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Book Review

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Peter R. Lavoy (Ed.), *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia.* Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 407, ISBN 978-0-521-76721-7.

To its eternal credit, the government of the day constituted, within a week of conflict termination in the Kargil heights in July 1999, a Committee, under the chairmanship of the redoubtable K. Subrahmanyam to look into this episode. Unprecedentedly, by early 2000 the Kargil Review Committee Report had been tabled in Parliament, albeit with some security deletions. Six years later, Generals V.P. Malik and Pervez Musharraf, the Army Chiefs of the two belligerents, published books which contained detailed accounts of the Kargil conflict, and provided clarifications on several issues of contention. However, these as well as other narratives reflect a degree of bias, no matter how unintended, simply because they can offer only one side of the story.

Now, a decade after the Kargil War, we have a compendium of essays, entitled; *"Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia",* which constitutes an objective and comprehensive appraisal and provides a unique 360 degree portrayal of the traumatic event. The volume, edited by Dr. Peter Lavoy, currently a Deputy Director of US National Intelligence, contains 15 well-researched and thoughtful articles written singly as well as jointly by a team of 17 analysts; mainly academics and journalists, leavened with a sprinkling of former soldiers.

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Lavoy, a South Asia and counter-proliferation *pundit* himself, has used his deft editorial pen to synthesize the writings of an eclectic mix of American, Indian and Pakistani experts. The volume goes to the heart of several conundrums embedded in this brief but sanguinary conflict and, in the words of its Editor, by diligent research, fieldwork, and analysis overcomes, *"…implausible stories, gaps in evidence and contradictory interpretations".* While this unique format makes for an intellectually stimulating *smorgasbord*, it is slightly marred by many authors, often, having to cover the same ground.

The sharp attention that the Kargil conflict drew from the US administration, and the extraordinary lengths that President Bill Clinton went to, in order to ensure a swift disengagement of forces, was a clear indicator of the deep concern that the Western world felt about the ongoing Indo-Pak conflict. The anxiety was understandable; because barely 12 months earlier, both nations had brought their nuclear weapons out of the closet. Whether they actually had the wherewithal and capability to deliver these weapons and whether the specter of nuclear war did, in fact, loom over Kargil in the summer of 1999 remains a matter for speculation, although Lavoy *et al.* seem to take it as a given.

As in most other spheres, Western analysts tend to evaluate sub-continental developments in the security arena, against known and familiar templates, and this study is no different. The theory of nuclear revolution, as Lavoy points out, holds that states armed with nuclear wars should not fight conventional wars with each other. Yet, Pakistan defied this logic by launching a dangerous incursion into Indian territory, and India challenged it further by mounting a fierce, albeit localised, counter-attack.

While analysing the Kargil conflict, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 keeps cropping up as a familiar benchmark to weigh the actions and reactions of the *dramatis personae* in the two crises because the protagonists happened to be nuclear armed. Unfortunately, sub-continental mores, culture and thought-processes do not always lend themselves to conventional interpretations that are familiar to the Western intellect. To compare the negotiations and strategic signalling undertaken by the Kennedy-Khrushchev dyad during October 1962, given the world-wide implications of the US-Soviet confrontation, with the kind of diplomatic manoeuvering or back-channel communication that Prime Ministers Atal Behari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif resorted to in 1999, with the narrow aim of disengagement, may be of limited utility. Taken beyond a point, it may even lead to flawed deductions.

This study, which declares that it presents the "causes, conduct and consequences" of the Kargil conflict, is the product of six years of rigorous research and analysis, as well as conscientious examination of many primary sources; especially, in Pakistan. The end result is an account of the conflict, which is as wide-ranging as it is deep in its treatment of the rationales, the prelude, the events, the decision-making, and the aftermath of this "near war" (it fails to meet the classical definition of 'war', which requires at least 1,000 battlefield casualties). This volume contains much to ponder and reflect upon, for an Indian; no matter what his or her calling.

