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ISLAM,
MILITARISM, AND
THE 2007–2008
ELECTIONS
IN PAKISTAN

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THE YEAR 2007 WILL BE CRUCIAL for the future of democracy in Pakistan. If the election schedule announced by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sher Afghan Niazi is followed, presidential elections will be held in the fall and the general and provincial elections will be held on January 30, 2008. All these elections will be carefully scrutinized by many in the United States and elsewhere, not least because they will include, among other political forces, a coalition of religious political parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). Many commentators in the West believe that the Pakistani regime will portray the elections as a contest between Islamists represented by the MMA and the enlightened moderation of President Pervez Musharraf and the Pakistan Army. However, the reality is that the Islamic forces will not be a defining factor. They are a dependent variable whose power is largely determined by the army. The only real questions are whether the army's tactics for manipulating the 2007–2008 elections will differ from those used in 2002 and what role the Islamic parties will play in the process.

The MMA emerged from the Pak-Afghan Defense Council, a coalition of twenty-six Islamic organizations established in December 2000 to protest the decision by the United Nations to withdraw from Taliban-dominated Afghanistan. The council disbanded shortly after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. In January 2002, six of its major parties formed the MMA in order to participate in the general elections in October. The MMA comprises five Sunni organizations—the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Maulana Fazlur Rehman faction, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Sami ul-Haq faction, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan, the Jamiat-i-Islami, and the Jamiat-al-Hadith—along with the Shiite group, Tehrik-i-Islami.

For many, the electoral success of the MMA in the 2002 general and provincial elections was both surprising and worrisome. It was, however, a blessing for the regime. A Supreme Court verdict of May 2, 2002 had required that elections be held to transition the country from military to civilian rule, but the elections for the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies were held with the clear understanding that real power would not be transferred to civilians. The military's authority and policies remained impervious to civilian challenge. Parliament had lost sovereignty under the Legal Framework Order (LFO) issued before the elections, which allowed the president to dissolve the National Assembly and created the National Security Council, a nonelected body intended to oversee the performance of the government.¹

The apparent rise of Islamist power in these elections distracted international actors from the key fact that little real democratization was occurring. Much of the international community, especially the United States, was grateful to have Musharraf remain in power behind a facade of civilian rule. A year after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, the outcome of the elections could be construed as validating the perception that Islamism was a force to reckon with in Pakistan and that the military was the ultimate institution able to prevent the country from going down the path of a Taliban-style Islamic “revolution.”

This perception was carefully cultivated by the Pakistan regime itself. Even the diplomatic community could not totally ignore the fact that the elections had been rigged in favor of the Islamist parties, but the argument was soon refined. High-ranking officials started leaking the idea that yes, the Islamist victory in Balochistan and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) had been partly engineered but the result had surpassed expectations, suggesting that uncontrollable Islamic forces could possibly be unleashed throughout the country if international pressures on Pakistan went too far. As a result, the regime got some breathing space from its ally, the United States.

The 2007–2008 elections will take place in a different context, both international and domestic. Pakistan is no longer perceived as a pariah state but as a key ally of the United States in the war against terror. Pakistan's economic situation has improved. As a result, the usefulness of the Islamist organizations for the regime has decreased, and their role will have to be assessed differently.

Although Pakistan appears much less fragile than it did seven years ago, democracy has hardly improved. The next elections will not change this situation. For the military in general and President Musharraf in particular, the elections will be about consolidating their hold on power while maintaining a facade of democracy. For the mainstream political forces, particularly the opposition parties such as the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), the elections will be about keeping (or not keeping) the promises of democratization and the return of their exiled leaders, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, respectively. For the general population, the elections will be, as usual, about living conditions and possibly another exercise in disillusionment. And for the international community—undoubtedly a stakeholder, though indirectly—the elections will most likely be another moment of imagined tension between democracy and stability.

One group will be uncertain of its fate and direction: the Islamic forces. The current legislature, whose term is ending, has been a difficult one for them. Although officially in the opposition, the MMA soon discovered that by criticizing the government and then bargaining for compromises, it became a key supporter of the regime. In particular, the MMA was instrumental in having the LFO passed in Parliament. Even though the MMA protested against democracy restrictions, it always provided the military with whatever support was needed. The MMA also channeled popular resentment when the government's actions did not match its rhetoric. The MMA was the pressure valve through which public frustration over contradictions in army policies could be released without risking true unrest because the MMA ultimately wanted to maintain the benefits of working with the government. Yet, as soon as the MMA established the formal legitimacy of the Musharraf government and the constitutional changes it sought, the military stopped favoring it.

For the MMA, the coming elections may well be a lose-lose situation; it might have to choose between marginalization and insignificance. Despite the supposed arbiter role that may eventually be attributed to the MMA by outside observers, it will be a dependent variable. It will no doubt retain some autonomy and try to enlarge its political space; however, it will most likely be able to do so only in the framework defined for it by the army. In no case will it be the master of its own destiny.

The situation of the MMA raises some serious issues regarding the nature of the relationship between the Islamists and the military. The mutual attempt of each to make the best possible use of the other is obvious here. Historically, however, the military has always gained much more politically from the relationship than the Islamists, who have had to pay the price of an increased dependence on the army for whatever support they received on the jihad's regional battlefields.

Delineating the process that led to this situation is the object of this paper. It seeks to identify not only the ideological evolution but also the tactical moves and eventual errors during the Musharraf period that led to the present domination of the MMA by the army. From there, it goes on to examine election and postelection scenarios.

