
Report of the Kargil Review Committee: An Appraisal

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) interviewed Mr **K Subrahmanyam**, Chairman of the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Kargil conflict, with a view to assess the extent to which the KRC's recommendations have been implemented. Team CLAWS comprised Brig **Gurmeet Kanwal** (Retd) and Dr **Monika Chansoria**.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Kargil conflict, what according to you are the major lessons learnt, how well have your recommendations been implemented and what still remains to be done?

The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) report was not an investigation into what happened at Kargil, but a review of the developments and recommendations as to the measures to be undertaken to prevent such an occurrence in the future. The report highlighted that it was a major intelligence failure and several recommendations were made to rectify the lacunae. The epilogue of the report states, "The Committee has, after very wide interaction, sign-posted directions along the path to peace, ensuring the progress, development and stability of the nation."

How exactly the country should proceed to refashion its security, intelligence and development shield to meet the challenges of the 21st century is for the government, Parliament and public opinion to determine. At the same time, there is no turning away from that responsibility. In a sense, the report was a breakthrough when it was published. It was unlike any of the reports commissioned before. Except for a few deletions, most of which I consider unjustified, the report was published as it is and has not been censored, which was a positive development. However, on the flip side, although the report was placed in the Parliament, it was never discussed by the Parliament primarily owing to partisan politics and evidenced lack of adequate interest in national security

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issues. This was very unfortunate. In addition, even though the government of the day took the report seriously enough to appoint a Group of Ministers (GoM) to go through the findings and recommendations of the committee and come up with their own proposals on reforming the framework of national security, however, yet again, the recommendations of the GoM were published but not discussed in the Parliament.

The Kargil Review Committee was considered a pioneer in the sense that it came out with very radical recommendations. KRC said that the decision-making process and procedures and organisation were 52 years old, formulated by Lord Ismay on the higher direction of war. India's Army, Navy and Air Force were all inherited from the British just like the police force and the judiciary. Unfortunately, we have not done anything to think for ourselves in all the above-mentioned spheres and make our own legislation over the last 60 years. Since then, there has been the emergence of nuclear weapons and the revolution in military affairs. There has been no attempt to think about these developments in respect to India's security. The type of armed forces that we should have for the future should be the subject matter of a high-powered independent commission.

As a matter of fact, although the three Services have often been engaged in such an exercise, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has seldom been on board during the discussion stage.

Today, the probability of inter-state war among major powers is progressively dwindling. The threats we face are terrorism, weapons of mass destruction being used by terrorists, civil disturbances, organised crime and narcotics. But we have not analysed and thought through any of these and, more importantly, have not looked at how our armed forces will tackle these challenges in the future. I would like to give credit to the Vajpayee government for having done whatever it did. Nevertheless, at the same time, we have to acknowledge that India's political class is still not in a position to tackle the national security issues with the seriousness they deserve—a fact that has to be acknowledged with a lot of regret 10 years after the Kargil Committee Report came out.

What did you see as the more substantive recommendations which you perhaps felt should be implemented immediately or as early as possible?

Undoubtedly, the most important recommendation was about intelligence. There has been some headway in a sense with the creation of the National Technical

Kargil Balance Sheet: Security as a Full Time Job

Kargil will feature as a defining moment in the history of the subcontinent though as a military conflict it does not compare with the four wars fought by India in 1947-48, 1962, 1965 and 1971 in terms of forces involved or casualties incurred. The IPKF operations in Sri Lanka were of a larger dimension, involved more casualties and spread over a longer period. Thanks to television, the Kargil War brought the images of the bravery of our jawans, their professionalism, the national integration they represented and the majesty of our borders into living rooms all over this country.

Spin-off Benefits

The description of India as “Aa Sethu Himachalam” is no longer an abstract concept. The soldiers, officers and airmen from Kerala and Tamil Nadu were seen by hundreds of millions of people on the screen defending the Himalayan peaks. Never before has the country felt so emotionally united as in these past eight weeks. It is an unfortunate fact of history that elsewhere in Europe and America, people got integrated as nations only through a series of wars. The Pakistanis who base their policy towards India on the assumption that Indian unity will be unsustainable over a period of time, have contributed to the consolidation of this unity significantly through their Kargil aggression even as they have undermined their own.

