

MP-IDSA

Issue Brief

The Unravelling of the Hybrid Regime in Pakistan

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Summary

Ever since Pakistan took the initiative to facilitate the United States and Iran in reaching an understanding to end the West Asia crisis, the hybrid regime at home swung into action to create a new narrative around its so-called regional diplomatic success. The situation on the ground, however, is entirely different from what Pakistan wants to portray to the world. The internal security situation has deteriorated, whereas economic growth lacks momentum. There is a complete disgruntlement in the society over governance. To divert people's attention from real issues, the security establishment has pushed for the creation of new administrative units at a time when none of the political parties is prepared for it.

Introduction

The army has historically been an important stakeholder and, in many instances, a prime mover in the Pakistani political system. It not only managed the affairs of the state directly by imposing martial law and suspending/abrogating the constitution; it also influenced major policy decisions even during periods when the so-called civilian set-up was at the helm in Islamabad. History suggests that military dictators in Pakistan suffer from a dual yet perennial crisis of legitimacy and credibility during their direct rule and become highly unpopular after some time, leading to their exit. Similarly, a Chief of Army Staff (COAS) with an unusually long stint in office faces a similar set of challenges.

For its survival, the present PML-N-led and PPP-supported political set-up is completely dependent on Asim Munir, who currently holds the dual offices of Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and COAS. The Shehbaz Sharif-led civilian set-up appears to be crawling before Asim Munir. In a completely changed geopolitical environment, especially due to the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, Pakistan has emerged as a vital third party facilitating a negotiated settlement between the United States and Iran.

Given its geo-strategic location and rentier character, Pakistan often presents itself as a useful partner to the powerful states in the international system. However, in all such endeavours, the security establishment emerges as the real beneficiary. Gen. Zia-ul-Haq strengthened his position during the Afghan Jihad, whereas Gen. Pervez Musharraf tightened his grip during the US' War on Terror in the region.

Undermining Democratic Institutions

Asim Munir has been utilising the opportunity offered by the geo-political changes introduced by the Middle East crisis to undermine the civilian dispensation on the one hand and strengthen his position on the other. Ever since he made it to the good books of President Donald Trump, who refers to him as his favourite Field Marshal, Munir's fortunes at home received a tremendous boost. He used the newfound confidence to introduce fundamental changes to the system, which have somewhat undermined the country's democratic and constitutional institutions.

It is important to note that he was instrumental in ensuring the smooth sailing of the 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments in the National Assembly and the Senate. The 26th Constitutional Amendment allowed a parliamentary committee to

appoint the Chief Justice of Pakistan, overlooking the seniority principle.¹ This was followed by new legislation to ensure a favourable balance in the higher judiciary by increasing the number of judges in the Supreme Court from 17 to 34 and in the Islamabad High Court from 9 to 12.² It also increased the tenures of all armed services chiefs from three to five years.³ It was akin to giving Asim Munir an extension before his original tenure was set to end.

Soon after the Pahalgham terror attack, Operation Sindoor, launched by India to punish the perpetrators of proxy war and eliminate terror nurseries nurtured by Pakistan,⁴ prompted Pakistan to launch Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos.⁵ During the four-day military action, India demonstrated its ability to strike deep inside Pakistan with complete precision by targeting several terror camps in Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (POJK) as well as in Punjab province, which included *inter alia* Sawai Nala Camp and Syedna Bilal Camp in Muzaffarabad, Gulpur and Abbas Camps in Kotli, Barnala Camp in Bhimber, Markaz Taiba Camp in Muridke, Markaz Subhanallah Camp in Bahawalpur, Sarjal and Mahmoona Joya Camps in Sialkot.⁶ India also targeted 11 airfields in the Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan, including Nur Khan/Chaklala (Rawalpindi), Rafiqui (Shorkot), Murid, Rahim Yar Khan, Chunian, Sargodha, Pasrur and Sialkot, Sukkur, Bholari and Jacobabad.⁷

Despite the stunning success of Indian armed forces during the four-day military action, Pakistan made unsuccessful attempts to build a narrative as if it had achieved some victory. To lend its peddled narrative some credence, on 20 May 2026, the Pakistani cabinet decided to promote Asim Munir to the rank of Field Marshal.⁸ In less than six months, politico-security elites introduced the 27th constitutional

¹ [**“Pakistan: 26th Constitutional Amendment is a Blow to the Independence of the Judiciary”**](#), *The International Commission of Jurists*, 21 October 2024.

