CHAPTER-V
KARGIL WAR: CHANGED US APPROACH
After its crushing defeat by India in the 1971 war, Pakistan came to terms with the hard reality that it could not take away Kashmir by force. Kashmir was relatively quiet for about eighteen years in the absence of any Pakistani machination. However, Islamabad began to show its true colour once again in late 1980s. Since 1989 it took resort to the policy of low intensity conflict (LIC)\(^1\) to bleed India indirectly through a strategy of “thousand cuts” and try to achieve its long-term objective of snatching Kashmir away from India. As part of this plan, Pakistan initiated cross-border terrorism against India by arming and training various groups of Kashmir militants, and providing them with political, economic and military support. These militants were to carry out subversive activities in Kashmir with the ultimate objective of the secession of the State from India. After a decade-long proxy war of this kind, Pakistan launched a limited scale-war against India in mid-1999 at Kargil sector of Kashmir.

Background

The Simla Agreement, concluded on 2 July 1972 in the aftermath of the 1971 Indo-Pak war, provided a comprehensive background for normalization of relations between India and Pakistan. Despite occasional tensions from time to time, there was no major armed conflicts between the two countries since the

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\(^1\) Low intensity conflict (LIC) is warfare that falls below the threshold of full-scale military combat between two adversaries. This type of warfare below the level of overt military operations by a State’s regular army includes proxy wars, wars fought with mercenaries, insurgency, terrorism and other psychological operations to terrorize the populace, suicide squads etc. The military action in a LIC, unlike the conventional war, remains subordinated to immediate political motives.
signing of the Simla Agreement for more than seventeen years. Under the Simla accord, the two countries had resolved to:

...settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them. Pending the final settlement of any of the problems between the two countries, neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation and both shall prevent the organization, assistance or encouragement of any acts detrimental to the maintenance of peaceful and harmonious relations.²

Bilateralism was at the very heart of the Simla Agreement. It clearly committed both countries to desist from any unilateral move, which could result in conflict. Article 4 (ii) of the Agreement says:

In Jammu and Kashmir, the Line of Control resulting from the ceasefire of December 17, 1971 shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognized position of either side. Neither side shall seek to alter it unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations. Both sides further undertake to refrain from the threat or the use of force in violation of this Line.³

Significantly, Simla Agreement recognized the sanctity of the Line of Control (LoC) for the maintenance of peace between the two countries. During the discussions at Shimla, it was assumed that LoC would be treated as a de facto frontier between India and Pakistan until the Kashmir issue was resolved bilaterally. In fact, according to P. N. Dhar, former Secretary of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and a member of the Indian delegation to Shimla, there was tacit understanding between Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Indira Gandhi that the LoC would gradually be endowed with the “characteristics of an international border.”⁴ However, it could be discerned that the future rulers of

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³ ibid., p. 169
Pakistan found it politically difficult to accept the Simla Agreement in toto. Interpreting the Agreement in a different way, they maintained that Pakistan was not debarred from seeking the resolution of the Kashmir problem with reference to the UN resolutions. It is not surprising that Pakistan subsequently stepped up its efforts to internationalize the Kashmir issue and even sought third party intervention, projecting the LoC as but a temporary arrangement.

It is to be noted that the impact of Pakistan’s defeat in the 1971 war and its bifurcation had demoralized and angered the Pakistani elite. This fact should not be understated. Apart from huge territorial loss, Pakistan lost fifty four percent of its population. Pakistani Army had felt humiliated, when about ninety thousand Pakistani troops were taken prisoner by India. Most of the Pakistani policy makers then came to believe that from the beginning New Delhi was instrumental in the East Pakistan separatist movement, which resulted in the division of Pakistan. Pakistani ruling elite thus developed a desire to pay India back in kind, whenever an opportunity arose.\(^5\)

Obsessed with avenging India, and accomplishing the unfinished agenda of annexing Kashmir, the Pakistani elite, and specifically the Army consistently tried to undo the Simla Agreement and thus adopted a policy of “eternal” hostility towards India. At the same time, they were equally aware of the futility of direct armed conflict with India, as the latter to proved its military superiority in almost all the previous armed conflicts. In this context, they adopted a two-pronged strategy as a means to attain their objectives. First, to initiate a nuclear weapons programme to balance India’s conventional military superiority and to achieve strategic parity with India and second to initiate a

proxy war – Low Intensity Conflict – against India, particularly in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Pakistani decision to undertake the strategy of low intensity conflict and launch proxy war against India could be analyzed in the context of strategic equations in South Asia, which underwent a major change after Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979. The Afghan crisis transformed Pakistan into a “front-line” State in the US strategy against the Soviet occupation there. It ushered in a new era in US-Pakistan security relationship. It had important strategic implications for India, as Pakistan became a recipient of major military and economic aid from the US. Washington also turned a blind eye towards Pakistan’s clandestine efforts to attain nuclear capability. When General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq assumed power in Pakistan, he exploited the situation to promote Islamisation at home, speed up Pakistan’s covert nuclear programme, initiate a proxy war against India and hardened Pakistan’s stance on Jammu and Kashmir. With the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)’s assistance, Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) gained rich experience in covert operations during the decade-long Afghan crisis. In Afghanistan, both the CIA and ISI cooperated to train mujahideens in conducting special trans-border operations and guerilla warfare. This helped Pakistan in developing infrastructural facilities for conducting cross-border terrorism in India later. The arms meant for the mujahideens to fight the Soviets were also transferred to the militants in Kashmir and Punjab after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

According to the Human Rights Watch Arms Project Report of September 1994:
The diffusion of vast quantities of weapons to militants in Punjab and Kashmir is linked to the so-called Afghan pipeline: massive covert transfers of arms by the US CIA through Pakistan’s ISI to the Afghan mujahidin after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979... [These] weapons have made their way into the hands of Sikh and Kashmiri militants.6

As a pragmatic leader, General Zia understood that no military solution to Kashmir problem was possible. But at the same time, the capture of Kashmir from India continued to be the national objective of Pakistan. In this context, he decided to make full use of the large-scale US military supply and the experience it acquired by fighting the proxy war in Afghanistan. He, therefore, decided to launch a similar proxy war in the State of Jammu and Kashmir in the aftermath of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. By late 1980s, the situation of Kashmir was volatile as there was internal political turmoil in the State coupled with growing feeling of alienation among the Kashmiri people. That was caused by various factors, including breakdown of Kashmiriyat identity; and the failure of the State and Central governments to arrest institutional decay and improve socio-economic conditions, especially the continuous failure of the Central government to mitigate the alienation of Kashmiri Muslims from the rest of the society and assimilate them within the national mainstream.7

**Operation Topac**

Taking into account the disturbed conditions of the State, General Zia felt that the situation was ripe to launch his scheme of proxy war in Kashmir. In fact, by mid-eighties, Pakistan’s ISI had already prepared a blueprint for starting a

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militant movement in Kashmir. The strategy comprised of luring disgruntled youth into Pakistan, training, arming, financing and indoctrinating them and pushing them back into Kashmir, with a view to indulging in militancy, bringing down the legally established government and finally, wresting the State from India. To implement the strategy effectively and attain his objectives efficiently, General Zia meticulously planned Operation Topac in late 1980s, with an ultimate goal of 'liberation of the Kashmir Valley' and briefed the details of it to his corps commanders, the ISI and others to be involved in the scheme. Operation Topac was to be carried out in three phases.

Phase I involved:

(i) A low-level insurgency against the regime, so that it is under siege, but does not collapse as we would not yet want central rule imposed by Delhi.
(ii) We plant our chosen men in all the key positions, they will subvert the police forces, financial institutions, communication network and other important organizations.
(iii) We whip up anti-Indian feelings amongst the students and peasants, preferably on some religious issues, so that we can enlist their active support for rioting and anti-government demonstrations.
(iv) Organise and train subversive elements and armed groups with capabilities, initially, to deal with paramilitary forces located in the valley.
(v) Adopt and develop means to cut off lines of communication between Jammu and Kashmir and within Kashmir and Ladakh by stealth without recourse to force. The road over Zojila upto Kargil and the road over Khardudngla should receive our special attention.
(vi) In collaboration with Sikh extremists, create chaos and terror in Jammu and divert attention from the valley at a critical juncture and discredit the regime even in the Hindu mind.
(vii) Establish virtual control in those parts of the Kashmir valley where the Indian Army is not located or deployed. The Southern Kashmir valley may be one such target.
Phase II involved:

(i) Exert maximum pressure on the Siachen, Kargil and Rajouri-Poonch sectors to force the Indian Army to deploy reserve formations outside the main Kashmir valley.

