
The Kargil War: Some Reflections

V P Malik

The Kargil War, forced on India ten years ago, will always be remembered for: (a) its strategic and tactical surprise; (b) the self-imposed national strategy of restraint, thus, keeping the war limited to the Kargil-Siachen sector; (c) military strategy and planning, in keeping with the political mandate; and for the (d) dedication, determination, and daring junior leadership at the tactical level. In fiercely fought combat actions, on the most difficult terrain that gave immense advantage to the enemy holding mountain-tops, we were able to evict Pakistani troops from most of their surreptitiously occupied positions. The Pakistani leadership was forced to sue for the ceasefire and seek withdrawal of its troops from the remaining areas. Operation Vijay (the codename of the war) was a blend of strong and determined political, military and diplomatic actions, which enabled us to transform an adverse situation into a military and diplomatic victory.

Political Background

India and Pakistan had tested their nuclear weapons in May 1998. With a new sense of responsibility and with much fanfare, the prime ministers of India and Pakistan signed the Lahore Declaration on February 20-21, 1999, for a peaceful and cooperative relationship in future. As part of this Declaration was a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the two nations “to engage in bilateral consultations on security concepts and nuclear doctrines with a view to developing measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields aimed at avoidance of conflict”, with significant clauses for consultations and communication on nuclear and conventional confidence-building measures (CBMs) between the two sides.¹

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After the Lahore Declaration, our political leaders expected that cross-border infiltration and militants' activities in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) would taper off. Army Headquarters' assessment of the ground situation was different: it indicated "no change in the ground situation; there could in fact be some escalation in the proxy war in the immediate future due to Pakistan's internal compulsions and its politico-military situation", and was conveyed in the review meetings in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). While addressing army commanders in April 1999, I had stated, "This diplomatic initiative has definitely opened the door for improving relations. But unless Pakistan translates it into ground realities, and stops sponsoring the proxy war, these confidence-building measures (CBMs) cannot be expected to fructify. Pakistan's military has been, and in the foreseeable future is likely to remain, negatively Indo-centric." On May 2, 1999, I gave an interview to a journalist and stated, "Recent Lahore Declaration has not in any way changed the ground situation in Kashmir. If anything, the Pakistan Army and ISI are still active in aiding and abetting terrorism in the state."²

As we later learnt, just when the preparations for the Lahore meeting had been going on, the Pakistan Army was busy planning and carrying out reconnaissance and logistics to initiate the intrusion in the Kargil sector, with a view to:

- Altering the alignment of the Line of Control (LoC) east of the Zoji La and denying the use of the Srinagar–Kargil–Leh highway to India.
- Reviving *jehadi* terrorism in J & K.
- Capturing Turtuk, a strategically important village located on the southern bank of the Shyok river in Ladakh through which an ancient trade route cuts through the Ladakh Range into the Northern Area of Pakistan.
- Highlighting the Indo–Pak dispute over J&K to the international community.

Why did the Pakistan Army initiate this operation in the midst of the ongoing political bonhomie? The reasons could be:

- The Pakistan Army, over the years, has developed an Indo-centric view and vested interest in maintaining tension with India. Senior Pakistan Army officers believed "that a stable nuclear balance between India and Pakistan permitted offensive actions to take place with impunity in Kashmir".
- Pakistan military planners expected that India would not undertake an all-out offensive against Pakistan and run the risk of ending in a stalemate.
- India's preemption on Siachen Glacier in 1984 continues to hurt the Pakistan

Army like a thorn in its flesh; it is a psychological drain. Kargil was seen as a justifiable response.

- There was a growing concern that the Kashmiri cause was losing its international salience. The waning militancy in J&K needed to be rejuvenated.

Intelligence and Surveillance Failure

The fact that India was completely surprised about the intrusion at the political, strategic and tactical levels cannot be denied. It reflected a major deficiency in our system of collecting, reporting, collating and assessing intelligence as well as poor surveillance on the ground. It is, therefore, important to learn how and why that happened.

