

# THE POLITICS OF CIVIL SERVICE REFORM IN PAKISTAN

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Over the course of the past six decades, the so-called steel frame of the civil service that Pakistan inherited from colonial India has become decidedly rusty.<sup>1</sup> The ineffectiveness of state institutions due to the diminishing capacity, over-politicization and corruption of the bureaucracy and its political masters is seriously undermining Pakistan's economic, social and political development. In addition the failure of Pakistan's state institutions to protect the welfare of its citizens, provide adequate social services and promote the rule of law are eroding the legitimacy and stability of the state.

International attention is belatedly focusing on Pakistan as a result of concerns over the destabilizing effects of an increasingly aggressive Taliban-led insurgency in this nuclear-armed state. One result of this attention is the commitment of large amounts of foreign aid by international donors, including \$7.5 billion by the U.S. government over the next five years. The rapid increase in foreign aid, however, combined with the decreasing capacity of Pakistan's state institutions to spend these funds in an effective and accountable manner, are likely to result in much of this aid simply fueling the very corruption that is eating away the legitimacy of state institutions.<sup>2</sup>

This paper argues that, for these large amounts of foreign aid to have significant benefits, the government of Pakistan and its international donors will have to prioritize rebuilding and repairing the dangerously weakened steel frame of the civil service.<sup>3</sup> After briefly providing some historical context, the paper outlines some of the main civil service reform priorities. It then discusses some of the political factors and interest groups that have contributed to the very limited reform progress to date. The paper concludes that future progress will not depend on more donor-driven technical assessments of what needs to be done, but rather on better strategies and tactics to address the politics of civil service reform, including creating a broader constituency supporting reform.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Pakistan's colonial heritage has heavily influenced its political culture as well as its bureaucratic and political institutions.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this study, the legacy of executive rule by a powerful bureaucracy is particularly worth highlighting. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, colonial administrators developed powerful and highly centralized bureaucratic institutions, administered by the famed Indian Civil Service (ICS), to rule the empire. While representative institutions were gradually introduced into colonial India, the role of these elected bodies was to serve as advisory rather than policymaking bodies, and to deal with local administrative matters rather than substantive issues. They were never intended to be democratic institutions that transferred power to elected representatives, but rather were designed to help legitimize and strengthen the authority of the bureaucratic state.<sup>5</sup> The power imbalance between the very strong bureaucratic institutions that Pakistan inherited from colonial India and the very weak representative and democratic institutions has been one of the greatest causes of political instability in Pakistan since its independence.

During the six decades since the departure of the last British colonial administrator, Pakistan's bureaucratic institutions have remained much stronger than its democratic institutions. The concentration of power in the executive branch, usually controlled directly or indirectly by the civil and military bureaucracies, has been at the expense of the legislature as well as the judiciary. Like the elected institutions during the colonial period, Pakistani legislatures have often had little

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more than an advisory or rubber stamp function, do not usually initiate legislation and serve primarily to legitimize the exercise of power by the executive branch of government. It is the executive, supported by the bureaucracy, that typically initiates legislation, often bypassing the National Assembly altogether by promulgating presidential ordinances.<sup>6</sup> The major change that has taken place over time is that the power and influence of the civilian bureaucracy has increasingly been replaced by the power and influence of the military.

A second colonial legacy that still heavily influences Pakistan's political culture and institutions, as well as its electoral politics, is the institutionalization of patron-client political relationships between the bureaucracy and local elites. In return for patronage—often in the form of land grants, pensions and titles—feudal landlords, religious leaders and tribal and clan leaders were co-opted by colonial administrators to provide political stability and

collect revenues. After independence, this direct patron-client relationship between the bureaucracy and local elites strengthened the image of the bureaucracy as the providers of patronage, influence and security and undermined the development of political parties that normally would have played this intermediary role.<sup>7</sup> The bureaucracy's important role as patron also contributed to the desire of every family to have one member employed in government service to serve as a problem-solver and provider of patronage.

#### CIVIL SERVICE REFORM PRIORITIES

The limited progress on civil service reform in Pakistan has not been due to a lack of knowledge about what needs to be done. Over the course of the past sixty years there have been more than twenty studies on administrative reform prepared by various government committees or commissions (including six since 1996), that have clearly identified the most serious problems.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the lack of progress is due primarily to political factors and ineffective political strategies for pushing through reforms. The following section briefly examines some of the major civil service reform priorities in Pakistan and describes some of the political factors that have contributed to the lack of progress in addressing them.

#### **Reducing the Politicization of the Bureaucracy**

From 1947 to 1971 the civilian bureaucracy played the dominant role in Pakistan's policymaking and as such was insufficiently controlled or influenced by elected politicians. During this period, there was limited scope for interference from politicians as the bureaucracy, particularly the elite Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), maintained control over the selection, training and posting of its members and was therefore able to retain its institutional autonomy.<sup>9</sup> The student demonstrations and political unrest that led to the collapse of General Ayub Khan's regime in 1969, followed by the bloody civil war that resulted in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, seriously undermined the political strength and legitimacy of both the civil and military bureaucracies. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto exploited this weakness after coming to power in 1971 and set out to redress the power imbalance between the elected and unelected institutions of the state. As the following quote demonstrates, he was particularly vocal in castigating the civil service and blaming it for many of the country's ills:

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In return for patronage feudal landlords, religious leaders and tribal and clan leaders were co-opted by colonial administrators to provide political stability and collect revenues.

