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Strategic Insight

Pakistan: Coming out of Praetorian Shadows

by [Surinder Rana](#)

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In a televised speech on January 12, 2002, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf announced that religious extremist organizations based in Pakistan would no longer be allowed to operate with impunity or continue fanning hatred and communal violence. In his address, which was aimed at the people of Pakistan, the Indian government, and the international community, Musharraf declared that he will not allow Pakistan's territory to be used for terrorist activities and that no Pakistan-based organization will be allowed to indulge in terrorism in the name of religion. [1] Emphasizing that "Pakistanis are sick of sectarian violence," Musharraf said his goal is to make Pakistan a progressive, modern, and dynamic state. Addressing Indian concerns about cross-border violence, Musharraf further announced the banning of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), two terrorist organizations named by India as involved in the bloody December 13, 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi. Musharraf said that while Pakistan would continue its moral and political support to the Kashmir movement, no individual or organization would be allowed to indulge in terrorism in the name of Kashmir. He urged Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to return to the negotiating table in order for both sides to resolve the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the wishes of the people of Kashmir, and to progress toward normalization of India-Pakistan ties.

General Musharraf's speech has received widespread acclaim from the international community. The Indian government also welcomed the speech, while emphasizing the expectation that Musharraf's words will be translated into action. In this article, we assess the significance of General Musharraf's speech from different perspectives, and its potential impact on the region's peace and security.

By joining the international coalition against global terrorism in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, General Musharraf had demonstrated a desire to distance himself from religious extremism. This effort constituted a major shift in Pakistan's policy of supporting regional Jihad (holy war). Musharraf, however, reiterated that supporting the U.S.-led coalition's military operations in Afghanistan does not imply disavowing Jihad in Kashmir, which he described as a legitimate struggle of the Kashmiri population against Indian rule. [2] Some Pakistan-based terrorist organizations apparently took Musharraf's ambiguity on Jihad in Kashmir to be his acquiescence to continued Islamist violence against India, which manifested most recently in the December 13 attack on the Indian Parliament. [3] India reacted to this attack by mobilizing its army along the India-Pakistan border; Pakistan followed suit, thereby leading to the present military stand-off and threat of nuclear conflagration in South Asia. [4] Musharraf's recent assurance that no individual or organization will be allowed to indulge in acts of terrorism in the name of Kashmir is ipso facto renunciation of Jihad as a state policy, which is significant from a regional perspective. If his intent is sincere and he proves able to redeem his pledge by translating words into action, it is likely that the region will move towards a long-term and lasting peace.

Inside Pakistan, Musharraf's speech drew mixed reactions. Although criticism from the main political parties was restrained, religious parties and Jihadi outfits rejected the speech outright. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) criticized Musharraf for failing to acknowledge that his government, by ignoring earlier warnings about these Jihadi outfits, had pursued policies that damaged Pakistan's international standing. [5] The Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) condemned the "rules of behavior" for

religious parties spelled out in the speech, according to which the Madaris (Islamic religious schools) and mosques would be required to register with the government, and their numbers would be limited. ARD President Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan pointed out on January 12, 2002 that even the British colonialists did not introduce such draconian laws to curb the religious activities of the people. Jihadi organizations and other Islamic parties banned by President Musharraf pledged to continue their struggle (Jihad) under different names; some of them even threatened to take legal recourse and initiate mass protests against Musharraf's government. The LeT and Al-Badar organizations argued that the liberation of Kashmir is critical to the national unity of Pakistan, and that any measure undermining the struggle is against Pakistan's national interests. [\[6\]](#)

India welcomed General Musharraf's declaration that Pakistan-based support for terrorist activities against India (including Kashmir) will be stopped. [\[7\]](#) Indian Home (Interior) Minister L.K. Advani, in an interview in New York on January 12, 2002 said the Indian government will judge the Pakistani government's intentions by actions and not by words. [\[8\]](#) During a visit to Washington on January 17, Indian Defense Minister George Fernandez warned that India will increase its pressure on Pakistan's government until Musharraf ends cross-border terrorism in Kashmir, and hands over 20 individuals named as terrorists by India.

