

1965 Indo-Pak War: Letter of condolence

AIR CDRE (RETD) ISHFAQ ILAHI CHOUDHURY

FOURTY six years ago this month, in September 1965, India and Pakistan were locked in a war over Kashmir. That war is largely forgotten in Bangladesh, eclipsed by our War of Liberation of 1971, although many brave sons of our soil, then serving in the Pakistan armed forces, fought extremely well, won many gallantry awards, many made supreme sacrifices. In India and Pakistan, however, the events of that war continue to be investigated and debated. Air Cdre (Retd) Kaiser Tufail, PAF, an aviation enthusiast, published a story in the April 2011 issue of "Defence

moment, bore bitterness or hatred for the person who actually pulled the trigger and caused my father's death. The fact that this all happened in the confusion of a tragic war was never lost to us".

The War was initiated around Mid-August 1965 with the incursion of Pakistani Special Forces, disguised as Kashmiri Freedom fighters, with the task to carry out insurgent activities inside Kashmir. On 1st September 1965, Pakistan launched a major offensive towards Jammu in the Indian-held Kashmir. India responded by launching a much bigger attack against Pakistani heartland of Lahore and Sialkot, five days later. It then became an all-out war on land, air and sea. On individual level there were superb examples of professionalism, bravery and dedication to the duties; however, on higher levels of military planning and execution, the war exposed serious shortcomings on both sides.

The Air Forces on either side realized that their initial efforts to destroy the other's air forces (counter-air operations) had proved too costly in aircraft and crew lost, with little achievements to show. Therefore, the main thrust of air power was diverted

to destroy the army on the ground -- enemy's tanks, vehicles, ammunition supply etc. At this stage, on 19th September 1965, at about 3-45 pm, a PAF radar located in Badin, Sindh picked up a slow moving aircraft in the Rann of Kutch area, south of Sindh bordering Gujarat. Assuming the aircraft to be a reconnaissance or army observation aircraft, the Duty Controller in Badin ordered two F-86 Sabres, which were in readiness in Mauripur airbase in Karachi, up in the air.

While getting ready for take off, the Lead aircraft, piloted by a Flt. Lt., developed engine problem and the 'Leader' abandoned the mission. The No 2 aircraft, piloted by Flg Off Qais, a freshly graduated pilot, continued the mission alone. The Controller directed Qais on to the target aircraft, but because of the distance and low altitude, the Controller was having only intermittent radar contact and difficulty in maintaining radio contact with Qais. As he neared the target, Qais descended to about 3000 feet to visually spot the aircraft. Qais saw the Indian aircraft and reported to the Radar station as, "Twin-engine, twin-tail, four side windows, probably an eight-seater." The Rules of Aerial Engagement says that the fighter will guide the intercepted aircraft to the nearest airfield for landing. Qais asked the ground control what he needed to do. In his interview with Air Cdre Kaiser, Qais stated that he sincerely hoped that the order

from the headquarters will be anything other than to shoot the aircraft. After few agonizing minutes, the order came to shoot down the aircraft. Against a setting sun, Qais made two short bursts from his six .5 inch machine guns. He saw the aircraft wing tearing apart and the aircraft turn into a ball of flame. The aircraft debris fell about 40 miles west of the intended destination and about 50 miles inside India. The map below shows the flight path of the Indian aircraft and the PAF interceptor.

Qais was running low on fuel and managed to land back to the base with fuel gauge almost zero. India called it a cowardly attack by the PAF fighter on an unarmed civilian aircraft flying inside India. Pakistan retorted by saying that the VIP aircraft had no business to fly so close to an undemarcated border in war (Border in the Rann of Kutch had still not been demarcated) and that its flight pattern suggested it to be on a reconnaissance mission. Flg Off Qais, as a young fighter pilot, probably had no remorse at the time, but as time passed and the youthful zeal weaned off, he felt the conscience pricking.

The Dawn, a prestigious newspaper of Pakistan, carried another interview of Qais on 1st September 2011 where he said, "I wished that I return without firing a shot." Air Cdre (Retd) Kaiser had argued in his article that both India and Pakistan had used their civilian air assets to carry military personnel and logistics in war. Such deployment would automatically make those aircraft valid military targets. Kaiser argued that the Beechcraft, instead of carrying the Chief Minister could have been carrying military observers or reconnaissance gadgets. He further argued that because of the failing light, extreme range, poor radio communication and low altitude, all combined, it was difficult to exactly ascertain the type and it was possible that the higher commander assumed the aircraft to be a C-119, an IAF transport aircraft, instead of the Beechcraft as revealed later. C-119 is a medium-size military transport aircraft, and because of its size, Qais would have spotted it from miles away and radioed it as such.

