

1977 Coup D'etat in Pakistan

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“I have been reading about Napoleon. I am also reading two books on Hitler. I wanted to see how Hitler controlled his generals and how I could not control mine”.¹ The former prime minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto told the journalists ten days after the army staged a successful coup d’etat in the country on July 5, 1977 and deposed him from the office. The main purpose of this research paper is to discover why Mr. Bhutto could not control his generals and what led the army to take over the country for the third time in its troubled history.

Considerable theoretical literature has appeared which claims to explain the phenomenon of frequent occurrences of military coups in the developing countries. Before we proceed to explain the recent Pakistani coup d’etat, we shall give a brief overview of the literature in order to utilize some of the theoretical insights in our case-study.

Two dominant approaches are found in the literature: societal perspective and soldiers’ perspective. Societal perspective claims that the military establishments do not operate in a vacuum, therefore, much of the explanation for military ought to be found in the general state of society. According to this approach low level of institutionalization of a political system and high level of political participation, low level of social mobilization, low level of economic development, political chaos, disorder and loss of legitimacy of government are the main factors which

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1 Michael Richardson, “Pakistan. Bhutto puts it on the line”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 29, 1977.

provoke a coup d'état.² The other approach, soldiers' perspective, attempts to explain the coup d'état by emphasising on the 'coup-makers' grievances'. Various authors consider them as the 'triggers' to coups.³ They mainly emphasize the corporate interests of the military establishments such as adequate budgetary support, autonomy in managing their internal affairs, continuity of institution itself, personal interests of the military elite, sectional, communal and regional interests of the various segments within military and officers' attitudes and perceptions towards societies. A factor common to both approaches is external influence. It may be in the form of interference or encouragement to particular groups in the society by a foreign power, or it may simply be the contagious effect on the military of coups occurring elsewhere.

Theoretically, the purpose of this article is to show that above-mentioned, apparently alternative explanations of military coups d'état are infact integrally related to each other. Our thesis is that the understanding of societal perspective is the key to the explanation of a coup d'état and officers' attitudes, perceptions and grievances, which determine their behaviour in any given situation, are mostly generated and perpetuated because of societal factors. And external influences also become effectively operative only when a regime experiences internal strains and a crisis of legitimacy. We shall elaborate our thesis further in our conclusion in the light of this case-study.

A Case-Study of Pakistan

Background: The leaders of the newly born state were faced with gigantic problems in 1947. The problems were innumerable: development of a national identity, formation and institutionalization of a political

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- 2 S.P. Huntington, "Political Development and Political Decay", XVII, April 1965; *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), S.E. Finer, *The Man on the Horseback* (NEW YORK: Praeger, 1973), J.J. Johnson (ed) *The Role of Military in Under-Development Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1968), R.D. Putnam, "Towards Explaining Military Intervention in 1967", E. Luttwak, *Coup D'état* (London: Penguin 1968), D.A. Hibbs. *Mass Political Violence: A Cross-National Casual Analysis*. (NEW YORK: John Wily & Sons, 1973), E. Fossum, "Factors influencing the occurrences of Military Coup d'état in Latin America", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.4 (1967); H. Bienen, *The Military Intervenes* (NEW YORK: Russell Sage Foundations. 1968). A. Wells, "The Coup d'état in the theory and Practice", *American Journal of Society* Vol.79, No.4 (Jan., 1974).
 - 3 W.R. Thompson, *The Grievances of Military Coupe-makers* (Beverly Hills Sage, 1973); E.A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics* (N.J. Prentice Hall 1977), M. Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations*", (Chicago: University Press, 1964).

system, creation of a new administrative structure, laying down the foundation of national economy and building a national army. Beside these basic problems, traumatic events of the partition had burdened the decision-makers with many other problems to be dealt with immediately such as the refugees' resettlement, war with India over Kashmir and problems with Afghanistan.

Pakistan started its journey with the British type of parliamentary political system. But the crisis of identity, the death of leaders of national stature (M.A. Jinnah in September 1948 and Liaqat Ali Khan in October, 1951) the weak organizational structure of the Muslim League and the growth of secular and provincial outlooks paved the way for the anarchic polity in the parliamentary system of Pakistan. In the absence of any permanent constitution and the democratic traditions, one author aptly noted that at the end of its first decade "Pakistan was very much like Hobbes' state of nature where every political or provincial group fought against every other group. It was a ceaseless and ruthless struggle for power".⁴

Pakistan inherited a weak, disorganized and disarrayed military establishment from British India in 1947.⁵ Because of external threats from India and Afghanistan (real or imaginary) and the geographic separateness of the country's two wings (West Pakistan and East Pakistan) with one thousand miles of hostile territory of India in between, defence of the state became the 'foremost consideration' dominating all other governmental activities.⁶ The defence expenditure remained as high as 70 per cent of the total public expenditures in the early years.⁷ The Pakistan Army, true to its British training patterns, remained largely aloof from politics in the early years.⁸ However, chaotic political situation did not let them remain a silent spectator. Rather, it drew them in as a separate powerful and influential actor. The political vacuum within the country

4 K.B. Sayeed, "The Collapse of Parliamentary Democracy in Pakistan", *Middle East Journal.*, Vol.XIII, No.4, (Autumn 1959) Fertile details of some of the basic problems faced by the leaders in early years, see E.L. Tepper, "Pakistan in Retrospect", *International Journal*, 3 (1972).