In April 1998, the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) had assessed that for Pakistan “waging war against India in the immediate future will not be a rational decision.” Its assessment in September 1998 was that there was a serious financial resource crunch within Pakistan in general and its army in particular. The March 1999 assessment reported heavy deployment of troops and artillery in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and stated that Pakistani troops “were prepared for the contingency of heavy exchange of artillery fire in April/May 1999.” This report concluded that *“waging a war against India in the immediate future would not seem to be a rational decision from the financial point of view...[the] Nawaz Sharif government would be left with little option but to pursue belligerence, abet infiltration, and indulge in proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir as part of an attempt to keep the hardliners subdued”*(italics added).

The Intelligence Bureau too remained focussed on *jehadi* activities. In June 1998, it had reported that some *jehadi* camps were located in POK, about 50 to 150 km north of the LoC. There was no hint of any impending military operation with a view to occupying important mountain heights within Indian territory. The focus of all these intelligence reports and assessments was on militancy or artillery fire exchanges in Kargil during the coming summer. The possibility of a conventional conflict with regular forces was consistently negated. On the other hand, the inputs and assessments reflected a lack of preparedness on Pakistan's part for a direct military conflict.

The scale and extent of the Kargil intrusion, however, involved elaborate planning and preparation. The operation required well-trained, duly acclimatised troops familiar with the ground that would have to be carefully selected. Large quantities of snow clothing and other winter warfare equipment would

be acquired. Some new roads and tracks would be required to be built. There would be a lot of movement besides dumping of artillery and ammunition and construction/renovation of bunkers. A large number of porters would be needed for logistical back-up support. Additional infantry battalions and artillery units would have to be deployed along the LoC.³ No such information except dumping of artillery ammunition was picked up by any agency or included in the assessments. As confirmed later, it was completely a Pakistan Army operation wherein no (or very few) *jehadis* were involved

In 1997-98, Headquarters (HQ) Northern Command had restructured its intelligence set-up to meet intelligence challenges in the wake of the overall internal and external security situation in J&K. Dedicated tactical intelligence resources were provided to the formation commanders down to the brigade level. In the process, HQ Northern Command also absorbed some personnel from the Army HQ liaison units located in J&K. What came out after the war was that the intelligence agencies at the tactical level i.e. the brigade intelligence teams and the Intelligence and Field Security Unit, spent considerable time and resources to accomplish militancy-oriented intelligence missions. The ability of their officers-in-charge to gather worthwhile intelligence from across the LoC was limited due to the non-availability of volunteers, sparse population and inadequate incentives. The intelligence teams were unable to find out that two additional battalions had been deployed in the area opposite Dras, Kargil and Turtuk and that field defences were being reinforced. The efforts of the corps intelligence groups too remained proxy war-centric.

In HQ 3 Infantry Division, incidents on the ground reported in different brigade sectors were neither linked together nor properly assessed. Most of the newly created intelligence teams remained obsessed with staff work and neglected the field work. Formation and unit commanders did not maintain close contacts with the civil population to obtain the ground-level feel. In some areas, there was a “strained relationship” between the locals and the men in uniform.⁴

Surveillance at the brigade and division levels proved to be a serious failing. Deployment with large gaps in the mountainous terrain lends itself to infiltration. Investigations later revealed that regular patrolling in the sector, which would have also ensured that troops were trained to operate in inclement weather and would have inculcated the determination and will to accomplish missions despite harsh and difficult battle conditions, was conspicuously absent. There was no patrolling along the ridgelines. Gaps between defended locations were not covered. The patrols visited only the *nalas* and that too halfway to the LoC.

Briefing and debriefing of patrols were not given due importance. In many cases, patrol reports were not even sent to the Brigade HQ.

