

War in the Western Theatre

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Introduction

On 3 December 1971, at about 1730h, the Pakistan Air Force crossed Indian air space and launched a series of air attacks on Indian airfields at Amritsar, Awantipur, Faridkot, Pathankot and Srinagar. These attacks did little in terms of inflicting serious damage on Indian Air Force capabilities, but with these attacks, Pakistan had started the war against India. It was Pakistan's strategy to launch an offensive in the West, should India invade the East Wing. The Pakistani plan had two ingredients. First, formations other than those in reserve were to launch limited offensives. Second, a major counter offensive was to be launched concurrently into India. The plan was altered by Yahya Khan, who ordered that the counter offensive should take place after local operations had secured ground. This change ostensibly was made due to shortage of equipment and the deployment of a large part of the army in its East Wing.

The Indian strategy had its war aims focused on the East. Strategic defence was to be maintained in the West and a counter offensive would only be launched after Pakistan initiated hostilities. This served the larger strategic purpose of ensuring that India was not accused of aggression which could have had a negative effect on its operations in the East Wing. The initiative in the West thus lay in the hands of the Pakistan military.

Force Levels

Pakistan

In the West, Pakistan had three corps and three infantry divisions commanded directly by General Head Quarter (GHQ). The orbat was as under:

- GHQ

- 12 Infantry Division.
- 18 Infantry Division.
- 23 Infantry Division.
- 1 Wing Frontier Scouts.

- **I Corps**
 - 6 Armoured Division.
 - 8 Independent Armoured Brigade.
 - 8 Infantry Division.
 - 15 Infantry Division.
 - 17 Infantry Division.

- **II Corps**
 - 1 Armoured Division.
 - 7 Infantry Division.
 - 33 Infantry Division. (Strategic Reserve)

- **IV Corps**
 - 10 Infantry Division.
 - 11 Infantry Division.
 - 3 Independent Armoured Brigade.

The above force was deployed as under:

- **Pakistan Occupied Kashmir:** 12 and 23 Infantry Divisions had nine brigades between them, which included one reserve brigade in each division. The rest of the troops were deployed in defence.
 - Ladakh and Kargil Sector: 1 Wing Frontier Scouts
 - Between Keran Nadi and Poonch River: 12 Infantry Division.
 - Between Poonch and Chenab: 23 Infantry Division.
- **Shakargarh Bulge:** (Between the Ravi and Chenab)
 - HQ I Corps
 - 6 Armoured Division. (Counter offensive Role)
 - 17 Infantry Division. (Counter offensive Role)
 - 8 Infantry Division. (Deployed in Defence)
 - 15 Infantry division. (Deployed in defence)
 - 8 Independent Armoured Brigade.

- **Lahore Sector:** (Ranian to Sulaimanke)
 - HQ IV Corps
 - 10 Infantry Division.
 - 11 Infantry Division.
 - Independent Armoured Brigade.
- **Desert Sector.**
 - Sulaimanke to Bahawalpur – 1 x Independent Infantry Brigade Group.
 - Beyond Bahawalpur-18 Infantry Division, which was also responsible for the defence of Karachi.
- **Offensive Force:** HQ II Corps with 1 Armoured Division and 7 and 33 Infantry Divisions.

Pakistan Military Strategy

In Pakistani military thinking, the defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan. This presumed a Pakistani offensive against India in the West should India attack its East Wing. Seven infantry divisions along with an independent infantry brigade were deployed in a holding role along the international border and the cease fire line. Two armoured divisions, three infantry divisions and an independent infantry brigade were available for offensive operations of which one armoured division and one infantry division were for the planned counter offensive. The Pakistan Army aimed to seize the initiative by launching an offensive at the start of hostilities to capture Indian territory of strategic, economic and political significance while denying similar gains to India.

