

Scenario 15

ISI Ruled Politics of 1990s:

[**Note:** Some lines of this essay belong to SAT since died in Nov 2005. After correcting certain facts, it is being placed here to keep the history in tact and sequence.]

In early 2011, the relationship between PPP and MQM were once more established (though only lasted for few months again) despite the bitter accusations on each other many times and on many counts throughout our political history. The general perception prevails that MQM was given birth and nurtured by Gen Ziaul Haq through Karachi Wing of the ISI in early 1980s just to counter or suppress the nationalist voices then raised by G M Syed, his associates and other similars. Whether it is true or not MQM people can better guide us.

The fact remains that in all the previous governments, civil or military, ISI had always been labelled with charges of playing important role in Pakistan's politics. However, ISI contributed much less in 2010-11 being least interested in breaking or repairing PPP-MQM relationships.

Testifying before the Supreme Court on 16th June 1997, in a petition filed by Air Marshal (retd) Asghar Khan, former chief of the Pakistan Air Force, had challenged the legality of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI)'s Political Division accepting a donation of Rs.140 million from Mehran Bank for use against PPP candidates during elections. Gen (retd) Mirza Aslam Beg, former Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), had affirmed that the ISI was (and is) manned mainly by serving army officers. It was a part of the Ministry of Defence then and it used to report to the Prime Minister and not to the COAS.

Contrarily, many Pakistani analysts correctly understand that the ISI, though *de jure* remained under the Prime Ministers during the political regimes but had always been controlled *de facto* by the COAS and that its internal Political Division had been in existence at least since the days of Gen Ayub Khan. Formally floated in 1948, ISI was purely a military organisation by objectives. It was Pakistan's first military ruler Gen Ayub Khan, who in late 1950s expanded its role to keep an eye on politicians but their reports were never made known to media or even to discuss in high level army meetings. It was for the personal knowledge of the Army Chief perhaps.

It may not be out of place to mention that the first martial law in the country was actually manoeuvred by the ISI in 1958. The nuisance of Military take over was started by the ISI while forcing Gen Ayub Khan to topple the government of Iskandar Mirza and thus paving way for Gen Ziaul Haq and then Gen Musharraf to launch their respective takeovers in succeeding years of 1977 and 1999.

Immediately after 7th October 1958, the day Iskandar Mirza had taken over the government with the help of Field Marshall Ayub Khan, the then Commander in Chief of Pakistan Armed Forces, a plan was chalked out to upset the original take over plan. Col K M Azhar (later became General & Governor NWFP) the Acting Director ISI had caught air of that upset plan. One Brig Qayyum of 51 Brigade had called Col Azhar of ISI that he had received a telephone call from 'high ups' to cancel the original plan of 7th October and act as per new plan. Col Azhar asked him to come to ISI HQ in person. Brig Qayyum reached there and told that he had received instructions from Gen Musa Khan to act at new plan.

Acting Director of ISI Col Azhar soon picked the conclusion that it was a fake call as Gen Musa was based at Rawalpindi those days. When the ISI secretly investigated the 'source of orders' it revealed that there existed no replacement plan; the call was actually fake. The matter was immediately brought in the notice of C-in-C Gen Ayub Khan.

Without taking formal approval from the CinC, ISI conveyed CinC's implied consent and the investigation was extended to senior army officers like Gen Hamid, Gen Yahya Khan, Gen Musa and Iskandar Mirza because these four were perspective beneficiaries of the new game plan. All were subjected through flip-flop interrogation; ISI eliminated the first three officers and Iskandar Mirza was declared as the only and prime suspect.

During the same days, one Air Commodore Abdul Rab received another similar phone call that 'the high ups want that you go and arrest so & so three senior army officers and report back'. AC Abdul Rab told Col Azhar of ISI about the suspicious call because how an Air Force officer could arrest the senior army officers. When Gen Ayub Khan came back from East Pakistan's tour, he was told about that later development also.

Conclusion: Gen Ayub Khan was suggested that Iskandar Mirza was using him as a tool and as a yes-sir man, breaking up the cabinet; changing the PM at its own and wanted to push out key Generals to go sovereign powerful person. Gen Ayub Khan was not agreeing to take any action and had discarded ISI's briefings. Col Azhar of the ISI then went to senior army officers and pumped them against Iskandar Mirza. Ultimately Gen Azam, Gen Yahya, Gen Hamid and Gen Burky went to Gen Ayub Khan, asked him to take over the government from Mr Mirza while announcing Chief Martial Law Administrator himself.

