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Musharraf and Pakistan's Crisis

Amin Saikal

The interplay between the internal settings and the external environment of a state is critical to determining its place in world politics. While Pakistan is no exception, there are two features that set it apart from many others. One is the country's reputation as a state that has shuttled painfully between quasi-democratic rule and military dictatorship at a fluctuating pace and intensity, with Islam as a central reference of national identity and unity. The other is the terrifying dichotomy — of the country's position as *both* a source of ideological extremism, aiding and spawning various terrorist groups, as well as a central player in fighting these phenomena. The first feature has dominated Pakistan's history ever since its creation in 1947, whilst the second one has become the country's *modus operandi* since the early 1980s and, more specifically, since the tragic events of 11 September 2001.

No Pakistani leader has exploited these two features as skilfully as President Pervez Musharraf to ensure the continuity of his thinly concealed military rule and to solidify a critical role for Pakistan in regional and international politics. In the process, he generated important opportunities and major challenges for Pakistan at regional and wider levels. The fear of what an extremist Pakistan can produce was played upon to perpetuate Musharraf's rule and maintain international support for it. The counter-terrorism card was played to promote the country as a pivotal force in shaping the regional geopolitical landscape in interaction with changing world politics.

This chapter has three specific objectives:

First, assess Musharraf's main policy postures against the backdrop of what has transpired in regional and world politics since his seizure of power in 1999.

Second, examine how Musharraf was able to shape and manage his domestic needs in an interactively manipulative manner with the changing dynamics of Pakistan's wider environment.

Third, investigate some of the major possible scenarios for Pakistan in the medium to long term.

■ Policy Postures

Musharraf's seizure of power through a coup on 12 October 1999 came against the backdrop of a number of important internal and external developments:

First, Pakistan, since the death of President General Zia-ul-Haq in a mysterious air crash in August 1988, had not progressed beyond a quasi-democracy under Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. The military, and more specifically its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) — which had grown to the position of almost a government-within-the government — had continued to act as the main determinant in Pakistani politics.¹

Second, Pakistan was in the grip of an economic crisis as well as social divisions and sectarian strife, threatening the unity and possibly even the very survival of Pakistan. Between 1997 and 2001, Pakistan's GDP dropped from US\$ 75.3 billion to US\$ 71.5 billion and by 2001, government debt was 82 per cent of its GDP. Over one-third of the government's revenue was spent on interest payments on the national debt.² In the meantime, the country suffered from growing ethno-linguistic hostilities, sectarian violence, rampant corruption and administrative malpractices.

Third, Pakistan's transformation into a source of Islamic extremism was nurtured and deployed as a foreign policy tool to boost the country's national cohesion and regional position within an approach that aimed at creating and exploiting a favourable external environment whenever possible.³ In this respect, the ISI had scored important successes in relation to Afghanistan, where it had raised and backed the medievalist Islamic Taliban from late 1994 to take over the country, and in the Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir, where it had supported a separatist movement through an array of radical Islamic groups. It had also managed to forge a mutually supportive relationship between these groups and the Taliban. The ISI's efforts in Afghanistan had resulted in the country becoming a hub for international terrorism, based on an alliance between the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda under its patronage. ISI activities amounted to a 'creeping invasion' of the country, causing a bloody conflict between the Taliban and the anti-Taliban forces, led by the legendary Afghan commander Ahmed Shah Massoud, who had also successfully resisted the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.⁴ In Kashmir, the ISI's activities had led to increased strife and bloodshed. Its interventionism had substantially contributed to

the Indo-Pakistan Kargil mini-war of early 1999, which according to many analysts had brought the two sides to the brink of a nuclear clash. Although the antagonists had pulled back from the brink under intense pressure from a number of major powers, especially the United States, their ensuing relation can only be described as an uneasy truce.⁵

Fourth, Pakistan and India came to be officially confirmed as nuclear powers. In 1998, India had carried out a series of nuclear tests and Pakistan had followed suit in response. These actions had evoked international condemnation for both sides, but had placed Pakistan, more so than India, under difficult military and economic sanctions, given Pakistan's position as the weaker of the two countries in terms of its capacity to cope with the sanctions.

