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MANEKSHAW PAPER

## **Restraint as a Successful Strategic Tool in Kargil Conflict 1999**

**DP PANDEY**

**CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES**

**Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw**, better known as Sam “Bahadur”, was the 8th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS). It was under his command that the Indian forces achieved a spectacular victory in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Starting from 1932, when he joined the first batch at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), his distinguished military career spanned over four decades and five wars, including World War II. He was the first of only two Field Marshals in the Indian Army. Sam Manekshaw’s contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. He was a soldier’s soldier and a General’s General. He was outspoken and stood by his convictions. He was immensely popular within the Services and among civilians of all ages. Boyish charm, wit and humour were other notable qualities of independent India’s best known soldier. Apart from hardcore military affairs, the Field Marshal took immense interest in strategic studies and national security issues. Owing to this unique blend of qualities, a grateful nation honoured him with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in 1968 and 1972 respectively.



**Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC  
1914-2008**

CLAWS Occasional Papers are dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw

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Centre for Land Warfare Studies  
New Delhi



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# Restraint as a Successful Strategic Tool in Kargil Conflict 1999

“We apologize for this temporary democratic interruption. Normal martial law will be resumed shortly.”

— Graffiti on Karachi wall, August, 1990<sup>1</sup>

“We should admit that Kargil has been a complete disaster and failure.”

— Lt. Gen. (ret'd) Kamal Matinuddin<sup>2</sup>, Pakistan Army

“The tailpiece of the Kargil fiasco is difficult to match in the annals of diplomatic humiliation.”

— Dawn, a Pakistani Newspaper, July 21, 1999

**Kargil Conflict Of 1999 Reprised in Operation Sindoor in 2025**



**OPERATION  
SINDOOR**

Source: The Indian Express

As debate rages on media justifying Operation Sindoor that was launched by the Indian Armed Forces in the night of 6/7 May 2025, in response to the brutal and dastardly terrorist action initiated by Pakistan sponsored group Lashkar -e- Tayyiba in Pahalgam, a famous tourist destination for all Indians, particularly, newlyweds, wherein 26 innocents were killed after deliberate identification parade to separate Muslims and non-Muslims – all male members were asked to recite Kalma and strip down to show the circumcision as mandated in Islam and if found to be a non-Muslim, were killed in front of their wives, children and family members. Swift retaliatory response by the Indian Armed Forces on 24 April 2025 made it evident the seriousness of ‘no tolerance stance of India’ and declared – "Today, from the soil of Bihar, I say this to the whole world, India will identify, trace and punish every terrorist and their backer. We will pursue them to the ends of the Earth". This message (by switching from Hindi to English) was deliberate and addressed in different constituencies. This message was also an indication to the world community that, ‘the country has been baited enough with no positive response from them and thus an independent action is unfolding’. To Pakistan and its stooges, the message could not have been clearer.

While more detailed orders would have been passed to the National Security Adviser, Chief of the Defence Staff and the three Service Chiefs, the speed and thoroughness with which retribution was brought upon, surprised the world and shocked the Pakistani leadership. The Pakistani capitulation, within four days, with all exposed Air Defence, destroyed airfields and critical air assets, sheer incapacitation of the military machinery and symbolic grounding to dust of the global headquarters of terrorism in Bahawalpur and Muridke, nesting in depths and safe confines of Pakistan Punjab, whetted the appetite of Indians. They desired and wanted a complete defeat and destruction of Pakistan. Fed up with



the terrorists' violence over past thirty-five years and more, there was a national mood to destroy Pakistan – so did, few political parties, with different reasons and the Deep State and China for more dangerous and strategic purpose.

The acceptance of the cessation of fire on request of the DGMO of Pakistan was unacceptable to the Indian population in general and to the security establishment in particular. 'When the enemy is down, the knockout punch must be delivered' – was the commonly quoted direction. It was also a political *hara-kiri* of sorts by the ruling dispensation, more so when Donald Trump, the most pompous, arrogant and unreliable American President, in recent times, jumped in quickly to stake claim for having brokered peace through trade offers.

While it will be few years that the strategic outcomes of the pause in Operation Sindoor will emerge clearly – one was drawn back to the Kargil conflict of 1999, where strategic restraint, self-imposed by the then political dispensation was most debated. No employment of Indian Airforce in its full measure and restricting the area of conflict only to Kargil Sector and disallowing any Trans LC operations were hotly deliberated at tactical and strategic levels. One had the privilege of analysing the compulsions and strategic outcomes of the 'Restraint', as a smart strategic manoeuvre, in comfort of retrospection, after nine years of the conflict. After 26 years one finds, most of the possible strategic outcomes of the Kargil conflict resonating to in the current ongoing Operation Sindoor. These were articulated in the paper "Restraint as a Successful Strategic Tool in Kargil Conflict 1999", written while attending the Master's Program in "Grand Strategy, Formulation of National and Foreign Policy" at National Defense University, Washington DC in 2007-08. The paper in abridged form was also published in Small Wars Journal, an online journal in USA.<sup>3</sup> The paper in its original form is reproduced.

## Abstract

Strategic restraint or patience in the world is perceived to be a sign of weakness. Particularly when military operations are paused and ceasefire declared when the enemy is down, the same is considered to be ill logical. The same was the case was in the Kargil Conflict of 1999, when the Government of the day ordered restrictions onto the Indian Armed Forces that were tactically expensive in terms of human lives and duration of the conflict. Limiting the conflict only to the geographical extent of intrusion where the enemy was entrenched onto dominating heights from where the entire slopes leading to the defences were exposed and no cover was available to the attacking Indian Army was nearly suicidal. Then came the next restriction of not crossing the Line of Control for launching of operations and restricted employment of the Indian Air Force in support of the attacking force came into criticism. The outcry on stopping of the operation based on the request of Pakistani government and the intervention of the Americans when the tide had clearly turned in favor was also a source of severe critical debate. The paper analyses the challenges faced at the tactical and operational levels that resulted in major strategic outcomes that could not be foreseen at that point of time. One concludes that in matters of application of military force and geo political and geo economic environment, strategic restraint pays far more dividends.

