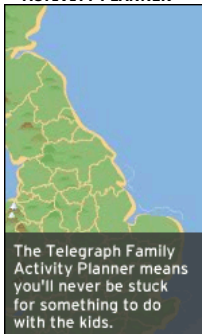




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**FEATURE FOCUS**

## Benazir Bhutto has only herself to blame

By Imran Khan  
Last Updated: 12:01am BST 21/10/2007

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I'm sorry to say this, but the bombing of Benazir Bhutto's cavalcade as she paraded through Karachi on Thursday night was a tragedy almost waiting to happen. You could argue it was inevitable.

Everyone here knew there was going to be a huge crowd turning up to see her return after eight years in self-imposed exile. Everyone also knows that there has been a spate of suicide bombings in Pakistan lately, especially in the frontier region where I am campaigning at the moment.

How was it ever going to be possible to monitor such a large crowd and guarantee that no suicide bombers would infiltrate it?



This may sound equally harsh, but she has only herself to blame. By making a deal with Musharraf's government — a deal brokered by the British as well as the Americans, by the way — she was hoping to get herself off the corruption charges that have been levelled against her.

What she hadn't taken into account was Musharraf's unpopularity. He is regarded in Pakistan as an American stooge. And the US war on terror, which he supports, is now perceived as a war against Islam.

That is why there is no shortage of recruits for the fundamentalist cause here. By siding with him, Benazir was making herself a target for assassination.

The sad thing is, she didn't need to do it. Musharraf was sinking and isolated. He was on the point of declaring a state of emergency. Just when it looked as if he had no lifelines left, Benazir came back and bailed him out.

Worse, by publicly siding with a dictator, she has deliberately sabotaged the democratic process. We have an election coming up in January. As leader of the Justice Party, I am running in it but it will be a free and fair election if Musharraf is still in charge.

He has dismantled state institutions, such as an independent judiciary and an election commission, and has introduced a controlled assembly, a controlled prime minister and a controlled media.

The polls show he can only win this next election if he massively rigs it. That is what he did in 2002, as confirmed by the EU monitoring team.

Given the way that she has undermined democracy by siding with Musharraf, I don't know how Benazir has the nerve to say that the 130 people killed in those bomb blasts sacrificed their lives for the sake of democracy in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, you can take your pick as to who was responsible for the two bombs that went off. At least three jihad groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Taliban were plotting suicide attacks — but one thing is for sure, there is no shortage of candidates.

The war on terror is turning everyone in the tribal border regions into potential guerrillas. Not militants necessarily but disparate groups who are becoming united by their suspicion of America. A coalition is forming, and al-Qaeda is going to be only a small part of it.

Benazir has made enemies for herself in this respect also. She alone among Pakistan's political party leaders has given public support to the massacre of women and children that Musharraf caused when he ordered his troops to attack the Red Mosque in Islamabad.

She also backed his attacks on civilians in the tribal regions. Note that Musharraf has called the civilian deaths there "collateral damage" — an American euphemism.



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Benazir also gave her backing to Musharraf's plan to allow Nato troops to hunt down maybe 200 or 300 Taliban and al-Qaeda supporters in the border region, but in doing that they have merely recruited a million potential supporters for the terrorists.

No one in the West understands that the tribal regions of Pakistan have always been an independent entity. They have never been conquered. Every man is a warrior and carries a gun. Even a superpower like the British Empire could not control that terrain. It had to bribe the tribes.

I have known Benazir since we were at Oxford together, but we have drifted apart politically since then. Perhaps I could have warned her that her life would be in danger if she returned to Pakistan and had a parade, but I doubt she would have listened.

After all, there has been no shortage of warnings from other quarters. But I can tell her this: it is not going to get any easier for her. Whenever she goes out campaigning in public, her life is going to be threatened.

It is different for me campaigning in public, even in the frontier region, because I am not perceived as an America stooge, or a supporter of the war on terror.

The British do not have clean hands in this latest suicide bombing outrage. Britain is providing a safe haven for Altaf Hussain, the Musharraf-supporting MQM political party leader who currently lives in London.

