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### **Awaiting a Breakthrough: Cyclical Issues of Governance in Pakistan**

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## Awaiting a Breakthrough: Cyclical Issues of Governance in Pakistan.

Iftikhar H. Malik<sup>1</sup>

Compared with its bigger neighbour to the east—India—Pakistan presents an unsavoury record in areas like governance and national integration but, concurrently, the post-colonial country is not so exceptional if one compares it with varied cases such as Russia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Serbia, Turkey, Indonesia and several others.<sup>2</sup> Located in a highly testing geo-political environment and characterised by enduring political and demographic imbalances, the country, even after six decades of its formation, is still waiting for a commonly agreed participatory system which could guarantee a peaceful transfer of power besides representing a consensus among its diverse population groups.<sup>3</sup> A highly centralised polity, still largely run on a modified colonial pattern, Pakistan has been usually controlled by the military and civil bureaucracy whose efforts in state building have often happened at the expense of prerogatives for nation-building.<sup>4</sup> In spite of a trans-regional dependence and a visible sense of shared national identity across the Indus Valley, Pakistan remains victim to a recurring misgovernance which visibly keeps on exacerbating its inability in developing a consensual nationhood.<sup>5</sup> The systemic malaise is further aggravated by a misplaced rhetorical emphasis on religion both by the state and society when a so-called majoritarianism forcefully tries overriding religious and doctrinal pluralism.<sup>6</sup> To liberal Pakistanis, Pakistan's redemption lies in remoulding itself on M. A. Jinnah's secularist vision whereas to the religio-political forces, the country is overdue for a holistic Islamisation that could guarantee its survival as well as role modelling for other Muslim states. Given the younger and often vulnerable nature of Pakistani civil society, such dichotomous views disallow any middle ground for an acceptable consensus, though the recent events following the dismissal of the Chief

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-first Century*, London: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2002; and, "Why we still need empires?" *The Observer*, 7 April 2002. Michael Ignatieff, another prolific writer and subsequently a Canadian politician, had also coined the term, "Imperialism Lite" as a protective mechanism for pre-empting the dissolution of fragmentary states. Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*, London: Vintage, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> For a few critical but not unsympathetic studies, see Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan at the Crosscurrent of History*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2005; 1997; Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, London: Hurst, 2005; and, Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Such a view has been prevalent since the heady days of the crisis in the eastern wing of the country, which eventually, in 1971, claimed its own independence. See, Leo Rose and Richard Sisson, *Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> For some critical viewpoints, see Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.) *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation*, London: Zed, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> This so-called majoritarianism, reflective of a complex but dangerous interplay of demography, religion and politics, is not merely confined to Pakistan, even many other democratic countries in the region and elsewhere are deeply afflicted by it. See, Iftikhar H. Malik, *Jihad, Hindutva and the Taliban: South Asia at the Crossroads*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Justice by President Pervez Musharraf and the latter's subsequent restoration through a responsive judiciary helped by an alert media allow for greater optimism.<sup>7</sup> Since 9/11, Islamabad's rhetoric has more often focused on turning the country into a progressive society imbued with what President Musharraf calls "enlightened moderation". However, Islamabad's complex and often unexplained alliance with the U.S.-led war on terror and its ramifications have begun to erode an erstwhile enthusiasm for such euphemism especially when the chronic problems of governance and socio-legal equity remain unsurmounted. The General, like his other predecessors, is seen merely perpetuating his own anomalous rule through a pseudo democratic set-up and by conjuring up coalitions while keeping himself secure in the military uniform.<sup>8</sup> The frequent and vocal criticism of Pakistan by the Kabul regime and allies in Washington and Brussels, despite the country's frontline role and a massive cost in human and national resources, has again dismayed several such pro-Musharraf elements. The lack of reciprocity from New Delhi on Siachin Glacier and Kashmir, contrasted with Islamabad's major concessions and even retreats on these disputed territories, has only aggravated Musharraf's agonies. Concurrently, growing U.S.-Indian mutualities in the wake of vocal American critique of Islamabad for not doing enough in the tribal belt has deeply angered Pakistanis, who feel that they have been once again "left high and dry".<sup>9</sup> The bomb blasts on Lahore-bound Samjotha train in Haryana on 18 February 2007 resulting into 68 deaths and several injured with most of them being Pakistani citizens did not dampen down the general eagerness for peace with India yet raised several concerns about the fragility of the entire process. Happening on the fifth anniversary of the Godhra train incident in Gujarat, which led to a Muslim carnage in 2002, the responsible analysts have remained cognisant of severe challenges posed by extreme elements on both sides. It is not difficult to detect a growing cynicism spawning a widely-shared opinion that the powerful forces are arrayed against Islam turning Muslim communities and countries into punch bags for an international demonisation and contempt.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Pakistani jubilations over the restoration of the Chief Justice on 20 July 2007 were quite pronounced and were evident in diverse interviews and reviews that this author held all the way from Karachi to Khyber. In some areas, Pakistani civil society sounds more vocal but echelons like judiciary, gender empowerment, minority rights and even a mature party politics are still confronted with several formidable challenges. For a background on these imbalances, see Iftikhar H. Malik, *State and Civil Society in Pakistan: Politics of Authority, Ideology and Ethnicity*, Oxford: St. Antony's-Macmillan Series, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> For an interesting perspective, see Mohsin Hamid, "General Musharraf: Pakistan's Big Beast Unleashed", *The Independent*, 11 February 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Quite a few Indians expressed their desire to develop closer relationship with Pakistan while exhibiting warmth for General Musharraf. On occasions, it appears that his role in the Kargil fiasco of 1999 had been forgotten by them so as to usher a new beginning in bilateral relations. However, one cannot easily brush aside the impression widely shared by several Indian opinion groups that the country is ebulliently marching forward with its ever-increasing global profile and closer proximity with the Western powers. Based on personal interviews in India, November 2006.