## Introduction

In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf, then Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) of the Pakistan Army, orchestrated a major intrusion into an unoccupied but strategically sensitive complex of Kargil along the northern border of India. The Kargil intrusion was an operation of strategic importance conducted by Pakistan to provide a much-

required momentum to its weakening proxy war in the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), a state of India. Pakistan had waged an irregular war, in J&K, for a decade, exploiting religious similarities to incite secessionist activities, by actively supporting, financing, and training insurgents, while exporting foreign radicals and so-called jihadist elements across the borders. This latest aggression across the border by the Pakistan Army was another attempt to redeem its prestige after the defeats of 1947-48, 1965 and 1971. The 1998-99 act of intrusion was of great significance in terms of national treachery because it was enacted during a political peace process when the then Indian Prime Minister was visiting Pakistan on invitation. The surprise intrusion, along a stretch of the border that had historically remained peaceful due to the terrain difficulties, was a spark in an already charged regional tinderbox.

There was immense public support and political pressure in India for a full-scale war to teach a lesson to the neighbor that had crossed the borders to seize territory by surprise using tribes from North West Frontier Province (NWFP) or mujahedeen, as a front, led by the Army, for the fourth time. The political leadership in India, however, showed great strategic maturity and restraint to limit the scope of military operations to the area of intrusion in Kargil at the cost of sacrificing immediate strategic military victory and domestic political gains to carve out long term national strategic advantages of immense proportions. They preferred to trade the local military advantage for political, diplomatic, and economic gains at the international level. By showing restraint, political dexterity and going beyond short-term political advantage, the Indian leadership exploited a situation of crisis to propel the country onto the world stage as a responsible nation. The decisions made at that time were challenging in view of the conflicting domestic passions, operational military compulsions and a need to emerge as a strong

nation willing to fight a war for its national interests. I intend to highlight the process of decision making at the national level in a highly charged environment of patriotic passion, uncertainty, and competing strategic objectives of the affected policy making agencies to resolve the Kargil conflict. This study also aims to draw lessons for the major powers of today in the relevance of *Strategy of Restraint*, the tool applied to resolve the Kargil conflict, in the contemporary world. The research shall delve into the issues listed in succeeding sub paragraphs:

- Section I - A summary of the strategic environment and the domestic context affecting the region during 1998-99.
- Section II - A summary account of the Kargil intrusion.
- Section III - A review of the process of resolution of the Kargil crisis by the Indian Government to include the National Strategic objectives before the crisis, the conflicting objectives and strategies of the agencies affecting the policy, and the evolution of strategy of restraint to realign the various conflicting objectives and strategies.
- Conclusion will include the lessons learned and the relevance of restraint in the contemporary environment.

## Section I - Strategic Environment and Domestic Context in The Region In 1998-99

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**Kargil Memorial: in the backdrop is the Kargil Heights where the brutal and bloody battles were fought. Source: Pinterest**

### Strategic Environment

In the 1990s, the world in general was peaceful with only NATO interference in Yugoslavia and humanitarian problems of the African continent in the media spotlight. The world was getting used to the idea of a system dominated by a single superpower with an ever increasing and expanding reach of globalization. All the major and smaller nations were attempting to exploit the advantages of globalization with a specific focus on the economic progress. There was a post cold war realignment taking place. The space created by the fall of the Soviet Union was being contested by few with the focus on economic alliances. An environment of

instability had emerged in absence of four-decade long blocs (communist and west) where new threats and opportunities were emerging for many countries coming out from the shadows of communism and protectorate of the US.

**US** The US, highly uncomfortable with its unique single superpower status, was searching for a strategic direction for role playing in the world affairs. The Clinton administration was tackling the Monica Lewinsky affair in a pre-election year. The US was more or less inward looking focusing on domestic affairs, managing its economy and was totally involved in the Mid East peace process. The interest in the Indian sub continent was reduced due to the resolution of the Afghan crisis.

**Russia** An important role player in the world and the region, Russia was licking its wounds of loss in Afghanistan and trying to manage the break up of the old Soviet system. They were totally involved with controlling the collapsing economy and tackling the domestic turmoil of governance. The Russians had no time for the world.

**China** On the northern borders of India and Pakistan, China was focused on the economic issues which had seen an upswing due to the radical pro-market changes in its domestic policies. It was emerging as an important nation with superpower ambitions to fill the gap created by the collapse of Soviet Russia. It had also undertaken to play a role of responsible nation.

**Afghanistan** The communist regime was effectively defeated and Taliban government had assumed control of 90% of the country by the end of 1998. A pro-Pakistan alliance, trained, financed and supported by the Pakistan establishment backed by the US dollars was a major success story for the Pakistan army. The unique experience of regime changes through a mujahidin army trained on the soil of Pakistan and success in insurgency war had

instilled a sense of confidence for the Pakistani establishment for future adventures.

## Regional Dynamics in the Domestic Context

The major event that was shaping the South Asian region and the domestic politics was that Pakistan had become nuclear capable after carrying out nuclear tests in May 1998. India had also carried out tests in early May 1998 after breaking a self-imposed moratorium. The sub continent was effectively a nuclear zone but had as a consequence become isolated. Virtually the entire world had reacted negatively to the nuclear tests by severing ties with India and Pakistan in a wide range of fields including, diplomatic, technology exchange, immigration, cultural exchange, military, and commerce. A number of significant leading organizations and countries, including the US, had imposed economic embargoes.

**Pakistan** The establishment of the country was riding high due to the success achieved in Afghanistan in terms of regime change. The regime change west of the border had given the strategic depth to face off the Indian threat. The termination of conflict in Afghanistan had relieved the establishment to focus efforts on the proxy war being waged in Kashmir as demanded by the religious groups. Unfortunately, the economic conditions in the country were extremely bad. The government, a democracy led by Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharief, was plagued with corruption charges leading to internal tensions, dissent, and turmoil. The fundamentalists were exploiting the poverty and corruption issues to incite trouble at the cost of the illiterate people to demand imposition of Islamic rule. The democratic government in power, corrupt as it was, was unable to tackle the challenges at home and needed to create an artificial crisis to divert the attention of the population. There were additional set of circumstances and perceptions within Pakistan that set the stage for next

misadventure with India. These are enumerated in brief in sub paragraphs below:

- The cessation of crisis on the Afghan front had a major negative effect for the Pakistani establishment. It had lost its privileged status of being a frontline state for the US. This resulted in loss of interest for the US that had even imposed economic sanctions after the nuclear tests. To the horror of the civil and military establishment in Pakistan, the Clinton administration was pushing them towards peaceful and bilateral resolution of Kashmir dispute with India whereas they wanted a third party (US) or international mediation. There was a sense of urgent need to revive the interest of the US and the world towards Pakistan to regain the ally status once again and reap the historic benefits of economic and military aid.
- The success and experience achieved in defeating the Russians in Afghanistan gave a sense of confidence that Pakistan could deliver a similar blow to India.
- The nuclear tests also gave a euphoric sense of national achievement, bolstered the confidence of the people and gave a feeling of protection from any punishing response from India due to the nuclear umbrella.<sup>4</sup>
- With the first step of the promised Islamic bomb achieved, the ambition of becoming the leader of the Islamic world seemed probable if the Muslims in Indian Kashmir could be liberated.
- The emerging domestic situation in India and its relative isolation due to the nuclear tests had created a perception of an opportunity to revenge previous defeats.
- **Major Indicator of Intent** A major indicator of intent of the brewing trouble was lost to the Indian intelligentsia. It was the



removal of Gen Karamat, the balanced and pragmatic COAS, who had distaste for politics and did not want the army to be involved in any misadventures. Gen Karamat was forced to resign under mysterious circumstances just three months before term end, due to differences with the PM. The public sacking of the most powerful person in the Pakistani hierarchy and smooth transition to a highly religious and fundamentalist officer should have placed caution for India. Gen Pervez Musharraf, a hardline officer with close ties to Taliban and Osama bin Laden was highly recommended by the religious groups, especially the hardcore fundamentalist party of Jamaat e Islami, became the COAS superseding two Generals who later resigned.<sup>5</sup>

**India** A weak central government cobbled of coalition parties, led by a minority party, had come to power in early 1998. However, within a few weeks, in April 1999, this Government also collapsed after losing the vote of confidence in the Parliament. A caretaker government was installed by the President, a titular head in Indian democracy where true power lies with the Parliament, till elections scheduled for Sep 1999.<sup>6</sup> The only positive activity on the Indian landscape was a waning insurgency in J&K where elections had been held and a state government was in power. Due to the nuclear tests, the relations with all the major countries in the world were on a downward spiral. The US, Australia, UK, Japan, France and China along with other countries had come out unified in vociferous condemnation and had imposed stringent economic embargoes. Unlike Pakistan, the effect of dissociation and embargoes was immense for India as it did not have support of any Islamic nations such as the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). There was a decline in conventional military capability for a decade as the defense expenditure had dropped from 3.6 per cent of the GDP in 1987 to 2.3 per cent in 1998.<sup>7</sup> It was believed that the

involvement of the Army in internal security operations for 15 years along with huge shortage of officers, 13000 at junior ranks, had resulted in its fatigue.<sup>8</sup> Lt General Javed Nisar, Chief Intelligence Adviser to Pakistan PM, had stated “The Indian Army is incapable of undertaking any conventional operations at present, what to talk of enlarging conventional conflict.”<sup>9</sup> India looked like easy meat for a country that had not known the power and dynamics of a true democracy. This set the stage for the implementation of the Kargil Intrusion plan lying in the cupboard of the Pakistani military planners that was rejected by Gen Zia-ul-Haq, the military dictator in 1987 and Gen Karamat in 1998 resulting in his sacking as the COAS.

## Section II - A Summary Account OF The Kargil Intrusion

### Key Battle Fronts during Kargil War



Source: Vision IAS

## Strategic Relevance of Kargil

Kargil is located at an extremely sensitive sector along the North Western border. The sector covers 168 kilometers of frontage with average heights of peaks along the mountain ridges being 17000 feet and is totally devoid of any vegetation or cover. It is characterized by extremely cold, glaciated valleys and forbiddingly precipitous mountains. Local conditions impose severe limitations on conduct of any sustained large size operations.<sup>10</sup> The heights along the borders in this sector dominate the all-important line of communication to the *Ladakh* Sector that also included *Siachen*, the ever-contentious glacier for Pakistan. The heights along the entire stretch were vacated by both the sides during the winters to avoid casualties due to extreme weather conditions and avalanches.<sup>11</sup> The heights were easily accessible from the Pakistani side due to the terrain configuration and could be occupied without detection as it had little or nil Indian troop deployment. The possibility of surprise was highest in this complex. Attacking was impossible and was not an advisable option at these heights due to the steep gradients, and rarefied atmosphere resulting in lack of oxygen. The absence of cover would also force the attacking troops to be exposed for the entire distance of 4000 to 5000ft of climb in face of direct and indirect fire. This area was a set piece copy book complex to fight a successful defensive battle. The rationale for selection of Kargil was a master piece of planning by an excellent military commander. The map of the Kargil area showing the areas of intrusion is attached as appendix A for reference.

**Influence of Demography** I personally feel that the issue of demography was also an essential element in deciding for intrusion in Kargil. In the area of intrusion, along the Line of Control (LOC), the population on the Indian side was Shia Muslims<sup>12</sup> and on the Pakistani side were Baltis. There was no insurgent activity in the area due to the lack of local support as both the Baltis and Shias did

not like the spread of Sunni base of the Mujahidin. The Pakistani establishment disliked both the groups. The Baltis were brutally crushed under Gen Pervez Musharraf, when he was the GOC 10 Corps, by bringing the tribes from the NWFP region. The reason of the intrusion in this area was on the premise that in an artillery duel, the Pakistani army could fire without any remorse on the Shia population whereas the retaliatory fire from the Indian side could destroy the Baltis on their side for whom they had no affection. During the conflict the population centers in the area were targeted by Pakistani artillery deliberately unlike elsewhere in J&K.

**The Politico-strategic Intentions of Pakistan in Kargil.** The politico-strategic intentions of Pakistan to undertake operations of such significance in Kargil were:

- To internationalize Kashmir as a nuclear flash point requiring urgent third-party intervention;<sup>13</sup>
- To alter the Line of Control (LOC) and disrupt its sanctity by capturing un held areas in Kargil;<sup>14</sup>
- To achieve a better bargaining position for a possible tradeoff against the positions held by India in Siachen;<sup>15</sup>
- To give a boost to militancy in Kashmir by drawing away Indian troops from the counter insurgency (CI) grid and play to the fundamentalist lobby and Pakistani people by bold action in Kashmir which continued to be a highly emotive issue.<sup>16</sup>

**Operation Badr.** The Kargil intrusion plan, eventually codenamed Operation Badr, was initially prepared and presented to Gen Zia-ul-Haq in 1987, as a retaliatory measure for the Siachen debacle. It was vetoed by the then Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yakub Khan as being militarily untenable and internationally and politically indefensible.<sup>17</sup> It was twice rejected by Mrs. Bhutto when she was the PM.<sup>18</sup> The plan was refined when Gen Musharraf

became the Director General of Military Operations in 1993-95.<sup>19</sup> Gen Karamat, the COAS in 1996-98, was presented with the plan and was removed due to his disapproval. Though he claims that this plan never came for his approval, it is unlikely that the process of implementation of such an important plan would have commenced during his tenure without his knowledge.<sup>20</sup> This plan was rehearsed and practiced by Gen Musharraf in 1997 and perfected in 1998 when he was the GOC 10 Corps, the formation responsible for the implementation of Operation Badr.

