



PATIENCE and restraint, the two recurrent motifs in India's approach to the Kargil conflict, are wearing thin on the ground. Five weeks into a bitter, taxing battle in this northern sector, with the forbidding prospect of a long haul ahead, two distinct schools of thought are emerging on the future conduct of operations. The mood among the Indian armed forces deployed on this front is, slowly but surely, veering away from the one basic ground-rule. New Delhi has steadfastly clung to: that the LoC is to be kept sacrosanct. The implications, if the militarist view comes to prevail, are colossal.

In pure operational terms, it is felt, crossing the LoC is a bleeding necessity. The reasons are simple, and many. Take the fight for Tiger Hills, which has become a kind of psychological block for the army. Soldiers of three crack infantry units have been at it since mid-May, in a vain bid to dislodge Pakistani troops from the crucial peak. The scenario is near-hopeless: hauling yourselves up on ropes at 15,000-foot, over a 90-degree gradient mountain face, weighed down by 40 kg backpacks, braving icy winds and sub-zero temperatures. Forget enemy guns, even boulders flung from the top take lives. The bodycount is climbing. Yet, the operation continues.

The sheer human cost, that too for elusive benefits, has impelled a rethink in army circles. A 'simple' thing like transgressing the LoC would allow the Indian army to tip the scales by cutting the supply lines of the intruders. In the face of operational exigencies, ground-level personnel are getting impatient with the reluctance exhibited by New Delhi, the diplomatic niceties, the international opinion. "The American General (Anthony) Zinni has been to Pakistan to persuade them to back off. If nothing happens, then we want the decision to cross the LoC taken in a week's time," says an officer.

Meanwhile, far removed from the blood and sweat of the actual fighting, the government

military strategists and political parties do not think that option should be exercised. For, it could mean a widening of the conflict and even a full-scale war. And in the post-May 98 scenario, any possibility of a war must also factor in the nuclear option. Not to forget the threat by Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif to 'use the ultimate option'.

Reasons Lt Gen Satish Nambiar, director, United Service Institution: "Having adopted the stance that we did to keep the Kargil affair localised, it would be advisable to keep it at that. We should not worry about the time-frame. We should carry out the operation very deliberately with minimum casualties."

The dilemma becomes even more acute if you juxtapose these stark options against the mysterious swings of public opinion—which rides alternately on a desire for retribution and a wariness of war, especially vis-à-vis the nuclear aspect. Already charged by a sense of betrayal and anger at Pakistani duplicity, it gets visibly heated up every time a bodybag arrives from the front. This is the most intangible commodity and dangerous precisely because of that. In an election year, a beleaguered government, being blamed for one of the greatest security blunders India has faced in years, can't ignore it. Where is all this heading? Is it taking India towards a more 'proactive' approach against Pakistan, a wider conflict?

For now, while not oblivious to the pressure from the troops for a military *carte blanche*, New Delhi is holding out. It's banking on diplomatic pressure to force Islamabad to back off. The visit of Gen Zinni to Islamabad was watched carefully in India. Initial reports suggest the US general has not met with success. And that's unfortunate. Every day that passes increases the pressure on New Delhi.

The Kargil campaign has seen some victories. But if the army was happy with the recapture of Point 5140 at Tololing

last week, it's subdued by the fact that Tiger Hills—the most dominant feature on the Dras-Kargil stretch of the Srinagar-Leh highway—stays under enemy control, despite the Mirage 2000 pounding on June 24. It's slow, very slow progress. The mood among troops is one of anger.

Says an officer involved in planning strategies on the ground: "We've drawn a sort of a semi-circle on many positions but to complete the circle we'll have to cross the LoC." Adds a staff officer, "It is now very clear that the enemy troops on these heights are extremely well-trained, well-acclimatised and well-stocked. Our attempts to cut off their supply lines have been only partially successful, mainly because they have too many routes." To block these routes, a decision on the LoC is required quickly, officers feel. The soldiers are chafing against the handicap imposed on them, and say they are made to fight the war according to Pakistani rules. Says a jawan from Bihar, "First they brought us here without any preparation. We said, for the motherland's sake, even that's acceptable. But when they say don't cross the LoC, we feel very angry."

