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**FIVE YEARS OF THE ARMY DICTATORSHIP IN PAKISTAN, ONE MORE BLACK DAY ADDED
TO THE DIRTY RULE**

By Aftab Hassan Khan

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Five years after seizing power in a bloodless coup, Pakistan's military Dictator, and self-appointed President Pervez Musharraf remains Pakistan's most powerful man.

Shortly after the 1999 coup, General Musharraf told the nation: "I shall not allow the people to be taken back to the era of sham democracy." Five years later, the people realized that Musharraf has truly kept his word. He did not allow anyone to take people back to the era of shame democracy. He did it himself.

The lesson General Musharraf and his Western backers are leaving behind for other coup leaders in this process is: If the constitution does not legitimize your actions, delegitimize the constitution. That you can do by virtue of holding it in abeyance. In the meanwhile, instead of mending your ways, amend the constitution to legitimize both your actions and the "sacred" document.

It might sound odd and impossible but not for someone backed up by absolute power.

The former shame Pakistani democracies now seem far better by comparison when looked at in the perspective of all the crusaders of democracy fully approving and supporting a people's living under a systematically legalized dictatorship.

The move by Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's military ruler, to legitimize and cement his grip on power through a passing awkward bill, 'The Bill to Enable the President of Pakistan to Hold Another Office' in the national assembly on October 14th, 2004 to extend his self-declared Presidency is as clear a manifestation of the absurdity of the exercise to legitimize General Pervez Musharraf and to remain in uniform as Chief of Army staff for unspecified period is likely to see him emerge far weaker politically and more vulnerable on the legitimacy question. In reneging on his pledge to return Pakistan to

democracy, General Musharraf has attacked the main political parties and their leaders and he alienated the very constituency that supported his bloodless coup. The reality is that without the military's grip on power being loosened and the rogue Inter-Services Intelligence agency being cut to size, there can be no real, sustained movement in Pakistan toward democracy.

The fact that in Pakistan holding public meetings and taking part in public demonstrations and processions are offenses under military decree is overshadowed by the General's rhetoric of "containing militancy".

Musharraf plans to continue his military dictatorship through a manufactured political party PML-Q

(Pakistan Muslim League-Q), shutting out from the contest the legitimate political parties and leaders of Pakistan. Two of Pakistan's ex-prime ministers are living in exile, and plenty of political workers are disqualified from taking part in the Pakistani politics.

Political parties fear that the secrete dealing between General Musharraf and a coalition of Islamist political parties would play into the long-term goals of Pakistani Islamic fundamentalism (The dictator, and the coalition of Islamist hardliners, the MMA (MULLAH MILITARY ALLIANCE) has already a deal and MMA has supported a bill in parliament by which the president can dismiss the prime minister – the move would have to be ratified by the Supreme court). To them, failure to return to democracy means that extremist allies remaining within Pakistan's security services cannot be effectively rooted out.

"Civilian control of all aspects of national policy, including security matters, is the only way to ensure that Pakistan does not become a haven for extremists again," one political analyst remarked.

"Let us remember the lessons of Iran," writes Benazir Bhutto. "The Shah of Iran was the West's surrogate regional policeman for decades. His policies of choking and victimizing democratic forces led to the fundamentalist revolution from which the world has yet to recover."

She continues, "For the moment, some might find Musharraf's dictatorship useful. But the United States must proceed with great caution and wisdom. In the words of John F. Kennedy, 'Foreign policy requires the long view.' Ultimately, the West's blind eye to democracy and human rights can have unintended, unforeseen, and deadly consequences, not just in Pakistan, but for regional and world peace."

No two opinions are the same about the time-tested notion that what appears to be convenient in the short-term is likely to be catastrophic in the long term. Who knows this better than the US, which is being blamed for its past patronage of today's rascals and past "freedom fighters"—the Muslim fundamentalist? A key lesson of September 11 is that terrorism springs from religious and political extremism nurtured by autocracy and the suppression of democratic voices.

Before September 11, Pervez Musharraf was more shunned than sought after by world leaders. Today, the opposite is true. The General himself, when he was army chief, was seen as an instigator of dangerous Pakistani provocations in Indian-administered Kashmir in 1999, a period best remembered as the "Kargil crisis." Later that year, he seized power in a bloodless coup and named himself

president in 2001, kicking out the civilian Prime Minister by accusing him of selling the national interest to US and India by agreeing to withdraw from the Kargil area in Indian Kashmir—an agreement Musharraf characterized as compromising national security.

General Musharraf is lucky as he is riding high internationally, having transformed his image from a virtual pariah to an ally of the West following his post–September 11 desertion of the Taliban. He has used that American–compelled turnabout in Pakistani policy and his assistance in the anti–terror war to reap major benefits, including significant Western aid and legitimizing his dictatorship. He has also kept Washington happy through certain concessions, like giving permission to the US forces to join Pakistani troops in hunting in the Pakistani territory. In turn, General Musharraf has taken advantage of the friendly attitudes of the West not only to break his democracy pledge but also to shrink back from

promises he made in when he took power.

General Musharraf oils his dictatorship with American aid, as did the previous Pakistani dictator, General Zia ul–Haq, who spurred on the rise of the forces of jihad and Islamisation campaign are still being felt today. The militant groups remain well–organised, well–armed and well– financed. Yet General Musharraf continues to place limits on American anti–terrorist operations, barring American forces from making independent hot–pursuit raids from Afghanistan into Pakistan. It is becoming more certain with every passing moment that the international community—read as 'USA'—is going to repeat the mistakes of the past—the mistake of supporting and nurturing Suhartos, Pinochets, Marcos and Zias.

The perpetrators of "Operation Enduring Freedom" are collaborating with Pakistan's generals to snatch the very freedom from the people of Pakistan that they claim to be fighting for.

The country's fifty–five year history has been a series of lengthy duels between general and politician, with civil servants acting as seconds for both sides. Statistics reveal the winner: while elected representatives have run the country for fifteen years, and unaccountable bureaucrats and their tame front men for eleven, the Army has been in power for Thirty Five—leading some to suggest that the green–and–white national flag might be re–coloured khaki. It is a dismal record, but the Pakistan high command has never tolerated interference from civilian politicians for too long. The last elected leader to believe he had the Army firmly under his control, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, had to be disabused of the notion. In 1977, on the orders of General Zia—an erstwhile favourite whom Bhutto had promoted over the heads of five, more deserving, superior officers—the prime minister was removed from power and hanged two years later.

No dictator believes in a short tenure. If Musharraf had any plans of turning over power to a civilian, he wouldn't have given the Sharif family its one–way ticket to Riyadh

Of the four dictators Pakistan has had, two have been assassinated; another two were removed in disgrace. There should be no reason for Musharraf to believe he would buck the trend

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U.S FUELLING ARMS RACE IN SOUTH ASIA

By Lalith

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The increasing military assistance by US for Pakistan is raising concerns for India and other South Asian countries. Pakistan the joint ally of US in the "war against terror" is reaping benefits in the form of military assistance.

According to official reports US has massive plans of military supplies worth more than \$1.5 billion to Pakistan in the next five years. As quoted in "Times of India", "According to details available in the Mission Performance Plan for financial year 2004 of the US embassy in Islamabad, and updated on the US State Department website, the Americans persuaded Pakistan government to establish an Interior Air Wing in Quetta with five American helicopters".

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