LoC, J&K and New Delhi: New Pak COAS & Likely Challenges for India

D. Suba Chandran

December 2016
National Institute of Advanced Studies
International Strategic and Security Studies Programme (ISSSP)

The International Strategic & Security Studies Programme, was started at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore in 1996 with the broad objective of conducting academic and policy research related to national and international security issues. The emphasis of research is towards integrating complex elements of science and technology with policy, organizational and institutional arrangements.

NIAS Strategic Forecasts aim at highlighting trends, threats and projections on contemporary developments at the regional and global levels. Some of the recent forecasts include:

- **The US Elections: Trump, Hillary & India**
  Amit Gupta

  Vijay Shankar

- **Global Transformations: Four Tectonic Shifts**
  Vijay Shankar

- **China and the Arctic: Evolving Geopolitics**
  Teshu Singh

- **Myanmar 2016: What next for the NLD?**
  M. Mayilvaganan

- **Will Pakistan Integrate Gilgit Baltistan? And What If?**
  D. Suba Chandran

**Other Recent ISSSP Publications**

- **Advanced Techniques in Environmental Monitoring**
  Kaveri Ashok, Arun Vishwanathan, S Chandrashekar, L V. Krishnan, Lalitha Sundaresan and Rajaram Nagappa

- **China’s Constellation of Yaogan Satellites & the ASBM**
  S. Chandrashekar and Soma Perumal

- **Space, War and Security – A Strategy for India**
  S. Chandrashekar

- **Promise of Small Satellites for National Security**
  Rajaram Nagappa

- **Estimating Uranium Mill Capacity Using Satellite Pictures**
  S. Chandrashekar, Lalitha Sundaresan, Bhupendra Jassani
Pakistan has a new Chief of Army Staff. Gen Bajwa has been appointed as the new COAS in November 2016, following the retirement of Gen Sharif. After taking charge, Gen Bajwa has made reshuffle within the organization; there is a new Chief of the ISI and also a new Chief of General Staff. In short, there is a new team at the helms of Pakistan’s military and its ISI.

From an Indian perspective, it is important to analyse and even forecast, Gen Bajwa’s likely India strategy. The Indo-Pak trend that was set by Musharraf on Indo-Pak relations, especially related to LoC and Kashmir, and pursued by Gen Kayani was broken during the end of Gen Sharif’s tenure.

Given the recent trend in India’s posture towards Pakistan, one could expect an assertive strategy towards Pakistan. What is likely to be Gen Bajwa’s response and road map vis-a-vis India? Will he follow the footsteps of Gen Sharif or Gen Kayani in pursuing his India strategy? Or, will he chart a road map of his own, different from his three predecessors – Sharif, Kayani and Musharraf?

The LoC: From Control to Domination

While Gen Sharif has made tremendous efforts within Pakistan to control the militant groups and violence, thereby leaving a positive legacy to Gen Bajwa, the LoC situation today is complicated. Gen Bajwa has a great opportunity to stabilize the LoC and leave a legacy to his successor. An immediate challenge for Gen Bajwa will be along the Line of Control; if not to restore the old ceasefire that India and Pakistan witnessed post 2004, at least to bring a new normalcy to the
The primary questions that India needs to address vis-a-vis the new Pakistan COAS on the LoC are the following: Will he try to stabilize the LoC, or will he pursue Gen Sharif’s strategy to allow the situation to escalate further? Worse, will he poke elsewhere across the Line?

While the recent developments along the LoC is seen and interpreted primarily as “Indian aggression” and “unprovoked”, the issue needs a larger attention. Since the late 1980s, the LoC was dominated by Pakistan, and India has been defensive until recently. India’s initiatives were aimed at maintaining the status quo and protecting its side by defending the LoC.

Whether the militant crossings or cross-border firings to facilitate the intrusion, Pakistan was dominating the LoC and India was defending it. And Pakistan had an edge in maintaining this domination, as calibrating the infiltration was in its favour; and so was the situation within J&K – from Rajouri to Kupwara sectors.

In the last few years, India has succeeded in bringing violence down in Jammu region, (emanating from Pakistani side) and to an extent even inside Kashmir Valley. Construction of fencing within the its side of the LoC has further helped India to reduce infiltration; the ceasefire and the prolonged absence of violence along the LoC during 2004-2014 ensured that it was neither dominated by Pakistan nor by India.