Fifth, the US presence in the region started waning in the wake of the defeat of Soviet communism on the one hand, and a concurrent growth of Pakistan as a bastion for Islamic militancy on the other. Washington had become especially concerned about Pakistan's backing of the Taliban and the Taliban-Al-Qaeda alliance, as well as a number of other Pakistan-based radical Islamic groups, such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Harkat-ul-Ansar cum Harkat-ul-Mujahideen in support of its Kashmir policy. Originally, Islamabad had quite successfully marketed the Taliban to Washington on the grounds that the militia was a Sunni outfit, capable of bringing stability to Afghanistan, checking Iranian influence and opening up Afghanistan as a direct corridor to the newly emerged, resource-rich region of Central Asia. However, the situation had changed following the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania by the Al-Qaeda in August 1998. The administration of President Clinton had embarked on a drive to punish the Al-Qaeda and review its attitude towards the Taliban; it had carried out a cruise missile attack on the Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. It had also mounted a concerted effort to coordinate an anti-terrorism policy with India, which had bitterly complained about cross-border terrorism from Pakistan for years, and with Russia, which had viewed the Taliban-Al-Qaeda's support of Chechen separatists and certain radical Islamic groups in Central Asia with increasing alarm. Further, it had engaged in a diplomatic offensive against the Taliban, resulting in a number of incremental UN (United Nations) sanctions against the militia. The US official who played a key role in all this was the then Under-Secretary of State, Thomas Pickering.⁶ Even so, Washington had remained remarkably

reluctant to do anything that could tip the balance of power in favour of the anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, or exert enough pressure on Islamabad to drop its support for the Taliban and other radical Islamic forces as a foreign policy instrument. This was largely because Washington had reasoned that it needed Pakistan's cooperation for the success of its anti-terrorism measures, and that it wanted to refrain from taking any policy action that could possibly accentuate Pakistan's domestic problems and cause the country to implode, with a possibility of its nuclear arsenals falling in the wrong hands.

Sixth, Washington had grown concerned about the rising power of China, confronting it with the question of how to contain the communist power. Pakistan had historically developed close strategic ties with China, based partly on a common anti-Indian position ever since the Indo-Chinese border war of 1962. Although Washington had ample opportunities in the past to forge close ties with democratic India, it had not done so partly because of its aversion to New Delhi's determination to pursue an independent course of foreign policy. Washington's off-and-on alliance with Pakistan from the early 1950s had taken on a dimension of *realpolitik*, but was void of any lasting principles.⁷ In this context, after many years of coolness, the US-Pakistan alliance had been revived in the wake of the decade-long Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, which Pakistan firmly opposed. At the same time, New Delhi's adoption of a rather supportive position on the occupation had irritated Washington. Although by late 1999, Indo-US relations had warmed up, so had also to some extent ties between India and China. This could not encourage Washington to court India to the degree that was necessary to use an 'India card' in formulating a policy that could put pressure on both China and Pakistan. As a result, Islamabad remained in a position to use its strategic ties with China not only to maintain a source of pressure on India, but also to caution the United States against pressuring Pakistan over its role in the post-Soviet environment in the region.

When Musharraf seized power, these developments confronted him with serious dilemmas and set the limits for the kind of foreign policy priorities he could pursue. He had personally been involved in most of the developments in one way or another. He was Army Chief of Staff under Nawaz Sharif, who served as Pakistan's elected prime minister for the second time from 1997 until his overthrow by Musharraf in 1999; he was also an active participant in all of the

major policy decisions, including Pakistan's Afghan and Kashmir adventures. In other words, he could not be exonerated of his role in the circumstances that had befallen Pakistan. He now had to deal with those circumstances from a position of leadership in ways that could help him consolidate his military rule on the one hand, and assuage the concerns of the international community (especially the United States, India, and many of its democratic allies within the Commonwealth) who had expressed deep concern over the 'end of democracy' in Pakistan, on the other. Initially, he could not but act within very limited policy options.

While relying necessarily on the military, the ISI and the ISI-linked Islamic groups as well as on the public's disillusionment with Sharif's government, Musharraf promised to return Pakistan to 'genuine democracy' as soon as possible, but signalled no major foreign policy changes. He found it imperative to defend Pakistan's nuclear status, and to pursue Pakistan's Afghan and Kashmir policies more or less in the same manner that had previously been constructed.

