

## 11 The Kargil conflict's impact on Pakistani politics and society

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The Kargil conflict evokes contradictory images and responses among Pakistani elites and the public. Although precious few people in Pakistan understand what actually occurred on the frigid heights in the Kargil-Dras sector of Indian-held Kashmir, popular perceptions of the conflict have profoundly affected politics and civil–military relations in Pakistan. Seven years after the Kargil conflict, in his memoirs General Pervez Musharraf claimed that the prime minister Nawaz Sharif was fully informed about the operation, that Kargil was a successful operation, and that the prime minister showed a lack of statesmanship by running to Washington and quickly yielding to US pressure to withdraw troops from Kargil.<sup>1</sup> Nawaz Sharif was quick to refute Musharraf's claims. He categorically denied any knowledge about the operation and claimed that he learned about the incursion from Indian prime minister Vajpayee.<sup>2</sup> This controversy led political leaders to demand investigation by a Parliamentary Committee. Some retired generals alleged that Kargil compromised Pakistan's position on Kashmir.<sup>3</sup> These allegations notwithstanding, the evidence about Kargil remains murky and both civil and military elites continue to contest the facts.

This chapter provides four main observations about the impact of the Kargil crisis on Pakistani politics and society. First, elite opinion in Pakistan remains fractured. Analysis of the Kargil operation – its purpose, its conduct, and its resolution – varies widely in press accounts and commentary, allowing different commentators to use selective media coverage to articulate their messages for their audience. The government's insistence on the *mujahideen* cover story significantly complicated not only the Pakistani media's reporting of the conflict but also Pakistan's

<sup>1</sup> Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 95–98.

<sup>2</sup> Nawaz Sharif's interview with Tahir Siddique, *The Herald* (Karachi), June 2006, 38–39.

<sup>3</sup> Raja Zafar ul-Haq, Chairman PML-N, [www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C10%5C20%5Cstory\\_20-10-2006](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C10%5C20%5Cstory_20-10-2006).

media-management strategy. Because Kargil was a clandestine operation, the Pakistan army was not in a position to provide the national media access to the war zone.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the Indian media was much more unified and coherent, and played an effective part in the Indian government's public relations strategy after it recovered from its early surprise.

Second, the Kargil conflict had an enormous impact on Pakistan's domestic politics. The mainstream political parties – the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) and the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) – were conspicuously silent during the crisis. In contrast, the religious right exploited the crisis to mobilize public opinion and generate political support. The religious parties attacked the civilian government and occasionally made spiteful comments about the military's role. Pakistani religious groups insisted that the military and the *jehadi* groups had waged a successful war, but that their valiant gains were lost on the political front by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who caved in to Indian-influenced US pressures and ordered the withdrawal of forces from tactically superior positions. After the Washington Declaration, the religious parties became more strident in demanding Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's removal.<sup>5</sup>

The third argument is that the Kargil crisis widened the gulf between the civilian and military leadership, and that ultimately led to the October military coup. Apparently, Kargil did not generate any serious discontent within the army's junior officer corps or *jawans* (soldiers) against the senior military command, but it does appear to have caused resentment against the civilian leadership – further discrediting political parties and the democratic process in the eyes of the Pakistan military.

Finally, the conflict increased the discomfort already apparent in Washington and other foreign capitals regarding Pakistan's ability to become a responsible nuclear weapons power. Conversely, it heightened India's reputation as a moderate, responsible nuclear state, and marked a

<sup>4</sup> The nearest media reporters could access the military front was by the nearby garrison of Skardu, about 60 miles from the battlefield, almost a day journey by road.

<sup>5</sup> Addressing a protest rally at Nasir Bagh, Lahore on 24 July 1999, Qazi Hussain Ahmad demanded: "it is imperative for the resolution of Kashmir issue and for the safety and solidarity of the country that Nawaz Sharif be removed from the office of the Prime Minister." Qazi charged that Nawaz had committed "an unforgivable crime by showing cowardice against a besieged army in Kashmir. It was shameful for the head of the only nuclear Muslim state to accept becoming a satellite state of India, despite having a historical and tactical edge over the enemy. The accord is nothing except to implement American New World Order with Indian hegemony in the region." Quoted in *The Nation* (Lahore), 25 July 1999. For more on this theme, see, Zahid Hussain, "Beating a Hasty Retreat," *Newsline*, July 1999, 21–23.

vivid enhancement in Indo-US relations, while Pakistan struggled to recover its reputation.

This chapter analyzes the tensions and contradictions that emerged in Pakistani politics and society in the wake of the Kargil conflict. The first section analyzes the literature and print media narratives of Pakistani commentators. The second section explains Kargil's impact on Pakistani domestic politics. The third section explains how and why national and religious political parties, *jehadi* groups, and the military perceived and responded to the conflict and its aftermath. The fourth and fifth sections analyze how the mismanagement of the crisis resulted in the military coup and created further civil–military tensions after the coup.

### The Pakistani print media's Kargil

A review of Pakistani journalism on the Kargil affair reveals that elite opinion is fractured. There were and still are divergent, albeit overlapping, views on the causes and conduct of the Kargil operation and, even more so, on its outcome. The outcome of the war came under more public scrutiny and debate than the actual conduct of the war itself because the media had (and still has) little access to reliable information about the actual conduct of the war. Thus journalists had to confine themselves to reporting on the tangible results of the conflict. As the crisis unfolded, domestic criticism increased as the international media uncovered Pakistan's involvement in the conflict and as the international community intensified calls for Pakistan to completely withdraw its military forces back across the Kashmir Line of Control (LoC). Several Pakistani groups expressed their disapproval: the *jehadi* groups and religious parties who felt that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had given in to the Americans; the English print media for the government's ill-conceived operational and diplomatic planning; and the armed forces after the prime minister tried to blame them for the whole Kargil episode.

A qualitative distinction must be drawn between the Urdu and English print media and the mindsets they reflect and promote.<sup>6</sup> However, it needs to be recognized that the dominant discourse in Pakistani print media with regard to the conflict has been Islamist and realist. The liberal worldview is marginal and largely confined to the English print media. Urdu print media tend to be more sensational, less investigative, and also have a tendency to portray the views and demands of religious groups with

<sup>6</sup> This interpretation is based on several conversations with Pakistani journalists, particularly Khaled Ahmed of the *Friday Times* (Lahore) and I. A. Rehman and Altaf Hasan Qureshi of the *Urdu Digest*.

great passion and strong rhetoric. Despite these limitations, the Urdu media do mobilize public opinion in Pakistan.

The English print media has matured considerably. It is more critical and less sensational than the Urdu media. It also tends to be progressive, liberal, conscious of its credibility, and generally more responsible. While the analysis and commentary in the English-language press are of high quality, most English-language journalists are not investigative reporters. This is evident in the lacunae in the commentary presented in the English-language media, although it is notable that by July 1999, several credible and highly critical pieces on the Kargil operation had appeared in several of the country's English-language newspapers and monthlies.<sup>7</sup>

Two related factors significantly constrained the ability of the Pakistani media to report and make educated commentary on the Kargil operation. First, the government had made it quite clear that this was a *mujahideen* operation, with only the political and moral support of the Pakistan government. Some commentators ran with this analysis, even after it became apparent that this was simply a government cover story for an entirely military operation. Second, the government restricted access to the Northern Areas – though it is unclear how eager the press was to travel and report from Skardu or elsewhere in this remote part of Pakistan. These governmental limitations were critical to keep the *mujahideen* cover story alive, and they necessarily limited investigative reporting. Kargil war coverage was downplayed in the Pakistani media. This contrasts markedly with India's media coverage of the conflict, which was able to bring the campaign onto the televisions in millions of Indian homes. Kargil became India's first "media war," which helped create more support among people for the Indian government's actions. Consequently, the media-management strategies of India succeeded and those of Pakistan failed.

