

"A SOLID FOUNDATION BUT A CHALLENGING FUTURE"

By Pervez Musharraf, President of Pakistan;

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TERRORISM

1. Over the past year, the conflict in Afghanistan and the emergence of a virulent campaign by foreign terrorists to destabilize Pakistan have created a national threat that has interrupted Pakistan's progress much as America experienced in 2001-02. Foreign terrorists have engaged our security forces and suicide bombers have struck at metropolises that are the pulse of our nation. These events have caused me to take unpopular and extraordinary actions to protect civil order. Those actions have succeeded in minimizing violence and the vulnerability to attacks, with costs incurred to civil liberty and institutional balance. We are actively engaging civil society to ensure that it continues its critical role in building a consensus around a progressive agenda.

ELECTIONS

2. Through all this, my commitment to free elections has not wavered and we will have elections in January, 2008. Elections are a very short time away, particularly for a nation that is 160 million strong, rich in diverse political opinions. America has the luxury of national campaigns in which a vision for your future can be developed and explained by your candidates over years. In Pakistan, we have but weeks. That is why I have been dismayed that the media has reduced our national discourse to a conflict between institutions and individuals, instead of real issues affecting the well-being of the people. I will judge Pakistan's elections a success if they meet two criteria. First, they must take place in a free and safe environment. We cannot allow terrorists to hijack this critical democratic institution through violence. Nor can we allow self-serving politicians to disrupt the consensus required to continue the fight against terror. Second, we must move beyond personalities to debate a vision for Pakistan: a vision that builds upon our achievements, leveraging Pakistan's intrinsic strengths, and taking the people of Pakistan beyond a narrow-minded focus to an integrated perspective reflecting development, justice, and prosperity. At this critical juncture, Pakistan needs the continuity of successful policies -- not a myopic hustle for individual power.

ECONOMY

3. We are confident in our ability to provide security. But as America knows well, a secure future requires more than physical security. Our literacy rate of 54% must be raised. One hundred million Pakistanis (63% of the population) are under 25 years of age, and many are intimidated by a vocal minority of extremists. We need to continue developing the economic opportunity that will give these young people the hope and encouragement to persuade them not to fall prey to extremist rhetoric, but rather to work productively toward a future that will benefit them and Pakistan as a whole. Even beyond the national borders, my concept of "Enlightened Moderation" needs to be used as a bridge between the Western World and the alienated Islamic world.

4. VIBRANT PAKISTAN

5. In a November, 2007 speech before the Center for U.S. Global Engagement, U.S. Senator Joseph Biden, among the most experienced foreign policy experts in Washington, called for "A New Approach to Pakistan." Senator Biden got many things right. He lauded Pakistan's tradition of democracy. He recognized our "large moderate majority." He recognized that a secure Pakistan is a Pakistan in which free institutions are made self-perpetuating by strong economic progress. He recognized that the building of schools, hospitals and infrastructure would support advancement of the Pakistani people and bring them out of the poverty trap of the past. Indeed, over the past eight years, we have built a solid foundation for an economically vibrant Pakistan. We have maintained one of Asia's highest GDP growth rates at 7.5%, more than double and achieved a record high foreign investment of \$8.4 billion, up from a mere \$ 322 million in 2000. Other financial indicators support this trend: Pakistan's total foreign exchange reserves have increased nine fold to reach \$15.7 billion, the stock exchange index has increased more than tenfold, the exchange rate has remained stable, 12.8 million the public debt has halved.

IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE

6. Taking advantage of our geo-strategic position, we have improved the infrastructure environment by investing in public sector development funds and promoting public-private partnerships towards infrastructure mega-projects. We have created a strong system of local governance where elected representatives manage their local districts with the help of civil administration, thereby significantly empowering the masses at the grassroots level. We have deregulated the media to where it is the freest in the history of Pakistan, where it is expected to exercise its freedom with responsibility. I have always believed in the freedom of expression and have respected difference of opinion, and I will continue to do so in the future. We have sought to create a government balanced between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches, coupled with a vibrant, peaceful and productive civil society.

MUSHARRAF AND PAKISTAN

7. Senator Biden was correct when in his New Hampshire speech he said the world must take a new approach to Pakistan, helping our people by solving problems. He made a mistake, however, when he referenced a "Musharraf policy" separate from a "Pakistan policy". I have never had a policy separate from a "Pakistan policy". My policies have reflected the aspirations of the progressive, moderate forces in Pakistan that have been aimed at containing the growing extremist forces fueled by regional unrest. Pakistan's physical security and that of the world necessitates that religious extremists are sidelined; that Pakistan's natural resources and nuclear assets are protected; and that military morale remains high.

CONFLICT FREE FUTURE

8. It is my commitment to ensure continued implementation of a policy that will take the people of Pakistan safely through this critical junction towards a future free from the present conflict. The vision I will present for a 'new Pakistan' in the coming days, as Pakistan's civilian democratically-elected President, rests on this decisive premise.*****