

ISAS Working Paper

No. 90 – Date: 18 September 2009

469A Bukit Timah Road
#07-01, Tower Block, Singapore 259770
Tel: 6516 6179 / 6516 4239
Fax: 6776 7505 / 6314 5447
Email: isassecc@nus.edu.sg
Website: www.isas.nus.edu.sg



The Pakistan Military: Change and Continuity under General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani

Ishtiaq Ahmed¹

Executive Summary

The Pakistan military is the most powerful institution in the country. It enjoys the informal status as the guardian of national sovereignty and integrity of a state perennially rocked by political instability and, in recent times, by terrorism. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Pakistan partakes in the United States-led “war on terror”. Such participation has earned Pakistan the wrath of Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other extremist Islamist organisations. Terrorism against Pakistan by the extremists is the latest threat faced by the country. Therefore, the decisions, policies and strategies adopted by the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) to deal with internal and external challenges to the state are imperative to understanding Pakistani politics. The COAS has, in the past, also ordered the military to remain neutral during the February 2008 elections. On the whole, he has used his influence to dissuade politicians from resorting to confrontational politics that could once again lead to political instability in the country.

On Pakistan’s relations with arch-rival India, the military, under General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, has held on to the doctrine that the main threat to the country’s survival is posed by its neighbour. Therefore, despite the conciliatory attitude of the elected government led by President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, the military has not ruled out the first strike nuclear option in a war with India. However, the military has proposed that, in future negotiations with India, its chief spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence should be included. Such a gesture suggests that cooperation between the armed forces and intelligence agencies can develop in the future. On the other hand, India continues to demand greater cooperation from Pakistan with regards to the Mumbai terrorist attacks, carried out by militants based in Pakistan. The United States has been trying hard to convince both India and Pakistan to improve their relations.

The most dramatic development during General Kayani’s current tenure as the COAS has been the determination to crush terrorism directed at Pakistan by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Since May 2009, the military has been engaged in a major operation against the Taliban in the Swat Valley. It is now pursuing them in South Waziristan in the North-West Frontier Province. Many leaders of the Taliban have been slain or captured and that organisation

¹ Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed is a Visiting Research Professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies, an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore. He can be contacted at isasia@nus.edu.sg.

seems to have been badly damaged. The launching of the military operations against the Taliban was the result of the extremists constantly escalating their terrorist activities in Pakistan and the United States exerting constant pressure on the country to deal with them.

On the whole, one can conclude that General Kayani does not seem to be keen on interfering in politics, and if the politicians behave responsibly, the chances of another military coup will diminish. With regards to external threats and challenges, General Kayani probably will not radically change his policy on India or Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the AfPak policy of United States President Barack Obama, which sees the war on terror as a common operation covering both Afghanistan and Pakistan, Pakistan is not likely to give in to American pressure as long as its military believes that India enjoys some advantages in Afghanistan that are inimical to Pakistan's national interest.

Introduction

The Pakistan military is the most powerful institution in the country, and few would dispute this observation. As long as the Chief of Army Staff (COAS)² enjoys the support of the powerful top brass, known as the Army Corps Commanders, his position is more or less unassailable. This is not to deny that disagreements and dissensions exist within the top brass and in the past a few abortive coups were attempted by dissenters.

In constitutional terms, the democratically-elected President and Prime Minister represent the will of the state and the COAS has to report to them with regards to ensuring national security and integrity. Under normal circumstances, therefore, the COAS has no original right to interfere in politics. However, political crises and instability have jolted Pakistan throughout its 62-year history. Consequently, the military takeovers in 1958, 1977 and 1999 were welcomed by disgruntled citizens facing economic hardship, unemployment, bad governance and the deterioration of law and order.