### **Dateline of Kargil Conflict**

The process of preparation for Kargil intrusion was effectively put in place in Oct 1998 when Gen Musharraf became the COAS and immediately visited HQ 10 Corps. His plan was approved probably in Jan 1999 by Nawaz Sharief during his briefing at General HQ, Rawalpindi.<sup>21</sup> The active intrusion commenced somewhere in Apr 1999,<sup>22</sup> detected by the Indian patrols in first week of May 1999 and evicted by 26 July 1999.<sup>23</sup> The cost was that India lost 461 men including 25 officers with 683 injured including 54 officers. Pakistan suffered 700 men and 45 officers killed during the conflict.<sup>24</sup> A brief sequence of events is given at the appendix B for reference.

### **A Major Shock and Strategic Surprise to India**

The Kargil Review Committee set up in India has stated, "There is a little doubt that the operation was extremely well planned and executed and that Pakistan was able to achieve total surprise."<sup>25</sup> The committee comprised a very high-profile set of members to look into the episode of the Kargil intrusion. It has acknowledged the planning acumen and timing of the Pakistan military to achieve surprise at the operational level. However, the strategic surprise and deception that was delivered on India by the Pakistani establishment was unparalleled. The intelligence community, the

military and the bureaucracy were lulled into complacency at the strategic level by a gradual peace process. The PMs of both the countries, I.K. Gujral and Nawaz Sharif, had met four times in a brief period of nine months, May 1997 to Jan 1998, to revitalize relations. After the new Indian PM, Atal Behari Vajpayee was sworn in, the PMs of either side met again in July 1998 in Colombo and September 23 in New York. A composite dialogue process for peaceful negotiations to resolve all differences had picked up steam. The Indian PM on invitation from Mr. Nawaz Sharif had travelled to Lahore and signed the famed Lahore Declaration to "... resolve all issues" and reaffirmed their "...condemnation of terrorism in all its forms."<sup>26</sup> There was a feeling of amity and bonhomie never witnessed before in the history of the two neighbors. There was a popular perception on either side of the border that finally the two nations will be at peace because there was a democratic government in Pakistan. The Indian establishment including the military and intelligence were ill prepared for this ultimate form of deception as the Kargil intrusion plan had already been approved in Jan 1999 and was in motion when the Indian PM was travelling to Lahore on the invite of the Pakistan PM to sign the widely hailed Lahore Declaration on Feb 21, 1999.

### **Section III - The Process of Resolution of the Kargil Crisis by India**

#### **National Strategic Objectives of India Prior to the Conflict**

The Indian economy, technology development programs, commerce and trade were stifled to a great extent due to the breaking of diplomatic ties and imposition of economic embargoes after the nuclear tests. Though the impacts were not crippling, the government realized that the nation was being left behind in exploiting the benefits of globalization. The diplomatic efforts to

break the impasse on various embargoes were well on the way to success but the progress was painfully slow. The foremost goal in the National Strategic Objectives of the Indian government was to stabilize the economy and ride the globalization boom. The second priority was to thaw the diplomatic isolation and join the world community as a responsible nation. The next priority was to emerge as a lead nation in the regional groupings of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). In absence of superpower rivalry, the relevance of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) had virtually ceased to exist. The leadership however wanted to revive NAM and lead it as a countervailing force to China and the sole superpower, the US. The ultimate goal was to continue on its path for gaining a permanent seat in the Security Council in the future when the time for expansion of the Security Council came. A number of actions were either taken or were in progress at the time of the Kargil crisis. A “no first use of nuclear weapons” declaration was made followed by a self-imposed moratorium on further nuclear testing. A concerted effort was made to engage and continue the process of dialogue towards peaceful settlement of all the festering issues. A diplomatic offensive of sorts was underway that was yielding very positive results leading to opening up diplomatic ties and breaking up of economic embargoes.

### **Dilemmas of the Kargil Crisis and its Effect on the Strategic Objectives**

An unwanted war was thrust on the doorstep of the Indian leadership at a very inopportune moment. A caretaker government was in power at the Centre and any action taken would be only viewed negatively in the domestic political arena and internationally. The crisis clashed directly with the base point of projecting the country as a responsible and peaceful nation in the region and thus be accepted as the lead nation or partner in various

economic and international groupings. If the country joined in a fight to evict or escalate the response to intrusion, the result will be of being treated as an aggressor and thus cast in the mould of irresponsible nation. The situation was difficult as there were many countries wanting to be a permanent member of the Security Council and would debunk Indian claims in light of the ongoing diplomatic isolation. Internally the political parties would make much noise over the political color for any action taken by the caretaker government on grounds of political ambitions. If nothing was done and total reliance was placed on diplomatic or international mediation to resolve the crisis, the country would have lost its prestige in the eyes of the world. It would have lost an important piece of territory to suffer a long-term strategic disadvantage. As such a weak nation had no place in the community of the world leaders.

It was a catch 22 situation wherein *three options* had emerged. The first option was to declare war, capture territory in the plain sector of Punjab, Bahawalpur etc exploiting the superior military advantage of technology, forces, and terrain to seek resolution of the Kashmir problem including withdrawal from the intrusion areas. The war was thrust upon India and hence it was a just cause to seek complete range of advantages to resolve all the pending issues. The second option was to limit the operations to the LOC along the J&K region and avoid a full range of war along the International Borders (IB) thus not violating the international norms and limiting conflict to the previously disputed areas. This limited the use of armor forces and exploiting of the full range of the military superiority. It restricted the employment of forces due to the constraints of operations in the mountainous terrain. However, internationally this course would have been more acceptable and yet giving wide range of suitable strategic options for the military. The final option was to take recourse to the



diplomatic and international mediation to resolve the conflict at least in the initial stages. This was the most plausible option wherein the country would have come out as a responsible and peaceful country. However, the dangers of negotiations failing and the simultaneous strengthening of the defenses in the intrusion area with passage of time were very high. The military operations in the Kargil sector were restricted to only summer months (June to August) due to the weather conditions and delays of every single day would result in corresponding increase in casualties. The Pakistani leadership was banking on the third option due to a caretaker government at the Centre. Pakistan also hoped for international intervention for ceasefire if India had escalated the conflict resulting in an early ceasefire with territorial advantages.

