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U.S. Prods Musharraf to End Emergency Rule

By **DAVID ROHDE**

This article was reported by David Rohde, Jane Perlez, Helene Cooper and Steven Lee Myers, and written by Mr. Rohde.

ISLAMABAD, [Pakistan](#), Nov. 7 — Amid a deepening crisis in Pakistan, Bush administration officials have begun pushing Gen. [Pervez Musharraf](#) on several fronts to reverse his state of emergency, quietly making contact with other senior army generals and backing Pakistan's opposition leader as she carries out back-channel negotiations with him.

Military attachés from the United States and several other Western nations are discreetly contacting senior Pakistani generals and asking them to press General Musharraf, the president, to back down from the emergency decree he issued Saturday night, according to a Western diplomat.

On Wednesday, President Bush telephoned General Musharraf for the first time since the crisis began and bluntly told him that he had to return Pakistan to civilian rule, hold elections and step down as chief of the military, as he had promised. Mr. Bush called him from the Oval Office at 11:30 a.m. Washington time, and spoke for about 20 minutes, according to the White House.

“My message was that we believe strongly in elections, and that you ought to have elections soon, and you need to take off your uniform,” Mr. Bush said later, appearing at George Washington's mansion in Mount Vernon, Va., with President [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) of France. “You can't be the president and the head of the military at the same time.”

General Musharraf sought to assure Mr. Bush that his power grab was temporary and that he still planned to call for elections, Pakistani and American officials said. At the same time, two aides to General Musharraf acknowledged that aides to the general and the opposition leader [Benazir Bhutto](#) were engaged in negotiations, even as her supporters clashed with police officers outside Parliament and she threatened larger protests on Friday.

“Talks back channel are going on with her,” said Tariq Azim Khan, the government's minister of state for information.

Ms. Bhutto's approach dovetailed with the American effort to defuse the situation in Pakistan and avoid major unrest in the country. And it left open the possibility that she and General Musharraf could yet return to the power-sharing arrangement envisioned when she returned to Pakistan last month after eight years in self-imposed exile.

For now, Bush administration officials are unanimous in saying that American financial support for Pakistan will continue regardless of whether General Musharraf reverses course.

A senior White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of diplomatic sensitivities, said Mr. Bush still held out hope that American pressure could persuade General Musharraf to reconsider his moves. That approach, the official said, was "Option No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3."

Deputy Secretary of State [John D. Negroponte](#) told a House committee on Wednesday that "the bottom line is, there's no question that we Americans have a stake in Pakistan."

But American support for General Musharraf himself is not limitless, several administration officials said privately. "We want to believe he will come around, and are giving him every opportunity to change his actions, but our verbal support is not going to last for very long," a senior administration official said.

Among Western diplomats, there is rising concern that General Musharraf's declaration is also damaging the standing of the Pakistani Army as an institution, which has long been seen as the force holding the country together.

Rumblings of discontent with General Musharraf exist in the armed forces, but they are far from reaching the point where the army's senior generals would turn against him, according to Western officials and Pakistani analysts. But they say sustained popular unrest against General Musharraf could cause the army to turn on him.

"It's the concern about how the military retains its position as an institution of national respect," said a Western diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity. "These kinds of things can be damaging to the institution, the respect for the institution and also the morale."

Western officials have also begun praising Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, General Musharraf's designated successor as army chief. General Kayani, a moderate, pro-American infantry commander, is widely seen as commanding respect within the army and, within Western circles, as a potential alternative to General Musharraf.

"He's somebody we know well, and he's tough on [Al Qaeda](#)," said one Bush administration official who works on Pakistan issues. "He's somebody we can work with."

Known as a soldier's soldier, General Kayani rarely mixes with politicians and is not thought to have used previous senior postings — including heading the country's powerful military intelligence service — to expand his own wealth and contacts.

During the recent religious holiday, he flew to embattled soldiers in the tribal areas and celebrated the holiday with them. Tall, introverted and highly professional, he received some of his key training in the United States. He declined a request for an interview, but is believed to favor decreasing the army's role in politics.

