Imran Khan's Arrest and Future Scenario in Pakistan

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Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan was arrested on August 5, 2023, sentenced to three years in jail, and disqualified from politics for "corrupt practices" in the Toshakhana case. Toshakhana is the government department that stores official gifts given to rulers and government officials. Pakistan's election commission began investigating allegations that Khan had bought and sold several valuable gifts for undeclared profit. Since April 2022, when he lost power, Khan has been slapped with more than 150 legal cases, including several charges of corruption, terrorism, and inciting people to violence over deadly protests in May 2023 that saw his followers attack government and military property across the country.The three-year prison sentence could bar Imran Khan from politics, as the law says people with a criminal conviction cannot hold or run for public office. Efforts to put Khan behind bars have been stepped up ahead of elections expected later this year. His popularity and large support base, combined with his ability to mobilise massive crowds, pose a threat to the ruling coalition and could potentially polarise the electorate. The basic purpose of his arrest was for the powerful military establishment to get the "desired results" in the polls because the army and ruling alliance were well aware of Imran's popularity.Imran is the seventh former Prime Minister arrested in Pakistan. Mr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was arrested and hanged in 1979. Nawaz Sharif, the former Prime Minister, was arrested several times on corruption allegations. The ruling and subsequent arrest are likely to be the final nail in the coffin for Khan's chances of contesting Pakistan's upcoming general elections, which are scheduled to take place by November but could be delayed further. Many in Pakistan felt Khan's arrest was the inevitable conclusion to his attempts to go up against Pakistan's all-powerful military establishment, which has had a grip on Pakistani politics for decades. All previous prime ministers who have tried to take on the military have ended up in prison.Pakistan is now facing a serious institutional crisis. It had multiple centres of power, such as the government, army, and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), as well as many other non-state players, especially jihadi outfits. The problem now is not an interference among these power centres but their lack of effectiveness in maintaining the Constitution and law and order in Pakistan. Though Pakistan is constitutionally a democratic parliamentary republic, the military has been in charge for half of its 74-year history. Since 1947, Pakistan has been ruled by four military rulers under three military coups. In an attempt to stop the cycle of long military rule followed by a brief stint of an elected government, the National Assembly in 2010 passed the 18th Constitutional Amendment. This amendment removed the power of the President to dissolve the Parliament unilaterally, turning Pakistan from a semi-presidential to a Parliamentary Republic. Though Pakistan has since seen fairly democratic transitions of power, the influence of the Army on the decision-making bodies has not been reduced.The Pakistan army has failed to maintain its neutrality from politics and with the political parties, and it always tries to become a "kingmaker.". The Army uses political leaders as tools for lodging and unlodging them from the seat of power. The army often hatches conspiracies against governments, which have lost

confidence in the military establishment and ISI. This has brought a bad reputation to Pakistan and pulled down the earlier elected governments before they completed their full terms. None of the nation's 31 Prime Ministers has completed a full five-year tenure. Since independence, Pakistan's Generals have become ever more involved in running the country, and its civilian leaders have become ever more dependent on their backing. Politicians survive in office only if they do as the Army tells them.In Pakistan, the Army generally enjoys high respect and public praise, which sometimes generates a self-righteous attitude among army officers. In the Pakistani political system, deep mistrust between civilian and military leaders confirms a permanent dysfunctional state. It is unrealistic to expect the Army to withdraw from the political sphere in Pakistan completely. The ongoing military establishment-led political manoeuvring is the reason for political instability in Pakistan. Pakistan has been unable to establish a stable democratic political system due to institutional conflicts and its influence on the defence establishment despite seven decades of democratic governance. The Army has played an influential role in government, positioning itself as a parallel power. Pakistan would be better served by having armed forces that are the military arm of the civilian government rather than a government that is the civilian arm of the military.

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