

Strategic decision making in Pakistan

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Abstract

Change is the only constant in life. Decisions once made are therefore constantly reviewed and altered to keep pace with the changes. If the matter is of strategic importance, it would obviously need a sound system to make and change decisions – and indeed to implement them. How Pakistan acquitted itself with this evolutionary process is the theme of this paper. With the help of a few case studies, it briefly describes the environment that influenced decisions, attempts to establish a pattern, and highlights any odd exception.

Introduction

Having been involved or closely associated with the events, this paper is essentially the perspective of a practitioner. It argues that in volatile environments, initial decisions are less a reflection of long-term strategy and more a response to a development, often an unexpected one. Initially, only a ‘core group’ is involved. As the situation evolves, adjustments and course corrections are made and usually the desired outcome has to be scaled down or modified. As illustrated by various examples, often the unintended consequences are hard to predict. Even when some of them can be predicted, the need to achieve the main objective overrides remedies that may be seen as detractions or too complex to execute.

Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, with India in the East and now an unfriendly superpower in the West, Pakistan found itself, so to speak, between the “jaws of a nutcracker.” Since there was no reasonable

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Note: The views expressed by the author in this paper are his alone and do not reflect the views of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.

chance of any outside help to get the occupation vacated, General Zia-ul-Haq, the Army Chief as well the President at that time, with a few of his aides decided to provide covert support to the Afghan resistance. Two years later, when the US and some other countries joined in with substantial assistance, the odds improved but the prospects of a Soviet withdrawal remained remote. Thousands of volunteers from all over the world arrived ostensibly to take part in this *jihad*, but since most of them had their own scores to settle back home, they had come to learn the art of resistance.¹ Their governments were indeed relieved to get rid of them in the hope that they would embrace martyrdom.

With the induction of the STINGER anti-aircraft missile system that the US was initially reluctant to provide lest it fell in Soviet hands, the tide started to turn. Soon thereafter, Gorbachev's assumption of power and the ensuing change of policy expedited Moscow's withdrawal from Afghanistan.²

Zia was opposed to signing the 1988 Geneva Accord that outlined the parameters of withdrawal unless it provided for an all-inclusive interim government. No one – the US, the Soviet Union, the Mujahedeen, even the Junejo led government in Islamabad – showed any interest in this proposal. Similarly, there was no agreement on freezing military support to the warring Afghan factions. An internecine war over the throne of Kabul following the Soviet withdrawal was now on the cards.

In February 1989, the ISI persuaded the seven major resistance parties to form an alliance, called the Afghan Interim Government (AIG).³ It was expected that Pakistan would recognise it and with some others following suit, the AIG could replace the Soviet legacy in Kabul – the PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) regime. The Foreign Office however was of the opinion that for recognition, the "interim government" had to have a foothold within Afghanistan. That led to the Jalalabad operation, which failed as the Mujahedeen were not trained for set-piece battles.⁴ After the fiasco, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto ordered a review of Pakistan's Afghan Policy. As DGMI, I was part of the committee that included the DG Afghanistan from the Foreign Office. The committee's main recommendation was that the AIG had to expand its political base. To follow up, some efforts were made to contact the diaspora, King Zahir Shah in Rome and the PDPA Regime in Kabul. Only the Peshawar based faction of Hizb-e-Wahdat, a Shiite-Hazara party, could be persuaded to come on board.

In early 1991, Benon Sevon, the UN envoy for Afghanistan, offered to convene a representative assembly. The AIG endorsed the proposal that was also approved by the Government of Pakistan in January 1992. Before the initiative

could make any headway the PDPA regime collapsed in March. In an emergency meeting held in Peshawar, the AIG reached an agreement (the Peshawar Accord) on how to fill the vacuum in Kabul. However, it was practically scuttled when Ahmed Shah Massoud won the race to Kabul beating his rival Hekmatyar and presented a *fait accompli*. Six months later, Pakistan tried to redress the situation through the Islamabad Accord, but to no avail (reminds one of the Soviets reaching Berlin ahead of their western allies in the Second World War, with equally grave consequences).⁵ This experience probably led Pakistan to plead with the US not to let the Northern Alliance enter Kabul in November 2001.

Having underwritten the two Accords in the belief that only a consensus could usher in stability in Afghanistan, Pakistan was obviously unhappy that the Massoud-supported-and-Rabbani-led government did not abide by their rules. Its subsequent support for the Taliban however had other motives. The Pashtuns were finally coming together and the militia was rapidly gaining ground. More importantly, only the Taliban seemed to be in a position to reunify the country, which was Pakistan's second most important objective (a grand reconciliation between the major Afghan factions was always the first priority). It almost worked. When the Taliban were ousted in the US led invasion post 9/11, they had brought most of the country under their control.

Pakistan's decision making during the last three decades of the Afghan imbroglio was influenced by the developments in Afghanistan, the external environment as it evolved, and indeed internal compulsions.

