

Does America really care?

Democracy

By Roedad Khan

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A STRING of secret and confidential despatches to the State Department from the US embassy in Karachi in 1958 suggests that the US administration did little to deter the Ayub-Mirza junta from stabbing Pakistan's fledgling democracy in the back. In fact, it backed the military and bureaucratic combination and gave it the green signal to topple the civilian government.

The irony is that the country was getting ready for the long-awaited elections under the 1956 constitution. I remember attending a meeting in Peshawar, called by F. M. Khan, the chief election commissioner, to finalize the election arrangements.

On the eve of the coup, politics had no doubt become quite chaotic in Pakistan but the law and order situation was well under control. The people were demanding early elections, and a foreign policy meriting their respect. Leading in eloquence was Qayyum Khan, the president of the Muslim League, demanding early elections and an independent foreign policy. In Mirza's own words, as reported by the US embassy, "we had reached a point where public meetings were being held outside the president's house...politicians shouted abuses and threats at me personally, while the loud-speakers directed the speech straight at my house".

In the summer of 1958, "a group of young army officers warned him (Qayyum Khan) that the senior army officers would not allow the scheduled election to take place" and "declared themselves ready to strike first with Muslim League backing, he (Qayyum Khan) discouraged them". Short of elections, Qayyum announced publicly, nothing could save Pakistan from a military takeover similar to the July 1958 coup by Iraqi junior officers.

Bitter attacks on foreign policy by all the opposition parties inflamed the already deeply embittered military high command. Its growing resolve to take over the state apparatus was communicated to Washington between mid-May and mid-September 1958. A military coup was initially not the US

1957, President Eisenhower was telling the National Security Council that "in some instances the neutrality of a foreign nation was to the direct advantage of the United States".

The US had made a "terrible error", keeping Pakistan as a military ally while "doing practically nothing" for its people. But having bet on the military and the bureaucracy in Pakistan, it was now impossible to avoid facing up to the consequences. Suggestions by American diplomats in Pakistan that Washington try and steer Mirza away from his authoritarian tendencies were countered by the argument that this would defeat US purposes by reviving the old slogan "the real prime minister (of Pakistan) is named Hildreth".

In any event, the State Department and the Joint Chief of Staff had not been seeing

ernment "would be even more pro-West than before". Armed with the legitimacy they deemed to be important, Mirza at Ayub's behest, issued a proclamation suspending the constitution, dismissing the central and provincial governments, dissolving the three assemblies, banning all political parties, postponing election indefinitely and placing Feroz Khan Noon as well as other members of the central cabinet under house arrest.

Not a single voice was raised in protest against the imposition of martial law. The only hitch, as everyone realized, was that the 'diarchy' of Ayub and Mirza could not last long. Neither had a solid constituency of support, but Ayub "with his direct control over the army, had a clear edge over Mirza". The US ambassador nevertheless thought it desirable that Mirza, a civilian, "emerge as top man". Yet Washington thought that the

"wisest course" would be to "take a rather neutral position between the two potential contenders for power while being friendly and equally frank with both of them".

The most remarkable development of the last quarter of the 20th century, according to Fukuyama, has been the collapse of dictatorships of all kinds. It is his brilliantly argued theme that, over time, the motor of history will drive societies toward establishing liberal democracies. Isn't it ironical that while authoritarian governments are collapsing all around us and the world has gotten better in many ways, Pakistan, which started as a modern, progressive, democratic state 55 years ago, is drifting away from the democratic path and sliding into

darkness. The engine of history is moving Pakistan backwards. Our fledgling democracy may, after all, turn out to be a historical accident and a parenthesis that is closing before our eyes.

Forty-four years after the first military coup in Pakistan, we are back to square one. The country is under military rule for the fourth time. The parliament stands dissolved. The constitution remains suspended. The Constitutional changes made by President Musharraf make a mockery of the promised October elections. The last 50 years or so have made all of us in Pakistan pessimists. As individuals we can, of course,

Democracy, freedom of choice, rule of law and human rights are highly desirable American goals but their priority has obviously diminished since September 11. In an off-the-cuff comment on the series of constitutional changes announced by President Musharraf, President Bush conveyed a sense that democracy in Pakistan wasn't all that important and was an afterthought for him. Many Pakistanis are wondering: why is America pushing for democracy only in Afghanistan and Iraq?

eye to eye on who was their "best man" — Mirza or Ayub. The State Department thought, Mirza was "more competent than Ayub", a view generally shared by the British, while the Joint Chiefs of Staff thought Mirza was "no match for Ayub", so far as honesty and directness were concerned. The American foreign and defence establishments, however, were agreed on one thing: they would back the military and bureaucratic combination most capable of restoring a semblance of stability in a country in which they had invested so much for so little.

So while "seeking to extricate the US from the present worrisome situation" there

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15.00 Baywatch, 16.00 The Simpsons, Hollywood Squares, 14.30 Family Ties, The Bold and the Beautiful, 14.00 Videos, 13.00 Caroline in the City, 13.30 Show, 12.00 Worlds Wildest Police, 10.00 Bugs, 10.5 Traders, 11.00 The CW Sing, STAR WORLD 9.00 Nash Bridges, 5.45 Playback, 7.30 Mockingbird Dont Lampons Men in White, 3.30 Fight Club, 23.30 Never Been Kissed, 1.45 National A Little Harmless Sex, 21.30 Mixed Nuts, 17.30 Three Men and a Cray, 19.30 Just Addams Family Reunion (Star Movie), 13.30 Dragon Dead & Loving It, 15.30 Mission Impossible, 11.30 Ladybugs, 9.30 Dracula

World Sport, 20.00 Business International, 21.00 World News, 22.30 World Sport, 22.00 World News, 23.30 Q&A, 00.00 World News, 23.30 Q&A, 4.00 World News Europe, 4.30 World Business Tonight, 5.00 Insight, 5.30 World Sport, 6.00 Lou Dobbs Moneyline, 9.30 Deadline Discovery, 10.30 On The Inside, 11.30 Planets, Funniest Animals, 12.00 The Aquanauts, 12.30 Discovery

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Scott & Kirk Kirkman