India would like to maintain the above and ensure that the LoC does not become a Line of Domination for Pakistan. India would like to negate any advantage that Pakistan would have over the LoC either in terms of aiding infiltration or in terms of calibrating violence to achieve its objectives within J&K. The decision makers in New Delhi today believe, it could be done only by not providing space for Pakistan to dominate, thereby not being at a disadvantageous situation within its own territory.

The “disproportionate” response by India to any firing from Pakistan can be explained with the above. The firing did take place earlier as well, but not with this alarming interval and intensity. India would like to negate the domination space that Pakistan has along the LoC.

India’s LoC strategy until recently was defensive; it was aimed at responding and neutralizing the infiltration into its side. Now it has become offensive-defence. With the present team in Delhi, this offensive defence is likely to continue. India would like to defend the LoC by fighting along the Line, and not inside the Indian territory; if there is a need, even to cross it. But the Endgame is to preserve the sanctity of the LoC.

Given the above recent Indian response to safeguard the LoC sanctity, how is Gen Bajwa and his new team likely to respond? His options are few, but significant. First, he could pursue a political
Pakistan’s New Army Chief: Likely Challenges for India

approach vis-a-vis India to stabilize the LoC. Second, he could pursue a political approach, but at global level in terms of internationalizing the LoC situation, thereby forcing the world community to intervene and pressurize India. Third, he could continue, where Gen Sharif ended; keep the LoC hot and try to regain Pakistan’s dominating position. Fourth, he could reopen the “militancy tap” and start pushing militants inside J&K.

The above four options along the LoC will obviously depend on the political situation within J&K, and the weather conditions enabling any infiltration. On the LoC, perhaps, Gen Bajwa will try to buy time, pursue the second strategy at the international level for the next few months, until the snow starts melting next summer.

II


Outside the LoC, what is likely to be Pakistan military’ strategy towards J&K? He has a political option to restart the cross-LoC interactions. The bus and truck services started during Gen Musharraf’s period, despite serious problems on the content and scope, did continue during the periods of Gen Kayani and Gen Sharif. The cross-LoC interactions has an immense scope to continue and expand beyond the bus and truck services.

Will Gen Bajwa allow a political approach towards J&K, or revert back to the traditional Pakistani approach and allow the painfully built cross-LoC processes to fail? What non-political options do Gen Bajwa have vis-a-vis J&K?

Cross-LoC Militant Pokes

The terrorist attack on a military installation outside Jammu city (Nagrota), immediately after his takeover may be a coincidence. Perhaps the decision was taken much earlier; but, much to the dismay of India, this is an option that the new Chief has. Though, India has threatened with surgical strikes, the Nagrota attack in November and the Uri attack earlier in September 2016 do highlight an option available for Gen Bajwa.

Pakistan’s military in this context has an inherent advantage in terms of militant groups willing to fight and die in India. Though Pakistan’s military was fighting the Pakistani Taliban and related groups, including the al Qaeda, both Gen Kayani and Gen Sharif did not go after militant groups with an avowed India focus, for example the Lashkar-e-Toiba.
Though India has built a fence along the LoC, it is not fool proof. Nor can the Indian military be able to absolutely patrol every inch of the territory along the LoC. The weather during the next few months, until the summer may limit the human movement, but does not make the LoC absolutely impregnable. Gen Bajwa has an asset within Pakistan, which is willing to be exploited across the LoC.

**Revising Pakistan's Kashmir Strategy: An international push**

During the last few years, there has been a debate within Pakistan to “do more” or “do something” in Kashmir. This was based on a Pakistani analysis that Gen Musharaff’s approach has given up Islamabad’s leverage in J&K, thereby placing them at a disadvantageous position vis-a-vis Indo-Pak relations and also at the international level. During Gen Sharif’s tenure, there was an increased effort to highlight the “Kashmir issue” at the international level, “condemning” India and its “military atrocities” within Kashmir. Though this phase saw Pakistan’s restricting its Kashmir intervention at the global level, it did not push militants in any major push into J&K.

While many (especially in India) would see “normalcy” in Kashmir valley in terms of decline in violence and the return of tourists during the last decade, all was not well within Kashmir and between Srinagar and New Delhi. The recent surge in violence led by the Kashmiri youths will underline that there are problems within Kashmir Valley, and New Delhi will have to “do more” in addressing the issue within. A section within India also agrees that New Delhi will have to pursue a political strategy, outside any ideological influence.

