

FOUR

PITFALLS OF MARTIAL RULE

ON THE NIGHT OF OCTOBER 7, 1958, with the populace in the depths of slumber, President Iskander Mirza put an unceremonious end to parliamentary democracy in Pakistan. The American ambassador and the British high commissioner were among the first to find out. They were summoned to the presidency just before midnight and, in General Ayub Khan's presence, informed that martial law had been imposed in the country. The new government was to be more pro-Western than before. Under military dictatorship, local political headaches would no longer distract Pakistan from honoring its international commitments in the Cold War against communism. Mirza suspended the constitution, dismissed the central and provincial governments, dissolved assemblies, banned political parties, postponed elections indefinitely, and placed the prime minister and his cabinet under house arrest. Justifying these drastic measures, the president noted that for the past two years he had been "watching with deepest anxiety the ruthless struggle for power, corruption, the shameful exploitation of our simple, honest, patriotic and industrious masses, the lack of decorum and the prostitution of Islam for political ends." Such "despicable activities" had "created a dictatorship of the lowest order." The "mentality of the politicians had sunk so low" that he was "unable to any longer believe that elections will improve the present chaotic situation." What Pakistanis needed most was not elections but freedom from "political adventurers, smugglers, black marketers and hoarders." The coup was "in the interests of the country."¹

Addressing the nation on radio in his capacity as chief martial law administrator and the new prime minister designate, General Ayub Khan

endorsed Mirza's reasoning. The army had "always kept severely aloof from politics" since the inception of Pakistan. Left to the politicians, "a perfectly sound country" had become the laughingstock of the world. Though taking the drastic measure, the army had no intention of running the day-to-day affairs of the state. Martial law was to be administered through the existing civilian organs of government. The "ultimate aim" of the military regime was to "restore democracy" but a democracy "people can understand and work." First, the country had to be put on an even keel by eradicating disruptionists, opportunists, and hoarders, the "social vermin" of whom soldiers and people alike were sick and tired. "History would never have forgiven us if the present chaotic conditions were allowed to go on any further," Ayub contended.² Knowledge of the exact timing of the coup was confined to a small circle of three to four generals. It took a fortnight to fine-tune the troop movements, giving their commanding officers an inkling of what was afoot.

Executing the military coup was a momentous decision. The new regime was committed to centralizing state power in disregard of regional sentiments and the pro-federation consensus. This augured poorly for the future of center-province relations. An imposed unity of the sort Mirza and Ayub had in mind carried an even greater likelihood of fragmentation than the provincialism they derided. The institutional shift from elected to nonelected institutions in the first decade, which the military intervention of 1958 sought to confirm, was to endure for decades to come. Pakistan's first military intervention coincided with anti-Western takeovers in Iraq and Burma and a pro-US one in Thailand, underlining the effects of Cold War politics on the domestic calculations of national armed forces. An anatomy of the coup with its far-reaching impact on civil-military and center-region relations offers key insights into the nature of Pakistan's military-dominated state.

A "Silent Revolution"

The efficiency with which the army assumed control of Pakistan under "Operation Fair Play" made for an impressive contrast with the political disarray of the recent past. Except for troops guarding some key installations, there was no evidence of anything unusual. Public reactions to the coup were mixed. Some were profoundly relieved to see an end to the

political shenanigans of the past several years. Among the middle classes there was genuine and rational regret that parliamentary democracy, though disappointing in its operation, had been replaced by a dictatorial regime. Unable to mount opposition to the new regime, even conscientious objectors sullenly fell into line. Newspapers, which had been writing paeans to democracy, came out with editorials praising the regime's achievements.³ Civil servants started working harder, claiming it was their last chance to get the country on its feet. Yet there was no spontaneous burst of enthusiasm or rush to adorn city streets with portraits of the new regime's leaders.

Ordinary citizens were gratified to see martial law authorities wielding the stick against shopkeepers who, fearing punishment for overpricing, adopted a code of fair practice. Prices dropped; smuggled goods vanished from the market and medicines in short supply became readily available. Those with money went on shopping sprees, stashing goods the regime was helping release from hoarders. The streets were cleaner, with fewer beggars in sight. Pedestrians seemed more disciplined, and cinema audiences stood up to hear the national anthem with military obedience.⁴ This apparent transformation of the national character, as a *New York Times* correspondent reported, was attributed to "the new regime's apparent determination to make a record as the champion of the harassed man in the street." In Karachi, bus drivers were more polite. There was quiet satisfaction with the crackdown on former parliamentarians, who had been peddling influence, accepting bribes, hoarding, and trafficking in import licenses—the get-rich-instantly formula that had become the favorite pursuit of the go-getters in the land of opportunity. The politically more sophisticated, however, worried about the implications of the army action, pointing out that Pakistan's problems were far more complicated and that the generals might find it difficult to relinquish power to the civilians.⁵

They were right. Cosmetic changes were no answer to Pakistan's deep-seated political and economic problems. Politicians may have disgraced themselves with their intrigues and corruption, but the new masters—senior army officers and civil servants—were hardly exempt from these traits. The more far-sighted citizens worried about the prospects of the army becoming entangled with corruption. Instead of stabilizing politics, they feared that the suspension of democratic processes and the replacement of the 1956 federal constitution with a Punjabi-military-dominated

unitary state would heighten center–province tensions and do irreparable damage to the fragile unity of the country. Under the martial law administration, concerted steps were taken to enhance border security. An anti-smuggling campaign called “Operation Close Door” was launched in the eastern wing that led to a reduced flow of goods between the two Bengals. The drying up of the commodity trade was reflected in diminished food stocks in Calcutta markets, leading one senior Pakistani Army officer to confidently assert, “Partition has now taken place for the first time.” West Pakistani officers at the brigadier level in the eastern wing favored turning to the Turkish model and establishing semiautocratic rule for a quarter of a century. Indicative of the contempt in which they held their Bengali compatriots, they advocated adopting an uncompromising attitude toward East Pakistan and eradicating the cancer of provincialism. The regime could easily take the “wind out of the sails of potential opponents among the politically conscious minority” by replicating the supposed British example of providing the poor with access to cheap food and clothing, a reasonable administration, and a fair chance at getting justice. But these military officers also realized that they could not wait for years to show the results.⁶

Stability eluded the new dispensation at the very outset. The joint authority of president and commander-in-chief was untenable and did not last more than a few weeks. Even before the coup, Mirza had been conspiring to replace Ayub as commander-in-chief. By appearing to go along with the president, Ayub bought precious time. Once the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Munir dignified the coup as a revolutionary necessity, Ayub sprang into action to establish himself as the undisputed leader of Pakistan. With the backing of his top military commanders, he packed off Mirza to permanent exile. Ayub justified his action by accusing the former president of trying to intrigue with discredited politicians and creating factions within the armed forces through unwarranted interference. Styling himself as an enlightened strong man who believed in effective action, Ayub made the consolidation of state power and an externally stimulated economic development strategy the main pillars of his military regime. Upon assuming the office of president, he made known his preference for a system of government that was closer to the American rather than the British model. He vowed to give people access to speedier justice, curb the crippling birth rate, and take appropriate steps, including

land reforms and technological innovation, to develop agriculture so that the country could feed itself. The sweeping reforms envisaged by the military regime demanded greater centralization of state authority and better coordination between the different arms of government.

Upon becoming lord of the land, Ayub Khan withdrew the army from martial law duties, declaring the successful restoration of the civil administration. Barring those specifically on martial law duties, the bulk of the army was kept out of civilian matters. Ayub relied heavily on the two military spy agencies, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Military Intelligence (MI), as well as the civilian Intelligence Bureau (IB), which now worked directly under the chief martial law administrator. This helped secure his base within the army and cement his alliance with the civil bureaucracy. Needing to stretch his network of support more widely, Ayub used a predominantly Punjabi army and civil bureaucracy—the establishment in Pakistani political parlance—to dispense patronage to social and economic groups with political bases that were neither extensive nor independent of the state apparatus so as to pose a serious threat to the regime.

Some of the best senior officers of the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) and the brightest legal minds were pressed into the service of the regime. Aziz Ahmad was appointed deputy martial law administrator. Qudratullah Shahab became Ayub's personal secretary and top media point man before being replaced by Altaf Gauhar as information secretary. They were among the most prominent members of the senior civil bureaucracy in this period. Brandishing the rousing doctrine of a strong leadership that could weld Pakistan's disparate constituent units into a single nation and fend off India's hegemonic designs, Ayub's bandwagon attracted politicians who were willing to cut their losses and serve as junior partners to a military usurper. These included the flamboyant thirty-year-old Sindh landlord and lawyer Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was retained from Mirza's inner cabinet. Muhammad Shoaib, the pro-American former executive director of the World Bank, was made finance minister. The stage was set for the enactment of a one-sided drama in which the main character was the prosecutor, defender, and juror all rolled into one.

Needing to secure support from his main constituency in the armed forces, Ayub appointed a staunch loyalist, General Muhammad Musa, as the new commander-in-chief before turning to neutralize other potential

threats. However, his breaking of the law to establish a new order did not go unnoticed. In a telling poetic repartee, Faiz asked:

Lifeless are the sick, why don't you administer the medicine?
 What kind of messiah are you, why don't you provide the cure?

...

Will you do justice after the people have been annihilated?
 Arbiter that you are, can't you see the rising tumult?⁷

Such impertinence was duly punished. The press was suppressed and newspaper editors told to toe the line or face grave consequences. A state-controlled media advertised the regime's success in punishing black marketers and venal politicians and putting the engine of government back on track. But it did not report how intellectuals were silenced and marginalized, particularly those suspected of communist sympathies. In keeping with the regime's buzzword—targeting corruption—an estimated 1,662 members of the federal bureaucracy were disciplined and 813 dismissed on charges of inefficiency, corruption, and misuse of office. Although most belonged to the lower tiers of the state administration, a few hundred middle and higher-ranking officials had to face disciplinary action, and a dozen members of the hitherto invincible CSP were sacked.⁸ Politicians were given the unenviable choice of quitting politics or facing prosecution for corruption and misuse of office under the Electoral Body Disqualification Ordinance (EBDO) of 1959. This deprived Pakistan of the services of several experienced politicians and administrators. Ayub had concluded that the people of Pakistan were temperamentally unsuited for parliamentary democracy and needed a presidential form of government in order to be tutored in the art of democracy. With all the pieces of his jigsaw puzzle of Pakistan seemingly in place, Ayub turned his attention to the mechanics of establishing a modicum of legitimacy.

Although fundamental rights remained suspended, the regime tried earning popular support by tackling two of the most contentious issues of the period in West Pakistan: the mismanagement of evacuee property and the inequitable land tenure system. There had been unbridled corruption in the allotment of evacuee property throughout the first decade; the property distribution system was streamlined and made relatively more efficient, though not necessarily more equitable. Reforming the land

tenure system in West Pakistan posed a thornier problem. Some 6,000 landlords owned huge tracts of land and controlled access to canals vital to the agricultural prosperity of Punjab and Sindh. According to one estimate, 80 percent of the landowners in the western wing had less than one-third of the cultivable land whereas about six-tenths of one percent owned a fifth of this area. Most of the agricultural units were less than five acres each, while the big landlords had holdings ranging from 500 to several thousand acres.