The main offensive against India was to commence after completion of preliminary operations. This involved the following:

- Attack on Poonch by 12 Infantry Division.
- Attack on Chhamb by 23 Infantry Division. In addition, 111 and 66 Infantry Brigades and 2 Armoured Brigade were allotted for this task. 111 Brigade was a reserve brigade while 66 Brigade was part of 17 Infantry Division.
- 105 Independent Infantry Brigade Group to capture areas opposite Fazilka to ensure the safety of the Sulaimanke Head works which was just about 1500 metres from the international boundary.
- 18 Infantry Division to launch operations opposite Jaisalmer-Longenwala with a view to confining Indian armoured formations to the South, thereby facilitating the operations of the main offensive. This would also give protection to the vulnerable Pakistani North-South road link which was just about 65 kilometers from the border in this area.

Tasks for the mobile forces and reserves were as under:

- 6 Armoured Division (less two armoured regiments) and 17 Infantry Division (less one infantry brigade) to counter attack in Ravi-Chenab Corridor when ordered. Both formations were under command Headquarter 1 Corps and were also army reserves. The detached armour and infantry were placed under command 23 Infantry Division for operations in Chhamb.
- 8 Independent Armoured Brigade located in Pasrur was to carry out various contingency counter-attack or counter penetration tasks when ordered by Headquarter 1 Corps. This formation had been raised in 1970 by withdrawing integral armoured regiments from some infantry divisions.
- 3 Independent Armoured Brigade located in Ravi-Sutlej Corridor was tasked with various contingency counter attack plans of counter attack/counter penetration.

The main offensive with 1 Armoured Division and 7 Infantry Division was to be launched opposite Ganganagar. This force, after crossing the Bikaner Canal opposite Bahawalnagar, was to swing North towards Bhatinda and thereafter threaten Ludhiana.

India

Indian strategy aimed at strategic defence in the Western Theatre while conducting offensive operations in East Pakistan. Western Command with 15 Corps, 1 Corps and 11 Corps and Southern Command with 11 and 12 Infantry Divisions were deployed on the Western front.

Western Command

- **XV Corps:** XV Corps consisting of 3, 19, 25, 10 and 26 Infantry Divisions and one independent armoured brigade was committed to static defence along the ceasefire line and to covering the routes of ingress to sensitive areas. 3 Infantry Division was deployed on the border with Tibet. One infantry brigade of this division was detached and stationed at Suratgarh. An independent brigade was placed under command 3 Infantry Division and was holding Kargil Sector. The Partapur Sector opposite Shyok River Gorge was held by Ladakh Scouts. 19 Infantry Division was deployed along the cease fire line in the Kashmir Valley. 25 Infantry Division was defending the sector from Poonch till Naushera. 10 Infantry Division was looking after the Hill Sub Sector and Chhamb. 26 Infantry Division was defending the Jammu-Samba region.

- **I Corps:** I Corps was tasked with the defence of the area from Aik Nala till and excluding Dera Baba Nanak Enclave on the Ravi River North of Amritsar. The Shakargarh bulge in Punjab from Samba to Dera Baba Nanak was held by a division. This presented to Pakistan the weakest gap in the Indian defences in the event of a preemptive attack. Located in the hinterland, I Corps was to assume responsibility of this sector on arrival. It had in its orbat 36, 39 and 54 Infantry Divisions and 2 and 16 Independent Armoured Brigades.
- **XI Corps:** XI Corps was holding area from Dera Baba Nanak Enclave in the North till South of Anupgarh. XI Corps consisted of 15 and 7 Infantry Divisions and an ad hoc division sized force holding Foxtrot Sector. 15 Division (Four infantry brigades and two armoured regiments) was responsible for defence of area from Dera Baba Nanak Enclave till and including Lahore-Amritsar Road and 7 Infantry Division (Three brigades and an armoured regiment) thereafter till and including Jalalabad, South of Ferozpur. From here onwards till the South of Anupgarh a new sector of divisional strength (three infantry brigades plus some armour) had been made responsible for the defence of the area. This was called Foxtrot Sector. In addition, a brigade from 14 Infantry Division had been detached and placed under command XI Corps. The mobile reserves consisted of 14 Armoured Brigade which had five armoured regiments (18, 62 and 64 Cavalry and 70 and 71 Armoured Regiment), one independent recce tank squadron and one mechanised infantry battalion. Some units had been detached and placed with 86 Infantry Brigade in Dera Baba Nanak Enclave, F Sector and Mike Force. This left 14 Armoured Brigade with 64 Cavalry. Mike Force with its Headquarter at Abohar was a reserve held by Western Command and consisted of 62 Cavalry (T-55), 18 Cavalry less B Squadron (T-54), one Mechanised Infantry Company and a medium artillery regiment.

