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How Military Dominates the Political Space in Pakistan: A Study of Musharraf's Rule (1999-2008)

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Where civilian opinion is inchoate, and its organisation feeble the armed forces are invulnerable, because the potential civilian opposition is so feeble and confused. S.E. Finer¹

General Pervez Musharraf stayed in power for almost nine years—between October 1999 and September 2008), two years short of his two earlier predecessors in uniform (Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq). During these years, he was busy in the game of political engineering to win over political forces amenable to his influence to lend his rule a nominal popular base, in spite of his visceral hatred for political forces. It is interesting to note that political leadership of all hues were eager to court the military ruler, knowing fully well that this will retard the pace and process of democracy in Pakistan.

General Pervez Musharraf came to power with promises of reforming Pakistani politics and ushering in true democracy. The people of Pakistan trusted him. But as he embarked on his endeavour, he considered himself indispensable. In a bid to perpetuate his hold on power, he employed the strategy of divide-and-rule to keep the political forces disunited. The politicians were also seen to be playing into his hands and participating indulgently in his game of power-politics. The present paper seeks to chronicle the General's eight-year rule, primarily as the Army Chief, in a detailed manner and isolate the strategies the General used to divide the opposition. The paper argues that there is a tendency among Pakistani politicians to fall prey to the strategies of an assertive army chief. General Musharraf played his game astutely and kept the opposition as divided and disunited as they were during the national elections in October 2002. Like his predecessors in uniform, he made full use of the establishment to muster enough political support to drive a message to the opposition forces that he could also play politics successfully, even if that were to be through fraud and cunning.

General Musharraf displayed uncanny zeal and verve in sailing through the rough and tumble of politics. After dealing with politicians for eight long years, he transformed himself into a wily and scheming 'politician', the very category he so deeply abhorred, when he came to power. When he entered the scene as a military dictator, he sought to steal the thunder from the sail of the politicians by ensuring clean, transparent and accountable governance for the people of Pakistan. However, as he proceeded, he adopted the style of the politicians to checkmate each other in Pakistan, shorn of all ethics and morality. He went on to divide the political opposition and succeeded in luring some leaders away from the opposition's camp. Gen

Musharraf's bid to bring morality, transparency and accountability proved to be a pipedream, as he was sucked into the very morass he promised to clean up.

The present paper seeks to study the attempts made by General Pervez Musharraf to fragment the political space in Pakistan, during the period he remained in power as both the army chief and the president. It will also study the political consequences of such attempts and their impact on the process of "reconciliation" and reversal to "genuine democracy" as he had initially promised while taking over as the Chief Executive of Pakistan on October 12, 1999.

Reflexes of Pakistani Politics

....if you want to keep the army out, you have to bring it in
Pervez Musharraf

Pakistan is a classic case of an 'overdeveloped' state with an underdeveloped polity and society.³ The underdevelopment of the society is both the cause and consequence of the persisting disjunction between "(the processes of) state construction and political processes".⁴ The inevitable result has been a perpetual "transition from an authoritarian system to a democratic order".⁵

This has been so mainly because of the skewed relationship between a relatively stable state apparatus, which Pakistan inherited from its colonial past, and an unstable political system, which has not evolved (or has not been allowed to evolve?) as a functioning democracy. The so called power elite presiding over the operation of the state machinery has sought to perpetuate the inegalitarian class structures in the society and played upon the intra-societal divides, to retain its hold over power. In the process, the political system has been utterly fragmented. A fragmented polity has been the sport of self-absorbed politicians as well as military adventurers seeking to consolidate their hold by weakening the opposition through fragmentation.⁶

Such fragmentation is not unique to Pakistan. Many post-colonial states do suffer from this problem especially in view of the politicisation of plural ethno-cultural groups in a democratic context. The multiple demands they place on the system often merge into the democratic processes of "interest aggregation" and "interest articulation" and their divisive effects are often sublimated and get absorbed into the system. However, in case of Pakistan, such fragmentation is imposed from above, nourished with care and employed craftily to divide potential opposition and perpetuate the hold of the ruling elite. Such manipulation retards the process of consensus-building across different social layers and leads to over-politicisation at one level and pervasive political apathy at the other.

This strategy of keeping political parties divided has been the most useful instrument in the hands of the military establishment in Pakistan to keep itself in the reckoning as the most important constituent of the 'Troika' (the President, the Prime Minister and the Army). In the event of direct rule by the army, the temptation to decimate political opposition through force

or fraud is almost irresistible. This has taken the army from strength to strength; simultaneously, it has adversely affected the smooth functioning of democracy in Pakistan.

The Army has, in fact, established itself as the most important component of the Pakistani state. It is not a junior member or the proverbial 'arm' of the 'Executive'. It has cast its long shadow on the politics of Pakistan, during the thirty-one years of army rule, out of total sixty years of its existence. The Army's role as a potential 'stabiliser' has been underlined by many observers both at the internal and external levels. In fact, it has been touted as the most organised of all institutions and an alternative or even anti-dote to an imperfect democracy run by self-seeking politicians in Pakistan. However, the Army in Pakistan has ironically projected itself as a saviour of democracy.

The four military leaders, who have ruled Pakistan among them for thirty one years during the last sixty years of its existence, have promised early return to 'genuine' democracy. But the process of transition has never been smooth. They have, with their divergent worldviews and political persuasions, considered themselves indispensable for Pakistan's growth and development as a nation state. They have hesitated to come up with any credible exit strategy. Rather, they have sought to take every step possible to fragment and weaken democratic opposition, and perpetuate their role as guardians of a spurious version of democracy, they champion and introduce. This, inevitably, has put the clock back and reversed the process of civilisation of the army as an institution.

Gen Musharraf's rule conformed to the pattern. Starting with the promise to purge Pakistani democracy of all its evils, he borrowed the political tactics of his predecessors to consolidate his hold on power. He sought to weaken his opposition through force or fraud. He tried to maintain a façade of civilian rule through the manipulated elections of 2002 and took the help of the same shady and corrupt politicians he promised to weed out. He split up political parties to form his own favourite group, punished people for showing dissent and dealt differentially with various groups without bothering much about their ideological or moral predilections. All these are natural steps for a military dictator on the look out for legitimacy. As Hamza Alavi would put it, they are born out of the "tension between locus of power and legitimation of power".⁸ The aim of this paper is to isolate the ways in which Musharraf sought legitimacy for himself, the strategy he adopted in this regard, its effect on the political culture and political space in Pakistan and make some prognosis for future.

Enter Musharraf

On October 17, 1999, five days after the army staged the bloodless coup (or counter-coup as Musharraf called it) to overthrow Nawaz Sharif's government, Gen Pervez Musharraf went on Pakistan Television, and almost echoing his predecessors said that "what Pakistan has experienced in the recent years has been merely a label of democracy not the essence of it" and the people of Pakistan were labouring under the "yoke of despotism". It was his duty therefore, he implied, to take the people from an "era of sham democracy", "to a true one".⁹ He laid down his seven-point agenda, i.e., (1) Rebuild national confidence and morale; (2) Strengthen

federation, remove inter provincial disharmony and restore national cohesion; (3) Revive economy and restore investors' confidence; (4) Ensure law and order and dispense speedy justice, (5) Depoliticise State institutions; (6) Devolution of power to the grass-roots level, and (7) Ensure swift and across the board accountability.

Three years later, on April 05, 2002, Musharraf assured the people in another televised address that he had kept his promises and made substantial progress on all the seven fronts. He would urge people to support him through a referendum and help him in completing his mission. It also provided him popular legitimacy.

Initial Strategy: Have conforming Judiciary, legalise your rule

Between October 1999, when he assumed power and April 2002, when he sought popular support through a referendum, much water flowed down the Indus. It is necessary to study how Musharraf enabled a tame system to strengthen his hold on power. Immediately after he assumed power, he suspended the 1973 constitution and the national and provincial assemblies. Unlike his predecessors, in stead of becoming the Chief Martial Law Administrator, he proclaimed emergency and called himself the Chief Executive of Pakistan. He retained President Tarar and made himself equivalent of the Prime Minister. He went on to institute a National Security Council (NSC) and have a select cabinet. He did not make any mention of elections in his address to the nation on October 17, 1999.

The military takeover was challenged by Nawaz Sharif's colleagues in the Supreme Court under Article 184 (3) of the constitution. The Supreme Court set the date for hearing on January 31, 2000. Gen Musharraf left the Judiciary untouched initially. But in view of the uncertainty about the verdict of the judiciary over the petitions against his takeover he decided to administer fresh oath of office to all the judges of the superior courts on January 26, 2000.

