
Pakistan's Long Tradition of Military Rule–II*: Musharraf's Follies and the Present Scenario

Gurmeet Kanwal

Military Disaster

The Pakistan Army's military defeat on the Line of Control (LoC) at Kargil in the summer months of 1999 and its ignominious withdrawal from the few remaining areas under its occupation came as a traumatic shock for the nation that had been conditioned to believe that the Pakistan Army-Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) combine had reduced the Indian Army to a demoralised force over ten years of proxy war and that the so-called Mujahideen (actually a motley array of rag-tag mercenary terrorists grouped into several *jihadi* outfits), were invincible. Hallucinatory public announcements of non-existent victories made the ultimate defeat much harder to accept. The people of Pakistan were even more disillusioned when the truth gradually dawned that the intruders were mainly troops of the regular Northern Light Infantry (NLI) battalions of the Pakistan Army and that the official line that they were Kashmiri freedom fighters was a skillfully crafted charade.¹ Besides captured Pakistani small arms, crew-served weapons and ammunition with Pakistan Ordnance Factories markings on them, India produced hard documentary evidence of the presence of regular Pakistan soldiers – identity cards, army pay books, operational orders, medal ribbons, NLI shoulder titles and other uniform insignia, daily parade state books of sundry

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havildar (sergeant) majors, ration issue receipts and letters and photographs from family members.

Unprofessional Conduct

The shell-shocked people of Pakistan were astounded that the Pakistan Army had completely disowned several hundred of its dead regular soldiers and had refused to accept their bodies back. It is the tradition in all professional armies to do their utmost, including resorting to military force, to retrieve the bodies of their martyrs. The Pakistan Army's refusal to even acknowledge the presence of its dead soldiers on the icy mountaintops where they died sent shock waves through Pakistan. The people of the Gilgit and Baltistan areas in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), from where the NLI soldiers predominantly hailed, were alienated forever from an army that had first used their brave young men as cannon fodder and then, in conduct unbecoming of a responsible army, disowned the dead. Also, on the eve of the Pakistan foreign minister's visit to India during the Kargil conflict, in an act of perverted defiance, the Pakistan Army had returned the horribly mutilated bodies of six Indian soldiers and had been criticised all over the world. The common man in Pakistan, especially the thinking man, saw this act as barbaric and against the basic tenets of Islam. It will take the Pakistan Army a long time to live down this image of shameless irresponsibility and its international designation as a "rogue army".

In a stinging editorial rebuke, *The Times of India* succinctly summed up the state of the Pakistan Army and its penchant for brutality as a tool to terrorise its opponents:²

All over the world, the uniformed fraternity observes normal courtesies even during active hostilities. By their action, complicity or silence, Pakistan's Generals have disgraced their own uniform... The genocidal killing and rape it indulged in Bangladesh was the beginning of its brutalisation. Then came the long period of martial law, which gave the army in Pakistan an unlimited license to suppress civil liberties and oppress its own people. Along with that, the Pakistan army got involved in Afghanistan. During that war, Russian prisoners were subjected to the kind of inhuman treatment now being inflicted on Indian soldiers.

The Pakistan army also trained mercenaries who subsequently spread all over the world as extremist warriors. Wherever they have gone, these extremists – known as Afghanis – have committed similar brutalities. As a general practice, the Afghanis in Algeria slit the throats of children, women and men whenever

they attack a village. India is aware of the unspeakable atrocities these elements inflicted on innocent Kashmiris, including the Pandits, who were ethnically cleansed from the Valley. The steady brutalisation of the Pakistani armed forces – and of the mercenaries they trained – has been accompanied by Islamabad's loss of control over both the army and the organisations of marauding terrorists financed by the narcotics trade... India is not dealing with a disciplined force proud of its uniform and its soldierly code of conduct.