(ii) Attack and destroy base depots and Headquarters located at Srinagar, Pattan, Kupwara, Baramulla, Bandipur and Chowkiwala, by covert action at a given time.

(iii) Some Afghan mujahideens, by then settled in Azad Kashmir, will infiltrate in selected pockets with a view to extending areas of our influence. This aspect will require detailed and ingenious planning. The fiasco of Op Gibraltar (1965) holds many lessons for us.

(iv) Finally a Special Force under selected retired officers belonging to Azad Kashmir, with the hard core consisting of Afghans, will be ready to attack and destroy airfields, radio stations, block Banihal Tunnel and Kargil-Leh Highway.

(v) At a certain stage of operations in Punjab and adjacent areas of Kashmir will be put under maximum pressure internally by our offensive posture.

Phase III involved:

Detailed plans for the liberation of Kashmir Valley and establishment of an independent Islamic State. 8

General Zia further cautioned that:

…it will be disastrous to believe that we can take on India in a straight contest. We must, therefore, be careful and maintain a low military profile so that the Indians do not find an excuse to pre-empt us, by attacking at a time and at a point of their own choosing, at least before Phase 1 and 2 of the operation are over. We must pause and assess the course of operation after each phase, as our strategy and plans may require drastic changes in certain circumstances. I need not emphasise any further that a deliberate and objective assessment of the situation must be ensured at each stage, otherwise a stalemate will follow. 9

Before he could implement the Operation Topac, Zia died in an air-crash in August 1988. However, by that time he had already prepared the ISI to undertake the task. He had also been able to instill the Islamic ideology in the armed forces; who were motivated to undertake this task for their country.

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8 As cited in Ravi Nanda, Kashmir and Indo-Pak Relations (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 95-96.
9 Ibid., p.97.
After Zia’s death, Pakistan came under a series of civilian political leaders, prominently among them were Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Though outwardly they professed to resolve disputes and develop friendly relations with India, they also supported the strategy of low-cost undeclared proxy war against India. When Benazir Bhutto took over as the Prime Minister of Pakistan, she chose not to interfere with the operation. As a result, *Operation Topac* was finally launched in 1989. In that year Pakistani Army formally claimed the adoption of a doctrine of “offensive defence”. While announcing this, the army chief had claimed that this doctrine would imply fighting the battle inside Indian territory. Soon several training camps were set up in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). The unemployed youths of Kashmir were misguided and indoctrinated with the idea of launching a *Jihad* or holy war against India. They were provided with arms, ammunitions and training in guerrilla warfare. Finally, they were infiltrated back into the Valley to carry out sabotage and subversion activities. Pakistan also started inducting foreign mercenaries to participate in her proxy war in Kashmir labelling it as *Jihad* and a freedom struggle by the local Kashmiris, against the alleged “Indian rule”. This proxy war gradually became nothing but cross-border terrorism against India. Simultaneously, Pakistan launched a diplomatic offensive to internationalize the Kashmir issue and by projecting Kashmir as a nuclear flashpoint. Pakistan’s low intensity conflict and proxy war against India continued even after Nawaz Sharif succeeded Benazir Bhutto as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Indeed, the proxy war by Pakistan gradually became more and more intense, reaching a high pitch in 1997. The Pakistanis were

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convinced that such a form of unconventional war would help reinforce and channelise the discontent in Kashmir and hoped that over a period of time it would move in the direction of secession from India.\textsuperscript{11}

As a result of Pakistan's proxy war against India, its bilateral relations with India deteriorated sharply. It was in this background that the two countries exploded their nuclear devices starting a new phase in their relations. The Indo-Pak relations almost touched its nadir in the period immediately following the May 1998 nuclear tests conducted by both the countries. In the aftermath of Chagai, Pakistani belligerency reached new levels as Islamabad assumed that the existence of nuclear deterrence would neutralize India's conventional military superiority over Pakistan. Besides, it would give impetus to the proxy war in Kashmir, as New Delhi would be deterred to take any firm action against Islamabad's sponsorship of cross-border terrorism. Consequently, July and August 1998 saw the most violent spell, in terms of military exchanges between Indian and Pakistani forces along the LoC, in a decade.\textsuperscript{12} On the diplomatic front, Pakistan actively tried to link the nuclear tests with the Kashmir question and argued that Kashmir had become "pregnant with possibilities" of a nuclear conflict in the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{13} By projecting Kashmir as a nuclear flash point, Pakistan intended to promote third party mediation in the resolution of the Kashmir problem.

Meanwhile, as rising tension led to critical international response, New Delhi and Islamabad felt the need to hold high level talks to find a meeting ground, ease tension and suspicion and to instill mutual confidence. The Indian Prime

\textsuperscript{12} See \textit{Hindustan Times} (New Delhi), 11 August 1998.
\textsuperscript{13} Kumar, n. 11, p. 226.
Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif met in Colombo on 29 July 1998, and again on 23 September, in New York. At the conclusion of their September meeting, the two Prime Ministers emphasized the need for a peaceful settlement of all outstanding issues and for creating an environment of durable peace and security. In this regard, they decided to initiate a composite dialogue process at the Foreign Secretary level to discuss the mutually identified contentious issues between the two countries. Thus both India and Pakistan entered into a dialogue process and several rounds of talks took place between the Prime Ministers and also between the senior officials of both the countries to reduce tension and create a peaceful climate in the region and explore possible solution of the outstanding issues. This dialogue process got a big boost by Lahore bus diplomacy initiated by the Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee that culminated in ‘Lahore Declaration’.

Vajpayee visited Lahore on 20 February 1999, with the inaugural run of Delhi-Lahore bus service. It was a sincere effort on India’s part to tackle the difficult issues in India-Pakistan relationship against the nuclear backdrop and to begin a new chapter in the bilateral relationship. The Lahore talks raised hopes that the two adversaries, sobered by the new nuclear environment, might at last begin a serious effort to reduce tensions. The Lahore summit ended with the signing of the ‘Lahore Declaration’ on 21 February 1999. At the end of the meeting a joint statement was issued and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan. Both the Lahore Declaration and the MoU accepted the principles of

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the UN Charter and contained references to the implementation of the Shimla Agreement. While India agreed to bring Kashmir high on the agenda, Pakistan agreed to hold a composite dialogue. Nawaz Sharif and Vajpayee announced a number of confidence building measures, on issues like conflict prevention, terrorism, composite and integrated dialogue process, accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs etc. It was agreed to take the Indo-Pak talks to the level of Foreign Ministers while keeping the process of Foreign Secretary level talks going. They also agreed to modify the travel restrictions in order to make people to people contact feasible. Subsequently, the Foreign Ministers of India and Pakistan met in Colombo on 22 March 1999, and reaffirmed their commitment to the Lahore process.

Operation Al Badr: Pakistani Misadventure at Kargil

However, the feeling of euphoria generated by the Lahore Declaration proved to be short-lived. Despite the positive and cooperative sentiments expressed in the Lahore Summit and in the weeks thereafter, the Pakistani military, with the acquiescence Nawaz Sharif, planned a military operation in Kashmir

15 According to the Lahore Declaration, both the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan were “committed to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, and the universally accepted principles of peaceful coexistence,” and they reiterated “the determination of both countries to implementing the Shimla Agreement in letter and spirit.” According to the MoU signed by the Foreign Secretaries of both the countries, they affirmed “the continued commitment of their respective governments to the principles and purposes of the U. N. Charter.”

16 As cited in Nanda, n.8, p. 136.

17 The Joint Statement issued after the meeting of Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh and Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz referred to the “urgency of taking concrete measures” for intensification of the “composite and integrated dialogue process.” The two sides agreed to resume the dialogue in May 1999.
designed to revive the Kashmir issue on the international agenda and jump-start the flagging insurgency.18

Code-named *Operation Al Badr*, the Pakistani misadventure involved yet another *Operation Gibraltar* (1965) type operation, led by infiltrators in Jammu and Kashmir. The infiltrators this time were mostly Pakistani Army regulars disguised as *mujahideens*. The deliberate employment of Pakistani Army regulars disguised as *mujahideens* was to project *Operation Al Badr* as an action by “Kashmiri freedom fighters.” They intruded through the gaps across the LoC at Kargil and occupied strategic heights dominating the Indian National Highway 1A between Zojila and Kargil, and in the Batalik sub-sector along the Kargil-Khalsi road. Like in 1965, this infiltration led to yet another Indo-Pak armed conflict, though this time limited in nature.

