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# COUP IN PAKISTAN: THE OVERVIEW; PAKISTAN ARMY SEIZES POWER HOURS AFTER PRIME MINISTER DISMISSES HIS MILITARY CHIEF

By CELIA W. DUGGER  
Published: October 13, 1999

The Prime Minister of Pakistan fired the powerful army chief Tuesday afternoon, and hours later the army struck back with a swift, apparently bloodless coup. Troops surrounded the Prime Minister's home, closed all the major airports and shut down the state-run television and [radio stations](#) for several hours.

At 2:50 A.M. today the army chief, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, addressing the nation on state television in a tone of patriotic earnestness, said the military had ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Government to stop any further politicization or destabilization of the military.

He was apparently referring to Mr. Sharif's efforts to strengthen his hold over the courts and the military, and to his success at pushing through a constitutional amendment that had ended a President's power to dismiss an elected Prime Minister -- a vestige of military rule.

General Musharraf offered no timetable for elections, nor did he say whether he would rule personally or whether the army would [install](#) a caretaker government.

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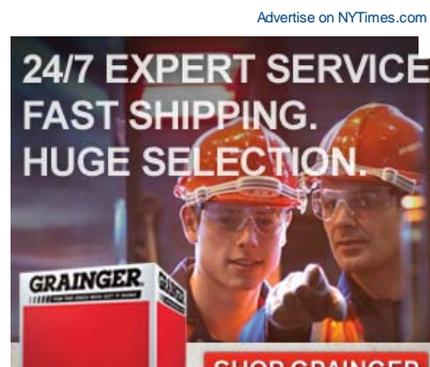


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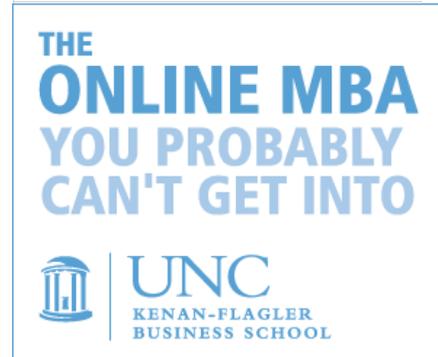
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"Despite all my advice," said the general, neatly attired in a camouflage uniform and wire-rimmed glasses, "they tried to interfere with the armed forces, the last remaining viable institution in which all of you take so much pride and look up to at all times for stability,

unity and integrity of our beloved country."

[A military spokesman, quoted by Reuters, said Mr. Sharif; his brother Shahbaz, chief minister of Punjab Province, and the intelligence chief, Lieut. Gen. Mohammad Ziauddin, were all taken into "protective custody."]

Mr. Sharif's sudden, unexplained decision to fire General Musharraf was risky; in Pakistan, generals have ruled for almost half of its 52 years as an independent nation.

The firing came only a year after Mr. Sharif had replaced another army chief who had sought a greater role for the army and technocrats in running the country.

There was virtually no public protest against the coup, and some demonstrators celebrated Mr. Sharif's demise, including one group near [Parliament](#) House in Islamabad, the capital.

Mr. Sharif, whose party won a landslide victory in February 1997, had become increasingly unpopular because of the deteriorating economy and uncontrolled sectarian violence, and because of Mr. Sharif's handling of a crisis over Kashmir.

The military takeover is likely to have serious international repercussions for Pakistan. A State Department spokesman said that if a coup were [confirmed](#), the United States would call for the earliest possible restoration of democracy and would not carry on "business as usual" with Pakistan.

India, too, voiced "grave concern" and placed its military on high alert along the border.

The deepening political crisis in Pakistan raises new questions about the prospects for restarting peace talks with India. These two new nuclear powers, bitter antagonists who have fought three wars, edged close a fourth this summer over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

Relations between Mr. Sharif and the military had soured over his handling of the Kashmir conflict. India fought intensely this summer to drive out infiltrators who had crossed from Pakistan to occupy Indian-held portions of Kashmir, a Himalayan territory both Pakistan and India want for their own.

After meeting with President Clinton in July, Mr. Sharif had called for the [withdrawal](#) of the infiltrators, who Western analysts now believe were mainly Pakistani soldiers. Army leaders, including General Musharraf, saw the withdrawal as a capitulation to American pressure, the abandonment of a rare military victory over India and a humiliation of the army.

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