5 F.M. Khan, *The Story of Pakistan Army*, Lahore, 1966.

6 H.A. Rizvi, *The Military and Politic in Pakistan* (Lahore: Progressive Publisher 1974), p.53.

7 *Ibid.*

8 See an excellent article for the structural characteristics of Pakistan Army. D.V. Jacques (ed) *Armed Forces and Society*, pp.247-68.

combined with the external threat perception paved the way for the increasing influence of the army in shaping the domestic and foreign policy of the country. Under the strong pressure of the military command, the civilian government entered into Mutual Defence Agreement with the U.S. in May, 1954, joined SEATO in September, 1954 and Baghdad Pact (later CENTO) in 1955.⁹ Domestically, the integration of the provinces of West Pakistan in the form of one unit was also the brainchild of Ayub Khan, first Pakistani commander-in-chief of the Pakistan army.¹⁰ The military establishment was the only cohesive and disciplined national institution in chaotic, turbulent and unstable Pakistani society.

General Ayub Khan led the first coup d'état in the country in October, 1958. The coup d'état was influenced by several factors; break down of the political system, government's overwhelming reliance on military for maintaining public law and order, deteriorating socio-economic conditions, high prestige of the military among the public, self images of the military elite as the guardian of national integrity and finally the external influences notably the U.S. encouragement and the contagious effects upon the military elite of the coups occurring in Egypt (July 1952), Iraq (July 1958) and Burma (September 1958).¹¹ This coup d'état marked the ascendancy of the military over the civilian for the coming twelve years. Pakistan under General Ayub Khan's leadership closely resembled a 'modernizing oligarchy'.¹² The decision-making was restricted to the senior military elites around Ayub and the bureaucracy. Pakistan between 1958-69 was an administrative state run by bureaucracy with the support of military. Ayub Khan also tried to create a new political system of Basic Democracies, but his ten years' rule created much more complex problems. Political suppression, bureaucratic high handedness, economic growth without social justice and inter-regional disparities finally resulted in the breakdown of his political system. And Ayub Khan had to resign in March 1969 in the wake of a prolonged, intense and wide-spread agitational campaign against his regime.

Ayub Khan handed over power to General Yahya Khan, the commander-in-chief of Pakistan army, chosen by him mainly because of

9 Wayne Wilcos, "Coup d'état of 1958 in Pakistan", *Pacific Affairs* (Jan., 1965).

10 *Ibid.*

11 H.A. Rizvi (1974), p.258.

12 See a detailed account of Ayub's regime Lawrence Ziring, *The Ayub Khan Era – Politics in Pakistan 1958-1969* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1971).

non-political reasons.¹³ He called for the general elections in December 1970, but he neither had any intentions to transfer power to the civilian representative nor had the ability to understand complex political and economic problems of the country. Two political parties emerged victorious out of December 1970 General Elections, the Awami League led by Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman in East Pakistan' and the Pakistan Peoples' Party led by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in West Pakistan.¹⁴ The lack of reconciliation between Sheikh Mujib's Awami League and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples' Party and General Yahya Khan's unfortunate military action in East Pakistan finally led to the 1971 War with India and the dismemberment of Pakistan.¹⁵ With the defeat in 1971 war from India and the creation of Bangladesh, the military rule came to an end in Pakistan. In the face of massive public demonstration against the military elite, one faction within the military Junta was instrumental in the withdrawal of the military from the government and the restoration of the civilian regime in Pakistan.¹⁶

Societal Perspective: Political System during Bhutto Regime

The political system established by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto after assuming power in 1971 was potentially unstable, leading towards chaos and disorder in the long run, thus providing a precondition for a potential coup d'etat. Bhutto had similar type of problems before him as its predecessors had, such as search for national identity, development of political rules of the game, framing of the new constitution and determining of the role of political parties, civil services and military.¹⁷

It is necessary to know Bhutto's own background and the context of his party's emergence in order to understand his regime properly.¹⁸

13 Robert Laporte Jr., "Succession in Pakistan: Continuity and Change in a Garrison State", *Asian Survey*, No.11 (Nov., 1969).

14 See for a detailed analysis Craig Baxter, "Pakistan Votes - 1970" *Asian Survey*, Vol.XI, No.3 (March 1971).

15 Robert Laporte Jr., "Pakistan in 1971: The Disintegration of a Nation", *Asian Survey*, Vol.XII, No.3 (February 1972); Robert V. Jackson, *South Asian Crisis* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975).

16 The Army Chief of Staff, General Gul Hasan and the Air Force Commander Air Marshal Rahim virtually threatened Yahya Khan and forced him to resign. H.A. Rizvi (1974).

17 Khalid Bin Sayeed, "Pakistan in 1971", *Asian Survey* (Jan., 1972), pp.280-86.

18 See two recent books which explain Bhutto's personality and his regime in detail Shahid Javaid Burki, *Pakistan Under Bhutto, 1971-77* (London: Ithaca Press, 1979).