- a. The initial objective, "vacation of Soviet occupation", was achieved when the Soviets withdrew. The subsequent aim to "help form a broad based government to restore unity and stability in Afghanistan", was yet to be fulfilled when the country was invaded, this time by the US.
- b. The hands-off policy after the Soviet withdrawal was an option that was considered. Arguments against it ranged from 'mission not yet accomplished' to 'continued involvement of other countries.'
- c. The genuine Afghan hands never suggested planting a pliant or even a 'friendly' government in Kabul. Any regime acceptable to the Afghans would have served our interests – as it happened before the Soviet invasion. In both our two wars against India, the governments in Kabul offered to ensure peace along the Durand Line. That helped us move all our forces to the eastern front.
- d. The wars in Afghanistan had some unintended consequence for Pakistan. An influx of refugees could not be prevented because of porous borders

(possibly also on political and humanitarian grounds), and flow of weaponry and drugs because of institutional disconnect.

The 1989 uprising in Kashmir

Pakistan's decision to send infiltrators to Kashmir in 1965 had not been adequately thought through.⁶ The assumption that it would not lead to an all-out war with India turned out to be a huge embarrassment. The real damage however was the Kashmiris' loss of faith in Pakistan's resolve to help their freedom struggle. In the aftermath of the 1971 debacle, and later due to the war in Afghanistan, Pakistan was neither keen nor in a position to pursue the Kashmiri cause. After the Simla Accord, the Kashmir issue was virtually frozen.⁷

The uprising in January 1990 thus took us by surprise (I was DGMI at the time) – perhaps also because the unrest was atypically led by the urban youth: educated but unemployed. By the time we learnt more about it, Benazir Bhutto, the then Prime Minister, was still convalescing after the birth of her second child. The first presentation was therefore made to President Ghulam Ishaq Khan (GIK). The PM was represented by Nusrat Bhutto, the Senior Minister. At that nascent stage, except for the need to watch for further developments, no major decision was advised.

Back in office, Bhutto tasked the Foreign Office, the ISI, and the MI, to brief representatives of all political parties regarding the uprising. Some deliberations indeed took place closed-doors. The broad consensus was that the turbulence would soon fizzle out and except for some diplomatic activity no other action was warranted. Of course the intelligence agencies had to keep watch and maintain contact with those who had crossed over from Indian-held Kashmir, some of them for military hardware and training. In the absence of any government directive, only some private groups provided limited help. The unrest however picked up pace and became a movement. Indian crackdown in the valley was accompanied by a military buildup on Pakistan's borders. Since most of the heavy ordnance had been left behind in peace locations, it was clear that India was not mobilising for war and the move was more of a political act to demonstrate firm action. We therefore decided to keep our forces in the barracks.

In June 1990, Robert Gates, the then deputy national security advisor in the US (later director of the CIA and Secretary Defence) visited both countries to plead restraint. He did not quite expect the relaxed atmosphere in Pakistan. The Prime Minister was visiting North Africa and the President, who knew better, did not take Gates' concerns about the likelihood of a nuclear holocaust seriously.

Indians however obliged him by pulling back from the borders and as *quid pro quo* demanded that the US dissuade Pakistan from any support to the militancy in Kashmir and consider declaring it a state sponsoring terrorism. Now that the Cold War was over and Pakistan no longer a “frontline state”, the US agreed and faithfully followed up.

In fact, it fit nicely with the United States’ new Pakistan Policy. Shortly thereafter, Pressler Amendment was invoked on 1 October 1990, all aid was frozen, and charges of abetting fundamentalism and terrorism were added to the existing list of nuclear deceit and drug paddling.⁸ The next three years saw a remarkable low in Pak-US relations. It was essentially President Khan’s experience and the resolute support from the civil and military establishment that helped Pakistan tide over that period. All this while, the resistance in Kashmir continued to intensify because of which, so much pressure was generated on both sides of the LOC that the ISI could no longer be kept out of it – primarily to ensure that the turmoil did not spin out of control and ignite a war with unpredictable consequences.

A people’s movement seldom finds united leadership right at the outset. There were over a hundred groups in Afghanistan during the initial years of the jihad against the Soviets. The ISI reduced them to seven parties and subsequently brought them under the AIG’s political umbrella. Having learnt from Vietnam that General Giap needed a Ho Chi Minh, and from Afghanistan that an armed struggle must ultimately find a single focus, the ISI persuaded the Kashmiri resistance to form a supreme council. So the Hurriyet (THK) was born.

Like the AIG, the THK too did not quite serve the purpose. A few groups remained outside its folds, some others left it. Micromanaging a liberation movement is a tough call, and this one was a particularly tall order. The Indo-US nexus was powerful and Pakistan suffered from institutional instability and lack of political cohesion. Consequently, under pressure it committed a cardinal sin: it left the Hurriyet to its own designs.

Fighting the state is a complex undertaking. If it was directed against a hard state like Russia, or if the stakes were high and humanitarian considerations low – like for India in Kashmir – the reprisals can be brutal. The resistance must therefore be planned for the long haul. Left to eager or fanatic streaks, it does not pay enough attention to non-military means that eventually matter more, and soon burns out. The Mujahedeen and the Taliban have survived for decades because they stagger their military operations in time and space. On the other hand, the attrition rate of the Punjabi Taliban in Afghanistan, always on the

offensive, is very high. The same fate is what befell the Kashmiri resistance. It may have lasted longer than we expected but failed to consolidate on the political front and in due course its armed element lost momentum. It still served a purpose: it persuaded both India and Pakistan to seriously find ways to at least manage this chronic conflict.