Field Marshall Ayub Khan had refused to accommodate his four senior Generals but ultimately surrendered because all the four had threatened to resign collectively. Then these four Generals went to Iskandar Mirza and asked him to step down voluntarily if he wanted pension and other benefits. Later it surfaced that those two phone calls were manipulated by Col Azhar of ISI himself and also pumped the senior Generals to take share of the booty.

ISI had played his first game successfully in which Col Azhar used all the above mentioned fabricated and concocted reports by putting guns on the shoulders of one Brig Qayyum and AC Abdul Rab. He was perhaps having some personal grudge against Iskandar Mirza for which he had also spread some fake stories of Naheed Mirza's corruption in the army circles using ISI network.

Gen Ayub Khan had issued the first notification for its changing role after his successful military coup of October 1958 thereby providing that the organisation would be directly answerable to the President of Pakistan. As per constitutional provisions then available it was unfair and illegal but no body raised voice for this unlawful government directive; neither in any court or otherwise. Later, the role of internal Political Division of ISI was redefined making it more assertive set up within the organisation by Prime Minister Z A Bhutto in 1975. Since then the ISI has been performing that role assertively as one can see now.

One can recall an interview of Maj Gen (Rtd) Ghulam Umar published in ***daily 'Jang' dated 20th September 1998***, who had told that:

"Yes! ISI and MI have been playing [role in Pakistani politics]. In Z A Bhutto's days, the political wing was reinforced. During previous eras the ISI had been doing political jobs but not in a way that 'this particular desk would only do political job, not at all'. Such orders affect the organizational ability of ISI. In our days, the ISI was such that if a Division Commander of Deccan in India was ordered to move out to Kashmir, the news reached us before the notification was received by that Div Commander who had been ordered to move."

It was pity that A M Asghar Khan's petition went almost undecided through unwarranted and undue delay. Still it is pending with the SC for want of decision. Two former Air Chiefs' condemnations of ISI are available on the court's record. The charge of maneuvering of three general elections in which the people of Pakistan were deceived and cheated thrice had been so momentous that delaying action on it should have been taken as criminal negligence on the part of judges sitting on the helm of affairs.

More instances to be recalled; the conspiracy to divide MQM was initiated during Benazir Bhutto's first regime but took concrete shape later. At that time Lt Gen Asif Nawaz Janjua

was Corps Commander Karachi and was keen on eliminating the anti-state elements including MQM. The MQM leader Altaf Hussain got smell of the army's plans to split his party in February 1991. Thereafter, on 2nd March 1991 he had expelled 19 members from his party because they were holding contacts with ISI and MI. [*The same group later developed itself as the MQM-Haqiqi and started its political activity independently*]

Altaf Hussain, the MQM Chief, had complained to the then President that the ISI was conspiring to divide the MQM. During May 1991 a couple of prominent MQM leaders were killed in Karachi by masked gunmen. The foreign electronic media, though having no evidence, had speculations that those MQM leaders were shot by some intelligence personnel alleging the ISI.

On 21st August 1991, the split in MQM formally took place during a convention of the MQM (Haqiqi) wherein Amir and Afaq, two activists of MQM and close buddies of Altaf Hussain, had expelled their own leader and founder from the party. This split was defined as between Mohajirs of Uttar Pradesh origin (in Altaf Hussain's MQM) and those of Bihar origin in the splinter anti-Altaf Hussain group called MQM (Haqiqi). In Altaf Hussain's MQM itself, the ISI did try to create a gulf between the Sunni and Shia migrants from Uttar Pradesh but remained unsuccessful, it was generally perceived.

Altaf Hussain of MQM, once known as a product of 'secret agencies', had accused ISI of this split and for massive violations of human rights in Karachi. The whole anti-MQM operation by the Army on 19th June 1992 and onwards had helped destroy Karachi's economy. Politics was tarnished, stained and got a bad image. The media propaganda against MQM (that the party harbours criminals and is not patriotic) was true or false but were the 'agencies' a right antidote of such accusations. When the MQM of Altaf Hussain led a revolt in late 1980s in Karachi Division, Hyderabad and Sukkur (three main cities of Sindh province), the ISI allegedly provided equipment and arms to certain sections of the Sindhi nationalist elements to kill *Mohajirs* to leave a lesson for many. No proof in that context anyway.

