



## PAKISTAN: Musharraf bid for survival may prove costly

Monday, November 5 2007

**EVENT:** Police used tear gas and baton charges today to break up demonstrations by lawyers protesting against the imposition of emergency rule.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** President Pervez Musharraf's declaration of emergency rule at the weekend has intensified a long-simmering political crisis. It has raised questions about the future role of the military and the United States, as the country faces a deep, and growing, militant threat.

**ANALYSIS:** President Pervez Musharraf and his political allies have frequently hinted this year that emergency rule could be imposed, as they came under pressure over election arrangements, ties with the United States and involvement in the 'war on terror'. However, the nature of its imposition at the weekend -- ahead of a Supreme Court ruling on the president's future and the dissolution of national and provincial assemblies -- was unexpected (see [PAKISTAN: Musharraf is vulnerable despite Bhutto deal - October 9, 2007](#)):

- Musharraf signed the proclamation in his capacity as army chief of staff -- a move that is technically illegal.
- In effect, martial law has been imposed.

Musharraf justified the proclamation with reference to several factors, namely:

- terrorist attacks on state infrastructure and security agencies;
- judicial interference that challenged the government, affected economic growth, undermined efforts to tackle militancy and demoralised the police; and
- judges generally overstepping their authority and humiliating officials.

**Two targets.** In an attempt to placate his Western allies, Musharraf blamed the judiciary and the media for a sharp deterioration in the security situation and the expansion of Taliban influence:

- **Judiciary.** He asked judges in the Supreme Court and those in provincial high courts to take new oaths. Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry Mohammed -- whom Musharraf earlier this year tried but failed to dismiss -- was not invited to do so.
- **Media.** The government has issued regulations banning reports that may aid terrorist activities, jeopardise national integrity, defame the administration or the army, be deemed vulgar or obscene or promote ethnic conflict. Footage of militants and live coverage of incidents of violence have also been banned.

Both the judiciary and the media have emerged as powerful sources of opposition under Musharraf. However, his attempt to discredit them lacks credibility, despite doubts among some about their roles -- for example, over the media's apparent leniency in reporting on the activities of militants at the Red Mosque in Islamabad.

**Survival tactics.** Rather than an effort to improve security, the emergency proclamation was an attempt by Musharraf to remain in power in the face of growing challenges to his status as president and/or army chief:

- The Supreme Court was due to rule on the legality of his re-election as president in October, and there was speculation that it would rule against him..
- He had promised to stand down as army chief, but his record on upholding pledges is poor and this may have increased doubts within the judiciary, as elsewhere, about his intentions.

**Provocative move.** Musharraf's move has been widely condemned, even among his political allies. The scale of the dissent within the judiciary is unprecedented:

- In the Supreme Court, twelve judges refused to accept the proclamation -- which was declared null and void within hours by a panel of seven judges before they were asked to accept a new oath.
- Chief justices in Sindh and the North-west Frontier Province (NWFP) also refused to comply.
- Lawyers have launched protests and will stage court boycotts.

**Protest prospects.** Hundreds of politicians, lawyers and human rights activists have been detained, which will reduce the scope for protests in the immediate term. With the media and the judiciary restricted (journalists have threatened to join protests against Musharraf, but government efforts to curb reporting are likely to be bolstered by the links it can foster with the business interests that control the media), the authorities will not hesitate to crush protests.

This may afford Musharraf a short-term advantage in controlling developments but it could be counter-productive over the longer term. Critical rallying points may emerge later this month -- notably when national and provincial assemblies complete their terms. Under emergency rule, assemblies can extend their life up to a year through a vote. In the absence of such a vote, Musharraf will have to appoint interim cabinets.

**Military lifeline.** In the absence of credible news (with broadcasts off air), rumours are adding to a sense of confusion. Musharraf was even forced today to issue a statement denying that army officials had put him under house arrest. The military remains critical to his survival (see [PAKISTAN: Musharraf faces danger if instability grows - July 24, 2007](#)), and senior army commanders appear to be standing behind him. However, this may not last, particularly if street protest turns violent. Civilian law enforcement, paramilitary forces and the police have been used to clamp down on resistance so far; the real test will come if the army has to face the public.

Morale among the middle and lower ranks of the military is already reported to be low as they bear the brunt of an upsurge in militant activity, particularly in the tribal areas and, most recently, in the Swat valley of the NWFP (see [PAKISTAN: Military status is assured -- unlike morale - October 25, 2007](#)). Amid the intensified political crisis, Musharraf may be less inclined to take military action in the volatile areas along the Afghan border that could fuel more suicide bombings (at least two of which have taken place near him and Bhutto in recent weeks).

**External backers.** Washington faces an acute policy challenge as a result of Musharraf's move. Its primary consideration will be continued progress in the 'war on terror'. Both London and Washington have expressed disappointment with the imposition of emergency rule, which may deal a fatal blow to their efforts to encourage negotiations between Musharraf and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

Washington's support for Musharraf has been under scrutiny for some time, and it has proved controversial both in the United States and Pakistan, where anti-US sentiment has surged (see [PAKISTAN/US: Frustration is growing over Musharraf - August 8, 2007](#)). US failure to prevent Musharraf imposing emergency rule will intensify concerns about the limits of its influence in Islamabad, and add to questions about the credibility of a Musharraf-focused Pakistan policy. US officials have reiterated that elections must be held on schedule (in January), but Washington will look primarily for reassurances on terrorism rather than democratic processes.

**Political rivals.** Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has already indicated that polling may be postponed by up to one year. Musharraf is under considerable pressure to delay the vote from members of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam) party, who sense defeat and strongly oppose a controversial alliance between Musharraf and Bhutto:

- **Bhutto factor.** Bhutto has distanced herself from the president and what she termed the "mini-martial law". The weekend's events have created problems for her, given that she has only recently drawn up a 'reconciliation ordinance' with Musharraf that enabled her to return to Pakistan after eight years in exile (see [PAKISTAN: Bhutto set for revival but legacy is mixed - May 10, 2007](#)). Her stance has provided some relief for the many Bhutto supporters who oppose the Musharraf deal.
- **Sharif prospects.** The ruling party also stands to lose members and influence if exiled former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is able to return (see [PAKISTAN: Musharraf faces backlash after Sharif arrest - September 10, 2007](#)). The Supreme Court last week reiterated an August ruling that backed his right to return as it considered a case against the government's deportation of the ex-leader hours after his attempted return in September. Sharif may ultimately emerge the key beneficiary of the current turmoil -- if and when the emergency is lifted and elections are held.

**CONCLUSION:** The imposition of an emergency declaration has exacerbated a political crisis, and threatens to extend it by leading to the postponement of elections. Opposition to Musharraf will not be eliminated by the weekend's move, which has complicated the position of his 'allies' internally and externally. Further protests and unrest are likely in the weeks ahead, and they may lead to the biggest threat of all to his rule: loss of support in the army.

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*Word Count (approx): 1358*