

Terrorism

Pakistan in tug of war over

By Syed Saleem Shahzad

The restoration of the judiciary and Pakistan's role in the 'war on terror' remain major challenges for the new government

UNITED STATES efforts have helped Pakistan come up with a basic formula for co-existence between the presidency, Parliament and the armed forces, but the million-dollar question is how and when the Pakistani establishment will assert itself against hostile politicians and their allies in civil society.

Backroom efforts by US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte since Pakistan's parliamentary elections on February 18 have already set aside the strong demands for the impeachment of President Pervez Musharraf for alleged unconstitutional actions taken during the "war on terror" over the past five years of his military rule.

Former premier Nawaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), which is a key part of the new ruling coalition and a main rival of Musharraf, has agreed to remain quite on the issue of impeachment.

However, during a meeting with Negroponte and US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher in Pakistan last

week, Sharif did not agree on the question of presidential powers to appoint armed services chiefs and the president's constitutional power to intervene in Parliament's assemblies.

Following the meetings, Sharif said he had pointed out to the US officials that one-man decisions in the "war on terror" were a mistake and Parliament should decide on such matters.

no question of him being replaced in this role by a regular politician.

Through his personal relationships, Musharraf obviously has an intimate knowledge of - and power over - the armed forces and he can effectively keep a check with any moves that would be tantamount to a betrayal of the cause of the "war on terror". At the same time, his constitutional powers

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Sharif is not entirely correct, though. Pakistan's participation in the battle against terror after September 11, 2001, was an institutional decision by the Pakistan Military, and this decision remains, as does its support for Musharraf, even though he has shed his uniform. With this support, and that of the US, Musharraf is seen as a "trouble shooter" should the situation demand. There is

enable him to counter any moves by law makers in this regard.

It is in this context that Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani's remarks in Parliament on Saturday have to be taken. He said that "all important policy matters and decisions on important national issues will be taken through the Parliament".

Many Pakistani intellectuals and

others regularly demand a US policy of non-intervention in Pakistan's affairs, but none of them raises the point of the US's extensive economic and military aid to Pakistan, which is conditional on Islamabad's support in the "war on terror".

Negroponte and Boucher have been assigned to review Pakistan's performance in this theatre on a quarterly basis and report back to Washington on whether or not aid should be released. In this situation, Pakistan has little option but to follow US demands. The alternative is to take the radical decision to part ways from the "war on terror" and face all sorts of economic sanctions, although at least then the country's sovereignty would not be compromised.

Litmus test for the establishment: Pakistan's legal fraternity is still celebrating the release last week of dozens of judges who had been detained on Musharraf's orders last year. The ruling coalition has since signed a declaration for their restoration.

The majority party in the coalition, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), did not agree on that declaration, but Sharif's PML prevailed so that the new administration could face the masses. However, the restoration of the judiciary carries with it the danger of a clash with the establishment - not just with

Musharraf. The reason is, the sacking of the judges was an institutional one, not just Musharraf's.

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Americans, ending up in Bagram air base in Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay in Cuba or other US facilities.

Deposed chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry was so concerned that he summoned all of the chiefs of the intelligence agencies to his chambers to brief him on the missing people. Visiting the chief justice was not a problem, but the intelligence bosses simply

immediately chose a collision course with the establishment on several issues, including the National Reconciliation Ordinance which dropped the corruption cases pending against slain former premier Benazir Bhutto and her husband Asif Zardari.

So the restoration of the judiciary remains one of the biggest challenges not only for Musharraf but also for the Pakistani establishment, which in all likelihood will once again be faced with the issue of missing people.

The establishment is also upset by the recent appointment of former boss of the Pakistani Federal Investigation Agency and leading member of the PPP, Rahman Malik, as an advisor (minister status) in the Ministry of Interior empowering him to run the "war on terror" theatre on the Pakistani side.

Malik owns and operates Shaffaf Limited, a security and detective agency which has coordinated Military Intelligence operations in Pakistan against Al Qaeda. Handing over the Ministry of Interior to Malik means direct access to Military Intelligence matters.

The Pakistani establishment is certain to put its foot down over these pressing issues related to the "war on terror" and the judiciary. It is just a question of when. COURTESY ASIA TIMES

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did not know the exact locations of the people in US custody.

At this point, the security agencies and the armed forces thought Chaudhry might turn the issue of missing people into a huge scandal. Therefore, on March 9 last year they recommended action him and he was subsequently suspended on charges of abuse of his position.

He was then restored on July 20 and