The planning for Kargil started soon after General Pervez Musharraf took over as Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of Pakistan in October 1998.19 The plan was first formulated by Lt. General Mahmud Ahmed, then commanding 10 Corps, and Maj. General Javed Hassan, then GOC, Frontier Constabulary of Northern Areas (FCNA). It was forwarded to the COAS General Pervez Musharraf by the CGS, Lt. General Muhammed Aziz.20 The idea was to exploit the large gaps that existed in the Kargil sector to cut the Leh-Srinagar highway and thereby prevent re-supply in the Ladakh area. The plan also dictated the capture of certain key heights in the Batalik and Turtok areas in

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order to cut off the Siachen glacier and force India out of Siachen. The plan was approved by Musharraf and preparation commenced. It was during the preparatory phase of the Kargil plan that Lahore summit took place. The Pakistani tactics, as revealed in a set of intercepted conversations between the Pakistani Army Chief, Gen. Pervez Musharraf and his Chief of Staff Lt.Gen. Mohammed Aziz, was to be two-tracked. In the first place, they would say that the mujahideens were conducting the operation. Secondly, they would declare that in any case the LoC was not clearly demarcated.21

There were several objectives and motivations, which lay behind Operation Al Badr involving Pakistani misadventure in Kargil. The politico-strategic motives were:

(a) To internationalise Kashmir as a nuclear flash point requiring urgent third party intervention; (b) To alter the Line of Control (LOC) and disrupt its sanctity by capturing unheld areas in Kargil; and (c) To achieve a better bargaining position for a possible trade-off against the positions held by India in Siachen.22

The military and proxy war related motives were:

(a) To interdict the Srinagar-Leh road by disrupting vital supplies to Leh; (b) To outflank India’s defences from the South in the Turtok and Chalunka Sectors through unheld areas thus rendering its defences untenable in Turtok and Siachen; (c) To give a fillip to militancy in Jammu and Kashmir by military action designed to weaken the Counter Insurgency (CI) grid by drawing away troops from the Valley to Kargil. It would also give a boost to the morale of the militants in the Valley; (d) To activate militancy in the Kargil and Turtok sectors and open new routes of infiltration into the Valley; and (e) To play to the fundamentalist lobby and the Pakistani people by bold action in Kashmir which continues to remain a highly emotional issue.23

Moreover, Pakistan’s Kargil misadventure could have been undertaken on the basis of following assumptions:

22 “From Surprise to Reckoning”, Kargil Review Committee Report (New Delhi,1999),p.68.
23 ibid., pp. 68-69. Also see Owen Bennett Jones, Pakistan: Eye of the Storm (New Haven, 2002), p. 93.
(a) Its nuclear capability would forestall any major Indian move particularly across the international border involving use of India’s larger conventional capabilities. It appears to have persuaded itself that nuclear deterrence had worked in its favour from the mid-1980s. (b) Confidence that the international community would intervene at an early stage, leaving it in possession of at least some of its gains across the LOC, thereby enabling it to bargain from a position of strength. (c) China would adopt a favourable posture in the light of its perceived anti-Indian stand in the post-Pokahran II period. (d) A weak and unstable government in India would be incapable of a quick and firm response and would not be inclined to open a new front. (e) The Indian Army would not be able to respond adequately due to its heavy CI [Counter Insurgency] commitment in J&K. (f) Due to an inadequacy of resources East of Zojila, India would not be able to react effectively against the intrusions before Zojila opened for traffic by end May/early July. (g) The Indian Army would not be able to muster adequate forces with high altitude training and acclimatization to fight on the Kargil heights. (h) Rapidly returning normalcy in J&K needed to be thwarted in order to sustain its “cause”.24

The Plan for Kargil intrusions was based on stealth and deception. This is reflected in the telephonic conversation between General Musharraf and Lt. General Mohammed Aziz on 26 May 1999, wherein it was obvious that the plan was kept a closely held secret among a small coterie.25 The plan mainly involved the use of troops deployed from within the sector under the Force Commander Northern Area (FCNA), thus obviating the need for any large-scale movement of forces from outside the area which would have made deception and surprise much more difficult. Another advantage of utilizing troops from within the Northern Areas namely, Northern Light Infantry (NLI) was that they were fully acclimatized.26 The plan entailed the occupation of a series of high features across the LoC in the Kargil sector in the unheld gaps

24 ibid., pp. 69-70. Also see Singh, n. 10, pp. 123-25.
in between the defended positions, which were not occupied and where patrolling was difficult in winter due to hazardous terrain and extreme climatic conditions. It was presumably envisaged that a bridgehead established across the LoC on the heights above Kargil would enable it to create a "new LOC". Meanwhile, there would be opportunities to cut off the Kargil-Ladakh sectors by interdicting NH-1A with far reaching political, diplomatic and military implications.\(^{27}\)

The intrusion plan envisaged creating four groups from four NLI battalions and two companies of Special Service Groups already located in the FCNA region. A total of eighteen artillery fire units provided fire support to the intruders from the Pakistani side of the LoC opposite the Kargil sector, ensuring that three to four fire units supported each intrusion area. The intruders were armed with sophisticated military equipment like AK-47 rifles, medium machine guns, automatic grenade launchers, ANZA and Stringer anti-aircraft missiles and 120-mm mortars. They also used helicopters, gas masks night vision devices and snow scooters.\(^{28}\)

Soon after assuming power, General Musharraf visited the FCNA region on 20-21 October 1998, alongwith Lt. General Mahmud Ahmed, GOC 10 Corps. The plan for intrusion into the Kargil sector could have been fine-tuned at this stage. There were also indications that the plan was approved as early as October 1998, by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif when it was proposed to him by General Musharraf.\(^{29}\) Subsequently, in January 1999, Nawaz Sharif was

\(^{27}\) ibid., pp. 71-72.
\(^{28}\) ibid., pp. 73-74.
\(^{29}\) ibid., p. 74.
briefed about the Kargil Operation at General Headquarters, Rawalpindi.\textsuperscript{30} Presumably, the final go-ahead with the Operation was given at this stage. The Pakistanis started their operational build-up on a small-scale from November 1998 onwards. In February-March 1999, the forward movement picked up when small groups, primarily consisting of officers, moved across the LoC in the Mashkoh sector and established themselves in ‘igloo’ tents. They carried out subsequent reconnaissance and created a few additional posts in the vicinity.\textsuperscript{31}

In April 1999, a further build-up of advance elements was effected with the support of the Chitral and Bajaur Scouts in the Batalik and Mashkoh areas. The main body of troops commenced occupation of the heights across the LoC in the latter half of April 1999.\textsuperscript{32} The Pakistani forces repaired the existing defences abandoned by the Indians during the winter. They also constructed new defences on the large number of places which they had occupied secretly and where India did not have any posts at all. Since only one Indian Brigade group was looking after the 142 km frontage, there were large gaps where there were no defences at all. The Pakistani intruders cleverly established defence posts in these large gaps. They established over hundred posts, mostly platoon posts, but some company level posts were also set up to establish Pakistan’s control over the Indian territory. Seven artillery regiments, two Engineer regiments and at least one squadron of helicopters, which were in position by May 1999, backed these posts.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} “From Surprise to Reckoning”, Kargil Review Committee Report, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{32} ibid., pp. 74-75.
\textsuperscript{33} Rajendra Nath, “Musharraf’s War”, in Rajendra Nath ed., Musharraf’s War (New Delhi, 2003 ), pp. 94-95.
By early May 1999, intrusions by Pakistani Army had been effected in the Batalik, Kaksar, Drass and Kashkoh sectors. Up to 1000 well-equipped regular Pakistani soldiers occupied the heights, ostensibly camouflaged as *mujahideens*. Four times as many troops were used to provide logistical support to these soldiers.\(^{34}\) It is to be noted that Pakistan’s *Operation Al Badr* was restricted to areas in Kargil sector, Turtok and Southern Glacier of the Siachen.\(^{35}\) The entire operation was extremely well planned and meticulously executed without attracting the attention of the Indian forces. Just as in 1947 or in 1965, Pakistan used a variety of deception methods to portray the Pakistani troops as *mujahideens* in order to maintain the façade that the intruders were “Kashmiri freedom fighters.” However, by early June 1999, it became clear that the main body of intruders consisted mostly of Pakistani Army regulars. The intrusion took place across a restricted front, of less than hundred kilometers to a depth of five to nine kilometers inside the Indian Territory.\(^{36}\)

**India’s Military Response**

Two ‘shepherds’ in the area of Banju in the Batalik sector first noticed the intrusions in the Kargil sector on 3 May 1999. That was reported to 3 PUNJAB, the battalion responsible for the security of that area. 3 PUNJAB launched two patrols on 4 and 6 May 1999, to investigate the reported intrusion. Both the patrols were ambushed by the intruders and Pakistani intrusions were confirmed on 7 May 1999. Subsequently, more patrol parties

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\(^{34}\) As cited in Sukumaran, n. 20, p. 345; according to the estimates of *Kargil Review Committee Report*, a total of 1500-2400 Pakistani troops, both regular and irregular, were deployed in the Kargil sector. See “From Surprise to Reckoning”, *Kargil Review Committee Report*, p.75.


