

SCENARIO 260

PM KHAN – ARMY RELATIONSHIP

PRO-ARMY STALWARTS LOST IN ELECTION-2018:

Allegations of rigging in Elections-2018 were generally raised by the opposition parties as per routine with fingers pointed in all directions, including the security forces. However, the results of elections 2018 suggested that major politicians who were supposed to be the '**pawns of the establishment**' suffered a defeat while the so-called army critics won their seats. The results surprisingly suggested that two major politicians linked to the **Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM)**, Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar, won elections from NA-50 South Waziristan and NA-48 North Waziristan, respectively.

Two of the biggest critics of the army within the PMLN, former defence minister Khawaja Asif and Rana Sanaullah, won elections from NA-73 Sialkot and NA-106 Faisalabad respectively. On the other hand, Elections-2018 proved to be a nightmare for most of the politicians who had leaning towards the military openly or covertly. Almost all candidates of *Pak-Sarzameen Party* (PSP), being viewed as pawn of the establishment to dislodge *Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan* [MQM-P] from urban Sindh, lost their seats. Chairman PSP Mustafa Kamal also lost the elections from both his National Assembly seats in Karachi; another, Raza Haroon met the same fate.

PMLN's ex-interior minister Ch Nisar Ali Khan, a political bigwig with pro-military views, suffered defeat at the hands of PTI's Ghulam Sarwar Khan from both NA-59 and NA-63 Rawalpindi. Also, chief of Balochistan Awami Party [BAP] faced defeat in NA-272, though known for being near the top army brass. Another pro-establishment politician Lt Gen Qadir Baloch lost in NA-268 Chaghari; he was a federal minister in PMLN government. Pro-army politician Amir Muqam lost to PTI's little-known politicians from two National Assembly constituencies; NA-2 Swat and NA-29 Peshawar. Ijazul Haq, son of Gen Ziaul Haq and another so-called pro-establishment politician, suffered defeat in Bahawalnagar though he had been winning from here since three decades.

In Sindh; total number of 26.99 million voters were registered of which about 17 million were male and 9.95 million were female voters who elected their representatives contesting elections on 61 National Assembly and 160 Provincial Assembly seats in the 11th general polls of the country. Amidst strict security measures, with personnel of both the police and military deployed, polling began at 8 am and, without any break, concluded at 6 pm across 17,758 polling stations of the province, out of which 2,716 had been declared highly sensitive whereas 10,864 were declared as sensitive.

Referring to daily '**Pakistan Today**' dated **26th July 2018**:

"....results are pouring in from various constituencies after successful and peaceful holding of general elections 2018 in the country, the dwellers of Karachi have largely disappointed 'bigwigs' of known major political parties by defeating Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Zardari and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P)'s Dr Farooq Sattar."

The PPP had ruled Sindh over the past three decades but could not save its own Chairman Bilawal Zardari in NA-246 Lyari, once the stronghold of PPP while MQM-P's Dr Farooq Sattar was in the run for NA-245 and NA-247 of Karachi South and East but lost at both his parental constituencies. Interestingly, Dr Farooq Sattar lost NA-245 constituency while securing only 35,247 votes against his competitor Dr Aamir Liaquat of PTI who got 56,615 votes. Dr Sattar also lost NA-247 seat against PTI's Dr Arif Alvi.

PPP's Shehla Raza and MQM-P's Ali Raza Abidi lost NA-243 constituency against PTI Chairman Imran Khan who got 91,358 votes. MQM-H's leader Afaq Ahmed who was contesting elections from NA-240 and PSP's Asif Hasnain also lost against MQM-P's Iqbal Muhammad Ali Khan. PSP leader and former mayor Mustafa Kamal was contesting elections on various constituencies including NA-253, PS-124 and PS-127, but could not win either seat. *Muttaahida Majlis Ama/ [MMA]*'s Asadullah Bhutto and PMLN's former federal finance minister Miftah Ismail lost NA-244 against PTI's Ali Haider Zaidi. Most interestingly, Irfanullah Marwat of Grand Democratic Alliance [GDA] also lost PS-104 against PPP's Saeed Ghani.

In short, PTI surprisingly emerged as a major political party in Karachi; it was ahead on 12 National Assembly [NA] seats out of 21. 2018's general elections produced surprise results in the metropolis for the first time in almost 30 years as Karachi's most popular party MQM-P could get six NA seats only. The Karachites turned down the election boycott call of MQM's London based Altaf Hussain, made on 23rd July 2018 via video message; the peaceful citizens of Karachi city had rejected his call and voted for change.

With Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam in prison and the PMLN headed by Shehbaz Sharif, and with several legal cases hanging over the heads of the PPP's leadership most notably Asif Ali Zardari and his sister Faryal Talpur, street agitation was neither likely nor anticipated. But even if complete calm were to prevail at home, the PTI government could still face challenges in the foreign policy field. It was clear that Pakistan's turbulent politics was not likely to set sail through calmer waters.

The new PTI government was required to ensure China stay committed to its planned \$62bn investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC] which was expected to develop direly needed infrastructure for the 240 million people of Pakistan.