Firstly, it enables the reader to view the continuum of Indo-Pakistan relationship, since partition, through a grand strategic lens. This is a historical perspective that the Indian security elite has largely missed out and, therefore, we have found ourselves repeatedly surprised by Pakistani actions; militarily, by the 1947, 1965, and 1999 incursions and, politically, by the Punjab and Kashmir insurrections. Indians need to acquire a comprehensive insight into the Pakistani mind-set if they seek to decipher the basis of Pakistan's perception of an everlasting "existential threat" from India, and its visceral hostility towards its eastern neighbour. The Kargil episode was merely the latest (but certainly not the last) manifestation of this syndrome.

As Feroze Hassan Khan, Lavoy and Clary point out in an early chapter, certain delusions have become articles of faith in Pakistan. Most Pakistanis are of the belief that the outcome of partition was neither fair nor just, and that the Indian *status quo* in Kashmir remains illegitimate. Having annexed Junagarh and Hyderabad by force (or through "police action") on the grounds of contiguity and a Hindu majority population, India 'duplicitously' applied a different yardstick to enforce accession, into India, of Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistanis further believe that Hindus have long oppressed the Kashmiri Muslims and denied them the right of self-determination through a United Nations mandated plebiscite. Facing a more prosperous and militarily more powerful India, most Pakistanis feel helpless and frustrated at their inability to redress this huge asymmetry. They are then suffused by a sense of moral righteousness which justifies, in their minds, the use of any means to cut India down to Pakistan's size and to wrest Kashmir from 'iniquitous' Indian rule. Their many failed attempts have only served to create a "history of grievances", point out the authors.

The invasion of Kashmir in 1947 by rapacious tribal *lashkars*, and the 1965 military adventure were both abortive, and failed to achieve Pakistani objectives. In 1971, the crass stupidity and myopia of Pakistani politicians, coupled with the brutal

army crackdown on their Bengali compatriots resulted in a mass exodus from East Pakistan and provided India a handle for intervention. The consequent bifurcation of their country convinced the mistrustful Pakistanis that India remained implacably opposed to the creation of their homeland. Then, 13 years later, the Indian Army's occupation of the Siachin glacier confirmed, in their minds, that India would seek to exploit every Pakistani vulnerability. Their military planners, too, sought chinks in India's armour; and thought they had found one in Kargil.

On the Indian side, a proper post-mortem was conducted soon after the end of the conflict by the Kargil Review Committee, whose findings dwelt at length on the intelligence and other failures that led to our forces being caught by total surprise. The Committee, in turn, led to the constitution of a Group of Ministers, which recommended important policy initiatives, in the field of national security, for implementation by the government.

Pakistan, on the other hand, according to Hasan-Askari Rizvi, has always had difficulty learning from its past military failures, but the process of introspection over Kargil seems to have been particularly tortuous and problematic. A common refrain that runs right through the pages of this study is the Pakistani Army's underestimation of India's responses to their transgressions, and overestimation of international sympathy for their own actions. This flawed logic is incomprehensible to Indians who have seen periodic re-plays of Pakistani belligerence with consistently futile conclusions. Perhaps the post-nuclearisation "stability-instability paradox" thesis, advanced by many authors in this volume, may serve to put a better gloss on this kind of behaviour.

In 1947, Pakistani planners did not anticipate the intense Indian military response to the marauding tribal *lashkars* in J&K. In 1965, the Pakistan military based their complete planning on the dubious premise that the Kashmiri population would rise in revolt and support the Pakistani invaders, and were surprised by the robust Indian response across the international boundary. In 1999, the Pakistan Army considered the intrusions in Kargil heights merely a *quid pro quo* for the Indian artillery shelling of Neelum Valley in Pakistan occupied Kashmir, and its 1984 occupation of the Siachin glacier. Therefore they neither expected the kind of international attention that it got, nor the Indian 'over-reaction' that it provoked.

