



Kargil war and its impact on Indo-Pak Relations.

Farhana Sultana

Research Scholar, Osmania University Hyderabad, Telangana

Prof M.Krishna Kumar

Prof of Political Science, Osmania University

Abstract: -

The Kargil war of 1999 between India and Pakistan offers one important useful test of the two competing positions about the nuclear stability and instability in the South- Asian region. The major reason of which Pakistan has motives to indulge in Kargil adventure seems to be totally based on bringing a change in the “Status quo” in Kashmir following the Kargil conflict.

The Kargil war of 1999 has its genesis totally oriented in the Kashmir problem. The issue of Kashmir still remains a bone of “contention” between India and Pakistan. This conflict has prevented improvements of bilateral relations between the two countries, with restricted trade and commerce and better people to people contacts. Kashmir had been retained as region for releasing suddenly the military conflict between the two countries. It is now a potential flash point for a nuclear war.

The intrusion across the line of control is thus a combination of three factors 1) It is a manifestation of the desire of the political leadership to internationalise the Kashmir issue and force India to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir in terms of the UN resolution, a plebiscite which Pakistan believes will lead to Kashmir becoming a part of Pakistan. 2) It is a desire’s manifestation of the fundamentalist to fight a jihad in Kashmir, to liberate Kashmir and to educate the Kashmiri Muslim in the correct Islamic ways of living. 3) It is the manifestation of the desire of the Pakistani army to impose decisive defeat on the Indian Army and to regain its lost honour and respect.

The Kargil war and the Agra summit stand as evidence of the intractable nature of the Indo-Pak dispute. Instead of acting as a deterrent, the nuclear power status of India and Pakistan can be cited as a cause of the Kargil war of May-July, 1999, and in fact, could be indicative of the things to come. ¹

The Kargil war of 1999 between India and Pakistan offers one important useful test of the two competing positions about the nuclear stability and instability in the South Asian region. ²

After the Indian and Pakistani nuclear test of 1998, both countries India and Pakistan had come under tremendous pressure from the United States of America and many other major powers to reduce their

bilateral issues and conflicts in the South Asian region. In fact, a number of key American and other officials has totally underestimated and undermined the increased risk of nuclear war in the region, given its conflict prone history.³

The major reason of which Pakistan has motives to indulge in Kargil adventure seems to be totally based on bringing a change in the “Status quo” in Kashmir following the Kargil conflict. There was a serious attempt from a section in the Indian strategic community to alter the status quo in India’s favour through a limited war and or pre-emptive strikes. The main understanding from the Indians perspective was that a limited war could be fought with Pakistan under nuclear umbrella. George Fernandez the then Indian Defence minister, one of The Pioneers of limited war with Pakistan stated that nuclear weapons “can deter only the use of nuclear weapons, but not all and any war” an under the nuclear shadow, a conventional war remained feasible through the definite limitation if escalation across the nuclear threshold was to be avoided.⁴

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The infiltration in Kargil took the nation by surprise. The Indian government was happy at the success of the Lahore bus diplomacy and the Lahore declaration of 1999. When India was busy in her internal engagements and when the army was busy trying to find more and more combatting forces to fight militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. All this time 5000 Muslim Mujahedeen’s and Pakistani regulars of North Light Infantry were quietly infiltrating into about 1000 square kilometres of Indian territory, preparing well-fortified defences stocking rations and ammunition, preparing administrative basis and getting ready to cut off the Srinagar-Leh Highway.⁵

The Kargil war of 1999 was viewed as a revenge by the Pakistan army and it has also tried to win back itself and regain its image especially got stained by the defeat in 1971 war. Even General Jagjit Singh Aurora, in his article “we are paying for past blunders” supports this view. Most of the Pakistani soldiers believed that one Pakistani soldier is equal to 20 Indian soldiers. But the humiliating defeat in the war of 1971, where nearly 90,000 soldiers had to lay down their weapons and were forced to spend time in captivity was considered as a great insult to their injury, the army of India annexed Siachen in 1984. Pakistan’s government had always had willingness to make peace with India but not the Pakistan Army.⁶

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plebiscite in Kashmir in terms of the UN resolution, a plebiscite which Pakistan believes will lead to Kashmir becoming a part of Pakistan. 2) It is a desire's manifestation of the Muslim fundamentalist to fight a jihad in Kashmir, to liberate Kashmir and to educate the Kashmiri Muslim in the correct Islamic ways of living. 3) It is the manifestation of the desire of the Pakistani army to impose decisive defeat on the Indian Army and to regain its lost honour and respect.

The 1999 Kargil war is not considered as a limited attempt to capture a few hundred square kilometres of mountain terrain or to alter the LOC. It has been scrupulously planned for many years. The infiltrators and the men of the Northern Light Infantry have been selected and given extensive training in mountain warfare and survival in sub-zero, snow bound winters on the slope of mount K2. Logistic bases have been built and stocked. Heavy mountain guns have been moved to selected gun areas. Required ammunition have been dumped. Agents have been moved to selected gun areas and were restricted in Kargil and Drass regions and trained in directing artillery fire, subversives have been recruited, trained and armed in the remote region of Turtuk in Bataliks.