Southern Command

Southern Command was responsible for the defence of area from Bikaner Sector in the North till the Arabian Sea in the South. It was divided into the Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Kutch Sectors. 12 Infantry Division was responsible for the Bikaner and Jaisalmer Sectors. On outbreak of hostilities, it was tasked to advance towards Rahimyar Khan and disrupt the communication links running from North to South. 11 Infantry Division was looking after the Barmer and Kutch Sectors. It was tasked to capture Naya Chor by advancing along axis Gadra Road-Munabao once hostilities had commenced.

Army Reserves

1 Armoured Division was stationed in Muktsar area against the expected Pakistan 2 Corps Counter offensive in Ganganagar area. 14 Infantry Division was stationed in Faridkot area. This division was also given some defensive responsibilities by Headquarter 11 Corps in Ferozpur and Fazilka Sectors.

Conduct of Offensive Operations: Pakistan

Pakistan had planned four preliminary operations prior to the launching of their main offensive. These were operations in Poonch, Chhamb, Fazilka and Ramgarh. Pakistan achieved partial success at Chhamb and Fazilka but the offensive at Poonch was defeated with the Pakistanis suffering heavy casualties. In their move to Ramgarh, the Pakistani force were stopped at Longenwala and suffered heavy attrition mainly from the Indian Air Force. At Poonch and Longenwala however, both the local Indian military commanders failed to exploit the success achieved. Bold leadership could have had a dramatic affect on the course of the war.

Battle of Poonch

Poonch was defended by 93 Infantry Brigade. The Pakistani attack plan revolved around establishing a corridor in the crust of the Indian defences along the ceasefire line by capturing the defended localities along on Shahpur and Danna features and at Guterian along the Darangla Nullah, about six to nine kilometers North and Northeast of Poonch town. Two battalions were to infiltrate through the corridor in the same night and capture Thanpir and Chandak ridges to the East and rear of Poonch overlooking the Kalai Bridge thus severing Poonch from Saujian, Mandi and Surankot. The plan was bold but perhaps a bit over ambitious.

Two brigades of 12 Infantry Division were assembled for this attack in Kahuta Area in November but as this was under Indian observation, the move was detected. As a precautionary measure 33 Infantry Brigade was inducted into the Poonch sector with one battalion at Banawat near Poonch, a battalion at Krishna Ghati and the third battalion at Jaran Wali Gali, presumably as reserves in their respective areas.

The Pakistani attack commenced as planned on night 3 December. Indian forward posts were attacked and the infiltrating columns infiltrated successfully and captured Thanpir and Chandak Ridges. The Pakistani attack however could not break the Indian defence on the ceasefire line and link up with the infiltrating force could not be achieved. On the morning of 5 December, the infiltrating

force, short on ammunition and supplies was ordered to withdraw. Indian reserves had by then also been moved to evict the infiltrators but the Pakistani troops got away before they could arrive, shedding much arms and equipment. The attack on the Indian forward posts was also called off.

