

The

Kargil episode

Intelligence on the ground that these pertained to national security and the Army.

Nawaz Sharif did not complain of the denial of information on Kargil operation until after he was dislodged from power in a military coup. While in Attock prison in 2000, he claimed that the Kargil operation was launched without his knowledge. He repeated the allegation in August 2002. In an interview with an Indian news magazine earlier this month, however, he gave a slightly different version saying the operation was not fully revealed to him. He also claimed that when army overthrew his government he was planning to appoint a commission of inquiry on Kargil war.

Research by this writer for an article to be published later this year in the United States reveals that General Pervez Musharraf gave Nawaz Sharif briefings on Kargil operation before and after the signing of the Lahore Declaration in mid-February 1999. At least one such briefing was given between December 1998 and February 1999. Another was given in the second week of March 1999. Nawaz Sharif allowed the operation because he was given to understand that it would contribute to achieving Pakistani goals in Kashmir.

This leaves room for three things: One, Nawaz Sharif did not comprehend the full implications of the plan; two, General Pervez Musharraf offered a bare minimum of information, and three, the scope of the operation was expanded later.

Nawaz Sharif's claim that he wanted to appoint a commission of inquiry in 1999 appears to be an afterthought. The available record shows that his government publicly defended the Kargil operation in July-August 1999. Responding to a question in July 1999, he declared that unless the Kashmir issue was resolved "in accordance with the promises made to the Kashmiris by the international community, Kargil-like situations would continue to erupt". Mushahid Hussain, the then federal information minister, maintained in August that Pakistan had emerged a "winner" in the Kargil

conflict, the Kashmir issue had been "internationalised" and pressure built on the Indian government to hold talks on Kashmir.

The Senate proceedings in August 1999 show that PPP members were the main critics of the Kargil operation. The Sharif government turned down a demand by some political quarters for independent investigation of the Kargil operation. In September 1999, the then minister of state for foreign affairs, Siddique Kanju, stated that there was no need for an inquiry into the political and strategic aspects of the Kargil operation. Towards the end of September, General Pervez Musharraf was appointed Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, for a full term. If the prime minister was planning to institute an inquiry against him, the appointment hardly made sense.

Though the civilian government went along with the army high command in the course of the Kargil war, strain began to show in their relations after Pakistani personnel withdrew in compliance with the Sharif-Clinton declaration of July 4. The decision was widely criticised in Pakistan because the official media was still talking of a Pakistani victory in Kargil. The withdrawal caused much resentment and disappointment in the public. The religious parties were particularly critical of the decision, describing it as a betrayal of the Kashmir cause.

The Sharif government initially defended the Kargil war as well as the withdrawal. However, in late August and September, it tried to deflect the negative comments by engaging in a low-key criticism of the army's decision to launch the operation. Some pro-government elements complained that Nawaz Sharif was not taken into confidence before the launching of the operation. This adversely affected the relations between the Sharif government and the army high command.

The most damaging development was a state-

VIEW



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THE MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTIES, THE PPP and the PMLN, are demanding that a judicial commission should be established for a thorough investigation of the Kargil war (May-July 1999). The PMLN leaders are particularly vocal in raising this demand and it appears to be a part of their efforts to embarrass President General Pervez Musharraf.

Some of the PMLN leaders are claiming that as army chief General Pervez Musharraf kept the then prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, in the dark about the Kargil operation. This, they say, landed the government in a difficult diplomatic situation after India discovered Pakistani military moves in the Kargil-Dras area across the Line of Control in Kashmir.

Others are saying that the information given to Nawaz Sharif was too late and inadequate. He was left no option by the army chief but to get on board. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, a federal minister in 1999, claimed in an interview published in *Daily Times* on November 23, 2003, that Nawaz Sharif was not informed on the Kargil war "at the right time". "When the whole thing was being conceived and put in motion, the prime minister of the country did not know about it. They... provided him only an outline of the exercise in which the focus was totally different."

On July 18, Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain (another member of Nawaz Sharif's cabinet in 1999) rejected the PMLN demand for setting up a judicial commission to investigate the Kargil war. He claimed that General Pervez Musharraf had briefed Nawaz Sharif on Kargil and that he himself had been present in one such briefing.

On July 22, the opposition members submitted adjournment motions to the National Assembly and the Senate secretariats to seek debate on the Kargil war. Earlier, in December 2003, the Senate chairman had refused to allow opposition questions and resolutions about Kargil war and the Inter-Services

ment attributed to former foreign secretary, Niaz A Naik, who had travelled to New Delhi for an informal dialogue while the Kargil war was going on. In the statement, issued on September 14, he claimed that India and Pakistan were very close to a settlement on Kashmir but this was subverted by the army's decision to launch the Kargil operation. The statement was viewed as an attempt by the government to shift the blame to the army. Later, Naik denied the statement and the government disowned his comments by declaring that the army had not "sabotaged" the peace process. However, the damage done to civil-military relations could not be repaired.

The Nawaz Sharif government (1997-99) has to share responsibility for the Kargil war. The PPP is the only major party that has been consistently criticising the Kargil war since the summer of 1999. However, if the political parties stay embroiled in the current polemics, the real Kargil war issue of policy-making and management would be sidelined.

The Kargil operation was planned in purely military terms ignoring the political and diplomatic implications against a backdrop of the nuclearisation of South Asia and the international context. It caused a major diplomatic setback to Pakistan. The principal states of the world did not buy Pakistan's official position that its troops were not involved in the operation. The friendly states, while they advised both India and Pakistan to observe restraint, invariably held Pakistan responsible for resort to a dangerous strategy. This calls for a high-powered inquiry into the episode so that past mistakes in policymaking and management are not repeated. The political leaders have to rise above their point-scoring strategies and the military should not shy away from public scrutiny of its decisions that have wide political and diplomatic implications.

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