The concentration of political and economic power in the hands of eighty or so large landlord families in West Pakistan posed a formidable barrier to land reforms. By contrast, the Estate Acquisition Act had breezed through the East Bengal assembly in 1950. The land reforms announced by Ayub in January 1959 were little more than a calculated sham in the redistribution of wealth. In keeping with the regime's intention to effect social and political change without any significant economic transformation, the Land Reforms Commission was asked to recommend ways of ensuring increased production while also providing social justice and security of tenure to the cultivators. The commission in its report noted that social justice and economics were not easily reconcilable. Under the circumstances, the best that could be done was to strike a delicate balance by fixing the ceiling at a level that would "eradicate the feudalistic elements" with "minimum necessary disturbance of the social edifice" while providing incentives to allow for higher levels of production. Consequently, the reforms neither addressed the problem of landless labor nor pretended to offer security of tenure. The ceiling of 500 acres for irrigated and 1000 acres for non-irrigated land was on individual rather than family holdings. This effectively exempted middle-sized landlords, raising objections from one member of the commission, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, who thought the ceiling should be much lower. He pointed out that most landlord politicians with access to state power had already parceled out land in excess of the ceiling to their family members in anticipation of the impending reform.⁹

Other loopholes in the form of exemptions for teaching, religious, and charitable institutions as well as orchards allowed West Pakistan's influential landlords to emerge unscathed from this ostensible attack on their power. Most of the acreage resumed by the state was wasteland, while huge sums were paid to the landlords as compensation. The principal ben-

eficiaries of the reforms were the army's recruiting grounds in the sparsely watered Potwar plateau, while traditional landed families in the rest of Punjab and Sindh lost out. Baloch tribesmen were the hardest hit, claiming that 2.3 million of the 2.6 million acres recouped by the government belonged to them. Resentful at not being forewarned like the bigger Punjabi, Pathan, and Sindhil landlords had been, the Baloch offered the most significant opposition to the regime over the land reforms.¹⁰ There was, however, no other major resistance to the land reform scheme. Some 20,000 peasants were given land, but without the requisite capital to develop it, most of them could not take advantage of the change in their fortunes.¹¹ Much of the appropriated land in the irrigated plains and pastoral deserts of West Pakistan was sold cheaply to the regime's supporters among army and civil officials. This was an important first step in a strategy of internal colonization designed to secure a loyal political constituency for the army outside its traditional stronghold in northern Punjab. The almost simultaneous shift in the capital from Karachi to Rawalpindi in the north left no scope for doubt that the army and not the landlords were the new power brokers in Pakistan. Ayub had struck a Faustian bargain according to which, in return for continued economic privileges, landlord politicians would accept a subservient role in the power-sharing equation. Instead of carping and complaining, the more enterprising of the landed families responded by moving capital from land to industry while others clung to their money until the regime showed more of its hand.

Controlled Democracy and Its Discontents

Ayub did not keep the country guessing very long about his vision of the future political system. While staying at the Dorchester Hotel in London, he had drawn up a plan for a controlled form of democracy that he believed was better suited to the "genius" of the Pakistani people. Presented as a *fait accompli*, the Basic Democracies Order of 1959 was authored by the eminent constitutional lawyer Manzur Qadir, who was foreign minister at the time. A blatant attempt at institutionalizing bureaucratic control over the political process, the basic democracies system virtually disenfranchised the more volatile sections of urban society—industrial labor and the intelligentsia in particular. The scales were loaded in favor of the rural notables who would dominate the new political system. They would

elect most of the 80,000 representatives, later increased to 120,000, equally divided between the wings. Known as Basic Democrats, or BDs, the representatives were to be elected on the basis of universal adult franchise to union councils and union committees in the rural and urban areas, respectively. These union-level representatives would then indirectly elect the next tier of local bodies as well as the district and divisional councils. They would also serve as the electoral college for the election of the president as well as the national and provincial assemblies. All four tiers of the system were closely monitored by the civil bureaucracy, which nominated nearly half the members of the district and the divisional councils.

In consolidating the state's hold over society by extending the scope of bureaucratic patronage—both political and economic—to the rural localities, Ayub was trying to bolster central authority by neutralizing parties with provincial bases of support. Such a controlled political system in which the representatives of the people could gain entry only by abject loyalty to Ayub was open to graft and corruption and fraught with problems for Pakistan's federal state. Designed to insulate the center from the campaigners of provincial rights, the basic democracies system simulated the British colonial policy of preventing the aggregation of nationalist demands. The first round of elections for basic democrats was held in January 1960. The following month, a record 95.6 percent of the BDs voted to endorse Ayub Khan as president and authorize him to frame the new constitution. Three days after being elected president, the chief martial law administrator appointed a constitutional commission to examine the reasons for the "failure of the parliamentary system" in Pakistan.

For a man whose retainers told him he could be king, Ayub was now completely beholden to his favorites in the civil bureaucracy. The confluence of sycophancy and unchecked powers of patronage produced impractical ideas, including the notion of indirectly elected party-less assemblies. This proposal was rejected by the constitution commission's report. Ayub skirted around the difficulty by appointing a cabinet subcommittee to study the report. After getting his way, the general on March 1, 1962, gave the nation a constitution based on a one-chamber legislature with equal representation for both wings and a presidential form of government. The Bengali minister of law Muhammad Ibrahim, who had advocated the need for a federal constitution in the preceding months, relinquished his office on April 11, 1962. Ayub Khan acknowledged that on

essentials like the constitution, the two men were “poles apart,” adding that accepting Ibrahim’s views would have entailed “laying the foundation of a bloody revolution in the country.”¹² By railroading the 1962 constitution of his choice, Ayub may have done just that.

The state’s designation was changed from the “Islamic Republic of Pakistan” to the “Republic of Pakistan,” and all references to the Quran and the sunnah in the 1956 constitution were deleted. Amendments to the constitution required a two-thirds majority in Parliament and presidential concurrence. The judiciary was stripped of powers to question any law passed by the legislature. Ayub justified the concentration of powers in presidential hands by pronouncing Pakistan incapable of working the Westminster system. The secret of the British parliamentary government’s success, he maintained, was a higher level of education, prosperity, public spirit, integrity, and, above all, “a really cool and phlegmatic temperament” that “only people living in cold climates seem to have.”¹³

Vain, arrogant, and quick-tempered, Ayub Khan was wary of letting “rabble-rousers” provoke people’s emotions. Cast in the mold of British colonial thinking, he planned on running Pakistan as a unitary state with a no-nonsense attitude toward proponents of regional rights. Ayub found a perfect instrument for his authoritarian rule in Malik Amir Mohammad Khan, the Nawab of Kalabagh in Mianwali district of northern Punjab, who was appointed governor of West Pakistan in April 1960. A ruthless administrator and a wily political manipulator, the thick-mustached Kalabagh kept firm controls on the press and used the police to silence the regime’s opponents. Stories of his tyrannical methods have passed into Pakistani folklore, making him Ayub’s most feared and hated lieutenant. Yet he functioned primarily as Ayub’s point man and did everything with the president’s sanction, hounding those opposed to the president and taking blame for his unjust acts.¹⁴ Frustrated by the regime’s autocracy, the politically sidelined former Unionist premier of undivided Punjab, Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana, suggested that the best assurance for stability might be for Pakistan to become a monarchy so that succession could remain in Ayub’s family.¹⁵ The projection of the president’s imperial affectations by the official media invoked ideas of Ayub as the perpetual ruler of Pakistan. As he himself mused, the “real trouble” was that the people of Pakistan had “never been the masters of their own destiny” and, as a result, were “instinctively suspicious of their rulers.”¹⁶

Whatever the justification for Ayub's dictatorship, the regime needed to cloak itself in some semblance of democracy. Within weeks of the promulgation of the new constitution and the lifting of martial law, the Political Parties Act legalized the formation of parties. This brought the Muslim League out of the woodwork, a pale shade of its illustrious forbear, split between the Council Muslim League, representing the stalwarts of the old party, and the progovernment Convention Muslim League. In a typically Pakistani all-in-the-family twist to politics, the president's estranged younger brother, Sardar Bahadur Khan, who headed the Muslim League's parliamentary party in the West Pakistan assembly before the coup, became leader of the opposition in the assembly. The rift between the two brothers was personal, not political. They had fallen out when Ayub Khan married his daughter Nasim to the Wali of Swat's heir instead of Sardar Bahadur's son, to whom she had been promised. Tall, round-faced, and sporting a brushed-up moustache, Sardar Bahadur was the spitting image of his elder brother. Objecting to Ayub's rejection of a more open political system but using his relationship with the president for political advantage, he provided loyal opposition rather than a real threat to the regime.

Even a foolproof political system that made the will of the people irrelevant did not guarantee the general's hold on office. No sooner had martial law been lifted than the opposition denounced the 1962 constitution as undemocratic. The ban on hundreds of politicians disqualified by the regime was retained, limiting the value of the initiative in the eyes of the opposition. Yet elections to the national assembly brought in several politicians who demanded the restoration of fundamental rights in the constitution. In October 1962, a National Democratic Front was formed consisting of more than half a dozen parties, including the Council Muslim League, the Awami League, the National Awami Party, and the Jamaat-i-Islami. They demanded adult franchise and objected to the arbitrary displacement of parliamentary democracy by a highly centralized presidential system and indirect elections. With Kalabagh showing excellent results in obstructing, if not breaking up, the opposition in West Pakistan, Ayub now needed someone comparable in East Pakistan. Abdul Monem Khan, a Bengali lawyer who had been elected unopposed to the national assembly and served as health minister in the first central cabinet formed after the 1962 constitution, was chosen as governor of the eastern wing. An Ayub loyalist by necessity, Monem Khan's corruption and strong-arm

tactics against the political opposition in the eastern wing made him one of the regime's die-hard supporters.

Amid growing acrimony with the opposition that was greatly embittered by gubernatorial arrogance in both wings, Ayub could not amend the constitution in the absence of the necessary parliamentary majority. In a clear defeat for the government, the first amendment to the constitution made fundamental rights defensible in the law courts. The appointment of Justice Cornelius as the chief justice of the Supreme Court gave a fillip to the fundamental rights lobby to the detriment of the military-controlled legislative and executive organs of the state. But here was the rub. While giving the 1962 constitution a democratic touch, the first amendment conceded the ulema's demand to change the nomenclature of the state by adding "Islamic" before the "Republic of Pakistan." This and subsequent amendments to the constitution demonstrated to the soldier-statesman that, try as he may, there was nothing to prevent politicians from coalescing with the ulema to undermine his vision of stability and progress. Despite his aversion to party politics, Ayub took the decisive plunge and added the presidency of the Convention Muslim League to his already colorful assortment of offices.