The anger only mounts when the jawans see so many of their colleagues die fighting such a tough battle. And the casualty rate is indeed high. "We're losing too many men too quickly," says a company commander. Officially, the death toll is 165 dead and over 300 injured but indications on the ground are that the deaths are much more. Even among the injured, over 80 per cent are unlikely to walk for the rest of their lives. Many have even gone blind, having climbed the icy heights without snow goggles.

Why are the commanders and JCOs demanding a decision within a week? They know the race is against time, with barely three months to go before the Manali-Leh and Srinagar-Leh highways become snow-bound and Ladakh is cut off. A supply corps officer points out, "Once the Pakistanis know both roads are closed, they'll pound us even if a bicycle starts out on the vulnerable stretches."

The counterpoint is that the military view on widening the conflict can't be treated in isolation. A full-scale war has political, strategic, economic and diplomatic ramifications. Not that crossing the LoC is not being considered by the government. Many do support it, arguing that a war is inevitable, and "the choice is to be prepared for it or not to be prepared for it. It's the Pakistanis who will escalate it." But the dominant view favours restraint, for now.

Given that the Indians were caught off guard, commanders on the front want to make amends. "So far we've only reacted to what they've been doing. It's time we became a little proactive," says a strategist. That is, to create a front of its own choosing and engage the enemy there. The army brass is well aware of the feeling. The army chief, Gen V.P. Malik, on June 23 tossed up the LoC question, left it open but said the decision would have to be taken by the Union Cabinet. Meanwhile, the army brass appears to have given the go-ahead for a build-up from where an offensive can be launched immediately.

The Dras-Leh stretch is moving into a stage described by a senior officer as "preventive defence." In other words, arrangements in anticipation of a retaliatory attack if India

launches an offensive are being put into place. State-of-the-art radars of the air force have been gassing the terrain. Guns of the air defence artillery have been placed strategically to protect the precious Bofors guns from incoming Pakistani fighter jets. Missiles with varying ranges have been placed at crucial heights over the past one week. "Once the defences are in place, the next stage is an all-out offensive across the LoC, maybe in the Kargil sector, maybe in some other place," the source said.

A crack para-commando unit, which moved into the zone two weeks ago, acclimatised itself with various altitudes starting from 9,000 feet, going up to 12,000 and then 15,000 feet. It's now ready to launch the first attack, waiting for orders. When it comes, if at all, will depend on the threshold New Delhi has set for itself. Pakistani strategists too are watching the evolving situation. They miscalculated once by not anticipating the strong Indian army and air response when they launched the Kargil operation. They can misread events now only at their own peril. The Indian foreign secretary, K. Raghunath, had warned that there is a limit to India's patience and restraint. Even Lt Gen Naqib said: "The international community should not bluff itself that restraint can be shown indefinitely."

The news from Batalik and Kaksar hasn't been very encouraging. There have been successes, but each time troops thought they'd captured a vital height, the Pakistanis appeared on peaks nearby. "The only inference one can draw from this is that the enemy is present in far larger numbers than we first thought," an officer points out.

Li Gen V.K. Sood, former vice chief of army staff, is dead opposed to a cavalier response: "You have to weigh the diplomatic and military options and consider the payoff from each. Pakistan has been isolated in-

Further west on the Srinagar-Leh highway, in the Mushkoh Valley too, the progress is slower than expected. With winter not far, the troops are reconciled to a Siachen-like situation. "Winter or no winter, we'll have to hold this entire stretch, the conditions be damned," says an officer. But that's easier said; the entire area will be snow-bound and temperatures will fall below minus 60 degrees for over eight months. "How many of our units have had the experience of Siachen?" asks a commanding officer. He has a point. Troops like the Ladakh Scouts have an in-born ability to stay at these heights but to expect every Indian soldier to adjust himself is madness, officers point out.

