

Using Benazir Bhutto for Imperial Gain

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Benazir Bhutto led the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) as "chairperson for life" until her death. She was the privileged daughter of former Pakistan President and Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was hanged in 1979 at the likely behest of Washington and replaced by military dictator General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq. He later outlived his usefulness and died in a "mysterious" plane crash. The CIA may have arranged the crash that allowed Bhutto to become Prime Minister in 1988.

She sought the post to avenge her father's death and twice held it as the first ever woman PM of an Islamic state – first from 1988 – 1990, then again from 1993 – 1996. In the end, she was too clever by half and it cost her. She lost out thinking she'd cut a binding deal with the Bush administration to return her to power a third time as Pervez Musharraf's number two and fig leaf democratic face in the scheduled January 8 elections, now postponed. On November 6, she may have been right when she returned from self-imposed exile. Like now, the country was in turmoil, and Washington arranged a power-sharing deal (so it seemed) to restore stability in the wake of this series of events:

- Musharraf suspended Pakistan's Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry in March, falsely accused him of "misconduct and misuse of authority," and used that excuse to remove a key official likely to block his plan for another five year term as President while illegally remaining chief of army staff (COAS) where the real power lies.

- The response was outrage from opposition parties, lawyers organizations and human rights groups. They called the action unconstitutional and publicly rallied against it.

- On October 6, Musharraf held a bogus election like all others in a country where democracy is a joke. It was stage-managed by the military, clearly unconstitutional, and Musharraf won all but five parliamentary votes and swept the Provincial Assembly balloting.

- Afterwards, Pakistan's Supreme Court said no winner could be declared until it ruled if Musharraf could run for office in his joint COAS capacity. Constitutionally, he can't, protests erupted, the country has been in turmoil since, and Musharraf lost all credibility;

- That was Bhutto's chance to return, again serve in the post she twice before held, and she thought her Washington allies arranged it. Maybe yes or maybe not. It didn't matter that she was being used – to be a democratic face and fig leaf adjunct to Musharraf's dictatorship, but whatever was then clearly changed by December 27 without Bhutto's knowledge. Now she's gone, and Musharraf nominally transferred his army chief post to close ally General Ashfaq Kayani last November. He also lifted a six week long state of emergency in mid-December ahead of the scheduled January 8 elections, now postponed after Bhutto's assassination until February 18 as of this writing.

Today, she's bigger in death than life, spoken of reverentially as a populist, and her 19 year old son, Bilawal (in school at Oxford), now heads the PPP as its figurehead leader and third generation family dynasty standard-bearer with his father, Asif Zardari, co-party chairman and de facto chief. More on him below.

Who Was Benazir Bhutto and Why Is She Important

Who was this woman, why the worldwide attention, and why another article with so many written and more likely coming? Bhutto was an aristocrat, privileged in every respect, and raised in opulence as the Harvard and Oxford-educated daughter of a wealthy landowning father who founded Pakistan's main opposition party (Pakistan Peoples Party – PPP) that Bhutto headed after his death.

While in office, she was no democrat in a military-run nation since its artificial creation in 1947. Elections, when held, are rigged, and the army runs things for Washington as a vassal state in a nation called a military with a country, not a country with a military. Its Army strength is 550,000, its Air Force and Navy 70,000, and 510,000 reservists back them with plenty of US-supplied weapons for the "Global War on Terrorism."

Today, FBI agents freely roam the streets, the Pentagon operates out of Pakistan military bases, and it has de facto control of its air space as part of the Bush administration's permanent state of war "that will not end in our lifetime." Pakistan is a client state, but what choice does it have. Post-9/11, Deputy Secretary of State Armitage warned Musharraf to comply or be declared a hostile power and "bombed back to the stone age." He got the message and a multi-billion dollar reward as well.

Bhutto knows the game, too, and the New York Times explained that she "always understood Washington more than Washington understood her" in a feature December 30 article called "How Bhutto Won Washington." Her relationship began in the spring of 1984 on her first "important trip" to the Capitol. At the time, she tried to persuade the Reagan administration it would be better served with her in power, but to do it she had to overcome her father's anti-western reputation. With considerable help she succeeded by assuring congressional members she was on board and supported Washington's proxy war on the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Faults aside, she had her attributes, and The Times called her "completely charming," very beautiful, and a woman "who could flatter the senators," understand their concerns, and better serve US interests than the man who hanged her father, General Zia-ul-Haq. At the same time, she began working with the Democratic National Committee's Executive Director, Mark Siegel, who later lobbied for her government when she was Prime Minister. Early on, he walked her through the halls of Congress, helped her develop relationships, and made her understand that to get along she had to go along.

