

FROM KUTCH TO TASHKENT and Indo-Pak Relations

23 October 2014

Thank you John for your kind words and it was an honour to be asked some time ago to deliver the Bernard Budd Memorial Lecture to the Indian Civil Service Association. The topic of this evening is on my book on the 1965 War between India and Pakistan and its repercussions.

With an audience such as this evenings I do not I am sure need to spell out the genesis of the Kashmir dispute except to say that it began with the independence of India and Pakistan and has unfortunately still not been resolved.

The book itself is both a military and diplomatic history of the 1965 war. The work is based on declassified papers from Washington, Austin Texas (the Lyndon Johnson Library) the National Archives at Kew, London as well as Indian and Pakistani sources. I hope one day that scholars are able to study the Russian and Chinese archives as well of course as the Indian and Pakistani ones which are still largely closed. However, semi-official histories have been released and I was able to interview some senior army officers on both sides of the conflict. With the passage of time more and more information has emerged which has helped build up a reasonably clear view of what really took place in broad terms. There are of course going to be further revelations with time but it is hoped that work will set out broadly what took place on the battlefield and in the negotiating rooms of world capitals.

In 1965, India and Pakistan went to war and the cause was relatively straightforward; over the state of Kashmir. Coming just 18 years after the horrific massacres which scarred the independence of both nations, the prospect of an all-out war between 2 large Asian nations caught the world's attention. This was also a time when the Vietnam War was in full swing and also soon after the Korean war.

It is straightforward to place a date and time on when the war ended; 23 September 1965 was when the United Nations sponsored ceasefire came into effect but when and how it began has always been controversial and rather murky. Those dates will often depend on which side of the Kashmir border one looks at and this was explored in the book.

In order to understand the war in context, it is important to return to both the background to the Kashmir dispute and international situation both in the run up to and during the war. Firstly on the issue of Kashmir itself. On the winding up of the British Raj in the sub-continent in August 1947, one of the large unresolved issues was those of the princely states. These were territories within the sub-continent which varied from the small and insignificant to large and important. These were legally not considered British territory but often had independent treaties with the British government. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was one of the latter; a territory of over 90,000 square miles in the northern part of the sub-continent; bordering to its north China and Tibet. In 1947 it was ruled over by a Hindu raja but with an overwhelming Muslim population. The rajas and princes were told politely but firmly by the outgoing Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, that independence for them was not a realistic option and they should opt for either India or Pakistan to join once the British handed over power. Almost all did so by August 1947 with a few exceptions, and Kashmir was one of these.

Given all the issues and problems of partition and independence, the new government of Pakistan did not prioritise the issue of Kashmir's future post-independence but appeared to assume given the logic of partition that the state would be part of Pakistan. The first prime minister of India, Nehru,

being of Kashmiri descent, was far more aware of the issue and was determined that the state should accede to India. The ruler of Kashmir signed the accession to India in October 1947 and India promised to hold a plebiscite to try and ascertain the people of Kashmir's wishes.

What followed was an armed conflict between the Indian and Pakistani forces but on 1 January 1949 a ceasefire was agreed between the two countries which left Pakistan in control of approximately one third of Kashmir and the Gilgit agency and India in control of the other 2 thirds including the capital and Kashmir valley.

No government of Pakistan; either at the time or since, has ever accepted the accession as valid or binding and no government of India; either at the time or since; has been seriously willing to concede that the accession was anything other than legal and binding. India's only real concession has been to propose that the ceasefire line should be made the international border; thereby agreeing that Pakistan can retain the area which is currently under its control and which is the area known as Azad Kashmir (Free Kashmir) and Gilgit-Baltistan region.

For the international community, particularly the newly formed United Nations, the issue of Kashmir was one its first challenges in the post war world. Although the UN did make some efforts in the 1950's to send representatives and delegations to try and keep the peace, the two sides were unable to reach agreement and the Pakistan sense of grievance remained. As they saw it, India had used its superior military force to take and hold an area which should be part of Pakistan. It was not simply a sentimental issue for Pakistan; the main rivers of the Punjab have their source in Kashmir and India could (and has occasionally) blocked off the river water; threatening Punjab with drought.