This sequence of 'miscalculations' has been examined by various authors in this anthology, and provides another, very useful, insight into the Pakistan Army's attitude and approach towards operational planning.

The planning for the 1947 assault on Jammu and Kashmir was apparently done by Major General Akbar Khan of the Pakistan Army, who wrote out a paper titled *"*Armed Revolt in Kashmir*"* to be executed by a serving Colonel who led the "Azad Kashmir" forces. Zafar Iqbal Cheema informs us that operational planning in 1965 was confined to a "handful of individuals", as President Ayub Khan established a secret Kashmir cell, headed by Aziz Ahmed, a career diplomat, to plan insurgency in Kashmir. In the summer of 1965, Ayub, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Ahmed and the General Officer Commanding 12 Infantry Division met in the hill station of Murree to approve Operations *Gibraltar* and *Grand Slam* with the aim of fomenting an uprising and then cutting off Kashmir from India. Both flopped due to India's unexpected response.

Exactly how the planning for the Kargil operation unfolded, say James Wirtz and Surinder Rana, remains somewhat obscure. The initial planning in Pakistan seems to have been confined to the General Officer Commanding 10 Corps, Force Commander Northern Areas, the Chief of General Staff and the Chief of Army Staff; hardly a "dream team" for the kind of meticulous and detailed staff-work required to evolve a watertight operational plan. It excluded not just the Foreign Office and the Pakistan Navy and Air Force, but also the Director General Military Operations and Director General Inter-Service Intelligence.

Strangely enough, each successive military failure seems to have reinforced the Pakistan Army's sense of grievance that either the Indians have somehow "played unfair" by not reacting according to their script, or that they have been 'betrayed' by their politicians. For an Indian military professional, this baffling reaction provides an interesting insight into the Pakistani mind.

For many years after partition, Pakistan's military adventures were predicated on the strange assumption that one Pakistani soldier was the equivalent of 4-10 Hindu combatants. This mind-set is illustrated by Hasan-Askari Rizvi who quotes a directive from President Ayub Khan to the Commander-in-Chief Pakistan Army in August 1965: "*As a general rule, Hindu morale would not stand for more than a couple of hard blows delivered at the right time and place. Such opportunities should, therefore, be sought and exploited*". However, this does not provide a sufficient rationale for the reckless Pakistani thought-processes or their botched planning that has continued over six decades.

Captains and Majors, in all armies, are taught the art of tactical-planning and employment of forces, by Staff Colleges, using a tool known as "Appreciation of the

Situation" or "Commander's Estimate of the Situation". This is a logical methodology of reasoning, by which a Commander considers all the circumstances affecting a given military situation and arrives at a decision as to the best course of action for accomplishment of the mission. This rigorous process requires a host of factors to be examined, and either rejected or taken into account. Of these, the most crucial factor is termed the "Enemy's Courses of Action", wherein the planner attempts to visualise every possible option open to the enemy, and how each would impact on one's own selected course of action.

A major advantage of this rigorous process is that it minimises the chances of being surprised by an unexpected enemy riposte. While there is no doubt that generations of bright young Pakistani staff officers must have learnt this planning process in the Quetta Command and Staff Course, the question that hangs in the air is: why do they not use it when they attain positions in the General Staff? Why is it that their planning process in 1947, 1965 and 1999 seems to have gone only up to a certain point and then abruptly collapsed without taking full account of the options available to the enemy; especially, the worst case scenarios?

The most frequently used term in this book is "*fait accompli".* The context is best illustrated by Lavoy as he describes Pakistan's fervent hope that once the Northern Light Infantry occupied the Kargil heights overlooking National Highway 1A, the combination of surprise, superior terrain, and a denial and deception strategy would inhibit India from dislodging the intruders before onset of winter; thereby achieving a military *fait accompli*.

