



## **APPOINTMENT OF THE NEW ARMY CHIEF IN PAKISTAN**

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Is the appointment of new army chief by Nawaz Sharif an effective step to limit the sway of an institution that has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 66 years of history? What could be the implications for India?

Pakistan has a history of the military coup and it has always been vulnerable to military interference in state politics. Nawaz Sharif must have not forgotten the tremendous political upheaval and the dramatic turn of the events in 1999. When his handpicked general Musharraf engineered a coup against him in October 1999 and threw both Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shahbaz Sharif in jail and then forced them to live in exile. Having bitter experiences in the past with country's powerful military generals, Nawaz Sharif took long time to contemplate and in the history of Pakistan this is the first time a Prime minister took such a long time in making his mind on the key military appointments.

Born in Quetta on 16 June 1956, Lieutenant General Raheel Sharif comes from a Punjabi family and grew up steeped in the military tradition. He is also considered as a gentleman with soft-spoken and dignified personality.<sup>i</sup>

Shabbir Sharif, Raheel Sharif's elder brother, was a course-mate of General Pervez Musharraf, and was killed during the 1971 war against India and awarded the Nishan-i-Haider, Pakistan's highest military award.<sup>ii</sup> Major Narain Singh, who led the counter-attack from India on the bridge that had been captured by Sharif and men, too died in the battle (awarded the Veer Chakra).<sup>iii</sup>

The decision came as a shock to all those predicting the scenario of Pakistan's politics. As Sharif chooses to bypass not only the most senior military officer after Kayani, Lieutenant-General Haroon Aslam but also ignored Kayani's favorite, Lieutenant General Rashad Mahmood.

About the event in which Nawaz Sharif sat down with his top aide to choose a successor, an insider with first-hand knowledge told the Reuters:

"We have to say 'no' to the Kayani doctrine." The insider quoted Sharif as saying at the meeting. "(Sharif) and the three others in the room all agreed that it was time to show the world that this was no longer Kayani's army."<sup>iv</sup>

Nawaz Sharif appears this time determined to seize control of strategic and foreign policy from the army, appointing Kayani's favorite would have been less than ideals and it means the person, who would come to the job with his own ideas or behave similar to Kayani or carry forward his legacy (apparently Kayani was considered as 28th among the most powerful man by Forbes)

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It is clear that Nawaz Sharif once gain made a decision based on his own judgment as opposed to following the protocol. This judgment might create damage of bias in some way or take another shape in future. The other possibility is that Nawaz Sharif proved to be played safe this time by appointing the non-political man as the army superior.

What everyone is interested to see is how Raheel would be dealing with TTP (Tehreek-e Taliban) and Baluchistan secessionist movement. It has been in the news recently, how Nawaz Sharif government is in the process of initiating peace talk with the Taliban. The Taliban as formidable force does not have ability to defeat the Pakistan army but the intention of the Pakistan's Army to completely defeat the Taliban is under suspicion<sup>v</sup>.

This change in Army leadership within Pakistan has been made to improve the relations between the political establishment and military. It could be possible that Raheel Sharif will try to bring out strategic changes in Army in dealing with internal conflicts but initially it will happen only with the Nawaz Sharif's consent. He was chosen out of Nawaz Sharif insecurity and only to benefit him to save his throne from another military coup. Any changes in dealing with the Taliban or Baloch secessionist movement are less likely.

For the moment, Raheel Sharif will play the waiting game and a continuation of the status quo is likely. India must therefore continue to be heedful of potential circumstances and move forward with precaution in its dealings with Pakistan.

The Army, undoubtedly, will continue to be the major background player in the Pakistan's affairs, especially in relation to its nuclear policy, its Afghan policy and its dealings with India. It would be no wise to consider that any shift in Pakistan's stance towards India will occur. This is something that doesn't seem to be happening anytime soon.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)*

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i "Troubled history hangs over Pakistan's new Army chief"

See- <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/troubled-history-hangs-over-pakistans-new-army-chief/article5398222.ece>

ii "Profile: Lt General Raheel Sharif"

See- <http://dawn.com/news/1058941/profile-lt-general-raheel-sharif>

iii "New Pak army chief's brother died in 1971 Battle of Majors in Fazlika"

See- <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/new-pak-army-chiefs-brother-died-in-1971-battle-of-majors-in-fazlika/1201821/>

iv "With a midnight meeting, delicate new balance emerges in Pakistan"

See- <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/11/28/uk-pakistan-army-sharif-idUKBRE9AR00F20131128>

v "Pakistan and Taliban peace process- Doomed to be fail?"

See- [http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS\\_Infocus\\_MR.pdf](http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS_Infocus_MR.pdf)