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The Deep State in Action: Military Influence on Pakistan's Political System since 1958

Abstract

Since 1958 Pakistan's government system has experienced substantial influence from its military authority which goes by the name Deep State. The Deep State label describes how military personnel together with intelligence agencies maintain their durable power to guide national decisions from hidden positions. Historic military involvement in Pakistan's politics extends across all eras as the military has exercised both direct governance and hidden political power over civilian government authorities. This paper investigates the military's rising political power from General Ayub Khan's 1958 coup through present times while assessing the direct effects of military rule on democratic processes, civil-military relations, and Pakistan's overall governance system. The paper examines military power using historical analysis to show its effect on democratic institutions along with creating political turmoil and explores political leaders' connections to civil society and military forces.

**Keywords:** Deep State, Military Influence, Civil-Military Relations, Political Instability, Pakistan's Democracy

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## Abstract

Since 1958 Pakistan's government system has experienced substantial influence from its military authority which goes by the name Deep State. The Deep State label describes how military personnel together with intelligence agencies maintain their durable power to guide national decisions from hidden positions. Historic military involvement in Pakistan's politics extends across all eras as the military has exercised both direct governance and hidden political power over civilian government authorities. This paper investigates the military's rising political power from General Ayub Khan's 1958 coup through present times while assessing the direct effects of military rule on democratic processes, civil-military relations, and Pakistan's overall governance system. The paper examines military power using historical analysis to show its effect on democratic institutions along with creating political turmoil and explores political leaders' connections to civil society and military forces.

## Keywords:

[Deep State](#), [Military Influence](#), [Civil-Military Relations](#), [Political Instability](#), [Pakistan's Democracy](#)

## Introduction

The domestic politics of Pakistan experienced significant military control throughout its political development starting from 1947. General Ayyub Khan took control through the first military coup of 1958 which became a model for subsequent political interference. The military institution gained total dominance of Pakistani politics in 1958 by assuming

control of executive decisions and regional defense tasks alongside international diplomacy. The blending of military with civilian leadership evolved into the "deep state" phenomenon according to current scholars denoting hidden government organizations that exercise control over national operations (Mahmood, 2023).



The Pakistani military upholds its power by using judicial involvement to regulate media systems and economic control together with an extensive presence of former military personnel in bureaucratic positions. The military conducts extensive supervisory roles that prevent civilian governments from autonomy while blocking democracy from developing with proper civil oversight (P Junejo, [2024](#)).

The executing branch controls Pakistani political structures through both direct and indirect interference beginning from 1958 until now. Research analyzes the military's powerful disruptions as well as the structural elements that enhanced military excellence and investigates how intelligence agencies affect democracy by politically manipulating Pakistan.

The Pakistani military rules indirectly through its influence on officials after direct military responsibilities by steering judges and managing media ownership and agencies while placing military retirees in important administrative posts (Kumar, [2020](#)). Military control establishes a continuing system where government leaders must submit to military authorities which blocks democratic growth and makes civilians lose control.

This research study discovers how Pakistan's military permanently expanded its political authority between 1958 and documents both open and secret interference methods. This paper studies the most important military takeovers and infrastructure additions for military power along with their effect on intelligence services in shaping Pakistani political modifications.

### Deep State in Action

Non-elected official bodies like military units and intelligence agencies join leaders of governmental institutions to direct political institutions from hidden positions. The term Deep State from Pakistani political circles means the military takes over government decisions and avoids civilian monitoring to handle defense affairs and international relationships as well as media support (Rahman & Shurong, [2021](#)). These institutions remain invisible while they lead democratic actions and make themselves stronger through political power.

### Historical Overview of Military Influence

General Ayub Khan executed the first military takeover of 1958 which became the foundation of consistent military control over politics (Rahim, [2023](#)). The rule of Ayub Khan brought a presidential system to Pakistan that produced executive control while diminishing parliamentary monitoring capabilities. Although the economic achievements of his rule were notable he simultaneously heightened political suppression by curbing speech liberties while manipulating the electoral process.

