

Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

No.1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
Delhi Cantonment, New Delhi-110010



Journal of Defence Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.idsa.in/journalofdefencestudies>

Air Power in the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War: An Assessment

Ramesh V. Phadke

To cite this article: Ramesh V. Phadke (2015): Air Power in the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War: An Assessment, Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 9, No. 3 July-September 2015, pp. 115-134

URL http://idsa.in/jds/9_3_2015_AirPowerinthe1965IndoPakistanWar.html

Please Scroll down for Article

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.idsa.in/termsfuse>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

Views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India.

Air Power in the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War An Assessment

*Ramesh V. Phadke**

The 1965 Indo-Pak War came when India was in the midst of a major military expansion. India did not want to escalate matters when Pakistani forces invaded Kutch in April 1965 and accepted a ceasefire with British mediation. Although the government allowed the use of Indian Air Force (IAF) combat aircraft on 1 September 1965, action remained localised to the Chhamb area for five days. This was primarily because of India's desire to avoid all-out war. IAF was used for counter air, air defence, and in support of the ground forces. Poor communications with the Army, lack of joint planning, an almost total absence of early warning and ground controlled interception (GCI) radars meant that its overall performance was sub-optimal. Despite these self-imposed restraints, India succeeded in thwarting Pakistan's efforts to grab Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) by force, and to that extent the war did become a limited victory for India.

In many respects, the 1965 war was different, if not completely unique. This was the first time that India fought a conventional war where its military and political leadership was wholly Indian. It was also the first time that the IAF was allowed to enter the fray and air power was used. According to one account:

1965 was the first time after independence in 1947 that the Cabinet, the Ministry of Defence, the Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Services Headquarters came face to face with the procedural realities of war and its international implications. Every single personage

* The author is a retired Air Commodore.



and institution had to carefully feel the way forward. There were no precedents to go by.¹

Although India had fought a long conflict with Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in 1947–48, it was localised and did not quite register on the conscience of the Indian people. The first Kashmir war was also fought under the overall direction of senior British officers.

The 1965 war was also seen as a test of the Indian Army after its dismal performance against the Chinese three years earlier. There was a groundswell of patriotism throughout India and the average Indian wanted to teach Pakistan a hard lesson. India was in the midst of its ambitious military expansion. The 1 Corps that launched a major attack into Pakistan was formed only in April 1965. Many other units, including IAF fighter squadrons, were new raisings. No. 28 Squadron, the first IAF unit to be equipped with the recently acquired MiG-21 supersonic fighter, had only a handful of aircraft. Although not quite ready for war, India's military and political leadership was, however, not prepared to let Pakistan get away with wanton aggression.

Writing in the *Indian Express* in 2005, Shekhar Gupta says:

It is often believed that 1965 ended in a stalemate and did not achieve any objectives since none was set prior to war. Yet, victory or defeat in a war is usually determined by the objectives with which each side started out with, or what was on the mind of the side that initiated it. This was a war initiated by Pakistan. Ayub Khan had run a military government, his armies had been fattened by the Americans after he joined their 'anti-Communist' security alliances. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was his Kautilya, such as he was. Between the two of them they decided—and with some justification—that 1965 was the moment to strike. India was still punch-drunk after the defeat by the Chinese in the Himalayas. Its order of battle, equipment, deployment patterns, were all changing. Nehru's rapid decline and death just the previous year had left a huge political vacuum at the exact moment when the military forces were in a disarray, the brass was still recovering from the post-[19]62 purge, there were food shortages, Shastri was seen to be a weak leader and, diplomatically, India was placed in that perilously transitional stage when the Americans had refused to supply any fighting equipment, the British had limitations and the Soviet connection was just firming up. In fact, when that war broke out, the IAF's first MiG-21 squadron was just formed, with only nine aircraft operational as yet.²

The United States (US) Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, had told Y.B. Chavan, India's new Defence Minister, on a visit to the US in search of military equipment:

Mr. Minister, your air force is like a museum. I wonder whether you are aware of the variety of aircraft in your air force. You are still operating with Hunters, Spitfires, Vampires, Liberators, Harvards—exotic names of World War II vintage. All these aircraft are only worthy of finding a place in the museum.³

McNamara was not entirely right; the Hunters were not old and the Spitfires had been phased out in the early 1950s.

