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## In Musharraf's Wake, U.S. Faces Political Disarray

By [JANE PERLEZ](#)

ISLAMABAD, [Pakistan](#) — Facing imminent impeachment charges, President [Pervez Musharraf](#) announced his resignation on Monday, after months of belated recognition by American officials that he had become a waning asset in the campaign against terrorism.

The decision removes from Pakistan's political stage the leader who for nearly nine years served as one of the United States' most important — and ultimately unreliable — allies. And it now leaves American officials to deal with a new, elected coalition that has so far proved itself to be unwilling or unable to confront an expanding [Taliban](#) insurgency determined to topple the government.

"Whether I win or lose the impeachment, the nation will lose," Mr. Musharraf said, explaining his decision in an emotional televised speech lasting more than an hour. He will stay in Pakistan and will not be put on trial, government officials said.

The question of who will succeed Mr. Musharraf is certain to unleash intense wrangling between the rival political parties that form the governing coalition and to add a new layer of turbulence to an already unstable nuclear-armed nation of 165 million people.

"We've said for years that Musharraf is our best bet, and my fear is that we are about to discover how true that was," one senior Bush administration official said, acknowledging that the United States had stuck with Mr. Musharraf for too long and developed few other relationships in Pakistan to fall back on.

Administration officials will now have to find allies within the fractious civilian government, which has so far shown scant interest in taking on militants from the Taliban and [Al Qaeda](#) who have roosted in Pakistan's badlands along the border with Afghanistan.

At the same time, suspicions between the American and Pakistani intelligence agencies and their militaries are deepening, and relations between the countries are at their lowest point since Mr. Musharraf pledged to ally Pakistan with the United States after the 9/11 attacks.

Among the greatest concerns, senior American officials say, is the durability of new controls over Pakistan's nuclear program. Though Pakistan has been through far more abrupt political transitions than this one — through assassinations, a mysterious plane crash and coups — this is the first since it amassed a large nuclear arsenal.

Another central concern is the war in Afghanistan, which has been fueled by Taliban and Qaeda fighters who have used Pakistan as a rear base to carry out increasingly lethal and sophisticated attacks across the border.

After years in which Mr. Musharraf proved unable or unwilling to rein in militants in Pakistan, American officials say they are now more skeptical than ever that they can count on cooperation from Pakistan's military leaders, even including Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, a former head of Pakistan's spy agency, who replaced Mr. Musharraf as military chief last November.

The coalition government had "no comprehension" of the insurgency, said a former interior minister, Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, whose parliamentary constituency adjoins the tribal areas. "They have one policy for domestic consumption: 'Have peace, don't use the army,'" he said. "Then for the foreigners they say, 'We will fight.'"

A main challenge for Washington now will be to fix the attention of the two leaders of the coalition parties, [Asif Ali Zardari](#) and [Nawaz Sharif](#), on the raging Taliban insurgency that not only threatens American soldiers in Afghanistan but also threatens to destabilize Pakistan itself.

The campaign against the militants is unpopular here in Pakistan because it is seen as an American conflict foisted on the country. Washington would like the new government to explain to the public that the effort to quell the Taliban is in Pakistan's interests as well.

So far, the coalition, distracted by internal machinations, has failed to make that case, even as the military has taken on the insurgents with new vigor in the last 10 days. Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#) sought on Monday to emphasize continuity with the new leaders of Pakistan, saying the United States would keep pressing the Pakistani government to battle extremism within its borders.

President Bush, at his ranch in Crawford, Tex., made no statement about Mr. Musharraf's resignation. A White House spokesman, Gordon D. Johndroe, said, "President Bush appreciates President Musharraf's efforts in the democratic transition of Pakistan as well as his commitment to fighting Al Qaeda and extremist groups."

The muted reaction from American officials was partly a result of the Bush administration's having come to terms months ago with the expectation that it would have to pursue its strategy in Pakistan without Mr. Musharraf.