India's integration into a global economy and the impressive economic growth averaging above 9% per annum can instil both a sense of greater responsibility towards the region at large and multiplied irreverence for regional imperatives. This preoccupation with economic growth is not merely confined to urban Indian opinion groups, it has become a familiar lexicon, where the country is routinely compared with China. "India Overheats", (leader), *The Economist*, 3 February 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Even General Musharraf, while critical of obscurantism, has often reminded his Western allies and audience of the ill-will created by festering political disputes across the Muslim world, which needed urgent attention to win over common Muslim trust. President Musharraf's address to the Oxford Student Union Society, 26 October 2006 (personal notes by the author).

## **Structural Imbalances**

A powerful executive, habitually dismissive of judiciary and other civilian echelons including the political processes, seeks its own perpetuation through a politics of patronage where land-owning elite, religio-political elements and even an emerging middle class stay state dependent while the masses stay largely adrift if not totally disempowered. Like his military predecessors, Musharraf has no qualms in accusing politicians of being adrift and corrupt, but even after ruling the country for eight years, Pakistan's political uncertainties, economic vulnerability and ethno-sectarian volatility within the backdrop of a throwback from West Asian geo-politics, remain unchecked. His own dependence on the support from a faction of the Muslim League (ML-Q), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and some other groups has always been based on mutual expediency rather than being rooted in some broad consensus. Owing to this untenability especially in view of his determination to seek another five-year term as country's head, Musharraf has been seeking out newer allies from amongst the mainstream national parties--a process of parleys that finally culminated in a special meeting with Benazir Bhutto in Dubai in late July.

Until recently, the Sunni-Shia feuds had persisted undiminished while the restive Baloch and Pushtun tribesmen have kept law enforcing authorities on tenterhooks over the past two years. In the case of Balochistan, the authorities routinely accuse Baloch chieftains such as the late Akbar Bugti, Ataullah Mengal and Khair Bakhsh Marri of trying to perpetuate their own feudal hold so as to disallow any development through "mega projects" such as the development of Gwadar Port or new dams in the interiors of the province. In the same vein, the anomalous situation prevailing in the border regions of Waziristan is emblematic of domestic and external crevices converging together to create a rather unnecessary security threat to the country. While being loyal to its colonial administrative legacies and seeking ad hoc solutions in a region of geo-strategic vitality, successive Pakistani regimes have always considered the seven tribal agencies within the Federally Administered Tribal Regions (FATA) less than equal with the rest of citizenry.

