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# Pakistan's Strategic Blunder at Kargil

Gurmeet Kanwal

## **Cause of Conflict: Failure of 10 Years of Proxy War**

India's territorial integrity had not been threatened seriously since the 1971 War as it was threatened by Pakistan's ill-conceived military adventure across the Line of Control (LoC) into the Kargil district of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in the summer months of 1999. By infiltrating its army soldiers in civilian clothes across the LoC, to physically occupy ground on the Indian side, Pakistan added a new dimension to its 10-year-old 'proxy war' against India. Pakistan's provocative action compelled India to launch a firm but measured and restrained military operation to clear the intruders.

Operation 'Vijay', finely calibrated to limit military action to the Indian side of the LoC, included air strikes from fighter-ground attack (FGA) aircraft and attack helicopters. Even as the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force (IAF) employed their synergised combat potential to eliminate the intruders and regain the territory occupied by them, the government kept all channels of communication open with Pakistan to ensure that the intrusions were vacated quickly and Pakistan's military adventurism was not allowed to escalate into a larger conflict. On July 26, 1999, the last of the Pakistani intruders was successfully evicted.

Why did Pakistan undertake a military operation that was foredoomed to failure? Clearly, the Pakistani military establishment was becoming increasingly frustrated with India's success in containing the militancy in J&K to within manageable limits and saw in the Kashmiri people's open expression of their preference for returning to normal life, the evaporation of all their hopes and desires to bleed India through a strategy of "a thousand cuts". Prime Minister

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Nawaz Sharif's government appeared to be inclined to accept India's hand of friendship, in keeping with the mood of popular opinion within Pakistan, and was committed to opening up trade, liberalising the visa regime and encouraging people-to-people, cultural and sports contacts. Though it did not feature in black and white in the Lahore Declaration of February 1999, the acceptance of the concept of the LoC as a permanent border between India and Pakistan was gaining currency due to the strong public opinion in this regard in both countries.

Pakistan's military establishment was apparently unable to come to terms with the fact that more than ten years of its concerted efforts in destabilising India through its proxy war in J&K had yielded almost no tangible gains at all. Peace with India would have also led to a diminishing role for the army in Pakistan's affairs and this prospect must have caused immense concern to the military leadership. It was in such a scenario that, in an act more of desperation than anything else, the Pakistan Army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate decided to launch an organised intrusion into unheld remote areas of Kargil district to once again ignite the spark of militancy and gain moral ascendancy over the Indian security forces. They failed miserably in this endeavour.



## Pakistan's Operation Badr

The overall strategic aim of Pakistan in engineering these intrusions under the facade of Kashmiri militancy was obviously to provide a fresh impetus to the flagging *jihad* and again attempt to focus international attention on the Kashmir issue. In the Dras, Mushko Valley and Kaksar sectors, the military aim was to sever the Srinagar-Leh National Highway (NH) 1A to isolate Kargil district and cut India's lifeline to Leh with a view to eventually choking supplies and reinforcements to Indian troops at Saltoro Ridge across the Siachen Glacier. Failing the full achievement of this aim during the summer months of 1999, the Pakistan Army hoped to establish a 'firm base', occupied by regular soldiers, from which traffic on the Srinagar-Leh highway could be disrupted at several places by trained mercenaries within

one day's return march. Occupation of high mountain features overlooking NH 1A was also expected to provide a lucrative opportunity to interdict the highway accurately through artillery fire. Another military aim in these sub-sectors was to open up a new route for infiltration into the Kashmir Valley and the Doda region south of the Pir Panjal range over the Amarnath Mountains.

In the Batalik and Turtok Valley area, which adjoins the Siachen glacial belt, Pakistan attempted to establish a firm base with a view to eventually advancing along the Shyok Valley to cut the only road link to India's Siachen Brigade. As an aim plus, the Pakistan Army had also planned to physically occupy a chunk of real estate on the Indian side of the LoC in Kargil district to use as a bargaining counter subsequently, particularly in respect of future negotiations for a mutual withdrawal from the Siachen Glacier. The capture of 12 trained mercenaries in the Turtok sector revealed that a larger aim was also to spread Islamic fundamentalism in Ladakh. Their interrogation brought to light that Pakistan had planned to execute its Turtok operation in four phases:<sup>1</sup>

- Phase 1 – Infiltrate militants into the area to subvert locals and initiate insurgency.
- Phase 2 – Launch operations to occupy critical areas around Turtok and the adjacent areas.

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- Phase 3 – Launch heliborne/airborne operations in the rear areas of Turtok sector to facilitate operations of ground forces.
- Phase 4 – Declare Turtok and its adjacent areas as part of the Northern Areas.

As per an Indian Army Headquarters assessment, Pakistan had the following military aims:<sup>2</sup>

- Cut off the strategic National Highway 1A (Srinagar-Leh highway).
- Alter the status of the LoC.
- Give impetus to insurgency in Kashmir Valley and elsewhere in J&K.

Even though the actual intrusions took place some time during the spring months of 1999, preparations had clearly been underway for a long time.<sup>3</sup> The major operational task of intruding into Indian territory across the LoC was allotted to Force Commander Northern Areas (FCNA), a division-size force. Pakistan's regular Northern Light Infantry (NLI) battalions were to be employed for the purpose.<sup>4</sup> Well-trained fundamentalist mercenaries from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), Pakistan and several other Islamic countries, armed, equipped, trained and funded by the ISI, were given a supporting role.<sup>5</sup> Their presence in the area was designed to hoodwink the international community into believing that the intrusions were a part of the Kashmiri people's "indigenous freedom movement" and that the Pakistan Army had no role to play.

