

## CAN PRESIDENT MUSHARRAF SURVIVE THE ELECTION RESULTS OF FEBRUARY 18 POLITICALLY?

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On February 18, Pakistan held the ninth general elections in its history. Due to the political and security crisis which rocked the country, this vote took on considerable importance both for the future of institutions and for the alliance in the war on terror. Facing deterioration in the situation in the South of Afghanistan, the countries which sent troops there in the framework of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) were therefore following these elections very closely. From the moment when the results were announced, the United Kingdom and France made known their concerns to President Musharraf and to the great winner of the elections, **Asif Ali Zardari**, widower of **Benazir Bhutto** and co-president of the **Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)**. The U.S. State Department also expressed its hope that one of its most loyal allies in the fight against Al-Qaeda would remain in place.<sup>1</sup> The alliances which were being concluded in the course of the following weeks are thus critical for his future as Head of State, which now seems to be heavily compromised by the message from voters.

Nine years after the coup which brought **Pervez Musharraf** to power on October 12, 1999, these elections marked the return of democracy to Pakistan. In the general opinion of local and international observers, and despite the fears of the Opposition, they were normal and, without any doubt, among the most honest and fair to have been held since 1947.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the defeat of the Presidential camp was so widely expected that any electoral fraud would have been very difficult. And so the voters massively rejected the policies of President Musharraf and of the present government of the **Pakistan Muslim League - Qaid-e-azam (PML-Q)**. They granted victory to the two principal Opposition parties, the **PPP** and the **Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz** of former Prime Minister **Nawaz Sharif**. Moreover, they also inflicted a veritable rout on the Islamist coalition **MMA**, which is close to the Taliban and the rebels in the tribal zones of the Northwest, and whose two parties boycotted the election.<sup>3</sup>

We will sketch below the main features of the various actors on whom Pakistan's future will depend: the winners of the February 18 elections, the **PPP** and the **Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)**, and the losers, **the Pakistan Muslim League-Qaid-e-azam**

<sup>1</sup> Vinod Sharma, 'The foreign hand in Pakistani Politics,' *Hindustan Times*, 23/02/2008.

<sup>2</sup> 'HRSP greets EC on conducting fair and peaceful elections,' *Daily Times*, 25/02/2008.

<sup>3</sup> Lodhi, Iftikhar A., 'Forthcoming Pakistan Elections: A profile on the Islamic parties,' *ISAS Brief*, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore, 26/12/2007.

(PML-Q) and the Islamists. We will also see the role which could be played by the two swing parties, **the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)** and the **Awami National Party (ANP)**, which will probably be called to participate in the future government coalition. Finally, after having presented the various scenarios which emerge for the formation of the government, we will try to see what chances they can offer to **Pervez Musharraf** to maintain his Presidency.

## 1. The winners of the election

### a. *The PPP: the return of the Bhutto clan*

With 89 seats, the big winner of the election is indisputably the **Pakistan People's Party (PPP)** of former Prime Minister **Benazir Bhutto**, who was assassinated on December 27 during an election rally in Rawalpindi<sup>4</sup>. The **PPP** thus managed to capitalise on the feelings of sympathy resulting from the tragic death of its president and from the rejection of the regime shown by the population. Today under the co-presidency of the widower of Benazir Bhutto, **Asif Ali Zardari**, and her son, **Bilawal Bhutto Zardari**, the **PPP** will be the dominant element of the next government. As of Now, its leaders have agreed on their candidate for the post of Prime Minister, **Makhmood Amin Fahim**, Vice President of the party and a loyal supporter of the Bhutto clan.<sup>5</sup> Handicapped by many corruption scandals – for which he spent many years in prison – and not having run in the elections, **Asif Ali Zardari** cannot in fact claim any right to head the government. The designated heir as set out in last will of his spouse, he will nonetheless exert a preponderant influence on the directions that the party will choose to take in the coming weeks.<sup>6</sup>

