

Bhutto's Assassination: Who Gains?

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Assassination of prominent political leaders, presumably protected by the best security, is no easy thing. It requires agencies of professional intelligence training to insure that the job is done and that no person is caught alive who can lead to those behind. Typically, from the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo in July 1914 to JFK, the person pulling the trigger is just an instrument of a far deeper conspiracy. So too in the assassination on December 27th, of Pakistani former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto. Cui bono?.

What was behind the murder of Bhutto at the moment her PPP party appeared about to win a resounding election victory in the planned January 8 elections, thereby posing a mass-based challenge to the dictatorial rule of President Musharraf?

Musharraf's government was indecently quick to blame "Al-Qaeda," the dubious entity allegedly the organization of Osama bin Laden, whom Washington accused for masterminding the September 11 2001 attacks. Musharraf just days after, declared he was "sure" Al Qaeda was the author, even though, on US pressure, he has asked Scotland Yard to come and investigate. "I want to say it with certainty, that these people (Al Qaeda) martyred ... Benazir Bhutto," Musharraf said in a Jan. 3 televised address. He named Baitullah Mehsud, a militant tribal chief fighting the Pakistani Army, who has alleged ties to al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taleban. Mehsud denied the charge. Had he been behind such a dramatic event, the desired propaganda impact among militant islamists would require taking open responsibility instead.

By linking the Bhutto killing to Al Qaeda, Musharraf conveniently gains several goals. First he reinforces the myth of Al Qaeda, something very useful to Washington at this time of growing global skepticism over the real intent of its War on Terrorism, making Musharraf more valuable to Washington. Second it gives Musharraf a plausible scapegoat to blame for the convenient elimination of a serious political rival to his consolidation of one-man rule.

Notable also is the fact that the Musharraf regime has rejected making a routine autopsy on Bhutto's body. Bhutto publicly charged that the Government had refused to make followup inquiry after the October bombing which nearly killed her and did 134 followers near her auto. Bhutto accused Pakistani authorities of not providing her with sufficient security, and hinted that they may have been complicit in the Karachi attack. She also made clear in a UK television interview shortly before her death that she would clean out the Pakistan military and security services of corrupt and islamist elements.

In the same David Frost interview, Bhutto also dropped the explosive news that Osama bin Laden had been murdered by Omar Sheikh Mohammad, a British citizen of Pakistani origin, an ISI Pakistani intelligence operative, who 'confessed' to the killing of Daniel Pearl. He was

arrested in February 2002. If Benazir's claim is correct, Omar Sheikh must have killed Osama before he was arrested in February 2002, which makes at least all the Osama messages after that date periodically delivered to western media clear forgeries.

Days after the Bhutto killing, Pakistani authorities published a photo alleged to be of the severed head of the suicide bomber who killed Bhutto. Severed heads, like a dead Lee Harvey Oswald don't talk or say embarrassing things. Also curious is the fact that Bhutto was killed in Rawalpindi, a garrison town, where every millimeter is controlled by the Army security complex. The murder weapon was a Steyr 9mm, issued only to Pakistani Army Special

Forces. Hmmm.

It has been known for months that the Bush-Cheney administration has been maneuvering to strengthen their political control of Pakistan, paving the way for the expansion and deepening of the "war on terrorism" across the region.

Who was Bhutto?

The Bhutto family was itself hardly democratic, drawing its core from feudal landowning families, but opposed to the commanding role of the army and ISI intelligence. Succeeding her father as head of the PPP, Benazir declared herself "chairperson for life" — a position she held until her death. Bhutto's husband, Ali Zardari, "Mr. 10%," is known in Pakistan for his demanding a 10% cut from letting major government contracts when Benazir was PM. In 2003, Benazir and her husband were convicted in Switzerland of money laundering and taking bribes from Swiss companies as PM. The family is allegedly worth several billions as a result. As prime minister from 1993 to 1996, she advocated a conciliatory policy toward Islamists, especially the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The Harvard educated Benazir had close ties to US and UK intelligence as well. She used the offices of neo-conservative US Congressman Tom Lantos when she was in Washington according to our informed reports, one reason Vice President Cheney backed her as a "safe" way to save his Pakistan strategic alliance in face of growing popular protest against Musharraf's declaring martial law last year. The ploy was to have Bhutto make a face-saving deal with Musharraf to put a democratic face on the dictatorship, while Washington maintained its strategic control. According to the Washington Post of 28 Dec., "*For Benazir Bhutto, the decision to return to Pakistan was sealed during a telephone call from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice just a week before Bhutto flew home in October. The call culminated more than a year of secret diplomacy — and came only when it became clear that the heir to Pakistan's most powerful political dynasty was the only one who could bail out Washington's key ally in the battle against terrorism. . . .As President Pervez Musharraf's political future began to unravel this year, Bhutto became the only politician who might help keep him in power.*"

In November, John Negroponte, former Bush Administration Intelligence Czar and now Deputy Secretary of State was deployed to Islamabad to pressure Musharraf to ease the situation by holding elections and forming a power-sharing with Bhutto. But once in Pakistan, where her supporters were mobilized, Bhutto made clear she would seek an election coalition to openly oppose Musharraf and military rule in the planned elections.

A cynical US-Musharraf deal?

Informed intelligence sources say there was a cynical deal cut behind the scenes between Washington and Musharraf. Musharraf is known to be Cheney's preferred partner and Cheney we are told is the sole person running US-Pakistan policy today.

Were Musharraf to agree to stationing of US Special Forces inside Pakistan, "Plan B", the democratic farce with Bhutto could be put aside, in favor of the continued Musharraf sole rule. Washington would "turn a blind eye."

On Dec. 28, one day after the Bhutto assassination, the *Washington Post* reported that in early 2008, "US Special Forces are expected to vastly expand their presence in Pakistan as part of an effort to train and support indigenous counter-insurgency forces and clandestine counterterrorism units," under the US Central Command and US Special Operations Command, a major shift in US Pakistani ties. Until now Musharraf and his military have refused such direct US control, aside from the agreement after September 11, extracted from Musharraf under extreme pressure of possible US bombing, to give the US military direct control of the Pakistan nuclear weapons.

The elimination of Bhutto leaves an opposition vacuum. The country lacks a credible political leader who can command national support, which leaves the military enhanced as an institution, with its willingness to defend Musharraf on the streets. This gives the Pentagon and Washington a chance to consolidate a military opposition to future Chinese economic hegemony—the real geopolitical goal of Washington.

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F. William Engdahl is a leading analyst of the New World Order, author of the best-selling book on oil and geopolitics, A Century of War: Anglo-American Politics and the New World Order, His writings have been translated into more than a dozen languages.

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(Anton Moser, Professor of Biotechnology, Graz, Austria).

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