



PAKISTAN: New army chief will focus on morale, image

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EVENT: President Pervez Musharraf was today succeeded as army chief by Ashfaq Parvez Kayani.

SIGNIFICANCE: Kayani assumes control of the most powerful institution in the country at a critical time, with a weakened Musharraf facing an uncertain future. The decisions taken by the professional and well-regarded military chief will have significant domestic and regional implications.

ANALYSIS: Ashfaq Parvez Kayani today became chief of the army staff, succeeding President Pervez Musharraf, who retains his position as supreme commander of the armed forces. He was born in 1952 and hails from Jhelum district in Punjab province, an area that has long provided soldiers and officers for the army. He is the first son of an ordinary soldier to rise so high, making him a popular choice as chief of army staff (two of his younger brothers also served as officers). By appointing a Punjabi general as army chief, Musharraf has also dispelled an impression that he prefers Urdu-speaking generals from his own ethnic group.

Kayani went to the Military College in Jhelum, where scholarships are provided for the sons of army soldiers and junior commissioned officers. He is a graduate (and has served as faculty member) of the Command and Staff College in Quetta and the National Defence College in Islamabad. He also studied at the Command and General Staff College in the United States.

Military rise. Having commanded an infantry battalion, infantry brigade, infantry division and a corps, Kayani has wide-ranging experience in command, instructional and staff appointments. He was commissioned to the Baloch Regiment (Infantry) in August 1971 -- the second most prestigious group within the army after the Armoured service.

He served as deputy military secretary (DMS) to the prime minister in 1988, during Benazir Bhutto's tenure as leader -- a position that is not considered to be a career appointment for professional army officers. As DMS, Kayani was responsible for managing the administrative affairs of the prime ministerial household, and for updating the military command on the activities of the prime minister -- at a time when relations between Bhutto and the military were poor.

Committed soldier. Kayani is thought to have turned down an opportunity to join the civil service (a position often offered as a reward for serving as DMS and one that comes with significant privileges). His refusal earned him considerable respect from his peers within the army. He has since held several important posts:

- He served as director-general of military operations during the military standoff with India in 2001-02, and was responsible for military planning and logistics coordination.
- He was then chief of the general staff of the army -- liaising between the chief of army staff and corps commanders.
- He has also been corps commander, Rawalpindi -- which is the most important corps command given its proximity to army headquarters and critical nuclear facilities (see [PAKISTAN: Instability raises nuclear safety concerns - August 31, 2007](#)).
- From 2004-07, Kayani was the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director-general, and is the first to go on to become chief of army staff (see [PAKISTAN: ISI plays ambiguous role - November 7, 2006](#)). His appointment followed success in the investigation of assassination plots.

Milestones

- Ashfaq Parvez Kayani is from Punjab's Jhelum district -- a key recruiting ground for the army.
- His background (he is the first son of an ordinary soldier to become chief of army staff) and his professionalism have earned him respect within the armed forces.
- His involvement in investigating assassination attempts against Musharraf boosted his career prospects; and his role in thwarting terrorist plots has helped raised his profile in the West.
- However, his record in the wider 'war on terror' is mixed, and his loyalty lies with the military rather than with Musharraf.



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Intelligence post. The last time an ISI chief was appointed army chief was in 1999, when then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif promoted Ziauddin Butt. Musharraf sacked both men within hours of staging his coup. Politics aside, Butt was considered unacceptable for the post within the army because of his background in the signals corps -- which is not considered a fighting service -- and because he never commanded a corps.

As leader of the ISI, Kayani distinguished himself in two respects, namely:

- he developed a good rapport with senior CIA and Pentagon officials; and
- he played an important role in uncovering an alleged plot to blow up airliners leaving London in 2006.

He is considered within army circles to be more knowledgeable about al-Qaida than any other army general. However, it is also the case that his tenure coincided with a Taliban resurgence and the further destabilisation of the tribal areas.

Political sensitivities. More recently, Kayani has played an important role in several critical political developments:

- He has been involved in negotiations between Musharraf and Bhutto.
- He was one of three intelligence chiefs present when Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry was being persuaded to 'resign' in March -- and was the only that did not file an affidavit against Chaudhry before the Supreme Court.
- It emerged later that during the meeting that Kayani kept quiet -- neither supporting Musharraf nor criticising Chaudhry.

Indeed, he seldom shares his views openly and is known to keep a low public profile. As a commander, he has a reputation as a tough leader and a hard task master. He is also known to be well read, often being compared with former army chief Jahangir Karamat -- who is known as an intellectual.

Loyalties. He is widely projected in the Pakistani and international media as a liberal and pro-American, though there is little evidence for (or against) this assertion. Nevertheless, Musharraf is unlikely to have appointed a successor with a different ideological orientation to his own, and he must have reason to be confident about Kayani's loyalty.

For now, Kayani is considered firmly in Musharraf's camp, but several leaders (civilian and military) have been brought down by 'loyal' aides. Relinquishing active command marks a significant step for Musharraf -- which he appeared to acknowledge while bidding farewell to retired generals, suggesting that there will be no problems "if the president, the prime minister and the army chief work in harmony". Short of a military defeat scenario, the army leadership would be highly unlikely to move against their chief. As former army chief, Musharraf cannot expect that kind of support.

Testing priorities. For Kayani, raising army morale (badly hit by costly involvement in fighting militants in areas near the Afghan border) and improving its image among the public will be top priorities. Supporting an unpopular civilian supreme commander will be a secondary consideration at best (see [PAKISTAN: Military status is assured -- unlike morale - October 25, 2007](#)). Soon after becoming the vice chief of army staff in October, Kayani visited garrisons and issued statements emphasising the importance of public support for the army campaign against terrorism. He urged restraint and warned troops to avoid 'collateral damage'.

Repeated references to public opinion indicate that it will have a great deal of influence on his policies. As Musharraf's popularity is declining, public expectations of Kayani will increase (see [PAKISTAN: Musharraf must compromise or risk overthrow - November 20, 2007](#) and see [PAKISTAN: Musharraf bid for survival may prove costly - November 5, 2007](#)). Yet his scope to work independently may be limited by the recent appointment of Nadeem Taj and Nadeem Ijaz as ISI and Military Intelligence chiefs -- both would probably be more loyal to Musharraf than Kayani in a crisis.

According to military norms and rules, the Intelligence chief is appointed at the discretion of the chief of army staff, while an elected prime minister has a say in the selection of an ISI chief. Kayani's control over the military will be really established the day he appoints to these two posts. It may be a few months before he asserts his command, but he is certain to move in that direction.

CONCLUSION: Kayani's assumption of military leadership leaves a weakened president with even less power. While Kayani is loyal to Musharraf for now, efforts to boost morale and improve public perceptions of the military will take priority over the protection of an unpopular civilian president.

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