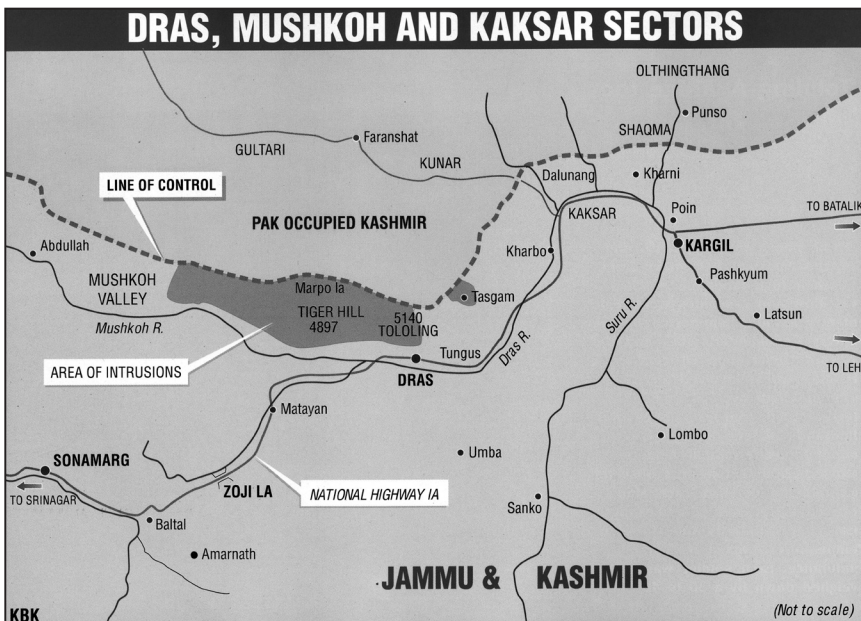
During the period from September 1998 to March 1999, when Zoji La Pass (which separates Kashmir Valley from the Ladakh region of J&K) on the Srinagar-Kargil-Leh highway was closed and the upper reaches of the entire Kargil district were snow-bound, the Pakistan Army was engaged in making extensive preparations for the intrusions planned for the following summer. Additional artillery units<sup>6</sup> were inducted from Pakistan's 11 Corps at Peshawar.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the winter, the nominated regular troops of the NLI, Chitral and Bijaur Scouts and selected Special Service Group (SSG) commandos, carried out extensive training in high-altitude warfare. Headquarters 62 Infantry Brigade of Pakistan was responsible for operations in the Kargil sector. A logistics and operational base for the operations was established at Olthingthang. The Northern Areas were placed under Pakistan Army rule to deny access to the media and "facilitate optimal exploitation of resources."<sup>8</sup>

Due to the militarily impassable nature of the terrain, especially for large-scale sustained military operations, it had been the practice on both the sides to hold only the tactically important features throughout the year. Some additional

posts were normally established during the summer months when the snow began to melt. These were used primarily as patrolling bases from which long-range patrols (LRPs) could be launched to keep the more sensitive areas under surveillance. For over 27 years since the Indian and Pakistan Armies had been at eyeball-to-eyeball contact along almost the entire length of the LoC in J&K after the 1971 War, Pakistan had never disputed the delineation of the LoC in the Kargil sector.<sup>9</sup> Both during 1997 and 1998, Pakistan's efforts to infiltrate large groups of Islamic mercenaries through the Mushko Valley sub-sector had been thwarted.

121 Independent (I) Infantry Brigade, with its headquarters at Kargil, was responsible for operations in the Kargil sector. The brigade group formed part of 3 Infantry Division at Leh which was responsible for operations in Ladakh, including the 140-km-long LoC in Kargil district up to NJ 9842, along the 110-km-long Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) at Siachen Glacier and along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) against China.<sup>10</sup> With only three infantry battalions on its order of battle, the defensive dispositions of 121 (I) Infantry Brigade on the LoC included several large gaps in relatively less threatened areas.

The Pakistan Army's nefarious designs in this sector took India's military planners by surprise. In launching its ill-conceived military adventure in the spring of 1999,<sup>11</sup> Pakistan breached the provisions of the Shimla Agreement and



violated the sanctity of the LoC that had been assiduously maintained by both the sides since 1972. After the heavy snowfalls were over, NLI soldiers transgressed the LoC in large numbers in Mushko Valley, Dras, Kaksar and Batalik sub-sectors and established themselves on the top of high mountain ridgelines (see map). They quickly set about building bunkers and *sangars*, bringing forward their heavy weapons including shoulder-fired Stinger surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), dumping ammunition, rations and other military stores and laying anti-personnel land-mines.<sup>12</sup> In all, the intruders were estimated to have numbered approximately 2,000,<sup>13</sup> though during May 1999, estimates of their total strength had varied from 800 to 1,000.<sup>14</sup>

The extent of intrusions varied from an average four to five kilometres to a maximum of seven to eight kilometres. On average, each major ridgeline was held by 40 to 60 NLI soldiers under the command of an officer. Besides personal weapons with the troops,<sup>15</sup> each post was provided and made self-contained in battalion support weapons such as heavy, medium and light machine guns, rocket launchers, automatic grenade launchers, mortars, anti-aircraft guns (which could also be used in the ground role against assaulting infantry) and Stinger SAMs.<sup>16</sup> Large numbers of plastic anti-personnel mines were indiscriminately laid along the expected approaches to the ridgelines. It was ensured that neighbouring posts were in 'mutual support' so that an attack on one could be seriously interfered with by one or more other posts. In short, the extent of preparation of the defences proved beyond doubt the involvement of the troops of a regular army, and the Indian Army had no illusions about what it was up against.