India's defeat in the short border war in 1962 with China had emboldened Pakistan to embark on a military adventure to snatch Kashmir which India was seen as slowly assimilating into the Indian union. The March 1963 border agreement with China in which Pakistan had generously given away a sizeable chunk of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) to China had also brought the two countries together into a virtual anti-India alliance.

Pakistan's membership of the Baghdad Pact had resulted in the US giving it massive quantities of sophisticated arms, especially over 350 M-48 Patton tanks and 125 F-86 Sabre fighters, some 25 of which were equipped with the famed Sidewinder air-to-air missiles; a dozen F-104 supersonic Starfighters; and above all, an effective radar-controlled air defence network, including training of its air force personnel. The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) was thus battle ready, experienced and motivated to pulverise its traditional enemy, India. Although the US had publicly announced that Pakistan was to use these arms only in defence in its larger Cold War context against communist expansion, Pakistan seemed confident that the Americans would turn a blind eye if these were actually used against India. Pakistan, it seems, was not ready to come to terms with Kashmir's accession to India.

The Soviets, while being friendly, had only recently accepted India's request for the licence production of the MiG-21. India's new Defence Minister, Y.B. Chavan, had drawn a blank when he visited the US and the United Kingdom (UK) in 1964 in search of modern arms.⁴ India was still groping for answers to the problems of national security. It was neither fully equipped nor fully ready to fight a conventional war. Given countrywide food shortages, a violent anti-Hindi agitation in Tamil Nadu and a weak economy, its political leadership, it seems, wanted to avoid an all-out war at almost any cost.

Pakistan's intransigence and anti-India propaganda were only adding to the grim resolve of the average Indian. Pakistan's incursion into Kutch roused strong feelings amongst the people of India. They had vivid memories of the humiliation India had suffered at the hands of the Chinese in 1962. The opposition parties alleged that Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri had not acted firmly enough. Several considerations appear to have weighed with the Prime Minister in handling the Kutch crisis.⁵

This was the psychological moment President Ayub chose to launch an ambitious military adventure against India in order to wrest Kashmir. Victim of his own propaganda machine he convinced himself that the Government of India was a push-over and the Indian Army a 'paper tiger'.⁶

The general mood was one of grim resolve and defiance. India, it seemed, was not going to take things lying down. The most notable feature of this war, however, was the utmost patience and reluctance to resort to use of force, now referred to as 'strategic restraint', that Indian political leadership displayed at every stage in the vain hope that Pakistan would see reason and avoid a clash of arms.

OPPOSING STRATEGIES

Following the Pakistan Army's aggressive deployment in November 1964, the Indian Army had fought a fierce encounter in the Tithwal sector with Pakistani troops;⁷ despite that, India did not want to escalate matters. Pakistan's had devised its plans in four phases. In the first phase, in a probing attack under the code name 'Operation Desert Fox', Pakistan decided to test India's resolve by launching a major ground strike in the remote Rann of Kutch in the extreme south-west of the International Boundary (IB), which was not clearly demarcated, and accused India of intrusions.

The second aim of this operation was to, if possible, divert India's attention and forces from Punjab to the Rann of Kutch. In the second phase, a large force of some 30,000 well-armed and trained tribals was to carry out multiple and simultaneous infiltrations into the Valley of Kashmir to carry out acts of sabotage, destroy roads and bridges, take control of the lone radio station, incite the locals to a full-fledged rebellion and declare a 'Government of Free Kashmir'.

In the third phase, Pakistan planned a brigade attack supported

by armour and artillery in the Chhamb area at the southern end of the Cease Fire Line (CFL), with a view to take control of the bridge at Akhnoor, to sever India's road link with its garrisons in Naushera, Poonch, Rajouri and Uri and if possible, threaten the main road from Jammu to Srinagar. In the fourth and final phase, an all-out attack was planned across the IB in Punjab to take Amritsar and threaten the Grand Trunk Road, if possible up to the Beas River. The whole exercise was to internationalise the Kashmir issue and force negotiations from a position of strength.