Heger's remarks was quite apt during his regime that 'Pakistan's political debility can be explained in terms of Bhutto his background, his views of power, his performance, his preoccupation with his personal destiny'.¹⁹ Bhutto belonged to a traditional landlord family of Sindh acquired advanced education at British and American Universities and emerged as an ambitious and volatile figure on the Pakistani political scene. During Ayub's period he served as his foreign minister and became his leading opponent after the Tashkent Declaration when Ayub Khan dismissed him from the government. During 1967-69, he acquired charisma, propounded his theory "of Islamic socialism, played upon the themes of social and economic injustices and organized his political party the Pakistan Peoples' Party. Organizationally, his political party was a very weak and incoherent political party which owed its existence to its founder.²⁰ Party elections were never held and the local office bearers were always nominated by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto himself. He was often proud to declare: "I am the Peoples' Party and they are all my creatures."²¹

Mr. Bhutto's personality had a deep imprint on the political system, he reconstituted. The constitution, though, approved with consensus, was tailored to the maximum advantage of the ruling junta. It was further changed through subsequent, arbitrary amendments in order to enhance the powers of the executive and reduce the powers of judiciary. Structurally, it was a federal parliamentary system, but in practice it was a highly personalized system of governance. Bhutto kept martial law in effect for more than a year after assuming control, thereby allowing himself extra-ordinary powers as the chief martial law administrator. He instituted a number of structural reforms in civilian and military bureaucracies which considerably enhanced his personal control over these institutions.²²

19 A.G. Heeger. "Politics in the Post-Military State: Some Reflections on the Pakistani Experience, *World Politics*, 2 (Jan., 1977), pp.242-62.

20 For a concise analysis of PPP's structure see Heeger (1977).

21 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 13, 1977.

22 Zia-ul-Haq's government has issued a white papers in four volumes, covering various aspects of the performance of the Bhutto regime See *White Paper on the Performance of the Bhutto Regime*, Vol.I, II, III, IV, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, January, 1979 Also see White Paper on the *Misuse of Media*. Government of Pakistan, August, 1978. William Richter also briefly mentions the style of Bhutto regime, through the focus of the articles is "Persistent Practonanism Pakistan's Third Military Regime", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol 51, No 3, Fall 1978.

Bhutto, well aware of the political position of the military, tried to restructure the pattern of civil-military relations in Pakistan. In the context of 1971 defeat, he shrewdly utilized the unfavourable position of the military among the public. He declared his intention to root out 'Bonapartism' from the military, holding them responsible for most of the political problems of the country.²³ Also suggested the idea of replacing the present army by 'the people's army' once, but did not repeat it again.²⁴ In the first four months he removed forty three senior military officers. He also introduced organizational changes in order to strengthen the civilian supremacy. He abolished the system of commanders-in-chief and instituted a system of having chiefs of staff. The chiefs of three services worked under the authority of a joint board of chiefs of staff with the head of the state as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Secondly, the chiefs of staff were given a fixed tenure and it was decided that no extension of the term would be granted. Thirdly, constitutional checks were placed on the military. The function of the military was clearly specified that it would "defend Pakistan against external aggression or threat of war, and, subject to law, act in aid of civil power when called upon to do so." The act of take over by army was specifically mentioned a "High treason".²⁵

Mr. Bhutto ruled the country with an iron hand. Being a landlord himself and trained in Ayub Khan's system it was characteristic of Mr. Bhutto's personality that he was extremely intolerant of any opposition to him. He struck hard upon his political rivals. The provincial governments of National Awami Party (NAP) and Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam (JUI) in N.W.F.P. and Balochistan were dismissed and their leaders were put behind the bars on various charges. The opposition leaders were harassed by all means. Several of them were detained and subjected to inhuman type of tortures.²⁶ They were threatened that their wives and daughters will be abducted if they did not stop opposing Mr. Bhutto.²⁷ Twenty four eminent opposition leaders were murdered during his regime.²⁸ According

23 H.A. Rizvi (1974), p.251.

24 *Ibid.*

25 Article 245 of the Constitution enforced on August 14, 1973.

26 Based upon personal interviews.

27 Infact some of the cases were reported to the police but the cases were hushed up on the orders of the government.

28 See the report "Torture claims in India and Pakistan", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (June 13, 1977).

to one Amnesty International report, the number of political prisoners during Bhutto regime (1971-77) was 2,000.²⁹ It does not include those 20,000 arrested during the political crisis which started after March 1977 elections. A strict censorship was imposed on the press during his regime. The independent role of the judiciary was also criticized by the regime and finally its powers were curtailed through constitutional amendments. Institutions created by the constitution had mere paper value. The whole political system revolved around one personality Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. What Huntington calls the 'institutional decay', was at its peak.³⁰

Mr. Bhutto's major contribution to Pakistani politics was that he ushered in an era of social mobilization. During his 1970 election campaign he brought structural social injustices into limelight and created an awareness of the basic issues among the public. Through his catchy slogans and charismatic personality he was able to break traditional patterns of politics and to give new hopes and expectations to the oppressed classes. But unfortunately, having assumed power he was a changed man. Now all his efforts were directed towards consolidating his own power rather than bringing a social revolution. The land reforms, industrial reforms, educational reforms and advertisement reforms, though publicized with much fanfare had nominal effect because of half-hearted attempts to implement them.³¹ The process of implementing these reforms rather alienated the people from the regime. A contemporary analyst rightly points out "it was the failure to comprehend that in implementing a number of the economic and social measures adopted by his administration he needed the full backing of the broad coalitions that had helped him into power".³² Middle classes were particularly affected by the economic policies of the regime as their share in the total wealth declined.³³ This alienated middle class formed the backbone of anti-Bhutto movement later.³⁴ His political party PPP was also of little help as it was source of further weakness because of its heterogeneous ideological groups (ranging from extreme right to extreme left) and loose

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 Khalid Bin Sayeed, "How Radical is Pakistan Peoples' Party", *Pacific Affairs* (January 1974).

32 Shahid Javaid Burki (1980), p.4.

33 *Ibid.*, p.67.

