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Opposition Sees Shades of 2007 in Pakistan's Judiciary Crisis

By [Jason Ditz](#)

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Pakistani opposition leader [Nawaz Sharif today termed President Asif Ali Zardari the gravest threat to democracy in the nation's history](#), an incredible statement in a nation rife with coups d'etat, including one that ousted Sharif from his former role as prime minister.

Sharif's comments come amid a growing crisis of confidence over what has come to be known as the "[judges issue](#)" in Pakistan, stemming from a dispute between the Supreme Court and the Zardari government over judicial appointments.

The constitution in Pakistan requires the president to consult the judiciary over the appointment of judges, but instead President Zardari ignored the recommendations and appointed two key judges seen as favorable to his administration.

[The Supreme Court declared the appointments illegal and struck them down yesterday](#). The incident didn't occur in a vacuum, of course. The Zardari government has been clashing with the judiciary for nearly a year, and [over the past few months has been in open battle with them over the loss of legal immunity for key members of the Zardari government](#), which could ultimately force the government from office and land several high profile ministers in prison for corruption.



Several opposition members, including Sharif, have suggested that the current dispute has shades of a November 2007 dispute in which [then-President Pervez Musharraf declared a state of emergency and had much of the court arrested by the military](#). Zardari insists that he has no plans to announce another state of emergency.

Though Zardari has repudiated the actions of Musharraf, in March of last year he ended up in open clash with much of the nation over his refusal to restore the judges ousted by Musharraf in 2007. Zardari placed portions of the country under emergency rule, temporarily ousted the provincial government of Punjab, and attempted to use the military to stop a public protest led by Sharif. Ultimately the protests were so massive and the military so reluctant to crush them that Zardari was forced to restore the judiciary, setting the stage for the battles with the restored judiciary over the balance of power which continues today.

At this point, most acknowledge that there is no working relationship between the executive and the judiciary, and while the ruling [PPP organizes pro-Zardari rallies](#), most of the opposition seems to be squaring up firmly on the opposite side. Pakistan's polity seems to be growing more polarized by the minute.