

# WebMemo



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## Musharraf's Emergency Rule Will Only Fuel Pakistan Crisis

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Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's imposition of emergency rule on November 3 appears aimed at avoiding the potential for an unfavorable Pakistani Supreme Court ruling that could invalidate the legitimacy of the October 6 presidential election. Aware that such a Supreme Court ruling—scheduled for this week—would have further eroded his credibility and intensified calls for him to step down from power altogether, Musharraf resorted to extra-constitutional measures to maintain his grip on power. The move will raise public anger against Musharraf, deepen civil-military tensions, and hinder the Army's ability to fight an already faltering war on extremists.

**Political Divisions Hamper Response to Surging Terrorism.** Pakistan's divisive politics are creating a situation in which a variety of Pakistani extremist groups that subscribe to al-Qaeda/Taliban goals are softening the state through an intensified campaign of violence. Since the July 10 Pakistan military operation at the Red Mosque, extremists have launched a series of revenge attacks that have killed hundreds of Pakistani security officials and civilians. Two suicide attacks—one on a bus carrying air force officials and another at a police checkpoint near Musharraf's office in Rawalpindi—together killed more than 15 people last week. The Pakistan military also recently sent troops to the Swat Valley in Northwest Pakistan to confront the forces of a militant cleric who has been inciting the population through radio broadcasts referencing the Red Mosque operation and calling on the people to rise up against the Musharraf regime.

The October 18 bombing on Pakistan People's Party leader and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto that resulted in more than 150 deaths deepened political fissures in the country. Bhutto accused several senior officials surrounding Musharraf of maintaining close ties to militants and implied they were complicit in the bombing. Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid essentially blamed the bombing on Bhutto's tough stance against extremism and her recent statements in support of U.S. action in Pakistan to address the growing terrorist threat. These highly provocative public statements fuel political divisions and contribute to the overall weakening of the state in the face of the rising challenges to maintaining law and order.

Imposition of emergency rule will further divide the country and will be unlikely to help the military guarantee the security of its citizens. Neither the Supreme Court nor the judiciary had sought to prevent the military from conducting operations in the Tribal Areas and the Swat Valley. In fact, the Supreme Court sought justice against the perpetrators of the October 18 bombings last Thursday when it asked the federal and provincial governments to submit a detailed report of the blasts within a week. Establishing emergency rule, which

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involves curbs on the media and dismissal of the judiciary, will heighten public anger against Musharraf and decrease overall support for the military. Also, the security services will be consumed with subduing an agitated civil society that will detract from efforts to prevent further terrorism.

#### **Tough U.S. Reaction Should Worry Musharraf.**

The United States has stated its opposition to Musharraf's decision to impose emergency rule and expressed solidarity with the Pakistani people in pursuing a democratic process as the best way to counter violent extremism. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had publicly warned President Musharraf against taking the drastic measure on November 2, and so he will be seen as openly defying the U.S. position. It is important for the United States to maintain its strong stance against the draconian measures and in favor of an early general election so that Washington is not viewed as backing Musharraf against the public's will. The Pakistani public in recent years has grown increasingly resentful of U.S. policy toward Pakistan, which it perceives as placing U.S. counterterrorism interests ahead of Pakistani popular objectives like return to civilian democratic rule. Anger at the United States has eroded popular support for countering extremists, damaging U.S. objectives in the war on terrorism.

**Conclusion.** The best-case scenario for Pakistan at this critical point in its history would be for a caretaker government to take power and allow the major politicians to lead their parties in a general election at the earliest date possible. The election rules and guidelines would have to be established by a neutral caretaker government in touch with all of the major

parties. In the past, Pakistan has established caretaker governments during periods of transition from military to civilian rule. For example, in 1993 a caretaker government was established to usher in elections that ended up bringing Benazir Bhutto to power for the second time.

A credible election would be a major blow to the extremists and their agenda for Pakistan—which includes imposing harsh Islamic rule—and provide conditions for a smoother working relationship between civilian and military leaders to confront the rising tide of Islamic extremism and violence in the country. In any new political dispensation, the military would maintain a strong decision-making role, especially regarding security matters, and would continue to be responsible for keeping the country's nuclear assets safe and secure and out of the hands of terrorists.

Musharraf has been an important ally for the United States in the war on terrorism, but his steps toward increasing authoritarianism have put him at odds with the moderate political forces of the country and thereby strengthened the extremists. Washington must consider carefully how to leverage its influence with Pakistani leaders to encourage this pivotal country of 165 million to transition to civilian-led government, while maintaining a military capable of focusing on confronting anti-state forces. Developing a united front between the Pakistani military leadership and moderate civilian politicians against the extremists remains the most promising path out of Pakistan's current crisis.

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