"How could they not anticipate" asks General Ved Prakash Malik, pertinently, in his book, *"that we would view this action as strategic in nature and respond accordingly?"* Is India then faced with an adversary whose operational planning is circumscribed by the wishful thinking of an intellectually mediocre and reckless military leadership? Are Pakistani military decisions buttressed, not by cold logic but, by the "hope like hell" factor? It is a chilling thought for an Indian that this adversary possesses a growing nuclear arsenal, and has arrogated, to itself, the right to escalate from conventional to nuclear conflict when things are not going right.

The international community, in fact, saw the Kargil conflict exclusively through the prism of the 1998 nuclear tests, because they desperately sought empirical data to prove or demolish theories about the behaviour of nuclear weapon states under crises. And that, really, is the *raison d'être* of the book under review.

So, how close did India and Pakistan come to nuclear war during the Kargil conflict? Not very close; if one is to believe General Pervez Musharraf: "*...in 1999 our nuclear capability was not yet operational. Merely exploding a bomb does not mean that you are operationally capable of deploying a nuclear force in the field...*".

I entered India's nuclear establishment, as Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, a few years after Kargil and can now say, that a mere 12 months after proving their nuclear devices in a controlled environment, neither India nor Pakistan (in spite of having received proven Chinese devices) could have had the doctrinal clarity, necessary infrastructure, command and control facilities or indeed adequate trained personnel to actually employ their nuclear weapons under operational conditions. More so, because hovering close to the nuclear threshold for strike, compellence or even deterrence is not just a question of assembling or dropping one or two bombs. The political establishment, the armed forces and the country must be prepared to go the whole hog.

Thus, as Timothy Hoyt points out, while some politicians on both sides may have indulged in nuclear rhetoric, nuclear weapons were not actually deployed in 1999. The emerging sub-continental nuclear capabilities, however, had a triple impact. They certainly emboldened Pakistan to embark on the Kargil adventure, possibly slowed down India's initial response to the incursion and having confirmed President Clinton's worst fears about nuclear escalation, spurred him into personal involvement in the disengagement endeavour. As India and Pakistan pursue larger arsenals and more capable missiles, nuclear weapons will play an increasingly dangerous role in the sub-continental balance of power; unless the two rivals agree to start a dialogue and evolve tangible confidence-building measures.

As Jones and McMillan point out, a key US concern, post-Kargil, related to the kind of (divergent) lessons taken up by India and Pakistan; possibly creating the potential for more future conflicts. The latter part of this volume is, therefore, devoted to the lessons learnt by India, Pakistan and the US. On the face of it, India seems to be the one Kargil participant who has undertaken the greatest introspection, and even gone through the motions of undertaking 'reforms' in the national security arena. However, subsequent crises including the November 26, 2008 Mumbai terror strike and the Maoist insurgency have demonstrated the lackadaisical implementation of these reforms, the gaping holes that persist, and the inability of India's security establishment to cope intellectually with serious threats.

In the concluding chapter of the book Robert Jervis wonders why Pakistan persists in its endeavours to change the *status quo* in the sub-continent when it clearly has few tools with which to accomplish this daunting task. He cites, in this context, the realist argument, which says that states not only should muster the resources needed to protect their interests, but must also trim their interests to fit their resources.

In this context, one cannot help recommending to our Western neighbours, John Kenneth Galbraith's stark but pragmatic "North American solution", which envisages the sacrifice of Kashmir as an emotional and military rallying point for Pakistanis and the acceptance of a subsidiary role in South Asia, commensurate with their country's size, population and economic strength. Only then might this troubled sub-continent see some peace and stability.

All in all, *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia* turned out to be a most absorbing and intellectually stimulating anthology which, I am confident, would be of interest, both for the lay Indian reader, who may have followed the conflict through the media, as well as for security experts and others who are more knowledgeable on such issues. Those pressed for time will benefit by choosing articles selectively from this, somewhat daunting, 400 page tome. This volume would form an appropriate foundation for Indian think-tanks to build further upon; with regard to pitfalls facing the India-Pakistan strategic relationship – especially in the domain of nuclear deterrence – and how it is likely to evolve in the years ahead.