The fall-out from the security operations in FATA and Balochistan has led to a radical multiplication in suicide bombings against official installations and public institutions in major cities.<sup>11</sup> Given the turbulent nature of the U.S-Iran relations and increased convergence on "a rising Shia crescent" between Washington and the Sunni ruling elite in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf states, Pakistan might again face an accentuated sectarian violence, which can escalate with any new geo-political polarisation such as a U.S. or Israeli operation against Iran. Despite suffering a loss of 800 Pakistani troops and incurring alienation among the local Pushtuns and their leaders, Hamid Karzai and his Western supporters routinely and even vociferously

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<sup>11</sup> There have been six suicide bombings just in six early weeks of 2007 and the targets have been varied. The suicide bombing in a civil court in Quetta on 17 February resulting into several fatalities was openly blamed on Musharraf's military operations in FATA besides the increased NATO operations in the neighbouring Pushtun regions of Afghanistan. Some suicide bombings are linked to sectarian factors while other bomb blasts are attributed to a simmering Baloch dissidence. These varied points were vocally aired on Pakistani networks by the security experts including General (retired) Asad Durrani, the former head of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Geo TV, monitored in Oxford, 17 February 2007

accuse Pakistan of harbouring and tolerating the Taliban sanctuaries.<sup>12</sup> Pakistanis including their president, feel deeply annoyed by such routine allegations against their country of providing succour to the Taliban stragglers.<sup>13</sup> Soon after 9/11, Pakistani authorities handed over hundreds of Taliban and other Al-Qaeda supporters to the CIA, which intensified resentment against the Musharraf regime especially in the wake of a pronounced anti-Americanism across the country, especially its Pushtun regions. Many of such individuals, irrespective of their nationalities, were bequeathed to the CIA for rendition and other such purposes simply to receive quick prize money “totalling millions of dollars”.<sup>14</sup> Despite an almost total censorship of ongoing military operations in Waziristan including a coercive treatment of the local journalists by the authorities, President Musharraf visibly became sensitive to a growing criticism of his “forward” policy in the tribal belt.<sup>15</sup> Following the fracas at

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<sup>12</sup>The Pakistani military operation against the Taliban sheltering in the border regions first focused on South Waziristan before moving on to North Waziristan with the tribal towns such as Miran Shah, Wana and Alizai leaving a trail of blood and vendetta on both sides. Apart from both the agencies in Waziristan, the Bajaur Agency further north also made headlines with the Pakistani air force and militia undertaking punitive campaigns against some seminaries and supposed hideouts of Al-Qaeda supporters. In January 2006, in a similar aerial attack on the town of Damadola, thirteen people were killed with some local press accusing the American troops for carrying out this operation. However, another missile strike of a seminary at Chingai resulted in the death of more than eighty people, many of them younger pupils. The Pakistani military spokesmen blamed the seminary for housing Al-Qaeda leadership including Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who had been reportedly visiting the area as his wife happened to be a local Pushtun. For details see, *Dawn*, 30 October 2006. A few weeks later, a revenge suicide attack presumably by the Bajaur dissidents on a Pakistani military training camp in Dargai in Malakand district led to more than two dozen deaths of recruits.

<sup>13</sup>General Musharraf has often shown his irritation over such statements of “Pakistan not doing enough” by accusing the Kabul regime of scapegoating Islamabad for its own failure. Despite high-level visits undertaken by President Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz in addition to the commitment of \$300 million in assistance to Kabul, the mutual accusations have remained undiminished. Many Pakistanis openly blamed Karzai regime for showing a soft corner for India by allowing it to open its consulate in Kandahar, where according to them, some Baloch dissidents receive support and training to carry on subversive activities in Pakistan. Hamid Karzai himself has not been able to broaden his support base which has further emboldened the Taliban in their attack. For his predicament, see Lyce Doucet, “Afghanistan: a job half done”, BBC Online, 4 December 2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/6205220.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6205220.stm). Karzai’s visit to the UK and EU in early February 2007 aimed at persuading the NATO leaders to commit more soldiers against the Taliban outside Kabul. Italy suffered a political crisis over troops in Afghanistan while Tony Blair’s Labour Government had been rapidly losing the support due to its unpopular decision of joining the U.S. in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The media reports and the warnings by the NATO commanders of an imminent spring offensive by the Taliban refused to change any public sentiment on policies in West Asia. The Karzai regime’s precarious situation and the unpopularity of the U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan came out more into open with the suicide bombing at the Bagram high security base where the U.S. Vice-President had been staying during his immensely secret and unannounced short visit to Kabul on 27 February 2007.