She caught on fast, and it made her Prime Minister in December, 1988 after she ran for the post, won a plurality but not a majority, and got Reagan administration officials to arrange with Pakistan's acting President to have her form a government. According to a Washington insider, it was the "direct result of her networking, of her being able to persuade the Washington establishment, the foreign policy community, the press, the think tanks, that she was a democrat," a moderate, and that she backed the US Afghanistan agenda against the Soviets. Public rhetoric aside, she was on board ever since, but she paid with her life by not understanding how Washington operates: like other rogue states – using leaders and

aspiring ones, then discarding them.

In the end, it didn't matter that she twice survived dismissal from office on corruption charges or that she managed to co-exist with her country's military and intelligence service (ISI) that deeply mistrusted her. Until her luck ran out, she maintained ties to Washington and key members of the press. She politicked well and "understood the nature of political life, which is to stay in touch with (key) people whether you're in or out of office" and let them know you back them.

Like others of her stature, she also relied on a PR firm to arrange meetings with the powerful and had plenty of resources to do it. She "kept up her networking," but she paid with her life. She tried to convince Washington that Musharraf's "war on terrorism" failed, she could do it better as a loyal ally, and she would eliminate extremist elements (meaning the Taliban and Al-Queda) by a determined effort to maintain pressure.

It sounded good but was risky and dangerous. Pakistan's army opposes it, especially in the ranks; a stepped-up effort assures a huge public outcry; disrupting the Taliban benefits India; and trying and failing might embolden their forces as the US occupation learned in Afghanistan. In the end, Washington and Pakistan's ISI may have concluded Bhutto was more a liability than an asset and had to go. Things came to a head on December 27, she's now a martyr, and larger than life dead than alive.

It wasn't that way as Prime Minister, however, when her tenure was marked by nepotism, opportunism, scheming, corruption, poor governance and selling out to the West. Her early popularity faded, especially when word got out about her businessman husband's dealings. Asif Zardari was known as "Mr. Ten Percent" (by some as "Mr. Thirty Percent") because he demanded a cut from deals as the Prime Minister's spouse and in some cases wanted more.

He was also reportedly into drugs trafficking and was investigated for it. With his wife in power, he amassed billions including what he stole in public funds that was even excessive by Pakistan standards and enough to get the country's President to sack Bhutto after 20 months in office. Whether personally culpable or not didn't matter. As Prime Minister, she made her husband a cabinet minister, gave him free rein to dispense favors in return for kick-backs, had to know about them, there was no evidence she objected, and she enjoyed the riches in office and thereafter.

In spite of it, Bhutto got a second chance. She returned as Prime Minister in 1993 for another three years, but was again dispatched on even greater corruption and incompetence charges than in her first term - this time by President Farooq Leghari, a member of the PPP and someone she thought was an ally. He certainly had cause as the amount stolen earlier was prologue for the fortune she and her husband (as Minister of Investment) amassed in her second term.

It was enough to get Transparency International, an independent watchdog group, to name Pakistan the second most corrupt country in the world in 1996 (Bhutto's last year in office). It also got her convicted in Switzerland of money laundering and bribe-taking and made her a fugitive with charges pending in Spain, Britain and her native Pakistan. That was until Musharraf signed a US-brokered "reconciliation ordinance," absolved her of all outstanding offenses, and allowed her to run for Prime Minister a third time as part of a power-sharing deal with her as number two.

Bhutto's earlier tenure had another notable feature as well. It was when Pakistan's military and ISI established the Taliban with covert CIA help. The link still exists, and at a September, 2006 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, General James Jones, former NATO Supreme Commander (who oversaw US-NATO Afghanistan operations), testified that it was "generally accepted" that Taliban leaders operated out of Quetta, Pakistan, the capital of Baluchistan province bordering Afghanistan and Iran.

Musharraf and other Pakistani officials deny it, but there's no hiding the facts or that nothing of consequence happens in Pakistan without Washington's knowledge and/or consent. It's also no secret that Pakistan's ISI is a CIA branch, and their regional activities are closely linked. Bhutto was on board, but what choice did she have.

All along, she was a daughter of privilege, acted like one, and enjoyed the good life the way billions allow. Today, the major media lionize her, but omit her dark side: as Prime Minister, she lusted for power, was arrogant and contemptuous, ignored the poor and Pakistani women, allowed outrageous laws to be enforced, gave the Army free reign including over nuclear weapons, and considered Pakistan her personal fiefdom. Her home was a \$50 million mansion on 110 acres, and she ruled like a feudal overlord. The family still owns a 350 acre UK estate complete with helipad and polo pony stables, a mansion in Dubai, two Texas properties, six in Florida, more homes in France and large bank accounts strategically stashed around the world, including in the US and France.