## India's Heroic Fightback

The first reports of the intrusions came in to an army unit in the Kargil sector from the local people on May 6, 1999.<sup>17</sup> Two reconnaissance patrols that were expeditiously despatched to investigate went missing on May 8 and 10, 1999. On May 9, 1999, Pakistan artillery achieved a direct hit on the ammunition dump in Kargil and it went up in smoke. Extensive patrolling immediately followed over the next few days. The depth of Pakistani intrusions and the extent of preparation soon became evident and plans were made to evict Pakistani troops from the Indian side of the LoC as early as possible and with the least possible casualties. The Indian government also stipulated that the LoC was not to be crossed so as to avoid escalation to a larger conflict.

The military strategy was to contain-evict-deny, that is, to immediately contain and limit the intrusions up to the areas already affected, then prepare

for, and evict, the Pakistani soldiers from the Indian side of the LoC and, finally, enhance surveillance, patrolling and deployment, where necessary, to ensure that the Pakistan Army is denied the opportunity to launch such a venture again. Army Headquarters realised that maximum available firepower would need to be requisitioned, including that of the IAF, to soften enemy positions by way of coordinated preparatory bombardment to reduce the combat potential of the enemy's posts and break his will to fight before infantry battalions could launch physical assaults to regain each position. Cabinet approval for air strikes against the enemy positions within own territory was sought and obtained. The first wave of air-to-ground strikes was launched by FGA aircraft of the IAF on May 26, 1999.

In view of the fact that the Tiger Hill and Tololing complex dominated the Srinagar-Leh highway, the highest priority was accorded to the eviction of the intruders from these features. Next in order of priority was the Batalik-Turtok sub-sector as it provided access to the Siachen region through the Shyok River. (The Turtok sub-sector has since been renamed as Haneefuddin sub-sector after Capt Haneefuddin, a gallant young officer who sacrificed his life in the area.) Relatively lower priority was given to the Mushko Valley and Kaksar sub-sectors as the intrusions in these areas had much less tactical significance.

Besides 3 Infantry Division, additional troops of 8 Mountain Division, engaged in counter-insurgency operations in the Kashmir Valley, were inducted into the Kargil sector. While 3 Infantry Division remained responsible for the Batalik and Kaksar sub-sectors, responsibility for the conduct of operations in the Dras and Mushko Valley sub-sectors was assigned to 8 Mountain Division.<sup>18</sup> Additional infantry battalions, artillery regiments and engineers units were inducted from other sectors in J&K on an as required basis.<sup>19</sup> Logistics plans were fine-tuned to sustain the additional forces in the difficult terrain of the Kargil sector. Fortuitously, Zoji La Pass opened in early May 1999 (it normally opens only by mid-June every year) and the induction of additional combat forces and

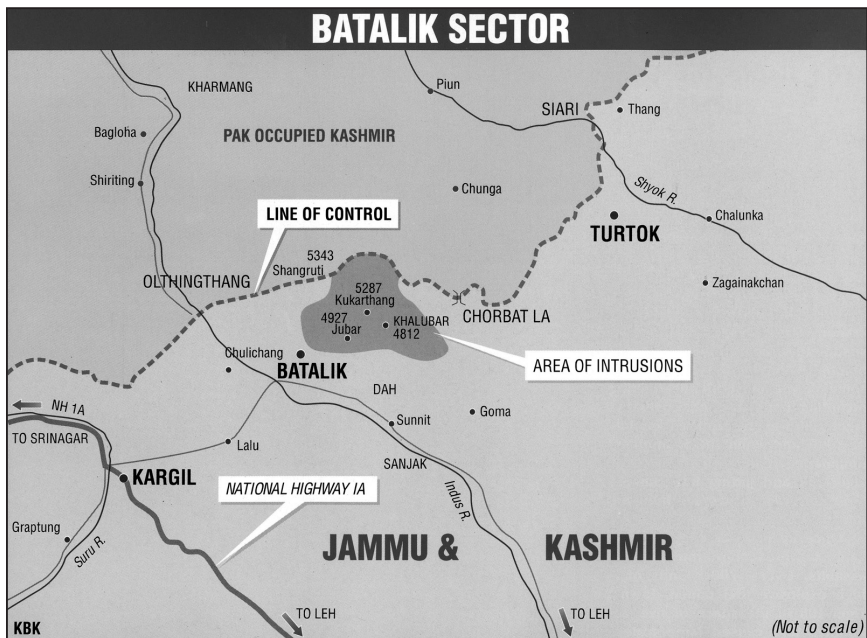
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logistics units became possible when it was most required. Specialised equipment and extreme cold climate clothing necessary for fighting at super high altitudes were rushed in from various sectors.

While additional troops were building up and acclimatisation was underway,<sup>20</sup> attempts were made to get around the intruders' positions and cut off their supply lines. These efforts were only partially successful due to the lie of the ground and the dominating observation that the intruders enjoyed. Along with regular troops, special forces troops were employed for such tasks. Meanwhile, a vigorous debate was on in the country regarding the need to cross the LoC in order to bring the intrusions to a quick end with minimum casualties. Many senior defence analysts strongly recommended that the restraint imposed on the army and the air force by the government must be lifted and a free hand should be given to the defence chiefs to conduct operations. A small minority continued to advocate restraint.<sup>21</sup> However, the government resolutely withstood all pressures to cross the LoC and clarified that if such a course of action became militarily necessary, the Cabinet Committee on Security would consider it.