34 Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Politics in Pakistan. The Nature and Direction of Change* (NEW YORK: Praeger, 1980), p.159.

organizational structure. Within PPP he played one faction against the other in order to keep a balance and to keep his position supreme. He combined the government offices with the party offices and disassociated himself from the masses. With the passage of time his party, the Pakistan Peoples' Party was shaped into a "relatively limited, minister focused party". As a result, police and intelligence agencies became the mainstay of power. Huge resources were allocated for strengthening these agencies and their directors were given wide powers to work for the PPP. According to one estimate expenditure on the FSF (Federal Security Force) increased from Rs.36.4 million for 1976-77 — Expenditure on civil armed forces increased from Rs.192.5 million to Rs.388.2 million. And total expenditure on police and security were as high as Rs.521.8 million for 1976-77. These figures reveal growing dependence of Bhutto regime on security agencies.³⁵ Bhutto wanted to demobilize the people through his autocratic measures as this appeared to him the only alternative to the institutionalization of the political system.

General Elections of March 1977

Many researchers agree that when civilian government loses its legitimacy, it is most vulnerable to the incidence of coup d'etat.³⁶ The government is considered to be "less than legitimate when many politically aware citizens do not accept its authority: a sizeable proportion of the politicized populations, ranging from those whose merely in national politics to the leaders of political parties believe that the government is not deserving its allegiance."³⁷ Bhutto regime also lost its legitimacy in the wake of general elections held in March 1977 in Pakistan.

On 7 January 1977, it was announced by the government that the general elections would be held on 7 March and 10 March for the national assembly and the provincial assemblies respectively. Bhutto perceived the situation favourable for him. The major opposition parties were in a disarray, divided by sharp ideological cleavages, political differences and personality clashes; the anti-regime movements in Balochistan and NWFP seemed well controlled; press, radio and television had already been tamed; and apparently there did not seem any effective political opponent in the field. But quite unexpectedly, within 48 hours of the announcement

35 Khalid Bin Sayeed (1980), p.107.

36 Nordlinger (1977), p.45.

37 *Ibid.*, p.92.

of elections, nine opposition parties formed the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) in order to confront the PPP.³⁸ The PNA was a conglomerate of heterogeneous parties ranging from extreme right to left. The Muslim League (Muslim League) the Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP), the Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam (JUI), the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP), the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), the National Democratic Party (NDP), the Tehrik-i-Istiqlal-i-Pakistan (TIP), the Khaksars and the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference. The only common basis among the PNA's political parties was their opposition to Mr. Bhutto.

Once the date for elections was announced, the genie of masses' feelings was out of the bottle and the PNA was able to capitalize on it. Politically conscious voters were expressing their genuine feelings against the loss of civil liberties, wide spread corruptions, excesses of PPP's MNAs (Member National Assembly) and MPAs (Member of Provincial Assemblies), rising prices, and the high-handedness of the police, the Federal Security Force (FSF) and the PPP guards. The turn-out of people at the PNA's meetings was surprising. As compared to the PPP, the PNA attracted the huge crowds in the public meetings and processions.³⁹ Despite the PNA's successful campaign most observers believed that the PPP could win a marginal victory. Even the PNA's candidates would be able to win 80 to 90 seats out of 200 National Assembly seats.⁴⁰ The general impression was that a strong opposition would emerge which would serve as an effective check on the unbridled activities of the PPP.

The results of the general elections were surprising. The PPP claimed to gain an overwhelming victory by winning 155 seats and 36 went to the PNA. The PNA leaders immediately denounced the elections, calling it completely 'rigged and farce' and demanded fresh elections and the resignation of an 'illegal Prime Minister'.⁴¹ The PPP maintained that the

38 Bhutto in his book "If I am assassinated" blamed that the spontaneity in the formation of the PNA's alliance was mainly due to the U.S involvement but there does not exist any concrete evidence to support his assertion Infact that opposition parties deliberately kept on giving an impression to Bhutto that they were deeply divided and Bhutto fell into their trap and visualizing an overwhelming victory over the divided opponents, he announced the date of elections. See for Bhutto's charge, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *If I Am Assassinated* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1979), p.87.

39 For the detailed account of election campaign, see, Lawrence Ziring, "March 1977 Elections in Pakistan", *Asian Survey* (May 1977), pp.60-80.

40 Based on interviews with the PNA leaders.

41 *The Pakistan Times*. March 10, 1977.

elections were fair and there was no question of fresh elections.⁴² Some foreign correspondents also reported that the electoral malpractices were confined to limited constituencies.⁴³ But infact, the rigging was well planned and at a very large scale. The PPP had been preparing for the elections for quite a long time. The government machinery, at all levels was mobilized at least one year prior to the elections.⁴⁴ The Prime Minister's Secretariat, the Intelligence Agencies and the information ministry were almost totally devoted in preparing estimates for the forthcoming elections, making recommendations for candidates, 'suitable' for the PPP and suggesting various measures in order to ensure the success of the ruling party in elections.⁴⁵

The district administration, which was to play a key role in the conduct of the elections, was thoroughly scrutinized and 'undependable' Deputy Commissioners and the Superintendents of Police were either transferred or sent on leave.

The PNA's candidate opposing Mr. Bhutto from Larkana, Maulana Jan Mohammad Abbasi was abducted and detained all night in order to prevent him from filing his nomination papers. Other PNA candidates, opposing the chief ministers also met the same fate. The Prime Minister and all four chief ministers were declared elected uncontested in order to make an impression. On the polling day, the police FSF and the civil service along with PPP workers did their job faithfully.⁴⁶ Bogus voting was done at a large scale, the women's polling stations wee special targets of the PPP workers.⁴⁷ At several places the oppositions' polling agents were locked in separate rooms until the counting was over. At many places the votes polled were found more than the actual voters registered in those polling stations. Several PPP ministers themselves were seen harassing the

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Keesings Contemporary Archives*, pp.28301-6.