On this incident, Shekhar Gupta, Editor, Indian Express wrote an editorial on 13th August 2011 titled, "National Interest: Fighting Shy" where he criticized Indian Air Force and the then IAF Chief Air Marshal Arjun Singh for poor preparedness and lack of coordination and above all, "constructing a fictional history" of IAF in that war. Indeed, one is mystified by apparent lack of action on the part of the IAF to allow a VIP aircraft to operate unescorted so close to the border, then not responding in time when the PAF fighter took-off from far away Karachi, entered 50 miles inside India and intercepted the Beechcraft. Shekhar pointed out many other fiascos that

raised doubt on the credibility of Air Marshal Arjun Singh who had been recently elevated to the rank of Marshal of the Air Force (equivalent to Field Marshal of the Army). Analysing the incident, it appeared to me that the IAF took lessons from that incident and after the '65 War built a new fighter base in Bhuj, close to where the interception took place and after '71 War, made another air base at Naliya, even closer to the Indo-Pak border. Incidentally, on 10th August 1999, two Indian Mig-21s operating from Naliya shot down a Pakistan Navy 'Atlantique', Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MRP) that was flying along the Kutch border, killing all ten Pakistani Naval officers and sailors on board. Although IAF claimed that the aircraft had violated Indian airspace when it was shot down, the debris actually fell close to the border on the Pakistani side.

If one has to take any lesson from these tragedies, the most important one would be that while the stories of bravery and heroism fades, personal tragedies suffered by individuals linger many years.

The writer was an officer in the erstwhile PAF, and especially worked for some time in the Radar station that controlled the fighter and also personally knew the Controller and his Officer Commanding.



Map showing the area of operation

Journal of Pakistan" of shooting down of an Indian government-owned civilian aircraft by a PAF fighter during the 1965 War. The story, based on his interviews with a number of personalities, including the interceptor pilot Flg Off (Retd) Qais Hussain, revealed that the aircraft was flying inside India, was probably lost, but was shot down on order from higher headquarters. The article gave full details of the turn of events, including the justification or otherwise, of the decision of shooting down a civilian aircraft during war.

On 5th August 2011, Flg Off (Retd) Qais M. Hussain wrote a letter of condolence to Mrs. Farida Singh, the daughter of Jahangir M. Engineer, the Captain of the ill-fated Beechcraft that he shot down on 19th September 1965. The twin-engine Beechcraft, which was at the time of the incident was about 50 miles inside Indian territory in the state of Gujarat, and carried the state's Chief Minister Mr. Balwantraj Mehta, his wife, a number of personal staff and journalists for a public meeting in a small town called Mithapur. In his letter, Qais Hussain expressed deep regret that his action caused the death of eight civilian non-combatants and the pain and anguish that it caused to the bereaved family. He justified his position by saying that it was war and that he was ordered by the Headquarters to open fire; he only carried out an order. A magnanimous Mrs. Singh wrote back saying, "We never, not for one



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Israel in the changing geo-political situation

SHAMIMA NASREEN

THE arab region is riddled with volatile situation if we look at the political happenings such as the Palestine-Israel gordian knot, a highly unstable Yemen, the situation in Libya, the future of Egypt, handsome possibility of the fall of Assad in Syria, Lebanon with Hezbollah as a major domestic player, Algeria, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, Iran and Morocco, have their own instabilities heightened by the possibility of religious extremism or the threat of Al Qaeda. It is already evident that after the Arab spring, Israel is in a precarious position with its Muslim allies like Egypt and Turkey, which will be evident in the following discussion. Even Jordan's King Abdullah II, one of Israel's few remaining close allies in the Muslim world, strongly rejected the notion that his country should take in Palestinians as a substitute for the creation of a state for them.

The Israeli ambassador to Egypt, Yitzhak Levanon, left the country with his family and staff of the diplomatic mission after hundreds of Egyptians stormed the Israeli embassy in Cairo, tried to tear down the newly built wall around it and threw thousands of documents to the street. The delicate balance was broken abruptly last August when five Israeli soldiers killed Egyptian border guards in Sinai at an operation to capture militants, who attacked two buses, a military vehicle and a civilian car. This led to mass demonstrations in Cairo against the Israeli Embassy, where they demanded the expulsion of Israeli Ambassador with an official apology.

After the incident, an Egyptian crisis cabinet has met and the country's interior minister has declared a state of alert and canceled vacations for police throughout the country. The diplomatic crisis between Israel and Egypt has pushed the U.S. president, Barack Obama, to express his "concern" and call on to the Egyptian government to ensure the security of the Israeli Embassy.

The new military rulers ensured that they would respect, not only because the assurance guarantee Egypt a major U.S. military aid, but, the government also has to deal with the discontent of the Egyptian people, who do not sympathize with Israel for its abuses on the Palestinians.

As part of the security measures, the Egyptian authorities had decided to build the six feet wall saying that it was not to protect the embassy but was aimed at protecting residents of nearby buildings. Also, the Egyptian Armed Forces have begun to seal the tunnels along the 12 km border between Gaza and Egypt due to the constant complaints of the Israelites over the smuggling of weapons from Egypt into the Gaza Strip through tunnels.