### The Players



**The Euphoric Indian Soldiers atop a post during Kargil Conflict.**

**Source: Pinterest**

A large number of agencies were involved in influencing the policy on the strategic directions to be taken for resolution of the crisis. All had stakes in the earliest resolution of the conflict with minimum pain. However, their perceptions, understanding of the situation and comprehension of the broader picture restricted the policy making capability. In light of a large number of diagrammatically opposing views of different policy influencers on the *ways to resolve the crisis* using a *wide range of means* to achieve the *similar end* i.e. eviction of the intrusion, it became quite difficult for the national leadership to arrive at any policy. The task became more complicated due to the fluid situation, lack of reliable intelligence, and pressures from the strategic environment of the nations wanting to avoid a nuclear catastrophe.

**The Public** The population wanted a quick fix to the problem of intrusion. There was rage against the aggressor for time and again invading the borders since independence. There was a sense that this was an opportunity to finally resolve the J&K problem and punish the invading country in such a manner as to be incapable of recovery. There were wild theories being projected that the invading country should be divided as it attempts to do to India. The newspapers and media were used intensively by the public as a platform to fan its ire. Every returning body bag from the front only added fuel to the fire. The passions at the time were very high. The bottom line of action was – a full-scale war at all cost. Influence of such popular desires and passions on shaping of the policy by any political party is obvious. There was dismay and disbelief on the deceit by the neighbor in the light of signing a peace agreement while hatching a military operation. The effect on decisions to be taken by a political party coming up for elections within few months can very well be imagined or a corollary drawn to the events of 9/11.

**The Political Parties** The political parties of all hues and colors had their patriotic badges pasted on their shoulders, and nationalism written on their sleeves. The parties in the opposition were the ones wanting action with utmost fervor as they knew that the course for eviction was set and they could not be seen to be left out of the battle. The demands were for full scale war in line with the public passions. The emotions were being mutually fed by the public's demand and political need. The case was similar with the coalition partners in the caretaker government. It would be fair to state that the scene was reminiscent of 9/11.

**Economic Advisors** The advisors informed the leadership that the economy of the Nation could sustain the war in spite of the embargoes. They also informed that a full-scale war will be in favor of the Nation as it will bleed Pakistan economically resulting in its long-term destruction as a nation state. The Indian External Affairs Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, had claimed, "For us the battle will be a cut in the finger. But Pakistan will bleed itself dry, if it does not see reason."<sup>27</sup> Few of the advisors took the strategic view of the situation stating that a responsible action will result in opening of the economic embargoes. They recommended a short and limited war with fixed aims that may benefit the long-term cause of India by getting approval of the regional countries and the goodwill of countries like G8 nations like Japan.

**Foreign Affairs** The foreign affairs policy makers advised caution and recommended restraint in the process of eviction of the intrusion. They advised against the escalation of the conflict to a full-scale war. They had a sense of the strategic environment. The Jaswant-Talbott talks had yielded a very pro- India response and the foreign policy direction of the US and other major countries of the world were tilting towards India. They cautioned for a restrained and calibrated response that would demonstrate the responsible character of the nation to deal with a major crisis. They

were looking to break the gridlock of diplomatic isolation and emerge as a lead nation riding on the crisis. However, they recommended the eviction of intrusion by application of the tools of diplomacy, information and military with a focus on public unveiling of the Pakistani claims that the intrusion was a purely mujahidin operation with no role by Pakistan.

**Defense Forces** Having faced a major resource crunch over the previous decade and fought an exhausting insurgency war in J&K in the same period; the defense forces finally had their moment in sun. Contrary to the claims of the Pakistani leadership, the military was in high morale and fighting fit due to the policies evolved to maintain the standards of conventional capabilities. The sense of *Just War* was an essential factor of the morale of the troops that were ready to scale heights of 18 to 20000 feet in sub zero temperatures without shred of cover in face of brutal and murderous enemy fire. The 2.5 to 1 ratio of troop strength and an overwhelming superiority in terms of equipment of all the services made the option of going for an all-out war attractive. There was also a feeling of doing the real fighting against a recognizable enemy instead of the counter insurgency operations that propelled the soldiers to deliver.

In light of the obvious terrain difficulties in the mountain sector of J&K region, the defense forces preferred the option of full-scale war to exploit the overall military superiority in ground of own choosing across the entire border. The crippling effect of a full-scale war on Pakistan's economy was also a factor for this recommendation. At *the boots on the ground* level, there was a desire to give a befitting reply for the decade long irregular war so that the unfinished business of 1971 could be completed.

The Army brass understood the political dilemma and was willing to limit the scale of operations to the J&K sector. However,

it wanted to expand the range of operations to the entire LOC sector with a view to exploit the space for applying forces at will and to achieve a certain degree of operational surprise.

The Air Force had an exceptional level of superiority in terms of aircraft, standards of pilots and technology. They were anxious to test the newly proposed doctrine of air superiority operations and exploit the entire range of space and targets available. They wanted to be the ultimate leverage by striking the logistics chain in depth, specifically in the area of intrusion, thus choking the troops across the LOC and forcing them to withdraw from the heights.

**The Political Direction of War by the Cabinet** To the dismay of all, the Cabinet decided to go for a restrained but full-scale response combining all the tools of statecraft. It further decided to limit the scale of operations to the frontage of intrusion only with a further caveat of no crossing the LOC. “The military strategy was to *contain-evict-deny*, that is to immediately contain and limit the intrusions up to the areas affected, then evict the intrusion and eventually deny such a venture in the future to the enemy”.<sup>28</sup> The operation was to be conducted as an information war under the full glare of media on the lines of Operation Desert Storm. A case of *Just War* was to be made to target the Indian public and give a high moral ground to the soldiers. This would position India as a responsible nation forced to war but willing to sacrifice strategic military advantages and short-term gains for the greater cause of peace. The fact that the political leadership wanted to avoid escalation was made clear by the statement of Air Chief Marshal Tipnis, “The government wants to ensure there is no escalation. The implications of restricted use of air power were made clear to it.”<sup>29</sup>

This issue was debated seriously in the public of India<sup>30</sup> and led to a tremendous consternation amongst all the ranks of the Army. Gen Chowdhary, a former COAS, stated, “It was an impractical

proposition for the Army to flush out intruders without crossing the LOC.”<sup>31</sup> It was plain and simple a suicidal act to launch operations from the frontal direction and along the spurs from which he expected the attacks to come. These types of tactics were not taught in any military text books and were unheard of in the history of military campaigns. The restriction became extremely serious as the attacking forces had no cover, could move very slowly due to the gradient and lack of oxygen, and resultantly were exposed for longer periods. During the operations, the attacking troops were subjected to range type targeting to the withering automatic and artillery fire from heights for periods exceeding 8 to 10 hours of movement time in the open. This was the cause of maximum casualties suffered by the Army. All possible advantages of military and terrain were traded to achieve the higher aims at the international level to prove the complicity of the Pakistan and emerge as a responsible nation.

