Why did a military dictator liberalize the electronic media in Pakistan?

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> *Many private television channels have opened since the liberalization of our media. We have to work hard to improve our image around the world, and we must proceed on all fronts simultaneously. We have to defeat terrorism and extremism, but at the same time we must also present a culturally rich, inviting, and economically vibrant alternative in its place. The media need to gear up to sell Pakistan abroad (Musharraf, 2006: 321).*

General Musharraf's liberalization of the media surprised many. The Pakistani media liberalization case contradicts conventional arguments that dictatorships impose repression on the press (Randall, 1993: 628); that news bureaus in non-democratic regimes often face strict state control (Gunther and Mughan, 2000: 404–405); or that military leaders usually adopt media control as a personal policy preference (Frantz and Ezrow, 2011: 86). Contrary to established wisdom, this chapter will present seven reasons which prompted the military dictator to liberalize the broadcasting sector in 2002, and through this case offer arguments on novel and counter-intuitive forms of media control that emerged with dictatorship and economic reforms in Pakistan.

Even though some analysts of contemporary Pakistan mention General Musharraf's privatization of the broadcasting sector, they tend to tackle this topic fleetingly. Talbot (2012) looks at Musharraf's aspiration for a more formidable military mouthpiece after the Kargil War, Lodhi (2011) treats this as part of Musharraf's liberal agenda, Zaidi (2011) believes it to be a timely response to the fast changing technologically savvy Asian neighbourhood, and Ahmed (2007) suggests that Musharraf was looking for economically viable reforms and that the liberalization of media was one of them.

Although these arguments seek to explain the military dictator's unusual policy endeavour, they have neglected critical points that encouraged Musharraf to open up the media. They overlook three factors which convinced Musharaff that liberalizing the broadcasting sector would serve his interest. First, in the aftermath of the severe press restrictions imposed by Nawaz Sharif's civilian government in 1998 and 1999, the local

media welcomed General Musharraf and his coup – so there was no animosity between him and large sections of the press. Second, under the irresolute and inconsistent governments of Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto in the 1990s, a policy paralysis had taken hold. Civilian government was neither interested in nor capable of passing a broadcasting privatization bill – leaving it for a military government to initiate this much needed policy change. Third, by ignoring sections of PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) policy and allowing media houses to operate in Pakistan, General Musharraf obliged and earned early support from the biggest newspaper group in the country. While PEMRA regulations specifically barred cross media ownership, this newspaper group was allowed to establish its first private television channel in August 2002.

Before I will delineate here seven factors that shaped the dictator's decision to open news broadcasting to the private sector, I shall argue that Musharraf's seemingly liberal gesture of relaxing pressure on the press can be best understood as a continuation of the post-colonial tradition.

In their efforts to explain media power, many theories of political communication often focus on how the media interact with politicians. As originators and senders of political messages, the media enjoy some influence in the political process, inviting the interest of political parties (McNair, 1995: 14). Power in this case is contested between both media and politicians making the media–politician alliance less harmonious. In non-democratic systems, the media cannot exert much power overtly, so that they must (as it were) camouflage their influence. Most dictatorships have kept a close guard on the media, to suffocate criticism. The mainstream media during dictatorships are usually subjected to extensive political repression because criticising autocratic rule means risking transgressing the hazy boundaries of what is deemed legitimate. This pattern clearly emerges in many Latin American, and African countries (Randall, 1993: 628).

Media coverage of politics differs between countries and political systems. However this coverage differs, it is about the same thing: creating a narrative of the political process. Covering politics means creating a believable story about actors and agencies within a political system to be important (Street, 2011: 58-59).

In the case of South Asia, media's role in the political process is deeply entrenched in colonialism and nationalism. Most government information systems have their origins in

colonial information machinery, which passed down government directives and decisions to the people. Hence, the concept of media freedom is cantankerous often raising several ideological volatile questions concerning how much freedom is enough (Mishra, 2008: 149-153). Nationalism, which is another critical feature of South Asian media signifies a close and emotional identification with the nation and the construction of legitimizing and unifying narratives linking past, present and future. The relationship between colonialism and nationalism is complex, ambiguous, multi-faceted and intrinsically linked with the media. Ridden with paradoxes, this relationship is also at the heart of the narrative that sketches news stories crucial in understanding Asian political cultures and their media trajectories (Dissanaayake, 1994:1).