THE MMA AND THE 2002 ELECTIONS

The MMA was generally considered the great victor in the 2002 provincial and general elections. Many described its electoral performance as a surge of fundamental Islam. As table 1 shows, however, the MMA received only 11.10 percent of the vote in the general election, far behind the PPP of exiled former prime minister Benazir Bhutto (which received 25.01 percent), the pro-Musharraf Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-i-Azam (PML-Q, which received 24.81 percent), and the PML-N of exiled former prime minister Nawaz Sharif (11.23 percent). The seat distribution was, therefore, surprising: The PML-Q emerged as the single largest party, with 77 seats, but the MMA, despite winning only 11.10 percent of the vote, became the second-largest bloc,² with 53 seats out of 342 in the National Assembly.³ The MMA's gains stemmed partly from postelection manipulations and the defections they generated from the PPP, which had initially gained 62 seats. More importantly, perhaps, the MMA was able to form the government in the two provinces bordering Afghanistan. In Balochistan, it did share power with the PML-Q, but in the NWFP it was able to form a government of its own.

Table 1. Breakdown, by Party, of Voting and Seats in the Pakistan General Election, 2002

Party	Votes (million)	Share of total vote (percent)	Number of seats won*
PPP	7.39	25.01	62
PML-Q	7.33	24.81	77
PML-N	3.32	11.23	14
MMA	3.19	11.10	53

* The number of seats does not include the reserved seats for women and minorities, which are apportioned according to the percentage of votes obtained in the general vote.

Source: International Crisis Group, *Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military*, ICG Asia Report 49 (Islamabad/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003), pp. 17–18.

Several arguments have been proposed to explain the rise of the MMA in the 2002 elections. Anti-Americanism was undoubtedly one factor—and candidates in the NWFP used this theme most effectively, probably because the local population was sensitive to the fate of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan. Official propaganda against the political class as well as the strategy of undermining the credibility of prominent personalities was another.⁴ Still another factor was the absence from the campaign of issues relevant to the real concerns of the people, which led to the depoliticization of large segments of the population and to voter apathy.⁵

With the exception of the post-9/11 situation in Afghanistan, these explanations were not new; neither are they sufficient to explain the results of the 2002 elections. The gradual loss of faith in electoral politics can be observed from the beginning of the 1990s, with voter turnout constantly below 50 percent and dropping to a historic low of 35.4 percent in 1997. By contrast, in 2002, voters showed a slightly greater interest in the election in every single province of the country.⁶

Manipulations preceding the elections, which were reported by the European Union Election Observation Mission, offer a slightly different picture. According to the Election Observation Mission's final report, all parties raised concerns regarding the delimitation of the constituencies and accused the Election Commission of Pakistan of diluting strongholds of parties opposing the regime while favoring parties supporting the regime.⁷

Serious concerns were also raised regarding the quality of the voters registered.⁸ The Election Observation Mission noted: "The electoral process was marked by the introduction of a new set of qualification criteria for the nomination of candidates, some of which [were] not in accordance with international standards or [were] clearly targeting specific prominent politicians."⁹ For example, university bachelor's degrees were required, but madrassa diplomas were considered equivalent. This measure significantly advantaged the MMA, particularly in Balochistan, where some prominent nationalist leaders without university degrees were prevented from running in the election even though several had previously exercised the functions of governor or chief minister of the province. Rallies and the use of loudspeakers were forbidden during the entire campaign. The duration of the campaign itself was reduced to a minimum.

These restrictions were applied selectively. For example, the PML-N and the PPP were denied permission to organize rallies, but the MMA was allowed to. Moreover, because the MMA campaigned essentially in madrassas and mosques, in the context of its religious activities, it was relatively unaffected by the ban on rallies imposed by the military government.¹⁰

RELIGIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE MILITARY: LONG-TERM TRENDS AND TACTICAL MISTAKES

The MMA had participated in the elections on an anti-Musharraf platform, yet it was favored by the regime. The point here is not to suggest any hidden tension within the regime but to examine the nature of the alliance between the Islamists and the military. This relationship is at the crossroads of two radically opposite worldviews: The Islamists see power as a means to expand ideology, whereas the military sees ideology as a tool to strengthen its power and rationalize its expansionism. Thus, neither the existence of occasional meeting points nor the prevalence of a preexisting tension should come as a surprise.

Examined from the military's perspective, the situation is obvious. Mohammed Waseem observes: "The tussle over control of ideological power bases has been endemic to the politics of Pakistan."¹¹ He also notes:

The ruling elite opted for Islam as an instrument of policy. It conceived religion as a counterweight to demands of leftist groups and ethnic parties to open up the state system to a wider section of the society. Under bureaucracy, and later the army, a democratic framework based on a mass mandate was considered dysfunctional. Therefore the state

elite used Islamic ideology and shaped its idiom. It sought to control ever more aspects of Islamic theory and practice, by passing legislation in the name of Shariat, assuming control over madrasahs and shrines and influencing the growth patterns of Islamic groups and networks.¹²

But what one Pakistani author once qualified as “Islam from the cantonment”¹³ is no more than a means of legitimating the regime. It has been demonstrated elsewhere that supporting the Islamist parties is a way of both weakening the mainstream parties and allowing the military to remain the ultimate arbiter of all Pakistani politics on the domestic front. A robust Islamist alternative is also a convenient foreign policy tool for convincing the international community that the army alone can contain the threat that the Islamists were supposed to represent.¹⁴

The motivations for this sometimes explicit but mostly implicit alliance are more enigmatic from the perspective of the religious political parties. It is sometimes argued that the Islamic establishment has reversed the relationship and has started to shape the political idiom according to its own preferences and politics. For some, “the emergence of the MMA as a serious power broker on the national scene in 2002 demonstrates the fact that now religion is seeking to define the state.”¹⁵ However, this does not mean that it can successfully do so. Pakistan’s politics have turned the Islamic forces into a natural ally of the military, not necessarily into a peon of the army. On the contrary, it is the autonomy of the Islamic forces that makes their exploitation possible.

