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Special Feature

The Context of the Cease-Fire Decision in the 1965 India-Pakistan War

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September 21, 2015

S*ummary*

It is widely believed that India agreed to the ceasefire because of the advice tendered by General Chaudhuri, the then Chief of Army Staff, based on his erroneous belief that the war effort could no longer be sustained given that “most of India's frontline ammunition had been used up”. But the reality was different: the Indian Army had used up only 14 per cent of its frontline ammunition and it possessed “twice the number” of tanks than the Pakistan Army. In contrast, the Pakistan Army is believed to have been “short of supplies” and “running out of ammunition” by then. It has been argued that under these circumstances, if India had continued the war “for another week, Pakistan would have been forced to surrender.” There are, however, four problems with this narrative. First, it is based on the erroneous claim that the Indian Army possessed twice the number of tanks than the Pakistan Army at the end of the war. Second, it rests on the unverified assumption that the Pakistan Army's ammunition and spare parts would not have lasted for more than a few days after 22 September. Third, the narrative fails to comprehend the context of the conversation between Prime Minister Shastri and Chaudhuri about extending the war for some more days. And finally, it fails to take into account military and diplomatic factors that actually determined the Cabinet's ceasefire decision, some of which Chaudhuri himself highlighted in a written assessment he shared with Defence Minister Chavan.

By declaring a ceasefire with effect from 3.30 a.m. on 23 September 1965, did India miss an opportunity to attain decisive victory over Pakistan? Yes, according to the existing narrative, which attributes the ceasefire decision solely to the advice tendered in this regard by General J. N. Chaudhuri, the then Chief of the Army Staff and Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. In this account, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri was willing to consider extending the war "for some days" if the Indian Army could attain "a spectacular victory" in that timeframe.¹ But Chaudhuri advised Shastri to agree to an immediate ceasefire because he was under the 'false' impression that the war effort could no longer be sustained given that "most of India's frontline ammunition had been used up and there had been considerable tank losses also."² The reality was, however, quite different. By 22 September, the Indian Army had used up only 14 per cent of its frontline ammunition and it possessed "twice the number" of tanks than the Pakistan Army.³ In contrast, the Pakistan Army is believed to have been "short of supplies" and "running out of ammunition" by then.⁴ And a high attrition rate was "daily reducing the number of operational aircraft available" to the Pakistan Air Force.⁵ As argued by K. Subrahmanyam, under these circumstances, if India had continued the war "for another week, Pakistan would have been forced to surrender."⁶

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¹ Shastri's poser to Chaudhuri sometime "towards the end of the war". This was recalled on 13 April 1988 by L. P. Singh (Home Secretary during the war) in an interview with the official historians of the 1965 War. Cited in B. C. Chakravorty, *History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965*, Chapter 12, pp. 333-34, 339, available at <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/LAND-FORCES/Army/History/1965War/PDF/index.html>. This account has subsequently been published as S. N. Prasad and U. P. Thapliyal, *The India-Pakistan War of 1965: A History* (New Delhi & Dehra Dun: Ministry of Defence, Government of India & Natraj Publishers, 2011), p. 314.

² Chaudhuri's response to Shastri's poser, recalled on 13 April 1988 by L. P. Singh. Cited in Chakravorty, *History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965*, Chapter 12, pp. 333-34; Prasad and Thapliyal, *India-Pakistan War of 1965*, p. 314.

³ Chakravorty, *History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965*, Chapter 12, p. 334; Prasad and Thapliyal, *India-Pakistan War of 1965*, p. 315.

⁴ Russell Brines, *The Indo-Pakistani Conflict* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968), p. 346; Altaf Gohar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 237.

⁵ Asghar Khan, *The First Round: Indo-Pakistan War 1965* (Ghaziabad: Vikas Publishing House, 1979 Indian edn.), p. 98.

⁶ K. Subrahmanyam, "Guilt Gen of '65," *Indian Express*, 12 June 2005, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/oldStory/72455/>.