We did not have unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that could fly at high altitudes to carry out aerial surveillance. Unattended ground sensors and local surveillance radars had not been inducted. Apart from patrolling, the only other viable means was visual winter aerial surveillance operations (WASO). This too was quite ineffective as there was no surveillance equipment onboard.

Despite the fact that small-scale infiltration and intrusions had been going on in the Kargil sector since February 1999, the formation responsible [121 (I) Infantry Brigade] was unable to detect it till May 1999. The brigade commander considered that the “threat was limited to infiltration of *jehadi* militants” — a statement, which has no military justification. If the militants could infiltrate, so could the regular army personnel. “Attack by infiltration” is a tactical technique in mountain warfare, taught in the army training establishments. Most probably, the obsession with *jehadi* militants made the local commanders neglect this aspect. Even after the intrusion had been detected, the brigade commander did not realise the seriousness of the situation. He dismissed the intruders as a handful of militants and tasked his units accordingly.

There was an impression on the ground that the Kargil terrain during winter did not allow large-scale, cross-country movement of forces, and that even foot patrols could not stay away from their bases for any length of time. Despite the odds, Pakistani forces did operate in such wintry conditions. As disciplined, determined and acclimatised small bodies of troops, they overcame these obstacles. We must remember that a determined foe can always achieve surprise, provided he has clear objectives, is prepared to take risks, and has the advantage of timing and operational flexibility.⁵

There has been a lot of misinformation about the practice of the Indian Army vacating posts along the LoC during winter. That indeed was the practice in the past. As Pakistan had attempted to capture some of our posts in the Siachen Glacier thrice in 1997 and eleven times in 1998, all field formations deployed along the LoC had been directed to be extra vigilant. HQ 15 Corps had ordered that no posts were to be vacated during the winter of 1998–99.

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Pakistani Measures for Surprise and Deception

Some of the measures taken by the Pakistan Army to achieve surprise and deception were:

- The plan, based on stealth and deception, was kept a closely guarded secret among select commanders and staff officers. Even the prime minister was not given details, or the whole truth. Other Service chiefs and corps commanders were briefed *after* the Pakistani troops had been infiltrated across the LoC.
- Regular troops were employed in the garb of *jehadis*. As a deception measure, radio transmissions in the Balti and Pashto languages were made to convey an impression that it was the *jehadi* elements, which had intruded and were occupying areas across the LoC.
- Northern Light Infantry units, which were involved upfront and provided the combat base, and the Chitral and Bajaur Scouts who assisted them in the logistics, were already located in Pakistan's Northern Areas. They were fully acclimatised and had good knowledge of the terrain. As such, not much of movement of troops was involved.
- The Pakistan Army chose the winter season to carry out reconnaissance of the area of operations and to establish firm bases when there is minimum movement of troops and civilians on either side of the LoC. Ammunition and stores for the operation were put in place over a period of two months. The bulk of the troops infiltrated across the LoC in April 1999.
- The Northern Areas were placed under army rule to deny access to the media and to facilitate optimal exploitation of local resources.

A factor that contributed the most to our surprise and to the fog of war was our inability to identify the intruders for some length of time. We depended more on the intelligence reports and enemy radio intercepts and took considerable time to go for enemy identifications on the ground. The failure to anticipate and identify military action of this nature on our borders by the Pakistan Army reflected a major weakness in our intelligence system. After the war, this aspect was questioned by a couple of former officers from the intelligence agencies in the media. But their reaction was more in anger and turf defence than on the basis of any logic! One, they had not contradicted any intelligence assessments of the period. At the level of the CCS and the COSC (Chiefs of Staff Committee), strategic decisions are taken on the basis of assessments and not individual reports. Two, had there been a timely and correct assessment of Pakistan's

military intrusion into the Indian territory, our politico-military reactions would have been very different. In such an eventuality:

- Prime Minister Vajpayee would not have visited Lahore in February 1999. I would not have gone on the official visit to Poland and the Czech Republic in May 1999.
- The Pakistani intrusion would have been declared a military aggression, with all its domestic and international implications. We would have had no hesitation in employing air power against the Pakistani military intrusion from the very beginning.
- The CCS could not have insisted on the Indian armed forces not crossing the LoC/border.