Ultimately, two main factors shape the relation of the Islamist parties with the military: their evolution toward what Olivier Roy qualifies as “Islamism,” that is, the combination of a pan-Islamist discourse with a practice that aims essentially at promoting the interest of the Pakistani state, perceived as the vector of the creation of the universal *ummah*,¹⁶ and the relation of the Islamist parties to democracy. These two factors combine to define the Islamists’ sphere of autonomy and their convergence of interests.

The Long Road Toward Islamo-Nationalism

It would not be useful here to rewrite the history of the ideological evolution of all the organizations that opposed the 1947 partition of the South Asian subcontinent because it broke the unity of the *ummah*, the community of the believers. Instead, it is sufficient simply to note how their involvement in Pakistan’s politics led them to see the new state as a vector of the unity of the *ummah*, creating a convergence with the military that later led to a client-patron relationship.

This phenomenon is best understood through the evolution of the Jamiat-i-Islami (JI). As indicated above, the MMA is a coalition of six Islamist parties¹⁷ formed to participate in the October 2002 elections. But, because of their importance for the coalition, two organizations stand out. The first, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI), a Deobandi organization,¹⁸ is numerically the most important. The JUI is divided into the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Maulana Fazlur Rehman faction (JUI-F) and the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Sami ul-Haq faction (JUI-S), led by Fazlur Rehman and Sami ul-Haq, respectively. Holding forty-one seats in the National Assembly and twenty-nine of the MMA’s seats in the legislature in the NWFP, the JUI-F is the larger of the two factions; it is also, numerically, the most important party of the coalition.¹⁹

The second organization, the JI, which some consider the main architect of official Islam in Pakistan, is more interesting for this study.²⁰ Having captured seventeen seats in the October 2002

general elections, the JI is only the second-largest component of the MMA, but its influence on the coalition is far greater than its numerical importance would suggest. Its evolution epitomizes in a sense the evolution of political Islam on the subcontinent, particularly in Pakistan.

The initial opposition by the founder of the JI, Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, to the formation of the country of Pakistan was based on quasi-Marxist historical dialectic, whereby the struggle between Islam and non-Islam had replaced class struggle. Maududi believed that this “struggle between Islam and non-Islam would culminate in an Islamic revolution and the creation of an Islamic State which would in turn initiate large scale reforms in society thereby leading to an utopian Islamic order.”²¹ The success of the Islamic state would inevitably strengthen its legitimacy in the eyes of society. It was therefore logical to Islamize society before the creation of the state.

The leaders of the JI soon came to understand that without the support of the ulema, the army, and the bureaucracy their objective of establishing an Islamic state could not be realized, and they thus adjusted their political strategy. Although it had started as a revivalist movement, the JI became a political party. From then on, the objective of taking over the state machinery prevailed over ideological purity, and the JI started to compromise with those who, at least in theory, favored the ideal of an Islamic system.

Until the late 1970s, this led the JI to oppose both the army and the secular parties. But the military coup d'état of General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq changed the relations. The religious credentials of the dictator allowed for a mutually beneficial rapprochement. The JI thus entered the government. Moreover, through the conflict in Afghanistan, Zia ul-Haq was ready to give the JI a role in the management of Pakistan's foreign policy. The JI's political role did not last more than eight months, but Pakistan's continuous involvement in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Central Asia resulted in a prolonged association with the army.

Other religious parties, with different ideological backgrounds, followed a similar evolution and were also later associated with both government and foreign policy management. For example, when the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence directorate preferred the Taliban over Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami movement in the mid-1990s, the two factions of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam became the military's proxy. As a result, the entire Islamist movement is now under military control in Pakistan.

Pakistan's Islamist Parties and Democracy

Even though the Pakistani Islamist movement is under military control, all the Islamist parties have uneasy relationships with the military. From their early confrontations with the army, they have retained the lesson that only through electoral politics can they one day expect to change the government. The main components of what is now the MMA had to camouflage their totalizing, and in many respects totalitarian, ideologies in favor of democratic discourse and practice because this became the condition for their political survival.

The Muhammad Ayub Khan years, which preceded the time of Zia ul-Haq, were the turning point for most of the Islamist parties. Like all political institutions, the Islamist parties were banned during the Ayub's martial law, but they continued to function under the cover of their social, educational, and religious activities. Because the dictator's economic policies proved successful, the only way the religious parties could attack the government was to demand that their civil

rights—their democratic rights, in other words—be respected. Because sovereignty belongs to God only, democracy remained anathema from a theoretical point of view, but it constituted the primary condition for political survival. Defending democracy was the only strategy that these political groups could reasonably adopt.

Despite the religious sympathies of Zia ul-Haq, the Islamist parties had no other option but to adopt a similar strategy during Zia's martial law period. This period was particularly difficult for the JI because of the Islamization campaign launched by the military dictator. Having fought Bhutto with the slogan "Islam and Democracy," the JI also disapproved of Zia's coup, but suddenly it had to choose between the two. After promises that democracy would be restored, the JI agreed to participate in the government, but it left disillusioned only eight months later when it had become obvious that the dictator had no intention of holding the promised elections. Relations grew worse when the military ruler created a Sharia federal court in charge of ensuring that existing laws were in conformity with Islam but then exempted the decrees of martial law, the tax system, and the overall banking system from conformity with Sharia.

