

ISAS Brief

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General Pervez Musharraf: A Profile

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President General Pervez Musharraf (born 11 August 1943) has ruled Pakistan since 12 October 1999 when he overthrew the government of Prime Minister Mian Muahammad Nawaz Sharif who tried to dismiss him and appoint another general as the army chief of staff. Musharraf hails from a lower middle class family of Urdu-speaking parents who migrated to Pakistan from Delhi, India, when Pakistan was created in 1947 as a separate Muslim-majority state in the Indian subcontinent.

In 1961, Musharraf joined the army. He received his commission in 1964 and was placed in an artillery regiment. He graduated from the Staff College, Quetta, and, later, from the Royal College of Defence Studies, United Kingdom. He saw action in the 1965 and 1971 wars with India. He became Major General on 15 January 1991 and Lieutenant General on 21 October 1995. In 1998, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif promoted him over other senior generals to the highest position in the army – Army Chief of Staff.

General Musharraf came into political limelight when, in May 1999, he masterminded a manoeuvre that resulted in some unoccupied posts at Kargil on the Indian side of the Line of Control in Kashmir being taken by men sent there by Pakistan. It precipitated a bloody showdown between Indian troops and them. Casualties on both sides were high. Sharif complained that Musharraf kept him in the dark about the Kargil operation. Sharif was summoned to the United States by President Bill Clinton who exerted great pressure on him to order a cessation of hostilities. Sharif complied accordingly. Musharraf was later to write in his autobiography, *In the Line of Fire*, that Sharif was in the know about the whole operation, and that he should not have given in to American pressure without exacting some concessions on Kashmir because Pakistan had gained the upper hand at Kargil.

Analysts believe, however, that Pakistan suffered greatly on the diplomatic front because the action in Kargil was in clear breach of the letter and spirit of the Lahore Declaration signed on 21 February 1999 by the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and Nawaz Sharif. It required that both countries shall desist from the use of force to settle their disputes. In any event, a rift between Sharif and Musharraf took place which culminated in the military coup. The latter accused the former of having gravely threatened his life by ordering that the plane carrying him and hundreds of other passengers to Karachi from Colombo, Sri Lanka, should

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be denied permission to land on Pakistani soil, but that his loyal generals foiled that plot. Sharif was exiled to Saudi Arabia for 10 years, allegedly in a deal brokered by the Saudis.

Musharraf assumed the position of 'Chief Executive' upon taking over power. On 20 June 2001, he appointed himself as President of Pakistan. This move was challenged in the courts. He responded by issuing an order which required the judges to swear allegiance to military rule. Some refused and resigned but others complied. The Pakistan Supreme Court ordered Musharraf to hold national elections by 12 October 2002.

A referendum was arranged by the government for 30 April 2002 to seek approval from the people to extend his rule to five years after the October elections. The two main opposition leaders, Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, both living in exile at that time and their supporters boycotted the referendum. They alleged that less than 30 percent of the people voted and that it was heavily rigged.

In any event, general elections were held in October 2002 and a plurality of the seats in the Parliament was won by the pro-Musharraf Pakistan Muslim League-Q. It formed a majority coalition with independents and allies. In December 2003, Musharraf made a deal with the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a six-member coalition of Islamic parties, agreeing to leave the army by 21 December 2004 if their legislators supported him to muster the two-third majority required to pass the Seventeenth Amendment which retroactively legalised his 1999 coup. However, he went back on his deal with the MMA and had a bill passed allowing him to keep the post of president as well as the army's Chief of Staff.

Over the years, Musharraf tried to establish for himself the reputation of a moderate and progressive Muslim leader. He condemned corruption which he alleged was rampant in the government bureaucracy and particularly accused Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto of amassing huge illicit wealth through abuse of the prime minister office when they were in power. However, critics point out that the military itself indulges in massive corruption.

With regard to Pakistan's economic development, Musharraf's government has been noted to have done quite well. Some recent studies show that Pakistan's economic position has improved substantially during his time. He recruited a team of competent bankers and economists who put the country's finances in order. Pakistan has also attracted foreign investments, including from Singapore. He appointed Shaukat Aziz, a prominent banker, as prime minister of Pakistan.

Musharraf remains a firm believer in retaining a credible nuclear deterrence against arch rival India, but in recent years he has climbed down from a policy of confrontation with it. He has offered very flexible terms for a resolution of the Kashmir dispute that has dogged the relations between the two major South Asian powers ever since they became independent.

As far as relations with the United States are concerned, Musharraf has tried to build on retaining the traditional policy of working closely with that superpower. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Pakistan joined the war on terror unleashed by President George Bush. Consequently, the Pakistan army arrested several suspected Al-Qaeda operatives and handed them over to the Americans. Also, army officers and nuclear scientists known to harbour Al-Qaeda sympathies were removed from their jobs. However, in that process, he earned the wrath of the Islamists who have their stronghold in the North West Frontier Province in areas close to the Afghanistan border and are dispersed in small numbers in all

parts of Pakistan. Between December 2003 and July 2007, Musharraf escaped four assassination attempts at their hands.

In the spring of 2007, heavily-armed, hardcore Islamists mounted a big challenge to his government when they barricaded themselves inside the Red Mosque in Islamabad. An insurgency began to evolve as the extremists gave a call for the overthrow of his government and imposition dogmatic Islamic law, the Shari'ah, all over Pakistan. It culminated in Operation Silence, launched on 14 July 2007, by the military to flush out the militants. At least 150 militants and four military personnel lost their lives.

But the most powerful challenge to his authority emerged in the wake of his decision to declare the chief justice of the Pakistan Supreme Court, Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, 'non-functional' on allegations of misuse of office. It is widely believed that Justice Chaudhry had told him that he could not contest elections while remaining in uniform. For several weeks, Pakistan witnessed agitation by lawyers and political workers. A full bench of the Supreme Court later declared the removal of Justice Chaudhry illegal. Musharraf suffered considerable loss of prestige.

Pakistan is in principle a parliamentary democracy but various amendments and supplementary constitutional and legal devices have made the office of president a strong one. According to constitutional procedure elections are due to the presidency as well as the national and provincial assemblies latest by the end of 2007 or early 2008. Musharraf persisted in holding election to the presidency with himself as one of the candidates and simultaneously remaining army chief of state. The Electoral College for the election of president comprises members of the National Assembly and provincial assemblies. Musharraf insisted that for the election of president the current assemblies, where his main political ally, the PML-Q, has a sound majority, should constitute the electoral college and not those who will be elected in the end of 2007 or early 2008.

Accordingly the election of president took place on 2 October 2007 and, quite expectedly, he won a clear majority. The MMA and Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N members of the assemblies boycotted the election while Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party abstained from voting. The election has been challenged by a number of petitioners in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. It is to be noted that just before his election Musharraf promised to give up his job as Army Chief of Staff if he was elected.

It is believed that Musharraf has worked out a power-sharing deal with Ms Bhutto. He issued an ordinance dropping charges of corruption against politicians during a specific period of time. It directly benefited Benazir. That decision too has been challenged in the Supreme Court. At the time of submitting this profile a decision by the full bench of the Supreme Court on the validity of his 2 October 2007 election as well as the amnesty given to politicians accused of corruption have still not been given. Benazir Bhutto arrived on 18 October 2007 after eight years of living in self-imposed exile. In the days and weeks ahead, great political drama can be expected to take place.

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