Founded by **Zulfikar Ali Bhutto**, the initiator of the nationalisation campaign of the 1970s, the **PPP** still describes itself as a progressive party, which has promised to '*get rid of the Islamists.*' Women, the lower middle classes and the disadvantaged constitute its electoral base. Banned by **General Zia ul-Haq** in 1977, the **PPP** returned to power after his death in 1988. Inseparable from the personality of its founder, the party was later run by his daughter, Benazir. She held the post of Prime Minister twice, from December 1988 to August 1990 and from October 1993 to November 1996, and she was twice driven out following corruption scandals, for which responsibility was largely attributed to her husband. Educated in England and in the United States, **Benazir Bhutto** embodied the Westernised elite of Pakistan which is more comfortable speaking English than Urdu. This closeness to the West explains the support which she enjoyed from the United States, which applied pressure that led to her return in October 2007, eight years after she left for exile.

The **PPP** has the support of the **Awami National Party (ANP)**. Well entrenched in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and in the North of Baluchistan, this nationalist Pashtun party of the centre-left obtained excellent results in the election. The **ANP** is the successor to the **National Awami Party of Abdul Wali Khan**, which the Supreme Court banned during the 1970s at the request of **Zulfikar Ali Bhutto**, who saw in it a threat to the unity of Pakistan. It was General Zia who freed its president and allowed him to resume political activity after his coup. Ironically, the **ANP** is today aligned with the party founded by the man who banned it. The two movements both are opposed to the Islamists who have led the **NWFP** since 2002 and who show their closeness to the Taliban living in exile in Pakistan since the American military intervention in Afghanistan in the autumn of 2001.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Pakistan/Terrorism : the death of Benazir Bhutto endangers the future of Pakistan.', ESISC, 27/12/2007.

<sup>5</sup> 'Pakistan/Elections : the new majority has chosen a Prime Minister,', ESISC, 22/02/2008.

<sup>6</sup> Shah, Saeed, 'Husband says Bhutto's will names him party leader,' *globeandmail.com*, 06/02/2008.

Together they form an anti-Islamist front, and an alliance with President Musharraf could constitute a guarantee that the war on terror would be continued.<sup>7</sup>

### ***b. Nawaz Sharif, the return of the ‘tiger’***

**The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)** took second place in an election which it had threatened to boycott, winning 66 seats in the National Assembly.<sup>8</sup> A conservative party, the **PML-N** is gathering the members of the **Pakistan Muslim League (PML)** who remained loyal to former Prime Minister **Nawaz Sharif** after his removal from power in 1999. Overthrown by General Musharraf, he was sentenced in 2000 to prison for life by an anti-terrorist court for ‘hijacking an airplane.’ Later he was allowed to go into exile in Saudi Arabia for a period of ten years.<sup>9</sup> Most of the members of his party joined instead the **Pakistan Muslim League - Qaid-e-Azam**, which rallied to the new regime. Upon his return last November thanks to the mediation of Ryad, **Nawaz Sharif** was forbidden to participate in the elections together with his brother, Shahbaz.<sup>10</sup> However, the **PML-N** remains inseparable from its leader and though his accession to the post of Prime Minister will require the adoption of a constitutional amendment, he will remain an key personality for any government which includes his party.

Born on December 10, 1949 in Lahore, **Nawaz Sharif** comes from a powerful family of industrialists in the Punjab allied with General **Zia ul-Haq**. Nationalised in 1972 by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the family steel mill was returned to Sharif after Bhutto’s overthrow. The family then relied on its network of relations to create an industrial empire and invested in politics. In 1981, Nawaz thus became the Minister of Finance of the Punjab, before being named as *Chief Minister* in 1985. As head of the most populous province and the one most represented in government administration and the Army, Nawaz Sharif was already a first rank politician. After the death of General Zia in 1988, he headed the conservative coalition **Islami-Jamhoori-Ittehad (IJI)**, and then rose to the position of Prime Minister in November 1990 under the colours of the **PML** following the fall of the first government of Benazir Bhutto. Like her, he was then removed from power for corruption in 1993 by President **Ghulam Ishaq Khan**.<sup>11</sup>

