

## SPECIAL SECTION

**A Conversation with Pervez Musharraf***By Adrienne Bryan and Varun Sivaram*

**Pervez Musharraf**, President of Pakistan from 2002 until 2008, occupied what *TIME Magazine* called “the most dangerous job in the world.” Balancing domestic political interests with cooperation with the United States in its war on terror, Musharraf survived two assassination attempts as he targeted terrorism and militancy in Pakistan. Previously, General Musharraf led the Pakistani army as Chief of Army Staff. In 1999, he became Chief Executive of a military regime, and was subsequently elected president in 2002. President Musharraf visited Stanford University on January 26, 2009 to give an address to the student body addressing the causes of terrorism and providing general strategies to defeat global terrorism.

In his address, President Musharraf asserted that the roots of terrorism - illiteracy, poverty, and disenfranchisement - must be solved in order to permanently curtail extremist violence. He asserted that Pakistan itself “had been a victim of terrorism” and therefore should not be faulted as a perpetrator. Another salient theme of his talk was the West’s abandonment of Pakistan when it came time to clean up the chaotic region after the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan.



Pervez Musharraf

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To follow up on some of these issues and others that went largely unaddressed at his keynote address, including the AQ Khan nuclear proliferation scandal, the *Stanford Journal of International Relations* secured an electronic interview with President Musharraf. Below is an excerpt of this interview.

**Q: What was the single most difficult decision that you had to make as president? Walk us through your decision-making process.**

The most difficult decision was the enforcement of the short emergency on November 3, 2007. I knew it would be unpopular, but it had to be taken to avoid a clash between the judiciary and the legislative pillars of the state. The Supreme Court was set to annul the election of the President and had in fact stopped its notification. If the Court had annulled the election, it could have led to incalculable negative consequences. The planned elections could not have taken place, and the transition to democracy would have been stalled in its last phase. I therefore made the difficult decision to enforce the emergency period, lifted the emergency after three weeks, and set into

operation the process of elections. There is a lot made out of the temporary closing of a few channels during this period. However, the print media remained unaffected and all the channels started functioning in a couple of weeks. The action was necessary to prevent the whipping up of agitation that could aggravate an already grave situation. This is something that the country could not afford.

**Q: What advice can you give the current President on balancing the interests of the various political groups in Pakistan, such as streamlining madrassa schools or cracking down on militant groups?**

Madrassas have to be brought into the main stream and provide normal education including vocational skills so that Madrassa graduates can become doctors, engineers and other types of professionals, and have useful skills. Militancy simply cannot be tolerated in the interest of sound effective governance, peace, and progress of the society.

**Q: During your keynote address, you argued that a solution to the Kashmir issue would eliminate the motive for violence for many extremists. What specifically would constitute an acceptable solution in your eyes that will also appease India and the Kashmiris?**

I believe that for eliminating terrorism, it is necessary to address the root causes that give rise to desperation and anger, which include long standing political disputes. In South Asia, Kashmir is the dispute that needs to be addressed to turn a new chapter of cooperation and good relations in our region.

I also believe that a solution of the Kashmir issue is possible. I personally took the initiative to offer ideas that drew enthusiastic response from the Kashmiris. We also engaged with India in serious and intensive discussions to develop a framework of a solution that is acceptable to Pakistan, India, and most importantly, the Kashmiri people. There was considerable progress and, in my view, threads can be picked to bring the endeavor to a successful conclusion. This will be great challenge for the two countries that requires sincerity, flexibility and courage.

However, the opportunity for resolving the problem often proves to be fleeting and it must be seized, and not allowed to slip away. In that sense, I find the current tension and war hysteria from India very unfortunate.

**Q: President Zardari recently announced a “no first strike” nuclear policy. Do you think this will pave the way for eventual disarmament, or does it pose a security risk to Pakistan, and why?**

I am not aware of the context of Mr. Zardari’s remark. I know that our nuclear doctrine is very clear. Our deterrence is solely for defensive purposes. However, we will maintain it at a credible minimum level and would not enter into a nuclear arms race with India. Deterrence is an indispensable part of our security doctrine.

I do not think that we in South Asia and indeed in the world are ready for disarmament. This is an idealistic goal that may be achievable in an idealistic global environment. I on my part had suggested a nuclear free zone in South Asia or a non-war pact with India.

**Q: What is the optimal way to deal with the sovereignty issues in the Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan?**

There ought not to be any compromise on sovereignty. Any local arrangements within the federal structure are under the constitution of the country. The government must be firm in dealing with any outside or inside challenge to its writ inside the country and to the sovereignty of the country. The challenge of terrorism and militancy is one such issue that must be addressed with clear vision, commitment, and firmness.

**Q: Why is civilian government historically weak in Pakistan, requiring an almost autonomous military to periodically take government control? What are the lessons Pakistan can learn from military rule?**

Again, the issue is of an effective government that is capable of good governance and ensuring the development of the state and the welfare of the people. The government must not become dysfunctional, and there should be a smooth and healthy relationship between the three pillars of the state, or the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature. Governance has to be by the legislature, or the parliament. This needs to be strengthened and made capable of governing.

**Q: What has Pakistan learned from the AQ Khan incident, and how specifically will it safeguard state nuclear secrets and prevent nuclear proliferation to states and non-state actors?**

The AQ Khan incident was an isolated incident that became possible when our program, for its success, was still covert. Now the situation is different. Pakistan has a strong command and control system. We have learned from the best practices of the world. The Pakistani strategic assets are fully safe and under strong custodial controls. The question of nuclear secrets (better word?) falling in the wrong hands simply does not arise. The propaganda and alarmist speculation on this count is unfounded and reflects prejudice. We are fully and unilaterally committed to nuclear non-proliferation. We want to be part of the international non-proliferation regime and not a target of any such regime or discrimination, especially when it comes to peaceful nuclear energy. Pakistan needs to develop nuclear power generation under IAEA safeguards.

In closing, I would always advise people, especially students, to be objective rather than emotional, and judge matters on their merit. Outside vested influence on their thinking and views must be avoided. §