Ayub's formal entry into politics in 1963 made it doubly important to strengthen his support among the elected representatives. Providing differential economic patronage to a freshly cultivated leadership in the rural areas and the regime's supporters among business and state officials in the urban areas was essential for the success of the basic democracies system. In a cash-starved state, this was possible only by soliciting handsome doses of foreign assistance. Aiming to industrialize and militarize Pakistan in the shortest possible time, Ayub wanted to wash his hands of all political constraints by getting Parliament to rubber-stamp his policies. This included an unabashedly pro-American foreign policy that ran the risk of jeopardizing Pakistan's national security by antagonizing the Soviet Union irreparably. These were, however, concerns for a later day. For now, Ayub had no hesitation in joining hands with the United States in the hope of raising a credible military defense against India.

Foreign Policy and Domestic Dissonance

As early as December 1958, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the youthful commerce minister, said at a meeting of the federal cabinet that Pakistan was depending

far too much on America and needed an independent foreign policy consistent with its sovereignty. Ayub countered this by saying that Pakistan's foreign policy was driven by security concerns. One had to approach foreign policy in a "realistic manner without being sentimental about it." The hard truth was that "our country would have ceased to exist if the U.S. economic and military aid had not been forthcoming." The only other option available was for Pakistan to look toward the Soviet Union for money, and that would almost certainly "reduce us to the level of a satellite country."¹⁷

If securing the territorial integrity of Pakistan was the primary motivation of Ayub's foreign policy, Kashmir and water disputes with India topped his agenda. Advocates of an independent foreign policy like Bhutto maintained that the tilt toward America was inconsistent with Pakistan's need to resolve Kashmir and the Indus water issue since Washington would stop short of doing anything that might upset New Delhi. In a startling admission of the limitations of his carefully cultivated pro-American policy, Ayub conceded that security pacts with America had "rendered the solution of Kashmir more difficult" as India pointed to the changed military balance in the region to justify its stance on the issue. However, the military assistance these deals had fetched for the armed forces had "underwritten the integrity and security of Pakistan." "We might not be able to go to war with India with the strength that we had," Ayub declared, but now Pakistan was "strong enough to deter India from attacking us."¹⁸

Washington's generosity included assistance under the Atoms for Peace program to help Pakistan develop expertise in nuclear science and technology as well as a multimillion dollar agreement to finance a rural development program needed to sustain the basic democracies system. In return, Ayub permitted the Americans to carry out surveillance flights from Pakistan Air Force facilities. These were monitored from Badaber base near Peshawar. It was from here that Francis Gary Powers flew the U-2 spy plane that was shot down on May 7, 1960, by the Soviets. Apart from the sheer embarrassment of being caught red-handed facilitating a US covert operation, the U-2 affair exposed Pakistan to the Soviet threat without any commensurate improvement in the quality or quantity of American military assistance. The continued American presence in Badaber spotlighted Pakistan's compromised sovereignty. A request by the acting for-

eign minister Bhutto to visit the base was turned down by the Americans, who incurred his abiding wrath by keeping him confined to the cafeteria.

The U-2 incident might have created a national uproar, if not brought down the government. With a military dictator and a toothless Parliament, however, the blow to Pakistan's strategic security was allowed to wear off quietly. If Ayub had cushioned his pro-American policy against attack, his regime's modernist and secular vision was acutely vulnerable to a popular whiplash by would-be religious divines looking for an opportunity to make a dramatic impression in politics. Ayub held the self-appointed guardians of Islam in utter contempt. He believed they distorted the spirit of Islam, "flourish[ed] on the ignorance of the people," and were the "deadliest enemy of the educated Muslim."¹⁹ Though he never wavered in his low opinion of those who peddled religion for popular consumption, his determination to resist the ulema visibly weakened after an initial spurt of modernist reforms. Using the cover of martial law, Ayub in March 1961 had introduced changes in Muslim family laws. These strengthened women's rights by imposing restrictions on polygamy and the verbal pronouncements of divorce. The ulema raised a storm against this unwarranted interference in Muslim law that, following colonial practice, they believed was their jurisdiction. Ayub remained steadfast in the face of agitation against the family law ordinance, although he later not only agreed to change Pakistan's name to an Islamic republic but also constituted the advisory Council of Islamic Ideology in August 1962. An Institute of Islamic Research was also set up the same year.

These gestures to Islam did not alter the essentially secular thrust of state policies until the mid-1970s. But there was a contradiction between the emphasis placed on Islam in the discourse on national unity and the desire to keep right-wing parties using religion as a cover for their political ambitions at bay. In the opinion of the former chief justice and first law minister under the 1962 constitution, Muhammad Munir, "one of the most serious threats to the future political stability and well-being of Pakistan was the multiplication of Islamic parties." He thought it "characteristic of a society like Pakistan's that when political life began on a mass scale it should express itself first in terms of religious fanaticism, since the people were so much more religiously than politically minded."²⁰ Even Daultana, who had pushed for land reforms giving peasants security of tenure, thought no "secular political party" could unite Bengalis, Punjabis, Pathans,

Balochis, and Sindhis into a single unit. He deplored the reluctance of certain East Pakistani politicians to revive the Muslim League in preference for a party that non-Muslims could join. Islam, he claimed, was “the only common value binding the people of East and West Pakistan together.”²¹

The tactic of keeping Islam in play, in order to keep the so-called religious parties out, produced a bittersweet harvest. On the positive side, the decision gave the modernist viewpoint on Islam an upper hand. Ayub projected his own notion of Islam for nation-building purposes. There was no contradiction between his insistence on a strong center and Islam, which was the “prime mover in attaining . . . progress, prosperity and social justice.”²² This exposed him to acerbic criticism from Mawdudi’s Jamaat-i-Islami, which accused the government of undermining Pakistan’s Islamic ideology both in form and substance. In November 1963, the student wing of the Jamaat-i-Islami, the Jamiat-i-Tulaba, led student protests against the regime in key cities of West Pakistan. Proving its martial colors despite the civilian guise, the regime banned the Jamaat-i-Islami in January 1964. The Supreme Court declared the government action to be in violation of the fundamental right of association. This hinted at the judiciary’s role as the sleeping giant that could, if it so wished, keep more effective watch and ward on the powers of an overweening executive than an ineffectual legislature. Though bolstering the confidence of political parties, the decision made Ayub more suspicious of politicians, whether of the liberal or of the socially conservative ilk.

The withering effect of ideological differences over the role of Islam in the affairs of the state was the lesser of the challenges confronting Ayub’s regime. Far more dangerous for the sustainability of the regime was its willful disregard of regional sentiments in the name of national unity based on Islam. Bengalis continued to be poorly represented in the military and the upper echelons of the civil bureaucracy. Anxious to step up the industrialization of the country, the regime opted to give a variety of tax incentives to big business at the cost of agriculturalists and small bazaar merchants. The bonus voucher scheme, introduced in 1959 as an export control measure to protect domestic industry, enabled well-connected businessmen to multiply their profits in no time and contributed to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few industrial houses.²³ Economic policies emphasizing growth rather than redistribution heightened

disparities between the two wings and made the lines dividing the rich from the poor starker than ever. Political denial matched by the dubious mantra of functional inequality—enhancing production rather than redistribution—as necessary for rapid economic growth bred hostility toward Ayub’s regime, especially in East Pakistan, where demands for provincial autonomy were backed by charges of West Pakistani colonization. Containing 55 percent of the country’s population, the eastern wing’s export earnings from raw jute had been financing industrialization in the western wing. The Ayub regime’s policy of state support for the private sector paid rich dividends in West Pakistan, where urbanization gathered pace, while the eastern wing, a river delta barely above sea level, was left out in the cold.

At the time of independence, West Pakistan’s per capita income was 10 percent higher than in the eastern wing. The Indo-Pakistan agreement on the Indus waters negotiated under the auspices of the World Bank in 1962 was not matched by a similar settlement on the sharing of the eastern rivers. Nor were steps taken to cope with the perennial problem of flooding in East Pakistan. By the late 1960s, the western wing had stolen the march with a per capita income that was nearly 40 percent more than East Pakistan’s.²⁴ Inequalities in growth rates of income between the two wings ought not to distract from variations in the incidence of poverty within West Pakistan. A few dozen industrial families, wealthier and innovative farmers, civil servants, and members of the armed forces reaped the fruits of foreign-aided development policies. With the exception of a few districts, there were pockets of acute poverty in many parts of Punjab. The problem of intraprovincial inequalities, however, took a back seat amid a charged debate on provincial autonomy fueled by feelings of discrimination in East Pakistan. Bengalis were galled to see non-Bengali families controlling the few large-scale industries in their province. They complained of central neglect in the granting of import licenses and receipt of development funds. Feeling isolated and alienated, Bengali economists in the national Planning Commission advocated the “two economy” thesis, according to which the economies of the two wings had to be considered separately. Apart from obvious differences between them due to geographical and cultural factors, the main justification was the discriminatory effects of the center’s investment policies. Drawing on the logic of investing in areas that offered the highest economic return, the policy was

not appropriate in a country where the limited mobility of people and goods between two far-flung wings prevented the spread of the gains evenly.

Intended to underscore the economic deprivations of East Pakistan, where per capita income lagged behind that of West Pakistan, the thesis was flayed by officialdom as proof of an Indian conspiracy to break up the country. The situation was only marginally better in the western wing, where the non-Punjabi provinces loathed the one-unit system, which they saw as a ruse to deny them their due share of political and economic power. The concentration of political power and wealth in the hands of a few notable landed and industrial families in the country meant that even in Punjab there were few genuine supporters of the military regime. After donning the civvies, Ayub relied on the loyal support of a charmed circle made up of landed politicians-turned-basic democrats, around 15,000 senior civil servants, 500 senior military officers, and the scions of under two dozen wealthy urban families who controlled the industrial, banking, and insurance assets of the country. One fierce bend in the wind could bring down Ayub's regime like a house of cards.

