

## My Own Soldiers Tried To Kill Me, Says Musharraf

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By Ahmed Rashid in Lahore

President Pervaiz Musharraf of Pakistan disclosed yesterday that members of his own armed forces had been involved in an attempt to assassinate him.

Gen Musharraf told Geo, a private Pakistani television network that some of those involved in the first of two attacks on him last December, were "very junior".

He stressed that senior officers were not implicated in the two assassination attempts.

"There are some people in uniform, junior level ... air force and army, none of them is of officer rank," he said.

He said the mastermind of the attack, a Pakistani, was still at large. "He is a Pakistani, he's very much a Pakistani, he's very clever but we'll get him," Gen Musharraf said.

The first attack, on Dec 14, in which terrorists blew up a bridge near Gen Musharraf's home in Rawalpindi just as his motorcade passed over it, resulted in no casualties.

But on Christmas Day suicide bombers made a second attempt at almost exactly the same location. That attack left 15 people dead.

Diplomats have long suspected that the attacks must have been carried out with the help of insiders using knowledge of the president's movements.

Some Islamic elements in the army are thought to be angry about Gen Musharraf's policy of backing the US-led war on terrorism and are concerned about his moves towards reaching peace with India.

Asked if he was concerned that some senior ranks might have been involved, Gen Musharraf replied: "No, no, not at all. Hundred per cent sure. Two hundred per cent sure."

At the time of the attacks officials said they were carried out by Pakistani groups loyal to al-Qa'eda and their supporters in the army and police.

Osama bin Laden has frequently demanded that his supporters kill Gen Musharraf for supporting the US-led war on terrorism.

"It is so easy to plant a bomb and explode it, that is why I say that the world has become a dangerous place," Gen Musharraf told Geo.

Police have now placed all diplomatic residences in Karachi and Islamabad on heightened security.

In order to preserve the army's unity and loyalty Gen Musharraf has been back-peddalling on support for America in recent months, but that has created rifts with Washington.

In recent weeks Gen Musharraf has faced rising public criticism from the US military in Afghanistan, for refusing adequately to rein in the Taliban and al-Qa'eda, who are launching attacks into Afghanistan from Pakistan.



General Musharraf

Last month, after Pakistani troops suffered heavy casualties in fighting with local tribesmen and al-Qa'eda in the Waziristan region along the border with Afghanistan, the army declared a ceasefire and opened talks with the militants.

Last week police arrested seven members of a militant group called al-Alaami, some of whom were involved in an earlier attack on Gen Musharraf in Karachi in April 2002.

Bomb attacks in Karachi on Wednesday are believed to have been carried out by al-Alaami.

This week Gen Musharraf's foreign minister, Khurshid Kasuri, criticised what he called American double standards while on a visit to Washington.

While promising full co-operation with Washington, the army has been instrumental in appointing as leader of the opposition in parliament Maulana Fazlur Rehman, an American-hating, pro-Taliban Islamic leader.

The army's manipulation of the country's nascent democratic system - largely in an attempt to keep Gen Musharraf in power as both president and army chief - have created growing resentment at home and raised concern abroad.