IMRAN KHAN - GEN BAJWA - TLP:

How Gen Bajwa was selected in 2016: - Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa was a firm opponent of extremism and terrorism. He was expected to come more forceful in the fight against terrorism than his predecessor, who was credited with launching Operation Zarb e Azb, which helped lower the frequency of terrorist attacks – and Gen Bajwa continued with the same force. In Feb 2017, Gen Bajwa himself started another ***Operation Raddul Fisaad*** (2017) to end the terrorism from the country.

During the last week of November 2016, Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa's pro-democracy credentials and his low-profile influenced Pakistan's then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to appoint him to the post of COAS, the army chief of Pakistan forces, superseding four top Generals. He had succeeded Gen Raheel Sharif who had completed his normal tenure then. With his elevation as army chief, Gen Bajwa had superseded Lt Gen Syed Wajid Hussain (Chairman of Heavy Industries Taxila), Lt Gen Najibullah Khan (DG Joint Staff HQ), Lt Gen Ishfaq Nadeem (Corps Commander Multan) and Lt Gen Javed Iqbal Ramday (Corps Commander Bahawalpur). Media had frequently mentioned then that that Nawaz Sharif picked Gen Bajwa because of his low-key style - the fourth oldest COAS in Pak-Army.

It was prime minister's discretion to appoint anyone among the four candidates. The PM Sharif wanted to appoint an army chief who should be military expert as well as backing democracy in the country. All the four Generals being considered for the post of COAS were passed out from Pak Military Academy on the

same day, but Gen Bajwa had an experience more diversified than all others. Gen Bajwa's calibre, credentials, experience and holding the biggest core also helped him to be appointed the Chief of Army Staff. Gen Bajwa's relatively more moderate view of the relationship with the civilian government proved to be the decisive factor in PM's decision.

Gen Bajwa, an infantry officer, had commanded the famed 10 Corps, the army's largest, which is responsible for guarding the area along the Line of Control with India. But here, the PM Sharif made sure that the fight against terrorism would take preference. Gen Bajwa, his colleagues said, was a firm opponent of extremism and terrorism – and he proved it as such. He rather proved even more forceful in the fight against terrorism than his predecessor, who was credited with launching ***Operation Zarb e Azb***.

It was the first time when, during Gen Bajwa's original tenure, a video surfaced at Pakistani media channels where the then Maj Gen Azhar Naveed, DG Pakistan Rangers was spotted distributing envelopes containing Rs:1000 each to the demonstrators of *Tehreek-e-Labbaik* (TLP) after Nov-2017's dharna (sit-in) in Islamabad. PMLN leader Nawaz Sharif claimed later that the protest of this barevi obscurantist set was planted by the ISI to remove him from his office and help Imran Khan in his election bid. Other opposition leaders and parties had repeatedly claimed the same stance – and also that the ISI was involved in the meddling of 2018's polls. Those accusations held some merit as Maj Gen Azhar Naveed had become one of the deputies in ISI when Lt Gen Faiz Hameed took over the wing on 16th June 2019.

{Allegedly, the TLP, was the organization that gave momentum to Mr Khan back in ending 2017 against Nawaz Sharif's PMLN, but later twisted the PTI to succumb to its demand over the then ongoing protests over the expulsion of French ambassador for publication of caricatures depicting the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in a French satirical magazine and incident of Samuel Paty. Though the movement calmed after it suddenly re-energized when Mr Khan was having differences with the Army Chief over new DG ISI's posting.}

In the past, TLP's former leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi was on record to state how his organization was used by some institutions to fulfill their designs. In the past, Gen Zia's doctrine to promote religious fringe groups in political discourse as the instrument of state policy was something used by the Pakistani deep state for a long time to meet its strategic objectives.}

The TLP's activity and the standoff with the military started at the beginning of October 2021 and ended as soon as indications came that a compromise had been achieved. Through shuttle diplomacy of Minister Fawad Chaudhary and Sh Rasheed, Gen Bajwa agreed to a face-saving measure to allow Lt-Gen Hameed to continue till 19th November 2021 and PM Khan gave approval for Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum. During the same time, Govt of Pakistan engaged with TLP leadership, and a compromise there too was achieved. No surprise, in this meeting which concerned civilian issues, Gen Bajwa graced the occasion and played a crucial role in this process. In a hybrid setup, this is what one gets, a confrontation spinning into a cold war – and the sudden compromise in the given situations.

However, during Mr Khan's era of 2018-22, the socio-political problems in Pakistan were NOT engineered by the establishment, as was widely alleged then; BUT most of those were the consequence of PTI cabinet's own mis-governance. The matters concerning administration had deteriorated from worse to worst due to visible poor performance of the whole team and PM Khan's appalling leadership. PTI had failed miserably on many core issues of foreign affairs, infrastructure, industrialization and religious extremism.