General Yahya Khan took control of the military in Pakistan leading to the country's failed conflict with India and ultimately causing East Pakistan's separation that became Bangladesh (Shah, [2021](#)). The national crisis resulted in military discredit which in turn enabled Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to serve as prime minister briefly. General Zia-ul-Haq ended Bhutto's government through a coup that brought military-backed authoritarianism with Islamic policy measures (Khan, [2019](#)).

General Zia's leadership advanced military control of Pakistan's political dynamics through two means: he unified armed forces with state institutions by regulating judicial and media sectors while forming better diplomatic relations with America during the Soviet-Afghan conflict (Bandesha, [2024](#)). The long-term consequences of his governance led to an environment of radicalization while it harmed democratic foundations and embedded military influence in national security and foreign policy administration. After Zia's death in 1988 both the democratic governments headed by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif encountered dismissal attempts orchestrated by military supporters within the political establishment (Hussain et al., [2021](#)).

In 1999 General Pervez Musharraf carried out a coup which he presented as necessary because of poor economic leadership and unstable political conditions. The period of Pervez Musharraf as president brought together economic restructuring efforts with both stern political control at home and the United States alliance in anti-terrorism operations (Malik, [2021](#)). The administration of Pervez Musharraf expanded military control in governing the country as armed forces took over central aspects of national and international policymaking.

Since Musharraf's departure through resignation in 2008 the military established an ongoing hidden influence which has predominantly focused on managing elections and dominant policy sectors. A research indicates that civilian governments consistently face difficulties in countering military power which remains entrenched within Pakistan's political system (Rafique et al., [2023](#)).

### **Indirect Control: The Military as the Invisible Arbiter**

The military has established covert methods to affect politics that stop short of taking complete power through coups. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) acts as an intelligence agency to manipulate elections push ideological propaganda and damage political opposition groups (Razzaq, [2024](#)). The intelligence organization ISI allegedly supported the formation of Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) in 1988 as a political alliance against Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP). During the 2018 general elections, the military used both pre-poll manipulation tactics and judicial coercion against political competition according to analysis (Shah, [2021](#)).

Military control extends especially to foreign policy matters regarding India along with the United States and Afghanistan. Indian normalization efforts of civilian leader Nawaz Sharif failed twice during his rule in 1999 and 2017. The military exercises control over foreign policy and national security domains which locks them as the final decision authority although it blocks representatives elected by the people from active participation (Craig, [2024](#)). Defense-run enterprises known as Fauji Foundation together with Army Welfare Trust exercise influential economic power throughout Pakistan. The military maintains financial independence which lets it operate without civilian oversight thus increasing its control over the state institutions.

Since 1958 the Pakistani military has deepened its political influence which has transformed governance and reduced opportunities for solid democratic rule in Pakistan. Through coups as well as legal manipulation vote tampering and financial force, the Pakistani military maintains its position as the dominant institution (Saad, [2025](#)). The long-lasting presence of Pakistan's "deep state" poses obstacles to civilian leaders in their efforts to control

policy formation external relationships and governmental operations. To estimate Pakistan's democratic growth and real democratic improvements we must study the role of its military institutions.

Since 1958 Pakistan's political system has undergone numerous transformations thanks to the military which modified its governance structures and blocked the path to real democratic order. The Pakistani military stays in power through both direct force takeovers plus indirect methods of using courts and economic powers to take part in elections. It controls all national leadership without opposition (Nasir, [2024](#)). The existence of a "deep state" proves that civilian leaders find it hard to govern political and global affairs as well as administer the government. Understanding this political state helps predict Pakistan's future path to democracy and its chances for real democratic growth. The study investigates military interventions with civilian-military relations during different presidential eras while proposing methods to decrease Pakistani political-military influence.

### **Hypotheses Development**

The following are hypotheses that this study focuses on:

1. H1. Military interventions in Pakistan since 1958 have hindered democratic development by consolidating power within military and intelligence institutions.
2. H2. The military's influence over the judiciary and media has restricted civilian governance and political accountability.
3. H3. Military-controlled economic enterprises have reinforced their long-term political dominance by ensuring financial independence from civilian oversight.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative historical assessment investigates military influence on Pakistan's political system from 1958 to date. A combination of historical records alongside scholarly articles and government documents serve to provide data for evaluating military interventions and governance structures as well as democracy effects. The research investigates military seizure examples and demonstrates how military rule occurs through judicial dominance

together with media control and economic superiority. The research uses thematic analysis methods to uncover recurring military intervention patterns along with their lasting influence on civil-military relationships. Through this method, researchers acquire detailed knowledge about how the military continues to control Pakistan's political direction.