Due to intelligence and surveillance failures, our initial ground-level reaction was in the form of counter-terrorist operations. Movement of additional units and subunits at the brigade and divisional levels was done in haste. The hastily moved units and sub-units had neither adequate combat strength nor logistic support. They were tasked in an ad hoc manner without any detailed planning. Little effort was made to establish the identity of the intruders and to collect detailed information about their precise locations in the area of intrusion.

Political and Military Strategy

The Pakistan Army, proactively, had taken the initiative and achieved tactical surprise, leading to penetration into our area along a 160 km front. On my return from abroad and after briefings in Delhi, Udhampur and Srinagar, I realised that we needed to react more deliberately, and strategically— where our strength lay. We discussed the situation and its political and military implications in the COSC and decided to fight the war jointly. The COSC agreed that our substantial superiority in the air and on the seas should be brought to bear on the enemy to create the necessary strategic asymmetry, not only in the Kargil sector but also along the entire western border.

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During earlier discussions, the CCS had been keen on exercising restraint. It was reluctant to escalate the conflict and had refused permission to the flying of armed or attack helicopters. We needed permission for larger mobilisation to gain a strategic advantage. The relevant questions that arose in this context were: would the CCS allow conflict escalation and induction of the other two Services? Would escalation dominance work in the nuclearised Indo-Pak environment and where political leaders indulged in rhetorical statements frequently? How would the government handle international opinion? How long would that diplomatic effort take? Under these circumstances, what political objectives were likely to be laid down? Would the government be prepared to declare a 'war' and go the whole hog?

Of the three Services, the army takes the maximum time to complete its mobilisation and is the most visible. As no 'war' had been declared politically, we had to achieve the required mobilisation without causing alarm in the country and abroad. In the existing circumstances, how soon could we launch an offensive, if permitted? How would the climate impact our war effort? We also needed to take stock of our inventories and reassess urgently our capabilities for defensive and offensive operations. Our logic for an integrated approach at the level of the COSC was simple. All three Services are national security assets. For any combat situation, we must employ all three Services optimally, in an integrated manner. The allocation of specific missions thereafter is a matter of detailed coordination, keeping in view factors such as the characteristics and capabilities of assets available with each Service, the level of joint training and the degree of interaction among the Services.

Before my return from abroad, the air chief had not agreed to the use of air power. He had two reasons: attack helicopters cannot fly at that altitude and the use of air power would escalate and enlarge the conflict. Consequently, the CCS had not allowed the use of air power, including armed helicopters. During our discussions on May 23, after giving an assessment of the situation, I explained that it was necessary to gain the strategic initiative in order to facilitate the operations of the 15 Corps and Northern Command. We had to be prepared for war escalation, either by Pakistan or by us. In such an eventuality, all three Services would be fully sucked into the war. It would, therefore, be desirable to take preparatory steps immediately. I suggested that the air force should use air power in Kargil to assist the 15 Corps' operations and, hereafter, we should carry out joint planning for war. I emphasised that we should have unanimity over this issue in the CCS meeting but also made it clear that if any of my colleagues were not agreeable to this, I would oppose their view in the CCS meeting. The

COSC then took a unanimous decision to recommend joint strategy, operational planning and action, including the use of naval and air power. Next day, in the CCS meeting, after briefing and giving assessment, we sought permission for the use of air power and deployment of the navy. The CCS approved the proposal and directed that the intrusion along the LoC should be cleared at the earliest. However, our forces should *not* cross the LoC or the international border.

Why the Political Restraint?

