

# Pakistan in Turmoil after Benazir Bhutto's Assassination

Thursday 3 January 2008, by [AHMED Manan](#), [ALI Tariq](#), [GONZALEZ Juan](#), [GOODMAN Amy](#) (Date first published: 28 December 2007).

Hundreds and thousands of Pakistanis attend the funeral of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Pakistan's political future remains unclear and riots erupted as news of Bhutto's assassination spread across the country. Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has blamed Islamic militants for carrying out the assassination, but several associates of Bhutto have accused Musharraf himself of having a role. In an email sent to a confidant in the US two months ago, Benazir Bhutto wrote that Musharraf should be held "responsible" if she was assassinated, because his government did not do enough to provide for her security. We go to British-Pakistani author and activist Tariq Ali in London and historian Manan Ahmed in Chicago for analysis of the current crisis and Benazir Bhutto's checkered history. [includes rush transcript]

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** Benazir Bhutto, the twice-elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, has just been buried in her home province of Sindh. She was assassinated Thursday evening after a political rally near the capital, plunging the country into a state of chaos.

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered in her ancestral village for her funeral, despite a long night of violence. As news of Bhutto's death rippled across the country, Pakistan was engulfed by riots.

Benazir Bhutto, the fifty-four-year-old mother of three, comes from a family steeped in both politics and tragedy. Her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a democratically elected populist leader in the 1970s who was executed by the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1979. One of her brothers was poisoned, and another shot to death.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Bhutto returned to Pakistan this October after being forced from power in 1996 on corruption charges. Her return was brokered by the United States. But Bhutto's homecoming was met with a suicide bombing she narrowly survived. 140 people were killed in that attack.

Bhutto spoke out against the bombing and said she believes government officials might have been involved in the attack.

*BENAZIR BHUTTO: We want to avoid bloodshed. We want to avoid loss of life. But I also want to say that if it means sacrificing our lives, if it means sacrificing our liberty to save Pakistan and to save democracy, because we believe democracy alone can save Pakistan from disintegration and a militant takeover, then we are prepared to risk our lives, and we are prepared to risk our liberty. But we are not prepared to surrender our great nation to the militants.*

**AMY GOODMAN:** Benazir Bhutto, speaking in October after escaping a suicide bombing attempt. President Musharraf expressed his condolences to Bhutto's family on Thursday after the assassination and announced a three-day period of mourning. He blamed "terrorists" for the attack and said terrorism is the country's biggest hurdle.

*PRESIDENT PERVEZ MUSHARRAF: [translated] I have always said that the biggest threat to*

*Pakistan and this nation is from these terrorists. Today, on this sad occasion, I want to make a pledge. I want to make this pledge, and I seek unity and support from the nation, that they will support me in this, that we will not sit and rest until we get rid of these terrorists and root them out completely. This is the only way out for Pakistan and for the nation, because this is the biggest hurdle for our prosperity and progress.*

**AMY GOODMAN:** Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf condemning the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Nawaz Sharif, once Bhutto's staunch political rival, also a former prime minister, visited the hospital shortly after Bhutto died. He blamed President Musharraf for allowing the "lapses in security" and announced that he would boycott the elections.

Three hours before the attack on Bhutto, gunfire killed four supporters of Nawaz Sharif in a rally outside Islamabad.

*NAWAZ SHARIF: [translated] The attacks on the two biggest national political parties on the same day indicate the intention of Musharraf. It was a preconceived conspiracy. Now this fully proves that there can be no free elections in Musharraf's presence. The chaos and killings cannot stop until Musharraf is there. There can be no peace in his presence, and the Federation of Pakistan cannot stand firm. And there is no doubt in that. In these circumstances, we have decided that after the barbaric killing of Benazir Bhutto, we are going to boycott the elections.*

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** Pakistani opposition leader Nawaz Sharif announcing his boycott of the elections scheduled for January 8<sup>th</sup>. The government, however, has reportedly said it will go ahead with the elections.

President Bush also denounced the attack Thursday and held "murderous extremists" responsible.

*PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: The United States strongly condemns this cowardly act by murderous extremists who are trying to undermine Pakistan's democracy. Those who committed this crime must be brought to justice. Mrs. Bhutto served her nation twice as prime minister, and she knew that her return to Pakistan earlier this year put her life at risk. Yet she refused to allow assassins to dictate the course of her country. We stand with the people of Pakistan in their struggle against the forces of terror and extremism. We urge them to honor Benazir Bhutto's memory by continuing with the democratic process for which she so bravely gave her life.*

**AMY GOODMAN:** President Bush condemning the assassination of the former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

For the latest update on Pakistan, we turn first to Manan Ahmed, a historian of modern Pakistan and South Asian Islam. He blogs at Chapati Mystery and Juan Cole's Informed Comment: Global Affairs. We welcome you, Manan, to Democracy Now!. First, talk about the latest that you understand is happening.

**MANAN AHMED:** Thank you for having me, Amy. The latest that I've—that's being reported through national and local media in Pakistan is that the government has called for an all-party conference and for the sake of determining whether the elections will be held January 8<sup>th</sup> or not. And the government has stated that whatever the decision emerges out of the all-party conference, they would abide by it, which is a very important step since Nawaz Sharif, as we just heard, has issued a boycott of the election.

The Pakistan People's Party has announced a forty-day mourning period. And other major political players, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, the Islamist parties, have so far—and MQM—have so far been on

the fence about whether or not they will participate any further.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** Well, Manan, given the forty-day mourning period declared by the People's Party, how could the government even be considering going ahead with these elections, as we're only talking about a little bit more than a week from now?

**MANAN AHMED:** Right, and that's absolutely right. You know, it's very hard to imagine an election taking place with campaigning and candidates standing, in the sense that if the government decides to go through with it, then the only clear indication would be that PLM-Q, the sort of the pro-government, pro-Musharraf party, has been put specifically in power. So the election, for all purposes, would appear to be rigged.

**AMY GOODMAN:** We're going to go now to Britain to Tariq Ali, the British Pakistani historian, activist, commentator, one of the editors of the New Left Review, author of more than a dozen books, was recently back in Pakistan, where he was born. Tariq, talk about your response on Thursday when you heard the news, and talk about why Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan.

**TARIQ ALI:** Well, Amy, my first reaction was anger. I was livid that Bush and his acolytes in Britain had fixed this deal, pushing her to do a deal with Musharraf, forcing her to play a role, which, of course, she agreed to do—it has to be admitted—in Pakistan, which she was not capable of playing. She made some extremely injudicious remarks, saying that she would go back, she was the only person who could deal with terrorism, etc., etc. The fact was that this was not the case.

And, you know, to—I wrote at the time that it is a big, big problem when you try and arrange a political marriage between two parties who loathe each other. And so, Musharraf very rapidly, after her return, embarrassed her by instituting a state of emergency. And she then didn't know whether to defend the state of emergency; finally, she attacked it. So the whole situation was a complete mess.

And now, everyone in Pakistan knows that an election organized in this fashion, under the leadership of a guy who's become a master at rigging elections, is not going to achieve anything. So Benazir was advised by close advisers, including one of the central leaders of her party, Aitzaz Ahsan, who is still in prison, by the way, saying we must not participate in this election, it's totally fake and rigged, it should be boycotted. She refused to accept that, because Washington insisted that she participate in this election, and she was torn in her loyalties. And finally, she, a woman of great physical courage, lacked the political courage to defy Washington. And I have to say this, it's cost her her life. Had she decided to boycott the election, this would not have happened.

And for Washington to send her to Pakistan, reassuring her that she would be safe, is shocking. At the very least, if they were insistent on doing this, they could have provided her with a Marine guard like Karzai gets in Kabul. But, you know, they depended on the locals to guard her, and they obviously couldn't do it. So she's now dead. And it's a tragedy. It's a personal tragedy for her and her family. And it sort of has begun, embarked on a new crisis for Pakistan, which is going to get worse.

