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#### **Pakistan's military general defies the West**

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### **Pakistan's military general defies the West**

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. General Pervez Musharraf has declared Emergency in Pakistan in complete disregard of the West's confidence in him to usher in his country in an era of democracy, peace and

moderation.

2. The West's trust in General Musharraf was based on his own commitment to bring in what he has called 'enlightened moderation' to Pakistani society. The United States has backed him with 11 billion US dollars since 9/11.

3. The imposition of emergency creates security and political vacuum in which Islamists, backed by a section of Pakistan's armed forces, can roam the streets freely. Nuclear-armed Pakistan remains the world's biggest problem today.

4. The US, Britain and European Union policymakers must realise now that the unconditional Western support to the Pakistan's army ruler over the past eight years has not delivered.

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The West's hope for a gradual return of democracy in Pakistan has been set back to several decades by a military ruler whose regime has received 11 billion US dollars worth of direct economic support from the United States since the attacks of 9/11. The US, Britain and the European Union have supported General Pervez Musharraf in the expectation that, being a moderate face of Pakistan, the military ruler would move, even if gradually, towards strengthening the country's civilian and political institutions. However, if there is one point that the November 3 imposition of Emergency by General Musharraf underlines is his complete disregard of the West's trust in him to usher in Pakistan in an era of democracy, peace and moderation.

The West's precarious wish that President Musharraf would allow some form of civilian rule to return was clear when the US brokered an undeclared understanding between him and former premier Miss Benazir Bhutto allowing her to return to Pakistan last October after eight years of exile. Hopes dawned among the 170 million Pakistanis and the outside world that the country's military ruler would relinquish at least partial control over the institutions of politics and governance by sharing power with popular civilian leaders such as Miss Bhutto. The West's confidence in the military general was in line with his own commitment, expressed several times in the years after 9/11, to bring in 'enlightened moderation' in the Pakistani society and create a model democratic Islamic state for the wider Muslim world.

However, General Musharraf, into his ninth year of military rule and lacking any form of legitimacy in the eyes of Pakistani people and neighbouring nations, chose to declare

emergency, suspended the country's constitution, imposed severe and despotic curbs on the electronic and print media, arrested several politicians and the widely respected lawyer Aitjaz Ahsan, subjugated the judiciary to military rule by removing the current set of independent Supreme Court judges and swearing in a compliant Abdul Hameed Dogar to the post of Chief Justice. In his justification for imposing emergency, General Musharraf has said that he did so because judges were acting at 'cross-purposes with the executive and legislature' and militant Islamists in the country's Northwest Frontier Province had created 'a grave threat' to the security of Pakistan. It is true that hundreds of Pakistani troops have been kidnapped by the Taliban on Pakistan-Afghan border and a number of suicide blasts in recent years was a cause of concern.

The decision however to impose emergency in Pakistan is not a cure for either getting rid of Islamic militants or for creating an effective executive. In fact, it does exactly the opposite. First, it creates a political and security vacuum in Pakistan for Islamic militants to roam more freely. The country's top generals who are witnessing bomb blasts at their doorstep in Rawalpindi, the headquarters of Pakistan's armed forces, cannot hope to wish away the Islamists by imposing emergency. It is widely understood that the militants are supported by elements in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence and they will now find it easier to carry out their violent activities. Second, the country's already stunted executive has been placed under the direct rule of military commanders and it will take several decades for it to acquire any form of transparency. Third, the higher judiciary, which was showing signs of gaining an autonomy of its own by restoring rule of law in recent months, has been made compliant overnight. Fourth, General Musharraf may think that he has strengthened his control over power by declaring emergency but ironically his decision also enhances threats to his own life, a fate not unfamiliar to Pakistan's military generals.

The timing of the decision therefore is such that it will be hard for common Pakistanis to believe in any of the cures President General Musharraf is proposing for Pakistan's problems. The key calculation in his decision has to do with his own need for survival in power rather than the security situation in Pakistan, a fact that is obvious to all Pakistanis. Pakistan's Supreme Court was set to deliver a verdict anytime these days on the legality of General Musharraf's eligibility for re-election as president while remaining the army chief. It must also now be obvious to Western nations that the military ruler cannot be entirely trusted on his words. Soon after imposing emergency, General Musharraf displayed his contempt for democratic principles in his televised speech to the nation. He asked Pakistan's 'western friends to understand that the country is passing through an internal and external

situation' and 'we are going through a process of learning'. Some Western leaders and diplomats should remind the military general of Pakistan that we in the West always thought that Pakistan was passing through a process of learning the basics of democracy but no longer think so.

The Western nations must act to prevail upon General Musharraf to declare a time table for his exit from power and agree time-bound measures for holding free and fair elections in Pakistan for civilian rulers to take charge. The immediate reaction from Western capitals however has not been encouraging for the cause of democracy in Pakistan, arguably the world's biggest problem. The US, Britain and European Union have all reacted with routine. The White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe described the emergency as 'disappointing'. Britain's Foreign Secretary David Miliband expressed 'concern'. The European Commission called for 'rapid return to civilian rule'. In diplomatic language, these reactions mean little more than routine statements. The West must now understand that its support for General Musharraf during the past eight years has not brought any form of positive change in Pakistan, not even a sense of direction that nuclear-armed Pakistan is headed on the right path.

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