Many people still question the logic of the political restraint to not cross the border or the LoC. It, therefore, needs to be explained. Firstly, we went to war so soon after the Lahore talks and declaration that our political establishment was taken aback. No one could believe that all the goodwill and bonhomie generated through Track-I and Track-II dialogues had collapsed so abruptly. There were no intelligence indicators like extra tension between opposing forces deployed on the border, termination of leave of military personnel or recall of those already on leave, unusual military movements, combat and logistic build-up or preparation of defences on the border. Although the intelligence agencies did indicate that *jehadi* militants would continue their attempts at infiltration across the LoC and that there could be an increase in violent activities, there was not the faintest hint that the Pakistan Army was planning or preparing to intrude on a large scale with regular troops. Due to these inadequacies, and also due to the Pakistan Army personnel masquerading as Mujahideen, the fog of war remained thick till the end of May 1999. These factors made the political leaders react tentatively and adopt a cautious approach.

Secondly, it was essential to ensure that international opinion was sufficiently in our favour. Such an opinion in a war situation is always a major force multiplier. We had to convince the world that India was a victim of Pakistani aggression, which had violated the Shimla Agreement and the sanctity of the LoC as laid down therein. We had to furnish irrefutable evidence to show that the infiltrators were not militants but regulars belonging to the Pakistan Army. Simultaneously, as a nation that had blasted its way out of nuclear ambiguity recently and caused a major setback to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, there was the need to show 'greater responsibility and restraint'. That was the main reason why we had signed the Lahore Declaration.

Thirdly, the nuclear weapons factor played on the minds of the political decision-makers. This factor posed little problems for a limited war. But, political and military planning and preparation for conflict escalation had to be carried

out carefully. Escalation control was essential. It is a well-known fact that during the 'hotting up' period, the civilian political leadership in all nuclear equipped countries tends to tighten its control over the military, particularly on its nuclear and missiles assets. There is nothing wrong with that. This is where a responsible strategic decision-making difference comes to the fore between a democratically elected government and a military or a semi-military regime.

Fourthly, if the conflict had escalated, the major powers would increase pressure—directly and through the United Nations—to prevent a nuclear confrontation. They would seek immediate ceasefire and termination of war. This *could* have left a part of our territory (now occupied by the Pakistanis) in their hands, which would be a major political and military setback. Moreover, Pakistan and countries friendly to it would have played up the issue of J & K in international fora. For the military, the grand strategy of exercising 'restraint' was no doubt a handicap. But such a strategy was politically justified, at least to start with. The COSC accepted it but as I stated clearly in a media briefing on June 23, 1999, we did not consider it as non-reviewable or unalterable. The prime minister and the national security advisers were also advised that our political leadership should not give an impression that not crossing the LoC or the international border had an all-time sanctity.

In a dynamic war situation, one has to cater for all contingencies. New situations can be caused either due to enemy action or due to some other unforeseen developments. In all contingency planning, the final goal is always to achieve the given political objective. *Kargil was a limited conventional war under the nuclear shadow where space below the threshold was available but had to be exploited carefully.* The political embargo on crossing the LoC or the border notwithstanding, the COSC and the operational directorates of the armed forces had done their planning and preparations for escalation (crossing the border or the LoC), if that had become necessary and was authorised by the CCS.

In the following weeks, 446 military special trains rolled towards the western border to carry troops and logistical equipment. The holding formations, 6 Mountain Division and 4 Mountain Division were moved by road to their assigned operational locations. Dual-task formations located in the northeast were moved to their assigned corps in the west or to interim locations close to the western border. 108 Mountain Brigade was moved from Port Blair to the west coast by sea. More than 19,000 tons of ammunition was moved from various depots to the western front.