I mean, I think Musharraf's days are numbered. I don't think he will be, even if he has this fake election in a week or ten days' time, which Bush is forcing him to do—I mean, I cannot understand, for the life of me, how the President of the United States can be so isolated and remote from reality as to insist that an election goes ahead when one of the central political leaders in the country, backed by Washington, has just been assassinated. I mean, what the hell are they going to achieve from this election? Nothing. It will not give legitimacy to anyone. It will create possibly, very rapidly afterwards, a new crisis, and then they will have to have a new military leader stepping in.

**AMY GOODMAN:** We're talking to Tariq Ali, a British Pakistani historian, activist, commentator; also Manan Ahmed, historian of modern Pakistan and South Asian Islam. This is Democracy Now! We're talking about Benazir Bhutto and Pakistan for the hour. Stay with us.

[break]

**AMY GOODMAN:** For our radio listeners, you can go to our website to see the video images that we show throughout the broadcast today on Pakistan. I'm Amy Goodman, with Juan Gonzalez. Our guests are Manan Ahmed, historian of modern Pakistan and South Asian Islam, as well as Tariq Ali, British Pakistani historian, activist and commentator, one of the editors of the *New Left Review*. Juan?

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** Yes, I'd like to ask Tariq Ali, I was struck by your counter-posing the physical courage of Benazir Bhutto with some of the lack of political courage. And this is something that you've remarked in many of your articles in the past, including interviews you had with her. I remember one article where you talked about a 1988 interview, I think it was, that you had with her when she was prime minister and how she was hemmed in by the political forces in Pakistan, but would not publicly tell her supporters what was going on. Could you talk about that in this sort of—this trend throughout her leadership of this lack of political courage.

**TARIQ ALI:** Well, Juan, this is absolutely right, and it's been her tragedy and the country's tragedy. When she came to power, elected for the first time, it is absolutely true she was hemmed in by the military on one side and an old rogue of a bureaucrat who had been made president on the other.

And she told me very openly, "I can't do anything." And I said to her at the time in Prime Minister's house in Islamabad, "I understand that, but there are two things you have to do. One, you have to make it very clear to the people publicly that this is the reason I can't deliver my promises on land reform, on health, on education. They won't let me do anything. This is why I can't make any readjustments in foreign policy. They have imposed their own foreign minister, Yacoub, on me, who insists we carry on as before," etc. etc. She didn't do that.

And I think by this time she had become a very different person politically from what she had been earlier and had decided that she didn't want to be on the wrong side of history, so to speak. She more or less said that to me. And she realized or she thought that the only way to survive in this world was basically to do the bidding of the army at home and Washington abroad, two institutions which had led to the—which had basically bumped off her dad in 1979 and which were not going to do her any favors.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Tariq, explain that, how her father died and who was involved in his assassination, in his execution.

**TARIQ ALI:** Her father was probably the most popular politician in Pakistan, pledging massive social reforms. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had been elected in the 1970 elections, had won a large majority in the country that we now know as Pakistan and had been elected on a very radical platform. He came to power.

He implemented some of his reforms, not all, became extremely autocratic, clashed with the United States on a number of issues, including Pakistan's right to have nuclear weapons. Henry Kissinger warned him in private that if you do not desist on the nuclear issue, we will make a terrible example out of you. That's what Bhutto wrote from his death cell. The United States organized a military coup d'etat. General Zia-ul-Haq took power in 1977, organized a trial against Bhutto, charging him with an absurd charge of murdering someone. The judges were pressured, and they found him

guilty, and Bhutto was hanged in April 1979. It could not have happened without US support and approval, because Zia was a nobody, and Washington clearly green-lighted the murder.

And Bhutto, from his death cell, wrote a very moving document called "If I Am Assassinated," in which he said there are two hegemonies—these are his words. He said, "There are two hegemonies that dominate our country. One is an internal hegemony, and the other is an external hegemony. And unless we challenge the external hegemony, we will never be able to deal with the internal one," meaning Washington is the external hegemony and the army is the internal one. And this is a problem which still haunts Pakistan and which, I have to say, has now created this new crisis.

And unfortunately, his daughter decided to collaborate with both of these hegemonies. One has to say this. Her second period in office was a total disaster, because not only did she do nothing for the poor or her natural constituency, but basically it became an extremely corrupt government, and she and her husband accumulated \$1.5 billion through corruption. This is well known to everyone.

