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## **INDIA'S NEED FOR**

### **A CREDIBLE MILITARY DETERRENT**

#### **ABSTRACT**

It would appear ironical that notwithstanding India's inherent abhorrence for wars and consistent efforts to avoid them, the country has had to, over a period of six decades since Independence, engage itself in five wars including the one recently fought at Kargil. This is, of course, not to talk of Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir that the country has been engaged in for the last 20 years. This is, perhaps, the highest number of wars fought by any other country in the world during the same length of time. Evidently there is a requirement for India to build up a credible military deterrent which could dissuade its enemies from taking recourse to the use of force in the settlement of their disputes. What seems to be coming in the way of our military growth is, apparently, the anti-war psyche of the nation which fails to appreciate that wars cannot be avoided – least of all by presenting ourselves to our enemies as a weak military target. The fact is that whether we like or not there is no alternative to military strength. Not even diplomacy which deceptively appears to so. For, diplomacy, to be effective, would itself need backing of military strength.

#### **BRIEF RESUME OF THE AUTHOR**

Major (Retd) Dr Brahma Singh (b 11 April 1931) was commissioned into the Army through the National Defence Academy Military Wing (now Indian Military Academy) Dehra Dun, in December 1953. He served in the Punjab Regiment till October 1962 where after he was transferred to the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles. Moved by events of the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962, he took to serious writings on Defence matters even while in service. Over the next twelve years, before his premature retirement in 1975 a series of his articles, dealing with military training, leadership, as also the tactical, strategic and nuclear aspects of Indian Defence, appeared regularly in the *United Services Institution of India (USI) Journal*, New Delhi. Some of these articles also attracted the attention of foreign military journals and two of them, one entitled *Lest We Falter* and the other, *India and the Balance of Power*, were reproduced in the *Military Review*, the professional journal of the United States Army Staff College, in 1973 and 1974 respectively.

He took to higher studies after retirement and after earning a Master's degree in Military Science from Jiwaji University, Gwalior, qualified for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy in History at the Jammu University in 1989. In between he undertook research for writing of the official History of the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles 1820 – 1956, which was published by Lancer International New Delhi in 1990. He has also authored official histories of the 9<sup>th</sup> Gorkha Rifles and 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Mechanised Regiment. A large number of his writings on Kashmir affairs

and national defence, have appeared in national/local dailies and periodicals from time to time in the form of articles and letters to editors.

## **INDIA'S NEED FOR A CREDIBLE MILITARY DETERRENT**

**Major (Retd) Dr Brahma Singh**

### **UNHEEDED WARNING**

Towards the end of 1950, Sardar Patel visualised the threat to the territorial integrity and the security of India arising out of the “disappearance of Tibet, as we knew it, and the expansion of China almost up to our gates”, which prompted him to write a prophetic letter<sup>1</sup> to the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, warning him of the impending danger. In his long letter dealing with the nature of the likely threat to the country, he made a fervent appeal to the Prime Minister “to evolve a clear cut national policy, the lack of which was preventing us from fully gearing up our resources to meet this threat”. He stressed the need to “have a clear idea of what we wish to achieve and also of the methods by which we should achieve it” and that “any faltering or lack of decisiveness in formulating our objectives is bound to weaken us and increase the threats that are so evident”. This was the first and, undoubtedly, the finest exposition of the basics on which the Indian Defence policy should have been based. Unfortunately, however, Sardar Patel died a month later and his treatise on India's defence policy, apparently, received only a little more attention of the nation than being consigned to the National Archives. Sadly, the defence policy that ultimately evolved was bereft of the foresight, pragmatism, and prudence displayed by Sardar Patel and seemed to be based on political idealism seeking to avoid wars rather than to fight them out. Evidently, under the pressure of the colossal effort required to match our defence preparedness with the nature and magnitude of the enemy threat, not only from China but also from Pakistan, the warning went unheeded and an ostrich-like policy of modifying the enemy threat to keep it within the ambit of national convenience, was adopted instead. A review of the various wars that we have fought since then would show this to have been so.

### **INDIA'S WAR EXPERIENCE**

#### **War with China 1962**

There is no point in recounting those horrid days of October 1962 when we suffered a humiliating defeat in the war with China which came even as we wishfully hoped that China would stand deterred by the magical spell of *panchsheel* and *Hindi Chini bhai bhai* diplomacy. After Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's statement in the Parliament on 25 October wherein he observed that “we were getting out of touch with reality” and “were living in an artificial atmosphere of our own creation”<sup>2</sup> not much, perhaps, remained to be said on the cause of our debacle.