India, on the other hand, only wanted to defend its territory and restrict the scope of its response to keep the conflict localised and contained, without allowing it to develop into an 'all-out' war. L.K. Jha, the Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Shastri, states:

I was involved with some of the overall considerations which were guiding the war effort and meetings of the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet (ECC) as well as the Secretaries where some aspects were viewed largely from the political point of view but equally from an *operational* point of view...the attempt on our part was to keep the whole thing confined...to a local conflict...But at the same time, we had come to realise that fighting on terrain chosen by the enemy would always leave you at a disadvantage. This came out very, very vividly during the Rann of Kutch affair...

At that very time, a political decision had been taken that we would not fight with our hands tied behind our backs and therefore a plan for opening a second front in the Punjab by marching into Lahore had been drawn up and perfected. But it was not launched because a cease fire came into existence...

...I recall...a meeting between Prime Minister Shastri and President Ayub during the Commonwealth Conference session... Ayub said somewhat patronisingly, 'You know, your chaps tried to commit aggression on our territory, our chaps gave them a few knocks and they began to flee.' Then Shastriji said 'Mr President, you are a General. I have no military knowledge or experience. But do you think if I had to attack Pakistan, I would choose a terrain where we have no logistic support and you have all the advantages? Do you think I would make such a mistake or any of my Generals would allow me to make that mistake?' And one could see from the face of President Ayub that this thought startled him...I could see him visibly pause and not pursue the point any further (author's emphasis).⁸

It is clear from this quote that while India did not want to expand the conflict, its leadership also was resolved to give a befitting reply to Pakistan's aggression. In India, as in many parts of the world, employment of air power is often seen as being a sure sign of escalation. The Indian political leadership was not ready to use the IAF in the Rann of Kutch. The nearest IAF airfield at Jamnagar being over 150 km away, air force sent only one Vampire on a photo-recce mission and provided conclusive evidence of the presence of American Patton tanks in the Rann of Kutch. IAF also did not want to divert its assets away from the more vulnerable area of Punjab and J&K.

Half a century later, it is difficult to believe that it was indeed this conscious appreciation of the situation that finally decided the course of action to not retaliate in the Rann of Kutch. There is no evidence of any lack of information or intelligence. In fact, since Defence Minister Y.B. Chavan, General J.N. Chaudhuri, Air Marshal Arjan Singh, Defence Secretary P.V.R. Rao and other senior officials met almost everyday, it is clear that the Indian political leadership had conveyed, in no uncertain terms, its decision to not escalate matters.

In light of this, it becomes clear why the then Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Arjan Singh, agreed in March 1965, with his Pakistani counterpart, Air Marshal Asghar Khan, to not employ the IAF in the Rann of Kutch. His decision was first cleared by both the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister himself. This was obviously not known to many and hence, the IAF Chief was criticised by some of his own officers.⁹ Although Pakistan had launched a surprise attack in the Rann of Kutch and put India on the back foot, India was clearly determined to not fight the war at the place and time of enemy's choosing.

The Indian Chief of Army Staff (COAS) also made plans to retaliate in Punjab if such a need arose and on 20 April 1965, Shastri declared in the Parliament, 'If Pakistan continues to disregard reason and persists in aggressive activities, our army will defend the country and decide its own strategy and employment of its manpower and equipment in the manner it deems best.'¹⁰ Pakistan ignored this clear warning.¹¹

INDIA'S WAR AIMS

On September 3, 1965 the war objectives of India were distinctly stated:

On this day the defence minister, along with his army and air force chiefs, had a long meeting with the prime minister to define the country's war objectives as follows:

To defend against Pakistan's attempts to grab Kashmir by force and to make it abundantly clear that Pakistan would never be allowed to wrest Kashmir from India.

To destroy the offensive power of Pakistan's armed forces.