Now, when the United States decided they wanted to put her back in there, they told her, we are going to whitewash you so clean no one will even know. And this is what the global media and networks have been doing. Look, I knew her well. I'm very upset that she's dead. But the piety being displayed on the global media networks is beyond belief. You know, it's as if there's no past, no history in this country or its politicians.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** I'd like to ask Manan Ahmed about that, as well. She is being obviously lionized, especially in the US press, as a martyr, and she was considered, of among the leaders, the potential leaders of Pakistan, the one that would most go after terrorism or extremism, but she herself, when she was in her second period as prime minister, helped back the Taliban in Afghanistan, didn't she?

**MANAN AHMED:** Yes, that's right. I mean, there was a history of political deals made not just in Afghanistan, but also in Swat region, I mean, the region that currently is a huge source of aggravation for the military regime with separatist movement. And during her second tenure, she allowed an Islamist agenda to be implemented, although curtailed to a certain extent. So, I mean, the sort of mythology of her being a sole democratic, modern, secular force in Pakistan is absolutely erroneous.

The key, I think, here is just as Tariq Ali has pointed out, is that the emphasis on her being the sole democratic sort of voice in Pakistan is belied simply by the events of 2007, when, in Pakistan since March, the lawyers and the civil society has participated in a mass movement for judicial rights, rights of the judiciary, for democratic practices. And this is a movement which had nothing to do with Benazir Bhutto in any shape as an ideologue or as a leader. This was a true movement of democratic reform that Washington should have supported from the very beginning, or at least since August, when it became clear that it was clearly the will of the Pakistani people. And installing Benazir from outside or brokering a deal undercut whatever legitimacy that she may have had with the people of Pakistan, which is not denying the fact that, you know, she is—I'm sorry, she was a very popular leader. But legitimacy is the key term here, something that Musharraf's regime is now sorely lacking, as well.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Let's talk for a minute about Benazir Bhutto returning. The Washington Post reports the United States brokered Bhutto's return to Pakistan in October in a deal where she could be prime minister, Musharraf could retain the presidency. In August of this year, Benazir Bhutto discussed her negotiations with General Musharraf.

*BENAZIR BHUTTO: As far as my understanding with General Musharraf is concerned, the ban on the twice-elected prime minister must go before the election period kicks in. And if that ban does not*

*go, then obviously the agreement is not there.*

**AMY GOODMAN:** That was Benazir Bhutto in August. Tariq Ali, you begin an extended piece that you wrote over this twenty-four hours by talking about who in Washington, people like John Negroponte, who were instrumental in her return.

**TARIQ ALI:** Well, yeah. I mean, John Negroponte was the ghoulish go-between fixing up—trying to fix up the marriage between Benazir and Musharraf, backed, as always, by the ever-loyal acolytes in the British Foreign Office, who were also pushing this deal without any real understanding, in my opinion, of what was going on in the country or what the country needed.

And essentially, Amy, if one has to ask the question, what was the desperation? The notion that the Jihadis in Pakistan are on the verge of achieving power is total nonsense. There is no danger, in my opinion, of any Jihadis coming close to Pakistan's nuclear facilities. The army is half-a-million strong, one of the toughest armies in the world. It will not permit anyone to get close to the nuclear facility, the Jihadis or the United States, if they tried. So that is not on.

The real crisis is a crisis in Afghanistan, which they don't like talking about, an occupation which is going badly wrong, seeing the revival of the Taliban. The United States knows this fully well and is negotiating with the Taliban behind the scenes. They don't even bother denying it.

So this is what is going on, and they needed a politician in Pakistan who could act on their behalf, like Karzai does in Kabul. And they picked Benazir, because they didn't trust the Sharif brothers. They thought they were too close to the Saudis, which is true, by the way. So they picked on Benazir to do the deal, because they thought Musharraf on his own was too closely attached to extremely retrograde elements and that Benazir would be able to swing it. But, you know, nothing in Pakistan can be swung without the army.