\(^{36}\) “From Surprise to Reckoning”, *Kargil Review Committee Report*, pp. 81-82.
and troops were sent to assess the situation and contain the intrusion. The Army's initial assessment in early May was that, about 200 to 300 Pakistani intruders had infiltrated across the LoC and were occupying certain remote and unmanned areas. By 17 May, there was increasing evidence that armed intruders had occupied the heights in the gaps between the Indian defended areas in all sub-sectors of the Kargil sector in various strengths — Batalik (200-250); Kaksar (80-100); Dras (60-80); and Mashkoh (200-250).\textsuperscript{37} By the last week of May the Indian Army realized that the Pakistani intruders had occupied as may as 70 positions along the LoC. They also came to the belated realization that well over the initial estimate of 800 intruders were involved in the operation. Worse still, the intruders had occupied a number of strategic positions directly above the road from Kargil to Leh and were in a position to cut off the northern portions of Kashmir from the rest of the State. Aerial surveillance revealed that the intruders were equipped with snowmobiles, artillery and substantial stock of supplies.\textsuperscript{38}

The initial aim of the Indian forces was to establish contact, assess the extent of intrusions, and contain the enemy. Consequently, a series of attacks were launched in the ensuing days on features held by the Pakistanis. In fact, the Indian Army had begun its offensive against the intruders on 8 May. But because of the lack of ground cover and the intruders' command of the heights, the advancing Indian troops became easy targets for Pakistani snipers and gunners. After taking substantial casualties, India realized that the intruders were heavily armed and well entrenched and their eviction would

\textsuperscript{37} ibid., p. 79.
\textsuperscript{38} Ganguly, n.2, p. 116.
require very deliberate measures including greater firepower and use of air power.

On 25 May 1999, the high-powered Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) met in New Delhi to take stock of the situation and undertake a comprehensive political-military analysis of the emergent problem. In the meeting it was realized that Kargil intrusions posed military as well as political and diplomatic challenges. The political directive given to the Indian armed forces was to evict the pockets of intrusion and restore the sanctity of the LoC. No time frame was given. CCS also approved the application of air power against the entrenched intruders. However, it strictly stipulated that LoC would not be crossed and if it became necessary to cross it, approval of the Cabinet had to be sought.39 India’s military strategy in Kargil, emanating from this political directive, was based on three objectives: First, to contain the enemy’s pockets of intrusion and prevent their further build-up and consolidation; Second, to evict the intruders and restore the LoC; Third, to hold ground so vacated and deny the same to the enemy.40

Operation Vijay

Finally, on 26 May 1999, India formally began its major military operation, code-named Operation Vijay, to evict the Pakistani intruders from the Indian soil. It led to a limited-scale war between Indian and Pakistani forces, without being openly so declared. The main fighting took place between the Pakistani troops deployed under the Force Commander Northern Area (FCNA), and 10 Corps of the Pakistani Army, and nearly two and a half divisions of the Indian

39 Anand, n. 19, p. 15; Bammi, n. 35, p. 448; Nanda, n. 8, p. 145.
40 ibid.
Army belonging to the Northern Command of India. While the Pakistani forces used light and heavy infantry weapons as well as heavy artillery and surface-to-air missiles, the Indian armed forces, apart from using similar weapon systems also used Air Force in the battle. The battle was fought along a 200 kilometre front on the LoC, stretching from Mashkoh Valley to the Saltoro Ridge on the western flank of the Siachen Glacier. The Pakistani intruders had not only crossed the LoC to a width of nearly 200 kilometres but had also moved into the Indian territory to a depth of 10 to 12 kilometres. The main battle was fought in excruciatingly difficult terrain, in extremely cold conditions, and heights of between 10,000 to 18,000 feet.  

The Indian Air Force (IAF) joined the battle in 26 May itself, by launching its Operation Safed Sagar. IAF began a series of air strikes on the intruders’ positions and in the process lost three aircrafts, a MIG-27, a MIG-21, and a Mi-17 helicopter in the next couple of days. Despite the losses, the IAF remained part of the collective coordinated military effort and played a crucial role in the high-altitude battle. It resorted to air-to-ground attacks against enemy targets on the Indian side of the LoC and provided limited fire-support for the Indian assaults. In all the Air Force flew 550 strike and 150 reconnaissance and 500 escort missions besides over 2,000 sorties by helicopters for evacuation, airlift of personnel and equipment. In its Operation Safed Sagar, the IAF relied on Mirage-2000, MiG-21, MiG-23 and MiG-27 fighter planes.

The use of IAF in the Kargil war marked a significant departure from past Indian responses to deal with Pakistani incursions along the LoC. Indeed,

41 J. N. Dixit, Indian-Pakistan in War & Peace (New Delhi, 2002), pp. 43-44.
42 "Reconnaissance will continue, says IAF," Indian Express (New Delhi), 13 July 1999.
since 1971 war, the Air Force had not been used in support of military operations in Kashmir. The Indian forces resorted to the use of air power because they realized that it would be all but impossible to dislodge the intruders through the use of ground troops in frontal assaults, since crossing the LoC was rejected for political reasons. The use of Air Force in support of the Army in the Kargil operation also had far reaching consequences both in political and strategic terms. Not only did this decision send a strong signal to Islamabad that New Delhi would use all available means to evict the intruders, but it also had a strong impact on the course of the tactical battle in terms of the interdiction of Pakistani supply lines within the Indian territory, the damage inflicted on the Pakistani defences and the lowering of the morale of the intruders. It also forced the Pakistani Air Force on the defensive during the entire period of conflict.

Along with Army’s Operation Vijay and Air Force’s Operation Safed Sagar, the Indian Navy also launched Operation Talwar, to step up pressure on Pakistan to withdraw the intrusion from the Indian territory. The Indian Navy went into a pre-emptive effective posture against Pakistan by deploying warships in Arbian Sea, bottling up the Pakistani Navy and Pakistani shipping at Karachi under Operation Talwar. Once Operation Vijay got under way, the Indian Navy employed its satellites, reconnaissance planes and other modes of intelligence gathering to monitor the movements of the Pakistan Navy. Between 28 and 31 May, India came to know that Pakistan had alerted its Navy. Thus the Indian Navy was immediately placed on high alert: it moved its Eastern Fleet to join the Western Fleet in the Arabian Sea and deployed its
maritime surveillance capabilities.\textsuperscript{43} By the first week of June, an exercise was begun off the western coast, code-named ‘Summerex Phase 1’. These naval manoeuvres ensured that the Indian Navy quickly took a forward position, thus denying Pakistan the initiative. Pakistan was surprised by the Indian Navy’s deterrent deployment under \textit{Operation Talwar} that bottled up the Pakistani fleet in Karachi. This objective was mainly achieved by showing a massive build-up in the Arabian Sea. The Navy’s maritime aircraft went on reconnaissance missions over international waters, its versatile Sea Harriers took to the air, and its destroyers fired surface-to-air missiles with a 120-km range, whilst the submarines travelled deep into the sea. The Navy was thus ready to impose a naval blockade of Pakistan’s coastline in the event of an all-out war. It is believed that the naval formations included all Ranjit Class destroyers, some Godavari Class frigates, one Kachin Class destroyer, and Kilo Class submarines.\textsuperscript{44} The pre-emptive move by the Indian Navy under \textit{Operation Talwar} not only made the Pakistani Navy vulnerable, it also deterred Pakistan from escalating the conflict.