Ironically, within a few years the military strongmen who took over power faced the same accusations and opposition to them emerged in large sections of the society. Thus, Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan (1969) and General Pervez Musharraf (2008) were forced out of power by popular agitation. General Zia-ul-Haq died in a plane crash in 1988. Few would argue that his rule enjoyed popular legitimacy (Azfar, Baxter, Burki and LaPorter Jr 1991). Consequently, while the recurring military coups can be explained partly as a result of the failure of the politicians to establish a stable and constitutional political process, evidence also suggests that the military's involvement in politics has not been an antidote to political instability and bad governance.

The military enhanced its position in Pakistan by another route as well. It invoked perceived threats from arch-rival India as the basis for making national security a top priority (Khan 1967). To invest in maintaining a deterrent meant the appropriation of huge portions of the otherwise meagre national wealth of a poor and underdeveloped nation by the military establishment. As a result, investments in development, education and health suffered considerably.

The appropriation of large portions of the national budget by the military is not discussed in parliament. Moreover, the military has acquired vast interests in the banking and insurance sectors, agriculture, arms production and sales, and real estate development. Such advantages have generated an "institutional interest" that sustains a system of perks and privileges for the higher officers. Critics have argued that such an interest does not conform to the well-being of the millions of poverty-stricken people who constitute the majority of the Pakistani population (Aziz 2007; Siddiq 2007; Shuja 2009).

However, at the time of independence, Pakistan had neither the economic capacity nor the industrial and technological know-how to build a strong military (Cheema 2003). To achieve such capability, armament and training were needed. By assuring the United States of its resolve to play an active role in containing Soviet influence in South Asia, the Middle East and in Southeast Asia, Pakistan was able to solicit military cooperation and alliances with the United States. General Ayub Khan played a pivotal role in convincing the Americans of Pakistan's importance as an ally in the containment of Soviet communism (Kux 2001).

² Before 1972, the COAS was called the Commander-in-Chief.

A donor-recipient relationship between the United States and Pakistan came into being as a result. During the Afghan *jihad* and in the war on terror launched by the United States in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda, Pakistan became a frontline state – a situation the military was able to use to its advantage to acquire a greater role in shaping Pakistani internal and regional policies. However, during the Afghan *jihad*, Pakistan skillfully exploited its vantage position to pursue a nuclear weapon capability programme. It earned itself the opposition and hostility of important sections of the United States establishment.

Much to the chagrin of the Americans, during the First Iraq War of 1991, the former COAS, General Aslam Beg, came out in support of Iraq's President, Saddam Hussein, with his idea of "strategic defiance". Relations between the United States and Pakistan were aggravated further in the wake of the Kargil War of 1999, and when in 2003, Libya spilled the beans that it had been receiving help from Pakistan with its nuclear weapons programme, it became clear that the so-called father of the Pakistani nuclear bomb, Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, had been selling information and technology to several rogue states, including North Korea and Iran. Dr Khan maintained close relations with the Pakistani military establishment. Under these circumstances, although Pakistan took part in the war on terror on the side of the United States, considerable misgivings and doubts marred their relationship.

Although criticism of Pakistan's alleged lukewarm commitment to fight terrorism was aired by the George W. Bush Administration, as long as General Musharraf remained in power, the pressure on Pakistan was less focused. This began to change after Barack Obama became the United States President. The AfPak strategy that was adopted linked Afghanistan and Pakistan into a single campaign aiming at defeating Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. It was presented in a talk given by President Obama on 27 March 2009 (Interview with Mowahid Hussain Shah). Pakistan did not approve of such categorisation, arguing that it was committed to fighting terrorism on Pakistani soil, but on its own conditions and a strategy that was acceptable to the people.

Given such antecedents, the decisions, policies and strategies adopted by the Pakistani military under the leadership of the current COAS, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, constitute an interesting source material to understanding the way in which such an institution is dealing with highly volatile and violence-ridden contemporary Pakistan.

