

Pak. Defence  
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# Inquiry on Kargil *A. Muneer*

**F**ormer Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif has claimed in a press interview that he was taken unawares when Pakistan's military launched the Kargil operation in May 1999. He also disclosed that he was thinking of setting up an inquiry commission to probe the Kargil affair when he was ousted by a military coup later in the year. Sharif's statement has triggered a demand by the ARD for setting up a commission to inquire into 'what, why and who' of the Kargil operation.

There is nothing wrong or unpatriotic in demanding a commission for Kargil. Almost all the countries that believe in democracy and the sovereignty of the people try to find out the truth whenever a government action, or inaction, results in infamy or loss of prestige. The basic idea of such probes is not to look for a sacrificial lamb but to pinpoint the faults in the institutional structures that had blinded the decision-makers to the impending disaster. Such commissions or committees examine the affair most thoroughly and suggest measures for the future, so that the follies are not repeated.

Several committees in the USA are probing the 9/11 disaster and some of them have released their reports that have generally blamed the lax security regime at the US airports. Probes into the Iraq invasion continue and committees conducting inquiries, independently in Washington and London, have concluded that the pre-invasion intelligence reports about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction were deeply flawed. India had an inquiry commission on Kargil to find out how and why Indian intelligence failed to anticipate the attack on Kargil.

Pakistan has a very poor history of fact-finding commissions, especially about its military affairs. It is not because that military wants to keep its affairs under the lid, but because the nation is not prepared to face and recognise the truth. For instance, it still believes that Pakistan was the victor in 1965 War and Kashmir was for the taking but for the ceasefire and the Tashkent Declaration. Even Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who knew better, gave air to this myth. Yes, Pakistan was the victor but to the extent of blunting the Indian invasion of Lahore. However, not a single voice was raised to demand a commission to ascertain the truth. Why, because we fear the truth. The Nation conveniently ignored the fact that it was Pakistan that had triggered the 1965 War by sending the 'Mujahidin' to the valley.

We did have the Hamoodur Rahman Commission to probe the East Pakistan debacle. To be sure, the terms of reference for this commission were severely limited. It



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was only charged with the military aspect of the break up making hogwash of the whole exercise. Pakistan broke up in two, not because of military defeat but for our political stupidities. No army in the world, howsoever strong it might be, could have sustained itself in East Pakistan in the face of popular insurgency, Indian army knocking at the door and world opinion turned wildly hostile. Moreover, our army in East Pakistan was completely cut off from its base, with no hope of supplies of either men or weapons or ammunition. Examples are not difficult to find; Vietnam and Iraq instantly come to mind.

**Kargil was a disaster but it has lessons for us to which we must pay heed. It made it evident that use of force, either as an outright engagement or through proxies, would not win freedom for Kashmir. Qazi Hussain Ahmed, MMA chief, says that Kargil operation was launched with 'good intentions', but it failed. He has advocated more Kargil-like operations**

Bhutto's decision to withhold the publication of the Hamoodur Rahman report was justified for it was one-sided. According to the terms of reference it had not touched upon the political reasons of the debacle. The examination of the political aspects would have revealed that it was not the military defeat that had caused the separation. It was the follies of the politicians that had resulted in the break up of Pakistan. The nation could not have swallowed this harsh truth because it had encouraged, and then applauded, the army action in East Pakistan. Almost every political leader had urged Gen Yahya Khan to teach Bengalis a lesson. Air

Marshal Asghar Khan was the sole noble exception; he opposed and condemned the army action.

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif says that he was kept in the dark about the Kargil operation. Present Prime Minister Ch Shujaat Hussain, rebutting this statement, says that he was eyewitness to a meeting in which Gen Musharraf, then COAS, had informed Nawaz Sharif of the details of the Kargil operation. Obviously, one of them is not telling the truth. Let us assume that Nawaz Sharif is telling the truth. If that is so then he was not fit to be the Prime Minister. A prime minister should know what his army chief was up to. In fact, the Prime Minister should keep himself informed of everything happening in the country. Whether he knew or not, he definitely embraced the idea when it was put into operation. It was only after it became apparent that Kargil was a fiasco that he distanced himself from it. Had it been a success, Nawaz Sharif would have been the first to own it.

**N**awaz Sharif has claimed that he was thinking of setting up a Kargil inquiry commission but he was deposed. That would have been the right time — July 1999, immediately after the fiasco — to establish a commission. What was stopping him from giving his thought a practical shape? He was the Prime Minister enjoying unprecedented majority in the Parliament, the heavy mandate as it was called. Did he fear a coup? In that case he would have gone home with flying colours. Three months later he inadvertently invited the coup by dismissing the COAS in a most bizarre manner when he was airborne. Sharif's idea of setting up an inquiry commission on Kargil seems to be an afterthought, but late by 5 years. The inquiry would not serve any useful purpose at this juncture. Even the Indians have stopped talking about Kargil. They are looking ahead for durable Indo-Pak amity and so should we.

Kargil was a disaster but it has lessons for us to which we must pay heed. It made it evident that use of force, either as an outright engagement or through proxies, would not win freedom for Kashmir. Qazi Hussain Ahmed, MMA chief, says that Kargil operation was launched with 'good intentions', but it failed. He has advocated more Kargil-like operations. He added that our army should adopt an aggressive and forward policy. It is easier said than done. If we were to follow Qazi Sahib's advice and launch another Kargil-like operation, India may not retaliate by attacking us, but it will surely beat any such attempt mercilessly as it demonstrated in Kargil.