

# WebMemo



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## Avoiding Return to Military Rule in Pakistan

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The announcement by Pakistan's civilian government that it will pursue impeachment proceedings against President Pervez Musharraf could help end months of political paralysis in the country and stabilize the new civilian government, which has been divided over whether Musharraf should stay in power. The fate of Musharraf now lies largely in the hands of Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Kayani. The U.S. should stay as removed as possible from the political machinations in Pakistan while urging all sides to find a peaceful resolution to the political crisis that strengthens the democratic institutions of the country and prevents a return to military rule.

In order to hold the new coalition government together, the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and its junior coalition partner the Pakistan Muslim League/Nawaz (PML/N) decided to pursue impeachment of President Musharraf. The PML/N had pulled its nine ministers from the cabinet in May after the two parties failed to agree on a formula for reinstating judges deposed by Musharraf last year. PML/N leaders had signalled that if the two parties could not reach agreement on reinstatement of the judges and removal of Musharraf by August, the PML/N would withdraw its support for the government, thereby precipitating the fall of the PPP-led administration. Now entering its fourth month, this three-way power struggle between the PPP, PML/N, and President Musharraf has distracted the Pakistani leadership from dealing with rising economic and terrorism challenges.

**Spiking Tensions in U.S.-Pakistan Relationship.** The current political crisis follows Pakistani

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani's visit to Washington last week, which was largely overshadowed by U.S. media reports that American officials recently confronted Pakistan with information linking its intelligence service to the July 7 bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul. Frustration has been growing in the U.S. over Pakistan's lack of control of its border areas and its pursuit of peace deals that have given militants greater latitude to operate in the region. The U.S. accusations of official Pakistani links to the Indian embassy bombing has raised temperatures even higher, fueling concern within Pakistan's security establishment that the U.S. is colluding with Kabul and New Delhi to pressure Pakistan. These Pakistani suspicions reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of U.S. priorities in the region: promoting stable democracy in Afghanistan and denying the Taliban and al-Qaeda a safe haven from which to launch deadly international attacks. Islamabad must accept that regarding terrorism, a convergence of U.S. interests with those of Kabul and New Delhi does not translate into a wider conspiracy to undermine core Pakistani national security interests.

Despite strained ties between India and Pakistan over the Embassy bombing, Indian Prime Minister

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Singh agreed to meet with Gilani on the fringes of a South Asia regional meeting last weekend. Following that meeting, Gilani agreed to investigate the allegations against the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). In contrast to Gilani's efforts to address international concerns regarding Pakistan's role in the bombing, Musharraf appeared to take a more defiant position, viewing the allegations as a U.S. conspiracy against Pakistan. Indeed, last week Musharraf staunchly defended Pakistan's ISI as "the first line of defense of Pakistan" and warned that weakening the spy agency would also weaken the country and its army.

**Decision Time for Kayani.** Musharraf's fate and the future direction of Pakistan is largely in the hands of the Chief of Army Staff General Kiyani. Kiyani helped to ensure the February elections were successful and appears committed to keeping the army out of politics. Given the myriad pressures facing Pakistan, however, he may decide to support dissolution of the new parliament and the reassertion of army control over the government. This would be a highly unpopular move with the Pakistani public and would likely result in potentially violent street protests.

An alternative scenario would be for General Kiyani to prevail on Musharraf to make a graceful exit that would allow for the installation of a new president that would be less likely to cause friction within the system and would allow the army to remain outside the political fray. The army's full attention should be on the real threat to the coun-

try's future: the advance of Taliban militants along the border with Afghanistan and in some of the settled areas of the Northwest Frontier Province. Clashes between the Pakistani military and pro-Taliban militants in the Swat Valley over the last week have reportedly resulted in more than one hundred casualties. The Taliban leadership has threatened to resume bombings throughout Pakistan if the military operation in the Swat Valley continues.

Pakistan's internal political turmoil provides the country an opportunity to make changes within the system that can improve Pakistan's regional relationships and remove international doubts about Pakistan's role in the war on terrorism. Pakistan would find support and patience from the U.S. and neighboring countries if it chose a path of stability and prosperity for the region. Such a decision would require a degree of introspection and examination of its traditional perceptions of its own security interests that has so far eluded the Pakistani security establishment. The U.S. can help Pakistan choose the right path by demonstrating its interest in playing the role of an honest peace broker in the region and encouraging regional confidence building measures among Pakistanis, Afghans, and Indians, including economic cooperation and joint border security efforts that bring the three countries together to fight their number one common enemy—terrorism.

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