

second-tier candidate's hopes of breaking out: former Sen. Fred Thompson. In March, allies of the "Law & Order" star started whispering, at greater and greater volumes, that he might be willing to make a presidential bid. The conservative blogosphere rushed to Thompson like ugly stepsisters trying on the glass slipper. Instapundit, still the premiere blog on the center-right, written by University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Reynolds, became a hub for pro-Thompson news. RedState.com opened its software for Thompson to post a *sturm-und-drang* squibble about the Iran/UK hostage standoff. *National Review's* online portal began posting Thompson's unedited political commentaries, which he reads over the radio in his job moonlighting for the waning Paul Harvey. A video of a Thompson speech shortly after 9/11 quickly attracted 10,000 hits on YouTube, all while fan-edited "draft Thompson" videos were bubbling up.

"The Thompson boom is really not being driven by consultants," Mortman points out. "There are candidates that the Right can settle for, maybe, but no one it seems to be excited for. And then Thompson arrives and people get excited about someone who sounds good and might have an impeccable record. He *might*, I mean. Who knows?"

That, so far, is what the Internet means in the Republicans' presidential race. The hard-luck conservatives who want to use it to gather support aren't having much luck, and the antiwar conservatives aren't broadening their base. The new media tools available online are doing the most for a candidates who weren't having much trouble with the old media tools. Technology has leveled the playing field, but the neoconservative, established candidates are bringing the bigger teams. ■

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Musharraf's Choice

Appease his countrymen or America

By Eric S. Margolis

COULD PAKISTAN be facing an explosion? America's most important ally in President George W. Bush's war on terror is unstable and violent at the best of times. But this writer, who has covered Pakistan since the early 1980s and recently returned from South Asia, has never before seen this highly strategic nation of 162.4 million so seething with tension and anger.

Last month, demonstrations and riots erupted in Pakistan's principal cities after its military ruler President-General (as he styles himself) Pervez Musharraf sacked the respected head of the nation's Supreme Court, Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudry. Eight senior justices resigned. Protesting lawyers were brutally beaten by police.

The chief justice's offense: daring to investigate the disappearance of some 400 suspects arrested by Pakistan at the behest of the United States. Chaudry was also investigating a series of huge financial scandals and was expected to rule on suits challenging Musharraf's plans to get himself re-elected next year in a rigged vote while retaining command of the 650,000-man armed forces, a clear violation of Pakistan's laws.

Newspapers and television stations were closed down and journalists intimidated for reporting Chaudry's arrest and the ensuing demonstrations. Hundreds of political opponents of the Musharraf regime were arrested. Meanwhile, Pakistani security agents and the army continued a two-year-old campaign to crush opposition to the government in the nation's hitherto

autonomous tribal regions along the Afghan border and to halt a growing rebellion in the western province of Baluchistan.

In the eight years since he came to power in a 1999 coup, Musharraf has relentlessly deconstructed Pakistan's weak democratic institutions, notably parliament and the courts, packing them with yes-men and staging elections so crudely rigged that even the general was embarrassed.

Before Musharraf, Pakistan had at least enjoyed a measure of parliamentary government. But after the 1999 military coup that ousted the inept Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan quickly transformed into a full-fledged military state with only the feeblest pretences of civilian government.

The nation's two most important opposition leaders, former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, are both in exile and have been warned by Musharraf that they face immediate arrest if they return. Both are well known to this writer, as was their predecessor, Zia ul-Haq. Benazir, who remains highly popular, could ably lead Pakistan again. The un-gifted Nawaz, by contrast, is not equal to the job of running one of the world's most difficult nations.

When Musharraf seized power in 1999, Washington denounced him for overthrowing Pakistan's elected government and branded him a military dictator. But once 9/11 occurred, Washington suddenly discovered the very useful general was a "democrat," "statesman," and "key non-NATO ally."

Last month, the outgoing U.S. ambassador to Islamabad, Ryan Crocker, who was moving to the Baghdad Embassy, actually proclaimed, “there is no dictatorship in Pakistan” and insisted that it was a fully functioning democracy. His preposterous claim, which echoed State Department policy, vividly recalls Ambrose Bierce’s wonderful definition of diplomacy: “the patriotic art of lying for one’s country.”