Logistical, organizational and topographic limitations significantly hobbled Indian military operations. Nevertheless, the determined Indian offensive slowly made progress in dislodging the Pakistani troops from well-entrenched, fortified positions. By 20 June, crucial Tololing heights, which overlooked Kargil-Leh road, had been captured completely by the Indian forces. As the Indian counter-attacked peaked and Pakistan faced major reverses in the battlefront, Nawaz Sharif rushed to Washington to meet the US President Bill Clinton. On 4 July, when Nawaz Sharif was being told by the

\textsuperscript{43} Ashok Krishna, “The Kargil War,” in Krishna and Chari, n.25, pp. 135-37.
\textsuperscript{44} ibid., pp. 135-37.
US President Bill Clinton to restore the sanctity of LoC, the Indian forces had captured the strategic Tiger Hill. Around 14 to 16 June, the Indian forces managed to retake key positions near Dras and Batalik. By 20 June, they managed to re-establish control over Batalik itself. In the face of heavy military debacle and under intense international pressure spearheaded by the US, Pakistan announced the withdrawal of its troops from across the border on 11 July. But except from the area of Kaksar, Pakistan did not pull out its troops from the other sectors. Therefore, the Indian forces had to fight to recover every inch of territory from the Pakistani intruders. Finally, with the capture of all the territories from the Pakistani intruders, Operation Vijay was declared terminated on 26 July 1999. It marked the end of the eight-week long fourth Indo-Pak armed conflict, which took place at Kargil.

The US Policy

When the Indian Army began its offensive against the intruders on 8 May 1999, Washington paid little attention to the initial reports of clashes, assuming them as part of the normal fighting between the Indian forces and Kashmiri “insurgents” along the LoC. As a US official later explained, “Everyone assumed it was the usual shootouts that happen after the snows melt.” As the fighting intensified, Washington became more concerned and began to receive a steady flow of intelligence reports about the happenings at the Kargil front. According to State Department officials, by 15 May, Washington doubted that Pakistan was responsible for pushing the intruders

45 ibid., pp. 112-31; Also see Anand, n. 19, p. 18; Ganguly, n.2, pp. 117-20; Manoj Joshi, “The Kargil War: Fourth Round,” in Kanti Bajpai and others ed. Kargil and After: Challenges for Indian Policy (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 46-53.
deep inside the Indian territory across the LoC. To an US official, “it was an open and shut case of infiltration. There was no doubt about whose fault it was.”\textsuperscript{47} The US was uncertain, however, whether the intruders were mujahideens or Pakistani Army regulars.

But once India initiated air strikes on enemy targets with the launching of \textit{Operation Vijay} on 26 May, the US realized the gravity of the situation. Beginning of the air campaign and shooting down of two Indian fighter jets by Pakistan escalated the conflict, with increasing artillery fires from both sides. The US was seriously concerned over the possibility of a full-fledged war between the two countries, which had overtly displayed their nuclear capability about a year ago. Taken aback and dismayed by the Kargil misadventure, the US government responded vigorously — far more so than the Johnson Administration had reacted during the early stages of the 1965 India-Pakistan war.\textsuperscript{48} Although in May-June 1999 the US was deeply involved in the Kosovo crisis, President Bill Clinton put special attention on the Kargil conflict. Trying to ensure that the fighting did not escalate any further appeared to be the primary objective of Washington at this juncture. Thus on 28 May, the US State Department in a major diplomatic move, summoned the Indian and Pakistani Ambassadors to underline the need for utmost restraint in handling the sensitive situation which had the potential of getting out of control. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Karl Inderfurth held separate meetings with India’s envoy Naresh Chandra and Pakistani envoy Riaz Khokkar and expressed “very strong concern” over the fighting in

\textsuperscript{47} ibid.

Kargil. He urged both the parties to show respect to Lahore peace process of February 1999. Voicing concern at the ‘rising escalation’ in fighting, the National Security Council spokesman Michael Hammer said, “We have appealed to the governments in both India and Pakistan to abide by the terms of the Lahore accords... The flare-up in fighting refocused world attention on Kashmir just when diplomatic efforts to ease tensions created by the 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan were starting to bear fruit.”

In the meantime, the US Ambassador to India, Richard Celeste, personally carried President Clinton’s appeal for restraint to the Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes. Similarly, the US diplomats in Islamabad met with the Pakistani officials to convey the American concern. Thus it is evident that apart from emphasizing the de-escalation of the conflict, the US had two other goals. First was to urge India and Pakistan to settle the dispute through negotiations. Washington was conscious that New Delhi was opposed to any external intervention in any dispute involving Kashmir. Second, the US hoped to keep alive the Lahore peace process and throughout the conflict repeatedly urged New Delhi and Islamabad to revive the spirit of Lahore. The US refused to intervene directly in the conflict and was also reluctant to mediate to end the crisis. It continued to expect both the contending parties to negotiate directly to find a solution. James Rubin, the spokesman of the State Department, articulated this policy of the Clinton Administration. He said:

We strongly support talks between India and Pakistan to resolve this latest dispute and believe these talks should take place as soon as possible. Ending the fighting in the Kargil area can only be accomplished through direct engagement by India and Pakistan. We remain in touch with the Indian and Pakistani Governments to express

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our strong concern, to urge them to show restraint and to prevent the
fighting from spreading and to urge both countries to work together to
reduce tensions... We certainly would want them to talk to each other
to work out an arrangement to stand down from the conflict. We
certainly would want them to talk to not take steps to expand the
conflict beyond the current Kargil area.\textsuperscript{51}

The US Ambassador to India, Richard Celeste, also echoed such a policy of
non-interference. He said, "The US will never interfere... Kashmir is an issue,
which can be only settled by peaceful talks between the two countries, without
any intervention. The US realizes this."\textsuperscript{52}

As the fighting intensified, Pakistan began its diplomatic offensive against
India. Pakistani diplomacy had several strands: First, throughout the conflict,
Islamabad continued to maintain that Pakistan was not directly involved in
intrusion and the intruders were "Kashmiri freedom fighters" and that
Pakistan had no control over their action. Second, Islamabad questioned the
sanctity of the LoC and took the position that the LoC was not clearly
delineated. On 2 June, the Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said on the
British Broadcasting Corporations' Urdu service that the LoC was not
demarcated on the ground. He followed this up by questioning the validity of
the LoC on Pakistan Television next day. Soon, Pakistani officials questioning
the sanctity of the LoC became a regular feature at the international fora.\textsuperscript{53}

Third, Islamabad tried to internationalize the conflict by highlighting the
likelihood of a nuclear flare-up. It was evident from the statement of Pakistani

\textsuperscript{51} As quoted in Sridhar Krishnaswami, "US Extends Support to Indo-Pak Talks," \textit{The Hindu},
6 June 1999.
\textsuperscript{52} "No Interference in Kashmir: Celeste," \textit{Asian Age} (New Delhi), 6 June 1999.
\textsuperscript{53} "LOC is Fully Settled Issue," \textit{Hindu}, 5 June 1999; Amit Baruah, "Pak Officials Echo Aziz
Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad, who declared on 31 May, that Pakistan could use “any weapon” in its arsenal if the situation demanded.54

Pakistan’s overall plan was to have the UN Security Council (UNSC) take up the issue and, as it had done in previous Indo-Pakistani conflicts, call for a cease-fire. Islamabad seemed to have hoped that if a cease-fire was called, the LoC would shift and Pakistan would be allowed to hold on to the territory it had seized. This objective of Pakistan was also recognized by Government of India’s Kargil Review Committee: “The aim was to internationalize the Kashmir issue and freeze the ground situation to Pakistan’s advantage through a cease-fire expected to be imposed by the international community.”55

However, the US policy response at this period came to direct conflict with the Pakistani objectives. By early June, the US had got confirmed reports and evidence from satellite surveillance and intelligence sources about the direct involvement of Pakistani Army in the Kargil intrusions. Thus Washington unequivocally held Pakistan responsible for the conflict and asked Islamabad to vacate the intrusion to end the conflict. Rejecting the Pakistani stand, Washington maintained that LoC had been clearly demarcated over the years and urged respect for its sanctity. Inderfurth responded to Pakistani claims that the LoC was not demarcated by sending a copy of the annex to the Shimla Agreement, which maps the line, to both the Indian and Pakistani Embassies.56 The US was also at the forefront to prevent the Pakistani attempt

55 “From Surprise to Reckoning”, Kargil Review Committee Report, p. 82.
to internationalize the conflict, or to gain any mileage from its aggression. The US ascertained by early June that the positions of the other P-5 nations complemented its own. Throughout the conflict, Washington repeatedly stressed that it believed India was a victim of aggression and was well within its rights to use its military to push them out. Thus Inderfurth declared unambiguously “the fighting would end only when the intruders either departed voluntarily or were taken out by the Indians.” More significantly, the US showed little inclination to support a Pakistani effort to bring the issue before the UNSC. Washington also blocked a Canadian attempt to bring Kargil to the attention of the Security Council.