So they were the key players, and they, 'til now, have been backing Musharraf. And they backed Musharraf's decision to impose an emergency, which completely pulled the rug underneath Benazir's feet. And it's at this point that the United States should have realized that an election in these conditions is completely foolish. It was not going to deliver anything. It was going to be rigged. There was no secret about it. Benazir herself said this: "I fear this is going to be a rigged election." Well, if that is the case, why participate in it?

**AMY GOODMAN:** Our top story yesterday, before we learned of Benazir Bhutto's assassination, was Pakistan, and it was the news that had come out about questions being raised over how Pakistan had spent \$5 billion in US aid sent since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. According to the New York Times, the money was supposed to have been spent to fight al-Qaeda and the Taliban, but now US officials are admitting that the funds were diverted to help finance weapons designed to counter India, another US ally. Tariq Ali?

**TARIQ ALI:** Well, this is totally true, and why are they surprised? It's been happening for years. You know, I remember during the war in Afghanistan when the Russians were there in the '80s. The United States, you know, sent billions into Pakistan in both money and weapons, including very advanced weapons, to help the Pakistan army and the Jihadi groups fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. And the same thing was happening: weapons were being sold on the open market, weapons money was being diverted. And when the Pentagon sent in its auditors to check what was happening to the money, one of the largest arms dumps, where a lot of American equipment was stored, suddenly blew up the day before the team delegation arrived from the United States in Ojri. I happened to be in the country then, and the blast was heard all over the city. So that is what they do. So no one should be surprised that this is what is being done.

I mean, essentially, the Pakistani—or sections inside the Pakistani military have never got used to the idea that they are no longer strong in Afghanistan, that they no longer control Kabul, and they believe that after NATO leaves, they'll take it back. And for the United States, the choice is either to use the Pakistan army as a cop to control Afghanistan or to fix a regional deal so that Afghanistan's stability is guaranteed by Russia, Iran, India and Pakistan. That is the way to go, not deal unilaterally with the Pakistani military. But no one is listening in Washington, because they're completely visionless at the moment. So the fact that these billions have been spent to provide security to fight one particular enemy and now being used to shore up the country against another supposed enemy shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. That's how things happen there.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** I'd like to ask Manan Ahmed, the day that President Musharraf declared his state of the emergency a couple of months ago, there was a long article in the New York Times. Buried at the very end of that article on the coup within a coup, in essence, was the result of a public opinion poll that had been conducted by a Washington firm in Pakistan, which showed that President Musharraf had a popularity rating slightly better than George Bush, but not much, but that Osama bin Laden was viewed favorably by more than 40% of the Pakistani people, an astounding figure, in my mind. And I'm wondering, your sense of this continued unrest and instability in Pakistan, now this assassination, the impact of these changes on the growth of fundamentalism within the Pakistani population.

**MANAN AHMED:** I think—I mean, part of the quote/unquote “threat” of, you know, an Islamist Pakistan is rather overblown. The recent history, both electoral politics and political discourse in the country clearly points that the Islamists have not been able to gather much support, even, you know, besides the sort of polls about Osama bin Laden and George Bush.

But that's not to say that in the last two years there hasn't been a marked increase in lack of stability and sort of, you know, what the Pakistani press calls foreign intervention in the areas in Balochistan, which is a separatist crisis, a crisis of federal versus state rights—it's a very real crisis with a long history—and in the sort of northwestern regions, Sawat, Peshawar. So there is something to the fact that militants, whether within Pakistan or from Afghanistan, are operating with greater autonomy.

Now, the military, of course, has the means and the power to deal with them. And they've been trying to do so with great casualties, I must add, in the last two years. But the basic point is that Musharraf lacks legitimacy from the people of Pakistan to fully commit to such actions in Balochistan and in the northwestern regions. And that political legitimacy translates to, you know, failure to act as strong as they would really like to do to carry out these operations. And that legitimacy is not going to come from even through the sort of, you know, civilian presidential role that he has now put upon himself. That legitimacy can only come from a democratically elected people. And again, Pakistan's history is very clear that were inactions to happen, even now, the people will elect someone who—you know, parties who are not lockstep with some extremist ideology, as the mainstream media, at least in the United States, would have you believe.

