

Media and the kargil war essay



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The Kargil War also known as the Kargil Conflict, was an armed conflict between India and Pakistan that took place between May and July 1999 in the Kargil district of Kashmir and elsewhere along the Line of Control (LoC).

After the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, there had been a long period with relatively few direct armed conflicts involving the military forces of the two neighbors – notwithstanding the efforts of both nations to control the Siachen Glacier by establishing military outposts on the surrounding mountains ridges and the resulting military skirmishes in the 1980s. During the 1990s, however, escalating tensions and conflict due to separatist activities in Kashmir, some of which were supported by Pakistan, as well as the conducting of nuclear tests by both countries in 1998, led to an increasingly belligerent atmosphere.

In an attempt to defuse the situation, both countries signed the Lahore Declaration in February 1999, promising to provide a peaceful and bilateral solution to the Kashmir conflict. During the winter of 1998 -1999, some elements of the Military of Pakistan were covertly training and sending Pakistani troops and paramilitary forces, some allegedly in the guise of mujahideen, into territory on the Indian side of the LOC.

The infiltration was code named “ Operation Badr”; its aim was to sever the link between Kashmir and Ladakh, and cause Indian forces to withdraw from the Siachen Glacier, thus forcing India to negotiate a settlement of the broader Kashmir dispute.

Pakistan also believed that any tension in the region would internationalise the Kashmir issue, helping it to secure a speedy resolution. Yet another goal

may have been to boost the morale of the decade-long rebellion in Indian Administered Kashmir by taking a proactive role.

Some writers have speculated that the operation's objective may also have been as retaliation for India's " Operation Meghdoot" in 1984 that seized much of Siachen Glacier. According to India's then army Chief Ved Prakash Malik, and many other scholars, much of the background planning, including construction of logistical supply routes, had been undertaken much earlier. On several occasions during the 1980s and 1990s, the army had given Pakistani leaders (Zia ul Haq and Benazir Bhutto) similar proposals for infiltration into the Kargil region, but the plans had been shelved for fear of drawing the nations into all-out war.

Some analysts believe that the blueprint of attack was reactivated soon after Pervez Musharraf was appointed chief of army staff in October 1998. After the war, Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan during the Kargil conflict, claimed that he was unaware of the plans, and that he first learned about the situation when he received an urgent phone call from Atal Bihari Vajpayee, his counterpart in India. Sharif attributed the plan to Musharraf and " just two or three of his cronies" a view shared by some Pakistani writers who have stated that only four generals, including Musharraf, knew of the plan.

Musharraf, however, asserted that Sharif had been briefed on the Kargil operation 15 days ahead of Vajpayee's journey to Lahore on February 20th. The cause of the war was the infiltration of Pakistani soldiers and Kashmiri

militants into positions on the Indian side of the LOC, which serves as the de facto border between the two states.

During the initial stages of the war, Pakistan blamed the fighting entirely on independent Kashmiri insurgents, but documents left behind by casualties and later statements by Pakistan's Prime Minister and Chief of Army Staff showed involvement of Pakistani paramilitary forces, led by General Ashraf Rashid.

The Indian Army, later on supported by the Indian Air Force, recaptured a majority of the positions on the Indian side of the LoC infiltrated by the Pakistani troops and militants. With international diplomatic opposition, the Pakistani forces were forced to withdraw from remaining Indian positions along the LOC. The war is one of the most recent examples of high altitude warfare in mountainous terrain, which posed significant logistical problems for the combating sides.

This was only the second direct ground war between any two countries after they had developed nuclear weapons; it is also the most recent. (India and Pakistan both test-detonated fission devices in May 1998, though the first Indian nuclear test was conducted in 1974.) The conflict led to heightened tension between the two nations and increased defence spending by India. The Kargil War was significant for the impact created by mass media by both nations, especially on the Indian side.

Coming at a time of exploding growth in electronic media such as television channels, etc in India, the Kargil news stories and war footages were often

telecast live on TV with many websites providing in-depth analysis of the war.

The conflict became the first “live” war in South Asia that was given such detailed media coverage, often to the extent of drumming up jingoistic feelings. The conflict soon turned into a news propaganda war with the official press briefings of both nations producing claims and counter claims.

The Indian Government placed a temporary News Embargo on information from Pakistan, even banning the telecast of the state run Pakistani channel PTV and blocked access to online editions of Dawn newspaper. Pakistan media played up this apparent lack of free speech in India, while the latter claimed it was in the interests of national security.

Incidentally, one of the shells fired by Pakistan troops even hit a Doordarshan transmission centre in Kargil, although coverage continued. One could even say that the war was being egged on by the opinions stated on the news channels and other media covering the war.

However, as the war progressed the entire media coverage was pretty much lopsided with countless channels in India showing images from the frontline with their troops in a style reminiscent of CNN’s coverage of the Gulf War. One of the reasons for this was the proliferation of numerous privately owned channels in India Vis a Vis the Pakistani electronic media scenario which was still at a nascent stage, and was not fully developed and widespread. Yet another was the relatively greater transparency in the Indian media.

In fact at a seminar in Karachi, Pakistani journalists agreed that while the Indian government had taken the media and the people into confidence, this was missing on the Pakistan side. The print media, in India and abroad was largely sympathetic to the Indian cause with editorials in newspapers based in the west and other neutral countries observing that Pakistan was largely responsible for the incursions. It is believed by analysts that the power of the Indian media which was both larger in number and assumed to be more credible, might have acted as a force multiplier for the Indian military operation in Kargil, serving as a morale booster. As the fighting intensified, the Pakistani version of the events had found little backing in the world stage, helping India to gain valuable diplomatic recognition for its belligerency in the region. In my personal opinion, the media coverage in the Kargil war played a very large and important role.

It firstly spread awareness of the situation as it happened at the same time, or as close to the same time as possible.

Secondly, it was amongst the first wars in southwest asia to have a live coverage by the media. Today, we think almost nothing of the media persons sent out into live war zones, and putting their lives at great risk. But it is only thanks to the first few wars like the Kargil war (amongst many others) that was covered by the media that the option is even thought of today. It is a widely known fact that the first stage of healing something is the recognition of the problem.

This is precisely what the media hopes to do, especially in a war-type situation.

The media, be it television broadcasts or the printed press like newspapers, magazines, or any other form of mass communication strives to open the eyes of the masses to the state of things. With the exposure to the root of the problem, a solution can be quickly reached. In conclusion I would just like to say that despite the amount of extra chatter, and “useless” gossip that is spread around in the media nowadays, it is one of the most important aspects of a peaceful, civilized existence that we all have the privilege of being part of.

We must remember that the media has proven useful time and time again, in covering every aspect of day to day activities wherever and whenever, and at great costs, sometimes even at the cost of a life. These media persons risking their lives every day by going into the heart of the war and staring death in the face do so for a greater purpose. It is because of these people that we have such a well informed grid at all times.