

1965 Indo-Pak War - A Critical Appraisal

Major General PJS Sandhu (Retd)@

Introduction

The events of 1965 seem to have almost faded from the memory of the Nation; except perhaps the battle honour days which are commemorated by various units of the Indian Army. There is no national war memorial to pay homage to the martyrs of not only the 1965 war but all the wars fought by the Indian soldier (sailors and airmen included) since Independence; nor for that matter to those who sacrificed their lives during the Second World War. This paper seeks to revisit 1965 Indo-Pak War and present a critical appraisal with a view to deriving any lessons that may still be relevant for the future. It is also a tribute to the martyrs of 1965 War.

Genesis of the 1965 Indo-Pak War

The genesis of the 1965 War lay in the events of 1947-48 when Pakistan tried to annex the State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) by force in the garb of tribal raiders and lashkars. It needs to be said to the credit of Pakistan that inspite of the birth pangs of a new nation state and the trauma of partition they were able to conceive and execute a cross border invasion of J&K to try and achieve their strategic aim. That they could not achieve their aim in entirety is due to the brilliant response by the Indian military which was able to thwart their carefully laid out plans in the nick of time. Another fortunate event for Pakistan was that India decided to go to the United Nations (UN) even while its forces were well poised to evict Pakistani forces from the whole of J&K. In the Northern Areas of the State, the treachery of two British officers, Major WA Brown and Captain Matheson of the Gilgit Scouts whose services had been retained by the State, was greatly responsible for the control of Gilgit to pass into the hands of Pakistan by 03 Nov 1947.¹

The net result was that when the UN sponsored ceasefire came into effect on 01 Jan 1949, Pakistan was in de-facto control of approximately one third of the entire territory of J&K, a situation that continues to prevail till date.

Developments from 1949-1965

India and Pakistan, the two nation states that emerged from the partition of the Sub-continent moved along entirely different trajectories. India believed that the post-World War II world was a benign one and the fatigue of the Great War would ensure a generally peaceful future. India also laid great trust in the efficacy of the UN for resolution of disputes amongst nations. Hence, India began its journey by concentrating on development and building of state institutions for a democratic and secular polity. In its foreign policy orientation, it chose non-alignment as state policy as the Cold War between the two power blocks was just setting in.

Pakistan on the other hand had a different world view. It joined South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in Sep 1954 and Baghdad Pact in early 1955 which later in 1959 was transformed into the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). Although the USA was still not a member of the organisation, it did sign bilateral military aid treaties with Pakistan, Iran and Turkey; thus ensuring that it would continue to be active in supporting the CENTO members.²

Soon after joining the above pacts, Pakistan started receiving military aid from the USA and by early 1965 four infantry and one and a half armoured divisions had been modernised with the American equipment.³ This emboldened Pakistan to test its strength against India once again and to try and wrest the rest of the State of J&K.

Consequent to the military debacle of 1962, India concentrated all its energies to build a strong military posture against China. What an irony - prior to 1962, all the military preparedness was against Pakistan; post 1962, now that all the attention was focussed against China, the Pakistan threat suddenly began to loom large in Kashmir and on the western border.

Operations in the Rann of Kutch

In Feb 1965 Pakistan had seized the area of Kanjarkot (Rann of Kutch) by a company of Indus Rangers. Surprised and reacting to the above situation, India assigned the responsibility for removing the above encroachment to 31 Infantry Brigade Group under the command of Maharashtra and Gujarat Area. Pakistan retaliated by moving in their 8 Infantry Division under Major General Tikka Khan and also inducted armour (24 Cavalry) into the area. There were series of land battles between the two forces during Mar-Apr 1965 with Pakistan capturing Biar Bet on 27 Apr 1965.

However, due to the intervention of Mr Harold Wilson, Prime Minister of the UK, a ceasefire came into effect on 01 Jul 1965 and both sides agreed to restore status quo as on 01 Jan 1965. Thus, the Kutch affair ended visibly on a peaceful note but in reality it was only a prelude to another effort by Pakistan to annex J&K, which was to unfold later. The dispute was subsequently referred to an International Tribunal which announced its award on 19 Feb 1968. The award was accepted by both sides.⁴

Operation Ablaze (India)

Operation Ablaze is an important interlude between the operations in the Rann of Kutch and Operation Gibraltar by Pakistan, leading to a full scale war. This Operation included the measures taken by the Indian Army along the western border in May-Jun 1965, following Pakistani attack in the Rann of Kutch. All the formations in Punjab, mainly under 11 Corps, were ordered to move and deploy in their battle locations. It appeared that India was ready for offensive operations across the International Border in Punjab, if the situation in the Rann of Kutch escalated further.⁵ Following the ceasefire in the Rann of Kutch and an agreement that the Kutch dispute was to be referred for arbitration, Operation Ablaze was called off and troops were ordered to return to their peace locations.