**AMY GOODMAN:** We're talking to Manan Ahmed, historian of modern Pakistan and South Asian Islam. He's speaking to us from Chicago. We're also speaking with Tariq Ali, British Pakistani historian, activist, commentator, is one of the editors of the New Left Review, author of more than a dozen book. When we come back, I also want to ask about the increase of US troops expected in Pakistan in 2008. This is a Democracy Now! special on the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Stay with us.

[break]

**AMY GOODMAN:** Hundreds of thousands of people have come out to mourn the death of Benazir

Bhutto, the former Pakistani prime minister. She was assassinated yesterday. Our guests are Tariq Ali, British Pakistani historian, activist, commentator, knew Benazir Bhutto; Manan Ahmed, historian of modern Pakistan and South Asian Islam.

Another part of our headlines yesterday, before the assassination, a top headline, the Washington Post reporting that US Special Forces expecting to vastly expand their presence in Pakistan in early 2008. The US troops reportedly taking part in an effort to train and support Pakistani counterinsurgency forces and clandestine counterterrorism units. Tariq Ali, talk about the significance of this.

**TARIQ ALI:** Well, I think, you know, the significance of this is that the United States refuses to understand that there is a big political problem which cannot be dealt with militarily. And that political problem can be summed up as follows, that the people of Afghanistan—like it or dislike it—do not like being occupied by foreign powers. They didn't like being occupied by the Russians, and they don't like being occupied by the United States and the NATO armies in their country. And as long as this foreign occupation lasts, there will be, you know, forms of resistance against it.

Now, this crisis and instability in Afghanistan is seeping across the border into northwestern Pakistan. Pakistan is, you know, sending troops to fight some of the people who come over the border, some who belong to Pakistan, who are fighting against NATO. They order their soldiers to kill, and Pakistani soldiers are refusing to open fire. That is essentially what's going on.

And the reason they're refusing to open fire is because for the last twenty-five years this ideology implanted in their heads when they're being trained to be soldiers in the Pakistan army is that your enemy is the Hindu. Your enemy is India. Your enemy is the traditional enemy of Pakistan and of Muslims, and these are the people you'll be fighting. This is what they've been led to believe.

Now they are being told that your enemies are other Muslims from a neighboring Muslim country, and so there's a massive crisis, a big psychological crisis, for lots of soldiers who are not fighting. In fact, you often read in the Pakistani press reports—twenty soldiers surrender, fifty soldiers surrender. And they are surrendering to groups of four or five armed Taliban or, you know, non-Taliban fighters from Afghanistan. This is impossible to understand, except in political terms.

So training more specialized troops isn't going to do the trick, if there's this basic problem, which is, as Juan was asking earlier, when you have some of these opinion polls, the reason people say that if there's a choice between Bush and bin Laden, they'll back bin Laden, or between—it's not because they're extremists in that sense, but they don't like the fact that Pakistan is totally on its knees as a state before Washington and the United States. It doesn't argue with them. It doesn't resist them on any level at all. So the fact that it's independent is neither here nor there. So sending in more US troops is actually going to make things much, much worse for pro-US politicians in that country. And they should be prepared for that.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** Tariq, I'd like to ask you, in an article in November, an extensive article on Pakistan, you delved in much detail into the death of one of Benazir Bhutto's brothers, Murtaza Bhutto, who—there's been much made of the history of violence in the family, of violent deaths of her father and both of her brothers. But you go in particular detail into the differences that had developed over the years between Benazir and her brother. Could you talk about that?

**TARIQ ALI:** Well, this was a big tragedy for this family. But, yeah, I mean, essentially what happened is that when Murtaza Bhutto returned to the country, their mother, Nusrat Bhutto, was chairperson of the Pakistan People's Party. Benazir was the prime minister of Pakistan. And the mother wanted Murtaza, as a member of the family and of the party, to be made chief minister of the



province of Sindh. At this point, Benazir's husband, Asif Zardari, said that this was intolerable, because he and Murtaza weren't exactly close. And Benazir then sacked her mother as chairperson of the party and became chairperson for life of the party herself. Her brother was being provoked by the local bureaucracy in Sindh. And finally, one day, returning to his home, his father's home, from where his father had been picked up by General Zia's commandos, he found a police ambush. The police were hoping that he would open fire, but he didn't. He came out, out of his car with his bodyguards to surrender, and they shot him dead on the street, while his sister was prime minister.