To occupy only the minimum Pakistan territory necessary to achieve these purposes which would be vacated after the satisfactory conclusion of the war.¹²

STRENGTHS AND ORDER OF BATTLE

Indian Air Force

This was the first time that IAF, which was undergoing a slow and somewhat halting process of expansion, was used in war. It possessed some 26 fighter squadrons and four medium bomber squadrons. But many of these were both understrength and undermanned, and also obsolescent if not obsolete. In addition, a sizeable portion of its assets were deployed in the east against a possible threat from China, whose Foreign Minister, Chen Yi, had declared, while on a visit to Karachi, his country's full support to Pakistan against Indian aggression.¹³ As a result, IAF could deploy only one MiG-21 (No. 28) squadron which had only a handful of aircraft on its strength; five Mystere Ground Attack (G/A) squadrons; three Hunter Fighter G/A squadrons; three Gnat Mk1 Air Defence (AD) squadrons; three Canberra medium bomber squadrons; and two reformed and merged Vampire squadrons, which were withdrawn when four Vampires were lost on the first day of operations. Of these, the Mysteres were designed for ground attack and hence were vulnerable to the PAF's F-86 Sabre and F-104 Starfighters.

The Hunters were relatively new and of roughly the same class as the Sabre, which was marginally better in close combat. The Gnat squadrons were also new raisings and lacked experienced pilots, and hence both pilots and aircraft were pooled and deployed at IAF forward bases (Pathankot and Halwara) in Punjab. The Gnat also suffered from frequent gun stoppages and other engine and hydraulic system problems. What IAF lacked most was reliable radar cover: the radar unit (230 Signal Unit [SU]) at Amritsar being the only radar unit in the Punjab with a very rudimentary early warning (EW) radar at Ferozpur. In addition, IAF signal and telecommunications between the air force stations, SUs, army units and forward air controllers, also called the Air Control Team (ACT), were extremely unreliable or virtually non-existent. This deficiency was to prove very costly to IAF and indeed, also to the Indian Army.

Pakistan Air Force

The PAF had some 125 F-86 Sabre distributed in seven squadrons, a dozen or so F-104 Starfighter in a solitary squadron and some 27 B-57 medium bombers. The B-57 was the American version of the English Electric Canberra, but was somewhat more advanced in that it had more advanced avionics and the navigator, like the pilot, also was provided with an ejection seat, whereas in the IAF Canberra, the navigator had to crawl out of his seat wearing a parachute to carry out a manual bail out; a near impossibility in an emergency.

The PAF had deployed most of its aircraft at Sargodha complex, Peshawar, Mauripur (Karachi) and other in-depth airfields that were out of reach of IAF fighter G/A aircraft. The PAF had deployed one F-86 Sabre squadron at Dacca in East Pakistan, but IAF did not know its exact location. PAF pilots had been training under American guidance for over eight years and had honed their fighting skills. Aggression and audaciousness came easily to them as their political and military leaders were themselves bellicose and followed an offensive doctrine.

To take care of the Chinese threat, India also had to keep a substantial portion of its military, both army and air force units, in the east. The Pakistan Army, in fact, enjoyed a decisive qualitative edge, and even in numbers it was not far behind. Most of Indian Army units and formations were also new raisings and the process of expansion had, in fact, caused much imbalance in terms of experienced, trained personnel.

Joint Planning

This was conspicuous by its absence throughout. In his autobiography, Air Chief Marshal (ACM) P.C. Lal, who was then Vice Chief, blames General J.N. Chaudhuri for this lapse. Although Chavan held morning meetings daily with the three Chiefs, and Defence Secretary and other important officials, and the COAS often attended the ECC meetings, he seldom took along the Naval Chief or the Air Chief. The COAS also was a rank higher than the Air Chief. It is obvious that the plans for the attack in Punjab were not shared with the Air Chief. It is also quite possible that PM and the Defence Minister did not want these plans to be shared at a level lower than that of the Chiefs of the Army and the Air Force. Even though during the 22 day-long conflict the Chiefs were regularly meeting each other, and also the Defence Minister and the Defence Secretary, who in turn was briefing the Prime Minister every evening, and yet there was little prior consultation or planning.

