

**EIGHT YEARS OF PERVEZ MUSHARRAF'S
RULE AND HIS FUTURE AGENDA**

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By Professor Khurshid Ahmad

Today the whole Pakistani nation is on trial. Its inherent resilience has helped it survive crisis after crisis confronting it one after the other during the past six decades. In fact, it is nothing short of a miracle and a blessing of Allah subhanahu wa taala that the country has continued its march forward and weathered the storms which, I am sure, would have left many nations at least ship-wrecked. During the last eight years, Gen (R) Pervez Musharraf has tried to rule the country through his hand-picked henchmen and destroyed in this process all established institutions of the country. No pillar of the state, neither the executive, the legislature nor the judiciary is intact as a viable and effective institution. Even the much-hallowed institution of the armed forces is now in shambles. It has lost much of its prestige and national standing. The law courts are in chains, the Parliament non-existent and the press in fetters.

With this backdrop, the stage is now being set for elections. The constitutional body that is responsible to hold this process has itself no legs to stand on. The credibility of the Election Commission is as doubtful as that of all other national institutions under the Pervez regime. The regime badly needs elections to put a stamp of legitimacy on its eight-year old dictatorship and perpetuate its rule for at least next five years through a coterie of hand-picked men.

Let us review in greater detail the regime's past performance and its future agenda.

In any democratic set up the most vital manifestation of 'national interest' is a nation's constitution, which enjoys consensus of the populace as the basic law of the land. The national interest within the framework of the constitution is that which spells itself out through the elected representatives of the people. Its various shades are also visible in public rallies, addresses by leaders of different political parties, the media and similar other forms of popular expressions and public opinion. Pervez Musharraf has, however, taken upon himself as his sole prerogative to determine the national interest. His own person and personal views remain above everything else, be it the country's constitution, the law and democracy or the judiciary. This is the same accursed philosophy that King Louis-VII of France so pronounced: "I am the law". From Hitler of Germany, Mussolini of Italy, Stalin of Russia, Reza Shah of Iran, to Saddam Hussain of Iraq and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, all dictators everywhere in the world have followed the same dictum. Pervez Musharraf is following exactly in their footsteps. Beginning from his coup of 12 October 1999, his action of 9 March 2007 against the Chief Justice, the imposition of emergency and PCO on the 3rd of November and then assumption of office as a civilian President under a stage-managed dispensation on 15 December 2007, stand out as the milestone of his unconstitutional rule. The measures, which he had himself acknowledged to the world media to be illegal and extra-constitutional, have now been accorded legal protection.

Disliked and discredited:

Opinion polls conducted in Pakistan during the last couple of years clearly indicate that Pervez Musharraf has lost his credibility. There is hardly any sensible Pakistani who is willing today to trust him and he is now the most undesirable political figure of the land. He may continue blowing his own trumpet and the controlled state media may remain busy day in and day out presenting him as the country's Messiah, but the factual position is that his words carry no weight today, neither at home nor internationally. This is because his game-plan revolves entirely round his own self. He has no concern whatsoever with Pakistan, democracy or national interest.

The opinion poll conducted by Gallop Pakistan, following the imposition of 'Martial Law' in the garb of emergency rule last November, was a true reflection of the popular sentiments. The result of the survey was as follows:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| • Emergency rule | Opposed: 67% | Favoured: 19%. |
| • Was 'Emergency' in Pakistan's interest? | No – 68% | Yes – 18%. |
| • Was the dismissal of CJ a correct step? | No – 70% | Yes – 14%. |
| • Some people think the imposition of | In the interest | In national |
| • Emergency was in national interest, | of President | Interest – 18%. |
| While others believe it was in personal | Musharraf – 68% | |
| Interest of President Musharraf. | | |
| What do you think? | | |

The 'Survey of Pakistan Public Opinion', carried out by the International Republican Institute (IRI) of Washington - D.C, during November 19-28 2007, and released to the media on 13 December, said:

"Musharraf's move polarized the country, and this polarization carries through the other attitudes and opinions of the Pakistani electorate. This line of polarization splits the electorate into two parts, at roughly the two-third and one-third divide. ... Seventy-five to 66 percent expressed anger at the current state of affairs, desired change and were anti-Musharraf."