In 1997, he returned to power following the fall of the second government of **Benazir Bhutto**. During this term, he passed laws considerably strengthening the powers of the Prime Minister, in particularly abolishing the eighth amendment to the Constitution which allowed the Head of State to remove him. He also imposed strict discipline on deputies from his party, having them adopt the fourteenth amendment, which allows the PM to unseat legislators who refuse to vote in accordance with their party instructions.<sup>12</sup> Though he governed with pragmatism from the economic point of view, his tenure in office was also marked by Islamic dogmatism. He tried to impose the application of the Sharia and to be given the title of ‘leader of the believers.’ Under his rule, Pakistan became a nuclear power in 1998 and gave unfailing support to the Taliban regime that was installed in Kabul.<sup>13</sup> Finally, one should remember that **Nawaz Sharif** directly opposed the President of the Supreme Court, **Syed Sajjad Ali**, on many legal and constitutional issues. He dismissed him from his duties in November 1997 after demonstrations organised by some members of the **PML** interrupted the work of the court. This should be remembered given that one of the main

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Zardari meets Awami National Party chief,’ *The Deccan Herald*, 21/02/2008.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Election Commission of Pakistan.

<sup>9</sup> « Pakistan/State of Emergency: return of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ’, ESISC, 26/11/2007.

<sup>10</sup> « Pakistan/State of Emergency: rejection of the candidature of Nawaz Sharif.’, ESISC, 03/12/2008.

<sup>11</sup> Ishtiaq Ahmed, ‘Forthcoming Pakistan Elections: A profile on Nawaz Sharif ’, *ISAS Brief*, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore, 19/12/2007.

<sup>12</sup> Id.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

demands of **Nawaz Sharif** today is the reestablishment of an independent judiciary that can cancel the Presidency of **Pervez Musharraf**.

## 2. The Presidential camp

### *a. The PML-Q has paid a price for the unpopularity of President Musharraf*

The Presidential party experienced a sharp defeat in Monday's election. The **PML-Q** not only lost a large part of its parliamentary representation, but many of its emblematic figures were not reelected. Former Prime Minister and party president **Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain** lost his seat from his Gujarat constituency to the former secretary general of the **PPP**, **Chaudry Ahmed Mukhtar**. Similarly, among those defeated were the president of Parliament, **Choudry Amir Hussain**, the former Minister of Defence, **Rao Sikandar Iqbal**, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri**, the former Minister of Transport, **Shaikh Rashid Ahmed**, as well as many other ministers in the government of Prime Minister **Shaukat Aziz**.<sup>14</sup> As soon as the first results were announced, the party spokesman **Tariq Azeem** was forced to admit defeat and said that 'the *PML-Q would learn to sit in the Opposition and congratulated the winners of the election.*' Under cover of anonymity, another party official said he was 'shocked,' adding that 'the *Nawaz factor played a major role in the defeat.*'<sup>15</sup>

On the eve of the elections, President Musharraf displayed great confidence, challenging the 'biased' polls taken by international NGOs.<sup>16</sup> The government defended its appreciable economic achievements, amounting to average annual growth of 7.5% since 2004 and strong domestic demand. This result was obtained thanks to an expansionist fiscal policy, recovery of the agricultural sector, good performance by manufacturing industry and strong growth in the service sector.<sup>17</sup> However, this steady growth produced inflation and troubling deficits in the public budget, all of which will have to be dealt with by the new government.<sup>18</sup> This economic policy was carried out under the direction of former Prime Minister and Minister of Finance **Shaukat Aziz**, who formerly served as a top executive at Citibank and was brought into the government in 1999 by President Musharraf. His achievements were insufficient to prevent the electoral setback of February 18. Party leaders now fear an exodus of members and those among them who have been elected towards the **PML-N**, where most of them originally came from.<sup>19</sup>

President Musharraf has been forced to make choices that work against his popularity, among them his alignment with the United States after the September 11, 2001 attacks. This policy was not without its ambiguities. The Head of State relied on Islamist parties to govern and negotiated agreements with the Pashtun rebel tribes of the **Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)**. The government was nonetheless incapable of preventing the Taliban and Al-Qaida from establishing themselves in the frontier areas. On the contrary, Pakistan declined into a cycle of violence which culminated in the assault on the Red Mosque of Islamabad in July 2007.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the President provoked the revolt of the judiciary by removing from office on March 9, 2007 the President of the Supreme Court, **Ifthikar**

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<sup>14</sup> 'Najeeb, Muhammad, 'PPP emerges biggest party in Pakistan polls,' *Hindustan Times*, 19/02/2008.