Pakistani analysts attribute failure to capture Poonch to the lack of dynamism in the Pakistani 12 Infantry Divisional commander. They also have praise for the resoluteness of India's Commander 93 Infantry Brigade who remained unruffled and refused to panic and the determined defence put up by 6 SIKH and 11 J&K Militia. But while the Poonch battle had been won by India, the higher leadership did not exploit the success achieved by undertaking a quick counter offensive into Pakistani depth areas with a view to annexing the Kahuta Bulge. 33 Infantry Brigade was available for the task and there was a fair chance of it cutting off the retreating Pakistanis and delivering a crushing blow before they had a chance to recover from the debacle. On such opportunities can great victories be turned into outstanding ones.

The higher leadership did not exploit the success achieved by undertaking a quick counter offensive into Pakistani depth areas.

Battle of Fazilka

India's 67 Brigade was tasked with the defence of Fazilka. As per the broader operational picture, Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division with one to two infantry divisions was assessed to be in the general area of Sahiwal – Okara. It was appreciated that this force could pose a threat to India's depth areas of Bhatinda and Faridkot. Fazilka hence assumed importance as it was an essential pivot for Pakistan to develop its operations. Opposite Fazilka, Pakistan's 105 Brigade was defending the Sulaimanke Headworks. This was a very vulnerable target as it was barely 1.5 kilometers from the border.

The Indian defence plan was initially based on the Sabuna distributary. This anti-tank obstacle with attendant fortifications was constructed based on the Indian war experience of 1965. However, as part of the XI Corps defence plan, Commander 67 Brigade was required to organise a fortress defence of the town and hold it at all costs. He accordingly organised Fazilka into a fortress with a battalion and two companies of another battalion. Fearful of his open Southern flank, he detached a battalion minus worth of troops at Shatriwala, some 20 kilometers away. A battalion was committed to the defences on the Sabuna distributary but it had three company strong points operating ahead.

Thus the main defences were held with only a company plus some ad hoc elements.

To impart depth to the Sulaimanke Headworks, Pakistan's 105 Brigade launched an attack on 3 December and succeeded in gaining a portion of the Sabuna distributary. Repeated Indian attempts to dislodge the attackers were foiled. The Indian commander was replaced in the course of the battle but that did not change the ultimate outcome. In hindsight, the debacle at Fazilka can be attributed to inept conduct of the defensive battle by the commander and to the faulty defensive posture of adopting a fortress defence. For the latter, the senior leadership of the Corps can be held equally accountable.

Battle of Chhamb

Chhamb had been captured by Pakistan in 1965 but subsequent to the Tashkent Agreement, the status quo ante all along the border had been restored. In 1971, XV Corps had been tasked to launch a sizeable offensive in the Sialkot Sector so as to draw a portion Pakistan's reserves away from the main Indian thrust in the general area of Shakargah – Zafarwal. The corps commander decided to go on an offensive on both sides of the Chenab on staggered timings with 10 and 26 Infantry Divisions, depending on the induction of 1 Corps into the theatre. The defences in these divisions were sited in depth, but this weakness was rectified in November when the Chief visited the formations and ordered them to adopt a forward posture. Consequently, 191 Brigade of 10 infantry Division was moved forward West of the Munawar Tawi and the scope of 26 Infantry division offensive operations were curtailed to what was possible within the available resources.

The deployment of 10 Division however continued to have a bias towards the planned offensive. One brigade was deployed in the depth position near the Troti heights and the third brigade was concentrated at Akhnur to be made available as the leading brigade for the projected offensive. The divisions integral armour was deployed with a squadron West of the Munawar Tawi, a squadron at Khaur to cover the Nadala salient and the remainder in the area of Kachrael to reinforce both sectors. The second armoured regiment was concentrated in the rear and the independent squadron in Akhnur.

On the Pakistani side, Pak 23 Infantry division had been given the task of securing Indian territory up to the Munawar Tawi. In addition to his two integral brigades in the holding role, he was allotted two more infantry brigades, an armoured brigade and 8 to 10 fire units of artillery.