Urdu- and English-speaking journalists have different mindsets. They reflect two different worldviews and voice the concerns of different constituencies in Pakistani society. English journalists are better educated and informed, and therefore are more professional in their approach. Nevertheless, Urdu newspapers have a much wider audience: almost 90 percent of the newspaper-reading population read an Urdu newspaper. The Urdu print media play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Maleeha Lodhi, "The Kargil Crisis: Anatomy of a Debacle," *Newsline*, July 1999, and Ardeshr Cowasjee, "Lesson Learnt," *Dawn*, 11 July 1999; "Endgame," *Dawn*, 18 July 1999. M. Ilyas Khan has written several pieces critical of Kargil's handling. See "Life After Kargil," *The Herald* (Karachi), July 2000, 24–30; "The Waiting Game," *The Herald* (Karachi), July 2003, 36–41; and "Business as Usual," *The Herald* (Karachi), July 2003, 38–39.

informing the public on a very wide variety of issues. The Urdu media do feature some diversity of views; however, their sensational style on occasion can inflame emotions. How effectively do they promote democratic norms versus authoritarian tendencies? Opinions differ, but by and large academics and policymakers agree that the Urdu print media have developed to a level that their voices cannot be muzzled – even though they are a little more susceptible to manipulation, regulation, disinformation, and control as compared to the English print media.

The degree of freedom of the Pakistani press can be measured by analyzing the wide variety of coverage the print media gave to India's May 1998 nuclear-test explosions, the February 1999 Lahore peace process, and the Kargil conflict. Urdu media reporting on the May 1998 Indian nuclear tests was very outspoken and placed tremendous pressure on the Pakistan government to respond in kind.<sup>8</sup> There was a healthy debate on the Lahore Declaration.<sup>9</sup> But the Urdu media discourse on Kargil mainly reproduced the *jehadi* euphoria that had become so prevalent throughout Pakistani society.<sup>10</sup> These episodes showed that the print media had become an important barometer of public opinion and also an effective instrument used to influence public opinion on specific issues. Ironically, the civilian and military governments in Pakistan continue to control, regulate, and suppress independent voices, but both the Urdu- and English-language journalism communities have shown considerable vigor and vitality in defending freedom of expression. The coverage of the Kargil crisis was a good test case of freedom of journalistic expression in Pakistan.

Kargil revealed two facets of the Pakistani print media. On the one hand, investigative reporting is still weak. The journalism community had neither the resources nor the will to report on the actual conduct of the war. It is obvious that the government was not keen to provide any opportunity for journalists to report on the nature and conduct of the military operations, especially in the early weeks of the crisis. The investigative role was covered largely by the Western and Indian media. On the other hand, many Pakistani political commentators were strident in presenting a critical appraisal of the conflict. For purposes of convenience and brevity, the commentators will be divided into three categories: liberals, Islamists, and realists.

Liberal commentators took the lead in criticizing the country's civil-military leadership, informing the citizens, and also defining the public

<sup>8</sup> See especially the stories appearing in *Daily Jang* and *Nawa-I-Waqat*, 8–30 May 1998.

<sup>9</sup> See *Nawa-I-Waqat*, 15 February to 15 March 1999.

<sup>10</sup> See *Daily Ausaf* (Lahore) and *Daily Pakistan* (Lahore).

discourse. Most liberal narratives revolved around the theme of injury to national pride, humiliation, bankruptcy of ruling elites, and betrayal of the people. They were critical of faulty military planning and incompetent civilian leadership. Thus, it was not the war, but the manner of withdrawal that was perceived as humiliating and compromising to “national dignity.”<sup>11</sup>

Liberal commentators articulated the outrage against the Washington Declaration in terms of injury to national pride, rather than military or diplomatic defeat. From the perspective of most of these journalists, the dominance of the military in Pakistan’s political system and the military elite’s attitude toward politics have been the primary causes of Pakistan’s problems. The Kargil intrusion was portrayed as yet another manifestation of this unending story. The liberal commentators echoed the popular question: will Pakistani elites ever shed their adventurous and reckless policies? Inadvertently, these narratives also gave boost to anti-American sentiment among the English-speaking classes in the country. These writings produced skepticism about any sympathy from the Clinton administration toward Pakistan’s position.<sup>12</sup> The liberal journalists thus criticized the military’s handling of the Kargil operation, the incompetence of the civilian leadership, and the American “tilt” toward India. However, they offered no suggestion about how to escape the quagmire; nor did they provide an alternate vision of crisis management.

Interestingly, the Western media, particularly the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), provided some credible early reports that exposed the Pakistani military’s support of the *mujahideen*.<sup>13</sup> Upon these reports, the Indian media launched a blistering attack on Pakistan as a state

<sup>11</sup> Ayaz Amir wrote in *Dawn* on 9 July 1999: “Kargil intrusion was a blunder, there was no reason to panic. Pakistan still had options before it which, if sensibly exercised, could have brought out a withdrawal without a minimum loss of national dignity.” He repeated the same theme a month later: “humiliated in that crisis [Kargil] and subsequently humbled in Washington, our circumstances are now so reduced that India thinks it can push us around and get away with anything. So not only does it shoot our aircraft, it also has the gall to send in helicopters and steal the wreckage. It is a measure of our helplessness that we cannot completely stop the theft.” *Dawn*, 13 August 1999. For a similar critique, see Irfan Hussain, “The Cost of Kargil,” *Dawn*, 14 August 1999; Ardeshir Cowasjee, “Lesson Learnt,” *Dawn*, 11 July 1999; “Endgame,” *Dawn*, 18 July 1999; and “Non-official Component,” *Dawn*, 19 September 1999.

<sup>12</sup> According to one June 1999 commentary, “Pakistan’s misfortunes” climaxed when the US House Foreign Relations Committee, “adopted with an overwhelming majority [22–5 vote] an anti-Pakistan resolution accusing it of precipitating the Kargil conflict and urging President Clinton to consider opposing the release of financial assistance to Pakistan from lending agencies unless the Pakistani forces were withdrawn.” Hasan Ali Shahzeb, “Clueless in Washington,” *Newsline*, July 1999, 23.

<sup>13</sup> The BBC reporting is available at [www.bbc.co.uk/hi/English/world/south\\_asia/05July1999](http://www.bbc.co.uk/hi/English/world/south_asia/05July1999).

sponsor of terrorists, particularly targeting the military as “rogue,” adventurous, and out of the control of the civilian leadership.<sup>14</sup> The Indian media and commentators were skillful in appealing to the sensibilities of the West that the military in Pakistan was the real culprit as it defied and deceived the civilian leadership. From the Indian perspective, success would mean “taming the Pakistan army” and convincing others to declare Pakistan a “terrorist state.”<sup>15</sup>

Islamist commentators, mostly in the Urdu press, focused their attention not on domestic factors in Pakistan, but rather on the perceived hostility of India and the United States. Urdu commentaries argued that a growing Washington–New Delhi conspiracy had targeted Islamic forces, which in their view were gaining momentum in Pakistan, particularly with the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> The Islamists advocated moral and material support to various Muslim groups, from Chechnya to Kashmir, which were combating the ruthlessness of the repressive states. They believed that the United States perceived the rise and success of these pan-Islamic movements as a challenge to its global hegemony.

<sup>14</sup> J. N. Dixit made a similar assertion, “Pakistan cannot be trusted ... The objective should be to exhaust Pakistan and convince it that its military/terrorist misadventures will not be allowed to succeed.” In “A Defining Moment,” *Guns and Yellow Roses: Essays on the Kargil War*, ed. Sankarshan Thakur (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1999), 205.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Gurmeet Kanwal, a retired Indian army officer then still in uniform, expressed this anti-Pakistan-military sentiment: “India’s problems in Kashmir will remain until Pakistan’s army is tamed ... the real problem between India and Pakistan is the Pakistan army and its abnormal influence in Pakistan’s affairs and not Kashmir or any other issue.” Gurmeet Kanwal, “Nawaz Sharif’s Damning Disclosures,” *Pioneer*, 16 August 2000.

<sup>16</sup> The Islamist viewpoint was reflected by Urdu columnists such as Abdul Qadir Hasan in *Daily Jang*, Altaf Hasan Qureshi in *Urdu Digest*, Hamid Mir in *Daily Ausaf*, Mujeeb-ur-Rehamn Shami in *Weekly Zindigi*, and editorials of *Nawa-I-Waqat*. *Monthly Baidar Digest (Urdu)*, a self-declared mouthpiece of intellectual and philosophical activities of the Mujahideen-e-Islam, extensively reported on the *jehadi* groups, their political and military connections, and stories of jihad. Its editorials portrayed Osama bin Laden as a holy warrior, the Taliban as a model Islamic government, and America as a “great Satan” bent on destroying them. See the issues of June 1998, October 2000, December 2000, January 2001. The trader-merchants of Lahore apparently support the *Monthly Baidar Digest*. For fascinating coverage of the views of Pakistani opinion builders on Kargil, particularly the perceptions of a leader of Lashkar-e-Taiba and the editors of *Nawa-I-Waqat* and *Ausaf*, see Bharat Bhushan, “In the ‘Enemy Country,’” in Thakur, ed., *Guns and Yellow Roses*, 95–122. For an enthusiastic depiction of the military-*jehadi* connection and claims of how “Mujahideen humbled the might of India” and why “Mujahideen of Kargil” and “Mujahideen of Afghanistan” have been denied the fruits of their struggles, see an interesting interpretation by the former chief of the Pakistan army, General (retd.) Mirza Aslam Beg, “Kargil Withdrawal and Rogue Army Image,” *Defence Journal* (September 1999).