<sup>15</sup> 'PPP, N rout PML-Q,' *The Nation*, 19/02/2007.

<sup>16</sup> 'Musharraf hits out at 'biased' opinion polls,' *The Dawn*, 15/02/2007.

<sup>17</sup> *Asian Development Outlook 2007 Update*, Asian Development Bank, 2007, p.212.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p, 213.

<sup>19</sup> Irfan Ghauri, 'PML-Q faced with defection threat,' *Daily Times*, 23/02/2008.

<sup>20</sup> Burstin, André, 'After the storming of the Red Mosque, what does the future hold for Pakistan,' *Analysis of ESISC*, 16/07/2007.

**Mohammed Chaudry**, whom he considered to be a restraint in the fight on terror.<sup>21</sup> The period of political instability which followed and the unprecedented wave of attacks finally led the President to declare a State of Emergency in March 2007, provoking massive rejection by the population. The Pakistanis have thus brutally punished the 'king's party,' indisputably withdrawing its confidence from the government of Pervez Musharraf.

### ***b. Preserving the MQM***

**The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)**, the party representing essentially the Muhajir community – the Indian Muslims who were exiled to Pakistan as from the Partition of 1947 – has kept its position with respect to the electoral results in 2002. It will thus have 19 deputies in the National Assembly and 38 deputies in the Assembly of the province of Sindh, its traditional fiefdom, where it came in second after the **PPP**.<sup>22</sup> Till now allied with President Musharraf, himself a Muhajir, the president of the party, **Altaf Hussain**, has nonetheless said he is ready to join the **PPP** in a coalition government. A leader of the **MQM**, **Mohammad Farouq Sattar**, said that he would '*propose a coalition to Zardari.*' '*I think that Zardari has also made this offer to Mr. Altaf Hussain,*' he added.<sup>23</sup> The **MQM** has taken part in four of the past five governments.

The most favourable configuration for such an alliance will be a coalition with the **PPP** and the **PML-Q**. An alliance with the **PML-N**, with which the **MQM** has already shared power between 1997 and 1999, seems to be more difficult due to profound political disagreements. '*Even a bitter pill can be swallowed, so I don't exclude it,*' **Mohammad Farouq Sattar** nonetheless admitted, adding that there was '*no final point in politics.*' However, it would be difficult for the two parties to agree on the attitude to adopt with respect to President Musharraf. While **Nawaz Sharif** wants to achieve the departure at any price of the man who drove him from power, the **MQM** favours a more conciliatory approach, wishing to continue to work with the President, so as to '*offer him an honourable exit*' at the conclusion of two years. However that may be, the decision on participation of the **MQM** in any government must be decided by the international secretariat of the party based in London ever since the departure of **Altaf Hussain**, who faced charges of violence and torture in Pakistan.<sup>24</sup>

## **3. Rout of the Islamists**

One of the notable elements of the February 18 election was the bitter setback for the Islamist coalition **Muttahidda Majlis-e-Amal (Coalition for Action, MMA)** both in the National Assembly, where it will now have no more than 6 seats, and in the province of the Northwest, which was till now under its control. Indeed, it has lost 60 seats there, keeping only 9 seats in the provincial Assembly.<sup>25</sup>

The **MMA** comprises three parties:

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<sup>21</sup> 'Pakistan/Politics : the removal of the President of the Supreme Court continues to enflame Pakistan,' 14/05/2007.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Election Commission of Pakistan.

<sup>23</sup> 'MQM strategy in 48 hours,' Daily Times, 20/02/2008.

<sup>24</sup> 'Pakistan: Information on Mohajir/Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Altaf (MQM-A),' UNHCR.

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&page=research&id=414fe5aa4>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Election Commission of Pakistan.