The initial progress in evicting the Pakistani NLI forces from their high mountain perches was slow and casualties were high. At most places, specialised



mountaineering skills were necessary. As the weary attackers gained ground and closed in with the enemy, they were subjected to withering small arms fire. However, as more and more artillery batteries were inducted and began to pulverise the Pakistani positions with devastating salvos, Indian attacks gathered momentum and major heights like Tololing, Khalubar and Tiger Hill began to fall in quick succession.

On June 10, 1999, the Pakistan Army returned the horribly mutilated bodies of six soldiers of a battalion of the Jat Regiment.<sup>22</sup> These brave men had been taken prisoner, tortured in custody to the point of death and then their bodies had been mutilated. The whole nation was shocked by this barbaric act by the soldiers of a so-called professional army. There was no expression of regret or apology from either the Pakistani political and diplomatic establishments or from the military hierarchy.<sup>23</sup> "Such conduct," said Mr. Jaswant Singh, India's minister for external affairs, "is not simply a breach of established norms, or a violation of international agreements; it is a civilisational crime against all humanity; it is a reversion to barbaric medievalism."<sup>24</sup> No other single incident served to solidify Indian resolve as much as this gross violation of the Geneva Conventions.

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## Strategic Moves

While a 'war-like' situation prevailed in Kargil<sup>25</sup>, Pakistan heightened military tension all along the rest of the LoC. There were increased exchanges of small arms, artillery and mortar fire, which resulted in casualties to army personnel and civilians on both sides. Consequently, thousands of civilians in border areas like Akhnoor, which had witnessed intense fighting during the 1965 and 1971 Wars between India and Pakistan, abandoned their villages and their land and moved to safer places.<sup>26</sup> The Indian Army carried out selective precautionary deployment of certain defensive field formations along the International Boundary (IB) with Pakistan and the Pakistan Army reciprocated. India's 6 Mountain Division was inducted into Ladakh "partly through Upshi-Manali and partly through Zoji La."<sup>27</sup>

The national press also reported certain strategic military movements and these must undoubtedly have convinced Pakistan that any attempt to enlarge the conflict would have serious repercussions for its survival as India was fully prepared for further Pakistani adventurism. However, the *Washington Post* report on July 26, 1999<sup>28</sup>, that “desert elements of India’s ‘strike force’ had been detected loading tanks, artillery and other heavy equipment on to flatbed rail cars by American spy satellites and that India was preparing to invade its neighbour,” was far from the truth and was denied and rejected as “ill-conceived and unfounded” by the official spokesperson of India’s Ministry of External Affairs.<sup>29</sup> Stephen P. Cohen of the Brookings Institution characterised the *Washington Post* story as exaggerating the “nature of the conflict in order to exaggerate the importance of the US role.”<sup>30</sup>

In a precautionary move, the Indian Navy deployed the Western Fleet to deter Pakistan and to ensure that no attempt could be made by Pakistan to launch a “low intensity insurgency attack”<sup>31</sup> on Indian onshore and offshore assets such as harbours and oil rigs. The naval deployment was subsequently stepped up to a ‘more visible profile’ in a calibrated manner. The area of the planned annual exercises of the Eastern Fleet was shifted to the western seaboard. As per Ikram Sehgal, a Pakistani commentator, this was interpreted in Pakistan to mean that the Indian Navy was prepared to enforce a “quarantine or blockade the coastline”,<sup>32</sup> if needed, to secure the withdrawal of Pakistani intruders from Kargil. Thus, as an instrument of national power, the Indian Navy played its part in convincing the Pakistani military leadership of the futility of prolonging the Kargil conflict and underscored the importance of harnessing the maritime dimension to achieve national security objectives. The deployments and manoeuvres also gave the Indian Navy an opportunity to test its operational readiness.

## **Endgame in Kargil**

Finding the Indian government unrelenting in its resolve to evict every intruder from its territory, Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Mian Nawaz Sharif, rushed to Washington in the first week of July 1999 and agreed in his talks with President Bill Clinton of the United States that Pakistan would pull out its troops from Kargil. India’s resounding victory at Tiger Hill, the news of which came even as Prime Minister Sharif was meeting President Clinton, contributed significantly to Pakistan’s capitulation. As a face saving device, Pakistan’s widely anticipated pullback was couched in euphemistic terms. Pakistan would “appeal to the Kashmiri freedom fighters to pull out from their positions in Kargil,” the Pakistan

government announced – the same so-called Mujahideen over whom the Pakistan government had repeatedly emphasised that it had no control!

At the request of the Government of Pakistan, a meeting was held between the Indian Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) and Pakistan's Director of Military Operations (DMO) at the Attari (Wagah) Border Outpost near Amritsar on July 11, 1999, to chalk out a time-frame for Pakistani forces to withdraw from Indian territory. The Pakistani DMO agreed that the Pakistani withdrawal, which had already commenced at first light on July 10, 1999, from the Kaksar sub-sector, following his telephonic talks with the Indian DGMO prior to their meeting, would begin on July 11, 1999, in the remaining areas and would be completed by first light on July 16, 1999.<sup>33</sup> As always, the Pakistanis failed to keep their word and sought an extension, which was rather magnanimously granted. Even after the extended deadline, the Pakistani intruders remained entrenched in small numbers in one pocket each in Dras, Mushko Valley and Batalik sub-sectors and were eventually physically evicted by July 25, 1999, after suffering heavy losses.