From the time of her father's death to her own, Bhutto had close ties to Washington, the CIA, Pakistan's military, its ISI, as well as to the Taliban (established in her second term), "militant Islam" and Big Oil interests. She was a servant of power and pocketed billions for her efforts. In the end, she lost out and paid with her life on December 27.

Who Killed Bhutto and Why

Bhutto's now dead, shot in the back of the head by one or more assassins at close range, plus the effects of a suicide bombing that killed two dozen or more and wounded many others tightly packed around her. It happened in Rawalpindi, "no ordinary city" as Michel Chossudovsky explains. It's the home of Pakistan's military, its CIA-linked ISI, and is the country's de facto seat of power. Chossudovsky adds: "Ironically Bhutto was assassinated in an urban area tightly controlled and guarded by the military police and the country's elite forces."

Rawalpindi and the country's capital, Islamabad, are sister cities, nine miles apart. They swarm with intelligence operatives including from CIA, and Chossudovsky stresses that Bhutto's assassination "was (no) haphazard event." Blaming Al-Queda misses the point, but that's how these schemes work. They're also clearer when convincing video is broadcast as UK's Channel 4 did on December 30. It debunked the official story and exposed Musharraf as a liar - that Bhutto died from a fractured skull "when she was thrown by the force of the (explosion's) shock wave (and) one of the levers of (her car's) sunroof hit her."

The video contradicts this. It shows a clean-shaven man in sunglasses watching close by with a concealed gun and the suspected suicide bomber behind him dressed in white. The gunman then approaches Bhutto's car and at point blank range fires three shots. Immediately after, the suicide bomber detonates his device, killing and wounding dozens nearby.

The question then is – not who killed her, but who ordered her killed and who profits from it? Musharraf quickly named the usual suspect – Al-Queda but ignored what William Engdahl observed in his January 4 Global Research article called “Bhutto’s Assassination: Who Gains?” He notes how well protected political leaders are so it’s no simple task killing them. “It requires agencies of professional intelligence training to insure the job is done” right, and no one can reveal who ordered it or the motive.

Engdahl also states that naming Al-Queda serves Musharraf and Washington. It increases public fear, revs up the “war on terror,” and provides justification for it to continue. It also reinforces the Al-Queda myth as well as “enemy number one” bin Laden, and ignores the evidence that the CIA created both in the 1980s for the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. It’s just as silent on the possibility bin Laden is dead, killed (as Bhutto told David Frost last fall) by Omar Sheikh whom the London Sunday Times called “no ordinary terrorist but a man who has connections that reach high into Pakistan’s military and intelligence elite and into the innermost circles” of bin Laden and Al-Queda.

If true, a dead bin Laden disrupts Washington’s national security doctrine that needs enemies to scare the public, eliminates “enemy number one” as the main one, and exposes strategically released bin Laden tapes as made-in-Washington frauds. Today, we’re told that bin Laden-led Islamic terrorists endanger the West, but at the same time we use them for imperial gain as we did against the Soviets, in the Balkans and now do in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and elsewhere. If Al-Queda operatives killed Bhutto, it means Pakistan’s ISI and CIA were involved, and what’s more likely than that. Forget a lone gunman theory, a lone cannon terrorist or a sole anti-Bhutto assassin. Consider “Cui bono,” examine the evidence, and it points to Washington and Islamabad.

Today in Pakistan, intrigue abounds, and the country is destabilized as Michel Chossudovsky observes in his December 30 Global Research article called “The Destabilization of Pakistan.” Assassinating Bhutto contributes to it, and Chossudovsky sees a US-sponsored “regime change” ahead. Musharraf is so weak and discredited “continuity under military rule is no long the main thrust of US foreign policy.” Musharraf’s regime “cannot prevail,” and Washington’s scheme is “to actively promote the political fragmentation and balkanization of Pakistan as a nation.”

From it, a new political leadership will emerge that will be “compliant,” have “no commitment to (Pakistan’s) national interest,” and will be subservient to “US imperial interests, while concurrently....weakening....the central government (and fracturing) Pakistan’s fragile federal structure.”

It makes perfect sense as part of Washington’s broader Middle East-Central Asia agenda. Pakistan is a key frontline state, a “geopolitical hub,” with a central role to play in the “Global War on Terrorism.” It includes “balkanizing” the country Yugoslavia-style the way it’s planned for Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran – a simple divide and conquer strategy. Chossudovsky adds: “Continuity, characterized by the dominant role of the Pakistani military and intelligence (that worked up to now) has been scrapped in favor of political breakup and balkanization.” The scheme is to foment “social, ethnic and factional divisions and political fragmentation, including the territorial breakup” of the country.