In relation to Afghanistan, Musharraf stood firm on Pakistan's support of the Taliban (and by implication of the Taliban-Al-Qaeda alliance), describing it as a 'national security imperative'⁸ for Pakistan. He pleaded repeatedly to the international community to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, as Pakistan and two of its close Arab friends — Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — had done. He shared the military and ISI view of Afghanistan as a source of 'strategic depth' in the event of a confrontation with India, and as an important corridor for Pakistan's access to the former Soviet Central Asian Muslim republics, partly to promote a wider regional economic and strategic role for Pakistan, and partly to deny India and Iran an opportunity to enhance their influence in the region.

With regard to Iran, he could count on the support of a number of Arab countries — especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE — and the United States, for several reasons. Saudi Arabia championed the cause of Sunni Islam and a close friendship with the United States, which locked it in serious sectarian and political rivalry with Iran's Shiite Islamic regime. As for the UAE, it was a close partner of Saudi Arabia in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which was formed in 1981 as a response to the call by Ayatollah Khomeini (the founder of the Iranian Islamic regime in the wake of the Iranian revolution of 1978/79) for the export of the Iranian revolution to

the region. The UAE also had a major territorial dispute with Iran. The dispute was over three strategic islands — Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tumbs in the Gulf — which the Sharjah emirate of the UAE claimed, but which had been taken over in 1971 by Iran under the Shah. Iran's refusal to return them had caused tension in Iran-UAE relations, which remains unresolved to the present day. Abu Dhabi was in search of means and ways to pressurize Tehran over the issue, and this also partly explained its support for the Taliban as a means to do so. Meanwhile, the United States was keen to reinforce its policy of containment of the Iranian regime, which it had pursued since the rise of Khomeini's Islamic government to power and the famous hostage crisis, which had emanated from the Iranian detention of about 52 US embassy staff members from 4 November 1979–21 January 1981 and had caused much humiliation for the United States.⁹ This could only give Musharraf confidence that despite the growing aversion of the United States to the Taliban and to Pakistan's support of the militia, Washington could not but remain lenient towards Pakistan.

In the case of Kashmir, Musharraf reiterated Pakistan's historical support for the right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination, and as an extension of this, for the ISI's continued backing of groups that had engaged in cross-border violence and linkages between these groups and the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies. Although the cross-border violations had reduced in both intensity and frequency since the Kargil conflict, they were still at a level that had prevented Islamabad and New Delhi from reducing tension in their relations and moving faster towards a rapprochement.

However, this is not to claim that there was no tension between Musharraf's public stand and what he privately harboured. Although presenting himself as committed to the religion of Islam, he essentially wanted to pursue secular politics. As he points out in his autobiography, *In the Line of Fire*, he had all along been deeply impressed by the secularist founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and entertained a wish to style himself after him as a military-cum-civilian reformer.¹⁰ As a result, he could not feel very comfortable with Pakistan's support of radical Islamism as a major ideological strand in its politics. Yet the prevailing circumstances under which he had come to power had severely impaired his legitimacy and ability to manoeuvre easily against the situation. While he was personally

languishing as a pariah in world politics and Pakistan was struggling under the growing weight of political, economic and social stagnation, Musharraf was confronted with serious policy confusions and dilemmas. He was badly in need of an external stimulus to enable him to break the circuit.

■ Domestic and Foreign Policy Interplay

That stimulus came with the events of 11 September 2001 (henceforth to be referred to as 9/11). The Al-Qaeda's attacks, which were masterminded from Afghanistan, proved to be almost a godsend to Musharraf. They presented him with an unexpected but necessary opportunity to prove his worth as a clever military politician, to shore up his own position as the leader of the country, and to transform Pakistan from being a producer of extremism and terrorism to becoming an actor without whose cooperation the United States and its allies could not combat the phenomena. Musharraf could now engage, with more vigour and assumed credibility than ever before, to combine politics of opportunism with that of regime preservation within an approach that would interface his own political survival with that of Pakistan. In other words, he was enabled to promote the claim that what was good for him was also good for Pakistan. He would become indispensable to what was required to save Pakistan and Pakistan would become critical to what was needed to defeat international terrorism. This was very much similar to the way that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had enabled one of his military predecessors, General Zia-ul-Haq, to revive his fortunes two decades earlier and renew Pakistan's strategic importance to the United States as a front-line state against 'Soviet expansionism'.