On July 26, 1999, the Indian DGMO declared at a press conference that all the Pakistani intruders had been evicted from Kargil district.<sup>34</sup> The DGMO also revealed that Pakistan was yet to implement the understanding arrived at between the two armies that neither side “should take up new positions within 1,000 metres of the LoC as a confidence building measure (CBM) in order to ensure that there was no fresh tension on the LoC.” It has been the experience in the past that Pakistan almost never reciprocates India's noble intentions. Eventually, this proposal also fell by the wayside. In any case, Pakistan has historically never set much store by bilateral agreements. Its Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz's statement before coming to India during the Kargil conflict that the LoC was “not clearly demarcated”<sup>35</sup> was as gross a travesty of the truth as can be committed by a high government official.

A large quantity of arms and ammunition, equipment and clothing items was recovered from the recaptured posts established by the Pakistani intruders. Some of the major weapons recovered were as under:<sup>36</sup>

■ 12.7 mm anti-aircraft guns	–	4
■ Heavy machine guns	–	46
■ Grenade/rocket launchers	–	19
■ 81 and 120 mm mortars	–	12
■ 37 mm twin barrel air defence gun	–	1
■ Stinger SAM with launcher	–	1
■ 23 mm air defence gun	–	1

■ 14,5 mm KPVT	–	1
■ 105 mm howitzers (without barrels)	–	3
■ Rifles (G-3/AK/Chinese/M-16/sniper)	–	198

India paid a heavy price for Pakistan's strategic misadventure in Kargil: 25 officers and 436 other ranks (OR) made the supreme sacrifice for a just and noble national cause, 54 officers and 629 OR were wounded, many of them maimed for life. Pakistan lost an estimated 45 officers and 700 OR, mainly of the NLI, in over two months of bitter fighting and gained absolutely nothing militarily, diplomatically or politically. After its military humiliation in 1971, Pakistan notched up one more stinging military defeat for which its army feels compelled to take revenge.

In the final analysis, while all the Arms and Services contributed significantly to the concerted effort to evict the Pakistani regulars from the Kargil sector, the victory belonged to the indomitable courage and selfless devotion to duty of the Indian infantryman and the overwhelming firepower of the artillery and the IAF. The infantry battalions of the Indian Army that participated in the literally and metaphorically uphill task of evicting the well-entrenched intruders, upheld the highest traditions of courage under fire of the Indian Army and, in fact, wrote a new saga of triumph against seemingly insuperable odds. The young company commanders and the artillery's forward observation officers (FOOs) led from the front by personal example and thus motivated their troops to perform outstanding acts of gallantry. Moreover, the Indian soldier showed his unflinching resolve to win every battle in the "Year of the Jawan" announced by Gen V P Malik, the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS PVSM, AVSM, ADC).<sup>37</sup> For their exceptional and exemplary valour and grit in the heroic battles in Kargil, the COAS honoured 11 infantry battalions, three units of the Regiment of Artillery and two reconnaissance and observation squadrons of the army with the special award of Unit Citation.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the Kargil conflict, the Pakistan government's propaganda machine continued to maintain that the intruders were "Kashmiri freedom fighters" and that Pakistan had no control over their actions, despite the irrefutable evidence furnished by the Indian government regarding the involvement of regular NLI battalions and SSG commandos of the Pakistan Army. The Pakistan Army, which had initiated the intrusions, had perhaps convinced its government that this was indeed the case. It was difficult to believe that a professional army would disown its regular soldiers and refuse to claim its dead. Under Gen Pervez Musharraf, the Pakistan Army not only suffered a humiliating military defeat in

Kargil, it also sank to an abysmal depth in the eyes of military professionals all over the world.

The retreating NLI troops had left behind the bodies of their comrades at the high-altitude mountain ridgelines that they had surreptitiously occupied. Some of these were half buried in shallow pits. Some others had simply been covered by rocks and some were left out in the open. All of them were honoured with the Pakistani flag and given a decent burial by Indian troops.<sup>39</sup> Besides captured arms, ammunition and equipment, a plethora of clinching documentary evidence<sup>40</sup> was provided by the Army Headquarters at New Delhi to the media and the diplomatic corps regarding the conduct of operations at Kargil by the Pakistan Army. Pakistan's aim in using mainly NLI soldiers as cannon fodder was apparently to limit the casualties to soldiers belonging mainly to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir so that body bags arriving in Lahore and Rawalpindi did not lead to a national uproar. Only the Pakistan Army could have practised such perfidy on its fellow citizens. Commentators the world over have labelled the Pakistan Army a "rogue army".<sup>41</sup>

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### **Military Lessons: Enhancing Surveillance and Firepower**

There is no doubt that the lion's share of the credit for the military victory in Kargil must go to the infantry battalions of the army for their unparalleled grit and determination and indomitable courage under withering fire while fighting to recapture prepared defensive positions in perhaps the most difficult terrain anywhere in the world. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the infantrymen's extremely difficult task was made much easier by the concentrated firepower of the FGA aircraft of the IAF and the guns, rocket launchers and mortars of the Indian artillery. Narrow ridgelines and jagged mountaintops make poor targets. Yet, if the IAF and the artillery achieved the success that they eventually did, credit must be given for their ability to improvise and find technical solutions to peculiar military problems.