Now, you know, there was a judicial inquiry into this, where the Murtaza Bhutto's family lawyers accused Benazir's husband of being responsible for having organized all this. The judicial inquiry, appointed by Benazir, said what while they couldn't exactly pin the—you know, point the finger at any one person, there was absolutely no doubt that the murder of Murtaza Bhutto had been organized and ordered from the highest level. Well, you know, they didn't have to say much more.

And Murtaza's daughter, Fatima, in an op-ed piece for the LA Times a few—four or five weeks ago, actually accused Benazir's husband of having carried out her father's murder eleven years ago. Just before the media, independent media, was taken off the air by Musharraf, one of the largest networks, Geo, was interviewing Benazir and asked her, said, "How was it that when you were prime minister, your brother lay bleeding to death outside his house? Were you—you know, what did you know about that?" She walked out of the studio.

So this is a very awkward question, but I have studied all the documentation now, and I have little doubt that the murder was ordered at the highest levels. Whether she knew it was going to happen is an open question. She is the only one who knew, and she is now dead. But there is absolutely no doubt that unless an instruction from someone at Prime Minister's house, the police force in Karachi would not have killed the prime minister's brother. Things do not happen that way.

**AMY GOODMAN:** I wanted to ask you, Tariq Ali, about this quote of Senator Barack Obama's top campaign strategist, David Axelrod, who responded to the assassination by highlighting Hillary Clinton's vote to support the US invasion of Iraq. He said, quote, "Barack Obama had the judgment to oppose the war in Iraq, and he warned at the time that it would divert us from Afghanistan and al-Qaeda, and now we see the effect of that. Senator Clinton made a different judgment. Let's have that discussion," he said.

**TARIQ ALI:** Well, I mean, you know, I think both of them were wrong, quite honestly. I think obviously Hillary Clinton was foolish, if not crazy, to support the war in Iraq. She couldn't see beyond her nose. And it's good that Obama opposed it. But for Obama and, I may say, many others who say that the only reason they can't do anything in Afghanistan is because they are bogged down in Iraq is nonsense. I mean, they took Afghanistan without a fight. There was no—in the early years, there was no resistance at all. And the reason for that is that the Taliban didn't fight. The Pakistani army told them, "Don't fight back now. We don't want to have any more people killed. Let them take over the country."

**AMY GOODMAN:** But the point of Axelrod's comment, the top strategist for Barack Obama, was responding to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, saying that here you have the war in Iraq, it diverted us from Afghanistan and al-Qaeda, and now we see the effect of this, responding to Benazir Bhutto. And this has caused a bit of an uproar here saying—as he's saying that Hillary Clinton is, you know, partially responsible by supporting the war and then seeing the surge of al-Qaeda in other places.

**TARIQ ALI:** Well, Amy, I mean, all I can say to that is, you know, politicians will say anything in the run-up to the primaries. But let's assume they hadn't invaded Iraq, OK? And let's assume that they

had sent twice as many soldiers into Afghanistan. I mean, the Russians, after all, did that. The notion that this would have somehow transformed the situation in Afghanistan is a joke. We don't even know to this day whether al-Qaeda was behind Benazir Bhutto's killing. I'm amazed to see newspaper headlines in quite a lot of Western newspapers. There is no evidence for it. For her to be killed not far from military headquarters, Pakistan's military capital, in the heart of the city, I personally find it very difficult to believe that any group of religious extremists could have carried this out without some support from some agency within the establishment. I can't believe it. So they assume that al-Qaeda carried this out.