Even within Pakistan, the army was severely criticised for inflicting a “military disaster” on the nation. Former Pakistan Air Chief, Air Marshal Nur Khan said at a post-Kargil seminar, “The buck stops at Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the COAS, General Pervez Musharraf, who are responsible for the whole debacle and must accept the responsibility.”³ Vice Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Matinuddin, described the Kargil operation as a complete fiasco and said that strategic planning was completely lacking as the army had failed to anticipate the enemy's reaction. Lt Gen Assad Durrani, former ISI chief, said that while the intrusions were tactically brilliant, Pakistan had not set its strategic priorities and had failed in diplomatic and political preparations. The Jamaat-e-Islami's mouthpiece *Jasarat*, criticised the government for its “hypocritical attitude” and said that a *“jihad cannot be conducted with lies.”*⁴ Salahuddin, the ‘supreme commander’ of the Hizbul Mujahideen, criticised Pakistan's political leadership for appealing to the Mujahideen to withdraw from Kargil.⁵ Former Pakistan Foreign Secretary Tanveer Ahmed Khan described the Kargil intrusions as “a poorly thought out and an *ad hoc* attempt to revive the Kashmir issue.”⁶ Another former Director General of the ISI, Lt Gen Talat Masood, was more perceptive and attributed the failure in Kargil to a flawed civil-military relationship. “Pakistan... tends to go for high-risk policies. There was a lack of synergy between the political and military elements in the sense that the likely political consequences were not fully debated. It is not true that the Prime Minister was not aware. This is not a case of denial of information. I attribute it to the lack of an institutional framework to discuss these things. That is why a National Security Council is important.”⁷

Post-Kargil Despair

Lt Gen Talat Masood wrote:⁸ “The Kargil crisis has once again exposed the bankruptcy of Pakistan's national policy. Events in and around Kargil brought India and Pakistan dangerously close to an all-out war, dealt a shattering blow

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to the peace process, have done immense damage to the already faltering economy, isolated Pakistan internationally and proved highly divisive internally.” However, not all retired Pakistani military men were balanced in their approach. Lt Gen Hamid Gul, also a former ISI chief, was bitter in his criticism of the US role in getting the Pakistan Army to withdraw from Kargil. “Why should not the Americans withdraw from America?” he asked rhetorically in an interview with the *Pakistan Observer*, “They are not the native dwellers of the land.”⁹ He also expressed the view

that India might have to surrender the Siachen Glacier if the Pakistani intruders “hold on to their present positions in Kashmir for another six to eight weeks.” It was wishful military thinking like this that had led the Pakistan Army to launch its misadventure in Kargil. Brian Cloughley, a military analyst and formerly Australia’s defence attaché in Pakistan, toured Pakistan extensively and has reported the post-Kargil mood within Pakistan to be one of despair.¹⁰ “The army was shaken and young officers, especially, felt betrayed. There was some plain speaking when the COAS toured military bases and morale was badly affected in some units. The entire episode seemed so unnecessary and harmful to Pakistan’s already shaky image...”

International Isolation

What also came as a big surprise to Pakistan was that India received support from almost the entire world while even China shied away from actively supporting Pakistan. US support to India was particularly galling for the Pakistan Army as Pakistan had for long been used to being bailed out by the US. Among others, Republican Senator Benjamin Gilman, chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, and his co-ranking Democrat, Sam Gejdenson, squarely blamed the Pakistani military for the intrusions and urged the State Department to persuade Pakistan to immediately withdraw its troops.¹¹ Even the US media, normally fairly supportive of Pakistan, was unequivocally critical of Pakistani involvement. In an editorial, the *Washington Post* warned that the escalating fighting was fraught with danger since Islamabad’s “headstrong Generals” or its “weak civilian leadership’s” fear of “prospective humiliation at the hands of India” makes for a “pervasive nervousness.”¹² The editorial suggested, “If it was not the elected government of the country that was responsible, then – perhaps worse – it may

have been a sort of Pakistan military-fundamentalist axis that the government is not in a position to know fully about, let alone subordinate.”