According to the (IRI) survey, 70% of the population opposed declaration of emergency and 66 percent believed that the measure was taken "to prevent the Supreme Court from overturning his re-election to another term as president". The IRI Survey said:

"Voters were also opposed to the various measures that accompanied the state of emergency declaration:

- 71 percent opposed the suspension of the constitution
- 77 percent opposed the detainment of the former Supreme Court justices
- 76 percent opposed the closure of TV news channels;
- 73 percent opposed the swearing in of new Supreme Court justices;
- 70 percent opposed the ban on political rallies; and
- 76 percent opposed the crackdown on lawyers and civil society, and the house arrest of opposition leaders.”

(Survey of Pakistan Public Opinion, IRI press release, Dec.13, 2007)

The tall claims by President Musharraf and his henchmen that he has restored democracy in the country and given freedom to the press and electronic media stand rejected not only by the people of Pakistan but also by the world public opinion. Even his foreign mentors, whom he has been using all along as his crutches, are no more ready now to subscribe to his views. The Washington Post, as quoted by daily The Nation of 30 December 2007, said:

“Like many autocrats before him, Pakistan’s Pervez Musharraf has confused his own fortunes with those of his country. Over the weekend he told a visiting US envoy that only he could save Pakistan from terrorism and lead it towards democracy. IN FACT THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE... Every major step General Pervez Musharraf has taken in the past two weeks has been aimed at PRESERVING HIS HOLD ON POWER”.

In its editorial of 19 December (2007), the Washington Post said:

"Though he has formally ended the de facto state of siege he imposed on Pakistan six weeks ago, Pervez Musharraf remains at war with his country’s secular, politically moderate elite. The press and private television have been hamstrung by a Musharraf-sponsored ‘code of conduct’ that punishes criticism of the president with imprisonment. The civilian legal system remains paralyzed by a lawyers’ boycott because of Mr. Musharraf’s refusal to reinstate the Supreme Court judges he improperly removed from office. Leaders of the two largest political parties are warning about the president’s plans to rig parliamentary elections next month so that his own, immensely unpopular, party remains in power.

Mr. Musharraf claims that by suspending the constitution he vanquished an unspecified ‘conspiracy’ and made Pakistan ‘stronger’. In fact, his only achievement was to prevent his own removal from office as president by the Supreme Court. The price was to further destabilize the country and intensify a conflict among the centrist civilian and military forces that desperately need to unite in order to combat al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other Islamic extremists."

Kuldip Nayar, who has normally praised Musharraf for his pro-India policies, while commenting on the General's interview to Washington Post, was critical of his self-indulgence and narcissism. Nayar said:

"Unfortunately, the Constitution has been amended and re-amended by martial law administrators. But the manner in which Musharraf has defiled it beats all. He has amended it and has also laid down that he cannot be touched for doing so.

How can the judges whom Musharraf did not like for their independence stay 'sacked'? He destroyed the judiciary at a time when its independence was looked at with envy in democratic countries, including India. Apart from the judiciary, Musharraf has damaged the media.

However, Musharraf remains undaunted. His observation during an interview with The Washington Post gives an insight into his future plans. When asked whether there would be a difference after he had shed the uniform, Musharraf said: 'The army is being managed by a chief of staff dedicated to the job and I will be the president of Pakistan. If the two are totally in harmony, the situation is better.' And then he added in reply to another question: 'I will appoint the chief.' Where does the prime minister, the elected representative of the people, come in? "

(Indian Express, New Delhi, 13 November 2007)

The Economist, in its report titled: "Neither democracy nor stability in prospect", wrote:

"IN THE topsy-turvy logic of General Pervez Musharraf, it takes an army dictator to deliver democracy to Pakistan—and a spell of martial law to safeguard the constitution. Or so Pakistan's president seemed to suggest this week, in a series of impassioned efforts to justify his second seizure of power, on November 3rd. How to deal with such a man? The general and his Punjab-dominated army cannot fix these problems.