When the Chief Justice Saidzumman Siddiqui and five of his colleagues in the Supreme Court refused to oblige, they were cordoned off and stopped from going to the court. Six judges from the Supreme Court and eight from the High Courts stayed out of the oath-taking exercise under a Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) devised by the Musharraf government. Rest of the 89 judges (out of the 103 in all) took oath under the PCO and the senior-most among them, Justice Irshad Hassan Khan was appointed Chief Justice (CJ) of Pakistan.

It was nothing unnatural on the part of the CJ, therefore, to replay *ad verbatim* the 1977 judgement by the Supreme Court (in the Begum Nusrat Bhutto case which had challenged Zia-ul-Haq's coup) on May 12, 2000. Justice Irshad Hassan Khan held that Gen Musharraf, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) and Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), had "validly assumed power by means of an extra-constitutional step, in the interest of the state for the welfare of the people".¹⁰ The verdict was well in line with the 'doctrine of necessity' and principle of '*salus populi supreme lex*' (in the supreme interest of the public), which the apex court had referred to from time to time ever since Justice Muhammad Munir had cited it to justify Ayub Khan's takeover in 1958. The court held that the doctrine of necessity had not only

been recognised in Islam and other religions of the world but also accepted by the eminent jurists, including Hugo, Grotius, Chitty, and De Smith. The Chief Justice also referred to the misrule by Nawaz Sharif which “had created conditions for a radical transformation”. The court, however, asked the Chief Executive to hold elections within three years of the takeover, i.e., before October 12, 2002.

Political Reconstruction Begins: Localisation of Politics?

In the meanwhile, Gen Musharraf had established the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) on the 18th November, 1999 to “generate fundamental thoughts on promoting good governance to strengthen democracy through reconstruction of institutions of State”¹¹, within the parameters of Musharraf’s 7-Point Agenda. The Bureau went on to recommend reconstruction of Local Governments and the Police which were approved in August 2000 by the NSC and the Federal Cabinet. The Local Government Ordinance, 2001 was promulgated by the provincial governments in August, 2001. But by then through a Presidential ordinance the elections to the local bodies had already taken place between December 30, 2000 and July 21, 2001.

Military rulers of Pakistan before Musharraf adopted the strategy of establishing ‘local bodies’ as a legitimising crutch for their unrepresentative rule. Hence there was nothing new about the prescription of the NRB in this regard. The aim of this exercise has been to create a vested interest group obliged to the military rulers at the local level on the one hand, and fragment the local support base of the existing political parties on the other. At another level, such harmless interim exercises help the administration derive popular legitimacy and serve as a barometer of the political climate in the country.

The local elections kick-started Gen Musharraf’s political game-plan for the future. Like his predecessors, he made it a party-less electoral exercise. The candidates were not allowed to use “the platform, flag, symbol, affiliation and financial and material resources or support of a political, religious, ethnic or sectarian party organisation”¹², directly or indirectly, while contesting for the local bodies. Various political parties geared themselves up for the local bodies and many candidates did reveal their party affiliations to garner votes. However, the results indicated that there were many newcomers elected as *nazims* (roughly translated as mayor) in the political scene at the district level, who would be favourably disposed towards Musharraf government.

Search for Collaborators

From the General’s side, the next step was to conduct national elections by October 2002. The preparation began immediately after the local bodies elections. His followers were on the look-out for like-minded politicians for raising a political party which would serve as the establishment’s party in the coming elections. Given Pakistan’s culture of opportunism, it was not hard to find willing collaborators to effect such political engineering. Political parties in Pakistan are, in fact, run in the most undemocratic manner like personal fiefdoms. It is natural

therefore for these parties to develop chronic fissures which entrepreneurial military adventurists like Ayub, Zia and Musharraf have found suitable for their political patchwork. They have also successfully manipulated such fissures and often used other instruments like accountability exercises to first apprehend dissenters of the previous administration and then turn them into willing allies through backroom deals and pardons.

Feeding on Dissenters: Willing Turncoats

By the time of Nawaz Sharif's ouster his authoritarian style of functioning had provoked the ire of many of his party colleagues. Some of them, i.e., Mian Azhar, Khurshid Muhammad Kasuri, Chaudhury Shujaat Hussain and his cousin Pervez Elahi had already formed a rebel caucus within the party. As soon as Nawaz was deposed, these rebels, along with Sikandar Hayat Malhi, Col (Retd.) Ghulam Sarwar Cheema and Abdul Sattar Lalika, came together to form the Pakistan Muslim League-Like Minded (PML-LM).

Apart from his own party-men Nawaz Sharif had also antagonised the opposition parties like Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) led by Benazir Bhutto and the religious political parties by his dictatorial policies. It was not difficult on the part of Musharraf-led administration, therefore, to find allies or collaborators to put together an obliging civilian administration as a democratic dispensation under Musharraf's diktat. This process began in mid-2000 as the regime geared up for local bodies elections later that year. All this while, the PML-LM was waiting patiently for the General's courting. The initial contacts were made and the PML-LM reorganised itself as PML-Qaid-e-Azam (PML-Q) during the local bodies elections in late-2001.

By the close of 2000, some of the opposition political forces came together in December 2000 to counter Musharraf's political moves and founded the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD). The formation of this alliance coincided with Nawaz Sharif's voluntary exile, reportedly under a secret agreement with the Saudi government, to keep away from Pakistan for ten years.

The alliance was composed of seven political parties initially including PPP and PML-N and its membership swelled to about 20 including the regional political parties fighting for ethnic rights under another alliance called the Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement (PONM). However, the ARD could never gather momentum because of the personal differences between Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, the two most popular political leaders of Pakistan. The regime did not ever take ARD seriously as the differences between PML-N and PPP reduced the effectiveness of the alliance as a political force.

NABbing Politicians, Generating Loyalty

By early 2001 Musharraf's Pakistan was smarting under international apathy as well as sanctions for its undemocratic rule. This was clear in the case of the "unsmiling and peremptory"¹³ stopover by Bill Clinton during March 2000 and the continued criticism by the Commonwealth. At the internal level, there was also a judicial directive too to hold elections by October 2002. All this expedited the regime's search for potential allies.

Musharraf had established National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on November 16, 1999, with the express aim of ensuring across-the-board accountability vide an ordinance. NAB came in handy for arm-twisting politicians to join the King's party, the PML-Q. By March 2000, the NAB had prepared a list of 109 parliamentarians and charged them with mis-declaration of assets or financial impropriety. They included prominent leaders of PML-N and PPP, i.e., Begum Abida Husain, Raza Yousif Gilani, Humayun Akhtar and Iftikar Gillani and Aftab Ahmed Sherpao.¹⁴

The local elections of 2000-2001 indicated political gains for PPP-supported candidates in rural Sindh and Punjab, and gains for PML-LM in the urban centres. The PML rebels had taken the opportunity to field their loyalists in the local elections and demonstrated their willingness to be part of Musharraf's game-plan and join the new political party, the PML-Q. It was during this period that the General tried his best to boost his image to sale himself to the people in Pakistan as a liberal and charismatic leader.

The religious groups fared well in the Pashtun dominated areas in NWFP in the local elections. By June 2001, towards the end of the local bodies elections, all the prominent religious parties, i.e., Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam-Fazlur(JUI-F), Jamiat-i-Islami (JI), Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP), Jamiat-e-Ahl-e-Hadith (JAH) and Tehrik-i-Islami (TI) came together to form Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA, United Party for Action). Media reports suggested that the intelligence establishment had played some role in bringing these groups together, as alternative to the mainstream parties like PPP and PML-N.

Gen Musharraf sought to strengthen his position further and asked President Tarar to leave in June 2001. He assumed the post of President and embarked on a visit to India for bilateral talks at Agra. The talks failed, but the General won domestic acclaim for his frank and tough talking to the Indian media. With international support hard to come by, yet basking under domestic popular support, on August 14, 2001, Musharraf congratulated his own government for the good work done in the local bodies elections and announced that the elections for both national and federal assemblies would take place by October 2002, as per the directive of the judiciary.