Approximately 5,000 artillery shells, mortar bombs and rockets were fired daily from 300 guns, mortars and MBRLs.<sup>42</sup> "9,000 shells were fired the day Tiger

Hill was regained.”<sup>43</sup> The much-maligned Bofors FH-77B 155mm gun proved to be outstanding. The 130mm medium guns and the indigenously designed 105mm Indian field gun played a significant role and so did the 122mm MBRL Grad BM-21. Mortars of artillery regiments that rendered yeoman service in the Kargil conflict included 120 mm mortar and the 160 mm heavy mortar. Had longer range MBRLs such as Smerch, which has a range of about 100 km, been available, it would have been possible for the Indian artillery to hit Skardu from Kargil.

It emerged clearly that artillery firepower plays a major part in achieving victory on the modern battlefield. Accurate artillery fire reduces the enemy's defences to rubble. Sustained artillery fire gradually wears down the enemy's resistance and ultimately breaks his will to fight. By systematically degrading the enemy's fighting potential before a physical assault is launched, the artillery helps to reduce the casualties suffered by assaulting infantrymen. It has been estimated that 70 to 80 percent of the casualties on both sides of the LoC were caused by artillery fire.<sup>44</sup> Throughout the offensive phase of the Kargil conflict, artillery was called upon to respond to emerging situations and it did so with alacrity and telling lethality. The infantry battalions involved in the fighting were the first to acknowledge the immense debt of gratitude that they owe to their artillery comrades.

For too long has the nation been dependent on the grit, determination and indomitable courage of infantrymen to keep the peace on the borders and restore adverse situations. While battles will continue to be ultimately won by infantrymen launching physical assaults under withering enemy fire to capture tactically important features of terrain, state-of-the-art military technology can and must be employed to reduce the present dependence on the supreme sacrifice of hundreds of young men to safeguard India's territorial integrity. The Indian Army's heroic efforts to recapture the high-altitude mountain ridges from Pakistan's regular army forces in the Dras, Batalik, Kaksar and Mushko Valley areas of Kargil district have dramatically highlighted the need for the early acquisition and deployment of sophisticated surveillance and early warning devices and precision strike munitions with the artillery and IAF. The much-vaunted revolution in military affairs (RMA) must be exploited to deliver a devastating punch and reduce armed forces casualties.

India needs to acquire state-of-the-art military satellites and aerial and ground surveillance systems to guard against a repeat performance of Kargil '99. There is an immediate need for military satellites with a sub-one metre

resolution and multi-spectral (optical, infrared and radar photography) capability, so that they are effective by both day and night. Satellite surveillance must be beefed up and an acceptable degree of redundancy achieved through the use of remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs) and ground surveillance means such as battlefield surveillance radars (BFSRs) and unattended ground sensors (UGS) in remote areas. Regular army aviation reconnaissance sorties need to be flown to detect intrusions and offensive military activity across the LoC, the AGPL in Siachen and the LAC with China while flying within own territory. Electronic surveillance means should be used to gain information about the plans and movement of Pakistan's regular troops and so-called Mujahideen mercenaries.

**In view of the current and emerging threats, the defence budget must be increased gradually to this level if 'many more Kargils' are to be avoided.**

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The IAF needs to supplement these efforts through its own reconnaissance flights using long-look optical systems (LLOS), infrared line scan (IRLS) and synthetic aperture radars (SAR). The IAF should acquire additional surveillance assets, where necessary, and should provide independent inputs to a national-level intelligence collection, collation, compilation, analysis, synthesis and dissemination centre. Quite obviously, HUMINT (human intelligence) means cannot be neglected and need to be appropriately strengthened. Only then, will it be possible to develop a comprehensive border surveillance and intelligence acquisition plan to defeat a belligerent adversary's nefarious designs. Finally, a responsive, real-time intelligence dissemination system must be instituted so that the concerned field commanders can be informed well in time to enable them to thwart infiltration and intrusion plans.

Once a threat from across the borders has been discerned, the intruding forces have to be destroyed quickly so that the sanctity of the LoC can be restored. The artillery, firing 155-mm precision strike ammunition, can best perform this task, particularly in high-altitude mountainous terrain. Today, laser-guided artillery shells can destroy bunkers, bridges and small buildings with a single-shot kill probability as high as 80 percent. Targets which can be seen by the troops in contact with the intruders can be 'designated' (illuminated by a laser beam) by a ground-based artillery observer (spotter) carrying a laser target designator and those which are behind crest lines and on reverse slopes can be designated by an airborne artillery observer in an army aviation helicopter.

Improved conventional munitions (ICMs) shells carrying anti-personnel grenades and lethal 'air-burst' ammunition can be 'dispensed' over soft targets such as administrative bases, rations and fuel storage dumps, headquarters and rest areas. Though precision strike munitions are relatively more costly than standard high explosive (HE) shells, these 'smart' and 'intelligent' munitions are more effective since only a direct hit from a 'dumb' artillery shell can destroy a bunker. If these are made available in large quantities, artillery can cause much greater destruction and indirectly reduce the number of casualties that the infantry has to suffer when the inevitable assault is finally launched. Gun locating radars for effective counter-bombardment, unarmed aerial vehicles (UAVs) equipped with TV cameras and suitable for high altitude operations, powerful binoculars for target acquisition and engagement by day and long-range night vision devices for the same purpose at night will increase the capacity of the regiment of artillery to act as a force multiplier on the modern battlefield by several orders of magnitude.<sup>45</sup>

IAF aircraft that are to be employed for ground strikes also need to be armed with precision strike munitions to achieve a telling effect. Only laser-guided and TV-guided bombs can provide the necessary accuracy. Ideally, the IAF should be equipped with a specialised, dedicated ground strike aircraft suitable for the mountains. Such an aircraft would also cost only a fraction of the cost of multi-role aircraft such as the Mirage-2000. Advanced attack helicopters (AAH) which are light and capable of operating in Himalayan terrain, can also launch precision strikes and need to be added to the air-to-ground strike arsenal.

