

Commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of the 1965 Indo-Pak War: Military, Diplomatic, and Strategic Perspective¹

Introduction

The 1965 Indo-Pakistan War was a major conflict centered on the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) question, which significantly influenced the military, diplomatic, and geopolitical landscapes of South Asia. Perceiving India to be weakened after the 1962 Sino-India conflict, Pakistan launched an incursion into Gujarat's Rann of Kutch region in Apr 1965, followed by Operation Gibraltar in Aug, aimed at inciting rebellion in J&K. In response, India countered by capturing strategic posts in Kargil and Haji Pir. Pakistan escalated further with Operation Grand Slam to capture Akhnoor and sever J&K's communication with the rest of India. Indian troops, backed by the Indian Air Force (IAF), not just successfully halted the advance, but launched major counter-offensives not Pakistan across Punjab, J&K, and Rajasthan.²

The warfighting that followed included intense tank and infantry battles, along with unprecedented aerial actions, which enabled India to make substantial territorial gains and inflict significant losses on Pakistani forces. Along with the Indian Army, the IAF played a critical role in defending Indian interests and mounting offensive operations. The Indian Navy, meanwhile, silently maintained the defence of Indian waters. Several other Indian forces, from the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force to the Punjab Police, made noteworthy contributions to India's war effort.

Lessons from 1965 War

Delivering the keynote at the United Service Institution of India, Lieutenant General Satish Nambiar (Retd) focussed not on the conduct of war or history, but instead reflected on "The state of play between the two countries at the outbreak of war in Sep 1965". Drawing from both research and personal experience as a young Captain, he spoke primarily about the army. He recalled that following the 1962 war with China, there was "A great trust deficit between these two vital pillars of the Indian establishment", the political leadership and the military. The defeat at 1962 war, revealed "The neglect of vital aspects of organisation, equipment, and operational capability and readiness", alongside political interference.

Pakistan perceived India's leadership under Shastri as 'Weak and Divided', but Shastri "Came out as a hero to us youngsters in the Indian Army". Meanwhile, the Indian military was undergoing expansion, but with "Inevitable imbalances in organisational capabilities", and units "Diluted in terms of trained manpower".

Pakistan's misjudgments included three key errors. The first: overestimating their success in the Rann of Kutch. The second: assuming Kashmiri locals would support infiltration, "They were destined to be cruelly disappointed". The third: launching

Operation Grand Slam, which led India to expand operations beyond Kashmir. He emphasised that "The Indian soldier was a match for any adversary", and "The morale at the junior leadership and rank and file was almost nil" despite setbacks. The 1965 war, while not an outright victory, "Went a long way in restoring the pride, confidence, and self-esteem" of the forces. Ultimately, he concluded, "It will always be the man behind the weapon that matters, not so much the weapon system itself".³

NCC'S Role in the 1965 War

Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd) emphasised the National Cadet Corps (NCC) played a crucial though often overlooked role in the 1965 war. He highlighted the gallantry of Cadet Sergeant Pratap Singh of 10 Punjab Battalion NCC, who led 59 cadets during a Pakistani air raid on Gurdaspur Railway Station on 13 September 1965, preventing a massive explosion and safeguarding critical army supplies, for which he was awarded the Ashok Chakra Class III (Shaurya Chakra) by President Dr S Radhakrishnan in 1966.⁴ He further said that NCC cadets also supported the Army, Punjab Police, villagers, and muleteers in countering Pakistan's para-commando drops near Pathankot, Halwara, and Adampur, where 138 of 180 infiltrators were captured. He concluded that the NCC's contribution, from civil defence to operational support, proved vital in sustaining India's war effort and showcased their readiness and patriotism.⁵

Akshay D Mandlik (NCC ANO, Assistant Professor) traced the origins of the NCC to the University Corps (1917), later restructured as the University Officers' Training Corps (1942), and finally established as the National Cadet Corps in 1948 following the Kunzru Committee's recommendations. The NCC was founded with three core aims: developing character and leadership, promoting defence preparedness, and contributing to nation-building.

During the 1965 war, NCC cadets played vital support roles, manning civil defence posts, guarding key establishments like Akashwani and telephone exchanges, assisting hospitals, regulating traffic, and engaging in firefighting and rescue operations. A notable example was Cadet Under Officer Pratap Singh, whose bravery during a Pakistani air raid saved many lives. Post-1971, the NCC's role expanded further into social service, disaster relief, and youth leadership while continuing to prepare cadets for the armed forces. Mandlik proudly shared that under his mentorship, over 50 cadets from his institution have joined the services.