The blame didn't stop here, the list was going long and exhaustive. With each passing day, Mr Khan's problems doubled down – because, allegedly, Gen Bajwa had started patronizing PM Khan's political opponents like Shahbaz Sharif with whom some mutual intimate meetings were also extensively reported in electronic media of the country.

GEN BAJWA's EXTENSION CASE IN SCP:

On 19th August 2019; Prime Minister Imran Khan approved an extension in the tenure of COAS Gen Bajwa for another three years. **On 26th November 2019,** the chief justice of Pakistan (CJP) took up a withdrawal application of a petition filed by The Jurists Foundation challenging the extension in Gen Bajwa's tenure. The top judge, however, rejected the application to withdraw the petition, saying it fell into the domain of public interest under Article 184 (3) of the Constitution; thus, the case was converted into a *suo motu* notice.

The CJP Asif Saeed Khan questioned the rationale behind the extending a new term for the COAS; the court suspended the earlier government decision, saying a '**detailed examination of the matter of extension / re-appointment of Gen Bajwa, the COAS** was needed. Referring to daily '**the Telegraph**' of UK dated 26th November 2019:

"Pakistan's top court blocked an extended term for the country's powerful army chief, potentially setting the judiciary on a collision course with the powerful military and a key ally of Imran Khan. The supreme court suspended a government decision to give Gen Bajwa a fresh three-year-term in office and ordered a detailed investigation into his extension.

The court's surprise questioning of a decision, previously seen as a formality, threatened to trigger a confrontation between the country's powerful military and its civilian institutions."

The supreme court's three-judge panel was worried about the legal basis for the extension. PTI government's spokesman Shafqat Mahmood told: "**It is the prime minister's discretion to decide whether there is a need to grant an extension to a services chief in unusual circumstances.**"

Farogh Naseem, the federal law minister, resigned that day to appear before the supreme court as Gen Bajwa's lawyer. The court was still likely to award the extension to Gen Bajwa, but its resistance had weakened a key safeguard of Mr Khan's government. Gen Bajwa's military had been seen as close to Mr Khan's government, with few of the disagreements which marred relations with PMLN leader Nawaz Sharif under the prior PMLN government. There had been speculation that **Gen Bajwa's extension had been unpopular with his subordinates in the military, who feared for their own promotion prospects if he seized prolonged control.**

The CJP Asif Saeed Khan, called on the PTI government to 'step back and assess what it is doing and not to do something like this,' also pointing out that the '**regional security situation justification for the extension was quite vague.**' He even gently questioned its validity: '**If at all there is any regional security threat then it is the gallant armed forces as an institution that are to meet the said threat and an individual's role in that regard may be minimal.**'

During the court proceedings, Justice Khan mostly ended up castigating the law ministry for its errors that were causing disrespect to the army chief. Media and legal analysts were trying to predict what would happen on 28th November, warning of the instability that could follow a potential court decision that struck down the army chief's extension altogether. The power an extension grants to the army chief, and the blow that would follow from it being revoked; it was not lost on anyone. In the end, the court saved face all around: '**It gave the army chief a six-month extension and directed the federal government to have parliament legislate on such extensions and their duration.**'

[Later, it transpired, that seven Generals of the Pakistan Army had joined hands with the CJP Asif Saeed Khan to block the PTI government's move to grant three-year extension to the COAS Gen

Bajwa. The list of disgruntled Generals included Corps Commander Multan Lt Gen Sarfraz Sattar who was on top of the seniority list for appointment as the Chief of Army Staff; Lt Gen Nadeem Raza, Lt Gen Humayun Aziz, Lt Gen Naeem Ashraf, Lt Gen Sher Afghan and Lt Gen Qazi Ikraam. Chief of General Staff Lt Gen Bilal Akbar stood at the seventh place on the seniority list to succeed Bajwa.

Lt Gen Sattar (senior-most after Gen Bajwa) had finally resigned after being superseded; also, said to have had a row with Bajwa a few weeks ago, having accused him of ruining the army's image. The fact remained that Gen (retd) Raheel Sharif, before his retirement as Chief of Army Chief, had suggested Sattar's name as one of the options for the top post for continuation of his policies.

Two indicators of differences in the army. First, the antecedents of the petitioner show that he has been filing cases that serve the army's interest. So, the only explanation of his filing the case against Bajwa's extension was to be that some strong lobby in the army had put him up to it. Second, a three-year extension meant to have retired about 24 Lt Generals in the row.

If Bajwa would get an extension for three years, the most senior Generals will not remain eligible for the post of Army Chief. Chief justice Khosa, who himself was retiring next month (20th December 2019), was part of the game. By extending Bajwa's term for 6 months, he had provided the ones-in-line an opportunity to manipulate the legislation process.]

There was a real question as to whether parliament would consider such legislation or whether it would seriously debate it. PM Khan had a majority in the lower house, but the opposition had control of the senate, and the polarization between Khan and the opposition parties had guts to stall the legislative process. There was also the question of what prompted the CJP to take notice of the petition challenging the army chief's extension at the last minute (intriguingly, after the petitioner tried to withdraw it). The last extension to be granted, Gen Kayani's, had also been challenged in the Islamabad High Court in 2010, but that petition was struck down. Some speculated that rival officers to Gen Bajwa prompted this case; others considered the recent back-and-forth between Khan and the judiciary over the cases of former leaders Nawaz Sharif and Gen Musharraf had provoked it.