- the **Jamiat Ulema-e-islami of Fazlur Rahman (JUI-F)**. Like most of the radical Islamist groups of Southern Asia and 65% of the Madrasas of Pakistan, this movement claims to follow the Deobandi school<sup>26</sup>
- the **Jama'at-e-islami (JI)**, the oldest religious party of the country which has extolled Islamic revolution ever since 1941
- the **Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistani**, which comes from the Bareilvi school led by **Shah Faridul Haq**.

Only the **JUI - Fazlur Rahman** took part in the election, while the others declared a boycott due to the continuation of fighting in the tribal zones and in the province of the Northwest Frontier. Although the rout is partly attributable to this boycott, it was greeted by an immense explosion of joy, particularly in Peshawar, the provincial capital.<sup>27</sup> As the winner by default in 2002, the Islamists did not honour their promises during their time at the head of the provincial government. Moreover, the introduction of a fundamentalist policy that in particular banned music distanced them from the majority of the population.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the support they accorded for years to President Musharraf and their closeness to the Taliban were punished by a population which has been worn down by the political crisis and violence.

Pakistani political Islamism was born with the founding of the **JI** in 1941 by **Abu lala Maududi** on the basis of an ideology inspired by fascism and Deobandi precepts.<sup>29</sup> By creating the **JI**, **Abu lala Maududi** hoped to lead an Islamic revolution in India, even as he opposed the creation of Pakistan. After the partition of 1947, he nonetheless emigrated and argued there in favour of replacing the parliamentary regime by an Islamic state. The violence of the campaigns led by the party forced **Zulfikar Ali Bhutto** to apply part of his programme and to adopt Islamic laws in the 1970s.<sup>30</sup> The traditional electoral base of the **JI** is found in the lower urban middle classes of the Punjab and Sindh. Although power within the party is much less personalised than among the secular parties, the **JI** has a very hierarchical structure that is essentially based on seniority. The head of the party is presently **Qazi Hussein Ahmed**, a former teacher from the province of the Northwest Frontier. Finally, it should be remembered that the **JI** created a military branch, the **Hizb-ul-Mujahideen**, whose members left to fight in Afghanistan and in Indian Kashmir.<sup>31</sup>

Traditionally, Pakistan has known two types of Islamist organisations, those that participate in political life and those that restrict themselves to the spiritual and charitable space. The accession to power of General Zia and the Soviet war in Afghanistan created a third type, the Jihadist organisations, which have little by little infiltrated the entire Islamist current. The movement most penetrated by this ideology is the **JUI- F**, whose head still maintains close ties with the civilian and military hierarchy of the Taliban.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Prospects for a government

As we go to press, the most likely scenario for forming a government is a coalition between the **PPP** and the **PML-N**. Despite the profound political differences, **Nawaz Sharif**

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<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group Asia report n°130, Pakistan : Karachi's Madrasas and violent extremism , Islamabad/Brussels,

29 March 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Chipaux, Françoise, ' Pakistan : 'We were not happy with the mullahs,' *Le Monde*, 21/02/2008.

<sup>28</sup> Id.

<sup>29</sup> Gaborieau, Marc, Another Islam, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, collection Planète Inde, Albin Michel, 2007, p.

154.

<sup>30</sup> Loc cit., Lodhi, Iftikhar A.

<sup>31</sup> 'Jammu & Kashmir. Terrorist Groups : an overview,' South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Loc cit., Lodhi, Iftikhar A.

announced in effect on Thursday, February 21, that an agreement had been reached during a meeting with **Asif Ali Zardari**. For his part, Zardari also said that he and Sharif '*intended to sit together in Parliament.*' The future Prime Minister most likely will come from the ranks of the **PPP**, which is expected to choose its vice president, **Makhdoom Amin Fahim**, who already opposed **Pervez Musharraf** during the Presidential election of October 6, 2007. Furthermore, the two political leaders have already refused the offer of support launched by President Musharraf to any new government. '*What help could Musharraf bring to us ?*' **Nawaz Sharif** said. If the negotiations between the two parties succeed, the formation of such a government would represent a new setback for the Head of State, who will then see a coalition of his opponents sharing power.