Even when permission was given to launch the air force on 1 September, the permission was conditional and restricted to Chhamb area only. In other words, the political leadership was desperately trying to keep the conflict within the bounds of J&K; crossing of the IB was not permitted, nor was the IAF allowed to attack PAF airfields even when the army was on the verge of launching its offensive in Punjab on the night of 5 September.¹⁴

The Government of India was proceeding on the assumption of reciprocity so that if India did not target Pakistan airfields, the latter would also not do so. Clearly, this was a hangover of 1962 when B.C. Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, and John Galbraith, the US Ambassador, had advised Nehru against using the air force.¹⁵ It appears from the diary entries of the Defence Minister that he was getting daily situation reports from the Air Chief; and the Air Chief, in turn, took the minister's permission for every important move, such as the attack on Peshawar and stopping of air strikes against East Pakistan airfields after the morning of 7 September even though the lone Pakistani Sabre squadron had attacked Kalaikunda, Barrackpore, Bagdogra, Agartala and dropped paratroopers between Gauhati and Shillong, apparently because India did not want to invite Chinese wrath.

As it came up again at the start of the Kargil conflict 34 years later in 1999, the IAF Chief was clearly not allowed to use combat air power in the conflict without the express permission of the government; something the army seems to forget every time.

Air Power Tasks

The primary task of the IAF is to defend the national air space and important vulnerable areas (VAs) and vulnerable points (VPs), including centres of economic and strategic importance. Although there were blackouts in Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan and other northern Indian states, and the national capital was defended with Soviet surface-to-air missiles, SAM II, the air threat was mainly to IAF airfields. While this task was generally done by Hunter and Gnat aircraft, most of this effort was directed to protection of forward airfields against enemy attack and protection of the national capital.

Many of the IAF airfields were located very close to the Indo-Pakistan border, as is the case even today. Unreliable signal/telecommunications and scant radar cover together made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get any early warning of enemy air activity. This serious

deficiency entailed mounting of combat air patrol (CAP) sorties of two or more fighters, especially when large formations were launched and/or recovered. As will be seen, PAF had a much better radar cover and an advanced air defence network. In the circumstances, in the entire Punjab sector, there was only one radar unit at Amritsar capable of ground-controlled interception, while the one at Ferozpur was only an EW radar. Pakistan knew this and PAF launched numerous attacks on the radar unit at Amritsar but failed to cause any damage, with the SU maintaining an operational watch throughout the war.

Counter-Air Operations

Counter-air operations (CAO) are designed to gain and maintain air superiority and require sustained offensive strikes against the enemy airfields. IAF carried out a total of 33 sorties against Sargodha, a complex of four airfields, including its satellite airfields, on 7 September, but suspended these daylight attacks due to high attrition. The main reason was the very limited range of IAF fighters, especially the Mystere. Sargodha being at the very limits of the radius of action of the aircraft, the pilots did not have enough fuel reserve to engage the enemy aircraft in air combat.

Both the Mystere and Hunter, when fully loaded with rockets and bombs, were naturally sitting ducks for enemy fighters, especially the F-104 which enjoyed superior speeds and acceleration and a formidable rapid-firing cannon. The F-104 was also capable of night interception. As a result, only the Canberra medium bomber was used for night strikes on PAF airfields at Sargodha, ChakJhumra, Risalwala, Miyanwali, Peshawar and Chaklala, Pasrur and Rahwali, but escaped the F-104, except when one Canberra was shot down. Neither IAF nor the PAF deliberately attacked any cities or civilian areas except once when, for no apparent reason, the PAF B-57 with Sabre escort targeted a suburban area of Amritsar on 22 September that resulted in 55 civilian deaths, with an equal number injured, and the destruction of some 15 houses.

Air Operations in Support of Ground Forces

One of the enduring complaints of this period is to do with the IAF's contribution to the land war. That IAF did not provide close air support (CAS), also sometimes referred to as offensive air support (OAS), to the army is fiction or at least gross exaggeration. The IAF, which had trained and practised army cooperation missions from its very birth in 1932, cannot be blamed for not providing CAS to the army simply because

almost all its efforts, barring the CAP sorties for airfield protection, was devoted to assist the army.