Whatever be the hurry, the whole affair — and its clash of egos and a tug-of-war over power — revealed two things: In Pakistan, **PM Khan's government was beholden to COAS Gen Bajwa, at least; and opposition parties were either unwilling, or unable, to take it on.**

Nawaz Sharif's PMLN was the one which had tried to take on the military in recent years; in 2016, it tried to assert some semblance of civilian supremacy over security policy, and many attributed Mr Sharif's downfall 'for that arrogance' coupled with corruption. Nawaz Sharif was in UK then for medical treatment, so PMLN preferred to go silenced into passivity vis-à-vis the army. The PTI government also showed its weakness for the judiciary: It was left awkward and panicked by the last-minute hearing, unable to successfully defend itself, or its constitutional prerogative to appoint (**and presumably re-appoint**) the army chief, in court while the justices criticized it.

It was a new front opening between the judiciary and the military. In the past, the judiciary had mostly unconditionally supported the military at the expense of civilian governments, rubber-stamping military coups via the doctrine of necessity and disqualifying prime ministers, including Nawaz Sharif. That new judiciary-military tension forced the country to think about a practice - it took for granted that effectively strengthened the military at the expense of civilian institutions.

However, the softness of PTI's civilian government vis-à-vis both the army and the judiciary were clear: **The judiciary had, through Gen Bajwa's case, assumed the role and the power (whether legally or not) to force Pakistan's politicians to fully define its institutions.** That whole episode explained

the saga of what kind of democracy Pakistan would have, and how its politicians would shape its institutions — whether to the strength of its civilian government, or to its disadvantage.

Let us see it in more details: This case was unprecedented — no such hearing over an extension for an army chief has ever been held in Pakistan, despite a history of army chiefs' tenures being extended. The case also has wider, significant implications about the state of civil-military-judiciary relations in Pakistan. On 19th August 2019, Gen Bajwa's three-year term was set to end, PM Khan's government — citing an emergency in the ***regional security situation*** — issued him a three-year extension beyond November (2019). The regional security issues at play were India's revocation of Kashmir's autonomy and Pakistan's ongoing help in the US-Afghan peace process. But many argued at the time that by granting Gen Bajwa an extension, Khan was ensuring smooth sailing for his own government for another three years — given the ways in which the army, under Gen Bajwa, had primed, the path for Mr Khan to become prime minister in 2018.

During the last week of November 2019, the CJP Khosa took the federal government and its Attorney General to task, pushing the decision down to the wire: the day the army chief was set to retire (28th November 2019). The court argued that the government had botched the bureaucratic process for Gen Bajwa's extension (alternately referring to it also as his re-appointment, or the limiting of retirement), but ***it also emerged during the proceedings that there was no legal basis — not in the constitution, nor in the army rules — for this extension, and certainly nothing specified that the duration needed to be three years.***

In Gen Bajwa's case, it appeared the PTI government had simply followed previous practice: Army chiefs either granted themselves extensions when they were in power, or civilian leaders did so. Most recently this occurred in 2010, when President Zardari extended the term of the then-army chief Gen Ashfaq Kayani.

ON THE SAME PAGE MANTRA:

On 27th August 2018: Pakistan Army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa extended his congratulations to PM Khan on being elected as premier; the two held their first meeting at Khan's office. Three days later, Khan paid his first visit to GHQ in Rawalpindi; and the iconic claim of '***civil-military leadership on one page***' appeared on the new government's agenda. Mr Khan's meeting at the GHQ lasted eight hours, during which he received briefings on highly sensitive and confidential security matters from the military establishment.

Next day, PM Khan said his foreign policy would prioritise the nation's interests above all else, that Pakistan would '***not become part of a war of any other country in future***'. He also ruled out the frequently discussed 'civil-military' dynamics as a myth, stating:

"There is no such thing as a civil-military tug of war... Our goals are same, that is to make Pakistan as one of the greatest countries of the world."

The Pak-Army supported Imran Khan and his party PTI before he formed his government, leading the opposition to claim that the PTI owed its victory in the 2018 elections to the army-generals. After Khan took power, he enjoyed nearly free rein in the domestic domain while the military high command retained control of sensitive foreign and security policy files. PM Khan and his cabinet ministers were often keen to emphasise that the PTI government and the military leadership were '***on the same page***'. However, despite all the adversaries, see below the Pak-Army's cooperation with the PTI government. Referring to ***Drazen Jorgic***'s analysis reported by **REUTERS.com** dated 5th June 2019:

*"Pakistan's powerful military has agreed in a rare move to cut its hefty budget for a year to help ease the South Asian **country's critical financial situation**.*

Pakistan has struck an agreement in principle with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a \$6 billion loan but Islamabad is expected to put in place measures to rein in a ballooning fiscal and current account deficits to get access to the funds. The IMF (wished that) the primary budget deficit should be trimmed by the equivalent of \$5 billion, but previous civilian rulers have rarely dared to trim defence spending for fear of stoking tension with the military."