9/11 : A Welcome Respite

The 9/11 came soon afterwards and the international approach changed towards Pakistan. So far neglected by USA, Pakistan emerged at the top in the list of Washington's foreign policy priorities. Gen Musharraf also took time by forelock and took the right decision to hitch his bandwagon to the American foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Although this was perceived as a strategic somersault, it provided the much needed oxygen for Musharraf administration. Between September 2002 and December 2002 when suicide terrorists having alleged links with Pakistani intelligence struck at Indian Parliament in New Delhi, Musharraf was busy reorienting Pakistan's policy preferences on terrorism. Here also he took many pragmatic decisions and changed his approach towards militancy at home and abroad. His positive approach won him acclaim both at home and abroad. Boosted by political support both at the

internal and external levels, Musharraf went about the game of political engineering much more confidently and adroitly.

Constitutional and Political Engineering in Full Swing

From the beginning of 2002, Musharraf started his constitutional engineering to lay down the rules of conduct for the impending elections in October. Till October 2002, he had issued as many as 12 Presidential orders for Conduct of General Elections. These orders were apart from the orders he issued relating to functioning of the Election Commission, eligibility of political parties, and the referendum to legitimise his rule.

He wanted to make it very sure for his favourites to win and during the run-up to elections, he took many tentative measures to exclude his political opponents from PPP and PML-N. Political Parties Order (Executive Order No 18) of June 28, 2002 stipulated that the candidate would have to prove there were no cases of conviction against him/her, which distinctly barred Benazir from participating in the elections, because she was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment under Section 31-A of NAB ordinance 1999 by NAB Court Rawalpindi/Islamabad.

Some more Presidential orders brought about provisions making the electoral process exclusive and elite-centric. One of the orders made it compulsory for candidates to prove that they had passed the graduation examination. This was relaxed, in line with Zia-ul-Haq's earlier observation, to accommodate equivalent madrassa degrees, to enable the Maulanas to contest the elections. In a brazen display of softness towards the religious political forces, the General released Azam Tariq, known for his extreme Sunni sectarian views, from prison and allowed him to fight the elections, which he subsequently won from Jhang defeating Tahir-ul Qadri of Awami Tehrik.

President through Referendum

In order to strengthen his position and gain popular legitimacy, taking a leaf out of Zia-ul-Haq's referendum exercise in favour of his rule in 1984, Musharraf announced on April 05, 2002 that a referendum would be held in the May to seek popular support for extension of his Presidential tenure for next five years. He discussed his seven point agenda and stated that he had adopted a four-pronged developmental strategy, i.e., (1) Economic revival, (2) Bringing good governance, (3) Poverty alleviation and last but not the least (4) Political re-structuring.

By political restructuring, he said, he meant a 'bottoms-up' 'silent revolution' in the form of decentralised local government system and introduction of "checks and balances on the power-brokers of Pakistan", whom he identified as President, Prime Minister and the Army Chief. He argued forcefully that with the setting up of the NSC would be a check on each of these power-brokers. He spoke at length about the need for democracy to readapt to Pakistani condition and held that "British model democracy, the democracy in Zimbabwe or any other democracy in

the East cannot be introduced in Pakistan".¹⁵ He also gave a vent to his predilections for a massive constitutional revision which would shut the door on autocratic rule and consolidate democracy. He stated:

"I would like to talk about our future political course....I have no ambition to enter into politics but I am involving myself in politics in the interest of democracy, maturing democracy and consolidating democracy. ...I want a constitutional answer to every political crisis. There have been problems, destabilisation and political crisis in the past for which there was no constitutional answer. Sometimes, some military man comes, sometimes a President dismisses the Prime Minister and sometimes a Prime Minister gets after the Chief Justice. We had turned the entire country into a political wrestling pad. We want to eliminate it."

Four days later, he kicked off his referendum campaign with an emotional speech from the Minar-e-Pakistan. More than half-a-dozen parties announced their support for the referendum. They included the PML (Q), National Awami Party (NAP) of Ajmal Khattak, Tehreek-i-Insaf of Imran Khan, Millat Party of Sardar Farooq Leghari, Sind Democratic Alliance (SDA) of Shaikh Imtiaz Ahmad, Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) of Tahirul Qadiri, Tehrik-i-Istiqlal of Rehmat Wardag, JUP (Niazi), All Pakistan Christian Movement, Qaumi Jamhoori Party and the MQM. The referendum took place on April 30, 2002. It was announced officially on May 02, 2002 that the voter turn out was 70 per cent. Out of a total 43.39 million people who used their right of franchise, 40.02 million endorsed Musharraf's policies. However, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and opposition political parties alleged massive rigging during the referendum.

By the time of referendum the pro-Musharraf forces had started gravitating towards his worldview in return for favours or expectations of a brighter political future. As soon as many erstwhile PML-N and PPP politicians agreed to work with Musharraf and support his policies, the cases registered against them by the NAB were withdrawn. In January 2002, Aftab Ahmed Sherpao head of his own faction of PPP was arrested the day he returned from self-imposed exile in London in Peshawar. By June 2002, all cases against him were withdrawn and he joined the pro-Musharraf's camp. Similarly, Chaudhury Shujaat Hussain and his brother Pervez Ilahi, who were implicated in acts of gross financial impropriety, were cleared of all the cases as soon as they agreed to work with Musharraf. Mian Azhar headed the PML-Q, but the Chaudhurys emerged as the real power-brokers within the party.

King's Party Formed, PML-N, PPP Fragmented

It was also reported that Tariq Aziz, one of the close supporters of Nawaz Sharif and infamous for having participated in the 1997 attack on the Supreme Court, had joined the PML-Q and agreed to work for Gen Musharraf and help him in setting up the PML-Q. By April 2002, the PML-Q had already taken firm roots. The establishment worked in full swing to translate Musharraf's desire to see the next parliament controlled by pro-Musharraf politicians.

It was reported by media in Pakistan that there were three monitoring cells operating within the establishment to work towards this end. Tariq Aziz controlled the operations these cells from the President's secretariat, while another cell operated out of the ISI office headed by one Major Gen Ehtesham Zamir. The third cell ran from the GHQ headed by Maj Gen Arif Hayat, brother of IG, Police of Punjab, Asif Hayat, and both the brothers actively engaged themselves in this entire game of pre-poll horse-trading.¹⁶

Apart from fragmenting political parties with robust political support through weaning away eminent politicians, the political engineers also sought to put together loyal alliances. Initially, they made an effort to raise an alliance of weak political parties from Sind as a possible alternative to PPP. This was known as Sind Democratic Alliance (SDA). This was led by the infamous and corrupt bureaucrat Imtiaz Sheikh who had served as secretary to former Sind chief minister Jam Sadiq Ali of PPP.

SDA sought to unite many influential political families from interior Sind, i.e., Arbabs of Tharparkar, Shirazis of Thatta, Jatois of Nawabshah and leading family-based politicians like Mir Hassan Khoso, Syed Zulfikar Ali Shah, Mir Muhammad Khokar, Khan Mohammad Dahir and many others. The services of MQM were harnessed through assurances of reciprocal help and support to further marginalise PPP in Sind. MQM, which had boycotted local elections joined the electoral fray with the secret blessings of the authorities.

There were reports of some indirect contact with the Sharifs to join Musharraf's efforts by merging their party in the PML-Q and forsaking claims of leadership of any such combine.¹⁷ When initial efforts at combining all the factions of PML (PML-Functional led By Pir Pagaro, PML-Junejo led by Hamid Nasir Chattha, PML (Hoti), PML (Qasim) and PML (Zia) led by Ejaz-ul-Haq, by the second week of August 2002, there was an effort at raising a Grand National Alliance like the Islamic Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) during the post-Zia days. However, such efforts could not take off because most of the political parties that were to join the alliance, more or less, existed on paper, without much political support. PML-Q, the main political party acting as the pivot in the alliance, was yet to test its political worth in the elections.

The anti-government forces made no efforts to pool their support bases together to frustrate Musharraf's game plan. The two principal parties stuck to their grooves and tried to capitalise on their traditional turfs. PPP focussed primarily on Sind and PML-N and rural areas of Punjab. PML-N, looking at its steady fragmentation by every passing day, did not think much beyond Punjab. The administration, however, penetrated these two parties successfully and organised defections from their ranks to strengthen PML-Q. The religious combine, traditionally neutral to military rule were critical of Musharraf but took care not to provoke the wrath of Musharraf administration. They benefited both from studied irreverence of the Musharraf regime and the active or passive engagement with PML-N, PPP and PPP-Sherpao group, especially in the Frontier province and northern Balochistan.