On a wider strategic level, Pakistan soon found itself a military and strategic asset in the Cold War. Pakistan signed up to US sponsored military pacts in Asia in the 1950's and in return received large scale military aid which enabled Pakistan not only to feel by the early 1960's that it could hold off an Indian military attack but also possibly even challenge it. India on the other hand although officially non-aligned in the Cold War, became a close ally of the Soviet Union. Apart from the 2 superpowers, the strategic elephant in the room was China – a country which shared a land border with both India and Pakistan. Relations between India and China was friendly in the 1950's and Pakistan was viewed by China as a US stooge in Asia. However, Pakistan made efforts to assure China that the US military pacts were not aimed at them and Pakistan refused to send troops to fight either in Korea or Vietnam.

By the start of the 1960's there were two major events which shaped South Asian politics for decades to come. In 1960 the election of JF Kennedy led to a reappraisal of the old Cold War position of the non-aligned movement being seen as soft on communism and India was now viewed a potential counterweight to both the Soviet and Chinese influence in Asia. Even more dramatically, in 1962 India and China went to war over a disputed boundary line. The war was short with China pushing as far as their claim went and then declaring a unilateral ceasefire. The effect of this war was to unite both the superpowers behind India from what they perceived as Chinese aggression and also to suddenly make Pakistan view China a potential ally.

For the next 3 years, the diplomatic position was in a state of flux; Pakistan was upset that the US starting supplying military aid to India post 1962 – especially as it came with no strings attached or pressure on Kashmir. Following the assassination of Kennedy in 1963, the Johnson administration continued the policy of engagement with India and took a dim view of Pakistan's improving relations with China.

The political leadership and situation of India and Pakistan in 1965 was highly relevant to the events that were to follow. Pakistan had been ruled by the General Ayub Khan who had come to power in 1958 through a military coup and in January 1965 had been elected president; albeit through rather dubious means. The Pakistani foreign minister was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, (father of Benazir). He was brilliant and flamboyant as well as impetuous and reckless. India on the other hand had lost its prime minister since independence, the renowned Nehru and the new prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri was unknown, physically unprepossessing and untested. Visiting US delegations to South Asia in early 1965 remarked at the contrasting moods in India and Pakistan. India was suffering from food shortages leading to riots, the economy was sluggish and the army morale had still not recovered from the Chinese debacle. Pakistan on the other hand was doing well economically, had now developed a formidable army with some of the latest US weapons, especially in armour, artillery and air force planes. The mood was one of self-confidence in Pakistan and the military top brass was convinced that it could now take on India militarily. The situation inside Indian Kashmir also seemed to be against India with the best known Kashmiri leader, Sheikh Abdullah beginning to hint that a plebiscite was needed.

The first shots were fired on the southern border between Sindh in what was then West Pakistan and the Indian state of Gujarat in an area known as the Rann of Kutch. This was an inhospitable desert area; mainly inhabited by nomads and of very little strategic value. Although the area of Kutch was inside India, it was the exact demarcation of the border which led to skirmishes in early 1965. These were militarily insignificant but India was fighting at a logistical disadvantage as the supply lines were through the desert and keeping a large number of troops on the ground was impossible. Pakistan on the other hand had troops near the border and was able to mobilise brigades quickly. In April 1965 Pakistan upped the ante by sending in tanks and artillery to capture 2 important Indian posts. Although the casualties were light, the Pakistanis felt that clashes proved that the Indians could not fight for long and they were more than a match for the Indian army. India on the other hand was acutely aware of their local disadvantages and began to move troops to the Punjab border to retaliate if Pakistan continued its push into Kutch.

Aware that the situation was escalating, the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson issued an appeal for a ceasefire and offered his good offices for mediation. Ayub was aware that Kutch was not worth a general war and so accepted the offer; Shastri likewise was aware that Kutch was not a battle India could win and so also accepted the offer. The ceasefire meant that the British high commissioners in India and Pakistan could now work on a solution which would allow a face saving and long term end to the Kutch border dispute which had been simmering for years. On 1 July 1965 agreement was reached when both sides agreed to return to their positions before the hostilities began and crucially to submit to binding arbitration to finalise the precise border. The deal was widely denounced in India as rewarding Pakistani aggression and Shastri's precarious position was not helped by this announcement. Ayub on the other was pleased with the deal and described it as a victory for common sense. The final award gave Pakistan some extra land but crucially it was the lessons drawn from Kutch by Pakistan which were far reaching and which is why this book deals with the Kutch episode in some detail.

