

Scenario 30

Musharraf – the 'Brutus' of 2000-01:

Gen Musharraf brought key changes in his army set-up to prolong his stay in power, moved certain known figures from strategic seats to comparatively ineffective places to demonstrate strength to be seen and realized by his American masters and to be felt by the intelligentsia in the country as well. These changes were done at senior levels of the army leadership and the most significant was of 31st August 2000. It was the transfer of Lt Gen Mohammad Aziz from the post of Chief of the General Staff (CGS) in the GHQ Rawalpindi to that of Commander 4 Corps Lahore. Lt Gen Mohammad Yusuf Khan, Commander 2 Corps Multan, was moved to GHQ as the new CGS.

The changes, which were made a few days before the departure of Gen Musharraf to New York in 2000 to attend the UN Millennium summit, had three connotations:

- The shifting of Lt Gen Aziz was a pre-emptive move by Gen Musharraf to prevent any possible threat to his position from him.
- It was a conciliatory move to dispel US concerns over his role in assisting the Islamic extremist organizations.

[The Pentagon had viewed Lt Gen M Aziz as the evil genius of the military regime and as a godfather of the Taliban of Afghanistan and the 300,000-strong armed jihadist militants of Pakistan belonging to different Islamic schools of thought]

- Gen Musharraf knew that in the backdrop of US disliking for Lt Gen Aziz it might be difficult for him to secure US support for resumption of the IMF assistance and re-scheduling of Pakistan's external debts.

An apparent impression conveyed to the media was that it was a normal transfer to give Lt Gen Aziz an experience as a Corps Commander without which he would be ineligible for consideration as the next COAS, which was a fact otherwise. The fact remains that no Pakistani army chief can seize and sustain himself in power without the support of the CGS who controls the Directorates-General of Military Intelligence and Military Operations, and the GOC 10 Corps, Rawalpindi.

In 2001, another development took place. Promoted to the ranks of four star Generals, Lt Gen M Yusuf, Chief of the General Staff (CGS), was appointed Vice Chief of Army Staff and Lt Gen M Aziz Khan, Commander 4 Corps at Lahore was elevated to the post of Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) on 7th October 2001. Gen Musharraf's tenure as COAS had expired the same day but his retirement as COAS could not take effect due to the Supreme Court's Judgement mandating him to complete his 'reforms' and to stay for three years till 12th October 2002.

[It was a historical blunder on the part of the Supreme Court of Pakistan (J Irshad Hasan Khan was the Chief Justice) that the court, while writing judgment of Zafar Ali Shah Case on 12th May 2000, had given three years stay to Gen Musharraf in the name of 'eradicating corruption' which relief was not even asked for. Perhaps it was a secret deal between the two top maligned minds because after retirement Chief Justice Irshad Hasan Khan was made the Chief Election Commissioner of Pakistan; a constitutional post.]

The most significant change appeared with the un-ceremonial exit of Lt Gen Mahmud Ahmed, the chief of the ISI, who (allegedly forced to get) resigned on 8th October 2001 because of differences over the reshuffling in the military high command.

[Gen Mahmud was known to visit the United States regularly during his time as the head of ISI consulting senior officials in the US administration in the weeks before 9/11. In fact, he was with a Congressman Porter Goss and Democratic Senator Bob Graham in Washington, discussing Osama over breakfast, when the attacks of 11th September 2001 happened. He was immediately called into meetings with American officials where demands of Pakistani cooperation were made and he was told to convey this to the Pakistani government.]

One could see the dreadful advice of the US bosses and their immense pressure behind Lt Gen Mahmud's quit in the backdrop of America's first attack launched on Afghanistan on 6th October 2001. A highly ambitious officer, Pakistan's chief spymaster, virtually ran Pakistan's Afghan policy, though had been supporting the Taliban regime but later he withdrew him back in the light of Gen Musharraf's obligations towards US after 9/11 episode of attack on Twin Towers.