With the intelligence agencies preparing reports based on rumor, gossip, and surmise more than an assessment of the political situation on the ground, the president was oblivious of the discontent brewing at home. The regime's takeover of Progressive Papers owned by the leftist Mian If-tikharuddin in 1959, the imposition of a system of "press advice" under which government laid down rules for what journalists could report, and the setting up of a National Press Trust in 1964 served to put an end to any serious intellectual debate in the country. Offensive antigovernment comment in the press ran the risk of newspaper establishments being shut down in a flash. The government's use of advertisements, both as reward and punishment, forced even the most obstreperous journalists to observe an intellectually deadening self-censorship. Plans to start a state-controlled television service promised to intensify the policy of indoctrinating the public in the cause of "national progress." This augured poorly for the regime's ability to keep abreast of the shifting moods of the populace and remain flexible in its approach to the challenge of governance. In the astute evaluation of the *Times* of London correspondent, "only a freeing of the political and intellectual climate" could "bring the government into a fruitful relationship with the intellectual and popular trends in the

country.” The supreme irony was that Ayub, with an impregnable hold on power, faced no danger in taking this oppressive course of action while “continued enforced conformity” was more than likely to result in “alienation as well as sterility.”²⁵

Surrounded by lackeys in the CSP, the Central Sultans of Pakistan as the civil servants were sarcastically called, Ayub was unaware of the mounting dissatisfaction with his policies, particularly in the eastern wing. If he had been unsure before, the soldier-turned-dictator was by now impervious to such intimations of trouble. As far as he was concerned, the people of East Pakistan were “incapable of seeing beyond their nose.” They had squandered an empire in 1905 by siding with the Hindus against the partition of Bengal and with “one false step” could “go back to serfdom under the Hindus for another couple of centuries.”²⁶ If his historical understanding was flawed, Ayub had amazing reserves of hubris. Not content with the authority he had already mustered, the soldier-president elevated himself to the rank of field marshal without having fought a single battle. This made him the supreme commander of the military. Facing a reelection campaign, the president needed an uplift of this kind. Any presidential election held within the confines of the basic democracies system was bound to be a cakewalk for Ayub. The electoral arithmetic gave him an overwhelming advantage. As many as 3,282 of the BDs constituting the electoral college were government nominees from the semiautonomous tribal areas of Pakistan’s northwestern frontier. Elsewhere, too, the BDs could hardly be expected to perform collective suicide by subscribing to the opposition’s call for the restoration of parliamentary system of democracy based on direct elections.

Hoping to make the most of the opening provided by a presidential election, the opposition parties formed the Combined Opposition Parties, representing a wide spectrum of public opinion in the two wings ranging from the far left to the extreme right. Their only common objective was to get rid of Ayub. What rattled the regime was not this ragtag alliance but its choice of presidential candidate—Fatima Jinnah, the sister of the founder of the nation. In an overreaction that was to later cost him dear, the entire administrative machinery was mobilized in Ayub’s favor. What followed was a thoroughly rigged electoral process. There were blatant financial irregularities, misuse of government resources, and extensive electoral malpractice. Ms. Jinnah nevertheless gave Ayub a few palpitations



Ayub Khan with Fatima Jinnah at a reception on January 16, 1959. *The White Star Photo Pvt. Ltd. Archive.*

with her good showing in East Pakistan and Karachi, the commercial hub of Pakistan. When the results of the January 2, 1965, elections were counted, Ayub had won a comfortable majority, bagging 49,951 votes against his opponent's 28,691. Dismissing the election as a farce, Fatima Jinnah portentously stated that "the so-called victory of Mr. Ayub Khan" would turn out to be "his greatest defeat."²⁷

She was right. Even if the regime's media gurus could conjure up ways to claim successes on the domestic front, there were tangible difficulties in pronouncing any victories vis-à-vis India. In a setback to Ayub's American-centered foreign policy, relations with Washington soured during John F. Kennedy's tenure as president in 1960. The fanfare surrounding Ayub's visit to Washington in 1961 soon died down. The new Democratic administration considered India a better bet for both strategic and economic reasons. The Sino-Indian War of 1962 only confirmed the US White House of this view. In the aftermath of the war, India became the recipient of generous flows of military and economic assistance from the

West. Ayub was deeply worried about Pakistan's sagging relationship with the United States and feared that a potentially debilitating strategic imbalance was being created by the Western rearmament of India. The feisty Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was now foreign minister, persuaded Ayub that the best retort to the shift in US priorities was to forge stronger ties with China. Though a member of SEATO, Pakistan needed to take a more independent line on American policies toward Vietnam in order to establish its credentials in Asia and Africa. British policies east of Suez, most notably in Malaysia, also came in for hard questioning.

The Pakistani government's newfound anti-imperialist stance aimed at correcting the negative public impression of the directions taken in the past on the foreign policy front. Far more substantive were the series of trade and military agreements negotiated with China that helped establish a number of industrial projects in Pakistan. To propel the new relationship into greener pastures, Bhutto advocated settling Pakistan's boundary with China. On March 2, 1963, he signed the Sino-Pakistan boundary agreement delimiting some 300 miles of their common boundary separating Hunza and Baltistan from Sinkiang. In return for acknowledging Chinese sovereignty in large swathes of northern Kashmir and Ladakh, Pakistan got 1,350 of the 3,400 square miles in dispute, including 750 square miles previously under Chinese control. It was a typically Bhutto move. Lacking the requisite firepower to take on India, Pakistan underlined its rejection of the status quo by voluntarily giving away a part of the disputed territory to China. The stroke of genius qualified Pakistan for Chinese economic and military largesse at a time when American assistance was beginning to dry up.

The 1965 War with India

The success of his China initiative encouraged Bhutto to try and assert himself more on the foreign policy front. He began hobnobbing with Aziz Ahmed, the foreign secretary, and Major General Akhtar Hussain Malik, the commander of the Twelfth Division stationed near Indian-occupied Kashmir. They agreed that Pakistan had to try and take Kashmir before India edged ahead decisively on the military front with the help of Western armaments. The situation on the ground looked propitious. There was growing disaffection in Kashmir with New Delhi's meddling designed to

erode the autonomy of the former princely state. On December 27, 1963, the underlying ferment in the state erupted into popular protests after the theft of the Prophet Muhammad's hair from the Hazrat Bal shrine. The relic was recovered, but to the dismay of Kashmiri Muslims, the culprits were never punished. In April 1964, the preeminent Kashmiri leader, Sheikh Abdullah, jailed in 1953 because of differences with Nehru, was released from prison. After he returned from a visit to Pakistan, where he received a warm welcome and held talks with Ayub and Bhutto, Abdullah was rearrested, infuriating his Kashmiri supporters. Anger toward India did not necessarily translate into pro-Pakistan sentiments but was nevertheless an opening worth exploiting further.

Relations with Afghanistan, too, were less overtly hostile than ever, releasing critical pressure on the Pakistani Army in the north as well as along much of the western front. This would enable the Pakistani Army to use its full force against India. These musings received a boost when in the spring of 1965 Pakistan appeared to have got the better of India militarily in a clash over the Rann of Kutch, an arid desert abutting Sindh and Indian Rajasthan. Bhutto wrote a ten-page memorandum calling for a military push into Kashmir and, more implicitly, for a Pakistani-backed Kashmiri uprising against India. Taking comfort in India's defeat at Chinese hands and its misadventure in the sand dunes of the Rann of Kutch, Bhutto argued that the Pakistani Army could outclass its rival despite being outnumbered by four to one. "The situation precipitated by India" in the Rann of Kutch gave Pakistan "an opportunity to hit back hard in self-defence, maim and cripple her forces in such a way as to make it virtually impossible for India to embark on a total war against Pakistan for the next decade or so." Timing was of the essence. With the "advent of massive U.S. military assistance," India's "desire to administer a crushing defeat to Pakistan is bound to increase with the passage of time." Although any conflict could potentially spiral out of control, India was "at present in no position to risk a general war of unlimited duration for the annihilation of Pakistan." Apart from economic difficulties, India had to contend with the "relative superiority of the military forces of Pakistan" in terms of equipment and morale. India in all probability would want to take some military action to restore the self-esteem of its armed forces after being discomfited in the Rann of Kutch. However, Bhutto thought it unlikely that India would take retaliatory action across Punjab's frontier, where

Pakistan's forces were well poised or, for that matter, disturb the status quo along the cease-fire line in Kashmir. It might be tempted to take military action in East Pakistan, where Pakistani defenses were vulnerable, but it could do so only at the risk of provoking the Chinese.²⁸

As commander-in-chief of the Pakistani Army General Musa realized, it was a tactically ingenious but strategically flawed plan. The success of a forward thrust in Kashmir depended on India not attacking West Pakistan along the international border. In a firm but politely worded note to Bhutto, Musa disputed the notion that India would at most strike in the southwestern sector of East Pakistan and that a general war of even a short duration was improbable. On the contrary, Musa thought Pakistan had to be fully prepared to take immediate and effective counterretaliatory measures on several fronts. Nothing could be more "futile" than to take territory in Kashmir that "we might lose due to our failure to protect it."²⁹ What seems to have ultimately clinched the argument for Ayub was his foreign minister's confident assertion that as far as Kashmir was concerned, it was a matter of acting now or never. By early 1965, the prospects of an Indo-Pakistan rapprochement on Kashmir looked remote. India openly dismissed the UN resolutions on the issue as "obsolete" because of Pakistani and Chinese aggression in Kashmir. Even General Musa agreed with Bhutto that regardless of whether Pakistan managed to maintain a military balance with India, it would be too late two to four years down the line to take Kashmir. Playing on the president's fears of the new direction in American policy toward the subcontinent, Bhutto wrote impishly: "just as today we have to be thankful to the United States for placing us in a position in which we can wage a war of self-defence, two years from now, our people will curse the United States for giving India the capacity to launch a war of annihilation on Pakistan."³⁰

In the first week of July 1965, Bhutto found his opportunity to go for the kill once Washington abruptly announced a two-month postponement in the meeting of the consortium of countries set up to sanction foreign aid to Pakistan. In a flurry of memos directed at persuading Ayub to approve military action in Kashmir, the foreign minister interpreted the delay as a political move by President Lyndon Baines Johnson. Facing escalating domestic and international pressure over his government's policy in Vietnam, Johnson was seen to be angling for Pakistan's acquiescence in America's global policy of pitting India against China. This would be "disastrous"

because the United States wanted to align Pakistan behind India in “a de facto Akhund Bharat arrangement” that would “mean the complete surrender of Jammu and Kashmir and the relegation of the Pakistani people to the position of second class citizens suffering the same fate as that of Muslims in India.” No regime could survive such a disastrous course of action, as Pakistanis “will never accept a position of subservience to India.”³¹

In an assessment fluctuating between passages of acute perceptiveness and extreme emotion, Bhutto told Ayub to take a tough stand with Washington. During the three years since the Sino-Indian War, Pakistan had demonstrated “utmost restraint” toward US policies that had “gone to the extent of endangering our national security.” Despite all the “valuable contributions” they had made to the American cause internationally as a member of CENTO and SEATO, Pakistanis were being threatened and browbeaten. A modest concession to the US hope of aligning Pakistan behind India in order to contain China would result in losing all the advantages of the carefully cultivated pro-Chinese policy. Pakistan would lose respect domestically and internationally. Gamal Abdul Nasser had shown the way with his gallant stand when threatened by the Americans over the Aswan Dam. Nasser told them to “go drink from the Red Sea.” Washington’s immediate reaction was to retract its position, illustrating the Anglo-Saxon tendency “to exploit decency and moderation” but “speedily come to terms with obduracy and firmness.” It was time Pakistan showed stiff resolve against American dictation. Even if Washington withdrew all its aid, which was doubtful, “the Pakistan nation will not crash like a stock exchange.” The national economy was sturdy enough to tide over the crisis with some adjustment in its development goals and help from other sources.³²