Since the death of Zia ul-Haq in 1988, all religious political parties have lived in this permanent tension between two series of contradictions. On one hand, they vitally need democracy to survive politically, but they have been unable to accommodate it during the rare periods of relative political freedom that the country has experienced. On the other hand, their Islamization agenda can partially materialize only with the support of the military, which provides the JI with an outlet by sending the Pakistan military to the hot spots of the subcontinent. In practice, strong antimilitary religious rhetoric barely hides the almost constant political and occasional "military" support for the army.

Pervez Musharraf and the MMA. Particularly significant for the JI's ambivalence about the military government was the attitude of the emir of the JI, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, after the 1999 military coup. Praising the army, and more specifically its chief, General Musharraf, "who had done an excellent job by dismissing the government of Nawaz Sharif," he demanded simultaneously "an evenhanded accountability and the constitution of an independent Election Commission to conduct free and fair polls in the country," the end of the state of emergency, and the return to democracy.²² Qazi Hussain Ahmed also observed a few days later that in the past "martial law and military regimes had done nothing for the needful."²³ The JI's relations with the government soon turned sour, but the relationship continues even though the MMA has been largely marginalized.

Legal Framework Order. The postelection scenario is another indicator of the nature of the relationship between the Islamist coalition and the military. The debate over the LFO was one such occasion when the MMA was literally trapped by the army and lost what remained of its independence and political credibility.

Following the 2002 elections, the MMA refused to join a coalition with the pro-Musharraf parties. These parties were, nevertheless, able to form a government, thanks to a few PPP defectors who were rewarded with ministerial portfolios. The Pakistani president still needed a two-thirds majority to have the constitutional amendments contained in the LFO (which had been initiated before the election) approved by Parliament, and therefore he needed the support of the religious parties.

For fourteen months, the MMA sided with the secular opposition unified under the banner of the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD).²⁴ They jointly refused the LFO and called for

Musharraf's resignation. In December 2003, betraying its previous understanding with the ARD, the MMA announced that it accepted the LFO (slightly revised) because Musharraf promised that he would resign from his position of chief of army staff by December 31 of the following year.²⁵

Whether the MMA leadership actually believed Musharraf's promise is a matter of debate. Although the content of the discussions between the military and religious leadership was not made public, there is little doubt that concessions were made regarding Islamization. The Hudood Laws, a code of honor that regulates male-female relations as well as marriages in Pakistan, had been discussed in the previous weeks, and a report from the chairperson of the Human Rights Commission was about to be released but was suddenly taken off the official agenda.

Politically the MMA was trapped. Having postured as being in opposition for fourteen months, it now appeared as the best support for the military regime. The MMA helped to institutionalize the presence of the army within Pakistan's political life through the creation of the National Security Council (NSC), a body in which the military predominated. It is true that the MMA could claim the creation of the NSC through a legislative process rather than a constitutional one as a major concession from the regime because it meant that the new body could be dissolved by a simple majority and not a two-thirds supermajority.²⁶ Given the army's degree of control over the political system, however, the concession was essentially cosmetic.

That the military no longer needed the MMA became obvious during the 2005 local elections. The Supreme Court suddenly disqualified candidates with madrassa degrees from running in elections unless they had studied and passed additional exams in English, Urdu, and Pakistan studies.²⁷ The International Crisis Group noted that this decision came against the backdrop of pressure by the regime on Akram Durrani, the NWFP MMA chief minister, and on Fazlur Rehman, the head of the JUI-F and leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, to end their boycott of the NSC.²⁸

As a result of this and other manipulations, the MMA lost ground to the PML-Q in the NWFP, and the JI was ousted from Karachi by the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM). Balochistan, where the JUI-F won six district *nazim* seats, was the only exception.²⁹ Given the nationalist insurrection in the province, the regime could not afford to favor the nationalist parties and other independent groups as it had done in the NWFP. The message was clear: With the threat of disqualification of MMA parliamentarians on educational grounds pending before the Supreme Court, the coalition could choose only between compliance with the military or political extinction.

Now that the military enjoyed a majority in the National Assembly sufficient to ensure the acceptance of whatever law it intended to pass as well as the institutionalism of its political role, it could do without the religious parties. Moreover, the now more vocal opposition from the MMA reinforced the international legitimacy of the regime. With the leaders of the mainstream opposition in exile and the MMA no longer able to form an alliance with the ARD, the regime had managed to marginalize its secular and religious oppositions alike.

DOES THE MMA MATTER?

The question arises of the actual importance of the MMA (and consequently of the wisdom of policy dictated by fear of an increased importance of such a movement). Not only is the MMA unable to get substantial results without the firm hand of the military, but it also differs only marginally

from the mainstream parties on a number of issues. Like mainstream groups, the MMA articulates the population's grievances vis-à-vis the regime. In January 2006, a resolution of the JI condemned Pakistan's "price hike, unemployment, inflation, social disparity and disappearing purchasing power."³⁰ Like its secular counterparts, whether in the government or in the opposition, the MMA often stops short of proposing any concrete alternatives.