1. Extension of propaganda machinery

Emerging from the Kargil War with India and partnering with the United States in a global conflict in Afghanistan, the Pakistani leadership under General Musharraf wanted media to provide favourable coverage to the military. The break with PEMRA's rules caused Javed Jabbar[1], the initiator of the PEMRA policy, to part ways with General Musharraf. When Musharraf had appointed Jabbar as his advisor on national affairs and information in November 1999, the original PEMRA law was circulated for public consultation and, with some amendments, was then approved by the Cabinet during 2000. It was eventually enforced in 2002, subsequent to Javed Jabbar's resignation from the Cabinet in October 2000. The former federal minister of information, explaining the thinking in the upper echelons of power that initiated changes in the media policy, argues that it was felt that Pakistan was weak and vulnerable on the information/communications front.

Threatened by the Indian media, which acted as a mouthpiece on behalf of the Indian state, the Pakistanis felt that they needed to come up with counter narratives. Especially during times of conflict, Pakistani rulers and ISI had long been the convenient scapegoats of the Indian establishment and media (Jamwal, 2006: 130). The intensive coverage of Kargil, which became a mega-event, promoted Indian television channels to battle for ratings and to create a wave of patriotism. So eager were India's electronic media to toe the official line that they forgot the basic of journalistic principle of balanced reporting (Saxena, 2006: 149).

The sharply divided narrative around Kargil contrasts earlier media encounters, when media on both the sides had also played a favourable role in enhancing Indo–Pak relations. Just before the implementation of the Liaqat–Nehru Pact, a delegation of the All Pakistan Newspaper Editors Society (APNES) went to New Delhi, where the newspaper editors of the two countries agreed to refrain from propaganda against either state.[2] On 26–28 April 1950, Jawaharlal Nehru – the first Prime Minister of India, accompanied by his daughter Indira visited Karachi and the Pakistani press provided favourable coverage (Afzal, 2001: 79). A large delegation, including leading journalists, accompanied Bhutto to Simla at the end of June 1972. The summit opened formally on 29 June 1972. Both sides expressed a sincere desire to end conflict and to establish durable and lasting peace. The summit was covered positively by the press in both countries (Ahmed, 2013: 210). More recently, when Musharraf visited his ancestral home in Delhi, India, great media hype was created before the Agra Summit in 2001 (321).

After the Kargil episode, it was obvious to the Pakistani military that they had lost the media war to India. Since their electronic media were inferior to their Indian media counterpart, the Pakistani military, government and intelligentsia wanted to be better prepared for future conflicts. This spurred the liberalization of the electronic media (International Media Support, 2009: 16).

Historically a similar humiliation had been faced by the military after the formation of Bangladesh. The officer corps was painfully aware of their loss of reputation when the local media criticised them. A cursory survey of Pakistan's Urdu newspapers reveals that the public received that defeat with disbelief, shock and grief. It was the army generals and not the military as an institution that came under severe criticism. The daily *Musawat* owned by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was particularly critical, when it flashed headlines demanding: "The people want to know what caused the defeat of the Pakistan army in East Pakistan". As a result, public confidence in the armed forces of Pakistan was severely shaken (Shaftqat, 1997: 166–167).

Therefore, in the aftermath of the 1971 war, the use of the media as a nationalistic mouthpiece was prioritized by Pakistan. During this period both India and Pakistan heavily invested in their broadcasting sectors as propaganda machines. After the 1971 war, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistan President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto began to take television more seriously. The sensitive border areas of Punjab and Kashmir came under the

Pakistani stations of Lahore and Rawalpindi. The Bombay station opened in 1972 was followed in the next year by stations of Amritsar and Srinagar. One of the purposes was to counter Pakistani propaganda in those strategically important regions. The Indian government even provided community television sets in Kashmir to hundreds of villagers to support this project. Both Bhutto and Gandhi saw television as an important new means of communication with the masses and focused on significant television building programmes. In Pakistan shortly after Bhutto assumed charge as president, he made Aslam Azhar managing director of television and asked him to put up two new television stations, one in Quetta and the other in Peshawar. When he was told that this would probably take twelve to fourteen months, Bhutto had replied: 'I am not asking you to build me a couple of nuclear reactors; all I want is two television stations. I am giving you three months' (Crawley and Page, 2001: 55).

In the post-9/11 period, Pakistan's image was suffering under severe criticism from the Indian and Western media. The Pakistani establishment had to come up with a strategy which would provide alternative and preferably local perspectives on Pakistan's involvement as a frontline state with Afghanistan on its western border. After 9/11, repeated criticism from the Indian media stressed that Pakistan had betrayed Afghanistan in favour of America. Keeping pace amid intense competition offered by numerous foreign news channels, it was essential that the Pakistani government promote many independent local news sources. Reiterating Talbot's point that Kargil was a major reason prompting the general to create a savvy domestic propaganda tool, General Jehangir Karamat[3] said:

> Kargil was one of the events that demonstrated that you cannot fiddle around with the media anymore. Media to some extent is a propaganda tool, but just like other segments of the society, the media also gets divided. It has sponsors, it has its own leanings, even anchors have leanings and the military was trying to use it. It was trying to develop expertise to use the media positively towards themselves (Karamat, 2011).