No lessons, however, seem to have been learnt from the Chinese invasion as we continued to hesitate to grow militarily to the extent necessary for meeting the threat that remained where it was. The spectacular leap under which India raised the strength of its Armed Forces from 2 lakh to 10 lakh within a year and a half or less after the '62 war was still woefully inadequate to meet the combined threat from China and Pakistan. Apparently in a pick and choose act, to which we were certainly not entitled, we decided

to shift the inconvenient threat from China to the back burner and prepare only for the more convenient threat from Pakistan. The sagacity of our decision to avoid confrontation with China has yet to go through the litmus test. God help us if it fails.

### **The Indo-Pak Wars**

The Indo-Pak war that followed in 1965 was then to show that we were not adequately prepared for fighting effectively even against Pakistan singly. Even though the Indian Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, turned the country's existing defence policy on its head by carrying the war into Pakistan, the Indian armed forces failed to take advantage of the change in policy to defeat Pakistan decisively for want of adequate superiority in strength. While the Indian Army is believed to have had sixteen full-fledged infantry divisions on its strength, on the eve of the war, it also had commitments to match and after meeting its requirements in the East and those of holding defensive positions in J&K and some parts of Punjab, only seven were available to it for offensive manoeuvres against Pakistan. With Pakistan mustering up five infantry divisions against it, the Indian Army was just a little above parity with Pakistan in infantry. Even this little superiority in infantry was offset by the edge that Pakistan had in armour – both, quantitatively as well as qualitatively – with its two armoured divisions based on Patton tanks against India's one, based on Centurions. India did not, therefore, have the requisite superiority to be able to put the war to any better use than it was able to do – save Jammu from being over-run by Pakistan. Besides this, there was not much to write home about. Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, then General Officer Commanding in Chief Western Command admitted that “although we did succeed in whittling down Pakistan's fighting potential, especially armour, and occupied chunks of her territory, most of our offensive actions fizzled into a series of stalemates without achieving any decisive results.”<sup>3</sup> What the General did not say was that the stalemate that occurred after hardly 10 to 12 days into the war was as a direct consequence of the balance of power that existed between the two opposing forces and not due to any tactical or strategic shortcomings on our part. The aim of this war should have been to give Pakistan such a thrashing as to deter it from ever raising a little finger against us let alone dare to invade J&K. If only we had a couple of extra infantry divisions and another armoured division we might have carried the war to its logical conclusion. Besides, by retaining our capacity to continue the war, we may not have lost at the negotiating table what we had won on the battlefield, as we did.

The equation between our available armed strength vis-à-vis that available to Pakistan remained the same during the Indo-Pak war of 1971. India's Western Army had a total of ten infantry divisions and one armoured division under its command against Pakistan's total of nine infantry divisions deployed in West Pakistan<sup>4</sup>. Consequently there was an action replay of the 1965 war on the Western front – a stalemate just after ten to twelve days into the war. The strategic objective of Western Command in 1971 was to “hold the enemy at bay while the Eastern Command over-ran East Pakistan” and its General Officer Commanding in Chief, Lieutenant General KP Candeth, could say with satisfaction that “by beating back all Pakistani offensives in the west, the Western Command played its part in the collapse of Pakistan's military regime and the liberation of Bangladesh.”<sup>5</sup>

What made the difference on the Eastern front was that by taking the risk of ignoring the Chinese threat, India could pull out greater number of troops from the Indo-Tibetan border to create a near 2:1 superiority<sup>6</sup> against the enemy on this front and snatch

what was, undoubtedly, a thrilling and decisive victory. We were greatly rushed for time and just made it before the UN could intervene. Even an additional Parachute Brigade would, probably, have reduced greatly the risk of a premature cease-fire that India faced.

The question that arises is as to why we restricted the aim of the 1971 war to just a philanthropic objective of liberating Bangladesh and nothing more. Why did we not take advantage of the War and on its sidelines liberate most if not the whole of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, even before the rest of the world could have woken up to it. This might have brought curtains on the Kashmir imbroglio for good. The answer obviously lies in the fact that we did not have the necessary strength to achieve such a self advantageous objective.