² [**“Parliament Passes Key Bills on SC Expansion, Military Chiefs’ Tenure Extension”**](#), *The Express Tribune*, 4 November 2024.

³ Ibid.

⁴ [**“Overall Politico-military Objective of Operation Sindoor Was to Punish Pakistan for Fighting a Proxy War; Pak-sponsored Terrorism is a Well-planned Strategy & Fundamental Rage: Raksha Mantri in Lok Sabha”**](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 28 July 2025.

⁵ Abid Hussain, [**“Pakistan Launches Operation Bunyan Marsoos: What We Know So Far”**](#), *Al Jazeera*, 10 May 2025.

⁶ [**“Where Did India Hit Pakistan? Mapping Operation Sindoor and Border Strikes”**](#), *Al Jazeera*, 7 May 2026.

⁷ [**“Operation SINDOOR: India’s Strategic Clarity and Calculated Force”**](#), Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 12 May 2025.

⁸ Abid Hussain, [**“Pakistan Promotes Army Chief Asim Munir to Field Marshal: Why It Matters”**](#), *Al Jazeera*, 21 May 2025.

amendment, which created a new constitutional post, Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), to be held concurrently by the COAS for a period of five years.

In a completely changed situation, the CDF became one of the most powerful constitutional authorities in the country, as individuals holding the position could only be removed with a two-thirds majority in parliament. In contrast, the requirement to de-seat the Prime Minister remains a simple majority.⁹ Besides, CDF now enjoys lifelong immunity from arrest and prosecution. Additionally, the amendment granted sweeping powers to the executive and legislative branches by authorising the creation of a Federal Constitutional Court with the authority to override decisions of the Supreme Court.¹⁰ Amnesty International termed the amendment a grave threat to judicial independence and the rule of law in Pakistan.¹¹

The Societal Unease and Internal Tension

The recent political, legal and constitutional moves have undoubtedly strengthened Asim Munir’s grip on the country’s political system and undermined important democratic institutions, including parliament and the judiciary. However, it has also inadvertently led to significant unease within society, as people’s hopes for good governance, economic growth, and development have remained unfulfilled. The military in Pakistan is an image-conscious institution, as it knows very well that with a dented image it may not be in a position to dictate terms.

In the 1960s, Gen. Ayub Khan and Gen. Yahya Khan ruled the country with an iron fist. However, both became highly unpopular at the end of their tenures. Although the 1971 war with India and the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation thoroughly discredited the military, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto failed to institutionalise and strengthen civilian oversight in a military-dominated system. In 1979, Zia-ul-Haq overthrew the Bhutto government and ruled the country till his death in 1989, paving the way for the emergence of the Troika System, in which the Army Chief, the President, and the Prime Minister jointly became the fulcrum of what Shuja Nawaz terms the “fissiparous politics” of Pakistan.¹² The military remained the most

⁹ Farzana Shaikh, [“Pakistan’s 27th Constitutional Amendment Moves It One Step Closer to Authoritarian Rule”](#), *Chatham House*, 2 December 2025.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ [“Pakistan: Twenty-Seventh Constitutional Amendment Attacks Independence of Judiciary”](#), Public Statement, Amnesty International, 5 January 2026.

¹² Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 411.

dominant pillar of the Troika and removed Prime Ministers at will through the Presidential powers under Article 58 (2) (b) of the constitution.

