

1965 War: Pakistan's Strategic Blunder

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HE STATE of J&K acceded to India on October 26, 1947. Pakistan did not accept the accession and, since then, has sought to wrest the state from India by any means, mostly foul.

Pakistan has repeatedly made efforts to win the J&K, one of the primary stated reasons being J&K's water resources. To get contemporary weapons, Pakistan became military ally of the US, in the name of fighting communism, and joined the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). Between 1956 and 1962, the

United States gave massive military aid to Pakistan which considerably increased its offensive capability.

Pakistan was happy at India's humbling in the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962, and took opportunity to befriend China. Islamabad and Beijing had a common adversary. Pakistan went to the extent of gifting the Shaksgam valley of J&K to China under a border agreement of March 2, 1963.

Pakistan had then both the US and China on its side.

PLANNING AND CONDUCT

A Pakistani army's ops in Kashmir were preceded by the operations in Kutch, which commenced in February. The terrain



offered advantage to Pakistan.

As a strategic response, the Indian Army deployed on the border in Punjab and captured three posts in Kargil on May 16 and 17, 1965. A Ceasefire agreement was signed on July 1, 1965. The Pakistanis inferred incorrectly about the offensive capability of the Indian Army and started planning on their cherished goal to seize Kashmir. It is important to note that the Kutch issue was resolved and India



withdrew from the three posts.

But Pakistan was conspiring. Pakistan President Field Marshal Ayub Khan felt that the Indian leadership after the death of Nehru was weak and would not be able to withstand a Pakistani offensive. Also, Pakistan was prospering economically and recording food surpluses while India was facing local famines and serious economic difficulties.

● India's reequipping programme after the

1962 War was in full swing. And India also started receiving military aid from the US, which gradually narrowed the qualitative edge that Pakistan possessed.

● There was unrest in J&K due to the loss of a Holy Relic (a strand of hair believed to be of the Prophet called Moe-e-Muqaddas) from the Hazratbal shrine on December 27, 1964. Though the relic was found and certified as authentic, Pakistan tried to create disturbances about the issue in

the state. Further, Sheikh Abdullah was interned in May 1965 by the Government of India, adding to the unrest.

- Ayub had won the Presidential elections by rigging against Ms Fatima Jinnah in January 1965. The dubious result could best be forgotten by launching operations against Kashmir as this would divert attention.

- The international situation favoured Pakistan, tied in military alliances with the US, and a de facto alliance with China. The Soviet Union was less hostile to Pakistan than for many years.

Ayub Khan approved the military planning for a limited war in Kashmir by the early summer of 1965, despite opposition from the Chief of Army Staff, Gen Mohammad Musa, and some other officers.

The war plans primarily comprised the

following:

- Operation Gibraltar which commenced with infiltration across the Ceasefire Line on August 1, 1965. It failed to create consternation and the Indian Army Commander in the west, Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh, launched counter-infiltration operations. This led to capture of posts in the Kargil and Kishanganga sectors as also the prized possession of Haji Pir Pass by Major Ranjit Singh Dayal (later Army Commander Southern Command) on August 28, 1965.

- Op Grand Slam was launched by Pakistan on September 1, 1965 with the aim of capturing Akhnoor. Pakistan captured Chhamb but failed to reach Akhnoor due to strengthening of the sector held by 191 Infantry Brigade by the newly raised Headquarters 10 Infantry Division.

- Op Riddle was an offensive launched by



India in the Sialkot and Lahore sectors by 1 and 11 Corps on the night of September 5, 1965. Indian Army's 1 Corps with 1 Armoured Division successfully fought in the tank battles of Phillaura and Chawinda. In the 11 Corps Sector, 15 Infantry Division advanced to the Ichhogil canal on the outskirts of Lahore, and in a daring move, 3 JAT commanded by Lt Col Desmond Hayde (later Brigadier) crossed it with two of his companies. However, Indian Army's 15 Infantry Division and 11 Corps did not fully exploit this gain.

- Audacious operations launched by Pakistan with 11 Infantry Division and 1 Armoured Division in the Khem Karan Sector with the aim of capturing the bridges at Harike and Beas were designed to give them multiple options of threatening Amritsar and Jullundur (now Jalandhar). The offensive commenced on September 8, 1965. But Indian Army's 4 Mountain Division fought gallantly with Deccan Horse, 3 Cavalry and 8 Cavalry Armoured Regiments in the sugarcane fields of Asal Uttar, causing 97 Pakistani tank casualties. It was a credit to the Indian Army's tank hunting teams, one of which was led by Company Quarter Master Havildar (CQMH) Abdul Hamid who was posthumously awarded a Param Vir Chakra. He destroyed three Pakistani Patton tanks before being felled by heavy tank fire specifically aimed at his position.

USE OF AIR FORCE

The Indian Air Force (IAF) played an active role in the War with effect from September 1, 1965 when 12 Vampires and 14 Mysteres were used in the Battle of Chhamb. IAF launched Counter Air, Bombing and Offensive Air Support missions. Numerically, IAF had 26 fighter squadrons and four bomber squadrons, while Pakistan had eight fighter squadrons and two bomber squadrons. Qualitatively, Pakistani F-86 Sabres and F-104 Star Fighters were superior to our Gnats, Hunters, Mysteres and Vampires. During the war that lasted 22 days, IAF undertook a total of 3937 sorties which paved the way for India to undertake a ceasefire creditably.

LESSONS LEARNT

Major lessons learnt during the 1965

War are important even today and need attention. These are:

- Pakistan believes in infiltrating its soldiers into Kashmir with the aim of creating an uprising and pressure India. It has done that in 1947-48, 1965 as also in 1999 (the Kargil War).

- Pakistan needs to be appreciated for its intelligence capability. India was not aware of Op Gibraltar. The Indian intelligence agencies must attain the ability to provide Actionable Intelligence in real time to enable the Indian armed forces to hit back.

- Pakistan launched its next Operation Grand Slam on September 1 which enabled India to stabilise and be prepared for an offensive while taking steps to counter infiltration. Ops in Rear Areas would have made greater difference had the main offensive been launched by August 15, 1965.

- Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh, the great Army Commander, was able to read the battle correctly thereby synergising the move of security forces in a balanced manner and defeating the saboteurs. He could hold the nerves of the Corps Commanders. He successfully captured Haji Pir, launched Operation Riddle and blunted the offensive of Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division at Asal Uttar.

- Joint Operations are the order of the day and greater synergy between the Services would pay rich dividends.

- There is a need to modernise equipment regularly to effectively match our adversaries. Unfortunately, this is not happening.

CONCLUSION

Pakistan failed to attain its objectives during the 1965 War. It is creditable for the Indian Army to have captured Haji Pir Pass, crossed the Ichhogil canal and blunt Pakistani armour at Asal Uttar. Air operations helped the Army to blunt the Pakistani offensive in Akhnoor. The lessons that the Indian armed forces learnt from the 1965 War led to a great victory in 1971.

In the negotiations that followed at Tashkent, India agreed to give back Haji Pir Pass and 13620 in Kargil while Pakistan gave back Chhamb. All territory captured across the International Boundary in the Punjab and Rajasthan sectors was returned by both the countries. ■

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