

ISPR vs PML[N] – NO ISSUE[?]:

From: Inam R Sehri

During the **2nd half of 2014**, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had been walking on rope, Imran Khan's '**dharna**' had choked the whole capital city Islamabad. It was only a matter of hours, most Pakistanis predicted, before he was ousted in a military coup or forced to step down.

May not be on record but the fact remains that PM Sharif was tacitly supported by the Pak-Army. It were Gen Raheel Sharif's instructions that the army troops did not allow the PTI's thousands of charged workers to enter the PM House or kept them away from breaking the Parliament's doors. It was only a game of moments had Imran Khan's mob gone nasty – the PM's staff, ministers and '*jaan-nisar*' bureaucrats had already packed up their luggage.

After **May 2013's** general elections, Nawaz Sharif had successfully taken over the reins of power in Pakistan but till late 2014 the economy was struggling and he had hesitated to back the Pak-army as it launched an antiterrorist campaign against the Pakistan Taliban. **On 16th December 2014** the perspective changed when the Taliban attacked the Army Public School Peshawar killing 142 children and teachers at the spot; late the toll reached 153.

That was the moment when Pakistanis united in disgust, revolt and revulsion against the Islamists, politicians of JUI and JI including Dr Tahirul Qadri and Imran Khan, once was labelled '**Taliban Khan**' for his militant sympathies. The whole nation backed their army and Gen Raheel Sharif, full of rage and anger, attacked the Taliban with renewed ferociousness.

PM Nawaz Sharif's government and the politicians had to stand by the nation, had to back the Pak-Army in their resolve, otherwise still PML[N]'s Rana Sanaulahs and Maulanas were not agreeing to that move. Imran Khan had to say that '**whatever happens now we've got to go after them.**' It was one of those traumatic events in Pakistan that changed the country. The Peshawar massacre was so gruesome that turned the whole Pakistan into one voice – the people were sick of terrorism, violence and Taliban marked Islamic revolution.

Then with the aid of Pak-Army, the days came when PM Sharif started feeling secure; with the economy recovering and political violence abating — despite the assassination of Shuja Khanzada, Punjab Home Minister like singular events. Arif Nizami like critics had to declare then that:

"I think Nawaz Sharif will survive, with a bit of luck and some good politics. In the past one year, he's mended fences with the army... Pakistan is definitely more stable than a year ago."

As Mr Nizami had further suggested that PM Sharif would only retain his position through balanced tolerance as for decades the Generals have been ruling Pakistan and controlled foreign and defence policy under civilian governments, and there was no sign of Gen Raheel Sharif loosening that military's grip. Of course, the military had helped the PML[N] government with security operations not only in the Taliban - dominated tribal areas but also in Karachi, where the paramilitary Rangers were being confronted with the private armies of the MQM and the PPP's gangsters in the robes of Karachi Administration.

On 10th November 2015, Corps Commanders Conference was held at Pak-Army's GHQ; COAS Gen Raheel Sharif chaired the meeting. An exhaustive review of internal security situation was carried out. While appreciating progress of ongoing operation and Intelligence Based Operations (IBOs), their achievements and effects, COAS acknowledged full support of Pakistani nation for ongoing operations to eliminate terrorism and extremism.

Gen Raheel Sharif, however, underlined the need for matching / complimentary governance initiatives for long term gains of operation and enduring peace across the country. Progress of National Action Plan's implementation, finalization of FATA reforms, and concluding all

ongoing JITs at priority, were highlighted as issues, which could undermine the effects of operations.

Then the media took ISPR's that press release on horns and made it an issue; on every Pakistani channel there were discussions. ***On 12th November 2015;*** two retired Pak-Army Generals Abdul Qayyum and Qadir Baloch of the PML[N] appeared on media and declared that some anti-democratic forces tried to disrupt the smooth working relationship existing amongst the civil and military elite of the country and there was no misunderstanding at all. Both the Generals, while talking to the media said that ***'...you people [media community] had blown out of proportion the two sentences of ISPR communiqué.'***

The reciprocal press statement from PM Secretariat was not at all confronting or disgusting wherein ***'...PML[N] has acknowledged the Pak-Army's stern efforts in tackling the terror menace in the country and also that there were actual shortcomings in the implementation of the National Action Plan's certain clauses. The party Chief has noted the same and we'll upgrade our efforts to do the best.'***

In fact, some Parliamentarians including Syed Khurshid Shah of the PPP, Maulana Fazalur Rehman of JUI[F] and Mr Achakzai of Balochistan had played more in deteriorating the situation on the floor by twisting the ISPR's press note un-necessarily. They had tried to divert the in-efficiency of the Sindh government towards the capital. The matter may be treated as finished.

Let us hope that the matter stands finished – in actual terms.