General Kayani as the Chief of Army Staff

General Kayani was appointed as the Vice Chief of Army Staff on 8 October 2007 by General Musharraf in the vain hope that the ongoing popular agitation against him after he virtually dismissed Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry earlier in March 2007, by lawyers and other civil society actors as well as political activists, would subside. Such a calculation proved grossly inaccurate – the agitation continued unabated despite repression. In popular perception, holding the powers of both President and the COAS made General Musharraf a dictator they wanted out of power. They, therefore, wanted him to give up both posts. On 18 November 2007, President Musharraf abdicated his post as the COAS and General Kayani was promoted to it.

General Kayani had earlier held key posts of Corps Commander of Rawalpindi and Director-General of the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Media descriptions of him generally projected the image of a quiet, professional soldier who shunned publicity, in sharp contrast to his predecessor who thrived on it. His voracious book-reading as well as heavy-smoking

habits were presented as evidence of an intellectually-inclined individual. More importantly, it was asserted that General Kayani did not support President Musharraf's clumsy handling of the conflict with Justice Chaudhry and generally was not known to have abused his office to help his relatives or for personal gains (Yusufzai, 28 November 2007). Other less charitable representations stressed his past as the head of the ISI, suggesting that he must have taken part in political manoeuvres that the ISI was notorious for. Moreover, he must have had to interact with the Taliban and Punjabi extremist organisations such as the *Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (LeT) and *Jaish-e-Muhammad* (JeM). Therefore, he was not likely to take a firm stand against them.

Given such variegated musings and speculations, the important question was whether General Kayani would redefine the parameters of the military's involvement in Pakistani politics as well as the strategy and policy on security, or whether the situation would continue more or less the same way as in the past.

Directives to Military Officers

Among the earliest decisions taken by General Kayani was a directive, which instructed army officers not to maintain contacts with the politicians. They were told that they had no role to play in politics. He emphasised that soldiers should pay heed to their professional responsibilities. Elaborating on this theme, General Kayani told them not to summon any politician to the General Headquarters. Those who violated the directive would have to explain their conduct, as was stressed in the communication to the officers (*News*, 14 January 2008). An even more significant decision taken by General Kayani on 11 February 2008 was to recall all officers serving in civil departments. The military spokesperson, the Director of the Inter-Services Public Relations, Major-General Athar Abbas told the press, "More than 300 army officers are presently working in various civil departments and the majority of them have been asked to report to the General Headquarters immediately." (*Dawn*, 12 February 2008). The decision had been agreed at the Corps Commanders' Conference on 7 February 2008, presided by General Kayani.

This was an important break with a process that had already begun in a small but significant manner when the first coup took place in 1958. Under General Zia (1977-88), there was a further appropriation of civil jobs by military officers while General Musharraf had gone the farthest in that direction. General Abbas informed that the highest number of officers recalled from any civil department were 61 who worked in the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) set up by President Musharraf soon after he took over power on 12 October 1999.

The NAB was tasked to investigate the abuse of power by the politicians. Not surprisingly, the NAB mainly directed its investigatory brief to nail down the offenders opposed to President Musharraf. Most notably, deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his coterie were subjected to scrutiny. Also, the long hand of the NAB was extended to the corruption that former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, were reputed to have indulged in. On the other hand, notorious defaulters on bank loans in the pro-Musharraf camp were ignored. Over time, the NAB was surrounded by controversies and the opposition kept up its criticism of the NAB's performance, terming it as a tool in the hands of the military rulers aiming to gain political advantage through it (*Dawn*, 12 January 2008).

Resentment against the military had not only been growing among politicians but also among civil servants. Initially, the civil servants, with the assistance of the military, had constituted

the oligarchy that called the shots while the politicians were reduced to mere pawns in its hands. That relationship had reversed under General Zia and the military had been appropriating more and more power as a result. When I interviewed Akbar S. Ahmed, a civil servant before he became an academic, he vividly described the way the military started sidelining the better-educated civil servants in the 1980s. He asserted that such intrusions partly explained why the general standards of administration deteriorated over the years because military officers had no experience or training to manage civil affairs.

