

Conflicting accounts from the Pakistani government fuel speculation of an assassination cover-up?

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Release of two new videos showing the assassin of Benazir Bhutto firing shots with a hand gun just feet away from her vehicle and the impact of the bullets upon the head of Benazir Bhutto prior to the explosion corroborate the testimonies of eye witnesses who saw shots being fired at the former Pakistani premier as she left the fatal election rally in Rawalpindi. In addition, testimonies from close aides to Bhutto who witnessed her wounds at the time of the attack and when her body was washed for burial confirmed that her death had been caused by shots to the neck/head.

This new evidence coupled with the scenes of Pakistani security forces washing the crime scene just hours after the assassination and conflicting statements from the Interior Ministry claiming that Benazir's death was caused by shrapnel wounds to the head, later revised to "had bumped her head on the sunroof" have fuelled speculation that Musharraf's regime is involved in a cover-up!

The unfolding events are a severe indictment of the dictator Musharraf, his US sponsors of the Bush administration and the Islamophobic media of the west who lost no time in confirming the notion that Bhutto had been targeted by "Islamic militants" linked to the Taliban commander Baitullah Mehsud without a shred of physical evidence being presented to substantiate the allegation. Both Bush and Brown claimed that Benazir's killing was another chapter in the war against "Islamic extremism" and that she was a martyr for democracy and moderation in Pakistan. However, Mehsud stated that his forces were not involved in any way with the assassination claiming that it was the work of Musharraf and the intelligence agencies and that his forces did not target women.

Further credibility for this view has been Bhutto's own statements via e-mail to a US journalist in which she claimed that Musharraf was deliberately not supplying adequate security arrangements indicating she had received only two of the four police escort vehicles she had requested to shield all four sides of her campaign vehicle. The video released yesterday demonstrates how the assassin got within point blank range of Bhutto from the exposed side of her vehicle!

The question that remains is why would state forces undertake the assassination of Bhutto when it was Musharraf who had allowed her to return to Pakistan at the instruction of the US and Britain in order to save his ailing government? Several scenarios could explain such a high-risk action by the state apparatus of the embattled dictator. Firstly, in the aftermath of the assassination Benazir's husband Asif Zardari called for a UN investigation and notably, help from the British government. Such a statement excluding the Americans clearly shows that the pro-British Bhutto camp do not hold confidence in the US agencies to act transparently. It also suggests that the original plan brokered by the US and Britain to forge a "secular democratic alliance" between Musharraf and Benazir against the "Islamic fundamentalists" may not have been going according to plan with the complication of cooperation between Benazir and Nawaz Sherif which looked sure to remove the power base of Musharraf's PML-Q party in the Punjab. The potential routing of the PML-Q in the January national elections would severely weaken Musharraf's presidency and his power, a problematic scenario for the dictator and his US sponsors whose courting of Bhutto had been merely to ensure Musharraf's survival and

prosecution of the war on terror. Despite her anti-Islamist rhetoric, a powerful Bhutto government could threaten US dominance in Pakistan and hence their interests in the region.

Another possibility, is that elements in the PML-Q whose power felt threatened by Bhutto's emergence on the scene took action independently of Musharraf, although such a scenario seems unlikely in view of need to compromise security arrangements in order to prosecute the operation. A third possibility is that Musharraf brought back Nawaz Sherrif after initially sending him unceremoniously back to Saudi Arabia following his recent two-day visit to the kingdom to counter the influence of Bhutto, With Bhutto gone, the PPP has been weakened and the rapid appointment of her 19 year old son as heir to the throne seems aimed to prevent fragmentation of the party through the emergence of internal power struggles in the vacuum left by her assassination. Bhutto's assassination has also left Nawaz Sheriff as the main opposition figure to Musharraf which could see him now emerge, in the coming weeks, as a rejuvenated political force galvanising the pro-democracy movement. This would suite the interests of the US, as historically, Sheriff was a loyal ally during the Clinton administration as his treachery over the Kargil crisis demonstrated. Sheriff is also viewed by many to have stronger "Islamic credentials" that could be an important factor in forging alliances with Islamic parties to try to stop cooperation of tribal elders with al Qaeda and the Taliban militants in the tribal regions. Only time will tell over the coming weeks which way the political power will shift in Pakistan in the run up to the elections.

Thus, the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, like the killing of her father and the assassination of General Zia after him would appear to be the work of state forces embroiled in a power struggle and not the work of Islamic militants as the dictator Musharraf and his western backers would like us to believe. Such is the dirty politics of Pakistan, which like other Muslim countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, are plagued by the continual interference of external colonial states like the US and Britain who enact their foreign policy objectives as if playing chess on a board comprising of the resource rich Muslim lands.

The Muslim Ummah realises that for every Benazir and Saddam, whose services to the west are rewarded with liquidation once they outlive their usefulness, tens of thousands of innocent people must pay with suffering and death through their treachery. This is why such rulers like Musharraf, who betray Islam and the Ummah of Muhammed (saw), are despised by the vast majority of people who long for an independent, sincere Islamic leadership. The time has come for the influentials and elites of Pakistan and other Muslim states to look to return this Ummah to a state of dignity, security and strength by rejecting once and for all the dirty politics plaguing our countries and restoring the Khilafah (Caliphate) that will bring a new era of unity and progress.