BENAZIR BHUTTO

I: NOT WHAT SHE SEEMED TO BE

By RALPH PETERS (**New York Post;** *December 28, 2007*)

FOR the next several days, you're going to read and hear a great deal of pious nonsense in the wake of the assassination of Pakistan's former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto. Her country's better off without her. She may serve Pakistan better after her death than she did in life.

We need have no sympathy with her Islamist assassin and the extremists behind him to recognize that Bhutto was corrupt, divisive, dishonest and utterly devoid of genuine concern for her country. She was a splendid con, persuading otherwise cynical Western politicians and "hardheaded" journalists that she was not only a brave woman crusading in the Islamic wilderness, but also a thoroughbred democrat.

In fact, Bhutto was a frivolously wealthy feudal landlord amid bleak poverty. The scion of a thieving political dynasty, she was always more concerned with power than with the wellbeing of the average Pakistani. Her program remained one of old-school patronage, not increased productivity or social decency. Educated in expensive Western schools, she permitted Pakistan's feeble education system to rot - opening the door to Islamists and their religious schools.

During her years as prime minister, Pakistan went backward, not forward. Her husband looted shamelessly and ended up fleeing the country, pursued by the courts. The Islamist threat - which she artfully played both ways - spread like cancer.

But she *always* knew how to work Westerners - unlike the hapless Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who sought the best for his tormented country but never knew how to package himself. Military regimes are never appealing to Western sensibilities. Yet, there are desperate hours when they provide the only, slim hope for a country nearing collapse. Democracy is certainly preferable - but, unfortunately, it's not always immediately possible. Like spoiled children, we have to have it *now* - and damn the consequences.

In Pakistan, the military has its own forms of graft; nonetheless, it remains the least corrupt institution in the country and the only force holding an unnatural state together. In Pakistan back in the '90s, the only people I met who cared a whit about the common man were military officers.

Americans don't like to hear that. But it's the truth.

Bhutto embodied the flaws in Pakistan's political system, not its , feudal loyalties that stymied the development of healthy government institutions (provoking coups by a disgusted military). When she held the reins of government, Bhutto did nothing to steer in a new direction - she merely sought to enhance her personal power.

Now she's dead. And she may finally render her country a genuine service (if cynical party hacks don't try to blame Musharraf for their own benefit). After the inevitable rioting subsides and the spectacular conspiracy theories cool a bit, her murder may galvanize Pakistanis against the Islamist extremists who've never gained great support among voters, but who nonetheless threaten the state's ability to govern.

As a victim of fanaticism, Bhutto may shine as a rallying symbol with a far purer light than she cast while alive. The bitter joke is that, while she was never serious about freedom, women's rights and fighting terrorism, the terrorists took her rhetoric seriously - and killed her for her words, not her actions.

Nothing's going to make Pakistan's political crisis disappear - this crisis may be permanent, subject only to intermittent amelioration. (Our State Department's policy toward Islamabad amounts to a pocket full of platitudes, nostalgia for the 20th century and a liberal version of the white man's burden mindset.)

The one slim hope is that this savage murder will - in the long term - clarify their lot for Pakistan's citizens. The old ways, the old personalities and old parties have failed them catastrophically. The country needs new leaders - who don't think an election victory entitles them to grab what little remains of the national patrimony.

In killing Bhutto, the Islamists over-reached (possibly aided by rogue elements in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, one of the murkiest outfits on this earth). Just as al Qaeda in Iraq overplayed its hand and alienated that country's Sunni Arabs, this assassination may disillusion Pakistanis who lent half an ear to Islamist rhetoric. A creature of insatiable ambition, Bhutto will now become a martyr. In death, she may pay back some of the enormous debt she owes her country.

II: PAKISTAN'S FLAWED AND FEUDAL PRINCESS

WILLIAM DALRYMPLE (The Observer; *December 30, 2007*)

One of Benazir Bhutto's more dubious legacies to Pakistan is the Prime Minister's house in the middle of Islamabad. The building is a giddy, pseudo-Mexican ranch house with white walls and a red tile roof. There is nothing remotely Islamic about the building which, as my minder said when I went there to interview the then Prime Minister Bhutto, was 'PM's own design'. Inside, it was the same story. Crystal chandeliers dangled sometimes two or three to a room; oils of sunflowers and tumbling kittens that would have looked at home on the Hyde Park railings hung below garishly gilt cornices. The place felt as though it might be the weekend retreat of a particularly flamboyant Latin-American industrialist, but, in fact, it could have been anywhere. Had you been shown pictures of the place on one of those TV game-shows where you are taken around a house and then have to guess who lives there, you may have awarded this hacienda to virtually anyone except, perhaps, to the Prime Minister of an impoverished Islamic republic situated next door to Iran.