After assuming office of the prime minister on 19th November 1990, Nawaz Sharif promoted the DG ISI Maj Gen M Asad Durrani and hunted to reverse the Benazir Bhutto regime's move to downsize the ISI. The next logical step was to reduce the importance of the IB which Benazir Bhutto had strengthened against ISI to deal with the internal and political intelligence. Nawaz Sharif was heading the IJI-led government in which MQM was also included.

Soon an issue cropped up when the PM opted to spy on their alliance partners especially the MQM which they came to know in December 1990. The IB had installed bugging devices in the rooms of all MNAs of MQM including their parliamentary leader named Aminul Haq. This brought a major embarrassment for the ruling IJI because MQM was an important ally at that time. Nawaz Sharif, however, handled the issue, offered apologies admitting mistake amidst explanations of misunderstanding but the distances set to widen.

Once, during Benazir Bhutto's second tenure of 1993-96, Opposition leader Nawaz Sharif had released secretly recorded tapes of a conversation to gain political advantage against her. These tapes contained a conversation between NWFP Chief Minister, Aftab Sherpao and top officials of Mehran Bank as 'conclusive evidence of horse-trading' in order to challenge the PML government of CM Sabir Shah on 1st December 1994.

This time again, the game was played between two political rivals and ISI had no hand in it.

In the Pakistan's history, there have been three instances when Directors ISI were at daggers drawn with their own boss Army Chiefs. The first instance was during the first tenure of Ms Benazir Bhutto as Prime Minister (1988 to 1990). To reduce the powers of the ISI, to re-organise the intelligence community and to enhance the powers of the police officers in the IB, she discontinued the practice of appointing a serving General as DG ISI. Instead she appointed Maj Gen (retd) Shamsur Rahman Kallue, a retired officer close to her father, as the DG in replacement of Lt Gen Hamid Gul in 1989 and entrusted him with the task of winding up political wing of the ISI.

The role of collection of internal intelligence was then entrusted to IB providing them more powers and funds. But the IB was proved a total failure under the command of one retired major Masood Sharif, a classmate and friend of her husband Asif Ali Zardari; the details are available in all leading articles of those times. Writing in **'the Nation' of 31st July 1997**, **Brig A R Siddiqui**, who had served as the Press Relations Officer in GHQ said that:

'This action of hers marked the beginning of her trouble with Gen Mirza Aslam Beg, the COAS, which ultimately led to her dismissal in August 1990. Gen Beg made Maj Gen Kallue persona non grata (PNG) and stopped inviting him to the Corps Commanders conferences. Not only confined to the dismissal of the government, Gen Beg made sure that PPP should not earn enough seats in the Parliament in the forthcoming elections.'

Gen Beg had distributed Rs: 140 million amongst the IJI and PML candidates on which the above referred A M Asghar Khan's petition cropped up in the SC.

[Gen Mirza Aslam Beg had given a press statement in early 1994 that Younus Habib of Mehran Bank had collected Rs: 140 million from the Business Community of Karachi for general elections of 1990. That money was handed over to the ISI which was distributed by them further. Lt Gen Asad Durrani, then DG ISI, was asked in 1995 to submit a statement in that respect before a judicial tribunal. Lt Gen Asad Durrani sent the details available on record to the judicial tribunal with a copy to the then PM Benazir Bhutto. In 1996, Benazir Bhutto presented that letter in the Parliament; it was her prerogative.]

It was then generally presumed that Lt Gen Durrani was an 'inner associate' of Benazir Bhutto. The PML and Nawaz Sharif had openly said that he had helped the PPP through 'engineered elections of 1993'. It was a wrong allegation. Lt Gen Durrani was retired from service on 3rd May 1993 whereas the general elections of 1993 were held in October. How much an ordinary citizen could affect the general elections of a country to be labelled as 'engineered'. However, Gen Durrani's association with PPP was a fact because soon after Benazir Bhutto's take over, he was sent to Germany as an ambassador, a well deserved slot after retirement.

Coming back; the second instance was during the first tenure of Nawaz Sharif (1990-93), who appointed Lt Gen Javed Nasir as DG ISI, a fundamentalist Kashmiri officer, against the recommendations of the then COAS for the post. Gen Asif Nawaz Janjua, the then COAS, also made Lt Gen Nasir a PNG like Gen Kallu in the previous regime, banned his entry in GHQ and extended the same harsh treatment to him.