In the face of an ultimatum from the Bush Administration either to join the United States or to side with the Al-Qaeda's terrorism and its harbourers — the Taliban, and 'be bombed back to the Stone Age', Musharraf shrewdly threw in his lot with Washington.¹¹ In declaring Pakistan as a partner of the United States in what President Bush called the 'war on terror', commencing with the 'Enduring Freedom Operation' in Afghanistan in October 2001, he forged a new and robust alliance with them. He changed certain basic elements of Pakistan's foreign policy posture almost overnight, with considerable impact on the country's domestic political dynamics. He found it both imperative and expedient to turn his back on Pakistan's clients — the Taliban regime and its Al-Qaeda allies — and to moderate Pakistan's

support for cross-border violence in Kashmir, with a commitment to do everything possible to lead Pakistan on a policy-path free of religious extremism.

However, he knew from the start that this new alliance was based on politics of mutual vulnerability and leverage, which if carefully and craftily managed could be highly advantageous to his regime and Pakistan. He needed Washington's partnership to help him consolidate power and lead Pakistan out of the dire predicaments in which it was placed. On the other hand, the Bush Administration needed Pakistan as a key state for not only toppling the Taliban and redirecting Afghanistan, but also successfully executing its war on terror strategy with wider aims than what it wanted to achieve in Afghanistan. The benefits that Musharraf was able to extract from the new alliance proved to be more than anybody could have originally anticipated. By presenting himself as a champion ready to fight extremism and terrorism, he was able to rapidly build an externally driven basis of legitimacy for his military rule and to gain a degree of international acceptability that would otherwise not have been within his reach.

Musharraf thus was no longer a pariah, but was courted as a trusted and much needed ally by the United States and its allies, which rapidly dropped all sanctions against Pakistan. While exalting him to a position of a close and trusted friend — a position that was once reserved for the Shah of Iran (1953–79) in the region — the Bush Administration found it politically and strategically expedient to shower Musharraf's regime with massive economic and military assistance. For example, in the three years following the events of 11 September 2001, the US military aid alone to Pakistan soared to \$4.2 billion, compared to \$9.1 million in the three years before the events. The total US military, economic and development assistance to Pakistan since the 2001 attacks has to date amounted to more than \$10 billion. Most of the money has come from the US Defence Department programme called the 'Coalition Support Fund'.¹² Meanwhile, US–Pakistan relations reached such a level of closeness in 2005 that Washington elevated Pakistan to the position of a major non-NATO ally, reflecting Musharraf's personal friendship with President Bush to the extent that few of the United States' traditional allies could dream of enjoying.

Musharraf could use US aid not only to strengthen the military and the ISI as the main pillars of his rule, but also to generate a level

of economic activity that could win him support from those secularist elites and segments of the population that would mostly benefit from the development. As a result, Pakistan's real GDP suddenly grew by 5.1 per cent during 2002–04, with all economic sectors — from agriculture to industry — registering healthy growth, giving rise to a degree of economic and social activity that Pakistan had not experienced for many years.¹³ Meanwhile, Musharraf found himself in a position to push for extra political and economic leverage for the military. He further formalized and expanded the role of the military in the political and economic life of Pakistan by enlarging its share in the National Security Council of Pakistan and allowing many influential military personnel to buy vast tracts of land, especially in the province of Baluchistan, at very low prices, and to secure an even greater stake in the country's new economic life.

Musharraf was suddenly placed in such a comfort zone that he could now act more in terms of what he saw fit for Pakistan under his rule than what the United States' 'war-on-terror' interests dictated. He was no longer required to keep his original promise of returning Pakistan to democracy soon, or to take the necessary steps to lead Pakistan on any other path than that of concealed military authoritarianism. Nor did he find it compelling to come totally clean on Pakistan's meddling in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Whatever measures he adopted in the name of democratization, they ultimately amounted to surface rather than structural changes. He managed these changes in ways that could enable him to increase his personal powers, to marginalize internal opposition and to neutralize foreign critics. In foreign affairs, he engaged in a public campaign that projected his regime and Pakistan as the repository of 'enlightened Islam' and defender of public good against the evils of extremism and terrorism. He refused to take any responsibility for what had transpired in Afghanistan and in Kashmir as a result of Pakistan's past policy actions. Musharraf repeatedly blamed Afghanistan as being the cradle for extremism and terrorism, and lambasted India for not doing enough to address the root causes of the Kashmir problem. He rapidly projected an image of himself as a very worthy ally of Washington, capable of not only democratizing Pakistan without changing his military uniform, but also assuming a central role in protecting US interests during the difficult phase of the war on terror in world politics. Concurrently, he ensured that Pakistan remained as much of a vital regional player in the post-9/11 scenario as it was