LFO: Legalising the Illegal

The regime sought to ensure participation of the *nazims* in the electoral process in support of PML-Q and even some candidates from other parties owing allegiance to Musharraf. The *nazims*, who owed their political fortune and authority to Musharraf's political restructuring, obliged the regime too. Many of them reportedly worked along with Tariq Aziz, Chaudhury Shujat and other PML-Q leaders to work at the grassroots during the elections.

Most importantly, another way of pre-poll manipulations was through fresh delimitation of constituencies in view of the population growth in different constituencies. Several complaints regarding gerry-mandering of electoral constituencies to favour the pro-regime forces were raised in the media.

Such pre-poll political manipulations could not even make Musharraf feel secure enough. He came up with his Legal Framework Order (LFO) in August 2002 which amended as many as 29 articles in the 1973 constitution and restored the controversial 58 (2) B— originally introduced by Zia-ul-Haq and later removed by Nawaz Sharif through his 13th amendment— which empowered the President to dismiss an elected government, when “a situation has arisen in which the Government of the Federation cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and an appeal to the electorate is necessary”. The LFO also increased the number of NA seats from 270 to 342, reserved 60 seats for women and 10 for minorities, removed joint electorates, reduced campaign period from 90 to 40 days, lowered voting age from 21 to 18 and expanded the ambit of the clause on disqualification to exclude undesirable elements.¹⁸

The Results: Surprises Galore, Hung Verdict

With the entire administration geared up for victory for PML-Q, the thirty nine days' campaign started in right earnest. The elections passed off relatively smoothly on October 12, 2002. The results (given below in Tabular form) suggested a hung National assembly. PPP emerged as a popular political force in Sindh while the MMA swept the Pathan belt riding on the widespread anti-US wave. PPP made gains in rural Punjab. PML-Q emerged as the single largest political party based on its performance in Punjab. The final party positions after 60 seats reserved for women and 19 for minorities were divided in direct proportion to the votes polled are given below.

Post Poll Rigging? Real or Sham Democracy?

The post-poll horse-trading and deal making went on for almost six weeks when no party could win a majority in the house. The military successfully thwarted moves by PPP and MMA to come together. The external help from US also came in handy for Musharraf, when Christina Rocca, US Deputy Secretary of State for South Asia reportedly persuaded Benazir Bhutto not to have any dealing with MMA.¹⁹ The US was particularly concerned about any political arrangement that would offer MMA a share in the federal government.

In a major attempt to even persuade PPP to come together with PMLQ to form the government, on October 29, Benazir Bhutto's husband was taken out of the Pakistan Medical Institute where he was detained, to discuss the prospect of a coalition. Benazir was not interested and the effort failed. However, the subsequent effort to split PPP succeeded. Almost 10 PPP Members of National Assembly (MNA) were lured away to form PPP (Forward Bloc) which supported PML-Q. This faction was later known as PPP-Patriot. On November 21, 2002, PML-Q led alliance could muster up support of 172 MNAs to stake claim for forming the government. Zafarullah Khan Jamali was chosen leader of PML-Q to become the Prime Minister

of Pakistan.

If this was what the General called 'real democracy', he was taking the people for granted.²⁰ The EU Election Observation Mission chastised the Election Commission for many undue practices during the elections. The Mission stated that there was blatant misuse of state resources in favour of PMLQ.²¹ The controlled electoral exercise only led to a sham democracy, which the General had so passionately pledged to fight in Pakistan. As he played the political game of dice with avid interest and closely monitored every political move by his friends and opponents, he seemed to overtake his opponents in the unethical game of wheeling dealing.

Democracy or Farce in Sind?

The establishment's zeal to install a pro-Musharraf government in Sind led it to an act of gross overkill. The government went out of its way to placate the MQM and struck a deal with it to share power with an opportunistic political conglomerate, the National Alliance, a synonym for PML-Q of Sind. In a bid to impress MQM, the leader of its rival faction MQM (Haqiqi), Younus Khan, was arrested from the premises of the Sind legislative assembly and put behind the bars. With MQM support, PPP, the single largest political entity in the house, was sidelined and Ali Mohammed Mehar was sworn in as Chief Minister of Sind only to be replaced later by the wilier Arbab Ghulam Rahim.

From De-politicisation to Over-politicisation

In the name of democracy and elections, the unelected vested interest groups were allowed to consolidate their hold on the levers of power. When the Gen talked about power to the grassroots and away from the feudal elements, he drew popular acclaim. However, if one looked at the people chosen for contesting the elections from PML ticket, one found that the General gave a fillip to *biradari* (clan group) politics. The Sardars, Maliks and Khans from north Punjab, the Melas, Cheemas, Tiwanas, Bharwanas, Sahis, Malhis, Warraichs, Dhillons, Rais, Virks, Bhattis and Ranas of central Punjab and Kasuris, Nakais, Kanjus, Khaggas, Manekas, Dreshaks, Jats, Joyias, Khichis, Khars, Quereshis, Lalekas and Makhdooms of southern Punjab were all there.²²

Musharraf started off with the noble aim of depoliticising the society. However, within three years of his rule he had, through his party-less local elections as well as collaboration with peripheral feudal groups, effectively politicised a whole new range of peoples and social groups. This also led inevitably to both horizontal and vertical fragmentation. By shutting the door on Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, he created a political vacuum and filled it up with elements that were rudderless and self-contained as those they sought to replace. Some of them struck opportunistic deals with Musharraf backed PML-Q and survived politically.

Reluctance to Shed Uniform: The MMA Trouble

Gen Musharraf, all this while, was seeking to save himself. He was, in fact, under grave threat of survival, both physical (for he was attacked twice in December 2003 and investigations suggested there were three more aborted attempts on his life) and political (for he was under constant threat of being taken to task for the usurpation of power in 1999, in case a civilian government headed by either Nawaz or Benazir scored massive electoral wins).

Even if the motley crowd Gen Musharraf assembled through successful fragmentation of the political space pulled through the vicissitudes of Pakistani politics with his blessings, he was seen to be feeling more and more insecure day by day. By 2003, he decided to validate his extra-constitutional acts through an amendment in the constitution. To this effect, he introduced the seventeenth amendment to the constitution which legalised many of his ordinances and orders. He also decided to continue with two offices (President and Army Chief) throughout his first term as President.

In his reaction to the suggestion by pro-government senators to take off his uniform Musharraf reportedly stated, "Politicians will start lining up to the new army chief the day I take off my uniform".²³ Prime Minister Jamali's half-hearted efforts earned him the displeasure of Musharraf and there were reports that he was going to be replaced soon by a more pliant leader.²⁴

For bringing about a constitutional amendment to make LFO part of the constitution it was necessary to have the support of the MMA. However, the MMA hesitated to support this bill and dithered. The negotiations between the government and the MMA went on for much of 2003 until the controversy over the legality of the graduation-equivalence of *madrassa sanad* used by almost all the MMA legislators surfaced over a petition by a lawyer in June 2003.

It is believed that the government took this as an opportunity to assure the MMA that they would not have any problem if they would agree to the seventeenth amendment bill.²⁵ MMA succeeded in bringing about certain amendments in the original bill. For example, the clause on the establishment of a National Security Council (NSC) was dropped to be introduced later as a separate bill, and Musharraf was made to promise to give up his uniform by the end of 2004. The passing of the seventeenth amendment was a great morale booster for Musharraf and he addressed the nation to say that they should not be scared of the 58(2) B and promised that the PML-Q-led government would be the first to complete its tenure and last for five years.

Dual Office Bill Passed

Musharraf spent the early part of year 2004 battling out the adverse international reaction to the disclosure on a clandestine nuclear proliferation network run by A Q Khan, touted as the father of the Pakistani bomb. The second half was largely spent in re-settling the ruling party after Zafarullah Jamali was forced to resign in June 2004. Chaudhury Shujat Hussain took over as caretaker Prime Minister only to make way for Shaukat Aziz who would step in after he was duly elected as a member of the lower house in August 2004.

The issue of uniform came in for wider public discussion towards the close of 2004. The lower house of the parliament passed "The President to Hold Another Office Bill 2004" amid protests from the opposition on October 14, 2004 and the Senate okayed the bill later on November 1, 2004. The opposition boycotted the house. The Bill was signed into law by Mohammedmian Soomro, the Senate Chairman officiating as President, on November 30, 2004, while Musharraf was on a tour of Latin America. This Act allowed him to hold both the offices till the end of 2007. Asking the opposition to honour the decision of the majority in the parliament, he stated in his address to the nation on December 31, 2004: "I have decided to keep both offices as the change in internal and external policies will be dangerous for Pakistan".²⁶

Strategy to Fragment MMA, Privilege PPP

Throughout 2004 and early 2005, the establishment largely permitted the conservative agenda of the religious parties and allowed them to appropriate the political space arising out of the vacuum created by the absence of PPP and PML-N. Aware of the nuisance potential of the religious parties (like MMA's threat of "million marches" in March 2005) and stooping to their conservative demands for ban on mixed marathon, Musharraf administration perhaps chalked out a different strategy of handling these elements. One of them was to cultivate PPP and ignore MMA. The other was to try to wreck MMA from within.