Islamist commentators were so convinced about the righteousness of their cause that they asserted the *mujahideen* were successful in imposing heavy casualties upon the Indian military fighting in the Kargil heights and elsewhere in Kashmir. To undermine the impending victory, this reporting maintained that the United States applied pressure on Pakistan and rescued India from an inevitable military defeat. The Islamist narratives constructed an anti-Islamic “axis of evil” led by the United States, India, and Israel. These narratives were conjectural at best. Yet, they had a profound impact on public consciousness in Pakistan. A significant number of Pakistanis believe that the United States and India cooperate in ways that are inimical to Muslim interests. This belief has grown even stronger in the aftermath of the US-led military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq and unrelated statements by American and Indian officials of the US–Indian strategic partnership.<sup>17</sup>

The realist position has been expressed mostly by former civil servants and academics who analyzed Kargil from the perspective of the endemic conflict between India and Pakistan. These commentaries highlighted the centrality of nuclear weapons, and implied how deterrence worked in keeping the conflict confined, and yet projected Kashmir as a potential “nuclear flash point.” Some realists took an alarmist position and argued that the risks of strategic misperceptions, brinkmanship, and miscalculation could trigger a nuclear war between India and Pakistan. It is in this context that they weaved a link between Kashmir and nuclear weapons, and claimed the United States and India were conniving to weaken Pakistan’s national security and nuclear program.<sup>18</sup>

Between the Kargil conflict and the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, the liberal, Islamist, and realist narratives all reinforced the anti-American sentiment among the Pakistani populace. In the post-Kargil phase, the liberal, progressive, tolerant, and democratic

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Maulana Tufail Muhammad, “Events September 11 and the Real Objectives of America,” *Jang*, 12 April 2004, [www.jang.com.pk/jang/apr2002-daily/09-04-2002](http://www.jang.com.pk/jang/apr2002-daily/09-04-2002). The former Jamaat-e-Islami chief contends that American Zionists who supported the Bush administration are promoting India to contain the Islamic world, while he also draws parallels between the conditions of Palestinians and the plight of the Kashmiris.

<sup>18</sup> See the realist views expressed by former Foreign Service officers Afzal Mahmud (“Seeing Kargil in Perspective,” *Dawn*, 18 July 1999, and “India’s Aggressive Posture,” *Dawn*, 31 January 2000) and Tanvir Ahmad Khan (“Kashmir: The Global Context,” *Dawn*, 13 July 1999). For a hawkish, deterrence-driven assessment of the Kargil conflict, see Shireen Mazari, “Low Intensity Conflicts: The New War in South Asia,” *Defence Journal*, July 1999, and “Re-Examining Kargil,” *Defence Journal*, June 2000. For a more recent, full-blown account, see, Shireen M. Mazari, *The Kargil Conflict 1999: Separating Fact from Fiction* (Islamabad: Ferozsons, 2003), esp. 42–63.



dispensations of Pakistani civil society were further constrained. The reporting on Kargil and its aftermath also brought to the surface the absence of consensus among the highest echelons of political and strategic decision-makers. At both the national and global levels, the intricate relationship between the Pakistani state and the Islamic militants became a matter of concern and debate. Kargil also roused speculation about the nature of the relationship between the mainstream religious political parties, such as Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam, and the *jehadi* groups. At the elite level, Kargil struck at the very roots of the government's relations with Pakistani religious groups. At the societal level, it showed how potent the religious groups had become in defining the parameters of public discourse in Pakistani society. However, once Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Washington, DC on 4 July 1999 and accepted the regime's involvement in the conflict by agreeing to order a full withdrawal from the Kargil heights, the full public debate ensued.

It could be argued that Kargil provided the political elites and the mainstream national political parties with a great opportunity to build consensus and redefine relations with the military and the religious groups. However, the political leadership could not rise to the occasion and seize the moment. Had Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif after the Washington Declaration reached out to the political parties, various Islamic groups, and also the military perhaps a process could have been initiated to improve decision-making mechanisms in the Pakistani institutions and power elites. There was a real possibility – and a real need – to rebuild trust among the state institutions after the Kargil conflict and to focus the system on how to avoid the recurrence of such a debacle. Instead, the civilian leadership, obsessed with threats to its continued rule, spent most of its energy on devising ways to sort out the military.<sup>19</sup> This brought to the fore not the system-corrective but system-reactive responses from the liberal media: how to sort out the military. Kargil revealed an intense need in Pakistan to rebuild linkages between different institutions. However, there was no way to begin such a discussion without one side attempting to implicate the other for the “failure” of the Kargil operation. After the crisis, the relationship between Nawaz Sharif and the military was irreparably damaged.

<sup>19</sup> It is possible that the political fallout from the Kargil conflict was more of an excuse than a reason for the prime minister to reduce the influence of the military. After all, prior to this crisis, Nawaz Sharif successfully stripped all meaningful power from the office of the president and also the institution of the judiciary of Pakistan. He also forced Pervez Musharraf's predecessor, Jehangir Karamat, to resign as army chief.

### The domestic political impact

Kargil was a clandestine operation, and the secret nature of the operation compelled the government to remain tight-lipped about it. Partially, but not entirely, as a consequence, the government had great difficulty in explaining the rationale of the intrusion and the subsequent fighting. In other words, the war itself had little or no effect on public consciousness, nor did the Pakistan government seem to have made any conscious effort to take the people into confidence about the war effort – probably because the government never contemplated a war. The planners of Kargil never anticipated the profound impact the operation could have on the domestic politics and external relations of Pakistan.

First, the Pakistani public came to believe that the junior officers and *jawans* (soldiers) of the Pakistan army fought valiantly under adverse environmental conditions and the flawed war plans of the “generals.” Kargil did produce skepticism among the populace about the war-winning strategies of the senior military leadership. Second, it brought the relationship between Pakistan-based *jehadi* groups and the Pakistani state under serious review and public scrutiny by the national and international media. Especially after 11 September 2001, the international community became more vigorous in exposing the links between the military and the *jehadi* groups and forced President Musharraf to reexamine its alleged involvement with some of these groups. Third, Kargil also revealed the disarray of pro-democracy and liberal forces in Pakistani civil society, which failed to realign and capitalize on the variance of interest between the *jehadi* groups and the military. Both the PML and the PPP found it difficult to build any bipartisan consensus on the after-effects of Kargil or to counter the rising tide of *jehadi* groups and their impact on society and politics. Fourth, following Kargil, the military was under pressure not only to redefine its relationship with the *jehadi* groups, but also to alter the entire framework of Pakistan’s Kashmir policy, which was defined by the military. Since 1989, Pakistan had supported the uprising in Indian-held Kashmir by not constricting the *jehadi* groups in cross-border violations. In the post-Kargil phase, the United States asked Pakistan to curb what it viewed as “cross-border terrorism” and restore a peace process. By September and October 1999 Nawaz’s government was showing indications of a future crackdown on *jehadi* groups, while simultaneously preparing to “sort out” the army chief. This sorting out ultimately precipitated the military takeover. No tears were shed over the ouster of Sharif; in fact, the government’s credibility had sunk so low that the Pakistani public showed signs of relief and many welcomed the coup. Finally, the planners of Kargil had not imagined how its outcome would

drastically alter US–Pakistan relations. Kargil brought a paradigm shift in the US–India relationship and redefined the terms of engagement for the United States in South Asia.

What follows is an assesment of how Kargil influenced the behavior of the religious political parties, the national political parties, and the armed forces. Each pursued an extremely narrow and partisan agenda, failing to evolve a coherent strategy or develop a national vision in a situation of national crisis. As noted at the outset of the chapter, the conflict exposed the absence of elite consensus, proportionately raised the dominance of the military in decision-making, and revealed that the civilian government's control over national security issues and the military was cosmetic and precarious. In particular, it examines how the religious political parties outmaneuvered their mainstream counterparts during and after the Kargil conflict, and also analyzes how the crisis – and subsequent blame game – exposed and then exacerbated the civil–military divide in Pakistan.