This is to mention here that, Egypt is the only Muslim state having diplomatic relations with Israel and Israel

made a rare apology for the deaths of the Egyptian soldiers after Cairo threatened to withdraw its ambassador. Though according to 'Now Lebanon', initially an Israeli military commander said that, after the attacks in Israel by the militants, Israeli and Egyptian security forces killed four of the militants on the Egyptian side of the border, which Sinai officials denied.

The Peace Treaty signed between Israel and Egypt in 1979, has been a solid pillar of stability in the border decreasing headaches for the United States, who is interested in maintaining good relations with both. Large sectors of the Egyptian population continue their demand for free and fair elections for a civilian rule. Here potential new authorities will have to take into account the degree of



influence of the "Muslim Brotherhood", considering their animosity toward Israel.

Young opponents of Egypt blamed for what happened to the supporters of deposed president, Hosni Mubarak, and former Interior Minister Habib al-Adly, with the intention of destabilizing the country. The opponents said that they want to create a chaotic situation in Egypt, damage the image of the revolution and the failure of the trial held against Mubarak.

Another possible change in the geo-political situation is the pending request from the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in the General Assembly of the United Nations, in this September for official recognition as a full member instead of an "observer".

If the United States applies its veto in the Security Council of the United Nations to block the appeal of PNA, it may resort to the General Assembly for votes. About this, one Israeli official said the adoption of a resolution recognizing the Palestinian state would create insurmountable gap and delay the negotiations. He specifically said that if the resolu-

tion was passed, the Palestinians would less be willing to negotiate and no leader of Israel could ever accept what the Palestinians might demand from the United Nations. In a letter (Thursday Sep 15, 2011) to 40 European heads of state, Democrats warned that such a step would have "devastating consequences for the peace process as well as for the Palestinians." Israel and the United States oppose the move, saying it would undercut negotiations leading to a two-state solution.

Furthermore, Israel does not intend to announce in advance how they would react if the UN approves of the resolution, taking a "basket of options" ranging from disregarding Oslo Accords, to occupying the Jordan Valley and large settlement blocs. It is estimated that above possibilities

would have serious implications internally in Israel particularly in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

We know the opposition of the United States to the Palestinian proposal for recognition. But in the European Union there is divided opinion. There is a country like Spain, supporting but nations like Germany and Italy who are opposing. French President Sarkozy has recently expressed his desire to have "a unified EU voice" in the case of Palestinian statehood order. The role of the United States is undeniable and irreplaceable, but everyone thinks it is not enough and urged Washington to do more for peace.

According to New York Times, the Palestinian decision to apply for full United Nations membership at the Security Council, announced on 16th Sep, 2011 by President Mahmoud Abbas, was the most viable of the only options possible: surrender, return to violence or appeal to the international community, a senior Palestinian official said on the next day.

The official, Nabil Shaath, spoke to journalists before leaving for New York as part of the Palestinian delegation heading to the United Nations. He said that the appeal would change the ground rules of the conflict, and that although the Obama administration had vowed to veto the request and Israel had threatened punitive countermeasures, the Arab uprisings should make them reconsider the issue.

Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan too, pose three real challenges to Israel as it has to face them for their possible vote in favour of Palestine at the UN meeting.

Israel and Turkey -- key American allies -- are also at loggerheads with each other. But they disagree over the source of their disagreement. Turkey says it



expelled the Israeli ambassador and cut its military ties with the Zionist state because Israel continues oppressing and mowing down Palestinians and refuses to apologize for killing activists aboard in a Turkish-based flotilla last year. Israel says Turkey wants regional supremacy so it is forsaking Israel.

To draw a new geopolitical map of the Middle East and adjacent areas, we have to wait and see what happens. However, Israel and US should understand that the world cannot continue bypassing the Palestinian peace process in a frozen state, as "Arab Spring" will affect other parts of the region.

The writer is an Analyst on International Relations and Sub-editor, The Daily Star.

Greece sharpens austerity IMF warns on banks

GREECE adopted yet more austerity measures on Wednesday to secure a bailout installment crucial to avoid running out of money next month, as the IMF warned that Europe's sovereign debt crisis risks tearing a giant hole in banks' capital.

The Greek cabinet agreed to cut high pensions by 20 percent, put 30,000 civil servants in a "labor reserve" on a road to redundancy, lower the income threshold for paying tax and extend a real estate tax, a government spokesman said.

"The measures taken today allow us to comply with the bailout plan through 2014," the spokesman, Ilias Mossialos, said.

The new package is designed to ensure Greece gets an 8 billion euro rescue loan vital to pay state salaries and bills in October. Senior European Union and International Monetary Fund officials are to arrive in Athens early next week to review progress, Mossialos said.

Greece is on the front line of the euro zone debt crisis that has engulfed Ireland and Portugal and now threatens Italy, Spain and some of Europe's biggest banks, risking plunging the West back into recession.

Source: Reuters



Greek Minister of Finance Evangelos Venizelos attends a parliament session, in Athens on Tuesday, Sep 20, 2011.