

Pakistani lawyers celebrate after the resignation of President Pervez Musharraf on a street in Karachi yesterday. Musharraf announced his resignation on Monday in the face of looming impeachment, ending a turbulent nine years in power.

Army's rejection spelled doom for Musharraf

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

He kept the suspense going until the very end. He built schools, clinics, irrigation projects, he said. He was innocent, chaos threatened. But finally, he had decided to go.

General Musharraf always liked to play the commander: decisive, daring, the master tactician. His first appearance on the nation's television after taking power in 1999 was at 3am, when the jammed single national TV channel cleared to reveal him in commando fatigues.

Never falsely modest, the serial misjudgments that led eventually to his resignation today were those of a military man with limited understanding of politics and of the social trends that, in part, his own policies had initiated.

So what happens now? First an interim president will be appointed, the chairman of the senate. Then a new election will be held for the post with votes cast by the two houses of the National

Assembly and the members of Pakistan's four provincial assemblies too.

Candidates and campaign are likely to be the subject of frantic negotiations, horse trading, political infighting and will almost certainly see a new arrangement of power between the two major coalition partners: Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League faction and Asif Zardari's Pakistan People's Party.

A new series of constitutional amendments to restrict the power of the president, based on the original 1973 constitution which gives much more power to the office of prime minister, is likely. As ever in Pakistan, the various legal and political manoeuvres over the next months will be complicated, opaque and will obsess the English language media and the elite of Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore particularly the significant number among them who welcomed the coup and who supported Musharraf for a long time.

Interest in the villages and small

towns in which two thirds of the population live will be more limited, despite the effects of the new private television chains.

Musharraf's problems are far from over. Though covered for his military coup in 1999 by a constitutional amendment, Musharraf has no such protection for the state of emergency he declared last autumn, bar some contested court judgments, and is thus going to be open to prosecution as long as he remains in Pakistan. There are also a lot of people mainly Islamic militants who want to kill him.

For the moment, Musharraf looks likely to be spared the courts. Some will regret that Pakistan has been spared a long and drawn-out battle to hold Musharraf to account. "An impeachment would have taken a long time but would have shown that coup-makers can be held accountable for their actions and set an important precedent," said Professor Osama Siddique, a constitutional expert at Lahore University of Management Sciences.

Yet the key factor in Musharraf's today's decision, one friend bitterly said, was his "hanging out to dry" by the army. Another way of looking at it is that General Ashfaq Kayani, who replaced the president as head of Pakistan's military when Musharraf belatedly became a simple civilian last year, has decided to restore the army's battered reputation domestically and internationally by withdrawing to the role of "guarantor" of Pakistani democracy, rather than being its dominant actor.

Along with the positive role played in the February general elections, where Kayani none too subtly warned Musharraf off any attempt at manipulation, the overall impression now that the president has gone is that this particular cycle of army rule has ended. There are shades here of 1988 when, following the sudden death of General Zia-ul-Haq after 11 years of dictatorial rule, the military top brass allowed a relatively smooth transition to civilian government.

World wants Pak stability

AFP, London

World leaders urged stability and unity in Pakistan -- seen by the West as a key partner in fighting terrorism -- as they reacted to news of Pervez Musharraf's resignation as president.

"We will continue to work with the Pakistani government and political leaders and urge them to redouble their focus on Pakistan's future and its most urgent needs, including stemming the growth of extremism," US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said.

In a statement, Rice called Musharraf "a friend to the United States and one of the world's most committed partners in the war against terrorism and extremism."

Pakistan's regional rival India declined to comment on Musharraf's decision, with the foreign ministry in Delhi describing it as an "internal matter" for its neighbour.

Musharraf, the former army chief who seized power in a coup in 1999, announced Monday in a

televised address that he would stand down in the face of looming impeachment charges.

Britain said Musharraf's announcement ended a "critical period" in Pakistan's history, and called for political leaders in Islamabad to unite to keep their nation on course with economic and security cooperation.

In Tokyo, Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda said he expected no immediate change to the US-led "war on terror" after Musharraf's departure.

