

## **Dictator, nukes must go: Constant U.S. flow of aid buys time for Musharraf**

By Dr. Han Park

President Bush is in a predicament with the current Pakistani crisis. He cannot condone the dictatorial and capricious exercise of power by Gen. Pervez Musharraf in suspending the constitution, closing all civilian TV channels and effectively imposing martial law.

If American foreign policy has anything to do with the protection and spread of democracy, there is absolutely no justification for supporting this dictator. On the other hand, the Bush administration has found an ally in Musharraf in its "war on terror" as Musharraf claims to be fighting al-Qaida, Taliban militants and Islamic extremists on behalf of America. He seeks justification for his current emergency measures under the pretext of national security.

How valuable is Musharraf for President Bush's war on terror? The Bush administration has padded Musharraf with some \$11 billion over the last five years. In order to continue to extract from the American treasury, Musharraf must maintain the presence of Bush's enemy within his jurisdiction. It does not take a genius to figure out that an alive Osama bin Laden somewhere in the mountains of Pakistan is much more useful for Musharraf than a dead one. It is increasingly evident that the general has no incentive to eradicate Bush's enemies. He has simply been exploiting the ill-fated American policy for his own political gains.

How can we prevent the current discontent from becoming a mass uprising that might open the door to a fundamentalist takeover of the state? We cannot afford another Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran in Pakistan, especially when the latter is a legitimate nuclear power.

Musharraf created this crisis to perpetuate his absolute power against the wishes of the people of Pakistan, not against the will of the terrorists. The protesters against his rule are lawyers, civil rights activists and ordinary people who refuse to be steamrolled by the military dictatorship. They are not terrorists or even religious fanatics.

Prolonged support of Musharraf by the Bush administration could exacerbate the chaos to the point where the embattled and frustrated population may embrace the militant extremists, leading possibly to a theocratic dictatorship. America must realize, albeit belatedly, that we have neither pragmatic incentives nor moral justifications for keeping the dictator and consequently undermining the democratic forces in Pakistan.

The choice for the United States is clear and easy: Stop all aid to Musharraf immediately unless he unconditionally restores the constitution, removes the state of emergency and holds a general election in which he may run only as a civilian.

However, the big question still remains: Will we be able to prevent a nuclear Pakistan from falling into the hands of radical fundamentalists? In the short run, probably yes; but in the long run, the challenge is real.

Once the pipelines of Western aid are dried up, Musharraf's days in power will be numbered. The United States should support a democratic process to ensure an early general election. It is probable that Benazir Bhutto, two-time former prime minister, may become the front-runner in the ensuing election, but she will be contested by another former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif who was ousted by Musharraf in the military coup and is certain to return from exile.

Both these contenders are not without shameful baggage, as they are known for political corruption. Nonetheless, they are believers in democratic processes and will be prepared to deter religious fanatics and militant extremists. If they should agree to form a unified government, we should support them even more enthusiastically. However, Washington should not interfere with the election, especially with the intention to steer the course of the election in a certain direction, for such a policy may backfire by fueling further anti-American sentiment among the Islamic public.

As for the task of keeping nuclear weapons "out of the wrong hands," we must take a two-track approach. While it is imperative for the Bush administration to guard against any major political upheavals that may allow nuclear arsenals to fall into the hands of militant extremists, it is time for Washington to map out a grand and persuasive strategy to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

When I was involved in a negotiation to persuade North Korea to relinquish its nuclear ambition, one question the North Koreans asked me was the very question I would now like to ask us all: Why should the United States and other U.N. Security Council members get to keep their stockpiles of nuclear weapons, while small countries are denied the right to defend themselves with the same kinds of arsenals?

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