The release of Benazir's husband, Asif Zardari, in November 2004, was construed as a calculated move to look for political support from PPP. The re-arrest of Zardari after he threatened mass protest and re-release and grant of permission to go abroad signaled the difficulties that both Musharraf and the PPP leadership faced during the initial days to start a process of reconciliation. Asif Zardari made yet another attempt to come back to Lahore to a rousing welcome by his party men on April 16, 2005. But the police whisked him away from the airport and later left him free. He was allowed to go back to his family abroad, which indicated a thaw setting into the Musharraf-PPP relationship.

At another level the strategy of privileging Maulana Fazlur Rehman, leader of the politically most influential group within MMA, over others began in right earnest. The fissure within MMA, especially caused by the differences of opinion between Qazi Hussain Ahmed and Fazlur Rehman became more visible by early 2005. This was apart from the differences between Maulana Sami-ul-Haq and Maulana Fazlur Rehman. The hand of the establishment in political

evolution and growth of MMA could not have been ruled out given the long standing links between the intelligence agencies and the religious outfits. There were many in Pakistan who believed that the “phenomenal rise (of the religious parties) in October 2002 was not just coincidental, but a part of the political plans of the military.”²⁷

Simultaneously, the ruling PML-Q leader Shujaat Hussain was allowed to cultivate the clergy. Analysts called this return of the conservative reflex of the “rump PML-N” led by Shujaat as “an old ‘homeopathic’ policy of occupying the clerical plank”²⁸. The government’s capitulation on the issue of reintroduction of the religion column was interpreted in Pakistan as a move not to displease the religious forces. As the decision on the issue was taken, Musharraf in his address to the media took a step backward and said: “Pakistan is an ideological state; it is not a secular state. It is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan”²⁹.

Local Bodies Election 2005: A Great Farce?

The dates for the elections for local councils were announced for August 18 and 25, 2005. Before this, the preparations from the government’s side began with revision of electoral roll and delimitation of some constituencies between August 2004 and March 2005. The media reports were full of allegations of redrawing of constituencies to favour feudal elements and MQM in Sind. The chief minister of Sind, Arbab Rahim, drew choicest invectives of the media columnists for the desperate hurry with which he was going about the local bodies elections.

The monthly *Newsline* in its September 2005 edition called the election “A Great Farce”. There were reports of the government machinery throwing all courtesy to winds and in clear defiance of the election rules, urging the electorate to vote for the candidates supported by PML-Q, when the candidates were not allowed under electoral laws to associate themselves with any political party. Gen Musharraf was even personally leading the campaign in certain areas like Swat where he called upon the people to vote for PML-Q candidates. Chief Ministers and ministers went around brazenly announcing development projects and campaigning for their favourite candidates, despite the ban by the Election Commission. There were several instances of harassment and intimidation by gun-toting campaigners of the ruling party.

The results suggested, quite expectedly after such rigging, a massive improvement in the fortunes of the ruling PML-Q. While local bodies in Sind swung Arbab Rahim’s way, in Punjab they strengthened the hands of the Chaudhurys. This led to sharp divisions within the ranks of the ruling political alliance. In many cases the ruling cabinet ministers propped up their own candidates against one another to expand their political hold beyond their immediate areas of influence. Federal ministers Jehangir Tareen, Owais Leghari and Dr. Sher Afghan joined the opposition in accusing their own party leaders of rigging.

The Commonwealth Expert Team overseeing the electoral process “found that these elections were conducted in an environment of intense mistrust and scepticism on the part of the public, political parties, the media, candidates and civil society”³⁰. It appeared that intense politicisation of the grassroots on non-party basis had led to vertical and horizontal

fragmentation of Pakistani society as was indicated by polarisations along caste, region, *biradari* (lineage) and ethnic lines which emerged as the marked feature of politics during the elections.

The elections results in the Frontier province came as a surprise for they showed a marked decline of popular support for religious parties. In contrast, Pashtun nationalist parties fared better than the elections in 2002. The rivalry between JI and JUI-F was cited as the foremost reason for the poor performance of the religious groups. Some estimates suggested that their poll percentage came down from 46 in 2002 to about 23 in 2005.³¹ They suffered similar reverses in Balochistan too.

One has to remember that ethnic resistance movement was on an upswing by 2005 and it was natural therefore that the nationalists would make a mark in the Baloch dominated areas in southern Balochistan. The ethno-nationalist elements seemed to make good use of the anti-incumbency as well as the anti-Centre sentiments of the people and staged a decent comeback in Balochistan as well as some areas in NWFP.

The overwhelming preoccupation of the state and society of Pakistan with the relief and rehabilitation efforts in the wake of the massive earth quake on October 5, 2005, diverted the popular attention away from politics. Musharraf focussed more on the Baloch and tribal militancy and the political temperature cooled down after the elections. By the beginning of 2006, the Taliban resurgence had engaged Musharraf's attention in FATA and northern Balochistan and attack by a US drone on Damadola on January 13, 2006 created lot of ruckus in Pakistan.

PML-N and PPP woo Each Other

In a surprising move, the government allowed Nawaz Sharif to visit London to attend his ailing son on January 29, 2006. After initially entering UK on a six-month multiple entry visa, Nawaz decided to stay on in UK and carry out his political activities from there. The effort to revive ARD began subsequently and on April 23, Nawaz, Benazir and Altaf Hussain came together on the occasion of a meeting organised by ANP to pay homage to its leader Wali Khan who had passed away on January 27, 2006.

Before the meeting, a PPP delegation, consisting of PPP president Makhdoom Amin Fahim, Raja Pervez Ashraf, Jahangir Badr, Senator Enver Baig and secretary general of the PPP Sind Chapter Nafees Siddiqui reached London and had held talks with Sharif on April 14 to finalize the draft of the 'charter of democracy,' to be signed by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in London. In their meeting on April 23, 2006, the two leaders discussed political issues and the prospect of joint political action against the Musharraf regime.

The meeting took place against the backdrop of alleged move by PML-Q to persuade PPP-Patriot members to quietly join the ruling party. The PPP-Patriot had lodged a complain with Musharraf and the meeting took place on April 21, 2006, Immediately after this Musharraf had

a prolonged meeting with the Prime Minister in his camp office and reportedly discussed various issues affecting the cohesion in the ruling alliance.³² The media reports said that General Musharraf expressed dismay over the deepening differences between the two key coalition partners as the date of the general elections was nearing and promised to intervene.

Coincidentally, the MMA announced its plans to stage a long “sit in” in Islamabad, to force ouster of the government which, they said, had “brought the country to the verge of collapse.”³³ Qazi Hussain, the JI leader was very livid in his expression when he stated that since coming elections would not be fair, ‘some other ways’ had to be used to get rid of the government.

Politics of Fragmentation

With opposition showing signs of coming together, the General’s strategy was to regain lost grounds. He would seek to keep the opposition divided, remove the differences among the members of the ruling alliance and reduce dependency on troublesome partners. He also evolved differentiated strategy to augment the chances of electoral success. For example, as per media reports, Aftab Sherpao was asked to “focus on beating the MMA into a bland pulp in the NWFP”. Amir Muqam, the provincial head of the PML-Q, along with Senator Gulzar and his two sons, Waqar and Amar, also in the Senate, were asked to supplement Sherpao’s effort to defeat the religious alliance.

At the same time, he quietly worked on the possibility of developing an understanding with the JUI-F (the most powerful constituent of MMA) in Balochistan to take on the resurgent nationalists. He asked Arbab Ghulam Rahim in Sind to deliver again in the local-bodies-elections as well as in the coming elections and encourage fight between PPP and MQM to weaken both and especially MQM in Sind to reduce PML-Q’s reliance on the latter.³⁴

Wake up Call for Musharraf?

