

# A letter and reply on Pakistan

16 January 2008

*The following is an email from Robert Templer, director of the Asian program of the International Crisis Group, regarding the January 7 article “Beleaguered Pakistani president lashes out at critics” and a reply.*

Far from having a “new found” interest in democracy in Pakistan, the International Crisis Group have been consistent in our view that military rule needs to end since we started work there in 2001. The head of our office there has been a consistent advocate for democracy for decades. Please get your facts right. We also don’t reflect “ruling circles” in Europe, whatever that means. Most European governments support Musharraf.

Robert Templer

Dear Mr Templer,

Thank you for your email to the *World Socialist Web Site* concerning my article “Beleaguered Pakistani president lashes out at critics”. Having reviewed the passage dealing with the International Crisis Group, I agree that the characterisation of your organisation’s position on the current crisis in Pakistan was not sufficiently precise and might lead to incorrect interpretations. It would be wrong to imply that the ICG has not previously been critical of the regime of President Pervez Musharraf or that it has not advocated various reforms.

That said, however, democracy is a term that is used very loosely. We have a different conception of democracy from that of the ICG. The ICG’s goal, as stated in its latest policy briefing, is a limited one: the reestablishment of parliamentary elections and the installation of an elected government led by one of the moderate parties to “return Pakistan to its moderate democratic moorings”. But Pakistan has no democratic past to speak of and the “moderate parties”, to which the ICG refers, have all headed governments that have not hesitated to abuse basic democratic rights. In fact, Pakistan’s entire history is testimony to incompatibility

of genuine democracy, broadly understood as the right of working people to participate fully in the making of all decisions affecting their daily lives, with a social and economic order that is rooted in the economic exploitation of the majority by a wealthy, privileged elite.

As for the use of the term “ruling circles”, it is a perfectly apt phrase. The list of prominent figures on the ICG’s board is enough to demonstrate the intimate connections between your think tank and the political, business, media and foreign policy establishments in the US, Europe and elsewhere in the world. Its co-chairs are Lord Patten, former EU Commissioner for External Affairs, and Thomas Pickering, a senior US diplomat. Its chairman is currently the former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans.

You may disagree with the conclusions that we have drawn, but the ICG undoubtedly reflects the thinking of a definite wing of the ruling elite in the US and Europe. In particular, ICG board members such as former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, former NATO supreme allied commander Wesley Clark and former German foreign minister Joschka Fischer, have all been critical of the aggressive, unilateral policies of the Bush administration from the standpoint of the interests of the US and European powers.

We agree that it is necessary to get the facts right and that political positions should be accurately portrayed, even when they are only mentioned briefly. We have modified the article accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

K. Ratnayake

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