In the first week of June, President Clinton personally involved himself in the diplomatic effort to defuse the crisis. On 2 June, he spoke to Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif and once again urged them to resolve the conflict by negotiations and in the spirit of Lahore Declaration. In his communication to Sharif, Clinton called upon Islamabad to take steps to defuse the crisis and respect the LoC. In effect, he blamed Pakistan for Kargil war and told Nawaz Sharif government to withdraw the Pakistani intruders out of Kargil. President Clinton then wrote to Vajpayee about the advice he gave to Sharif. At the same time, he expressed his appreciation for the “restrain” shown by India in dealing with the situation. The US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright also told Sharif to use every possible means to get the intruders out and restore the LoC. To build further

58 Chaudhury, n.56, p.338.
pressure on Sharif, the Chairman of the House International Committee, Benjamin Gilman, sent a letter to him, bluntly instructing him to “withdraw” the military forces and end the fighting. Gilman wrote: “…The insertion of a large Pakistan-supported military force across the LoC threatens the peace and stability of South Asia... Pakistan has nothing to gain by permitting the fighting to continue and much to lose by prolonging the crisis. I urge you to instruct Pakistan’s military forces to withdraw and to end its support for the current fighting.”

It was clear that the US executive as well as the legislative branch refused to believe in the Pakistani version of the Kargil event. In effect, both the executive and the legislative branches of the US government were united in their response to the Kargil conflict.

When Pakistan questioned the sanctity of the LoC by claiming that it had not been clearly delineated, the US forcefully rejected such argument. Enunciating the US stand on the issue, Bruce Riedel, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for the Near East and South Asia at the National Security Council, said that the LoC had been clearly demarcated over the years. Both India and Pakistan had not shown any significant difference in the past about the location of the LoC. He observed that there had to be respect for the LoC and that the reaffirmation of the LoC was “very very important.”

These were the policy response of the US during the initial phase of the Kargil war. On the whole, however, the US had a mixed record when it came to accomplishing its foreign policy goals during this initial period of the Kargil war. First, Washington’s main foreign policy goal of preventing the escalation...

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of the conflict was successful. However, the primary reason for this was India’s policy of self-restraint in not crossing the LoC and limiting the military action to its own side of the LoC. Second, the US could not achieve success in getting India and Pakistan to resolve the crisis through bilateral means. There were some attempts in early June by the State Department to put into effect a withdrawal agreement through the provision of safe passage to the intruders. However such plans never came close to being realized. Third, Washington’s most important role was in ensuring that internationalization of the conflict did not take place. In diplomatic front, Washington thwarted the Pakistani attempt to internationalize the Kashmir issue and tried hard to emphasize the need of preserving the sanctity of the LoC. 62

Pro-active Steps

Meanwhile the fighting continued unabated and by mid-June, there was no sign of any de-escalation. Despite Indian military operation and international appeal, Pakistan showed no sign of withdrawing its intrusion from Kargil. As the fighting escalated, and India suffered heavy casualties, the domestic pressure mounted on caretaker Vajpayee government to break its self-restraint and cross the LoC. In this context Washington feared that India would be tempted to either open a second front in Rajasthan or cross the LoC which would escalate the Kargil conflict leading to an all-out war between the two nuclear capable rivals. 63

This apprehension was aggravated when Indian National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra met his American counterpart Samuel R. Berger in Geneva on

63 ibid., p. 341.
15 June and handed over a letter from Prime Minister Vajpayee to President Clinton. Vajpayee’s main message was interpreted by Washington to mean that the sands of time were running out for India’s policy of restraint. India would have to consider crossing the LoC if Pakistan did not withdraw soon. According to a Washington Post report, “Vajpayee’s message was that India might have to attack inside Pakistan, if Pakistan did not pull back troops who had seized Indian outposts in the disputed territory of India. It stoked already high US fears that India … would storm across the cease-fire line that divides Kashmir or open a second front elsewhere.”

Consequently, having realized the explosive nature of the crisis and wary of the danger of a wider war, the Clinton Administration decided to involve itself directly in the crisis and take pro-active steps to defuse the situation. Vajpayee’s letter could also have acted as the catalyst. Worried about the possible escalation of the crisis, which would lead to an all-out Indo-Pakistani war, President Clinton rang up Vajpayee and urged him to hold to a policy of restraint. He then called Sharif on 15 June and asked him to pull back his forces out of the Indian side of the LoC, warning that the deployment would hold up any effort to end the fighting between the two countries. He also persuaded both the sides to resume direct talks in the spirit of Lahore Declaration to defuse the crisis. By asking Sharif rather bluntly to pull out Pakistani troops from the Indian side, Clinton openly supported India’s stand that the crisis situation in Kargil was a Pakistani creation.

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The US also stepped up its diplomatic efforts and took a number of initiatives to exert pressure on Pakistan to withdraw the intruders and de-escalate the conflict. First, it persuaded the G-8 countries then meeting at Cologne, to issue a statement expressing deep concern over the “infiltration of armed intruders which violated the Line of Control.” Falling short of naming Pakistan, the statement noted:

We regard any military action to change the status quo as irresponsible. We therefore call for the immediate end of these actions, restoration of the Line of Control and for the parties to work for an immediate cessation of the fighting, full respect in the future for the Line of Control and the resumption of the dialogue between India and Pakistan in the spirit of Lahore Declaration.\(^67\)

Moreover, President Clinton decided to send a two-member delegation to Islamabad consisting of General Anthony Zinni, the Commander-in-Chief of the US Central Command, and Gibson Lanpher, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. According to a State Department official, the purpose of the US delegation to Islamabad was to ensure the withdrawal of Pakistani incursion from the Indian side of the LoC. He said that the US wanted to see the re-establishment of the LoC, early end to the fighting, exercise of restraint and recommencement of the Indo-Pak bilateral dialogue as envisaged in the Lahore Declaration.\(^68\)

The Zinni and Lanpher mission reached Pakistan on 24 June 1999. General Zinni first met General Musharraf and the next day met Sharif, to whom he delivered a letter from President Clinton. Brushing aside Pakistan’s claim that it was not directly involved in the Kargil operation and did not have control over the *mujahideens*, General Zinni urged Islamabad to ensure that the


intruders were pulled back across the LoC.\textsuperscript{69} Just after meeting Zinni, Musharraf publicly stated that Clinton and Sharif would meet soon. To him, Pakistan was trying to find a Kargil solution which was agreeable “to us, to the US and should be to the Indians too.” When asked about a withdrawal, Musharraf replied, “It is a political question and should be [put to] ... the Prime Minister.”\textsuperscript{70}

During his meeting with Sharif on 25 June, Zinni conveyed him a message from Clinton underscoring the need for “de-escalation of the current situation in Kargil and the importance of a peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute.”\textsuperscript{71} However, Zinni-Sharif meeting ended inconclusively as both sides remained stuck to their known and stated positions on the Kargil crisis. Zinni and Lanpher mission could not achieve any breakthrough as Islamabad continued to deny involvement of her Army in Kargil, and declined to withdraw the mujahideens without an Indian withdrawal from Siachen. Moreover, Sharif told the US delegation that unless the Kashmir issue was resolved in the “shortest possible time”, Kargil like situations would continue to erupt. Sharif also called for the deployment of international observers along the LoC to verify Pakistan’s claim that it was not aiding militant secessionists in Kargil.\textsuperscript{72} Meanwhile, Pakistan tired to make a withdrawal of Kargil intrusion contingent upon the settlement of the Kashmir dispute. On 24 June, the same day that Zinni and Lanpher landed in Pakistan, the Governor of Punjab province of Pakistan, Shahid Hamid met Inderfurth in Washington and