No institution in the country has so lowered the quality of our national life as to what is called *Naukarshahi* [bureaucratic rule]. It has done so by imposing a caste system on our society. It has created a class of 'Brahmins' or mandarins, unrivalled in its snobbery and arrogance, insulated from life of the people and incapable of identifying itself with them.<sup>10</sup>

Less than three months after coming to power, Bhutto sent a clear message of who was in charge by compulsorily retiring approximately 1,300 civil service officers. This was followed in 1973 by sweeping administrative reforms designed, in part, to weaken the elite CSP cadre and to increase political influence and control over the powerful bureaucracy.<sup>11</sup> Central to this strategy was the introduction of a policy of "lateral recruitment" as a way to increase political influence over the bureaucracy and to ensure that Bhutto's policies and programs could be implemented in the face of a self-interested bureaucracy that was resistant to change.

The measure promoted by Bhutto that was to have the most far-reaching and damaging consequences for the effectiveness and integrity of the civil service, however, was the 1973 Constitution's redaction of the protection that had been afforded to the civil service in previous constitutions. These protections, which were present in the 1956, 1962 and interim 1972 constitutions, included safeguards against the dismissal, reduction in rank or compulsory retirement of public servants.<sup>12</sup> This measure was deliberately designed to undermine the independence of the civil service. The rapid politicization of the civil service quickly followed. In July 1974, an Urdu daily in Lahore identified one hundred senior civil service political appointees who were close relatives and associates of ministers in Bhutto's cabinet.<sup>13</sup> More recently, this politicization is vividly demonstrated before and after elections when thousands of civil servants are posted or transferred to serve the wishes of their political masters. It has become increasingly difficult for civil servants to get postings, transfers or promotions without the support of a political patron.

The politicization of the bureaucracy as a result of Bhutto's administrative reforms did have the positive result of giving elected representatives more influence over unelected institutions. The frequent misuse of this influence, however, has also resulted in the politicization of the civil service to such an extent that it has all but destroyed the concept of a neutral and competent civil service.<sup>14</sup> Many of the senior government officials interviewed during my field research pointed to the urgent need to address this problem. According to one, "The most important issue today for the civil service is to restore constitutional security. Bhutto's 1973 Constitution and Civil Service Ordinance killed the civil service."<sup>15</sup> Another noted, "Insecure people do not perform well and by making the civil servants insecure it reduced the performance of the bureaucracy."<sup>16</sup>

While reducing politicization by restoring a certain degree of constitutional protection to the civil service is critically important, the political obstacles in the path of achieving this reform objective are formidable. The main challenge is that the politicians and military officers who would need to bring about this change prefer to have a weak and subservient civil service rather than a strong and independent one. A retired senior civil servant explained:

Bhutto removed the civil services protection by taking it out of the 1973 Constitution. He tinkered with the system to make sure the bureaucracy became completely docile and pliable. Now you can't get promotions or good postings without political support. In the late '70s and early '80s Zia initially wanted to restore some of the guarantees to the bureaucracy...When Zia realized that he'd be tying his own hands by making the bureaucracy more independent he stopped pushing to restore constitutional protection. Politicians also want a full hold on the bureaucracy. We suggested to [President Pervez] Musharraf to restore constitutional protection to the civil service but he didn't take a decision. He also wanted the power to remove civil servants without any reasons given.<sup>17</sup>

### **Reversing the Militarization of the Bureaucracy**

As noted earlier, one notable departure from the colonial legacy of bureaucratic rule is that the political power and influence of the civilian bureaucracy has been reduced significantly as the bureaucracy became more subject to the political influences of both civilian and military governments. The military, however, has succeeded in strengthening and consolidating its preeminent position, not only as Pakistan's strongest bureaucratic institution, but also as its strongest political institution and interest group. This is best illustrated by the nearly three decades of direct military rule since independence and indirect rule by the civil and military bureaucracies for much of the rest of Pakistan's history.

From 1958 to 1969, the military regime under General Ayub Khan took measures to reign in the powers of the CSP, but overall there was a close symbiotic relationship between the military and the civilian bureaucracy.<sup>18</sup> The systematic militarization of the bureaucracy began in earnest following General Zia ul-Haq's overthrow of the Bhutto government in a military coup in 1977. Many senior civil service officers welcomed Bhutto's downfall, as they believed his administrative reforms had undermined their power and independence. As one remarked, the "CSP was back in the saddle" and "the natural comity of interests between civilian and military bureaucrats had been restored."<sup>19</sup> While Zia ul-Haq did reverse some of Bhutto's reforms, such as the lateral entry of civilian bureaucrats, he offset this

by increasing the lateral entry of military officers into the civilian bureaucracy. Zia ul-Haq also ensured that the civilian bureaucracy did not regain its preeminent position in policymaking by deliberately failing to restore the powerful CSP cadre.<sup>20</sup> The net effect was not to decrease the influence of politicians over the bureaucracy, but to increase the influence of the military.