The direction given by the Cabinet short changed the Air Force also of its relative advantage of superiority. They were required to engage the enemy defenses and bases from own side of the LOC, as they also could not cross the LOC in deference to the Cabinet decision. They were exposed to targeting from the stingers deployed by the enemy along the flight path. Targeting the defenses was an unenviable task while flying with jet speed at heights of 20 to 21000 feet exposed to stingers, siphoned by the Pakistan Army from the Afghan front as a gift of Charlie Wilson. The Air Force lost two fighter bombers and two MI 17 helicopters within first few days but thereafter recovered to devise newer tactics.

**Process of the Decision by the Cabinet.** The Cabinet held a large number of meetings with the affected parties, particularly the Chiefs of the Services. A series of visits were made by the PM, Defense Minister and the Foreign Minister to the forward areas to

assess the situation on the ground. Though the intelligence picture was only emerging, a number of preparatory actions were put in place. The most important facet of the decision-making process was to involve the Corps commander and the Division commanders responsible for the intrusion area and discuss the various options of operation in the light of achievement of overall national strategic objectives.

The overall strategic vision of *restraint* was evolved early on and put forth for the consideration of the field commanders intimately involved in the operational level. The turning point came with realization of importance of the long term national strategic objectives by the field commanders. Plans were made keeping the rhetoric and passions aside and evaluating all the ramifications of failures. The eviction of intrusion was central to all permutation combinations discussed. The components of the strategy of restraint emerged during the discussions at the operational level. The most important was to call the bluff of the Pakistan Army that was claiming that the intrusions were mujahidin, on whom they had no control. This would have led to loss of credibility of the Pakistani establishment in the world. It was a strategic victory of a sort in terms of informational warfare. Localizing of the operation was the second component of the strategy. The core issue was that the limiting of the operations to own side of the LOC, would result in a Just Cause scenario thus enhancing of the image of the country and the military. Third was to concentrate effort in the area of interest and thus not allow Pakistan an excuse to escalate the war into other areas. Besides achieving concentration of forces, this would deny the much sought after intention of Pakistan to internationalize the issue. Any attempt to open the conflict in the J&K sector or the plains of Punjab would have resulted in playing right into the hands of the enemy's design. Escalation could have resulted in greater international interference leading to an early

ceasefire in an advantageous position for Pakistan. The fourth factor of the strategy of restraint was early conclusion of the conflict thereby limiting the unintended consequences of war. The concentration of forces would enable greater firepower and troops to evict the intrusion before the next snowfall expected by early August after which the conduct of operation would have become virtually impossible. The fifth side of the strategy was to exploit the favorable international opinion that could have faded with passage of time. The next factor of consideration was the issue of casualties. Any type of war would have resulted in unwarranted but definitely large number of casualties. The bedrock of all the components of the strategy was to maintain focus on the desired end state, to evict the intrusion, and that may not have been feasible if forces were dissipated, resulting in a strategic disadvantage in the sector. The maintenance of aim, was the most essential element that resulted in realigning of the opinions of all the policy makers. Any success elsewhere but loss of the intrusion area would have resulted in loss of prestige and strategically important territory.

**Direction of War** Once the military was on board for the strategy of restraint, a focused offensive was put in place to win over the public and the political parties. The military was made responsible to appoint a spokesman and represent the government to the public and media. All military activities in detail were presented to the media for time by a uniformed person thus lending credibility to the government's strategy. The media was taken on board to bring the tactical level of fight to the living rooms of the public for the first time. All the Cabinet members, the Chiefs and the Commanders in the field spoke in one language due to high degree of involvement in the planning process. This resulted in confidence of the public in the course adopted for the operation. The operation was to be conducted by the local Corps Commander with minimum injection of troops from outside.



Simultaneously, a diplomatic offensive was also launched to discredit the Pakistani claims and to explain the situation on the border to the world. An open access to media to visit the site of conflict and explaining the rationale of the restrained response to the world leaders yielded great results. Not crossing the LOC resulted in maintaining the international pressure on Pakistan. The world community was convinced that the conflict was initiated by Pakistan and the situation was being diffused by India.<sup>32</sup> The information war and diplomatic offensive resulted in isolation of Pakistan even from its traditional allies. China, a long term ally of Pakistan and mentor of its nuclear capabilities, maintained a neutral stand.<sup>33</sup> Mr. Clinton, the President of the US, again an important ally, advised Nawaz Sharief to take his men and soldiers out of Kargil.<sup>34</sup> The US stand changed to neutrality for the first time in history by going against the Pakistani claims and intent and stated that the LOC was clearly demarcated and recognized by the both sides for years and the issue needs to be resolved bilaterally. Similar sentiments were expressed by all the major powers of the world.<sup>35</sup>

With eviction process completed on July 26, 1999, the Kargil conflict was resolved with great advantages for India. Its basic goals of national strategic objectives were met in totality. Though the price paid in terms of lives of the brave men of Indian Forces was high, one could seek some solace in the fact that the figures of casualties would have been much higher if a full-scale war had been fought. The basic aim of eviction was met well before the commencement of the bad weather season. A subtle message was also sent regarding the professionalism of the Indian Armed Forces that had won an impossible war in one of the highest battlefields of the world with a very low casualty ratio. In the given terrain a ratio of 12 to 1 between the attacker and defender was a must to achieve some success. The infantry had assaulted with a ratio of less than 3

to 1. Pakistan lost on the battlefield at the tactical level and its isolation at the international resulted in the strategic success for the Indian leadership. It eventually failed politically when Gen Musharraf led a coup to overthrow his own mentor and benefactor, Mr. Nawaz Sharief, on October 12, 1999 to establish a dictatorship that continues till date in some form.