Grievances against the military's involvement in civil affairs had been growing in the key province of Punjab as well, where, in the past, the men in uniform had enjoyed great popularity. Thus, in the major cities of Punjab, from where civil officers mainly hailed, the traditional support for the military had been declining. In contrast, the social background of military officers is predominantly rural Punjab or from the smaller towns of northern Punjab. During several visits between 2000 and 2009, I was able to assess the resentment in Punjab by talking to a cross-section of the Punjabi elite. Given such developments, the military badly needed to improve its standing in society. Therefore, General Kayani's decision to recall serving officers from the civil departments was a long overdue measure.

Neutrality during Elections

The military had also gained notoriety by taking a partisan role in national politics. Especially in the 1990s, military officers, especially those serving in the ISI, were involved in sowing political differences among rival political factions, and again in the 2002 elections, they played a leading role in rigging them to help General Musharraf achieve a result that could provide him with some form of dependable parliamentary support. General Kayani decided to make a clean break with such malpractices. At the same Corps Commanders' Conference, where orders were issued to recall military officers from civil departments, he stated that holding free and fair elections was the sole responsibility of the Election Commission and that the "army will meet only its constitutional obligations and help the civil administration maintain law and order, as and when required" (*Dawn*, 12 February 2008.. Some analysts, however, believe that, had Benazir Bhutto not been assassinated (27 December 2007), the establishment, notably the ISI, would have engineered an election result that would have ensured that the pro-Musharraf Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) gained the most seats. Such a result would have been fabricated with the blessings of the United States (interview with Christine Fair).

It would have meant Musharraf continuing as President and Benazir becoming Prime Minister. Benazir's assassination a few days before the elections in December 2007 created an explosive situation. For a few days, it seemed that a civil war would erupt. Under the circumstances, none of the stakeholders in the Benazir-Musharraf deal dared to tinker with the elections that were held on 18 February 2008. The PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) emerged as the main winners. It remains highly debatable as to whether General Kayani would have been party to rigging the elections if they had taken place in accordance with the plot that Benazir and Musharraf had devised. The fact remains that the military and the ISI accepted the people's verdict expressed on 18 February 2008.

Elected Government in Office

The elections of 18 February 2008 created much euphoria and there was talk of a national government led by the two main victorious parties coming into being. It was to open a new

vista in parliamentary democracy. Thereafter followed several weeks of hectic horse-trading but finally a PPP-PML-N-led coalition government took office in late March 2008. Amid all this, Musharraf continued to claim that he was the legally-elected and legitimate President of Pakistan and that he wanted to retain that office. In October 2007, he had engineered an election with the help of outgoing members of the national and provincial assemblies elected in 2002. However, after 18 February 2008, there was no doubt that his already-shrinking stature had diminished drastically.

At the oath-taking ceremony, angry slogans were chanted against Musharraf who, as President of Pakistan, administered the oaths of office. The leaders of the PPP and PML-N stayed away. It was clear that maintaining Musharraf as President was becoming increasingly untenable and the military was not willing to interfere on his behalf. At about the same time, the law and order situation in the country deteriorated as ministers from the outgoing pro-Musharraf government were manhandled in Lahore and Karachi by lawyers and political workers. The fracas that occurred claimed a number of lives and pro-military column writers and other such voices began to clamour for the military to step in and save Pakistan from a civil war.

The situation worsened when the newfound PPP-PML-N concord foundered as their leaders, Zardari and Sharif respectively, could not agree on the restoration of the judges deposed by Musharraf and on the removal of Musharraf from the Office of President. An agreement on both issues had been obtained in the so-called Murree Accord before the election but Zardari had begun to prevaricate and seemed keen to renege, while Nawaz only assumed an unbending and uncompromising stand on both issues. It was widely believed that Zardari was hoping to revive the deal his wife had made with Musharraf and thus sideline the PML-N. However, that attempt failed and Musharraf was forced to step down from the Presidency in August 2008.