In 1997, with I.K. Gujral in Delhi and Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad, the climate was conducive for peace. Though not yet proven but still strongly suspected, the nuclear capability of the two countries must have induced a sense of urgency. The formula that the two countries invented, famously called the Composite Dialogue, wisely kept the intractable issue of Kashmir on the backburners, to first improve the environment before it could be addressed. Despite being rocked by the Kargil war⁹ (another venture launched without envisaging the endgame), the coup of 1999¹⁰, the failure of the Agra Summit¹¹, the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001¹², and the 2008 carnage at Mumbai¹³, the concept of Composite Dialogue has continued to underpin the bilateral relationship. It may still not lead to any strategic breakthrough because of our heavy historical baggage, dogmatic establishment culture, and weak political leadership. Moreover, the turmoil in Pakistan and its relative power deficit vis-à-vis India have led Delhi to believe that it need not make any compromises that would substantially change the status-quo. Even the symbolic CBMs on Kashmir, for instance the bus service between the two parts that was meant to sign the seriousness of the peace process, were undermined by India when it suspected that the improved environment might acquire a dynamic of its own.

During the first fifty years of its existence, Pakistan's policy on Kashmir lacked a long-term perspective. Its decisions were dictated by events and thus hardly strategic. When the valley of Kashmir erupted in the early 1990s, Pakistan's responses took an evolutionary course. Undergoing a state of transition both internally as well as geo-politically (with the end of the Cold War), Pakistan's decisions were tactical in nature. It was only after another transition, to the status of a nuclear weapon state, that the issue was brought within a strategic framework.

Pakistan's inadequacies did contribute to the movement's setbacks. However, having lived under occupation for long years the Kashmiri continue to covet freedom from the Indian yoke. They remain alienated and sporadic flare-ups are still likely. Nevertheless, because of internal turmoil and a war raging on its western borders, Pakistan's best option remains plodding along within the

parameters of the conflict containment formula; perhaps a more appropriate description of the Composite Dialogue.

Dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's first government

When Benazir Bhutto (BB) became the prime minister of Pakistan in 1988, her victory was understandably acclaimed as a momentous event.¹⁴ It was not merely that a conservative Muslim country had elected a woman as its leader but more the disbelief that in the real world too such happy endings were possible. The fables don't get it any better: a popularly elected leader removed from power by a military dictator and hanged; his young daughter returns after years in exile; and with the help of the down-trodden takes back her father's throne. In the real world, however, hardly anyone lives happily thereafter. BB had no intentions to, despite the fact that a good number wanted to see her survive the mandated tenure. Contrary to common belief, her gender usually worked in her favour. Shortly after she was sworn-in, the Chinese Ambassador called on Aslam Beg, the Army Chief, and told him that BB needed help. Armed with millennia of hindsight, the Chinese had enough foresight to fear that the combination of a vicious opposition, BB's inexperience and the feudal baggage she carried, were a recipe for disaster. Little did he know that help was already underway.

The first paper sent to her from the GHQ proposed the formation of a National Security Advisory Group (NSAG). Though mindful of the aversion the civilians have for the concept of a National Security Council (NSC) that they consider perpetuation of military rule by other means, the proposal was not a camouflage under another name. It in fact recommended the engagement of a civilian body with national security. On defence matters, the only brass it needed to consult was the harmless Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. The paper did however suggest that in addition to experts and academics, representatives from political parties should also be included. Other than providing the government with multiple options and opinions, this arrangement could dissuade the opposition (as it would be part of the policy discourse) from exploiting national security issues for their political ends. The paper never saw the light of day.

In September 1988, an ethnic carnage in Hyderabad took nearly a hundred lives.¹⁵ After the October elections, a coalition between the PPP and the MQM – two parties that represented the feuding communities – augured well for peace. The optimism lasted a mere hundred days. The ruling PPP intended to concede no more than the bare minimum and what the MQM demanded (the famous 54 points), no government could concede. Within a few months, Sindh was back in

turmoil. This time the mission to help BB was led by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. In March 1989, he went to Karachi to take stock of the situation and to advise the Prime Minister. One group that he consulted consisted of the Army Chief, the DGISI, and me as the DGMI. There was consensus that the PM should extend her stay in the province and personally lead the peace talks with the MQM. BB's reaction to the presidential advice was made amply clear when she promptly headed back to Islamabad.

Bhutto was understandably uncomfortable with Hameed Gul heading the all-powerful ISI. The general was not only one of the better known legacies of Zia-ul-Haq but also a self-proclaimed godfather of the IJI, a coalition of parties opposed to the PPP. The failure at Jalalabad provided just the right pretext to remove him from the country's top intelligence job. In his place she appointed Lt Gen (retired) Shams-ur-Rehman Kallue. It was the first time the post was held by someone not on the active list of the Army.

The selection of the DGISI is the Chief Executive's prerogative and according to the rules of business he, or even she, does not have to belong to the Armed Forces. GHQ's claim on this post is based on the argument that since the organisation was mainly manned by the Khakis, its head should be a serving general. Another reason may well be the Army's larger than life role in the country's polity. General Beg, who as per the practice in vogue had offered a panel of officers for the PM to choose Gul's successor, was obviously miffed. Those who used to warn that to get even for the past indignities, BB once in power would wreak havoc on the military, were now in full cry. A running battle between the government and the Army's high command followed, rapidly engulfing the Presidency. The distribution of power in the political system and our aversion to abide by its algorithm made it inevitable.

