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Dr. Hoodbhoy, a faculty member at the Department of Physics at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, is an outspoken critic of Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf. He has written and spoken extensively on topics ranging from science in Islam to education issues in Pakistan and nuclear disarmament. Read his interview with NBC's Tom Brokaw below:

Tom Brokaw: Dr. Hoodbhoy, it has been almost four years now since the

Prof. Pervez Hoodbhoy says only 'veneer of liberalism' exists

Americans were under attack on 9/11. Pakistan and the United States have had a very strong alliance since then at the top. How has it affected your country and your judgment?

Pervez Hoodbhoy: As you say, it's been an alliance at the top and there alone, because there is a great deal of resentment at this country, at United States policies in Iraq, in the Middle East and in Afghanistan. And so all of the government is one side; the people are thinking very differently here.

Brokaw: Do the people endorse what the Taliban had in mind for Afghanistan?

Hoodbhoy: There is a split among people. A lot of people here initially had supported the Taliban. But, when they got to know what the Taliban had done to Afghan society, that support dropped. However, when the United States bombed Afghanistan, that support increased again. And now I believe that there is a substantial number of people that do support ideas that General Musharraf is seeking to propound. But this country is moving towards increasing conservatism. And there is--

Brokaw: In a religious sense?

Hoodbhoy: In a religious sense. There is a lot more religion here in Pakistan today than there was 15 years, 20 years ago. There is a generation that has come up which has experienced text books, which are totally different from those that were taught in the beginning years of Pakistan. And that has created a new generation of Pakistanis. One which is much less tolerant and one which is much more prone to religious extremism.

I think that these are signs of danger. The present government has paid virtually no attention to this. And so although we have a veneer of liberalism at the top, I'm afraid things are different in the body and

then mass of society.

Brokaw: But, even if President Musharraf were to be a more aggressive reformer in education, in politics, in the economic, do you think that the would dissuade the Mulas who are teaching a radical form of Islamic law?

Hoodbhoy: There has been a kind of a symbiosis between the military and the Mulas in Pakistan. One has helped encourage the other. I do believe that General Musharraf could act much more boldly and could make a real difference. But, he is not out to be a social reformer. His primary constituency is the Pakistan army. And so he represents the establishment and its interests. I wish that he would act more boldly on many social issues. I'm afraid he's not doing that.

Brokaw: President Musharraf, General Musharraf, has a delicate balancing act here. He's trying to fight the war on terror. He's trying to keep radical Islam in check. He's trying to deal with his adversaries to the East, the Indians, at the same time. And maintain a good relationship with the United States. You can't envy him those many positions, can you?

Hoodbhoy: Well, General Musharraf deserves a certain amount of credit. Certainly, he is doing well on India and in making piece with India. And doing something about the Kashmir issue. Although, that's a long way towards getting settled. Nevertheless, whenever the General is challenged by the Mulas in Pakistan, he immediately steps back. The blasphemy laws are one example of this. Under the blasphemy laws, a person can be sent to death immediately. And there is no penalty other than this.

When challenged, the General immediately moved back. There's another case and that was of the religious column in Pakistani passports. After many years, it had become possible for this column to be omitted from passports. But, then when the religious extremists came out in the streets, the General backtracked on that. And so, example after example can be given of this kind. The General has the Pakistan army as his constituency and that's the one that he considers the most important. So, it is not civil society. It is not democracy. It is being in power that is most important for him.

Brokaw: But, should the secular, civil society in Pakistan, those people who are not religious extremists and are not in the military, take a larger role in defining this country's future as well. Don't they have an obligation?

Hoodbhoy: Oh, absolutely. I believe that it is the secular elements in this society who have a duty to transform society. But that part of society is small. And it has had to deal with terrific disadvantages.

Twenty-five years ago, the entire curriculum of this country was redefined by a serving army general. One who has seized who had seized power and become the president. And then he went about redefining Pakistan as an Islamic state. Not as a state for Muslims, but as one where Islamic would apply.

And thereafter, what we saw was a rewriting of history. We saw children being encouraged into jihad, into martyrdom and so forth. And this government, the present military government has done nothing to change things. So today, our curriculum, that which is taught in public schools, is one that encourages concepts of jihad, which encourages militarism, which encourages violence. And so a society that has its children brought up in this way will obviously, in the future, breed extremists and will breed terrorists.