## **Results:**

### **Military Influence on Pakistan's Political System**

Since Pakistan formed as a nation its military leaders have always made major political decisions. Three periods of military control over the government between 1958 and 1999 severely reshaped political behavior in Pakistan (Yousafzai & Fatima, 2021). For the research period of 1958 to 1999 military governance in Pakistan influenced political operations and required evaluation through governing methods and achievements.

### **The First Military Coup in Pakistan (1958-1971)**

The Pakistani military staged its first-ever coup on October 7 1958 and changed Pakistan's path permanently. President Iskander Mirza placed General Ayub Khan in charge of Pakistan during martial law as Chief Martial Law Administrator to halt the running of constitutional processes (Lodhi, 2024). Ayub Khan rose to the presidency through military power within just a few days to start Pakistan's first military rule. Military leaders established a procedure that enabled them to control national operations and assume government authority in Pakistan.

### **Background and Causes of the Coup**

During the time of political instability, multiple institutions failed to operate effectively resulting in the coup. The creation of Pakistan as a sovereign nation faced numerous difficulties that led to multiple unsuccessful efforts towards stable government formation. Political instability emerged because the prime ministers continuously lost their positions and there was no proper electoral system or parliamentary structure thus causing a governance breakdown. Political leaders failed to resolve economic problems thus allowing public

frustration to escalate to huge proportions (Ullah & Khan, 2023).

The 1956 Constitutional document failed to establish democracy through its Islamic Republic designation. The constitutional framework established no political steadiness while remaining unaccompanied by overall popular voting since no general elections took place. The presidential power of Iskander Mirza masked democratic institutions by keeping prime ministers in office as well as refusing to maintain regular political systems. The implementation of martial law by President Iskander Mirza led to catastrophic results when it enabled Ayub Khan to replace him as leader and seize control of Pakistan (Tinker, 2021).

During this time civilian institutions fluctuated more than military organizations regarding stability levels. Through his position as Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army Ayub Khan had already gained major military power. Politicians had made governance inefficient and corrupt and the military personnel thought that they were a good enough reason to hijack authority (Rahman, 2022). Several people's thoughts expressed that it was acceptable to take over political power using military force.

### **Ayub Khan's Takeover and Policy Changes**

Ayub Khan's leadership started with the Basic Democracies system that restricted political parties and assisted the military in controlling. Under Ayub Khan, the 1962 Constitution was brought into being in which Pakistan became a presidential republic in which power was conferred on the chief executive who, by subduing the legislative and judicial branches, kept himself all-powerful. However, his economic policies only brought forth industrial advancement into prominent classes but social upheaval together with great economic differences were most apparent during his regime. During Ayub Khan's political rule, opposition leaders were kept in jail and political parties and the media were banned with censorship. Jawad & Shabbir (2024) which made him confront revolting opposition that resulted in his readiness to sacrifice his prime minister office in 1969.

### **Towards the End of Ayub Khan's Reign**

The last years of the 1960s were the highest level of unpopularity for Ayub Khan in Pakistan. Organized demonstrations which were spread all over Pakistan

were a combination of students union and trade union members along with political institutions. In this way, political suppression along with economic imbalances and restricted democratic privileges resulted in widespread discontent amongst the population. The crisis in Pakistan developed because his growing political difficulties became uncontrollable (Mugheri, 2023).

The management of Ayub Khan could no longer withstand the pressures of the people forcing him to resign in March 1969 and General Yahya Khan took leadership. Yahya Khan attained his position of military control but did two more things: promising due restoration of democracy and fair organization of elections (Abbas et al., 2024). Due to severe dilemmas in East Pakistan, the leadership shown by Yahya Khan was insufficient to curb political tensions. Whereas Bangladesh was created when Pakistan divided between East and West became the basic failure of the rule of the military from the year 1958.