Indeed he has exacerbated them by attacking the civil institutions that hold the country feebly together. Even before his coup, he ruled more or less by decree. Parliament has been reduced to a facile talking-shop. And his latest wrecking-job on the judiciary is impressive even by his own standards. Of 17 Supreme Court judges, 12 have been dismissed since his coup. Several, including the Chief Justice, Iftikhar Chaudhry, are under arrest. They have all been replaced with army-picked sycophants. Indeed, it was for this purpose that General Musharraf grabbed power: Mr. Chaudhry had developed a bad case of judicial independence."

(The Economist, London, 17 November 2007)

This is how the eight-year rule of Gen. (R) Musharraf is held at home and abroad. No impartial analyst and man of opinion is ready to buy his word of achieving for the country what he claims he has achieved. He has never bothered to respect his oath of office and its demands under the country's Constitution. He has been destroying institutions after institutions at will; depriving the people of their basic human rights; caring too hot for the esteemed judicial system and honorable judges of the superior court and denying the press and electronic media of its well-earned freedom. He has felt free to grant himself extension and accord as many privileges and concessions as he wished. To him the country's Constitution has been no more than a plaything. He never took it as his responsibility to consult and share his views with even his own hand-picked Prime Minister, his cabinet and the rubber-stamp Parliament, especially in matters of great national importance and while dealing with foreign powers.

With such a style of governance, can anyone expect even a semblance of democracy, supremacy of law, stability of national institutions and a peaceful transfer of power to a political leadership elected by popular vote? This is why all men of foresight and sound judgment, ranging from the country's political leadership, the Bench and the Bar and the civil society, are unanimous in their rejection of Musharraf, in uniform or without uniform. The 'Emergency' was clamped on the country and PCO enforced only for the same reason, i.e., to prevent superior courts from thwarting the General's efforts for perpetuation of his rule. The same 'Provisional Constitutional Order' has now been made part of the Constitution and the drama of elections is being staged under its umbrella.

National freedom and sovereignty at stake!

The most serious threat faced by the country today, with Musharraf as its ruler, is what directly concerns with its political freedom, sovereignty and independent existence. The way Pakistan has now been made the target of interference by foreign countries, especially the United States and its allies, was even beyond one's fancy in the past. The Quaid-I-Azam even refused to accept pro-India Lord Mountbatten as Pakistan's interim Governor General. How strictly the founding father believed in the rule of law is evident from the famous incident when the British Commander of Pakistan's armed force was hesitant to concede to his orders as the head of state. The gentleman was quickly shown the way out without a moment's fear that he represented a colonial power that was held in awe even after its formal departure from the land. Unfortunately, however, the situation has so much changed now that the US envoy in Pakistan today behaves as if he was his country's viceroy in the land. Even a third-grade US officer feels free to move around in the country at will, call on the President or meet the Army Chief or the head of ISI and other State functionaries. The state of affairs has reached to a level where Pakistan is now the target of open threats from everybody who is anybody in US Administration, from George Bush to George Gates. Without mincing words they have warned us that the United State would carry out military operation directly within Pakistan to achieve its targets whenever they felt it necessary. These are

not just their verbal threats. These have, in fact, been carried out practically many times. The US and NATO forces repeatedly launched their attacks on the Pakistani territory from inside Afghanistan and Musharraf government did not have the courage even to lodge a meaningful protest. Unfortunately, instead of showing a little bit of self-respect and sense of national dignity, the government stooped so low as to often own those attacks as being the handiwork of Pakistani forces. Such a claim was equally self-defeating. Can any govt, worth the name, indulge in brutally killing innocent civilians and destroys their hearth and homes?