The IAF was perhaps not always visible and the CAS/OAS was no doubt less than optimal, but it alone cannot be held responsible for this deficiency. The IAF also carried out armed reconnaissance, interdiction and CAS sorties. Lieutenant General (Lt Gen) Harbaksh Singh, the then Army Commander in Punjab, devotes a chapter to CAS in his candid account of the war. He says:

The IAF provided two and later three helicopter squadrons (Mi-4 medium lift and Alouette) to the army for operations in J&K. These were fitted with guns and rockets and flew some 79 offensive missions to drive out the Pak infiltrators. Although these caused little material damage [*sic*] proved helpful in raising the morale of our troops and to provide a bird's eye view to commanders. In addition, these helicopters evacuated a number of critically wounded soldiers and transported 92,000 kg of essential supplies and ammunitions to forward columns.

He adds, 'Conventional CAS started on 1 September but no accurate record could be maintained of the air effort demanded and provided due to fast-moving engagements and quickly changing situations from the 1 to 6 September 1965.' From the 7 to 23 September 1965, according to the records maintained by Western Air Command IAF, a total of 795 'pre-planned' and 212 'immediate' sorties were flown; of the 795 pre-planned sorties, 482 were ordered by the Joint Army Air Control Centre (JAAOC), which in other words means by the air and the army staff at the Army Command Headquarter (HQ), then located at Simla (now Shimla). The claims of the IAF and the Indian Army are given in Table 1.

Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh says that both the army and air force claims are exaggerated because the damage caused by PAF to the Indian Army was relatively light when, in fact, PAF had ostensibly flown more CAS/

Table 1: Claims of the IAF and the Indian Army

<i>Type</i>	<i>Army</i>	<i>Air Force</i>
Tanks Destroyed	70	123
Tanks Damaged	07	20
Guns Destroyed	19	56
Guns Damaged	04	03
Vehicles Destroyed	145	281
Vehicles Damaged	19	27

OAS sorties. This logic, however, is not convincing. According to Shekhar Gupta, the famed Patton tank caught fire easily because it used petrol. This led to dieselisation of all tanks worldwide. This is also the reason why the Pakistani tank crews abandoned them at the first hint of trouble.¹⁶ Singh attributes the deficiencies in CAS/OAS to there being no pre-planned communications between the rear bases and army formations. The other associated problems were:

1. Problems with allocation of air effort to various army formations.
2. Demands were delayed or remained unexecuted due to the unplanned move of fighters every evening to rear bases to protect them against PAF nightly strikes.
3. Poor landline signal/telecommunications.
4. Quality and experience of ground liaison officers (GLOs) at IAF bases was found to be inadequate.

Mechanics of CAS/OAS

To reiterate, CAS/OAS missions are of two types: immediate and pre-planned. As the name suggests, immediate sorties are provided when a unit/formation of the army is faced with a sudden emergency, such as an enemy offensive from an unexpected direction in large strength. Pre-planned sorties are allocated on the previous evening after due prioritisation to various units, usually when an advance or attack is planned. Such sorties are first vetted by the army corps HQ and only then passed on to IAF bases for execution the next day.

As is evident, this requires intimate planning and regular, if not continuous, telecommunication between the army units/division/corps HQ and the air force stations. Without such close and joint planning, it is well-nigh impossible to provide any pre-planned support. Another complaint of the army was that the sorties allocated to CAS were usually fewer than demanded and that IAF did not dedicate a squadron for CAS alone. This is difficult since in such cases, the so-called dedicated unit would remain tied down on the ground and would be underutilised, especially when communications were unreliable or even non-existent.

It is also not possible to maintain a round-the-clock CAP over forward battle areas simply because it would require huge air resources. In this war, the Indian Army fought in three areas: Kasur–Khem Karan, Wagha–Bedia–Attari, and Sialkot–Chawinda–Phillora–Shakargarh. Take, for example, a battle in Khem Karan, which is approximately 100–120

km from both Halwara and Adampur where Hunter and Mystere fighters were based. When called for a CAP mission, it would take about 20 minutes in transit and just about 25–30 minutes over the target area since the average sortie time of most IAF fighters was about 45 minutes, and even less for Gnats.