Political unrest and instability continued as the lawyers wanted the deposed judges brought back and Sharif supported them. In late February 2009, when General Kayani visited the United States, he told the Americans that the Pakistani army will keep out of politics. Thus, when the lawyers decided to start a countrywide long march in mid-March 2008 to compel the government to restore the judges and Sharif jumped on to the bandwagon, the situation became explosive. General Kayani warned the politicians to act responsibly. As a result, Zardari was forced to give in. Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani ordered an immediate restoration of Chaudhry as Chief Justice of the Pakistan Supreme Court. Other judges who had sided with Chaudhry were also given their jobs back. That process culminated recently, with the removal of the judges who had been put on the benches by Musharraf during the emergency of November 2007.

In an important sense, the process of civilianising the political system in a substantial manner has been accomplished with the military and the ISI keeping away from politics, but there can be no denying that General Kayani exerted benign pressure on the politicians to exercise restraint and act responsibly.

Relations with India

In relation to India, however, the elected government and the military establishment have had different approaches. The first signs of differences became explicit when President Zardari declared the militants active in the Indian-administered Kashmir as terrorists instead of

freedom fighters; announced that India did not pose a threat to Pakistan, and went on to declare that Pakistan will not resort to a nuclear first strike, in case of a war with India. None of these three positions corresponded to those held by the military.

The Pakistan military and the ISI had been covertly involved in despatching militants of the LeT, JeM and several other outfits into the Indian-administered Kashmir. However, following the attack on the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001, which resulted in India ordering its troops to the international border with Pakistan, followed by intense pressure from the United States and other western nations, General Musharraf imposed a ban on both the LeT and JeM on 12 January 2002, declaring them terrorist organisations. However, such militant organisations had not been effectively dismantled. After the Mumbai terrorist attacks on 26 November 2008, in which the LeT's involvement became more or less established, it became clear that such an organisation continued to maintain the capability to plan and organise terrorist attacks.

With regards to President Zardari's statements about India not posing a threat to Pakistan and declaring that Pakistan will not resort to a nuclear first strike, the differences between him and the military were even more pronounced and explicit. There was nothing to suggest that the military establishment had, at any point, revised its position on the relationship with India. Consequently, the military contradicted him by saying that it was his personal opinion and Pakistan did not subscribe to any no-first-strike doctrine. Moreover, although on a number of occasions, military spokespersons alluded to the Taliban as the imminent threat to Pakistan's security, there was no fundamental reconsideration of India remaining the main, constant threat to Pakistan's security. In fact, the military and even civilian ministers alleged that the Indian consulates in the border towns of Afghanistan were being used to spy on Pakistan, and that India was involved in helping the separatist insurgency in the Baluchistan province.

Differences between the elected government and the military on specific issues became more pronounced when, immediately after the Mumbai terrorist attack of 26 November 2008, the Indian government wanted the Director-General of the ISI, Lt. General Ahmed Kamal Pasha, to visit India and look at the evidence which the Indians claimed pinned down the perpetrators to Pakistan. Prime Minister Gilani agreed to despatch General Pasha but the decision was never implemented. No high-ranking Pakistani military or ISI officer went to India to assist in the investigation. It is not difficult to deduce that the detraction from the pledge must have been dictated by the military and/or ISI. On the other hand, the ISI recently suggested that in future discussions between India and Pakistan on terrorism and security issues, it should be included on the Pakistani side.

It seems that such a suggestion did make sense to the Indians. Thus, on 10 September 2009, the Director-General ISI, Lt. General Ahmed Shuja Pasha attended an *Iftar* dinner (served after breaking fast during Ramadan) hosted by the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad, Sharat Sabharwal. Diplomatic sources remarked that the presence of General Pasha at the dinner could hopefully lead to intelligence officials of the two countries reviewing "the policy of sworn hostility" towards each other (*Daily Times*, 11 September 2009).