### **The religious parties outflank the mainstream**

In early 1999, as the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif embarked on the Lahore peace process, it was obvious to most observers that he had not built sufficient consensus to carry along the political parties, particularly the religious right. Consequently, when the Kargil episode unfolded in May–June 1999, the religious political parties were already on a warpath with the government. They seized the opportunity and were quick to project Kargil as a *jehadi* affair – yet another holy war. They adopted a dual strategy of mobilizing the masses and confronting the government. Their political approach in the summer of 1999 actually was an extension of the steadily increasing political role they had played in Pakistani politics and society, especially during the last decade of civilian rule in Pakistan, from 1988 to 1999.

The political and ideological usage of Islam – and Islamization – has gained momentum in Pakistan since the country's independence in 1947. More than a belief system, Islam became a particularly potent instrument of mass mobilization in the Pakistani polity and society to protest the creeping authoritarianism of the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto government of the 1970s. It is in this context that the religious parties have structural roots, as well as cultural and political legitimacy. On the domestic front, religious political parties have propounded and sought to reform society and political institutions by demanding the implementation and enforcement of Shariah (Islamic laws). During Pakistan's most recent period of civilian rule from 1988 to 1999, the Pakistani religious right also had gained greater influence in the government's deliberations on foreign policy matters, especially on India and

Table 11.1 *Party share of votes: all-Pakistan National Assembly elections*

	1988		1990		1993		1997	
	% of votes	Seats won	% of votes	Seats won	% of votes	Seats won	% of votes	Seats won
PML-N/IJI	30.16	54	37.37	106	39.86	72	45.88	134
PPA/PDA	38.52	93	36.83	44	37.85	86	21.80	18
MQM	5.37	13	5.54	15	-	-	3.55	12
JUI (F)	1.84	7	2.94	6	2.40	4	1.61	2
ANP	2.09	2	1.68	6	1.67	3	2.31	9
JWP/BNA	0.36	2	0.61	2	0.27	2	0.29	2
BNP	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.66	3
PKMA/PMAI	0.24	0	0.35	1	0.49	3	0.33	0
Others	1.92	6	4.38	5	12.46	21	9.20	2
IND	19.50	27	10.30	22	7.40	15	14.37	22
Total	100	204	100	207	100	206	100	204

Afghanistan. It is ironic that the parties in charge – both the PPP and the PML-N – faced slow erosion in their influence and increasing difficulty in defining their policy goals toward their northern and eastern neighbors – an opportunity that was seized by the religious right.

In the elections from 1988 to 1997, the voting strength of religious parties remained no more than 3 percent, as shown in Table 11.1.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> This table is taken from *The Herald*, March 1997. PML-N/IJI is the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz Sharif faction). In 1988 when Islami Jamhuri Ittehad (IJI) was formed, the two League factions were PML-N and the Pakistan Muslim League (Junejo). IJI was formed on 8 October 1988, and on 10 October Jamaat-e-Islami also joined. PPA/PDA is the Pakistan Peoples Alliance/Pakistan Democratic Alliance, an alliance dominated by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), then led by Benazir Bhutto. It has a national support base as a mainstream liberal party. MQM was originally called Muhajir Qaumi Movement, and is now called the Muttahida Qaumi Mahaz. It has a predominantly Karachi-Hyderabad base and claims to represent the interests and voice of Urdu-speaking and Muhajirs – those who migrated to Pakistan after 1947. JUI-F Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam has two factions, one headed by Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, the other by Maulana Sami-ul-Haq (JUI-S). These two factions of Jamiat traditionally have been popular in two provinces of Pakistan: the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan. Explicitly religious political parties, they do have support bases in Punjab and Sindh. JUI factions are the backbone of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), the six-religious-party coalition. ANP is Awami National Party, a Pashtun nationalist, secular party with socialist orientation, with primarily support from NWFP and to a lesser extent Baluchistan. JWP is Jamhuri Watan Party, a Baluchistan-based regional party. BNA is Baluch National Alliance, another Baluchistan-based regional party. BNP is Baluchistan National Party, another Baluchistan-based regional party. PKMA/PMAI is the Pakistan Kissan Mazdur Alliance (Peasant, Labour) Pakistan and Mazdur Awami Ittehad, which are small leftist/Marxist movements that participate in elections for symbolic reasons. IND means independent candidates who have traditional constituencies and after electoral victory make bargains with the political parties that would best serve their interest/agendas.

The weak electoral showing of Pakistan's religious parties cannot provide an accurate indication of their true political power. It is not the small support base of religious parties or their failure in elections, but the clamor they make in raising demands for Islamization of laws that projects them as a large force on the national scene. More importantly, they have created an environment of trepidation in which espousing liberal causes could be equated with rejecting Islamic Shariah. Most of the religious parties have a small but loyal following cadre of committed workers who possess an enormous capacity to mobilize mass support for religious issues or ignite agitation on issues that they oppose.

Pakistan's two largest religious political parties – the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) – reacted strenuously to the Kargil conflict. The JI, led by Qazi Hussain Ahmed, is the only religious political party in the country that has a small but strong party cadre, whose members are recruited through a rigorous process, and which holds elections for top party positions. The JI has a support base among the traders, public officials, and semiliterate groups in the urban centers of Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), and in urban Sindh, especially in the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad. Since late 1960s, the JI has been able to win support from sympathizers and develop ideological linkages with the Pakistan army and governmental bureaucracy. These connections peaked when Zia ul-Haq was president in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The JI and the JUI are mainstream religious political parties. They have participated consistently in the electoral process and have taken part in coalition governments in various phases of Pakistan's history. These religious parties also have supported and at times made alliances with the military regimes in Pakistan; yet from the sidelines they have also shown forbearance for the electoral process. As noted above, these religious political parties have built coalitions in situations of crisis and pursued mass mobilization and regime confrontation. During and after the 2002 elections, these religious parties have demonstrated considerable coalition building skills and pragmatism. They have sustained the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) coalition and also retained power in the two provinces of NWFP and Baluchistan. The MMA did not approve of Pakistan's abandoning of the Taliban and President Musharraf's pro-US tilt, but they refrained from launching a full-scale confrontation with the Musharraf government, recognizing that such a confrontation likely would lead to the dissolution of the provincial governments.

The JUI has two factions. Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman leads JUI-F and Maulana Sami-ul-Haq leads the other, JUI-S. Both of these factions have a strong support base in Baluchistan and the NWFP, and also have a significant following among the trade-merchant classes in Punjab. The

JUI ulema (religious hierarchy) consider themselves to be the guardians of and successors to the Deobandi tradition in Islam. The Pesh Imams (prayer leaders) of the two factions of JUI dominate and control mosques in rural and urban Pakistan. The JI has been marginal in controlling the mosques and therefore has a predominantly urban support base.<sup>21</sup>

The JUI-F and JUI-S gained the status of spiritual and political mentors of the Taliban movement. The JUI madrassas (religious schools) in the NWFP and Baluchistan were prominent breeding grounds for the Taliban. Emerging from these madrassas, the Taliban rose and swept through Afghanistan in 1994.<sup>22</sup> In 1993, while the JUI-F was a coalition partner to the Benazir Bhutto government, Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman was chosen as the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the Parliament of Pakistan. He held that largely ceremonial but highly visible position until 1996 – during the very years that the Taliban grew and captured Kabul. It was an important trendsetter and morale booster for the religious right. It established that religious leaders could have a role in voicing their concerns on foreign policy issues and also closely observe, if not influence, the formulation of foreign policy. Major General (ret.) Naseer Ullah Baber, who was interior minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto from 1993 to 1996, played a key role in coordinating Pakistan's Afghanistan policy and developing ties with the JUI. Under the Interior Ministry's supervision, JUI-Taliban connections were nurtured. Thus the JUI-F and JUI-S assumed the role of defenders of the Taliban and also become more vocal in advocating a Taliban-like Islamic government for Pakistan. Interestingly, however, the JUI-F supported the Lahore peace process in 1999, even while the JI protested against it. It reluctantly began to distance itself from the government of Nawaz Sharif when the prime minister grew antagonistic toward the Taliban and showed inclination to support the deportation of Osama bin Laden from Afghanistan. Between July and October 1999, as the Nawaz Sharif government began to adopt what the religious right saw as "anti-Kashmir *mujahideen*" and "anti-Taliban" measures, the religious parties began to explore ways to minimize their differences and built coalitions to combat these hostile policies, which they perceived were driven by the "American agenda."