"What kind of changes does this bring to the 'war-on-terror' and the Afghan situation? I don't expect any significant change for now," Fukuda told reporters.

"I would expect different things would occur later. But it is not a time for us to make predictions and share them with you," he added.

Japan is a major donor to Pakistan, a front-line ally in the US-led military efforts in Afghanistan, despite concerns about Islamabad's nuclear arsenal, public unrest and its democratic pro-

cess.

Afghanistan, whose President Hamid Karzai has had strained relations with Musharraf amid a surge in Islamic extremist violence, said it hoped the move would help strengthen the Pakistani government.

"We hope that the resignation of President Musharraf... leads to a strengthening of the civilian government and democracy in Pakistan," foreign ministry spokesman Sultan Ahmad Baheem told AFP.

"Afghanistan is in favour of a democratic and stable Pakistan which is based on the rule of law."

Russia, another major player in Central Asian geopolitics, expressed hope that Musharraf's departure would not cause instability in the country.

Russia hopes the departure of Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf will not have negative consequences for the internal political stability of this major Asian nation," its foreign ministry said in a statement.

Rise and fall of Musharaff

CNN-IBN, New Delhi

On October 12 1999, Pervez Musharraf went from being the chief of Pakistan's army to the chief of its government. In a bloodless coup, democracy was toppled and the general faced flak for it, but that didn't stop him from formally appointing himself President less than two years later on June 20, 2001.

The event which was going to define Musharraf's presidency however came later that year - on September 11.

Almost overnight, the man who many in the west had shunned as a dictator became a pivotal player in the war on terror. Islamists' back home, however, denounced him as a traitor.

In April 2002, Musharraf conducted a widely criticised referendum where he won himself five years in office. By August that year, he had sweeping new powers including the right to dismiss and elect a Parliament.

In October 2002, the general elections resulted in a hung parliament, but Musharraf bailed himself out by making a deal with a coalition of Islamic parties.

He promised to leave the army by December 31 2004, but later broke his promise.

The next few years saw him walking a tightrope. His relationship with the US had its ups and downs.

Musharraf's true test however lay ahead. On March 9, 2007, he fired chief justice Iftikhar Choudhary accusing him of misuse of authority. A week later, the police attacked the office of a private news channel minutes after it showed a video of police roughing up Choudhary's supporters.

On May 12, 2007, large-scale clashes left 35 people dead and then the Pakistani army raided the Lal Masjid on July 10. Musharraf had been avoiding action against the madarsa for nearly seven months, but finally, extremism was met with an iron fist.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Musharraf's peaceful exit brings only uncertainty

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

President Pervez Musharraf's days in office were numbered from the moment his nemesis, Nawaz Sharif, came to power in the elections that brought a coalition government to power in Pakistan.

Sharif, who was overthrown as prime minister in 1999 by General Musharraf in a bloodless coup, had been obsessed with revenge ever since he was sent into exile in Saudi Arabia by the president. Musharraf dealt him a further blow by thwarting his return from exile at the end of last year, sending him back to Saudi Arabia, hours after he returned to Islamabad.

The question now for Pakistan is whether the departure of the president who unlike most Pakistani politicians has never been accused

of corruption will bring more stability to the country. It will be a major test for the governing alliance which has discredited itself in recent months by in-fighting and squabbling. At least by going quietly, he has saved the country from a long-drawn out impeachment which would have plunged Pakistan into further political turmoil.

General Musharraf owes his longevity as president to his association with Washington's "war on terror", which secured him the West's unconditional backing. But as he stifled political freedoms, and instability reigned, there were mounting doubts about whether he remained a bulwark against Islamic extremism or whether he was part of the problem. So his departure from office will also raise big questions for his former back-

ers in the US and UK, which engineered the return of Benazir Bhutto as a way of marginalising the general who was deemed to be losing control of the security and political situation at the end of last year.

Washington already seems to have lost patience with the new civilian government, and the US military have been conducting strikes inside Pakistani territory against alleged al-Qaeda targets which no independent government in Islamabad will tolerate for long.