### **Pakistan's Proxy War**

No raise in the strength of the Indian Army was made even when its commitments increased many fold following the start of Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir in 1989. With an open war against Pakistan over the issue ruled out by our political leadership, obviously for want of adequate military strength, the Indian Army settled for the ongoing disadvantageous war with Pakistan. The war, even though by proxy in the garb of people's insurgency seeking self determination for Kashmir, has already lasted 20 years and there is yet no end in sight. One wonders if this actually is Pakistan's "thousand year war" for Kashmir with the aim of "inflicting a thousand cuts on India to make it bleed to death" about which Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto is known to have bragged. We may be in a position to fight till "eternity"<sup>7</sup> without letting go of Kashmir, but our aim in this war should be to prevent Pakistan from continuing this war, rather than acquiescing to fight it out as long as it likes. Let us not forget that the war of attrition unleashed by Pakistan in Kashmir affects India alone. Pakistan is not a party to the war as it is involved in it only by proxy. To prevent Pakistan from continuing its proxy war India's minimum requirement would be for the liberation of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir even if it means an open and decisive war with Pakistan. But can we even think of doing this at our present force level?

### **The Kargil War**

Of all the wars fought by India, the Kargil war was, perhaps, the best run show. In a superb display of strategic acumen and diplomatic sagacity, our political leadership kept the war zone restricted to Kargil. By not succumbing to the national clamour for crossing the LOC, India not only won applause of the international community for not allowing the war to escalate into a larger conflagration, but also enabled its Army to create, from its existing resources, local numerical and fire-power superiority against the enemy at Kargil. Material deficiencies, if any remained, were then made up with the stunning valour of the Indian troops to completely fulfil the country's war aim – eviction of the intruder from its territory - with much aplomb.

## **PRESENT THREAT PERSPECTIVE**

### **Threat from China**

The gravity of the threat to the security of the country from China would appear to be exactly how and where it was when it first manifested itself some fifty years ago. As a matter of fact the Chinese are, today, more vociferous about their territorial claim to Arunachal Pradesh than they ever were before. While every opportunity is being availed of for projecting the existence of the dispute officially, diplomatic probity is being

maintained by out-sourcing harsh and offensive write-ups on the issue to unofficial or Communist Party forums.<sup>8</sup>

The optimism expressed by our Prime Minister, Dr Man Mohan Singh, at the end of his three day visit to China in mid January last year, on the ability of the Indian and Chinese leaders to settle the long standing border dispute sooner than later, would, therefore, appear to be an over-simplification of issues involved. The Chinese Premier, Mr Wen Jiahao was, perhaps, being more practical in not having given vent to any such sentiments. Who would know better than him that the dispute between the two countries is not just a simple matter of border adjustments that could be easily sorted out across a conference table in a spirit of give and take but involves a serious case of clash of policy objectives of the two countries.

What, in fact, brings India in direct conflict with China is that large tracts of Indian Territory, including the whole of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, and parts of Bengal are included in China's list of "lost territories",<sup>9</sup> which it has vowed to recover in keeping with its official foreign policy objectives, with Arunachal Pradesh, evidently, as its immediate target.

Apart from launching short successive wars over a long period of time to gradually nibble into our territory, China has the option of launching a long drawn out war by proxy for attaining its objective. The tribal population adjoining the Indo-Tibetan border are yet to develop strong patriotic links with the rest of the country and the Chinese could easily subvert local loyalties for launching such a war. In all probability the on going Maoist and Naxal insurgencies in eastern India are already being sponsored by China, but even if not so yet, they have the potential for being so converted by China. The responsibility for fighting such a war will then certainly devolve on the Indian Army.<sup>10</sup>

### **The threat from Pakistan**

The speed at which the political situation is developing in Pakistan, it will, in all probability, not be too long before a Talibanized Pakistan becomes a reality and freed as it would then be of international obligations and control it could pose a much graver threat to India than ever before. But even as Pakistan and the Taliban continue to fight each other for supremacy they are likely to combine over the common objective of "liberating" Kashmir. The entry of the Taliban into Pakistan by itself is, therefore, bound to give a big boost to the ongoing proxy war in Kashmir. The present war on terror launched by the US in combination with Pakistan is not likely to be of any help to us as the US seems to have acquiesced to Pakistan's categorisation of the terrorists into good and bad ones. The good ones being those engaged as "freedom fighters" in Jammu and Kashmir and the bad ones being those engaged in fighting the US-Pak duo. The "good ones" – and they are in pretty large numbers – we shall have to fight on our own. Notwithstanding official denials there are strong indications that the Taliban are infiltrating into J&K in large numbers which could pose a very serious threat to the country sooner than later. This will greatly add to the demands for employment of the Army.