For similar reasons, both civilian and military rulers want the political benefits of being able to provide jobs in the bureaucracy as patronage and to ensure that, in a bureaucracy that is resistant to change, they have their loyalists in key positions to promote their policies. Both the Ayub and Bhutto governments inducted small numbers of retired or released military officers into the civilian bureaucracy, but the practice was never institutionalized. General Zia ul-Haq not only recruited many more officers and placed them in higher ranks of the bureaucracy, he also institutionalized the practice by establishing quotas that reserved 10 percent of the vacancies in the officer grades in the civilian bureaucracy for former military officers.<sup>21</sup>

Although exact figures are hard to come by, interviews and press accounts suggest that former President Musharraf's government took the practice of appointing serving and retired military officers into the civilian bureaucracy to "unprecedented" levels.<sup>22</sup> During much of his rule, all the major civil service institutions were headed by retired military officers. These included the Federal Public Service Commission responsible for overseeing recruitment, the two main civil service training institutions for mid- and senior-level officers, as well as the Civil Service Reform Unit.

Not surprisingly, this practice was frequently cited in interviews as a cause of growing disgruntlement amongst civil servants who saw their promotion prospects blocked by military appointees. While the civil service has historically viewed the military as their natural allies and politicians as the major threat to their power and influence, the large-scale appointment of military officers into senior positions in the civil bureaucracy may be reversing this perception. Of course, Pakistani politicians also resent the increasing monopolization of power and policymaking by military rulers. According to one senior political party leader:

Twenty years ago the Army was a state within a state. Today the Army is the state—everything else is appendages. The Army controls all state institutions—civil service, foreign policy, economic policy, intelligence agencies, judiciary and the legislature. They've monopolized policymaking.<sup>23</sup>

A growing cause for concern is that, as the civilian bureaucracy continues to decay, the administration of state institutions will become increasingly dependent on the capacity of military rather than civilian personnel. Foreign donors, led by

the United States, risk exacerbating this problem by focusing more attention and resources on developing the capacity of military rather than civilian institutions and personnel. Over time, the effect is compounded. A Pakistani scholar noted with concern the growing imbalance between the governance capacities of the civilian and military bureaucracies:

The military has become organizationally and institutionally stronger in the last twenty years—especially in terms of their governance skills. The military now gets much better governance and administrative training than the civilian bureaucracy. At the same time, the civilian bureaucracy is suffering from institutional decay and moving in the opposite direction. This has changed the power balance from the colonial era and the first two decades after independence when the civilian bureaucracy was the strongest institution. The Army is replacing the CSP and the District Management Group.<sup>24</sup>

Although the military is undoubtedly the strongest state institution, there are still constraints on its power. Pakistan's democratic traditions and institutions are weak, but the military cannot ignore them altogether. Increasingly it must accommodate the growing domestic and international pressures to govern through democratically elected institutions. This was vividly demonstrated by the lawyers' movement of 2007 and 2008, which helped force President Musharraf to hold National and Provincial Assembly elections in February 2008 and to resign as president six months later.

### **Recruiting, Training and Retaining “The Best and the Brightest”**

One of the most critical problems highlighted in interviews with civil servants was the increasing inability of the civil service to attract and retain the best and the brightest at the officer levels.<sup>25</sup> The Chairman of the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC), the institution responsible for overseeing recruitment to the officer levels, noted that there was a worrying deterioration in the caliber of applicants taking the civil service exam. Several senior civil servants also mentioned the difficulty of finding capable junior officers to work in their departments. Some even recounted how they had discouraged their children from joining the civil service and that the incentives that had led them to join and stay in the civil service were no longer there.

The three main motivations cited by interviewees for joining the civil service in the past were power, prestige and job security. Starting with the removal of the constitutional protection of the civil service by Bhutto in 1973, however, the perception was that all three of these incentives had been eroded. While many still do take the civil service exam, the main motivations cited by interviewees were:

1) lingering but misplaced perceptions of what the civil service used to be; 2) high rates of educated unemployment; 3) corruption opportunities; and 4) the desire to have one family member in the bureaucracy to help access patronage and solve problems. None of these factors, however, are going to motivate the most promising young graduates to join the civil service.