The Troika system was disrupted when Gen. Pervez Musharraf abrogated the constitution in October 1999 and assumed direct control of the country's affairs. In the wake of a united political opposition and an insurmountable challenge in the Supreme Court during Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry's Chief Justiceship, a highly unpopular Musharraf first had to shed his uniform and later the Presidency.

Unlike Musharraf, Asim Munir is well aware of history and is operating in a different environment. At a time when politico-security elites in Pakistan are busy taking credit for their role as peacemakers in the ongoing Middle East crisis, the internal political and security situation at home has increasingly been deteriorating. The economy has somewhat stabilised. However, there are no signs of real growth and development. Two out of four provinces, along with the POJK, are in turmoil.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) in Balochistan and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have pushed the security establishment on the backfoot by repeatedly attacking military installations in the respective provinces. Deadly protests and clashes have been reported in parts of POJK where the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) has locked horns with Islamabad over several issues.¹³ Apart from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) intermittent targeting of the federal government and the security establishment, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has opened a new front against Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) over the recently concluded elections in POJK's Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and so-called 'Azad Kashmir'.

The Demand for New Administrative Units

Recent developments in Pakistan have cumulatively led to growing disgruntlement in the broader society, which may, in the coming time, transform into a severe crisis. It is important to note that these developments are unfolding at a time when at least four South Asian countries, including India, have witnessed Gen-Z movements. Munir knows this well, and that is why he is looking for ways to defuse internal tensions and address the growing unease in society.

¹³ [“Deadly Protests in Pakistan-administered Kashmir: What's Going On?”](#), *Al Jazeera*, 9 June 2026.

It is in this context, on 30 July 2026, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, while addressing the Pakistan Economic Summit 2026 in Islamabad, stated:

Yah system jiske andar ham rah rahe hain, yah collapse kar chukka hai, aap mane ya na mane...Is nizam me har cheez buri nahi hai. Lekin ek aam aadmi jo Pakistan ke kisi kone mein baitha hua hai, usko apni basic facilities chahiye jo ham nahi de pa rahe hain.¹⁴ (Whether you agree or not, the system we have been living under has collapsed...the common man, sitting in any part of Pakistan, needs his share of basic facilities which we are unable to provide).

He further stated:

Main nahin janta ki ham isko kaise lekar jayen. Aap administrative units, soobe ya jo bhi naam de den, usko lekar jana padega awam ki satah par...Naujawanon ki sirf ek hi maang hai, apna nizam theek kar len, hamen insaf mil jaye, merit mil jaye, hame job opportunities mil jaye...¹⁵ (I don't know how we got about it. You call them administrative units, provinces, or whatever; we will have to take it to the people on the ground. Youth has only one demand – correct your administration, ensure justice, merit and job opportunities).

The speech created a political storm in Pakistan that none of the political parties was prepared for. This was seconded by Director General Inter Services Public Relations (DG-ISPR) on 31 July at a news conference during which Gen. Ahmad Sharif Chaudhry stated that “... good governance is due for the security and stability of Pakistan...without this, none of our issues could be resolved”.¹⁶

Mansoor Ali Khan, a Sama TV journalist who often peddles the security establishment's narratives, warned that the PPP and PML-N have six months to implement the plan regarding the creation of new administrative units/provinces. In contrast, PTI has an opportunity to negotiate for some relief for its jailed leader, Imran Khan. In his vlog on 2 August 2026, he also referred to a new map circulating in the country that suggests possible divisions within existing provinces.¹⁷ It

¹⁴ [“Accept It or Not, the System Has Already Collapsed: Mohsin Naqvi's Fiery Speech”](#), Sama TV, 30 July 2026.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Baqir Sajjad Syed, [“Military Throws Its Weight Behind Call for Governance Reset”](#), Dawn, 1 August 2026.