Although such overtures suggest the possibility of an improvement in relations between the two South Asian rivals, Indian grievances about Pakistan's dealing with terrorist organisations such as the LeT and JeM remain in place. The Indian government has, from time to time, expressed doubts about Pakistan's cooperation to uncover the conspiracy behind

the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 26 November 2008. Pakistan, on the other hand, has insisted that it would bring to book those Pakistani nationals who were involved in the attacks, if sufficient evidence is provided by India. Recently, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expressed the fear that terrorists in Pakistan were planning more attacks in India; something Pakistan has promised to investigate if intelligence is shared with it. At present, relations between the two states remain hostile.

The United States has been trying hard to convince both India and Pakistan to improve their relations. The United States and India were estranged for a long time during the Cold War. The thaw in their relations began quickly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Under President George W. Bush, the courtship with India culminated in a nuclear deal which permits India to retain its nuclear weapon assets without being admitted in the nuclear powers club. The United States' war on terror in South Asia hinges, in an important sense, on these two South Asian neighbours maintaining good relations. This has been stated many times by United States civil and military spokespersons. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Robert Blake, took up this issue in a speech delivered at the Johns Hopkins University, reported the *Daily Times* on 11 September 2009.

Fighting Terrorism

Pakistan earned the wrath of Al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban for joining the United States-led military offensive against them after 9/11. From 2005 onwards, the Taliban began to expand through brute force and terror their power and influence in different parts of the North-West Frontier Province and established some enclaves in the Baluchistan province as well. From 2007, suicide bombers began to be sent to other parts of Pakistan as well. During 2005-08, 7,997 fatalities and 9,670 injuries took place in Pakistan due to terrorism. The government succeeded in arresting 4,113 suspected terrorists (*Pakistan Security Report 2008 2009*, p. 4).

Upon assuming office as the COAS, General Kayani issued a strong condemnation of terrorism and vowed to crush its perpetrators. Yet, the Americans were not satisfied and doubts were expressed about the military's will and determination to fight the terrorists. Visits to Islamabad by senior United States diplomats and military generals increased dramatically after General Kayani became the COAS. In particular, Admiral Mike Mullen, the United States Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, paid several visits to Islamabad in 2008 and 2009. In April 2009, he and Richard Holbrooke, the new United States Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, first went to Afghanistan and then Pakistan. Talking informally to some prominent Pakistanis at a dinner hosted by United States Ambassador Anne Patterson, both of them emphasised that Pakistan lay at the core of America's strategic concerns. The Afghans had apparently told them that Afghanistan's problems lay exclusively in Pakistan. Criticism of the ISI created a diplomatic row, but Mullen praised General Kayani as a straight-talking general with whom he could work with mutual trust and benefit at the tactical and strategic level. However, Mullen and Holbrooke left no doubt in anyone's mind that the economic and military aid to Pakistan would be linked to Pakistan's concrete support to the war against Al-Qaeda. However, they also insisted that America respected Pakistan's sovereignty and there was no chance of American "boots on ground" in the Pakistani tribal areas (*Daily Times*, 7 April 2009).

During a visit to Washington D.C. in July 2009, I was told by many United States analysts that the United States-Pakistan relationship suffered from a serious trust deficit. Some,

however, were sympathetic to Pakistan's difficulties in fighting an enemy that was an expert in guerrilla warfare and therefore not easy to defeat. They conceded that fighting men who had been celebrated as freedom fighters by the military was never going to be easy as sympathy for them could exist within the armed forces themselves.

The Swat Peace Deals

The differences between the ways in which United States and Pakistan deal with the Taliban were epitomised by the peace agreements in 2007, 2008 and again in 2009 between the Pakistani government and the Taliban of the Swat Valley. Each deal allowed the Taliban to impose *Sharia* laws in areas under their control and, in return, they were to acknowledge the writ of the state and abstain from terrorist activities. The United States considered such peace deals a betrayal by Pakistan in the war on terror. On the other hand, Pakistan continued to insist that the imposition of *Sharia* law to limited areas did not contradict its commitment to fight terrorism. The infamous destruction of more than 200 girl schools in early 2009 brought international condemnation. Within Pakistan, the Taliban threat began to be felt in a direct and palpable manner in the towns and cities of Pakistan.

