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## Raheel Sharif: The New Dictator of Pakistan

By RSN Singh  
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The latest attack at an Air Base near Peshawar in which more than 30 air force and army personnel have been killed has not dented the honeymoon of the general public with the Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif. Gen Sharif is riding a new wave of popularity in Pakistan. This is nothing new. Such messianic moments are a cyclical feature in Pakistan. Nevertheless, Raheel Sharif has gone beyond the past benchmark in many ways. His extension of tenure is but a foregone conclusion.

Raheel Sharif is the sixth Army Chief that Nawaz Sharif is dealing with since he first became prime minister in November 1990. Depending on vicissitudes of the geopolitical flux, each army chief presented new set of challenges to Nawaz. Gen Asif Nawaz Janjua was the first adversary that Nawaz Sharif had to deal with. Of many things, what had irked Asif was the appointment of Lt Gen Javed Nasir as the ISI Chief. Nasir was a votary of pan-Islamism and believed in reaching out to Muslims wherever in distress including China. At that time as per reports, the CIA had also infiltrated into Pakistan's nuclear establishment through a Pakistani scientist. During the same period, for the first time, Pakistan was put on US watch list of terrorists. Several sources reveal that Janjua was about to impose a martial law when he suddenly died under very mysterious circumstances. Such sudden and mysterious deaths are not alien to Pakistan or to say the Indian Subcontinent.

It is at the behest of Gen Raheel Sharif that Nawaz Sharif has not been able to revamp trade relations with India. He is learnt to have vetoed the proposal of purchasing electricity from India.

In 1993 Gen Waheed Kakkar, considered close to Benazir maneuvered the exit of Nawaz following his impasse with the then President Ishaq Khan. At that time the President was a part of the ruling troika, along with Army Chief and the PM. The Army Chief could thus tilt the balance. In the Troika, the President has apparently been supplanted by non-state actors like Hafiz Saeed.

Then in August 1998 Nawaz Sharif had moved a bill in National Assembly for the 15th Amendment to the Constitution to enforce rule by Islamic law. Ostensibly the Bill was moved for religious considerations but concealed Nawaz Sharif's intention of acquiring unbridled power riding the horse of Islamic fundamentalism. Nawaz Sharif has therefore been more than willing to play the fundamentalist card for political consolidations. In the last elections, he is known to have elicited the support of terrorists organizations like the LeT and the LeJ.

The 15th Amendment Bill was passed by the Lower House, but got stuck in the Senate because Sharif fell little short of numbers. He then encouraged the mullahs to lay siege of the Senate. Pakistan was about to become a completely theocratic state with its consequences on the military. A sizeable and influential segment involved with the governance of Pakistan wanted the Army Chief Gen Jehangir Karamat to intervene. Nawaz Sharif was desperate to get rid of Gen Karamat. A suggestion by Gen Karamat during his talk at the Naval Staff College in 1998 wherein he proposed the creation of National Security Council provided Sharif with the opportunity. He construed Gen Karamat's remark that 'Pakistan could not afford the destabilizing effects of polarization, vendettas, and insecurity-expedient policies' as indictment of his government and forced him to resign. Gen Karamat was known to be apolitical.

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However Sharif was not so lucky with Musharraf, someone who was appointed as Chief by superseding two seniors. Sharif totally misread Musharraf's loyalty and underestimated his ability and following to harbor political ambitions. Rest what followed is too recent and fresh to be reiterated.

So Nawaz Sharif has had different tastes of various Chiefs he has worked with. One strand, in the post-Zia period, however has run constant that the Pakistan Military has brooked no interference in nuclear program, Afghan policy, Kashmir Policy, promotions and transfers in armed forces and the defence budget. In fact when Benazir Bhutto won the elections in 1988 she could not have occupied the chair of Prime Minister without giving this assurance and final push by the American Ambassador Robert Oakley. As part of the deal the Americans had also extracted the concession that she would retain Sahibzada Yakub Khan as Foreign Minister. This realpolitik bears on Pakistan even now.

The American factor continues to be strong. It is evidenced by week long official trips by the Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif and the ISI Chief Rizwan Akhtar. The Americans have never been averse to military rule in Pakistan. In his book, "Kashmir the Vajpayee Years", Mr AS

Daulat, former R&AW Chief writes: “As George Tenet’s counterpart I invited the DCI (Director Central Intelligence Agency), to a meeting... I asked his assessment of Gen Musharraf... Tenet said that as far as Americans were concerned, Musharraf was there to stay. He further added that the Americans felt they could do business with the General. Implicit in the remark was the suggestion that others could also do business with Musharraf”. It will augur well for India to pay minimal reliance on American posturing on Pakistan.

No Army Chief under a civilian dispensation has enjoyed such powers in the past.

As the Army Chief, however Gen Raheel Sharif has gone a step beyond his predecessors in undermining the civilian regime, both in matters of internal security and foreign policy. It is widely known that Gen Sharif is a protégé of Gen Musharraf. To that extent, Gen Raheel Sharif has ensured that no harm comes to his mentor by way of politicians and judiciary. Stern signals were sent in this regard to the latter. The ongoing Operation Zarb-e-Azb launched in FATA in the wake of terrorist attack in Army School in Peshawar was presented as a fate accompli to the civilian leadership. Also in the wake of this School attack, Pakistan initiated a National Action Plan (NAP) to deal with terrorism. In that a 21st Amendment to the Constitution was passed unanimously in the Parliament. This amendment allowed the setting up of the Military Courts headed by Army Officers. These Courts have the powers to order execution of terrorists and some executions have already been carried out, making a departure from the past seven years with regard to capital punishment. The Judiciary has also endorsed the establishment of these Courts.