With the American stock sinking sharply in the Asian political market because of the Vietnam quagmire, Bhutto did not think the United States could afford to lose Pakistan. If Pakistan could seize the advantage by making as many territorial and tactical gains as possible in Kashmir within a week or two, the UN would be forced to intervene and enforce a settlement. In his considered opinion, the people of Pakistan were more united than at any other time in the country’s history and would support any attempt to resist American interference. Bhutto accused the American Peace Corps stationed in Pakistan of engaging in unacceptable activi-

ties against the regime during the 1965 elections. “They are in our hair, under our nails—they are to be found every where,” he bellowed. Bhutto concluded by warning that the United States was now seeking to get rid of him and “even the President himself.”³³

Linking the military action in Kashmir to Ayub’s own political future was a masterstroke. Bhutto is thought to have laid the snare along with hard-liners in the civil service, such as the foreign and information secretaries Aziz Ahmed and Altaf Gauhar, to advance his own political future. The 1965 elections had underlined the difficulty of ejecting Ayub from within the confines of his bureaucratically monitored political system. So an exit strategy had to be imposed on him instead. Officials at the Indian Ministry of External Affairs attributed the incursions to “a struggle for power going on in Pakistan,” with the faction led by the foreign minister “working to remove President Ayub and substitute Bhutto as the head of the Government.”³⁴ Whatever Bhutto’s ultimate reasons for advocating a limited war in Kashmir, the president fell for it and gave the green signal for the operation. Expectation that India would not attack Pakistan if it meddled in Kashmir proved to be a chimera, sustained by faulty intelligence provided by the military’s main spy agencies. The ISI and MI assumed that there would be a spontaneous popular revolt in Kashmir soon after the incursions, which were timed to coincide with a general strike. They were wrong. Support for the 5,000 or more infiltrators, styled as “liberators” by the local populace, was passive in light of the heavy concentration of police and armed forces in Srinagar.³⁵

What followed was a bungled operation called Gibraltar, which was supplemented by Operation Grand Slam to take Akhnoor and threaten India’s hold over Kashmir. Significantly, the military high command remained lukewarm in its support for both operations, convinced that the conflict could not remain confined to Kashmir. But once Ayub had bitten on the bait, there was no scope for dissent among the officer corps. If GHQ was a less than willing participant, most Kashmiris were too absorbed with everyday struggles to earn a living to risk taking on the Indian security forces. There was no spontaneous popular revolt. Trained guerillas from camps in Azad Kashmir, some of whom were originally from Srinagar, had been organized into groups named after famous Muslim military heroes under the command of the Pakistani Army. They were supposed to pave the way for a decisive military thrust into Kashmir. Instead

of performing heroics, the infiltrators were caught the instant they entered Indian-occupied Kashmir in August of 1965. Four of them divulged the secret operational plans on All-India Radio.

India used this as the pretext to launch a three-pronged attack on Pakistan along the international border at Wagah near Lahore in the early morning hours of September 6, 1965. The attack was repelled. There were extraordinary displays of gallantry, adding to the pantheon of national heroes. Washington's decision to cut off arm supplies and stay neutral in the war came as a rude shock for Pakistan, America's most loyal ally in Asia. Unable to replenish its rapidly depleting ammunition, the Pakistani war machinery could neither best its rival nor make a decisive move to take Kashmir. As Bhutto had anticipated, the outbreak of hostilities between the subcontinental neighbors came at a most inconvenient time for the Americans, who were thoroughly engrossed with Vietnam and, closer to home, with a controversial intervention in the civil war in the Dominican Republic. The Soviets, too, were perturbed by conflict on their southern flank. It might lead to interference by outside powers, forcing them to back India against the Chinese with consequent damage to Soviet interests in North Vietnam. A cease-fire between India and Pakistan was, therefore, a top priority for Moscow, which had strategic differences but a common tactical interest with the Western powers in bringing a quick end to the war under the auspices of the UN Security Council. Recognizing that the Soviets had a stake in the resolution of the dispute, the British in unison with the Americans backed efforts by the UN Secretary General to negotiate a cease-fire while at the same secretly encouraging Moscow to take the lead in getting India and Pakistan to agree to a long-term settlement in Kashmir. This saved Pakistan from humiliation. The suspension of military supplies from the United States had grounded most of its air force and left the army capable of fighting for only a few more days.

These hard realities were a stretch removed from popular expectations in West Pakistan. Programmed by official propaganda into believing that one Pakistani soldier was equal to ten Indians, people in the western wing responded to the war with an unprecedented show of patriotism. Poets and singers volunteered their services to Radio Pakistan, which aired a series of patriotic songs that remained part of the national repertoire long after the 1965 war had slipped from public memory. The courage of the citizens of Lahore in withstanding the Indian attack and repeated aerial

bombardment was celebrated with special gusto. Pakistan's leading female singer, Noor Jahan, won hearts and minds with her inspirational and melodious songs in praise of the men in arms. Miraculous stories were circulated during the short-lived war, encapsulating the spirituality embedded in regional cultures on the one hand and, on the other, the impact of the officially encouraged belief in the superiority of the Pakistani forces over their Indian foes. Journalists returning from battlefields reported that Indians surrendered because they thought they were completely outnumbered when the Pakistani forces were actually small in number. The idea melded well with the yarn that men in white had descended from the heavens to assist the Pakistani Army. A letter appeared in the Urdu daily *Jang*, claiming that the Holy Prophet had been sighted in Medina riding a horse "Going on Jihad in Pakistan."³⁶

Notwithstanding the fantastical elements, the 1965 war elicited a rare sense of national solidarity in the west. Citizens assisted by students organized demonstrations in Karachi and Lahore in support of Pakistan's demand for a plebiscite in Kashmir. Substantial Pathan representation in the armed forces also ensured support in the NWFP. However, backing for the war was noticeably absent in the eastern wing, where Kashmir and the related Indus water dispute were nonissues. From the East Pakistani perspective, the center's preoccupation with Kashmir was a barrier to improved relations with India without which there was no real prospect of settling the dispute over the sharing of the Ganges river waters between the two Bengals. Bengalis had always resented the Pakistani military credo that the defense of East Pakistan lay in the west. They saw concrete proof of their place in the priorities of the national security state when they were left defenseless during the war. The Chinese "ultimatum" to India on September 17, 1965, demanding the removal of Indian fortifications along their disputed border in Sikkim, fell miserably short of giving East Pakistanis a sense of security. There was no chance of China intervening militarily from the north to defend Pakistan's eastern wing, but Beijing used the opportunity to condemn India's designs in Sikkim and Kashmir. This raised alarm bells in several capitals across the globe and, most important, in New Delhi. Once India promptly complied with the demand, the Chinese were at pains to deny that they had ever issued the "ultimatum."³⁷ Ayub himself was wary of encouraging a Chinese intervention, recognizing that it would mean international condemnation and likely expulsion from

the Western bloc. After the 1965 war, Pakistan accused New Delhi of pushing Muslims from Assam into East Pakistan and abruptly sealing its borders with India. This incensed Bengalis, who made a living from a thriving two-way trade in smuggled goods, and intensified feelings of alienation toward West Pakistan.

These were ominous signs in view of the economic fallout of the seventeen-day war. Heavily dependent on foreign aid, Pakistanis were astounded by Washington's suspension of military and economic assistance to protest the violation of the understanding that American arms would not be used against India. Drastic cutbacks in foreign aid followed, adversely affecting all sectors of an economy that just the previous year had grown at a rate of 6.5 percent. The official government report on the state of the economy in 1963–64 had presented a rosy picture of the future, no doubt with a view to the forthcoming presidential elections. Despite structural problems in the agricultural sector and a spiraling population growth rate, crop yields had been higher, export earnings were better than expected, and the Second Five Year Plan's ambitious target of a 24 percent national growth rate had seemed within reach. But the robustness of an aid-dependent economy could always be exaggerated. As soon as international aid was reduced to a trickle, development funds had to be scaled down in order to divert resources to defense expenditure. With debt servicing already accounting for 10 percent of the export earnings, the impact of the 1965 war on Pakistan's economic prospects were grimmer than anyone had anticipated.

Fighting a hugely expensive war against India to a stalemate was not an achievement Ayub could gloat about. The war revealed the weaknesses and incoherence in the Pakistani Army's command and execution skills. Rapid promotions through the ranks had bred a culture of sycophancy and a consequent decline in standards. The war itself exposed the army's abject dependence on the continued supply of American weapons. A US embargo on arms and ammunition to the two combatants hurt Pakistan more than India. Many in Pakistan saw this as a betrayal in their moment of dire need and led to America being dubbed a "fair-weather friend." Bhutto is generally seen to have plotted the war to sideline the pro-American party in the government and, in due course, to turn the popular rage against Ayub himself. Regardless of the veracity of the charge, the foreign minister managed to overcome his pride to plead with the Americans not

to bring the Pakistani military machine to a grinding halt. If the necessary military supplies could not be given on the usual grant basis, then Pakistanis were ready to pay cash. They would “sell all their possessions,” Bhutto asserted emotionally, “even their family heirlooms in order to get the means to continue the struggle until the Indian invasion [was] repulsed and Kashmiri rights established.”³⁸

The sentiment was widely shared in the urban centers of Punjab. Government propaganda had led people to think they were winning the war. A corollary to this misinformation was the officially planted view that Pakistan had been in a position to take Kashmir but had been forced by the international community under UN auspices to accept a cease-fire. Bhutto was among the most eloquent advocates of this view. Perturbed by Ayub’s expressions of anger at US betrayal, the Americans turned to their point man in the Pakistani capital—the finance minister Muhammad Shoaib—to assess whether the disappointing progress of the military campaign in Kashmir had changed the field marshal’s attitude. On the thirteenth day of the war, Shoaib met with Ayub and reported that he was “disenchanted with Bhutto’s reckless adventurism,” “grieved” by the losses Pakistan had suffered, reluctant to forge any alliance with the Chinese, and willing to compromise with India. But Ayub knew that an admission of failure after the sacrifices made would cause the fall of his government.³⁹

By that time Pakistan was fast running out of firepower. So it accepted the UN-sponsored cease-fire on September 22, 1965. Official media hacks created the illusion that Pakistan had “won” the war, a difficult proposition to sustain considering that India’s grip on Kashmir remained unshaken. Pakistan’s attempt to link the withdrawal of troops from the border to a settlement of the Kashmir dispute made little headway. India for its part insisted on the prior removal of all the infiltrators before it pulled back its troops. This made for an uneasy peace along the cease-fire line and gave the Americans and the British incentive to back the Soviet initiative to invite the leaders of India and Pakistan to Tashkent to discuss the formal cessation of hostilities. President Johnson summed up the American attitude when he said that both sides had to agree to the cease-fire unconditionally. The United States had to remain “strictly neutral” and issue “no threats,” but India and Pakistan “just can’t afford to have this World War III. . . . They can’t have that kind of crime around their necks.”⁴⁰

