

# Pakistan's prime minister kowtows to military in bid to end political crisis

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Tensions between Pakistan's civilian government and its military appear to have lessened since Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani made a humiliating climbdown. Before departing last week for the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Gilani retracted his accusation that the Army chief, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, and the head of Pakistan's principal intelligence agency, Lt. General Ahmed Pasha, had disobeyed the government.

"I want to dispel the impression that the military leadership acted unconstitutionally or violated rules," said Gilani. "The current situation cannot afford conflict among the institutions."

In late December, Gilani had denounced Kiyani and Pasha for appealing to the Supreme Court to take up a politically charged court case that the government wanted dismissed, the so-called Memogate affair, calling their intervention "unconstitutional and illegal." In reply, the military high command publicly warned of "potentially grievous consequences" if Gilani did not retract his allegation. This threat lent credence to mounting rumors that the military was actively considering forcing the four year-old Pakistan People's Party-led coalition from office.

Trying to put the best face on his submission to the military's threats, Gilani said last week that his December remarks had been misinterpreted and that their true target had been "certain functionaries." This convinced no one. Titled "A diet of eaten words," the lead editorial in the January 29 *Express Tribune* declared, "The [Prime Minister's] retraction has highlighted as never before in the past: the military has a de facto dominance in the state."

It has been widely suggested in Pakistan's media that Gilani's statement was meant to seal a deal between the government and the military that had been worked out in a lengthy meeting between Gilani, Kayani, and Pasha the day

before.

Needless to say, the Pakistani people will never be made privy to the contents of any such deal. But the military will have insisted on unfettered control over Pakistan's national security and foreign policies, most importantly Islamabad's relations with Washington, while letting the civilian government serve as the lightning rod for popular opposition to the reactionary AfPak War.

Not, it must be added, that the PPP leadership has had any qualms about aiding the US occupation of Afghanistan or unleashing the Pakistani military on the country's Pashtun-speaking tribal areas. Indeed, the PPP sought to convince the Bush administration that it could be a better ally in the "war on terror" than the dictator General Pervez Musharraf. Since gaining office it has sought to secure Washington's assistance in restraining the political power of the military by promising to be an even more slavish ally.

The media, in supporting its claim of a deal between Gilani and Kayani—in reality a fresh conspiracy against the Pakistani people—has pointed to several events that suggest behind the scenes efforts to decompress tensions.

#The same day Gilani hosted the two most powerful figures in Pakistan's military-intelligence apparatus, Mansoor Ijaz—the Pakistani-American businessman who has claimed that he was the conduit for a secret offer from Pakistan's government to the US behind the backs of the military establishment—failed to travel to Pakistan to appear before a Supreme Court-created judicial commission charged with investigating his charges.

#On Monday, the Supreme Court lifted a ban on Pakistan's former ambassador to Washington, Husain Haqqani, leaving the country. Ijaz alleges that the memo outlining the secret offer was dictated by Haqqani.

#Gilani has said that the government is willing to move up the date for elections.

Whatever the truth in the claims of a deal between Islamabad and military headquarters in Rawalpindi, relations between the top brass and the government and within Pakistan's ruling elite as a whole remain riven with conflict.

Significantly, the Supreme Court, which has a long history of conniving in military coups and power-plays, has not withdrawn either of the two court cases that have been used to destabilize the government—the Memogate case and its order that the government instruct Swiss authorities to reopen corruption cases against PPP co-leader and Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari that were vacated under Musharraf's 2007 National Reconciliation Ordinance.

Bitter struggles for pelf and power have been a defining feature of Pakistani bourgeois rule since the state was created through the communal partition of the subcontinent. But they have taken on an explosive new dimension because of the vast social chasm that has developed between the entire bourgeois establishment and Pakistan's workers and toilers.

Growing popular opposition to the AfPak War, Pakistan's decades-long subservient relationship with the US, double-digit price hikes, privatization, subsidy cuts, and the collapse of public infrastructure have given rise to widespread fears within the elite that they could soon confront an Egyptian or Tunisian-type eruption.

But Pakistan's elite is as impervious to popular will as the North African dictators were. Notwithstanding resentments over the US bullying and Washington's courting of Pakistan's archrival India, the six-decades-old alliance with Washington remains at the heart of the Pakistani bourgeoisie's geo-political and class strategy; the dependent, crisis-ridden character of the Pakistani economy precludes any concessions to the masses.

The PPP-led government is popularly discredited because of its role in waging the AfPak war and implementing IMF austerity measures. But the bourgeoisie lacks confidence that the opposition, a collection of ethnically-based or religious parties, many of which owe their existence to military patronage, will be better able to force through the draconian measures demanded by the IMF as the condition for further financial support or to contain the popular anger over the war. The military is the bulwark of bourgeois rule, but there are dangers for the elite in dispensing with the fig leaf of

civilian rule. Just four short years ago the military, faced with growing popular protests against its authoritarian rule, crony capitalism, and growing poverty and social inequality, decided its vast economic and political interests could best be defended by relinquishing its formal control over the government.

A Reuters report published Sunday cited a "senior US official" as saying, "Things have calmed down in the last week or so ... But this is Pakistan. Any of the players could do something unexpected."

What the unnamed US official didn't say is that Washington is a pivotal factor in the multiple crises that beset Pakistan and not only because the US has supported a succession of military dictatorships and continues to patronize the military as the pivot of US-Pakistani relations.

The US has bullied and threatened Pakistan to assume an ever greater share of the burden of its Afghan war, by waging war in the country's northwest Pashtun-speaking tribal areas against Taliban-aligned militias. And it has been the most insistent proponent of IMF restructuring for Pakistan.

In yet another signal that the US will continue to violate Pakistani sovereignty and rain down death on its citizens no matter how much this outrages ordinary Pakistanis and causes political difficulties for its Pakistani elite allies, US President Obama publicly proclaimed for the first time Monday that the US carries out drone strikes inside Pakistan.

The political crisis in Pakistan has once again demonstrated that some 65 years after independence Pakistani democracy remains stillborn. Only through a working-class-led mobilization of the toilers in opposition to imperialism and the entire Pakistani bourgeoisie will it be possible to fulfill the most elementary democratic and social aspirations of the Pakistani people.



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