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United States Department of State
Bureau of Intelligence and Research

(C) Pakistan: Musharraf Keeps Opposition Parties Off Balance

(C) President Musharraf and his military-dominated government appear to have succeeded in keeping the fractious parties of the political opposition off balance and individually isolated. Nonetheless, the government continues to monitor closely any attempts by the opposition to achieve greater political cohesion or unity of purpose.

■ Politics of manipulation . . .

(S//NF) Musharraf has proved a masterful practitioner of traditionally manipulative South Asian politics, allowing the political opposition fairly free rein to organize and demonstrate while keeping the various parties from uniting against him [redacted]

B1

[redacted] The following are examples of how Musharraf [redacted] have kept off balance the major parties he will have to face in the general elections scheduled for 2007.

Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal—MMA

(S//NF) Musharraf caused concern among many commentators that his tactical alliance with the MMA, a new coalition of Islamic parties, could backfire by providing legitimacy to some of the most dogmatic, reactionary elements in Pakistan's unruly political arena. This concern was heightened in the October 2002 elections when the MMA won control of the government of the Northwest Frontier Province and became a member of the ruling coalition in Balochistan.

(S//NF) The MMA has since been discredited in two ways. First, its lackluster performance in fulfilling its campaign pledges regarding economic development and law and order in the two provinces has disappointed many voters and provided abundant ammunition for its political rivals. [redacted]

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Islamist hardliner Fazl ur-Rehman, the leader of one of the two largest component parties in the MMA, the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam/Fazl (JUI-F). Rehman's support for Musharraf became so divisive within the MMA that it nearly caused a split with the other major party, the Jamaat-I-Islami (JI). In mid-February Rehman decided not to break with the rest of the MMA for fear that his party would lose influence and that he would be handicapped in collecting money from Libya, Iran, and Saudi Arabia if he supported Musharraf too openly.

Pakistan People's Party—PPP

(S//NF) Pakistan has been abuzz with rumors of the impending pardon (of corruption charges) and political rehabilitation of Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister and leader of the PPP, since her husband, Asif Zardari, was released from prison in November 2004.

B1

The left-of-center PPP would be hamstrung in elections if Zardari, were its declared candidate. Bhutto remains unconvinced and is still in exile in London and Dubai.

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(S//NF) A senior legislator in the Pakistan Muslim League Qaid-e-Azam (PML/Q) asserts Musharraf is not interested in permitting Bhutto to return to Pakistan anytime soon and is using speculation about his backchannel dialogue with her to chasten the other parties. Bhutto's return to the political fray presumably would revitalize the PPP and bolster its electoral prospects.

Pakistan Muslim League/Nawaz (PML/N)

(S//NF) Musharraf is the leader in the National Assembly of the PML/Q, a party composed of legislators whom Musharraf persuaded in 2002 to defect from the PML/N, the right-of-center party of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Sharif, who remains in exile in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, tries to link his party with the antigovernment programs that political organizations like the MMA are trying to launch. Javed Hashmi, the leader of the PML/N in Sharif's absence and an outspoken Musharraf critic, was convicted in April 2004 of "abetting mutiny" and sentenced to 23 years in prison.

■ ... and the divisive impact of elections

(S//NF) The MMA and several of its opportunistic allies in the opposition are planning a series of anti-Musharraf rallies in major cities this month. Whether or not a "Million March" materializes, the prospects for longer-term unity within the opposition are not good. Political parties are beginning to focus on local elections scheduled for later this year as an opportunity to strengthen their organizations and position themselves for

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the national elections of 2007. Under such circumstances, the personal rivalries and ideological differences among the parties are likely to loom larger than their common interest in unseating Musharraf. Not only will secular parties like the PPP be more reluctant to associate with the Islamist MMA, but also the papered-over rift within the MMA between the JUI-F and the JI is likely to reemerge. In fact, all interparty alliances could splinter as their components decide to contest the election from their individual party platforms.

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