Same day PM Khan tweeted that he appreciated the military's '**unprecedented voluntary initiative of stringent cuts in their defence expenditures for next financial year because of the country's critical financial situation**'. This allowed extra money to be spent on the development of the tribal regions bordering Afghanistan, (still) recovering from more than a decade-long Islamist insurgency, and violence-wracked Baluchistan province. The previous governments hiked military spending by 20pc to 1.1 billion, but, for PM Khan, the military had overshot that figure.

Unlike some other civilian leaders in Pakistan's fragile democracy, PM Khan had good relations with the Generals. Under Pakistan's devolved system, reshaped after passing 18th Amendment in the constitution during PPP's last stint (2008-13) the federal government must hand over more than half its budget to the provinces, and the remainder had been mostly eaten up by debt servicing and the military's vast budget.

[Pakistan has one of the world's largest armies but critics say the military's spending is unnecessary and holds the country back in key areas such as health and education. More than 40 percent of the population is illiterate]

However, the relationship became increasingly strained between the military and PM Khan when later encroached on the military's institutional autonomy. In October 2021, Khan refused to speedily sign off on the military's nominee for the crucial post of Inter-Services Intelligence Chief. He backed down in the end, abandoning efforts to retain his preferred candidate Lt Gen Faiz Hameed on the grounds that he was best placed to deal with the crisis next door in Afghanistan, and approving the high command's choice, Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum. But the damage had already been occurred – it was irreparable. With the second extension stint for the COAS Gen Bajwa, the senior-most military officer, due to finally retire in November 2022, the Generals thought that Khan would once again try to keep him as the next chief.

ANTI-WEST FOREIGN POLICY:

PM Khan's hardline anti-West foreign policy also likely played a role in the military's decision to distance itself from him. The prime minister's visit to Moscow in Feb 2022 had taken place ignoring Washington's calls to cancel the trip. PM Khan also got offensive at an open letter (dated 1st March 2022) from 22 Islamabad-based diplomats, including envoys of all the major European Union states, asking Pakistan to condemn Russia's aggression in Ukraine at the UN General Assembly. Imran Khan vowed in a public meeting, while saying:

"Are we your slaves?"

The EU remained Pakistan's largest trading partner and a source of much-needed assistance for its faltering economy, particularly through the provision of GSP+ status. PM Khan's hostility toward the EU came at a time when the military high command was attempting – including through a mid-February visit by Gen Bajwa to Brussels – to ease tensions with EU institutions [...***some analysts opine the said trip was to buy the Pak-Army over differing approaches toward Taliban-controlled Afghanistan***].

On 30th March 2022; at last-minute, PM Khan approached Gen Bajwa and his intelligence director and discussed **three (given) options with the prime minister: resign, call for new elections or face the vote of no-confidence.** PM Khan opted for new elections, but the joint opposition insisted that he should either resign or face the no-trust vote. The Supreme Court's intervention would decide the fate of the prime minister and his government. Yet the army high command's decision to keep Mr Khan stay out of the political fray could bear implications for the country's future.

On 31st March 2022: Differences between PM Khan and Gen Bajwa grew even wider after the PM said in the high command National Security Council meeting that Pak-Army backed the opposition in connivance with the US to remove him from the chair [[details of the Cypher Case are referred](#)]. In fact, it was a stinking note for Washington for its policy of '**blatant interference in Pakistan's internal affairs**'. As the PTI government continued to insist that the military was on its side, a day before the opposition's no-trust vote against Khan, the army chief issued what appeared to be a public rebuke of the prime minister's anti-Western and seemingly pro-Russian agenda – PAK-ARMY WENT NEUTRAL.

On 1st April 2022: PM Imran Khan revealed that the 'establishment' had given him three options: '**resignation, no-confidence [vote] or elections**', following the filing of a no-confidence motion against him in the National Assembly; an interview aired on **ARY News TV** on 1st April 2022 is referred. He further said: "**We said elections is the best option, I cannot even think about resigning and as far as the no-confidence vote is concerned, I believe in fighting till the end. It will be better for Pakistan if we hold elections again. If we win [in] this [no-confidence] vote, it is a very good idea to go for early elections.**"

The premier Khan also said in his interview on live TV that:

*"...there is a threat to my life; those conspiring to topple my government are scared knowing that even if he is ousted, the public will continue to support him. **I am saying this openly that there is a threat to my life.***

*They, all those who have colluded [against me], know that I will not sit silently. What do they think? They will spend Rs:20 billion, Rs:25 billion and topple my government and I will watch silently? (...**they want to kill me**) because I don't suit those involved in the conspiracy as well as people like Shahbaz Sharif, who polishes boots and are slaves to money".*

PM Imran Khan added that they (?) would try their best through local collaborators, the three stooges — a term he occasionally used to refer to Shahbaz, PPP co-chair Asif Ali Zardari and Pakistan Democratic Movement [PDM] Chief Fazlur Rehman. During that week, one PTI leader Faisal Vawda had made similar claims, stating that a conspiracy was being hatched to assassinate the prime minister Khan '[over his refusal to sell the country](#)'. Vawda had made the remarks on **ARY News show 'Off the Record'** in response to a question about a letter PM Imran waved at the PTI's 27th March 2022 public address in Islamabad.

