

Military Lessons of the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War

V GANAPATHY

If Pakistan has any ideas of annexing any part of our territories by force, she should think afresh. I want to state categorically that force will be met with force and aggression against us will never be allowed to succeed.

— Lal Bahadur Shastri

The Indo-Pakistan War, 1965, the second war between India and Pakistan since August 1947, began as a localised conflict between India and Pakistan. Recovering from the ignominy of the 1962 Chinese attack, India was in the midst of giving its Army a face-lift. Pakistan, already better equipped and prepared for war, and still simmering from what it could not achieve in 1947-48, considered this an apt moment to attack India while it was still unprepared. The early confrontations started in the Rann of Kutch on April 09, 1965, when Pakistan attacked an Indian post under codename Op Desert Hawk. At the same time, between January and May 1965, there were numerous ceasefire violations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), when Pakistanis attacked and occupied posts on the ridgelines in Kargil on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC), prompting India to beat them back and occupy the heights north of the ceasefire line to protect India's lines of communication.

In August 1965, Pakistan upped the ante when it infiltrated thousands of soldiers of irregular forces to instigate a rebellion and carry out acts of sabotage in J&K as part of Op Gibraltar. The infiltrators, comprising mainly Razakars, followed by the Mujahids, were forcibly recruited and organised into

Intelligence regarding Pakistan's activities and intentions was wanting, inaccurate and misleading.

task forces. Officers, soldiers and Special Forces personnel from the regular Pakistan Army were incorporated to strengthen the force. The first wave was inducted on August 05 and the second wave in the third week of August. The infiltrators first worked independently and then, as their objectives were not being achieved, moved together to work as bigger groups. They engaged in sabotage activities—raiding Army posts, Headquarters (HQs), disrupting communications, directing artillery fire from Pakistan, ambushing Indian patrols and convoys, blowing up logistic installations and targeting civilians. India had no option but to respond aggressively and mounted operations in Kargil, Tithwal and Hajipir to capture heights and posts, thereby frustrating their operational and strategic objectives. As Op Gibraltar started failing, Pakistan was forced to increase the stakes.

Pakistan launched Op Grand Slam, the next phase of its strategic plan, to capture the Akhnoor bridge to sever J&K from the rest of India and then advance to Akhnoor and Jammu. The Chhamb-Jaurian sector was chosen for attack by Pakistan with a powerful armour-cum-infantry force. The official history of the war states, "According to the information available to India, the ceasefire line in Pakistan was held by only two battalions and some 600 odd paramilitary force, with an armour squadron and a Baluch battalion in depth. Across the IB, one infantry battalion, a regiment of armour less two squadrons and a mechanized battalion were stationed. Pakistan reserves, consisting of two battalions, regiment armour, 14 Para Brigade less battalion, one medium battery and two heavy mortar battery, were around Bhimber and Marala HW. With this force, India thought, Pakistan posed no major threat in the immediate future." Pakistan's intentions and capabilities had been grossly underestimated by the Indian Army, especially at the higher stratum. Contrary to all Indian assessments, Pakistan had planned to launch a major offensive in Chhamb-Jaurian with more than two regiments of armour and 7 Infantry Division (eight battalions) supported by artillery. Akhnoor was defended by 191 Infantry Brigade Group. On September 01, Pakistan attacked a post in Chhamb triggering the next phase of the war.

After the initial speed and surprise and gains, Pakistan could not exploit the successes. India, on the other hand, did well to form resolute defences to prevent Pakistan from gaining more ground. More importantly, India launched a counter-offensive in Punjab opposite Lahore, forcing Pakistan to relocate forces from

this sector, thus, relieving pressure on Akhnoor. By the time the war ended, the Indian forces had established a defensive line west of Akhnoor between Akhnoor and Kalit-Troti and Indian troops were in occupation of the Kalidhar ridge.

The war ended on September 22, with India having captured 1,920 sq km of Pakistani area and still capable of waging war, whereas Pakistan appeared to be at the end of its logistic sustenance. The Tashkent Declaration was signed on January 10, 1966, as a peace agreement between India and Pakistan which pushed both countries back to pre-conflict August 1965 positions. Both countries returned the captured areas at the end of the war.