The Nawaz-Benazir meeting in London on April 24, 2006, indeed, acted as a wake up call for Musharraf and his followers. The fact that the two leaders came together again in three weeks and arrived at a consensus over a “Charter of Democracy” and signed it on May 14, 2006, late in the night in London, must have added to their sense of unease and concern. Their efforts were then directed towards breaking up the ties between PPP and PML-N and ensure that the ARD did not grow into a threat for the establishment in future.

It is not known whether Benazir Bhutto was using such ties as a bargaining lever to force the establishment to negotiate with her. The Charter committed the two parties to struggle against dictatorship and said that on coming to power they would take the necessary steps to do away with the ‘distortions’ made in the Constitution after the overthrow of the PML-N government. The two sides pledged not to approach the army to come to power and reiterated that free and fair elections were not possible under the supervision of Gen Musharraf and that both the exiled leaders would return to the country together before the election.

There were reports of Musharraf government making political overtures to both Ms Bhutto and Mr Sharif after signing of the Charter. On June 2, 2006, the two leaders met to dispel any misunderstanding regarding any backdoor deal with the government. They had reportedly agreed at their meeting held in April that they would keep each other informed about any contact made with any of them by the government in an effort to counter the government's disinformation campaign regarding contacts with them.

They met again on July 2, 2006 in London in an ARD meet convened for the Charter of democracy to be signed by other ARD members. ARD alleged that the government had undermined national sovereignty and hence demanded resignation of Gen Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz by July 31, "failing which a vote of no-confidence shall be moved against the Musharraf regime".

In this meeting, Nawaz categorically rejected any possibility of his party participating in the coming polls under Musharraf's tutelage and said "We'll not walk into the trap laid by the general to get legitimacy for himself".³⁵ Benazir was equally firm on this. She expected opposition parties in the ARD to come together but rejected suggestions of the MMA being invited into the ARD. Coincidentally on the same day, Qazi Hussain of JI demanded immediate resignation of Musharraf and urged his followers to take to the streets because only "street power" could get rid of "perpetual army rule".³⁶

Backchannel with Benazir

On October 6, 2006, Benazir Bhutto finally revealed that some back channel contact had conveyed the desire of Musharraf for a political patch-up before the 2007 elections. Suspecting some deal taking shape between Musharraf and Benazir, PML-N chairman Raja Zafarul Haq was quick to indicate on October 12, that there were differences in the approach of the two leading parties and warned that the next meeting between Benazir and Nawaz might well be the last if the differences persisted.

The two leaders met on October 19, 2006 in London and reiterated their resolve to return to Pakistan before the polls. The differences between the two over roping in MMA's support for a Grand Opposition Alliance did not find favour with Benazir. She also started emphasising on the need to fight the Taliban in Pakistan. The leader of the PPP in the Pakistani Parliament, Makhdoom Amin Fahim made a special visit to London by November 24, to assure Nawaz that the report was untrue.

In their next meeting in London on November 27, they again vowed not to cut any deal with the government. However, in the meeting Bhutto admitted to the fact that she was offered two deals in return for her acceptance of all the changes in the constitution effected during the army rule and she had rejected it. She denied any role played by US or UK in conveying such offers by Musharraf to her.³⁷ The sticking point that emerged from this meet was Benazir's insistence that she would not recommend boycotting of the elections if it took place under Musharraf administration.

As one would observe later, JUI-F leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman would also oppose the idea of any such boycott. Between them, Benazir and Fazlur would divide and paralyse two different political alliances which had decided to oppose Musharraf in the next elections. They discussed the issue of MMA's threat of resignation from the National Assembly in protest against the passage of the Protection of Women Bill by parliament. Benazir was critical of MMA's effort, while Nawaz argued that the killing of Nawab Bugti would have been a much more legitimate ground for resignation. It was interesting to observe Maulana Fazlur Rehman calling the steps "suicidal".

Multi Party Conference and APDM: Paralysed by PPP absence

In early 2007, Nawaz expressed his desire to convene a Multi Party Conference. However, Benazir expressed her reservations against sharing the table with the MMA. When the dates for the MPC were finalised, PPP leader Fahim ruled out Benazir's participation citing her unavailability on those dates. However, in the wake of the judicial crisis that followed the removal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhury on March 09, 2007, the two leader met on March 21 in London and discussed the political developments. Benazir was again very critical of MMA and saw in MMA's (especially Qazi Husain's) bid for agitation, a mullah-military ploy to fuel a crisis and then use it for postponement of elections. The two leaders again reiterated their commitment to the Charter.

Benazir Bhutto emerged as a crucial component for any future alliance that would hold sway in the politics of Pakistan in the coming days. She seemed to be riding the crest of a fresh wave of popularity and receiving attention and importance all around. So much so, that some of the pro-establishment leaders like Abida Husain, Syed Fakhr Imam, Amanullah Shahani, Sardar Wazir Ahmed Jogezeai approached Benazir to return to the PPP fold, during this time³⁸.

Benazir's zeal to project herself as a liberal suggested unmistakably that she had emerged as a darling of the US and UK. She seemed to forget the ties she had struck earlier with JUI-F and helped raise Taliban during her second term as Prime Minister of Pakistan. Her inflexible stand on the MMA surprised many observers even as some factions within MMA would almost parrot her line of thinking. Another important issue on which she differed with Nawaz was the issue of adopting a radical political strategy to embarrass and corner Musharraf by resigning en masse from the assemblies, before Musharraf planned to seek a second Presidential term from the outgoing assemblies. Maulana Rehman Fazlur parroted Benazir's position even if they hardly exchanged views on the subject.

The rift between PML-N and PPP became more visible over the issue of forming an alliance broader than the ARD, including MMA. After several rounds of talks the delegates from both the parties could not settle their differences and when the initial dates for the meeting was fixed for March 24-25, 2007, Benazir excused herself out of it. As the political climate changed after the dismissal of the Chief Justice (CJ), the dates were rescheduled for July 7-8, 2007. Even then Benazir kept out of the Multi Party Conference(MPC).

There was a deadlock in the MPC meet over issues relating to joint electorate, reservations for women (with MMA) and mass resignations (with PPP). The resolutions were suitably worded to accommodate the view points all the participants and the resolution ended up accommodating many changes brought about by Musharraf even though they pledged to fight his rule and take necessary measures to strengthen the judiciary and political institutions to make military takeovers impossible in future.

Interestingly, the differences of perception on the judicial crisis emerged quite clearly when Fazlur Rehman argued that the CJ had taken his oath under PCO and hence he was part of the very system he was fighting and it was not wise to support him when he was pursuing his personal interest rather than for judicial freedom. Other leaders supporting him on the issue were, Imran Khan, Asfandyar Wali Khan, Rafiq Tarar, Allama Sajid Naqvi and Mehmood Khan Achakzai.

The fact that veteran PPP leader from Punjab, Aitzaz Ahsan, was fighting the case of the CJ might have acted as a point of grave concern for all these leaders who would apprehend that the entire issue was being hijacked by PPP. Three days later, the MPC converted itself into a Grand Alliance called All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) minus PPP. Qazi Hussain seemed to be in a desperate hurry and argued that the APDM had to be launched because they could not have returned empty-handed to Pakistan. Apart from PML-N and MMA, other constituents included ANP, MAKP, four members of the ARD, the Tehrik-e-Insaaf and components of PONM.

In the midst of the enthusiasm surrounding the MPC in London, on July 12, Benazir shifted her emphasis from democracy in Pakistan to rising extremism in Pakistan that threatened the future of Pakistan.³⁹ She would express her reservations on some portions of the resolution but assured to work with ARD, if not APDM. Benazir admitted to the fact that she was engaged in a long-drawn dialogue with Musharraf but they were far from any deal because of differences of opinion. She also emphasised she would not strike any deal that would “undermine the democratic aspirations of the people”. The information secretary of the PPP defended the dialogue saying that PPP’s “dialogue with the regime has been focused on steps for the restoration of democracy through constitutional means via a free and fair election”.⁴⁰

On August 14, 2007, the then Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed claimed that a deal between President Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto had already been finalised with ‘all details’. On August 22, 2007, Benazir in her interview with Margaret Warner of PBS acknowledged this and said that the deal did not seek to “bail out a military dictator” but sought “a compromise that could help bring about a stable, democratic, civilian order”.⁴¹ She also referred to the possibility of two presidential elections. “

“The first presidential election is going to take place in September, when General Musharraf is still wearing the uniform. I made it very clear that it’s not possible for my party to vote for a uniformed president. General Musharraf understands that. But if the elections are fair, and we

have a level playing field, and he seeks re-election from the next assembly, then certainly the parliament can consider that, if the uniform is not there, and the elections have been fair".⁴²

Other issues that were being discussed pertained to balance of power between the President and the Parliament, Musharraf's shedding of uniform by the time of elections, and an indemnity provision for holders of public office, as part of the reconciliation process and assurance of free and fair elections. She also pointed out that while negotiating with Musharraf, she was aware of the political cost involved in case Musharraf reneged on his promise, but she was ready to take the risk in the interest of democracy. She stated, "I hope it doesn't come to a breakdown in the negotiations between General Musharraf and the PPP, but at the end of the day, we can't afford to be contaminated by his unpopularity without getting the prize for democracy". Nawaz Sharif, interviewed by the same TV channel six days later expressed his displeasure and said that Benazir's parleys and negotiations with Musharraf were a clear violation of the Charter of democracy.