In dirty power play, even then Lt Gen Mahmud could not earn trust of his army chief. Considered the second most powerful member of the military junta, he was a key player in the military coup of 12th October 1999 that had brought Gen Musharraf to power. As the then Corps Commander Rawalpindi, he was one of the two Generals who ordered the troops to move into the PM's official residence and arrest Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister. His loyalty was above board but not believed and depended by Gen Musharraf.

In the monthly '**Newsline Karachi**' of **October 2001**, Zahid Hussain had expressed his views as:

'Despite his hardline views on other issues, Lt Gen Mahmud went along with Gen Musharraf on withdrawing support from the then Taliban regime. The former ISI chief who was in America during the days of 11th September terrorist attack, led talks with senior US officials on Pakistan's cooperation with the US anti-terrorism campaign. He also went to Afghanistan twice before his departure (to Washington) to persuade the Taliban government to accede to international demands to surrender Osama bin Laden.'

Gen Musharraf had consolidated his power base as he kicked out his three top Generals known for their hard-line Islamic views and the changes were rightly made to coincide with American and British attack on Afghanistan. It was seen as a part of Gen Musharraf's plan to bring a fresh team of liberal loyalists, who could support his pro-west policy, into key positions of army at whatever price.

The shake-up of 2001 in the army high command had changed the entire composition of the Pakistan army which had ruled the country since seizing power in October 1999. The re-assignment of Lt Gen Aziz to a weak, feeble and largely ceremonial post of Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, had consolidated Gen Musharraf's position that had emerged as the sole power centre.

The bearded Lt Gen Aziz was also the main player in the 1999 military coup and was corps commander Lahore before being elevated to his new position which kept him out of the decision-making process.

A firm conservative, Lt Gen Aziz had significant influence in determining Pakistan's policy on Kashmir. There had been a sharp divergence of views particularly on Kashmir, Afghanistan, signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and some other issues among the then Generals of Pakistan Army. The hardliner Generals were alleged to likely block Gen Musharraf's more liberal and pragmatic policies, with LT Gen M Aziz and some other Generals suspecting to:

'Prevent Pakistan from showing any flexibility in its policy of supporting Islamic militancy in Kashmir, the then Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Afghan fighting factions.'

It was not surprising that some of the Islamic political parties had publicly aligned themselves with Lt Gen Aziz and some other hardliners whom they described as 'pro-jihad' Generals. This trio formed the nucleus of the ruling junta which also included Lt Gen Muzaffar Usmani, then Deputy Chief of the Army Staff, yet another bearded General known for his more Islamic fundamentalist views who had also been retired in the reshuffle. Every decision taken by Gen Musharraf's Cabinet and the National Security Council (NSC) once had to be stamped by these Generals; they were so in.

Gen Musharraf had felt bound to consult the above Generals in all policies and military decisions before according approval for implementation. He, however, went successful in countering the challenges from the then allegedly pro-Taliban Islamic fundamentalists and Kashmiri fighters, while the army appeared to be stood united behind him.

Looking back a bit earlier, one of the first acts of Gen Musharraf, after his appointment as the COAS by the then Prime Minister Mr Nawaz Sharif in October 1998, was to move Lt Gen Aziz from the post of Deputy Director-General ISI dealing with Kashmir and Afghanistan, to the GHQ as the CGS. He then shifted Lt Gen Mahmood Ahmed (the then Commandant National Defense College) to command GOC 10 Corps, the most trusted one in army.

However, Gen Musharraf could not succeed in having his nominee selected as Director General of the ISI. The then PM Nawaz Sharif instead had appointed Lt Gen Ziauddin, belonging to a family of PML(N)'s loyalists, as the DG ISI, the most vulnerable slot.

Gen Musharraf did not want Lt Gen Ziauddin, an engineer by profession, to handle Kashmir and Afghanistan affairs as an ISI Chief. He disliked the later immensely and distrusted him as Mr Sharif's mole in the Pakistan Army. Gen Musharraf, therefore, transferred the Kashmir and Afghanistan operations of ISI to the DG MI and made Lt Gen Aziz as the CGS to deal with these sensitive affairs. The entire Kargil operation of 1999 was handled by Lt Gen Aziz and Lt Gen Ziauddin was not capable enough to have an air of its implementation.