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Times of India}, 26 June 1999.
asked him to get Kashmir onto the Kargil agenda. He claimed New Delhi was rejecting Islamabad’s “peace initiatives”. Hamid urged the State Department to send a “special observer” to reconcile the “conflicting claims” of the two sides. But he was sharply rebuffed. Inderfurth told him there could be no mention of Kashmir until Kargil was vacated. And the US had enough evidence to decide who was the aggressor. Pakistani diplomats in Islamabad told their Western counterparts that they wanted India to withdraw from the Siachen glacier and two other points on the LoC, at Qamar and Chorbat La in return for a Kargil withdrawal.73

On 27 June, Lanpher went to New Delhi and apprised the Indian government of the content of discussions that took place in Islamabad and their outcome. The State Department described his mission as being “part of our efforts to keep both sides fully informed.”74 During the discussions between Lanpher and Indian officials in New Delhi, a broad understanding emerged between the US and India that a credible Pakistani commitment to an unconditional withdrawal of its troops from across the LoC must be the first step in defusing the Kargil crisis.75 To assuage the Indian aversion to any third party mediation, Washington insisted that Zinni and Lanpher mission to the subcontinent was not an attempt to mediate between India and Pakistan. State Department spokesman James Rubin said that the issue must be settled “directly between India and Pakistan. He categorically stated that the US was “not a mediator” and “we have not offered any specific proposals for

74 Chaudhury, n. 56, p. 344.
resolving the dispute.” The US was simply interested to see the dispute resolved rapidly. On the diplomatic front, the US was also vigilant to ensure that unlike the previous Indo-Pak conflicts, Pakistan did not get any encouragement from China for its Kargil misadventure. Washington kept constant touch with Beijing so as to avoid any contradiction in their policy response towards the Kargil conflict. Commenting on the Chinese role, the State Department’s spokesperson, James Rubin, stated that Washington had been working closely with Beijing since the May 1998 nuclear tests in South Asia. He said both the US and China shared an interest in not allowing the Kargil conflict to escalate. He added that the Clinton Administration had been requesting the Chinese to persuade India and Pakistan to avoid escalation and “to pursue an approach consistent with the steps the G-8 started.”

After the return of Zinni and Lanpher mission, Pakistan turned towards China for support. Thus, Prime Minister Sharif left for China on 28 June, on a six-day visit to secure the support of Pakistan’s long time ally. However, China largely shared the US view that Pakistan’s actions were far too risky and maintained that the sanctity of the LoC should be observed. The Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji advised Sharif to resolve the conflict over Kashmir through “peaceful methods” by mutual dialogue with India. In an important shift of its position on the Kargil crisis, China urged both India and Pakistan to respect the LoC and resume negotiations to find a fair and reasonable settlement of the crisis, in accordance with the spirit and principles of the

76 Ramesh Chandran, “We are not Mediators in Kargil Conflict”, Times of India, 30 June 1999.
77 ibid.,
Lahore Declaration.\textsuperscript{78} Failing to obtain Chinese support, a disappointed Sharif cut short his visit and returned to Pakistan after only one day.

After his return from China, Prime Minister Sharif realized that Islamabad had no other option but to withdraw its intrusion from Kargil. What Sharif really needed was a face saving formula for troops withdrawal. There are several factors, which contributed to such a decision. With China’s rebuff, Pakistan’s diplomatic isolation was complete. Almost the entire international community supported the Indian stand and held Pakistan responsible for the conflict. Secondly, the economic pressure on Pakistan was also increasing. According to a \textit{Washington Post} report, by the end of June, the US had plans to withhold the $100 million disbursement that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was planning to release in the next few days if Pakistan failed to make serious efforts for pulling out its troops.\textsuperscript{79} With Pakistan’s economy already in bad shape, such an event would have totally crippled it. Thirdly, India had taken a tough stand on the Kargil conflict. Rejecting all the proposals of Islamabad, New Delhi insisted on withdrawal of the Pakistan backed intruder from the Indian side of the LoC as the first condition before any talks could be held between the two countries. Back channel diplomacy between the two countries had also failed to yield any result. Finally, the most important factor was the increasing military pressure from the Indian side and the mounting Pakistani casualties in the battlefront. The Indian Army was advancing on all fronts in Kargil by capturing the strategic points from the intruders. The military situation in Kargil was running strongly against Pakistan. With the


\textsuperscript{79} "USA May Block $100-m IMF Loan to Islamabad", \textit{Statesman}, 28 June 1999.
loss of Tiger Hill in the Drass sector, the most important military objective of
the intrusion – domination of the Leh-Srinagar highway – was lost.\textsuperscript{80}

Shaken by the grim situation, Prime Minister Sharif arranged a meeting of the
Defense Cabinet Committee to discuss the further course of action on 2 July.
After a long discussion, it seemed that despite Pakistan Army’s objections, a
decision was taken to seek American help to extricate the country from the
Kargil imbroglio.\textsuperscript{81} Desperate to find a way out, Sharif finally called Clinton
on 3 July and requested for an early meeting. The US President agreed, but on
the understanding that Pakistan would accept a pullback from Kargil. Sharif
agreed and left for Washington that night with 26-member delegation.\textsuperscript{82} Even
at this juncture, Washington tried to make it clear that it had no intention to
act as a mediator to resolve the conflict. Thus before agreeing to meet Sharif,
Clinton telephoned Vajpayee, and the latter raised “no objections” for the
meeting. However, Vajpayee turned down Clinton’s invitation to visit
Washington for talks on Kargil, saying it was not “convenient” for him, as
India was against any third party mediation.\textsuperscript{83} Finally on 4 July, the Clinton-
Sharif meeting took place in Washington, which lasted for more than three
hours. The urgency of the dialogue was highlighted by the fact that it took
place on a Sunday, which was also US national day. During talks, the US
made it clear that Pakistan should unconditionally and immediately withdraw
from Kargil. After the first round of talks, Clinton rang up Vajpayee to apprise

\textsuperscript{80} Chaudhury, n.56, p.348.
\textsuperscript{81} Bammi, n. 35, p. 470.
\textsuperscript{82} Kux, n.48, p. 353; Amit Baruah, “Sharif’s US Visit may Be a Turning Point”; Sridhar Krishnaswami,
“Clinton Talks to Sharif, Vajpayee”, \textit{The Hindu}, 5 July 1999; Chidanand Rajghatta, “The lovefest that
\textsuperscript{83} “A ‘Tense’ Sharif Goes to Meet Clinton”, \textit{Hindustan Times}, 5 July 1999; Joyti Malhotra, “Vajpayee
Truns Down Clinton Invitation”, \textit{Indian Express}, 5 July 1999.
him of his talks with Sharif.\textsuperscript{84} After the end of Clinton-Sharif meeting, a joint statement was issued on 5 July 1999. It stated:

President Clinton and Prime Minister Sharif share the view that the current fighting in Kargil region of Kashmir is dangerous and contains the seeds of a wider conflict. They also agreed that it was vital for the peace of South Asia that the Line of Control in Kashmir be respected by both parties, in accordance with the 1972 Simla accord. It was agreed between the President and the Prime Minister that concrete steps will be taken for the restoration of the Line of Control in accordance with the Simla Agreement. The President urged an immediate cessation of the hostilities once these steps are taken. The Prime Minister and President agreed that the bilateral dialogue begun in Lahore in February provides the best forum for resolving all issues dividing India and Pakistan, including Kashmir. The President said he would take a personal interest in encouraging an expeditious resumption and intensification of these bilateral efforts, once the sanctity of the Line of Control has been fully restored. The President reaffirmed his intent to pay an early visit to South Asia.\textsuperscript{85}

Thus the joint statement emphasized on the sanctity of the LoC on Kashmir and its restoration in accordance with the 1972 Shimla Agreement. It indirectly urged Pakistan to withdraw the intruders across the LoC and to restart the stalled Lahore process with India to resolve all contentious issues. In turn, Clinton promised that he would take an active interest in efforts to address the Kashmir problem and would visit South Asia soon. The statement asked nothing substantial of India. Rather, Clinton took care so that India would not see Clinton-Sharif joint statement as an attempt to mediate over Kashmir dispute. Thus during his deliberations with Sharif, Clinton was in touch with Vajpayee to brief him on the developments. The US was concerned that India would see the Washington Declaration as an attempt to “mediate” over or “internationalize the Kashmir dispute”. Washington took great pains afterwards to stress that the US was uninterested in playing the