Twice in Pakistan's history, senior generals have asked military rulers to resign when their popularity faded and their rule was viewed as damaging to the army as a whole, according to American and Pakistani experts on the Pakistani military. They said General Musharraf could find himself in that position too.

Retired officers said they had not spoken with many serving officers since this weekend's declaration, but said they believed it had worsened morale. "I do not come across anyone who says this was the right thing," said one retired officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "I don't think that they are very happy."

Even as the pressure on General Musharraf builds, one Bush administration official who works on Pakistan issues said that the White House was concerned about any appearance that the United States was interfering in the country's politics. "We can't reach ourselves into the Pakistani political process more than we already have," he said, referring to recent attempts to broker a power-sharing arrangement between General Musharraf and Ms. Bhutto.

In a sign of the closeness between Ms. Bhutto and Washington, the opposition leader met after a news conference with the American ambassador to Pakistan, Anne W. Patterson. The perception among Pakistani analysts is that Ms. Bhutto is being guided by Washington. "She's listening to the Americans, no one else," said Najam Sethi, the editor in chief of The Daily Times and a sympathizer to her cause.

An American official who spoke on condition of anonymity said that the United States was not instructing Ms. Bhutto on how to proceed, and that American officials were unaware of the details of her protest plan until she announced them publicly.

Daniel Markey, a former State Department official who is now a senior fellow at the [Council on Foreign Relations](#), said he understood she was getting advice from the Bush administration to "sit tight and try to work things out and don't do anything rash."

But Ms. Bhutto also runs a risk of being perceived as too close to the United States, and too accommodating of General Musharraf. Many Pakistanis, weary of General Musharraf's military rule, are skeptical of Ms. Bhutto's drive to end the emergency and believe the two leaders will eventually strike a deal.

They are quick to note that Ms. Bhutto is the only opposition leader freely operating since the emergency decree on Saturday. For days now her supporters have mostly stayed on the sidelines as hundreds of Pakistan's lawyers have led street demonstrations against the decree and been rounded up by the police in clashes.

In a telling sign of this mood, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, the chairman in the Punjab of Ms. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, was booed when he walked into a group of lawyers preparing to demonstrate in Lahore on Monday morning. "They yelled at him and called him a collaborator," said a lawyer at the scene.

On Wednesday Ms. Bhutto finally appeared to strike a more aggressive stance. She gave General Musharraf two implicit deadlines. She would go ahead on Friday with a planned protest rally in Rawalpindi, the garrison city adjacent to the capital, even though the authorities there have said the gathering is prohibited under the emergency decree.

“I understand my liberty might be at stake,” she said. “But we are facing much greater risks than the liberty of an individual.”

If the general does not agree to parliamentary elections on the January timetable, she will lead a “long march” of more than 300 miles across the plains of Punjab from Lahore to Islamabad. Threatening unrest in Punjab, the country’s largest province and its political center of gravity, is a challenge to the general’s authority.

In an indication of the potential for violence, after her news conference, the police fired tear gas and carried out a baton charge against 100 of her party workers when they tried to push through police barriers blocking public access to the country’s Parliament building in Islamabad.

How General Musharraf will react to her challenge and the new pressure from the United States is difficult to gauge, diplomats and analysts here said. Resigning his post as army chief would greatly reduce his influence, and the general’s already low public standing appears to have fallen substantially since his declaration of emergency rule.

Discontent among Pakistanis has been rising throughout the year, particularly after General Musharraf tried to remove the country’s chief justice from the bench. That dissatisfaction, Western diplomats say, is also being felt in the armed forces.

“There are a number of generals who feel that the time has come for the army to get out of politics,” said a second Western diplomat. “Most importantly, that the army has become unpopular and the image of the army is suffering in Pakistan, largely due to the insurgency, but also that they are associated with the president.”

David Rohde and Jane Perlez reported from Islamabad, and Helene Cooper and Steven Lee Myers from Washington. Salman Masood contributed reporting from Islamabad, and Mark Mazzetti from Washington.