

Elections in Pakistan Would Be a Mistake

General Beg is a senior figure in the Pakistani military establishment, having taken over as the Chief of Army Staff after President Gen. Mohammed Zia ul-Haq was killed in an air crash in 1988. This interview was conducted by telephone by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach on Nov. 9.



EIR: General Beg, how would you describe the current situation in Pakistan?

Beg: It is a very interesting and complicated situation. It is time to understand the reason and real issues of the crisis. The American agenda was to have General Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto, as the best combination, together with the secular and enlightened parties (those which support President Pervez Musharraf). The process was orchestrated, on Oct. 18, when Bhutto got a hearty reception on her return [from self-imposed exile abroad], and a rousing rally. But that all came to nought with one bomb blast. Surprisingly, all those among her supporters who were not hurt, left people dying and wounded and went home. Bhutto said there were 2 million people there; if so, it should have turned into a battleground, but it didn't happen. You can see the character of the leaders and of the party.

EIR: A battleground between what forces, if it was a suicide bomber?

Beg: That's not known. The government made no serious effort to find out. There were two serious incidents earlier. Last year in Karachi, when 22 were killed and the religious party leadership was eliminated in a bomb blast; then on May 12, when the Chief Justice, supported by the people, was encountered by bullets, in Karachi; hundreds were killed, but there was no inquiry.

So this, with Bhutto, was the third major incident in Karachi. It was a setback for Benazir Bhutto. She was supposed to lead the "Rose Revolution," like in Ukraine, but it didn't work.

Musharraf was opposing the Supreme Court, because it had yet to give its judgment regarding whether his election

was constitutional or not; they were to give judgments on several other cases where the government was involved. The freedom that was enjoyed by the judiciary and by the media, was struck down by the emergency [declared by Musharraf]. The emergency is actually a coup against the judiciary and the media. Now 50 judges of the Supreme Court and lower courts have refused to take their oath under the martial law regime. This is unprecedented anywhere in the world. The judiciary and the media were leading the revolt. All private television channels have been banned and only government channels are allowed.

According to the American agenda, with the Benazir-Musharraf combination, in this situation, with the judiciary now under government control, if elections are held, there will be a repeat performance of 2002, when the government stage-managed the election.

Today [Nov. 9], Bhutto wanted to hold a rally in defiance of the government, but her political activity has been confined for three days, nothing more.

EIR: Then Bhutto's defiance is orchestrated?

Beg: It's all drama, to boost her image. Today, Benazir is so openly supporting the American agenda, that she carries the burden of the unpopularity of the Americans and the regime. If they succeed in forming a government, it will be like a red flag waved in front of a bull, for the frontier regions where there is a revolt, and for the masses, and particularly for the civil society which, for the first time, experienced some freedom. The media used its relative freedom to inform the public. It was the Bar and the Bench which led the movement, the revolution in Pakistan, and now it is this group, and the media, which is the target of the martial law. It's not against any government, just against civil society which, for the first time, had gained a degree of ascendancy.

If elections are held, it will be very dangerous for Pakistan. Therefore, what must happen is the following: The first priority is to restore the dignity and honor of the judiciary, by restoring all the judges who were fired. The second priority, now that Gen. Pervez Musharraf has lost all credibility, is to have a government which can heal the wounds—mental and physical—inflicted on the people. This should be a national unity government, with all parties represented, which could rule for six months to a year. Then, one could hold elections.

Enough American Blunders

The present machinations will lead to a very serious situation. This American agenda is like the one followed in Iran, when the Americans continued support of the unpopular Shah, who had destroyed political parties, and, when the crunch came, the only ones to take on the situation were the radicals.

When they occupied Afghanistan, knowing it has never

accepted foreign domination (and were supported by the EU, especially Germany), they made their second major strategic failure. When you don't learn the lessons of history, that is what you face. The coalition there has been defeated.

Now in Pakistan, this is the third major mistake. A Musharraf-Bhutto government would be a catastrophe for Pakistan.

EIR: Bhutto does not really have popular support.

Beg: There are two hate objects in Pakistan: America and the regime of Musharraf. Bhutto has inherited both.

EIR: U.S. CENTCOM commander Adm. William Fallon was in Pakistan meeting with Musharraf just before the emergency was declared. Was this to approve the coup, and prepare military operations against the forces in the tribal region?

Beg: Of course. But it is the wrong direction. The Pakistani Armed Forces are not capable of dealing with the problem in the tribal regions. The problem is in Afghanistan, the foreign occupation, and the extension of this problem to our tribal regions. The Pakistani military has been defeated in Waziristan. What's left? The only solution is political rehabilitation, restoring the honor and dignity of the judiciary, and national reconciliation under a national government—then, elections, as the last priority. For the Americans and Musharraf, the elections are the first priority, whereby they want to rule another five years.

EIR: Some moot that if elections were held, extremists would win.

Beg: Not true. Let me give you an example. In 1988, when General Zia died, we three chiefs [of the armed forces] sat together, and within three hours we restored the Constitution. People thought the radicals would take over, and at the time, Pakistan was ten times more radicalized than now. The CIA report of 2004 said there had been 60,000 jihadis from 70 countries, plus 30-35,000 more from Pakistan. They had no interest in elections; the religious parties all together got only 8% or so.

This is true even today. If there are elections, the jihadis will not take part. They will not let this kind of secular government come to power, and crush them with the use of force. That is what has been happening, and they have retaliated. They will take revenge. Instead of their guns pointing at Kabul and Kandahar, they have them pointing at Peshawar and Islamabad. They must take revenge—it is a tribal custom. And they have given a very clear warning to Benazir Bhutto: If she comes to power, they will capture her and slaughter her.

The Americans made mistakes in Iran and Afghanistan. They must not commit another blunder in Pakistan.