for India are that the Pakistan Army might try to open up a new front along the LoC by accusing the Indian Army of relieving the pressure from internal factors. India has adopted a steady and righteous policy to Pakistan i.e. in keeping with its *Neighbourhood First Policy*, India seeks out normal friendly relationships with Pakistan in an environment free from terror, hostility and violence. India is steadfast in tackling issues, if any, bilaterally and peacefully in keeping with the Simla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration. India will not compromise on matters connected to its national security. It will take firm and decisive measures to deal with all efforts to challenge India's security and territorial integrity.

## End Notes

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[i] Daily Excelsior, 11 May 2023, <http://epaper.dailyexcelsior.com>

[ii] Role of establishment in Pakistan, Tribune Chandigarh, 03 Dec, 20122, <http://tribuneindian.com>

[iii] Avinash Paliwal, No good choices, Indian Express dt 11 May, 2023.

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