This limited conflict recalls to one's mind that of 1965. Then too Pakistan initiated Operation Gibraltar and Operation Grand Slam and sent infiltrators into Kashmir. India reacted with a counter-attack in the Lahore-Sialkot sectors. The war ended in a stalemate though India could have won if it had continued it for another week or ten days since Pakistan was running out of ammunition. It resulted in the mediation in Tashkent. There was no winner or vanquished in that war though Pakistan attempted to portray it as a great victory. But the effects on Pakistan's domestic politics were long lasting. It led to East Bengal feeling undefended and consequently to the six-point programme of Mujibur Rahman.

Since India had not set itself any objective beyond throwing the Pakistanis out of its territory, this country did not aim at a spectacular victory. Even in 1971, the fall of Dacca and the capture of 93,000 prisoners were not specifically planned for. Kargil was only a damage-limiting operation and no victory was

aimed at or obtained. But it did produce a number of spin-off benefits which need to be carefully exploited. If India is not careful, these gains could be squandered as happened at Simla, with the very best of intentions.

The Kargil campaign is the first one in which a well-coordinated air-land battle on a restricted scale was fought by Indian forces. This is the first step and needs to be built on further. One hopes this will sow the seeds for integrated planning between the two Services. It was no mean achievement for the army to have concentrated approximately three divisions on the Kargil sector in a short period and launched high altitude operations with several battalions. This experience was so new and unprecedented that many generals, experienced in high altitude warfare, could not anticipate the rapidity with which our forces could outflank and overwhelm the well-entrenched enemy. This operation speaks well of the innovation in tactical operations by our operational commanders, the leadership qualities of our young officers who led from the front and who took casualties disproportionate to the average ratios in terms of officers to jawans in normal infantry battles. Those who predicted that the war would be prolonged into autumn and further were proved wrong.

Global Security Risk

On the diplomatic front, the G-8 nations came out against Pakistan on the Kargil issue for their own reasons—perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism. China did not support Pakistan because of its concerns on Tibet and Xinjiang and the possibility of the ‘Mujahideen’ turning up there. The Indian efforts to project the Pakistani aggression in Kargil as an international terrorist and Islamic fundamentalist issue connected with ethnic cleansing in Kashmir and narcotics traffic have been feeble. No doubt, this time there has been more support for India than in 1949, 1965 and 1971. But that should not lead to a sense of complacency, and euphoria but should result in a concerted effort to project the state of Pakistan and its army, its fundamentalism, terrorism, its narcotics traffic and its crumbling economy as an international security problem.

In Simla, Indira Gandhi and her advisers fell for Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s wiles and felt that he was the best bet for India. Consequently, he was not pushed hard on war crimes trials and converting the Line of Control into an international border. Now there are people who advance the same kind of arguments vis-a-vis Mr Nawaz Sharif. India has to deal with the government

in power in Pakistan and, therefore, with Mr Sharif. Hostilities of the Kargil type which took a toll of 410 Indian lives should be avoided. Beyond that, India has to wage a relentless information war against Pakistan to compel that country to give up its terrorist campaign.

Total Revamp

Pakistan's denial of basic human rights in the northern areas of occupied Kashmir, as brought out by the Pakistan Supreme Court, its oppression of minorities, its sponsorship of fundamentalism and international terrorism, its ethnic cleansing and its involvement in narcotics traffic have to be projected to the international community. It should be explained that Kashmir is only a symptom of fundamentalism and ethnic cleansing underlying the two-nation theory. This time, India did slightly better in the information war, thanks mainly to the efforts of the Indian print and the private sector electronic media. The Government of India is still living in the pre-information war age.

Kargil proves that national security cannot be handled as a part-time vocation. It requires full time attention of a national security adviser and a fully and adequately manned National Security Council secretariat and well-crafted procedures to ensure that there are no lapses in intelligence assessment, policy formulation and purposeful direction in matters relating to the country's security. That calls for a total revamp of our national security set-up, which has to be undertaken after the elections.

[Courtesy: *The Times of India*, 26 July 1999]

Reconnaissance Organisation (NTRO) and Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA). However, there are doubts whether intelligence culture has permeated into the Services. Regarding NTRO, while I was deputy secretary, I wrote a paper stressing the need for setting up such an organisation after the army established its Signal Intelligence Directorate. As I did my own reading on intelligence in the MoD as deputy secretary, it appeared to me that the most important intelligence capability we had to create for ourselves was the signal intelligence capability, an organisation analogous to the US National Security Agency (NSA). I submitted a paper that was discussed between the defence secretary and the army chief but did not go any further.