Opinions are mixed among former army bosses on the question of crossing the LoC. Former army chief Gen Shankar Roy Chowdhury feels that militarily, "to defeat them, it's important to strike across the LoC." But like others, he too feels international opinion and the high casualties that would ensue have to be considered. One of his predecessors, Gen P. Rodriguez, a member of the advisory board of the National Security Council, favours restraint. He points to the post-Kosovo situation in which NATO is on a roll. "Do we want to give them the slightest opportunity to interfere?" he asks. In the long term, he says, Pakistan is "an irritant too small to impinge on us...we shouldn't give it that importance."

Li Gen V.K. Sood, former vice chief of army staff, is dead opposed to a cavalier response: "You have to weigh the diplomatic and military options and consider the payoff from each. Pakistan has been isolated in-

ternationally because of our restraint." As for casualties, he says that in "any calculus of fighting in high altitude, the attacker vs defender ratio is 10:1 because of the overwhelming advantage the defender has. But we are succeeding in this difficult terrain, we shouldn't get unnecessarily worried." He doesn't think strategic decisions like going to war should be based on public opinion. But he agrees with Nambiar that India can't show restraint indefinitely. "There has to be some time-frame for Pakistan to back down."

Several former army generals share the feeling that while the going is slow, it's steady and that there's no need to panic. Former western army commander Lt Gen H.K. Kaul feels Islamabad is not prepared for a full-scale war: "Unless they want to commit suicide, I don't think they want war." He feels that if India reverses its stand on the LoC after so many weeks without any new fact emerging, it would lose world support. He points out that in '65 and '71, the casualties were over 8,000 and nearly 9,000, respectively.

"If you have a war now, casualties will be far higher than what we have now," Nambiar feels commanders were "propelled into assaulting some features because of the compulsion of doing something" and this explains the initial high casualties. "Don't push the army into ending it quickly. Do everything very deliberately. If a stalemate arises, we should consider opening up elsewhere, after we are fully prepared with equipment and adequate reserves."

Politically, the Kargil affair is troublesome for a government facing elections by September. It's necessary for it to end by then. There's some unanimity that war is avoidable. Says the BJP's K.N. Govindacharya, "This is a battle of nerves. A fine balance between maturity and sensitivity is needed. But if Pakistan wants to commit harakiri by escalating the conflict, let them." Former BJP MP, Maj Gen B.C. Khanduri, admits the military is fighting without

With Ishan Joshi in Srinagar, Ashis K. Biswas in Calcutta, Ramananda Sengupta and Ludwina A. Joseph in Washington. Courtesy: The Outlook magazine of India

A Step Across the Thin Line?

To widen or not to widen the conflict — that is the vital question. Troops want a free hand, but it's not coming just yet, write Sunil Narula in New Delhi and Nitin A Gokhale in Kargil, Dras and Batalik

India's Intimidatory Tactics

India's policy on Kashmir avoids arriving at a negotiated and peaceful settlement of this core dispute, says Khalid Mahmud Arif

NDIA is the largest democracy in the world not because its democratic credentials weigh heavier than others but because its population had been swelling over the centuries with a high birth rate to give it a large demographic resource. Post-independence India has frequently arm-twisted its small neighbours and imposed a military solution on them on their bilateral political disputes.

Pakistan's High Commissioner in India has apologetically stated that "the Indians are not interested in the talks unless Pakistan agrees for dialogue in their terms." This policy of "heads I win, tails you lose" is unacceptable to an honourable country that seeks a negotiated settlement of the principal bilateral dispute. India's belligerent attitude causes serious doubt about its real intentions. Was the bus journey an attempt to lull Pakistan and ease global pressure then felt by India because of Pokhran-II tests, or was it a serious effort to bury the India-Pakistan mistrust of the past and set a healthy course for the future?

Was the Lahore Declaration a piece of paper to be dumped into the dustbin of history at a convenient opportunity or did it reflect the thinking of two enlightened leaders who desired to put their countries on the road of peace and prosperity? Those at the helm are expected to lead their nations from the front and rise above the petty pincers that may occasionally cloud the thinking of the smaller minds. But who will pick up the beads of sanity if the prime minister in India hurls loaded threats at Pakistan?