The Indian Navy had issued instructions for an alert before the CCS meeting and commenced patrolling off the coast of Dwarka. After the meeting, it

supplemented the Western Naval Fleet with selected units of the Eastern Naval Fleet and moved the latter from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. This step enabled it to extend the range of deployment. Naval staff carried out an analysis of Pakistan's oil vulnerability and plans to interdict Pakistani tankers. The naval projection of 'reach and mobility' had an immediate impact: Pakistan started providing escorts to its oil tankers as they moved out from the Gulf to Karachi.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) responded very quickly after the CCS approved employment of air power on our side of the LoC. It deployed its forces and launched the first close-support air strikes with MiGs and armed Mi-17 helicopters within 48 hours. After May 23, there were no professional differences whatsoever that could affect our teamwork or planning.

After the CCS meeting on May 24, the three chiefs were closely involved in the politico-military decision-making process. The CCS met on an almost daily basis till the second week of July 1999. Besides the prime minister and the other CCS members, these meetings were attended by the national security adviser, the Cabinet secretary, the three Service chiefs, the secretaries of the Defence, Home, Finance and External Affairs Ministries, the heads of the Intelligence Bureau and R&AW and the secretary, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS). Sometimes, for some specific purposes, special invitees were also called in. The meetings would generally begin with the heads of the intelligence agencies giving fresh information or follow-up results. The Service chiefs then briefed the participants by providing the details of the previous days' operations. They also presented envisaged plans that required CCS clearance or coordination. All politico-military-diplomatic aspects were considered and discussed. The international environment was monitored continuously. The foreign secretary gave his briefing on our own diplomatic initiatives and reactions from different countries. The home secretary provided information on the domestic political and law and order situation. The defence and finance secretaries noted all envisaged procurements, movements of troops and material and other actions that had major financial implications and required procedural clearances. Complete synergy and consensus was thus achieved among the various organs of the government, from political direction to execution in the field and to

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proactive diplomacy. The political leadership received the views of the Service chiefs first-hand. After discussions, the concerned executive authorities received directions from the prime minister. All these developments led to a very integrated approach to 'war management' with the political, economic, diplomatic, media and military aspects meshed together cogently.

At the level of the armed forces, regular military briefings were carried out in the Military Operations Room. Besides the three chiefs, representatives of the Ministries of Defence, External Affairs, Home and the intelligence agencies attended these briefings. The daily briefings were followed by an 'in-house' discussion on a 'need-to-know' basis.

Strategic Lessons from the War

Many strategic lessons have emerged from the Kargil War. Some important lessons that should be noted are as follows:

- There are remote chances of full-scale conventional wars between two nuclear weapon states. But as long as there are territory-related disputes, the adversary may indulge in a proxy war leading to a conventional war or a limited border war.
- Loss of territory is unacceptable to the public or political authority. This is a strategic handicap and a risk in a conventional war setting, which increases in a limited war scenario. It implies greater attention to surveillance and close defence of the borders or lines of controls.
- The new strategic environment calls for speedier, more versatile and more flexible combat organisations in the mountainous as well as non-mountainous terrain. The successful outcome of a border war depends upon the ability to react rapidly to an evolving crisis. The military would be expected to react quickly in order to localise/freeze/reverse the situation and to arrest the deterioration, enhance deterrence, and prevent escalation on the ground.

Capability to wage a successful conventional and nuclear war is a necessary deterrent. A war may remain limited because of credible deterrence or *escalation dominance*, when a side has overwhelming military superiority at every level. The other side will then be deterred from using conventional or nuclear war due to the ability of the first to wage a war with much greater chances of success. It means more room is available for manoeuvre in diplomacy and in conflict.

- A limited conventional war will require close political oversight and politico- civil-military interaction. It is essential to keep the military leadership within the security and strategic decision-making loop. During a conflict, all participants must remain in constant touch with the political leadership.
- Mobilising and sustaining domestic and international support for military operations would depend upon righteous action and the ability to operate in a manner that conforms to political legitimacy, for example, avoidance of civilian and military casualties and minimisation of collateral damage.
- A major military challenge in India remains political reluctance to commit a proactive engagement and insistence to retain the authority for approving key military moves and operational decisions. Political requirements and military targeting would need a heavy reliance on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance for target selection.
- Information operations are important due to the growing transparency of the battlefield. The political requirement of a military operation, and to retain the moral high ground (and deny that to the adversary) needs a comprehensive media and information campaign.