Operation Gibraltar (Pakistan)

Even before the ceasefire took effect in the Rann of Kutch, Pakistan had been planning much bigger things in J&K commencing in May 1965. The plan was to infiltrate a large force comprising some 30,000 men to incite a general uprising in the Valley which could in turn be used to justify Pakistani military intervention. While addressing the Force Commanders on 01 Aug 1965, Field Marshal Ayub Khan impressed upon them the importance of the mission and emphasised that it was their (Pakistan's) last chance to liberate Kashmir.

Pakistan commenced infiltration of the Gibraltar Force in small groups across the cease fire line (CFL) in J&K between 01 and 05 Aug 1965. The areas covered were – right from Kargil in the North to Chhamb in the South. Once inside the Valley, they were to mingle unnoticed among the crowds celebrating the festival of Pir Dastgir Sahib on 08 Aug 1965 and were to engineer an armed uprising, and in the process capture the radio station, Srinagar airfield and some vital installations. Following this, a 'Revolutionary Council' was to proclaim itself as the lawful government and broadcast an appeal for recognition and assistance from all countries, especially Pakistan. This was to be the signal for the Pakistan Army to move in for the kill.⁶

However, Operation Gibraltar came to naught, mainly for two reasons. First, the internal conditions in the Valley were not ripe for an insurrection of the kind that Pakistan had hoped to incite. Secondly, a quick and firm response by India took Pakistan by surprise and thwarted their well laid out plans. India reacted almost immediately by recapturing Kargil heights which had been returned in Jul 1965, a limited offensive in the Tithwal Sector and most importantly, the capture of Haji Pir Pass in a daring operation by 1 PARA of 68 Infantry Brigade under the command of Brigadier (later Lieutenant General) ZC Bakshi by 28 Aug 1965. Thus, by the end of Aug 1965, Pakistan's plans for quick annexation of the Valley had been squarely defeated.

The War : Chhamb - Jaurian Sector

In desperation, Pakistan faced with the failure of Operation Gibraltar, played its final hand by launching Operation 'Grand Slam' on 01 Sep 1965. It was launched across the southernmost portion of the CFL and was aimed at Akhnoor; thus isolating Indian positions in Naushera, Rajauri and Punch. Thereafter, an armoured thrust could be developed towards Jammu, the capture of which would have severed all land communications to J&K. This would place Pakistan in a position to dictate terms to India. The offensive had achieved surprise and made good progress initially but had lost its momentum by 03 Sep 1965. The Indian Air Force played a major role in blunting the Pak offensive. The situation in this sector was stabilised by about 10 Sep and Pakistan remained in control of the areas upto and including Jaurian. Pakistan's grand aim to capture Akhnoor had been thwarted.

Indian Counter Offensives

Indian reaction to Pakistan's Grand Slam came by way of counter offensives across the international border in J&K, Punjab and Rajasthan, commencing on 06 Sep 1965. The 'go-ahead' for an all-out military response had been given by the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on 03 Sep. The Indian grand strategy was to threaten Lahore and Sialkot, thus relieving pressure in Chhamb-Jaurian Sector and while doing so, degrade Pakistani armed potential and capture some territory which could be used for bargaining in the post-war negotiations.

Indian 11 Corps Offensive - Operation Riddle

The main aim of the offensive was to secure the line of Ichhogil Canal and a few bridgeheads, thus posing a threat to Lahore; and in turn remove any threat to the sensitive areas of Punjab; like Amritsar, Beas etc. The formations were required to go on the offensive straight from their peacetime locations without first moving to concentration areas. It was a kind of 'Cold Start'. The offensives commenced at 0500 hours on 06 Sep 1965 as under :-

- (a) 15 Infantry Division along Amritsar - Lahore Axis.
- (b) 7 Infantry Division along Khalra - Barki Axis.
- (c) 4 Mountain Division on Khemkaran - Kasur Axis. However, a major portion of 4 Mountain Division was also required to occupy defences in area Khemkaran to counter an offensive by Pak armoured division which was expected in this area.

The Indian offensives achieved complete surprise and made good progress initially. Along the GT Road Axis, one of the battalions of 15 Infantry Division crossed the Ichhogil Canal at Dograi and reached Batapore on the outskirts of Lahore. However, initial success was not exploited and by about the end of Day One, the Indian offensives had lost their momentum and there were a number of setbacks. Though Ichhogil canal was reached at a few points, no crossings could be secured and held. There was also lack of coordination between armour and infantry. It appears that air support had also not been planned for the offensives.