Tank Strengths of India and Pakistan at the end of the War

The official history of the war produced by the History Division of the Ministry of Defence claims that the Indian Army possessed twice the number of tanks than the Pakistan Army at the end of the war.⁷ It cites two sources in support of this claim: first, an interview given to its authors on 13 April 1988 by L. P. Singh, Home Secretary during the war; and, second, a letter sent to them on 12 April 1990 by K. Subrahmanyam, Deputy Secretary (Budget and Planning) in the Ministry of Defence during the war. It is not known what data source L. P. Singh and Subrahmanyam used to arrive at their conclusion. But their data source definitely could not have been the one used by the authors of the official history. If Singh and Subrahmanyam had used the same data source as the authors of the official history, they would not have been able to conclude that the Indian Army possessed twice the number of tanks the Pakistan Army did at the end of the war.

The official history provides two sets of specific numbers that help to derive the actual number of tanks possessed by the Indian and Pakistan Armies at the end of the war. One, it provides the actual number of tanks the two armies possessed on September 1, the day the war began. And two, it provides the number of tanks that each army lost during the course of the war. Subtracting the number of tanks each army lost during the war from the total number of tanks each possessed on September 1 would give the net number of tanks each possessed at the end of the war.

According to the official history, as on 1 September 1965, the Indian Army possessed 720 tanks and the Pakistan Army 765 tanks. That is, the Pakistan Army possessed 45 tanks more than the Indian Army on the day the war began. The official history's source for these figures is Lt. Col. Bhupinder Singh's book *Role of Tanks in India-Pakistan War*. Bhupinder Singh, in turn, had taken these figures from the 1965-66 edition of the *Military Balance* published by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.⁸ During the course of the war, the Indian Army lost 128 tanks according to the official history, which cites a statement made to this effect by Defence Minister Chavan on 25 September 1965.⁹ Subtracting these 128 tanks lost from the pre-war strength of 720 gives a net figure of 592 tanks for the Indian Army at the end of the war.

As for the Pakistan Army's tank losses during the course of the war, the official history provides two figures, one the Indian estimate and the other the Pakistani estimate. The Indian estimate is that the Pakistan Army lost 200 tanks during the war. And the Pakistani estimate is that the Pakistan Army lost 165 tanks during the war. Subtracting the Indian estimate of 200 Pakistani tanks lost from the pre-war tank strength of 765 tanks gives a net figure of 565 tanks for the Pakistan Army at the end of the war. And subtracting the Pakistani estimate of 165 tanks lost from the pre-war strength of 765 tanks gives a net figure of 600 tanks for the Pakistan Army at the end of the war.

⁷ Chakravorty, *History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965*, Chapter 12, pp. 334, 339. See Endnote 15 on page 339.

⁸ Chakravorty, *History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965*, Chapter 1, p. 10; Prasad and Thapliyal, *India-Pakistan War of 1965*, p. 10; Bhupinder Singh, *1965 War: Role of Tanks in India-Pakistan War* (Patiala: B. C. Publishers, 1982), pp. 20-21.

⁹ Chakravorty, *History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965*, Chapter 12, pp. 333, 339. Prasad and Thapliyal, *India-Pakistan War of 1965*, pp. 312, 316.

In sum, at the end of the war, the Indian Army possessed 592 tanks; and the Pakistan Army possessed either 565 tanks or 600 tanks. In other words, the Indian Army possessed either 27 tanks more than the Pakistan Army or it possessed eight tanks less than the Pakistan Army. These numbers derived from the data cited in the official history itself discredit the claim that the Indian Army possessed twice the number of tanks than the Pakistan Army at the end of the war.

That, in turn, calls into question the contention that the Indian Army would have been able to attain a spectacular victory if the war had been extended by a few more days. For, on 20 September, 1 Armoured Division, which had been “staked to turn the tide of the war” in India’s favour, had assumed the defensive and began to engage in refit and recoupment. And it did so after twice failing to capture the crucial town of Chawinda.¹⁰ By this time, moreover, it was being opposed not only by Pakistan Army’s 6 Armoured Division but also by a substantial portion of Pakistan’s 1 Armoured Division which had been moved from Khem Karan to the Sialkot front. Further, the two opposing Corps on this front, both named I Corps, were by then evenly matched in their non-armoured component, with seven brigades each.¹¹ Under these circumstances of marked numerical inferiority in armoured strength and evenly matched infantry numbers, it would have been extremely difficult for the Indian Army’s I Corps and 1 Armoured Division to effect a break through the entrenched Pakistani defences or even batter them down through sheer attrition especially in a timeframe of a few days. In effect, a swift and spectacular victory would have been impossible if the war had been extended only by a few days or a week.

