

Red Mosque action ends in Pakistan

by UPI

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan -- Pakistani forces have completed the takeover of Islamabad's Red Mosque but concerns remained Thursday whether it would set off reprisals by Islamic militants. Even as the two-day military action to retake the mosque from radical Islamic students ended Wednesday, a recorded message -- purportedly from No. 2 al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri -- appeared on Web sites used by Islamists, requesting they take revenge against Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's government. The message's authenticity had not yet been verified, The New York Times reported Thursday. There still was no official count of those killed in the mosque battle, although the military had said earlier at least 50 militants and nine security personnel had died. A major concern, the Times said, is whether the mosque episode will further inflame the radical elements and add to the woes of Musharraf, who faces criticism for suspending Chief Justice Iftikhar Chowdhury and is under international pressure to flush terrorists out of tribal and border areas. Pakistan also is scheduled to hold elections this fall and it is not yet clear whether the high court will allow Musharraf to be re-elected while continuing to keep his post as the country's top military official.

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