Until now the position of **Asif Ali Zardari** seemed, however, to be much less clear-cut. Though he is in the Opposition to **Pervez Musharraf**, he does not share the view of Nawaz **Sharif** on judges who might cancel the amnesty accorded to him for crimes of corruption committed before 1999. In the end, he might thus favour an alliance with the Pakistan **Muslim League-Quaid-i-Azam (PML-Q)**, the Presidential party, and the **MQM**. The president of the **PML-Q**, **Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain**, has already met with members of the leadership of the **PPP** in Rawalpindi to smooth out the disagreements and try to obtain a majority agreement. Such a coalition would also enjoy the support of the United States, which has always encouraged an alliance between President Musharraf and the **PPP** in order to continue the war on terror. According to members of the **PML-N** cited by *CNN* and the Pakistani information site *IBN live* on condition of anonymity, the camp of **Nawaz Sharif** has begun to doubt the sincerity of the commitment of **Asif Ali Zardari** to form a government of Opposition to **Pervez Musharraf**<sup>33</sup>.

Finally, though not very likely, the possibility of a new intervention by the Army in the political game cannot be excluded. If a coalition between the **PPP** and the **PML-N** tried in fact to remove or to cancel his tenure in office, President Musharraf could dissolve Parliament or as the Army to turn the power over to him. However, the new chief of the Army command, General **Ashfaq Kiyani**, a person close to **Pervez Musharraf**, has warned that he intends to concentrate on strictly military activities. Though it has scored some successes in the Swat Valley in fighting against the **Tehrik Nifaz-e-Shariat Mohammadi**,<sup>34</sup> the Army has shown itself to be unable to defeat the Islamist militants in the tribal zones. Furthermore, the kidnapping of several hundred soldiers by Islamist fighters struck a heavy blow at the prestige of the military institution. The military still has considerable economic interests that were largely reinforced under the leadership of **Pervez Musharraf**. A policy aimed at withdrawing these advantages could provoke a reaction, even if this is, again, highly unlikely at the present moment.

## 5. The end of the reign of Pervez Musharraf ?

The electoral results of February certainly marked a major turning point in the reign of **Pervez Musharraf** in Islamabad. By offering victory to his most ferocious opponents, the Pakistani voters in fact expressed their weariness and anger towards a government which was incapable of preventing the country from slipping into terrorist violence and political chaos. At the same time, the result will not necessarily lead to his giving up power. Not only has the President excluded the possibility of resigning,<sup>35</sup> but his opponents do not have a shared position on what his fate should be. While **Nawaz Sharif** demands the removal of the man who drove him from power, **Asif Ali Zardari** prefers to speak of a possible collaboration, remembering that the President granted him an amnesty allowing him to return to Pakistan.

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<sup>33</sup> 'PML-N having doubts over support to Zardari,' *IBNlive.com*, 24/02/2008.

<sup>34</sup> (TNSM – Movement for the defence of the law of the prophet) by Maulana Fazlullah.

<sup>35</sup> 'Pakistan/Terrorism: President Musharraf will not resign'

Furthermore, foreign influence may turn out to be the determining factor for the formation of the new government. Ever since the announcement of the results, **Asif Ali Zardari** has been meeting with the United States ambassador, **Anne Patterson**, to discuss all the possible post-electoral scenarios and continuation of the fight against the armed Islamists.<sup>36</sup> We should remember that Washington played an essential role in the return to Pakistan of **Benazir Bhutto** on October 18, 2007. The United States hoped at the time for the conclusion of an alliance between President Musharraf and the former Prime Minister, believing this would be the best way to preserve the commitment of the country to the war on terror, which later claimed her life as one of its most symbolic victims. If the negotiations between the **PPP** and the **PML-N** fail, such a coalition could still be formed, thereby keeping **Pervez Musharraf** as Head of State despite one of the most significant electoral defeats in the history of Pakistan.

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<sup>36</sup> «Pakistan/Elections : defeat of the Presidential camp in the general elections»