Pakistan Army’s Materiel Situation

The second problem with the existing narrative is its unverified assumption that the Pakistan Army was on the verge of running out of ammunition and spare parts. According to K. Subrahmanyam, it was US policy to provide six weeks’ worth of ammunition as war wastage reserves (WWR) to countries receiving American military aid. Further, such WWR of ammunition was provided at US rates, “which were lower than our rates”; Subrahmanyam does not, however, specify by how much or by what factor US WWR of ammunition were lower than “our rates”. This US policy applied to Pakistan as well, whose armed forces were equipped principally with American weapons and equipment during the 1950s and early 1960s.¹²

The 1965 War began on 1 September with the Pakistani offensive in Chhamb, and ended on the early morning of 23 September. That is, it lasted 22 days or three weeks and one day. That means that the Pakistan Army would have used up three weeks’ worth of ammunition and spares. In effect, it would have possessed another three weeks’ worth of war wastage reserves. Such a conclusion is not difficult to arrive at. India, according to Subrahmanyam, had war wastage reserves worth 90 days at that time. And, as the official history of the war notes, the Indian Army had used up only 14 per cent of

¹⁰ Prasad and Thapliyal, *India-Pakistan War of 1965*, pp. 187-221; Harbakhsh Singh, *War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict 1965* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1991), p. 158.

¹¹ Prasad and Thapliyal, *India-Pakistan War of 1965*, pp. 188-90.

¹² Subrahmanyam, “Guilt Gen of ‘65”.

frontline ammunition at the end of 22 days of war. There is no reason to assume that the other party to this war, the Pakistan Army, consumed far greater quantities of ammunition; although the WWR, consisting of equipment and ammunition, is only a figure for planning and the actual expenditure of ammunition or loss of equipment varies depending upon intensity of engagement in battle(s). During war time the stocks from WWR are utilised to replenish the expenditure of ammunition or equipment getting destroyed or damaged beyond immediate repairs, during the battle. Of course, provision of Pakistan's WWR would have been at US rates - not Indian rates - but in the absence of any indication about the exact differential between these two rates and actual expenditure, it is impossible to come to a definite conclusion that the Pakistan Army would have run out of ammunition if the war had continued for some more days or a week.

Context of the Shastri-Chaudhuri Conversation

The third inadequacy of the narrative that India could have attained a decisive victory is the inability of its advocates to comprehend the context of the Shastri-Chaudhuri conversation. In his interview to the authors of the official history, L. P. Singh stated that "towards the end of the war" Shastri asked Chaudhuri "whether India could win a spectacular victory if the war was prolonged for some days", to which Chaudhuri responded that the army has already used up most of its frontline ammunition and had suffered considerable tank losses as well.¹³ In effect, by highlighting what turned out to be a non-existent ammunition shortage, Chaudhuri provided Shastri an indirect answer, namely, that "a spectacular victory" was no longer possible in "some days" given this deficiency. In the light of the subsequent revelation that the army had used up only 14 per cent of its frontline ammunition, analysts have exclusively focused upon Chaudhuri's error, his fearfully cautious nature, and his tendency to act in an arbitrary and imperious manner.¹⁴ But what has been missed in these analyses is the context of the Shastri-Chaudhuri conversation.

That context lies in the discussions that took place on 13 and 14 September 1965 in the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet (ECC). On these two days, the ECC was debating the pros and cons of agreeing to a ceasefire with effect from 6.30 p.m. on 14 September, which was being urged by the United Nations Secretary General, U Thant, who was actually present in Delhi between 12 and 15 September. The ECC stood divided on the question of whether to accept or reject U Thant's plea, and the Security Council's demand, for an early ceasefire. Acutely concerned about the impact of the war on the economy, Prime Minister Shastri, Finance Minister T. T. Krishnamachari and Food Minister C. Subramaniam were all in favour of agreeing to a ceasefire on the basis of the UN Security Council Resolution of 6 September. But they were strongly opposed by Defence Minister Chavan, who was not only reflecting his own views but also that of the leadership of the armed forces. Further, Selig Harrison, the then South Asia Bureau

¹³ Chakravorty, *History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965*, Chapter 12, pp. 333, 339; Prasad and U. P. Thapliyal, *India-Pakistan War of 1965*, p. 314.

