

## U.S. Support For Musharraf Undermines War On Terror

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### The Pakistan paradox

LAHORE, Pakistan Here in Pakistan, one consequence of the war on terrorism is clear: Military rulers can have a free hand at home as long as they remain partners in that war. In the long run, this policy may undermine the very attempt to uproot terrorism.

The year-long tension between the army and opposition politicians has paralyzed Pakistan's legislature and allowed the military to continue its domination of the political system and foreign policy.

Pakistan's support has been critical in the arrest of about 500 members of Al Qaeda. But the lack of political stability has emboldened Islamic fundamentalist parties and their allies in the military to continue covert support for the Taliban in Afghanistan and militants in Kashmir.

General Pervez Musharraf seized power from the elected prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, in 1999, named himself president in 2001, and renewed his term for five years in a controversial referendum in April 2002. The general election last year - which the opposition and several international monitoring groups claimed was rigged by the military - brought to power a grouping of politicians close to the army who reconstituted the Pakistan Muslim League, or PML, and chose Zafrullah Khan Jamali as prime minister.

But things have not gone as Musharraf had hoped. It is clear that the military is disappointed with Jamali for not being able to deliver an agreement between the army and opposition parties in the assembly that would allow Musharraf to remain as both president and army chief of staff. The two opposition alliances - one of secular parties and the other of Islamic parties - have refused to let Musharraf retain both offices and have demanded that a package of amendments to the Constitution, which would grant Musharraf overwhelming power, be put before Parliament.

The standoff has resulted in paralysis in Parliament. The assembly passed only two bills over the past 12 months - one of them the budget. The performance was the most dismal in Pakistan's parliamentary history.

The military's arrest of a leading opposition politician, Javed Hashmi, has further infuriated the legislators. Hashmi, president of the secular Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy and acting leader of the PML faction headed by Nawaz Sharif, was charged with high treason after he had publicly criticized the army for meddling in politics. After Hashmi's arrest, Jamali warned politicians and the news media not to criticize the army. The arrest stunned leaders of Jamali's own faction of the PML, which has been trying to convey to a skeptical public that it, and not the army, was running the country. No important PML leader voiced support for the arrest, and it became clear that neither Jamali nor the cabinet had been consulted by the military in advance of the arrest.

October 29. Musharraf, however, remains confident because he is strongly supported by the United States, which has been silent on Hashmi's arrest and the opposition's protests. The Bush administration is committed to the military's control in Pakistan in the belief that the army can fight the war against terrorism better than civilian politicians. The U.S. military is also lobbying hard to get Pakistan to commit a division of troops to Iraq.

Yet Hashmi's arrest also highlighted the different manner in which the military treats secular politicians and the alliance of Islamic fundamentalist parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal, or MMA.

The MMA has repeatedly called on the army to topple Musharraf because they consider him to be working for the United States. Yet MMA leaders still remain close to the army and have never been threatened with arrest. There were no signs that the military was serious about charging radical leaders who had long association with Pakistan's military intelligence. The MMA, which controls provinces that border Afghanistan, has provided support for the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan as well as Islamic militant groups fighting Indian troops in Kashmir - policies to which the army is closely tied. Publicly, the government strongly denies that it is allowing the Taliban to regroup

on Pakistani soil or that it supports militant Kashmiri groups.

The contradictions in the military's policies and the harsh line it has taken toward the opposition has brought growing public resentment.

But Musharraf is banking on the presumption that Washington, preoccupied with Iraq and in need of Pakistan's support, is not likely to criticize the military's policies at home. Though President George W. Bush has now signaled that the United States will no longer tolerate dictatorships in the Muslim world, the military is convinced that such a policy does not apply to Pakistan.

The writer is a correspondent for the Far Eastern Economic Review and author of "Taliban" and "Jihad." This comment is reprinted with permission from Yale-Global Online ([www.yaleglobal.yale.edu](http://www.yaleglobal.yale.edu)).