44 Following information is mostly based on the personal interviews with the government officials who wish to remain unidentified.

45 See an organ of PPP Mahmood Sham 'Hookamran Party Ki Intikhabi Mohim Ya Siasi Party Ki Moham' *Weekly Meyyar*, (Karachi) March 5, 1977, pp.36-44.

46 I myself visited several polling stations in and around Rawalpindi and interviewed a number of people from different constituencies in Punjab.

47 Mukhtar Hassan 'Satt March Ka Drama – Purdah Utha Ha', *Weekly Islami Janhoorivya*, Lahore, March 14, 1977.

voters and stamping the ballot papers themselves.⁴⁸ The state controlled radio and T.V. started announcing landslide victories for the PPP candidates even before the counting was over.

It is difficult to assess the exact scope of rigging in the elections, but these were by no means ordinary or confined to limited number of constituencies.⁴⁹ The Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. Sajjad Ahmad Jan made three public statements about massive rigging in the elections and showed his helplessness in preventing it.⁵⁰ After examining the results of 24 constituencies⁵¹ later he said that he was 'shocked' and was convinced that elections were massively rigged in more than half of the constituencies and suggested 're-elections instead of further enquiries'.⁵² His powers were withdrawn and he was sent abroad on medical leave when he unseated six PPP members of the National Assembly and was busy in examining the results of 80 other seats.⁵³ The PPP's position was that the national assembly's election was a settled matter and it was not open to negotiations, however, the opposition's complaints may be given a sympathetic hearing. Mr. Bhutto kept insisting on the legitimacy of the elections simultaneously offering the PNA leaders to negotiate, but they outrightly rejected his offer until the acceptance of their basic demands.⁵⁴

48 Walter Schwarz, 'Why Bhutto's power is crumbling', *The Guardian*, London, May 1, 1977.

49 Zia-ul-Haq's government issued a voluminous white paper on the general elections of March 1977, releasing innumerable official documents which throw light on the conduct of General Elections Obviously the government did have the propagandist motive as well which makes the document clumsy, inconsistent and self-contradictory at various places Nevertheless, it is an important document to understand the process of organized rigging by Bhutto regime. It is interesting to note that Bhutto in his reply to this white paper calls these documents "one-sided" and "part of character assassination campaign", but he does not challenge the authenticity of these documents. See *White Paper on the Conduct of the General Elections* in March, 1977, Government of Pakistan, July 1978. And for Bhutto's reply Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, *If I Am Assassinated...* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1979).

50 Hassan (1977).

51 *Daily Millat*, Karachi, June 13, 1977.

52 *The Pakistan Times*, June 23, 1977.

53 *Ibid.*, Karachi 10, 1977.

54 *The Pakistan Times*. March 10, 1977.

The boycott of provincial assemblies' elections was a complete success. The agitational movement started growing gradually. The movement was more successful in the urban areas of Sindh in the beginning, but after 9th April's violent demonstration in Lahore, the movement quickly engulfed the Punjab as well. By 20th April all the major urban centres of Punjab, Sindh and NWFP were under curfew. The movement acquired a religious colour when the PNA leaders declared that it was a 'Tehreek-i-Nizam-i-Mustafa' i.e. the movement for establishment of Islamic system of life as given by Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). Despite massive use of force by the government, the movement was extremely fierce and continued unabated. The PNA's appeal to the masses for the withdrawal of money from the banks, non-payment of taxes and regular weekly strikes had a considerable success.⁵⁵ "The Wheel Jam" strike launched by the PNA was also a complete success: the trains were stopped, the means of communication were blocked, factories and educational institutions remained closed and the whole country came to a standstill for one day.⁵⁶ This strike was the catalyst to partial martial law in three major cities, accompanied by a presidential proclamation of a state of emergency, suspending citizens' constitutional rights, placing a long list of penal offenders under the jurisdiction of military courts, making the verdict of these courts final and amending the army laws to grant the troops wider powers.⁵⁷

Mr. Bhutto conceded that some irregularities and malpractices were committed by certain individuals, but he maintained that it was not a deliberate plan of the government to manipulate the elections.⁵⁸ His position was characteristic of his personality. He said, "I don't want to go down in history as a rigger of the elections, which I am not. If I have re-elections, I would be conceding their false charge that I am a manipulator and rigger of elections... What the hell is office of Prime Minister? I am more concerned about my place in history".⁵⁹ But as the

55 Long queues of people were seen before the banks after the PNA call to withdraw money from the banks.

56 See for the details, Salamat Ali, 'Bhutto Weathers Storm', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 6, 1977.

57 *Ibid.*

58 *The Pakistan Times*, March 28, 1977. Bhutto, replying to the charges of rigging writes: "I will stand by that statement I did not rig the elections. I am not responsible for the individuals who indulged in electoral malpractices in their individual capacity", Bhutto, *If I Am Assassinated...* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1979), p.9.