It is not just the question of Pakistan's role in the so-called US war against terrorism, the country is being governed entirely under the tutelage of Washington. Be that the realm of its economic policies, national education policy, or even the election of the country's future political leadership, everything is being guided, governed and arranged by Musharraf's patrons abroad. It is now up to the US leadership and its officials to decide who should be the partners of Musharraf in power and how should they be brought in the line of success. The favorite ones were thus absolved of the charges of corruption pending against them in the country's law courts and abroad and necessary measures were taken to paint them white for the Pakistani public opinion to seek their vote.

Our standing today as a nation is so shaky that not just the US envoys, but the ambassadors of European and ME countries feel encouraged to get involved in our domestic matters. The US passed two bills last year from both its Senate and Congress, which has made all aid conditional to Pakistan's more effective role in the so-called war against terror and to its efforts to make domestic politics, education and the whole national system conform to the US agenda of secularism and 'enlightened moderation'. Musharraf regime has preferred the annual dole of a few million dollars over the demands of national prestige and honor. Our foreign policy is being framed now in Washington, which is reflected in Pakistan's 'U' turn on its unanimous and time-honored stance on Kashmir, relations with India and the efforts to lend hands of friendship to Israel. Our current Kashmir policy is nothing short of stabbing the Kashmiri people's resistance movement in the back.

Pervez Musharraf took the 'initiative' to let his former Foreign Minister hold parleys with his Israeli counterpart. This was followed by his address at the American Jewish Congress and explicit desire to do his bit as a go-between the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships. These steps of far-reaching consequences were discussed neither at any policy-making forum, nor the people were taken into confidence about them. For the first time in Pakistan's 60 years of independence Pakistan voted in favour of the Israeli resolution at the UN, while even those Arab countries that accorded recognition to Israel contrary to their people's will, preferred to abstain during voting. The news of the visit of Jack Rosen, Chairman, World Jewry of the American Jewish Congress, and his secret talks with Pervez Musharraf, General Pervez Kiyani (then Pakistan Army's Dy. Chief of Staff), a number of Federal Ministers and senior officials, just before John Negroponte's official visit to Islamabad, was kept a total secret and the national print and electronic media were left absolutely

in dark. Detailed report of this visit and how Jack Rosen on return mobilized the US lobby in favour of Pervez Musharraf can be viewed in the website of the Jewish daily 'Foreword' of

21 November, 2007: (www.foreward.com/articles/12080)

It may be significant to add here that the late Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto also took time, close to the same period, to call on the Israeli President Shimon Perez and the Israeli envoy at UN and reiterated her resolve to recognize Israel once she came to power. She also confirmed that when elected in to power her government would hand over the case relating to the national hero Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

It may be difficult now to fully grasp the extent to which Pervez Musharraf and those aspiring to share power with him now or in future have moved to barter away the national prestige and dignity to win favors with the United States. Perhaps this may come to light only when the regime is gone.

The country's ideological and religious identity:

The third gift of Musharraf regime is the damage done to Pakistan's ideological, religious and cultural identity. A desperate craving for western culture and civilization, the secularization of education sector and the full play given to promiscuity and profligate lifestyle are the phenomena never witnessed in the country before. The regime's domestic policies have created an atmosphere of utter intellectual and cultural confusion and anarchy. Attempts are also being made to further divide the nation on sectarian grounds, for which some foreign countries and their foot-soldiers, the NGOs, have been let loose to play their role. Credit definitely goes to the political insight of religious parties, and their top leadership to contain the spread of sectarian conflagration, much to the dismay of the US policy-makers and local agencies.

