Pakistani Army's Political Clout

What is the issue?

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- Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa had recently concluded a high-profile 3 nation tour of Brunei, Malaysia and Maldives.
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- This raised considerable interest as his popularity within Pakistan is rising and he has also called for peace with India – which might mark a new geopolitics.
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What were the contours of his trip?

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- In Mr. Bajwa's three-nation tour, it was his visit to Maldives that gained much attention due the political churn going on in the island.
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- Maldives had only recently lifted the much criticised 45 day emergency that was imposed by its president Yameen to save his government.
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- Mr. Bajwa is hence the 1st high profile delegate to have visited Maldives after the emergency, and he has called for closer ties between both the countries.
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- The visit is all the more significant as the Pakistani PM had only recently declined an invite by the Maldivian government and criticised the emergency.
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- Additionally, considering the aggressive Chinese foray into Maldives, India too has been highly cynical of the island's political situation.
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- Notably, Mr. Bajwa appears to be the most powerful man in Pakistan presently and has also been vocal on political issues within Pakistan.
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What marked the rise of Gen. Bajwa's profile?

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- **Conference -** In early March, Gen Bajwa briefed about 30 top Pakistani journalists for a record 4 hours, which was a first since Gen Pervez Musharraf.
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- The press meet wasn't restricted to "peace and security" alone and the General is said to have answered most question in clear and direct terms.
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- He spoke about the poor shape of the economy, criticised Pakistan's massive social security scheme, and called for bettering civilian institutions and police.
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- Notably, previous army generals too had given out political statements, and this is seen as the army's way to destabilise the civilian administration.
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- **Controversies -** He commended the judiciary for its work, while it is facing accusations of trying to destabilizing the ruling PML government.
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- Additionally, he even stated that politicians need to step up their game and that if martial law was to be imposed, it would be because of their snag.
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- More importantly, he criticized the 18th Constitutional Amendment that devolved more power to provinvcial governments to strengthen democracy.
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- While the amendment had largly been received positively, the general had stated that the provisions were dangerous and could lead to sectarian fissures.
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- **The interpretations -** The contents of the pressmeet have been coined the "Bajwa Doctrine" by the media due to its comprehensiveness.
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- The event genereated a political storm and prompted some to question the intention of the general – which forced the military to issue a clarification.
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- ISPR (military's media wing) had subsequently issued a generic clarification that the Army doesn't wish to derail the civilian democracy.
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What are the security implications of the Bajwa doctrine?

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- On reading between the lines, some analysts state that the General seems to want a proud Pakistan with a peaceful and friendly neighbourhood.
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- But he has made it unambiguous that the Pakistan will continue building its military prowess, in order to respond with muscle if provoked or pressurised.
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- While a compromise on Kashmir looks distant, the general seems to be renouncing war for the cause and is hoping an economic integration first.
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- Interestingly, he mooted further that India and Pakistan should establish trade ties akin to the US-Canada model.
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- He even boldly asserted that Pakistan lacked strategic depth in Afghanistan and stressed the need for promoting peace with Iran and Afghanistan.
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- He also suggested a non-confrontational dialogue with the US to resolve thorny issues, but simultaneously asserting that U.S. can't intimidate Pakistan.
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- For 'de-weaponising' various groups within Pakistan and mainstreaming them, the general had vouched for following the Ireland model, which doesn't distinguish between good and bad terrorist.
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What are the implications for India?

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- Gen Bajwa's views on making peace with India could be perceived as a mere reiteration of Pakistan's traditional position.
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- Hence, India would continue to be sceptical until Pakistan acts against the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), and other militants who are active in Kashmir.
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- However, Mr. Bajwa's reconciliatory tone on issues regarding the US, Afghanistan and China indicates a genuine desire for peace and stability.
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- Hence, the rise of General Bajwa could usher in a new geopolitical reality to the subcontinent and beyond.

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Source: Indian Express

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