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Another serious problem affecting recruitment and retention at the officer grades is the compression of salary scales over time. This has resulted in government employees in lower grades (one to sixteen) still being paid competitively with the private sector, but those in the officer grades (seventeen to twenty-two) are increasingly being paid considerably less than the private sector. During the past decade an increasingly dynamic and growing private sector, especially in banking and telecommunications, means that the brightest young graduates can now earn considerably more working in the private sector than if they join the civil service.<sup>26</sup> For political reasons, little progress has been made in addressing this problem by raising the salaries of the

underpaid officer levels, while keeping the lower grades at current levels. As a former Establishment Division secretary noted, “Decompressing salaries is politically very difficult because you’ll please only 4.5 percent of civil servants and antagonize 95 percent. These junior grades would come out and strike and protest.”<sup>27</sup>

In addition to offering more competitive remuneration to senior civil servants, nearly all the public administration reform commissions have highlighted the need for a comprehensive overhaul of all stages of human resource policies, including recruitment and induction procedures, post-induction training, career planning and development opportunities and performance appraisal mechanisms that reward strong performance.<sup>28</sup> In particular, the independence and capacities of the Federal and Provincial Public Service Commissions must be strengthened in order to promote more open and transparent merit-based recruitment.<sup>29</sup>

### Other Civil Service Reform Priorities

Some of the other important civil service reform needs identified in the 2008 report of the National Commission for Government Reforms (NCGR), and many of the previous commissions, are as follows:<sup>30</sup>

**Greater accountability**—The need to strengthen internal and external accountability mechanisms to address widespread corruption within the bureaucracy.

**Enhanced efficiency and transparency**—The need to promote greater efficiency

and transparency by replacing manual processes with automated ones and rationalizing antiquated and outdated rules, procedures and regulations.

***Rightsizing***—The need for greater efficiency and affordability through right-sizing (most feasibly through natural attrition) of the large number of government employees in the relatively unproductive subordinate services (grades one to sixteen).

***Reform of the cadre system***—The need to promote equality of opportunities and career advancement within the civil service rather than the tradition of giving preferential treatment in terms of training, positions and promotions to certain elite cadres (e.g., the Civil Service of Pakistan until 1973, followed by the District Management Group).<sup>31</sup>

***Clarifying relationships and responsibilities of civil servants at federal, provincial and district levels***—The 2001 Local Government Ordinance devolved considerable authority from provincial to district governments, and at the district level from civil servants (most notably the powerful district commissioners) to elected *nazims*. While there have been some positive benefits from devolution, it has generated tensions between provincial and district governments, and is perceived by many to have increased law and order problems by politicizing the role of the police, who are accountable to locally elected politicians rather than district officers. It has also generated considerable confusion about the responsibilities and reporting relationships for civil servants operating at the district level.

## THE POLITICS OF CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

Given the inherently political nature of civil service reform, much more attention must be given to developing political strategies and tactics to push through reforms rather than treating problems as fundamentally technical in nature. Several interviewees for this study criticized donors for overly technocratic approaches and for pushing for changes without investing sufficiently in understanding the social, cultural and political contexts within which the civil service functions. According to a former finance secretary, “Civil service reform is reduced to a technical exercise—problems are reduced to boxes and then solutions are found to fit into the boxes. The political and cultural contexts are lost in these exercises.”<sup>32</sup> The interviewees argued that civil service reform efforts would fail unless more investments were made in “political needs assessments,” which should trump technical needs assessments. The following sections highlight some of the important considerations of political context that need to be factored into reform initiatives.

### The Legacy of Executive Rule

As mentioned earlier, Pakistan’s political culture has been heavily influenced

by its colonial inheritance of highly centralized state institutions with power concentrated in the executive branch of government. This concentration of power has helped perpetuate an authoritarian and hierarchical political culture, which in turn influences the choice of tactics that are utilized to either promote or resist reform initiatives. For example, a recurring theme in the interviews regarding civil service reform was the necessity of having specific reforms personally backed by the president, or in some cases the prime minister, if they were to have any chance of moving through the system and being implemented. A former cabinet minister observed, “Unless the chief executive or president believes in it and supports it nothing will happen. Because the bureaucracy always prefer the status quo, restructuring can only happen if the leader is interested.”<sup>33</sup>

With the success of reforms dependent on the continuous backing of key individuals rather than institutions, reform efforts become very vulnerable to shifting priorities. Even if a president or prime minister is interested in reform, as the only champions of reform who really matter they can easily become a bottleneck for progress as competing priorities vie for their attention. While reforming the civil service was reportedly a high priority issue for General Musharraf during 1999 and 2000, for example, other priorities subsequently pushed civil service reform down the priority list. The emergence of Pakistan as a frontline state in the war on terror following 9/11 was undoubtedly one such issue, as was the 2005 earthquake and the need to respond to internal and external pressures to hold elections in 2002 and 2008.

### **Political Instability**

Pakistan’s chronic political instability has been another major impediment blocking civil service reform efforts. The short tenure of governments has helped create an environment where the incentives are to focus on short-term political (and financial) gain rather than on achieving mid- to longer-term policy objectives. In interviews for this study, several of those who led public administration reform efforts in the 1990s commented on the disruptive influence of the frequent changes of government:

Just after the report was finalized, the government was dismissed so none of the recommendations were implemented.<sup>34</sup>

The Administrative Restructuring Committee only functioned for one year and then the government was dismissed.<sup>35</sup>

I funded a study in 1997-1998 on establishing a pension fund, but by the time the report was finalized the government had been dismissed.<sup>36</sup>

The latest NCGR report was also finalized at a time of political transition, and political ownership of the report's findings and recommendations following the election of a new government in 2008 remains uncertain.