Similarly, the MMA rightly condemns the democratic shortcomings of the regime. On January 3, 2006, for example, the *shura* of the JI passed a resolution in which most criticism could have been expressed by other opposition forces irrespective of their secular or religious character or by any independent observer. The same resolution condemned the military dictatorship for the paralysis of "all constitutional institutions" and the elimination of "the political system from the country besides causing irreparable damage to the independence, honor and reputation of the judiciary."³¹

Unlike the JI, the MMA's official motto is "Islam is the solution." The JI and its allies differ from the other opposition parties and the regime on two issues: Islamization and foreign policy. For most MMA members, Islamization and foreign policy are officially linked.

One should not be confused, here again, by the actors' discourse. Officially, Islamization is the main point of contention between the MMA and the regime. The coalition frequently blames the regime³² for what it has termed a secularization program, accusing Musharraf of "forcing people to accept enlightened moderation" while the government cites militant Islamists as a danger that should make the United States hesitant to push democratization in Pakistan. But, once again, the social and, therefore, indirectly political roles of the MMA serve the regime. The Musharraf regime opposes Islamization only at the rhetorical level, and its secularization policies are, at best, limited. Musharraf has made significant concessions to the MMA by simply not changing the legislation regarding discrimination against gender or minorities.

More important is that, despite a number of claims and official texts, the regime has supported—at least passively—the madrassa network. What is at stake here is not the link between the madrassas and the jihadi organizations but, rather, the kind of education they disseminate and its social impact. Madrassa students are likely to graduate fully indoctrinated but not equipped with skills of value on the job market. By maintaining a substantial part of the population in such a state of semiliteracy, the regime guarantees its own stability; better-educated people might be in a position to ask for more accountability, a greater share of power, and a more equitable distribution of the country's economic resources.

The situation is similar in the foreign policy realm. During the past seven years, the MMA has often condemned the Musharraf regime for its alleged excessive compliance with its U.S. patrons, especially after September 11, 2001, and the U-turn in Pakistan's Afghan policy. By contrast, because they expect U.S. support in their electoral endeavors, the mainstream parties have not condemned the United States or have only criticized it slightly for supporting the regime. Yet the MMA has remained instrumental in implementing Pakistan's Kashmir and Afghan policies. JUI madrassas still provide Taliban manpower, and a number of militant groups, some of them close to the JI, remain active in Kashmir. At the political level, MMA propaganda generates the impression that both of these causes have popular support.

THE 2007–2008 ELECTIONS: ONE CENTRAL ISSUE

The five years separating the last election from the upcoming one have, therefore, deeply changed Pakistan's political landscape. Several scenarios can be envisaged regarding the role of the Islamic forces in the upcoming elections as well as the outcome of these elections. All depend on one central issue: the president's decision whether to remain as chief of army staff. Elections for the presidency, the National Assembly, and the provincial assemblies are separate issues, although the president is elected by these bodies and the Senate. In other words, the coming elections are organizationally and politically linked.

Musharraf's mandate will end in April 2007, and he will eventually have to be reelected by the National Assembly, the Senate, and the four provincial assemblies.³³ It is therefore essential for Musharraf's political survival to ensure the victory of the PML-Q. His decision to run while retaining his post of chief of army staff will also influence his own prospects for reelection.

Remaining chief of army staff and rigging elections are the two conditions under which General Musharraf can retain power. Having no real political base, he has very little chance of being reelected as head of state if he does keep his post of chief of army staff. This applies whether or not he chooses to run for reelection before or after the general and provincial assembly elections. Only in his capacity as chief of army staff can he be reasonably certain of being obeyed and therefore followed, even by those whom he helped get elected.

The assumption that the elections will be rigged if Musharraf wants to retain power is not merely academic. Free and fair elections are almost unknown in Pakistan, but rigging elections has undoubtedly reached new levels under Musharraf, despite his recent protest that "Pakistan is a true democracy."³⁴ Manipulation of polls has included preelection division of existing districts as well as extension of chief-minister powers to remove *nazims*, with the effect that the latter became totally dependent on the provincial chief executive and, therefore, were rendered totally subservient. Although elections were supposed to be contested on a nonpartisan basis, both the president and the prime minister openly supported PML-Q candidates.³⁵ Polling was further rigged on election day. The International Crisis Group reported ballot stuffing and intimidation of opposition candidates by the police. In Balochistan, some opposition voters were detained, and some disappeared.³⁶ The monthly *Newsline* reported that in Gujrat (in Punjab), rival candidates of the PML-Q were arrested.³⁷

Not only were the August and October 2005 local elections rigged to further weaken the mainstream opposition parties, but Musharraf also laid the groundwork for his supporters to dominate the forthcoming parliamentary elections.³⁸ Local elections were the first round of Musharraf's consolidation of power, as they ensured his control over the organization of the coming elections. Because the PML-Q won the elections, it will now be in charge of a majority of polling stations and therefore in a position to manipulate the results.

The regime has also taken care to choose a nonthreatening chief election commissioner, Qazi Mohammed Farooq, a former Supreme Court judge who, on May 12, 2000, validated the emergency proclaimed by Musharraf on the basis of the doctrine of "state necessity." Farooq is the author of a series of controversial decisions, all favoring the military. He is therefore no more likely than his predecessor, Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar, to challenge whatever fraud will take place. Against all evidence, Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar declared the 2005 local polls fair and transparent.

The MMA, like most other political parties in the country, is therefore most likely to ask for two things:

- That the series of elections scheduled for 2007 be held in the proper sequence (Musharraf's mandate will end on November 15, 2007, whereas the general and provincial elections are due 60 days after the termination of the assemblies mandates); and
- That Musharraf step down from his position as chief of army staff before his own bid for reelection.

