

The Kargil Offensive [1999]

One dispute that remains unresolved in United Nations forum is the over 50-year-old Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. This disputed State of Jammu and Kashmir has been a continuous flash point and the cause of two wars (1948 and 1965) between the two countries. In the last few years, and particularly during the 1990s, the issue of Kashmir has been brought to the forefront of the world agenda by the struggle of the Kashmiri freedom fighters fighting in Indian occupied Kashmir. This freedom struggle against the brute Indian force, now in excess of 700,000 troops, demands the fulfillment of U. N. Resolutions and of Indian commitments to give them the opportunity to decide their political future through a fair and free plebiscite. This plebiscite to be held under U. N. auspices was mandated by the U. N. Security Council Resolutions of August 13, 1948, and January 05, 1949.

The freedom struggle gained further momentum in 1999 when the freedom fighters, in probably the most brilliant and courageous maneuver in modern military history, made high-altitude conquests in their territory. They captured high ground of a 140 kilometers long stretch of 4,500 meters high mountain ridges, near the strategic Indian-held garrison towns of Kargil and Drass. These towns lie on the only usable road between Srinagar, capital of Indian-occupied Kashmir, and the East. This threatened India's main supply route to its forces on the Chinese border.

The occupation by the Kashmiri freedom fighters came as a "Spring Surprise" to the Indian patrols. During the winter freeze, the area is abandoned by Indian patrols and isolated from the rest of Indian occupied Kashmir. In the beginning of May 1999, when the Indian forces returned to the mountains, they were surprised to find around 600 Kashmiri freedom fighters, occupying a territory 5 kilometers inside Indian occupied Kashmir. India alleged that these "militants" were sponsored by Pakistan, and that these militants crossed the provisional borderline, the "Line of Control", in an attempt to alter the de facto border by force.

The Government of Pakistan stated that it was not involved in any way and clarified that it is only the moral, diplomatic and political support that the Government of Pakistan continues to extend to Kashmiri freedom fighters for their cause of self-determination. It further clarified that the heights near Kargil were occupied by indigenous Kashmiri freedom fighters.

On May 26, 1999, India resorted to air strikes to drive out the freedom fighters. During this episode, two Indian aircraft entered the territory of Pakistan, one of which was shot down. The situation across the Line of Control became tense and several innocent civilians became the targets of indiscriminate Indian shelling. The conflict posed a threat to the region of South Asia.

The international community was concerned about the escalation of the conflict between the two newly declared nuclear powers, India and Pakistan. Talks, however, resumed between India and Pakistan in the summer of 1999 and efforts were made to resolve the crises. International intervention, most notably from the President of United States, Bill Clinton, persuaded Pakistan to use its influence on the freedom fighters to avert a full-scale war with India.

The freedom fighters vacated the captured territory by August, 1999.