before it, but of course now in different regional and international settings. In the process, he poised himself to give Washington what was needed to retain its favours, but not more, even if at times that meant Washington's interests were not truly served. This was so to the extent that he could get away with action as serious as nuclear proliferation, in which Pakistan's chief atomic scientist, A.Q. Khan, had engaged. Musharraf was able to override the whole episode without any public recrimination from the Bush Administration.

In this context, Musharraf skilfully, though in the eyes of many analysts also manipulatively, focused on achieving a number of subtly self-serving foreign policy priorities and objectives.

He declared full support for the US-backed government of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan and extended (apparently) full security and intelligence cooperation to the US-led 'war on terror'. In this regard, he made a remarkable public display of what he called Pakistan's brotherly contributions to the reconstruction of Afghanistan and national resolve to fight the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban at all levels, and prevent them from receiving any aid from Pakistan for cross-border operations. To this end, from time to time, Islamabad captured and handed over to the United States certain Al-Qaeda operatives as 'high value targets' in a blaze of publicity. In 2005, it even announced the deployment of 80,000 troops on the border with Afghanistan, resulting in fighting with a number of tribal and foreign supporters of the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda in the free tribal areas of Pakistan, especially in north Waziristan, over which no Pakistani government had full control in the past. Similarly, in relation to the Kashmir dispute, he scaled down Pakistan's support for cross-border violence, agreed to a number of confidence-building measures with India and proposed ostensibly bold initiatives to secure an enduring resolution of the Kashmir problem.

Beyond these, Islamabad declared a campaign to reform religious education, especially in Pakistani madrasas (which had been widely viewed as a source of Islamic extremism), quietly supported the US-led invasion of Iraq (although declining to send troops there for fear of public backlash), and secretly expressed solidarity with Washington in its hostilities with the Iranian Islamic regime. Further, it assured Washington that Pakistan's historical friendship with China should not be a source of any concern, given Pakistan's growing commitment to the new alliance with the United States.

Yet, Musharraf never failed to press for his vision of a Pakistan whose politics must be conducted on the basis of what was conducive

to his interests. While maintaining his domestic reforms largely at a non-structural level, he made sure that his foreign policy actions were in line with maintaining the support of the military and the ISI as his real power base and was careful not to invite a serious backlash from conservative Islamic forces. This meant that he found it imperative to sustain continuity between Pakistan's pre- and post-9/11 foreign policy postures. Hence, his strenuous efforts to walk a tightrope on Afghanistan, Kashmir and Pakistan's wider regional relations within an approach of one step forward and one step backward, requiring the Bush Administration to play its regional politics more in tune with Musharraf's priorities than according to US needs. The strong lobby group that he established in Washington constantly reminded the Bush Administration and the Congress that if the United States failed to remain sensitive to the complexity of Pakistan's position under Musharraf, Pakistan could easily fall prey to serious instability. This, they maintained, could result not only in undermining the US operations in Afghanistan and its wider war on terror, but also in confronting Washington with an even greater nightmare — a collapse of Musharraf's regime and Pakistan's implosion.

In this context, the Musharraf regime successfully pushed for four policy objectives:

First, while publicly backing the Karzai government, Islamabad privately demanded that Karzai give his ethnic Pashtuns, to which the Taliban also belong, the largest share in the post-Taliban power structure and rid his government of the influence of those non-Pashtuns who had formed the bulk of the anti-Taliban resistance within the United Front or the so-called Northern Alliance, and who had played a critical role in the US-led ground war that had toppled the Taliban regime. To reinforce this position, Musharraf in September 2006 went so far as to claim (inaccurately) that in Afghanistan the Pashtuns constituted almost 60 per cent of the population and that the Tajiks formed a mere 5–7 per cent minority.¹⁴ Yet historically, the Pashtuns have never accounted for more than 42 per cent of the Afghan population, followed by ethnic Tajiks as the second largest group with 25–30 per cent of the population and other minorities making up the rest.

