

Night of the Generals

VIKRAM SOOD ► July 29, 2010

Deccan Chronicle

This is not the first time that a Pakistan Army Chief has decided to stay on beyond his scheduled date of departure. The version that the civilian government of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani granted Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani this extension is a myth that very few believe. In fact, speculation and justifications for his extension were making the rounds in Islamabad in early summer this year.

By May 2010, there were articles, sponsored undoubtedly, suggesting that Gen. Kayani had become indispensable to the scheme of things in Pakistan; that Pakistan was passing through a critical phase and continuity as the Army Chief was essential; that Gen. Kayani would not seek extension but would gracefully accept if invited to serve the country for a little while longer.

Pakistani analyst Ayesha Siddiqa had earlier commented that a decision to extend the term would depend upon three factors — an agreement within the GHQ, a nod from the United States and support of the government. With the Zardari-Gilani government perennially on the backfoot, there would have been very little resistance from the political setup. It is true that the US would like continuity and Gen. Kayani became the preferred option, as he was perceived to be able to deliver on US objectives.

In the immediate future, Gen. Kayani will have to keep the war on terror against selected sections going, keep the US at arm's length when it relates to the Pakistan Army's other strategic assets considered vital to its perceived aims in Afghanistan and India without any stoppage of funds from the US. He will also have to make some arrangements for those who will feel they have been deprived of the top slot because of this extension. For instance, at least 16 lieutenant-generals — some of whom are now corps commanders — are due to retire after November 23, 2010 and before Gen. Kayani's extended term expires in November 2013. This includes Lt. Gen. Shuja Pasha, Gen. Kayani's successor as ISI chief and who is already on a year's year extension. Gen. Pervez Musharraf

had not extended the terms of his generals but accommodated them in civilian assignments.

Increasing numbers of Pakistani military officers who will now be due for promotions as major-general and lieutenant-general or equivalent will be those recruited during Gen. Zia-ul Haq's days of excessive Islamisation.

The Pakistan Army — with its ultimate control on policies relating to India, Afghanistan and the nuclear button — has shown remarkable tactical brilliance in enhancing its position in its own country but has left the country with very little resilience to tackle its major internal socio-economic problems. Outsiders see the march of folly of a nation with a crumbling economy, dwindling exports and the sole source of dollars being handouts by the US and the International Monetary Fund, with terrorists knocking at various doors even in Punjab. Yet it continues to convince its people that “enemy” India is still trying to undo Pakistan. In the process, Pakistan has been involved in a two-front jihad, has punched above its weight and thus finds itself in the middle of a crippling and tragic blowback. Caught in the brinkmanship of its rhetoric, Pakistan's rulers are unable to retreat from the cul de sac into which they have pushed their country.

Pakistan's tragedy has been that its civil society is today under siege from Islamic radicals and the Army, and these radicals and terrorists have been raised by the Army. With all other systems of law and order collapsing, civil society is dependent on the same Army for its own security and well-being. That is why at various moments in the history of Pakistan whenever the Army has been seen to take over the reins upfront, there have been many from within this liberal society who actually showered accolades on the Army.

The invisible hand of Rawalpindi was patently visible in the fiasco of the recent talks in Islamabad. Now that we have Gen. Kayani in charge of policy towards India and Afghanistan for the next three years, we should expect some hardening of attitudes. Pakistan's tactics in Jammu and Kashmir have already begun to change. Terrorist violence in the Valley has diminishing returns for Pakistan under the present circumstances; it wins Pakistan no new friends and attracts adverse attention from the US. We take solace behind encouraging statistics, but they tell only a part of the story. Stone-throwing tactics in the Valley portrayed as a people's movement in the new tactic where the state is made to look increasingly helpless and vicious.

Pakistan's postures on India are not going to be affected by the recent disclosures by WikiLeaks. Despite the usual exultation in India forever looking for Western approval, the leaks do not say anything new. They are more about the

US. The speed with which US national security adviser James Jones supported the Pakistan government immediately after the disclosures, confirming US commitment to deepening partnership with Afghanistan and Pakistan, the manner in which AfPak special envoy Richard Holbrooke certified Pakistan was part of the solution in Afghanistan and the timing of the release of \$500 million during Hillary Clinton's Islamabad visit (where she called on Gen. Kayani) — these only confirm the desperation of America's Afghan situation. Besides, Gen. Kayani's and the ISI chief's closeness to the Haqqani networks, their close liaison and protection of the Quetta Shura impinge directly on the US effort in Afghanistan. Pakistan has strengthened its assets in Afghanistan by inducting Lashkar-e-Tayyaba terrorists into Afghanistan.

Pakistan carefully assessed the limitations of US military power and Indian decibel. The Americans had needed Pakistan to launch into Afghanistan in 2001; nine years later they need Pakistan to come to an honourable arrangement in Afghanistan, whatever that might be. Given the paranoia that affects Punjabi officers in the Pakistan Army along with the desire to avenge 1971, there is need for India to prepare for the future and strengthen its defence and intelligence capabilities substantially — in quality and quantity. We face multiple fronts — Pakistan, China, terrorism and the unguarded sea.

While India-Pakistan talks may become desirable at some future date under suitable circumstances, they are neither irreversible nor uninterrupted. India must dispel the impression that there is no option except to talk to Pakistan and lose on the negotiating table what we have won on the battlefield. Therefore, between the option to talk and total war there are several options that can be exercised and we should be prepared for the long haul.

Source: <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/dc-comment/night-generals-717>