¹⁴ K. Subrahmanyam, "Guilty Gen of '65"; Chakravorty, *History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965*, Chapter 12, p. 334; D. K. Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1991), pp. 401-28.

chief of *The Washington Post*, had reported at that time that Chaudhuri actually “urged” the ECC “to avoid a cessation of hostilities” at that point in time because the army was “on the verge of a decisive victory in the Punjab and should be allowed to inflict the maximum damage on Pakistani power.”¹⁵

Shastri and other members of the ECC had to convince Chaudhuri to relent from his opposition to the government accepting an immediate ceasefire. The argument that they employed for this purpose went as follows: even if India accepted a ceasefire, Pakistan was probably not likely to do so; consequently, the war could well continue; and that would afford an opportunity for the army to attain its decisive, spectacular, victory, even as the government earned diplomatic points among world opinion by contrasting its own earnestness for peace with Pakistan’s attachment to war. It is on the basis of this understanding – that the war would probably continue and India would gain both diplomatically and militarily – that Chaudhuri accepted Shastri’s and the ECC’s decision to convey to the UN Secretary General India’s consent to the ceasefire.¹⁶

Thereupon, Shastri wrote to U Thant on 14 September accepting the latter’s ceasefire proposal with effect from 6.30 a.m. on 16 September, provided Pakistan also agreed to do so. In this letter, Shastri also noted that military operations will continue against existing or future armed infiltrators from Pakistan and that the Security Council needs to make a distinction between Pakistan the aggressor and India the victim of aggression.¹⁷ When U Thant pointed out that these latter statements amounted to conditions for the ceasefire to come into effect, Shastri, with the concurrence of the ECC, sent “a more agreeable” follow-up letter to the UN Secretary General on 15 September.¹⁸ In this follow-up letter, after noting that he did not ask U Thant to give any undertaking on the issues of Pakistan’s aggression and armed Pakistani infiltrators, Shastri reaffirmed his “willingness, as communicated yesterday, to order a simple cease-fire and cessation of hostilities as proposed by you, as soon as you are able to confirm to me that the Government of Pakistan has agreed to do so as well.”¹⁹ But a ceasefire did not come into effect on 16 September and the war continued for another week because Pakistan insisted upon a precondition: that the ceasefire be accompanied by concrete steps that would “lead to a final settlement of the Kashmir dispute.”²⁰

What these events demonstrate is that the political leadership had taken a considered decision to accept an unconditional ceasefire with effect from 16 September. In the process, Shastri and his colleagues in the ECC had to convince Chaudhuri to relent from his strong opposition to that decision. Given this reality, it is inconceivable that only a week later Shastri seriously contemplated an extension of the war beyond 22 September,

¹⁵ Selig S. Harrison reported on this episode in *The Washington Post* on 14 and 15 September 1965. Cited in Brines, *Indo-Pakistani Conflict*, pp. 367, 464.

¹⁶ Brines, *Indo-Pakistani Conflict*, p. 367.

¹⁷ Text of Shastri’s letter to U Thant dated 14 September 1965, reprinted as “Offer to Ceasefire,” in *Selected Speeches of Lal Bahadur Shastri: June 11, 1964 to January 10, 1966* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2007 reprint), pp. 334-35.

¹⁸ In his diary entry for 15 September, Chavan noted that the ECC “decided after some discussion to reply in a more agreeable way” to U Thant. R. D. Pradhan, *Debacle to Resurgence: Y. B. Chavan – Defence Minister 1962-66* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2013), p. 273.

¹⁹ Cited in Brines, *Indo-Pakistani Conflict*, p. 368.

²⁰ Brines, *Indo-Pakistani Conflict*, pp. 368-69.

especially when neither the military nor diplomatic situation had improved in any significant way and when it was also clear that Pakistan will “ultimately agree to the ceasefire” without insisting upon any precondition this time around.²¹

These developments help explain the manner in which Shastri phrased his question to Chaudhuri a week later: “whether India could win a spectacular victory if the war was prolonged for some days”? It is quite conceivable that Chaudhuri’s vehement opposition to the ceasefire decision and his assertion that the army was on the verge of a decisive victory at the ECC meetings on 13 and 14 September made a strong impression upon Shastri. After all, as Chief of the Army Staff and Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Chaudhuri represented the views of the entire military establishment. The very fact that the appropriateness of the ceasefire decision is still being discussed 50 years later in military circles attests to the enduring views that the armed forces have held in this regard. Consequently, before conveying to the United Nations his willingness to order a ceasefire that will bring the war to an end, Shastri may have felt compelled to ask Chaudhuri whether the decisive, spectacular, victory, which the army chief had earlier asserted was within reach, could still be attained if the war were to be extended for some days beyond 22 September.

