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Musharraf Seems to Have Lost Everything

The General in His Labyrinth

By AYESHA IJAZ KHAN

Contrary to General Musharraf's address and the Proclamation Order issued on November 3, declaration of a state of emergency in Pakistan had nothing to do with combating terrorism and everything to do with avoiding potentially unfavourable Supreme Court verdicts.

During Musharraf's time in power, his government has consistently targeted the moderate political forces and civil society but approached extremists with timidity, notwithstanding rhetoric to the contrary. He has portrayed the people of Pakistan as untrustworthy radicals and himself as the great secular saviour.

In reality, he solidified his position by initially sidelining the mainstream political parties and granting concessions to an alliance of religious parties, who, in return, voted for the Seventeenth Amendment, allowing him to retain the office of President and Chief of Army Staff for five years.

The give and take between Musharraf and the religious alliance continued to the point where the Frontier Province was taken over by extreme elements. It was only when they began to propose draconian legislation that some action was taken to curb their power but always with a gentle hand, using diplomacy and dialogue.

On the other hand, in the case of secular forces and institutions such as the judiciary, media and opposition politicians, no time is lost in making arrests, cutting off transmission or even using the administration to scare through violent means.

Although the heavily armed Red Mosque radicals had been harassing the citizens of Islamabad for months, action was only taken after China complained about the abduction of a number of its citizens. No court martial proceedings moreover were instituted against military personnel who surrendered to the militants without putting up a fight. In stark contrast, the Supreme Court was still considering the case challenging the dual offices of Musharraf as President and Army Chief that emergency was declared and the army deployed, sending all members of the bench home.

The brutal Maulana Fazlullah is allowed to broadcast his firebrand and distorted version of Islam from an FM radio station in Swat, leading to a virtual takeover of the valley by the militants as they attack music stores and women as well as remove the Pakistani flag and hoist their own on government buildings, but private television channels commenting on the peaceful lawyers' movement and the judiciary's bold steps against police brutality are taken off air.

The sad truth is that Musharraf is either insincere or simply unable to combat terrorism. He has too many enemies and has opened up too many battlefronts to be effective in an anti-terrorism campaign which can only be led by a respected individual who has the capability to unite the nation and isolate extreme elements. Instead Musharraf has only managed to isolate himself and his motley crew of ministers.

He has completely outlived his utility to the Pakistani nation and his friends in the west. In what many in Pakistan hope was his final address to the nation, on November 3, 2007, he put a perverse spin on Abraham Lincoln's words in his attempt to justify his own Machiavellian tendencies. In his declaration of emergency, we heard the worst speech of his tenure. Musharraf seems to have lost everything, the support of the people, his ability to reason, even his charisma!

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