

Kargil, Nawaz Sharif and Allah

Pak. Defence
Daily Times
28.7.09

OFFICIAL COUNTERPOINT



TARIQ AZIM KHAN

It is the duty of the army to make war plans and launch attacks when ordered. The responsibility for approving or rejecting a plan remains with the government

ONCE BITTEN, TWICE SHY IS WHAT THE wise believe. Not so Mr Nawaz Sharif. He is thus being trapped again by the people who had put him on the path of confrontation with successive presidents and the establishment. That

resulted in a head-on collision with the army on the issue of the National Security Council, which ultimately forced Gen Jehangir Karamit to resign. Somehow, these very elements managed to convince Nawaz Sharif to dismiss the next chief of army staff.

Who are these people? I am not aware of their identity. But whoever they might be, Nawaz Sharif faced repeated political failures just because of these elements. For his first tenure, he was elected prime minister with a two-thirds majority. Yet he was unable to complete his tenure. He won a two-thirds majority for the second time as well but again lost his office and had to face imprisonment and exile. I had assumed that having shot himself twice in the foot, Nawaz Sharif must have been so much the wiser. His interview to an Indian magazine on the Kargil issue, proves me wrong. By announcing that he would establish a commission on Kargil after coming into power, he is only shutting himself off of any possibility of a return to power in Pakistan.

Mr Sharif might recall the day of October 12, 1999, when he was returning from Multan to Islamabad. Just before landing an aide advised him not to dismiss the COAS in an indecent manner and not to adopt the path of confrontation with the army. In this context, the aide cited the example of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto saying that in 1972 Mr Bhutto was an extremely powerful man. His support in the National Assembly as well as amongst the people was at its peak while the

army was highly demoralised, due to the surrender in East Pakistan and was the target of people's wrath. Even in that situation, when the scenes of maltreatment of Pakistan Army personnel by the Indian Army were shown on TV, the GHQ protested to the prime minister who had to concede to its demand not to show the scenes.

Mr Bhutto established the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission, but could not publish its report despite two attempts. Mr Sharif was told that his support and popularity in the parliament and amongst the people was certainly far less than Mr Bhutto's in 1972 and the army was far more powerful now compared to the Bhutto era. There was now greater goodwill for the army amongst the people. The institution which a leader like Mr Bhutto could not subdue could not be pushed to the wall by such tactics. The aide cautioned him, "You won't be able to preserve the Army in these circumstances." In reply, Mr Sharif said, "Bhutto was a coward." The decision taken by Mr Sharif without a realistic assessment of his strength pushed him out of power and into exile. It is for history now to judge whether it was bravery or foolishness.

Today, Pakistan is once again making a transition from military rule to democracy. Those committed to democracy are trying to get all political parties to participate in the democratic process. They have been suggesting that democracy cannot be fully restored in the country without the participation of Mr Sharif and Benazir Bhutto. However, Mr Sharif's announcement

regarding the appointment of an inquiry commission on the Kargil issue has weakened those arguing in his favour. It is common knowledge that the Kargil episode was not a result of individual decisions by Gen Pervaiz Musharraf or some of his colleagues. It was a plan worked out by strategists of the national institution.

It must be kept in mind that as an institution the army remains engaged in working out defence plans and strategies. It also draws plans and strategies to attack the enemy when necessary and keeps the government abreast of the plans. The government can then decide, keeping in view the diplomatic support available and the country's economic situation, whether or not to go to war.

In other words, it is the duty of the army to make war plans and launch attacks when ordered. The responsibility for approving or rejecting a plan remains with the government. Did not India occupy Sialkot where its forces remain to this day? Which Indian prime minister has asked for a commission of inquiry? Was it not Mr Sharif who as prime minister of Pakistan met President Clinton on July 4, 1999 to agree to a withdrawal from Kargil. Was the visit not arranged expressly for that purpose? But then Mr Sharif appears to be ever ready to shoot himself in the foot. And thus a continued stay in the royal comfort of Jeddah appears to be his destiny as willed by Allah.

Tariq Azim Khan is a PML member of the Senate of Pakistan