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Problems Faced by President Ayub Khan During His Long-Lasting Rule 1958-1969: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

In eleven years as Pakistan's leader, Mohammed Ayub Khan had kept a stable government and handled economic issues well. However, he had not enhanced his relations with India, especially regarding the issue of Kashmir. His failure to secure an agreement on the issue of Kashmir had reduced his army support and strengthened his opponents. Additionally, the war against India in September 1965 had increased separatist unrest in East Pakistan. Ayub faces significant domestic criticism mainly about his foreign policy. He can only silence critics through successful dealings with India, which seems unlikely. Without this success, he must pay more attention to his opponents' views. Ayub and the Army have significant personal influence in the officer corps. Ayub is worried about criticism from the military. His good relations with the army weakened after his unsuccessful attempt to resolve the Kashmir issue in 1965. Without army support, he might stay in power for a while, but would quickly fall if the army opposed him. The article aims to examine the various problems faced by Ayub Khan during his rule.

Keywords: Ayub Khan, Problems, Military, Kashmir, Financial, Political, Opposition, East Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

After achieving independence, Pakistan faced political instability, economic crises, and interventions from civil and military bureaucracies, which led to the October 7, 1958 military coup entrance in Pakistan politics. Iskandar Mirza and Ayub Khan started their regime together, calling it a two-man rule. Mirza wanted to return to his previous influential role, believing he still had military support.¹ In contrast, Ayub Khan, aware that real power lay with the army, aimed to assert his own plans.² Iskandar Mirza, after declaring Martial Law, realized his mistake and promised to keep it short. He regretted ending the Constitution, stating, "I did not mean to do it."³ However, Ayub Khan insisted that Martial Law would stay until its goals were achieved.⁴ Mirza's attempts to manipulate the situation backfired, leading to his resignation and quick departure to England.⁵ The new regime, led by General Ayub Khan, presented itself as a reformer and banned political activities while launching a reform program across various sectors. Despite initial economic growth and international support amid the Cold War, the regime fell apart due to rising poverty and regional disparities, which damaged Ayub Khan's image as a reformer. This discontent was leveraged by political parties like the Awami League and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). As the regime lost domestic and international

¹ The Pakistan Times, October 10,11, 1958

² Ibid, October 10, 1958

³ Ibid, October 16, 1958

⁴ Ibid, October 18, 1958

⁵ M Rafique Afzal, Political Parties in Pakistan 1958-1969 volume II National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Centre of Excellence, Quaid Azam University, Islamabad, 2018 10th Edition p, 3

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legitimacy, Ayub Khan transferred power to General Yahya Khan, who promised elections in 1970 and a return to civilian leadership. However, the political crises continued, ultimately leading to Pakistan's disintegration and the birth of Bangladesh.

AYUB AND THE MILITARY

Ayub had significant influence in the military, though his relationship with the army had been strained due to his failed attempt for a Kashmir solution in 1965. His military critics point to several reasons for this failure, including his poor judgement of India's response and the incompetence of loyal generals. Despite being a professional soldier with generally favorable ties to the army since taking power, Ayub's authority could quickly diminish without the army's support. He agrees with the army's belief in its importance to the country and shared their view on the September ceasefire, which some believe undermined their perceived victory.

Some officers in Pakistan were concerned about a potential war with India and the country's lack of military supplies to recover from combat losses, especially after recent increases in Indian military strength. The United States had been the main arms supplier to Pakistan, but during the September war, the United States stopped military aid to both India and Pakistan, affecting Pakistan more severely due to its heavier reliance on American support. President Ayub Khan had sought more arms from other countries like Iran and Turkey to address these shortages. He had also faced internal pressure, leading to the resignation of two prominent cabinet members as he tries to shift blame for issues related to Kashmir. Ayub

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values debate within the cabinet but expects ministers to support his final decisions without reservation. Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was put on sick leave and later replaced, as he reportedly did not meet Ayub's standards for loyalty and public support of decisions made by the president.

AYUB AND HIS GOVERNMENT

Criticism of Ayub's government from civilians was less intense than from the military. Those directly involved in foreign policy believe Ayub might worry that advice could become biased towards the West, especially with Shoaib as a key figure. Shoaib's resignation helped quell public speculation that Bhutto's dismissal was due to US pressure following the resumption of US aid. Bhutto and Shoaib had different views on East-West relations, influenced by how they prioritized the Kashmir issue and Pakistan's economic growth. Bhutto wanted to build closer ties with China to counter India, while Shoaib hesitated to risk American economic support due to the instability during the 1965 war. Ayub maintains strong control over the civilian government. Although Bhutto may become a rival, his dismissal has not significantly harmed Ayub's position. Relations with the Khan of Kalabagh had deteriorated due to claimed interference. Some backbenchers in Ayub's party express criticism, but his supporters were hesitant to oppose him or seek a replacement.