The situation became particularly grave in the 4 Mountain Division Sector where enemy launched its counter offensive by 1 Armoured Division on 08 Sep towards Jandiala Guru, Beas Bridge and Harike. 4 Mountain Division had to occupy a hastily prepared Division Defended Sector in Area Asal Uttar in the face of this powerful offensive. The Defended sector had approximately three and a half battalions of Infantry (18 raj rif, 1/9 gr less two companies, 4 GRENADIERS and 9 JAK RIF) along with units of 2 Independent Armoured Brigade (3 Cavalry, 8 CAVALRY less a squadron and 9 HORSE) and artillery guns deployed in Area Chittikhui-Valtoha.⁷ A few minefields were also laid and some areas were flooded. Fierce battles raged on 08-09 Sep in which Indian forces repelled repeated attacks by Pak armour and infantry. More importantly, personal intervention by the Army Commander, Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, VrC, ensured that there were no withdrawals; Indian troops held firm and the situation was stabilised by 10 Sep with heavy losses to Pak armour. Indian estimate of Pak tank casualties in the battle of Asal Uttar is 97, including 72 Pattons.⁸ Hereafter, there were no major battles fought in this Sector. By the time of ceasefire, Indian forces were on the home-bank (eastern) of Ichhogil Canal, while Pakistan remained in control of a small enclave in the Khemkaran

Sector. After the launch of Indian 1 Corps in the Sialkot Sector, Pak was forced to pull out and divert an armoured brigade from this sector to Sialkot Sector to stabilise the situation there.

Indian 1 Corps Offensive in Sialkot Sector (Operation Nepal)

As part of the overall strategy, India decided to launch its main counter offensive by the newly raised 1 Corps in the Sialkot Sector in order to relieve pressure in the Chhamb Sector as also to degrade Pakistan's fighting potential. The offensive was launched on the Night of 07 / 08 Sep 1965 on a frontage from Suchetgarh in the West to Degh Nadi in the East. The Corps was commanded by Lieutenant General PO Dunn and had the following major formations :-

- (a) 1 Armoured Division
- (b) 6 Mountain Division
- (c) 14 Infantry Division
- (d) 26 Infantry Division

A few words about the state of operational readiness of the Corps. The Corps HQ had been raised in May 1965 and was still facing teething troubles which are common with new raisings. 6 Mountain Division had only two mountain brigades (69 and 99). The Division had been deployed on the Himalayan border and was neither equipped, nor trained for warfare in the plains. 14 Infantry Division was still in the process of being raised and comprised only two infantry brigades (35 and 58) which had been deployed on the UP-Tibet border till Aug 1965. Its third brigade (116) joined the Division at Babina in Aug 1965. 26 Infantry Division, which was in area Jammu also had only two infantry brigades (162 and 168). The Corps had never trained as a cohesive formation for its operational role and most of its units met each other for the first time in the concentration area.⁹

Indian 1 Corps Mission. The Corps was tasked to secure areas Bhagowal - Phillaurah - Chawinda - Cross Roads (Badiana) with a view to advancing towards the Marala Ravi Link (MRL) Canal and eventually to the line of Dhalliwali - Wuhilam - Daska - Mandhali.¹⁰

The Corps was opposed by Pakistan 1 Corps comprising 6 Armoured Division and 15 Infantry Division. Initially, the area into which Indian 1 Corps was launched was the area of responsibility of Pak 15 Infantry Division with its HQ in Sialkot. However, as the operations progressed, the responsibility to counter the Indian offensive was given to Pak 6 Armoured Division with 24 Infantry Brigade of 15 Infantry Division which had been deployed in this area placed under its command. So, it was a contest between the Indian 1 Corps which was on the offensive and the Pak 6 Armoured Division with attached troops who were defending. The battles were fought in general area Bhagowal - Badiana - Pasrur - Zafarwal. Before proceeding further, it would be relevant to look at the state of Pak 6 Armoured Division.

Pak 6 Armoured Division was raised from 100 Independent Armoured Brigade Group in Apr 1964. It comprised three armoured regiments and two armoured infantry battalions. There are two points that need to be noted. First, each tank regiment consisted of two squadrons of M-48 Patton tanks and a squadron of M36B2 Tank Destroyers of World War II vintage. Secondly, there was no combat command HQ under HQ 6 Armoured Division. Hence, the Division HQ had to control all the units directly on any combat mission. The concept of combat commands had been imbibed by Pak Army from the US Army. The Division was commanded by Major General Abrar Husain who was from the first batch of emergency commissioned officers passing out from the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun in Jul 1940.¹¹

As mentioned earlier, after the failure of Operation Gibraltar in J&K, Pak launched an offensive in the Chhamb Sector on 01 Sep 1965. For this offensive, the GHQ took away from 6 Armoured Division, the HQ and units of 4 Corps Artillery, 25 Infantry Brigade and two out of three integral tank regiments i.e. 13 Lancers, 11 Cavalry with one company of 9 Frontier Force. As a replacement they received 22 Cavalry (all three squadrons equipped with M-48 Patton tanks) just before the war started. After some to and fro moves from 05 - 07 Sep, the Division HQ was finally deployed in Area Bhallowali (about 10 km South of Sialkot) by first light 08 Sep 1965. By now, 11 Cavalry had rejoined the Division from Chhamb Sector and the Division had its three tank regiments (Guides Cavalry (FF), 11 Cavalry and 22 Cavalry) and two armoured infantry battalions (9 and 14 FF) on its order of battle (ORBAT).