The main conclusion drawn from the conflict by Pakistan was that if it could establish a military advantage, the international community; especially the US and UK, would persuade both sides to stop fighting sooner rather than later which would force India to come to the negotiating table with Pakistan at least as an equal if not with a slight advantage. The obvious goal was Kashmir which now a hawkish faction of the Pakistan cabinet and military high command now felt was within grasp for the first time in the eighteen years since independence. The fact that India was willing to accept binding arbitration over some salt marshes and may not have been so ready to agree to the state of

Kashmir was not considered an insurmountable obstacle neither the fact that Indian troops in Kashmir outnumbered Pakistan's. Ayub gave the green light soon after the Kutch episode in 1965 to detailed military planning to commence which was designed to give Pakistan a military advantage in Kashmir without leading to an all out war with India.

The plan was presented to Ayub and approved on 13 May 1965 at the hill station of Murree. The plan was for a two phased attack; phase one was code named Operation Gibraltar and involved sending in thousands of lightly armed guerrillas into Indian Kashmir to disrupt the Indian forces there and to rally the local Kashmiris into mass opposition against India. This was to be followed by a Pakistani military strike into Indian Kashmir; aimed at the strategic town of Akhnur. This was code named Operation Grand Slam and the capture of Akhnur would have cut off Indian troops in Srinagar from the main road from India.

In early August 1965, Gibraltar was launched and managed to take the Indian forces by surprise. Despite that advantage the guerrillas soon realised that they were out gunned and even worse did not receive the assistance and co-operation from the local Kashmiris that they had expected and hoped for. The Pakistani government line that the guerrillas were Kashmiris who had risen up from within Indian Kashmir was not believed by the UN observers and India retaliated hard. A decision was made to not only round up all the guerrillas or infiltrators depending on one's perspective but to attack and capture the routes they were taking from Pakistani controlled Kashmir into Indian controlled Kashmir. On 28 August the Indians captured the strategic post of Haji Pir Pass; which was indeed a critical supply line for the Gibraltar forces.

The capture of Haji Pir Pass capped off the obvious failure of Operation Gibraltar and now Ayub had to decide when and if to launch Grand Slam. Pressure was growing within the Pakistani GHQ that if this was not launched soon, Pakistan would be in a worse position in Kashmir than before Gibraltar. Ayub hesitated for days, unsure whether to cut his losses and try and recover Haji Pir Pass and other territory by diplomacy or whether to follow through with the agreed plan and sending in the heavy armour and artillery of the Pakistan army. Finally at the end of August Ayub gave the go ahead for Grand Sam which was launched on 1 September. India was again taken off guard and the first 24 hours of the assault went almost exactly according to Pakistani plans. However with town of Akhnur within sight by 2 September, Ayub appeared to lose his nerve again and Gen Akhtar Malik leading Grand Slam was ordered to hand over command to another general. The change of command at this juncture has kept conspiracy theorists in business ever since but it appears to be nothing more than a loss of nerve by Ayub who was afraid that the capture of Akhnur would lead to an all-out war with India. Instead Pakistani forces advanced slowly to the town but made no serious attempt to capture it for the next few days.

Ayub's hopes of avoiding an all-out war with India were dashed by the Indian decision to relieve the military pressure in Kashmir by an assault on Lahore across the international border on 6 September. This was the moment that Pakistan had very surprisingly not prepared for. Despite the Indian military build-up on the Punjab border through the summer of 1965 and the clear warnings from India that they would choose the battlefield if provoked, the Pakistani high command dismissed such talk as bravado. As the Indian assault was lodged at first light it caught the Pakistani troops napping – literally and metaphorically. For some hours it seemed likely that India would capture the city of Lahore as it was lightly defended and unprepared for the assault. The Pakistani forces however managed to regroup and hold the line sufficiently to counter attack on 7 September; pushing the Indian forces some miles from Lahore by 8 September.