One of the leading causes of anti-American feelings in the Muslim world is our nation’s glaring double standard in which allies are given *carte blanche* while non-allies are scourged for doing the same things. Supporting Pakistan’s military junta as “democratic” while claiming to be fighting a war in neighboring Afghanistan to promote democracy is but the latest example.

General Musharraf, whom I have interviewed, has indeed proved a most useful American ally. Right after 9/11, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage threatened that the U.S. would immediately attack Pakistan unless it complied with an American ultimatum. This fact was confirmed to me by the former head of Pakistani intelligence and also by Musharraf in his recently published memoirs.

Musharraf quickly caved, purging his army and intelligence service, ISI, of all officers deemed Islamists or “non-cooperative” by the U.S. and replacing them with toadies. He abandoned Pakistan’s own creation, the Taliban, and joined the American-led war in Afghanistan, offering Washington exclusive use of three important military bases in Pakistan and the vital services of ISI. He also largely abandoned the struggle to oust Indian rule from Kashmir, branding Kashmiri *mujahidin*, who had been supported by ISI, “terrorists,” to the glee of India, which had furiously accused Islamabad of “cross-border terrorism.” Pakistan’s press noted tartly, “at least

Taliban held out against the US for two weeks; Pakistan surrendered after a phone call from Washington.”

Musharraf’s security forces arrested 800-1,000 suspected al-Qaeda and other jihadis, subjecting many to brutal tortures before handing them over to the United States. In fact, most of the important al-Qaeda suspects now in U.S. hands were apprehended by Pakistan.

The general’s reward was substantial: full American support as dictator of Pakistan and \$3-5 billion poured into Pakistan’s economy, as well as up to a billion more in secret CIA stipends to senior army officers and bureaucrats. But Musharraf barely survived two assassination attempts by his increasingly infuriated people who deemed his betrayal of the Kashmir *jihad* and the Taliban acts of treason.

Musharraf is now in much the same position that Egypt’s U.S.-backed military ruler Anwar Sadat was before his assassination—feted abroad, hated at home. Washington has relentlessly twisted Musharraf’s arm to adopt measures detested by his people: sending the army to wage a small war against pro-Taliban Pashtuns in the “autonomous” tribal territories; cracking down on local Islamists because of their opposition to the war in Afghanistan; and making nice to India and abandoning Pakistan’s most sacred cause, liberation of Indian-ruled Kashmir. In a clumsy effort to curry favor with Congress, Musharraf even suggested he might recognize Israel.

The war in Afghanistan could not be waged without the use of Pakistani bases. Eighty thousand Pakistani troops are now hunting al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and their allies inside Pakistan, leading Pakistan’s press to scream, “fight India, not your own people.” Musharraf’s soldiers have so far killed some 3,000 tribesmen and lost about 800 men themselves in a war nearly all Pakistanis see as remote-controlled from Washington.

Meanwhile, the Taliban and its nationalist allies have put U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan on the defensive and are expanding the territory they control. This is hardly a surprise, since the Taliban is an offshoot of Afghanistan’s Pashtun tribes, who comprise over half of that nation’s population.

Washington has been taking out growing frustration over its inability to either catch Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar or stop the supposedly defeated Taliban by blaming cross-border infiltration from Pakistan and making threats of hot pursuit by U.S. forces from Afghanistan into Pakistan.

But Pakistan cannot control its wild, mountainous 1,440-mile border with Afghanistan. If the mighty United States can’t stop a million people from illegally crossing its border from Mexico, how can Pakistan, which lacks helicopters, do any better?

American critics charge that Musharraf’s military and intelligence services are playing a double game, appearing to fight the jihadis with one hand while quietly supporting and sheltering them with the other. In fact, there are ever louder rumbles in Washington that Musharraf may have to be replaced by an even more compliant general. A State Department spokesman called on Musharraf to give up command of the army next year. The buzz in Pakistan is that CIA’s “head-of-state hunters” have already picked a replacement for Musharraf.