\textsuperscript{85} \textit{The Hindu}, 6 July 1999.
role of an independent third party in the Kashmir dispute. The White House subsequently leaked to the press that Clinton was unenthusiastic about involving himself in a diplomatic dead-end like Kashmir. It was said that the President had only "vaguely" promised to visit Pakistan if Kargil was cleared up and Islamabad signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).\(^86\)

After Sharif's return to Islamabad, there was still some concern in Washington as to whether the Pakistani Prime Minister could implement the Washington declaration. The Pakistani Army's refusal to comment on the summit declaration was worrying. Islamabad seemed to act as if it was holding out for more concessions. However, the US made it clear that it was holding Sharif to his promise. A State Department spokesman, when asked on 8 July, whether the US believed Sharif had control over the "guerrilla fighters" in Kargil, replied, "Yes, we do. It is indeed possible and we think it is necessary for Pakistan to ensure that those forces that crossed from its side of the LoC onto the Indian side must be withdrawn. And that's certainly what Prime Minister Sharif committed to do when he was here."\(^87\) Other US officials said the intruders were wholly depended on the Pakistani Army for transport, food and ammunition. Thus the Pakistani Army could order or "advise" them to withdraw.\(^88\)

As the days ticked by without any signs of retreat, the Clinton Administration got increasingly concerned about it. With winter approaching in Kargil, India would soon have to decide whether to expand the war to drive out the


\(^88\) ibid.
intruders. Finally, Washington appeared relieved when announcement was made on 11 July, that the Director Generals of Military Operation (DGMO) of India and Pakistan were meeting to discuss the "modalities of withdrawal". A White House spokesman said, "This is the kind of bilateral meeting that the president urged. We're pleased that these kind of meetings are taking place."

Then Islamabad declared that full withdrawal would be completed by 16 July, a deadline later extended by another day. However, it was only on 26 July, that the Pakistani withdrawal was complete, and the Indian DGMO announced that the LoC was fully restored. It should be noted that even as late as 23 July, the US was urging Pakistan to surrender the last remnants of the territory its troops had occupied.

Thus it could be seen that Washington played a very important role in the early cessation of the Kargil conflict. In fact, the Clinton-Sharif Washington summit was the turning point in the two-month old crisis. The US activism, especially the personal effort by President Clinton at last succeeded in defusing the crisis by making Pakistan agree to the withdrawal of troops from across the LoC at Kargil.

Conclusion

Kargil war is a turning point in the history of US policy towards Indo-Pak conflicts in the sense that it catalyzed a distinct shift in the American response towards the Indo-Pak hostility over Kashmir. For the first time in the history of Indo-Pak rivalry, the US gave up the doctrine of equal culpability - treating the aggressor and victim of aggression on equal terms - and made Pakistan...

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solely responsible for violating the LoC. It is also for the first time that the US took a clearly pro-India stand, which is in sharp contrast to the infamous pro-Pakistan tilt of 1971. Moreover, unlike the 1971 crisis, where there were clear differences and disagreement between the Congress and White House in their perception of the conflict, both the legislative and executive branches of the US appeared to be united in their response to the Kargil conflict. It is important to note that Kargil marked a major shift in US policy away from its earlier position, which affirmed Kashmir as a dispute to be resolved by India and Pakistan, towards a position effectively recognizing the sanctity of LoC, which cannot be violated. Clinton’s emphasis on the “sanctity of the LoC” and his admonition to Pakistan that it should not hope to “redraw borders in blood” signalled what seemed like a new American line. Moreover, unlike the past, the US backed Indo-Pakistani bilateralism instead of UN multilateralism to resolve the crisis. The US position shattered one of Pakistan’s principal assumptions in embarking on the Kargil misadventure that Washington would intervene on its behalf.

In fact, the stand taken by the US during the Kargil conflict has had many strands that had worked in India’s favour. First was the acknowledgement of the fact that the genesis of the crisis lay in Pakistan’s misadventure. The US never accepted the Pakistani contention that the intruders were the mujahideens over which Islamabad had no control. Instead, Washington considered that the intrusion into Kargil was directly undertaken by Pakistan. Throughout the conflict Washington repeatedly stressed that it believed India was a victim of aggression and was well within its rights to use its military to push the intruders out. Second, the Clinton Administration refused to support
Pakistan’s attempt to internationalize the Kashmir dispute in the wake of the Kargil crisis. Pakistan’s calculation was that the military tensions between the two nuclear weapon capable States could be used to bring the UNSC into diplomatic activism over Kashmir. The US determination not to go along undermined this objective. Moreover, even though Washington played a crucial role to defuse the Kargil crisis, it took great pains to project its role as that of a facilitator rather than a mediator. The third significant strand had been the firm American rejection of the Pakistani questioning the validity of the existing LoC. In challenging its legitimacy, Pakistan may have expected to reopen issues that were settled twenty-seven years ago at Shimla Agreement and consolidate territorial gains acquired by covert aggression at Kargil. But the Clinton Administration’s decision to go public with its position on the sanctity of the LoC set back Pakistani dream of changing the boundary in its favour.91

These approaches brought a rare harmony between the political objectives of New Delhi and Washington for the first time in the long history of Indo-US relations. What could be the rationale behind the change in the US response? On deeper analysis, one could discern several factors, which appeared to have influenced the US policy. First, the US was deeply concerned at the dangers in Indo-Pak tension that could escalate into a nuclear conflict. It was this apprehension that induced the Clinton Administration to go out of its way to counsel Pakistan to end the intrusion. The US argued that the rules of engagement in the subcontinent had fundamentally changed with the introduction of nuclear weapons in the subcontinent. And that irresponsible

actions, such as the one initiated by Pakistan in Kargil, could result in dangerous destabilization. A major policy tenet in Washington during the 1990s had been that a "nuclear flashpoint" in South Asia could only be prevented through careful management of Indo-Pak deterrence. And that any development that could lead to instability in the Indo-Pak relations need to be dampened.

Secondly, the Clinton Administration had recognized the relevance of Shimla Agreement and Lahore Declaration to end the unending bitterness in India-Pakistan relations. Given the long history of Indo-Pakistani conflicts and the inability of the international community to find a permanent solution, Washington believed that the Indo-Pak bilateralism instead of UN multilateralism could be more effective to bring in long lasting peace in South Asia. The US believed that the Kargil aggression threatened the Lahore peace process and must be quickly reversed.

Thirdly, the new realities of the post-Cold War era and the increasing convergence of Indo-US interests shaped the US response. As the US began to define a new foreign policy for the post-Soviet world, its earlier strategic interest in Pakistan began to diminish if not disappear. There were also new tensions in the Sino-US relationship. As a new fluidity emerged in India’s neighbourhood, it seemed that the US was finally ready to deal with New Delhi in a framework that was significantly different from what obtained in the days of the Cold War. It is in this context that the Kargil crisis took place.\(^{92}\) In fact, since Clinton was elected for a second term in office, Washington had been expressing a keen desire to build a new relationship

\(^{92}\) ibid., p. 31.
with New Delhi and initiated a strategic dialogue. The US relationship with India and Pakistan is no longer shaped through the prism of Cold War. In the new world order, the US has begun to treat India and Pakistan differently and the Indo-US and US-Pak relations have acquired separate momentum and direction without being seen at opposed to each other.

Finally, the issue of international terrorism had been another factor. As the spectre of Communism has receded to the background, international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism have taken the formers place in America’s global agenda. In the US perception, international terrorism and the growing menace of *Talibanization* have emerged as serious security threats to international peace and regional stability. The Pakistan-Afghanistan area has gradually been converted into a breeding ground of international terrorism. In this context, Washington found it hard to condone the cross-border terrorism openly sponsored by Pakistan against India, which ultimately led to the Kargil conflict.

However, it would be incorrect to consider that the US response to Kargil conflict reflected a ‘paradigm shift’ in US South Asia policy. It is true that at that juncture Washington’s relations with New Delhi and Islamabad were undergoing notable transformation. The Cold War dynamics that guided the US policy towards South Asia were beginning to disappear. New concerns about an Asian balance, the rise of religious fundamentalism and terrorism in Pakistan and nuclearization of South Asia impinged on the US thinking. But most importantly, the possibility of a full-scale war between the two nuclear rivals induced the US to pressurize Pakistan to avert further escalation. In fact,
the pressure applied on Pakistan by the US did not represent a 'paradigm shift' in US policy towards India, but only a de-escalation venture.