Further, while Nawaz Sharif was inclined to respond to the Saudi request for the military help for Yemen, it was torpedoed by the Army Chief. In Karachi, the unprecedented crackdown is being supervised under the overall control of the Army Chief. The main agency, i.e. the Rangers involved in the cleansing of Karachi of criminals and terrorists, have gone after some politicians with allegiance to MQM and the PPP. The relations of Sindh province of Pakistan in political terms as a result have undergone a paradigm change. In the past, some politicians of the ruling dispensation have accused the ISI Chief of colluding with Imran Khan’s Tahreek-e-Insaf party to dislodge Nawaz Sharif. Reportedly, it is at the behest of Gen Raheel Sharif that Nawaz Sharif has not been able to revamp trade relations with India. He is learnt to have vetoed the proposal of purchasing electricity from India.

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The President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani realized the central role of Gen Raheel Sharif or the Pakistan Military in influencing the course of events in his country. For the first time in the history of Pakistan, a President of another country visited the GHQ on an official visit. Later, the intelligence agencies of the two countries, i.e. Afghanistan’s NDS (National Directorate of Security) and Pakistan’s ISI signed a MoU. It was hailed as a paradigm shift in Afghan-Pak relations, but the Afghani hopes were soon belied by series of attacks by the Afghan-Taliban by the Haqqani network. Recently, on 07August2015, there were series of explosions in Kabul,

wherein more than 50 people were killed and 300 were injured. Just a few days back, the Afghan-Taliban attacked a jail in Ghazni and released 350 inmates. Such has been the deterioration in Afghan-Pak relationship that the Pakistani Ambassador has pulled his staff into the Chancery. The overall message is that Pakistan is not prepared to jettison its instruments of proxy war against Afghanistan as well as India. It is the compulsion of proxy war that compels Pakistan to distinguish between ‘Good Taliban and Bad Taliban’ or ‘Good Jihadis or Bad Jihadis’. The good ones, it reckons are critical for survival the State.

Though the functioning of political democracy in Pakistan can be questioned, there has always been ‘democratization’ of warfare by the Pakistan Military. It implies that Pakistan has traditionally and ideologically relied upon non-state actors to achieve its strategic ends. Choosing a passage from a report by a senior official of Ayub Khan’s intelligence and research outfit – the Bureau of National Reconstruction, entrusted with the task of identifying and recommending solutions to Pakistan’s security problems – Hussain Haqqani, in his book “Pakistan Between Mosque and Military”, quotes: “In its manpower, Pakistan is very fortunate. In some of the regions, people have long traditions of irregular fighting. Now that they have got a homeland and a state based on their own ideology they are bound to show great courage and determination to defend them. Then why not train irregular fighters...Their training in warfare will have to be strenuous and wide in scope. The irregular fighter will have to be shrewd, familiar with local environmental factors, aware of the psychology of his own people and of the enemy and of the political consequences of the struggle. Irregular warfare can help in reducing the crucial nature of the initial battles of Pakistan. It can help in spreading out prolonging action...”. This philosophy has guided the Pakistan Military all through.

Since the last two decades, Pakistan Military seems to have adopted the formula, i.e. nuclear weapons = proxy war and nuclear weapons – conventional war = zero.

India must be prepared for a new wave of proxy war by Pakistan.

In other words, in the reckoning of Pakistan, nuclear weapons obviate conventional war and therefore it can continue its proxy war with impunity. It is rather scared of a conventional war. It is for this reason that Pakistan invokes nuclear weapons at the slightest opportunity or pretext. Its conventional capabilities seem to be reserved for internal operations like Zarb-e-Azb, where tanks and aircraft are being used. The religious narrative that Pakistan relies on for Proxy War is not likely to change as it is critical to that facet of warfare. It is naïve therefore to think that Pakistan will ever act against Hafiz Saeed or Dawood Ibrahim.

The National Security Advisor (NSA) of Pakistan has therefore ‘no say’ in the conduct of proxy war by the military-intelligence establishment against India. For India to expect Ufa declaration to deliver was therefore an expectation in futility. To that extent even any rapprochement between Modi and Nawaz Sharif is bedeviled with limitations and imponderables.

The sad part, however, is that the novel coup by Raheel Sharif is being hailed by the people at large in Pakistan. He is being treated as some kind of a savior or Messiah. Pakistan has passed through many such Messianic moments in the past. Many times before the Messiah has come

donning the khaki. Invariably, every Messianic period has been followed by interlude of civilian rule and the cycle continues.

The fright of internal security threats and hostile neighbours, bandied is being bought by the people of Pakistan. They are so forgetful that they do not realize that the architects of the present instability are the Messiahs themselves. Under the new Messiah, Raheel Sharif, the Pakistan State has been losing its internal sovereignty even as it harps on external sovereignty. It is increasingly mortgaging its external sovereignty to China, thinking that the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor is a panacea for all the disconnect between 'Pakistan – the Security State, and Pakistan – the Economic State'. It does not realize the hardheadedness of the Chinese when it comes to national interests. It overlooks the fact that Pak imports from China are \$ 7 billion, while exports are \$ 2.2 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of \$ 4.8 billion.