The NCC today emphasises institutional and camp training, adventure activities, leadership development, and youth exchange programs, alongside attachment training with the army, navy, and air force. Cadets now actively contribute to national causes; be it flood relief, COVID-19 assistance, or environmental drives. Mandlik concluded by reaffirming that the NCC remains a pillar of discipline,

leadership, and national service, nurturing future leaders while offering unparalleled opportunities to the youth at no cost in government institutions.

Punjab Police in the 1965 War

Mr Man Aman Singh Chhina (Journalist and Defence Analyst) highlighted the role of the Punjab Police and Punjab Armed Police (PAP). A subject often overlooked in military seminars dominated by discussions of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. He emphasised that Punjab Police, NCC cadets, and even civilian communities like truck drivers played a decisive yet under-recognised role during the 1965 war and subsequent conflicts. Drawing on historical accounts, he recalled how, during the mobilisation of 4 Infantry Division in 1965, every passing truck on the Grand Trunk Road was requisitioned overnight under the orders of then Deputy Commissioner of Ambala, Shri MS Gill (later Chief Election Commissioner). These trucks not only carried troops and ammunition to the frontlines in Sialkot but also transported Pakistani prisoners of war back to Indian camps. This effort, carried out without hesitation by civilians, remains largely unrecorded and unacknowledged.

Highlighting the combat role of PAP battalions, Mr Chhina noted their deployment alongside the Army in multiple theatres. In J&K, PAP troops were instrumental in halting infiltrators advancing towards the Srinagar Air Force Station, fighting alongside Central India Horse and infantry battalions. A PAP battalion also served with 191 Infantry Brigade at Akhnoor, where it bore the brunt of Pakistani offensives, and several others fought in the Burki and Khalra sectors near Lahore, participating in offensive operations despite being primarily a border-guarding force. Though they did not receive gallantry awards such as Vir Chakras, their service was recognised through Police Gallantry Medals.

In addition to combat, the Punjab Police's conventional duties expanded during wartime. They were tasked with enforcing blackouts, preventing sabotage, and handling captured infiltrators and downed aircrew. Often in cooperation with villagers, the police recovered pilots of Pakistani B-57 bombers and handed them over to the air force for interrogation, underscoring their critical link between the civil population and military operations. The speaker also contextualised the evolution of the Punjab Police beyond 1965.

During the 1971 conflict, they facilitated the evacuation of civilians from border areas, while in the turbulent 1980s, they confronted militancy during the Khalistan movement, reflecting their resilience in both external and internal security domains. Turning to the NCC, he emphasised its dual role in nation-building and preparedness. The syllabus, he explained, is divided into common and specialised training modules for the army, navy, and air force wings. Attachments with field units, fleets, and air bases give cadets practical exposure, though he suggested that training could be further aligned with modern-day operational realities and emerging

security challenges. In conclusion, Mr Chhina stressed that the Punjab Police, PAP, NCC, and civilians of Punjab collectively contributed to national defence in ways that remain insufficiently documented. Their sacrifices and support, whether through mobilisation of resources, direct combat, or law-and-order responsibilities, form an indispensable yet understated chapter of India's wartime history.

Conclusion

The Diamond Jubilee of the 1965 Indo-Pak War served as a poignant reminder of the collective resilience, courage, and commitment of India's armed forces, paramilitary units, police, NCC cadets, and civilians. Beyond battlefield heroics, the war highlighted the crucial synergy between military strength and civilian support in defending national sovereignty. It restored the morale of a post-1962 military and showcased India's resolve under Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's leadership. As this milestone is commemorated, it is imperative to honour all contributors, uniformed and civilian, whose sacrifices and efforts remain integral to India's defence legacy and enduring spirit of unity.

Endnotes

¹ Commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of the 1965 Indo-Pak War: Military, Diplomatic, and Strategic Perspective, USI Seminar, 01-02 Sep 2025.

² The Indian-Pakistan War of 1965: A History, SN Prasad and UP Thapliyal (2011). Natraj Publishers and Ministry of Defence, Government of India.

³ War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict 1965, Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh, Vrc (1991), Lancer International, New Delhi

⁴ Sergeant Pratap Singh, The Gazette of India, Notification No. 12-Pres/66—dated 12 Feb 1966.

⁵ The Monsoon War: Young Officers Reminisce, Capt Amrinder Singh and Lt Gen Tajinder Shergill (2015), Roli Books, New Delhi.

Dhanajay Shinde has been a researcher with multiple think tanks. Presently he is at USI, where he is engaged in intense defence-related research and has contributed extensively in the form of articles to the project of recording India's post-independent military history.

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