

India's Master-stroke of Diplomacy

THREAT OF WAR DID THE JOB

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From what has been appearing in the national Press off and on it would appear that far too many people, (including quite a few from the Army itself), have begun to doubt the sagacity of the Government's handling of the situation arising out of both the Pakistani intrusion into Kargil as well as the terrorist attack on the Parliament. While criticism of Government policies should be treated as a healthy sign in a democracy, it is also important that these are viewed in their correct perspective so that such criticism does not cause unnecessary demoralisation in the nation and the Armed Forces. Every policy has its pros and con and must be considered in its totality. Most of the criticism in circulation today, however, seems to be based on misconceptions in respect of diplomacy and strategy primarily because all Governments are secretive on such matters. Remember how the US Government was hard put to trying to explain why it had sent a task force into the Bay of Bengal during the Indo-Pak war of 1971. It had gone to the ridiculous extent of explaining away its purpose as that of evacuating the forty odd Americans stranding in East Pakistan. The American people understood the real motive and never embarrassed their Government on this account. As one cannot expect our Government to come out openly to explain the what and why of its diplomacy, the people themselves will have to have to be knowledgeable enough to understand the intricacies of this state-craft. The aim of writing this piece is to give the positive side of Government's actions, which does not seem to have found favour with the critics, so that the people can make a more rational assessment.

It is generally said that India committed a mistake by not crossing the Line of Control, (LOC) in J&K in retaliation to Pakistan's aggression in Kargil. While some have attributed this to general lack of guts on the part of the political leadership in India others felt that this was out of fear of Pakistan's nuclear capability. This would appear unfair considering the fact that the present political leadership is as good, if not better than it was during the last two wars with Pakistan of which we have always felt so proud. It is the present leadership that gave the green signal for developing a nuclear capability in the country with the very purpose of eliminating the element of fear of such capabilities of our neighbors in the formulation of our own strategies. How could it be afraid of a nuclear first strike by Pakistan when it possesses a counter second-strike capability, which it developed so fearlessly?

In actual fact, far from being considered a mistake, India's action in keeping the war confined to Kargil may even be termed as a masterstroke of diplomacy for serving the needs of strategy. Who would know better than General VN Sharma, former Chief of the Army Staff, who has often been criticising the Government for not carrying the war into Pakistan, that India does not have the requisite military strength to fight an all-out decisive war with Pakistan. With the balance of power that obtains between the two countries, a war over the Kargil issue would have gone the same way as the previous two Indo-Pak wars. A stalemate would have ensued, a cease-fire called by the UN and we would have been back to square one - with the Kargil issue remaining unresolved. By limiting the war to Kargil India not just won accolades of the international community but also foreclosed the possibility of its intervention even if it be of the 1947, '65 and '71 kind. Strategically it enabled the Indian Army to muster local superiority over the enemy at Kargil, sufficient enough to defeat him in detail and have the area vacated. Here, having the area vacated was most important and no one can say for sure – not even the former

Chief of the Army Staff – whether an all-out war would have helped in achieving our objective better.

On the question of deployment of the Army along the Indo-Pak border it is said that the deployment served no useful purpose as India dithered to go to war. It is argued that if India was not to go to war then where was the need for the deployment of the Army. What is not generally realised is that threat of war itself is a recognised instrument of State policy and deployment of the Army was to serve the purpose of posing that threat. For the threat to be effective it had to be real and there can be little doubt that India did make it look real to the maximum extent possible. While balance of power was sought to be tilted in its favour by transferring troops from the eastern front to the western front, mines were actually laid to make war look most imminent. But even those who recognised it as ‘coercive’ diplomacy have generally failed to discern any gains resulting from India taking recourse to this option. There is, in fact, nothing known as a ‘coercive diplomacy’ as every type of diplomacy, (if at all there are many types), must be backed by military strength so as to be effective. Indian diplomacy of *Panchsheel* and *Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai* failed because it was not backed by military strength. Diplomacy and war go side by side. As a matter of fact war starts where diplomacy ends. In our context diplomacy had succeeded to a great extent, as conceded to by many knowledgeable people, including the former chief of Army Staff, General VP Malik. The problem here is that results of ‘coercive diplomacy’ - if we wish to call it so – are never too tangible. In our case also they have not been tangible enough to be easily discerned. But they are there nevertheless. In any case there was no point in going to war even if our demands did not appear to have been fully met. With the existing force level we could have hardly achieved anything more by going to war than what we had already done by threatening it. The mere fact that Musharraf shook at his knees and disowned all terrorist activity, even if outwardly under pressure, has had a very demoralising effect on the Pak sponsored militancy in Kashmir - the results of which we are already beginning to see. If the successful conduct of elections in J&K was one of our political objectives, as all would agree it was, the extension of the period of deployment of troops till then was necessary. The Army has suffered tremendous hardships, both physical as well as mental, on this account but it has all been well worth it. Well done Indian Army, keep it up.