Initially, the responsibility for defence of the complete area from the Chenab to the Ravi River, a distance of about 220 km along the border was that of Pak 15 Infantry Division. However, after the main direction of the Indian 1 Corps offensive became clear the task for defence of this area excluding Sialkot was assigned to Pak 6 Armoured Division with effect from 0001 hours on 10 Sep 1965.¹²

Please see Sketch 1 for Indian 1 Corps plan of operations. The stage was now set for a trial of strength between Indian 1 Corps and Pak 6 Armoured Division. The next ten days or so were to see a series of tank battles in general area Badiana- Phillaurah-Chawinda-Zafarwal on a scale not seen since the Second World War. It is not within the scope of this paper to follow the detailed course of these battles. A few important aspects are mentioned in the succeeding paras.

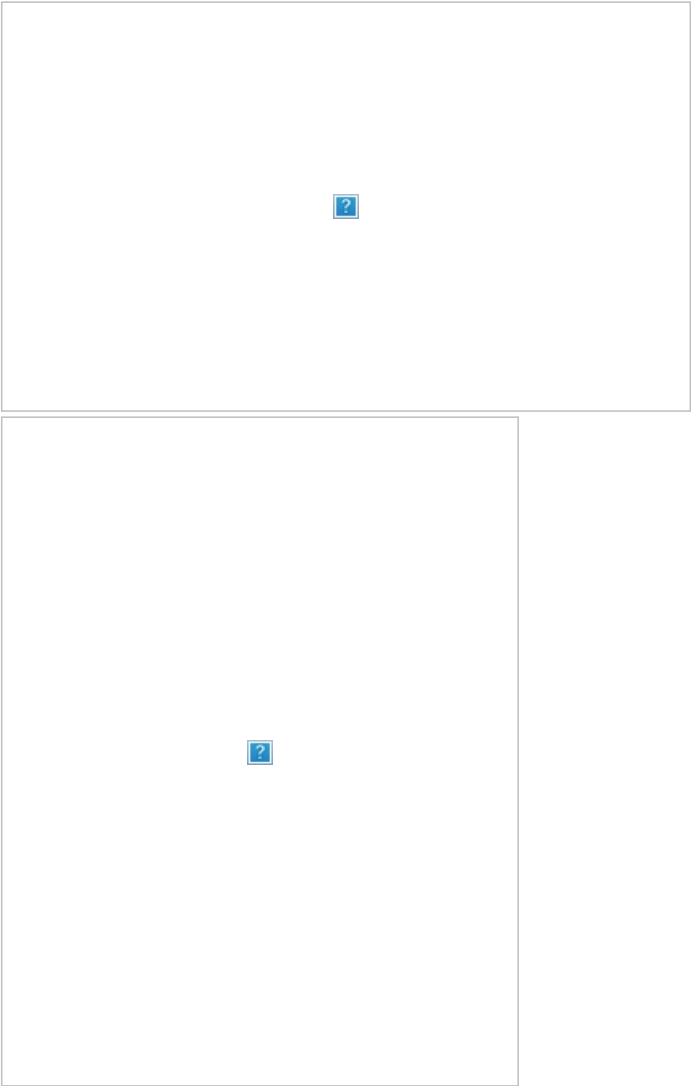
Indian 1 Corps offensive had achieved complete surprise but after initial success, operations came to a near standstill and there was no major operational activity on 09 and 10 Sep. This gave adequate time to Pak 6 Armoured Division to organise their defences. They adopted the concept of mobile defence. This aspect needs some elaboration.

Major General Sahabzada Mohammad Yakub Khan, who had earlier commanded 1 Armoured Division was now attached to HQ 1 Corps as the Deputy Corps Commander. He developed a concept of operations for 6 Armoured Division which was presented to the GOC at a conference held at HQ Pak 1 Corps at 1100 hours on 10 Sep 1965. Please see Sketch 2.13 The above plan gave strong pivots at Pasrur and Zafarwal that enabled armour to operate against the

flanks of the Indian offensive.

