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FROM CIVIL SERVANT TO PRESIDENT: THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF FAROOQ LEGHARI

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ABSTRACT

An influential figure in Pakistan's political history, Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari transitioned from a senior bureaucrat to the 8th President of Pakistan and dominated the tumultuous political landscape of the 1990s. Farooq Leghari hailed from a prominent tribal family of Dera Ghazi Khan. He is a product of Aitchison College and Oxford University, which trained him for a leadership role both in the bureaucracy and politics of Pakistan. He joined the Pakistan Civil Service in 1964, from which he resigned in 1973. That was the beginning of his long political journey in the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). He was an enthusiastic supporter of Benazir Bhutto and served in various ministerial positions, and played a pivotal role during the turbulent democratic shifts. The years of President Farooq Leghari (1993–1997) were then a time of political crisis culminating in the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's second government. His metamorphosis from a diehard PPP *Jiala* into a robust constitutional character highlights the intricate intermeshing of personal faith, party loyalty, and institutional responsibility. The current paper explores Farooq Leghari's journey from a civil servant to the head of the state and the determining factors that influenced and led to his characteristic political thinking, style of leadership, and significance for Pakistan's fragile democratic process.

1. Introduction

Throughout the state's political history, the transition from civil service to political leadership has always been rare but a needle-moving phenomenon in Pakistan. The only exception among a bureaucrat-turned-politician who reached the top constitutional position of the country — the presidency — is Sardar Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari. Leghari, born into the powerful Leghari tribe of Dera Ghazi Khan in 1940, has a personal trajectory consistent with tribal status and

administrative competence: the Leghari, a Baloch tribe, have been associated with the British colonial administration and subsequently post-independence state structures (Rose 1990) – is centered in a sense of both tribal adequacy and administrative effectiveness. He received his early education from Aitchison College, later to Forman Christian College, and then the University of Oxford, studying Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, a degree common amongst the world's political heads (Talbot, 2009, p. 184).

Ranked third (among candidates from East & West Pakistan), Leghari joined the Central Superior Services (CSS) in 1964. During his civil service tenure, he had served at several important assignments, including assistant commissioner in Pakpattan and deputy commissioner of Dhaka. He also showed strong organizational skills and diplomatic distance through a very volatile period of ethnic strife and power base concentration. He also served as Deputy Secretary of Home and Industries (*The News*, 2010). His resignation from the public service in 1973, after the death of his father, Sardar Muhammad Khan Leghari, was a significant juncture. He joined the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on the invitation of the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which marked the beginning of his political career, which lasted over two decades. His highly positive image as a committed and honest administrator earned him some ministerial positions in the Z.A. Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto governments, and he finally became the President of Pakistan in 1993 (Hamid Khan, 2001, p. 417). As President (1993–97), Leghari steered the country through a particularly turbulent political era. His term saw the controversial dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's second government under the then-Article 58(2)(b) of the Constitution, the appointment of the caretaker government under Malik Meraj Khalid, and a constitutional deadlock between Leghari and the then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that led to Leghari being compelled to resign in December of 1997 (Hamid Khan, 2001, pp. 417–420). A study of the political career of Farooq Leghari is important for understanding the impact of the technocratic elites on the shaky democratic experiment in Pakistan. They paint a picture of both the promise and the limitations of technocrats turned politicians — the moment when national politics, personal integrity, institutional knowledge, and tribal roots collide. Leghari remains an interesting outlier worth studying in a country where power tends to be in the hands of populists or the military. Technocrats may indeed rise into elected office, but their harmony with shaky democratic institutions that are as much the product of bureaucratic elites as exogenous factors does not always materialize. Leghari's case examines this dynamic and its implications on the question of belief and the nature of the state.

2. Objectives of the Study:

- This study examines Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari's rise from civil servant to Pakistani president, focusing on his educational, tribal, and bureaucratic background.
- An analysis of Leghari's constitutional and executive power during his presidency (1993–1997) will focus on Article 58(2)(b) and civil-military interactions.
- To analyze Leghari's political and institutional legacy on three consecutive governments – the PPP, the Interim Setup, and the PML-N – in the democratic transition process of Pakistan.
- The objective is to evaluate Leghari's leadership tests and constraints as a non-dynastic politician and the influence of his technocratic proclivities on policy-making in a polarized political environment.

