**[The Egypt model](https://www.dawn.com/news/1768827/the-egypt-model)**

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IN his book, *Ruling Oneself Out*, sociologist Ivan Ermakoff makes an important distinction between ‘surrender’ and ‘abdication’. Surrender refers to an unwilling decision imposed because of external constraints, such as a loss on the battlefield. Abdication, in Ermakoff’s words, suggests: “It is surrender that legitimises one’s surrender. It implies a statement of irrelevance. When the act is collective, the statement is about the group that makes the decision. The group dismisses itself. It surrenders itself and agrees to do so, thereby justifying its subservience.”

The book was written almost two decades ago. The case it built its theory of abdication on was the Reichstag’s transfer of its own authority to Hitler on March 23, 1933, gutting democracy and, ironically, the Weimar constitution that gave parliament its supreme power.

This type of abdication is an extreme case from 90 years ago. But one doesn’t have to squint too hard to see some similarities, with events taking place in Islamabad in 2023. After all, legislators in Pakistan’s National Assembly are also willing to abdicate their own authority in front of another power.

Among the fire sale of hasty legislation this past month, there have been several pieces (some proposed, some passed) that expand or bring various issues under the domain of the security agencies. This includes c[hanges to the Army Act](https://www.dawn.com/news/1767681) as well as proposed amendments to the [Official Secrets Act](https://www.dawn.com/news/1767984) and [laws dealing with media regulation](https://www.dawn.com/news/1768126). Coupled with the draft bill on data protection and older legislation such as Peca and its social media rules, the past few years have been one of increased securitisation, surveillance, and control, largely by the security establishment.

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The pace at which domains of governance are formally or informally being handed over to unelected institutions by ostensibly elected representatives has picked up considerably over the past few months. What we are seeing is a complete reconfiguration of the way both political and economic power is exercised in this country, towards something approximating the Egyptian model.

The signs of this reconfiguration have been around for some time. When a dispassionate review of the political transition from [Musharraf’s exit](https://www.dawn.com/news/955891/president-pervez-musharraf-resigns) onwards is ultimately written, it will become more apparent that the actual window of democratic opportunity existed only between 2008 and 2011. It was during this time that the 18th Amendment and the seventh NFC award were cleared, expanding the rights of smaller provinces and settling resource conflicts as old as the country itself. This was also coupled with greater space for critique through mainstream media and civil society, which faced far fewer restrictions compared to today.

From 2012 onwards is when the realisation started to set in, in terms of just what exactly had been given away in a comparatively small time frame. Since then, every successive year has seen various attempts at enhancing control in some form or the other.

Securitisation of everyday life, such as through check-posts and spatial restrictions, took place because of the rise in terrorist militancy. Media control was first seen to be exercised informally by interventions of the military’s media wing and then more formally through regulatory overreach, which saw channels being taken off or coerced at will. Social media control was enshrined through [Peca](https://www.dawn.com/news/1676116), accompanying social media rules, and direct control over the telecommunications authority (PTA). Rights-based civil society was muzzled through arcane registration requirements housed at the Economic Affairs Division, all passed under the pretext of FATF compliance.

Politically, the PTI and judicial interventions provided an integral ally to limit the power of the older mainstream parties, which ultimately found its fruition in the first hybrid model of 2018-2021. And finally, once that same-page wilted, a comprehensive model was reinstalled from 2022 onwards, leveraging the desperation of the older parties — the PML-N in particular — that otherwise face near-certain electoral demise.

The last remaining frontier had been hands-on management and governance of the economy. If the past few months are any indication, this domain is poised to be conquered as well. The [Special Investments Facilitation Council](https://www.dawn.com/news/1760909) enshrines the role of the military high command in not only apex policymaking but also implementation of targeted government-to-government commercial transactions. Along with the [corporate farming initiative](https://www.dawn.com/news/1742652), and recent discussions about minerals and natural resources, the stage is set for some pretty drastic changes in how economic governance is carried out in this country.

The pace at which we are heading towards a new political and economic order suggests that at least part of it is being driven by external factors. Maybe, there is pressure from the Chinese, or the Saudis, or the Emiratis, all of whom have been cited as having an interest in various sectors. Maybe, they would prefer to work with a centralised state with little space for the political messiness that has so often characterised Pakistani democracy. But maybe, that preference is also being used as a pretext to take more control anyway.

Either way, there are a few more things that are worth watching out for, which may be under threat of this ‘reconfiguration’ exercise currently underway. The first is the administrative rights of provinces and the jurisdictions that were granted under a federal Constitution through the 18th Amendment. Pakistan has a history of centralised authority during periods of unelected/non-democratic rule and it seems we are approaching something similar once again.

The second one, linked to the first, is the state of federal government finances and the fiscal transfers to the provinces. This has long been a bone of contention, but cross-party resistance from the smaller provinces has so far prevented any change to the arrangement that was agreed upon 13 years ago. If this hybrid arrangement morphs into something far more direct, then these too would be at risk.

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*Published in Dawn, August 7th, 2023*