The Indian 1 Armoured Division commenced its attack on Phillaurah at first light on 10 Sep from an unexpected direction. It was a well coordinated attack between armour, lorried infantry and artillery. The high points of the battle were the manoeuvres by 4 HORSE and 17 HORSE who were operating on both flanks of Phillaurah. They manoeuvred beautifully in a text book manner, thus drawing away the enemy armour (11 Cavalry) deployed at Phillaurah. In the tank versus tank battles that ensued that morning, as per Indian estimates, Pakistan lost 28 tanks in this battle. Pakistan accounts accept a loss of 22 tanks on this day, i.e. 16 tanks of 11 Cavalry and six of Guides Cavalry. As a result of this battle, Pak 6 Armoured Division had to temporarily break up 11 Cavalry and its remaining M-48s were formed into a squadron and transferred to the Guides Cavalry. Two units of the enemy (11 Cavalry and 9 Frontier Force) were now out of action with their remnants located at Pasrur and awaiting reinforcements and new equipment.14 6 Armoured Division was now left with the Guides Cavalry, 22 Cavalry and 25 Cavalry, the latter being part of 24 Infantry Brigade Group.

After the capture of Phillaurah there was a lull in the battle on 12 and 13 Sep, till Indian 1 Corps renewed its offensive for capture of Chawinda on 14 Sep. Two attempts were made (the first one by 1 Armoured Division and the second one by 6 Mountain Division) but both were a failure. There was lack of coordination between armour and infantry, and air support had not been planned. By now, Pak had also moved an armoured brigade from Khemkaran into this Sector and forces, especially armour, were almost evenly matched. The formations came out of these battles badly battered and there followed a stalemate which lasted for the rest of the war.15



Operations in Barmer Sector (Desert Sector)

In order to contain the Pak offensive in Chhamb Sector as also to pre-empt any Pakistani offensive in the desert Sector, India launched a limited offensive by 30 Infantry Brigade of 11 Infantry Division on Axis Barmer-Hyderabad (Sind). By the time of the ceasefire, India had captured 390 sq km of Pak territory in this sector, while Pakistan held on to the Indian border Post at Munabao.16

War in the Air

On the eve of the war, Pakistan Air Force consisted of about 17 squadrons having a total of 260 aircraft of all types approximately. As against this, the Indian Air Force had an overall strength of 26 squadrons with a total holding of about 460 combat aircraft of all types. A few of these squadrons had also to be deployed in the East. The Indian edge in numbers was more than offset by Pakistan’s qualitative superiority. Thus, the two air forces in the West were almost evenly matched.18

As the war opened with a strong ground offensive by Pakistan in the Chhamb Sector on 01 Sep 1965, Indian Air Force swung into action in support of the Army almost immediately and continued to do so day after day, and thus played a major role in blunting the Pak offensive. As a reaction to Pakistani offensive in the Chhamb Sector, India launched its counter-offensive by 11 Corps in Lahore Sector on 06 Sep 1965. In accordance with their war plans, Pakistan Air Force responded by a pre-emptive strike on Indian air bases at Pathankot, Adampur, Halwara and Amritsar commencing at 1740 hours (time on target).¹⁹

From 07 Sep onwards the air war intensified and both the air forces were carrying out air operations in support of ground forces, counter air, air interdiction and air defence. Indian Air Force carried out a number of attacks against Pak air bases, railway yards, logistics installations, radar sites and even a train carrying tanks. A number of search and destroy, and tactical reconnaissance missions were also flown by the Indian Air Force. However, neither side could establish a favourable air situation over the battle area. There were some air operations conducted by both sides in the Eastern Sector but these were not of much consequence and did not affect the outcome of the war.

In the overall analysis, neither side could claim air superiority but by the end of the war India's greater numbers were beginning to tell and Pakistan Air Force was shying away from aerial combat. On the Indian side, apart from lack of joint planning, there was also no worthwhile air intelligence forthcoming.²⁰ However, it can be said beyond doubt that the Indian air crew performed admirably throughout the war and, whenever and wherever a call for help came from the Army to meet a crisis, Indian Air Force responded magnificently.

War at Sea

There were no naval battles fought during 1965. Indian Navy was no doubt larger and stronger but then it had a huge coastline and many island territories to defend. India had only one fleet and at the time of the commencement of hostilities, the fleet was operating off the East Coast in the Bay of Bengal. The fleet was able to reach Bombay only by about 08/09 Sep 1965.

During Night 07/08 Sep, some Pakistani naval ships, disguised as merchant ships, carried out bombing of the minor port of Dwarka but with little damage as most of the shells landed on the beach.²¹

In spite of being the stronger force, Indian Navy was not assigned an offensive role, though Admiral Soman, Chief of the Naval Staff tried his best for the Navy to join the war. The political leadership, perhaps wanted to keep the war limited to land and air, and did not relent. They may have also been influenced by the need to ensure the security of the island territories from other powers in the region who had their sympathies with Pakistan.

Casualties and Territory Captured

The total number of casualties suffered by the Indian Armed Forces during the Indo-Pak War of 1965 and in the subsequent cease-fire violations amounted to 2,862 killed and 8,617 wounded. According to the Defence Minister of Pakistan, 1,033 Pakistanis were killed during the War. The Indian official sources, however, state that about 5,800 Pakistanis were killed.¹⁷

Please see Sketch 3 for territory captured by either side. India had captured approximately 1,920 sq km, Pakistan on the other hand occupied 540 sq km of Indian territory.