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Brilliant Junior Leadership: A reflection on the Kargil War will never be complete without a mention of the brilliant junior leadership that we witnessed during the battles. It was an eye-opener for those who lament that the armed forces are no longer attracting the best talent, or that the training in our basic military institutions has got diluted, or that our young leaders are less motivated. The Cassandras and pessimists were proved wrong!

In every battle, the young officers were upfront, not hesitating to make any sacrifice to uphold the regimental and national pride and dignity. With great determination, high morale and exemplary leadership, our troops performed superbly. There were countless acts of most extraordinary valour, courage and grit to achieve what would have appeared impossible under normal circumstances.

Such acts by young officers like Vikram Batra (whose success signal to his commanding officer was “*Yeh dil maange more*”), Manoj Pandey, Vijayant Thapar, Balwan Singh, and soldiers like Sanjay Kumar and Yadav can never be forgotten. They make us proud. Commanding officers like Ravindernath, Khushal Thakur and Lalit Rai displayed steely resilience and single-minded devotion to duty. There were many actions by young artillery forward observation officers (FOO) who took over companies when their infantry company commander colleagues were killed. They rallied the men and led them to the objective or to ward off severe counter-attacks. And for every single brave deed noticed and recognised, there were many that went unnoticed in the fog of war.

These legendary tales deserve mention not only in our military history books but also in the textbooks of our primary and secondary schools, to be able to inspire young children. My regret is that these days we remember gods and soldiers only at the time of crisis. Both are forgotten as soon as the crisis is over!

Gaps in Defences, Force Levels, Command and Control: Soon after the war, we realised that in the light of the continuing proxy war with Pakistan (despite political attempts to underplay it sometimes), we had to restore the strategic balance in J&K. A peculiar strategic problem that the Indian military faces is that it cannot trade any space for major offensive manoeuvres elsewhere. Loss of territory is not acceptable to the public or the political authority. This is a strategic handicap and a risk, which increases in a limited war scenario. It implies greater attention to surveillance and close defence of the borders or lines of controls.

The command and control of the Srinagar Corps, having to look after the LoC with Pakistan and China and active anti-terrorist operations, was over-extended. This strategic requirement called for raising a separate Corps Headquarter, reinducting a division (in place of 28 Infantry Division raised for the Siachen sector but moved to the Valley in 1991), and improving surveillance and overall combat capability in Ladakh. For this purpose, we raised HQ 14 Corps and retained 8 Mountain Division in the Kargil sector. With additional forces (including the Ladakh Scouts), better command and control, and improved surveillance capability, this shortcoming of the Kargil War was overcome quickly.

Reforming the National Security System⁶: The Kargil Review Committee Report⁷ led to the Indian government constituting a Group of Ministers (GoM) to review the performance of all defence related organisations and recommend reforms in the national security system. The CCS approved the GoM's recommendations, submitted in February 2001. Although in terms of numbers, most of these reforms are stated to have been implemented, many changes have

only been cosmetic. The willingness and spirit to change has been lacking. For example, there is hardly any integration in the Ministry of Defence. I feel that we need competent and committed political leadership to bring it about.

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS): The GoM had recommended the appointment of a CDS as the existing COSC has serious weaknesses in its ability to provide single point military advice to the government, and to resolve substantive inter-Service doctrinal, planning, policy and operational issues. In India, there is neither a holistic approach to defence planning nor adequate synergy in operational planning and execution. Planning in defence tends to be 'competitive' and, thus, 'uneconomical'. In the new strategic environment of *unpredictability* and enhanced *interactivity*, it is essential to create synergy and optimise defence and operational planning. A face-to-face dialogue and military advice is critical to success in politico-military strategic and operational issues. The appointment of the CDS, therefore, is essential. But the creation of the post of CDS is still pending, despite statements of the Standing Committee of the Parliament, which had noted, "Coordination and synergy amongst the armed forces, Service Headquarters and the MoD is extremely vital for expeditious decision-making and also for enhancing the capabilities of our defence forces. The existing structure for higher defence management, viz, the COSC, has not been able to perform their role and function in bringing together and promoting coordination amongst the Services."