PPP and PML-N go separate ways

By the close of August 2007, it was very clear that the leaders of the two leading political parties of Pakistan had fallen out with each other. The division was brought about by Musharraf's confidantes who had engaged Benazir seriously since early 2006. As it emerged later, the two most trusted lieutenants who made the deal possible were, Lt Gen Ashfaq Pervez Kiani, the then Director General of ISI and Maj Gen Nadeem Taj, who had earlier worked as Deputy Military Secretary to Benazir during her second term as Prime Minister. On October 5, 2007, a day before the elections for President Musharraf promulgated the National Reconciliation Ordinance which led to "withdrawal and termination of prolonged pending proceedings initiated prior to 12th October, 1999", which meant it would not apply to Nawaz Sharif. Gen Musharraf defended the deal from his side saying it was necessary for bringing together all the moderate forces to fight extremism in Pakistan.

The deal drove a wedge into the relationship between PML-N and PPP which had started warming up since early 2006. Nawaz Sharif, in a bid to outsmart Benazir and demonstrate his courage undertook his much publicised trip of Pakistan on September 10, 2007, after the apex court declared that it was his right to come to his motherland. However, upon his arrival he was detained in the airport lounge and then sent back to Saudi Arabia from the airport as Nawaz had signed a deal with the Saudis not to return to Pakistan for 10 years. For Musharraf, scotching Nawaz's return was a big political victory but it helped Nawaz regain the confidence of the electorate.

Having divided ARD, Musharraf was not going to relax. His administration played a big role in dividing MMA too. As it was clear in the wake of the elections for Presidency on October 6, 2007, Maulana Fazlur Rehman had effectively fallen out with fellow MMA leader, Qazi Hussain of JI. Without going into the details, one could infer that MMA stood effectively divided on the eve of the elections primarily due to the divisive politics played by Musharraf,

apart from Maulana Fazl's own pragmatic approach and his concern for loss of power in case he sided with the radical approach of JL.

Other constraints

Gen Musharraf had other surprises in store for him. In a surprising move, the Supreme Court negated the Presidential reference against the CJ and restored him on July 20, 2007. The restoration was welcomed by people and Gen Musharraf's decision to honour the verdict brought back some semblance of normalcy, as it happened immediately after the Lal Masjid issue, which had kept the nation on the boil in the early part of July 2007. Musharraf's aggressive stance on the Balochistan issue leading to the killing of Nawab Bugti in August 2006 and subsequent neglect of the fundamentalist assertion around Lal Masjid followed by army action and his handling of the CJ issue discredited the General in many ways. The popular approval ratings of the General had started going down since the middle of 2006 and the General found it difficult to hold on to dual office beyond 2007.

Shedding his second skin

At the end of the day I am a soldier and I love to wear uniform. It is part of me, my second skin

General Pervez Musharraf ⁴³

Gen Musharraf called his uniform his second skin. However, with pressures building up on him to shed his uniform, and with this deal firmed up with Benazir, he took the first step forward to civilianise himself. Once he considered political opposition to him effectively fragmented and weakened, he filed his nomination for his re-election in the Presidential poll on September 27, 2007.

The General's strategy seemed to pay off. The opposition, APDM, threatened to resign but could not muster up a strong consensus around this demand because PPP kept itself aloof from this debate. Eighty five members of the national assembly, belonging to the opposition political parties who were members of APDM, resigned on October 02, 2007. Resignation by PPP members, at this juncture, would have discredited the exercise in a big way.

However, the PPP decided not to resign. As a reciprocal gesture, the very same day, Musharraf persuaded a reluctant PML-Q to endorse the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) to grant indemnity to Benazir Bhutto. In another important development, on the same day Musharraf promoted Lt Gen Ashfaq Pervez Kiani, then Director General of ISI, to the post of Vice Chief of the Army Staff, as his apparent successor in the event of his upcoming retirement. The NRO was promulgated on October 05, 2007, a day earlier than the Presidential election.

On October 06, PPP abstained and Musharraf polled 55 percent of the total votes (99 percent of the votes cast) and secured the required majority to be re-elected as President for next five years. This was, however, subject to judicial review; because, six different petitions, seeking

enquiry into the issue of whether Musharraf was eligible to contest the election while he was still serving as army chief, were pending before the Supreme Court. Nevertheless, the re-election contributed to the General's self-confidence and helped him in taking the decision on the uniform issue. With Gen A. P. Kiyani assuming office on October 9, 2007, Pakistan looked all set for a smooth transition, if the judiciary were not to rock the boat.

Decontrolling Politics

Ever since Gen Musharraf assumed power, he was distinctly uncomfortable with popular politicians like Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. He made all possible attempts to keep them out of the political circus, over which he officiated as the ring master during his entire reign as both President and Army Chief. He brought in an amendment to deny Prime Minister-ship to persons who had assumed the post twice in their political carrier. This was particularly aimed at Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. He also made the eligibility provision very strict making it difficult on the part of these two leaders even to contest elections.

However, in changed situation he had to bring in NRO to relax certain provisions in the case of Benazir, to enable her return and participation in the coming elections to lend wider legitimacy to the electoral exercise. The pressures from the international community had also started mounting on him to diff his uniform and allow genuine democracy. Later reports revealed that while he might have preferred Benazir to Nawaz, he made some efforts, not of course with equal success, to rope in Nawaz as well. He expected Nawaz to honour the deal with him and stay out of Pakistan for ten years, while his party would participate in the elections without him like in 2002. Thus, he made attempts to ensure that the two premier political parties would participate in the elections and checkmate each other.

With the stage set for the next elections sometime in January 2008, Benazir Bhutto reached Karachi on October 18, 2007. She was greeted with two powerful explosions during the course of her procession from the airport, which killed 125 and maimed many. A day before that, the SC removed barriers against Nawaz Sharif's return and held that the Sharif brothers could return as no restraint could be placed on a Pakistani citizen to return to his country and "the undertaking given by them had no constitutional legitimacy as such the petitioners cannot be prohibited from coming to Pakistan". However, Nawaz would allegedly require some undisclosed deals again with Musharraf to return later on November 26, 2007.

A Defiant Judiciary and a Second Coup: Last Flicker of a Dying Flame!

Amid all these positive signs indicating a smooth changeover, hardly a month after he was re-elected President, Gen Musharraf put on his Army Chief's hat and "decided to topple President Musharraf". He imposed emergency on November 03, 2007 and suspended the constitution of Pakistan and replaced judges of the top courts. He accused superior judiciary of "working at cross purposes with the executive and legislature in the fight against terrorism and

extremism” and “weakening the government and the nation’s resolve and diluting the efficacy of its actions to control this menace”.⁴⁴

However, it was clear that Judiciary was about to invalidate Musharraf’s re-election as President. And the General wanted to save his Presidency from Judicial assault. This extraordinary measure was so blatantly self-seeking that it raised the eyebrows everywhere. The Commonwealth asked Musharraf to lift emergency by November 22, 2007. When Musharraf ignored it, on November 23, 2007, it suspended Pakistan’s membership. The US Secretary of State, Ms Condoleezza Rice was also critical and urged Musharraf to lift emergency. EU was overly critical, as was UK. Undaunted, Musharraf administration went about arresting thousands of opposition party workers, lawyers and human rights activists. Musharraf appointed new judges to the Supreme Court and provincial High Courts who were sworn in under the Provisional Constitutional Order, brought in by him. The new judiciary validated Musharraf’s candidature for Presidential elections on November 24, 2007, and ordered the Election Commission to notify his election as president soon.