The Pakistani attack was launched with armour on 4 December but had been preceded by heavy shelling throughout the night. For two days, the battle raged back and forth. As it appeared that it would not be possible to hold on West of the Munawar Tawi, the GOC decided to pull back the forward brigade on 6 December. The withdrawal was started at 2100 hours and completed two hours later with 191 Brigade coming back in good shape. It thereafter took up defences in the Troti Heights.

The enemy continued with his offensive and by early morning on 10 December had established a bridgehead across the Munawar Tawi. This was counterattacked and by the evening the enemy withdrew with heavy casualties. The line thereafter stabilised along the Munawar Tawi.

Battle of Longenwala

Pakistan 18 Infantry division was deployed opposite Southern Command. This Division was tasked to launch an offensive with two combat groups against Ramgarh on two axes along the Tanot and Longenwala approaches. The offensive was planned for 3 December but was postponed to the 4th because of logistical difficulties. The Pakistani GOC was not in favour of the offensive as it was taking place sans air support and the vehicular fleet lacked four wheel drives which would impair its move in the desert. Both columns, one by design and the other by default landed in Longenwala in the early hours of 5 December, about six miles deep in Indian Territory.

In the desert sector, India's Southern Command had planned an offensive each by 11 and 12 Infantry Divisions. 11 Infantry Division was to take the offensive in the Barmer Sector to capture Gadra City and Khokhrapar and then advance to Naya Chor to destroy maximum Pakistani forces in the Naya Chor – Umarmot Area. 12 Infantry Division was to advance and intercept road and rail communications in the general area of Khanpur – Rahimyar Khan – Khairpur.

When Pakistan initiated hostilities on 3 December, Southern Command was given the go ahead to proceed with its operations. The offensive in both the divisional sectors were to start at last light on 4 December. 11 Infantry Division proceeded as planned but 12 Infantry Division insisted on a delay of 24 hours to complete preparations which was reluctantly accepted by the Command Headquarter. In the event this proved fortuitous.

At about 0400 hours on 5 December, the company commander at Longenwala reported tank noises in and around his post. Soon thereafter his post was contacted by the leading enemy armour. The company commander however held his ground

and his actions imposed caution on the enemy. The enemy consequently did not rush his post despite the fact that it was not mined and lacked anti tank potential. The divisional commander then contacted the Jaisalmer air base for air support. There were only four Hunters at the base, two of which were unserviceable. Many air sorties were flown in these two aircraft and the invading enemy columns were caught in the open and suffered heavy casualties. On 7 December the Pakistani GOC was removed from command and his successor ordered the withdrawal of the force. The Indian counter attack to trap the enemy was finally launched on 8 December, but by then the enemy had cut his losses and withdrawn. The Indian inability to exploit the confusion was the result of an overtly defensive mindset which prevented the destruction of the complete enemy force.

Conduct of Offensive Operations: India

Many small scale actions were conducted by the defensive formations all across the front. A large number of enclaves were captured but their impact on the overall conduct of the campaign was restricted to improving the defensive posture. The operations which had a material impact on the war are discussed below.

Ladakh and Kargil Operations

Two small scale but very effective operations took place, one in Partapur and the other in Kargil Sector. The area opposite the Partapur Sector was held by Pakistan with one company of Karakoram Scouts. The defences in this sector though lightly held were well prepared. On the Indian side, the commander of the Ladakh Scouts was Maj Rinchen. Of his four companies, three faced the Chinese in Tibet and one faced the Pakistanis along the Shyok River. The terrain in this sector was steep and rocky with heights ranging from 18,000 ft to 23,000 ft. The temperatures were sub zero.

On the initiative of Maj Rinchen, his Scouts captured the forward enemy post and advanced along the Shyok River towards Turtok. Maintenance of the Force was a problem as it had to be supplied by foot. Due to administrative constraints, Rinchen was halted at Turtok.

In Kargil, Commander 121 Infantry Brigade had six battalions, four of which were deployed in a defensive role and two were available as reserves for launching offensive tasks. The picquets on the Pakistani side could observe the Srinagar Leh Road and hence it was important to deny this capability to Pakistan. These picquets – the Barchla and Gangam complex of picquets as well as Point 13620 and Black Rocks had been captured by India in 1965 but returned to Pakistan

when status quo ante was ordered. Pakistan had since considerably increased their defence potential.