<sup>21</sup> For details and an overview of the JUI, see Sayyid A. S. Pirzada, *The Politics of the Jamiat ulema-i-Islam 1971–77* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon: Afghanistan 1994–97* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 17–27; and Ahmed Rashid, "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1999): 22–35.

A significant change that occurred in the post-Kargil phase and does not seem to have received adequate attention was that the conflict brought the JI, the JUI-F, and the Taliban closer to one another. Interaction among the three groups intensified in an unusual manner when the provincial *naib ameer* (vice-president) of JI, Dr. Yaqub, visited Afghanistan in August 1999.<sup>23</sup> Prior to this visit, relations between the JI and the Taliban had remained cool and tense because of the Taliban's hostile attitude toward Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (who had been closely allied with the JI during the Afghan war against the Soviets in the 1980s), and his forced exile in Iran after the Taliban came to power. In their public pronouncements, the leaders of the three religious parties vociferously denounced the United States and also criticized the Pakistan military's role in agreeing to support the withdrawal of *mujahideen* from Kargil and for turning their backs on the Taliban for not handing over Osama bin Laden to America.<sup>24</sup> These religious parties felt that the military was simply succumbing to the US pressure to appease India, which they believed was on the run but was favored by Washington.

In their perception, the ejection of "the *jehadis*" from Kargil was an American action. Adding insult to injury, this policy was portrayed as being done at the behest of India. The JI, JUI, and the *jehadi* groups believed that the United States and India put pressure on the Sharif government to curb fundamentalism and sought Pakistan's help in capturing Osama bin Laden. To counter this perceived threat, groups on the religious right began to form a broad coalition. The religious groups raucously maintained that the military and the *jehadi* groups had waged a successful war, but that their valiant gains were lost on the political front. Obviously, the religious groups downplayed – and still downplay – the Pakistan military's complete involvement. Indeed, many in the Pakistan armed forces hold similar views. Anti-American sentiments are common in the military not just because of US sanctions on Pakistan in 1990 owing to nonproliferation concerns, in 1998 because of the nuclear tests, and in 1999 because of the military coup, but also because of a widespread perception of Washington's heavy-handed and uneven pressure on Pakistan during the Kargil affair.<sup>25</sup>

Professor Khurshheed Ahmed propounded the Jamaat-e-Islami position on Kargil: "after conquering the peaks of Kargil, the climb down and

<sup>23</sup> Behroz Khan, "For the Love of Islam," *Newsline*, August 1999, 43–44.

<sup>24</sup> Ismail Khan, "For the Love of Islam," *Newsline*, August 1999, 57–58.

<sup>25</sup> Shireen Mazari's book, *The Kargil Conflict 1999*, is especially revealing as a reflection of anti-American sentiment within senior military circles in Pakistan.

humiliation of the Washington declaration and retreat of the *mujahideen* has created a complex situation which has made the old wounds bleed again and has endangered the very existence of the country and the freedom of its people.” Khursheed lamented that the withdrawal from Kargil “has distorted the Kashmir issue and has stabbed the Jihad movement in the back. It has rendered even our nuclear deterrence ineffective and has very adversely affected our defense capability and morale of the fighting forces.”<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, the JI view coincided with and somewhat reflected what many in the Pakistan military felt then. There was no real partnership between the JI and the military leadership at the time, but such views published mostly in the Urdu press were widely read by soldiers, followers of *jehadi* groups, religious party supporters, and ordinary citizens. This narrative did have a profound impact on public consciousness and partly explains the continuing mystique of the *mujahideen* role in Kargil even today.<sup>27</sup>

After the Kargil withdrawal, Khursheed Ahmed questioned the personal integrity and “patriotism” of Nawaz Sharif, declared the prime minister a “security risk,” and called for the overthrow of the government. An editorial in the Jamaat’s official mouthpiece, *Tarjuman ul Quran*, echoed the same theme. It exhorted “all the *jehadi* forces to hold on their positions on this point firmly with resolve and unity.” Then in a style characteristic of JI, the editorial, without any shred of evidence, harped that “some American and Jewish circles wish to take advantage of India’s imbroglio and drag it into a war so as to secretly target the nuclear installations of Pakistan.”<sup>28</sup> Islamists have been prolific in splashing and echoing this convoluted message. One editorial ran, “America is the sworn enemy of Osama bin Laden. In order to get him, the United States could commit any terrorist act in any Muslim state. In order to curb and disband religious organizations, it is necessary to flare up sectarianism – we cannot rule out the role of the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Indian Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and Israeli Mossad in converting sectarianism into terrorism to discredit the *mujahideen*.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Professor Khursheed Ahmed, “The Washington Declaration and Retreat from Kargil,” [www.Jamaat.org/Isharat/index/htm/sept.1999](http://www.Jamaat.org/Isharat/index/htm/sept.1999).

<sup>27</sup> C. Christine Fair observes in chapter 9 in this book that this lauding of the militant groups and neglect of the NLI soldiers’ efforts had its own impacts.

<sup>28</sup> *Tarjuman ul Quran* editorial, July 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Author’s translation of editorial from *Takbeer*, 13 October 1999, 5. Also see the many statements by Qazi Hussain Ahmed, Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, Maulana M. Ajmal Khan (JUI-F), and Senator Abid Hussain al Hussaini, secretary (Wahdat-e-Islami), insinuating CIA and RAW involvement in sectarian killings in Pakistan to discredit the religious parties, *Takbeer*, 13 October 1999. Strangely, a few years ago such writings



Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman readily articulated the JUI-F position: “JUI was of the opinion that the withdrawal from Kargil would put an end to the Kashmir issue once and for all.” Rehman condemned the Washington Declaration because he felt that it “betrayed the people and *mujahideen* of Kashmir where [the] freedom movement had received a great setback.” He asserted that the Pakistani people want to change the government and replace it with a “new system based on Islamic principles.” In a conjectural way, the JUI leader weaved a linkage between Kargil and the Taliban “and warned that a withdrawal from Kargil will lead to a US attack on Afghanistan and will be a blow to jihad.”<sup>30</sup> In the post-Kargil phase, JUI-F has relentlessly defended the Taliban and advocated Taliban-style Islamic government in Pakistan.<sup>31</sup>

The religious parties played off the Kargil withdrawal to redefine the country’s political discourse and subsequently became more vocal in promoting Islamization. The Kargil episode also enabled these religious groups to develop an effective strategy of regime confrontation and mass mobilization against the Nawaz Sharif government. That experience came in handy during the October 2002 election campaign in the two provinces of NWFP and Baluchistan. At that time, the religious parties formed a six-party coalition called the MMA. They mobilized mass support in opposing both the US-led war in Afghanistan and the Musharraf government for supporting the US campaign against terrorism. This strategy proved fruitful. For the first time in Pakistan’s electoral history, a coalition of religious parties emerged as the third largest party in Pakistan’s national assembly, winning fifty-two seats and 11 percent of the total votes polled.<sup>32</sup>

### Political management and mismanagement

By the summer of 1999, Nawaz Sharif was the leader of the party that dominated the Pakistani parliament, and in turn dominated Pakistani civilian institutions. It was his party that, upon Sharif’s wishes, was able to emasculate the office of the President and the Supreme Court. But the Sharif government suffered a fatal flaw: it was highly personalized in its

would have been considered comical and devoid of any validity or serious research. However, growing Indo-Israeli ties and the expanding US–India strategic partnership have helped these messages to register in the public consciousness.

<sup>30</sup> Statement by Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, *Dawn*, 12 July 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Amir Meer, “Crusade,” *Newsline*, October 1999, 65–69. Also see Dr. Inam Ullah Khan, “Taliban Movement: Analysis and Suggestions,” *Monthly Baidar Digest* (Urdu), January 2000: 31–34.

<sup>32</sup> The PPP won 25 percent, and the Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-i-Azam) (PML-Q) earned 24 percent of the total votes cast.

decision-making. When a real crisis appeared, Sharif and his cadre of advisors were unable to overcome the breakdown between Pakistani institutions that had occurred in the 1990s. This inability to formulate a coherent message not only weakened Pakistan's position internationally, it also weakened the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) in its competition with the religious parties and, to a lesser extent, the Pakistan Peoples Party, and ultimately set the stage for a future civil–military showdown.