Those terrorists may be dangerous to the United States. But, they are much more dangerous for us here in Pakistan.

Brokaw: Help me out here. In the United States, General Musharraf is seen as a very important ally. But, what you're saying is that in this country, he's not tough enough on religious extremism. And it's harder on Pakistan as a result of his policies than it may be helpful to the United States in fighting the Taliban.

Hoodbhoy: Absolutely. There is only a veneer of liberalism. And General Musharraf has got a very good mechanism for convincing the world and convincing the United States that he's their ally. But, if you look at the long term everyone of Pakistani society, I see a very serious problem over there. Because here religious orthodoxy and together with that religious extremist are growing. You can see that in terms of the social behavior around you.

I have been teaching in my university for now 31 years. There was scarcely a girl in boka in those days. Now, it is the other way around. You can hardly see girls who are without a boka. Yes, some. But, fewer and fewer with time. This social conservatism is a consequence of the ceaseless efforts of the orthodoxy in seeking to impose their version of Islam upon the people of Pakistan.

Brokaw: Bottom line, almost four years after 9/11, is there much more sympathy for the Taliban here? More active members of the Taliban or Al-Qaida than there may have been before the attacks?

Hoodbhoy: It is not so much support for the Taliban as a fear and a dislike of the United States that has grown. And this has particularly increased after the war in Iraq. The government of Pakistan may well be

with the United States. But, the majority of people over here have been appalled. They've been shocked. And now they deeply fear and dislike the United States.

Brokaw: You have described the United States now as imperial America determine to redraw the boundaries of the Middle East. Members of the administration and people who are supportive of President Bush would say, "No, we're attempting to give the people of those countries a right to choose their own destiny. That's why we had elections in Afghanistan, in Iraq. That's why we're putting additional pressure on Egypt."

Hoodbhoy: Well, how can there be democracy without sovereignty? There is no real Iraqi government. There is no real Afghan government. These are--

Brokaw: --it's a work in progress?

Hoodbhoy: In the long term, let's see how it goes. But, the costs have been enormous. It was 100,000 Iraqi people who were killed because it had been claimed by the United States. We shall never forget Colin Powell saying that these are mobile vans with weapons of mass destruction in them moving around. We shall never forget that the United States had said that Iraq was a threat to the biggest power on earth.

And that was the reason for the invasion. And now with 100,000 people dead, daily car bombings and suicide bombings in Iraq, I don't see how the United States can claim victory over there. This has done immense damage to the United States.

Brokaw: On that point, President Musharraf may agree with you. He has said to me that he believes that the war in Iraq was unnecessary and a big distraction from the fundamental war on terrorism. That what the war in Iraq did was mobilize sympathy in this part of the world for Islam.

Hoodbhoy: It was not only a distraction. And here I agree with General Musharraf. Iraq has not become an epicenter of terrorism itself. It is terrorism of Iraqis upon people of the other sect. But that terrorism will know no bounds. No geographical boundaries. And with time, this is going to increase. Not decrease. And you can see even now a linkage between terror here and there. There are militant groups in Pakistan which openly advertise. Let's go to Iraq and fight the Americans there.

Brokaw: What will happen if there's a major offensive this spring and summer in the frontier regions between your country and Afghanistan and the Pakistani army becomes much more involved in a proactive way in going after elements of Al-Qaida and other terrorists groups?

Hoodbhoy: Well, terrorism will go into recession and it will go back into the nooks and crannies and reform. But, we'll need to have is a long term strategy. And I don't see this long term strategy anywhere.

Brokaw: The long time strategy being reforms in a fundamental way, a greater understanding of the dilemma that most Pakistani people find themselves in?

Hoodbhoy: Well, in Pakistan, I believe the reforms must have two elements in them. First of all, there has to be great social justice. The fact that the Pakistan army has been ruling this country and keeping all the material resources to itself. That has to change. The feudal and the land structure of the this country has to change. But then more than that, the religious orthodoxy in this country has to be taken head on. And there's no way other than this. This General Musharraf has not only refused to do, but he's actually worked against it by disallowing the democratic process in this country to evolve. So, the political parties have to deal with enormous odds. Yes, of course, there's a problem with the political parties themselves. Many of the leaders have been corrupt and so forth. But, to not allow democracy to grow at the roots, that is going to be fatal for Pakistan and for the future of fighting the war against terror.