3. Early Life and Education:

Sardar Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari was born on May 2, 1940, in Tank, then part of NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), at the residence of his maternal grandfather, Colonel Abdul Rahim Khan. His paternal ancestry descended from the Aliani Clan of Leghari Tribe, a major Baloch

tribe from Choti Zareen, Dera Ghazi Khan. The Leghari had collaborated with the British Raj and wielded political power in the British as well as the post-independence period. His grandfather, Sardar Jamal Khan Leghari, had received the appellation Khan Bahadur and the title of Nawab for wartime efforts during World War I and for the settling of tribal disputes during the British Administration (Mehmood, 2004, p. 793). His father, Sardar Muhammad Khan Leghari, continued the family tradition in the political arena by being a member of the Punjab Assembly in the 1950s, participating in legislative activities of the inceptive years of provincial government in Pakistan (Khan, 1998, p. 26). Farooq Leghari began his early education at Chopra Primary School, followed by his admission in Aitchison College, Lahore, which is the leading A-class elite educational institution, normally meant for the sons of landed aristocracy and bureaucratic families. He showed early leadership, academic distinction, and athletic skills at Aitchison. He was later elected as the Head Boy of his school and was recognized as an ideal student for his excellence in both academics and co-curricular activities. He passed his Senior Cambridge with flying colours in 1956 (The News, 2010). It was written in the College News Letter that Farooq Leghari was an all-rounder student of the college. He excelled in swimming, tennis, and oratory. As a college prefect boy, he made an appearance in 1958. Up until 1958, he stayed at Aitchison College. He did his graduation from F.C. College Lahore where again he was among the top students. He graduated with a B. A (Hons) in English from the Punjab University Lahore in 1960 (The News, 2010). Then Sardar Farooq Leghari went to Oxford University for further studies. He completed his major in Economics, Philosophy, and Political Science at Oxford University. Mr. Leghari graduated from Oxford University in 1963, and during his studies, he was addressed as a professor. He was an avid reader, enjoyed hunting, and target shooting (The Nation, 1993). Farooq Leghari was multilingual, capable of speaking English, Urdu, Balochi, Saraiki, and Persian, an indicative representation of his rich cultural heritage and wide range of intellectual cosmopolitanism. These early educational experiences left a deep impact on his political vision and administrative style, a blend of Western political education and South Asian traditional leadership values.

4. Civil Service Career

After the completion of his education at Oxford University in 1963, Farooq Leghari appeared in the CSS exams and secured 3rd position in both wings of Pakistan. He became a member of the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) – the elite administrative cadre of the country – in 1964. His initial appointments were an expression of the state's trust in his administrative prospects. He was inducted as AC in Pakpattan Sharif, a rural but politically significant part of Punjab. In 1967, he was posted to the then East Pakistan, serving as Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Mank Ganj City (The News, 2010). By 1969, Leghari had grown to become a Deputy Commissioner in Dhaka, the capital of East Pakistan at the time, and saw the escalating Bengali nationalist movement from up close. After coming back to West Pakistan, he served in significant provincial government posts, including that of the Deputy Secretary, Home Department (Internal Security) and Deputy Secretary (Coordination) Industries, where he was associated with policy related to internal security as well as economic regulation (The Dawn 1993). Throughout this time, Leghari earned the reputation of being capable, articulate, and principled – qualities that would shape his future political career.

5. Political Career of Farooq Leghari

In 1970, the Leghari and Mazari tribes formally joined the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in what was a major political shift in southern Punjab. Politician Sardar Muhammad Khan Leghari (father of Farooq Leghari) died in Choti Zaireen on September 21, 1971 (The News 2010). After

