

Pak Defence

# The general's new

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*Pakistan's latest army chief holds the key to next week's vote, and to the future of his unstable nation*

HE stands at one end of the back row in his class photo, a stern-looking man in a pale uniform, aloof from the grinning, khaki-clad Americans beside him. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani was only one military officer among 993, including 123 from foreign armed services, in the US Army Command and General Staff College's class of 1988. Still, the ramrod-straight, six-foot Pakistani caught the notice of some at Fort Leavenworth, Kans. "He was a very quiet guy, very sober, very serious", says retired US Army Col William Kiskowski. "But very smart". While classmates recall a party given by Kayani and his wife - liquor was served, but the couple didn't touch it - they say Kayani kept himself to himself. "He is a very easy man to underestimate", says a longtime US Army friend whose job prevents him from speaking for attribution. "When he does speak he tends to mumble. So those meeting him for the first time will possibly go away thinking he is perhaps not quite as smart as people have said. This would be a terrible mistake."

Kayani had better be every bit that smart - and lucky, too. He's been tasked with one of the toughest, most urgent military assignments in the world: reforming Pakistan's Armed forces and rescuing the country itself from possible collapse. Unless the 55-year-old four-star general can do that, and quickly, the official outcome in next week's parliamentary elections could be beside the point. The long dictatorship of Gen

Pervez Musharraf has left the Army widely distrusted and deeply demoralised, while armed allies of Al Qaeda rampage in the countryside and suicide bombers terrorise the cities. Since taking over as chief of Army staff (his formal job title) less than three months ago, Kayani has raced to undo the damage. "He's by far the best officer I've come across in the Pakistani Army", says a Western military official in Islamabad with experience on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border. But will the best be good enough? "No matter how progressive and capable he

firing offence, and troops this Election Day are to do nothing at the polls beyond keeping them secure. Even so, just about everyone in Pakistan is bracing for the possibility of widespread violence. Opposition candidates are already crying foul, complaining especially that the Interior Ministry's Intelligence Bureau (IB) and its paramilitary Rangers are intimidating candidates and planning to meddle with the polls. "The IB is much more dangerous than the MI or ISI", says Samina Ahmed, the South Asia director of the International Crisis Group. "The IB works more closely with local police

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is, that doesn't mean he can turn everything around in the time allotted to him", adds the official, who is not authorised to be quoted by name. "He's dealing with an institution that is a proverbial dinosaur, and very resistant to change."

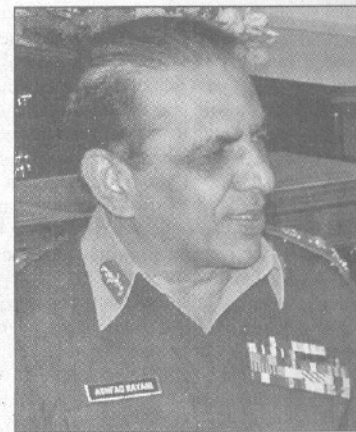
Kayani could face an even bigger challenge in the wake of the Feb 18 vote. He has sworn from the start to get the Military out of politics, and he's made no exceptions for soldiers and officers assigned to the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Military Intelligence (MI) agencies. Unauthorised contact with any politician is now a

and knows the administration and the local players."

The fears are compounded by the threat of further terrorist attacks. "There is a strong feeling within the Military that there will be an aftermath of violence no matter who wins", says the Western military official. "The big question is, how will Kayani and the Army deal with that, if it happens." No one knows the answer. Despite his order for the Army to withdraw from politics, Kayani has never explicitly said he wouldn't order his forces to crush civil unrest if it threatened Musharraf's presidency. And if Kayani did issue such

an order? "Would the Army do it"? says his longtime Army friend. "Yes, in my view. But it would be very distasteful." Retired Gen Anthony Zinni, who got to know the Pakistani Military closely as commander of the US Central Command in the late '90s, agrees: "They wouldn't allow chaos. But they'd be very reluctant, because of the importance they place on their relationship with the people."

In recent weeks a steady parade of top-level US officials have visited



Kayani to make up their own minds about him. Most - including CIA chief Michael Hayden, National Intelligence Director Mike McConnell and CENTCOM commander Adm. William Fallon - have come away confident that Kayani knows what he's doing. Hayden and McConnell hinted to Kayani that the Americans would like to send additional US personnel into the country to battle Al Qaeda, according to a US official who refused to be named on such delicate issues. The Pakistanis rebuffed the notion, exactly as the

# new mission

Americans had anticipated. Instead, both sides agreed to increased Predator flights and more sharing of US intelligence with the Pakistanis. "A lot of (US) folks like him", says the official. "Nobody hates him".

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That only underscores his achievements. Before enrolling in the elite command school in Kansas he graduated first in his class at the Army Staff College in Quetta, Pakistan, and he took the advanced course for infantry officers at Fort Benning, Ga. It served him well. Studies at Fort Leavenworth were tough on many of Kayani's foreign-born classmates. "They didn't have the grounding", says Kiskowski. "But Kayani did. He had a really good command of American battlefield tactics."

But stopping the armed extremists

Swat Valley and taking the fight to Waziristan. Still, the Army doesn't have the experience and training it needs to achieve lasting gains, or even an overall strategy against the insurgents. For six decades, Pakistan's military has been dedicated to the threat of conventional war against India - nothing like the dangers that are now posed by the homegrown Taliban on the opposite side of the country.

The Americans are eager to help. The latest US defence budget allots \$75 million to train and equip the paramilitary Frontier Corps, which the Pentagon views as better suited than Pakistan's regular Army for counterinsurgency. But aid alone won't solve the worst weakness of the Pakistani Army: its conservative, old-school command culture. Kayani can't afford for his fellow officers or the civilian public to think he's too close to the Americans. "It would do him great harm if he is pegged as America's puppet", the Western military official says. Now, says Shuja Nawaz, author of a forthcoming history of the Pakistani Armed forces, "Kayani will do what he thinks is right for Pakistan - not what the United States necessarily wants".

At this point they want basically the same thing: a stable, democratic Pakistan that can defend itself against the jihadists. That goal remains elusive. Kayani has warned publicly that no counterinsurgency campaign can succeed without the public's full support. And yet less than half of Pakistan's people favour using Army forces against Al Qaeda and its allies. The last thing Kayani needs now is a bunch of camouflage-painted American Rambos running around Waziristan. Still, it won't be easy watching him go it alone. COURTESY NEWSWEEK

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in its \$1 billion empire, as well as some pricey real estate, to the government.) His primary recreation is golf, and his only obvious affectation is a long ivory cigarette holder. "He is a man who is temperamentally given to reading, reflection and to listening more and talking less", says analyst Nasim Zehra, a fellow at Harvard's Asian Centre. Kayani was born into Army life. His father, a senior NCO, couldn't send the boy to the best schools, where commissioned officers' kids went. To this day Kayani's English is less fluent than that of many more-privileged officers who serve under him.

will take more than that. Some senior officers continue to deny the rising danger from the insurgents, and the security services have historic ties to and sympathies for jihadists in Kashmir and Afghanistan. Still, counterinsurgency is one of Kayani's highest priorities. The day after he was named Army chief, he paid the first of several morale-building visits to the troops in Waziristan. The security-conscious Musharraf seldom went near the insurgent-ridden place. In recent weeks the Army and the paramilitary Frontier Corps have responded to Kayani's encouragement, cleaning out militant strongholds in the