However, the Pashtuns had traditionally dominated the Afghan political and military leaderships ever since the emergence of modern Afghanistan as an identifiable political unit in the mid-eighteenth century. Islamabad essentially called for the restoration of this

situation as a necessary foundation for creating the conditions of stability in Afghanistan, and for avoiding the kind of developments in Pakistan that could adversely affect the United States' regional interests and operations. Yet, in this, Islamabad chose to ignore the fact that the conflicts following the seizure of power by a cluster of pro-Soviet communists in Kabul in April 1978 had profoundly changed the Afghan political and social landscapes, empowering the non-Pashtun segments of the population to resist any return to past Pashtun supremacy. Islamabad nonetheless persisted with its reasoning as part of an approach essentially designed to pressure the Karzai government and its international supporters to incorporate the Taliban in the government, and as a consequence enable Pakistan to regain some of its past influence in Afghan politics. It seems to have reasoned that the foreign forces will eventually leave Afghanistan (as the Soviet Union ultimately did) and that the prospects for Afghanistan's transformation do not look bright. As such, Pakistan seemed to be in a position to safeguard its interests against any adverse developments in Afghanistan and the region. Hence, Pakistan's continued support for the Taliban in terms of provision of both sanctuary and material assistance, despite a demand by the United States and its allies that all such support be stopped. Musharraf did admit to a certain level of Pakistani support, but denied his government's role in it.

All the anti-Taliban measures that he announced — ranging from deploying troops along the border with Afghanistan, and fighting both the foreign and tribal backers of the Taliban on the Pakistani side of the border to fencing parts of the Afghan-Pakistan border and closely cooperating with the US-led coalition and NATO forces for enhancing border security — amounted to little more than impressing Washington that he remained a committed partner in the war on terror. Yet, the bitter fact was that Musharraf's alliance with the US had rested primarily on the Afghan conflict and the war on terror. Therefore, a continuation of the two was clearly in his interests.

The second was the Musharraf regime's stand on relations with India exhibited a degree of double-speak that complemented to a large extent its position on Afghanistan and the war on terror. While urged by Washington to improve relations with India, the regime only took measures that were expedient to its domestic needs and capabilities, and did what minimum it was required to do to please Washington. There was certainly an improvement in Indo-Pakistan bilateral

relations, based on a number of confidence-building measures since 2004, but Islamabad was not able to build on this by cutting off all links with Kashmiri separatists and negotiating to turn the 'Line of Control' into a *de jure* border with India. This is not to deny that Musharraf did not come up with some unprecedented proposals for a resolution of the Kashmir issue. In October 2004, he proposed that India and Pakistan should identify 'regions' of Kashmir on both sides of the Line of Control, demilitarize them and grant them the status of independence — joint control or under UN mandate.¹⁵ The proposal was publicized enough to generate some optimism, but it was ultimately designed to soothe Washington's quest for action. As New Delhi expectedly gave the proposal an initially cold reaction, Islamabad followed it up in 2006¹⁶ by nothing bolder that could bring New Delhi to the negotiating table. Two factors hampered Musharraf's efforts in this respect. One is that the entire Kashmir problem has been closely knotted to Pakistani domestic politics, as is also the case in relation to India. It has suited Islamabad, whenever needed, to use it to highlight Pakistan's Islamic credentials, but it has also served diversionary purposes. Another is that, given its nature, Musharraf's regime was not able to rely on a public mandate to do what was required to secure a resolution of the Kashmir problem. Instead, it found it easier to deflect the need for a resolution by making its usual claim that any degree of US pressure on Pakistan to do more would endanger Pakistan's internal stability and hurt the success of the war on terror.