American Military Diplomacy

The US dispatched Gen Anthony Zinni, commander-in-chief of the US Central Command, to meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Gen Pervez Musharraf, in the last week of June 1999, to impress on them that they should comply with the G-8 resolution and withdraw Pakistani forces

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that had intruded into the Indian side of the LoC.¹³ While the visiting US general had detailed discussions with the Pakistan COAS, the Pakistan Army did not allow him to have a private audience with Nawaz Sharif. “It is significant that General Zinni could not see the Pakistani Prime Minister alone; throughout the meeting the Pakistani army Chief was also present.”¹⁴ Right through the Kargil campaign, the dissonance between the Pakistan government and the army emerged quite clearly. Under pressure from the US president and many other world leaders to withdraw from Kargil, with the army recommending that the Kargil campaign be fought to the bitter end, and worried about the political fallout of capitulation to India, Nawaz Sharif was caught in a cleft stick. Finally, when Tiger Hill fell in the full glare of the world media, Nawaz Sharif was negotiating a face saving formula with President Clinton in Washington on 04 July 1999. He was reportedly shown satellite photographs of the build up of several Indian Strike Corps, the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force. Bruce Riedel has claimed that he was also shown photographs of Pakistani nuclear-tipped missiles being readied for launch by the army.¹⁵

The Pakistan prime minister clearly saw the writing on the wall, even though his army chief still refused to do so. Sharif capitulated and agreed to withdraw the Pakistan Army from Kargil while continuing to call the intruders Kashmiri freedom fighters. His spin-doctors tried their best to salvage a politically bad situation. The Pakistan Muslim League (PML) spokesman asserted, “Sharif had averted a nuclear holocaust, ensured peace in South Asia and upheld Pakistan’s ‘principled stand’ on Kashmir.”¹⁶ Though the army reluctantly carried out his orders subsequently,¹⁷ perhaps because the military brass also began to see the light of day regarding the imminent defeat and the physical expulsion of the NLI units from the remaining areas, with much higher casualty rates, the army never

forgave Nawaz Sharif for inflicting humiliation on it by accepting India's diktat through Uncle Sam's good offices.

Hence, despite the US State Department's reported warning to the army chief to desist from toppling the Sharif government,¹⁸ Musharraf's military coup was inevitable. However, it may still not have come about so soon if Nawaz Sharif had not started colluding with some of the corps commanders to win their support and divide the army's top echelons with promises of power, senior gubernatorial and ambassadorial assignments and perhaps even heaps of money. In all these murky confabulations, Lt Gen Ziauddin, the director general of the ISI and a Sharif appointee, played a major role as a go-between. The army brass resented these amateurish attempts at subverting the loyalty of top generals and Musharraf moved quickly to retire one corps commander and relieve another of his active command. On 10 October 1999, the Quetta Corps Commander, Lt Gen Tariq Parvaiz Khan, was ordered to retire with effect from 13 October 1999.¹⁹ The endgame for Sharif had started. On 12 October 1999, Nawaz Sharif attempted to sack the COAS by appointing Lt Gen Ziauddin, director general of the ISI, as the new COAS while Musharraf was on his way back from Sri Lanka, and went the way of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto – unwept, unhonoured and unsung by the people who had elected him with a massive majority.

Musharraf's Agenda

The army placed Nawaz Sharif, his brother Shahbaz and Lt Gen Ziauddin under house arrest, took over the studios of Pakistan TV and radio and the generals were in business again as the country's *de facto* rulers. In a broadcast to the nation on 17 October 1999, Gen Pervez Musharraf expressed dismay at the state of affairs, blamed Nawaz Sharif for attempting to destroy the Pakistan Army through intrigue and admitted that he took over in "extremely unusual circumstances – not of my own making."²⁰ He said, "Today, we have reached a stage where our economy has crumbled, our credibility is lost, state institutions lie demolished, provincial disharmony has caused cracks in the federation and people who were once brothers are now at each other's throat. In sum, we have lost our honour, our dignity, our respect in the comity of nations... the last government (was) intriguing to destroy the last institution of stability left in Pakistan by creating dissensions in the ranks of the armed forces of Pakistan." Musharraf spelt out the following aims and objectives of the military regime:²¹

- Rebuild national confidence and morale.
- Strengthen the federation, remove inter-provincial disharmony and restore national cohesion.
- Revive the economy and restore investor confidence.
- Ensure law and order and dispense speedy justice.
- De-politicise state institutions.
- Devolution of power to the grassroots level.
- Ensure swift and across the board accountability.

