

## Musharraf Takes Pakistan To The Brink

BBC News, 14/11/2007

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President Pervez Musharraf's imposition of a state of emergency and draconian crackdown on civil society and opposition parties is in danger of leading to the unravelling of key institutions of the Pakistan state.

The present political crisis and the failure to halt the expansion of the Pakistani Taliban are now in danger of being dwarfed by a far deeper structural crisis that may take the country years to recover from.

At risk is the constitution, the independence of the judiciary, a demoralised army and bureaucracy, a collapsing economy and acute polarisation between the army and the political parties and civil society.

The army was once considered the single united institution of state keeping Pakistan together.

Now it is now in danger of becoming the cause for the unravelling of the state faster than anyone could have imagined before President Musharraf imposed the emergency on 3 November.

### Judges Targeted

Many fear that Gen Musharraf's emergency rule was not just a temporary measure to curtail protests and the judicial activism of the Supreme Court, but that he may be intending to reshape the constitution and install a presidential system of government.

Gen Musharraf has also clearly identified an independent judiciary as the army's worst enemy.

He devoted much of a recent press conference and a briefing to foreign diplomats to vilifying the former 17 member bench of the Supreme Court.

Most of them did not take the new oath of allegiance and are now under house arrest. At least 60 of the 97 High Court judges in the four provinces did not take the oath either.

In the past year or more the judiciary has, for the first time, ceased to be the handmaiden of the military and come out for constitutionalism and its own independence.

The army has never faced such a situation before and is determined to place the judiciary back in its box by appointing new judges.

Meanwhile the courts are paralysed due to the arrest of thousands of lawyers.

At the same time the army is creating a militarised legal system at odds with the constitution and the judiciary.

The army has amended the 1952 Army Act so that civilians can now be tried for treason in military courts.

Some 18 politicians and lawyers are already scheduled to be tried in these courts. Army officers acting as judges will give more cause for hatred of the military.

The reinstatement of the former Supreme Court bench is now a key demand of civil society, but the army does not agree. The decimation of the judiciary by the army in this manner is certain to have profoundly negative

consequences for the future.

### Tensions in the military

The bureaucracy has long been in silent revolt against Gen Musharraf as hundreds of senior civilian jobs in ministries and state corporations have gone to army officers.

Many top bureaucrats have been made to take lesser assignments.

There are signs that many bureaucrats in the districts are no longer cooperating with the military or the emergency rule.

Although the police have been used to brutalise protesters, senior officers have privately told political leaders and human rights officials that they are being forced to carry out orders.

Senior military intelligence officers have been posted alongside police units to boost their morale and make sure the police crack the heads of protesters.

Police morale is already abysmally low because the force has been deliberately targeted by suicide bombers from the Pakistani Taleban.

If the situation worsens and the police are asked to fire upon demonstrators, especially in Punjab province, it could well be that many will refuse to comply.

However the real danger for the state is the demoralisation in the army which has failed to combat the spread north and east from the Afghan border area of the Pakistani Taleban.

In the Swat valley - which was the country's largest tourist resort - - the militants now hold complete sway. In recent days they have penetrated large cities such as Mardan and Kohat close to Peshawar, capital of the North West Frontier Province.

Hundreds of police, paramilitary and regular soldiers have surrendered to the militants. The army is now trying to save face by once again negotiating local peace deals with the different heavily armed militias that make up the Pakistani Taleban.

To many Pakistanis and much of the international community, the army presently appears rudderless in its fight against the Taleban.

That is perhaps not surprising as the resources of the army and intelligence services are heavily involved in implementing the state of emergency.

It is hard to see how the army high command can offer any coherent strategy to combat the extremists, when it is preoccupied with saving President Musharraf and the present political system.

### Economic fears

As for the economy, it had been growing at around 7% since 2001 when Pakistan began to receive lavish aid from abroad. But now it is in a tail spin.

Economic activity is grinding to a halt, inflation is worsening and there is widespread hoarding of key food items like sugar and wheat.

The government may well have to jack up fuel prices substantially as the international price of oil soars.

The business community has been a key supporter of Gen Musharraf and army rule. But now businessmen are afraid of deepening instability unless the army gives way.

The Pakistani business community has deep links in the Gulf and Europe.

So there is a fear that there could be a sudden flight of capital as happened in the 1970s and again in the 1980s.

This time round it would be more difficult for that capital to come back.

Unlike the present political crises in other developing countries, Pakistan does have strongly developed state structures, a powerful public belief in the rule of law and constitutionalism and a vibrant legal system.

A desire for democracy is already deeply ingrained in the public.

It is dangerous for the army to ignore these foundations of the Pakistani state and put at risk the very institutions that have helped keep such a diverse and multi-ethnic country united.

By introducing emergency rule, Gen Musharraf could well have ensured his own political demise. He is also putting at risk all that has been achieved since Pakistan was founded 60 years ago.