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FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Pakistan relies heavily on foreign aid for its economic development, with nearly half of its funding for five-year plans coming from outside sources. The upcoming Third Five-Year Plan (1965-70) will need even more funds, although the proportion of foreign financing will decrease to about one-third. The US has been the largest contributor, providing around \$2.9 billion up to 1965, with other Western nations contributing most of the remainder. While Pakistanis take pride in their economic achievements, any slowdown could lead to resentment towards the government, creating instability. Development programs were politically beneficial for Ayub Khan, as they help secure support at the local level, especially among groups like the Pathans, who have historically resisted control. However, these programs come with challenges, including issues of corruption and inefficiency. Ayub allocated more development funds to the Pathans than their taxes or economic impact justified. This new prosperity helped prevent Afghan influence from causing rebellion in the early 1960s and kept the often-unruly population quieter since then.

POLITICAL PROBLEMS

Ayub Khan, facing little serious challenge from political opposition, has not hesitated to arrest leaders who oppose him. Opposition parties often label him a dictator and criticize his failure to secure victory in Kashmir. However, these parties display significant differences that hinder their ability to threaten his power. The ultraconservative Jamaat-i-Islami condemns Ayub for not amending the constitution according to Islamic principles and for abandoning the

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conflict over Kashmir. In contrast, the far-left National Awami Party (NAP) criticizes him for imprisoning leftist activists and for allegedly yielding to imperialist pressures. Internal divisions also plague the opposition, particularly within the moderate Awami League (AL), which faces a near split between its East and West Pakistan factions over Bengali separatism. Other parties experience divisions as well, often losing support from Bengalis when they align closely with leaders from West Pakistan who oppose autonomy. Attempts at unifying opposition forces have only resulted in temporary cooperation. In the 1965 presidential election, they managed to collectively support the inexperienced Fatima Jinnah, sister of Pakistan's founder, but this unity was short-lived. Right and center parties maintain some cooperation despite ongoing disputes, while the NAP has distanced itself from any unified front. Ayub continues to strengthen his position through strategic manipulation of the election process.

Basic Democrats choose officials, but they are fewer than the total voters. The political opposition is unable to present a strong challenge to Ayub, as none of their leaders are as popular. They will likely continue to criticize Ayub and attempt to gain support from dissatisfied citizens. A significant threat to Ayub's rule comes from rising separatist feelings in East Pakistan, mainly among the Bengali population. They feel disconnected from West Pakistan, differing in culture and economy, and believe the central government favors the west despite East Pakistan's contributions. This growing discontent could lead to more serious demands from the region.

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The September war sparked feelings of separation among many Bengalis who felt abandoned by Ayub's government, which only had weak military support in the East. The government's claims that troops in the West could protect East Pakistan did not reassure those far away from the defending forces. Confusing statements about India and China further complicated the situation. Separatist feelings were fueled by the presence of many non-Bengalis in important roles, the dominance of West Pakistanis in leadership, and concerns about the potential loss of Bengali language and culture. The main goal of the current protests is to achieve provincial autonomy, with a focus on economic reforms. Various political parties have put forth programs, with Mujibur Rahman's six points being the most notable. He is advocating for a federal system focused on defense and foreign affairs, stopping capital flight, possibly creating a separate currency, eliminating central taxation, and allowing each province to manage its own defense.

the alleged discrimination against East Pakistan, highlighting issues such as unfair distribution of central government and foreign development funds, the funding of West Pakistan's imports through East Pakistan's exports, and the misuse of East Pakistani taxes for West Pakistan's development. It mentions that rising food costs have also contributed to dissatisfaction among the people in East Bengal. The government's cautious response to the region's unrest, which turned a general strike into riots, reflects their concerns about the volatile population. Although strong measures have been taken against the autonomy movement, leading to deaths among protesters, resentment toward the government has only grown. Support for the autonomy movement is primarily found in Dacca and a few other

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cities, but the movement faces significant challenges. Leader Mujib is unwilling to collaborate with other opposition figures, causing internal rivalry. While some East Pakistani parties have formed a fragile alliance, their focus is on leadership rather than on the goal of achieving autonomy. The issues in East Pakistan are complex, such as low educational levels which limit access to high government positions, and costlier development projects due to the region's terrain. The lack of interest from foreign aid suppliers aggravates the situation, leaving Bengalis feeling shortchanged despite an equal distribution of aid. Ayub's awareness that equal defense forces would weaken both provinces has led to a focus on West Pakistan's defense. His initial public condemnations of the movement and actions against Mujib aim to curb the momentum of the growing agitation. Ayub shut down an opposition newspaper and made many arrests, weakening the AL by targeting its top leaders. This led to riots and armed police intervention, causing deaths among protestors. Ayub has not yet deployed the army, which lacks separatist feelings.

CONCLUSION

Ayub faces significant challenges in solving Pakistan's domestic issues due to limited resources, which require constant effort to maintain living standards. The country's diverse population leads to ongoing separatism risks, particularly among the Bengalis, Baluchis, and Pathans. Historical Hindu-Muslim conflicts further hinder cooperation between India and Pakistan, with both sides reluctant to make concessions. Ayub can only expect some economic improvement, continue management of separatist movements, and limit diplomatic success against India.

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Many Pakistanis believe Ayub, despite failing to resolve the Kashmir issue, has managed as well as anyone could. However, a major policy failure could shift public opinion, making it essential for Ayub to consider this in his domestic and foreign policies.

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