Pervez Musharraf has diligently tried to divide the nation into the two distinct camps of 'extremists' and 'enlightened moderates'. He made all-out efforts to pose one camp against the other. He has personally been engaged in the dangerous game of promoting an ideological conflict in the country in furtherance of the US strategy. Differences of opinion are found in all societies and are a natural phenomenon, but to create a volatile environment of confrontation and conflict has never been in anyone's interest. It is not for the rulers to determine what extremism is and what enlightenment is. Such a decision is always done by the common conscience of the nation. Who can be more tolerant and large-hearted than a Muslim? Tolerance and magnanimity have been the distinguished features of the Pakistani society. This has been practically demonstrated in its dealing with religious minorities, linguistic and ethnic groups and in its handling of the refugees' problem. When compared with the treatment meted out to minorities and other groups in the neighboring country and even in many advanced countries of Europe and America, Pakistan stands

out holding its head high on this front. This is because of its Islamic and ideological moorings, which unfortunately are now the target of the regimes continues onslaught.

Institutions Destabilized:

In addition to the irreparable damage caused by Musharraf regime's policies in different sections, it has been instrumental in a systematic destabilization of vital national institutions. Many of these now face a grave threat of their eventual destruction. As the focus has been on a single person and how to perpetuate his rule, all efforts remain directed to keep him in power. Among the institutions, which have been victims of this well-thought out state policy is the Constitution, the judiciary, the press, the parliament and the Election Commission. The country's armed forces were the next to face the brunt. Let us examine the extent of damage that has already been done to some of these institutions.

Dishonoring the Constitution:

The presidential referendum held in 2002 resulted in a Parliament the first year of which was consumed by protests. Its performance during the remaining four years was equally disappointing. The President never felt obliged to do his constitutional duty of addressing the Parliament. He simply ignored this and publicly denigrated the parliament as 'uncivilized'. Seventy-five percent of legislation was done through Presidential Ordinances. The political parties were allowed to indulge in horse-trading and then arrangements were made for splinter groups to merge and form a 'King's Party'. From policy-making to legislation everything revolved round a single person. The completion of the five-year term by the National Assembly is often described as a big achievement of the regime, but without answering some basic questions: 'For how many days did this Assembly function?' Did the Parliament ever show any respect to the opposition's adjournment motions? Did it observe the requirement of quorum? There were not one but so many members of the ruling clique who did not open their mouths even to speak on the National Assembly floor, but continued drawing hefty perks and privileges from the national exchequer.

Judiciary in chains:

One of the major "achievements" of Musharraf regime is the dishonoring of the institutions of Bench and the Bar. Never before in our national history, was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court subjected to an inhuman treatment like the one meted out to him by this government. The justices of the superior courts were treated like common convicts. They were subjected to dismissal and detention by violating all norms of justice and fairplay. The lawyers' community was brutalized and treated like criminals. As a result of such unfortunate measures, 54 judges of the superior courts are today facing dismissal orders, which make 60% of their total strength. Pakistan

Bar Council and the lawyers are openly at war with the government and the regime continues taking steps to consolidate its dark rule.

Freedom of expression:

Print and electronic media make the fourth column of a state. The coming up of so many private TV channels is generally touted as the regime's major contribution to free media. The fact, however, remains that the national press and news channels remain under effective government control through different administrative measures. Disrespect was shown to the Wage Board award, while newspapers and TV channels were put in shackles through PEMRA regulations. The police force was let loose against popular national dailies and it ransacked its officers and manhandled newsmen. The journalists were put behind the bar and subjected to brutal torture. Again for the first time in Pakistan's history as many as 24 journalists lost their lives due to the state machinery's oppression.

Institution of armed forces dishonored:

The armed forces in Pakistan were always held in great esteem. In spite of frequent military interventions, they generally enjoyed honor and prestige among the people. Pervez Musharraf has done the greatest harm to this dignified institution in general and the army in particular. He put the forces, which were trained to defend the country's frontiers to a use for which they were neither raised nor trained. It was tragic to see them serving as fodder for the so-called US war on terrorism. The situation arising out of the calamity of 9/11 needed public consensus on the role Pakistan and its armed forces could have played in supreme national interest. Unfortunately, this did not happen and one late-night telephone call from Washington made everything topsy tervy in Islamabad. Pervez Musharraf took neither the people nor his own hand-picked government into confidence. This is why subsequent actions taken by the regime were totally at variance with the people's aspirations and expectations. Senseless military operations were launched within the country against the so-called terrorists, who are now labeled, perhaps rather courteously, as 'militants'. Casualties suffered so far by the military alone in these brutal attacks exceeds one thousand men and officers, while the number of civilians killed are more than double that figure. Majority of the victims of the army operation are old men, children and women.