2. Enlightened moderation agenda

Once Pakistan was obliged to join the United States in its global War on Terror, the Musharraf government walked a tightrope between meeting American expectations and remaining popular domestically. Musharraf was quite adept at this balancing act, and he characterized this strategy of his foreign policy as "enlightened moderation". The core of this

strategy was to adopt policies that responded to international pressure but were designed to be implemented in such a way as to provide minimal challenges to its domestic interests (Kennedy, 2006: 129–130).

While trying to win the support of the international community, General Musharraf, by offering freedom to the press, provided a breath of fresh air after prolonged oppression. In response, it was the press – taking full advantage of its new-found freedom – that came to the dictator's rescue with bold and outspoken coverage. Enjoying this breathing space he made no attempt to interfere with the day-to-day functioning of the print media (Niazi, 2005: 145). He can be compared to General Zia-ul-Haq (give years) who brought major changes of a very different kind to the public sphere. Zia altered Pakistani discourse by pursuing Islamization with great effectiveness. His deceptive promises to enforce Islam were given force by unlawful amendments to the constitution. He also drew to his side many religious scholars with selfish motives who blithely distorted Islamic law to appease Zia (Kibria, 1999: 137). Musharraf rolled back Zia's legacy. The Zia era was still fresh in the memories not only of Pakistanis but of the international community. As an antidote to Zia's approach, the modernization of the broadcasting sector provided a tangible transformation for all to see.

Indeed the process of easing control on the press had started by the end of the Zia regime ending in a remarkable improvement in the quality of the print media. It was the Pakistani television which remained restricted until Musharraf's regime, due to strict government control (Baxter, 2001: 137). Musharraf understood that the print had evolved very differently from the broadcasting sector, and that television had become the most prominent medium of political communication. When he allowed it greater independence, many within the journalistic community thought that he had taken this initiative partly because there was a foreign hand involved. The general understanding was that he wanted to remain in the good books of the Americans. According to Sajjad Mir[4]:

> There was an unsaid understanding with the Americans that unlike Zia-ul-haq he will not muzzle the press. We were convinced in Pakistan that Musharraf had that understanding with the Americans (Mir, 2011).

This logic cannot be dismissed. Some suggest that the main purpose of Musharraf's "enlightened moderation" strategy was to adopt policies that responded to international perceptions and pressure (Kennedy, 2006: 129–130).

Like most dictators, Musharraf was trying to justify his continuance in power to the people. Liberalizing the media helped him bring authenticity to his claims of legitimacy. Through free electronic media, Musharraf presented himself as a leader who believed in sharing information with the people, and he stressed in many of his speeches that he had provided media freedom for the first time in Pakistan and that liberated media were to play a significant role in developing democracy. His strategy is summarised by eminent journalist Ibn Abdur Rehman[5] as follows:

> General Musharraf had no lobby, no constituency, and from the very beginning he realized that. We had a slogan of democracy, we had the slogan of Islam in the past and now he was looking for a new slogan so he said the only constituency left was a liberal lobby so he did quite a few things to establish his liberal credentials. He took a couple of ministers who…made noise about civil society…about women's rights, so liberalization of the media was part of the ground strategy which later on he defined as *enlightened moderation* (Rehman, 2011).

Commentators like Lieven gave credit to the open-mindedness of the General for offering freedom of expression, arguing that "enlightened moderation" reflected his commitment to a form of liberal progress (2011). Aftab Gul,[6] a renowned lawyer, concured with this view:

> Musharraf to his credit... it should be said that even at times when he was at the receiving end, he did not overly interfere with the media, it is only when he became weak and he saw that he could be ousted that he turned on the media. Musharraf in the context of the Pakistani army was an outsider. He did not belong to this 'Warrior Race'. He was not a Pathan, he was not a Punjabi, he wasn't a Balochi, he didn't belong from Chakwal to Jhelum... and he was not very popular amongst the generals of the Pakistani army. He was a city boy who wanted to create a place for himself. He wasn't like the others who came before him. Believe me, he was an urbanized man. From FC (Forman Christian) College to PMA (Pakistan Military Academy) where he did reasonably well, people surrounding him were mostly from Karachi the only metropolis... maybe he was influenced by them and then maybe he thought that he could actually make a difference by liberalizing the society and… the media (Gul, 2011).

While these observations gained popular traction, a far more influential factor for liberalizing media was the rapid commercialization of the media sector in the neighbouring countries of Asia.