<sup>14</sup>Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir*, London: Free Press, 2006, p. 237. He noted in his book: “We have done more than any other country to capture and kill members of al Qaeda, and to destroy its infrastructure in our cities and mountains. Many of these stories have not been told in full before now”. *Ibid.*, p. 223. For other personal accounts of such illegal transfers, see Moazzam Baig, *Enemy Combatant: A British Muslim’s Journey to Guantanamo and Back*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2006; and *The Economist*, 3 February 2007. A parliamentary committee of the European Union investigating renditions has criticised several countries for allowing facilities to the CIA-operated flights to the countries where many of these Muslim prisoners were brutalised. “EU countries ignored CIA terror suspect flights, report says”, *The Guardian*, 14 February 2007. For a well-informed monograph on Guantanamo, see David Rose, *Guantanamo: America’s: America’s War on Human Rights*, London: New Press, 2004.

<sup>15</sup>It is pertinent to note the pervasive nature of popular opposition to the U.S. and its regional allies among the Pushtuns on both sides of the borders. In a major procession on 23 February 2007 in Kabul

the Red Mosque in Islamabad, the battle lines between Islamabad and the radical Islamists have become clearer but even more volatile.

The anomalous situation in FATA is, in fact, symptomatic of a country-wide malaise, where the centre and federating units do not share a clear, consensual and equitable balance of power. The high-handed executive would never tolerate an independent judiciary and transparent politicians fully prepared to take charge of the country. Pakistan's Supreme Court has more often legalised the military coups and the dismissal of political governments since 1953 all the way to 1999 under various pedantic euphemisms such as "the doctrine of necessity", though there have been dissenting voices, routinely bypassed by the executive. Musharraf's military coup was not only legitimised by the Supreme Court; the latter even significantly and rather dramatically allowed a state employee from the armed services to change national constitution as well. Emboldened by his de facto position in malaise ridden governance and irritated by some suo motto decisions taken by Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry--the Chief Justice--the latter was called to Musharraf's "camp office" on 9 March and was dismissed in a rather unceremonious way.<sup>16</sup> This mistreatment of the most superior judge, otherwise a Musharraf loyalist and known for his abrasive style and penchant for protocol, proved to be a rallying point for country's legal community. "The Black Coats", joined by a vocal media and antagonistic politicians including the Islamists, were soon protesting all across the country at a time, when the general-president was planning to seek another 5-year presidential term for himself from the outgoing National Assembly.<sup>17</sup> As the domestic challenges multiplied within

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following the proposed legislation on amnesty for Afghan warlords, the participants marched the streets chanting slogans such as "Death to America". "Afghan warlords in amnesty rally", 23 February 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/6389137.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6389137.stm)

"Death to America" and "Death to Karzai" were the slogans raised in Jalalabad in early March when the U.S. troops opened indiscriminate fire on civilians following a suicide bombing of a convoy. Within the first week of the same month, two such retaliations cost several lives including women and children adding resentment against the Western troops.

In Pakistan's Bajaur Agency, 26,000 children were deterred from receiving polio vaccination by the clerics who called it an American conspiracy to sterilise Muslims. A Pushtun doctor, Abdul Ghani Khan, while administering vaccination fell victim to a target killing as well. *The News*, 23 February 2007.

<sup>16</sup> The country's information ministers and other official media handlers hesitated to call it a straight "dismissal" and, instead, used terms such as "the non-functional judge" to explain Justice Chaudhry's status during his hearings before the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC). The council is meant to investigate allegations and "references" against the senior judges. He was accused by General Musharraf of "misuse of authority" and the reference was sent to the SJC, besides putting him under a house arrest amidst a ban on his contacts with friends and media. *Dawn*, 9, 16 & 17 March 2007.