It’s a common US strategy with covert intelligence support, and consider The New York Times article on January 6 called “US Considers New Covert Push Within Pakistan” to exploit Bhutto’s death. It states that senior national security advisers (including Dick Cheney,

Condoleezza Rice and Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen) may “expand the authority of the CIA and the military to conduct far more aggressive covert operations in the tribal areas of Pakistan” against Al-Queda and the Taliban to counteract their efforts and “destabilize the Pakistani government.”

The article states that Musharraf and the military are on board, gives the usual boiler plate reasons, but omits what’s really at stake even as it admits Musharraf is unpopular and a US intervention could “prompt a powerful popular backlash against” both countries.

Chussodovsky fills in the blanks and explains that US strategy aims to trigger “ethnic and religious strife,” abet and finance “secessionist movements while also weakening” Musharraf’s government. “The broader objective is to fracture the Nation State....redraw the borders of Iraq, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan” and replace Musharraf in the process. He’s unpopular, damaged goods and has to go.

Bhutto was an unwitting part of the scheme but not the way she planned. She thought Washington needed here, and she was right – not as Prime Minister but as a martyr to destabilize the country and break it up if the plan works. It may as internal secessionist elements are strong, especially in energy rich (mostly gas) Balochistan province, and “indications” are they’re supported by “Britain and the US.” The idea is a “Greater Balochistan” by integrating Baloch areas with those in Iran and southern Afghanistan.

Chossudovsky explains that it was not “accidental that the 2005 National Intelligence Council-CIA report predicted a ‘Yugoslav-like fate’ for Pakistan” through internally and externally manufactured “economic mismanagement.” Remember also that the country split before in 1971 when East Pakistan became Bangladesh following months of civil war and against India that took a million or more lives. Pakistanis may face that prospect again as US plans unfold.

Future Outlook Remains Uncertain

Big questions remain, and key ones are will breakup plans work, who’ll emerge with enough popular support to lead it, and will the public go along. They’ve got no incentive to do it once anger over Bhutto’s death subsides, and recent polling data show overwhelming public opposition to US or other foreign intervention that’s very much part of the scheme. In the end, their views don’t count, and it may happen anyway through political intrigue and Washington-led brute force.

Reports prior to Bhutto’s assassination point that way. They suggest US Special and other forces already operate in Pakistan, and head of US Special Operations Command, Admiral Eric Olson, arranged with Musharraf and Pakistan’s military last summer and fall to substantially increase their numbers early this year. Involved as well is what The New York Times reported in November that the “US Hopes to Use Pakistani Tribes Against Al Queda” in the country’s “frontier areas.”

The scheme is similar to the effort in Iraq’s al-Anbar province with bribes and weapons to seal a deal apparently now finalized. US Central Command Commander Admiral William Fallon alluded to it in a recent Voice of America interview by saying we’re ready to provide “training, assistance and mentoring based on our experience with insurgencies,” but he left out the bribing part that’s part of these deals.

Where this will lead is speculation, but consider a feature Wall Street Journal January 8 article. It's headlined "Bhutto Killing Roils Province, Spurring Calls to Quit Pakistan" and calls Bhutto's native Sindh province (second largest of Pakistan's four provinces) the "Latest Fault Line In a Fractured Country; Like Occupied Territory."

Mourners filed past Bhutto's grave chanting "We don't want Pakistan," and in the wake of her death "Sindh has been swept by nationalist rage." Many in the province are "calling for outright independence," and support for separation has grown among rank and file PPP members. There's even talk of an "armed insurgency" as anger is directed against neighboring Punjab, the largest province, and home of the military, ISI and government.

The Journal quotes Qadir Magsi, head of the nationalist Sindh Taraqi Passand movement saying...."Bhutto was the last hope (for unity). Now this Pakistan must be broken up." The article continues saying what's happening in Sindh is already in play in the Northwest Frontier province where central government authority withered in recent years. In addition, Pakistan's Army has been embroiled in Baluchistan's insurgency for the past few years adding to overall instability. The theme of the Journal article is that calls for unity are falling on deaf ears, and one PPP veteran sums it up: "What we need is separation."

That suits Bush administration officials fine, they're likely stoking it, and one thing is clear. US forces are in the region to stay, and Washington under any administration (Democrat or Republican) intends to dominate this vital part of the world with its vast energy reserves. The strategy appears similar to the divide and conquer one in Yugoslavia. There it worked, but the Middle East and Central Asia aren't so simple. Stay tuned as events will likely accelerate, the media will highlight them, and it looks like stepped up conflict (and its fallout) is part of the plan.

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