**Better late than never**

[**Najm us Saqib**](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/najm-us-saqib)

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The ‘news’ on the appointment of the impending Army Staff kept ‘breaking’ day in and day out for several days. No one knows how and why a routine matter of selection turned into a national mega event…!! However, it seemed as if the solution to all internal and external issues were centered around the ‘correct’ choice of the COAS. Perhaps, due to this decision’s ‘far reaching’ effects in the affairs of the country, the entire nation was involved in the selection process. Indeed, it was the biggest issue facing the people of Pakistan. The gathering of ‘millions’ in Rawalpindi in the aftermath of the nomination of the ‘most coveted post’ also points towards the same fact.

Looking at the situation on the ground, the nation’s biggest issue seemed neither health nor education. Worries of a possible ‘default’, declining rupee, rising inflation, deepening debt burden, failure of IMF talks, import bills, extremism, terrorism and border security were overtaken by a much bigger ‘issue’. Who will or should be the next Army Chief? India participated in the discussion by issuing veiled threats to Pakistan through one of its Generals.

[Strict action demanded against violators on motorways](https://www.nation.com.pk/28-Nov-2022/strict-action-demanded-against-violators-on-motorways)

What does it mean? In simple words, it means the people of Pakistan including all political parties believe that an Army Chief’s appointment should carefully be made in view of his ‘perceived’ role and influence in the country. Khan’s admission that he was not allowed to take certain decisions as the country’s PM, also pointed towards the same fact. Certain facts on the subject were admitted and revealed in a recent joint presser held by DG (ISI) and DG (ISPR). The unconditional vow that the Army would not meddle with politics any more clearly suggested two facts. One that it had a certain role to play in politics in the past and two that considering certain ‘lessons learnt’, the Army has decided to stay apolitical.

Even the outside observers were aware of COAS’s perceived role in the affairs of the country particularly with reference to the nuclear programme and bilateral relations with key countries such as the US, China and India. Lisa Curtis, the Trump era expert on South and Central Asian affairs, is of the opinion that the Pak Army and not the PM controls decision-making on issues important to the US. Hence, the future of US-Pakistan relations does not hinge on who the next PM will be. ‘More important is who will be the Chief of Army Staff’.

[Pakistan reports 28 coronavirus cases, no death in 24 hours](https://www.nation.com.pk/28-Nov-2022/pakistan-reports-28-coronavirus-cases-no-death-in-24-hours)

If ever there was any doubt about the Army’s future role in politics, none other than the outgoing Army Chief himself has clarified it in no uncertain terms. Speaking at a recent ceremony at GHQ, he lamented the fact that the people of Pakistan kept criticizing the Army from time to time. Digging out the reasons of such continual criticism, the General deduced that it was the Army’s meddling with politics in the past that placed it in a tight spot. Terming the interference in politics as ‘unconstitutional’, he revealed that in this regard, a decision-in-principle had been taken in Feb 2021. Assuring the nation of the Army’s firm commitment to stay apolitical, the General expected political parties to also learn from past mistakes and move forward.

Yes, you have heard it right. Pakistan Army would not interfere in the political affairs of the country any more. Time to see what this unprecedented and hitherto unbelievable sea-change in the political history of Pakistan actually entails.

[Dense fog disrupts road traffic in parts of Punjab](https://www.nation.com.pk/28-Nov-2022/dense-fog-disrupts-road-traffic-in-parts-of-punjab)

Considering a number of factors, the Realists might raise certain questions as there is many a slip between cup and lip:

-Is it the collective decision of the Institution, to be implemented for all times to come? Would the new policy continue with the change of military leadership? Would the successive Army Chiefs keep the Institution apolitical, in the real sense of the word? How must we believe what an outgoing boss is committing?

-How much of it is a ‘defusing ploy’ and how much truth does this change of hearts carry?

-What is the extent of this non-interference? Clarity is also needed on the definition of ‘politics’...!!

-Would the non-interference stance be both honest and transparent?

-Would the ‘opportunist’ politicians welcome the move and stop relying on the ‘hidden hands’ once and for all?

-The test of the pudding is in its eating. Hence, we will wait and see.

For eternal Pessimists:

[Electricity consumption curbs take effect across Ukraine](https://www.nation.com.pk/28-Nov-2022/electricity-consumption-curbs-take-effect-across-ukraine)

-The development does not change the ground realities:

-The more you change, the more you remain the same;

-Why the Institution took so long to call a spade a spade?

-How would the ‘losses’ so accrued during the ‘period of interference’ be made good and by whom?

-They are talking about ‘politics’ only. What about Foreign Policy? CPEC?

-Politicians will have no check on them. Once the cat is away, the mice will play.

For Optimists, the development comes as a breath of fresh air:

-This might be the real beginning of ‘putting the house in order’;

-This might be the best ever news for Pakistan’s democratic process;

-This might be the beginning of an era of having free and fair elections in the country;

-This might be the stepping stone for providing space for purely professional military leadership;

-This might be the end of ‘adopted’ and ‘groomed in the garrison’ politicians;

[Death toll from Italy landslide rises to 7, several still missing](https://www.nation.com.pk/28-Nov-2022/death-toll-from-italy-landslide-rises-to-7-several-still-missing)

-This might be the best chance for the Army to restore trust both at home and abroad;

-This might be the end of the blame-game played by politicians in case of a political failure.

All said and done, amidst the hullaballoo of regime-change, long marches, conspiracy theories, the debate on ‘selected’ and ‘imported’ governments, selection of the new Army Chief and the ongoing political uncertainty, at least one positive outcome has emerged. The Army will stay apolitical…!! In this way, it would not matter who the successive Army Chiefs would be…!! Let the eternal Pessimists and Realists keep wondering about the ‘truth’. For now, let us support the Optimists for there lies the only scintilla of hope for Pakistan’s internal political and economic stability.