Finally, a very strong response from General Kayani followed. On 24 April 2009, he condemned the Taliban in the strongest terms. He reportedly said, "The army will not allow the militants to dictate terms to the government or impose their way of life on the civil society of Pakistan," (*Daily Times*, 25 April 2009), referring to the strict *Sharia* codes imposed by the Taliban in the areas they dominate. General Kayani admitted that he was aware of the doubts being voiced about the intent and the capability of the army to defeat the Taliban.

He went on to say that, the "Pakistan army never has and never will hesitate to sacrifice whatever it may take to ensure [the] safety and well-being of the people of Pakistan and the country's territorial integrity." He also stated that, "the victory against terror and militancy will be achieved at all costs." (*Daily Times*, 25 April 2009). The COAS condemned statements from a number of countries expressing concerns about the future of Pakistan, and said that, "a country of 170 million resilient people under a democratic dispensation, and strongly supported by the army" was capable of handling any crisis that it might be confronted with (*Daily Times*, 25 April 2009).

Operation *Rah-e-Rast*

Such pronouncements did not deter the Taliban, who intensified their attacks on the security forces and terrorised the local people through the imposition of barbaric punishments and other extremist actions. In May 2009, General Kayani ordered the launch of Operation *Rah-e-Rast* (Operation Black Thunderstorm), beginning with heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, followed by infantry incursions and a large-scale operation. After a few weeks, the Taliban were dislodged from the urban areas of Pakistan. Pakistani soldiers engaged the Taliban in street fighting and there were hundreds of casualties on both sides. On 30 May 2009, the Pakistani military informed that, barring some pockets of resistance it had regained control of the main city of Mingora. Prior to the fighting, Mingora had a population of 200,000 people. Most of them fled to safety outside Swat. As fighting expanded to other parts of Swat, there was a veritable exodus of people from the Valley. More than two million people abandoned hearth and home.

General Kayani inspected the operation area in Swat onboard an F-16 of the Pakistan Air Force. Chief Marshal Rao Qamar Suleman, who accompanied him, said the army and air force were united in ending the curse of terrorism (*Daily Times*, 16 June 2009). The fighting continued in June and July 2009, with the military claiming success all this time. One of the leaders of the Swat Taliban, Sufi Muhammad, was captured in June 2009. The more fanatical Maulana Fazlullah was reportedly hit during air strikes but was not captured. The military claims to have established its complete hold over the Swat Valley. By 22 August 2009, 1.6 million of 2.2 million have returned home.

The military went in pursuit of the Taliban in their strongholds in South Waziristan and other enclaves. On 5 August 2009, the dreaded overall leader of the Pakistan Taliban, Baitullah Mehsud, was killed by missiles fired by a United States drone. It was indicative of the close cooperation between the American and Pakistani intelligence and military functionaries. Already in April 2009, the Pakistanis and Americans had agreed to join efforts to kill Mehsud. The Americans had agreed only after considerable pressure was exercised by Pakistani intelligence officers (*Daily Times*, 5 April 2009). The Taliban retaliated by suicide bombings against Pakistani troops in Swat, Malakand and several other places. However, it seems that the death of Mehsud has been a crippling blow and the Taliban's ability to fight the Pakistan military may have been radically damaged.