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Musharraf retained Rafiq Tarar, another Sharif appointee, as a figurehead president, appointed himself as chief executive and moved quickly to consolidate power. However, like Zia-ul-Haq before him, he was careful to retain the position of COAS. He appointed a National Security Council (NSC) headed by himself with six other members (the chiefs of the Naval and Air Force Staff and a specialist each in finance, foreign policy, legal and national affairs) and a small Cabinet to assist the NSC to govern. A National Reconstruction Bureau was set up to recommend changes in the system of governance and political and electoral reforms.²² The provinces were also placed under selected governors, to be assisted by a small provincial Cabinet. Serving and retired military officers were seconded to the administration at various levels to cleanse it and make it more responsive to the people. The *Ehtsaab* (Accountability) Bureau launched a witch-hunt against tax offenders and bank loan defaulters. The National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies were suspended and Musharraf ruled out the question of their revival at a later date.²³

Defence Budget Under Pressure

Even as Pakistan's enhanced deployment along the LoC in Kargil led to increased expenditure on military infrastructure and the maintenance of additional troops in high-altitude terrain, the military regime had to reduce its defence budget due to the economic woes of the country. Pakistan's defence budget accounts for

almost five percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and constitutes 20 to 22 percent of the total government expenditure in which debt servicing takes away another 45 percent. Columnist Sultan Ahmed, while criticising India's defence budget of Rs 580 billion as being "more than the total Pakistani budget for the current year of Rs 705 billion at its lower exchange rate", claims that "Pakistan had, in fact, lowered the military spending last year from Rs 145 billion to Rs 128 billion and the current year's outlay of Rs 142 billion is lower than last year's budgeted outlay of Rs 145 billion... The trend in Pakistan is clearly in the opposite direction..."²⁴ Ahmed glosses over the fact that a minor decrease in Pakistan's defence budget was not occasioned by a sudden realisation of the futility of an arms race with India but purely out of economic necessity as the military regime was saddled with responsibility for Pakistan's sinking economy and had no choice but to temporarily reduce at least the overt defence expenditure. No major weapons acquisition and missile development plans were ever curtailed. As soon as debt repayments were re-scheduled and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) sanctioned new loans, it was business as usual. Pakistan soon found it difficult to sustain its new deployments opposite Kargil without substantially increasing its defence spending. Also, it incurred major expenditure on its nuclear command and control and enhanced surveillance systems.

Musharraf's Flawed Exit Strategy

Pakistan's so-called Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf's long-term plans for his country were never formally articulated but were definitely not a mystery. He had clearly said that though he did not wish to cling to power for long, he would hand over to a civilian regime only after sorting out the mess created by the politicians. That, he said, could take a few years; it could even take a decade or more as he did not spell out a specific "cleansing" agenda and all that was in evidence in the early years was a vindictive approach towards the Sharif and Bhutto families. Musharraf eventually followed in Zia's footsteps and continued as Pakistan's *de facto* ruler for almost nine years.

Prescience regarding what military dictators may do in future is one of the rarest of gifts and all those who made predictions about Musharraf's future course of action were skating on thin ice. Even the abysmal state of the economy and the unstable internal security situation did not provide adequate justification for prolonging military rule. The international community refused to countenance continued military rule and soon began to indulge in diplomatic arm-twisting through its IMF and World Bank leverages. Also, as was demonstrated so vividly in

East Timor and Serbia, in this age of the free flow of information, the people's quest for self-rule cannot be crushed for long. Musharraf formally appointed himself president on 20 June 2001 but failed to appoint a new army chief till he appointed Gen Ashfaq Kayani to the post on 29 November 2007.

Musharraf and his military advisers were finally forced to hand over power to the civilians sooner than they thought it was prudent to do so. Many Islamic scholars have commented that a parliamentary form of democracy is not suitable for Islamic countries as vote bank politics is inherently divisive. In his long rule, Musharraf proved himself to be bereft of genuine ideas on the resolution of Pakistan's political, economic, social and religion-related problems. However, when the US and its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies launched an invasion of Afghanistan after the attacks on 11 September 2001, Musharraf batted well for Pakistan and succeeded in pitch-forking it once again to the status of a frontline state. The Pakistan Army gleefully accepted all the goodies that the Americans offered without reciprocating in a manner that the Americans had wanted them to i.e. to fight the Taliban-Al Qaeda terrorists on Pakistani soil and to stop aiding and abetting their Taliban protégés in Afghanistan. Under Musharraf, the Pakistan Army mastered the fine art of running with the Taliban hare while pretending to hunt them down with the US hounds. President Obama's hardheaded Af-Pak strategy has now come to haunt the Pakistan Army and it knows that denouement is at hand.