Any other sequence will allow Musharraf to manipulate the election in his favor.

The JI has taken the lead in appealing for procedural reforms. The emir, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, who is also president of the MMA, continues to call for the resignation of Musharraf. In Lahore, on March 14, 2006, he warned that the MMA would boycott the next elections if they were held under the current Pakistani head of state, arguing that they would “not be genuine and fair” and would “consolidate the oppressive system.”³⁹ In Peshawar, on March 26, he announced that all political and religious parties had agreed on a four-point agenda that envisages the resignation of Musharraf, the formation of a caretaker government, the restoration of the pre-1999 constitution, and the formation of an independent election commission.⁴⁰

The U.S. Factor

The signal the United States sends to Pakistan's military rulers will be decisive for both the preelection situation and the election outcome. The central question here is not which particular political force may or may not win the election but, instead, the extent of the army's determination to consolidate its position within the country and orient Pakistan's foreign policy in a way that potentially collides with U.S. interests. Whether the army supports the Pakistani president or simply accepts the status quo will therefore be a true political choice between short- and longer-term interests.

There is little prospect that Musharraf will voluntarily resign his position as chief of army staff. The position of the U.S. administration will be decisive in determining the attitude of the Pakistani president. The intensity of the pressures and the nature of the demands on the Pakistani head of state will influence whether Musharraf retains his military position and will thus influence the position of the Islamist parties.

While he visited Pakistan on April 5, 2006, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher stated that the Bush administration strongly favored civilian rule and civilian control of the military in Pakistan.⁴¹ Acknowledging that General Musharraf's holding the dual offices of president and army chief negated “the spirit of democracy,” Boucher declared that it remained to be seen how the issue would be addressed by the Pakistani president. Boucher remained evasive on the question of whether the United States would accept President Musharraf in uniform after the elections if he continued to hold both offices.⁴²

This ambiguity illustrates the dilemma faced by the United States in its relations with Pakistan. Although the United States in principle favors a greater degree of democracy in the country (as stated in the new *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*⁴³), the U.S. attitude will ultimately be decided by other considerations, such as the impact on the U.S. hierarchy of priorities of the most probable alternative. With the war on terror at the top of U.S. priorities for the South

Asian region, tacit U.S. acquiescence to Musharraf retaining his uniform remains the most likely scenario.

Four Electoral Scenarios

Four different scenarios can be identified for the elections. Two depend not so much on whether the United States accepts Musharraf holding dual offices as on the intensity of the pressures his dual position will put on him and how those pressures are related to the extent of democratization in Pakistan.

Scenario 1: In exchange for implicit U.S. acquiescence in Musharraf continuing in uniform, Musharraf distances himself further from the Islamist parties. This scenario reflects, to some extent, the existing reality. Soon after the LFO was passed in Parliament, General Musharraf started dissociating himself from religious parties that were increasingly becoming irrelevant, and they became more vocal against him. In the 2007 election scenario, increasing the distance would mean nothing worse for the religious parties than a few seats less in both the national and provincial assemblies.

Easy ways for the regime to weaken the religious parties would be to end the equivalence of madrassa certificates and university degrees or to suppress the law requiring a person to possess a university degree in order to be eligible to run for election. Such a measure would undoubtedly strengthen the regional parties countrywide but most notably in Balochistan and the NWFP. Given the present turbulence in Balochistan, such a decision is highly unlikely. The JUI will benefit from government support in the province.

Another possibility in the same context would be for the MMA to boycott the elections, as it is regularly tempted to do. Qazi Hussain Ahmed, the chairman of the MMA, has threatened to do so on several occasions, but a separate boycott by the MMA would almost inevitably provoke a split in the organization, which would then lose what is left of its political weight. Qazi Hussain has already made clear that the disintegration of the MMA is not an option.⁴⁴ As a matter of fact, despite many internal tensions, the MMA has proved to be much more cohesive than many initially believed it would be.⁴⁵ Moreover, having “demonstrated” its capacity to weaken the Islamic camp, the regime would feel internationally relegitimized.

The perspective would be different if the entire opposition decided to boycott the election, for it would demonstrate an absence of legitimacy of the regime that would be difficult for the United States and the European Union to ignore. This would not necessarily benefit the MMA because the opposition credentials of the ARD against the regime are much stronger, although the MMA has often been more vocal.

The dissociation between Musharraf and the MMA would benefit the MMA only in the case of an alliance between the regime and the liberal parties.⁴⁶ Such an alliance of all parties except the MMA (which, incidentally, U.S. diplomacy has been trying to promote for the past few years) would create a political vacuum that the MMA would be keen to fill, although it is highly improbable that it would be able to do so. With the exception of the regional parties, whose combined political weight is insufficient to challenge the central government, the MMA would be the sole real opposition. The population would become further depoliticized. The MMA would be unable to

threaten the regime, but it would undoubtedly be legitimized in some segments of the population that otherwise have no ideological sympathy for the Islamists.

Scenario 2: Musharraf continues in uniform despite U.S. pressure and decides to favor the Islamist parties to ease the pressure, repeating the 2002 scenario. Such a scenario would undoubtedly benefit the MMA, which would feel strengthened and thus would be more assertive in its demands. Its actual political power would not necessarily be greater, but the regime would probably make additional compromises on Islamization, in particular on family laws and education.

This scenario is unlikely for at least two reasons:

- Technically, elections will have to be supervised by elected local bodies, whose majority, thanks to the rigged 2005 local elections, belongs to the PML-Q and will therefore be difficult to convince to favor candidates from other parties.
- The mechanism would be too transparent, even for international public opinion.

