



## **Precarious predicament for Musharraf**

**Author:** G.K. Kalyanaram Special to The Star

**Publish Date:** March 7, 2004

Since his commitment to help the US to combat terrorism and fundamentalism after the 9/11 tragedy, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has come under blistering criticism and ridicule by the fundamentalists.

Musharraf has now been the target of at least three assassination attempts. Two of the bloodiest and near-miss attacks have come in the last three months.

The army, the source of Musharraf's past strength, is beginning to desert him slowly but palpably. In fact, the recent assassination attempts appear to have been abetted by a section of the army. Musharraf has been forced to give up his position as the Chief of Army by the end of 2004 --- that may come even earlier than the publicly stated timetable

While we have much to thank for recent successes in trying to limit the fear and uncertainty of terrorism in the world and at home, our biggest threat for terrorism comes from the extremists operating in and from Pakistan. Pakistan is fragile and vulnerable.

Pakistan as a society and a nation is moderate and peace-loving but almost twenty-years of support to *Madrasas* and other infrastructure of the radical Islamists has made Pakistan a hospitable home for the fundamentalists.

The Islamic fundamentalists have Pakistan embattled. President Musharraf has been projected as an American lackey.

Furthermore, Musharraf is also now seen as short-changing Pakistan's national interests and security as a result of his reconciliation efforts with India.

Musharraf and his Prime Minister, Jamali, have made a series of bold and productive decisions to improve the relations with India but that has only angered the fundamentalists even more.

For the first time, the Kashmir issue appears to be addressed in a more thoughtful manner and a dialog is beginning to emerge. The Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and President Musharaff have given a substantial impetus to this dialog in their recent meeting at the regional summit last month. The first set of official talks have begun and they appear to be productive.

Imagine the feelings of terrorist groups which feel yet again betrayed by Musharraf --- this time in curbing their activities in Kashmir. The extremists have already publicly avowed to continue their *jihadi* activities against Kashmir.

Musharraf has now conceded that several high-level of Pakistan nuclear scientists had sold nuclear and missile technologies to Libya, Iran and North Korea.

The father of Pakistan's nuclear program, Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, has now confessed to selling nuclear technologies to rogue nations like Libya, Iran and North Korea. From the documents provided by Libya and Iran, we now know that Pakistan has been the source of the critical centrifuge nuclear expertise.

Musharraf has now begun to crack down upon the errant scientists responsible for the export of the nuclear expertise. Dr. Khan has resigned and President Musharraf has pardoned him but most close-observers recognize that such scale illegal trade and export in nuclear technologies could not have happened without the knowledge of the army.

The fundamentalists and the army are livid at what they see as yet another betrayal and sell-out by President Musharraf: this time with regard to the Islamic nuclear bomb. To add insult to the injury, the extremists feel that a genuine national hero, Dr. Khan, has been made the scapegoat to satisfy the global community.

It has been a one-two-three punch for Islamic extremists and radicals, and a significant section of the army: betrayal of the Taliban, renegeing on the Kashmir issue, and curbing the development of the Islamic nuclear bomb.

Musharraf has alienated not only the fundamentalists but also common citizens who were sympathetic to his efforts to curb extremism and corruption because of his arbitrary and autocratic governance.

If Musharraf is displaced (a likely scenario) and the Islamic radicalists take over, then the potential for calamity is extraordinary. Fundamentalism and terrorism will have a new state-protected home in Pakistan.

It is in the deep self-interest of the US, India and the world at large to help Pakistan (not necessarily Musharraf --- remember the mistake we made in supporting the Shah of Iran and not the people of Iran) to grow democratic and moderate.

And this requires providing Pakistan not only military assistance but also massive economic assistance and expertise in governance and swift devolution of power. Pakistan requires our immediate and undivided attention.