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Portents for India

Now that the Taliban has been defeated in Swat and Buner and Baitullah Mehsud, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leader has been killed in a US drone strike in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the Pakistan Army is no longer under too much pressure. It has once again turned its attention towards Kashmir. Infiltration levels in the summer of 2009 have been much higher than in previous years and a further increase in the number of terrorist incidents in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) can be safely predicted. Unless the presence of security forces is maintained and the people in the rural areas are simultaneously empowered

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to organise themselves to ensure their own security, J&K may be in for a few more 'hot' summers of militancy.

Any new moves towards a permanent solution of the Kashmir issue will inevitably remain on the back-burner for a long time to come. However, the Pakistani generals may not be averse to discussing additional confidence building measures in the military field and it would be in India's interest to agree to do so. In case the spectre of a Taliban backlash gradually recedes in Pakistan, the Pakistan Army can be expected to persist with its policy of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds in Afghanistan in covert aid of the Taliban militia.

India must continue its efforts to build an

international consensus for an amicable resolution of that war-torn country's nightmarish problems in the interest of regional stability.

The clearest lesson to emerge from the civil-military imbroglio in Pakistan is that, as long as the Pakistani armed forces remain far more powerful than the country's legitimate security considerations warrant, repeated military coups will continue to hang over Pakistan's fledgling democracy like the proverbial sword of Damocles. The well-wishers of Pakistan in the West, who have consistently and rather naively, been supporting the Pakistan Army, ostensibly in order to strengthen democracy in Pakistan, including premier think-tanks like the Washington-based Council for Foreign Relations and the Brookings Institution, need to reassess the warped calculus of their analyses.

Gen Musharraf's military regime had declared that, "Pakistan would continue to support with moral, political and diplomatic backing militants seeking independence of Kashmir from India." Despite his peace overtures towards India, Nawaz Sharif had also promised "many more Kargils" and Indian policy planners clearly understand that Pakistan's military chief executive had merely reiterated Pakistan's proxy war policy to annex Kashmir by any means and to continue Pakistan's strategy to bleed India through a thousand cuts. Perhaps the Mumbai terror attacks that are known to have been perpetuated by the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) and supported by the ISI were part of this strategy of aggressive engagement. The real problem between India and Pakistan is the

Pakistan Army and its abnormal influence in Pakistan's affairs, and not the Kashmir issue or any other issue. Till the Pakistan Army is tamed and genuine democracy takes root in Pakistan, Indo-Pak problems will remain irreconcilable.

While the Pakistan Army will for some more time remain preoccupied with fighting the emerging scourge of fundamentalist terrorism within Pakistan and from across its western borders, India can ill-afford to let its guard slacken for, sooner rather than later, new attempts will invariably be made by the Pakistani generals to again enlarge the scope of the proxy war in Kashmir and other parts of India. In keeping with its tradition of doing things on a grand scale without due thought being given to the consequences, the Pakistan Army, aided by the ISI, may attempt to get its mercenary marauders to 'seize' a small town in Kashmir and proclaim that it has been liberated

by the Mujahideen. Such attempts need to be guarded against through effective intelligence networks and vigorous operations by the security forces.

