

Q. Under what circumstances might a democratic country turn to military dictatorship?
Narrate with case study

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1- Introduction

The transition from a democratic state to a military dictatorship represents a complex chapter in the political history of nations. Each transition is unique, often shaped by a combination of historical, socio-political, and economic factors. According to John Acton, "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". History pages are linked with the blood from the "reign of terror", which repeated itself time and again. According to Machiavelli, "politics has nothing to do with morals", and there are politicians and military who defy all the morals and end up ruling a state with complete absolutism.

Turkey's case serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges that democracies face, resisting the allure of military rule.

2. Dictatorship: the rule of one man who exercise absolute power

(a) Dictatorship is an antithesis to democracy

Dictatorship is a form of government in which one person or a small group

possesses absolute power. It is an antithesis to democracy, because dictatorship is, firstly, government by decree rather than by law; secondly, the dictator is not accountable before any parliament or representative body, and thirdly, there is no limitation on the duration of the dictator's authority. He holds the power till he dies or is overthrown.

(b) The concept of Totalitarianism emerged after WWII

That was the time, when fascism, Nazism, and communist governments came to the power. Niccolò Machiavelli gave an account of a totalitarian ruler in his book "The Prince". According to him, ruler is the one from whom subjects get feared, he knows how to use virtue and vice and he could become a fox to recognize traps and a lion to frighten wolves.

So, Along with that, a totalitarian ruler would be both democratic and non-democratic, constitutional and un-constitutional. It can mould public opinion through violations or restrictions.

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3. Rise of modern dictatorship

Modern dictator captures supreme power against law and constitution and secures popular support by a strong government and plebiscite.

(a) These dictatorships arose during first world war (1914-18)

Firstly, arose of the communist dictatorship in Russia in 1917, then in 1921, Kemal established his Fascist dictatorship in Turkey, and soon after, in 1922, Benito Mussolini established his fascist dictatorship in Italy.

In 1933, the most ferocious of all the fascist dictatorships, arose the Hitlerite dictatorship of Germany, usually called Nazi dictatorship.

(b) Three dictatorships of Italy, Germany and Japan started World War II (1939) which ended in 1945 with the utter destruction of the three fascist powers. Mussolini was hanged by Italians; Adolf Hitler died in an air-raid shelter in Berlin.

4. Possible circumstances that would trigger absolutism

Various possible circumstances could compel a military leader to intervene in a regular and democratic government. Following are some of those reasons that could trigger both military and civilian rulers to hold absolutism:

(a) The chaotic political dilemma back in the Ottoman Empire

Turkey has experienced a tumultuous political landscape marked by frequent changes in government. The legacy of military involvement in Turkish politics goes back to Ottoman times. The military played a key role in history of the Ottoman empire. The name of "Sickman of Europe" was given to Ottoman Empire during world war I.

State's modernization process was driven by military concerns, towards the end of Ottoman Empire. These officers

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began to see them as vanguard of enlightenment. They planned the 1978 revolution and the Young Turk revolution of 1908.

Their interventions brought significant changes in politics.

After the world war I, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk emerged as country's political and military leader. Turkey's modernization process was led by military.

(b) External threats justify the military interventions

Firstly, the aim of Mustafa Kemal was to prevent military from exercising direct political influences but later on he saw the role of army as guardian.

This was supported by the Turkish constitution that it is the duty of armed forces to protect Turkish territory and Turkish Republic.

1960's, 1970's, 1980's martial laws were result of this authority given to Turkish military and their intervention was legally justified by

constitution

(c) Economic turmoil in 2001 incited military intervention

In 2001, inflation had reached staggering levels, with rates as high as 64%. Public confidence in government's ability to manage the crisis eroded rapidly.

Military as stabilizing force, issued a memorandum, referred as '12-memorandum', a warning to the government. Subsequently, the coalition government resigned in 2002.

A new government AKP came to the power. This shows how economic crisis, shift power from politics to military.

(d) Social unrest directly lead to military intervention

The Gezi Park protests in 2013, not only triggered military coup, but also raised political tensions and concerns about the state of democracy and civil liberties in the country. The military role has made its influence a significant factor in Turkish politics during the period of social unrest.

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(c) military perceives itself as necessary force during leadership failures

In July 2016, Turkey experienced a significant crisis when a faction within the military attempted a coup against president Erdogan's government. The failed coup attempt triggered a massive government crackdown that created a leadership crisis. It creates an environment where military perceive its interventions as a mean to restore stability.

(d) Constitutional weakness paves the way for military intervention

When a constitution lacks robust checks and balances, and mechanisms for resolving political disputes, it can create an environment where authoritarian tendencies can thrive.

(e) 1960 military coup was driven by concerns about corruption within government

The military saw itself as responsible for protecting kemalist principles. The perception of a leadership crisis and constitutional weakness contributed to the military's decision to intervene.

(ii) 1980 military coup occurred during a period of intense political violence.

The military justified its intervention by citing the need to restore law and order and protect the secular state. This contributed to military perception that a strong hand was needed to stabilize the country.

(iii) 1997 "post-modern coup" occurred when coalition governments fail to address issues. In 1997, military issued a memorandum that was a pressure campaign, resulted in the resignation of the government.

5. Conclusion

The shift from democracy to military dictatorship include different circumstances like political instability, economic crises, social unrest and weak constitution. Turkey's history has been marked by episodes of military interventions. The lessons from Turkey's history serve as a reminder of ongoing challenge of delicate balance between civilian leadership and role of the military.