his father's death, Sardar Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari came back to his homeland to preside over his tribe. He was subsequently declared the 21st Chief of the Leghari tribe. Farooq Leghari had resigned from the Civil Service in 1973 and joined the PPP on the invitation of the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He soon moved up the party ladder, alongside taking the position of close aide to Bhutto. Being given the charge of District Secretary General PPP, he was then promoted as Provincial Finance Secretary. He was appointed to represent Pakistan at the UNO in September 1974, where he served for about 4 months (The Dawn 2010). Leghari's technocratic background and tribal credentials further gave an edge to the PPP, especially in the southern Punjab, where the party wanted to strengthen its roots. In 1975, he entered the Senate of Pakistan, which marked the onset of his parliamentary career. He was appointed Federal Minister for Production in 1977 and began to implement industrial policies in keeping with the socialist programme of Bhutto. In that same year, during the 1977 General Elections, Leghari won a National Assembly seat from his ancestral constituency in Dera Ghazi Khan with a big margin, reflecting his political prestige. Farooq Leghari took part in the General Election 1977 from NA 125 D.G Khan II and was successful. He got 81044 votes, while PNA member Abdullah Khan got 31643 votes (Nawa-e-Waqat, 2010). The political course in Pakistan was changed on July 5, 1977, with the enforcement of Martial Law by General Zia-ul-Haq, who suspended the assemblies and put the political leaders behind bars. Farooq Leghari was one of the leading PPP members apprehended for his stand against the imposition of martial law. He was lodged in different prisons, including Multan, Sahiwal, and Lahore (The News, 2010). His time in prison, which spanned more than four years, was a time of personal tribulation and political trial. At that time, he was confined along with many other prominent politicians and academics such as the film actor Muhammad Ali, journalist Hameed Akhtar, and Meraj Khalid, who later served as the interim Prime Minister of Pakistan. Despite conditional offers for release, Leghari refused to bend his political or his loyalty to his party, the PPP ranks, and was offered respect by the party ranks. In the 1980s, Farooq Leghari had a leading role in the PPP's internal structure and external communications. As the party's Secretary General, he coordinated the party during Benazir Bhutto's years of exile, helped galvanize support across provinces, and continued to be an ardent advocate of civilian supremacy years when the country was heavily under military control (Ziring, 1997, p. 308). Following the 1988 general elections in which the PPP returned to power, Leghari was given the portfolio as a Federal Minister for Water and Power. During his term, several large-scale rural electrification projects were initiated, especially in underdeveloped areas such as southern Punjab and Sindh. He also enlarged hydro power operations, proving that a technocrat would work within a political system (The News, 2010). In the following 1990 and 1993 elections, Leghari succeeded in retaining his parliamentary seat, further enhancing his position as an efficient administrator and loyal party member. His ideological devotion, tribal chieftaincy, and institutional experience got the PPP to select him as the presidential candidate in 1993, once a civil-military consensus forced the restoration of democracy. Leghari's elevation to the presidency was not just the reward of party loyalty; it was the rare event of the ascension to the constitutional leadership of the country of a technocrat-cum-politician. His ascension signified a comprehensive transformation in PPP strategy—from populist antagonism to technical legitimacy at the executive tier.

6. Farooq Leghari as the President of Pakistan:

On 14 November 1993, Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari took oath as the 8th President of Pakistan. He was nominated by the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and his ties to Premier Benazir Bhutto made his candidacy appear, to many, as an extension of party authority. Leghari won the

presidential election against Waseem Sajjad, the PML-N's candidate, with a strong parliamentary majority. Although he came from the ruling party, Leghari was intent on presenting himself as a constitutional president who abided by the letter and the spirit of the Constitution rather than a partisan (Hamid Khan 2001, p. 417).

6.1 Presidency Under the PPP Government (1993-1996)

In the beginning, President Farooq Leghari and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto were on the same cordial terms, shared history within the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and a common struggle against military rule. But with the rise of governance challenges escalating, tensions surfaced. Differences also arose on the question of appointments in the judiciary, as well as the appointment of the Army Chief. The law-and-order situation, especially in Sindh, and the allegations of corruption against the cabinet members were the main reasons for their differences. Leghari, committed to constitutional propriety, became increasingly critical of executive overreach and administrative mismanagement. The growing divergence between his expectations of institutional integrity and the government's political conduct ultimately strained their alliance, setting the stage for a constitutional confrontation in 1996 (Talbot, 2009, p. 230). The assassination of Mir Murtaza Bhutto on September 20, 1996, presented yet again a catastrophic personal and political crisis. His death in Karachi in a controversial police encounter outside his home, being the estranged brother of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, seriously posed questions on the credibility of the PPP leadership and showed that there are internal divisions within the PPP (Nawaz, 2008, p. 483). There was widespread erosion of public trust in the government and increasing pressure on President Leghari to intervene. As allegations over corruption continued to mount, particularly against Asif Ali Zardari and several cabinet ministers, and with the country reeling from worsening economic instability, Leghari made covert efforts to persuade for reforms. He held several meetings with Benazir and her advisers, warning of the consequences of continued inaction, as documented in various political memoirs and press accounts (Ziring, 1997, p. 540). However, his recommendations were ignored or dismissed. On 5 November 1996, President Farooq Leghari used his discretionary power under Article 58(2)(b) to dismiss the PPP Government, the very party that had elected him as the president. This was a bold and controversial move on Leghari's part, pointing to rampant corruption, a worse law and order situation, and administrative paralysis. It put personal loyalty aside for constitutional duty (Hamid Khan, 2001, pp. 417–418). The dismissal of the Benazir Government by President Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari on November 5, 1996, was a dramatic episode of politics and institutional assertion. It was a decision with far-reaching implications, and to many, a surprising one, especially considering Leghari's longstanding loyalty to the Pakistan People's Party. The public and political observers were shocked: how could a loyal party insider use Article 58(2)(b) to sack his own government? (Chaudhary, 2011: 267). But the fact is that Leghari's decision was not motivated by personal rivalry; as far as he was concerned, the state was in anarchy, full of corruption and lawlessness. It has been bitter and politically costly, but his action was taken in what he believed was the national interest and part of the constitutional powers the presidency confers on him. Most people breathed a sigh of relief. Throughout Pakistan, people and political parties, likely the PML-N, PPP- Shaheed Bhutto, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Istiqlal, and PML (F) have welcomed it as a need of the hour, and a long overdue step (Anjum, 1997, p. 22).