### **The Second Military Regime (1977-1988)**

On July 5 1977 General Zia-ul-Haq took control of Pakistan for the second time through a military coup after dismissing Zulfikar Ali Bhutto from office. After July 5 1977 Pakistan began operating under the leadership of military dictators who implemented both Islamic principles and direct military rule (Siddiqi, 2024). General Zia declared his need for temporary martial law to hold elections and then took absolute power as president of Pakistan for eleven years which transformed every aspect of Pakistani life.

### **Context and Causes of the Coup**

The military seized power because political disorder continued plus conflicts within the military corps and election problems. The rift between East and Pakistan formed Bangladesh caused intense social instability and political turmoil throughout Pakistan during the 1970s. In 1973 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as a response to destroyed military authority established a civilian government (Lehoucq, 2021).

Bhutto established Pakistan as a representative democracy through the 1973 Constitution which ended military leadership. By running his country like a dictator he pushed away both government opponents and every major interest group. After winning all the electoral seats in the general election

the PNA accused Bhutto's party of manipulating vote counts.

People from every region of Pakistan organized protests to tell the government they wanted Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to resign and new elections to take place (Ahmed et al., 2022). The government crackdown made national disagreements between people even worse. When military officials took hold under Zia-ul-Haq they arrested Prime Minister Bhutto by presenting their actions as necessary for law enforcement operations. The Pakistani military arrested Bhutto when they established martial law on July 5, 1977.

### **Policy Modifications and Zia-ul-Haq's Domination**

Under martial law, General Zia-ul-Haq rose to complete control limiting party activities and using media restrictions plus suppression of all dissent during his takeover. Under martial law, General Zia-ul-Haq rose to complete control limiting party activities and using media restrictions before experiencing brutal assaults that led to their deaths. Zia adopted Islamization strategies to build Sharia laws and religious education to transform both Pakistan's legal system and cultural basic framework through the Hudood Ordinance (Hamrah, 2023). Under Zia the National Security Council let military institutions handle administration through decision control and legal frameworks supported by Denial of Necessity principles. When he left office Zia had to resist the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan which elevated Pakistan's value to American Cold War plans. Pakistani military control of its foreign policy grew from the US money spent on Mujahideen activities. Through his leadership, Zia changed Pakistan's politics and made military influence stronger while making religion more important in government decisions.

### **Public Opposition and Zia's Decline in Rule**

His uncommon powers to control Pakistan remained intact despite resistance from organizations working against his dictatorship. People opposed military dictatorship from 1983 onwards when MROD launched its movement. The president sent his security force to end any political challenge that defied his administration (Nelson, 2022).

Zia called Pakistani voters to publicize he would lead Pakistan as an Islamic nation in 1984. Against public opinion, Zia used this illegal decision to lengthen his presidency by five years. Zia-ul-Haq initiated nationwide political elections in 1985 which appointed Muhammad Khan Junejo as prime minister without party restrictions. Through every election, the military kept its true dominance over Pakistan's politics.

Zia Ul Haq and his senior military officials died on August 17, 1988, in an airplane incident that brought his leadership to an end (Imran, 2023). Research teams cannot find the plane crash reason that made the jet explode because mechanical error and military hits remain possible sources of failure.

### **The Third Military Takeover (1999-2008)**

Without media coverage, General Pervez Musharraf assumed the prime minister role from Nawaz Sharif on October 12, 1999. When authorities announced the third military government it became the third time Pakistani military forces had seized power of the executive branch. The military seized power when Pervez Musharraf made a decision to take control because he believed Pakistani political turmoil stemmed from state corruption while civil servants failed to show adequate economic results (Talbot, 2025). During the early stages of 1999, the rise of military-civilian institutional conflicts became more intense due to the Kargil incident. The Pakistani nation endured nine continuous years of Pervez Musharraf's leadership as he managed to achieve economic development under his authoritarian direction with direct administration control.

Pakistan entered a dangerous time of deep political turmoil during a period when economic decline and institutional governmental feuds were present. During his attempt to supervise the judiciary system Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif faced resistance from military institutions which started a power conflict between civil and military leadership. The news of Nawaz Sharif's discharge from military service reached General Musharraf when he was on a Sri Lankan official visit (Rafiq, 2022). Following this duration Nawaz Sharif wanted the army chief to step down from his position. The military forces refused to listen to all executive directives Nawaz Sharif released about power until he lost his prime minister position. Military forces took control

during sufficient time to arrest Nawaz Sharif while he remained in Saudi Arabia until the end of his life.

