

Kargil Aggression – The Continuum Of A Strategy

Riyaz Punjabi*

**Riyaz Punjabi is Director (Hony.), Centre for Peace Studies, New Delhi.*

I arrived in Srinagar on 25th May 1999. A cursory look around the city made it difficult to comprehend that the state had undergone the worst phase of militancy. The Srinagar city, which was once perceived as a 'danger zone' due to the presence of militants and violence unleashed by them, wore an entirely different and a festive look. The entire place was over-flooded with the tourists from different parts of the country. Hotels, guest-houses, house-boats and tourist lodges were jam-packed with the tourists. The colourful Shikaras were busy recovering the losses they had suffered as a result of the lull in the tourist seasons over the years. More and more tourists were arriving in chartered buses, private cars and taxis. The traffic jams gave a tough time to the traffic police. The scene was similar in other tourist resorts of the Kashmir valley, particularly Pahalgam, Sonamarg and Gulmarg. One could see a relief on the faces of the local population. The next day the news of Kargil aggression occupied the front pages of the media. The news of the closure of civilian airport, although for a couple of days, created a panic reaction. Within a week the bustling streets of Srinagar were deserted again. The Kargil aggression thus stifled the process of restoration of peace and normal life in Kashmir. This situation was imposed on the people of the state.

(Author)

The aggression in Kargil is the continuum of Pakistan's strategy towards Kashmir since 1947 when J&K State acceded to the Union of India. Pakistan launched its strategy to occupy Kashmir by force in September 1947 when it realized that Maharaja of the State, backed by majority of people in Kashmir had decided to throw its lot with Union of India.

The founder of Pakistan, Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah had been persuading the Maharaja of J&K, Hari Singh, to accede to Pakistan. The former was convinced that this proposition had no public support in the state, particularly in the valley. In a public meeting in Srinagar in 1944 when Mr. Jinnah exhorted the people of Kashmir to support the Maharaja, he had to face the hostile crowds. He had to make a hasty retreat from Kashmir and in his anger he made some derogatory remarks about the popular political party in the state, National Conference, and its leadership. Since the Two-Nation theory had no market in Kashmir, Mr. Jinnah argued that the ruler of the State, Maharaja Hari Singh, had final authority to decide the issue of accession of the state with either dominion as per in the terms of the Act of Independence of 1947. By September 1947, it was clear that the Ruler of J&K was not interested in acceding to Pakistan. Thus, herds of tribal raiders were pushed into the border areas of Jammu in J&K to create instability and chaos. By 27th October 1947, Maharaja of J&K had acceded to the Union of India. The event was followed by a new tribal incursion, which was launched in full strength in Kashmir.

At the diplomatic level, Pakistan kept on insisting that the raiders (whom it described as *Mujahideen*) were not under its control, although practically it provided them all the logistical support including the fact of launching them from its own territory. Pakistan pleaded that driven by a “religious zeal”, raiders were on a mission to “liberate their brethren” in J&K. This strategy of pushing the “Mujahideen” (armed infiltrators) in J&K was repeated by Pakistan in 1965. On both the occasions, Pakistan suffered heavy reverses, apart from lack of cooperation, even sympathy, from the local population in Kashmir. However, this strategy continued to guide Pakistan in its approach towards J&K in subsequent days. It may be recalled that in 1947, Kashmiri people organized themselves into several groups, which acted as civil defence bodies to fight the Pakistani raiders. The slogan ‘*Raiders Beware-We Kashmiris are prepared to take on you*’, became part of the folklore in Kashmir. In 1965 the insurgents, which were pushed by Pakistan in the valley found no local cooperation despite the tension between National Conference party and the Central Government on the issue of the autonomy.

Policy of Internationalising Kashmir

The experience of more than five decades convinced the strategists in Pakistan about the futility of military misadventures in J&K. Hence they concluded that diplomatic offensive by involving UN and/or third party intervention provided the only opportunity to realize Pakistan’s objective of annexation of Kashmir. This exercise, it was perceived, would also convince the hard-liners within the establishment and political spectrum of Pakistan about the seriousness of purpose, on the part of latter, on Kashmir. The assumption of diplomatic offensive had a historical connection too. The tribal invasion on J&K in 1947 assumed the proportions of a full-scale war between the two countries, which attracted the international attention towards Kashmir. India sought the intervention of Security Council in vacating Pakistan’s aggression in Kashmir. In the turn of events, India accepted the Resolution of 27th January 1948 to hold plebiscite in J&K, which changed the entire context of Kashmir issue. Pakistan first dithered, and ultimately ignored to implement the crucial part of resolution referred to withdrawal of Pakistani forces from the occupied part of J&K. In this process, the real issue of vacating the part occupied by Pakistan was relegated to background and a new term “Kashmir dispute” was coined to misguide the international opinion. The launching of aggressions in violation of agreements and manipulating the international public opinion on Kashmir is the continuum of Pakistan’s strategy on Kashmir.