## Conclusion

### Lessons from the Process of Resolution of Conflict

The restraint exercised by the Indian leadership in the resolution of the Kargil crisis is instructive in the contemporary environment wherein the unintended consequences of war have global dimensions. The most important lesson is “--in the end it is reality, not publicity, which determines whether a leader has made a difference.”<sup>36</sup> It is imperative for the leaders to take control, during a crisis, instead of being steamrolled to deliver unprecedented response due to popular passions at the domestic front to do something. It needs to be realized that once unleashed, the dynamics of war are extremely difficult to reverse, limit, or control especially in the face of an emotionally charged domestic environment and political necessity to win. The second lesson is that Restraint is the tool of the powerful. Unlike popular misconceptions, restraint is not a sign of weakness but a reflection of courage by the more dominant to restrict one’s might and power. Restraint is not a privilege of weak being at mercy of the superior power. The third lesson is that restraint enables a calibrated and incremental response enabling use of a wide range of tools of statecraft to limit the effects of war/conflict as the efforts to resurrect a defeated country is more difficult with increase in levels of violence. Fourth, the interest and vision of subordinate policy makers is usually short term and populist due to lack of

accountability and lack of longer-term vision which separates them from the top leadership. The leadership should distance itself from the existing collegial system of following advice from the self-serving policy advisors, particularly the ones seeking to fulfill narrow organizational agendas; else minor crises will always escalate into major conflicts. It is a must to focus on the *end* and not allow the war to run away on its own course.

### **Consequences of War in the Contemporary Environment**

Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century employment of military as the prominent tool of statecraft was a matter of aristocratic pride with consequences restricted to the participating states. Thereafter, wars were waged to express nationalism and project power to dominate or extract commercial advantage until the Second World War. These were brutal battle engagements and long drawn wars resulting in incalculable destruction and human suffering for the warring countries. The wars had minimal adverse effects on the non participating countries and in many cases resulted in positions of advantage due to the weakening of the economy and military of the warring nations. Though the warring countries bore the brunt of war during this period, their neighbors also had to bear the pains in terms of commerce, economy and refugee movements. The effects of wars in any part of the world could be localized to the specific regions with the influence of the respective blocks or partnerships.

**Effect of Globalisation on War** However onset of the globalization has changed all the limiting factors of the world and has exacerbated the after effects of conflicts. The universal effects of globalization have touched the lives world wide in a positive manner spreading the benefits of progress; it has also carried the unintended consequences of war to every corner of the globe. With each conflict in the Middle East, the cost of oil has only climbed. A

single oil pipeline blast in terrorist action in a remote corner of Africa sends tremors in the world market. War in today's globalized world has an impact on the entire world along with the immediate effect on the countries involved. One may argue that the spiraling price rise of oil from 20\$ a barrel in 2001 to 100\$ in 2007 is due to the increase in world demand but impact of the ongoing Iraq war cannot be denied. The tragedy in terms of destruction of economy in Iraq, loss of numerous human lives of the involved nations, displacement of populations and their effect on the bordering countries are the obvious downsides. The effects of rise in oil price as a consequence of the war in Iraq and the resultant religious ramifications are pushing the poorer countries towards the precipice of becoming a failed state. This will manifest in a system of driving more countries towards totalitarian regimes with more numbers of trouble spots on the globe warranting increased interventions by the powers that might be having the stamina and strength to sustain.

### **Restraint as Realm of the Responsible**

A pre-emptive sledgehammer response results in splattering the wall with dirt that requires a tougher effort to clean up. Events at national levels espouse very high, vitriolic nationalistic fervor especially by those who are not responsible for the eventual outcomes. Once the offensive, aggressive and macho strategies result in human casualties and economic costs, the same passionate supporters' bay for axing the leadership with similar fervor. It is important to understand that the popular emotions are fickle and go along only with the successful that does not demand their contributions and sacrifice. The lessons drawn from conduct of the Indian leadership in the application of strategy of restraint during the Kargil Conflict 1999 with Pakistan to achieve long term National Strategic objectives at the cost of immediate populist aspirations are instructive. The US leadership, on whom rests the

responsibility to act with maturity in view of the power they wield to influence positive or negative outcomes at the international level, needs to consider this option as war with non state actors or non compliant nations can only make the security situation worse. Given the expenditure in terms of human and economic costs of both the wars being waged, instead of police action against a petty criminal with perverted bent of mind, the security situation for the US assets has only worsened and the criminal has achieved a symbolic heroic status.

It is imperative for the policymakers of the powerful and developed countries, the movers and shakers of the world events, to be responsible and reflect upon the utility of total war in light of its unintended consequences and long-term impact on their security due to the global effect of any war or conflict. Spiraling oil prices, crashing economies, job losses, the polarizing of communities based on ethnicity or religion, terrorist attacks, kidnapping of civilians or threat of weapons of mass destruction are a few of the impacts felt by countries not involved in the conflict. These events only tend to precipitate security problems for the powerful states wielding military might to crush dissent or react to minor players with no responsibility.

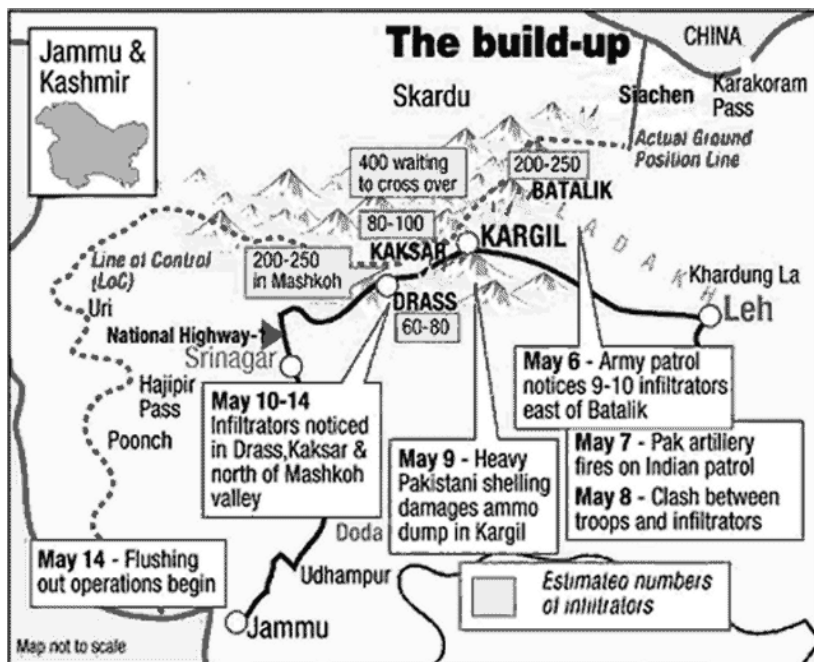
In an emerging conflict situation, the responsibility to calibrate and select the scale of war, ranging from inaction to a nuclear strike, rests on the table of the more powerful. Therefore, given the extent of the influence of war, it is incumbent upon the leadership of a mature and responsible nation to restrict the scale of conflict by combining it with all the tools of statecraft and spare the world of the resultant fallout. It is therefore essential to craft a strategy of restraint, as applicable to the situation, which is short of total or limited war so that the consequences are restricted, regional, remedial and realistic and yet achieving the national or international objectives.

