



REVIEWS



IN THE LINE OF FIRE: A MEMOIR

by Pervez Musharraf

Free Press, 368 pages, \$28

Reviewed by SADANAND DHUME

ON SEPT. 19, 2001, as the ashes of the World Trade Center still smoldered, a shaken Gen. Pervez Musharraf went on national television and radio to explain an unpopular decision to his countrymen. He had agreed, under intense American pressure, to throw Pakistan's support behind the effort to crush the Taliban, al Qaeda's Afghan host.

The decision was understandably painful given the Taliban's birth in Pakistan's fundamentalist *madrassas*, its nurture by the country's premier intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence, and Islamabad's long and lonely effort to win international recognition for the bearded rulers of Kabul. Gen. Musharraf sold it by drawing a parallel with an event obscure to non-Muslims but rich with meaning for the faithful: the Treaty of Hudaibiya (628 A.D.), a 10-year truce between the Prophet Muhammad and the then infidel but powerful tribe of Mecca, the Quraish. Two years later a much stronger Mohammed found a pretext to break the pact, leading the Quraish to surrender Mecca without a fight. In the Muslim imagination, Hudaibiya stands as an example of a tactical compromise with an enemy in the interests of a broader strategic gain.

This detail would be merely academic if not for the fact that five years after Gen.

Musharraf's speech his commitment to the war on terror remains questionable to say the least. From last year's suicide bombings in London, to this summer's Heathrow Airport bomb plot, to stepped-up attacks on NATO forces in Afghanistan, the trail invariably leads back to Pakistan. Add to that evidence of Islamabad's complicity in the July train blasts in Mumbai and in supplying nuclear technology to North Korea, and it's easy to see why historian Niall Ferguson sees the danger of another Sept. 11 style attack coming less from the so-called "axis of evil" than from the "axis of allies": the Saudis who fund terrorism; the Pakistanis who provide the training; and the British, whose laissez-faire approach to radical Islam has helped create the plotter's haven known as Londonistan.

Those expecting *In the Line of Fire*, the general's much hyped memoir, to show evidence that Pakistan is grappling with its problems will be disappointed. Instead we're treated to an unintentionally amusing portrait of a man who lends new meaning to the old saw about a book only a mother could love. No detail is too small for the pistol-packing (Glock 17) Gen. Musharraf to boast about. Thus we learn that at college in Lahore he was the fourth-best cross-country runner, stood third in the "Mr. Forman Christian College" bodybuilding competition, and that one Muhammad Iqbal Butt, a former Mr. Universe contestant no less, complimented the future leader on his "most muscular physique."

Mr. Butt ought to feel honored, for most of Gen. Musharraf's encomiums are self-generated. At the Pakistan Military Academy, his physical bearing and drill

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are “so good” that he passes his saluting test on the first try. In short order he becomes “an exceptionally good shot with a rifle and a submachine gun.” His men, of course, love him for being “just and compassionate.” Years later, after the general has seized power from the country’s elected prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, in what he imaginatively calls a countercoup, he even manages to claim credit for allowing the army’s powerful corps commanders to have their say at a meeting to discuss the possible imposition of martial law. For the general this is “normal practice,” we are informed, though such enlightenment is apparently “new to the army.”

The barrage of self-congratulation is laced with an unctuous effort to ingratiate himself with the Western reader, or perhaps prove he is no fundamentalist. We learn, for example, that as a child the general owned a brown dog named Whiskey, and that while his father was posted at the Pakistani embassy in Ankara in the 1950s his parents won first prize in a ballroom dancing competition to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

The attempts to incorporate American metaphors are especially strained. Gen. Musharraf the boy is “something of a Tom Sawyer.” Nazimabad, the low rent neighborhood where the family alights as refugees from Delhi in 1947, is not “the Harlem of Karachi,” but perhaps “the South Bronx.” The mullahs who keep Pakistan on the cutting edge of obscurantism are called “the religious right.” Not to be outdone, his wife-to-be, Sehba, miraculously prefigures today’s People magazine terminology in 1960s Karachi: At first she is appalled by the “fashion disaster” who seeks her hand.