Quoting Jasjit Singh, former director, IDSA, Jairam Ramesh wrote during the conflict that armed forces "modernisation tends to be cyclical and is undertaken, if at all, in spurts."<sup>46</sup> After the Kargil conflict and recent terror strikes, it is to be hoped that appropriate lessons have been learnt by Indian decision-makers and that long-pending decisions on urgent equipment acquisition will be taken expeditiously and that the progressive decline in the defence budget since the end-1980s will be reversed. An annual defence budget of between 3 to 3.5 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is sustainable. In view of the current and emerging threats, the defence budget must be increased gradually to this level if 'many more Kargils' are to be avoided.

## Conclusion

Ever since independence, Pakistan has engaged in relentless confrontation with India. Since the creation of Pakistan, successive governments in Islamabad have

sought with varying degrees of intensity to destabilise India, wreck its unity and challenge its integrity. Though the situation in Kargil has stabilised due to the deployment of 8 Mountain Division, India must remain on guard against more such sinister operations being launched by the vengeful and devious military leadership of Pakistan with a hate-India mindset and the mentality of primitive warlords. It would be futile to hope that internal instability, international pressure or economic compulsions will dissuade the Pakistanis from embarking on such trans-LoC excursions in future. The government must send a clear message to the Pakistani leadership that there is a limit to India's patience and tolerance and that India will consider harder options if there is no let-up in the relentless proxy war being waged from across its western border by the Pakistan Army and the ISI.

After the Mumbai terror attacks, it will be a long time before public opinion within India once again backs a government effort to negotiate a final solution to the Kashmir issue with Pakistan. Any further talk of accepting the LoC as a permanent border between India and Pakistan will have to be shelved for some years, as the present anti-Pakistan mood of the Indian public will not change easily. However, the need to deescalate the present situation and to institute CBMs is unquestionable. Political negotiations for these must proceed even if a final solution to the dispute appears to be a distant dream at present.

The most important strategic lesson for India from the Kargil imbroglio is that a country cannot afford to be complacent and let down its guard on matters of national security. The progressive decline in the defence budget since the process of economic liberalisation began in 1991, even as the threats from across the borders and internal threats and challenges increased manifold, has drastically affected the armed forces ability to modernise and to prepare for the type of war they are now being called upon to fight. The inescapable requirements of national security cannot be compromised. In international politics, the policy of mutual friendship and cooperation with one's neighbours has to be balanced with vigilance. A neighbour's capacity to damage one's security interests should never be underestimated, leave alone disregarded.

## Notes

1. Army Headquarters Press Release dated June 11, 1999. Throughout the Kargil conflict, joint briefings were conducted daily by the official spokespersons of the Ministry of External Affairs, the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force. These briefings were

extensively covered by the Indian and international media and were followed with immense interest all over India. Along with television and news coverage from the front, these media briefings were to a large extent responsible for generating a wave of nationalism and for uniting the Indian people together as one entity.

2. *Pakistan Army's Misadventure in Kargil*, published by the Army Liaison Cell, Army Headquarters, New Delhi, p. 8.
3. The Pakistan Army purchased large quantities of specialised mountaineering equipment from several West European firms months before the hostilities in Kargil commenced. The equipment included special thermal jackets, snowmobiles, snow tents and 50,000 pairs of snow boots. (Ravi Bhatia and Dinesh Kumar, "Shopping Spree Preceded Intrusion", *The Times of India*, June 24, 1999.) Also see, Prem Shankar Jha, "The Lessons of Kargil", *Outlook*, August 9, 1999, p. 34.
4. In 1973, the Northern Scouts, Karakoram Scouts and Gilgit Scouts were reorganised as the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) regiment of the Pakistan Army. Almost 85 percent of NLI troops are from Gilgit and Baltistan and 49 percent are Shia Muslims. "The NLI battalions specialise in commando operations, snow warfare and anti-heliborne operations." (*Pakistan Army Misadventure*).
5. The ISI had fixed a compensation of US \$ 19,000 for those killed and \$ 8,500 for the mercenaries injured during the Kargil operations. ("6 Pak Troops Killed, two Militants held", *The Times of India*, June 9, 1999.)
6. As per Army Headquarters estimates, a total of 20 artillery batteries were provided to the NLI battalions for supporting the intrusions. (*Pak Army Plan for Intrusions*, published by the Army Liaison Cell, Army Headquarters, New Delhi, p. 4.)
7. Praveen Swami, "A Long haul Ahead", *Frontline*, July 2, 1999, p. 11.
8. *Pakistan Army's Misadventure*.
9. *Delineation of the Line of Control*, published by the Army Liaison Cell, Army Headquarters, New Delhi, p. 6.)
10. Shishir Gupta, "Redeployment of Forces Likely in Kargil", *Hindustan Times*, June 4, 1999.
11. Lt Gen Javed Nasir, ex ISI chief, wrote on June 26, 1999, "They occupied the vacant Kargil heights as early as January-February this year and kept building stocks and improving defences for the next four months." (*Islamisation of Pakistan's Military*, published by the Army Liaison Cell, Army Headquarters, New Delhi, p. 16.)
12. J N Dixit, "Invasion of Kargil", *Hindustan Times*, June 23, 1999. Also see "The Ghosts of Lahore", *Telegraph*, May 30, 1999.
13. Maj Gen Ashok K Mehta, "How Kargil Was Won Back", *Sunday*, July 18-24, 1999.
14. Ranjit Bhushan and others, "Kargil, Post Mortem", *Outlook*, July 26, 1999.
15. The NLI battalions are organised on similar lines as other regular battalions of the