During her second tenure (1993-96), Benazir Bhutto avoided any conflict with Gen Abdul Waheed Kakkar and Gen Jehangir Karamat, the Chiefs of the Army Staff in succession, on appointment of the DG ISI. Her action in transferring part of responsibility for operations in Afghanistan including handling of the Taliban, from the ISI to the Federal Interior Ministry headed by Major Gen (ret'd) Nasirullah Babar, who used to lever Afghan operations in the ISI during the tenure of her father, did not create any friction with the army since she had ordered that Lt Gen Musharraf, the then DG Military Operations, should be closely associated by Major Gen Babar in the Afghan operations.

However, certain dissident and hired trained men of the ISI, said to be close to Farooq Leghari, the then President of Pakistan, were allegedly involved in the assassination of Murtaza Bhutto, the surviving brother of Benazir Bhutto, outside his house in Karachi on 20th September 1996, with the complicity of few local police officers and started a disinformation campaign in the media blaming her husband Asif Zardari for that murder. This campaign was proved to be lethal for her dismissal by President Farooq Leghari in November 1996.

The third instance was during the second tenure of Nawaz Sharif (1997-99) when his action of appointing Lt Gen Ziauddin as the DG ISI, over-riding the objections of Gen Musharraf, led to the first friction between the two. Lt Gen Ziauddin was an engineer by profession and had zero experience in intelligence gathering. He was given this slot only having one merit that he

was a Kashmiri clan brother of Nawaz Sharif. Gen Musharraf transferred Lt Gen Aziz, the then Deputy DG ISI, to the GHQ as the CGS and transferred the entire political surveillance wing to him as per previous exercise of Benazir Bhutto's days.

Gen Musharraf, as COAS, made Lt Gen Ziauddin PNG as per previous practice and stopped inviting him to the vital Corps Commanders conferences. Lt Gen Ziauddin also proved himself unfit because he could not even smell the planning and implementation of the Kargil operations for his boss Nawaz Sharif though it was spread over eight months.

But otherwise, during his second tenure Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had used the ISI in an ill-effective manner to investigate financial dealings abroad by various politicians and bureaucrats particularly those of Benazir Bhutto and her husband. Those investigations included major contracts signed with foreign companies like Cotecna & CSG and the kick-backs deposited in Swiss Bank accounts. This exercise was carried out in rogue association with one Hasan Waseem Afzal, then Director Ehtesab Bureau, spending millions of dollars from secret funds of ISI for which no accounts were ever submitted.

The critics maintain that to that extent, the ISI was misused under Lt Gen Ziauddin because the said task was of Ehtesab Bureau or more precisely belonged to FIA's jurisdiction alone and not of an intelligence agency. Nawaz Sharif had realised this anomaly later and that is why he was planning to open a new intelligence wing in the FIA in that connection but his government collapsed after wasting millions of dollars by that pseudo-bureaucrat who was purely performing the political job on behalf of PML.

During the last months of Nawaz Sharif's regime, various intelligence agencies were working against each other. The DG ISI used to send reports to the PM (but was under the COAS for organisational control) whereas the DG MI reported to the COAS. In the process the political and military leaderships were at loggerheads with each other and competition between their respective intelligence agencies only proved to be purely extension of clash of interests.

Daily **'the Nation' of 28th June 1997** had once commented on the ISI involvement in the Mehran Bank scandal that:

'The case has amply attracted public attention on what is widely perceived to be a government within a government. They (ISI's) are virtually autonomous while playing role in the political affairs of the country. The baneful influence of the intelligence agencies of Pakistan has spread its malign shadow over the political destiny of the country.'

Reportedly, a 105 pages report on the lack of utility of Pakistan's strong intelligence community, was also prepared by old and experienced intelligence officers and submitted to the then DG ISI in October 1998 but its contents were never made public.

The above narrations are sufficient to reflect that whenever an elected leadership was in power in Pakistan, whether of PPP or of PML, the then serving Chiefs Of Army Staff had formulated their own operational policies. The elected Prime Ministers did not have effective control over the ISI and that the ISI, as an organization, was cornered or marginalised every time if its head appeared to show any loyalty to that elected Prime Minister of whatever political party.

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