Which is, of course, exactly why the West always had a soft spot for Benazir Bhutto. Her neighboring heads of state may have been figures as unpredictable and potentially alarming as President Ahmadinejad of Iran and a clutch of opium-trading Afghan warlords, but Bhutto has always seemed reassuringly familiar to Western governments - one of us. She spoke English fluently because it was her first language. She had an English governess, went to a convent run by Irish nuns and rounded off her education with degrees from Harvard and Oxford. 'London is like a second home for me,' she once told me. 'I know London well. I know where the theatres are, I know where the shops are, I know where the hairdressers are. I love to browse through Harrods and WH Smith in Sloane Square. I know all my favorite ice cream parlors. I used to particularly love going to the one at Marble Arch: Baskin Robbins. Sometimes, I used to drive all the way up from Oxford just for an ice cream and then drive back again. That was my idea of sin.' It was difficult to imagine any of her neighboring heads of state, even India's earnest Sikh economist, Manmohan Singh, talking like this. For the Americans, what Benazir Bhutto wasn't, was possibly more attractive even than what she was. She wasn't a religious fundamentalist, she didn't have a beard, she didn't organize rallies where everyone shouts: 'Death to America' and she didn't issue fatwas against Booker-winning authors, even though Salman Rushdie ridiculed her as the Virgin Ironpants in his novel Shame.

However, the very reasons that made the West love Benazir Bhutto are the same that gave many Pakistanis second thoughts. Her English might have been fluent, but you couldn't say the same about her Urdu which she spoke like a well-groomed foreigner: fluently, but ungrammatically. Her Sindhi was even worse; apart from a few imperatives, she was completely at sea. English friends who knew Benazir at Oxford remember a bubbly babe who drove to lectures in a yellow MG, wintered in Gstaad and who to used to talk of the thrill of walking through Cannes with her hunky younger brother and being 'the centre of envy; wherever Shahnawaz went, women would be bowled over'. This Benazir, known to her friends as Bibi or Pinky, adored royal biographies and slushy romances: in her old Karachi bedroom, I found stacks of well-thumbed Mills and Boons including An Affair to Forget, Sweet Imposter and two copies of The Butterfly and the Baron. This same Benazir also had a weakness for dodgy Seventies easy listening - 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree' was apparently at the top of her playlist. This is also the Benazir who had an enviable line in red-rimmed fashion specs and who went weak at the sight of Marrons Glace.

But there was something much more majestic, even imperial, about the Benazir I met when she was Prime Minister. She walked and talked in a deliberately measured and regal manner and frequently used the royal 'we'. At my interview, she took a full three minutes to float down the 100 yards of lawns separating the Prime Minister's house from the chairs where I had been told to wait for her. There followed an interlude when Benazir found the sun was not shining in quite the way she wanted it to. 'The sun is in the wrong direction,' she announced. Her hair was arranged in a sort of baroque beehive topped by a white gauze dupatta. The whole painted vision reminded me of one of those aristocratic Roman princesses in Caligula This Benazir was a very different figure from that remembered by her Oxford contemporaries. This one was renowned throughout Islamabad for chairing 12-hour cabinet meetings and for surviving on four hours' sleep. This was the Benazir who continued campaigning after the suicide bomber attacked her convoy the very day of her return to Pakistan in October, and who blithely disregarded the

mortal threat to her life in order to continue fighting. This other Benazir Bhutto, in other words, was fearless, sometimes heroically so, and as hard as nails.

More than anything, perhaps, Benazir was a feudal princess with the aristocratic sense of entitlement that came with owning great tracts of the country and the Western-leaning tastes that such a background tends to give. It was this that gave her the sophisticated gloss and the feudal grit that distinguished her political style. In this, she was typical of many Pakistani politicians. Real democracy has never thrived in Pakistan, in part because landowning remains the principle social base from which politicians emerge. The educated middle class is in Pakistan still largely excluded from the political process. As a result, in many of the more backward parts of Pakistan, the feudal landowner expects his people to vote for his chosen candidate. As writer Ahmed Rashid put it: 'In some constituencies, if the feudals put up their dog as a candidate, that dog would get elected with 99 per cent of the vote.