59 *The Pakistan Times*, April 9, 1977.

crisis prolonged, Mr. Bhutto, blowing hot and cold at the same time, changed his position vis-à-vis PNA. He offered them several alternatives: formation of special tribunal in order to investigate the allegations of rigging; re-election of provincial assemblies and the holding of new general elections in case the opposition wins the provincial elections, special announcement regarding the enforcement of Shariat laws within six months, immediate prohibition on the use of Alcohol, gambling and night clubs and holding of a nation-wide referendum whether people want him as a Prime Minister or not.⁶⁰ The PNA leaders rejected all of these proposals declaring that these were irrelevant to their basic demands. On April 29, 1977 Mr. Bhutto revealed an international conspiracy against him and alleged that his opponents were seeking assistance from the U.S. in order to topple his regime.⁶¹

The mistrust among the politicians was so high that they were not prepared to talk to each other. The political dialogue between the PNA and the PPP which started on June 3, 1977 were facilitated mainly by the Saudi envoy to Pakistan, Mr. Raizul Khatib. Playing the crucial role of an intermediary, he was successful in persuading both the parties to soften their positions and hold negotiations to resolve three-month old political crisis. There were other factors as well which forced both the parties to come to terms. More than 300 people had been killed and over 20,000 arrested but still the intensity of the movement was not on the wane.⁶² There was fear that it might get out of control of even the PNA leaders. Secondly, the national economic situation was also deteriorating seriously because of prolonged crisis. Estimated losses during the previous three months were more than \$ 730 million.⁶³ Finally, besides Saudi Arabia, emissaries from Libya U.A.E. and P.L.O. frequently visited Pakistan and communicated grave concern of their governments over Pakistan's political deadlock. And Pakistan's leading financiers' voice could not be ignored.⁶⁴

The negotiations started on June 3, 1977 and an agreement was reached between the PPP and the PNA on June 16, 1977. Thanks to the Saudi envoy's efforts, even before the formal negotiations started both

60 See for the details of these proposals, *The Pakistan Times*, May 1977 issue.

61 *The Pakistan Times*, April 29, 1977.

62 *The New York Times*, June 1955.

63 *Keesings Contemporary Archives*, p.28301-6.

64 Salamat Ali, 'Arab Wail and See', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 6, 1978.

parties had softened their basic positions. The PPP had agreed to the holding of fresh elections and the PNA had shelved its main demand for Bhutto's resignation. The agreement included several clauses regarding the fool proof arrangements for new elections such as the dissolution of present national and provincial cabinets and assemblies, reappointment of provincial governors in consultation with the PNA, association of election commission and formation of a national level committee in order to supervise the conduct of elections. The task of working out the details of the agreement were left to a two-member sub-committee.⁶⁵

Despite the negotiations and the agreement, there still existed an unbridgeable credibility gap between the two opponents. Both continued exercising pressure tactics upon each other. Before the agreement was signed, Bhutto left the country for the tour of Middle Eastern countries, apparently to 'thank them', but in fact to show the strength of his power base by illustrating that he could remain absent for five days without fearing his opponents.⁶⁶ The second rate leadership of both the parties kept threatening each other and some violent skirmishes also occurred. In the meanwhile, the sub-committee talks were bogged down on the question of powers of the implementation committee. The PPP wanted to give it the status of an advisory council while the PNA wanted to give it all possible powers to conduct an impartial election. Mr. Bhutto said that he could not accept a 'super-government' while Mufti Mahmood, the PNA's President alleged that the government was trying to wriggle out of the agreement.⁶⁷ The dispute was resolved on July 3, 1977 when a new accord was reached between the PPP and the PNA regarding the powers of committee.⁶⁸ But the situation became more complicated when the PNA's general council refused to accept the new accord and presented 10 new demands in order to ensure a fair election. Air Marshal (R) Asghar Khan, head of the Tehrik-i-Istiqlal-i-Pakistan (a component of PNA) openly rebuked the PNA's negotiating team and charged them of 'over-reaching'.⁶⁹ Bhutto accused the PNA for violating the accord in his last press conference on

65 *The Pakistan Times*, June 16, 1977.

66 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 15, 1977.

67 *The Pakistan Times*, July 29, 1977.

68 The Committee, consisting of equal number of PPP and PNA members was given review powers over government decisions. In the case of dispute the matter would be referred to the supreme court which would give its verdict within 72 hours, *The Pakistan Times*, July 3, 1977.

69 *Dawn*, July 3, 1977.

July 4, 1977 and said that 'he will reopen as many issues as they want'.⁷⁰ He expressed his willingness to talk to the PNA leaders again, but the army's patience was over by then. Keeping in view the recurrent deadlocks among the politicians, highly volatile political situation characterized by violence and civil war and continuously deteriorating economic conditions, the army staged the coup d'etat on July 5, 1977 and Bhutto regime came to an end in Pakistan.

Soldiers' Perspective

There do not seem to be any dominant motives of the coup-makers in this case. The army's intervention was not designed; rather, it was 'reactive'. It is evident from the fact that at the height of the agitational movement, when the rumours were common that the military is going to take over the country, one of the prominent leaders of the PNA Air Marshal (retired) Asghar Khan, through his signed letter, virtually invited the army to take-over the country. He called on the officers to distinguish between 'lawful' and 'unlawful' commands and not to support 'the illegal government of the day'.⁷¹ Furthermore, the army commanders received thousands of telegrams from the people cursing them for the support of an unpopular regime and for the killing of innocent people instead of taking power themselves.⁷² Despite these appeals the chiefs of staff of army, navy and air force came with a clear declaration in favour of the government in the following words: "We wish to make it absolutely clear that Pakistan army, navy and air force are totally united to discharge their constitutional obligations in support of the present legally constituted government".⁷³ This sort of statement was unique in the history of civil-military relations of Pakistan.