Mr. Musharraf's political demise was nearly inevitable after he shed his military role last year and since his party was soundly defeated in parliamentary elections in February.

Since then, the White House has been grappling with a new political reality, where the civilian leaders seem to have tenuous control over Pakistan's military and intelligence establishment.

Some inside the [Central Intelligence Agency](#) and the Pentagon believe that Pakistan's powerful [Inter-Services Intelligence](#) agency has used the democratic transition in Islamabad to strengthen its ties to militants in Pakistan's tribal areas who are carrying out operations into Afghanistan.

Uncertainty over who is actually in charge in Pakistan has heightened concerns over the country's nuclear arsenal, which is today variously estimated at 50 to 100 weapons.

While American officials say publicly that they are confident it is secure, in private they have long harbored worries about what would happen when Mr. Musharraf no longer stood atop the country's nuclear command structure, which has always been a creation of Mr. Musharraf himself. How robust it will prove without him, they say, is a worrisome unknown.

Perhaps the greatest concern is what one senior Bush administration official recently termed "steadfast efforts" by the extremist groups to infiltrate Pakistan's nuclear laboratories, the heart of a vast infrastructure that employs tens of thousands of people. Some of the efforts, officials said, are believed to have involved Pakistani scientists trained abroad.

Pakistan's weapons themselves are considered less of a concern — thanks in part to a secret program initiated by the Bush administration, with Mr. Musharraf's consent, to help train Pakistani security forces to keep the weapons safe.

But American officials say they do not know the details of how much money was spent, and they have been barred from reviewing crucial aspects of the security procedures.

In announcing his resignation, from his presidential office here in Islamabad at 1 p.m., Mr. Musharraf said that he was putting national interest above "personal bravado," adding that he was not prepared to put the office of the presidency through the impeachment process.

Mr. Musharraf said the governing coalition, which was pushing for impeachment, had tried to "turn lies into truths," and finished his speech by raising his clenched fists chest high and declaring, "Long live Pakistan!"

Mr. Musharraf decided to resign after the coalition mounted a campaign over 10 days to impeach him and said it would file charges based on gross violations of the Constitution. For the new government, elected with a big majority in February, his departure represented a vindication of democracy in a country that has been ruled for more than half its 61-year existence by the military.

By 5 p.m., Mr. Musharraf had been granted a ceremonial departure composed of a military guard of honor, and he left the presidential building for the last time. He headed to an army house in Rawalpindi, a city adjacent to Islamabad, where he has lived as president.

He will stay there for the next few days before moving elsewhere in Islamabad, perhaps to a house he is building in an exclusive enclave on the outskirts of the city.

The chairman of the Senate, [Muhammad Mian Soomro](#), who had served as caretaker prime minister this year, was named acting president. He will keep the office until a new president is chosen by Parliament and four provincial assemblies within 30 days.

Mr. Zardari, the widower of former Prime Minister [Benazir Bhutto](#) and now the head of the Pakistan Peoples Party, which she led before her assassination, is known to want the job. But he remains something of a controversial figure, having faced multiple counts of corruption in the past, though he was never convicted and says the charges were politically motivated. They were dropped when Mr. Zardari returned to Pakistan this year.

A senior American official who deals with Pakistan said last week that the notion of Mr. Zardari as president was not appealing, but neither were the alternatives.

One of the other candidates mentioned is Aftab Shahban Mirani, a former defense minister and a longtime stalwart of the Pakistan Peoples Party.

Whoever emerges, the talks are likely to be long and contentious. Mr. Sharif, who has a past checkered by corruption allegations, maintains a barely civil relationship with Mr. Zardari, and is said to be strongly opposed to the elevation of Mr. Zardari.

A colleague of Mr. Sharif's said the Pakistan Muslim League-N, the party Mr. Sharif leads, might agree to Mr. Zardari in the post if it was stripped of its current powers, including the power to dissolve Parliament and to choose the army chief.

*Salman Masood contributed reporting from Islamabad, Mark Mazzetti from Washington, and David E. Sanger from Vermont.*

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