Hindsight helps draw the correct lessons from history. Pakistan, carried away by India's measured response in Kutch, banking on India's low preparedness and misreading Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri whom they perceived as a diminutive man unlikely to take a strong decision, deemed it fit to walk into a very ambitious project of wresting Kashmir away from India. There are numerous perspectives of the 1965 War, at the end of which it gets difficult to say who started the war, who won the war, so on and so forth. The mathematical sigma of the war, however, was pretty much, as commented on by many critics of the war: an impasse – both countries left unconsummated. India did well on many fronts – displaying aggression in the Kashmir Valley by disregarding the ceasefire line to pursue infiltrators and in the capture of Hajipir and other posts, by opening a new front in Punjab, and destroyed the myth propagated by Pakistan that one Pakistani soldier was equal to three Indians ! However, as a takeaway of the war, some critical lessons which emerged are discussed below.

- **Intelligence**

- Intelligence regarding Pakistan's activities and intentions was wanting, inaccurate and misleading at best. While ground soldiers had an inkling of the Pakistan build-up opposite Akhnoor, commanders at higher levels seemed to know less of it, and apparently failed to attribute credence to such ground intelligence.
- Information from the Air Force in the form of air photos and their interpretation reached fighting units late. Moreover, the air effort allotted for this task was felt to be inadequate.
- Gen Harbaksh Singh, the Western Army Commander during 1965, has alluded to the fact that processing of information by intelligence staff was far from satisfactory, leading to distorted and disjointed versions of Pakistani capabilities and intentions.

- Information of Pakistani pre-war activities in general, including ignorance of the impending Gibraltar infiltrations, was a major reflection on the capability or lack of it of the Intelligence Bureau (IB). The dismal performance of the IB had been earlier noted during the 1962 episode. Consequently, in 1968, the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) was raised to overcome this critical lacuna.
- **Diplomacy**

Pakistan was supported by Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Jordan and China, while the USA and UK had banned weapons sales to Pakistan and India. Since early September, China had pressurised India by accusing it frequently of border violations. China also attacked India in some posts and amassed its troops as a part of pressure tactics. Keeping the Soviet Union on its side and standing up to the constant and increasing pressure from China were the highlights of India's diplomatic battle. There has been much debate about diplomatic compromise at the end of the war regarding India having to return territories captured, notably Hajipir and Kargil, won after great battles as part of the Tashkent Agreement. However, these must be seen in the context of events unfolding then, including the pressure of yielding to a ceasefire initiative backed by the USSR which primarily sought to avoid the September 22, 1965, Chinese deadline to India. Pakistan was the worse for the ceasefire, since it had initiated the war and all the myth propagated by it stood exposed to its public.
- **Strategy**
 - The war lasted 22 days, from September 01-22, 1965, and was **limited in geography** (only the Western and Northern Sectors were involved), by the **Services involved** (the Indian Navy played a very limited role), and by **time** (with all the pressure to go for a ceasefire). Consequently, strategy was relegated to the back-seat, the war more driven by immediate concerns of the battlefield. Field commanders were apparently not very clear about the goals of the war and, thus, of their goals – whether it was an all out war, a war of attrition, a war to capture territory or a war to destroy the enemy's war machine? Though during the later stages Gen JN Chaudhuri, the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), was said to have spelt out that it was a war of attrition]. In the absence

of clear-cut directives, ground commanders slogged on unimaginatively, the war turning out to be a slug-fest with minor advantages for the larger participant.

Attacking many defended localities simulataneously dissipated the ground forces.

- Complete combat power was not brought to the fore in many operations, to name a few, Dograi, Mirpur, Daulat Beg Oldi (DBN). While reserves for major operations were available, they were not employed in time or fully; even complete resources were not employed, both indicating a hesitation and lack of aggressive mentality, much required for successful operations, especially at a higher level. As a result, concentration of forces was not achieved when required.
- Attacking many places along the border did not work out in favour of India and ended up dissipating its forces. A well-intended concentrated breakthrough and thrust may have unbalanced Pakistan. Deliberate planning, preparation and bold execution may well have led to India delivering a lethal blow to Pakistan, not just a mauling.
- **Tactics**
 - Battle inoculation, critical to hardening the soldier, was absent, leading to lack of confidence amongst the soldiers, especially the large number of new recruits. Also, battle stamina, the ability to withstand and fight wars for a long duration, was found to be below par.
 - Basic field craft and battle craft, including digging for defences were found to be insufficient, leading to increased casualties and hasty retreats during counter-attacks by the enemy.
 - Training for night operations was highlighted by the fact that enemy artillery barrages played havoc with own movement during day-time.
 - While helicopters as a resource were minimal, the effective employment of available helicopters has been observed.

