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US should know it's either Musharraf or Pakistan

Even after the end of his government, Pakistan still is suffering the consequences of Shaukat Aziz's short-sighted and self-promoting financial management policies. Pakistan at the moment is

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dangerously surrounded by the domestic and international problems ranging from the financial, energy, politico-judicial and regional issues. While Washington is looking for an honorable exit for "her boy" – Musharraf – the nation wants his impeachment and accountability of all that he has done in the name of war on terror, governance, economic development and political stability. In his famous – and forgotten – speech of October 14, 1999, he promised a stronger, more prosperous, stable and progressive Pakistan that was the *raison d'être* of his coup and assumption of power. Today, vast majority of Pakistan is searching for the reality under the military's own myth that military rulers are more organized, better prepared and have the capacity to turn around the country.

Last month, US Ambassador to Pakistan, Ann W Patterson was quoted in the media that "we are not apologetic about our policy on Musharraf. We are trying to secure an honorable and peaceful exit for him." With such representatives to an important country like Pakistan, there's little hope that a true understanding of the situation in Pakistan would ever make sense to the decision makers in Washington.

Interesting is the fact that the US Administration historically never sided with democratically elected civilian leadership and rather supported all the military dictators, top among them General Ziaul Haq, Washington's favorite dictator of the 80s that created a Pakistan that the world is

watching today. Civilian elected leadership was hanged, sent into exile, conspired against and pressed into the corner while dictators were flowered with tranches, rescheduling of long term loans and much more.

Times in Pakistan have changed and the nation now wants to leave Musharraf – and his legacy – behind but Washington still seems determined to keep supporting him even at the cost of burning hatred against the US. One most recent incident was when a Pakistani student from a high-end school refused to accept award from the American Ambassador and said that the US was supporting dictatorship and was attacking Pakistan. And no; he was not an extremist supporting a beard and a sword in the hand. He currently is a student of law at Harvard. Such blatant support and denial of political reality on ground in Pakistan is nothing but unrealistic and condemnable.

The policy of supporting a dictator, who confessed of resorting to unlawful action of imposing emergency on November 3, 2007, reveals much truth of Washington's desire to promote democracy, rule of law, accountability and transparency in Pakistan. Musharraf and his handpicked Prime Minister, Shaukat Aziz's record is highly questionable if they are to be judged on these principles for modern democracies. Both, together, trampled upon the constitution, economy, political reforms, political parties, civil society, non government sector, constitutional institutions and the people of Pakistan. Shaukat safely left Pakistan after his "stint" as the Prime Minister and now nation is looking forward as to when would the other leave the country. If

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"hate" is considered to be a social value, then this is the only value uniting almost the whole country against Musharraf as people are crying his removal and subsequent legal and constitutional action against him. He is involved from strangling the civil and democratic liberties to shady deals with the US in the name of cooperation in war on terror. The will and health of Musharraf's sincerity could very well be

judged by an analysis of the present situation on both counts of democratic liberties to war on terror. And he fails in both.

This country needs a break from thugs.

Washington's policy on Pakistan is quite bizarre because the US administration appears bent upon protecting a person who still believes that he never committed any mistake and that only the political class that was elected on February 18, 2008 is responsible for all that is happening in Pakistan at the moment. Ironically, the US administration has never officially supported the cause of the whole Pakistani nation i.e. restoration of the judiciary and expects respect and support from the Pakistani nation on her agenda. US rather is supporting Musharraf who once said that "I did not dismiss them but they stood dismissed once they turned down the PCO." This speaks volumes about his ability to understand statecraft.

Keeping politics aside, Musharraf's economic wizard, Shaukat Aziz managed economy by playing havoc as the government owed Rs. 175 billion to oil companies. WAPDA owes over Rs. 200 billion to IPPs. And the oil supply prospects are not rosy at all in the near future. The country is facing over 4,000 megawatt power shortage. PIA's operational deficit has crossed Rs. 42 billion. Internal borrowing crossed the Rs. 500 billion mark, while external debt touching Rs. 40 billion, with fast depleting forex reserves because from January onwards the rescheduling concessions came to an end and millions of dollars are flowing out of the country every month to service the debt. All in the name of economic management under Musharraf's handpicked financial and economic "expert!"

Shaukat Aziz government approved a record number of development projects and paraded them as hallmarks of a "shining Pakistan", but the shining Pakistan was a hoax and became clear within a couple of months of Shaukat Aziz's departure. The man, wedded to the external finance institutions, with little stake inside Pakistan, hoodwinked everybody. Even the World Bank officials in Pakistan bought the intellectually dishonest advice, and kept churning out articles favoring Aziz's fiscal and economic vision, which lacked ownership and sincerity.

Had he been committed, he would have stayed on and defended his position.

Where does Pakistan stand? Will it be shortly declared insolvent, or will the Americans and Saudis provide a multi-billion dollar shot in the arm to help it sail through the rough financial patch? Will that ensure financial independence? Will that make Pakistani nation stronger and more democratic? Will such arrangement help the liberal and democratic forces to get stronger against the rise of the religious and extremist ones? Will Pakistan with such a plethora of issues be able to guarantee and ensure the regional and global security? And US still harps on supporting a man who is responsible for the head-bang of the nation and the State.

This country needs a break from thugs. It also desperately needs accountability and in this process people of the country expects from leading countries to throw their weight in for accountability and rule of law, and not keeps defending people who violate the law, transcend their mandate, and still believe they haven't committed any wrong.

Western allies of Musharraf – and Shaukat Aziz – must put an end to the brazen hypocrisy. They must support the country's yearning for the rule of law and not stand behind those who threw the Constitution and caution to the wind. A fragile Pakistan is in none's interest and this includes the US too.