Today, Benazir is being hailed as a martyr for freedom and democracy, but far from being a natural democrat, in many ways, Benazir was the person who brought Pakistan's strange variety of democracy, really a form of 'elective feudalism', into disrepute and who helped fuel the current, apparently unstoppable, growth of the Islamists. For Bhutto was no Aung San Suu Kyi. During her first 20-month premiership, astonishingly, she failed to pass a single piece of major legislation. Amnesty International accused her government of having one of the world's worst records of custodial deaths, killings and torture. Within her party, she declared herself the lifetime president of the PPP and refused to let her brother Murtaza challenge her. When he persisted in doing so, he ended up shot dead in highly suspicious circumstances outside the family home. Murtaza's wife Ghinwa and his daughter Fatima, as well as Benazir's mother, all firmly believed that Benazir gave the order to have him killed. As recently as the autumn, Benazir did and said nothing to stop President Musharraf ordering the US and UK-brokered 'rendition' of her rival, Nawaz Sharif, to Saudi Arabia and so remove from the election her most formidable rival. Many of her supporters regarded her deal with Musharraf as a betrayal of all her party stood for.

Behind Pakistan's endless swings between military government and democracy lies a surprising continuity of elitist interests: to some extent, Pakistan's industrial, military and landowning classes are all interrelated and they look after each other. They do not, however, do much to look after the poor. The government education system barely functions in Pakistan and for the poor, justice is almost impossible to come by. According to political scientist Ayesha Siddiqa: 'Both the military and the political parties have all failed to create an environment where the poor can get what they need from the state. So the poor have begun to look to alternatives for justice. In the long term, flaws in the system will create more room for the fundamentalists.' In the West, many right-wing commentators on the Islamic world tend to see the march of political Islam as the triumph of an anti-liberal and irrational 'Islamo-fascism'. Yet much of the success of the Islamists in countries such as Pakistan comes from the Islamists' ability to portray themselves as champions of social justice, fighting people such as Benazir Bhutto from the Islamic elite that rules most of the Muslim world from Karachi to Beirut, Ramallah and Cairo.

This elite the Islamists successfully depict as rich, corrupt, decadent and westernized. Benazir had a reputation for massive corruption. During her government, the anti-corruption organization

Transparency International named Pakistan one of the three most corrupt countries in the world. Bhutto and her husband, Asif Zardari, widely known as 'Mr 10 Per Cent', faced allegations of plundering the country. Charges were filed in Pakistan, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States to investigate their various bank accounts.

When I interviewed Abdul Rashid Ghazi in the Islamabad Red Mosque shortly before his death in the storming of the complex in July, he kept returning to the issue of social justice: 'We want our rulers to be honest people,' he said. 'But now the rulers are living a life of luxury while thousands of innocent children have empty stomachs and can't even get basic necessities.' This is the reason for the rise of the Islamists in Pakistan and why so many people support them: they are the only force capable of taking on the country's landowners and their military cousins.

This is why in all recent elections the Islamist parties have hugely increased their share of the vote, why they now already control both the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan and why it is they who are most likely to gain from the current crisis. Benazir Bhutto was a courageous, secular and liberal woman. But sadness at the demise of this courageous fighter should not mask the fact that as a pro-Western feudal leader who did little for the poor, she was as much a central part of Pakistan's problems as the solution to them.

William Dalrymple's latest book, The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857, published by Bloomsbury, recently won the Duff Cooper Prize for History.

III: IN THE WAKE OF ASSASSINATION

DELCAN WALSH (The Guardian; *January 2, 2008***)**

Mumtaz Bhutto head of the Bhutto tribe in Pakistan's Sindh province and former rival of Benazir Bhutto sat back on the cool marble veranda of his sprawling country mansion in rural Sindh province. A guard brandishing a Kalashnikov stood behind him. A servant fanned the chocolate cake on the table to keep the flies at bay. He was dismayed.

The rise of Asif Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's husband, to the leadership of the Pakistan People's party, was nothing less than a disaster, said Mumtaz, the sprightly 74-year-old head of the Bhutto clan. “Zardari is an illiterate man. He has no political background or experience. He will not be able to conduct himself as the same level as Benazir,” he said with barely concealed disdain, “Most unfortunate”.

Family feuds are never pretty but for the Bhuttos, Pakistan's dominant political dynasty, they are played out with the same intensity that characterises the rest of the family's Greek tragedy-style history. As Pakistan's opposition has fractured, so Bhutto's family has been rent asunder by discord. There are several rival wings, mostly defined in terms of support or opposition to Benazir. Now that she is dead, though, that may be about to change.