After the 1985 general elections, Zia-ul-Haq extorted the house to grant him (now an elected president) the fiat to dissolve assemblies and choose service chiefs. Famously known as the eighth amendment, GIK inherited these powers.¹⁶ Armed with it, the President was an important pillar of the new power matrix; the Prime Minister as the chief executive and the COAS as the prime arbiter, being the other two. The trio was called 'The Troika' though it never acted as one. In its original Russian sense, the troika was a chaise driven by three horses in the same direction. Our bargain was designed to rein them in. The army chief now did not have to break loose and take the country with him; if the prime minister ran amok, he or she could be pre-empted or prevented; and the president in any case had nowhere to go. It was not a bad idea considering our previous (and subsequent) experience. Had it worked, it would not have had the mobility of a

troika, but at least the stability of a tripod. It was workable provided the three actors accepted the limits of their power.

The Army made the first move to test these limits.

The Government has the right to make or review policies. After the Soviet withdrawal and the Jalalabad fiasco, its decision to have another look at our Afghan policy was therefore reasonable. I was a member of the review committee that included Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, DG Afghanistan from the Foreign Office. General Beg did not like the review and swayed the PM to appoint him the chief policy coordinator. BB agreed, probably to let the Army dig itself deeper in the Afghan hole; but in public perceptions the PM had lost a round to the GHQ.

Soon thereafter, Bhutto upped the ante by asserting that though the President could appoint the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, his retirement was the PM's prerogative. Now, no one ever told GIK that what he believed to be his domain was in fact not his, and got away with it. In this case there was another, graver reason that BB was not going to get her way. Aslam Beg was convinced that the Chairman was only the test case to be followed by the 'real thing' - him. The time had come to give the lady a taste of her own medicine!

General Beg was not very fond of the MQM or its methods but as the senior most 'mohajir' in the country's hierarchy, the MQM was always game to his signal. I am not sure if he gave any but in early September 1989 the MQM's decision to part ways with the PPP came at the heels of the PM's latest attempt to rock the balance of power. The loss of an important coalition partner reduced the government's majority in the National Assembly to 12. The Opposition led by Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi decided that the time was now ripe to wrest power from the PPP through a motion of no-confidence. In our assessment it seemed unlikely that the no-confidence motion would succeed, and it was a sobering thought. BB's supporters in the Parliament knew that the mighty Army wanted it to be carried and also that the wielder of the 8th amendment would be gratified if it did; but none of them was willing to walk the gauntlet to vote for the motion. Eventually the ruling party walked away with one from the other side (Anwar Aziz) and the motion fell short by 13 votes. BB had won against the other two, supposedly more powerful, members of the Troika.

It was now the President's call. That he did not like Ms. Bhutto was a well-known sentiment exacerbated by the lady's disrespect for decorum. Even then it

surprised us when he got himself in a squabble with the PM that he could well have lost.

Towards the end of 1989, I was asked by General Beg to go see the PM and dissuade her from taking a contentious matter to the court. Apparently, the President had ignored some of her recommendations for appointments to the higher judiciary. She probably had a good case there and having defeated the no-confidence motion on the floor of the House, was now raring for a constitutional showdown. Air Chief Marshal Hakeem-Ullah, Chief of the Air Staff, was also there on the same mission. A compromise formula was worked out and BB agreed to stand down in the (vain) hope that her gesture would help get the Army and the Presidency off her back. But that is not how politics works, anywhere.

The turn of the year brought a God sent pause in these running battles. Ms. Bhutto was expecting a child and in the true chivalrous tradition of our society, her antagonists waited till the baby was safely delivered. The storm that followed this lull was unleashed by the MQM in Karachi on 7 February 1990. Scores of people were killed.¹⁷ The countdown for BB-1 had started.

When Rajiv Gandhi, the then Indian Prime Minister, visited Islamabad in 1988, we learnt that BB had assured him of cooperation against the Sikh uprising raging in the Indian Punjab (she later conceded that she helped India control the Sikh insurgency).¹⁸ BB had obviously acted without consulting all relevant organs of the state. A few months later, during the PM's visit to the US in June 1989, the CIA gave her an "unprecedented" briefing on Pakistan's nuclear programme.¹⁹ Reportedly, she was "shocked" and stated that at home she had not been adequately briefed on the subject. Some gave her the benefit of doubt since feigning ignorance under the circumstances was the sensible thing to do. However, on her return it became quite clear that the Prime Minister had taken the CIA's briefing rather seriously. It was time the Army Chief invited the Prime Minister for an exclusive briefing on Pakistan's core security issues. She accepted but without any prior notice arrived accompanied by Robert Oakley, the American Ambassador to Pakistan. Of course we could not make the presentation that was originally planned.

How the Army was to be employed in aid of civil power to combat ethnic warfare in Sindh became a contentious issue between the government and the GHQ. The government wanted the Army to operate under Article 137 of the constitution, restricting its room for action. General Beg asked for more freedom under Article 242, a demand made famous by his statement that his troops "would not chase shadows."²⁰ The executive indeed had the final word.