The power grab by Musharraf in October 1999 required him to disband the Pakistani constitution and implement new emergency measures that allowed him to control the executive branch. During his time as prime minister, he sought international backing by implementing economic reforms that Western countries needed for area stability (Zahir, 2020). During the faulty 2002 presidential elections, Musharraf received five more years as president which strengthened his control of Pakistan. Musharraf's economic drive generated infrastructure prosperity together with economic growth but his government progressively adopted authoritarian practices. Through constitutional amendments and the implementation of Legal Framework Orders (LFOs) President Musharraf expanded his executive control to preserve military supremacy in national governmental decisions.

Following the 9/11 terrorist events the War on Terror positioned Musharraf and his government to become leaders known on an international scale. The international diplomatic community supported his strategic military agreement with the USA because it brought intelligence services and footholds for military bases to Afghanistan (Ahsan & Khan, 2019). International donations to Pakistan reached billions but brought even greater terrorist dangers to her governmental establishments. Many people in Pakistan opposed Musharraf's leadership because he manipulated politics and ordered media restrictions plus civil group bans throughout the nation.

During 2007 Musharraf faced complete public disapproval and stayed without formal authority. Lawyers and opposition parties united their efforts to stop Musharraf from removing Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. This action gradually eroded his presidential authority until it dissipated completely. Police arrests of Benazir Bhutto's murderers caused important political changes to occur in December 2007 (Naz & Kanwal, 2022). The combined influence of international support and local resistance made Musharraf cease to be president. The political parties that won power in 2008 rejected all backing for Musharraf's political stance. In August 2008 the military administration surrendered control because people were preparing to impeach Musharraf.

Musharraf remained involved in handling key military operations throughout significant political moments that happened both before and after his presidency. Musharraf's economic growth plans caused vast civilian uprisings nationwide because his political suppression tactics harmed Pakistani regions. The military wanted to keep its control over politics unofficially to shape Pakistani policies after Musharraf left power. Under the third military rule, Pakistan experienced its harshest conflict between civil government officials and military administrators (Lakhani, 2025)

### **Impact of Military Rule on Pakistan's Political System**

After 1958 the military joined politics and transformed Pakistan's political system entirely by creating new government structures and updating political standards. When the Pakistani military takes part in politics it creates these primary changes:

- The military took control of democracy by making political parties surrender their power and corrupting voting methods until national institutions weakened across Pakistan (Staniland et al., 2020). Repeated military coups badly harmed both the political system and how regularly citizens participated in running their country.
- During the whole period of the Doctrine of Necessity concept military coups would only happen when both the courts and legal system granted their approval. Despite facing challenges the court surrendered to military power because legal officials supported military command as the main authority.
- The military made government policy decisions through its power grab by making civilian staff appear unnecessary. Even during unstable politics the armed forces controlled both defense and international policy matters plus key economic aspects (Zahra & Bouckaert, 2022)
- Under the leadership of Pakistani military officials, they followed armed forces-centered diplomatic strategies during the Cold War times and the War on Terror period. Historically, military leaders in foreign policy mostly discouraged diplomatic initiatives for amicable ties between Pakistan and both India

and Afghanistan. The military dominated national priorities so Pakistan adopted government decisions that opposed its main goals at particular moments.

- The military built its control in Pakistan using two corporate arms Fauji Foundation and Army Welfare Trust as financial tools. The military earned more authority in national decision-making when financial independence made it separate from civilian rule.

The powerful military institution fights ongoing battles with civilian authorities which stops Pakistan from becoming a true democracy.

### **Media and Military Influence in Pakistan's Political System**

In relation to military control, the Pakistan media acts twofold in the form that battles against military controls, and assists military leaders to gain and maintain power.

#### **Media as a Tool for Military Control**

- The military leaders employed many strategies to limit press freedom and control how news events were reported.
- Under the Press and Publication Ordinance that Ayub Khan authorized in 1962 authorities gained power to shut down news outlets seize newspapers and arrest journalists for state control over media in Pakistan (Mir et al., 2023).
- From 1977 through 1988 Zia-ul-Haq made alterations to the PPO that led his government to restrict media content supportive of his Islamic agenda.
- The government gave media freedom when Pervez Musharraf allowed private broadcasters to operate but PEMRA controlled free speech under rules.