It is more a plan of capturing of Ladakh Kashmir by force. Kargil is more likely an attempt to capture the Ladakh or the whole of the Kashmir.⁷

The Kargil portion of the western Ladakh union territory, North western India, formerly part of Northwestern Jammu and Kashmir state. The sector, centred around the town of Kargil, lies in the Zaskar range of the Himalayas an Abuts of the line of control between the portions of Kashmir region administered by India and Pakistan. Kargil town, located roughly equidistant between Srinagar (southwest) and Leh (southeast) is considered the gateway to Ladakh.

Kargil's landscape is mountainous, rugged and high the minimum elevation being some 8,000 feet (2,440 metres). The climate is cold and dry with scanty precipitation that falls mainly as snow in winter. One locality, Dras (Drass), is reputed to be one of the World coldest permanently inhabited places, with winter temperatures falling to as low as - 40°F (-40° C] or colder. Most of the residents of Kargil are of Balti region are Balti origin, and the large majority are Shia Muslims. Because of its close proximity to the line of control, Kargil has often been the site of border conflicts between India and Pakistan, among that was the largest and the deadliest clashes of these was the Kargil war of 1999, which took place on May–July 1999. The intrusion triggered intense fighting between the two sides that lasted more than two months.

The Indian army reclaimed most of the area on the Indian side that has been occupied by infiltrators and hostilities finally ended in July when the remaining Pakistani fighters retreated from the Indian zone. Several hundred combatants were killed on each side during the conflict.⁸

The infiltration of Pakistani forces, infiltrates both by foot and helicopter. They captured abandoned Indian outposts by taking their fortified positions. They were equipped with substantial fire power, including light cannon, motors and surface-to-air missiles (SAM). The NLI occupied outposts along a total frontage of about 150-kilometres, at heights approaching 18,000 feet (5, 485 m) above sea level. The positions of the Pakistani infiltrators include the strategic Tololing-Tiger Hill complex in Dra's that dominates the Srinagar- Leh Highway near the Zoji-La Pass. The attack of this nature by Pakistani infiltrators caught the Indian administration and the Indian military by surprise. The Indian army normally stretched the battalions of 121 Infantry brigade along the 168-kilometre LOC in the Kargil sector for routine security operations.⁹

The Pakistani battalions occupied outposts on several key paths of approach. The Pakistani Army conducted regular patrols and took control of many isolated posts, but had left approximately 80 kilometres of unmanned gaps. These patrols and out posts failed to detect the NLI soldiers throughout the spring. This forcible intrusion of Pakistani infiltrators and later the Army of Pakistan was discovered in the early May by the local shepherd of the Kargil area and within a matter of days Pakistani intrusion became very evident in the Kashmir valley.¹⁰

Only a small circle of senior political Pakistani leaders knows whether the intrusion that began in early 1999 was a strategy designed to force international intervention in Kashmir, or if it was simply the result of the local commander's effort to capture the terrain along the LOC unoccupied by Indian forces. From the defence point of view the objective may not have been big in scope, but with the help of this operation Pakistan got an opportunity to change the situation on the ground in Jammu and Kashmir. The Pakistani infiltrators captured several critical peaks which would have threatened the Srinagar-Leh Highway and isolate Leh, which was considered India's base of operations in Ladakh. The plans of Pakistan were so decisive that they decided to capture the places of which are of formidable heights which they thought would dissuade India from launching an offensive to retake the lost ground.¹¹

After many weeks of debates, discussions, uncertainty and deliberations of high level, the Indian political administration finally issued the orders to its armed forces to make arrangements to evacuate the Pakistani forces and infiltrators. The major agenda of this entire operation was the restoration of the original LOC. The Indian Army proposed and developed operation Vijay (victory) to wipe out the infiltrators and forces of Pakistan. This operation Vijay was based on three vital objectives: 1) To contain the existing enemy pockets to prevent further buildup of forces 2) To evacuate the enemy forces and 3) Plans were drafted to see that the Indian Army units would occupy key terrain along the LOC.¹²

Indian Political Administration and Indian Army after facing weeks of unforeseen turn of events on the LOC. India choose to make a device of a military campaign to thrash out the Pakistani invaders from the mountains of Kargil. The Indian Army started quickly to mobilise in Kargil and there they began the toilsome and exhausting task of clearing the Kargil heights from the Pakistani infiltrators.¹³

War on Progress:

Under the first attack, Pakistan captured several strategic high points in the Indian-control section of Kashmir. In response to this attack of Pakistan, India responded by first capturing strategic high points in the Indian control section of Kashmir. India firstly captured strategic transportation routes and ways, then militarily pushing Pakistani forces back across the line of control.¹⁴

Occupation of Pakistan under the first phase:

The Government of India responded with “Operation Vijay”, a mobilisation of 20,000 Indian troops. Because of the nature of the Terrian, division and corps operations had to be suspended, with most fighting scaled back to the regimental or battalion levels. In effect, two divisions of the Indian army numbering 20,000 plus several thousand from the Indian paramilitary forces and the air force deployed in the conflict zone. The total number of the Indian soldiers involved in the military operations on the Kargil–Drass sector numbered close to 30,000. The number of infiltrators, including those providing logistical backup, had been put at approximately 5000 at the height of the conflict. That figure includes troops from Pakistan-administered Kashmir providing additional artillery support.

