



Kargil: What Does It Mean?

Pakistan's first effort in 35 years to seize and hold territory on India's side of the Line of Control backfired. Pakistani prime minister Sharif's July 4 agreement with president Clinton made clear Pakistan's responsibility for both the incursion and the withdrawal. In return, the United States promised a more active role in encouraging an Indo-Pakistan rapprochement. On the surface, this meets Pakistan's long-standing goal of getting the outside world's help on the neuralgic Kashmir dispute. But the Kargil operation has sparked international interest in a settlement that would essentially freeze the status of Kashmir with the key areas still in Indian hands.

This first serious combat after the nuclear tests in the subcontinent suggests a disturbing Pakistani willingness to try brinkmanship, but a degree of effective restraint by both sides in pursuing strategic targets.

As for the Indo-Pakistan dialogue, nothing serious will happen until after India's elections.

Pakistan's risky strategy in Kargil backfired. It attracted greater international interest -- but no international support for Pakistan's desire to detach Kashmir from India

What happened? The fighting took place near Kargil, a small town about 120 miles from the Kashmiri capital of Srinagar and just east of one of the major passes on the only road between Srinagar and Leh, the principal town in the Ladakh district. The road itself is at about 11,000 feet, and the surrounding peaks are upwards of 15,000 feet high. The area is snowed in and inaccessible to most civilian traffic from about October to June. The population is sparse and differs both in language and in its Shia faith from the overwhelmingly Kashmiri-speaking, Sunni population of the valley of Kashmir - the part of the state that generates such strong emotions.

The Indian army first detected intruders in the Kargil sector on May 6. Over the next week, groups of militants clashed with army patrols throughout an area extending from the Muskoh

Valley to Batalik, and a group of militants destroyed a large supply of artillery rounds at an Indian army ammunition dump. By May 26, army efforts to flush out the infiltrators with ground action escalated to air strikes. The next day, an Indian MIG fighter was shot down, and the heaviest fighting since the 1971 India-Pakistan war was under way.

Militarily, the Indians spent the next six weeks - until the Pakistani withdrawal formally began July 11 - moving up the peaks where groups of militants were entrenched. By early July, the Indian army claimed to have recaptured Tiger Hill, Tololing, Jubar, and several other key peaks, and by July 11, it said it had removed the intruders from much of the area.

The Indians argued from the start that the intruders included regular Pakistani troops, and governments around the world shared this assessment despite Pakistan's denials. Given the kind of weaponry available to the intruders, the kind of defenses they had built, and the terrain in which they were operating, the notion that these were freedom fighters acting on their own was implausible. The operation India mounted to remove them was complicated and costly. The two sides' casualty claims differ widely, but an estimate of a combined total of 1000 killed on both sides seems plausible.

The diplomatic side: Diplomatic contacts started as soon as India's air action began. Pakistan pushed for a cease-fire in place; India was to have serious discussions until the infiltrators left. The two foreign ministers had a dialogue of the deaf in early June. Later that month, amid signs that Pakistan was looking for a way out that preserved some diplomatic advantage from the operation, both sides dispatched "secret" envoys. This kept communications open with little practical effect.

By early June it was clear that the United States and Europe looked on Pakistan as the party responsible for sparking trouble in Kargil. The June 20 statement of the G-8 countries made this clear publicly without mentioning Pakistan by

name. While the United States denied any intention to "mediate" - in deference to India's long-standing aversion to third-party involvement - it sent General Anthony Zinni, commander of the Central Command, to Pakistan in an effort to persuade Pakistan to call off the operation.

In the last week of June, Prime Minister Sharif went to China seeking its usual steadfast support. Chinese public statements during his visit were carefully neutral and referred prominently to the Line of Control, a reference that seemed discreetly to echo the criticisms of Pakistan emanating from other capitals. At the same time, there was mounting concern that the United States was considering blocking the next IMF tranche of between U.S. \$100 and \$200 million due to be disbursed this July.

Climbing down: Sharif in Washington: This was the backdrop for Prime Minister Sharif's sudden trip to Washington on July 4. His agreement to take "concrete steps...for the restoration of the Line of Control" was a tough sell on his return. All opposition parties and a variety of Islamic and mujahideen groups vowed not to heed his call to retreat. He argued within the Cabinet, with the Army and in a speech to the nation that Pakistan had accomplished its long-standing goal of involving the United States in resolving the Kashmir issue, making the Kargil operation a moral victory.

Sharif's considerable political persuasion and army discipline brought about the initial withdrawal, but the final results are still to come. He emerges from this exercise with at best a very mixed impact on his domestic power base. Many Pakistanis saw the Washington statement as humiliating, recognizing that the American commitment to get involved was highly qualified and still linked to Indo-Pakistan bilateral efforts. Some saw the withdrawal as a sellout; others saw the entire Kargil adventure as foolhardy and dangerous. The Islamic right will be looking for some kind of compensation - either making trouble in other parts of Kashmir, or in the governance of the country. And while the army obeyed Sharif's orders, there could well be resentment about its having been made to look weak.

Making peace: As the crisis unfolded, both prime ministers had spoken of resuming the peacemaking process they began when they met in Lahore last February. But this is easier said than done. The political momentum generated in Lahore has been stopped, trust between them severely damaged. Nothing meaningful is likely to happen until the leaders find a new opportunity to make a fresh political commitment to solve India's and Pakistan's bilateral differences. Without such a commitment, meetings between senior officials are likely to accomplish nothing. With Indian elections set for September, it is hard to imagine significant progress before the fall.

But the international climate in which they operate has changed. Despite President Clinton's clear statement that the United States did not wish to mediate unless invited by both sides, world interest in pushing India and Pakistan toward a more stable settlement has increased.

Kargil put the international spotlight on the danger of two nuclear armed countries with major unresolved problems; it also dramatically reduced international support for Pakistan's position on how Kashmir should be resolved. There is new interest in the idea of urging the two countries to find a permanent settlement, probably involving an international border along the present Line of Control, substantial Kashmiri autonomy within India, and perhaps easier travel between the two parts of Kashmir.

Priority for the future: preventing similar risky enterprises.

Deterrence strategy and nonproliferation: Kargil also represents the first instance of serious combat between emerging nuclear countries with major unresolved bilateral problems. It raises disturbing questions about how the presence of nuclear weapons affects strategic thinking and nonproliferation priorities:

- Risk-taking as the flip side of deterrence: Pakistan's decision to allow a move into Kargil may have been based on the notion that India's strategic response would be constrained by Pakistan's nuclear umbrella. The fact that India decided not to cross the Line of Control may be seen as confirming this thesis.
- The role of nuclear risk reduction measures: No overt threats were made, nor were any of the existing Indo-Pakistan nuclear risk reduction measures used. Not until the crisis was almost resolved did a serious meeting between the two Directors General of Military Operations take place. What does this say for the role of risk reduction measures in a future crisis? Are there ways of making them robust enough to withstand this kind of pressure?
- Incomplete intelligence: The intruders probably moved across the Line of Control toward the end of the season of heavy snows, several weeks before they were discovered. Given the terrain and the type of operation, this type of "intelligence failure" is to be expected - but what does it say about the quality of intelligence needed to underpin a confidence-building regime?

- Who is learning lessons from this experience: India and Pakistan will be assessing their experience in Kargil, but so will other countries with ambitions to acquire weapons of mass destruction. To prevent heightened interest in these weapons, it will be important that the strategy of taking risks under a nuclear "umbrella" not be seen as a success.

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