The third was to maintain and strengthen Pakistan's position, despite its misdeeds, as a central player on the regional and international scenes. For this, the Musharraf regime again pursued a double-edged approach. On the one hand, it emphasized the regime's normative commitment to expunging Pakistan of Islamic extremism by reforming religious teaching and schools, and bringing them under government control, and de-linking Pakistan from Islamic extremist groups in the region and beyond. On the other, it concurrently sought to promote an image of Pakistan as a closely Arab-linked and potentially Sunni bulwark against the predominantly Shiite and anti-US Iran and other hostile forces as part of a policy of safeguarding Pakistani and US interests in the region. While announcing some measures to control Islamic extremism at home, it balanced this by constantly prompting Washington to remain content with the fact that Pakistan needs to maintain its Sunni Muslim status as a means

to retaining its close ties with the United States' oil-rich Arab allies in the Gulf and mainly Sunni-profiled friends in Central Asia. It intimated that without such a status Pakistan would be unable to help the United States in containing possible Iranian predatory actions in Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics.

The fourth objective focused on carving a critical niche for Pakistan in relation to a drive by the Karzai government and its international supporters to capitalize on Afghanistan's strategic position to strengthen the country's reconstruction and security on the basis of promoting economic cooperation and integration between Central Asia and South Asia.¹⁷ The Musharraf regime was careful to make sure that this drive did not result in either an emergence of a strong Afghanistan or extra leverages for India that could possibly limit Pakistan's role as a central regional player. While conscious of Kabul's close ties with New Delhi as a counter to Pakistan, and of Afghanistan's entry into the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the regime endeavoured that whatever economic and infrastructural networks and facilities were built, they were conducive to two things. One was that they lead only to the kinds of linkages between Afghanistan, the Central Asian republics and India that would not limit Pakistan's manoeuvrability as a pivotal actor in the process. The other was that Pakistan remained in a position to obstruct such linkages whenever it deemed it necessary. As a result, on the one hand, the Musharraf regime made sure to be seen as a strong supporter of regional economic cooperation; on the other hand, it sought to shape this cooperation in a way that proved to be quite frustrating for Kabul and New Delhi. Again, in the context of its alliance with the United States, it was able not only to make the Bush Administration tolerate its double-edged attitude, but even to demand that Washington help it in directing the regional cooperation in a manner that would make Afghanistan essentially an extension of Pakistan. This was firmly reflected in a series of talking points that Pakistani lobbyists circulated to officials of the Bush Administration and the Congress in January 2007.¹⁸ The main message was that an economic integration of Afghanistan into Pakistan was the best way to stabilize Afghanistan and to strengthen Pakistan as a foundation for enabling the United States to succeed in the war on terror and protect its interests in the region against a rising Iran, Russia and China.

However, by 2007 the tide turned against Musharraf and his US supporters. A majority of the Pakistani people evidently grew

very impatient with his politics of deception. Meanwhile, the sham parliament that he had created and which had endorsed the continuation of his military rule for another term five years ago, was to end in November 2007. But he wanted that parliament to elect him for another term before it wrapped up. To achieve this goal, he doubled his efforts from early in the year to silence his critics and create a national political environment conducive to his purposes. His actions included: an attempt to dismiss Chief Justice Iftikhar Ahmad Chowdhry; measures to marginalize the two main opposition parties, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Muslim League, and keep their respective leaders Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in exile; the use of maximum force to violently suppress a challenge by a radical Muslim group in the Red Mosque in Islamabad in early July 2007; and moves to clamp down on nationalist opponents, especially in Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Provinces.

However, none of his actions paid off; if anything, they backfired. They helped the growth of Muslim extremism and the Talibanization of Pakistan's 'free tribal belt' on the border with Afghanistan, and united diverse groups against his rule — many of which would otherwise have had little in common ideologically or politically. While in July, the Supreme Court reinstated Chowdhry, who had emerged as a credible opposition figure and who doubted the constitutionality of Musharraf's move to secure himself another term as president without shedding his military uniform before being re-elected, his military assaults on the Red Mosque in the same month unleashed a sustained wave of violent retaliatory actions by Islamic militants across the country. As a substantial cross-section of the Pakistani population grew very discontented and frustrated with Musharraf,¹⁹ the latter reached a position where he could no longer sustain his rule as before.

By the same token, his relations with the Bush Administration reached a critical point. The two sides became a liability for one another — many Pakistanis viewed Musharraf as a US puppet and Washington could not reliably depend upon Musharraf for maintaining its 'war on terror' or regional interests. The two countries faced a serious dilemma about how to salvage the situation. Of the few policy options open to them, two deserve attention as more likely than the others:

One was for Musharraf to impose a state of emergency, to suspend the parliament, to postpone elections and to rule by decree as he did

when he first seized power. He was on the verge of declaring such a measure in mid-August 2007, but Washington advised him against it, for two main reasons — it would sink Pakistan into deeper instability, and it would make a mockery of the Bush Administration's stand for democracy. The US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, urged him to stay on course with elections.

