

# Statement by the Editorial Advisory Committee

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Itty Abraham, *University of Texas-Austin*

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In November 2007, eight years after he first seized power in a coup, and six years after declaring himself president of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf declared a state of emergency, suspended the Constitution and basic rights, and dismissed the Supreme Court. Musharraf claimed that the emergency was needed to stem the growing Islamic militancy in Pakistan. But his Proclamation of Emergency was a litany of complaints about the Pakistani courts, the only branch of government that the general and his army did not control, for having “weakened the writ of the government.” Musharraf also banned independent television and clamped down on the print media, because he said it was “demoralizing the nation.” Washington was alerted to Musharraf’s impending action. Admiral William Fallon, the head of US military forces in West Asia, met Musharraf in Islamabad the day before the coup, and is reported to have warned the general against declaring an emergency. US officials said that

“General Musharraf had been offering private assurances that any emergency declaration would be short-lived.”

Musharraf’s actions incited protests across the country, led by lawyers, human rights and democracy activists, students and civil society groups. These have been met with tear gas, beatings and mass arrests. The government admitted to detaining over 5000 people. After 42 days, Musharraf gave up the post of Chief of Army Staff, announced the ‘lifting’ of the emergency and said the constitution was being restored. The restored constitution has been amended by decree to protect Musharraf from legal challenge and gives him enhanced powers as president. He has also appointed a new Supreme Court, established a law to allow military courts to try civilians, and imposed restriction on the media specifically preventing criticism of him and the army.

Pakistan has been here before, as have many of its neighbours in South Asia. Insecure and undemocratic leaders, weak regimes, a society that cannot hold its state machinery in check. It is far from certain that these steps will give Musharraf the unchecked power or the legitimacy that he and the army seek. The crisis in Pakistan may be too deep and too fundamental for such easy solutions.

The test for Musharraf, his supporters, and his opponents will come with the January 2008 elections. The Musharraf government is widely expected to rig these elections if only to ensure that its opponents do not win a clear majority and threaten Musharraf’s continued role as President. Washington has already accepted that “It’s not going to be a perfect election.” A recent poll found that 70 percent of Pakistanis

believed the Musharraf government did not deserve re-election and 67 percent wanted Musharraf to resign immediately. The protest movement against Musharraf and the army may gather new momentum. But Pakistan's civil society is poorly equipped for a long and difficult struggle against a determined military regime. It will need to find ways to mobilise large numbers of ordinary people, for whom the real concerns are not elections but the economy and the problem of making ends meet amid rising inflation.

The essays gathered here open a small window onto the drama unfolding in Pakistan. They seek to illuminate some of underlying political, social and economic issues that are shaping the crisis. The essays include both current writing and work of historical importance.

They cover, among other topics:

- The politics of the emergency and Pakistan's elites;
- The hidden narratives of oppression, discrimination and the subaltern;
- Change and continuity in the economy;
- The politics of Pakistan's 'war on terror' and the role of the United States.

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