Gen Bajwa may be tempted to make use of the prevailing unrest within J&K. The current situation in J&K is our own making. Aiding militancy is not the only option he has in J&K. An open commitment (political and rhetoric though) by him supported by a Parliamentary push and public support in Pakistan towards the “Kashmiri cause” is likely to revive the jihadi infrastructure within Pakistan, especially in Punjab. This may even bring some of the “sectarian” militants fighting elsewhere in Pakistan back into Lashkar and Jaish folds. Any support to the militant infrastructure in Pakistan – direct, indirect or indifferent, will automatically revive them.

Gen Bajwa may be willing to keep the LoC hot, to ensure that the “Kashmir issue” gets international attention. Gen Sharif’s strategy along the LoC has already undermined the uprising within and converted a political issue within Kashmir, into a bilateral one. Firing across the LoC has diverted real issues within J&K and brought international attention back to Kashmir.
A major challenge for India will be on the nuclear front – weapons, platforms, doctrines and new theories.

Official statements following the recent testing of Babur cruise missile (after the new COAS taking over) mentioned the following: “It (Babur) is a low flying, terrain hugging missile, which carries certain stealth features and is capable of carrying various types of warheads,” “Babur Weapon System is an important force multiplier for Pakistan’s strategic defence” and “this test further strengthens Pakistan’s deterrence capability.”

While the Babur missile might have been in production and the test planned before the new COAS taking over, the official statements do highlight an option available for Gen Bajwa.

On nuclear weapons, programme and platforms, both India and Pakistan have a trajectory of their own. While many in Pakistan believe, that India’s nuclear pursuits (especially its military programme) as Pakistan specific, they fail to appreciate the larger Indian trajectory from the time of Jawahalal Nehru and Homi Bhaba. True it has a strong military component to its nuclear programme, but in the recent years, also has an equally stronger energy component to it. Given the larger energy needs to sustain its economy, India is likely to further invest in its nuclear energy programme. Nuclear deals with US, Japan and others, is a part of its search for a place on the global nuclear high table (including the NSG).

On nuclear weapons and deterrence, India’s posture, as could be seen from the recent statement by its Defence minister, is a work in progress. For long, both India and Pakistan has been engaging in a theoretical nuclear war fighting, and attempting to match with each other’s rhetoric. Limited War, Cold Start, Tactical Nuclear Weapons are new doctrines to have domination over war fighting capabilities.

Gen Bajwa is more likely to follow his predecessor. The nuclear thought in India and Pakistan has been following a trajectory and expanding. The introduction of Nasr and Babur, debate on battlefield nuclear weapons and full spectrum deterrence seem to be the likely path of Pakistan’s nuclear debate. Gen Bajwa will follow the trajectory.

Even if such strategies lead to an unstable debate involving nuclear weapons, it would still suit Pakistan. Instead of engaging India to stabilize the nuclear debate, Pakistan would rather prefer to highlight “South Asia as a nuclear flashpoint” and “Kashmir as the root cause”; such a strategy will gain more international attention. One should
expect more of the above in the following months from Pakistan.

IV
Responding to the New Team in New Delhi

Will Gen Bajwa be able to understand and appreciate the new team in Delhi led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and his National Security Advisor Ajit Doval along with the Foreign Secretary Jaishankar? Gen Sharif did mis-calculate this new team, which is remarkably different from the previous ones led by Manmohan Singh. As a Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh was status quo-ist and was risk averse.

Though one could see a demonization of the current Indian Prime Minister in the Pakistani media, he would be willing to work with Pakistan. Else, why would he make that dash to Lahore last year? There is not enough appreciation in Islamabad and Rawalpindi about the new team. Will Gen Bajwa be willing to take decisions, where Gen Sharif failed?

An allied question will also be, whether Gen Bajwa will give the space for Pakistan’s political leadership to interact with the new team in India. Gen Sharif had a tight control over Pakistan’s foreign policy and Nawaz Sharif also did not want to take any bolder decision overlooking his Establishment.

How Gen Bajwa will deal with the team in Delhi, and also with his own Prime Minister is too early to forecast. However, on the LoC, he is likely to continue with Pakistan’s efforts to control it in its favour and dominate it. He is likely to use the tested strategy of cross-LoC firing to facilitate illegal movement across the border; while, this may decline in the next few months, due to weather and snow, one could expect the militant pokes within J&K across the LoC. On J&K, one could expected an extra push at the international level, highlighting “Indian excesses”. Nuclear weapons and doctrines will be tuned to neutralise any Indian advantage—strategically and doctrinally. If, in the above process, the West feels that the region is becoming a nuclear flash point, that would suit Pakistan’s efforts as well.