The insiders also held that with the posting of Gen Ziauddin as DG ISI, the COAS, Gen Musharraf had immediately withdrawn the whole wing of internal / political affairs from ISI HQ and placed it with MI wing in the GHQ. The surveillance of political people, serving and otherwise, has been the main source of tension between the rulers and COAS since the last three decades. Nawaz Sharif had nothing to do much with Kashmir or Afghanistan affairs. The only strength of ISI near a political ruler is the department's role in political coercion.

The appointment of Lt Gen Aziz as the CGS had attracted considerable murmuring in ranks because he was the junior-most Lt General that time. It was a reflection of Gen Musharraf's trust in him. Previously, the tradition in the Pakistan army had been to appoint one of the seniors, if not the senior-most, Lt Generals as the CGS. Lt Gen Aziz's friendship with Gen Musharraf dated back to the days of Gen Ziaul-Haq in 1980s, when the two along with Maj Gen Mehmood Durrani, afterwards a dearest adviser of Gen Musharraf and his number one person in the United States, played an active role in training and arming of the Afghan Mujahideen in Afghanistan where they were blocking way of Russians.

Lt Gen Aziz was Gen Ziaul Haq's Deputy Military Secretary and, like Gen Musharraf, had also served in the Special Services Group (SSG), a commando force. The friendship between Gen Musharraf and Lt Gen Mahmood Ahmed dated back to the days of their career as young officers of an Artillery Regiment. All of them were close protégés of Lt Gen Hamid Gul, the then DG ISI, under Ms Benazir Bhutto during her first tenure as the Prime Minister during 1988-1990.

The idea of keeping the Indian security forces bleeding on Azad Jammu & Kashmir borders by employing strategic military tactics was their brain-child. This working relationship brought

them close to the Islamic political parties and soon they were labelled as 'Mulla' Generals by the army contingents under their command.

It was Lt Gen M Aziz, Lt Gen Mahmud Ahmed and Lt Gen Usmani, who three had refused to accept Lt Gen Ziauddin as the COAS and staged a coup against Nawaz Sharif and seized power much before Gen Musharraf's plane landed at Karachi on 12th October 1999.

[On 12th day of October 1999, Lt Gen Mahmud had led 10 Corps troops (111 Brigade) into the PM House, after moving in SSG troops, which were hastily lifted by a helicopter earlier from Mangla Cantonment on orders of the CGS Lt Gen Aziz. It was Lt Gen Muzzafar Usmani as Commander 5 Corps Karachi, who took over the Airport to allow landing of the PIA aircraft in which the COAS was travelling along with tens of other passengers, and which was dangerously low on fuel then.

Lt Gen M Aziz Khan as the CGS had masterminded the counter-coup which brought Gen Musharraf back as COAS. But when the moment of replacing Lt Gen Aziz cropped up, Gen Musharraf had selected Lt Gen Yusuf as CGS. The CGS slot is considered to be the most powerful in the Pakistan Army after that of the COAS, particularly because the elite SSG Brigade plus is under his direct control. Lt Gen Aziz was the one who had denied control of GHQ to the new team of Lt Gen Ziauddin Butt, the newly appointed Army Chief by the then PM Nawaz Sharif.]

The other Lt Generals ex-post facto approved the action of the three above mentioned Generals. Lt Gen Mahmud Ahmed and Lt Gen M Aziz Khan continued to enjoy the confidence of Gen Musharraf till the visit of President Clinton to Pakistan in March 2000. There were persistent reports of differences with Lt Gen Aziz, who strongly opposed any pressure on the then Taliban regime or Osama issue and any action against the Pakistan-based activities of organizations such as *Harkat ul Mujahideen*, the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* and the *Al Badr* etc.

