

Musharraf Can't Wage War on His People

Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg (ret.), former Chief of Staff of the Pakistani Army, currently director of the FRIENDS thinktank, gave this interview to Muriel Mirak-Weissbach on July 23.



EIR: General Beg, I would like your views on the overall situation in Pakistan, which has become extremely turbulent. President Musharraf has been dealt a political blow with the Supreme Court's decision to reverse his ouster of Chief Justice Chaudry, while pressure from the U.S. is escalating, to demand that Musharraf move militarily against what they say is al-Qaeda, or let the U.S. troops go in.

Beg: Well, some good things have happened in Pakistan, even despite the gloomy picture. First, the judiciary is independent, which it had never been before. So the course of justice will be okay. Secondly, the supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law have been established. Number three: The judiciary, which had supported a military takeover, can never do that again. And finally, there are new power-bases emerging in Pakistan, which have brought about changes, and are related to the middle class. These are the Bar and the Bench, and the media. As a result of this movement, the status quo, based upon a group of politicians in collaboration with the military and judiciary, who held power for decades, has been changed.

As for the negative things that have happened, first of all was the bloodbath at Lal Masjid [the Red Mosque]. This has created a new scenario in Pakistan. Either by design, or by deceit, the Army has been pitted against those who oppose Musharraf and his "enlightened moderation." Musharraf calls on the nation to fight extremism, but the people will not do it.

His second defeat was the Supreme Court's judgment on July 20. Musharraf is on weak legs politically. His options are limited; he cannot use force to break through, in the political field, and also in Waziristan and the Bajuar area, where the military are fighting. They know they will be defeated. The government is trying to negotiate with the tribals, despite the pressure from the U.S. to join hands and strike the extremists.

Musharraf knows that would be suicidal and a tragedy for the armed forces of Pakistan.

There were 2,600 girls and women in that mosque, but only 1,200 have been accounted for, not the rest. They were brutally killed. This is a sinister design in Pakistan, because all the students in the madrasas, boys and girls, come from the poorest of the poor. Many of them are orphans of the earthquakes in the north, many are children of the tribesmen from Waziristan, from the frontier region. There are hundreds of madrasas, which take in children and give them food and housing, run by the charities of the community. They were ruthlessly, brutally killed, and none of the many organizations fighting here for human rights has raised a hue and cry. These are the poor, being killed and exploited.

This is where Chaudry stands. In the short period of one and a half years, Chaudry dealt with 30,000 pending cases, and mainly the poor benefitted. That's why they hit at him. But the people won. This is the revolution in Pakistan, a peaceful revolution, which has taken a new shape here, as a result of the movement I mentioned earlier, of the Bar and Bench, and media. The political forces, secular or not, have no role to play.

EIR: How do you respond to the concrete pressures being put on Musharraf, to go after al-Qaeda or let foreign troops come in?

Beg: The Americans and NATO want Pakistan to do something that they failed to do themselves. They lost the war in Iraq, and lost the war in Afghanistan, and they will retreat. They expect Musharraf to deliver at a point when he is at his weakest, with few options left. His Attorney General resigned, there is division in his party, resentment in the Army. If the Americans (or Europeans) and NATO expect something to happen from this side, it will not happen. If they take action themselves, that will hasten the demise of General Musharraf....

Everyone knows they cannot win [against the extremists] militarily and will lose, the way the U.S. lost in Iraq. Two years ago, when they used force in Waziristan, they lost 670. Accepting defeat, they called for a cease-fire, negotiations started, a peace agreement was signed with the tribesmen. Now this has been broken after troops were sent in, in violation of the agreement. Over the last seven days, they have lost 130 Pakistani troops. The fighting is going on and negotiations are going on too. NATO and the Americans want our troops drawn into quicksand there. This is the tussle between Pakistan, and NATO and the U.S....

EIR: What do you think the government will do?

Beg: Under popular pressure, it will not wage war there. If the armed forces were defeated, there would be nobody left [to defend the nation].