He's been living in London for 15 years and from there he controls Karachi with an iron will through his mafia-like party. It was this political gangster who persuaded Benazir that he could ensure her safety if she returned.

The only positive thing that might come out of this horrific bombing is that it will force everyone in Pakistani politics to sit down together at a big table and review our strategy on terror. We have to accept that it is not working, that, in fact, it is making matters worse.

It is an idiotic policy because the Americans are pushing people who are in favour of democracy at the moment towards extremism. Pakistan is in danger of turning into Algeria, a country where you had government forces firing on their own civilians.

Once the Pakistani army started its latest operation at the behest of the US, the whole border area rose up against it. And because the US has also bombed the area, killing many tribesmen, anyone who opposes the US becomes a hero.

The tribesman's culture is a revenge culture. When one is killed another takes his place. That is where the war on terror has been so misguided. It has benefited the people who caused 9/11. And it has made Musharraf — and now his ally Benazir Bhutto — look even more like puppets of America.

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Yeah-these victims always blaming the bombers.

**Posted by brian spooner on October 21, 2007 11:42 AM**

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This article should be read by supporters of multiculturalism: it seems to imply that these days you cannot have a large crowd of politicised Pakistanis without having suicide bombers. In the UK hitherto we've had centuries of large political gathering without being afflicted by suicide bombers, although 7/7/05 and 21/7/05 showed the direction in which we are now headed.

**Posted by John Gentle on October 21, 2007 11:01 AM**

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Mr. Imran Khan is one of the few tireless und untarnished political leaders who really have the welfare of the country and the common man at heart. I believe that his analysis and judgement of the current situation is very accurate and sincerely hope that it would receive more attention in Washington and elsewhere. I wish Mr. Khan all success and hope he continues in this manner as the country has very ew other options.

**Posted by Zaighum Sultan on October 21, 2007 11:00 AM**

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"The tribesman's culture is a revenge culture. When one is killed another takes his place." Well, in the 21st century, don't you think it's about time these people moved on? Perhaps learn to be civilised? That, I would hazard, is the essential problem here - not whether someone decides to hold a rally or not.

**Posted by Jez B on October 21, 2007 10:57 AM**

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Does Mr Khan mean: "it will be a free and fair election if Musharraf is still in charge".

**Posted by Paul Danon on October 21, 2007 10:37 AM**

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I don't suppose anyone expected to see "The Wrath of (Two) Khans" in these columns today but I have to say

that this is the more objective piece.

Our view of events in Pakistan is naturally from our standpoint. Imran Khan gives you his - and it is not anti-American but objective.

His piece succinctly expresses how Pakistanis see the situation - and he is right about the border tribesmen. Iraq too, in the south, is a country where every man carries a gun - despite Saddam's attempts to change forever the lives of the Marsh Arabs.

The best thing for Pakistan is an embracing secular government in a democracy - one which is a big tent and can find a way to accommodate many viewpoints.

The "War on Terror" taken to the Taliban in the tribal hinterland on the border with Afghanistan has, at least officially, not involved hot pursuit or other actions coming over to the Pakistani side.

Clearly the tribesmen have affinity with the Taliban and you begin to see that just as the enemy in the WoT is amorphous so have been the decisions by the Coalition as to who and where this enemy lies. Criminal clans that profit from the opium trade are not al Qa'eda - but fight with them and they soon will be - because it is a loosely structured 'coalition of the willing' to borrow a phrase.

The US and others are making, not suppressing, enemies in this whole region - every day. Guerilla wars are notoriously difficult to win with conventional forces.

It is two steps forward one back every day in Helmand Province and elsewhere for the UN - getting absolutely nowhere, and getting western troops killed.

As Khan says here, replacements on the other side spring up like heads on a Hydra in a culture where one warrior moves in where another has fallen.

This was ever a lawless region - the UN cannot bring law and order nor will it defeat the opium trade with arms.

Someone needs to start thinking about achievable aims in this whole region - distant as it is from western interests other than in oil - and in removing all dependency on the area.

**Posted by simon coulter on October 21, 2007 10:27 AM**

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