There is indeed widespread anti-Americanism in Pakistan and deep sympathy for the jihadist case, which is known in the Muslim world as “resistance.” Over ninety percent of Pakistanis see Osama bin Laden as a hero and George W. Bush as a menace to their nation and to Islam. The army remains bitter over abandoning Kashmir and Afghanistan. And Pakistanis know that one day the Americans will depart, and they will have to make accommodations

with the people the U.S. has been fighting. So Pakistan is hedging its bets, no doubt remembering Henry Kissinger's famous quip that it's more dangerous to be America's ally than its enemy.

Islamabad and Delhi concur on one point: the U.S. faces defeats in both Iraq and Afghanistan that will profoundly alter Western Asia's geopolitical dynamics. Both are developing plans for the post-U.S. era. But Washington continues to ignore these distant realities. It is, in the words of Indian strategist Manoj Joshi, "advice immune." Those administration neoconservatives and military hardliners who favor replacing Musharraf or, even worse, sending U.S. troops into Pakistan if it "does not do more"—whatever that means—are courting a calamity in South Asia that might make Iraq appear almost benign by comparison.

Pakistan is a very fragile nation whose feuding, disparate parts—Punjab, Sindh, Northwest Frontier, and Baluchistan—could fly apart. Musharraf has bent over as far as he can to accommodate American demands, and most of his people already want to lynch him. Any more pressure threatens a popular uprising or a military coup. There have long been strong secessionist movements in the Pashtun tribal areas, Sindh and Baluchistan, and dissolution could trigger civil war and possible intervention by India. In 1971, civil war in East Pakistan brought Indian invasion.

Pakistan has 40-60 nuclear weapons, guarded by the army and ISI. In the event of Musharraf's death or a coup, another military junta would likely take over and safeguard the nuclear arsenal. But real danger will come if Pakistan's military leaders split and begin a power struggle in which younger jihadist officers could seize control. This is seen by India's intelligence agency, RAW, as the greatest peril facing both nations.

A Pakistan shorn of its current U.S.-backed military ruler could clearly

become a boiling caldron of anti-Western activity. The U.S. campaign to pacify Afghanistan would collapse and so would Washington's struggle against jihadist groups. Coming on the heels of the Iraq debacle, the overthrow of the American-supported regime in Islamabad would be a geopolitical catastrophe for the U.S. and an enormous victory for Osama bin Laden and all like-minded jihadists.

But there is an alternative to Musharraf's insistence that *le déluge* awaits Pakistan if he is no longer dictator. That is the swift and full restoration of parliamentary government in Pakistan. Washington can either do it now, while there is still time, or wait until Musharraf is blown up and Pakistan sinks into the most violent chaos, and then, as in Iraq, try to cobble together a democratic government amid a brutal civil war.

Americans should have no illusions that Pakistan is our democratic ally in the war on terror, as the administration has long claimed. Pakistan is a time bomb ticking down to a huge explosion that could inflict grave damage on America's regional interests, further energize anti-American groups everywhere, put nuclear-armed India and Pakistan in confrontation, and ignite a regional crisis fraught with perils for all concerned. ■

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Exporting Idiocracy

Sending American-style education to China could stunt the dragon's rise.

By Peter Wood

CHINA'S RISE from the nightmarish reign of Mao Zedong to maker-of-all-things WalMart typically rests as lightly as a feather on me. Or rather, many feathers: I think of China as spreading a down comforter over the great futon of American life. Sometimes as I doze comfortably in this splendid world of cheap luxuries, however, I am agitated by an intrusive thought. Where is all this leading?

China's barreling economic growth, military vigor, gargantuan trade surpluses, and disdain for Western niceties like elected government and free speech are almost enough to make me want to

go out and buy something American. Then I get hold of myself. What do Americans make besides YouTube videos, pornography, and vitamins? In any case, I frequently run across the assurance that having achieved economic freedom, China will inexorably move towards political freedom. I am a little shaky on the mechanism by which this will occur, but occur it must. The Chinese down comforter comforts all alike and makes no exception for political theorists.

I don't mean to imply any reservations about the value of free trade between the U.S. and the world's most