The efficacy of this strategy was further realized by Pakistan in 1971 War when its army suffered humiliating defeat apart from losing a part of its territory which emerged as the independent state of Bangladesh. Thus, Pakistan was convinced that it would have to revise its strategy of aggression alone and evolve other mechanisms, which would effectively internationalise Kashmir, to needle India.

The Simla Agreement and demarcation of the LOC ostensibly reflected the reciprocity of Pakistan’s political establishment to strengthen the bilateral relations with India. However the ‘invisible’ government in Pakistan went ahead with its agenda on creating situations to attract the International attention on Kashmir. The ‘Operation Topac’, which was devised after the Simla Agreement was concluded, provides an illustration to the point.

Pakistan rakes up HR issue

In pursuance of this strategy, in late Eighties, before the insurgency was launched in J&K, Pakistani think tanks, after the deliberations in Seminars and discussions concluded that Human Rights issue in J&K held the potential of internationalizing Kashmir. This conclusion was brought out in various publications of strategic institutions in Pakistan in 1988-89. In their reckoning, the insurgency and launching of the militant offensive could provide this opportunity for them. Thus, the offensive of insurgency and training and arming the militants was launched in full swing in 1990. For a while, the activities of insurgents and Pak-trained militants in J&K and the responses from Indian security forces did provide an opportunity to Pakistan to raise a hype on human rights issue in Kashmir. However, Pakistan's failure in bringing a resolution to censure India in UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in 1994, and greater awareness of the international community on Pakistan's machinations in J&K blunted the human rights weapon which Pakistan sought to use against India at the diplomatic level.

Kashmiri Disenchantment with violence

In the meantime the section of the local youth, which had joined the insurgency due to the disenchantment with the political system in Kashmir, had abandoned the path of violence. This led to the change of strategy by Pakistan and a large number of foreigners, particularly the Afghans, were pushed into the State. With no local cooperation this initiative also failed. With the democratic elections in 1996 and the return of a democratically elected government in J&K, people started engaging themselves in strengthening social, political, administrative, educational and economic structures, which had been impaired during the militancy phase in the state. The consensus among the political parties, even those advocating secession, was that violence should be shunned and redressal to the grievances should be sought through political and democratic means. This resolve was reflected during Hague Appeal for Peace in May 1999, when Kashmiris belonging to different Schools of thought, including the representatives of Kashmiri Pandits issued an appeal for the silencing of guns from whichever direction these were used, for restoring peace in the state and initiating an intra-state dialogue among different regions of the state. This appeal was issued after intense debate for five days among the Kashmiris who had gathered in Hague. The conclusion of the deliberations and the consensus on a peace appeal drew an international applause and the convenor of the Hague Appeal for Peace, Cora Weiss accompanied by Nobel Laureate Jose Ramos Horta of East Timor came personally to congratulate the Kashmiri participants, all the initiatives of Pakistan on annexation of Kashmir had failed.

It is becoming increasingly clear now that Pakistan had made some contingency plan, which could be launched in the event of the failure on other fronts. Thus, when Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee was entering Lahore introducing a bus service and while Lahore Declaration was being signed, the preparations for Kargil aggression were in full swing. Pakistan had reverted back to its strategy of 1947 in engineering the aggression through "Mujahideen" in J&K, providing them with all logistical support including the involvement of its regular army personnel. Kargil is the manifestation of the same old strategy.

Reactions of the Kashmiris

The sufferings of civilian Muslim population in Kargil and the set back to the tourism industry have created a wave of resentment among the people in Kashmir against Pakistan. Due to various factors, this resentment is not articulated in terms of protests and demonstrations. The desperation from the pro-Pakistani forces was reflected in Hurriyat Conference's call for a bandh in support of "Mujahideen" in Kargil on a Sunday, which, in any case, remains a holiday for government, commercial and educational establishments in Kashmir.

India has the capacity to send back the aggressors from Kargil. But the statement of Pakistan Prime Minister that there are more Kargils in the offing in J&K cannot be dismissed as mere rhetoric. The absence of sympathy for "Mujahideen" and yearning for peace and development in Kashmir has enhanced the dangers of future Kargils being reenacted on many points across the vast stretch of more than 700 KM of Line of Control. The fact that millions of Afghans, Arabs and Sudanese and many other unemployed but militarily trained youth from different parts of Pakistan are posing serious threat to the civil society in Pakistan and are eager to take up arms under the pretext of a holy war outside Pakistan as well, is prodding policy planners in India to draw a long term security and diplomatic strategy. Moreover, the implications of Kargil are being assessed by China and former Republics of Soviet Central Asia. The presence of Private Armies enjoying the official military patronage in Pakistan is crucial in the context of security and stability of not only South Asia but of Asia as a whole.