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An unforgettable September

Dear Editor

One wonders what makes Mr Om Saraf to disagree in his article “unforgettable Sept”, with General Chibber’s assertion that all the major assumptions on which Ayub Khan based his operation “Gibraltar” proved wrong, when he has no dispute with the General on the fact that the President of Pakistan got carried away by promise of spectacular results while deciding upon a conflict with India. After all what was the promise of spectacular results built upon if not on the assumptions as enumerated by General Chibber. He could not have possibly miscalculated with regard to the relative strength of the two countries where India clearly had an edge over Pakistan, even after taking into consideration the commitments of the Indian Armed Forces against China. Indeed Ayub Khan could not have seen the tilt in the balance of power in his favour without assuming (a) that the Kashmiris would render positive support to Pak infiltrators and create conditions of insurgency in the Valley; (b) that operations by the Indian Army would be restricted to counter-insurgency or action against the infiltrators; and (c) that India would not dare to carry the war into Pakistan.

Ayub Khan’s miscalculations cannot, however, be termed as the miscalculations of a “drawing room strategist”. Ayub Khan, in fact, took, what in military parlance is called, a calculated risk, which is permitted to every military strategist. Those were the days when the Indian Nation was still suffering from the ignominy caused by our debacle against the Chinese, and Nehru had just then passed away to create, what we were made to believe, a void in the political leadership in the country. What to talk of Pakistan many people in India itself had started to doubt the fighting ability of our soldier after the 1962 debacle and few in the country had imagined that our diminutive Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, would prove to be such a man of steel as he ultimately turned out to be during the Indo-Pak war of 1965. With both the Army as well as the political leadership in India giving such an impression of being weak, it should not be surprising that Ayub Khan assumed that India would not react so boldly as to take the initiative out of his hands.

Apparently there were other factors also that helped to strengthen Ayub Khan’s belief that India would not dare to engage Pakistan in a full-fledged war. It is most likely that China had given an assurance to Pakistan of threatening India in a manner that would deter her from opening another front with Pakistan. It is another matter that when the threat actually came, Shastri stood up to it so boldly as to expose its hollowness. Another factor was the acquisition of Patton tanks and Sabre jets by Pakistan, both of which were rated by military experts much higher than its counter parts in India viz. The aged Centurian and the unsophisticated Gnat. This disparity in weapons may well have deterred India from going on the offensive but the Indian soldier who was itching for an opportunity to redeem his honour favoured the option of carrying the war into Pakistan and when permitted to do so converted the disadvantage into an advantage through a stunning display of ingenuity and courage. Who could have foreseen such performance by the Indian Army and the Air Force.

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