

# Can Musharraf Survive?

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It seems that Musharraf is on his last leg. He has become the most detested and despicable president in the history of Pakistan. No longer are there progressives, liberals or moderates in his camp. His enlightened moderation has been buried with the passage of time.

Musharraf is unloved even by most religious extremists. His previous policies gave them space into which they have moved aggressively. But

Washington demanded that he suppress them in order to prove his usefulness to U.S. imperialism and he did so. However he did not please either Washington or the extremists.

The economic crisis has isolated him from the vast majority of ordinary Pakistanis, including formerly close associates. His traditional support among the stock exchange and Chambers of Commerce has evaporated. They are no more his enthusiastic supporters.

Musharraf's comments about democracy during his nine-day European tour (starting 20 January 2008) has annoyed democrats inside and outside Pakistan. The comment that the "West is obsessed about democracy" was a direct insult to the people of Pakistan but his sarcastic and taunting tone did not please his European friends. Gone are the days when he could say any nonsense and get away with it!

His recent comment echoed his remark during his 2006 U.S. tour, where he managed to annoy women organizations inside and outside Pakistan. He had prevented Muktaran Mai, who was gang raped on the order of the local Punchait, from leaving Pakistan. In explaining his action he told reporters that the impression was that she had gotten "raped in order to get a visa."

The recent murder of Benazir Bhutto was a shock to many of the European governments that had been friendly to Musharraf. He had previously projected the image that he was their much need friend in the war on terror. But the unprecedented reaction to Benazir's brutal assassination is shattering his image at home and abroad.

The U.S. and British governments' projected Plan A for maintaining stability in Pakistan was built on the unholy governing combination of Benazir and Musharraf. This has come undone by the Benazir assassination. There seems to be no Plan B. Has Musharraf outlived his usefulness to his imperialist masters? His tour of Europe may be an attempt to reassure his colleagues in Pakistan that he is still able to secure the support of his European friends. One recalls a similar trip to Washington in October 1999 by Nawaz Sharif, just before his overthrow.

Musharraf's repeated assurances that nuclear weapons are in safe hands and the army cannot be defeated by religious fundamentalists illustrates the concerns of the friendly European countries. His trip is to address these worries by putting on a "brave" face. However, his justification in imposing the emergency, disposing and arresting the country's top judges, arresting thousands and curbing the media will satisfy none. Now he is imposing democracy as he imposed the emergency, bringing democracy with the barrel of his gun.

In the face of the proposed 18 February 2008 general elections there are two political camps: those participating and those boycotting. The massive turnout at the boycott meeting by All Parties

Democratic Movement on 22 January in Loralai, Baluchistan indicates that the boycott campaign is picking up steam. This was the fourth successive APDM mass rally in Baluchistan.

The Pakistan Muslim league Q (PMLQ), Musharraf's favorite, is in absolute crisis after the recent shortages of food items, electricity and gas. The PMLQ candidates are the target of anti-Musharraf consciousness. The general perception is that if you are against Musharraf, do not vote for the PMLQ. Following Benazir's assassination, the wave of sympathy has opposed the PMLQ.

Unless there is an all-out rigging of the election, there is no guarantee that Musharraf's supported candidates will win the election. If Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Muslim league Nawaz (PMLN) candidates gain a majority in the next parliament, Musharraf will find very difficult to repeat what he did following the 2002 election, when he bribed many PMLN and PPP parliamentarians to join hands with the PMLQ to form a majority government. At that time, shortly after 9/11, Musharraf's military regime was supported by both U.S. and European governments. But in 2008 he is seen standing in the wind. It will be difficult for any parliamentarian elected on anti-Musharraf feeling to cross over to his camp.

Boycott, or no boycott, the future scenario seems more and more problematic for Musharraf. His departure seems written on the front door of every home. Only another 9/11-like situation could alter his fate. Students are awakening and so is the trade union movement. That, combined with the pressure from the lawyers movement and growing participation by civil society, may succeed in pushing Musharraf from power.

Pakistan may take a page from their nearby Nepalese brothers and sisters. "If they can get rid of the King, why can not we do it here with the military dictatorship?" is the question many of the activists ask.

Let's do it Nepalese way: with a peaceful massive movement everyone can get out into the street and make it clear that Musharraf must go. "Go Musharraf Go."

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