

# Lifting the Veil Over Pak

KAUTILYA



by JAIRAM RAMESH

Unravelling why Kargil became neighbour's envy, owner's pride

**N**OW THAT THE KARGIL CRISIS IS WINDING down, it is time to ask a most basic question, a question that got lost in the perfectly understandable jingoistic fervour that swept this country over the past six weeks. It is now clear that the Kargil intrusions started way back in November 1998 and by March 1999 critical heights had been captured. But why did Pakistan do what it did? Four broad motivations emerge.

The first is psychological. Army chief General Pervez Musharraf is the man, along with Chief of General Staff Lt-General Mohammed Aziz, widely credited with having masterminded the operation. Indeed, India believes that Musharraf's immediate predecessor, the more cerebral Jehangir Karamat, refused to go along with a Kargil-type operation and that was one of the reasons why he was replaced in October 1998.

Musharraf is Allahabad-born and is in the language of Pakistani society a *mohajir*, a refugee from India. This argument was also used earlier to explain the tough position that one of Musharraf's predecessors, Azamgarh-born Mirza Aslam Beg, took in regard to India. Why is a *mohajir* supposed to be more anti-Indian than most? Perhaps because his loyalty is always under test and perhaps because the Uttar Pradesh-born immigrant to Pakistan is more conscious than anybody else that it was his ancestors who fought for Pakistan, much more than the Punjabi Muslim.

The *mohajir* argument, however, places far too much importance on an individual's likes and dislikes. In any case, for a definitive analysis of its direct impact we have to await a detailed Bruce Mazlish-type psycho-histories.

More persuasive than Musharraf's origins as far as psychological factors go, is the argument that the current leadership of the Pakistani Army comprises those who were majors and captains during the 1971 war, which ended humiliatingly for Pakistan. Lt-General Satish Nambiar has written that the desire to avenge the trauma of 1971 has led to Kargil. Later, Pakistanis themselves put out the argument that Kargil was revenge for India's 1984 Siachen operation. But this was clearly an afterthought even though it could well be argued, as J.N. Dixit has done, that by dominating Turtok, Batalik, Drass, Kargil and Mashkoh, Pakistan aimed at neutralising our strategic position on the Siachen heights.

A second explanation is sociological. The Pakistani Army is no longer western-influenced. The number of Pakistani Army officers going to the US over the past decade has dwindled. The army has changed its character and is being gradually dominated by a non-secular class educated in traditional *madarsas*. In other words, the army is becoming increasingly

"Islamised". It has an instinctive empathy with and admiration for the Osama Bin Laden-types. The prism through which this army sees the world is religion. Its top hierarchy comprises those who ran the mujahideen and more recently the Taliban operations and, therefore, are prone to look to a wider applicability of the "Afghan" model in India. The zealots and training camps are already in place in Pakistan.

A third explanation is military. Pakistan's doctrine is now to engage India in the heights where we are at a comparative disadvantage. This doctrine evolved after Operation Brasstacks in 1987, when India showcased its full military might and it became obvious to Pakistan that it could not win a conventional war in the plains. Hence was born the strategy of incursions where India would bleed most and where her positions were weakly held—like Kargil.

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This assumed special significance after the May 1998 nuclear tests. Pakistan may well have thought that since it had the nuclear deterrent, India would not risk a full-fledged confrontation. To Pakistan, this is low-cost nuclear brinkmanship to disturb the status quo. Challenging the LOC is the easiest first step.

A fourth explanation is political, that Pakistan wanted somehow to raise the pitch and bring Kashmir back to centrestage. The Pak Army is deeply suspicious of the Lahore spirit. Indeed, service chiefs broke protocol and did not receive Atal Bihari Vajpayee at Wagah in February 1999.

Pakistan may well have figured the Lahore bonhomie, the return of tourists to and the whittling down of militant activity in the Valley are not conducive to its interests.

This is not the first time that Pakistan's military has been proved hopelessly wrong. It totally miscalculated the Indian response and resolve and overestimated its clout with China and the US—China because it is keen on consolidating the historic 1993 Sino-Indian border agreement and the Americans because they possess clinching satellite evidence about movements of the Northern Light Infantry.

But what Pakistan has been able to do is to convert Kargil into a Siachen for us to defend at considerable extra cost and revive world interest in Kashmir. However, this has been only a qualified success since—more than ever before—the idea of converting the LOC into the international border has gained global respectability. India can actually convert Kargil into an opportunity for settling Kashmir. If this is accompanied by big-bang economic reforms, then it would be what the Americans call a double whammy.

*The author is secretary of the AICC's Economic Affairs Department. The views expressed here are his own.*