### **Ethnic Politics**

A major political obstacle in the path of merit-based recruitment into the civil service is the highly emotive issue of ethnicity in Pakistani politics. The dominant role of the civil and military bureaucracies, and the dominant role of Punjabis within these bureaucracies, has been a major grievance of other ethnic groups and smaller provinces since Pakistan's independence. Most dramatically, the unwillingness of the Punjabi-dominated establishment in West Pakistan to share power with the country's majority Bengali population living in East Pakistan led to a bloody civil war and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Resentment against the province of Punjab, which accounts for 45 percent of Pakistan's population, continues amongst the smaller provinces. In addition to inter-provincial tensions, bitter ethnic rivalries exist within provinces, such as between the Sindhis and the Urdu-speaking *muhajirs* who migrated from India after Partition in 1947, as well as between the Baluch and Pashtuns in Baluchistan province.

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The political importance of ethnic politics is institutionalized within the bureaucracy in the form of federal quota policies.

The political importance of ethnic politics is recognized and institutionalized within the bureaucracy in the form of federal quota policies that establish provincial/regional quotas for recruitment into the civil service. The quota policy provides for only 10 percent of new recruits at the national level to be selected purely on the basis of merit, and the rest according to their standing within their province/region.<sup>37</sup> The desire for public administration reforms to promote merit-based recruitment has therefore been balanced with the political importance and sensitivity of ethnically-based recruitment quotas.

### **KEY POLITICAL INTEREST GROUPS**

For reform initiatives to be successful they will need to garner greater support from the key interest groups that have to date been more active in blocking rather than promoting reforms. Some of the important political interest groups in Pakistan include: the "feudal" lobby, which has successfully lobbied against land reforms and agricultural tax and for subsidized farm inputs; a lobby of religious groups that have promoted conservative religious and social agendas; and a busi-

ness lobby that has lobbied for exemption from import duties, trade protection, access to subsidized inputs, non-compliance with tax laws and preferential access to credit.<sup>38</sup> Strong labor unions existed in the 1970s that successfully agitated for workers' rights, but today they are a relatively weak and ineffective political lobby. In terms of civil service reforms, however, the key political actors to date have been the civil service itself, politicians and the military.

## **Civil Service**

Not surprisingly, some of the strongest opposition to civil service reforms comes from public sector employees, where the losers are perceived to outnumber the winners. For example, the junior grade employees fear restructuring and rightsizing initiatives that would result in job losses in the overstuffed and unproductive non-officer grades that account for 95 percent of the bureaucracy. The officer levels fear the introduction of merit- or performance-based promotions systems that would do away with the current system of near-automatic promotions based on length of service rather than performance and merit. Both the junior and senior grades fear changes to the current generous pension scheme for government employees.

Despite the internal resistance to reforms, interviews with serving and retired senior civil servants highlighted their strong opinion that the civil service is facing a major crisis that fails to receive sufficient attention from both the public and policymakers. Several felt that the growing recognition of a crisis could be turned into an opportunity to create greater support for reforms within the civil service. Greater support can also be generated by shifting the rationale for reform away from budgetary considerations that prioritize cost-cutting measures such as downsizing, which will inevitably generate internal resistance to reform. Instead, much more attention needs to be given to creating positive incentives for civil servants to support rather than oppose reforms.<sup>39</sup>

## **Politicians**

Politicians and political parties have an important role in aggregating and representing different interests, including ones that have a direct bearing on civil service reform. Pakistan's two largest political parties—the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML)—can both be described as centrist/opportunistic in their orientation. Historically, however, the PPP has been viewed as left-of-center with support from the intelligentsia and the urban and rural poor, while the PML has been right-of-center with support from the urban middle and upper classes, especially businessmen, traders and rural elites. The PPP's support from labor unions has meant that it has been less inclined to push for rightsizing initiatives and instead provided large numbers of public sector clerical jobs to sup-

porters when in power. The PML's support from the business community meant that it was more willing to start privatizing the banking sector and some other state enterprises when it was in power in the 1990s. Other political parties, especially those organized along ethnic and regional lines, have also mobilized to promote or resist specific issues, such as those relating to provincial employment quotas.

As noted earlier, the removal in 1973 of the constitutional provisions that protected the independence of the civil service resulted in its rapid politicization. In Pakistan's zero-sum politics, politicians soon had little time for neutral civil servants. According to one former secretary of the powerful Establishment Division, "Decision-makers are not very interested in reform. They all say they want good civil servants, but only ones who do what they want. The focus of politics is destroying the government or the opposition. Civil servants get brought into this process."<sup>40</sup> Another politician who headed a civil service reform commission acknowledged that he made little progress in moving reforms forward because, "politicians are only interested in using bureaucrats, not in reforming them."<sup>41</sup>

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Employment is the number one demand placed on politicians from their constituents in a patron-client system.