<sup>17</sup> In fact, there was a writ petition awaiting hearing at the Supreme Court against Musharraf's proposed candidacy and his advisors apprehended that the Chief Justice might disallow the former from extending the Assembly's tenure, and thus could debar his second term. The Chief Justice had recently taken the government to the task for selling Karachi Steel Mills rather too cheaply besides allowing Mukhtaran Mai to undertake her publicised visit abroad, which Musharraf had banned in the first place. In addition, the Chief Justice, a former supporter of Musharraf, his take-over and Referendum, had been proactive on hearing petitions dealing with "the disappeared Pakistanis" who had been taken away from homes by the intelligence agencies soon after 9/11 and have ever since remained unaccounted for. In early March, a strongly worded open letter against the Chief Justice, presumably authored by Naem Bokhari, a Lahore-based lawyer, was emailed to thousands of people in the country and abroad and listed allegations of corruption by the highest judge. Mr. Bokhari is a media celebrity who has usually enjoyed closer rapport with Pakistan's elite and, according to some reports, was "used" for discrediting Justice Chaudhry to prepare grounds for his ouster by President Musharraf. It was reported that in a special meeting with the senior politicians and officials on 17 March, Musharraf

the pervasive aura of resentment and disillusionment and “faced [with] the gravest threat” to his regime, Musharraf often took recourse to more draconian measures.<sup>18</sup> As seen on 12 May, the collaboration between the MQM marauders and several other official bodies caused the brutal murder of 48 people in Karachi in the full glare of television cameras, once again affirming the dictum of the criminalisation of politics at the behest of Islamabad and ethnic leadership. In early August, a reawakened judiciary, following the restoration of the Chief Justice, was not only being proactive on “disappeared Pakistanis” and releasing high-profile detainees but was also seeking explanations from the officials on the use of force in Karachi on 12 May.

### **Ideological Fissures**

Pakistan’s simplified rationale as a polity created in the name of Islam -a premise often applied hastily- has only problematised the ambiguous interface between politics and religion. It is true that Muslimness played a crucial role in spawning Jinnah’s demand for a separate state out of British and princely India, yet, in most cases, Islam was seen both as an identity marker and a civilisational force that would override the ethno-doctrinal differences among South Asian Muslims without assuming any theocratic propensities. Given the open-endedness in both the approaches and without a sustained democratic nomenclature in the country, especially after 1958, the official and sectional use of Islam for political purposes gained greater ascendancy until during the 1980s and General Zia ul Haq turned it into the main preoccupation of the state. The discretionary use of Islam, particularly in legal areas, not only circumscribed citizenry rights of the religious minorities they equally marginalised Pakistani women within an already diminishing public sphere. Another dangerous outcome of bringing in Islam as the mainstay of governance was the exacerbation of intra-Muslim doctrinal and sectarian diversities resulting into the evolution of militant outfits such as the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ) and Sipah-i-Muhammad (SM)—both being the armed wings of two antagonistic Sunni and Shia religio-political organisations. The presence of the Afghan refugees and willingness of many of them to become Mujahideen owing to their own zeal and external encouragement resulted in the inculcation of a new form of activism in the curricula of several seminaries (*madrassas*) until some of them especially those on the Frontier, turned into recruiting grounds for fighters and some Taliban. The intractability of the Kashmir dispute, Delhi’s political somersaults in the Valley and the triumphalism in South-western Asia owing to the Soviet retreat and the eventual dissolution, only helped strengthen the adoption of similar activism against India.

At present, there are two prevalent views about Musharraf: firstly, he is genuinely trying to wrest Pakistan from fundamentalist challenges and, despite being a dictator, he is to be protected and gradually led towards democratising a country which is otherwise beset with several destabilising challenges. According to this opinion, largely shared in the Western capitals and by several Pakistanis, Musharraf is a bulwark against Islamist and other segmentary forces confronting a nuclearised

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exhorted them to be more proactive in neutralising opposition to his decision. *Dawn*, 18 March 2006. According to some analysts, Mr. Bokhari had even distanced himself from this letter though the details about Musharraf’s discussion with the Chief Justice and other prevailing circumstances remain unclear. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, in a statement on 9 March, viewed Musharraf’s decision “illegal”. See its Chairperson, Asma Jahangir’s press release on: [www.hrcp-web.org](http://www.hrcp-web.org)

<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, 16 March 2007.

Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> He is credited to have injected a new confidence in Pakistani economy besides jettisoning those fundamentalist groups that the intelligence agencies had promoted in the first place. He is also applauded for normalising thorny relations with India by undertaking bold steps and thus is seen to have accomplished more than a democratic leader could do in a challenging polity like Pakistan.<sup>20</sup> The contrarian view holds Musharraf responsible for governability crisis by virtue of being part of an establishment which has been indifferent towards Pakistan's democratic imperatives. To such critics, Musharraf is capriciously playing on the Western fears of political Islam and has been successful in projecting himself as the only formidable challenge to an encroaching Islamism in a vital region. Accordingly, his dalliance with the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IJI) ruling the Frontier and Balochistan is not out of any compulsion, but, in fact, reflects the age-old Mullah-Military nexus.<sup>21</sup> Musharraf's acceptance of judicial activism and parleys with Benazir Bhutto for a future political dispensation, despite all the latent criticism, reveal growing U.S. interest and intent in shoring up support for a broad coalition of "moderate" forces within the country so as to neutralise a growing threat of Talibanisation.

By emphasising its Islamic credential while being mostly ruled by Westernised elite whose own mindset and interests are inextricably linked with the West, Pakistan has often found it difficult to locate a modus operandi combining the highly contentious realms of tradition and modernity. Certainly, such a dilemma is not merely confined to a Muslim country like Pakistan; even countries such as India or Israel, despite their democratic nomenclatures are often pulled towards turning into specifically Zionist and Hindutva dispensations. The lack of trust in the U.S. leadership has long-time roots though Pakistanis would never question the necessity to maintain good relationship with Washington through positive engagement. Since 9/11, many of them fear history might repeat itself when once again Washington would leave them high and dry. At another level, there is a grave concern that while one section in the U.S. Administration might be appreciative of Islamabad as a close ally, several others concurrently pressurise the latter for undertaking even more punitive campaigns against Pushtun tribals. Such suspicions were in currency when, during the unannounced visit by the Vice-President Dick Cheney on 26 February, leading American newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* reported stories based on "leaked" information from Washington of the latter's arm twisting Pakistan for not being assertive enough on curbing Taliban activities on its soil.<sup>22</sup> Even the arrest in Quetta of Mullah Obaidullah Akhund, a senior Taliban

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<sup>19</sup> In a speech at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington on 15 February 2007, President George W. Bush reiterated his support for Musharraf vocally by acknowledging his genuine commitment in fighting terrorism. The U. S. President pledged technical and aerial support for Pakistan to monitor the border regions besides funds to help build a hundred security posts along the Pak-Afghan borders. Unlike the Afghan reservations about the proposed barbed wire, President Bush had only praise for Musharraf who himself had been target of two life attempts. *Dawn*, 16 February 2007.

<sup>20</sup> It is a view that one often comes across in private meetings with the officials in London, Brussels and Washington and at times in Delhi as well. For more details, Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> According to a former French diplomat in South Asia "Islamic threat is neither as great nor as autonomous as many assume". Instead, "Pakistani military is the main source of insecurity on the subcontinent". Frederic Grare, *Pakistan: The Myth of an Islamist Peril*, Policy Brief No. 45, Washington D. C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2006., pp. 1 & 2.

<sup>22</sup> For a comment on these parallel policies and pressures on Pakistan, see Khalid Hasan, "Open Season on Pakistan, Hallelujah!" *The Daily Times*, 4 March 2007.

commander, on 1 March was attributed to this American rebuke, which was personally delivered by the Vice-President.<sup>23</sup>