The 121 Brigade offensive opened with a two pronged thrust over the Shingo, supported by two Vampire aircraft, a regiment of 120 mm mortars and a field battery. After fierce resistance post after post was captured. By the time the ceasefire had come into effect, 36 Pakistani posts had been taken and 110 square miles of territory secured. The important operational gain was that Pakistan no longer had observation over the Leh-Srinagar Road.

Operations in Jammu and Kashmir

19 Infantry Division captured the Kaiyan bowl, made extensions to the Tithwal bulge and extended the territorial gains towards Minimarg. Though none of these operations contributed significantly to enhancing defence potential, the area captured was large and in the context of the Shimla agreement wherein areas captured were to be retained, assumed great significance. Perhaps, if the Bugina bulge or the Hajipir Pass had been addressed, their capture would have contributed greatly to India's defensive posture. In the Jammu Sector, the entire Chicken Neck's area was captured in a well planned and orchestrated operation. This area however had to be returned post the Shimla agreement as it was not part of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Shakargarh Sector

How the 1 corps offensive was to manifest depended to a large extent on Pakistani actions as the initiative lay with the latter. After Pakistan declared war on 3 December, it was decided to launch the 1 Corps offensive on 5 December. The offensive set off at 1830 hours on a broad front between the Degh Nadi and Basantar as follows:

- 54 Infantry division with 16 Armoured Brigade less one armoured regiment from the general area Mawa – Galar.
- 39 Infantry Division, with 72 Infantry Brigade of 36 Infantry Division and 2 Armoured Brigade less one armoured regiment from the general area Londi – Chak Dolna – Mangu Chak.
- The remainder of the corps was to remain on the defensive as under:
 - 323 Infantry Brigade of 39 Infantry Division and 168 Infantry Brigade of 26 infantry division holding the general area of Bajpur – Samba organised as X-ray Sector.

- 87 Infantry Brigade of 39 infantry division on a firm base in the general area of Bamial - Narot – Parol.
- 36 Infantry Division (two brigades) with one armoured regiment looking after the general area of the Thakur ferry.

The opposition faced was light but the attacking force took considerable time in negotiating the deep minefields laid by the enemy. By 9 December the progress remained agonisingly slow. However, as the enemy had not committed his strike elements anywhere in the bulge, 36 Infantry Division was tasked to develop operations towards Shakargarh. The division put up bridges of classification 40 and 9 over the Ravi and by 10 December had captured Nainakot. The resistance so far was minimal. On 11th the formation continued its advance on the Nainakot – Nurkot and Nainakot – Shakargarh Axis. By 12 December the formation was leaning on the Bein on both axes. It had taken 4 days to traverse 8 miles against very limited opposition.

By 12 December, I Corps was regrouped to accelerate the pace of operations. HQ 39 Infantry Division assumed responsibility of X-ray Sector and 72 Infantry Brigade took over its role. This brigade was placed under command of 54 Infantry Division. 36 Infantry Division was beefed up with HQ 2 Armoured Brigade and an armoured regiment. 87 Infantry Brigade was also placed under its command.

On night 13/ 14 December, 115 Infantry Brigade made an abortive attack on Shakargarh which was beaten back. This was followed by another abortive attack on night 14/ 15 December. The next assault on Shakargarh coincided with the ceasefire and thus was not launched.

54 Infantry Division in the meantime, on reaching the Basantar struck an enemy minefield of 1600 yards depth on the river bed. On night 15/ 16 December it established a bridgehead across the minefield and by first light on the 16th had extended it to up to Gazepur – Bara Pind village. Sensitive to the Indian move, Pakistan GOC 8 Infantry Division finally reacted with elements of 24 Infantry Brigade and 8 Armoured Brigade. A series of counter attacks were launched against the Bridgehead but by then the same had been impregnably strengthened by three squadrons plus of Poona Horse and Hodson's Horse. Over the next two days the Pakistani force was decimated, losing 48 tanks in the repeated counter attacks. The ceasefire on the 17th brought hostilities to a close.

