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Inside the Pakistan Army: Moves on the Chessboard

By: Arun Vishwanathan and Ramya PS

On April 9, 2015, Pakistan's Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) put out two short press releases. The two-line press releases gave the names of the [officers promoted](#) from the rank of Maj. General to Lt. General and [details](#) of key new postings.

This was the second major reshuffle that has taken place in the higher echelons of the Pakistan Army after General Raheel Sharif [took over](#) as the [15th Chief of the Pakistan Army](#) in November 2013.

Changes in the Strategic Plans Division

Interestingly, in both cases, there was a change at the helm of the Strategic Plans Division (SPD), the custodian of Pakistani nuclear weapons. This is in [stark contrast](#) to the long period of continuity when Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai was at the helm of the SPD for nearly fourteen years between February 2000 and December 2013.

The December 2013 reshuffle took place barely a month after Gen. Raheel Sharif assumed office. One of the important [appointments](#) was Lt. Gen. Zubair Mohammed Hayat as Director General, SPD, following the retirement of Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai.

Fifteen months after the last incumbent took office, the SPD now has [a new chief](#), Lt. Gen. Mazhar Jamil. An artillery officer, Lt. Gen. Jamil is known to be close to former Pakistan Army Chief Gen. Kayani. He was [promoted](#) to Lt. Gen. during Kayani's tenure, superseding four other generals. [Prior](#) to taking charge of the SPD, Lt. Gen. Jamil had been Military Secretary since September 2013, and Vice Chief of General Staff from 2012 to 2013. Interestingly, Lt. Gen. Jamil [was garrison commander](#) at Abbottabad and Commandant, Pakistan Military Academy (PMA), Kakul when the U.S. Navy SEALs attacked a compound near PMA to kill Osama Bin Laden.

With the second incumbent taking charge of the SPD since Kidwai's departure, a few things are becoming clear about the Pakistani mindset in selecting the individual to lead the SPD. First, there is no fixed term for the post of DG, SPD. The incumbent's term in office will be largely determined by external factors like the retirement of senior generals, and resultant reorganization within the Pakistan Army. Secondly, it is unlikely that an SPD officer is going to rise from within the ranks to head the organization in the near future. This is for the simple reason that no SPD officer has picked up a three-star (Lt. Gen.) rank while staying in the organization. Thirdly, one wonders whether despite the hullabaloo about nuclear weapons, a posting in SPD is not viewed very differently from any other posting like the General Staff or Military Secretary. In the post-Khalid Kidwai era, the personality cult that enveloped the SPD might be ebbing away with bureaucratic inertia taking over.

Next Pakistan Army Chief: Some Crystal Ball Gazing

The latest round of changes in the Pakistan Army are also important because they throw light on Gen. Raheel Sharif's thinking

as he sets up the race for the next Pakistan Army Chief when his term comes to an end in 2016.

When Gen. Sharif appointed Lt. Gen. Zubair Mahmood Hayat as DG, SPD to take over from Khalid Kidwai, there was some speculation that Lt. Gen. Hayat was being sidelined over Gen. Sharif's favorites. Hayat was known to be close to former Army Chief Gen. Kayani and was then commanding the 31 Corps out of Bawalpur. However, in the latest rejig, Hayat has been appointed as Chief of General Staff (CGS) becoming the senior most among current three star generals. Having commanded a corps, the SPD, and now appointed as CGS, Hayat could be a strong candidate for becoming the next Pakistan Army CoAS in 2016. However, going by past experience, the race is never truly over till the "fat lady sings."

Lt. Gen. Hayat hails from a military family with his father having retired as a Lt. General. He has two brothers both of whom serve in the Pakistan Army. Omar Mahmood Hayat was also promoted to Lt. Gen. in the April 2015 round of promotions and is going to [head the Ordnance Factories at Wah](#). His other brother, [Maj. Gen. Amhed Mahmood Hayat](#) also occupies a key post as Director General (Analysis) in the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

Another key aspect of the recent reorganization within the Pakistan Army has been the return of officers close to former Army Chief Kayani to key positions. In addition to the post of Chief of General Staff being occupied by Lt. Gen. Hayat, Lt. Gen. Shahid Baig Mirza was promoted and took charge as Military Secretary. Lt. Gen. Mirza was previously part of Kayani's personal staff. The third Kayani confidant to occupy a key position was Lt. Gen. Mazhar Jamil, who went from being Military Secretary to Director General, Strategic

Plans Division.

The current and the past Pakistan Army Chiefs, Gen. Sharif and Gen. Kayani, [share one important personality trait](#) – both are shy of the limelight, despite maintaining an iron grip over the civilian government. Some view the reshuffle at GHQ, Rawalpindi as part of a bureaucratic tug of war between the Chief and his senior generals. However, one thing is clear: that with General Raheel Sharif's tenure coming to an end in November 2016, the moves on the chessboard are beginning to make sense.

Arun Vishwanathan is Assistant Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. He tweets @ArunVish_. Ramya PS is Junior Research Fellow, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. She tweets at @Ramya0831