According to authentic public opinion surveys, 80 percent of Pakistani population in 1999 regarded the national armed forces as the country's most respected and capable institution. This figure has come down to 54 percent in 2007, which means 40 percent decline in their prestige and this is no mean a national loss. The situation has come to a pass that the Ministry of Interior had to issue a directive couple of months back discouraging the members of the armed forces from moving around alone without uniform.

The erosion of the armed forces' prestige has also been due to its induction in civilian positions where it had neither served before nor had any training. One can find senior men in uniform and without uniform holding different responsible posts in sectors ranging from administrative, economic, finance, trade and commerce and interior, to public sector organizations. The result of this 'civilianization' is not too difficult to guess. In a recent article, former Foreign Secretary, Dr. Tanveer Ahmad Khan noted that the armed forces are today blamed of having accumulated assets worth 20 billion dollars, while the extent of land now in their possession comes to 12 million acres. This is why they are generally viewed today as topping the list of the corrupt in the land.

Pakistan is now being ruled, in the words of President Musharraf himself, by the 'troika' of the President, the Chief of the Armed Forces and the Prime Minister. Of this triangle, the first two top positions are held by a single person, while the Prime Minister remains his hand-picked. This simply means that the country today is completely under the thumb of its armed forces, in spite of the fact that they are paid from the public exchequer for a much different job. So long as Musharraf occupies his position as President, though without uniform, the present constitutional and political anomaly would continue to persist. The overwhelming majority of the people, the country's political leadership, the lawyers' community and the civil society is, therefore, unanimous in their demand from Musharraf to quit and a national government to be formed according to the provisions of the Constitution in order to restore normalcy and the rule of law in the country. Such a government should conduct free and fair elections under a newly constituted and fully independent Election Commission.

Musharraf's agenda and the way out:

Continuity of Pervez Musharraf in his present position depends on the following three crucial points of his agenda:

- (i) The judiciary remains subservient to him; superior court judges, dismissed as a result of 3rd November action are not restored; and the present constitutional monstrosity is given full protection.
- (ii) Favorable results must be obtained through engineered rigging of projected elections.
- (iii) US and the western backing must be ensured.

It naturally follows from this that action must be taken in earnest to rid the nation of the present unhappy state of affairs. The situation inevitably calls for certain immediate measures, which need

united efforts from all segments of the society in the best interest of the state and the nation. These measures may be summed up as follows:

- (i) restoration of the judiciary's original position and reinstatement of superior courts' judges who valiantly refused to give in to government pressures and victimization and acted according to the voice of their conscience;
- (ii) induction into office of an interim government, to be formed as provided by the Constitution; and
- (iii) Holding of free and fair elections through an independent and impartial Election Commission, in the light of the necessary provisions of the Constitution and a total check on foreign intervention in electoral process.

As confirmed by opinion polls, conducted by Gallop Pakistan and IRI, no free, fair and transparent elections are possible under the present dispensation. Electoral boycott and a relentless struggle to achieve the goal as identified above, therefore, remains the only plausible option before the people and their political leadership. Those joining the Musharraf bandwagon and participating in sham elections are, in fact, going against popular sentiments. As stated earlier, IRI survey confirmed that 66% of the population believed that no free and fair elections were possible under present rulers, while according to Gallop Pakistan, 56% of the people favored boycott. All leading foreign newspapers and journals, including Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Boston Globe, The Guardian, The Economist and the Foreign Policy magazine are unanimous in their analytical reports that the projected elections would be engineered and far from transparent. It will, therefore, be tragic if our politicians lose this God-given opportunity to get rid of the dictatorial rule and scarify popular sentiments and the national interest at the altar of expediency and their own selfish ends.
