

Pakistan: They Don't Blame Al-Qa'ida. They Blame Musharraf

Tuesday 1 January 2008, by [FISK Robert](#) (Date first published: 30 December 2007).

Weird, isn't it, how swiftly the narrative is laid down for us. Benazir Bhutto, the courageous leader of the Pakistan People's Party, is assassinated in Rawalpindi - attached to the very capital of Islamabad wherein ex-General Pervez Musharraf lives - and we are told by George Bush that her murderers were "extremists" and "terrorists". Well, you can't dispute that.

But the implication of the Bush comment was that Islamists were behind the assassination. It was the Taliban madmen again, the al-Qa'ida spider who struck at this lone and brave woman who had dared to call for democracy in her country.

Of course, given the childish coverage of this appalling tragedy - and however corrupt Ms Bhutto may have been, let us be under no illusions that this brave lady is indeed a true martyr - it's not surprising that the "good-versus-evil" donkey can be trotted out to explain the carnage in Rawalpindi.

Who would have imagined, watching the BBC or CNN on Thursday, that her two brothers, Murtaza and Shahnawaz, hijacked a Pakistani airliner in 1981 and flew it to Kabul where Murtaza demanded the release of political prisoners in Pakistan. Here, a military officer on the plane was murdered. There were Americans aboard the flight - which is probably why the prisoners were indeed released.

Only a few days ago - in one of the most remarkable (but typically unrecognised) scoops of the year - Tariq Ali published a brilliant dissection of Pakistan (and Bhutto) corruption in the *London Review of Books*, focusing on Benazir and headlined: "Daughter of the West" [\[1\]](#). In fact, the article was on my desk to photocopy as its subject was being murdered in Rawalpindi.

Towards the end of this report, Tariq Ali dwelt at length on the subsequent murder of Murtaza Bhutto by police close to his home at a time when Benazir was prime minister - and at a time when Benazir was enraged at Murtaza for demanding a return to PPP values and for condemning Benazir's appointment of her own husband as minister for industry, a highly lucrative post.

In a passage which may yet be applied to the aftermath of Benazir's murder, the report continues: "The fatal bullet had been fired at close range. The trap had been carefully laid, but, as is the way in Pakistan, the crudeness of the operation - false entries in police log-books, lost evidence, witnesses arrested and intimidated - a policeman killed who they feared might talk - made it obvious that the decision to execute the prime minister's brother had been taken at a very high level."

When Murtaza's 14-year-old daughter, Fatima, rang her aunt Benazir to ask why witnesses were being arrested - rather than her father's killers - she says Benazir told her: "Look, you're very young. You don't understand things." [\[2\]](#) Or so Tariq Ali's exposé would have us believe. Over all this, however, looms the shocking power of Pakistan's ISI, the Inter Services Intelligence.

This vast institution - corrupt, venal and brutal - works for Musharraf.

But it also worked - and still works - for the Taliban. It also works for the Americans. In fact, it works

for everybody. But it is the key which Musharraf can use to open talks with America's enemies when he feels threatened or wants to put pressure on Afghanistan or wants to appease the "extremists" and "terrorists" who so oppress George Bush. And let us remember, by the way, that Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter beheaded by his Islamist captors in Karachi, actually made his fatal appointment with his future murderers from an ISI commander's office. Ahmed Rashid's book Taliban provides riveting proof of the ISI's web of corruption and violence. Read it, and all of the above makes more sense.

But back to the official narrative. George Bush announced on Thursday he was "looking forward" to talking to his old friend Musharraf. Of course, they would talk about Benazir. They certainly would not talk about the fact that Musharraf continues to protect his old acquaintance - a certain Mr Khan - who supplied all Pakistan's nuclear secrets to Libya and Iran. No, let's not bring that bit of the "axis of evil" into this.

So, of course, we were asked to concentrate once more on all those "extremists" and "terrorists", not on the logic of questioning which many Pakistanis were feeling their way through in the aftermath of Benazir's assassination.

It doesn't, after all, take much to comprehend that the hated elections looming over Musharraf would probably be postponed indefinitely if his principal political opponent happened to be liquidated before polling day.

So let's run through this logic in the way that Inspector Ian Blair might have done in his policeman's notebook before he became the top cop in London.

Question: Who forced Benazir Bhutto to stay in London and tried to prevent her return to Pakistan?
Answer: General Musharraf.

Question: Who ordered the arrest of thousands of Benazir's supporters this month? Answer: General Musharraf.

Question: Who placed Benazir under temporary house arrest this month? Answer: General Musharraf.

Question: Who declared martial law this month? Answer General Musharraf.

Question: who killed Benazir Bhutto?

Er. Yes. Well quite.

You see the problem? Yesterday, our television warriors informed us the PPP members shouting that Musharraf was a "murderer" were complaining he had not provided sufficient security for Benazir. Wrong. They were shouting this because they believe he killed her.

P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF: [Benazir: Daughter of the West](#)

[2] See also on ESSF in French: [Benazir Bhutto peut-elle sauver la démocratie ?](#)