But to return to Obama, if you'd had, you know, three times as more US troops in Afghanistan, casualties would have been higher. People would have—more people would have been fighting it. The real problem in Afghanistan is that they occupied it without having any understanding whatsoever what they were going to do. They put Karzai in, and they couldn't do anything to transform the lives of ordinary people in that country. You have large-scale corruption with Karzai and his cronies getting rich, with Karzai's brother actually in charge of the heroin trade and arms smuggling. That's the problem, that the people they put in had—were feathering their own nests. So I think Obama is out of line on this. I mean, there is no guarantee that if he had sent twice or three times as many troops, that the situation would have been any better. It could have been worse.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** I'd like to ask Manan Ahmed about the whole issue of the assassination and also its impact on the Bush administration policies regarding Pakistan. Clearly, all indications, or at least in the press in the US, are pointing to al-Qaeda. But as Tariq Ali raises the issue of the government's involvement is not—is certainly not out of the question. Your sense of the security precautions for Benazir Bhutto and also the impact on the Bush administration's policies there?

**MANAN AHMED:** Right. On the security front, there was lots of reports in local media in the last three or four days about the rally and specific threats made against Benazir Bhutto at that specific rally. And in fact, there was a report issued by the government saying the security at Liaquat Bagh is going to be foolproof and, you know, we're taking all steps to make sure that she has—you know, that she's completely secure. So, obviously, you know, reality did not jibe with whatever aversion that the government was sort of publicly proclaiming.

But I want to sort of step back a little bit and talk about this notion of how the United States has, since 1951, when Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated, another prime minister of Pakistan, and military regimes were put in place—there has been the—you know, American foreign policy has been towards developing individuals, you know, people that they can sort of work with and trust in these key areas in Pakistan and other Southeast Asia and the world. And so, you have a political climate which is geared towards cult of personality or charismatic leadership, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto being another key example, Benazir's father, and then Benazir herself when she comes back. And so, a lot of, you know, discussions, such as Tariq Ali, the history that he sort of described about Bhutto's machinations in power and her turmoil in her family life, goes to the fact that Pakistan was not allowed or did not have an adequate political sort of social structure—political structure throughout its history. So you have these personalities that at some point drop in and drop out, are assassinated, are blown out of the sky, as General Zia-ul-Haq was, and you end up to this day, where Benazir Bhutto is assassinated—entire foreign policy in the White House hinged on her—there is a complete vacuum of any leadership, outside of her, in that party at the moment.

So, you know, even if elections, as the White House is saying, that, you know, elections should go forth—which, again, is ludicrous—on January the 8<sup>th</sup>, well, who is going to stand on those elections in terms of leadership, true leadership? There is none in the People's Party, since Benazir sort of gathered all that influence into her own person, even in exile. And the same situation is true in other main parties in Pakistan.

So the way forward for the Bush administration is to support, you know, true democratic reform in Pakistan, which is a lot harder than occupying Iraq or occupying Afghanistan. It is. It's very hard, and there is no guarantee that things will turn out to Washington's liking. But there is a guarantee that people of Pakistan will have a true hope of going forward in their country and experiencing freedom and democracy as, you know, the Bush administration reminds us is the right of every human being.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Tariq Ali, finally—we have fifteen seconds—what you see as the future of Pakistan right now?

**TARIQ ALI:** Well, I think that General Musharraf's days are numbered. He has blown it. He was entrusted by Washington with pushing through this deal with Benazir. He wasn't able to do it. She was murdered on his watch. So I think sooner rather than later they'll be looking for someone else to remain—to replace him. And Pakistan's dark night will continue. We will enter into a new cycle of military rulers and corrupt politicians.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Tariq Ali, we have to leave it there. Tariq Ali, British Pakistani historian, activist and commentator; Manan Ahmed, historian of modern Pakistan and South Asia, blogs at Juan Cole's Informed Comment, as well as Chapati Mystery.

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## **P.S.**

\* From Democracy Now:

[http://www.democracynow.org/2007/12/28/pakistan\\_in\\_turmoil\\_after\\_benazir\\_bhuttos](http://www.democracynow.org/2007/12/28/pakistan_in_turmoil_after_benazir_bhuttos)

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\* Guests:

Tariq Ali, acclaimed British-Pakistani historian, activist, and commentator joins us now on the phone from London. He is one of the editors of the New Left Review and the author of a dozen books.

Manan Ahmed, historian of Pakistan and South Asian Islam. He blogs at Chapati Mystery and at Juan Cole's Informed Comment.