

Musharraf Plays Bush for a Fool

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Pakistan 's President General Pervez Musharraf declared a state of emergency on November 3rd after the Pakistani Supreme Court indicated it would overturn the results of an illegitimate election that would have extended Musharraf's term as president. Musharraf quickly fired the Supreme Court justices who planned to rule against him. And his declaration of emergency attacked the entire population of Pakistan by suspending fundamental constitutional rights to life and liberty, freedom of speech, assembly and association, and equal protection of the law.

As a result of Musharraf's action, Pakistani Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry is being held under house arrest, and over 2500 lawyers in different parts of Pakistan have been detained. The detainees include the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association and officials of the Democratic Lawyers Association of Pakistan. The government also ordered that journalists who brought "ridicule or disrepute" to Musharraf could face three years in prison.

The real motivation for Musharraf's declared emergency is not to defend the country against "Islamic extremists," as he claims, but to maintain Musharraf in power. He acted to prevent public protests that lawyers and political parties were organizing. And his scheme is working. Musharraf's new brand-new, hand-picked Supreme Court ruled on Monday that Musharraf can remain in power for five more years.

Meanwhile, the Bush Administration is scurrying around in damage control mode. Musharraf's actions would be very embarrassing for Bush — if Bush were the type of guy to get embarrassed. After all, Bush has been claiming for the past several years that he wants to spread democracy throughout the Islamic world. Somehow, Musharraf's declared state of emergency, followed by mass arrests of his political opponents, doesn't seem very democratic.

Bush dispatched Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte to Pakistan to talk sense to Musharraf. Negroponte urged Musharraf to end the state of emergency. But Bush's man didn't complain about Musharraf shutting down the Supreme Court and replacing it with his loyalists. Negroponte also failed to tell Musharraf to release the judges and lawyers from prison. So much for democracy and an independent judiciary.

The recipient of nearly \$11 billion of U.S. aid since 9/11, Musharraf will cover for his benefactor Bush to keep him from losing face in light of the Pakistani strongman's blatant and tyrannical power grab. Musharraf has agreed that parliamentary elections scheduled for January will proceed and that he will take off his military uniform after the sham elections are held. Of course, Musharraf's jailed political opponents will likely find it difficult to

campaign effectively for seats in parliament while incarcerated under a state of martial law.

American citizens whose tax dollars are being used to prop up this ruthless and corrupt regime should demand an accounting of how their money is being spent.

Bush claims that Musharraf is an indispensable ally in his “war against terror,” and that money sent to Pakistan supports that goal. It appears from my vantage point, though, that Musharraf is playing Bush for a fool. Musharraf tells Bush he will help destroy the Taliban. However, Pakistani Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy wrote in the November 18 Los Angeles Times that some people in Pakistan believe Musharraf is “secretly supporting the Taliban as a means for countering Indian influence.” Moreover, if Musharraf wants to regain and maintain support of the Pakistani people, he will continue to support the Taliban. Hoodbhoy also wrote, “Most Pakistanis see the [Taliban] as America’s enemy, not their own. The Taliban is perceived as the only group standing up against the unwelcome American presence in the region.” According to Hoodbhoy, “For more than 25 years, the army has nurtured Islamist radicals as proxy warriors for covert operations on Pakistan’s borders in Kashmir and Afghanistan.”

Hoodbhoy’s remarks are corroborated by Adrien Levy, co-author of “Deception: Pakistan, the United States and the Global Nuclear Weapons Conspiracy.” Levy told Amy Goodman on Democracy Now!, “The [Musharraf] agenda is to destabilize Afghanistan, to create a government there which is favorable to Islamabad. These are goals which are actually contrary to the goals – very largely contrary to the goals of the West. Yet,” Levy, said, “this slowly moving car crash of the U.S. pumping billions of untraceable cash into the Pakistan military has continued since 2001 and we’re left with the position where Pakistan is devoid of democracy, democracy is weakened and feeble, and we have just increased instability, quite honestly.”

If Congress stands by and does nothing to cut off the funds to Musharraf while he maintains martial law in Pakistan, it will confirm our worst fears that Democrats and Republicans alike are making a sham of our democracy.

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