Similarly, while I was secretary (Defence Production), I suggested the transfer of the Cipher Bureau from the jurisdiction of the joint secretary (General Staff) who knew nothing about ciphers, to the scientific adviser since it was a highly scientific subject. It was a matter of particular satisfaction to me, given that what was started by me in January 1964, was recommended in January 2000 and finally implemented.

Nevertheless, the other organisations initially gave the NTRO a very hard time.

Yes. Those who gave a hard time only did that primarily because they themselves did not know the full scope of their own work. For instance, once I made a recommendation as secretary (Defence Production) that there should be a separate Department of Aerospace. Later on, when I appeared before the Estimates Committee, Madhu Dandavate (MP) was surprised at my suggestion since he had never come across a secretary to the government who actually wanted his department to be bifurcated in order to create another independent department. The primary reason, according to me, was to do justice to the mission on hand. As a matter of fact, the creation of a Department of Defence in the United States had also met with stiff resistance. While taking major decisions on strategic bombers and aircraft carriers, the decision had to be taken by sacking six admirals in a single day—thus, exhibiting strength of character by the political class in the US. Change is always resisted and has to be enforced. Unfortunately, we do not have such people in India at present.

Speaking of the recommendations that are yet to be implemented, why in your view have two successive governments failed to implement them?

As I said, the main recommendation was on intelligence and I would say that some, if not all, significant steps have been taken. There is another recommendation that was not a focussed recommendation though, but was made on manpower policy. The suggestion was that soldiers after seven years of service should be transferred to the paramilitary forces. I understand the Sixth Pay Commission has taken up the issue. This way, training, costs and pensions could be saved while providing lifetime employment. Thirdly was the issue of sensitisation of the National Security Council membership to intelligence and the state of security. There was a recommendation that they should have periodic briefings by the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC).

I am told that this was accepted by the GoM but subsequently people raised reservations saying it was a waste of the time of ministers and in case a crisis

were to occur, the concerned agency would bring it to the notice of the Cabinet. There are two different approaches in this case. The first approach is to sensitise ministers to the state of the security situation regularly so that they are well informed while arriving at a decision. The second approach is their response to the security situation once the crisis occurs. In the case of the 26/11 terror strikes in Mumbai, if the concerned minister had been sensitised to the security situation, deployment of the National Security Guards (NSG), with dedicated airlift capability would have been sanctioned without delay. The approach I suggested that the five ministers of the National Security Council should have regular periodic intelligence briefings was not followed. I hope that there would be attempts to review this after the Mumbai terrorist attacks.

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) met with a fair amount of frequency after the Mumbai crisis.

There needs to be an understanding that it is incumbent on the chairman, JIC to brief the CCS every fortnight for the entire process for intelligence to assume particular importance. This would enable the ministers to be prepared in case of an eventuality. The role of intelligence is preparing oneself to anticipate and be ready to meet a crisis. We are actually neglecting the significance of the process by stating that the information can be provided when a crisis situation occurs.

Home Minister P Chidambaram has been regularly taking stock of the available intelligence since he took over. What more needs to be done? That certainly is an improvement, but is not adequate. The CCS should meet at least every fortnight and should have one session of intelligence briefing at that point. In the US, the president is briefed on a daily basis. They have got a Principals Committee and a Deputy Principals Committee also to review intelligence briefings. In comparison, I feel that the role of intelligence in national security decision-making in India has not yet received the central attention it deserves.

Do you feel the role of the national security adviser (NSA) has crystallised particularly regarding intelligence? The NSA appears to be the person in charge now.

The Kargil Committee Report mentioned that at that time, two jobs were held by one person simultaneously, but now that is no longer the case. The principal secretary to the prime minister is different from the NSA, but since the time of the setting up of the National Security Council, I was critical of the scheme of the National Security

Council that was implemented. This, in fact, was quite different from the organisation of the National Security Council recommended by the KC Pant-Jaswant Singh-Jasjit Singh Committee. I am in agreement with the original recommendation of the KC Pant-Jaswant Singh-Jasjit Singh Committee, but I disagree with the manner in which it was actually implemented. The national security adviser in the US is a monitor, an agenda-setter and an advisor to the president. He is not an executive. The executive is each individual department. The NSA monitors that each department carries out the role determined for it by the NSC.