¹⁷ Mansoor Ali Khan, [“Mohsin Naqvi's Statement: Govt's Time is OVER? | What is PMLN Plan Now? | If Karachi Say YES, Then?”](#), YouTube, 2 August 2026.

showcases Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) divided into four parts: Eastern, Northern, Central and Southern KP. Similarly, Punjab is shown divided into six parts: Northern, Northeastern, Eastern, Central, South Central, and Southern Punjab, whereas Sindh is shown with three parts: Northern, Central, and Southern Sindh. Balochistan, along these lines, is shown divided into five parts: Northern, Northwestern, Central, Western, and Southern Balochistan.

Mohsin Naqvi, in the present dispensation in Islamabad, is considered quite close to the security establishment. Therefore, his remarks reflect the anxiety within the security establishment about a possible Gen-Z uprising in Pakistan. Both PML-N and PPP are uncomfortable with such a proposition and consider it a recipe for disaster that could negatively affect their political prospects in the future. PPP's Nayyar Bokhari has said that the Central Executive Committee will take up the question of new administrative units. In contrast, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah dismissed the proposal as a stereotype which would not be acceptable to the people of Sindh.¹⁸

Defence Minister Khwaja Asif has offered his views on the issue, saying he believes Pakistan's political evolution has been held captive by factional and personal interests for decades.¹⁹ He went on to advise Naqvi to begin the overhaul process by implementing the National Action Plan (NAP), which was devised in 2014 to address internal security issues, including terrorism and radicalisation, within his own ministry.

None of the prominent political parties has completely opposed the idea of new administrative units/provinces because their own survival depends on support from the security establishment. However, many analysts believe that if the security establishment insists upon it, the political parties would not be able to resist it for long. But they would go for a hard bargain before agreeing to implement the scheme with respect to the new administrative units/province. As the debate continued in political circles across the country, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz approved PKR 12.52 billion to hold long-delayed local government elections in the province.²⁰ It seems the move is linked to the demand for new administrative units in Punjab and other parts of the country.

¹⁸ Mohammad Hussain Khan and Wajih Ahmad Sheikh et al., [“Naqvi’s Remarks Ignite Fresh Debate in Political Circles”](#), *Dawn*, 1 August 2026.

¹⁹ [“Naqvi’s Call for New Provinces Faces Fresh Pushback”](#), *Dawn*, 3 August 2026.

²⁰ [“Punjab CM Maryam Okays Rs 12.52b Funds to Hold Local Govt Elections”](#), *The Nation*, 7 August 2026.

Conclusion

Amid a fast-changing geopolitical situation in the Middle East, Pakistan has put its diplomatic machinery into action to facilitate understanding between the United States and Iran so that the ongoing crisis can end. Its top political and military leadership, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Field Marshal Asim Munir and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, has engaged with relevant stakeholders to defuse tensions. However, despite several rounds of interaction, no lasting agreement has been reached between the two parties.

Pakistan has used its newfound role to drive home a new narrative centred on the nation and its leadership receiving accolades worldwide. However, this newfound confidence and praise have not improved the situation at home. The economy has somewhat stabilised, but the growth momentum is nowhere to be seen. The internal security situation has been deteriorating with each passing day. Balochistan and KP have been witnessing increased violence due to constant attacks by BLA and TTP.

Besides PTI, PPP have also locked horns with ruling PML-N over the recent elections in POJK. So far, the security establishment has somehow managed the situation. However, it is not entirely confident in its ability to effectively address the multifaceted crisis that is giving rise to societal unease and internal tensions. It is also worried about the possibility of a Gen-Z movement in the country. In the recent past, South Asia has witnessed at least four youth-led movements.

To divert people's attention from these pressing issues, the security establishment, through Mohsin Naqvi, has suggested creating new administrative units to facilitate good governance in the country. For several reasons, prominent political parties have neither accepted nor rejected the demand. PPP and PML are worried about their political fortunes in the country if the suggestion takes concrete shape and is implemented on the ground. In contrast, PTI may drive a hard bargain to secure some concessions for its jailed leader, Imran Khan.

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