

Observation no: 151 – Pakistan (Bangladesh War)

Country-year: 1971

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

Yes.

In 1958, the military Commander-in-Chief Ayub Khan seized power from the civilian leadership and governed through a lightly applied martial law regime.¹ As the chief army commander, Khan first entered the government in 1954, when he was brought into the ruling parliamentary cabinet “as part of a bid for stability, marking the beginning of the loss of civilian control.”² After four years of political instability, Khan and President Iskander Mirza colluded to take over the government in 1958, though Mirza was quickly exiled to London, leaving the Khan and the Pakistani military in control of the country.

In 1968, Ayub Khan stepped down from power and General Yahya Khan assumed the reins and imposed martial law over Pakistan.

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

See 1. But prior to Ayub Khan’s coup in 1958, Pakistan had only experienced an aborted junior level coup in 1951 (the Rawalpindi Conspiracy).³

3. Is the country’s top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

See 1. The top leader of Pakistan in 1971 was General Yahya Khan, a military officer who imposed martial law in 1968 after Ayub Khan stepped down.⁴

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

Yes.

Pakistan was partitioned from India with the core purpose of creating a state for Muslim South Asians. The Pakistani army originated as the British Indian Army before partition.

¹ Stephen Philip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 124-125; Brian Cloughley, *A History of the Pakistan Army: Wars and Insurrections* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 21-45.

² Staniland, Paul. “Explaining Civil-Military Relations in Complex Political Environments: India and Pakistan in Comparative Perspective.” *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008), 349.

³ Cohen, 102; Cloughley, 26.

⁴ Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (Public Affairs, 2011).

Many units in the British Indian Army were mixed in religions, ethnicity, and castes. The partition plan allocated the British Indian Army to India and Pakistan according to a 70:30 split. Thus, “a battalion ordered to join the army of Pakistan would retain only its Muslim company or companies and those headquarters’ officers and men of the same religion.”⁵ Although Muslim identity was required to join the military officer corps, many different ethnic groups exist within Pakistan. The Pakistani military has always been “extremely cagey about releasing figures for ethnic proportions in the military,” though Muslims from the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province regions traditionally outnumber and dominate Muslims from Sindhi, Mohajir, and Baloch.⁶

[Observation 251 on the 1998 Kargil War discusses briefly the role of Islam in the Pakistani military]

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Ayub Khan restructured and modernized the armed forces of Pakistan. Partition bequeathed the Pakistani military with a significant shortage of officers and military training institutes (not to mention severe gaps in equipment and logistical production chains). Khan set out to modernize the Pakistani army and rebuild the officer corps. The basic structure of the military did not deviate significantly from the highly professional British system handed down from the British colonial army. Khan’s main goals were to standardize the disparate training program for the armed forces, remove incompetent officers, and build-up military capabilities with assistance from the superpowers (a very close relationship flourished briefly in the late 1950s with the United States, who provided Pakistan with subsidized military equipment, weapon systems, and training programs). Therefore, aside from a unique geo-strategic worldview shared by most Pakistanis (an overwhelming preoccupation with a perceived existential threat from India), there were no strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps. During this time, though, Khan took a very “personal approach to running the army, [which] meant he took more interest than would be usual in officer appointments.”⁷ Thus, while party membership or a particular ideology were not required to be promoted to the senior level, an aspiring officer did need to demonstrate loyalty and allegiance to Ayub Khan. This pattern did not change significantly during the tenure of General Yahya Khan.

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

See 5.

⁵ Brian Cloughley, *A History of the Pakistan Army: Wars and Insurrections* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

⁶ Lieven, 179.

⁷ Cloughley, 34.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

No.

See 5.

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

The use of the military to repress the Bengali nationalist movement in East Pakistan was a critical factor leading up to the 1971 Bangladesh war. In response to the eruption of communal violence in East Pakistan, the military launched Operation Searchlight in March 1971. The primary objective was to seize control of all major cities in East Pakistan, and then to eliminate all civilian and military opposition. The Pakistani armed forces encountered heavy resistance from the Bengali fighters, but managed to retake the last major city in May 1971. With the primary military objective achieved, the operation devolved into a brutal campaign of repression against the Bengali population. These atrocities catalyzed the independence movement in East Pakistan, thereby laying the foundation for the 1971 war with India.

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

Yes.

See 1.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

No.

However, several paramilitary organizations led by army officers provide internal and border security, particularly in the Northwest along the disputed border in the Pashtun areas with Afghanistan.⁸

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

Yes.

⁸ Cloughley, 30; Ziring, Lawrence. *Pakistan: At the Crosscurrent of History*. Oneworld, 2004: 70.

The two primary external intelligence organizations in Pakistan are the (infamous) Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Defense Intelligence of Pakistan. The Intelligence Bureau is the main internal intelligence and security organization, and is directly controlled by the head of state. The Military Intelligence agency plays a similar and overlapping role, though it focuses primarily on intra-military espionage and counterinsurgency intelligence. To some degree, the ISI, IB, and MI all watch the regular military.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

However, under the leadership of Ayub Khan, any senior officer who appeared incompetent was summarily sacked.⁹

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

No.

⁹ Cloughley, 27.