3. Competitor in the technologically-savvy Asian neighbourhood

Broadcasting configurations in Asian Nations such as South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand and India since the 1980s were undergoing sweeping processes of commercialization. Although governments throughout the region maintained great influence over broadcast news, the decade was characterized by rapid commercialization. Countries such as South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia replaced state monopolies with hybrid systems through the transfer of control of some state stations to private ownership and licensing of new private stations. Even governments like India, which resisted privatization, allowed steady rise in advertising revenues to help finance major new state broadcasting initiatives. As the wave of media technologies spread, broadcasting competition increased. With the rapidly growing Asian economies attracting major transnational media investment throughout the 1990s, it became clear to the governments that their failure to invigorate ungainly state-run networks and to encourage private national media expansion would inevitably mean the demise of locally-controlled broadcasting in the face of international competition (Moog and Sluyter-Beltrao, 2001: 45–46).

Asia's mass media was in a transitional period (Arora, 2006: 191). Developments in satellite broadcasting transformed the television industry. Consequently governments and broadcasters in India, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong by not succumbing to western broadcasters by 1996 were actually changing the functioning of some international television operators. Although the imported foreign programming that was brought in was considered important, it took second billing to growing local production. Recognizing the competition that they faced, as well as the Asian penchant for local programming in local languages, international operators were forced to create regional language services and to link up with Asian networks (184).

During much of the 1990s the satellite revolution prevailed. The massive influence of the satellite channels had achieved a very high level of penetration and had put the state broadcaster, PTV under considerable pressure.[7] According to figures given by Gallup, viewershipwas about the same in rural as in urban Pakistan, and while the greater proportion of urban Pakistanis watched satellite, viewership in community centres in rural areas brought the total numbers between state television and satellite broadcasting almost in a balance (Crawley and Page, 2001:98). A part of the government's strategy was to persuade the private sector to enter the domain of satellite television and launch channels that depicted Pakistani

society's ideological and cultural values (Shaikh, 2007: 79). Catering to domestic demand while offering competition to foreign satellite channels, and consequently retaining advertising revenue within the country, left General Musharraf with little choice but to liberalize the television industry.

4. Driver to kick-start the flagging economy

Musharraf's military-led government has been widely credited with turning the economy around from the verge of bankruptcy and managing to steer it to more than eight percent growth in 2005. Part of this economic boom was the result of the aid from the USA and other western nations. Post-9/11 Pakistan saw boosts both in the stock market and in real estate because of consumer confidence. This led to the emergence of a new middle class with drastically altered spending patterns, spurring demands for motorcycles, cars, and other consumer goods (Hussain, 2008: 189).

Since the 1990s, many businesses in Karachi had started to advertise through satellite transmissions, which were believed to enhance the speed and volume of business and industry. Therefore the acquisition of satellite transmission facilities started to increase. In the wake of mushrooming dish antennae these efforts gained further momentum (Zuberi, 1993). The advertising sector in Pakistan surged with the birth of private television channels. A booming economy and a technologically updated broadcasting industry complimented each other mightily.

General Musharraf liberalized the broadcasting sector as part of an effort to pursue economic reforms. He appointed Shaukat Aziz as his economic czar (Moreau, 2006), and gave him a free hand to invigorate the economy by turning increasingly to a market-led system which was more akin to its giant economic neighbours: India and China. While serving a purely economic function, Ahmed (2007) confirms that the surge in the private sector made it possible for the new electronic media and print outlets to survive by picking up more advertisements (Ahmed, 2007). While in India the print media were still attracting 60 percent of advertising funds, in Pakistan television enjoyed the lion's share of advertising expenditure (Crawley and Page, 2001: 101). This was significant especially because according to Siddiqua (2007), the Pakistani military was already comfortably entrenched in the economy.The Pakistani armed forces are well known for having constructed a complex web of institutionalized military control: formally by introducing constitutional provisions

that extend its influence deep into the public sector, and by occupying economic space through its business activities. The military regimes of 1958, 1977 and 1999 are remarkable for swift civilianisation. This co-opting of civilians who were drawn into office provides evidence of the military's confidence in its ability to control political space or a desire to attain internal and international legitimacy (Aziz, 2008: 45).

5. Not threatened by the local media

By opening up the broadcasting sector, General Musharaff stood in stark contrast to all civilian and military governments which had repeatedly strangled news broadcasting. Finally coming out of a fifty year period of suffocation, the media were truly indebted to the regime which had officially recognized their autonomy. The media have usually been the strongest voice against military coups, often questioning the legitimacy of military regimes, impelling the dictators to hit them hardest. In the Pakistani case, the civilian leaders like Nawaz Sharif, free of doubts about his issue of legitimacy, did not treat the press any better. Coming in the wake of such abuse, Musharraf enjoyed a largely congenial relationship with the press, especially in the beginning. By privatizing the electronic media, this bond was further consolidated, so the General felt confident about the press.