Shortage of Arms, Ammunition and Equipment: When the Kargil War broke out, our 'bottom line' holdings and reserves of weapons, ammunition and equipment were in a depleted state due to continuous lack of budgetary support, tedious—almost non-functional—procurement system, and raising of Rashtriya Rifles units without sanctions for weapons and equipment. The procurement structure in the Ministry of Defence was responsible for the sub-optimal utilisation of funds and long delays (it continues to be so!). There were large-scale shortages of weapons and equipment; even of the clothing required

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for high altitude warfare. And yet, some bureaucrats complained to the prime minister about my remarks to the media during the war that “we will fight with whatever we have.”

For some time, the Kargil War made people conscious of this responsibility. But modernisation of the armed forces continues to lag behind even now due to inadequate self-reliance and reluctance to procure big-ticket essential equipment like the medium artillery guns. The newly constituted Defence Procurement Board has failed to speed up the process. Instead, it seems to have added one more tier in clearance of proposals, causing further delays. There is also an urgent need to streamline and establish accountability in the Defence Research and Defence Organisation (DRDO). There is no point talking about the revolution in military affairs, information systems and net-centric warfare if we cannot induct relevant weapons and equipment in time. No one is affected more than the soldiers who have always to be prepared for all kinds of contingencies. We must remember that the military is an organismic being, not a switch on-switch off robot.

Intelligence and Surveillance: The deficiencies in our system of collection, reporting, collation and assessment of intelligence have been stated earlier. With the setting up of the National Security Council Secretariat, this aspect has improved to some extent. An integrated Defence Intelligence Agency has been established. However, its technological, coordination, and assessment-making capabilities need to be further strengthened to make it effective.

The war had highlighted the gross inadequacies in the nation's surveillance capability. We sought satellite imagery from two friendly countries but received unsatisfactory responses. This capability has now been made up with indigenous satellites. By setting up direct communications from DIPAC to the corps, there has been substantial improvement in this field. We have also acquired effective unmanned aerial vehicles, upgraded helicopter capability for day and night surveillance, and, most importantly, acquired hand-held thermal imagers, surveillance radars and ground sensors.

Kargil was a limited war; the first of its kind after the Indo-Pak nuclear weapons tests and the Lahore Declaration. It has now become a more likely operational norm in the strategic environment where large scale capture of territories, forced change of regimes, and extensive military damage on the adversary are ruled out politically. It was not the first time when Pakistan initiated a war; and we must not assume that it would be the last time. Every good military would like to be proactive. However, it has also to develop the will and capability to react. The

essence of military leadership lies in the manner in which we react to restore a situation, however, adverse the circumstances of the battle. The most important lesson I believe is that sound defence makes sound foreign policies.

Notes

1. "The Lahore Declaration February 21, 1999", in *Defence Related Treaties of India* (New Delhi: ICC India Pvt Ltd).
2. "Malik Sees Trouble on J&K Front", *The Times of India*, May 3, 1999.
3. The Pakistan Army in the sector deployed two additional battalions in the sector. These battalions could not be identified or reflected by R&AW in the order of battle of the FCNA.
4. P Stobdan, who comes from Ladakh and was then working in the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi, after his tour of the area from June 2 to 9, 1999, reported these facts to me.
5. Kargil Review Committee Report, Para 8.20.
6. Recommendations of the Group of Ministers, February 2001
7. Ordered by the Government of India under the chairmanship of K Subrahmanyam, with Lt Gen KK Hazari, Mr BG Verghese as members, and Mr Satish Chandra as member-secretary.