However, when the list of miscreants was received – a list with only MQM names on it – the intentions became clear. The government wanted to hound its political opponents with the help of the Army. The military high command decided not to oblige.

In June 1990, the PPP government in Sindh ordered a raid on Pucca Qila, an MQM stronghold in Hyderabad.²¹ The timing was curious. Not only was the PM out of the country but so were the COAS and the Karachi Corps Commander. Moreover, it was the first time during this phase of unrest that the provincial administration did not coordinate a major operation with the Corps HQ. The Army intervened and the bloodbath was prevented. Both the President and the Army Chief now agreed that the dispensation was no more working. The next steps were to be decided by the President.

In mid-July I learnt, purely by chance, that some of the President's men were working full steam on the dissolution of the National Assembly. When I informed General Beg he did not seem too happy. It had been less than two years that the democratic process was restored with much fanfare and applause. As the acclaimed godfather of this restoration, Beg had hoped that the President might try something less drastic than invoking the much dreaded 58.2(b). After a quick meeting with GIK, he confirmed that the die had been cast. The President made the announcement at 1700 hours on the 6 August 1990.²²

This was a decision many powerful groups had not desired, but when it was taken most of them, fed up with the perpetual turmoil and no governance, heaved a sigh of relief. The President may not have liked BB's impudence but he did try to guide her. The Army was generally sympathetic. A poll conducted in a formation (not the done thing) upheld the right of a woman to become the head of the government in an Islamic country. Indeed at one stage we not only considered her a "security risk" but also had serious misgivings that she wanted to wreck revenge on the country (or the Army) for what was done to her father. Even then, General Beg's dismay when he learnt about the Presidential decision was shared by a good number in the brass. Did we become impatient? Probably yes. A few years later, the same team was prepared to forgive BB's sins because in the successor government they perceived a bigger disaster.

Nawaz Sharif's first stint as PM

The civil-military team that ushered Nawaz Sharif into power in 1990 was led by GIK. It used every trick in the trade to deny power to BB even in her home base, the province of Sindh. But one doubt that Sharif started to dismantle

without loss of time was that just because of this favour he would remain eternally beholden to them. The two nominees of the President: Ijlal Haider Zaidi, the advisor on Defence, and Sahibzada Yakub Khan, the Foreign Minister, were bundled out in quick succession. That the Kingmakers must be gotten rid of as early as possible, he had been taught; but that one did not have to pick all one's battles right at the outset, he had failed to learn from his predecessor. With some unintended help from General Beg, Sharif was quickly on the war path.

The US led war against Iraq's occupation of Kuwait started on 17 January 1991 with the bombardment of Baghdad.²³ A few days later, Mr. Zaidi, Advisor on Defence, sponsored a meeting of the Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC). Different views were indeed expressed, the one from the Army Chief being the most diverse. Dissent is not unusual in a discussion but for someone used to hearing only one opinion, it was nothing less than an affront. For that nerve alone, Sharif was not going to forgive Beg. The more urgent problem however was that because of a dissenting voice, the PM had to take a decision. For want of anything better, it was decided that Sharif should visit a few countries and plead for a ceasefire. On return he was disappointed because no media was there to be enlightened on his peace mission. It had chosen instead to attend one of Beg's favourite treatises on strategy – this time on Strategic Defiance. The PM requested the President to sack the Army Chief forthwith.

General Beg had undoubtedly acted improperly. Expressing divergent views in the DCC or propounding doctrines in military circles was one thing, but publicly adopting a collision course with the government was quite another. He later apologised to the PM but the bitterness continued. When the President was found unwilling to retire the General prematurely, the PM persuaded him to name the new Army Chief three months before Beg was to complete his tenure. That, Nawaz Sharif believed, would make him a lame duck COAS. General Beg may have believed that he was ordained to usher in a new era guided by his strategic vision but one instrument he was not going to use to realise this mission was that of a military takeover. The ceremony that marks an Army Chief's formal handing over of command to his successor – one that had not taken place in Pakistan for a long time – was more important to him than delivering another "my dear countrymen" address.

When General Asif Nawaz took over as COAS on 16 August 1991, there was an audible sigh of relief from Sharif's camp. But a minor matter still had to be taken care of: the disposal of the incumbent DGISI, Asad Durrani. Since the ISI Chief serves at the PM's pleasure, getting rid of me was no big deal. Asif Nawaz had already told the PM that it was time I commanded a division. In anticipation

of the likely change, the Chief even suggested a panel to the PM from which to choose my successor. Having suffered the Beg-Durrani axis for almost a year, Sharif was however unwilling to face yet another Army-ISI nexus. He conveyed to the Army Chief that with the transition in Afghanistan at a critical stage, the change in the ISI could be pended for a while.

No chief executive would be much at ease if the President was armed with the eighth amendment. The PM therefore reached out to Asif Nawaz in a bid to win him over to his camp. The Chief and his wife were invited to the Sharif's family house in Lahore and offered a BMW as a token of friendship. The General was deeply embarrassed and his inability to contain his sentiments led to plenty of stir. The PM's camp responded to Asif Nawaz's expressions of discontent by threatening to do a "Gul Hassan" on him²⁴ (Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, as the President of Pakistan, charged General Gul Hassan, the then army chief, of 'Bonapartism' and sacked him on 3 March 1972). Not to be outdone, the Chief blurted out the episode in a formation commanders conference in February 1992. All present, over a hundred of them, froze for a while. A few eyes turned towards me. Luckily, I was too numb to show any emotions. I later asked Asif Nawaz as to what led him to this indiscretion. Not yet fully cognisant of its implications, he responded with his trademark nonchalance, "I just wanted to get it out of my system." Perhaps he did, but in the process he had shaken the bigger system to its core.