This occurred at a time when the private press in Pakistan was becoming less accommodating to the government's disproportionate demands. By the late 1990s, established newspaper groups were finally asserting their autonomy. This was evident in the contestation between the Nawaz government and the biggest newspaper group, Jang, in 1998–1999. The owner of the group, Mir Shakil-ur-Rehman, in August 1998 went public with his complaints against the Nawaz government. He claimed that despite his constant efforts to accommodate the government's wishes, he had been subjected to a series of harassments. According to him, the Jang group had been given income tax notices, threatened with arrests, and victimized in a number of other ways. The newspaper's bank accounts were frozen, its newsprints sealed, supplies intercepted, and Mir Shakil was asked to dismiss his Lahore and Islamabad editors: Maleeha Lodhi, Kamila Hayat, and Irshad Ahmed Haqqani. Later a couple of feature editors, Sohail Marghoob and Abid Tehami were added to the list. Urging All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS) and Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) to intervene with support, Mir Shakil vowed that if the government continued to be unreasonable he would take the matter to the courts. A show down of unprecedented

proportions between the government and the press occurred at the end of 1998 (Human Rights Commission, 1998: 171).

Historically and up to 2002, all Pakistani governments, by controlling finances, licenses, newsprint, and other benefits, made it very difficult for the press to criticize the government. As a result, readers and viewers regarded most media, especially the state-controlled PTV, as puppets of the government of the day. Since control over editorial policy and operation was directly or indirectly in government hands, professional organizations in mass media institutions acted more as bargaining agents for benefits, and were less involved in setting or maintaining standards of excellence for their profession (Nawaz, 1983: 949–950).

It was also believed – and many times denied by government officials – that the Pakistani government maintains an unspecified and un-auditable amount of money in a "Secret Fund". Operated personally by the information minister and secretary this money is said to be used for buying the loyalty of selected journalists. The term '*lifafa* [envelope] *journalists'* became common from this practice. It is still remembered that the federal information secretary in 1998 was replaced because he had objected to the practice (Human Rights Commission, 1998: 173). Because of determined interference by all governments, most newspaper owners appointed themselves as chief executive and/or chief editor of their newspapers, and exercised day-to-day control. The freedom of the press, therefore, was in fact the (rather tenuous) freedom of the owners of the press. Publicly admitting this in August 1998, the owner of the Jang group, Mir Shakil-ur-Rehman, apologized to his readers that he had frequently accommodated the wishes of the authorities and was sometimes forced by the Nawaz government to be dishonest (Human Rights Commission, 1998: 178).

Before a reconciliation in early February 1999 (CPJ, 1999), *Jang* and *The News* were each running skeleton editions of just four pages, down from an average of around two dozen. After the publisher held closed-door talks with senior government officials, the crisis passed. But within the newsroom, there remained an air of uncertainty. "There's a hanging sword on our necks," Anjum Rashid, a senior editor of *Jang*'s Lahore edition, told CPJ. "So we are behaving."

The Nawaz government had also come down hard on Najam Sethi, editor of *Friday Times*, an influential English weekly. Sethi was arrested after a raid on his house in May 1999.

After holding him for three weeks, the authorities abruptly released him. The government blamed Sethi for being an agent of India's secret intelligence agency, RAW, because he had read a paper at a seminar in Delhi analysing Pakistan's crises. Sethi's weekly was one of the sharpest critics of the Nawaz government (Human Rights Commission, 1999: 135). His supporters believe that he was detained because of a series of articles – and a BBC interview – in which he exposed government corruption. However, the Pakistani authorities said he had criticised the government's performance in a speech in India. Sethi's arrest followed action against other journalists. It drew strong protests from the European Union and demands from the United States for his release (BBC News, 17 May 1999).

When General Musharraf unseated Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a military coup on 12 October, 1999, the common sentiment amongst Pakistani journalists – many of whom had been jailed, threatened and systematically harassed under Sharif – was to shed no tears. Even though Musharraf's unconstitutional assumption of absolute power was completely antidemocratic, because he was replacing a leader who had ruled despotically, few seemed to mind (Menon, 2000).

