

War on Terror Menaces Pakistan's Integrity

by Ramtanu Maitra

Under intense pressure from the United States and European Union, Pakistan President Gen. Pervez Musharraf on Nov. 8 said he was committed to holding general elections and the transition to full democratic civilian rule in the country.

Musharraf's statement was issued less than 24 hours after U.S. President George Bush, addressing the Pakistan crisis at a joint press conference in Washington with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, announced that he had spoken to the Pakistani President and urged him to end the state of emergency and give up his military post. "My message was very plain. . . . The U.S. wants you to have the elections as scheduled and take your uniform off," Bush said.

During the intense media coverage in the United States, and elsewhere in the West, the focus remained on how Musharraf and the military were strangling the democratic aspirations of the Pakistani people. Not a word has been written about the fast-approaching desperate situation in the western part of country, bordering Afghanistan, where the U.S. and NATO troops are involved in military operations against the Taliban.

Do Britain and the U.S.A. Want a Break-Up of Pakistan?

In the Swat district, located north of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and bordering Afghanistan, the Taliban have taken over police stations in Matta, Khawazkhela, and Charbagh. The Swat Valley was previously the second-most attractive area for foreign tourists, but one correspondent, who visited the Matta police station after the imposition of emergency in Pakistan, pointed out that many areas in this tourist paradise look like ghost towns. More than 500 hotels and restaurants have closed down in the last two months. Schools have been closed in all Taliban-controlled areas. Security forces have converted many restaurants and shopping plazas into trenches. The Taliban replaced Pakistan's flag with their own at the police station, after more than 120 soldiers surrendered on Nov. 4.

Immediately after Musharraf's speech imposing a state of emergency throughout Pakistan, the army swapped 25 Taliban fighters for 211 kidnapped soldiers in South Waziristan. Taliban leader Maulvi Fazlullah is reportedly strutting around in half of the Swat area like a ruler with full protocol. He has appointed his own "governors" in Kabal, Matta, and Khawazkhela. He has also ordered the establishment of Islamic courts

in areas under his control. Fazlullah's own FM radio station is blaring news of yet another victory against the state of Pakistan. The Taliban leader says that all he wants is *Shariat* (Islamic law), but the truth is there for everyone to see. He has annexed territory from the state of Pakistan, and plans to set up a government there, like that of Taliban strongman Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan.

An editorial in the Lahore-based *The Daily Times*, said on Nov. 8: "If Swat is going to follow the model of South Waziristan, then let us take a look at the kind of government Baitullah has set up there. From a population not used to paying their bills for state utilities, and used to no taxation system, Baitullah has extracted taxes with which he can run his mini-state. What went under the name of smuggling is now legalized because everyone pays his taxes. With tax on trade of all sorts and the vehicle 'token system,' the warlord has enough revenue to finance his 30,000-strong army, and even send it into all parts of the Tribal Areas to help other Taliban elements. He also has a contingent of suicide-bombers whose outreach now includes the entire length and breadth of Pakistan. Salaries paid to the ranks and officers range from Rs 10,000 [about \$200] to Rs 25,000 [\$500] per month. . . ."

Why the Silence on Threats to Pakistan?

Very little has been said about these developments, by world leaders or the Pakistani political leaders pursuing democracy. On the other hand, the Pakistan situation, which has been deteriorating for years, particularly since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in the Winter of 2001, suddenly became the focus of public attention on Nov. 3. On that date, President Musharraf announced the state of emergency, suspension of the Constitution, replacement of the chief judge, and blackout of independent TV outlets, saying the country must fight rising Islamic extremism. These measures clearly indicated that Musharraf did not want to go ahead with the general elections previously scheduled for mid-January 2008.

There are speculations about what triggered the imposition of the state of emergency. The foremost reason cited by the Pakistani media is that on Nov. 5, the 11-member Supreme Court, hearing petitions challenging Musharraf's Presidential candidacy, will issue a decision that would nullify the election he won handily on Oct. 6. President Musharraf had promised the United States, the European Union, and the people of Pakistan earlier that he would give up his military uniform and remain as President. The invalidation of his election as President means that Musharraf will lose both his position as Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) and President of Pakistan.

The second possible reason is the growing security crisis inside the country. On Oct. 18, the day the former twice-failed Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan after eight years of self-imposed exile, two massive bombs went off in Karachi, killing more than 140 people who were among hundreds of thousands celebrating the former Prime Minister's return. A few days later, a suicide bomber got close to the



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As the crisis in Pakistan unfolded over recent days, scarcely a word has been written about the desperate situation in the western region bordering Afghanistan, where U.S. and NATO troops are involved in military operations against the Taliban. President Musharraf (left) shown meeting with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in Islamabad last February.

Army headquarters in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, where Musharraf was conducting a meeting of senior Army officers. On Nov. 1, in Sargodha, Punjab, a suicide bomber killed nine Pakistani Air Force personnel, including a squadron leader. These incidents indicated to the Pakistani Army, the institution that is considered by many as the only functional institution in the nation, that the security situation is too dangerous to allow it to share power with democratic forces. It is no secret that the principal objective of most of the political leaders who are now on the front line calling for democracy, is to undermine and vilify the Army's rule. At the same time, there is no doubt that eight years of Army rule under Musharraf have done little to earn people's love and respect.