#### **Media as a Platform for Resistance**

- Media institutions with limited freedom act as valuable platforms for fighting against military rule in Pakistan.
- The Lawyers' Movement gained national support through broadcast media that organized public opposition against Musharraf which resulted in his ouster in 2007 (Jamil, 2021).

- Supporters and opposition leaders now use new digital tools to share news and spark civil pushback against military control in public debates.

## Discussion

This research demonstrates that all military takeovers beginning in 1958 in Pakistan systematically weakened democratic institutions while giving military and intelligence organizations increasing power. Three military coups directed by Ayub Khan (1958), Zia-ul-Haq (1977), and Pervez Musharraf (1999) transformed Pakistan's governance structure by diminishing civilian governance while establishing enduring military control (Rahim, 2023). Through meddling in the judiciary and placing restrictions on political accountability the military has achieved its control goals while ensuring its preferred policies escape opposition (Kumar, 2020). Due to its management of Fauji Foundation and Army Welfare Trust enterprises the military acquired financial independence through which it operates without civilian supervision (Saad, 2025). After the military dictatorship formally collapsed intelligence agencies maintained control over elections and external decision-making processes thus damaging democratic practices (Shah 2021). The continuous military involvement in directing Pakistan's political direction creates obstacles for civilian governments that want to permanently implement democratic reforms. Besides institutional reforms judicial independence and enhanced civil society engagement, the findings indicate military power should decrease to secure democratic stability.

## Recommendations

The government of Pakistan must gain more authority through strategies that reduce the armed forces' interference in political matters. Regular institution transformation forms the base to put civilian rule above all else. Public workers should gain more authority over operations to let the legislative authority create better security policies without general involvement. Civilian control organizations will balance military power by managing foreign contacts and acquiring finances needed to dominate operations.

The illegal status of the Doctrine of Necessity should be maintained because judicial

independence failure leads to coup attempts. Protection of constitutional rights requires courts to maintain neutrality so political and military institutions should end their participation in selecting judges. The election standards require reform to stop military institutions from directing electoral management procedures. The protection of political independence at intelligence agencies must be maintained because an independent commission must provide objective evaluations of voting process integrity.

Civil rights agencies along with protected media rights enable the appropriate execution of open government principles. Freedom of political expression for the public requires the complete elimination of military control over media platforms. Public advocacy from Pakistani civil society organizations should be strengthened to advance human rights protection, democratic rule, and institutional accountability.

The total elimination of military-economic control in Pakistan will require economic liberalization as the last step. The Philippine government should monitor military operations in foundation and commercial business activities to limit military domination from gaining further power. The management of military economic achievements needs to provide civilians with the responsibility to take over projects and national decision-making abilities.

## Conclusion

Through its political intervention, the military damaged civil-military relations to such a degree that democratic institutions became targets of governance operations. Military interventions including coups together with covert activities have been persistent in Pakistan since its first military coup of 1958 thus blocking long-term democratic institution development. With the military-operative direct rule, judicial interference electoral manipulations, and control of state institutions, national leadership decisions that reduce the governing capacity of elected politicians become possible.

While civilians only sometimes lead political issues, politics has permanently been in control of the military and remained their dominant position. The leader has triggered political anomalies through the use of his authority and also caused damage to

democratic institutions and civil society restrictions. The two essential conditions of institutional interference and deliberate suppression of democratic principles were relied on by military regimes in promoting threads of their economic reforms and policy changes. After military rule, the secretive power structure of the deep state is still active because by operating in the realm of hidden networks, it regulates vital political choices.

For Pakistan to reach democracy and stability, it needs to give complete freedom to the media and

make an independent judiciary separate from military involvement in foreign policy decisions. For such a legitimate democratic government to operate properly it must be comprised of a blend of civic activists, public supporters, and members of a legitimate democratic government who have substantial safeguards in place against any military control or constitutional leadership. In order to craft a first-class democratic system of government, Aernic Pakistan must tackle foundational issues that are national in scope.

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