Yet the scenario cannot be totally dismissed as a real possibility if the regime feels threatened. Following Boucher's visit to Pakistan on April 5, 2006, the PML-Q central secretary and minister of state for information, Tariq Azim Khan, declared that the United States "cannot dictate [to] President Musharraf on the uniform issue,"⁴⁷ thus indicating that the regime would oppose such a move.

Moreover, the mainstream parties (PML-N and PPP) have threatened to boycott the elections if their leaders, former prime ministers Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, are prevented from returning to Pakistan and a caretaker government is not formed.⁴⁸ For the MMA, such a boycott would result in a situation similar to the one generated by an alliance between the regime and these parties. The Islamist coalition would try to fill the political vacuum, although it would not have as much benefit as in a crisis of legitimacy generated by an alliance of the liberals and the military.

Scenario 3: Musharraf disappears from the political scene. Although this scenario is not the most likely, it is not totally improbable and thus is worth examining. Notwithstanding death resulting from natural causes or accident, this scenario could result from two different politically meaningful situations: Musharraf could be assassinated, or the army could decide that he is no longer its best representative and force him to resign.

The assassination of Pakistan's head of state would most likely result in the cancellation or postponement of the elections. Whatever the army's decision, it would negatively affect the MMA, whose past and present links with jihadi movements would be examined with the blessing of the international community.

Much less clear would be the impact of a forced resignation of Musharraf, as happened to Ayub Khan. Such could be the case if, for example, the army decided that, given the current level of frustration in the country, it would be better off with a civilian assuming power but would be confronted with Musharraf unwilling to give up his position.

The situation in Waziristan and the current insurrection in Balochistan make this scenario improbable, as the army wants to avoid further disorder and uncertainty. Such a scenario would be more likely in the postelection period if, for example, Benazir Bhutto came back and was able to

mobilize the population against the regime. Although not the most likely scenario, this possibility cannot totally be dismissed. The army might then be tempted to ask Musharraf to resign and let a civilian assume power while the army kept its control of the main levers of power.

Should Musharraf exit the political scene before the elections, it would probably lead to the closest possible approximation of a free and fair election. The military would be tempted to favor its preferred party but would be ready to accept the outcome of the election, providing that the winner would agree not to cross certain red lines concerning the role, budget, and prerogatives of the military and would not try to interfere with foreign policy.

In such a situation, the MMA would most probably emerge as a significant component of Pakistan's polity with its number of seats less than or equal to its current count, and it would remain an opposition party.

Scenario 4: Musharraf resigns his position of chief of army staff, and the national and provincial elections are held in a free and fair manner. This scenario is the least likely for it would almost automatically mean a normalization of Pakistan's political life. For the MMA, its impact would be similar to that of scenario 3.

Potential Impact of the Return to Pakistan of Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto on the Upcoming Elections

Unless he is forced to do so, General Musharraf is very unlikely to accept the return of either of the exiled former prime ministers, Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto. The unacceptability of Benazir Bhutto and her husband Asif Zardari to the military is well known, and additional charges against the couple were recently made public. Similarly, the negotiated exile of Nawaz Sharif is expected to cease only at the end of the decade. It is therefore improbable that he or his brother Shabaz, former chief minister of Punjab, will be allowed to return to Pakistan to run in the elections.

The government reaction (the announcement that the President would be re-elected by the current assemblies) to the signing by former prime ministers Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto on May 15, 2006, of the Charter of Democracy—a text calling for a number of constitutional amendments as well as legal and institutional changes to restore democracy, defining a code of conduct for the mainstream political parties, and excluding any recourse to the army against the parties⁴⁹—is an indication of what could possibly happen in such an eventuality, even though the document is not a predictor that the two exiled leaders may be allowed to return to Pakistan for the elections, and there is no certainty that they will remain united.

Should they be allowed to return, the situation would become more complicated for the PML-Q and Musharraf. Although their return would not fundamentally alter any of the above scenarios, it would introduce an additional element of uncertainty.

In scenario 1 (in exchange for implicit U.S. acquiescence in Musharraf continuing in uniform, Musharraf distances himself further from the Islamist parties), the presence of either Sharif or Bhutto, or both, would facilitate Musharraf's plan by preventing the MMA from gaining ground in both Punjab and Sindh, which are their respective strongholds. It would, however, make life more difficult for him, for he would most likely have to face divisions within the PML-Q as some elements

might be tempted once again to join the PML-N. Two cases could then be envisaged, depending on whether the PML-N and the PPP could sustainably unite against Musharraf. It would become extremely difficult for Musharraf to govern if they were able to muster such an alliance. If they cannot join forces, it would be difficult but not impossible for Musharraf to remain the arbiter.

Scenario 2 (Musharraf continues in uniform against U.S. pressure and decides to favor the Islamist parties to ease the pressure, repeating the 2002 scenario) would be much more difficult to implement should Sharif and Bhutto come back. The MMA obviously benefited from their absence in 2002. Although it is difficult to guess the margin by which the vote would be affected if the two leaders came back to contest the elections, the MMA would likely lose ground at least in Punjab and Sindh. Again, Musharraf's own position would depend on whether the PPP and the PML-N can unite.

In scenarios 3 (Musharraf disappears from the political scene) and 4 (Musharraf resigns his position of chief of army staff, and the national and provincial elections are held in a free and fair manner), the presence of Sharif and Bhutto only helps bring back the MMA to its natural modest electoral performance, which is nuanced only by circumstantial variations.