This new front threatened an all-out war – something which neither super-power wanted but both were unwilling to jump into the fray. The British urged an immediate ceasefire and China watched

carefully from the side-lines. It was a serious moment for South Asia which in the worst case scenario could have led to a long a bloody conflict. The most important player thanks to its supply of almost all Pakistan's hardware and ammunition was the United States and it was to Washington that all eyes turned. President Lyndon Johnson had considered Ayub a friend and an ally but had been angered by Pakistani overtures to China and the USSR during the early part of 1965 and reacted coolly to the military developments in early September. Pakistan officially demanded on 6 September that the US honour its promises to defend Pakistan in the event of Indian aggression which had been alluded to during various military pacts signed in the 1950's. The Pakistan government knew however that the military assistance pacts had referred to communist aggression and at its most generous, it could be said that if India launched an unprovoked attack on Pakistan there had been some oral assurances that the US would not stand by. This chain of events which the Americans could see clearly had been begun by Pakistan using their weapons and even worse, using the Chinese threat to try and force India to the negotiating table was something which infuriated Johnson. Rather than provide any assistance, Johnson ordered an arms embargo on both India and Pakistan on 8 September; a move far more damaging to Pakistan; given Pakistan's almost complete reliance on US weapons.

Just as damagingly for Pakistan, Johnson decided that the US would not take any political initiative and instead wanted the UN to take the lead. This was a huge blow to Pakistan as India was sure to receive Soviet support as a permanent member of the Security Council and this effectively meant that the Indians would be shielded from any resolution that they disliked. Bhutto and Ayub declared themselves disappointed and disillusioned but the reality was they knew the terms of US aid and should not have expected anything else.

The wild card remained China. Although China had not been permitted to take up its seat in the UN, it had the military capacity to worry the Indians and was making bellicose noises in support of Pakistan. The problem for Pakistan was that not only were the Chinese reluctant to become involved in a war with its large neighbour with no vital interest of its own at stake, they had not been taken into Pakistani confidence before the war and so were limited in what they were prepared to do. Ayub sent an envoy to China soon after war began to ask for military aid but was politely told that any request for military aid would have to come from him personally and would not be granted on the basis of indirect requests. Ayub was reluctant to do so knowing that such a request would mean US assistance would turn to enmity.

Ayub instead decided to play his last military card; the much vaunted Pakistani 1 Armoured Division comprising mainly of US heavy Patton tanks was now ordered to attack into Indian Punjab. This was launched on 8 September and although there was no clearly defined end objective in terms of which town was the ultimate target, it was designed to punch a hole through Indian defences and threaten the Grand Trunk Road near Amritsar. Although on the first day, the tanks managed to push into India, they were ordered to rest and return back to base near the border at nightfall; thereby surrendering the gains they had made. The next few days saw the Pakistani armoured division make repeated and predictable attacks along the same tracks as covered earlier with the Indian becoming more confident in their ability to take on the technically superior tanks. By 11 September the armoured division had lost some many tanks that the offensive was well and truly over. From that date effectively Pakistan knew it could not now obtain any military advantage by further fighting. Given the fact that Ayub had staked his reputation on his military and political strategy succeeding, he felt he could not afford to accept a ceasefire without some international assurance that some Indian concession on Kashmir would be made. India was no mood to concede anything and almost as the Pakistani armoured attack was getting under way south of Lahore, India sent its own armoured division into the northern Pakistani Punjab district of Sialkot. Although the Indian attack started well, it was unable to break through and although the Indian tanks managed to avoid the mauling that the Pakistani tanks had

received, they were soon bogged down by a dogged defence. Even ten days after the assault began India had not managed to capture any major town or strategic objective. It was therefore not until 19 September that India began to accept that it was not likely to gain any further military advantage by fighting on.

The scene now shifted to the United Nations where on 20 September a resolution was passed by the Security Council calling on an end to hostilities by 22 September. Bhutto arrived in New York on 21 September and although he threatened both a long war with India should the Kashmir issue not be resolved justly and also for Pakistan to withdraw from the UN if the organisation did not enforce a solution, the US were aware that he had been sent by Ayub with instructions to accept the ceasefire call. The deadline was slightly extended and the word Kashmir added to the UN resolution to allow some Pakistan face saving; the important fact was that both India and Pakistan accepted the UN resolution for a ceasefire which came into force on 0300 PST 23 September.