Ironically for the general, the man who once said that his uniform was like a "second skin", had shown signs of political skills since being forced to become civilian president as part of the deal that led to the return of Bhutto last October. She was assassinated on 27 December.

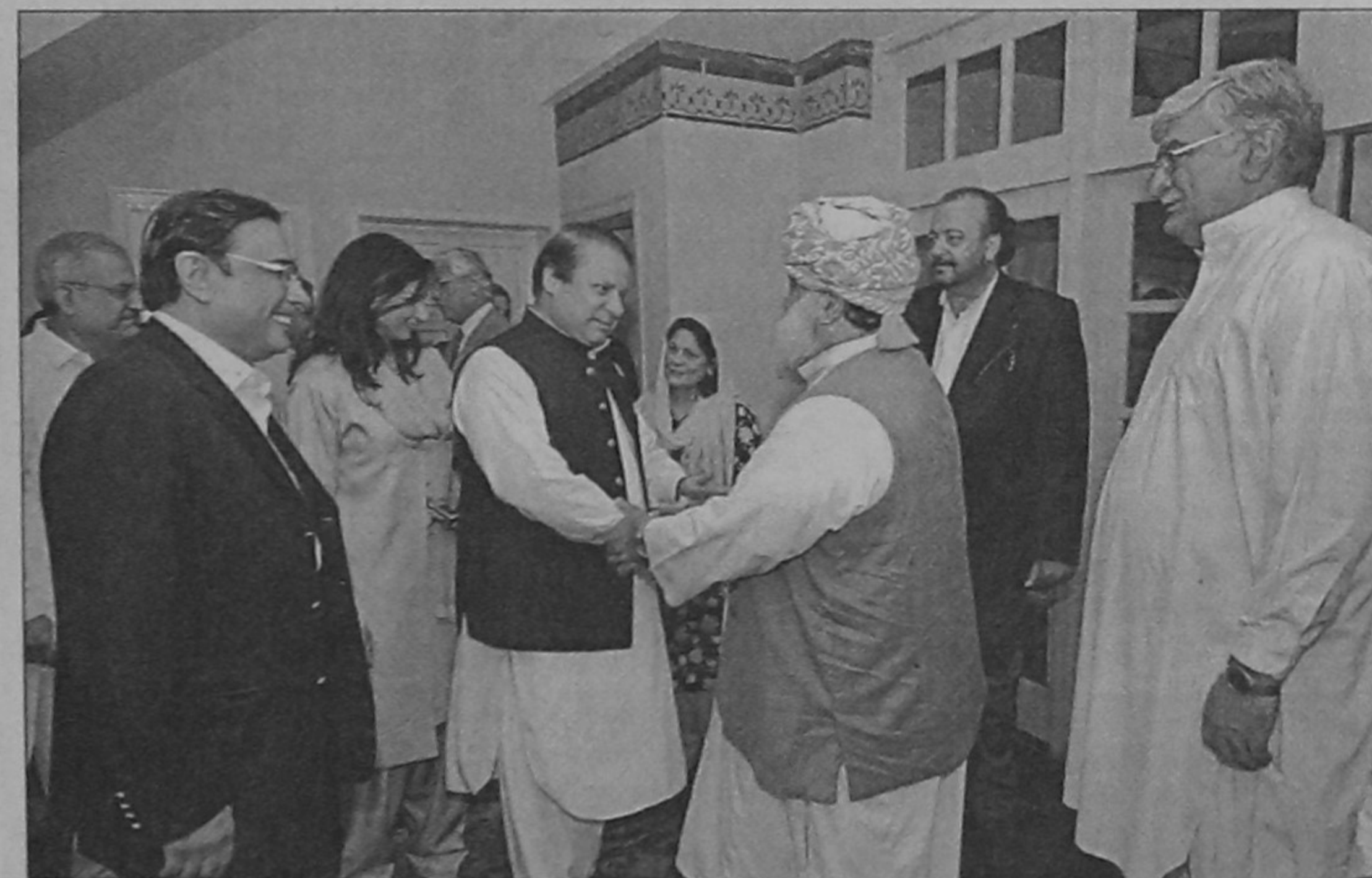


PHOTO AFP

Handout picture shows Pakistan's ruling coalition leaders Asfand Yarwani (R) and Asif Ali Zardari (L) watch Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman greets former prime minister Nawaz Sharif upon his arrival after the resignation of President Pervez Musharraf in Islamabad yesterday.