Finally, one should also consider the possibility of mass agitation if the elections are too blatantly rigged, in particular under scenario 1. In such a scenario the MMA could side with the opposition, being even the most vocal. Such a possibility would not necessarily benefit the MMA, however, because the logic of the situation would lead to either an army repression or new elections. In the case of repression, the MMA would most probably have to suffer from army subjugation like all political parties. In the case of fresh elections, the MMA would most likely lose badly in comparison with its 2002 performance.

Ultimately, for the MMA the most probable outcome of the 2007-2008 elections, which will be controlled by the PML, is a situation only marginally different from its present one. None of the scenarios proposed envisages a significant electoral gain for the Islamist coalition in the 2007 election, although the MMA could gain some seats in Punjab and Sindh if Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto are prevented from running. It is even more difficult to realistically envisage the situation that could potentially lead to an Islamist takeover unless it was engineered by the regime itself (that is, by the political wing of the Inter-Services Intelligence directorate), which would most probably prove internationally counterproductive.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Whatever the prevailing scenario, the Islamic forces will be, ultimately, a dependent variable rather than a defining factor. In the months to come, the Musharraf regime is likely to try to convince the international community otherwise with a strategy opposite from the one it successfully used in 2002.

The MMA's success in the last general elections, following 9/11, was supposed to create the impression of a gradual yet inexorable trend toward extremism. The strategy this time could be to use extremism to discredit political Islam. The multiplication of sectarian incidents and the authorization to some previously banned sectarian organizations, such as the Sipah-e-Sahaba, to hold public

rallies, although under a new name,⁵⁰ could be indicators of the government's willingness to use sectarian violence as an electoral tool. All over the country, sectarianism will contribute to creating an atmosphere of fear, a demand for law and order, and a rejection of religious violence. Fortunately for the regime, the situation in Waziristan, where the army seems unable to prevent the rise of the Taliban, will reinforce the threat perception.

Having increased the threat perception, the military will try to generate a secular front, playing on the frustrations generated by the 2002 general elections. If the 2005 local elections are any indication, we should witness a resurgence of the local nationalist parties. The Awami National Party will resurface in the NWFP, and the MQM will be allowed to continue terrorizing its political opponents in Karachi and elsewhere in Sindh. The same card will be more difficult to play in Balochistan because of the nationalist insurrection, but the regime may be tempted to exploit the divisions between tribal and non tribal leaders by asking the National Party, a non tribal organization, to join a vast anti-MMA coalition, at the same time making sure that the MMA gets enough seats in the provincial assembly to participate in the government. Overall, the PML-Q will get a majority and will be helped as much as necessary. The regional parties, however, will be there essentially to add credibility to the PML-Q victory.

Incidentally, it will be essential for the success of this strategy that the two leaders of the mainstream opposition, Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, be prevented from running in the elections. The leader of the PPP in particular could constitute a real political threat for the regime because the PPP remains the number one party in the country. The regime will undoubtedly find allies in the regional parties and locally, with the MMA, because a too assertive PPP could engender a backlash.

The MMA will not disappear from the political scene. Depending on the evolution of alliances, it could even end up in a position similar to where it stood in 2002. But even a poor electoral performance would not spark a political confrontation with the military. The MMA's limited, yet real, popular support will make it essential for the army to assure itself that the MMA can be reactivated whenever necessary and can facilitate covert operations along the Afghan borders if need be. Politically, however, the MMA would likely return to its traditional position of opposition party with no other hope than being a catalyst for dissent and protest.

Whatever the MMA's ultimate electoral fate, it should not be the determinant of the international community's tolerance for the violation of democracy in Pakistan. Despite the blatant rigging of the 2002 elections, the international community remained mute, accepting a military dictator who promised to fight political Islam and promote "enlightened moderation" but then did neither. Just as the MMA's relative success in the 2002 election should not have determined policy toward Pakistan at that time, neither should the MMA's electoral defeat be the objective of any policy toward Pakistan in the coming months. Renouncing its own values will not serve the West but instead will reinforce the idea that the West applies a double standard when it comes to Islamic countries. The main illness of Pakistan is not Islamism, but militarism.

NOTES

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- ¹³ Jamal Malik, *Colonization of Islam: Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1996), p. 8.
- ¹⁴ Frédéric Grare, *Pakistan: The Myth of an Islamist Peril*, Policy Brief 45 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), <<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/45.grare.final.pdf>>.
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- ¹⁶ See Olivier Roy, “Le neo fondamentalisme islamique ou l’imaginaire de l’Oumma,” *Esprit*, April 1996, p. 82.
- ¹⁷ For a brief review of each component of the MMA, see International Crisis Group, *Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military*, pp. 5–6.
- ¹⁸ Deobandi organizations belong to the Hanafi legal school. They qualify themselves as deobandi as they feel connected one way or another with the theological seminary founded in 1867 in Deoband, near Delhi. According to Jamal Malik, “the core of affiliation comprised civil servants and merchants, while the students of the seminary basically originated from urban retail merchants, while the students of the seminary basically originated from urban retail merchant families, small landowners and also the poorer strata of society.” Malik continues, “the role of the Prophet and the widespread cult of hereditary saints (pir) were demystified among the Deobandis. They do not project the solution of contemporary problems into the hereafter as other groups did. In this sense, they were vividly interested in the actual condition of life, *hic et nunc*.” They are politicized to a considerable degree. See Jamal Malik, *Colonization of Islam*, pp. 4–5.
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