While it is not known when exactly Shastri posed this question to Chaudhuri, Chavan’s diary throws light on how and when the ceasefire decision was actually arrived at. The decision was made on the evening of 20 September at a meeting that Shastri held with Chavan, Chaudhuri and P.V.R. Rao, in which the Prime Minister’s Secretary L.K. Jha also participated. Chavan’s diary entry for that date states: “After some preliminary discussion about the military point of view, it was agreed that Prime Minister should send to U Thant ... (a message) confirming our willingness to order simple ceasefire if Pakistan is agreeable.”²² In effect, the decision was taken by the Prime Minister on 20 September in consultation with the top leaders of the defence establishment – Defence Minister, Army Chief who was also Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, and Defence Secretary. It was only subsequently, on 21 September, that the ECC endorsed the Prime Minister’s prior decision to accept the ceasefire “without much discussion”.²³

But what explains the difference between Chaudhuri’s initial opposition to a ceasefire and the erroneous excuse he offered for accepting the ceasefire a week later? Chaudhuri had expressed his strong opposition to a ceasefire on 13 and 14 September and asserted that the army was on the verge of a decisive victory because he believed that the armoured offensive in the Sialkot Sector, which was then underway, would turn the tide of war in India’s favour. I Corps’ objective was to secure Pakistani territory up to the Marala-Ravi Link Canal, thus driving a wedge between Sialkot and Lahore, and in the process considerably attrite Pakistani forces. 1 Armoured Division had already captured Phillora on 11 September and in the process had inflicted heavy attrition on Pakistani armour. And on the morning of 14 September it began its advance against Chawinda. The capture of Chawinda would have severed a crucial rail link between Sialkot and Lahore and maintained the momentum of the forward advance towards the Marala-Ravi

²¹ Quoted phrase from Chavan’s entry in his diary on 21 September. Pradhan, *Debacle to Resurgence*, p. 307.

²² Chavan’s diary entry on 20 September. Pradhan, *Debacle to Resurgence*, p. 306.

²³ Chavan’s diary entry on 21 September. Pradhan, *Debacle to Resurgence*, p. 307.

Link Canal. But fierce Pakistani resistance and misunderstandings between Indian commanders prevented Chawinda's capture despite two successive attempts, the first on 14 September by 1 Armoured Division and the second on 19 September by 6 Mountain Division. Thereupon, 1 Armoured Division, which had by then lost 70 tanks through damage or destruction, assumed the defensive and began the process of refitting and recouping. In effect, as Harbakhsh Singh notes, the war on the Sialkot front had reached "a virtual stalemate".²⁴

By this time, moreover, the war on the Lahore front had settled down to a series of relatively minor actions that could not fundamentally change the frontline. 4 Mountain Division failed to retake Khem Karan. While 7 Infantry Division managed to improve its position slightly, it could not fully mop up Pakistani pockets or destroy the bridges on the Ichhogil. The only major success was the capture of Dograi by 15 Infantry Division, but that came on 22 September, two days after the ceasefire decision had already been taken.²⁵

In the light of this turn of events, Chaudhuri could no longer assert to the Prime Minister that the army would be able to attain a spectacular victory if the war were to be extended by some more days beyond 22 September. Perhaps, in the light of his previous assertion about attaining a decisive victory within a few days, he felt compelled to offer the excuse that the army had used up most of its frontline ammunition and suffered considerable tank losses. As D. K. Palit notes, this was an "off-the-cuff answer" that Chaudhuri delivered without, as was his habit, verifying it first with his staff.²⁶ But whatever Chaudhuri's motive or fault or actual belief for providing the answer that he did, the fact of the matter is that the Indian Army was simply not in a position at that point in time to attain a spectacular victory in a matter of a few days or a week.