Despite all, Gen Musharraf continued to enjoy the support of Lt Gens Yusuf and Usmani. There had been a speculation in high circles that Gen Musharraf wanted to displace Lt Gen Mahmud Ahmed from ISI and wanted to adjust Lt Gen Usmani as the DG ISI. This proposed move was perhaps based on the fact that when Gen Musharraf went to New York, he had asked Lt Gen Usmani to look after routine work of the COAS in the GHQ, indicating his confidence in the officer.

The critical moment in Gen Musharraf's presidency was 9/11 of 2001, when Washington suddenly and direly needed his support in the international anti-terrorism campaign and to crush the Taliban in Afghanistan. Thus he became a pivotal player on the world stage and a close ally, welcomed in Washington and London alike, as a statesman of international status and standing.

Getting benefit of this 9/11 situation and in the backdrop of American support Gen Musharraf had also played some of his hidden cards at home front. What he did with his closest companion Generals who brought him in power on 12th October 1999 can be judged from an article captioned as: *'Pakistani leader's attempt to rein in militants is met with defiance'*, by **Rory McCarthy** appeared in **The Guardian of 25th May 2002**:

*'Hours after the September 11 attacks Washington had **ordered Islamabad** [one may ponder over the language] to halt unconditionally its long-criticised support for the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Within days General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's straight-talking military dictator, called together his 12 or 13 most senior officers. Although he expects his Generals to speak freely at these meetings they rarely oppose the army chief's decisions.*

This time the atmosphere was cold. Gen Musharraf laid out his proposal to support America in the imminent war against the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. There was, he told them, simply no other choice. Officially the public was told the officers supported Gen Musharraf unanimously. But now it has emerged that four of his most

senior generals opposed him outright. the four openly challenged the president's pro-US stance. In military terms it was a stunning display of disloyalty.

..... the angriest among the four that night was Lieutenant General Mehmood Ahmed, the religious hardliner who headed the ISI and was once Gen Musharraf's closest ally.

Three other Lieutenant Generals had joined his protest: Muzaffar Usmani, a corps commander (at Karachi) who was instrumental in orchestrating the coup of October 1999 that brought the army back to power; Jamshaid Gulzar Kiani, Commander the 10 Corps Rawalpindi; and Mohammad Aziz Khan, the Kashmir-born Lahore corps commander and a former ISI deputy chief.

Within a month the dissenters were silenced. Gen Ahmed and Gen Usmani were sacked. Gen Kiani lost his corps to become Adjutant-General (quite an unattractive post after corps job) while Gen Khan was promoted to the only theoretically powerful, but largely ceremonial, position of Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff committee.

It was exactly what Washington wanted; firm leadership against the militant wing of the army.'

This event was better described by Eric Margolis, a famous defence analyst and columnist, in his communication that:

'I've felt certain sympathy for Gen. Musharraf, who overthrew Then came 9/11; the Bush Administration put a gun to Musharraf's head, ordering him to ditch Pakistan's Afghan ally, Taliban, open Pak bases to US forces, arrest anti-American militants, and fire the capable nationalist officers - and close friends - who put him into power, Generals Aziz and Mahmoud.

Obey, Washington warned Islamabad, or we will foreclose your loans, impose trade sanctions, cut off spare parts, and give India a green light to go after you. Tough Ziaul Haq, Pakistan's last military ruler would have stood up to American bullying.

Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto would have cleverly managed to somehow finesse Washington's threats. But Musharraf, with a near-bankrupt nation, and faced with what he viewed as a Hobson's choice between obedience and ruin, caved in to Washington's demands and became, overnight, its compliant servitor.' (Ref: Soldier of the RAJ by **Eric Margolis appeared on 30th June 2003** in www.EricMargolis.com)

Days and nights passed, the decisions were taken as per speculations but went unimplemented. Gen Musharraf continued to hold strength in the close army circles and had secretly opted to change his team one by one so that the stake-holders of politics would remain satisfied. General elections of 2002 were announced but under strict supervision and control of military sponsored teams.