The 1965 war was a turning point in the US–Pakistan Cold War alliance. Built on mutually contradictory interests from the outset, the relationship had been on a downward incline since the Sino-Indian War in 1962, but the myth of the “special relationship” persisted. Untutored in the subtleties of international relations, ordinary Pakistanis felt betrayed and accused America of stabbing them in the back. The closure of smaller American facilities by the government was matched by public displays of outrage against the United States in the streets of West Pakistan. Mobs in Karachi were seen with handbills of a newspaper article that had appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* about how the CIA started the 1965 war in an effort to get rid of Ayub. The Americans suspected Bhutto’s hand in this and condemned his political gamesmanship. But they were more irked by the discovery that some of their Pakistani friends had sent photographs of mobs damaging the United States Information Service (USIS) installations in Karachi to the Turks, presumably to instruct them on how to deal with American facilities.⁴¹

In an effort to salvage something out of their damaged relationship and, in the process, douse the anti-American fires in Pakistan, President Johnson invited Ayub Khan to Washington in December of 1965 for a tête-à-tête. The discussions were to be based on certain ground rules that were interpreted in Pakistan as an “ultimatum,” creating a public outcry against the president going to Washington. The visit only served to underscore the State Department’s misgivings about Bhutto and strengthen American resolve not to be drawn into the Kashmir dispute beyond what was acceptable to India. In an uncompromising mood, Johnson candidly told Ayub that he should “get it out of his system” that the United States could pressure India on Kashmir. American differences with India were economic while those with Pakistan were political. Johnson then proceeded to muddy the waters by calling the 1965 war between India and Pakistan a “civil war.” As if this were not enough, the American president, sensitive to criticisms of his Vietnam policies, went out of his way to snub Bhutto by giving greater importance to the foreign secretary, Aziz Ahmed. The final straw was Johnson’s assertion that he was prepared to resume economic aid to Pakistan if the interests of the two countries converged. If this was the inducement, Ayub Khan was subtly reminded that the price for noncompliance with Washington’s purposes could mean his being ousted like other dictators who had fallen out of favor.⁴² Knowing on which

side his bread was buttered, the Pakistani president told his American hosts that he wanted “nothing to do with the Chinese” but was “trying to prevent [Pakistan] from being eaten up.”⁴³

After their meeting in the Oval Office on December 15, 1965, President Johnson talked about “how close he felt to Ayub” and how well he understood the Pakistani president’s fears and problems. He had assured Ayub that the United States would not let India “gobble up Pakistan.” In return, Pakistan had to keep China at an arm’s length.⁴⁴ Ayub’s “ecstatic” account of his final round of talks with Johnson led to much conjecture in Pakistan. On Bhutto’s instructions, the report prepared by the Foreign Office on the president’s visit to the United States stated that a “secret understanding” appeared to have been reached that entailed sacrificing the Pakistani foreign minister.⁴⁵ Tensions between Ayub and his erstwhile protégé were registered in Washington and London before they made themselves felt on the Pakistani domestic political scene. The real opening for the mercurial foreign minister came after Ayub Khan signed the Tashkent Declaration in January 1966 with Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri of India. American approval of the declaration gave weight to Bhutto’s contention that Ayub had bartered away Pakistan’s interests in Kashmir at Tashkent. Misled by the state’s propaganda machinery into overestimating Pakistan’s defense capabilities, people widely held that the war had been won militarily but lost politically. Bhutto exploited the trend in popular opinion by insinuating a possible deal between Ayub and Shastri at Tashkent. The impact of the foreign minister’s “revelation” on a volatile political situation was explosive. In June 1966, Bhutto “resigned,” ostensibly under American pressure, after being issued a notice to quit in January. According to informed sources, it was “the British who had more influence in removing Mr. Bhutto than the Americans.” In a private conversation with the Pakistani president, Prime Minister Harold Wilson had commented that he was “puzzled by the fact that Ayub and his foreign minister spoke with different voices.” Ayub was thought to have leaked the story to order to counter criticism in Pakistan that he had “given way to the Americans in sacking Bhutto.”⁴⁶

Aftershocks of War

If the 1965 presidential elections had underscored the impossibility of dislodging Ayub through the basic democracies system, an inconclusive war

with India opened the floodgates for his downfall. The costs of the war burned a gaping hole in the central exchequer's pocket. Depletion of military stores and the continued suspension of American military assistance saw defense expenditure being hiked by 17 percent during 1965–66, imposing strains on a stumbling economy. Business confidence had been badly shaken, leading to a fall in private investment and a corresponding slowing down of Pakistan's previously impressive growth rate. As industrial production dropped sharply, inflation skyrocketed. The introduction of "Green Revolution" technologies led to hikes in production for larger landlords, who acquired land previously cultivated by tenants and squeezed out middling farmers, aggravating social polarization in the agrarian sector. Increased landlessness led to a sharp rise in rural–urban migration, heightening pressures on already congested cities. Two consecutive monsoon failures in 1965 and 1966 resulted in a food shortage, particularly acute in East Pakistan, forcing the government to import food at a time when foreign aid had declined by as much as 25 percent.

Political resentments in the different regions, inflamed by the economic duress of social classes marginalized by capitalist-orientated growth strategies, were a potent brew for a regime facing international disdain for its abortive military adventurism. The 1965 war was an eye-opener for the Bengalis. They always objected to the West Pakistan–centered military doctrine, but now discovered to their dismay that their security against any Indian misadventure had been outsourced to China. For the proponents of the two-economy thesis, this was concrete evidence of the inherent injustice of East Pakistan being made to contribute to the center's defense budget while its own population lived a marginal existence.

Paradoxically, the real opportunity for the advocates of autonomy for East Pakistan came just as the economic trends were registering a slight decrease in regional disparities. West Pakistan's export earnings had started outpacing those of East Pakistan. Some Bengali entrepreneurs had begun emerging. The Ayub regime was plowing more development funds into the eastern wing and taking steps to improve Bengali representation in senior ranks of the civil service. But after the 1965 war and the adverse economic effects of restrictions on cross-border trade with India, these palliatives were an instance of too little, too late.⁴⁷ The combined impact of the center's differential economic policies and postwar inflation had reduced the already low standard of living in the East Pakistani country-

side, home to a large proportion of the industrial labor force and university students. Against the backdrop of labor militancy and radical student activism, the main political parties demanded an immediate return to democracy, the end of “one unit” in West Pakistan, and the devolution of political and economic power to the constituent units. The leader of the East Pakistan-based Awami League, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, unfurled a six-point program for provincial autonomy in February 1966, pointing to growing economic disparities between the two wings and the inadequate representation of Bengalis in the military and the civil bureaucracy.

The Awami League’s six-point program was the firecracker that lit the tinderbox of disillusionments in Ayub’s Pakistan. Instead of permitting an open discussion to flush out the merits and demerits of the Awami League’s program for provincial autonomy in public, a paranoid West Pakistani establishment accustomed to functioning like a semipolice state, dubbed the demands secessionist. It was a colossal mistake. The opposition to Ayub in West Pakistan was at sixes and sevens and in no position to seriously challenge the regime. Bhutto was a potential menace, but the state’s coercive arms were deployed to the fullest extent to restrict his political activities. Ironically, it was Ayub’s own inability to read the direction in which the wind was blowing that hastened his political demise. In September 1966, he broke off with the Nawab of Kalabagh, accusing him of deviousness and betrayal, and appointed the loyalist and former commander-in-chief General Musa as governor of West Pakistan. The removal of the regime’s most dreaded official opened up space for long-suffering opposition politicians in the west. In December 1966, the end of the ban on 5,000 disqualified politicians led to some of them joining Ayub’s Convention Muslim League, which he intended to turn into a mass-based party in both parts of the country. For a regime that was fast becoming a police state and completely out of touch with the people, this was little more than a pipe dream.

East Pakistan posed the single biggest threat to the regime. Bengalis were united in opposition to the central government and Ayub’s chosen governor, Monem Khan, had become an object of public disdain. The elected representatives were self-servingly corrupt and incapable of countering the rising popularity of the discourse on autonomy, some of which bordered on secession. In May 1967, the Council Muslim League, the Jamaat-i-Islami, and the Nizam-i-Islam parties coalesced with the Awami

League in the Pakistan Democratic Movement Although not going as far as the six-points policy, they demanded the restoration of parliamentary government based on direct elections and universal suffrage; a federal center restricted to defense, foreign affairs, currency, communications, and trade; separate foreign exchange accounts for the two wings based on their export earnings; relocation of the naval headquarters from Karachi to East Pakistan; and the achievement of parity in the state services within ten years.

By the summer of 1967, Ayub appeared to be vacillating before the force of demands for autonomy in East Pakistan. He had been struck by the strength of the provincial sentiments voiced by Bengali politicians attending the national assembly session in Rawalpindi. Some of the younger West Pakistani officers around Ayub also impressed on him the need to establish a looser relationship between the two wings as this was the only hope left for a united Pakistan. A firm believer in keeping secessionists on a tight leash, the general had gone to the other extreme and was leaning toward a confederation. The Bengali opposition leader Nurul Amin “opposed the idea and said he and his friends do not want a confederation.” The president was extremely concerned about foreign policy matters. He wanted peace with India but was “disheartened” by New Delhi’s attitude. Ayub is reported to have sounded “very anti-American” and was “very worried” because he feared “the CIA was plotting against him all the time.”⁴⁸

Ayub’s posthumously published private dairies provide a different take on his state of mind at a time of intensifying pressure. “I am giving them all the resources possible for development,” he bitterly complained, but “both the provincialists and the secessionists” have “combined to blackmail the centre and sow discord between East and West Pakistan.” To spite their coreligionists in West Pakistan, Bengalis were “consciously Hinduizing the[ir] language and culture” and “Tagore has become their god.” All the signs in East Pakistan, even number plates on vehicles, were in Bengali, with the result that “a West Pakistani feels like a foreigner in Dacca.”⁴⁹ Ayub’s line of thinking was unmistakable. Further concessions to the Bengali majority demanded their adherence to the dominant narratives of nationhood authored in the west. The more East Pakistanis wanted closer ties with India, the stronger would be the authoritarian center’s disciplinary response. In an ill-conceived step, the regime decided to extend the state of emergency that had been declared at the onset of the 1965 war.

All opposition politics were now equated in the language of officialdom as subversive antistate activity—a very wide and flexible category. In early 1968, the Awami League leader Mujibur Rahman and thirty-four others were accused of plotting with India to dismember the country. Known as the Agartala Conspiracy Case, the court proceedings provoked an outburst of Bengali anger. The regime was forced to withdraw the case. Mujib now was the icon of a surging Bengali nationalism.

