

Indian Express July 15, 1989

Retreat from Siachen

Sir,

Lt Col Daljit Singh deserves kudos for his very informative and highly analytical article "Why retreat from Siachen?" (IE July 1). Few in our country are, indeed, aware of the great struggle that our jawans are engaged in at the World's highest battlefield in holding on to positions of strategic importance against Pakistan's utmost efforts to dislodge them. The Indian soldier who is roughing it out on the glacier without the slightest demur deserves, no doubt, the highest praise.

Nothing hurts a soldier more than when he is asked to withdraw from positions to defend which he has made sacrifices and which he is still in a position to hold. Colonel Daljit Singh's anguish at the Army being asked to withdraw from Siachen after successfully thwarting concerted Pakistani efforts at gaining a tactical foothold on the glacier, is, therefore, understandable. A soldier might not, however, feel that frustrated if he were made to understand that our withdrawal from Siachen is part of demilitarisation of the area and not a retreat. I would not agree with the Colonel that in practical terms demilitarisation and retreat amount to the same thing. Whereas retreat cannot prevent the enemy from occupying positions vacated by Our own troops, mutual demilitarisation binds the other side to keep away from the vacated area.

There are, in fact, two ways of securing a strategic area. One, by occupying it and, two, by preventing the enemy from occupying it. While force must be used in the former case, the latter may be achieved through diplomacy. Diplomacy is a recognised method of promoting national interests through peaceful means. A soldier may not, therefore, grudge use of means other than military for settling international disputes. It is for his satisfaction that no amount of diplomacy can succeed unless it is backed by military strength. The Indian soldier may on his part take pride in the fact that through his grit, determination and valour he has forced Pakistan to the negotiating table.

It is unlikely that Pakistan with its present military capability will try to wriggle out of any agreement that it may enter into with India on Siachen. But it may do so if ever the balance of power tilts in its favour. This we must never allow.

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