From a western perspective, Musharraf's landmark speech positioned him as the kind of leader in the Muslim world the West has been desperately seeking. Some western analysts note that by verbally taking on political Islam, Musharraf has helped define how Islam and its institutions should fit with the requirement of a modern society. [\[9\]](#) On January 13, an article in the New York Times noted that many in the United States see the general's effort to turn away from extremism and religious intolerance - and to build a stable, modern nation - as being in India's long-term interests. Quoting a western diplomat, the article also said, "Is the General a man genuinely attempting to end India-Pakistan conflict? Or is it the speech of a man trying to fudge actions he doesn't want to take?" The answer is yet to emerge. [\[10\]](#)

Analysis

The Pakistani government's decision to join the U.S.-led international coalition against terrorism had led to skepticism about Musharraf's ability to rein in the pro-Taliban and other Islamist factions in Pakistan. As events in Pakistan during the last four months have shown, the president is in control of the situation, and he has crucial support for his policies from a majority of the middle-class population, members of the media and academia, and even a large section of the moderate political establishment in Pakistan. Criticism against his speech from the main political parties and radical Islamists notwithstanding, the contemporary domestic situation in Pakistan suggests that General Musharraf can transform Pakistani society if he has the intent and will to redeem his promises. Right now he has the initiative and the momentum, but his policies will have to show quick and positive economic results, and progress in the fight against corruption, feudalism and Islamic radicalism, if such momentum and popular support are to be maintained and religious extremism is to be kept at bay.

Indian officials' skepticism of General Musharraf's intentions and capabilities comes from a deep mistrust engendered by previous Pakistani leaders. Indian officials note that in 1993-94, Pakistani presidents Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharief, after promising to end Pakistani sponsorship of terrorism, reneged once U.S. pressure on Pakistan was relaxed. General Musharraf himself banned the anti-Shia militant organization Lashka-re-Jhangvi and the anti-Sunni organization Sipah-e-Mohammad on August 14, 2001, but they continue to be active as ever. [\[11\]](#) According to Indian policymakers, his ability to effectively curb terrorist groups in Pakistan is questionable. Indian experts find it hard to believe that despite supposed full cooperation from Pakistan's military and ISI (Inter Services Intelligence), the top leadership of Al-Qaeda continues to elude the grasp of the U.S. military. Indian officials regard the ISI as a state within a state that, according to them, has hindered rather than helped U.S. anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding India's mistrust of the Pakistani government's intentions, General Musharraf's speech has cajoled the Indian government into rethinking its approach to regional issues, especially Kashmir. There is growing pressure on the Vajpayee government from outside as well inside India to initiate

negotiations with Pakistan and settle all pending issues including Kashmir. During recent visits to India, prominent world leaders such as British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell urged the Indian government to find ways of ending the present military stand-off with Pakistan. There is near unanimity in India for a strong posture towards Pakistan, yet significant sections of the Indian political establishment and academicians have suggested a conciliatory approach to end the current military impasse. [12]

From an international perspective, two conflicting theories about Pakistan's existential choices are currently in vogue. A skeptical school of thought has it that the military-led government in Islamabad was faced with a Hobson's choice when it was asked to join the U.S.-led anti-terror campaign. The more optimistic theory flows from General Musharraf's recent policy pronouncements. In a commemorative speech in December 2001, he declared his intention to remodel Pakistan according to the lost vision of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, that country's founding father, who wanted a tolerant and moderate Pakistan society. It is likely General Musharraf set this goal in reaction to worldwide outrage over the terrorist assault on India's Parliament House and the attackers' suspected links to at least two Pakistan-based terrorist networks. Yet, his high-profile campaign against Islamic fundamentalist and political terrorism had begun earlier, during the run-up to the July 2001 India-Pakistan summit in Agra. Viewed in this perspective, his latest blueprint appears to underline a Pakistan-centric political resolve as distinct from a clever response to international dismay over recent events.

The centerpiece of Musharraf's new political agenda is an elaborate system of regulations being applied to the network of religious institutions in Pakistan. The prime objective apparently is to liberate Pakistan from a virtual anti-culture of sectarian strife that exists within the majority of Muslim societies. However, the pervasive menace of terrorism, whose critical mass has been traced to the dominant extremism of some of these religious institutions, is also to be weeded out. If, on balance, Musharraf is looking to emulate his one-time role model Kemal Ataturk by facilitating a politics of tolerance, his attempt to dismantle Pakistan's existing system of a separate minority electorate deserves notice. As a logical follow-up, he should also restore democracy in Pakistan and remove the praetorian shadows. [13]

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