Like his instincts, Asif Nawaz' math was also "infantarian": simple and down to earth. In a troika, two must prevail against the third, was his political doctrine. Though not universally true (his successor persuaded both the President and the Prime Minister to step down), in the current situation obtaining it was pragmatic thinking. By supporting GIK, who was getting dismayed with the state of governance, Asif Nawaz believed that the PM could be shown the door. He however did not contemplate a military takeover for which the situation was unfavourable. Sharif on the other hand understood the outburst in the Army auditorium as an ultimatum.

The next episode to further widen the gulf between the Army and the government, this time with the President's involvement, was the military action against the MQM. As the corps commander in Sindh, Asif Nawaz had gone through some bad patches, from the Hyderabad massacre to the carnage in Karachi and the raid on Pucca Qila. MQM's ways and Altaf Hussain's messianic hold over the masses made him uneasy. He therefore was pretty excited when the organisation's former militant aces, Amir and Afaq, broke ranks with its

leadership to form a splinter group (the *Haqiqis*). He believed that this ethnic group could only be weakened from within.

On 19 June 1992, the Army with the help of Haqiqi informers raided some MQM facilities reportedly used for the detention and torture of dissidents and opponents. The results were revealing and within hours many high profile MQM figures were either caught or went underground. Since neither Nawaz Sharif nor Muzaffar Ali Shah, the Chief Minister, were very comfortable with their coalition partner, the operation had the tacit nod from the federal as well as the provincial government. It was however stopped in its tracks by GIK, the President and the Supreme Commander – in this case acting primarily as the country's last defence against Benazir Bhutto's return to power in Sindh. He quickly grasped that the MQM's loss was inevitably PPP's gain. Once Nawaz Sharif understood the implication, his conclusion was equally inevitable: the operation was the Army's plot to dethrone him.

In the meantime, Asif Nawaz was toying with another idea: "if BB could raise enough turmoil on the streets, GIK might be persuaded to dismiss the government." BB agreed and planned a long march to invest Islamabad in late 1992. The attempt was effectively scuttled by the administration that blocked all routes leading to the Capitol. Interestingly, the Army was asked to come to the aid of civil power. This being a legitimate request, the Army provided help against a movement that had its chief's couched support. Such were the contradictions in a system that did not follow its natural course.

A few months later, Asif Nawaz suffered a massive stroke and died within hours. On 8 January 1993, the General got onto a treadmill after breakfast and collapsed while exercising. The death of an army chief in Pakistan is a tectonic affair, even in normal times. This one happened when the three pillars of political power were in a state of critical imbalance. The events that followed are as illustrative of the genesis of Pakistani politics as perhaps any other.

Selecting an army chief in Pakistan is much like launching a boomerang. If not done perfectly it can do immense damage, to the launcher as well. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1976 and Nawaz Sharif in 1999 went deep down the ladder to find someone who they believed would remain obliged to them and spare their throne. They both regretted it. GIK would also go wrong this time.

Choosing Asif Nawaz' successor was indeed the President's prerogative, but given Sharif's prior experiences of dealing with two army chiefs, the PM understandably wanted a say in the matter. He therefore asked the President to

adopt a consensual approach. GIK agreed to listen but without any binding commitment. However, when Sharif exclaimed in frustration that he would accept anyone but Farrukh Khan (who he believed was an Asif Nawaz loyalist), the President thought the PM could be accommodated. I have reason to believe that Waheed Kakar was GIK's first choice and he was using Khan's name merely as a red herring. Though not very happy with the President's decision, Nawaz Sharif had to swallow the less bitter pill.

Kakar too was not the takeover type but did believe that as the army chief he had a political role. He once told me that he was trying to reconcile the President and the Prime Minister. I wished him luck but also expressed my doubts if that would work – the two were too diverse a personality to find common working ground. Nawaz Sharif made matters worse and sent a message to the President that he was prepared to bury the hatchet and his party would support the latter if he sought another term (he made a similar move in his second tenure when to get rid of Musharaf, the General was offered a “promotion” to the politically irrelevant post of CJCS). GIK, even though he may have wanted the job, could not have lived with the perception that he had bargained for the office. The President now felt compelled to convey to the government that he was not satisfied with its performance. In the belief that Sharif was now on a weak wicket he decided to go public with his charge sheet. It was now the PM's turn to show that he was the elected leader of the country. He made his famous “I will not take dictation” speech on 17 April 1993.²⁵ GIK, duly provoked, invoked 58.2(b) for the second time and dismissed the government the following day. Desperate to unite all anti-Sharif forces, GIK inducted a sixty-plus interim government that included Asif Zardari, BB's husband and the man who the President had got arrested and tried hard to get convicted. Such were the incongruities of a system that was neither parliamentary nor presidential.