Brokaw: What you're saying is that there's a certain amount of hypocrisy on the part of the United States. Where it talks about democracy in Afghanistan and in Iraq, it turns a blind eye to the absence of real democracy in Pakistan.

Hoodbhoy: Oh, that goes without saying. And it's not anything new. The fact is that we've had four military dictators in Pakistan. General Ayub, General Diahahan, General Zia and now General Pervez Musharraf. And the United States has supported every single one of them.

Brokaw: Let's talk about another volatile issue. Pakistan was involved in the war on terror has also developed a nuclear arsenal. And the United States is not putting the same kind of pressure on Pakistan about its nuclear arsenal that is, for example, on Iran or North Korea.

Hoodbhoy: Yes, and I think it's very unfortunate that the United States has essentially given up on nonproliferation. There is now no effort being made to have India and Pakistan reduce or even do anything.

Brokaw: The United States has been quite critical of the nuclear arsenal that it believes is being developed in Iran. The nuclear arsenal that already in North Korea. But it says very little about the nuclear arsenal that exists here in Pakistan.

Hoodbhoy: Well, basically the United States says our friends can have nukes but nobody else can. So, that's the kind of attitude now the United States has brought to bear on the whole problem. And it's unfortunate.

Brokaw: The United States has been quite critical of Iran because it believes that is developing a nuclear arsenal. It's also outspokenly critical of North Korea and its nuclear arsenal. But it says very little publicly about the nuclear capability of your country. Of Pakistan.

Hoodbhoy: Well, basically the United States says that our friends can have nukes. But nobody else can. And that's unfortunate. Because non-proliferation has been given up as a goal. During the Clinton era, the United States put a lot of pressure upon both Pakistan and India to reduce the number of nuclear weapons And to roll back and end the nuclear programs.

That pressure has completely and totally disappeared. The United States has basically accepted both Pakistan and India as nuclear weapon states. On Iran it has a different position. Well, now that's being selective. It's being selective on Israel. That kind of selectivity then looks to the rest of the world as something which is not right. Double standards. Multiple standards. Whatever. And so proliferation is now something that's going to occur.

Brokaw: Professor, put yourself in president Musarref's place, trying to fight the war on terror, trying to keep the lid on extremists in this country who are teaching young Islamic students that they must join jihad against the United States. And trying to keep Pakistan moving forward economically and culturally. Can you imagine how you can do it better?

Hoodbhoy: Well, I'd take the extremists on. Head on. That's necessary. Because as soon as you give in to them, you give an inch, they take a mile. And the entire history of Pakistan is a sorry record of that. It started with a former prime minister who gave into the religious extremists and started changing Pakistan more and more into an intolerant Islamic state. After that it continued.

General Musharraf is continuing that tradition. What he must do is say, Pakistan will be a place where everybody has the same rights irrespective of which religion, which sect you are born into. And that this is a land where there will be social justice. There's no social justice here. And there is no democracy. Democracy must be allowed to prosper, to grow. And the way to do that is to remove the curbs upon it. And General Musharraf is simply not doing that.

Brokaw: Are you saying that if things don't change in Pakistan internally and in its relationship with the United States, there's a danger that this country could become another Iran, within, not so many years?

Hoodbhoy: Iran will appear minor. Iran was 35, 40 million at the time of the revolution. Pakistan right now is 150 million people. With 70 percent of the population being under the age of 16. In 25 years from now, it will be 250 million people. That's a quarter billion people. And of those quarter billion the kids will be the overwhelming majority. And those will be kids who have been brought up, nurtured on the ideas of jihad and martyrdom. And brought up to believe that militarism, taking up arms is the way to solve the world's problems. This government is not doing anything about that.

Brokaw: You deal a lot with youngsters, many of them are deeply religious. How many of them talk about Osama bin Laden? Or hold him up as some kind of iconic figure?

Hoodbhoy: Osama has disappeared from public life in Pakistan. There was a time when there used to be Osama T-shirts. There was a time when people actually had biographies of Bin Laden. But now you don't see very much of that. He's fallen into disfavor. The authorities have targeted him as an enemy. And so the public has followed to an extent.

Now, it's different in different places in Pakistan. In the frontier provinces he is still a hero. And in the minds of the lower middle-classes in Pakistan, there you would see him, again, as an icon. As one who has resisted the world's only super power and who then stands for fighting the forces that seek to oppress Islam.