The PML-N and its leadership could do little to explain why the Kargil operation was imperative for Pakistan. It opted to put the blame on the army at a time when charges of civilian corruption and mismanagement were on the rise. At the same time, the PML-N's chief mainstream competitor, the PPP, also failed to capture the public sentiment or develop a coherent strategy to challenge the Nawaz Sharif government. As a result, Kargil marginalized the national parties, and the incompetence of their leadership severely damaged and constrained the liberal and progressive voices in Pakistan. It is in this context that we may look at the support base of these national parties and how their leadership responded to the crisis.

Pakistan's two major national political parties, the PPP and PML, have amorphous and uneven support bases, cutting across all regions of the country. Their leadership hails from different areas and they have office-holders and branches in every province. National political parties accept elections as a vital condition for democracy. Therefore, the leadership of national parties and their candidates participate vigorously in the electoral process and make promises to strengthen governance through democracy. In the 1990s, the PPP and the PML maintained themselves as national political parties. Both acquired power twice, forming governments at the federal level as well as in the provinces. Ironically, both did little to promote conditions for good governance and democracy. They violated the rule of law, failed to tolerate dissent, encouraged confrontations rather than consensus-building, and ultimately failed to strengthen the country's representative institutions – the parliament, autonomous groups, and civil society – which are essential for efficient governance and democracy. Both political parties have remained elitist: landlords, tribal chiefs, business groups, and a few urban professionals dominate their leadership. These parties were so occupied with acquiring and perpetuating power and preserving the status quo that they failed to comprehend the scale of *jehadi* fervor that Pakistan's religious groups and *jehadi* networks had produced. The domestic hue and cry over Kargil came as a complete surprise: the PML-N and PPP were practically paralyzed and unable to respond.

The immediate political consequences of Kargil are best analyzed by focusing on the second term of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, which may

be divided into three phases. In the first phase, from October 1997 to May 1998, Sharif sought to consolidate power. On the one hand, he revealed democratic dispensations, pursued politics of accommodation and coalition-building, and constructed a coalition government at the federal level. In the process, he strengthened the federalist spirit in Pakistan.<sup>33</sup> However, these hopeful tendencies contrasted markedly with more vicious and authoritarian moves to seize power. He initiated a series of events that were designed to emasculate the presidency and the judiciary.

Following the nuclear tests in May 1998, the prime minister and his close associates began to suffer from delusions of invincibility and adopted a do-it-alone policy, gradually wrecking the national coalition and consensus. During the second phase, from May 1998 to the beginning of the Kargil conflict in May 1999, Prime Minister Sharif decided to assert his newly consolidated power. Having removed the chief justice, replaced the president, and done away with the federal and provincial coalition governments that he had so skillfully built in the first year, he also replaced the chiefs of the navy and air force. Finally, in October 1998, he forced the resignation of General Jehangir Karamat, the army chief, only three months before his scheduled retirement date. As brought out by Feroz Hassan Khan, Peter R. Lavoy, and Christopher Clary in chapter 3 of this book, the army did not take such an unprecedented, intrusive move lightly – in particular because of Karamat's very short remaining tenure. The prime minister promoted and appointed General Pervez Musharraf to replace Karamat. Musharraf spent the next week assembling his team and making important appointments. By the end of 1998, Sharif controlled two-thirds of the parliament, and had successfully demonstrated primacy over the presidency, the judiciary, and the army.

The seeds of civil–military distrust were sown at the very outset of General Pervez Musharraf's appointment as Chief of Army Staff (COAS). Three days later, on 10 October, the prime minister removed the chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISID), Lieutenant General Nasim Rana, and appointed Lieutenant General Ziauddin in his place – a move that was not well received by the army.<sup>34</sup> The army was already wary of the prime minister's intrusive approach in its internal

<sup>33</sup> Hasan Askari Rizvi, "Civil–Military Relations in Contemporary Pakistan," *Survival* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 96–113.

<sup>34</sup> As a matter of convention and procedure, the ISID chief is appointed in consultation with the COAS. The Military Secretariat proposes the name to the COAS, who forwards it the Ministry of Defence, which puts it up to the prime minister for final selection/approval. The military grudgingly accepted the appointment, but quietly upgraded the parallel Military Intelligence organization. Information based on interviews with senior Pakistan military officers.

affairs and was willing to protect its institutional interests. In any case, it needs to be recognized that the COAS maintains his authority and the functional autonomy of the army by relying on and operating through formation commanders. Thus, even early on, the ISID chief was an “outsider” – a Nawaz loyalist – and later events were to prove that. While pursuing the subordination of the military, had the prime minister and the party in power shown democratic dispensation or taken steps to strengthen the party system and the judiciary, or shown respect for freedom of the press – steps that could have proved conducive for establishing supremacy of the elected leadership over the military – civilian supremacy over the military could have materialized.

Sharif was not content to play a subtle form of power consolidation, however. He sought to curb the media, thus causing uproar and outrage at both the national and the global levels.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, his freedom of maneuver had been dramatically constrained economically and internationally. Sharif’s May 1998 decision to reciprocate India’s nuclear tests had triggered international sanctions against Pakistan – sanctions that were more damaging to Pakistan than India. Sharif’s decision to freeze foreign currency accounts caused serious hardship and resentment among the populace. At the same time, the “Cooperatives Scandal,” which had emerged earlier in 1997, was also generating popular concern about the country’s financial trajectory.<sup>36</sup> Abroad, Sharif was under intense international pressure to resolve outstanding conflicts and build confidence with India. Foreign secretary-level talks were held in Islamabad in October 1998 on peace and security issues – talks in which the military was engaged and supportive. Outside pressure on Sharif culminated in a December 1998 trip to Washington, DC to meet with US president Bill Clinton.

During the third phase of Sharif’s rule – which began with the Lahore peace process, was rocked by Kargil, and ended in October 1999 – Sharif struggled to rescue the government from the various missteps that had been made. The unfolding of Kargil raised several questions: first, did the civilian leadership and the military have a common strategic vision of Indo-Pakistani relations? The Kargil episode, following so shortly after the Lahore peace process, revealed that the two were working at cross-purposes. However, once the events unfolded, the civil and military

<sup>35</sup> Amir Mir, “The Midnight Knock,” *Newsline*, May 1999, 29–30.

<sup>36</sup> The Cooperatives Scandal was a junk-bond crisis in Pakistan. Companies with close ties to serving politicians, including those in the Nawaz Sharif government, had been selling corporate debt to the public with high rates of return, but when these companies collapsed, thousands of middle-class Pakistanis lost their investments.

leadership put on a brave face and insisted that everyone was on board. Within weeks after the Washington Declaration the unease between civilian and military leaders began to surface. Second, did Pakistan's institutions function properly? Specifically, were institutions such as the Defence Cabinet Committee (DCC) fully and effectively utilized to monitor the operational plan proposed by the army? Most accounts appear to convey at best that the civilian control of the military was precarious and decision-making highly personalized. At the worst, it has been suggested that Nawaz Sharif either had no clue what the army was doing or could hardly comprehend the complexities of the operation, if and when given briefings on the subject.<sup>37</sup>

After Sharif's December 1998 visit to the United States, the momentum for substantive India-Pakistan talks grew rapidly. The peace and security talks between India and Pakistan, which previously had been managed by both countries at a bureaucratic level, were overwhelmed by Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Lahore initiative. The military was increasingly concerned that Sharif's highly personalized and erratic decision-making style was inappropriate for Indo-Pakistani negotiations, which could permanently impact Pakistani national security. The military was concerned that Sharif was getting carried away with the dynamics of the process leading to Lahore. Ground realities could not, in the military's opinion, be altered so quickly.

This institutional disconnect was epitomized in the decision to continue with Kargil. Sharif had visited Skardu for briefings on Kargil on 29 January and the Kel sector on 5 February 1999, nearly simultaneously with the first press reports of Prime Minister Vajpayee's intention to travel to Pakistan during the bus route's opening.<sup>38</sup> In other words, Sharif had approved the progression down two incompatible tracks pursued by the Foreign Office and the armed forces, respectively. Had Sharif institutionalized these decisions, and if the Foreign Office knew about the military's moves, it seems unlikely that these professionals would not grasp the obvious cross-purposes in the two policies. The army's General Headquarters (GHQ), however, knew of both developments, and its

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Chaudhry Iftikhar, Rawalpindi, 19 January 2003. Also see, Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 34–55, 87–108. Khan, Lavoy, and Clary provide a detailed discussion in chapter 3 of this book.