An analysis of the battle reveals the defensive mindset of both the opposing corps. The Pakistani commander refused to bring 1 Armoured Division and 17

Infantry Division in to battle. They sat out the war around Pasrur. The Indian advance was agonisingly slow; a mere 13 kilometers in 12 days against covering troops. A Pakistani historian had caustic comments of the way the operation was conducted by both sides. He described the Pakistani Corps Commander Lieutenant General Irshad as 'a sentry who had to react only when threatened and would do nothing else'. He was equally derisive of Irshad's counterpart, calling the Indian Corps Commander as 'another similarly typical sub continental corps commander, mediocre in operational outlook, immensely concerned about security, timid in offensive operations'. Sadly, there was nothing in the Shakargarh operation which could negate that view, despite the many acts of heroism and raw courage displayed by the officers and men on both sides of the divide.

The Rajasthan Sector

As mentioned earlier in the battle of Longenwala, 11 Infantry Division began its offensive on 4 December towards Naya Chor. The force made good progress and by 8 December had captured Sandh. By 9 December it was in contact with the Naya Chor defences but the track work was slow and the build up remained hampered. By the time the force was ready to attack Naya Chor, the locality had been reinforced by Pakistan and a stalemate ensued till the ceasefire was declared. What India achieved here was a large tract of desert area but its value was insignificant.

Analysis

Higher Direction of War

'War', as Clausewitz observed, 'is a continuation of politics by other means'. Politics defines the war aims which the military then converts to a war fighting strategy. At the political level, diplomatic initiatives taken by Indira Gandhi set the stage for ultimate victory in East Pakistan. But both the antagonists were found wanting in defining political and strategic goals and war aims. Pakistan floundered in its belief that the defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan. What this term signified was at best a vague statement of intent. The Pakistani military establishment had a naively simplistic attitude towards Bengali separatism and failed to comprehend how a political problem could seriously compromise the strategic equilibrium of the army. Air lifting of Pakistan Army's reserves of 9 and 16 Divisions to East Pakistan in March-April 1971 seriously compromised Pakistan's military balance in West Pakistan. Though two divisions were raised to fill up

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the void, adequate time was not available for them to become operationally effective. As part of strategic forethought, it would have been far better for Pakistan to have raised two new divisions in the late sixties to cater for contingencies arising in its East Wing.

The only answer to Pakistan's strategic dilemma was to mount a pre-emptive attack on India in September or early October before the Indian Army had fully mobilised and the Himalayan Passes had not become snow bound. Indira Gandhi's skilful diplomacy and the Pakistan military's lack of strategic insight prevented such an outcome. Lt Gen Candeth, commanding the Western Command admitted that India's attack plans would have gone to the winds had Pakistan attacked in October 1971. In Candeth's words, 'Yahya Khan had tarried too long and had missed the boat'.

India was clear that decision was sought in the East Wing. While support was being given to the Mukti Bahini in East Pakistan, India had no intention of initiating hostilities in West Pakistan, to avoid the tag of aggression and maintain world support for its actions in the East. Indian political compulsions thus foreclosed the option of a preemptive strike in the West, leaving it to Pakistan to start the war. As the initiative lay with Pakistan it was incumbent on the part of India's military to have based their strategy on a defensive posture to first counter a Pakistani thrust and then move on to a counter offensive. This was not reflected in some of the Indian dispositions in the months leading up to the war especially in the 10 Infantry Division Sector which led to the loss of Chhamb.