The dismissal, like all the previous ones, was challenged in the Supreme Court but unlike any of them was reversed while the sacking authority was still in office. GIK's case indeed was weak and he had obviously acted impulsively, but whether the Court's decision was based on the merit of the case or influenced by the Army's non-partisan posture, is difficult to judge. Waheed Kakar was beholden to the President for the ultimate military rank but that is one lesson the civilian leadership never learnt: an army chief, regardless of how and who assigns him, draws his strength from the institution.

Yet another case of a government that started, if anything, with greater support of the establishment and lost it in a remarkably short period. Whose fault, is not for me, a partisan actor, to judge. I still can state one lesson conclusively:

those who seek ever more power – in this case, more than their share in the “troika” – lose even what was their rightful due.

The First Gulf War, 1990-91

Saddam Hussain invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990 and formally annexed it six days later. BB's first government was sacked on 6 August and though an interim government headed by Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi had been sworn in, the first policy decision was taken at an emergency meeting in the Joint Staff HQ. General Beg, the Army Chief, persuaded the Chief Executive to send a brigade to Saudi Arabia as a token of support. Around the same time, a US-led coalition had started assembling forces on the Arabian Peninsula to evict the occupation by military means if necessary. On 29 November, the UNSC sanctioned the use of force if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait by 15 January 1991. General Beg in the meantime was having second thoughts.

A coterie of generals around the Chief convinced him that Saddam could foil any military venture by the western alliance and therefore there was little chance of war. Furthermore, since Pakistan's support for a US led operation against a Muslim country would be unpopular at home, at the very least our brigade should not be employed in any possible encounter with the Iraqi forces. The Saudis got the message and their Intelligence Chief, Prince Turki-al-Faisal, sent an envoy whom I received on 20 August 1990, my first day in the office as DGISI. Shortly thereafter I went to Riyadh, ostensibly to pay an inaugural call on the Prince but more so to make a personal assessment of the Kuwait crisis. My Saudi hosts were reluctant to facilitate a meeting with General Norman Schwarzkopf, Commander CENTCOM and the Supreme Commander of all Allied Forces in the war theatre. As DGMI, I had met him a number of times and thus managed to see him in his headquarters near Riyadh.

On my return, I told General Beg that the US was ready and raring for war. That may well have been the reason that in a high level exercise near Gujranwala, fortuitously planned in mid-January 1991, the task of briefing on this issue (normally an ISI matter) was entrusted to one of his informal advisors. During the night of 16/17 January, my office informed me that the Allies had started bombing the Iraqi forces. Beg was quite distressed when told about the near lack of response by the Republican Guards, the elite Iraqi force in Kuwait. When we returned from the exercise, Ijlal Haider Zaidi, the Advisor to the PM on Defence, urgently organised a DCC meeting with Nawaz Sharif, now the PM. The other participants were Sahibzada Yakub Khan, the Foreign Minister;

Chairman JCSC and the three Service Chiefs; Jehangir Karamat as the DGMO; and me.

Except for Beg, all others believed that Saddam Hussain would be defeated in a short order. The PM expected unanimity but a dissenting voice, that too from someone as powerful as the Army Chief, created a serious dilemma for him. He did what many under the circumstances are wont to do: created a committee to recommend a course of action. The PM was advised to visit a few countries to gather support to end the war. Another visit was however more productive; that of Beg to Schwarzkopf. He finally reconciled with the bitter reality.

Decision making during the Gulf Crisis of 1990-91 suffered from many handicaps. It overlapped with a political transition in the country. In its initial phase, we had an interim government fully focused on the ensuing elections. And during its critical period, a newly elected team was reluctant to be distracted from its settling down process. The civil and military establishment could have adequately fulfilled the role, especially with an experienced President at the helm (even though the latter too was deeply involved with internal politics). The issue therefore by default landed in the lap of an army chief who exploited the exceptional status of his organisation to ride roughshod over institutional opinions. A tested and tried decision making procedure was never more missed.

Our nuclear tests of 1998

Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear capability was understandably a clandestine operation. Though the cover was blown fairly early in the process, the commitment of a dedicated team and a cooperative mechanism that involved all essential organs of the state kept it on track. Despite immense external pressure, notably from the US, and some reservations from a regime at home; it succeeded. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto created a mechanism that protected the programme from bureaucratic stranglehold. Zia placed it under presidential oversight saving it from the quirks of Pakistani politics. GIK used his immense experience to ward off many a threat; post-Pressler pressure by the sole surviving superpower was merely one of them. Perhaps his most critical contribution was his patience with AQ Khan. Though aware of holes in the Dr's modus operandi, in the greater interest of the programme the President resisted all attempts to have him sacked.

This well-rounded management of the programme resulted not only in Pakistan becoming a nuclear weapon state (NWS) against all odds, but also in taking sound and timely decisions. It was obvious that having denied our real ambitions, even if unconvincingly, we could not demonstrate our achievement.

Technical requirements therefore had to make do with cold tests and “ambivalence” mercifully served the purpose of deterrence. Nevertheless, preparations had to be made in good time if ever the bomb had to be brought out of the basement. Test sites at Chaghai in Balochistan were constructed in the mid-1980s. In late 1996, when Narasimha Rao, the then Indian Prime Minister, was toying with the idea of nuclear testing, Pakistani Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, ordered that the test facilities at Chaghai be readied, just in case they were needed. That enabled Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to deliver a timely response.