Earlier in that interview, PM Khan revealed that he was aware of the conspiracy being hatched to oust his government since August 2021; that planning was ongoing in London. He had reports from agencies in this regard; also named PMLN supremo heading the conspiracy. [*Nawaz Sharif had meetings with the people like Hussain Haqqani (of Memo-gate repute) whom he had met on 3rd March 2022...*]. Also, that people who had colluded in this purported conspiracy were also against the Pakistan Army. Prime Minister Khan categorically stressed that:

"Pakistan has been surviving because of its army. And Nawaz Sharif and his daughter have openly railed against the army. The joint opposition was making efforts to oust his government in order to get an NRO (amnesty). But I will never give them an NRO. Moreover, external

powers needed robbers and thugs ... and the corrupt who become their slaves to save their corruption".

During that media interview, PM Khan, inter-alia, said in response to a question about civil-military relations with respect to '***an appointment in October (2021)***' — which was an apparent reference to the appointment of a new Inter-Services Intelligence director general (DG ISI) — "**We were all on one page. We had no differences.**" He further elaborated that he had no issues with the military leadership unlike past leaders, who were scared of the army because of their corruption. When the anchorperson specifically named the former ISI chief, Lt Gen Faiz Hameed, asking whether the premier wanted him to continue as the spymaster because he was his favourite, PM Imran said he had worked with Lt Gen Faiz for three years and he knew that the winter of 2021 would be the most difficult time for us.

Citing economic difficulties and the situation in Afghanistan after the US exit, '***I was insisting on him (Lt Gen Faiz) continuing till winter as he was experienced. They had their own view, which was that there was a system in the army. They had their own perspective and I had mine. But I wasn't thinking about who will be the new army chief.***' PM Imran Khan also denied reports that he intended to de-notify Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa as the army chief and said '***it was the PMLN's disinformation campaign.***'

Further, speaking at an event in Islamabad on 2nd April 2022, Gen Bajwa strongly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and also emphasized that Pakistan had a '***long and excellent strategic relationship with the US, which remains our largest export market.***'

On 10th April 2022: Following Imran Khan's ouster as Prime Minister, supporters of Khan's party PTI called for Gen Bajwa's resignation as army chief on Twitter, and Twitter trends denouncing the General as a 'traitor' reached over a million tweets. The supporters claimed that Gen Bajwa conspired to remove Khan from office along with the country's opposition parties.

After Gen Bajwa's retirement, the mother of slain journalist Arshad Sharif requested the Chief Justice of Pakistan to formally charge Gen Bajwa, among other military officers, for the 'targeted, premeditated, planned and calculated murder' of her son, claiming members of the military's Public Relations division began threatening Sharif after he emerged as a critic when vote-of-no-confidence was instituted against Imran Khan. Particularly when a program called '***Woh Kon Tha***' got aired on ***ARY News***, in which Sharif insinuated Gen Bajwa had a hand in ousting an elected PM Imran Khan.

KHAN & MILITARY – HOW FELL APART:

Imran Khan used to admire aspects of the military's influence; see his words – referring to an interview of November 2022 (about seven months after his departure) done by ATIKA REHMAN of a magazine titled ***PROSPECT:***

"... it's pragmatic to work with the Generals - the idea of removing them from politics altogether is idealistic. He respects the military's power and organizational skills, (and believes) he would allow it to work to some extent outside of its constitutional mandate if that served his purpose."

An extensive discussion was there during the said interview. Notable gaps between what he had promised and what he delivered was enormous. For diehard Khan loyalists none of that mattered. Khan worked 12 hours a day, didn't take a single day off. The most attentive statement from Khan was:

*"Pakistan is run by Generals. As well as commanding one of the world's largest armies, **a handful of them play politics, install governments and manipulate elections. They dictate Pakistan's nuclear and foreign policy and much of what happens at home too.** Elected prime ministers have one task that supersedes all others: keep the army happy. Politicians in general, with their lust for political success and the riches that come with office, are often ready to cut the deals that keep them in power—an unsettling but chronic flaw in a system that is ostensibly democratic."*

"... that the army defied him when he was prime minister. I could not push them to take action against the corruption of the elite. The outgoing army chief Gen Bajwa all but dictated political appointments in Punjab, the country's most populous province where electoral victory paves the way for power in the center. The military thwarted his efforts to introduce electronic voting machines — he (Gen Bajwa) suspects the technology would have made it harder for the army to manipulate election results."

