

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

Where have we seen this before: a Bush Administration gives vague guidance to our favored military dictator in a turbulent neighborhood, and the dictator takes a step that might destabilize the whole region.

The Bush Administration knew that Pakistani strongman Pervez Musharraf planned to institute emergency rule but did not act or speak out about the plan, according to officials with knowledge of the discussion who spoke anonymously in Friday's *Wall Street Journal*.

"In the days before the Nov. 3 announcement, the general's aides and advisers forewarned U.S. diplomats in a series of meetings in Islamabad, according to Pakistani and U.S. officials," the paper said.

Because the US response was "muted," Pakistan interpreted American silence as a green light to instituting martial law, quickly deposing an intransigent Supreme Court, which had ruled against the general in the past.

"One of Gen. Musharraf's closest advisers said U.S. criticism was muted, which some senior Pakistanis interpreted as a sign they could proceed," the *Journal* said. "'You don't like that option? You give us one,' the adviser says he told his American interlocutors. 'There were no good options.'"

A U.S. official "familiar with the discussions" told the paper the talks were part of "'intensive efforts' to dissuade Gen. Musharraf from declaring a state of emergency."

"There was never a green light," the
U.S. official told the New York daily.
[my emphasis]

Of course, when we offered such vague guidance to Saddam Hussein in July 1990, just before he invaded Kuwait, he did not yet have nukes (though he was trying awfully hard to get them). Nor was he hosting a slew of terrorists who had already struck at the United States.

I'd love to know a little more about these conversations. The most obvious question, of course, pertains to the role of Dick Cheney in these purported "intensive efforts" to dissuade General Musharraf from imposing martial law. Was this vague guidance just one more consequence of having Dick in charge of Pakistan policy?