Ceasefire and Tashkent Accord

It was not a comfortable situation for the USA and the UK that Pakistan, an ally of the US and a member of both SEATO and CENTO, decided to join hands with China against India. In the Communist bloc, differences between China and the Soviet Union were also emerging. It did not welcome the growth of China's influence in South Asia, particularly at the cost of non-aligned India, where it had significant economic and political stakes. Hence, persistent efforts were being made by Moscow, Washington, London and UNSC for immediate cessation of hostilities.

On 04 Sep 1965, the Security Council adopted a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Kashmir. When neither India nor Pakistan responded to this, the Security Council requested UN Secretary General to visit both the countries in an effort to bring about ceasefire. U Thant visited Pakistan on 09 Sep 1965 and left for Delhi on 12 Sep without any positive outcome.

Meanwhile, China, showing her solidarity with Pakistan, issued a warning Note on 08 Sep 1965 to India that blamed Indian Government of expansionist action against her and said that India must dismantle all aggressive military structures it had illegally built on China-Sikkim boundary or else bear the responsibility for all consequences. China issued another ultimatum to India on 16 Sep and reiterated the support to Pakistan on Kashmir.

On 19 Sep, China issued another Note to India, reiterating its allegations and putting off the time limit set in its Note of 16 Sep to 'before midnight of 22 Sep 1965'. The Super Powers and other members of the Security Council were keenly watching China. They wanted India and Pakistan to accept a ceasefire proposal before China's second ultimatum expired on 22 Sep. On 20 Sep, the Security Council adopted a resolution calling upon India

and Pakistan to ceasefire on Wed 22 Sep 1965 at 0700 h GMT (1230 h IST). The ceasefire was accepted by both the countries and it became effective with effect from 0330 hours (IST) on 23 Sep 1965.

Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin, through his earlier letter of 17 Sep had invited the PM of India and President of Pakistan to hold peace talks in Tashkent to which both sides eventually agreed. Before going to Tashkent, India made it clear that Kashmir could not be made an issue for discussion while Pakistan said that it would not sign a 'no war pact' unless Kashmir problem was resolved. However, the Soviet PM persuaded them to agree to a Joint Declaration. The Agreement was signed at 1630 hours on 10 Jan. Prime Minister Shastri died of a heart attack at about 0130 hours on 11 Jan 1966.²²



The Tashkent Agreement satisfied the leaders of both the countries to some extent. India's take away from Tashkent was that the conference did not make any reference to Kashmir, and Pakistan was happy that it got back from India the territories that it had lost to India during the war, especially the Haji Pir Pass.

An Overview of the War

Looking back, one can say that 1965 War was a continuation of the 1947-48 War launched by Pakistan for annexation of J&K. It is well known now that it (Oct 1947) was a near run thing and the part of J&K that remained with India was the result of many hard fought battles. However, Pakistan on its part had not given up its dream of annexing the complete State of J&K by any means and was constantly planning for the same.

The next opportunity that came Pakistan's way was the Sino-Indian War of 1962 which was an unmitigated disaster for India. However, Pakistan was restrained from taking advantage of the situation by western powers. In the middle of the crisis, India appealed for western help, especially from the USA and the UK. They (USA and UK) readily agreed to help, provided India and Pakistan could resolve the Kashmir dispute. Six rounds of talks were held between Dec 1962 and May 1963 but these failed to produce any results. It was a win-win situation for Pakistan. From then on, India faced a two front scenario. It also emboldened Pakistan to plan its next move for annexation of J&K which unfolded in the form of Operation Gibraltar commencing on 05 Aug 1965.

There was a change in political leadership in India following the passing away of Pandit Nehru on 27 May 1964. In Pakistan's perception, India had a weak political leadership and Indian Army would be still recovering from the 1962 debacle. On the other hand, Pak had a new friend in China which was India's enemy and its (Pakistan's) Armed Forces had developed a degree of renewed confidence - with newly inducted American arms and equipment, further reinforced by the outcome of the recent confrontation in the Rann of Kutch. Thus, Pakistan considered this to be the appropriate time to decide the issue of J&K by force of arms. This then was the Pak calculation and thinking which set the stage for the 22 days war that followed.

In the Rann of Kutch episode, Pakistan's Army had crossed the international border. The Indian reaction need not have remained confined to Rann of Kutch alone. Military prudence lies in avoiding headlong collision and adopting a strategy of 'indirect approach'. Even a limited reaction in the neighbouring desert sector would have produced the desired results and sent a strong signal to Pakistan - not to take India for granted. Secondly, not using own Air Force in offensive role when the adversary has crossed the International Border does not make strategic sense, especially after a similar experience in 1962 against the Chinese.