Elections Scheduled, Musharraf Sheds Uniform

On November 15, 2007, Gen Musharraf formed the interim government headed by Muhammad Mian Soomro, which would conduct the next elections. Musharraf asserted that a neutral interim administration would introduce “a new culture of smooth transition which is as it should be in civilised societies”. On November 20, the interim government announced the date of elections as January 08, 2008. With less than two months to elections, Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan with his brother on November 25, 2007. Both Benazir and Nawaz filed their nominations on November 26, 2007. Nawaz’s nomination was subsequently turned down because of his convictions in the cases of hijacking and terrorism. However, Benazir was allowed to contest as all charges against her were withdrawn after the NRO was promulgated.

Gen Musharraf, with his election validated by the judiciary, now thought it safe to shed his uniform. On November 28, 2007, the General finally retired from the army and handed over the baton to Gen A. P. Kiyani. On November 29, 2007, he was sworn in as the civilian president of Pakistan and declared subsequently that he would lift the emergency on December 16, 2007. While many analysts speculated that his power would diminish after this, he chose to maintain symbolic links with the army. For example he stayed on in the same residential accommodation within the General Head Quarters (GHQ) and on several occasions alluded to his control over the army.

Killing of Benazir & Postponement of Elections

The political process gathered momentum when Nawaz Sharif ignored the decision of APDM and joined the electoral fray. The speculations that PML-N and PPP might strike a pre-poll alliance proved wrong when they chose to go it alone. There were instances of former PML-Q supporters defecting to Nawaz’s PML during the course of filing of nominations. Most members of the religious combine, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), decided not to participate

the elections. However, Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam (Fazlur) decided to use MMA's name and join the electoral fray. The electoral process chugged on amid apprehensions of massive rigging by the pro-establishment forces, while the international community kept up its pressure on Musharraf and urged him to ensure a free and fair poll in his own interest and the interest of the people of Pakistan.

The assertion of the radical elements also increased during the same period as the army under Gen A.P. Kiyani focussed on its counter insurgency operations in the north-west frontier. Almost everyday one heard accounts of attacks on army personnel or check-posts. Maulana Fazlulah's assertion in Swat particularly engaged the attention of the army during the period while South Waziristan leapt back onto the centre stage, with Baitullah Mehsud showing his resolve to defy and attack the army, by December 2007. In fact, Baitullah Mehsud was selected as the leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (United Taliban Movement of Pakistan).

The Tehrik, an umbrella group consisting of Pakistani Taliban groups from the seven tribal agencies in FATA as well as the adjacent districts of Bannu, Tank, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohistan, Buner, Swat and Malakand division, was formed exactly on the day President Musharraf lifted the emergency in Pakistan. The army appeared to be investing more in tackling this menace, as pressure on it mounted from the US. Progressively, the army was seen to be concentrating more on its task of containing the militants in the tribal belt and withdrew from the political scene in Pakistan.

The final turn came with Benazir's tragic death during an election rally in Rawalpindi on December 27, 2007. Gen A. P. Kiyani's reactions to her death showed that he had decided to pull the Pakistani army out of politics. He sent a wreath to be laid on her grave and talked more openly about the need to keep army out of the political affairs of the state. If one interpreted his overtures, he considered the threat of extremism and radicalism as the most serious challenge confronting Pakistan.

Benazir's departure from the political scene did not alter the political situation in any major way. It was predicted, however, that her party will benefit from the sympathy wave in the elections and get few more seats. The decision of the government to extend/postpone the date of elections to February 18, 2008, due to the disturbances in Sindh, in the aftermath of Benazir's death, gave the political parties an opportunity to extend their election campaigns. Her death also made the political parties focus more on the issue of extremism and radicalism in Pakistan and affected the electoral prospects of the religious parties like JUI-F which had advocated a soft line on the issue. The issues that were flagged by various parties in their manifestoes were the autonomy of the provinces, restoration of the 1973 constitution, restoration of the judges and keeping the army out of politics. There was a political consensus on most of the issues; however, the parties differed on the details.

The results of the elections on February 18, 2008 turned the tide against pro-Musharraf forces and led to a hung house with PML-N and PPP sharing a comfortable majority between themselves. These two parties subsequently decided to enter into an alliance to form a coalition

government. The popular verdict against Musharraf brought these two parties together. But there were apprehensions that the coalition might not last long given the differences in the world-views of the two parties. Musharraf, as the civilian President, may have brought these parties together but the fragmentation of the political space could only be effectively countered if the political forces would come together and recast the shape of politics in Pakistan.

Conclusion

Pakistan only seems to have arrived at a consensus against what Musharraf stands for. If you look closely at this consensus, it is riven with contradictions and promises nothing but chaos if Musharraf fails.

Khaled Ahmed⁴⁵

Military Rule accentuates political fragmentation and divisive tendencies in a multi-ethnic and diversified society especially if there are ethnic and regional imbalances in the army. These factors make the task of political management difficult for any post-martial civilian regime aiming to establish itself as a genuine democratic government while not alienating the top commanders

Hassan Askari Rizvi⁴⁶

It is natural to expect a military ruler to divide his political opponents and keep them eternally divided in the interest of survival of his regime. Gen Musharraf's predecessors in uniform had also attempted this with varying degrees of success. However, Musharraf proved himself shrewder than Ayub, Yahya or Zia ul Haq. He combined in him the fortitude and liberal outlook of Ayub and the wile and confidence of Zia. He shared with them a reflexive hatred of the politicians. He proved that he benefited immensely from the operational strategies that these two rulers had employed earlier to legitimise their rules— the same emphasis on local government, partyless elections at grassroots, referendum to seek direct approval of their rule from the people and the same old game of divide and rule. Like Ayub and Zia he considered himself indispensable for Pakistan's growth and stability and directed all the efforts of his government towards his own survival.

The above discussion suggests that Musharraf successfully fragmented the political space of Pakistan by dividing potential threats to his survival in power. As a military General unschooled in the vagaries of electoral politics, he wanted everything to happen predictably. He wanted everything to be under his control.

He made it difficult for any wider political consensus to emerge against him during his rule as the General after fragmenting the political space in every possible way. By giving fillip to *biradari* politics at the local level he sharpened the inter-clan rivalry and his politics of deal making with select groups divided the groups opposed to him. When he entered into the world of politics, he found it polarised and fragmented. He made a vow to build national consensus and depoliticise society in the larger interests of national integration. However, after eight good years of incessant political activity aimed at re-engineering Pakistani society, polity and economy, he only made it worse.

The mass euphoria that had spontaneously greeted him on the army's takeover thinned out as he proceeded with his despotic style of functioning. He failed to rebuild national morale and confidence. His military rule left the internal security scenario much worse than when he took over. The country drifted towards ever more political uncertainty as he went about playing off one political group against another.

All his political engineering and co-option of corrupt and opportunist politicians worsened the political situation in Pakistan. His miscalculations on the CJ affair and untiring effort to keep the uniform till late 2007 cost him dearly. It made him lose substantial popular support and affected his legitimacy. The distance between the centre and the provinces widened because of an increasing centralisation of power and the expanding control of the military. The unrest in Balochistan and the Tribal areas further exacerbated the situation.

The decline and fall of pro-Musharraf forces in the elections showed the power of the Pakistani people, but the politicians of the country have a long way to go. The two principal political parties of the country, PML(N) and PPP, who came together briefly against Gen (Retd.) Musharraf and succeeded in weakening his hold on Pakistani politics, fell apart even before Musharraf's departure over the issue of restoration of the Judges. Even if the coalition of PPP, ANP, JUI-F and later MQM chugs on, the political consensus over important issues like the role of the army in politics, the nature of political system in Pakistan, the question of autonomy for the provinces, the division of power between the President and Prime Minister etc, is yet to be worked out among the political forces. The political forces have forgotten to take adequate steps to counter the possibility of any adventurist General taking over from the civilian administration in any near future. The army is likely to reappear on the political scene if the political forces get entangled in its wider politics of divide and rule.

Thus there is every possibility now that the political fragmentation that the General had engineered and which, even otherwise, persists to this day, might lead to 'confrontational' politics and to, what Giovanni Sartori would call, a spirit of 'againstism' and 'movementism' and the temptation to use military in the civilian struggle for power. This will retard the process of national consensus building and undermine democratic institutions making it even more difficult for 'real democracy' to evolve in Pakistan. To employ Samuel P. Huntington's famous metaphorical assertion, Pakistan is yet to evolve a "liberal, antimilitaristic consensus" to brush military aside "into a discredited cranny of history".

Endnotes

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