<sup>38</sup> Discussion of Sharif's trips to the 10 Corps area of operations can be found in Mazari, *The Kargil Conflict 1999*, 55–58. Early press accounts include K. K. Katyal, "PM to Take Bus to Lahore," *The Hindu*, 4 February 1999 and Malina Parthasarathy, "US Sees Potential in Indo-Pak 'Bus Diplomacy,'" *The Hindu*, 6 February 1999. Also see Robert J. Wirsing, *Kashmir in the Shadow of War: Regional Rivalries in the Nuclear Age* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 18–25.

inability to foresee the implications of these two incompatible tracts was inexcusable – though even key directorates of the GHQ, much less the navy and the air force, were not fully aware of the developments on the Kargil heights.<sup>39</sup> The secret nature of the planning and execution, combined with the belief that the mission would remain limited to 10 Corps, meant that even the military hierarchy had a limited understanding of the ramifications of the Kargil operation. As a result, even though Pakistan launched the surprise operation, initially with success, when it encountered Indian resistance, Pakistan's national security institutions were what were really put into disarray.

This institutional breakdown is highlighted even further in Robert Wirsing's recent account of back-channel talks between India and Pakistan during March and June 1999. Nine rounds of secret talks took place between Nawaz Sharif's representative, Niaz A. Naik, and Atal Behari Vajpayee's delegate, R. K. Mishra. Wirsing appears to convey that the two negotiators not only respected each other's views and sensitivities but were also convinced that in order to have any resolution of the Kashmir dispute the two sides would need to move beyond their stated positions.<sup>40</sup> This account reinforces the view that the relevant decision-making bodies were either out of the loop or that there was no communication among the military, ISID, Foreign Office and prime minister's office on these crucial secret talks.

As Kargil unfolded, the Pakistani national security apparatus was dumbfounded about how to respond. The Foreign Office, prime minister's office, and the military had been pursuing two separate tracks, which diverged further after the Indian prime minister's February visit to Lahore. As Pakistani troops were already in motion to seize territory across the LoC near the Indian town of Kargil, the political breakthrough at Lahore took almost everyone by surprise. Momentum in both directions was growing, and Sharif and the military proved unable or unwilling to reverse the Kargil operation. Perhaps it would have been easier to reverse this operation if it were not proceeding excellently on the ground. Pakistani troops were able to maintain surprise and had begun to seize large swathes of Indian territory.

An arrangement in such tension is unsustainable. Two ripples disturbed the stillness of March, April, and May. On 12 April, India tested its new Agni-2 ballistic missile. This was the first such test since the May 1998 nuclear detonations. More significantly, on 15 April, the BJP-led government in India lost a no-confidence motion in the parliament.

<sup>39</sup> Interviews by the CCC research team with senior Pakistani military officers and government officials.

<sup>40</sup> Wirsing, *Kashmir in the Shadow of War*, 25–36.

Finally, though, the stillness was truly shattered when Indian troops discovered intruders on their side of the LoC on 28 April 1999. Although it took India several days to recover from the surprise, India's national security institutions ultimately worked well together to produce a coherent Indian response. Pakistan, however, was at a loss to explain whether independent *jehadis* or its own military forces carried out the operation. It also was at a loss to explain how it would respond to the fighting around Kargil. Fearful from perceived threats on multiple fronts, Nawaz Sharif flew to Washington, DC – uninvited – to seek a way out of his international and domestic crises.

The prime minister's meeting with President Clinton on 4 July 1999 and the signing of the Washington Declaration sealed his fate. In the popular perception, Nawaz Sharif came to be seen as a leader who had no vision or comprehension about Pakistan's strategic interests and vital national goals. A number of accounts reinforce the perception about Nawaz Sharif as a clueless leader. For example, Shaheen Sehbai, then the *Dawn* correspondent in Washington, DC, reported that the prime minister looked "resigned ... unruffled by the enormity of the occasion." According to Bruce Riedel (who took the only notes during the Clinton–Sharif meeting): "The PM was distraught, deeply worried about the direction the crisis was going ... his own hold on power and the threat from his military chiefs who were pressing for a tough stand."<sup>41</sup> In his autobiography even Musharraf asserts that, "International pressure had a demoralizing effect on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif."<sup>42</sup>

It is widely recognized that Sharif's decision-making style was highly personalized and confined to a few select associates. The cabinet had one or two briefings on Kargil, but there were hardly any discussions on the possible political implications of the conflict. The party leadership was least equipped to evolve a response as the government sought political and diplomatic resolutions to the conflict. In a situation of national crisis, the prime minister was unable to win the goodwill of the main opposition party in the parliament, the PPP, even though earlier, for the Lahore peace process, he was able to carry it along. More importantly, in this hour of crisis, the PML government failed to win the support of its former regional coalition partners, including the Awami National Party, Muhajir Qaumi Movement, and the Baluchistan National Movement. Instead of mobilizing the party leadership to build consensus, the prime minister

<sup>41</sup> An early and insightful account of the meeting between President Clinton and Prime Minister Sharif was provided by Shaheen Sehbai, "Blair House to Kargil," *Dawn*, 13 July 1999. See also chapter 5 in this book by Bruce Riedel (quotation on p. 000).

<sup>42</sup> Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*, 93.

relied on his younger brother, Shahbaz Sharif, the chief minister of Punjab, to defend and rescue his government. It reflected how isolated and nepotistic he had become. Thus, in the post-Kargil phase, Shahbaz Sharif emerged as the crisis manager for the government, which undermined the federal government's credibility, evoked criticism from the opponents, and also diminished the chief minister's management of the provincial government. Since the prime minister kept the defense portfolio to himself, it was widely reported in the Pakistani media that he allowed PML politicians and ministers, such as Choudhry Nisar and Mushahid Hussain, as well as his brother, Shahbaz Sharif, to meddle in the affairs of the military, which was not seen kindly within the armed forces.<sup>43</sup>

Choudhry Nisar and Shahbaz Sharif served as crucial "message carriers" between the prime minister's secretariat and the army GHQ.<sup>44</sup> This view gains further credence by examining the events and circumstances between the Kargil conflict and the October 1999 military coup. Shahbaz Sharif's role as "crisis manager" and "broker" for the federal government reached its climax when he and the ISID chief, Lieutenant General Ziauddin, visited the United States from 14 to 25 September 1999. During their meetings, it appears they offered to take a harder line against the Taliban while also agreeing to provide Pakistani assistance to find Osama bin Laden. At the same time, they apparently expressed their fears to US officials that Sharif was in danger of being overthrown by the Pakistan armed forces. In response, Reuters quoted an unnamed US official in Washington as saying, "We hope there will be no return to the days of interrupted democracy in Pakistan." Further, the official let it be known that Washington would oppose "any extra-constitutional actions" in Pakistan.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Amir Mir, "The Army Strikes Back," *Newsline*, October 1999, 30–34.

<sup>44</sup> Based on private conversations with senior officials in the Punjab bureaucracy.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, 40–41. In a 12 October 1999 briefing, US State Department spokesman James Rubin repeated the US stance by saying that, "we were concerned about the extra constitutional measure" and that "Pakistan's constitution must be respected not only its letter but spirit." Transcript: State Department Noon Briefing, 12 October 1999. The US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Karl Inderfurth's testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 14 October 1999 is equally revealing. While referring to the house arrest of General Ziauddin, Nawaz Sharif, and Shahbaz Sharif, he asserted: "we call upon the current Pakistani authorities to assure their safety and well being." Karl F. Inderfurth, Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, 14 October 1999, [www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1999\\_h/991014\\_inderfurth\\_tst.htm](http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/congress/1999_h/991014_inderfurth_tst.htm). These pronouncements and degree of interest shown by US officials led many to ask if Nawaz Sharif was seeking US support to remove Musharraf. It seems highly speculative but has led analysts such as Tariq Ali to assert that Musharraf's takeover was "the first time that the army seized power without the approval of Washington." Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihadis and Modernity* (London: Verso, 2002), 200. Another news report speculated that perhaps a "deal" was struck between the Nawaz government and the Clinton



This statement and the visit by Shahbaz Sharif was celebrated and seen as an important victory for the Sharif government. In reality, it was an ephemeral victory and showed that the government had lost its domestic political support and moral authority to rule. After the visit, a badly bruised and injured Pakistan government took a hard-line position against the *jehadi* groups and the Taliban, and also attempted to distance itself from the religious political parties. However, this action proved to be too little, too late.