### **REQUIREMENT OF A MILITARY DETERRENT**

The arrangements that India has made for meeting the twin threat from China and Pakistan would appear to be far from adequate. While India suffers from a tremendous handicap of the gaping disparity vis-à-vis the Chinese forces along the Indo-Tibetan

border, against Pakistan it seems to be maintaining a balance of power with just a precarious tilt in its favour. So precarious, indeed that it is capable of being miscalculated and misunderstood either way. In fact, as revealed by Mr Altaf Gauhar, Pakistan's Secretary Information in the 1960s, all Pakistan's wars against India "were conceived and launched on the basis of one assumption: that the Indians are too cowardly and ill organised to offer any effective military response which could pose a threat to Pakistan".<sup>11</sup>

Evidently, India's defence requirement today is to put in place a credible military deterrent the mere presence of which could dissuade its enemies from seeking solutions to their disputes by resorting to the use of force. Kargil Review Committee set up after the Kargil war, probably, wished to convey the same message but, apparently, faltered in carrying the argument to its logical conclusion. While warning the country of the dangers in holding all the "heights and similar un-held unpopulated gaps in the High Himalayas along the entire length of the northern border" the report suggests that "the alternative should be a credible declaratory policy of swiftly punishing wanton and wilful violations of the sanctity of the LOC."<sup>12</sup> But the question that still remains is to punish with what? Had we the necessary strength where would have been the need for any such declaration of our intent. Our military strength would have then spoken for itself. Interestingly the Kargil Review Committee has itself wondered how Pakistan "could sustain its proxy war against India, inflicting thousands of casualties, without being unduly concerned about India's conventional superiority" but rather than attributing this to inadequacy of India's "conventional superiority" over Pakistan, the Committee seems to attribute this to Pakistan's possession of a nuclear deterrent.<sup>13</sup> With India possessing a nuclear capability many times greater than that of Pakistan how could the latter have indulged in any nuclear black-mail? Any suggestion for punishing violations of the sanctity of our borders should, therefore, have been backed with recommendations for an appropriate increase in our military strength which has, apparently, not been done. Needless to say that under the present situation any such "declaratory policy" in the face of the Chinese would appear meaningless if not ridiculous.

## **ADDITIONAL TROOPS REQUIRED**

### **Against China**

Assuming that our defence posture against the Chinese in Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh is of a static nature with little or no scope for any manoeuvring, there exists a requirement for mobile reserves for regaining initiative soon after the start of a Chinese offensive. These reserves would have to be organised and equipped as Strike Corps capable of initiating counter offensive action at points of enemy's maximum vulnerability. Three such Corps, each based on three infantry divisions, are recommended against China for offensive action separately in the Chumbi Valley, Western Tibet opposite Ladakh and within Arunachal Pradesh on an as-required- basis.

### **Against Pakistan**

In order to tilt the existing balance of power with Pakistan decisively in our favour and deter Pakistan from committing further aggression, there appears to be a requirement for two Strike Corps of the type recommended for offensive action against the Chinese. One for offensive action in the Uri Sector in J&K so as to threaten Islamabad directly via Kohala<sup>14</sup> and the other for threatening Karachi through Rajasthan.

## THE 'TINA' FACTOR

It would appear that while we are generally not averse to locking horns with Pakistan, not many of us would feel enthusiastic about doing the same with China. Evidently too many people in the country seem to think that it is beyond our capacity to match the military might of China. The flutter, bordering on panic, that was created when Mr George Frenandes, as the Defence Minister of India, named China as our enemy number one only reflected the national psyche – of letting the sleeping dog lie in the hope that the dog may never wake up on its own. There is no rationale behind this psyche though. What does China have which India doesn't? India has an equally booming economy and is bestowed with a vast reservoir of the best fighting material in the world. Besides the effort required to meet the Chinese threat may not be as colossal as imagined. By raising its defence expenditure from the present 2% of our Gross National Product to 7% like that of China both could, perhaps, be able to stand on the same pedestal of military power. What is, perhaps, lacking is the national will.

The fact of the matter is that **there is no alternative** to military power.<sup>15</sup> Not even diplomacy, which may, deceptively, appear to be so. For, diplomacy to succeed would itself need the backing of military strength<sup>16</sup>. Our *Hindi chini bhai* diplomacy failed because it had no military backing. Any fresh initiatives seeking peace with China and Pakistan can also fail for want of necessary military backing.