The strongman and the war on terror

BBC ONLINE

The resignation of Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf is a sign of how the "war on terror" is changing.

Musharraf was once the lynchpin of Pakistan's alliance with the United States in President George Bush's "war on terror", but the days of a single strongman laying down and executing the policy are gone.

Instead, a longer-term reliance on the emergence of democratic institutions to offer an alternative to extremism is taking place.

This partly explains why for the US and Britain, the departure of their former ally matters less than it once would have. His time came and went.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, President Bush drew up battle lines and President Musharraf

stepped forward to take his place in the frontline.

War on terror changing But today, al-Qaeda is seen as a weakened organisation, on the defensive in Iraq and unable to regroup in Afghanistan, while retaining its ambition and potential to cause real damage.

In such a situation, there is less need for battle cries against extremism - and more of a need for the building of representative governments - as in Iraq and now in Pakistan.

The "war on terror" is proving to be a generational struggle, similar perhaps to the Cold War, which saw communism in power across Russia, half of Europe and China for 50 years before it collapsed or significantly changed.

Civilian leadership In Musharraf's place comes a

civilian leadership, albeit in an unstable coalition government whose future is uncertain and whose ability to combat the extremism in the tribal areas is untested. Nobody yet knows who will be the next president.

But the coalition was the product of elections, not a coup, and therefore is now being projected by Washington and London as a surer basis for future action than the weakened Musharraf.

Role of military A great deal also depends, as always in Pakistan, on the military. The army chief, General Ashfaq Kayani, has moved to align himself with the civilian leadership and not long ago resigned some senior commanders appointed by Musharraf as a signal of his intentions.

But the army still faces a huge task in the border regions.

Chronology of events

AFP, Islamabad

Following is a brief chronology of major political developments in Pakistan since 1999 when Pervez Musharraf, who Monday announced his resignation as president to avoid impeachment charges, seized power as army chief.

-- 1999 --

October 12: Musharraf overthrows elected PM Nawaz Sharif after Sharif sacks him as army chief.

-- 2000 --

May 13: Supreme Court validates coup.

December: Sharif is freed from prison on hijacking and corruption charges, exiled to Saudi Arabia and banned from returning to Pakistan for 10 years.

-- 2001 --

June 20: Musharraf declares himself president after the incumbent, Mohammad Rafiq Tarar, resigns.

September 11: Musharraf drops support for Taliban and allies Pakistan with Washington after 9/11 attacks.

-- 2002 --

April 30: Musharraf wins controversial national referendum on his rule.

October 10: Pro-Musharraf Pakistan Muslim League-Q wins general elections.

November 16: Musharraf sworn in for a fresh five-year term.

-- 2003 --

December: Musharraf escapes two assassination attempts, one by Islamist military officers and the other by al-Qaeda.

-- 2004 --

January 1: Musharraf wins parliamentary vote of confidence affirming his unelected rule until 2007.

February: Musharraf pardons nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan for leaking nuclear secrets to Iran, North Korea and Libya.

December 30: Musharraf reneges on promise to quit as army chief.

-- 2007 --

March 9: Musharraf sacks chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, sparking protests. Chaudhry reinstated by Supreme Court in July.

July 10: Pakistani troops storm the radical Red Mosque.

October 6: Parliament elects Musharraf to another five-year term as president in a vote boycotted by the opposition.

October 18: Benazir Bhutto returns from exile.

November 3: Musharraf imposes state of emergency, sacks chief justice, suspends constitution.

November 25: Sharif returns from exile.

November 28: Musharraf steps down as army chief and hands control of military to General Ashfaq Kayani.