However, the strategy adopted by General Kayani did not consist only of military actions to crush the Taliban. It included measures meant to win back the young men who were led astray by the militants. Thus, in early September 2009, General Kayani inaugurated a rehabilitation centre set up for men whom the Taliban had indoctrinated and trained in terrorism and suicide bombing. He emphasised that the military had broken the terrorists' back and Operation *Rah-e-Rast* would continue as long as the last terrorist was not eliminated. He told a gathering of local leaders and soldiers that the terrorist network had been dismantled and peace was restored to the Swat Valley. He also discussed issues of rehabilitating and resettling the internally-displaced population of the area. The local elders assured General Kayani of their complete support to the army (*Daily Times*, 5 September 2009). On 11 September 2009, the Pakistan army arrested some top leaders of the Swat Taliban. Among them were Muslim Khan and Mahmood Khan, both with a bounty on their heads announced by Pakistan. Altogether 1,800 Taliban were slain during the Swat operation.

An Evaluation

In light of the aforementioned review of developments after General Kayani became the COAS, the following seem to be his way of handling internal and external challenges facing Pakistan:

1. It seems General Kayani does not harbour ambitions of interfering in politics,, except to steer the politicians away from confrontational postures which can again generate political instability. If the politicians behave responsibly, the chances of another military coup will diminish.
2. Crushing the Taliban now seems to be an objective that General Kayani is strongly committed to. Any internal threat that puts Pakistani sovereignty and integrity in jeopardy is likely to be dealt with a very strong hand.

3. With regards to India, the policy remains steadfast to treat it as a major threat. The Mumbai terrorist attacks greatly exacerbated relations between India and Pakistan. India remains largely dissatisfied with Pakistan's cooperation in investigating the conspiracy that led to those attacks. However, there are some overtures that suggest that the worst is over and the Pakistani military and ISI may be willing to listen to the Indians, provided such framework is institutionalised.
4. With regards to Pakistan's commitment to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan, there is no clarity as yet. As long as the military believes that India has assumed such influence in Afghanistan that Pakistan's interests in the country are adversely affected, General Kayani is not likely to order his men to actively engage the Afghanistan Taliban.
5. The United States' AfPak policy is likely to continue linking economic and military aid to Pakistan to the latter's commitment to root out Al-Qaeda and the Taliban from both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.
6. In the longer run, only a comprehensive peace formula that takes cognition of the common interests of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India can ensure peace in South Asia. That may take some time before the parties involved reach a consensus on it.
7. Only after regional stability has endured for some time can Pakistani politics move forward to reduce expenditure on defence.

oooOOOooo

References

- Aziz, Mazhar. 2007. *Military Control in Pakistan*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Azfar, Kamal, Baxter, Craig, Burki, Shahid Javed and LaPorte Jr, Robert, 1991, *Pakistan under the Military: Eleven Years of Zia Ul-Haq*, Westview, Boulder.
- Cheema, Pervaiz Iqbal. 2003. *The Armed Forces of Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Faruqui, Ahmad. 2003. *Rethinking the National Security of Pakistan: The Price of Strategic Myopia*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Khan, Mohammad Ayub, 1967, *Friends not Masters*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Kux, Dennis. 2001. *The United States and Pakistan 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nawaz, Shuja, 2009, *Crossed Swords*, Oxford University Press, Karachi and London.
- Siddiq, Ayesha. 2007. *Military Inc. Inside Pakistan's Military Economy*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Yusufzai, Rahimullah, 2007, 'General Kayani's rise from humble beginnings', *The News International*, Karachi.

Interviews in the United States, July 2009

Ambassador Richard Boucher

Ambassador Robin Raphel

Ambassador Wendy Chamberlin

Ambassador Teresita Schaffer

Dr Christine Fair

Dr Walter Andersen

Dr Larry Robinson, formerly of the State Department

Mr Robert Hathaway, Director South Asia, Woodrow Wilson Peace Center

Mr Shuja Nawaz, Director South Asia, Atlantic Council

Mr Mowahid Hussain Shah, former Punjab Minister and Adviser to Punjab Chief Minister

Chaudhry Pervez Ellahi

Professor Akbar Ahmed

Professor Marvin Weinbaum

Professor Selig Harrison

Newspapers

Dawn, Karachi

The Daily Times, Lahore

The News International, Karachi-Islamabad-Lahore