6.2 Presidency Under the Interim Government of Maraj Khalid

After the dislodging of Benazir Bhutto's second government on 5 November 1996, President Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari appointed a senior and widely respected former Speaker of the National Assembly, Malik Meraj Khalid, as caretaker Prime Minister. Although this interim setup

was constitutional, it was viewed as a trial for Leghari — whether he would respect democratic continuity or prolong presidential dominance through an extended unelected regime.

Shortly after the dissolution of the Assembly, which occurred approximately ten days later, Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah made a confidential recommendation to President Leghari to postpone the elections for a period of at least two years. Sajjad Ali Shah was of the opinion that the time had come to launch a full-scale accountability campaign from the very beginning. He thought that if elections were held too early, “one group of thieves will leave, and another will come (Nawaz, 2008: 487).” Leghari, on the other hand, turned down the idea, saying that he believed in democratic continuity and that public trust needed to be restored through early elections and a constitutional transition (Ziring, 1997, pp. 542–543). In the meantime, during this interim setup, the Ehtesab Commission was formed to launch a wide-ranging accountability drive against the corrupt politicians. It was a reaction to heightened public calls for transparency and justice. Some saw the effort as a necessary step in the right direction, while others thought it was politically motivated and lacked legal force. Despite these strains, the caretaker government led by Leghari conducted the general elections in February 1997, which were the 8th general elections in Pakistan. These elections were perceived as free, fair, and credible. In particular, these elections wrote a seminal chapter by enabling the residents of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to exercise their right to vote; a landmark development in the political history of Pakistan (Leghari, n.d.). Public and political circles gave mixed responses to the interim setup of President Farooq Leghari— some commended its neutrality and reform intentions, while others criticized it for loading too much power into the presidency. However, Leghari’s decision to accept the election schedule and transfer power peacefully to an elected government confirmed his commitment to the democratic transition process.

6.3 Presidency Under PML-N

Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) won a landslide victory, securing a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly in the 1997 general elections. The strong mandate enabled the new government to quickly embark on amending the constitution. The most important of these were the 13th Amendment, which abrogated Article 58(2)(b)—removing the president’s power to dissolve the National Assembly—and the 14th Amendment, which enforced party discipline on legislators prohibiting dissent within the party lines (Hamid Khan, 2001, pp. 418–420). These amendments severely limited the constitutional powers of President Leghari, leaving the presidency as a ceremonial position. Tensions arose between the presidency and the executive, the latter damaged following the judicial crises with the Supreme Court and Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah. When PML-N leaders allegedly pressured President Leghari to sack the Chief Justice, he declined, saying such a move would breach the principle of judicial independence and his impartiality under the constitution. Tensions reached their climax in November 1997, when pro-government militants stormed the Supreme Court, setting off a spectacular institutional crisis and revealing deep rifts in the judiciary. It was not just an assault against judicial independence, but a blow to the already fragile equilibrium between the executive and constitutional accountability. In this climate of political confrontation and institutional decay, President Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari, isolated and denuded of his constitutional role, sought resignation on December 2, 1997 (The Dawn, 1997). In his farewell address, he said he was no longer willing to serve as a ceremonial head of the state, in a system where the presidency had been stripped of its teeth. His decision was the end of a principled tenure characterized by respect for constitutional values over political expediency. Though

controversial at times, Leghari departed with dignity, remembered by many as a leader who placed institutional integrity and national interest above personal or party gain.

Conclusion:

This study, in its exploration of the political journey of Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari, from being one of the most distinguished civil servants of his time to the 8th President of Pakistan, underscores the challenges of balancing institutional responsibility within an unstable democratic milieu. What should be made of Leghari was not an opportunist but a person dedicated to constitutionalism, accountability to the people, and the integrity of institutions. His evolution from a senior CSP officer to a PPP leader and ultimately to the presidency was a distinctive amalgamation of bureaucratic discipline, tribal leadership, and political acumen. Despite inciting political controversy, his dismissal of the PPP government in 1996 demonstrated his will to prioritize national interests before party allegiance, a decision later affirmed by the Supreme Court. The decision to deny the approval of the interim government and the insistence on conducting general elections as scheduled highlighted his commitment to democratic continuity. He facilitated a timely electoral transition by resisting undemocratic demands during the interim setup. Despite being limited by the PML-N, he resigned rather than become a ceremonial figurehead to safeguard judicial independence. Leghari's legacy is law over loyalty and principles over partisanship. His leadership in Pakistan's political growth shows that service, conscience, and constitutionalism may leave an institutional mark.

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