At the same time, after Musharraf came to power, he took action to curtail the influence of the pro-Nawaz Nawa-i-Waqt newspaper group. The downsizing of one of the oldest and most influential newspaper group is best explained by Arif Nizami[8] who was the editor of *The Nation*, and is also the nephew of Majid Nizami, the owner of Nawa-i-Waqt Group:

> Musharraf did not like the Nawa-i-Waqt media group at all. *Nawa-i- Waqt* and *The Nation* had a right-wing policy which did not complement the enlightened moderation agenda of Musharraf. He did not like its chief editor Mr Majid Nizami. They never got along but the Nawa-i-Waqt group had certain policies which also endeared the military establishment: its policy towards India, its policy towards USA. Musharraf was fond of Nawa-i-Waqt's policy towards foreign matters but was weary of its domestic policy because he had always thought that Nawa-i-Waqt was on the payroll of the Sharifs. He would say that to me in so many words because I was the bridge between the Nawa-i-Waqt group and Musharraf. The Nawa-i-Waqt group has always supported PMLN [Pakistan Muslim League]. Of course this was one group which was going against Musharraf, initially, but in the end the other main group Jang and Geo went against him as well (Nizami, 2011).

Musharaff's bold initiatives, thus, captured allies while antagonizing many other players in the news sector.

6. Bold policy only possible for a military dictator

Two major political parties, the PPP and PMLN, dominated civilian rule in Pakistan from 1988 to 1999. The PPP leader Benazir Bhutto, served as prime minster twice (1988–1990 and 1993–1996) and Nawaz Sharif, leader of PMLN, also held the office twice (1990–1993 and 1997–1999). These two parties during this period were at war with each other. Whichever was in power applied bureaucratic and legal pressures to harass the other. When in opposition, each engaged in propaganda against the government of the other party for corruption and mismanagement. They welcomed the dismissal of each other's government by the president, with the support of the army chief (Rizvi, 2009: 74). The decade-long see-sawing power game between Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto was widely blamed for having discredited democracy itself (Constable, 2000: 129). With both parties determined to retain political control of the electronic media, efforts at reform often came during the interim administrations which held power at various times during much of the 1990s. These short-lived non-party governments which held office between the dismissal of one government and the election of another, attempted to introduce what they and the country's creditors regarded as desirable reforms prior to handing power back to the politicians. Such was the case with the Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (EMRA) ordinance, which was promulgated by President Farooq Leghari in February 1997 (Crawley and Page, 2001: 276).

The fact that this innovation was not backed by Benazir Bhutto's People's Party, and shelved by the PMLN's Nawaz government, indicates that both mainstream political parties lacked the vision or the will to expand the EMRA broadcasting policy. And, even if any of one of these parties had placed a PEMRA bill before the parliament, it was unlikely that it would receive majority support. The underhanded provision of private television licences by Benazir Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari during her second term had already been contested by Javed Jabbar in the Supreme Court leaving it for the interim government of Malik Miraj Khaled to pass the EMRA bill. Neither of the two major parties was entirely comfortable with a free rein for the media. Nor was either prepared to allow the rival party

when in power to receive the entire credit for electronic media liberalization. Hypothetically, if one of them had decided to liberalize the media, it would have gone down in history of Pakistan as a party truly dedicated towards freedom of expression and the principles of democracy. But, without the support of the opposition, the broadcasting policy never got top priority. Furthermore, any private broadcasting activity needed clearance from the military agencies before it was permitted. So it was only possible for a military government to formulate this regulation and create PEMRA.

Arguing that the country needed his brand of leadership, and describing himself as a democrat, Musharraf stressed that the Benazir and Sharif governments had failed to promote an open and equitable political process, had exploited their political high office for personal gain and had destroyed the people's confidence in competitive politics (Ziring, 2005: 332).

Until then, the press had been treated as enemy number one by all of the dictators, including General Iskandar Mirza, Field Marshal Ayub Khan and General Zia-ul-Haq. The "democracies" of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto were nodifferent. Rulers in civilian garb sustained the legacy of the khakis, adopting the same carrot and stick approach to control the press. Their limited success was due to a handful of intrepid professional editors (Niazi, 2005: 144).

General Musharraf was rewriting history by offering freedom to the media, especially before the 2002 elections. In a country where more than two-thirds of the population was illiterate, the importance of the electronic media for the election campaign was clear. In the absence of visible public enthusiasm for elections, the private media pretended to assume a critical role for the successful mobilization of voters by political parties (Waseem, 2006:141–142).

General Musharraf's critics argue that his efforts to influence public opinion primarily through broadcast media failed because he did not comprehend the need for an integrated media space that could mould opinions and attitudes from the grassroots upward through civil society organizations, opinion formers and political groups. Hoping to manipulate the media, Musharraf did a poor job of mobilizing his political allies and building coalitions that could validate his message for democracy (Farwell, 2011: 145).