However, the danger that such an anti-Army policy poses is evident from what is happening in the western part of Pakistan, bordering Afghanistan. In this virtually ungovernable region, the Pakistani Army is facing a situation which has only two options. The first is to wage a full-fledged war against the tribals who are now backed by the anti-West, anti-Islamabad militants. Some of these militants were created by Western powers to be used against the now-defunct Soviet Army. Others are the victims and sympathizers of the seven years of war waged by the United States and the NATO. These militants are all Muslims who have come to the understanding that the War on Terror is a euphemism for war against Islam. Since the Pakistani military is 100% Muslim, it is almost a certainty, as we can see by what is happening in the Swat district, that the soldiers will lay down their arms and refuse to fight.

But, even if the Pakistani Army engages itself fully against the militants in this extremely difficult terrain, the "victory" could very much elude them, even after years of war and the loss of many lives. The situation would then be untenable, and a civil war would be almost a certainty.

The second option is equally painful. It would mean no interference in the tribal areas and letting things develop as they may. But, that option would turn the entire area bordering Afghanistan into an independent nation under control of the militants. This is what Osama bin Laden tried to establish in Somalia, but he failed to do so. This is, nonetheless, now becoming a reality, thanks to a policy adopted by the United States and the European nations.

Were these developments not foreseen, or were they designed to break Pakistan up into two countries: one part west of the Indus River that would

consist of Baloch rebels and militants in the Pushtun land practicing radical Islam and feudal traditions. They will be the protectors, or destroyers, of Central Asia, if, and when, their benefactors choose to use them.

On the other hand, the region east of the Indus, consisting of the provinces of Punjab and Sindh, and the part of Kashmir under Pakistani occupation, will be under "secular" and "democratic" Pakistanis, who would practice a form of liberal Islam and allow globalization and economic liberalization. This is essentially the old British colonial formula to maintain control of vital areas—such as the oil and gas fields. What is disturbing is British involvement in the area, and their promotion of Benazir Bhutto's return to power. Britain, with its intelligence agents/academics, knows the area well and thrives on breaking up Islamic nations to maintain access not only to oil and gas, but also to the cash of the oil-exporting countries, which are heavily invested in the City of London.

What One Could Expect

The reaction to Musharraf's defiant declaration of the state of emergency was sharp in the United States, and also in Europe. Beside Bush's orders to Musharraf to give up his uniform and hold near-term elections, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has also made public that she would be considering punitive measures such as re-evaluating the monthly \$150 million aid to Pakistan. On Nov. 8, two senior U.S. Senators, John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Joseph Biden (D-Del.) introduced a resolution, urging President Musharraf to

end Pakistan's state of emergency and reinstate the Constitution. The Kerry-Biden resolution declares that U.S. military assistance to Pakistan should be subject to careful review, and asserts that assistance for the purchase of certain weapons systems that are not directly related to the fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban should be suspended, if Musharraf does not revoke the state of emergency, restore the Constitution, follow through on the pledge to relinquish his position as Chief of the Army, and allow for free and fair elections to be held in accordance with the time frame announced by the government of Pakistan.

From Britain, Foreign Secretary David Miliband said that Britain is "gravely concerned" at the emergency declaration and urged Musharraf to act within the Constitution. "It is vital that the government act in accordance with the Constitution and abide by the commitment to hold free and fair elections on schedule, which President Musharraf reiterated to the [British] Prime Minister [Gordon Brown] when they spoke on Nov. 1," he added.

Musharraf's statement on Nov. 8 indicates that he is willing to bend over backwards and allow elections to be held in mid-February. But that statement has not satisfied Benazir Bhutto, who is now arguably the most visible of the British assets in Pakistan. Reacting to Musharraf's statement, she said on Nov. 8 that the President's pledge to hold elections by mid-February was insufficient, adding that he must quit as Army chief by the following week. "We want an exact election date, schedule of elections, and a clear date of Musharraf hanging up his uniform," Bhutto told a news conference. "This is yet another vague announcement. We want him to hang up his uniform by Nov. 15." The former Prime Minister has vowed to hold a protest rally in Rawalpindi on Nov. 9, and then to lead a "long march" from Lahore to Islamabad on Nov. 13, if Musharraf does not meet these demands and rescind the state of emergency.

These threats may harden the Army position. The top Pakistani generals, who have all along been suspicious of Bhutto, who was allowed to return to Pakistan by assuring London and Washington that she would not work against their interests under any circumstances, may not allow that situation to develop. They do not want an open conflict between the military and demonstrators, who would be a mix of all those, including the radical militants, who hate the authoritarian rule of the Army.

But, the real danger to Pakistan lies in its western region. It is evident that the threat that is posed along Pakistan's western borders cannot be resolved through military operations alone, although the U.S. neocons under Vice President Dick Cheney demand such a "solution." In other words, the area needs a political solution which must address as well, the presence of 40,000-plus foreign troops in Afghanistan, the massive production of opium under the watchful eyes of the foreign troops, and an economic policy, which caters to a very small percentage of English-speaking Pakistanis.