Wars do not promote peace. Political disputes are best settled by political means. A political settlement emerges out of negotiations — the strongest and the most potent weapon in the armoury of statesmen. This is well known to the top leaders in India and Pakistan who now guide the destinies of one billion people living in South Asia. While it is the job of the military to prepare for war, it is the cardinal responsibility of the politicians and the diplomats to prevent the outbreak of hostilities. Peace is the mutual requirement of both the countries. And, those preaching peace do not speak from a position of weakness. It will be folly

to draw such a conclusion.

India's repeated acts of aggression in Kashmir during the last five decades and its never-ending disregard of trust have imposed a preventive caution on Pakistan. This country respects the Line of Control in Kashmir and expects an identical commitment on the issue from India. It has suffered in the past and will strongly resist any attempt by India to create another Siachen-like situation along any segment of the Line of Control. The Indian aggression in the Siachen area and in the Neelum Valley are too recent to forget and too serious to ignore. India's offensive plans in the name of "hot pursuit" forced Pakistan to take some purely precautionary measures on its own side of the already delineated Line of Control. By so doing Pakistan did not commit any wrong.

The Indian military is in the habit of first creating a problem and then crying wolf when its "secret" offensive plans are exposed by its neighbours. So it happened in 1987 when the much-inflated balloon of the hi-fi and grandiose exercise Brass Tacks was pricked by the timely and effective counter measures taken by the defence forces of this country. On that occasion the Indian military had kept the people of India and perhaps, to some extent, its prime minister in the dark and tried to wriggle out of its self-created military quagmire when the Pakistani army pulled the rug from under its feet. The panic that gripped India then is a matter of record. I say so rather reluctantly because the then Indian army chief General Sunderji, is no longer alive to reply. But I have had the opportunity of saying so to him in the presence of witnesses who are still living.

India's track record in implementing its international and bilateral commitments has been slippery and selective since 1947. Pandit Nehru had repeatedly made unconditional and firm commitments in the UN and to the people that Kashmiris will themselves decide the accession of their state under a UN-supervised plebiscite. Later, India reneged from that solemn undertaking. Secondly, in violation of the Indo-Pakistani Indus Water Treaty, India made a water storage facility in Kashmir to

squeeze Pakistan.

Thirdly, the Indian military intruded into the Siachen Glacier area in blatant disregard of the 1972 Simla Agreement. Fourthly, the 1989 secretary-level agreement between the two countries about the withdrawal of forces from the Siachen region was ignored by India even before its ink was dry. If any territory of trust has been transgressed, as stated by a distinguished Indian, this sin has repeatedly been committed by the top leadership in India ever since 1947.

The Indian claim that the Pakistani troops are operating across the LoC in the Kargil area is a fiction, a propaganda ploy to cover up its hidden motives, to gain foreign sympathy and to create a war hysteria to browbeat Pakistan. It appears that India itself does not believe in this accusation. Had it done so it would have had no hesitation in requesting the UN military observers present in the country to visit the area and verify the truth. Secondly, it might have invited international media to check facts. Neither of the two options has been exercised. India's double standards are too transparent to hide. On the one hand, it asks Pakistan to respect the Line of Control and on the other, it openly threatens to violate this line itself. India's defence minister has personally issued a veiled threat on this score. How can a wrong act committed by Pakistan suddenly become a right step only because it is taken by India? Perhaps the law is meant for the weak and India can do without it.

Reports emanating from across the border indicate that the officially orchestrated war hysteria has started overshadowing the political climate in India. With the Indian military placed in a state of high alert and the Indian army politicized, Pakistan is forced to take minimum precautionary measures to protect its national security. The war hysteria in India presents a contrast to the sober and dignified response given by Pakistan.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

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Strategic Pointers from Kargil

The Kargil conflict shows up new strategic dimensions which need to be understood for better management of national security, says V R Raghavan

ONE MUST be thankful that the military can still produce in the mountains of Kargil the leadership and soldiers representing character qualities not easily seen in our daily lives. The conflict in Kargil is one of closing in on the enemy for mortal combat and physically evicting him. The developed world has already moved away from this form of fighting, taking recourse to distant combat through missile and air attacks coupled with electronic and cyber warfare.