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- 19 Ali Usman in *Takbeer*, June 10, 1999 states "In 1994 Gen Azizuddin finalized a plan to dislodge the Indian Army from Siachen. The most important part of the plan was to cut the Indian supply line to Siachen." At that time Gen Musharraf was the DGMO.
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### The Map of Kargil Sector Showing the Intrusion Areas





## The Dateline of Events in Resolution of Kargil Conflict In 1999

**May 3** Indian Shepherds sight Pakistani Troops on Jubar Heights in Kargil Sector well inside the LOC.<sup>1</sup>

**May 4-10** Shelling and other military activities increased by Pakistan towards the Indian side of LOC. Indian Reconnaissance patrols ambushed on May 10, 1999 well inside their territory.<sup>2</sup>

**May 14** Eight Indians killed in Kargil town area. The infiltration by Pakistani regulars confirmed in the Batalik and Dras areas.<sup>3</sup> Indian troops were mobilized by the local Commanders to manage the emerging situation.

**May 16** Though denying to the world regarding the presence of Pakistani troops, the Pakistan Army claims in their media a major success in seizing of more than five very important posts in India.<sup>4</sup>

**May 18** *Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan rules out full scale war.*<sup>5</sup> This public posturing early on reflects the position of the Indian leadership.

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1 *Frontline*, July 30, 1999.

2 *Times of India*, July 19, 1999.

3 *Times of India*, May 15, 1999.

4 *Frontier Post*, Pakistan, May 17, 1999.

5 *News*, a Pakistani Paper, May 18, 1999.

**May 21** Indian Air Force (IAF) on full alert. Three Brigades sidestepped by the Corps Commander. Reflects again the attempt of leadership to localize the conflict by not moving troops from outside of the conflict zone and limit the escalation.<sup>6</sup>

**May 21** The attacks begin to evict the intrusion. Pakistan claims Indian troops crossed LOC. Gen Musharraf warns of serious consequences.<sup>7</sup>

**May 22** A Kahmiri Liberation group claims publicly in Pakistan of having captured several hundred kilometers of territory from the Indian Forces.<sup>8</sup>

**May 26** Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) clears air strikes on own side of LOC. Air strikes commenced on May 26.<sup>9</sup>

**May 28** The US rejects Pakistani claims of LOC violations by India. An US department Official states, "To our knowledge India has not struck over the LOC, deliberately or accidentally".<sup>10</sup>

**June 6** Clear proof of involvement of Pakistani regulars emerged by capture of their soldiers during attacks and seizure of documents.<sup>11</sup>

**June 11** ISPR directorate of Pakistan admitted that Pakistani forces were in the Kargil and Dras sectors and can stop the road link to Siachen and Ladakh at will. It was a step taken prior to arrival

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6 *Times of India*, May 21, 1999.

7 *Times of India*, May 21, 1999.

8 *Public Opinion Trends (POT) Database*, Pakistan, May 22, 1999.

9 *Times of India*, May 27, 1999.

10 *Times of India*, May 28, 1999.

11 *The Hindu*, June 6, 1999.

of the Pakistan's Foreign minister in India to force a public negotiation from position of strength.

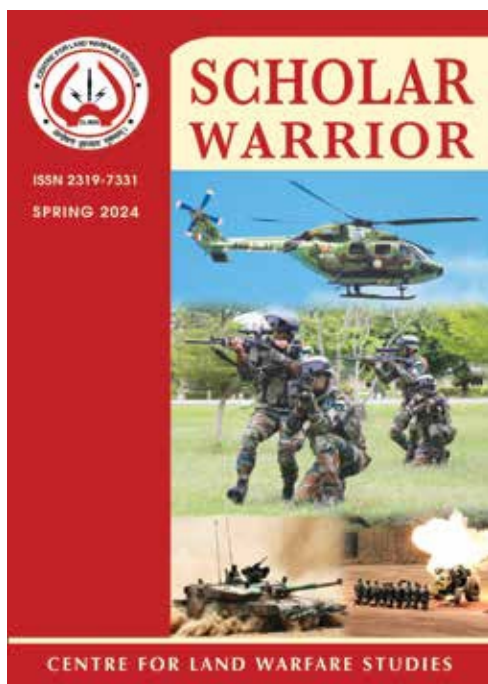
**July 26** The Indian Army declares completion of the operations to evict the intrusion in Kargil.

**October 12** Coup in Pakistan.

**October 17** Gen Musharraf takes over as the Chief Executive of Pakistan.

*The paper was written by the author, as a colonel, on 13 February 2008, while attending the Master's Program in "Grand Strategy, Formulation of National and Foreign Policy" at National Defense University, Washington DC in 2007-08. The paper in abridged form was published in Small Wars Journal, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/2008/06/15/restraint-as-a-successful-strategy-in-the-1999-kargil-conflict/>; on 15 June 2008.*

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In matters of statecraft, application of military force is considered to be the last tool of diplomacy. Once applied, escalation control is the acme of exceptional political military deftness as the levers of the continued force application are held hostage in geo strategic compulsions, internal and external political dimensions and of course the other side. The sagacity to restrict to the mission assigned and achieved is extremely difficult to find in the history of warfare. In the entire spectrum of warfighting the strategic restraint is dictated by the external and internal compulsions, at times ignored particularly when overwhelming success is achieved and the population and military leadership is in favor of continuance of war. The Kargil Conflict is a case study wherein while there were significant operational costs in spite of exceptional tactical brilliance, the strategic restraint exercised by the Indian side had far reaching geo strategic outcomes for the country.

• • •



**Lt Gen DP Pandey, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM** was the Corps Commander of the prestigious Chinari Corps of Indian Army responsible for operations along the Line of Control opposite Pakistan Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and also for the counter terrorist operations in Kashmir during the post abrogation of Article 370 period. He has the experience of also being part of Operation Vijay Kargil, Operation Meghdoot and Operation Parakaram amongst others. His assignments include being a Military Observer in the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia as a Captain, instructor in National Defence Academy, Director in Infantry Directorate for a brief period and then Director of Military Intelligence Foreign Division, the Brigadier General Operations of a Command and then of a Corps along the Western Front, he was also was the Head of the Additional Directorate of Strategic Communication and the first Director General of the Territorial Army. The Officer retired as the Commandant of the Army War College. A book, '**Soldiering with Passion**' has been written on him by Col Ajay Raina. The author also has number of publications accredited to him.

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