Soon after the ceasefire in the Rann of Kutch, based on the assurances by the UN Secretary General of Pakistan's good behaviour, India called off Operation Ablaze, returned the territories captured in J&K and moved its army formations to their peace locations. On the other hand Pakistan was giving finishing touches to launching of Operation Gibraltar. Two aspects stand out. At politico-diplomatic level, India was gullible and not enough intelligence about Pakistan's intentions and capabilities was obtained. For such a state of affairs to have existed so soon after the Sino-Indian War of 1962 is, to say the least, inexplicable and unpardonable!

War erupted in all its fury on 01 Sep 1965. It is ironic that prior to 1962 War, most of the Indian Army was deployed on the Western border with Pakistan. So troops from the plains of Punjab and the deserts of Rajasthan had to be moved straight to high Himalayas to face the Chinese. Now the reverse happened. Mountain divisions from the northern borders with China had to be moved post haste to the plains of Punjab and J&K to face Pak armour; e.g., 4, 6 and 23 Mountain Divisions. Obviously, there was no comprehensive defence plan taking into account a threat from China and Pakistan, both proven adversaries at that time.

Coming to the Western Sector, once Pakistan had played its hand in Chhamb-Jaurian Sector Indian reaction was swift and decisive. Army was given a free hand to launch its offensives across the International Border as they deemed necessary. However, close air support of ground operations had not been planned and coordinated; hence, the same was not forthcoming to the desired extent. This was not due to any inhibition on the part of Indian Air Force but

due to lack of joint planning and coordination. However, when the crisis had developed on 01 Sep in Chhamb Sector, Indian Air Force responded magnificently and was not found wanting, inspite of no prior warning. Basically, our institutions and systems for joint planning were neither in place, nor functioning. No lessons had been learnt from 1962!

The main Indian counter offensives had been launched in Punjab (Lahore Sector) and in J&K (Sialkot Sector). Indian formations in Punjab having to move from their peace locations, straight into attack, without going into concentration areas where 'marrying up' could take place, were at a great disadvantage. As a result, armour and infantry coordination was poor and initial success on the Ichhogil Canal could not be exploited. The 4 Mountain Division offensive ran headlong into a Pak offensive by 1 Armoured Division. As a result, a serious crisis developed on 4 Mountain Division front in the Khemkaran Sector on 08 Sep. Had it not been for the tenacity and cool courage displayed by Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, VrC, Western Army Commander to stay put and fight, the results could have been disastrous.

Let us turn for a while to the main Indian punch delivered by 1 Corps in the Sialkot Sector. Though complete strategic surprise was achieved, the Corps was not able to make much progress after initial successes. Pak defences in the area of operations were quite thin. However, there was complete inactivity by Indian 1 Corps on 09 and 10 Sep for almost 48 hours which gave Pak time to rehash their defensive plans and by 10 Sep, Pak 6 Armoured Division had set itself up for a mobile defence.

In hindsight, one can say that the Indian 1 Corps instead of getting involved in clearing strong points like Phillaurah / Chawinda could have isolated these and projected the Armoured Division in the Area of Badiana - Chawinda - Pasrur, as also contacting the MRL Canal (in accordance with the mission assigned) in an early time frame would have denied freedom of movement to Pak forces. The infantry divisions with their integral armoured regiments could have cleared the axis of maintenance. In the event, as the time passed, Pak was able to build-up its strength by pulling in forces from Chhamb Sector and moving an additional armoured brigade from its 1 Armoured Division in the Khemkaran Sector. Thus by about 12 Sep, there was near parity of forces, especially armour. The initial advantage of the attacker and momentum of attack had been lost. There was no cohesive plan for a Corps battle. Each division was fighting its own battle. Instead of a battle of manoeuvre which should have found the Corps leaning on the MRL Canal, the Corps got involved in a battle of attrition for the capture of Chawinda in which it did not succeed till the very end.

At operational level, the Pakistani attempts to breakthrough Indian defences at Asal Uttar on 08-09 Sep and Indian attacks for the capture of Chawinda on 14 Sep and then again on 18-19 Sep were a mirror image of each other. Both were failures, though for different reasons. In the case of Pakistan, they tried to breakthrough Indian positions at Asal Uttar using their 1 Armoured Division and suffered very heavy tank casualties. In the Indian case, 1 Corps tried to capture Chawinda, a strongly held position using an armoured division and a mountain division but separately without proper coordination, resulting in heavy attrition to the attacking troops. Both sides (in both cases) knew that they were defending the most politically sensitive territory and that the ramifications of a breakthrough by the enemy were serious, and there were no further reserves available to restore an adverse situation. At the end of it, both sides had suffered so much attrition that they were unable to mount any fresh major offensive operations.