General Musharraf's miscalculations, stressed by Farwell (2011), are perceived differently by IA Rehman. Explaining why the General was confident about inviting the private sector into broadcasting media, he says:

> He was very confident that there is no political opposition in Pakistan that could benefit from a liberal media – a position both Zia-ul-haq and Ayub did not enjoy because both had robust political oppositions. Musharraf thought the demonization of politicians had been carried on to such an extent that he need not have any fears (Rehman, 2011).

7. General Musharraf's confused media policy

According to the 2002 PEMRA regulations, a licence to establish or operate a broadcast or cable TV network station would not be granted to a person who already owns or operates as sole or joint shareholder, any other broadcast or cable TV network station, printed newspaper, or magazine or an advertising agency (PEMRA, 2002: 43). Yet according to the Geo TV's own website: GEO TV by the Jang group was established in May 2002. Test transmission started on 14 August 2002 on the PAS 10 digital satellite. Regular transmission started on 1st October 2002. Geo TV is the first South Asian Urdu language channel to provide content comparable with world-class television broadcasters. Geo is the fastest growing TV Channel in Pakistan with ratings exceeding all satellite delivered TV channels in the market. Geo has the widest distribution on cable systems in Pakistan with 100% carriage within 90 days of launch (Geo TV website).

Noting that the oldest and largest media group in Pakistan (the Jang group) was the primary beneficiary of the new PEMRA regulatory regime, Rasul and McDowell (2012) state that by launching the first privately-owned television channel, Geo TV challenged the decades-long monopoly of state-owned television in Pakistan. According to them, PEMRA officials privileged the already existing media groups in Pakistan. Since these large and economically powerful organizations were already in the business, it was easier for them to influence PEMRA officials, thanks to their lobbying power, political influence and economic prowess resulting in cross-media ownership (Rasul and McDowell, 2012:6).

Although PEMRA appears to deserve the blame of irregular implementation, General Musharaff's consent cannot be ruled out. This open favouritism for the Geo/Jang group raises questions about Musharraf's intentions in liberalization of media. It also demonstrates that

the General was not so different from his military and civilian predecessors in his handling of the press and that he was not as politically naive as some of his critics claim.

General Musharraf's personalized politics are discussed by Constable (2000). In her view, technically his rule might not have fallen into a category of full martial law – but to all intent and purposes there was no question that one man and one man alone was calling the shots in Pakistan (Constable, 2000: 129). Since he understood the power of subtle televised advocacy, it suited General Musharraf that the first private channel, run by the biggest newsgroup, would not act as a critical watchdog over the controversial elections in 2002. This claim can be made because according to Ziring (2005) the General was not ready to listen to dissenting views before the 2002 election. Even before the 30 April 2002 referendum, as he was attending a rally in Faisalabad, an ugly contestation occurred between the journalists covering the event and the police. The Punjab governor, a protégé of the president, was accused of ordering the manhandling of the newspapermen. The journalists declared the government could not have both a free and a gagged press at the same time. Arguing that the referendum was in the people's interest, Musharraf insisted that his government had already empowered people at the grassroots, had stimulated a lacklustre economy, and had enhanced Pakistan's image abroad (Ziring, 2005: 333).

Waseem (2006), commenting on the 2002 elections, argues that if we compare coverage of it to earlier election campaigns, the relative freedom of expression on the electronic media introduced a dynamic character to the election process (Waseem, 2006: 142).

Pakistani leadership − both civilian and military − had clearly been apprehensive about the press coverage before earlier elections. And once again like previous governments, Musharraf's heralded popular policy change before the election.

And yet questions arise about his intentions when we consider that he had turned a blind eye towards the 2002 PEMRA regulations and allowed the largest newspaper group to operate the first private television in August 2002. If television licences were selectively distributed and were not awarded through fair competition, then the concept of a free and liberal media gets seriously jeopardized and we are forced to doubt the General's positive contribution. If the largest newspaper group had an understanding with Musharraf, then he did not have to worry about controlling the media. In reality, he was coercively partnering

with one of the key drivers of political change – a politically astute move. Some, however, including Arif Nizami, call this Musharraf's biggest blunder. According to Nizami:

> Musharraf opened media channels, where he went wrong was when he gave cross media ownership. For instance if you look at the ratings, Geo's ratings are more than the combined ratings of the other five channels (Nizami, 2011).

