

## Axis of Sketchy Allies

by Maureen Dowd via rialator - New York Times *Friday, Sep 22 2006, 5:20pm*

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Pakistan is at the heart of the Faustian deal the Bush administration has made.

It helps to plug your book at the White House.

After Pervez Musharraf coyly sidestepped a question at a news conference with President Bush about his claim on "60 Minutes" that Richard Armitage threatened to bomb Pakistan back to the Stone Age if it did not cooperate in routing the Taliban in Afghanistan, noting that he had to save such juicy tidbits for his book's publication next week, he shot up over 1,000 spots on Amazon.com.



**Maureen Dowd**

General Musharraf told Steve Kroft he found the Stone Age crack "very rude," and Mr. Armitage was on the defensive yesterday, explaining that he had been tough with Pakistan just after 9/11 but had not made any Flintstones threats.

The former deputy to Colin Powell needn't apologize. That was the last time our foreign policy was on track, when we were pursuing the real enemy. It's all been downhill from there.

The Pakistan president is a smooth operator, a military dictator cruising around the capital with his elegant wife and enormous security contingent, talking about how much he likes democracy, which he won't yet allow.

He may have more respect for checks and balances than Dick Cheney, but that's not saying much.

On the subject of Osama, he's so slippery you want to lock him in a room with the muscle-bound Mr. Armitage. General ... General, as W. called him in that famous campaign pop quiz, tried to persuade Mr. Bush that the shabby truce he recently made with tribal leaders, agreeing that the Pakistani Army would stay out of the wild border area next to Afghanistan — where Osama and other Al Qaeda and Taliban members are believed to be hiding — was really "against" the militants.

The Pakistan government has, in effect, simply turned over the North Waziristan area to the militants. ABC News quoted Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan Khan of Pakistan as saying that the deal was an implicit amnesty, and that Osama "would not be taken into custody" as long as he was "being like a peaceful citizen."

American officials are dubious about Mr. Musharraf's commitment to destroying Al Qaeda and the Taliban. But at the press conference, W., who no doubt thinks he has seen into General ... General's soul, acted as though he were willing to believe the Pakistani president when he says he is "on the hunt" for Osama and the Taliban at the same time he's setting up a safe haven for them — and getting huffy at the idea that American forces have the right to go into Pakistan to track Osama.

"Americans who are concerned about a recurrence of 9/11 are worried about the Axis of Evil when the real problem is the Axis of Allies — Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Britain," the British historian Niall Ferguson says. "The terrorists are funded in Saudi Arabia, they're trained in Pakistan, and they organize their plots quite easily in London."

Mr. Ferguson, who analyzes evildoers and despots in his new book, "The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West," observes that Mr. Musharraf could not survive if he truly tried to break up the cozy relationship between militants, tribal leaders and some in his Army and intelligence service.

The Paks, as W. and Vice like to call them, are at the heart of the Faustian deal the Bush administration has made. The justification for invading Iraq was that they couldn't allow a dictator who might be harboring terrorists to stay in power. But their great ally in the war on terror is General Musharraf, a dictator who appears to be harboring terrorists, including the one we want most.

Hamid Karzai, the president of Afghanistan, who is coming to the White House next week to dine with W. and General ... General, expressed a sly skepticism about his neighbor's protestations that he is strategizing against militants. As David Sanger reported, the Afghan leader told Times editors and reporters at a meeting Thursday that he had tried to get Pakistan's help in repelling the resurgent Taliban by giving the Pakistanis "information on training ground, on operation, people, their phone numbers, their G.P.S. locations."

"Our friends come back to us and say this information is old," Mr. Karzai continued. "Maybe. But it means they were there."

Asked where Osama was, he smiled and replied: "If I said he was in Pakistan, President Musharraf would be mad at me. And if I said he was in Afghanistan, it would not be true."

We may not have Osama, but at least W. helped General ... General with his Amazon ranking. "Buy the book," the president recommended as the two allies wrapped up.

<http://select.nytimes.com/2006/09/23/opinion/23dowd.html>

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Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-313.html>