Atika Rehman held that it was fascinating to see him (Mr Khan) hurl those allegations. Not because they were untrue — but because in Pakistan it was widely believed that it was the army that had put him in power in the first place. However, Cyril Almeida had the opinion that:

"For 20 years, Pakistan's military told the public that the two mainstream parties, the PPP and PMLN, were corrupt to the core. They planted the seeds of hatred for the existing political class. In Imran Khan, they found a likeable man."

Atika Rehman further held that with 115 of the 270 seats up for election-2018, he (Mr Khan) was exactly where the army wanted him: without an overall majority and dependent on their backing. It seemed like the perfect marriage: Khan to all appearances supported army policies, gave retired generals key government positions and consulted serving ones on aspects of governance. Yet four years later, in April 2022, the army's golden boy became the 18th prime minister to be removed from office.

What went wrong? Many say that Khan failed to deliver on his campaign promises and made the country's debt burden worse. ***The army, perhaps, had realized that an incompetent leader was as insufferable as a corrupt one.*** But *'Imran Khan was beginning to get comfortable as prime minister (Almeida). After three years of working together, he wanted the military to be his junior partner. What happened was inevitable.'*

For weeks before Khan's final treat, Islamabad was thick with rumours that his rivals were in talks with senior Generals — and it was the truth. Then the same pro-army parties that were said to have enabled Mr Khan to form a government ditched him; he had to walk alone and without sticks. Instead of accepting defeat, the ex-cricketer began blaming first the US and then senior military Generals for engineering his removal.

Out of office, Khan turned on the army. He called the Generals names and mocked them for their '*neutral stance*'. He bashed the military so relentlessly that the army chief made the usually elusive DG ISI to publicly address Khan's allegations — however, his popularity soared. Atika Rehman, after speaking to some army officer, noted:

*"The officer was alluding to the ISI's ultimate weapon, which it has deployed against many Pakistani politicians: **sex tapes**. Sure enough, explicit clips supposedly of Khan having phone sex appeared online. His party dubbed them **fake**; the army tactic backfired. **Khan is relaxed about the tapes. He's not losing sleep over them.**"*

Talking about personal traits of PM Khan, he was always seen reluctant to meet opposition leaders to create unity even on key national security and foreign policy issues; thus, giving way to the agencies including Pak-Army, Rangers and ISI. One example was to get opposition's support for FATF-related legislation. In a similar context, it was not the political leadership that brought together the political forces during the Indian intrusion in February 2019; it was the establishment which did his job. At another occasion; what was the logic and lucidity when the army chief accompanied the prime minister to a meeting with the US president at Washington in 2019; it was neither a fine example of democratic statesmanship nor the diplomatic norm.

At times, the military leadership was requested to sort out problems with other countries arising from some impulsive decisions taken by PM Khan himself or statements made by his cabinet ministers. Gen Bajwa had to go China to control the damage caused by a federal minister's media statement only months into the PTI government.

At another juncture, the Army Chief was found rushing to Saudi Arabia after the foreign minister's statement on the role of the OIC; should one call it a sensible and mature governance. Such irresponsible behaviour [*may be taken as gross mistakes*] on behalf his team members at the global forums caused bigger dents in PM Khan's ruling strategy. The Generals started thinking about alternatives; closer relations between the establishment and the opposition parties developed. PMLN leaders restricted their attacks on PM and the PTI govt because of agencies' flag; misunderstandings amongst the coalition partners about the PM's indispensability started cropping up. Philosophy of '**Brutus – you too**' had started playing in.

LATER: On 5th May 2023; Mr Khan was speaking to media in Islamabad while appearing before the Islamabad High Court (IHC); AND referring to a senior army officer, he alleged:

"Dirty Harry had hatched another plan to assassinate him; he and PTI leader Murad Saeed faced life threat from terrorists. Everyone should know that 'Dirty Harry' (Maj Gen Faisal Naseer of the ISI) is responsible if anything happens to us. I have no threats from foreign agencies or terrorists but from Dirty Harry."

BBC's journalist **M Hanif** once (on 27th May 2023) wrote:

"For many years, Pakistan's military establishment believed that in Imran Khan they had found a savior for the country. (But) after only a year out of power he is threatening to become their opponent - and the military is using all its might to save itself from Khan's wrath. As Imran Khan and his party face a country-wide crackdown, Pakistan seems to have come to a standstill."

The writer added that '**The country didn't quite burn, but Khan's supporters took the fight to military cantonments**'. The army's headquarters, General Headquarters (GHQ), probably the most secure place in Pakistan, was breached and people trampled on the signboards with military logos – a sense of hatred which was allegedly being developed through PTI's social-media campaigns in the cities.

3 OPTIONS FROM THE 'UPPERS' (?)

Ref Imran Khan's meeting with media-men at his Bani Gala residence on 18th April 2022, a week after his departure AND as reported by **Samaa TV News**, the former PM Khan shared that the establishment had given him three options, of which he had chosen early elections. He had identified resignation and facing the no-confidence motion as the other two options. However, the media-story remained that Khan's assertion was NOT recognized by the military. His story had appeared days after Inter-Services Public Relations

(ISPR) Director General (DG) Maj Gen Babar Iftikhar had claimed that '***it was Khan who had approached the military leadership and that no option from the establishment was given***'.