Conclusion

Democratic governments control media differently from dictatorships, and to lesser degrees. Unlike in a democracy where media control and content is dispersed and pluralistic (Street, 2011: 232), dictatorships tend strongly to monopolize from above to control media and to disseminate propaganda. Many military regimes profess their commitment to some form of democracy, a device to enhance their claims of legitimacy. But they also practice phoney democratization and deploy a range of organizations and administrative instruments that strengthen their control over society (Brooker, 2009: 132–137). They often pursue populist strategies, using media control to awe the masses, command respect, demonstrate their capability – but in a manner that suggests that they emerge from amongst the masses. Modern history is full of examples where dictators like Fidel Castro, Saddam Hussain or Samora Machel were constantly on television and radio, greeting delegations, making long speeches, visiting schools and farms (Rubin, 1987: 194–195). But dictators face a dilemma. Their use of power to threaten people can increase their insecurity in office, but also disguise it. If by dissembling, people convince a dictator of their support, then s/he may conclude, inaccurately, that s/he need not fear them (Wintrobe, 1998: 39).

Another problem may also arise: the media may start to question its support for the regime. If dictatorships pursue free-market policies, power tends to disperse among private sector institutions. This together with the emergence of new media technologies, facilitate the development of pluralism in political expression – eventually undercutting support for authoritarian regimes and paving the way to democratization. The Chilean case provides partial support for this notion. General Pinochet allowed the development of an extensive

private sector in the communication industry as part of his regime's neoliberal economic development strategy. While he had no desire for political liberalization, the emergence of more autonomous media as a result of economic liberalization undermined the regime's capacity to control political communication (Gunther and Mughan, 2000: 413).

General Musharraf staged what Perlmutter (1977: 89) describes as a Praetorian coup in which a failed civilian government was overturned by an army that it could not control. Many Pakistanis were expecting a military takeover, given the ineffectiveness of the civilian Nawaz government. Thanks to a unified military, plus domestic and international tolerance, Musharraf's coup in Pakistan was successful (Barracca, 2007: 139). Moreover, his regime was not particularly repressive. Measured against the deplorable standards of the previous 45 years, Pakistan remained a relatively open society during the Musharraf era (Palmer, 2003: 269). Thus Musharraf's media liberalization policy resembles Pinochet's expansion of the media industry only if we consider media liberalization as a process driven by economic change. As this chapter has argued, Musharraf was interested in expanding a domestic propaganda machine in the aftermath of the Kargil War and the beginning of the post-9/11 Afghanistan conflict. Large sections of the media were secretly relieved to get rid of Nawaz Sharif's oppressive civilian government, so instead of criticising Musharraf's coup, they initially supported his military regime. Considering the ineffective and fragile democratic governments in the 1990s, his audacious liberalization of the media could have only been taken and implemented by a military government. But by liberalizing unevenly, he had not given an entirely free rein to the media – as is widely presumed, and as he still claims.

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[1] Javed Jabbar is Chairman and Chief Executive, JJ Media (Pvt.) Ltd., Karachi, Pakistan. A former Senator and Federal Minister of Pakistan, he has contributed extensively in the fields of mass media, international affairs and advertisement in Pakistan. He was known to be a close friend of General Musharraf.

[2] Liaqat–Nehru Pact

[3] General Jehangir Karamat (retired) remained Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army from January 1996 to October 1998. He resigned as army chief following differences with the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Having served as a professor of political science at the National Defence University in Islamabad, General Karamat is also an expert on defence and security matters, especially with his career in the military. In 2004, he was appointed Pakistan's Ambassador to the US, where he served from November 2004 to June 2006 (Changappa, 2013).

[4] Journalist and news anchor Sajjad Mir was associated with Nawa-i-Waqt as an editor, and has been editor of Hurriyat, a Dawn Group paper. He has written extensively in Jang, Khabrain and Nawa-i-Waqt, and he is associated with TV-1 as Executive Director, Head of Current Affairs. .

[5] Along with being an eminent journalist IA Rehman is a Pakistani peace and human rights advocate and a veteran communist. A protégé of the great Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, in 1989, he became chief editor of the Pakistan Times. He is founding chair of the Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy and since 1990, director of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

[6] Interview with Aftab Gul in Lahore December 2010. Gul is a lawyer from Lahore. In 1979, Gul was tried in absentia for his alleged involvement in abetting Al Zulfikar's activities. He is known in the civil military establishment circles as an insider.

[7] In 1997 the government terminated the NTM contract and its programmes went off air for a month. By that time almost 10 percent of the advertising budget had moved to satellite, with Zee TV being the favourite destination. The quality of programmes on PTV had declined considerably with advertisers realizing that satellite channels had more audience. PTV's total dependence for revenue on advertisements made it very vulnerable to shifting audiences in an increasingly competitive world (Crawley and Page, 2001: 278).

[8] Arif Nizami is the son of the renowned journalist and founder of Nawa-e-Waqt late Hamid Nizami. The group is controlled, managed and majority owned by Arif Nizami's uncle Majeed Nizami. Arif Nizami was recently removed as the editor of The Nation. Following the termination of Editor of The Nation, Arif Nizami launched his own English daily 'Pakistan Today'.