Developments in the west also spelled disaster for a regime that dealt with provincial autonomy demands from a rigid national security perspective. Just as the Indian bugbear was used to delegitimize Bengali demands for a better share out of resources with the center, Balochi calls for an end to “one-unit” governance and a higher percentage of the royalties from natural gas resources at Sui were treated as part of a treacherous plot to make common cause with Afghanistan. Trapped by the limiting vision of its national narratives, the Ayub regime was unable to pacify the Baloch sardars or cultivate support among the provincial middle classes with its development projects, many of which were put into place from a security perspective. The building of military installations in conflict areas during the early 1960s provided the catalyst for armed insurgency in the Marri, Mengal, and Bugti tribal areas. By 1964 a point had been reached when Kalabagh’s stick had broken off all contacts between the tribes and the government. Upon becoming governor of West Pakistan, General Musa, a Hazara of Afghan origin who was born in Balochistan, made special gestures to placate the tribal chiefs and reconcile them to Pakistan. Except for this short-lived interlude, Balochistan remained up in arms for most of the Ayub period, forcing the central government to seek recourse in army action and aerial bombing.

No less ominous was the unrest in Sindh, where opposition to Ayub was gaining momentum. Bhutto had stormed into the limelight with his belligerent stance on the Tashkent Declaration. Bhutto had attributed Washington’s decision in April 1967 not to resume military assistance to Pakistan and India after the 1965 war to the imperatives of an escalating war in Vietnam. He characterized American policy toward Pakistan as a “please–punch” approach. To achieve its national objectives, the United States pushed Pakistan closer into its global orbit with a gesture to “please” in the form of economic assistance. This was followed by a “punch” and then another round of economic palliatives. The United States would continue

imposing its strategic objectives until Pakistan drew the line and said “no further.”⁵⁰ On December 1, 1967, Bhutto launched the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), comprising leftists and liberals of varied hues. Vowing Islam as its faith, democracy as its politics, and socialism as its economy, the PPP promised all power to the people and adopted the populist slogan: “Food, clothing and housing is everyone’s demand.” Before the PPP could sink its roots among a disaffected populace, there was a mass uprising against Ayub that knocked the bottom out of his exclusionary and repressive political system. In 1967 he had launched his autobiography, *Friends Not Masters*, with considerable fanfare as part of a public relations exercise to promote the regime both at home and abroad. While Pakistanis were agitating to protest its failures, the regime’s deep inner circle trumpeted Ayub’s accomplishments through an expensive and intrusive media blitz. The people’s rage against this blatant propaganda was palpable.

Bhutto inflamed students and lawyers with detailed descriptions of the regime’s crimes and misdemeanors, drawing attention to the corruption of Ayub’s sons and extended family; administrative inefficiency; graft and venality; heightening social and economic disparities; and, most egregiously, the stifling of any free expression of public opinion. The regime had become irremediably unpopular. Anyone with the courage to take on its coercive arms could acquire an instant following among a disenchanting and directionless populace. Bhutto was quick to snap up the opportunity and cash in on student discontents. His moment came on November 7, 1968, when 3,000 students in Rawalpindi defied a ban on meetings to welcome him. Two people were killed when police opened fire, inciting student protests in all major cities of West Pakistan. Lawyers and civil society groups joined unprecedented street demonstrations to protest the regime’s imperious treatment of the students. The USIS library in Peshawar was ransacked. On November 10, Ayub survived an amateur assassination attempt by a disgruntled pro-Bhutto student while addressing an open-air meeting in Peshawar, leading many to suspect that it was an official plot to discredit the opposition.⁵¹

On November 13, 1968, Bhutto was arrested along with Wali Khan, the leader of the NWFP-based National Awami Party, under the Defense of Pakistan Rules (DPR). The former air marshal Asghar Khan also joined the fray, condemning Ayub for maladministration, nepotism, and corruption. But it was Bhutto who captured the popular imagination. Students

inspired by contemporary movements spearheaded by their counterparts in other parts of the globe, such as Paris and Mexico City, rallied to his side. In the affidavit challenging his detention, Bhutto ranted against a regime of which he until recently had been a key defender. He was not planning a violent overthrow of the government, but its “misrule and oppression” had alienated the people. “The popular agitation in the country,” Bhutto declaimed, was “a spontaneous verdict of the people against the excess of the regime, its corruption, its selfish purposes, its contempt for the rights of man, its corroding of institutions, its dependence on an oppressive bureaucracy, its failure to serve the common weal, its pedantic approach to culture, its insulation from the people and its insatiable appetite for family fortunes.” He used the “weapon of language” only to rouse the people while the government, which had “slandered” the word “revolution” in describing its own illegal takeover, was capriciously using the “language of weapons” to suppress a democratic movement: “Everywhere the blood of innocents has watered the land, sometimes in Baluchistan and sometimes in East Pakistan. On occasion it is in the Punjab and Sind; on others, in the ramparts of our northern regions.” Every bit the populist, Bhutto waxed eloquent on the virtues of democracy. More than a feeling, democracy was about “fundamental rights, adult franchise, the secrecy of ballot, freedom of the press and association, independence of the judiciary, supremacy of the legislature, controls on the executive—in short, everything that was sorely missing under the current regime.”⁵²

Between November 1968 and March 1969, students, industrial labor, lower-grade government servants, and even the ulema took to the streets in key urban centers to protest the regime’s sins of omission and commission. Their demand was categorical: “Ayub must go.” An unrepentant Ayub called Bhutto and Asghar Khan “charlatans and self-seekers” and bemoaned the “gangsterism” and “madness” parading the streets. In the president’s opinion, the opposition was “paving the way for the disintegration of the country.” “My fight,” he stated self-righteously, “is to save us from this disaster.” He could not have been more wide of the mark. The restrictions on political activities, controls on the media, and suppression of free speech were coming back to haunt the dictator. After a serious heart attack in January 1968, Ayub was relieved of effective power by his trusted commander-in-chief, General Yahya Khan. A virtual palace coup had taken place. Once the turmoil took a turn for the worse in early 1969,

Yahya began preparing for the kill. In a desperate attempt to save himself, Ayub announced that he would not contest elections again, leading his information secretary and propaganda maestro Altaf Gauhar to utter: "Pakistan has committed suicide."⁵³

Coming from Ayub's top spin doctor, the comment reflects just how much the military-bureaucratic clique surrounding the president was isolated from the actual realities. Even the long suppressed media was breaking loose and criticizing the regime. More ominously, the army was getting politicized and split four ways among supporters of Ayub, Bhutto, Asghar Khan, and Yahya Khan. Lacking an effective political party to counter the growing opposition, the president banked on the continued support of the civil service, the police, the army, and sections of the rural population. Although no longer enjoying a false sense of security, he had not changed his approach to Pakistani politics. He remained opposed to opening up the political system so long as politicians were airing demands like the six-point program. Ayub's contempt for politicians and distrust of intellectuals were so embedded in the regime's thinking that adjusting to the tumult rising from below proved impossible. Other than a few minor concessions to students, the government made no effort to take the public into confidence or try and redress their more ingrained grievances.

At the end of a long and lonely road, Ayub's parting shot was to convene a round table conference to thrash out differences with a political opposition whose internal rifts offered him an outside chance to save face. Held in Rawalpindi on March 10, 1969, all the main opposition politicians attended the conference except Bhutto and Maulana Abdul Hamid Bhashani, the pro-Chinese leader of the East Pakistani left. Days before the meeting, the government tried to assuage the political mood by lifting the emergency in place since the 1965 war. Though united in opposition to the regime, each of the politicians had their own definition of parliamentary democracy. With Mujibur Rahman pressing the six points, and most West Pakistani politicians unwilling to go so far as to concede them on the plea of not wanting to undermine the unity of the country, the conference made no headway before breaking for the Muslim festival of Eid to mark the culmination of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Apart from agreeing to dissolve "one unit" in West Pakistan, restore parliamentary government, and hold elections based on universal adult franchise, there was no agreement on key constitutional issues for center-province relations.

On February 21, 1969, Ayub had announced his decision not to contest the next presidential elections and soon after withdrew charges against Mujib in the Agartala Conspiracy Case. Mujib's participation in the round table conference raised doubts about his ability to carry the Awami League's rank and file with him. By then, radicalized students in East Pakistan were dictating the terms of the political debate. Their conditions for dialogue with the government were presented at a rally on February 9, 1969, attended by 100,000 students and urban workers: (1) winding up the Agartala trial, (2) lifting the state of emergency, (3) releasing all those arrested under DPR, and (4) ending all political cases. A student leader conveyed the mood when he asserted that the government's failure to meet these demands would "set the whole of East Pakistan aflame."⁵⁴ With such clear warnings from the eastern wing, there was a gnawing sense that groups other than those participating in the round table conference would eventually decide Pakistan's future. Mujib sent a draft amendment bill to Ayub providing for a highly decentralized Pakistan with representation at the center on a population basis. He not only made concessions to West Pakistani regional sentiments by calling for the end of "one unit" and the restoration of the provinces but also indicated that the powers to be retained by the central government were open to negotiation. In private conversations, Mujib repeatedly said that he favored a united and prosperous Pakistan and did not want the eastern wing to secede.⁵⁵

This made for a sharp contrast in attitude with the West Pakistani-dominated establishment and its industrial and landlord supporters. Unwilling to accept a decentralization of power to make way for an open political process, they advocated military intervention to put down labor militancy and regional unrest in the east. There was evidence of growing cynicism among West Pakistani bureaucrats and businessmen, some of whom had come to accept a parting of ways between the two wings as unavoidable and desirable. Senior West Pakistani civil servants opposed fresh allocations of funds to East Pakistan, an ill-conceived policy that further riled the Bengalis. Hard statistics underlined the case for regional disparity in no uncertain terms. In 1966-67, per capita income in the east was Rs.348 compared with Rs.467 in the west, where electricity costs were 40 percent less than in East Pakistan. In an early sign of disengagement by West Pakistanis, big industrial houses like the Adamjees, Dawoods, and Ispahanis were cutting their losses and moving their investments out of

the eastern wing. The flight of capital from East Pakistan led to the depreciation of an artificially overvalued rupee by more than half. Economic and political uncertainties compounded fears among the military top brass about their ability to hold the country together in the event of a renewed burst of antigovernment demonstrations in East Pakistan. The men in khaki manning GHQ had other more pressing concerns on their mind. Removing disparities between the two wings invariably meant apportioning larger outlays of investment for the east and a corresponding slowing down of the growth rate in the west. More awkwardly, it meant inducting a larger number of Bengalis into the ranks and a corresponding reduction of recruitment from West Pakistan. The prospect of senior Bengali army officers influencing the future course of Pakistan's national security was a chilling prospect for a Punjabi-dominated military high command.

