

## PAKISTAN'S THREAT OF WAR

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Going by the public protests in India, it seems that much is being made of Ms Benazir Bhutto's threat of another war over the Kashmir issue. It is difficult to believe that Pakistan's Prime Minister actually meant what she said. She would have known that Pakistan has already fought two wars (since after the one in 1947) over this issue and achieved nothing. How could she now believe that the matter could be settled with a third one? She would also have known that political heads have invariably rolled in Pakistan after every war with India. How could she be so unconcerned about her own head as to start another war.

The balance of power is so tilted against Pakistan that militarily it is not in a position to go to war with India. The balance of power has, in fact, always been in favour of India; even during the period preceding each of the last two Indo-Pak wars, but each time Pakistan had gone to war after a series of miscalculations. In 1965 it was, firstly, the miscalculation of the support of the people of Kashmir. The people refused to cooperate with the Pakistani infiltrators and thus tilted the scales of war against Pakistan no sooner than it had started. Secondly, it was the miscalculation of the Indian Army's ability to resist a blitz action which led Pakistan to plan materially for the shortest possible war. When its attempts to capture Jammu by an advance from Chhamb and reach Delhi via Khem Karan failed, it found the 22-days war too long for logistic support planned for the adventure and even for its total national resources. This is not to talk of the shattering of its self-created bogey of its "superior" soldier, the Patton Tank and the Sabre Jets on which so much was staked. The "superior" soldier was dislodged from picquet after picquet in J&K, the Patton Tank came to a stand-still just after piercing only three miles into the Khem Karan sector, while the Sabre jets found their match in the Indian Gnat. Thirdly, the Pakistani leadership totally miscalculated the dynamism of the existing political leadership in India, which was capable of taking quick decisions on matters involving grave military risks. Along with it Pakistan also underestimated the Punjabis who gave unprecedented civil support to the armed forces and made complete mockery of its attempts to create disorder by dropping Para troopers among the civil population.

In 1971 Pakistan over-estimated the Chinese support in tying down a number of Indian Divisions along the Indo-Tibetan border for maintaining the balance of power with India. In actual fact India was able to pull out troops from the North-eastern borders and muster enough superiority against the Pakistani army in East Pakistan to hand out the most crushing and humiliating defeat. Then by opening the western front, by making a pre-emptive air strike simultaneously on all the Indian air-fields, Pakistan totally miscalculated India's capacity to withstand such a move and yet retain its retaliatory capability. Pakistan also found its expectations from American intervention completely misplaced. The Seventh Fleet did arrive only to witness the mass surrender of the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan. It could little else in face of threat of Soviet intervention on the other side. It, perhaps, then dawned on Pakistan that the defence pacts notwithstanding, no country is prepared to fight another's war.

It is ironical that on both the occasions – 1965 and 1971 – when such gross miscalculations were made, Pakistan had military Generals at the helm of affairs. The Pakistani Generals did learn their lessons nevertheless, though at a considerable cost – secession of East Pakistan and the ignominy of having had to surrender 90,000 of their troops. One of the lessons learnt after the two wars was that India was too big a country for Pakistan to fight with. Too big

in every way – size, economy, material resources, manpower and all the factors that go to build a country's war potential. As a matter of fact some of the less ambitious military commanders had learnt this lesson after the 1965 war itself. Soon after the war, Air Chief Marshal Asghar Khan (son of Brigadier Rehmat Ullah Khan of J&K State Force) was quite forth-right in making this point in an article that he wrote after his retirement and which was published in the *Dawn* of Lahore. It is because of this lesson having gone home generally after the 1971 war that Pakistan launched a proxy war in Kashmir. A war in which Pakistan is aiming at promoting its national interests through use of military force without having to bear its ruinous consequences. Indeed if war is an instrument of state policy, proxy war is even better so. Why should Pakistan then ever think of switching over from an advantageous war to a disadvantageous one.

History, it is believed, has a tendency to repeat itself. In that case there will be fresh miscalculations on the part of Pakistan, another war, and yet another defeat? Political compulsions in Pakistan demand spectacular results which a long drawn out proxy war is not able to provide; while the belief that about six lakh Indian troops have been tied up by the militants in Kashmir provides the temptation for Pakistan to miscalculate India's capacity to withstand an open war. The great hatred for India in general and the strong urge for avenging the humiliation suffered during 1971, could provide the necessary impetus to such miscalculations. As for as India is concerned nothing suits it better than an open war, which would free it of the severe handicaps under which it is fighting the present proxy war in Kashmir.