Mr Khan also shared that he had called Chief of Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa prior to his two-day trip to Russia in February (2022) during which the army chief had said he should go ahead with the visit, according to the *Samaa TV* report. The former prime minister also reportedly clarified that he had not met anyone besides anchorpersons and party members on his last night in office, thus, putting to rest reports of a meeting with the army leadership the night he was ousted (10th April 2022) from the top office. Khan's comments came days after ***the BBC published a story*** recounting the events leading up to the ouster of Imran Khan as prime minister.

{BBC's story had alleged that '***two uninvited guests***' reached PM House, with an extraordinary security detail, via helicopter and held a 45-minute private meeting with Khan. The biggest claim in the story — made by quoting government sources — said that the meeting was less than pleasant. **'Just an hour ago, former prime minister Imran Khan had given orders to remove one of the senior officials present for the meeting,'** the story alleged, without taking any names.}

BBC's story was later rejected by the military's media affairs wing (ISPR) also which termed it to be '***totally baseless and a pack of lies***'; daily **DAWN** dated 10th April 2022 is referred. In a statement, the ISPR had branded the story '***typical propaganda lacking any credible, authentic and relevant source and claiming that it violates basic journalistic ethos***' — further explaining that:

"There is no truth in the fake story whatsoever and clearly seems part of an organized disinformation campaign. The matter is being taken up with BBC authorities."

As per BBC's article, Parliament House was abuzz with activity during the day as the National Assembly was in session. However, it claimed that this activity shifted to the PM House once the session was adjourned for Iftar. Imran Khan had convened an emergency meeting of his cabinet — summoning his legal and political advisers, the NA speaker and deputy speaker and several bureaucrats — where it was decided that the '***CYPHER – the threat letter***' would be shown to a select few officials.

The biggest claim in BBC's story — made by quoting government sources (?) — was that the meeting was less than pleasant. **"Just an hour ago, former prime minister Imran Khan had given orders to remove one of the senior officials present for the meeting,"** the story alleged, without taking any names. Also, that the sudden arrival of the guests was unexpected for the former premier. The story alleged that the necessary notifications for the removal and the new appointment were not issued by the Ministry of Defence. **'Even if the removal was carried out on the prime minister's orders, preparations had been made to declare it null and void.'**

ON CEC's SELECTION: Referring to daily **DAWN** dated 10th April 2022: Mr Khan revealed that the incumbent Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikander Sultan Raja's name was ***proposed by the establishment*** after a deadlock between the then government and the opposition. In a separate tweet, Mr Khan shared that the PTI would file a reference against the CEC, adding that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had shown ***incompetency*** by not completing delimitation of constituencies in time because of which early elections were delayed — BUT till then Imran Khan's political era, and thus assignment of his premiership, had ended.

PETITION FILED IN HIGH COURT:

BBC's News-Report dated **10th April 2022** also talked about how the doors of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) were open late at night to take up a petition asking the court to restrain Imran Khan from possibly de-notifying Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Qamar Bajwa. The urgent petition — which was filed but never fixed for hearing — said that Imran Khan, for political and personal purposes, had misused his powers and recommended the removal of the Chief of Army Staff, urging the court to quash the order in public interest. The report concluded:

"It is important to mention that while the petition was prepared, the space for the number of the notification regarding the army chief's dismissal was left blank. The reason for this was that despite the prime minister's request, the notification could not be issued and there was no need for a hearing."

On that late night, the petition was filed in the Islamabad High Court (IHC), but never fixed for hearing whereas government ministers vehemently denied having any such plans in place. It was filed by Advocate Adnan Iqbal under Article 199 of the Constitution and mentioned the Federation of Pakistan, Government of Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan, President Dr Arif Alvi, Ministry of Law and the Secretary of the Ministry of Defence as respondents. The petitioner held he was filing the petition to '**uphold the enforcement and mandatory constitutional provision with regard to identification of term of the COAS**'.

The petition was a pre-emptive measure to restrain the premier from '*using his arbitrary power to recommend the army chief's approval before the expiry of his term for personal and political motive*'. However, ***the fact remains that NO such notification was issued by the prime minister Imran Khan***. Meanwhile, federal Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry had also denied that the government had taken any step to remove the army chief, terming such reports ***baseless***. The minister wrote on twitter:

"The government fully understands the importance of the army chief and Pakistan Army as an institution. Reports that anyone is even thinking of changing the leadership of Pakistan Army are baseless rumours and lies. This is being done under an agenda. The government condemns these rumours and completely denies them."

The petition had baselessly raised a number of questions — just on the basis of assumptions: whether the approval of the cabinet was obtained for the issuance of any such supposed notification; whether the prime minister had "unfettered powers" to remove the COAS when he had recommended his appointment and in the "absence of any cogent reason for altering the earlier recommendation"; and lastly whether the premier could remove the army chief for "furtherance of political interests".

The petition framed was manifestly deceptive.