December 15: Musharraf lifts state of emergency.

December 27: Bhutto assassinated at election rally.

-- 2008 --

February 18: Parties of Bhutto and Sharif trounce Musharraf's allies in general elections.

March 24: Parliament elects Bhutto aide Yusuf Raza Gilani as prime minister.

August 7: Coalition says Musharraf to face impeachment.

August 17: Coalition says it has finalised impeachment charges.

August 18: Musharraf announces his resignation.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Exit unlikely to undo Pak militants

AP, Islamabad

The resignation of Pervez Musharraf removes a favorite bogeyman of Islamic militants both in and outside of Pakistan, but the government that forced him out is unlikely to change the policies that keep the jihadists fighting.

"It will take away a symbol of hatred but the essential issues don't end with Musharraf," said Shafqat Mahmood, a former government minister and political analyst.

The outgoing Pakistani president who abandoned Pakistan's support of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and sided with Washington after the Sept. 11 attacks has been largely sidelined since February elections brought his foes to power.

But the new civilian government has done surprisingly little to change his policies in the militant-infested northwest regions bordering Afghanistan and wants to retain close ties with the US, supporting the

international fight against Islamic extremism.

Mahmood said poverty, poor governance and anger at the US presence in Afghanistan combined to strengthen the pro-Taliban movement on both sides of the border.

Although suicide bombings overall have dropped since last year in Pakistan, the insurgent threat is as pervasive as ever.

"It's a virulent cancer that is eating into our society," said defense analyst Ikram Sehgal.

The coalition government's efforts to strike peace deals with militants are in tatters, and like Musharraf it is back to relying on the military to try to root out the extremists.

"I think they don't have any option," Rasul Bakhsh Rais, a politics professor at Lahore's University of Management Sciences. "The terrorists are not going to surrender. They have long-term objectives in the region."

Pakistani Taliban spokesman Maulvi Umar said Monday that

the Islamist movement was "happy" that Musharraf has resigned, but he called for an end to "his policies" mainly the use of the military.

"This is a positive change, but it is just the beginning," Umar said, promising, "If the government ends these policies, the Taliban will stop their activities immediately."

Militant attacks in various parts of the northwest are reported almost daily, and pro-Taliban insurgents have at times staged executions of people they claim are US spies.

In recent weeks, a massive military operation against insurgents in Bajur, a tribal region, has killed nearly 500 people, the government says, and displaced more than 200,000.

Other operations, such as in Khyber tribal agency, have also sought to emphasise government authority, but they have only spurred militant promises of revenge.

Meanwhile, officials say militant attacks across the border in

Afghanistan have surged because so many of the insurgents are finding refuge in Pakistan's tribal regions.

What Musharraf's departure could do is force the new government to focus on the Islamist threat, said analyst Talat Masood.

The ruling coalition's main parties have been distracted since they took power over how to deal with Musharraf as well as how to restore dozens of judges he fired last year.

Musharraf's own future home may depend on the militant threat against him. The outgoing president has already survived multiple assassination attempts and there is speculation that he may have to seek exile abroad for his own safety.

Umar said the militants weren't simply happy with a Musharraf resignation.

"He should also be awarded strict punishment, because he is a culprit of the whole country," Umar said.



PHOTO AFP

File picture taken on September 27, 2006 shows US President George W. Bush (C) speaking beside Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf (L) and Afghan President Hamid Karzai in the Rose Garden following a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC.

Pervez Musharraf	
President of Pakistan	
1943	Born in Old Delhi, in British-ruled India
1998	Appointed army chief by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif
1999	Takes power from Sharif in bloodless military coup
2001	Appoints himself president. Backs United States in "war on terror"
March 2007	Tries to sack chief justice, sparking nationwide protests
Oct 2007	Wins presidential election, boycotted by most of the opposition
Nov 2007	Declares state of emergency, suspends constitution. Steps down as head of army
Dec 2007	Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto assassinated
Feb 2008	Opposition parties win general election
Aug 7 2008	Government says Musharraf to face impeachment
Aug 18 2008	Musharraf announces resignation