Mumtaz Bhutto fell out with Benazir more than 15 years ago. He said she had led the PPP astray; she said he was jealous of her power. His house is just six miles from Benazir's Naudero home, but the last time they met was in 1995. “It was a lunch in Islamabad. We didn't agree on anything,” he recalled. Mumtaz retreated to start his own political party from his elegant home amid the salt-encrusted fields. But it won little support, so he concentrated on his duties as an old-style feudal lord. Critics call him a relic of another age.

Peasants surround his magnificent house with its fleet of four-wheel-drive vehicles and ornate private mosque. Two sleek hunting dogs, recently imported from Britain, roam the garden where servants trim the grass with a donkey-drawn mower. A domineering Raj-era portrait in the hall shows his grandfather brandishing a curved sword and a Purdey gun.

By Mumtaz's estimates, his land is worth £12m and he makes approximately £23 per acre from his landholdings, which he estimates at about 15,000 acres. Summers are spent in London, where he rents flats in Mayfair or Knightsbridge, or on Italy's Amalfi coast. “Absolutely heaven,” he said. “But this year we went to Portofino - the Hotel Splendido.” Otherwise he sits on the veranda of his home, solving the problems of his peasant tenants. Up to 100 supplicants stream in every day, bringing a variety of grievances to be solved. “There is total lawlessness here. Someone gets shot, someone is murdered, marriage disputes, wife eloping - I have to find a solution,” he said.

But the one dispute he could never solve was the one with Benazir, whose tomb he has just visited. Now he is angry that control of the PPP - considered synonymous with the Bhutto family - has passed to her son Bilawal, and he has dared to take to the Bhutto name.

“He is a Zardari, you can't just change it like that,” he said. The mantle should have passed to a Bhutto, he said, because “it came into existence and survived on the name and sweat and blood of the Bhutto family.” Asif Zardari, he said, “made no sacrifices for the party”.

“He has become a billionaire with bank balances and studs and ranches all over the world. That should have been enough for him." Instead, he said, the title should have passed to the “real” Bhuttos.

In life Benazir was a great rival to her sister-in-law, Ghinwa Bhutto, the widow of Benazir's brother, Murtaza, who was gunned down on a Karachi street in 1996 while she was prime minister. Ghinwa comes from northern Lebanon and met her husband during his exile in Syria, where she worked as a ballet teacher. Benazir disparaged her as the “Lebanese bellydancer”. Ghinwa blamed Benazir for the death of her husband.

“I place the moral responsibility on Benazir. If she did not kill him, certainly his death was very convenient for her party of cronies,” Ghinwa told the Guardian last October. Benazir denied the accusation, saying the shooting had been engineered by the country's intelligence agencies to undermine her rule and divided her clan. “Kill a Bhutto to get a Bhutto,” she would tell friends.

But the conflict passed to the next generation through Fatima, Murtaza's 25-year-old daughter and newspaper columnist. Clever and impassioned, Fatima was considered a possible heir to the Bhutto political dynasty. But she has not entered politics and her mother's party, a splinter from Bhutto's PPP - lacks even one seat in the provincial assembly.

Until recently, they were campaigning for a seat in Larkana, the heartland of Bhutto power. Fatima had tried to avoid living in the shadow of her more famous aunt. "The fact that she's my aunt is just a footnote," she said in October. "Benazir always gives these interviews saying that we are brainwashed and mummy's a bellydancer. But I don't engage in that. We don't respond to her petty diatribes and attacks."

After Benazir returned to Pakistan, surviving a suicide bombing, Fatima issued scathing criticism of her aunt, whom she referred to as "Mrs Zardari". Benazir had recklessly exposed hundreds of people for the sake of her "personal theatre", she charged. "She insisted on this grand show, she bears a responsibility for these deaths and these injuries."

But this week, all that changed. Traumatised by her aunt's killing, Fatima dropped the fiery rhetoric for wistful memories. "Honestly, I am at a loss," she wrote in a heartfelt column in The News, a Pakistani daily, this week. "I am compounded in a state of shock."

Bhutto's death reminded her of her own ghosts, she said. "I have yet to bury a family member who has died a natural death," she said, recalling her father, who was shot, her uncle Shahnawaz who was poisoned, and her aunt Benazir, assassinated.

"This isn't about me, it's about those whom we have lost," she wrote. "It's about the graveyard ... that is just too full".