In the aftermath of 1962 War, India undertook a large scale expansion of its armed forces but the emphasis now was on the Chinese border. The capabilities required for the western front, Navy and the Air Force were still neglected. The result was that when 1965 War came, our mountain divisions were fighting in the plains and our tank fleet, except four regiments of Centurions and two regiments of AMX-13 light tanks consisted of obsolete Shermans which were no match for Pattons M-47/48s. The Air Force which could have played a major role in the plains and deserts, though superior in numbers, was at a disadvantage qualitatively. Indian Navy, inspite of remonstrations by the Chief of Naval Staff was not given any offensive task, like the Air Force in 1962. In retrospect, one can say that in war, a nation ought to bring to bear all its military strength in a synergised manner, more so, in a short duration war.

By 1965, not much had changed in terms of higher direction of war, joint planning and a synergised prosecution of war in the politico-military-diplomatic domain. There was complete lack of strategic thinking to prepare the Country and its Armed Forces to pre-empt or face security threats. The politico - bureaucratic mindset of not involving the military in strategic decision making had not changed. Strategic and operational intelligence were still uncoordinated. There was generally a policy of drift towards the security of the CFL and the international border in J&K. Hence, security threats were not seen in advance and the armed forces had to react only after a threat had manifested itself. The Rann of Kutch episode and operation Gibraltar are prime examples.

If a country goes to war, it is important that politico-military objectives are well defined and once defined these must be pursued vigorously. In 1965, neither of the above happened. We simply reacted to the situations created by Pakistan. Having gone to war, we accepted a ceasefire without achieving any worthwhile politico-military objectives. If Rann of Kutch had been taken as a warning, a number of measures to upgrade our military capability could have been taken in the ensuing months. We could have raised a few more infantry divisions for the Western Front.

Lastly and most importantly, should India have accepted the ceasefire when it did? It has been argued that Indian stocks of all types of ammunition had run extremely low; hence there was no alternative but to accept the ceasefire. Post conflict enquiries have revealed that in overall terms only about 14-20 per cent of the Indian Army's ammunition stocks had been used up; large dumps of unused ammunition were lying in sectors where fighting had not been intensive. On the other hand, in Pakistan nearly 80 per cent of ammunition stocks had actually been expended.²³ Obviously, it was in Indian interest to continue the war a bit longer. The military leadership (Chiefs of Staff) ought to have strongly and unambiguously advised the political leadership on this vital question. In strategic terms, Pakistan had ventured one more time to wrest J&K by force of arms; it was a good opportunity for India to have changed the status quo in J&K in its favour, provided India had prepared and persevered. In the event, India had neither prepared militarily nor, was it able to create international environment diplomatically to be able to prolong the war much longer.

However, it can be said without hesitation that the Indian soldier (sailors and airmen included) had once

again given off his best in service of the Nation. He was brave, resolute and steadfast in battle, and units sought to achieve their missions relentlessly against heavy odds. The Nation too rallied and stood behind its soldiers in a magnificent manner. In the final analysis, the outcome of the war is a tribute to the Indian soldier.

Endnotes

1. History of Operations in Jammu and Kashmir (1947-48), SN Prasad, D Phil and Dharm Pal, PhD, History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, pp 280-282.
2. The US Department of State Archive, Information released online from January 20, 2001 to January 20, 2009, accessed on 27 Jul 2015.
3. The India-Pakistan War of 1965, SN Prasad and UP Thapliyal, Natraj Publishers, 2011, p.5.
4. Ibid, pp. 27-38.
5. Ibid, p. 88
6. Ibid, pp. 51 – 56.
7. Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh, VrC (Retd), War Despatches : Indo-Pak Conflict 1965, Lancer International, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 102-107.
8. Ibid, p. 167.
9. Ibid, p. 189.
10. Ibid.
11. Men of Steel, War Despatches of major General Abrar Husain, HJ, MBE (Mily) Army Education Publishing House, Army Education Directorate, GHQ Rawalpindi, 2005, pp 1-7.
12. Ibid, pp. 19 and 59
13. Ibid, p. 89 (Annexure 5)
14. Ibid., p.33
15. Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, VrC, In the Line of Duty, Lancer Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2000, p. 361.
16. Op Cit. 3, p 236
17. Ibid., pp..239-241
18. Ibid., pp. 239 - 241
19. Ibid., p. 244.
20. Op. Cit. 3, p. 264.
21. Ibid., p. 275
22. BC Chakaravorty, D.Phil, History of the Indo-Pak War 1965, History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, New Delhi, 1992.
23. Major General DK Palit, VrC, War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962, Lancer International, 1991, pp. 423-427.

@Major General PJS Sandhu (Retd) was commissioned into 8th Light Cavalry on 15 June 1966 and later commanded 47 Armoured Regiment. He retired from the Army as Chief of Staff, 1 Corps on 31 July 2003. Presently, he is working as Deputy Director and Editor at USI since 01 May 2007.

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CXLV, No. 601, July-September 2015.