Washington and London perceive the Taliban as a major component of radical Islam which is at war with the former after having hosted Osama bin Laden and then by undertaking suicide attacks on the American and NATO troops. Accordingly, the Taliban, both for their support for Al-Qaeda and for their armed defiance of the Kabul regime and its Western backers, are a militarist threat and not merely an ideological riposte. On the contrary, deeper scholarly analyses see in the Taliban a model of political Islam, which is predominantly Sunni, puritanical, masculine and inherently anti-westernisation. Their use of force and an exclusive view of Islam is seen as coalescing with the tribal Pushtun tradition of resistance and could lead to further instability of Pakistan-Afghanistan borders. Pakistan's critical opinion groups were not totally pleased with the military-led policy of revenge that President Bush unleashed on Afghanistan, though some of them might have felt that a possible day of reckoning had come for the Taliban. On the one hand, the Taliban were expected to be weakened before the US-led attacks, concurrently there was worry of wider sympathy for the former, which could converge with anti-Americanism in the country proving inimical to civic institutions. Thus, the Taliban resistance and the continuing US-NATO operations have increased Pakistani anxieties, especially in view of greater expectations and criticism from its allies, and also because the Taliban's model of political Islam still carries a steady following in the border regions and some settled areas, as was affirmed through the volatile events at the Red Mosque. The juxtaposition of Pushtun nationalism with the concept of Jihad against the anti-Islam forces amidst a greater politico-economic instability and a self-congratulatory view of pushing aside Islamabad underwrite resistance and volatility in the Pushtun regions of South-western Asia.<sup>24</sup> The critique of the Bush Administration due to its daredevil invasion of two Muslim countries and the resultant chaos and destruction along with a nod to Israel's military invasion of Lebanon have not only rehabilitated Al-Qaeda as an ideology, it has further weakened the pro-Western sections across the Muslim world. As a result, the Taliban, Iranians, Hamas, Iraqis—irrespective of their sectarian volition—are being idealised as folk heroes for standing up to bullies and their surrogates in the Muslim world.<sup>25</sup>

### **Pluralism and Ethnic Chasms**

The Pakistani elite are justified in being weary of ethno-regional forces given the experiences that led to the separation of its former eastern wing, and more recent worries about Karachi and Balochistan. It is only in recent times that in the wake of diversification of media and more openness towards public debate that the academics and politicians have slowly begun to view ethnic pluralism as more than an inherently

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<sup>23</sup> *The Guardian*, 3 March 2007.

<sup>24</sup> M. Ilyas Khan, "United against Nato and the West", BBC Online, 7 March 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/south\\_asia/6423903.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/south_asia/6423903.stm)

<sup>25</sup> Of course, many Iranian expatriates and exiles in the U.S. and a few other places in Europe have been critical of Tehran yet lately there are noticeable divisions on the possibility and consequences of any military operation against thousands of Iranian defence sites. The commentaries by Western academics on the feared destruction of some of the world's heritage sites such as Isfahan, Shiraz and Persipolis have also led to a slight review among many critical Iranian exile groups.

negative challenge.<sup>26</sup> The studies on the linguistic and regional diversity of Pakistan, often going back in centuries, are appearing more regularly and a vocal middle class, especially from the lower Indus regions, is making Punjab and Pushtun centrist elite think more in terms of co-optation instead of sheer dismissal of pluralism. Issues like the construction of new dams and the redistribution of powers and resources remains contentious given the inter-provincial mistrust, but even a military-run system in the country has not been able to ignore the public dissent. It is true that Pakistan's four provinces do not fully reflect four distinct ethnic blocs since they are linguistically and demographically plural but still there are areas where ethno-regional mutualities are stronger and easily decipherable. It is here that a bold decentralisation and devolution may help erase a pervasive sense of alienation. General Musharraf's plan of devolution at the district and local level may help strengthen local political forces, yet without a corresponding provincial and nation-wide decentralisation such a scheme is seen as an age-old ploy to divert attention and resources from the prerogatives of a nation-wide democratisation. As seen in several other cases, ethnic and ideological parties have to be allowed to function without any restrictions so that greater alliances could be formed besides disallowing disgruntled forces from turning into separatist insurrectionists.

Pakistan's ethnic and religious pluralism can be harnessed through a systemic overhaul and corresponding administrative reformism which may usher a greater sense of belonging underpinning national integration. Here, Musharraf's role can be of a redeemer, and instead of being driven by personal gains and insecurity, his energy could be devoted to let the country develop a proper system of government which is neither dependent upon generals nor is periodically weakened over the issue of transfer of power. An empowered judiciary especially after the ebullient restoration of the Chief Justice, promulgation of 1973 constitution without the lateral amendments, a guaranteed parliamentary form of government and substantive devolution at all levels, while pursuing a foreign policy based on non-interference and constructive engagement, can certainly help Pakistan steer out of a repetitive cycle of governability crisis.

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<sup>26</sup> For well-researched date on lingual and ethnic pluralism, see Tariq Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996.