Protection of National Highway No-1 under the second phase:

The Kashmir has mountainous terrain at the high altitudes, even the best roads, such as National Highway No 1 (NH1) from Leh to Srinagar have only two lanes. The rough terrain and the narrow roads showed traffic, and the high altitude, affecting the ability of the aircraft to carry loads, made control of an NH1A (the actual stretch of the highway under Pakistani fire), a priority for India. From their observation posts, the Pakistani forces had a clear line of sight to lay down indirect artillery fire on an NH1A, inflicting heavy casualties on the Indians that post a serious problem for the Indian army as the highway served as its main logistical and supply route. The infiltrators, apart from being equipped with small arms and grenade launches, also had mortars, artillery and anti-craft guns. There were many posts which had been heavily mined, with India later recovering nearly 9000 anti-personnel mines according to ICBL. The initial Indian attack aimed at controlling the hills overlooking NH1A, with high priority being given to the stretches of the highway near the town of Kargil. The protection of that route and the recapture of the forward posts constituted a going objective throughout the war. India had cleared most of the posts in the vicinity of the

highway by mid-June, some parts of the highway by mid-June, some parts of the highway near Drass witness sporadic shelling until the end of the war.

Recovery of the Indian territory under the third phase:

Once India regained control of hills overlooking NH1A, the Indian Army turned to driving the invading force back across the line of control, but refrained from pursuing forces further into Pakistani -controlled portion of Kashmir. The Battle of Tololing among other assaults, slowly tilted the combat in India's favour.¹⁵

Operation Vijay:

It was launched from 3 May to 26 July 1999. During the entire operation of "Operation Vijay" the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force flew as many as 550 sorties. In the conduct of these operations, the IAF relied on Mirage-2000, MiG-21, MiG-23, and MiG-27 airplanes of which it lost two a MiG-21 and MiG-27. Indian authorities were of the confirmed opinion that all the air attacks were targeted to the areas where Indian thought to be on its side of the LOC whereas the Pakistani administration were of the opinion and claimed that the IAF planes have crossed the LOC and had struck targets within the "Azad Kashmir". The decision to use air power marked a significant departure from a past Indian attempt to deal with the Pakistani incursions along the LOC. Indeed, not since the 1971 war had air power been used in support of military operations in Kashmir. The last option that Indian forces have was to use Air Force as a last resort because they realised that it would be all but impossible to evict the intruders through the use of ground troops in frontal assault since crossing the LOC was rejected for political reasons. Though "Operation Vijay" was a successful effort but it proved to be the extraordinarily costly in both human and material terms. Official sources in India stated that 487 men were killed and another 1,000 injured. unofficial account suggests that the casualties may have been significantly higher.¹⁶

The Kargil war of 1999 has caused India a lot of anguish, it has also stirred its soul. The Kargil war and the concept of Kargil has now become a defining movement, a watershed and a new beginning, spreading a beacon to the new avenues and opportunities that lie before this nation. The sacrifices of those who died for the nation and the mourning of those left behind cannot be allowed to go in vain.¹⁷

The Kargil war of 1999, made India to spend an average of 15 crores of rupees per day only for war operations. The coffer of the Indian government was made poorer by about 1,110 crores of rupees and including all other expenses, the additional expenditure on the Kargil war of 1999 may be in the vicinity of 1, 500 crores of rupees. Indian armed forces registered a decisive victory in kargil.¹⁸

After the Kargil war, the relationship between India and Pakistan settled back into pattern of mutual counterattack and acquisition. The pressure from the international community on two countries India and Pakistan where high in order to make them resolve their differences over Kashmir. The United States of America, argued that the Kargil war had demonstrated that the nuclearization of the subcontinent had not in fact reduced the likelihood of war. As both the countries were contemplating of improving the relations after the Kargil war of 1999, however, a military coup overthrew the regime of Nawaz Sharif in Pakistan in October 1999. General Pervez Musharraf, the chief of army staff, declared himself the chief executive of the country. As could be expected, relations between India and Pakistan worsened considerably. Particularly because Musharraf had been the prime architect of the Kargil operations of 1999 in Kashmir.¹⁹

The Kargil war of 1999 was more than a regionalized limited war with short term results. The major aim with which Pakistan attack in Kargil was to force Indians to operate from a position of weakness by giving no strategical access to Leh. The political administration in Pakistan failed to understand the degree of difference or distinction of evolving in a convention conflict under a nuclear umbrella. To that extent, Kargil war was not a limited war. The objectives with which Pakistan engaged in the Kargil war could range from minimal, that of cutting off Leh to internationalising the Kashmir issue and forcing India to compromise by putting it in an unfavourable bargaining platform.²⁰

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