The Prime Minister was only stating a truism when, at the end of his recent three-day visit to China, he reportedly said that the world respected the strong and not the weak. It is another matter that while elaborating he mentioned only the economic, political and social strengths that earned a country the respect of the world<sup>17</sup>. While one may understand the political and diplomatic compulsions of the Prime Minister in not naming military strength as the mainstay of national power, the nation can ignore it only at its peril.

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced by Friends of Tibet (INDIA), @ [www.friensoftibet.org](http://www.friensoftibet.org)

<sup>2</sup> Chandrasekhar S, *Communist China Today*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi 1964, p 223

<sup>3</sup> Kuldip Nayar, *Distant Neighbours* Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd Delhi 1972, p 118

<sup>4</sup> Candeth, KP, Lt Gen (Retd) *The Western Front: Indo-Pakistan War 1971*, Allied Publishers Private Limited New Delhi, 1984, pp18-24

<sup>5</sup> *ibid* p 168

<sup>6</sup> Jacob JFR, Lt Gen (Retd) *Surrender at Dacca-Birth of a Nation*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi 1997 pp 184-188

<sup>7</sup> As part of Lal Bahadur Shastri's repartee to Bhutto's rhetoric on thousand years war over Kashmir.

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<sup>8</sup> Voice of Sikkim, quoting an editorial in Global Times, a tabloid of the People's Daily Group, a mouthpiece of the Communist Party of China, spewing venom against India. <http://voiceofsikkim.com/2009/07/10/indian-might-met-with-chinese-threats> and Times of India (Chandigarh) Aug 13, 2009 news item *Chinese think-tank: Split India into 20-30 parts*, quoting from a write-up posted on a quasi-Chinese web site iiss.cn

<sup>9</sup> The Chinese are showing these Indian territories as their own on their maps and India's polite and not too publicised protests since 1950 have been falling on deaf ears.

<sup>10</sup> During conversation with some very senior officers of the Army the author got the impression that rather than raising the strength of the Army, its burden is being sought to be reduced by absolving it of any responsibility in respect of counter-insurgency operations for which para-military forces will be strengthened and trained adequately. While such an arrangement could work satisfactorily for local insurgencies it would not be adequate for dealing with foreign sponsored insurgency the responsibility for the handling of which is going to ultimately devolve on the Army.

<sup>11</sup> A UNI news report date line Islamabad Sep 12, 1999, quoting from *The Nation*, an English-language Daily of Pakistan, reproduced by *Daily Excelsior*, Jammu, 13 Sep, 1999 under "Intrusion into Kargil planned 12 years ago". Mr Altaf Gauhar was very close to both Ayub Khan as well as Yahya Khan and was known to have been a powerful member of the coterie that formulated Pakistan's plans and policies during the 1960s. On leaving service he took over as the editor of the Dawn in 1972.

<sup>12</sup> Report of the Kargil Review Committee: Executive Summary, USI Journal New Delhi Jan-Mar 2000 issue, p 33

<sup>13</sup> *ibid* p23

<sup>14</sup> Pakistan's anxiety at the prospect of India occupying Kohala is revealed in General Gracey's military appreciation of the situation in J&K in about April 1948 in which he wrote: "If India is not to be allowed to sit on the door steps of Pakistan to the rear and on the flank, at liberty to enter at its will and pleasure, if the civilian and military morale is not to be effected to a dangerous extent, and if subversive political forces are not to be encouraged and let loose within Pakistan itself, it is imperative that the Indian Army is not allowed to advance beyond the general line Uri-Poonch-Nowshera" (as reproduced by Maj Gen Shaukat Riza (Pak army) in his book *Izzat o Iqbal* ). It is intriguing that the Indian advance in J&K was halted, more or less, where Pakistan's Commander in Chief wanted it to.

<sup>15</sup> It might interest the reader to know that based on this premise I had written an article in the USI Journal Jan-Mar 1972 entitled *Lest We Falter*, which was reproduced in the US Military Review Jan 1973, to suggest an army for India based on fifty infantry divisions. The requirement projected now would probably work out to, more or less, the same.



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<sup>16</sup> Morgenthau Hans J. *Politics Among Nations*, Scientific Book Agency Calcutta 1973 pp 521-22

<sup>17</sup> Amit Baruah, *Enter the dragon* Hindustan Times (Chandigarh) Jan 22, 2008