Ayub had miscalculated badly and lost. Shastri has held his nerve and won. The blame game began inside the Pakistani cabinet and GHQ with Bhutto being blamed for giving false assurances that India would not attack Lahore or across the international boundary. Bhutto in turned blamed the generals for not fighting properly and not playing the China card correctly. The USSR now offered to host peace talks to ensure the war could come to an organised end. India accepted the offer immediately but Pakistan hesitated; knowing the Soviets were never going to apply any serious pressure on India to compromise on Kashmir.

Whatever the facts, Ayub was now forced to go to meet Johnson in December 1965 in Washington for a stern lecture that Pakistan could not take US aid for granted and that any alliance with China—even if only directed at India, would place Pakistan beyond the pale as far as the US was concerned. Johnson bluntly informed Ayub that the Soviet offer to host peace talks in the Soviet Central Asian city of Tashkent was the only offer on the table and the USSR had full US support. Ayub was now under no illusions that on going to Tashkent was his only option for negotiating an official end to the war. In early January 1966, the Tashkent summit opened and it was soon very obvious that the Indians were not in the mood for even the slightest concession on Kashmir. The most that Ayub managed to obtain was an Indian return to the position before Gibraltar which meant the return of Haji Pir Pass. There were no talks on the future of Kashmir and the Indians even refused to have it as an agenda item on the talks. It was only with some Soviet persuasion that the Indians agreed to the mention of the word Kashmir in the final declaration. On 10 January the Tashkent Declaration was signed. There was of course absolutely no mechanism for any supposed resolution to the Kashmir issue. As far as India was concerned, there was no Kashmir issue to discuss. Pakistan had tried to take it by force and failed and India was not going to concede on the diplomatic field something Pakistan had failed to win on the military field.

It was a moment of great personal triumph for Shastri who had come with clear objectives and conceded nothing. However, the night the Declaration was signed, Shastri died in his sleep; providing conspiracy theorists with yet another field day of speculation. It is almost certain that Shastri died of natural causes but the timing provided yet another twist to the tale.

The war had only lasted a few weeks and in the awful context of the long and bloody wars of the 20th century was quick and light on casualties. However the domestic and international repercussions would be long lasting.

Firstly, it marked the last time that Pakistan attempted a direct military solution to the Kashmir issue. Although no government in Pakistan can ever concede the principle that Kashmiris should be given the right to self-determination, over time Afghanistan has become a more pressing issue.

Secondly, the US-Pakistan relationship was never the same. Although Pakistan received substantial US military and economic aid during the 1980's and 2000's due to the Afghanistan situation, it was limited in nature and carefully intended not to allow Pakistan to ever challenge Indian militarily again.

Thirdly, the Indian army and government was sufficiently confident of their abilities that just six years later they launched an all-out offensive in East Pakistan, leading to the creation of Bangladesh without fear of Pakistani tanks invading Indian Punjab.

Fourthly, Ayub's political stature was never the same. Although he held onto power for another few years, it was as a lame duck and the confident swagger of his early years were well behind him. The main beneficiary of both the military conflicts of 1965 and 1971 was Bhutto who took power in December 1971.

With the ending of the war as a virtual stalemate, the external borders of Kashmir returned to the pre-war situation. The wider repercussions of the war, although not apparent at the time, were far reaching. India lost its fear of Pakistan's US supplied weapons to the extent that just 6 years later was able to launch a full scale assault on East Pakistan (or Bangladesh) as it was soon to become, without any fear of the West Pakistan front. As Indian confidence grew, so Pakistan's diminished and it was not until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, that the Pakistan army felt able to replenish its weaponry thanks to a large influx of US military aid.

The Kashmir issue appears to be at a stalemate but the issue never quite ever goes away either. It has been the cause of both Pakistani suspicion that India has never quite accepted the rationale of partition and Indian suspicion that Pakistan is encouraging terrorism in India to offset Indian military superiority. Behind the scenes diplomacy is on going but any early settlement seems a long way off. The only lesson of the 1965 war appears to Pakistan to be that an all out military assault will not work. If it did succeed in 1965 when the two sides were relatively evenly matched, it would be hopeless in 2014 with India having out spent Pakistan hugely on military development.

Thank you all