Leadership

The official history of the war, while discussing India's offensive action by 11 Corps in its chapter in Reviews and Reflections, notes, "*There was not only lack of good generalship, but also absence of spirited infantry action in some areas.....*". Adequate defences were not prepared, opportunities were not followed up, and imagination was not exercised, leading to an indecisive

deadlock in the sector. The Indian setbacks at Chawinda are attributed to lack of initiative and control of 1 Corps and 1 Armoured Division. Similarly, 15 Infantry's Division's accountability in the failure to support the initial thrust across the Ichhogil canal at Dograi has been documented, as is 29 Infantry Brigade's faltering at DBN at the initial stages.

Air Force

Various accounts of the conflict point to lack of coordination between the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Indian Army. A strong joint plan would have ensured that the IAF launched preemptive air strikes against Pakistani air bases before the Army crossed the IB into Pakistan on September 06, 1965. Lack of strategic air bombardment missions, airlifts and air-bridge supply operations further corroborated disjointedness in planning. Even though Pakistan possessed superior aircraft, it is believed that towards the end of the war, and despite the IAF's vintage aircraft, the losses suffered by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) would have tilted the air battle in India's favour.

Air Defence

Both India and Pakistan were constrained by obsolescent Air Defence (AD) guns. Indian cities and air bases were defended by 3.7" and 40 mm Bofors, lacking radar control facilities. The guns were inadequate to protect armoured columns and were, consequently, ineffective against modern aircraft.

Armour

The tank-to-tank battles in the war were almost unprecedented since World War II, with almost a thousand tanks, on both sides, engaged in battles. India had one armoured division, one independent armoured brigade and six armoured regiments against Pakistan's two armoured divisions (M-48 Patton). In the Battle of Asal Uttar in the Khem Karan sector, on September 10, 1965, Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division was blunted by three Indian armoured regiments with inferior tanks – Deccan Horse (Sherman), 3 Cavalry (Centurion) and 8 Cavalry (AMX-13) – and were able to capture 97 Pakistani tanks. Indian losses in the Khem Karan sector were 32 tanks. While Pakistan was equipped with the better Patton tanks, in the ultimate analysis, the Indian armour fared better for reasons of better training, better tactical display and confidence in their equipment.

Infantry

The bulk of the Army involved in the war was the infantry. Deployed extensively along India's borders, and despite the lack of notice of war and preparation, the infantry acquitted itself well both in the hills and the plains, successfully dislodging infiltrators and deterring enemy armour. Several examples of individual and collective acts of bravery are testimony to this fact, among them the actions of CQMH Abdul Hamid in the Khem Karan sector and Major BS Randhawa in Kargil being examples. The battles fought by units at Dograi and Barki also exemplified infantry actions. However, as mentioned earlier, indifferent leadership and dull imagination, in many cases, prevented opportunities from being pursued.

The Indians proved that the man behind the machine mattered.

Man-Machine Conundrum

This war again proved that it was the man behind the machine which mattered. This was truer with Pakistan, as, despite possessing better equipment, it failed to push home the advantage, whereas the Indian Army, with older vintage equipment, performed better.

Conclusion

The Indian Army was recovering, expanding and modernising post 1962. Most formations were new and not yet battle-worthy. As regards the performance of the individual soldier, the officers and other ranks stood out in display of individual bravery. The younger age group officers' sacrifice is noted by the officer casualty ratio – 1:14 against 1:60 casualty ratio of other ranks. The war did redeem, to a considerable extent, the honour of the Indian military, particularly the Army. However, the lessons of the war held the Indian defence forces in good stead when in 1971 they handed a decisive blow to Pakistan. The major taking from the war, it appears, is that there is no way but continuous training for an Army if it does not want to be surprised on the day of reckoning.

Col V Ganapathy is a Senior Fellow at CLAWS.

References

1. SN Prasad, Chief Editor, *History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965* (New Delhi: History Division of Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 1992).
2. Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh, *War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict, 1965* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1991).
3. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/india-pakistan-war>
4. Air Marshal PC Lal, "A Critical Look at the 1965 Ops," National Security Lecture at the USI, 1973, accessed from <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/1965War/1159-Lal.html>
5. <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/LAND-FORCES/Army/Galleries/Wars/PattonNagar/1965/>
6. <http://forums.civfanatics.com/showthread.php?t=118324>
7. <http://defenceforumindia.com/forum/defence-strategic-issues/844-indo-pakistan-war-1965-a.html>
8. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pakistani_War_of_1965
9. <http://www.military-quotes.com/forum/indo-pak-wars-brief-overview-t22382.html>