Unfortunately, in India, the NSA has become an executive. Brajesh Mishra, the former NSA, explained that in Indian conditions, this was needed in order to get things going. Since he has been in the government and knows how the system works, I would not challenge it. However, the NSA should equip himself to carry out the crucial role, namely, a monitor of the decisions of the NSC and a reviewer of implementation following the decisions of the NSC. The staff of the present NSA has been expanded to three deputies. I believe that as the NSA has executive jurisdiction, he becomes increasingly less effective as a monitor of the implementation of national security decisions.

Implementation of the NSC decisions is not being well supervised. As you are aware, the NSC initially met very rarely and it is only lately that the NSC has been meeting regularly. Since the NSC is not really carrying out the functions of long-term national security planning, that function also has devolved on the CCS by default. But, implementation of CCS decisions is in the realm of various ministries as well as of the Cabinet Secretary. Therefore, isn't there a major lacuna in the process?

This is happening because the NSC is not performing its primary role, namely, long-term planning and the CCS is focussing on immediate decisions. Therefore, the long-term decisions in that respect continue to go by default.

Is there, in your view, any legislative avenue, which could compel the prime minister and the NSC to meet every quarter or six months in order to carry out a review of the long-term aspects of national security and report back to Parliament?

The NSC in the US came into being as a result of legislation as did the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In India, the difficulty arises since our Parliament does not even debate the reports that have been tabled in the Parliament. The Parliament today is defaulting on its principal role of governance, given that the

Parliament in its entirety is supposed to govern this country. Both the Opposition and the ruling party together are supposed to govern the country according to the constitutional theory. The failure of governance by the Parliament of India is the core issue. In addition, there is a total lack of responsibility and accountability. If the Parliament does not have discipline, one cannot expect the state police to have discipline. There is a correlation between what happens in our Parliament during disruptions and what happened in Madras High Court when the lawyers indulged in violence and this needs to be understood.

In your view, are conflicts like the Kargil conflict likely to continue or do you see a change in Pakistan's basic strategic outlook, given the current situation and the challenges that it faces?

The most authoritative person whom I can quote on this question is Gen Pervez Musharraf who says they will continue. I certainly cannot question his authority on this subject.

While addressing a question to Gen Pervez Musharraf at the India Conclave held in New Delhi, I (Brig Gurmeet Kanwal) had asked, "Many Indians are of the view that the present rapprochement process is a tactical ploy rather than a strategic change of heart because the Pakistan Army and ISI cannot afford to fight on three fronts: eastern front with India, Kashmir and elsewhere, internal stability and Taliban/Al Qaeda on the western borders. Many Indians feel that the real threat to peace and stability between India and Pakistan are the Pakistan Army and the ISI and not Pakistan as a nation-state. What would you like to say to convince us that there has been a change of heart and the Pakistan Army and ISI are now on board for the peace process?" Apparently, Gen Musharraf had nothing substantial to say, although he wanted Indians to believe that there has been a change of heart and added that he is a man for peace.

I would not question that. A general can initiate a war, get defeated and then claim to be a man for peace. Therefore, the real issue is whether he is a man of peace out of instinct or out of compulsion.

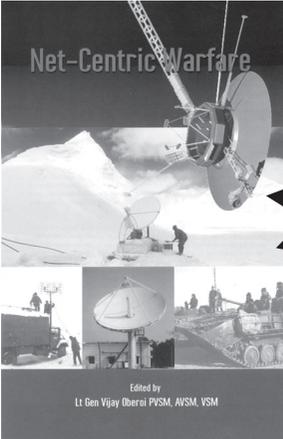
What are the significant political and military lessons of the Kargil conflict, which are still relevant for India in your opinion?

The most significant lesson would be the need for eternal vigilance, given that we have an enemy who is looking for gaps in our preparedness at every given point in order to exploit it.

We do not seem to have learnt that eternal vigilance is the price of peace as we have had a spate of terrorist incidents all across the country.

There is a difference. In the case of a Kargil-like conflict, a manned border was penetrated whilst it was under the control of the army. Brig Surinder Singh (the Kargil brigade commander) said that he anticipated it but at the same time did not send patrols because he was afraid of snow casualties. In a situation like this, a decision has to be arrived upon whether the threat was severe enough to take the risk or not— this is where the question of eternal vigilance comes in.

Eternal vigilance applies also to internal security. The police needs to be taken away from party politics and made autonomous and accountable to law— something that would be difficult to agree upon because in this country the police is used as an instrument of the government of the day. Ultimately, national security is rooted in good and fair governance and we must ensure that.



ISBN 978-81-87966-64-7

Rs. 620.00 US \$ 18.00

Hardback

Available through your regular book supplier or directly through:



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