In March 1998, the BJP, led by Atal Bahari Vajpayee, won the elections in India. The Party had already proclaimed that if voted to power it would carry out nuclear tests and claim the NWS status. In May it exploded four devices. Most of the international community, especially the cartel of the five recognised nuclear powers, was clearly unhappy. Countries like the US however were now more concerned about Pakistan responding in kind. Our ability to produce a nuclear bomb was generally known and so was our constraint to admit its possession. In theory therefore we did not have to carry out a live test to prove that we had the capability. A “reasonable doubt” that we could do so would serve the purpose. However, when India breached the status quo it became difficult, if not impossible, to sustain this policy of ambiguity.

To start with, it was a matter of status. A ‘perceived nuclear capability’ was not going to be enough to get us in the NWS Club. Following its tests, India could at least strive for it. More importantly, it was now a psychological issue. By going overtly nuclear, India had broken a taboo and dared us to follow suit. At stake was the credibility of Pakistan’s nuclear programme. For two decades, we had consoled the nation that their sufferings were not in vain and one day we would be a nuclear power. Despite gross provocation, if we now failed to prove that we had become one, the Pakistani people would have lost any remaining faith in the State. There was also a less familiar doctrinal point. Deterrence is not only about material possession; it must be accompanied by the will to use it. If the state was deterred from testing due to any economic or political constraints no one would believe that it could muster the courage to use it in face of graver consequences. Indeed, there was a cost to be paid in case Pakistan carried out the tests. Besides the ill will of the international community, especially that of the US, it would face economic sanctions already imposed on India.

During the fortnight following the Indian explosions, Pakistan was subjected to immense pressures to prevent it from detonating a nuclear device. Clinton, the US President, made a number of calls to Nawaz Sharif and offered incentives if

we showed restraint. A healthy domestic debate was of course expected, and took place at times with surprising results. At a public forum organised by the Institute of Regional Studies under the aegis of Mushahid Hussain, the Minister of Information, three out of five retired three star generals were not in favour of Pakistan following suit (one remained ambiguous). The Army High Command gave its professional opinion but left it to the government to make the final decision since the issue was more than a military affair. Advice from the foreign office favoured a live test – probably for reasons of status. Sharif’s decision may have been influenced more by politics than strategy but he takes the credit for not wilting under outside pressure as well as from his core constituency, the business community. On May 28, he told the nation that Pakistan had carried out five nuclear tests and thus catapulted to the exclusive club of nuclear powers.²⁶

Conclusion

To illustrate decision making in Pakistan on subjects of strategic significance, this study has explored six cases. Two of them – Afghanistan and Kashmir – are regional issues. Two others, in which elected governments were dismissed under an exceptional constitutional provision, are about domestic politics. The First Gulf War, though beyond our immediate neighbourhood, had implications both for our external relations as well as for internal policy. The acquisition of nuclear capability qualitatively changed Pakistan’s global standing and altered the regional equation. Only the last one can be considered to have achieved its stated goal. Kashmir and Afghanistan continue to simmer. The remaining three, though behind us, have impacted Pakistan’s internal balance of power and can be understood as part of our learning process.

The nuclear programme succeeded because the decision was followed up by all the involved organs of state through sustained commitment, and there was a steering mechanism that kept it on track against great odds. The Kashmir project was always going to be difficult because of a powerful adversary – India. Even then, stumbling into the 1965 war and losing control over the insurgency following the 1990 uprising, failed the test of carefully dovetailing tactical events to achieve a strategic objective. Little progress after the formulation of a sound framework (the Composite Dialogue) has been inter-alia, primarily due to internal instability and weakness.

On Afghanistan, the decisions taken were amongst the reasonably available ones at any given time. The shortcomings were due to our inability to control the internal dynamics of another country and the involvement of other, some very powerful, countries. Certainly the absence of institutional coordination and

cooperation provided the Army more than its due space on policy formulation and implementation.

Two elected governments became victims of a unique constitutional clause. It can thus be reasonably argued that the 8th Amendment, especially its clause 58.2(b), and the so-called ‘Troika’ that was its inevitable consequence, were unworkable. While this may be so, another factor may have been at least as important. Having accepted the rules, no matter how flawed, the game can only be played if the rules were observed. The problem was that all three players – the president, the prime minister, and the army chief – while jealously guarding their respective turf, suspected others of violating them. This proclivity may be inherent in power spiel but becomes fatal because of a serious flaw most of our leaders suffer from: they are vulnerable to a small coterie of henchmen. This creed survives and thrives on information coups, insidious schemes, and conspiracy concoctions; anything to justify their indispensability. Their exaggerated, often fabricated, accounts keep the boss-man on edge and by ‘successfully eliminating’ non-existent threats they ensure their continued existence. In this process, the threats become real because the other side reacts in the same vein.

Kashmir and the first Gulf war are classic examples of the political leadership either abdicating its responsibility or falling short of the task. Whether the Army was left holding the baby or jumped to grab the crib can be discussed ad-nauseam but the best way to address this dilemma seems to be the establishment of some form of a decision making structure at the national level. There was none in the formal sense but the mere fact that its spirit was followed led to a sound and timely response to the Indian nuclear tests in 1998.

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