By the time the governor of East Pakistan, Monem Khan, submitted his resignation on March 2, 1969, the decision to impose martial law had been taken. General Musa, the governor of the western wing, had resigned earlier. Indication that the top generals were planning to intervene for some time was the steady dispatch of additional troops and military equipment from West Pakistan to the eastern wing. Ready to take on the malcontents, they were no longer prepared to serve Ayub. Tainted by the corruption of his sons, the president carried no moral authority. Most Punjabi officers had not forgiven Ayub for his "surrender" at Tashkent. The junior cadres were drawn mainly from the lower classes and, being more politically minded than their predecessors, shared the grievances of the protesters. So on March 3, 1969, when the question of imposing martial law was formally raised, Yahya Khan cited the unreliability of the army, leaving the beleaguered president no option except to step down. In his final address to the nation on March 25, Ayub Khan reaffirmed his conviction in the need for a strong Pakistani center. He had accepted the opposition's demand for a parliamentary government in keeping with that objective, but now the politicians wanted to split the country up into different parts, leaving state institutions ineffective and powerless. The defense services would be crippled and the political entity of West Pakistan abolished—all this at a time when the national economy was in shambles, civil servants were intimidated by mob rule, and serious matters were decided in the streets rather than in parliament house. "I cannot preside over the de-

struction of my country,” Ayub declared disingenuously, before calling on the commander-in-chief to perform his “legal and constitutional responsibility” to not only defend Pakistan from external threats “but also to save it from internal disorder and chaos.”⁵⁶

Elections under Martial Law

By the time Ayub Khan abdicated, a sizeable contingent of troops and equipment had been sent to East Pakistan, with more in the pipeline if the need arose. The strength of the army in East Pakistan had risen to a corps of three divisions, making for approximately 40,000 men, including 12,000 of the mainly Bengali paramilitary East Pakistan Rifles.⁵⁷ Reasonably satisfied with the security arrangements, GHQ was in no mood to apply the soothing balm to the festering sore in the east. This was overly optimistic as the loyalty of the Bengali component of the security forces remained deeply suspect. But Mujib’s demand for an immediate decentralization of power accompanied by the threat of renewed trouble in the east had persuaded the generals to intervene. Ayub’s letter asking Yahya Khan to do his “constitutional” duty was supposed to provide a fig leaf of legality to the new dispensation. There was no constitutional provision for martial law. Under the constitution, the speaker of the national assembly Abdul Jabbar Khan from East Pakistan was the legal successor. The imposition of martial law was seen in the eastern wing as a ploy to prevent a Bengali from becoming head of state. This underlined the severe strains in the federal equation due to the chronic imbalance between military and civilian institutions. While most of the western wing quietly accepted the reimposition of martial law, Bengalis were despondent about the turn of events, which they considered an unwarranted occupation by West Pakistan. With food shortages in the countryside from where many university students came, there was far more resentment against than support for the martial law administration in East Pakistan.

Upon becoming the new chief martial law administrator (CMLA), Yahya abrogated the constitution, dissolved the national and the provincial assemblies, and issued a flurry of regulations detailing offenses and punishments as well as trial procedures. The state of martial rule was parading in its full colors. But 1969 was not 1958, when martial law was received with far less consternation. In his opening speech to the nation, Yahya

called for sanity as a precondition for constitutional government. Justifying martial law to protect the life and property of citizens and revive the administrative machinery of the state, he promised elections on the basis of adult franchise and a constitution framed according to the will of the people. Keen observers of the political scene could see that the return to martial law in Pakistan was yet another puerile attempt to freeze the problem of democracy. Whatever the merit of Yahya's stated intention to restore democracy, there was now a very real "danger that in East Pakistan martial law w[ould] in effect be only a prelude to the total collapse of the country."⁵⁸ Soon after the coup, Yahya slotted himself into the presidential office and declared that the country would be governed as closely as possible to the 1962 constitution. For someone who described himself as a caretaker and a simple soldier who preferred the barracks to the presidential palace, he was in no rush to relinquish power.

Agha Yahya Khan was a Shia from the Qizilbash family of Persian descent. He rose to rule a Sunni-majority country by besting rival generals who contested his credentials to replace Ayub. A boisterous fellow and determined drunkard, Yahya Khan had a penchant for cavorting with abandon. His nocturnal activities were the talk of the nation, with stories about the overweening influence of his procuress Akleem Akhtar aka "General Rani" occupying center stage on the elite gossip circuit. These excesses exposed Yahya to criticism, sparking a struggle for power within the military high command. Although he eventually prevailed, it took him eight months to announce on November 28, 1969, that general elections based on universal adult franchise would be held the following year, on October 5, 1970. The amalgamation of the provinces in the west under "one unit" was to be abolished and the princely states of Chitral, Dir, and Swat merged into West Pakistan. A reversion to a federal parliamentary system of government was conceded in principle. The long-standing Bengali demand for representation according to population was grudgingly conceded. To guard against endless delays in constitution making, the elected national assembly was given 120 days to complete the document, failing which it was to be dissolved and a new assembly elected in its place. A conspicuous omission was the absence of any reference to Bengali demands for provincial autonomy enshrined in Mujib's six points. This was a subtle signal that, notwithstanding the change of guard, there would be more continuity than discontinuity in the regime's policies toward the

eastern wing. In keeping with the army's conception of national interests, Yahya considered Bengali demands for autonomy as a subterfuge for secession. Although offering the opposition a few carrots, he was ready to wield the big stick to perpetuate Ayub's policies of centralization.

The new year saw the resumption of political activity and the start of an inexplicably long election campaign. In a clear indication of the regime's wariness of what the elections might throw up, Yahya on March 30, 1970, announced a Legal Framework Order (LFO) that gave him the power to veto any constitutional document prepared by an elected assembly. The LFO was a nonnegotiable template for the future constitution. The only matter left for the people's representatives to decide was the distribution of powers between the center and the provinces. There was to be maximum autonomy for the provinces, but only to an extent consistent with the federal center possessing the requisite powers to preserve the independence and territorial integrity of the country. In a conspicuous omission, the LFO made no mention of the voting method to be employed by the elected assembly in framing a constitution within 120 days. It was apparent that Yahya had given in to the army hawks and diluted popular sovereignty beyond recognition.

All this was designed as an insurance against any political move after the elections to alter the balance of state power to the disadvantage of the military and the civil bureaucracy. For the military mind-set, in particular, any electoral reference to the populace was an inherently destabilizing activity. "The curse of the parliamentary system," Ayub had written in his diary in November 1969, "is that the politicians compete with each other in making fabulous promises to catch votes and find it difficult to retreat from the positions taken."⁵⁹ The army high command distrusted Mujib, who they believed was working with India to dismember Pakistan. Bhutto, too, was not above suspicion, especially once he began flirting with socialist ideas. Amid widespread economic distress caused by a shortfall in food production in East Pakistan as well as continuing labor and student unrest, the intelligence agencies feared that the left-leaning parties might have a field day at the polls. A special fund was created for the intelligence agencies to enhance the electoral chances of the so-called pro-Islam parties. The minister of information General Sher Ali Khan played a key role in the regime's efforts to deploy Islamist parties, notably the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP), against the PPP and the

Awami League's left-leaning tendencies. Whether out of a misplaced sense of superiority or plain incompetence, the military's intelligence agencies overestimated their success in taking the wind out of the Awami League's and the PPP's sails. The Awami League was expected to get between forty and seventy of the 162 elected national assembly seats from East Pakistan and the PPP no more than twenty to thirty of the 138 elected seats for the western wing.⁶⁰

If wishes were horses, Yahya Khan might have ridden the political twister with exemplary nonchalance. No amount of raw intelligence could exactly predict the outcome of Pakistan's first national election based on universal franchise. Prone to misreading the popular mood, particularly in the east, the intelligence agencies erred in assuming that the electorate would return a hung Parliament, with half a dozen or so parties splitting up the electoral booty. This would give Yahya a controlling hand in the postelectoral scene and, barring the unavoidable concessions to provincial autonomy, shepherd the straying flock of Pakistani politicians into accepting a constitution that upheld all the sacred idioms of the military-bureaucratic state. These assumptions were rocked by events beyond the control of the military intelligence agencies. Monsoon rains in East Pakistan caused heavy flooding, exacerbating the food situation and leading to a postponement of the elections until December. On the night of November 12, a massive cyclone accompanied by high tidal waves devastated the coastline of East Pakistan. One of the deadliest natural disasters in modern history, the cyclone left 200,000 people dead and millions of starving people homeless.

The West Pakistani-based central government's tardy response to the human catastrophe was pilloried in East Pakistan, gifting the Awami League an unexpectedly easy victory that was beyond anything Mujib had anticipated. Bengali middle-class professionals, students, businessmen, and industrial labor, left out of the distribution of economic rewards in Pakistan, would have voted for the Awami League's six-point program for maximum provincial autonomy without an act of God. The main victims of government negligence in the face of a human calamity—the poverty-stricken peasantry in East Pakistan—voted en masse for the Awami League. More than 50 percent of the total electorate in the eastern wing voted in the 1970 elections. Coming at the end of more than a decade of virtual political disenfranchisement, the first general elections on the ba-

sis of universal adult franchise in Pakistan were a remarkable demonstration of the voters' maturity in using the secret ballot to decide their own future without the traditional influences of mullahs, landlords, or local leaders. Three-quarters of the votes were cast for the Awami League, giving it all but two of the 162 seats from East Pakistan in a national assembly consisting of 300 elected and thirteen nonelected members. In the western wing, the PPP surprisingly won more than two-thirds of the seats in Punjab and Sindh, or eighty-one of the 138 elected seats in the national assembly from West Pakistan, plus an additional seven reserved for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The margin of victory of both the Awami League and the PPP in individual constituencies was very large. But neither party won a single seat in the other wing, a poor omen for the postelectoral negotiations to determine how power was to be shared.

By emphasizing the links between the center and the localities, the basic democracies system had sought to undermine provincial politics. No amount of gerrymandering or ideological manipulation could alter the regional basis of politics in Pakistan. Far from diluting the strength of provincial feelings, a decade of basic democracies under tight administrative control had heightened demands for provincial autonomy from an unrepresentative and overweening center. Once he did not get the fragmented Parliament of his dreams, Yahya Khan and his top generals took comfort in the LFO. Although agreeing to hold the first ever national election on the basis of adult franchise, they were strongly averse to transferring power to any political group, from the eastern or the western half of the country, that aimed at circumscribing the interests or reducing the dominance of the military and the bureaucracy. In the late 1940s and early 1950s—when the state was still in the process of formation—the sharing of power between the two wings may have been a matter for the main political party or parties to settle. By 1970–71, the institutional stakes of the military and the bureaucracy within the existing state structure were much greater than those of the diverse social groups represented by Mujib's Awami League and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's PPP. This, rather than the supposedly irreconcilable differences between east and west Pakistani electorates and the intransigence of certain politicians, was the more important reason why no political formula for power sharing could be found to prevent the tragic disintegration of the country.