Patronage is the so-called "stuff" of politics in Pakistan, and the most politically important form of patronage is providing jobs in the bureaucracy. Employment is the number one demand placed on politicians from their constituents in a patron-client system, and its political importance has been one of the major obstacles blocking several public administration reform initiatives. The following quote from a politician interviewed for the study illustrates both the political importance of providing jobs as well as the political hazards of patronage-based politics:

As soon as people think I am in a position to get them jobs I get inundated with hundreds of requests, and most of my time is spent dealing with these requests rather than focusing on legislative priorities and other tasks. Dealing with requests related to jobs, postings and transfers wastes inordinate amounts of time, and forces one to spend the day entertaining people, serving them tea and lying to them. No matter how many people I get jobs for, I will always end up displeasing more than I please. It is therefore politically expedient to have a merit-based system...Some governments have tried introducing more merit-based recruitment, but often that has meant removing the influence of politicians in providing jobs and giving it to bureaucrats. It is fatal for politicians if we say there is a merit-based system and we can't get you a job, and they can then go to a bureaucrat who can use his influence to get them a job. The

politicians then look very bad. For the system to work it must be completely transparent and trusted by everyone.<sup>42</sup>

This quote highlights that politicians also recognize the disadvantages of providing jobs on the basis of patronage rather than merit. It is therefore conceivable that a constituency of politicians could be created to support the establishment of an effective and transparent merit-based appointments system. Similarly, the growing public demand for more effective and accountable government institutions could also convince politicians that a stronger and more independent civil service might also be in their political interests. Shahid Javed Burki has convincingly argued that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's attempts to undermine the power of the civil service had the unintended consequence of contributing to his downfall by weakening the very institution that subsequently needed to deliver services to the people.<sup>43</sup> Parallels could be drawn with current ambitious plans to use foreign aid to significantly expand the delivery of services by the government, but with inadequate attention being given to addressing the declining capacity of the civil service to manage this expansion.

### The Military

As Pakistan's most powerful political interest group, the military can be very effective at blocking reforms that are perceived to be inimical to its interests. This was reported to be the case with regard to pension reform which, according to several interviewees, the military strongly resisted.<sup>44</sup> But the power and influence of the military means that it can also play a major role in promoting reforms.

The interviews, conducted for this study while General Musharraf was still

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the president, suggested that in the short-term military governments are less constrained by political considerations and the need to build consensus around reforms. They can therefore push through public administration reforms more easily than democratically elected governments. The record is less clear in the longer term, however, as military governments are pressured into accommodating a broader spectrum of political interests and responding to domestic

and international pressures to legitimize and democratize their governments. During President Musharraf's rule, for example, there was a clear relationship between the slowing down and rolling back of some of his reform initiative, due to his need to broaden political support prior to and following the 2002 presidential referendum and parliamentary elections. This suggests that the timing of reforms

is as relevant a tactical issue for military governments as it is for civilian governments. As noted by one senior civil servant:

In the beginning after a coup, Martial Law administrators want to go straight, make reforms, hold elections and then get out. But once in power, they want to stay. To do this they need legitimacy and do things like hold referendums. They start adapting to the political culture, and start going back on reforms. Real reforms can only happen in the beginning when they don't have political ambitions.<sup>45</sup>

Some of the dramatic political developments of the past few years in Pakistan could convince the military's leadership that a policy of undermining the civilian bureaucracy is short-sighted. During Musharraf's rule there was growing resentment by the public and civilian bureaucracy of the military's domination of power and politics, vividly demonstrated by the political unrest that ultimately helped force Musharraf from power. For an institution that has historically had considerable public support, this growing anti-military sentiment seems to have convinced the current army leadership that its interests would be better served by a role behind the scenes rather than by taking the brunt of public criticism in a front and center role. This shift may also contribute to a reversal of the militarization of the civilian bureaucracy that was taking place. Furthermore, the dramatic growth of the Taliban insurgency in FATA and the Northwest Frontier Province has forced the military to focus more on security issues and may lead to a greater recognition of the security benefits of having a more effective civil service and public administration.

#### DEVELOP A POLITICAL STRATEGY AND CREATE A BROADER CONSTITUENCY FOR REFORM

This paper describes how the fundamental obstacles to civil service reform in Pakistan are primarily political in nature and not due to a lack of technical expertise or knowledge about what needs to be done. The main political challenge is that those with the power to push for reform—namely the military, politicians and civil servants themselves—have historically had more incentives to oppose rather than support efforts to make the civil service more efficient and effective. This highlights the need for a political strategy that includes sufficient incentives to convince a critical mass of these key interest groups to support reform.

For civil service reform efforts to succeed, there is also a need to create a broader constituency for reform within Pakistan. Discussions and debates must move beyond the offices of the president, prime minister, minister of finance and international donors in order to create a wider constituency that recognizes the

growing crisis in the civil service and supports a reform agenda. While there is a strong public perception that the bureaucracy is corrupt and inefficient, this has not yet created a strong constituency lobbying to reform the bureaucracy. This is due in part to the many people with influence both inside and outside of the bureaucracy who benefit from this corruption and inefficiency, as well as the broader perception that the bureaucratic function of providing jobs is just as important, if not more important, as the provision of services.

