[**Hail and farewell**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1722790/hail-and-farewell)

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NEVER in Pakistan’s history has there been so much speculation swirling around the appointment of a non-elected public official as there has been over the COAS-ship.

On Nov 30, 2022, Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, after serving 44 years in the Pakistan Army, will become just another retiree, shorn of the immense power he currently wields. He might like to recall the observation made by Gen Norman Schwarzkopf (of Operation Desert Storm fame) on his retirement: “Yesterday, I commanded over 500,000 soldiers; today, I cannot get a plumber to come to the house.”

Gen Bajwa may not be as helpless in retirement as Gen Schwarzkopf claimed to be. He would though share his belief that “to be an effective leader, you have to have a manipulative streak”.’

Gen Bajwa was [appointed COAS](https://www.dawn.com/news/1299382) on Nov 29, 2016, by the prime minister Nawaz Sharif. He was fourth in seniority. In the general elections of July 2018, it was alleged that Bajwa’s intervention brought the PTI leader Imran Khan to power.

History may have a different view of Gen Bajwa’s stewardship.

In 2019, Imran Khan sought to ensure his own continuity by [providing Gen Bajwa with an extension](https://www.dawn.com/news/1500427) for three years. He cemented this with an amendment to the Pakistan Army Act 1952, under which the COAS could receive an extension for another three years, until he reached the age of 64 years. Such extension could not be “called into question before any court on any ground whatsoever”.

It seems that this tailor-made, iron-clad provision has proved infructuous for Gen Bajwa. A number of missteps by him have eroded the position of unimpeachable authority he exercised over six years.

A requiem of his tenure as COAS was published recently in a local daily. It reads like a modern version of Mark Antony’s oration in defence of Julius Caesar: “Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?”

The [article](https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1009425-at-the-helm-a-snapshot-of-general-bajwa-s-six-years-as-coas) admits that “during his tenure as the COAS, the Pakistan Army became the subject of immense public scrutiny due to its perceived role in politics and as a top office holder in the country, Gen Bajwa himself became the target of reproval from politicians, the media and civil society. Yet, despite the constant carping from various quarters, the outgoing COAS succeeded in setting new precedents”.

Regarding the defence budget, for example, it asserts that “the Pakistan Army gets a paltry seven per cent [Rs594 billion] of the total budgetary resources. The Pakistan Army in the year 2019 also relinquished Rs100bn of its budgetary allocation to support the economy of the country”. Despite these constraints, under Gen Bajwa, “the Pakistan Army did not compromise on its professional standards and is ranked as the ninth most powerful military in the world by the Global Firepower Index”.

To answer those who question the greedy grasp of Military Inc., it discloses that “Pakistan Army also contributed Rs28bn in fiscal year 2020/21 as direct taxes to the government exchequer. … Fauji Group is among the country’s highest taxpayers, with Rs150bn paid to the national exchequer in taxes, duties and levies in fiscal year 2020-21. Over the last five years, Fauji Foundation paid Rs1 trillion to the government in taxes and levies. Moreover, Fauji Group incurred Rs1.377bn in the year 2021-21 on account of corporate social responsibility activities through donations and local welfare activities.

“Similarly, DHAs are self-generating units with no financial contribution from the Pakistan Army. … In the last five years, DHAs have contributed approximately Rs20bn in taxes to the exchequer. The National Logistics Cell … has paid Rs6bn in taxes” over the same period.

The funding of the Frontier Works Organi­sation has not been disclosed, even though it has expended a fortu­­ne on “the construction of roads, railway lines and airfields, construction of dams, canals and barrages, tunnelling, mining and construction of residential and industrial infrastructure. The FWO [has] contributed to the inauguration of Kartar­pur border crossing, Mak­ran Coastal Highway, road network in former Fata as well as Balochistan, M-8, N-85 and the rehabilitation of Sukkur Barrage and the construction of Pakistan’s first special hospital to treat infectious diseases at Islamabad in only 40 days”.

Other areas in which Gen Bajwa has demonstrated leadership, the report concludes, are dispute settlements (Turkey and Reko Diq), security to CPEC projects, NCOC and Covid-19 support, urban flooding, countering the locust threat, military diplomacy and international relations.

History may have a different view of Gen Bajwa’s stewardship. Some may wonder why he oscillated, all too often, between being a re­­luctant autocrat and a uniformed democrat.

The government has yet to announce the name of Gen Bajwa’s successor as COAS. Whoever it is, he might care to avoid the example of his four predecessors — Generals Pervez Musharraf, Ashfaq Kayani, Raheel Sharif and Qamar Bajwa. They have left behind damaged swagger sticks.

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