Operational Art

The operational level of war is that level generally fought at corps level and above. Robert Leonhard defines it as 'the planning level of war that constructs campaigns and major operations in order to accomplish the theatre goals articulated at the strategic planning level; the intermediate planning level that integrates tactical efforts and events into a campaign'. Operational art was conspicuous by its lack of application throughout the conflict in the Western theatre. Senior commanders on both sides failed to comprehend the larger war picture and missed out capitalising on fleeting opportunities. The genesis for such shortcomings perhaps lay in the fact that prior to Independence, officers of the Indian Army were the product of an age and a military system which trained Indian officers in tactical concepts for operations at the battalion level

and below. Strategic grooming for higher command responsibilities was not a part of the discourse. Post-Independence, the Indian political establishment was naïve in its appreciation of external threats to India. That and an irrational fear of the Indian Army taking over the reins of power in Delhi led to stagnation in India's military preparedness. The 62 conflict with China was a wakeup call but a decade and half had already been lost. Post partition, the exit of British officers also led to quick promotions to higher levels of command. This was further compounded by the raising of additional formations post the 62 conflict. The consequences were a senior leadership steeped in tactical thought processes of the British era and out of sync with the concepts and precepts of operational art.

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At the operational level both sides showed a remarkable hesitation in use of reserves. Reserves once created must be used with effect to further the commander's aim. In the context of short duration wars, the creation of expensive assets is certainly not for ceremonial purposes. This is something which needs to be urgently addressed.

A great deal of uncertainty was displayed at operational level which was in stark contrast to the heroism and courage displayed at lower levels of command. In the Ravi-Chenab Corridor, Pakistan's 1 Corps Commander remained indecisive and was content to react to Indian moves, waiting patiently for Indian forces to breach the last minefield. His Indian counterpart also proceeded with equal caution, overtly concerned with safety and security rather than dynamism and speed. Over a period of 12 days, India's 1 Corps advanced a bare 13 kilometers against Pakistani covering troops. By the time contact was made with the main objectives, the ceasefire had come into effect. The Pakistani historian, Fazal Muqem, commenting on the operations conducted in the Shakargarh sector caustically stated that 'The Indians captured some large size mud villages of no strategic consequence whereas Pakistan's 6 Armoured Division and 17 Infantry Division remained unemployed with no effort being made to wrest the initiative from the Indians. Mediocrity was the common factor on both sides in 1 Corps battle. The Indian 1 Corps Commander advanced because he was told to do so and the Pakistani 1 Corps Commander did not advance because no one told him to do so'. These were strong words but they reflected a weakness in operational art and a lack

of strategic thought. The urgency to win was lacking. It seemed that the intent was not to lose. This is why most battles ended in stalemates.

Leadership

In most of the formations on both sides general officers preferred conducting the battle by wireless and telephone. Moltke the Elder once said that...‘Everything comes to this; to be able to recognise the changed situation and order the foreseeable course and prepare it energetically’. In operations across the Western theatre, senior commanders fought the battle from their headquarters and missed seeing the changing situation. Thus fleeting opportunities which could have altered the course of a campaign were lost.

At the junior level, leadership displayed was of a high order. This was reflected in the success achieved in Ladakh, Kargil and many other areas all across the front. The defence of the bridgehead at Barapind or the holding on of the post at Longenwala is another fine example of junior leadership rising to exceptional heights.

Conclusion

The 1971 war proved yet again the heroism, resoluteness and courage of the Indian Army’s junior leadership. This was once again reflected in the Kargil conflict of 1999, as also in actions over the Siachen Glacier and the counter insurgency operations in which the army has been involved in for decades. While the junior leadership has always been brilliant, it has not led to the making of exceptional operational commanders and strategic thinkers at the senior levels of command. How this is to be rectified is something which needs to be given serious consideration.

We need to prepare for future conflict rather than looking back at conflicts of the past. The need for synergy in operations, integration of attack helicopters with the ground forces, precision engagement of targets and battlefield transparency points the way to the manner in which future forces should be structured, organised and trained. The need to be prepared is far greater now than at any time past in our history. We can only neglect this at grave cost to the nation’s security.

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