The second option was for Musharraf to hang on to power, but on the basis of reaching a power-sharing agreement with one of the main civilian political parties — either Benazir Bhutto's PPP or Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League — or both to enable him to put an acceptable civilian face on his rule. Washington was keen to see this option materializing as the most viable one. However, Nawaz Sharif's refusal to reach any accommodation with Musharraf and the latter's immediate deportation of the former upon his return to Islamabad in September 2007 to participate in the forthcoming parliamentary elections narrowed Musharraf's option to a considerable extent. The PPP was left as the obvious choice. Bhutto was not only politically ambitious but also amenable to the United States, given her strong public stand against terrorism. Although a partnership with Musharraf would have benefited Musharraf more than Bhutto, given the military's pervasive control of power and politics, Bhutto's interest in status rather than policy drove her to return to Pakistan in October 2007, based on an understanding that Musharraf would drop corruption charges against her to allow her to contest the parliamentary election and she would support Musharraf to become a civilian president for another term.

None of these options was very attractive in terms of putting Pakistan on a path of enduring stability and viability, but in the end Musharraf was compelled to follow both. Given the circumstances he faced, Musharraf at first embraced the second option as Washington's preferred one. However, he did so reluctantly, and feared that the Supreme Court under Chowdhry would not declare his October parliamentary re-election as constitutional. This proved instrumental in Musharraf resorting to the first option by declaring a state of emergency in November 2007 to save his rule. He appointed a new Supreme Court bench that immediately endorsed his presidency for a further term. It was only then that he shed his military uniform and appointed one of his loyalists, General Kayani, as Army Chief of Staff, without necessarily weakening his firm grip on the military and the ISI.

As he came under mounting domestic and international criticism, he found it imperative to lift the state of emergency in mid-December and set 8 January 2008 as the new date for parliamentary elections, while still keeping hundreds of judges and political activists in prison and severely restricting media activities. Bhutto agreed to this with much trepidation, but was assassinated on 27 December.

Although Musharraf blamed the Islamic extremists for Bhutto's death, fingers were also pointed at him. Bhutto's killing removed a major challenge to Musharraf, prompting Washington to rally once again behind Musharraf as one of its most important allies in the so-called war on terror. Despite the fact that Musharraf rescheduled the elections for 18 February 2008, with a promise to bring genuine democracy to Pakistan, few inside or outside Pakistan believed that the elections would meet international standards. Even so, when the elections were held, they were won by the opposition parties, with the PPP gaining the largest number of seats and Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League (PML-N) coming second. Initially, the two parties formed a coalition government, with a commitment to unseating Musharraf. Under threat of parliamentary impeachment, Musharraf finally resigned on 18 August 2008. However, the PPP-PML-N alliance also could not survive because of their differences, leaving the PPP to govern with the help of minor parties, but on a highly unstable basis.

■ Conclusion

Pakistan and the US-Pakistan alliance are now in a serious crisis. Pakistan cannot afford to muddle through for much longer, drifting between the poles of authoritarianism and quasi-democracy, Islamism and secularism in its domestic politics, with exploitative and double-edged postures in its regional and international relations, as it has done up to this point. It is badly in need of enduring foundations that can consolidate its position as a stable, secure and responsible actor in world politics. It requires institutionalized processes of change and development, and publicly mandated governments, without the military acting as the real power either overtly or covertly.

The United States and its allies bear a special responsibility in this respect. Instead of manipulating Pakistan to realize their short-term goals, they need to work out a long-term strategy whereby the Pakistanis could develop an inclusive, participatory system of governance on an enduring basis. It is now in no one's interest

to see a nuclear-armed Pakistan either becoming a weak state or disintegrating — both scenarios would have far-reaching consequences for world politics. The sooner Pakistan is moved on the path of solid democratic transformation, the better. The emphasis should not be on whether or not the 'war on terror' is successful, but rather on what is imperative to transform Pakistan into a viable state. The best way forward is for the military and the ISI to be placed under democratic control, and this requires serious constitutional and political changes in Pakistan.

■ Notes

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