The main motivation which led General Zia-ul-Haq from this perspective seems to be his concern of army's prestige and image in the

70 *Dawn*, July 5, 1977.

71 See for the ext of the letter, *The Pakistan Times*, May 5, 1977.

72 Based on personal interviews.

73 *The Pakistan Times*, April 28, 1977. Later during his imprisonment Bhutto alleged that the army and PNA had collaborated to topple his regime he wrote: "since February 1977, PNA and the Chief Martial Law Administrator have been in league with each other. The agitation was a common affair. Jawans dressed in civilian clothes or in Muftis were sent to PNA demonstrations to swell the crowds and incite public provocation." Bhutto (1979), p. 145. Bhutto's allegation is totally baseless as the army chiefs were completely supporting him at that time and the army was battling with the people on streets.

society. The army had suffered a serious loss of prestige for supporting a highly unpopular regime. People used to taunt the army officers in the streets, and several times refused to sell them eatables. General Zia in his first address, talking about the role of the armed forces during the political crisis also mentioned this point: "The Armed Forces were subjected to criticisms and ridicules in the hope that it was a passing phase".⁷⁴ General Zia also alleged that during the cabinet meeting on July 3, 1977 the political advisers of the Prime Minister were pressing hard to 'exterminate ten or twelve leaders of PNA'.⁷⁵ According to General Zia, General Tikka Khan (Prime Minister's adviser on national security) advised him "you can shoot down between 10000 to 20000 people. That is nothing; it is in the national interest. You must do your duty."⁷⁶ Even if this statement may be considered exaggerated, there is no denying the fact that a new spiral of frenzy and violence was in the offing.⁷⁷

Another factor which was very pinching for the army generals was that Bhutto had used them very crudely against the opposition parties. During the negotiations, he used to call the generals to explain 'the dangers to the national security' as a result of the PNA's agitation. The generals used to explain to the PNA leaders that because of internal agitation India are amassing troops on the Punjab borders and Iran on the Balochistan border.

The establishment of Federal Security Force during Bhutto's regime was also very resenting for the army officers. In the words of *The Times* (London) it was 'Bhutto's personal army to coerce the political opponents'.⁷⁸ It was equipped with the modern light arms and very good transport facilities and it was always perceived by the army officers as a functional rival. On the very second day of the coup, General Zia dismantled this organization.

External Influences

The patterns of events leading towards this coup d'etat show the United States' concern and influence in this event. On April 29, 1977 at the height of PNA's agitational movement Prime Minister Bhutto

74 *The Pakistan Times*, July 6, 1977.

75 *New York Times*, July 6, 1977.

76 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 14, 1977.

77 *Ibid.*

78 *The Times*, London, July 5, 1977.

disclosed an 'international conspiracy' against him in the parliament. He alleged the U.S. 'flooding the money into the country', backing up his political opponents and U.S. attempts to topple his regime. He stressed that Americans were unhappy over his policies, in particular his independent stance over getting 'Nuclear Reprocessing Plant' from France and efforts to unite the third world.⁷⁹

Although a large pan of the speech was propagandistic in nature and an attempt to divert public attention, yet there seems to be an element of truth in some of his allegations Pakistan had very bad relations with U.S. over her 'Nuclear Reprocessing Plant Deal with France. In view of her global interests of nuclear non-proliferation and strategic interest in South Asian region the U.S. was exercising massive pressure upon Pakistan. In August 1976, Kissinger had talked of 'punitive measures' in terms of cutting off military and economic aid to Pakistan, if Pakistan did not abandon the plant.⁸⁰

The Pakistani government remained adamant, speeding up the work for the actual instalment of the nuclear reprocessing plant. First signs of pressure appeared when Canada cut-off her supplies, fuels and spare parts for the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant. The major point in this controversy between the Canadian and Pakistani governments was that Canada wanted to extend the safeguards to Pakistan's entire nuclear programme (not merely Canadian supplied reactor) including the nuclear reprocessing plant deal of Pakistan with France, and Pakistan was unwilling.⁸¹

United States clearly denied any involvement in Pakistan's internal affairs and Cyrus Vance made it clear that 'we have given no assistance to any organization or individual in Pakistan'.⁸² His suggestion to have talks "quietly and dispassionately' was exploited by Bhutto, who made

79 *The Pakistan Times*, April 29, 1977.

80 See Pakistan's foreign minister's statement, *Pakistan Times*, June 11, 1977, and *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 1, 1977 Kissinger also warned 'Carter' if he comes to power, will make a horrible example of your country.

81 *Keesings Contemporary Archives*, p.28301.

82 *Pakistan Times*, May 5, 1977. The charge was seriously lacking in evidence Bhutto only referred to the talks of two American diplomats on the telephone 'the man is gone, the party is over', *Pakistan Times*, April 29, 1977.

it public as an evidence of his charge. As a protest America withdrew the nomination of George Vest as Ambassador to Pakistan.⁸³

During the political crisis, there occurred a chain of seemingly unrelated events in US-Pakistan relations, which had its impact on the domestic situation. At the peak of the crisis on April 25th, the State department refused to deliver tear-gas consignments against her March 15 decision to provide them. This was interpreted as an indication of the shift in the American government's policy towards the Bhutto regime.⁸⁴ On June 5, 1977, the U.S. revoked A-7 aircraft deal worth \$ 700 million with Pakistan.⁸⁵ Bhutto told the parliament that it came as no 'surprise' because 'A-7 was dangled before our eyes' by the former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger 'in exchange of certain other things' and cancellation of some other contracts.⁸⁶ One June 20, 1977 when Pakistan's economic difficulties were growing, the scheduled meeting of the International aid Consortium helping Pakistan (primary consisting of Western countries) was postponed.⁸⁷ The American active concern is also reflected by the fact that the American Ambassador remained very close and watchful of the political process.⁸⁸

Although these events do not provide any definitive evidence of US involvement, yet if taken together these seemingly unrelated events do show that the US gave the green signal to the Pakistan army that it did not like Bhutto regime any more. The powerful signals from the external environment were definitely encouraging for the coup-makers.