There are several ways in which greater public support could be generated for civil service reform. The increasingly influential role of the electronic media sector in Pakistan in informing and influencing public opinion provides perhaps the best opportunity to raise greater public awareness regarding the crisis confronting the civil service.<sup>46</sup> Pakistani academic institutions and think tanks could also be supported to develop stronger research and analytical capacity in the area of public administration reform. More resources also need to be devoted to carefully targeted information campaigns to better inform and convince key constituencies, including cabinet members, parliamentarians, the media, political parties, the private sector and NGOs, about the importance of civil service reforms.<sup>47</sup> Unless awareness of the crisis confronting the civil service is better communicated in Pakistan, and the pressure for civil service reform comes from within Pakistan rather than being imposed by international donors, its chances of success will be slim.

There is still time to strengthen and straighten the rusted frame of Pakistan's civil service, but this urgently requires carefully crafted political strategies and tactics to overcome disincentives for reform, along with efforts to create a broader constituency demanding reform. Continuing to ignore the problem will ensure that large amounts of donor development aid currently being committed to Pakistan will do more damage than good by fueling corruption rather than development. More worrisome, failure to reform the civil service will continue to erode the already limited capacity of the state to address the needs of its citizens, which could ultimately lead to the collapse of the state itself. ♣

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In a speech to the British Parliament in 1922, Prime Minister Lloyd George famously referred to the Indian Civil Service as "the steel frame" that held together the British Raj.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed account of the concern that U.S. foreign aid will fuel corruption, see Jane Perlez, "U.S. Fears Pakistan Aid Will Feed Graft," *New York Times*, 21 September 2009.

<sup>3</sup> This paper is based primarily on information collected through interviews conducted in Pakistan with approximately 60 senior civil servants, politicians, academics, journalists and bilateral and multilateral donor representatives. The first round of interviews was conducted in November-December 2005 and the last round in April 2008.

<sup>4</sup> For more details of the colonial influence on Pakistan's bureaucratic institutions, see Nasir Islam,

“Colonial Legacy, Administrative Reform and Politics: Pakistan 1947-1987,” *Public Administration and Development* 9, no. 3 (June-August 1989), 271-285.

<sup>5</sup> David Washbrook, “The Rhetoric of Democracy and Development in Late Colonial India,” in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, eds. *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> The 1973 Constitution authorizes the president to enact laws through the promulgation of an ordinance in circumstances requiring immediate action when the National Assembly is not in session. Presidential ordinances are only valid for a period of four months, after which they must be passed as an Act by the National Assembly or, as is often the case, reissued by the president as another ordinance. According to one study between 1985 and 1995, 408 presidential ordinances were promulgated in comparison with only 152 National Assembly Acts. See Chapter XI, “What is the True State of Affairs,” in Abdus Sattar Ghazali, *Pakistan: Illusions and Reality* (Islamabad: National Book Club, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> The success of the Congress Party in India at offering itself as a rival source of patronage to the local elites stands in stark contrast to the failure of the Muslim League in Pakistan to do so. See Mohammad Waseem, *The 1993 Elections in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1994), 30.

<sup>8</sup> For a useful summary of the major administrative reform reports, see National Reconstruction Bureau (Operations Wing), *Synopses of Reports on Administrative Restructuring and Civil Service Reforms in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Chief Executive Secretariat, n.d.). The most recent report was released in the spring of 2008 by the National Commission for Government Reforms (NCGR) headed by Dr. Ishrat Hussain, the former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan. National Commission for Government Reforms, *Civil Service of Pakistan: A Proposed Framework* (Islamabad: National Commission for Government Reforms, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed account of the Pakistan civil service during this period, see Shahid Javed Burki, “Twenty-Five Years of the Civil Service of Pakistan: A Reevaluation,” *Asian Survey* 9, no. 4 (1969), 239-254.

<sup>10</sup> Zulfigar Ali Bhutto, quoted in W. Eric Gustafson, “Economic Reforms under the Bhutto Regime,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 8 (July-October 1973), 256.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed account of Bhutto’s administrative reforms, see Charles Kennedy, *Bureaucracy in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1987). For an analysis of Bhutto’s political considerations in pushing for the administrative reforms, see Shahid Javed Burki, *Pakistan Under Bhutto, 1971-1977* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980). See also Saeed Shafqat, “Pakistani Bureaucracy: Crisis of Governance and Prospects of Reform,” *Pakistan Development Review* 38, no. 4 Part II (Winter 1999), 995-1017.

<sup>12</sup> Kennedy, 212.

<sup>13</sup> Burki (1980), 102.

<sup>14</sup> The NCGR report noted: “Pressures and compulsions from the political leadership in power push the ambitious Civil Servants into taking partisan positions favoring the ruling party rather than adopt a neutral stance.” National Commission for Government Reforms, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Senior civil servant, interview by author, Islamabad, 9 December 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Retired senior civil servant, interview by author, Islamabad, 15 December 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Retired senior civil servant, interview by author, Islamabad, 14 December 2005.