- Pakistan Army. Besides all battalion support weapons, they hold sophisticated night vision and communications equipment. (*Northern Light Infantry*, published by the Army Liaison Cell, Army Headquarters, New Delhi, p. 5.)
16. Lt Gen Krishen Pal, GOC 15 Corps at Srinagar, said that the Pakistani posts had as much firepower as is generally available to a regular infantry battalion. (Dinesh Kumar, "What it Took and the Run-up to Operation Vijay", *The Times of India*, July 19, 1999.)
  17. A G Noorani, "Questions of Accountability", *Frontline*, July 2, 1999, p. 22-23.
  18. Harinder Baweja, "War by Proxy", *India Today*, July 26, 1999, p. 49.
  19. Defence correspondents covering the Kargil conflict estimated that up to four additional brigades were inducted into the Kargil sector to clear the intruders. (Harinder Baweja, "Peak by Peak", *India Today*, June 14, 1999.
  20. Lt Gen Krishen Pal, GOC, 15 Corps, stated that it took three weeks to build up an adequate offensive potential and that the acclimatisation of troops took up to 12 days.
  21. Lt Gen V R Raghavan (Retd), "Crossing LoC Not End in Itself", *Hindustan Times*, June 29, 1999.
  22. "Barbarians at the Gate", *The Times of India*, June 11, 1999. Also see, Ashwani Kumar, "Pakistan's Barbarity: Crimes Against Indian Soldiers", *The Times of India*, June 17, 1999.
  23. "Uniform Disgraced", *The Times of India*, June 12, 1999.
  24. Sukumar Muralidharan, "High Stakes, Hardening Positions", *Frontline*, July 2, 1999.
  25. The situation was characterised as war-like by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on May 31, 1999. ("Soldier's Hour", *India Today*, July 26, 1999, p. 23.
  26. Swami, "A Long Haul Ahead."
  27. The COAS stated this in an interview. (Maj Gen Ashok K Mehta, "The Kargil Campaign is a Good Tonic for the Country and the Army", *Sunday*, July 18-24, 1999.
  28. "Clinton Helped Avert Indo-Pak War", *The Times of India*, July 27, 1999.
  29. Vinod Taksal, "India Debunks 'Post' Report", *The Times of India*, July 28, 1999.
  30. L. A. Joseph, "Posting an Untruth", *Outlook*, August 9, 1999, p. 38.
  31. C Uday Bhaskar, "The Maritime Dimension", *Economic Times*, July 21, 1999.
  32. Joseph, "Posting an Untruth".
  33. Army Headquarters Press Release dated July 11, 1999. Also see, "Lull after Storm as Pak Troops Start Withdrawing", *Economic Times*, July 13, 1999.
  34. "Last Three Pockets of Intrusion Vacated", *Hindustan Times*, July 27, 1999.
  35. "Sartaj Says LoC not Clearly Demarcated", *The Times of India*, June 4, 1999.
  36. Pakistan's Army Misadventure.
  37. Maj Gen Ian Cardozo (Retd), "A Soldier's Story", *Sunday*, July 18-24, 1999.
  38. *Baatchet*, No. 14, July 1999, published by the Army Liaison Cell, Army Headquarters, New Delhi.

39. The army recovered 249 dead bodies of Pakistani regular soldiers from the area of operations in Kargil; 244 dead bodies were buried as per military norms with religious rites; five bodies were accepted by Pakistan and taken back. Two prisoners of war were taken; both belonged to 5 NLI.
40. *Pakistan Army Intrusions in Kargil*, published by the Army Liaison Cell, Army Headquarters, New Delhi.
41. The barbaric torture and mutilation of the bodies of Indian prisoners of war has been roundly condemned by military and political leaders and diplomats the world over. The complete lack of professionalism and propriety exhibited by the Pakistani Army has led to its being labelled a 'rogue army'. Opposition leader and former Pakistan Prime Minister, Ms Benazir Bhutto, in a statement calling for the ouster of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, also echoed this sentiment: "Pakistan stands isolated in the international community and its army is today being called a rogue and a terrorist army." ("Benazir Calls to Oust Sharif", *Hindustan Times*, July 29, 1999.)
42. "Kargil War: The Facts", *India Today*, July 26, 1999, p. 32.
43. Pranab Dhall Samanta, "The 'Gunners' War", *Sunday*, July 18-24, 1999.
44. Jha, "The Lessons of Kargil".
45. Most of the deficiencies in artillery equipment listed in this chapter were pointed out by Lt Gen Krishen Pal, GOC, 15 Corps.
46. Jairam Ramesh, "War and Costs", *India Today*, June 28, 1999.