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Pakistan PM Surrounded by Growing Protests After Deadly Clashes

By Jason Ditz

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Weeks of protests in Pakistan came to a head over the weekend, with police out in force against demonstrators in a violent crackdown that left at least 8 dead and over 500 wounded.

Protesters had been calling for Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to step down and order new elections after the presentation of new evidence related to corruption in the previous vote. The Lahore courts also ordered police to take a report against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and other officials for multiple counts of murder related to a previous crackdown.

As is so often the case, the crackdown made matters worse for the government, and now in addition to the Pakistani Tehreek-e Insaf (PTI) party, which is at the head of the protests, other major parties are echoing the call for the government to step down.

Likely an even bigger problem for the Sharif government is that the Pakistani Army is expressing “concern” about the violence and warning the government against further use of force against protesters.

Pakistan has a long history of coups d’etat, and governments tend to go out of their way to avoid angering the powerful military leadership. The violent crackdown, coming so soon after the army chief had tried to negotiate a settlement, looks to have been a major error in judgement, and

could dramatically weaken the government's position amid growing calls to resume talks with the protesters.