Coup D'etat

"The army had watched political wrangling in the country for a long time",⁸⁹ General Zia-ul-Haq told the journalists after the coup.

83 *The New York Times*, April 29, 1977. See a recent book, Latif Ahmad Sherwani, *Pakistan China & America*, (Karachi: D.Y. Printers, 1980).

84 *Washington Post*, April 22, 1977.

85 *Pakistan Time*, June 7, 1977.

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Christian Science Monitor*, July 6, 1977.

88 American Ambassador Arthur Hummel requested an urgent meeting with the Prime Minister one day before the coup which he did grant despite his political preoccupations, *Pakistan Times*, July 4, 1977.

89 *New York Times*, July 6, 1977.

Keeping in view the growing violence in the country and the Prime Minister's inability to reach the political settlement, the chiefs of staff of three forces had prepared a secret 'contingency plan', 'Operation Fair-play' in the early period of political turmoil when the generals thought that 'the Prime Minister was not going on sound lines.'⁹⁰ Bhutto had been very watchful of the army generals throughout the political crisis. He thought that General Zia was advantageous for him because he was 'mediocre, non-political and professional man'.⁹¹ The military decided to act after Prime Minister Bhutto disclosed in the afternoon of July 4, that the final compromise over the question of new elections had again broken down.⁹²

The timing of the coup was very surprising. Few were anticipating the coup at that time, because the armed forces had shown their unqualified support for the regime at the height of the agitational movement. They had not hesitated in opening fire on the demonstrators. The masses perceived General Zia-ul-Haq as highly 'submissive, unimaginative and yes-man commander-in-chief.'⁹³ The military started its 'Operation Fairplay' early in the morning at 3 O' clock on July 5, 1977. By 5 O' clock, they had arrested the Prime Minister, the Federal Ministers and all the PNA leaders.⁹⁴ The coup was bloodless, and the military met no resistance from any quarter. The coup was so peaceful that within twenty four hours, the military was withdrawn from all the installations except very critical one.⁹⁵ Most of the people in the capital city did not believe that it was a real coup. They thought that Prime Minister Bhutto had done a new manoeuvre against the opposition. General Zia himself had to explain in his first address to the nation that he had not secretly

90 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 8, 1977.

91 *Ibid.*

92 *New York Time*, July 8, 1977.

93 Based on personal talk with the people in Rawalpindi and Lahore.

94 *Pakistan Times*, July 8, 1977.

95 *New York Times*. July 8, 1977.

'concerted' with the former Prime Minister and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Government has ceased to exist.⁹⁶

The public reaction to the coup d'etat was favourable in general; however, the intelligentsia was sad that the country had back-tracked to 1958 again.

Conclusion

Our argument set out in the beginning of the paper was that societal factors basically explain the occurrence of a coup d'etat and alternative explanatory factors are, in fact, related to, or better understood only in the context of societal perspective. Our case study shows that it was essentially the crisis of legitimacy of Bhutto regime which set the ball rolling. Erosion of legitimacy was long in process. The political system established by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was potentially unstable. It depended mainly on his personality. Instead of taking an institutional path, Bhutto opted for a personal style of politics. The political, social and economic policies adopted by him frustrated most sections of society and particularly alienated the middle class. The political system collapsed and lost its legitimacy in the wake of massive rigging in the general elections of March 1977. The agitational movement launched by the opposition was in full swing by the end of May 1977. The credibility of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government was at its lowest ebb; the civil disorder and violence was at its height and the whole country was almost paralyzed as a result of continuous strikes, processions and fierce skirmishes between the police and the people. Even the army was unable to control the situation at several places. Although the dialogue started between the government and the opposition in June 1977 and an agreement was also achieved but the credibility gap between the ruling party and the opposition appeared unbridgeable. The agreement broke finally while settling the details regarding its implementation. Now the stage was set for the army's intervention.

The military hesitated for a long time. Although some of the opposition leaders openly invited the military to take over the country, yet the military kept on supporting the regime even at the

96 See General Zia-ul-Haq's speech in *Pakistan Times*, July 6, 1977.

peak of the political crisis. Most of the military's grievances were peripheral, but as the political crisis deepened the attitudes and perceptions of the officers and jawans began changing. Those who have seen the political crisis could realize a distinct change in them. Many of them defied the orders to shoot down the people. The military elites were greatly concerned with their tarnished public image during the prolonged political crisis. They hated their role of being used by the regime like police. There was much frustration and resentment in the junior ranks of the army. When the politicians were unable to reach any political settlement even within five months, the generals, keeping in view the mood of the army and fearing a new spiral of frenzy and violence emerging in the country after the break-up of final political talks, thought it proper to take over the country rather than supporting unpopular regime. The deteriorating relationship between the United States government and Bhutto government was a further source of encouragement for the coup-makers as they perceived both internal and external environment favourable for staging the coup d'état.