The Kargil conflict shows up new strategic dimensions which need to be understood for better management of national security. The defence of this national interest, nevertheless, cannot justify a recourse to nuclear weapons. On the other hand, nuclear weapons did not deter Pakistan from launching the offensive. One can even conclude that nuclear weapons encouraged it to think otherwise. The limits of nuclear "currency of power", which nuclear weapons signify in some circles, are made apparent by Kargil.

The Indian Government, early in the conflict, took the laudable initiative of limiting the conflict in geographic terms. This straightforwardly imposed a heavy burden on the military. It left the Pakistani military free to make its response without fear of a wider conflict. A full-scale war would have been calamitous to Pakistan. The limits India placed on itself have, however, led to heavy Indian casualties. The reality can be different. Nuclear weapons do little to either limit or prevent a conflict on the lower or even middle rungs of the military ladder. That, however, does not prevent the option of looking for a quick solution through nuclear weapons.

A political leadership unable to explain the justification for the conflict or to sustain public opinion in the face of mounting human and other costs is more prone to it. The call for using nuclear weapons from the political classes in India and Pakistan is a factor which requires greater attention today. These limits place a new perspective on the nature of future conflicts and the forces required. International support and cooperation form an essential ingredient for the successful conclusion of conflicts. The possession of military hardware is merely one dimension of conflict and is wholly inadequate for strategic success. Integrating with the global security systems and regimes, in addition to economic and political engagement, holds the key to

national security. The belief that possession of technological and military capabilities will ensure security or obtain influence needs to be tempered by the realities of the new security outlook emerging at the turn of the century.

Managing disputes wholly on a bilateral basis is another strategic outlook which influences conflict resolution. The Indian position on J&K has thus far been strongly in favour of bilateral resolution. There is no doubt that in the ultimate analysis, India and Pakistan would need to come to a bilateral conclusion. Bilateral processes work best in situations of trust and cooperation. That situation does not obtain, notwithstanding the attempts to build trust through confidence-building measures (CBMs) and bold political initiatives such as the Lahore Declaration. International opinion and economic-cum-political persuasion by major powers, therefore, have a role to play in the bilateral process. India has sought and successfully obtained that international advantage in the Kargil conflict. It has had to accept restraint on its military options as a trade-off to gain the support. There are strategic pointers in this development which can be ignored only to the disadvantage of national security interests.

The Kargil conflict throws up a number of disturbing possibilities for the future. Pakistan has chosen an area where the full power of the Indian military machine cannot be brought to bear. The strike corps, tank divisions, heavy artillery and air power are of little avail in the high mountains. Pakistan has also used a force in which the bulk of its soldiers is provided by its Afghan involvement. This group has had years of war fighting experience and has close links with the Pakistani General Staff and the logistics-cum-intelligence structures. A moderate percentage of the military personnel of the army, with a large para-military balance, the Taliban-Mujahideen-Lashkar force, provides Pakistan with an additional low cost army. Such an army

has drawn and engaged a substantial part of the Indian army in intense combat and imposed a high cost. The conflict can be continued by Pakistan almost indefinitely at low costs. Its Prime Minister, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, is only stating the obvious when he talks of the possibility of many more Kargils in the future. The people of India have been directly drawn into the conflict by the television and media coverage. Every home is aware of the reality of war, thanks to the pictures of troops and weapons in the battle area. Even more, every citizen knows and feels the pain of hundreds of Indian families losing their young men in battle. The great upsurge of sentiment for the fighting soldier in the form of unsolicited money and other support is significant. This popular pride can also turn into dismay and doubts about the government's ability to conduct statecraft if the costs rise in human and economic terms. When that happens, jingoism and calls from political leadership for sacrifice would carry little conviction with the people.

The new threshold of military challenge raised by Pakistan would require a multi-dimensional response. The military response in the short term will have to be the continuance of the ongoing operation. In the long term, there is need to create a complete new range of military capabilities for high altitude warfare. These can no longer be based on force structures, whose low technology and shoe-string logistics are sought to be compensated by the outstanding valour and heroism of our officers and men. What is needed is a new strategic outlook which will take into account the limited capacity of nuclear weapons to influence conflict outcomes, understand the importance of international support in the bilateral processes for conflict resolution and factor in the new range of war-waging capabilities necessary for the future.

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Courtesy: The Hindu of India