**Towards the cliff**

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[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

Infested with severe political uncertainty, the country needed someone responsible to take charge, call a spade a spade, and take steps to bring normalcy. Guess what? By default, the events of 9th May have brought the most powerful stakeholder out in the open to take charge. By resolving to ‘strengthen democratic process’, the Army has made an important point. While staying ‘apolitical’, it will ensure that democracy prevails in the country so that economic activity could be ‘reinvigorated’.

Flashback. A fragile coalition Government was busy dealing with unprecedented inflation and tricky foreign policy issues while enjoying the accruing perks and privileges; the main opposition party was struggling to get its leader back to power; Parliament wore a deserted look; Judiciary was trying to look neutral while putting its own house in order; and, a divided Media were caught up in the ratings-race in the midst of several audio and video leaks. On the other hand, the heated debate on who would be the next COAS was about to end. The nation was keen to know whether the new Chief would take the difficult responsibility of holding the fort.

[Fresh westerly wave to bring rainfall in Sindh, Balochistan](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-May-2023/fresh-westerly-wave-to-bring-rainfall-in-sindh-balochistan)

This was Nov 2022.

Then came a bolt from the blue…!! The outgoing COAS stated: ‘Our army, which is busy serving the nation day and night, is subjected to criticism from time to time. I believe the major reason has been the military’s interference in politics for the past 70 years, which is unconstitutional. Therefore, in February last year, the military decided after a lot of deliberation that it would never again interfere in any political matter in the future. I assure you we are strictly committed to it.’ The ISPR has effectively put every question to the contrary to rest by reiterating the Institution’s strictly security-bound role of safeguarding the country’s borders, and sovereignty, and continuing with its endeavours regarding counterterrorism. How long would it take the Army to prepare for its ‘apolitical’ role and leave politics at the mercy of politicians was not known. However, following the revelation of ‘interference in politics for the past 70 years’, the doubting Thomas refused to believe in any such sea-change in Pakistan.

[Khusro Bakhtiar quits Imran Khan’s PTI](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-May-2023/khusro-bakhtiar-quits-imran-khan-s-pti)

Fast forward. This is May 2023. Khan spells out the reasons for his miseries in one sentence, ‘It is the Army Chief.’ Then the unthinkable happened…!! The 9th of May saw ‘PTI’s lust for power’ achieving what Pakistan’s ‘enemy had failed to do in 75 years.’ Khan’s temporary arrest on corruption charges triggered widespread protests across the country, resulting in the ransacking of the Lahore Corps Commander’s residence; breach of the Army’s Headquarters; vandalism of military monuments; and stone-pelting at military convoys. Indeed, a sad day for Pakistan…!!

A Special Corps Commanders meeting was in order. It ‘revealed’ that a plan that was ‘executed to malign the Institution and provoke it towards giving an impulsive reaction’, was hatched. Resultantly, based on some ‘irrefutable evidence’, the identified planners, instigators, and abettors along with those involved in ‘vicious’ propaganda warfare would be brought to justice through trials under relevant laws of Pakistan including the Pakistan Army Act and Official Secret Act. It was declared that ‘restraint will no longer be exercised under any circumstances’ indicating the resolve to stage a real showdown. Following this path, the Commanders seemed sure of restoring ‘public confidence, reinvigorate economic activity and strengthen the democratic process.’

[Imran Khan challenges search warrants for Zaman park residence](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-May-2023/imran-khan-challenges-search-warrants-for-zaman-park-residence)

The statement that ‘restraint will no longer be exercised under any circumstances’ suggests a two-prong approach. One, that action will be taken against the miscreants as some ‘irrefutable evidence’ is available. Two, that any such untoward incident in the future would not be allowed. In either case, the Army High Command has decided to deal with past and future such eventualities with an iron hand. The battle lines, thus, seem drawn….!!

Since the ultimate objective is to ‘restore public confidence, reinvigorate economic activity, and strengthen the democratic process’, every precautionary measure would be taken to minimize the damage. As the ‘enemy’ this time around is of a different nature, the concerned military strategies might have to be honed accordingly.

Any student of military history would know about Maneuver Warfare that seeks to shatter the enemy’s overall cohesion and will to fight. A ‘Chokepoint’ could be created as a force multiplier to restrict the attacker from advancing any further. If pitched battles are to be avoided, the Fabian Strategy could be employed thereby wearing down the ‘enemy’ and causing attrition, disrupting supply, and affecting morale. Or the Elastic Defence that would force the ‘enemy’ to spread out before launching a defensive counterattack on its weak points. Finally, God forbid, there is Blitzkrieg whereby a rapid overwhelming force is employed to break through the enemy’s lines of defence, dislocate and unbalance it before the decisive Vernichtungsschlacht, the battle of annihilation. (Expectedly, sensing the winds, some notable birds have already left the flock while others are waiting in the wings. The message has been received loud and clear.)

[PM urges businessmen to help govt in creating jobs, enhancing exports](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-May-2023/pm-urges-businessmen-to-help-govt-in-creating-jobs-enhancing-exports)

Bottom line? All options are available if the invisible ‘Operation Clean-up’ fails in achieving immediate objectives. However, all said and done, wisdom demands that all concerned should sit together and find an amicable political solution to a political problem. Now that Khan has learned a few lessons in Pakistani political science, such a huddle might prove effective and beneficial for the country’s political future.

A word of caution for Islamabad. The Government of the day must not get relaxed assuming that now the battle was between Khan and the Army. Instead, they may prepare for doing a little overtime as the coming days may require them to ‘do more’……!!!!