<sup>18</sup> For example, in 1959 Ayub compulsorily retired 37 senior civil servants. Burki (1980), 42.

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous civil servant, quoted in Kennedy, 210.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-24.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Massoud Ansari, “The Militarisation of Pakistan,” *Newsline* (Karachi), October 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Political party leader, interview by author, Peshawar, 16 April 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Pakistani academic, interview by author, Lahore, 12 April 2008.

<sup>25</sup> For a recent press account highlighting this concern, see Raza Rumi, “Now or never,” *News* (Islamabad), 29 June 2009.

<sup>26</sup> While the private sector generally pays more than the public sector in most countries, in developing countries like Pakistan it is important that the officer ranks of the civil service be able to compete with the private sector for the relatively small numbers of well-educated graduates.

<sup>27</sup> Retired senior civil servant, interview by author, Islamabad, 14 December 2005.

<sup>28</sup> NCGR, 2-3.

<sup>29</sup> Another important reform needed is to ensure that appointments have fixed term tenures to minimize the current practice of frequently transferring civil servants based on political considerations. For the views of a Pakistani expert on this and other civil service reform priorities, see Nadeem Ul Haque, "ANALYSIS: CSR—do it right!," *Daily Times* (Lahore), 13 July 2009.

<sup>30</sup> NCGR, 2-5.

<sup>31</sup> Following the abolition of the CSP in 1973, the District Management Group (DMG) was one among several new civil service groups to be formed. Over time the DMG emerged as the most powerful and prestigious and was perceived to be the "linear descendant" of the elitist CSP. In addition to being responsible for district administration and manning the powerful positions of district commissioners (DC), DMG members also dominated most of the senior positions in the civil service. The 2001 Local Governance Ordinance dealt a severe blow to the power and prestige of the DMG by replacing the position of DC with district coordination officers and transferring many of the powers of the former DCs to elected *Nazims* who head elected district councils. For more details regarding the formation of the DMG, see Kennedy, 90-93.

<sup>32</sup> Former finance secretary, interview by author, Islamabad, 15 December 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Former federal minister, interview by author, Lahore, 17 December 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Hamid Nasir Chattha, Member of the National Assembly and Chairman of the Chattha Commission, interview by author, Islamabad, 15 December 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Fakhr Imam, former Minister of Education, and Chairman of the Commission for Administrative Restructuring, interview by author, Lahore, 17 December 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Sartaj Aziz, Senator and former Finance Minister, interview by author, Islamabad, 16 December 2005.

<sup>37</sup> The current quotas are as follows: merit 10%, Punjab 50%, Sindh 19% (Urban 7.6%, Rural 11.4%), Northwest Frontier Province 11.5%, Baluchistan 3.5%, Northern Areas and Federally Administered Tribal Areas 4%, Azad Jammu Kashmir 2%. Kennedy, 188. For a more detailed description of the civil service quota system, see chapter 8, "The Quota System of Regional Representation in the Federal Bureaucracy," in Kennedy, 181-208.

<sup>38</sup> Sadiq Ahmed, "The Politics of Reforms in South Asia: Bangladesh and Pakistan," South Asia Region Internal Discussion Paper (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, October 2002), 73-74.

<sup>39</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the importance of incentives for successful civil service reform, see Nadeem Ul Haque, "Why Civil Service Reforms Do Not Work," PIDE Working Papers 2007:24 (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, 2007). Haque warns, "If the appropriate incentives for public service and productivity in the public sector are not in place, corruption or rent-seeking can become the primary incentives attracting those with a proclivity for these activities." Haque, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Retired senior civil servant, interview by author, Islamabad, 15 December 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Pakistani politician and former federal minister, interview by author, Lahore, 17 December 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Senior politician and Member of the National Assembly (MNA), interview by author, Islamabad, 16 December 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Burki (1980), 103 and 107.

<sup>44</sup> Military pensions were reported to be the major cause of the pension problem, as many soldiers retire before the age of 40 on a full pension and in addition are given a very generous 65% commutation payment. Military pensions were reported to account for approximately two-thirds of total pension costs. Senior civil servant, interview by author, Islamabad, 8 December 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Senior civil servant, interview by author, Islamabad, 14 December 2005.

<sup>46</sup> The important role of the electronic media in influencing and mobilizing public support was

amply demonstrated during the lawyers' movement in 2007 and 2008 that ultimately forced President Musharraf to resign.

<sup>47</sup> Retired senior civil servant, interview by author, Lahore, 7 December 2005. A former finance secretary stated that a public information campaign would be timely, seeing as the public perception of the civil service was changing: "In the 1970s the bureaucracy was viewed as very high-handed and the public and the press wanted their powers curbed. Anti-bureaucratic sentiments meant that there was no support for raising salary levels. The perception now is that they have too little power and that the military and politicians have too much power, and that the bureaucracy needs to be strengthened and institutionalized."