Unintentional humor aside, *In the Line of Fire* reveals two disquieting aspects of Gen. Musharraf’s personality. The first is a kind of back-alley cunning easily recognizable to anyone who has lived in a coun-

try where bribing the meter reader is an acceptable alternative to paying the power company. Gen. Musharraf boasts of “outsmarting” hazers as a young cadet by hiding in the bathroom while his classmates balance tubs of ice cold water on their heads or crawl on all fours. Later he risks expulsion from the academy when caught taking a shortcut during a nine-mile punishment run. As army chief in the summer of 1999, Gen. Musharraf surreptitiously sends soldiers across the line of control that divides Indian and Pakistani Kashmir to capture a clutch of strategic heights. He describes the resulting miniwar, by most accounts a diplomatic and military debacle for Pakistan, as “a tactical marvel of military professionalism.”

More disturbing is his ambivalence toward combating fundamentalism. Gen. Musharraf criticizes former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto not for appeasing “the religious right” by banning liquor and gambling and declaring Friday a holiday instead of Sunday, but for doing so without really believing in it. Yet he comes to the decision to join the war on terror only after “wargaming the U.S. as an adversary.” Only then Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage’s alleged threat to bomb Pakistan “back into the Stone Age” prompts him to abandon the Taliban. “Why should we put our national interest on the line for a primitive regime that would be defeated?”

This ambivalence shows up in other ways as well. On the one hand Gen. Musharraf boasts of handing over 369 al Qaeda operatives to America and earning millions of dollars in bounties. On the other, rather than ask uncomfortable questions about his own society, he casually blames murdered Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl for being careless. He also displays a grudging admiration for Khalid Sheikh Mohammed: “One cannot say that KSM did not have big plans, the big-

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gest of which, 9/11, was carried out with clockwork precision.”

In a similar vein, the book offers an apologetic for Osama bin Laden by referring to the jihad consortium he established in 1998 as the “Islamic World Front” rather than using its rather less innocuous formal name, the “Islamic World Front for the Struggle against Jews and Crusaders.” In Gen. Musharraf’s formulation, the Front is formed merely to “struggle against the occupation of Palestine by Israel.” He repeatedly blames the West for terrorism, arguing that it will only end when “injustices against Muslims are removed,” and claiming that since the July 7 bombers in London were not politically deprived, uneducated or poor, “clearly, their motivation came from the socioeconomic deprivation of their community.”

Ever since Sept. 11, Gen. Musharraf has successfully packaged himself as Pakistan’s last line of defense against radical Islam, a no-nonsense, straight-shooting military man who can be relied on to get the job done. But with attacks on NATO troops in Afghanistan from their Pakistani sanctuaries mounting, and bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Mullah Omar still at large, he will need to do more to prove his sincerity than plucking the occasional unfortunate off his country’s endless terrorist assembly line.

Shedding the odd blend of victimhood and triumphalism that marks much of the Muslim world, and shutting down the madrassas that fuel jihads in Afghanistan and India would be as good a place to start as any. Until then skeptics will continue to argue that Pakistan’s half-hearted effort in the war on terror is marked by do-the-minimum convenience rather than any real commitment.

THE LENOVO AFFAIR: THE GROWTH OF CHINA’S COMPUTER GIANT AND ITS TAKEOVER OF IBM-PC

*by Ling Zhijun,
translated by Martha Avery
John Wiley & Sons, 250 pages, \$24.95*

Reviewed by RICK CAREW

CHINA’S CORPORATE strategy over the next five years will be centered on two key objectives: scaling the value chain and creating global brands. These goals, while government-supported, are driven largely by economic fundamentals. As wages rise, China’s coastline can no longer afford to be a low-cost manufacturing center. At the same time, China’s policy of openness to trade and investment has created a hypercompetitive domestic market that offers scale but low profits to firms that can’t distinguish themselves by building a brand.

These market realities put Chinese firms at a disadvantage vis-à-vis global multinationals. Few Chinese companies possess superior branding and most have relied on their ability to undercut global competitors on price to stay competitive at home. But multinationals that once saw China as solely a cheap manufacturing base are now turning their attention to its increasingly affluent consumers.

To address these challenges, Beijing has advocated a dual strategy of “going outward” and creating an “innovative society.” Chinese firms must look abroad for investment opportunities that will build their brands and pack more value into their products at home.

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