Military and Diplomatic Factors that Influenced the Ceasefire Decision

Finally, what has been missed through this exclusive focus upon Chaudhuri's 'erroneous' belief about the army's *materiel* position are other military and diplomatic factors that compelled the government to accept an early ceasefire. That the ceasefire decision did not solely hinge on Chaudhuri's advice and incorrect statement about ammunition stocks, but was instead a function of other diplomatic and military factors, is evident from a written assessment that Chaudhuri himself had prepared and shared with Defence Minister Chavan on the morning of 20 September. As noted earlier, the Prime Minister took the ceasefire decision in consultation with the leaders of the defence establishment that very evening.

During the morning meeting on 20 September, Chavan asked the three Chiefs of Staff about "their view" on the government agreeing to a ceasefire given that the UN Security Council was "expected" to pass another resolution that day demanding an immediate termination of hostilities. Chaudhuri responded that he had "prepared an assessment

²⁴ Harbakhsh Singh, *War Despatches*, pp. 158, 122; Prasad and Thapliyal, *India-Pakistan War of 1965*, pp. 187-221.

²⁵ Harbakhsh Singh, *War Despatches*, pp. 112-21.

²⁶ Palit, *War in High Himalaya*, p. 427.

from (the) military point of view", and after the morning meeting he "came back alone" to share this assessment with Chavan. The "thesis" of Chaudhuri's assessment, as briefly recorded by Chavan in his diary, was that India had achieved both its war objectives: defeating Pakistan's attempt to conquer Jammu & Kashmir, and inflicting damage on Pakistan's "war potential and military machine". Since India was "on top of the situation" militarily, the army would support the government's decision to agree to a ceasefire. Further, the resulting "respite ... will be good to put things right as far as supplies were concerned." In addition, the assessment highlighted two other factors that necessitated a ceasefire. First, India stood "completely isolated" in the diplomatic arena. Second, rejecting a ceasefire would also be "unwise" from the long-term military point of view because of the China factor. China, the assessment noted, is keen to ensure that the India-Pakistan war continued so that it can "fish in the troubled waters". After recording this gist of Chaudhuri's assessment on the ceasefire in his diary, Chavan noted: "I think it is good that the military and political thinking was moving in the same direction."²⁷

In this assessment, Chaudhuri refers to the opportunity that the ceasefire would provide to replenish war supplies, although he does not expressly state whether most supplies had been used up. More importantly, he highlights two other factors that had a considerable bearing on the government's calculations: the prospect of China initiating hostilities against India, and India's diplomatic isolation and the international diplomatic pressure that was being exerted upon it to agree to an early ceasefire.

The prospect of China initiating hostilities became evident as early as 7 September, when it issued a statement contending that India's expansion of the "local conflict ... in Kashmir into a general conflict" constituted "a grave threat to peace in this part of Asia." Further, in an apparent attempt to lay the ground for a Chinese military intervention, the statement asserted that "India's aggression against any one of its neighbours concerns all of its neighbours".²⁸ The very next day, on 8 September, China sent an ultimatum demanding that India either "dismantle" certain "military structures", "withdraw" its armed forces from the border and "stop all its acts of aggression and provocation against China" or else "bear responsibility for all the consequences arising therefrom."²⁹ After a week-long lull, another ultimatum followed on 16 September demanding that India either "dismantle" 56 military works along the Sikkim border, "immediately stop all its intrusions" into Chinese territory, and "pledge to refrain from any more harassing raids across the boundary" or "bear full responsibility for all the grave consequences arising therefrom."³⁰ On the very next day, 17 September, Chinese troops began to move closer to the border in the Sikkim and Ladakh Sectors.³¹ And,

²⁷ Pradhan, *Debacle to Resurgence*, pp. 285-86. All quotations in this paragraph are from this source.

²⁸ "Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China, 7 September 1965," reprinted as Appendix I in *White Paper No. XII: Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged Between The Government of India and China, January 1965-February 1966* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1966), pp. 134-35.

²⁹ "Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 8 September, 1965," reprinted in *White Paper No. XII*, pp. 38-39.

³⁰ "Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 16 September, 1965," reprinted in *White Paper No. XII*, pp. 42-44.