### The coup and its aftermath

By early September 1999, it was clear to many Pakistanis that a showdown between Sharif and Musharraf was imminent. For both the prime minister's office and the army, it was difficult to imagine blame for Kargil being apportioned without one or the other losing decisively. The military was also increasingly concerned with what it perceived to be Sharif's misrule and poor management. At the same time, as Owen Bennett Jones notes, at a mid-September corps commanders meeting, "the generals decided that the army could not move without clear justification. But if Sharif tried to sack Musharraf, the corps commanders agreed, then they would act: to lose two army chiefs in the space of a year would be unacceptable."<sup>46</sup>

Shortly after the mid-September meeting of the senior military leadership, Lt. Gen. Tariq Pervez, Corps Commander for Quetta, met privately with Nawaz Sharif and informed the prime minister that if he moved against Musharraf the army would respond. But Sharif, in turn, dispatched Shahbaz Sharif and Lt. Gen. Ziauddin to Washington, and received in return supporting statements by US officials on 20 September. The trip demonstrated only Sharif's domestic weakness. Musharraf was made full chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee in the first week of October – either to appease Musharraf or as an attempt to provide Musharraf an easy offramp out of the more powerful Chief of Army Staff position. Immediately after receiving this additional position, Musharraf demanded and received Tariq Pervez's resignation, having learned of his back-channel communication with the prime minister. Musharraf then left on a fateful trip to Sri Lanka for a meeting of South Asian military chiefs.

administration that in return for supporting the appointment of Ziauddin as COAS, Pakistan would sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), make peace with India, and curb *jehadi* groups. Amir Mir, "The Army Strikes Back," *Newsline*, October 1999, 33–34. Both interpretations are highly speculative, but what is evident is that the civil–military consensus that was assiduously built in Pakistan at the time of Kargil fell apart by September, when the personal and policy differences between the Nawaz government and the military surfaced and culminated in the October coup.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, 39.

The story of the coup itself is not the subject of this chapter; but when Sharif decided to move against Musharraf, the dominos were tipped. The prime minister's groundless attempt to remove Musharraf as army chief was unacceptable – even more so when he was abroad. The army moved quickly to execute a “counter-coup.” Sharif's gambit had failed, and he was ousted by the military, making way for Musharraf's safe landing at Karachi airport.

Many Pakistanis, particularly those close to the Sharif government, feel that Sharif was ousted in part because he was demanding a reappraisal of the military's ties with the Taliban regime. Reportedly, the military was concerned that the Sharif government was giving too many concessions to the Clinton administration as it sought to further isolate the Taliban regime and pursue al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. During the September visit by Shahbaz Sharif and Ziauddin, plans to coordinate operations against bin Laden were discussed. By October, the Sharif government had dispatched ISID chief Ziauddin to Kabul to ask for the deportation of bin Laden and, when that failed, Sharif ordered ISID to cease its support of Taliban groups along the Pakistani–Afghan border. The order was issued on 11 October, one day before the coup, and was never implemented.<sup>47</sup> Others argue that the Sharif administration's change of heart about the Taliban had more to do with its fears of an ensuing coup and attempts to receive support from the Clinton administration than anything else. This line of argument concludes that while Musharraf did stop cooperation with the United States on a commando raid to seize bin Laden after the October coup, this was significant, but by no means the cause of Sharif's ouster.<sup>48</sup>

Regardless of its causes, the military coup had several effects on politics and society. First, it further deepened Pakistan's international isolation. Pakistan now triggered almost all possible US sanctions, though it still avoided being listed as a state sponsor of terror. Second, Musharraf's

<sup>47</sup> Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquie, *Forbidden Truth: US–Taliban Secret Oil Diplomacy and the Failed Hunt for Bin Laden* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002); and Amir Meer, “The Army Strikes Back,” *Newsline*, October 1999, 30–34.

<sup>48</sup> Steve Coll's excellent *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004) describes how persistent the United States had been during September and October 1999 in putting pressure on the Nawaz government to abandon the Taliban and help capture Osama bin Laden. This account also explains how the Pakistan military grew suspicious over the way the ISID chief, General Ziauddin, was conducting himself on behalf of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Aside from acting independently of the army high command, in the eyes of army chief and army top brass, the ISID chief was working against the army's institutional interest; and that was significant enough to disrupt the trust between the civil and military leadership. In short, the prime minister could not persuade the military to revise the government's Afghan policy. See esp. 478–480.

disgust at a decade of PPP and PML-N misrule led him to politically exclude the leadership of these two mainstream parties. From the membership of these two parties, he crafted a “king’s party,” which would support him in his rule after parliament was reconvened in 2002. In the meantime, the mainstream parties were allowed to wither on the vine. Further, post-9/11, the religious parties were able to take advantage of international events and this domestic-leadership vacuum to gain greater prominence. So while Musharraf opposed and was opposed by the religious parties, he inadvertently aided them. Finally, in the disarray of Pakistani political institutions that typically characterizes a coup, previous military regimes had generally sought partnership with the bureaucracy, particularly the celebrated and powerful Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP). The military regime of General Musharraf departed from the old pattern. The regime decided to uproot the linchpin administrative role of the CSP and its offshoot, the District Management Group (DMG). It demolished the “colonial relic of Deputy Commissioner” and declared its aim to empower the elected public official at the grass-roots level. The regime recast itself as the dominant governor relegating civil bureaucracy to a subordinate role. Like many military rulers, Musharraf was prone to technocratic solutions, and as a result he redefined the role of the bureaucracy in his government.

### **Conclusion**

The Kargil conflict had three principal effects on Pakistani society and politics. First, it revealed profound institutional cleavages within the Pakistani polity. There were gaps within the military (crucial directorates and the other services were left uninformed about Kargil), there were gaps between the military and the prime minister’s office, there were gaps between the prime minister’s office and his cabinet, and the list could go on further. The press reporting about the conflict and its aftermath reveals the fractured nature of elite opinion in Pakistan. This stands in sharp contrast with the more coherent and unified Indian response.

Second, Kargil set in train a series of events that led directly to the October 1999 coup – possibly in part because the military was increasingly concerned that Sharif was making ill-informed changes in Pakistan’s Afghan policy. While blame for Kargil’s mishandling can be spread between the military and civilian institutions, it was clear that in Pakistan’s political game, determining blame would be a winner-take-all affair. Nawaz Sharif decided he had to move against the military before it moved against him, but he seriously overestimated his strength relative to that of the armed forces. There was no conceivable way the Pakistan army

would allow the removal of two chiefs within a year. The effects of that coup are still being felt today. Kargil, coupled with 9/11, reestablished the supremacy of the military in Pakistani politics – the military assumed the role of a controlling agency in constructing and defining the parameters of party politics; it allowed elections and facilitated the installation of elected governments at local, provincial, and national levels – important steps toward symbolic democracy; it pursued power sharing with a carefully constructed parliament and political parties. But liberal values and democratic dispensations remained weak. The military's preoccupation with political order and institutional supremacy restricted the development of countervailing institutions and civil society; the civil–military disconnect that Kargil caused did not end Pakistan's search for restoring a balance between its security imperatives and democratic aspirations. The debates about the proper relationship between the civil and the military were still unresolved, and looked likely to remain unresolved at least until 2007.

Finally, it is encouraging to note that the deepening of US engagement in South Asia and growing wariness with terrorism at the global level has forced Indian and Pakistani leaders to recognize the dangers of a conflict escalating into a potential nuclear war. The paradigm shift that had begun with Kargil was jolted by the infamous terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, which roused Indian suspicions of a possible US “tilt” toward Pakistan, which the United States quickly attempted to dispel. In the post-September 11 period the United States deepened its engagement in prodding and persuading India and Pakistan to initiate a broad dialogue. The January 2004 restoration of a peace process between India and Pakistan was an outcome of serious behind-the-scenes diplomacy urging the two to recognize the merits of a dialogue process and the resolution of disputes (including Kashmir) through peaceful means. It brightened the prospects of the normalization of relations between India and Pakistan and could usher in a new era where Kargil-like ventures become an exception rather than the norm in South Asia.