Pakistan is now recognised as the world's mother nation in spreading the cult of radical fundamentalism through state-sponsored terrorism. It could not have achieved this dubious distinction but for the machinations of its unjustifiably large army. Concerted international efforts must be made in the long-term interest of Pakistani democracy and regional stability to ensure that the Pakistan Army is not allowed to rule unhindered from behind the scenes and further build itself into an even more powerful force. In this respect, the conventional military aid being given to the Pakistan Army by the US and its allies is a retrograde step. India must influence Western democracies to refrain from conducting business as usual with the Pakistani military and from encouraging it in any manner, despite the so-called global war on terrorism. With an elected civilian government once again in power, Pakistan now has an opportunity to redeem itself. It remains to be seen whether the Asif Zardari led coalition will take effective measures to set Pakistan firmly on a democratic course or if it will fritter away its mandate in petty political machinations. Already whispers of a nexus between Prime Minister

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Yousaf Raza Gilani and the army top brass are doing the rounds and the army may not allow President Asif Zardari to continue in power for very long. Under the circumstances, India must carefully think through its policy of resuming the stalled rapprochement process.

Notes

1. In its report, the Kargil Review Committee stated that while the Director General of Military Intelligence (DGMI) is of the view that “virtually all were regular soldiers”, other agencies have estimated that “the regular/irregular ratio may well have been 70:30” with the irregular Pakistan Army trained militants being “used in a supporting role”. *From Surprise to Reckoning – The Kargil Review Committee Report* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 97.
2. “Uniform Disgraced”, *The Times of India*, 12 June 1999.
3. “Kargil Intrusions a Disaster, ex-Brass of Pakistan Army Feel”, *Hindustan Times*, 21 July 1999.
4. “Tell the World the Truth, Jamaat Tells Pakistan PM”, *The Times of India*, 24 June 1999.
5. Amit Baruah, “Pakistan Army has Control over Mujahideen”, *The Hindu*, 05 August 1999.
6. Bharat Bhushan, “View from the ‘Enemy Country’”, *Hindustan Times*, 24 October 1999.
7. Lt Gen Talat Masood, “Lessons to Learn from Kargil”, *Dawn*, 17 July 1999.
8. *Ibid.*
9. “India Stands to Lose Siachen if Pakistan Holds Out for 6-8 Weeks”, *The Times of India*, 28 June 1999.
10. Brian Cloughley, *A History of the Pakistan Army: Wars and Insurrections* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers and Distributors, 2000), p. 390.
11. “US Senators Support India Over Kargil”, *The Times of India*, 24 June 1999.
12. Ramesh Chandran, “‘Post’ Blames Pakistan for Triggering Kargil Crisis”, *The Times of India*, 29 June 1999.
13. Sridhar Krishnaswami, “Gen Zinni to Meet Sharif”, *The Hindu*, 25 June 1999.
14. K Subrahmanyam, “Pakistan’s Next Move: Only Checks, No Mates”, *The Times of India*, 29 June 1999.
15. Anwar Iqbal, “Pak had Readied N-missiles for Launch During Kargil Crisis: Clinton Aide”, *Tribune*, 21 June 2005, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2005/20050621/world.htm#1>
16. Amit Baruah, “Sharif Goes into a Huddle”, *The Hindu*, 09 July 1999.
17. Brian Cloughley, “Pakistan Army Resented Sharif Order on Kargil Withdrawal”, *Asian Age*, 22 March 2000. The junior officers were particularly exercised over the forced

withdrawal and considered it shameful. Possibly this was due entirely to nationalistic fervour and they were largely ignorant of the hopelessness of the ground situation. It is well known that the Pakistan Army General Headquarters (GHQ) had not shared knowledge of its Kargil plans even with those corps commanders who were not directly involved. As such, it could be expected that the lower rungs would have had no information whatsoever about how badly the Kargil campaign had gone for the Pakistan Army after it achieved initial tactical surprise.

18. Brig A R Siddiqi, "Army Reaps the Whirlwind", *Nation*, 06 October 1999.
19. Cloughley, n. 10, p. 404.
20. "Text of General Pervez Musharraf's Speech", *Dawn*, 18 October 1999.
21. "Tarat to Continue: Seven Objectives", *Nation*, 18 October 1999.
22. Amit Baruah, "Pakistan's Military Studying Changes in Political System", *The Hindu*, 23 December 1999.
23. "Army Rule not for few Months", *Tribune*, 25 December 1999.
24. Sultan Ahmed, "India Prods Pakistan to Spend More on Defence", *Pakistan Defence Journal*, April 2000, www.defencejournal.com.

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