³¹ Srivastava, *Lal Bahadur Shastri*, p. 279.

three days later, on 20 September, Chinese troops fired upon Indian positions at several places along the border including Nathu La.³²

Although Indian leaders discounted a large-scale Chinese attack, they did think that China might initiate limited military action in order to divert India's attention from the war against Pakistan. They believed that a Chinese attack could occur either through Chumbi Valley or more worryingly through the Karakoram Pass "in vicinity Kargil" with a view to cutting off the Srinagar-Leh road".³³ Seriously concerned about such a possibility, the prime minister's secretary, L. K. Jha, made a request to the US Ambassador in Delhi, Chester Bowles, that secret consultations be commenced between Indian and American military personnel with a view to "speed up" US military assistance in the event of a Chinese attack. But the United States expressed its unwillingness to initiate any such "contingency planning" given President Lyndon Johnson's decision "to avoid commitment of any sort".³⁴

China's entry into the war, however limited its military intervention might have been, would have made it impossible for India to fully focus on the war with Pakistan. Continuing the war with Pakistan under these circumstances may not have yielded any appreciable advantages. In addition, China would have had an opportunity to once again "bruise India's morale" or even pose a challenge to the Indian military presence in Ladakh.³⁵ Under these circumstances, the ceasefire decision became impossible to postpone.

Another factor that made the ceasefire decision impossible to postpone was lack of diplomatic support for India's position in the international arena as well as the enormous diplomatic pressure that was being exerted, particularly by all the major powers in unison, to terminate the hostilities.

The Soviet Union adopted a position of studied neutrality. Premier Alexie Kosygin repeatedly urged Shastri and Ayub Khan to cease hostilities and even offered to mediate between them. Further, for the first time since the United Nations was formed, the Soviet Union voted along with the United States in favour of three successive Security Council resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire. What drove Soviet policy was concern about its communist rival, China, exploiting the India-Pakistan war to acquire a prominent role in South Asia.

Preventing China from entering the war and denying it an opportunity to do so was also an important factor in US policy. For this purpose, even as it privately warned China against intervening in the India-Pakistan war, the United States worked with the Soviet Union to pass successive UN Security Council resolutions that contained explicit language about the undesirability of third-party military intervention. At the same time,

³² Pradhan, *Debacle to Resurgence*, p. 290; Defence Minister's diary entry of 21 September 1965.

³³ B. K. Nehru, Indian Ambassador in Washington, to George Ball, US Undersecretary of State. See "Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in India," 19 September 1965, Document 216, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968: Volume XXV, South Asia*, available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v25/d216>; Srivastava, *Lal Bahadur Shastri*, pp. 275-76.

³⁴ "Telegram From the Embassy in India to the Department of State," 18 September 1965, Document 211, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968: Volume XXV*.

³⁵ Srivastava, *Lal Bahadur Shastri*, p. 276.

to deny China an opportunity to intervene, the United States, along with the United Kingdom, suspended all economic and military assistance to India and Pakistan in order to compel them to end the war. In addition, the United States also began to exert subtle pressure on both countries by “dribbling” out food aid “slowly”.³⁶ That this subtle pressure did register is evident from Indian Ambassador B. K. Nehru’s question to US Undersecretary of State George Ball as to “why you are trying to starve us out?”³⁷

India could not even obtain diplomatic support from its non-aligned friends such as Egypt and Yugoslavia. These and several other countries in Asia and Africa also urged an early ceasefire.³⁸ In effect, India stood isolated diplomatically and faced enormous international diplomatic pressure, a circumstance that had a major impact on the ceasefire decision.

Conclusion

For 25 years since the compilation of the official history and the series of books published in the 1990s, a simplistic narrative has dominated the debate on the decision to agree to a ceasefire. But this narrative is not only based on one erroneous claim and another unverified assumption, but it also fails to take into account the stalemate on the war front as well as other military and diplomatic factors that ultimately influenced the ceasefire decision. As a result, myth had usurped the place of history and the context in which that history unfolded. The history is that the ceasefire decision was influenced not by Chaudhuri’s ‘erroneous’ belief that the army had run out of ammunition but by the combination of the absence of the prospect of a swift victory, concerns about Chinese military intervention and its consequences, and concerted diplomatic pressure from the major powers.

³⁶ “Memorandum From Robert Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy),” Document 203, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XXV*, available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v25/d203>.

³⁷ “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in India,” 19 September 1965, Document 216, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968: Volume XXV*.

³⁸ For an overview of the international diplomatic efforts to bring about a ceasefire and the positions adopted by the major powers, see Brines, *Indo-Pakistani Conflict*, pp. 353-81.

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