It is easy to calculate the effort required to mount a continuous CAP. On the other hand, if planned in advance, such CAPs or CAS missions can easily be executed. Fifty years after the event, it is extremely difficult for people, especially of the younger generation, to imagine how poor and unreliable the communications between the IAF airfields and Tactical Air Centres (TAC) co-located with army corps HQ were. Even fixed telephone exchanges at the airfields were manually operated and a subscriber had to go through the operator for even local calls. Signal messages were first coded in the daily cipher and sent by wireless telegraphy (WT) or over congested lines. Signals piled up at the receiving end for want of adequate cipher-trained staff.

In his conclusion, Singh says:

Bearing in mind the size of the air force, the wide theatre of operations, the location of the airfields and the suddenness at [*sic*] which events took place it would appear that OAS was not lacking in terms of sorties flown but not necessarily in terms of results achieved. Although the helicopters made only a minor contribution towards the liquidation of infiltrators the potentialities of this force, if employed on a larger scale, in a campaign of this nature were amply demonstrated.¹⁷

The following inferences can be drawn from this account by the highest Army Commander in the field.

1. The Army Commander has chosen to omit any reference to joint planning and prior consultations with the air force because he, like his COAS, did not think such prior planning was essential.
2. From 1 to 6 September, events were moving fast and in quickly changing situations planning was difficult for both the army and more so for the air force. The IAF was ready but could not launch strikes until it received clearance from the Defence Minister on the afternoon of 1 September 1965. Surprisingly, the Pakistani attack in Chhamb came as a major surprise to the army, even though it had been fighting infiltrators since early August and had, in fact, crossed the CFL to take control of vantage points

to seal ingress routes in Kargil, Kishanganga Bulge and Haji Pir Pass; the last one as late as on 27/28 August 1965. It is reasonable to assume that when the enemy violates ceasefire on a regular basis, the local troops and their commanders are lulled into believing that it is 'business as usual', when, in fact, it is a major and deliberate offensive by the enemy; as happened in Chhamb.

3. Without joint planning and regular updates, sorties cannot be planned. Rapidly changing positions of own troops make it extremely hazardous to carry out air strikes if clearly discernible 'bomb lines' are not available.
4. Brigades, and higher formations, cannot obviously demand pre-planned sorties in situations when uncertainty rules, as in Chhamb, Khem Karan and later, Chawinda and Phillora areas.
5. The fact that more than half the pre-planned sorties were ordered by JAAOC at Simla and not the TACs co-located with the two corps HQs clearly shows that these formations failed to raise demands in time. The complaints of the IAF Air Chief Arjan Singh and Vice Air Chief P.C. Lal that the main reason was the army's reluctance to share its plans with the IAF in advance appear to be valid.¹⁸ Whichever example is given, after 50 years such explanation is bound to sound like a lame excuse and it is true that IAF could have done better but in the circumstances then prevailing and the available facilities, it is doubtful if the results would have been dramatically different.
6. According to the 'official history' of the 1965 war that is available at *Bharat Rakshak.com*, the IAF flew a total 3,937 sorties during the war. Of these, 1,352 were devoted to CAP over four forward IAF airfields (Ambala, Adampur, Halwara and Pathankot); 1,017 fighter sorties, 1,372 CAS and others (recce and interdiction) and lastly, 33 CAO and 163 bombing sorties were flown. It is a well-known fact that probably due to the high attrition suffered by both IAF and PAF, daylight counter-air operations were suspended after 7 September. Thereafter, IAF used the Canberra medium bomber in night attacks and PAF likewise used the B-57. PAF lost four bombers but caused considerable damage to IAF airfields even when bombing was erratic. Night attacks proved to be of immense nuisance value as these disrupted servicing and maintenance activities and deprived the operators of sleep.
7. Assuming that these figures are reasonably accurate, it is evident

that IAF devoted over 90 per cent of its air effort to operations designed to aid ground operations. Even when army demands did not materialise, it mounted armed reconnaissance, search and destroy and high and medium-level sweep missions to strike at targets of opportunity, and this took a big toll of enemy tanks, guns and vehicles, and also interdicted railway trains carrying tanks ammunition and other stores in close vicinity of ground action, throughout the period of operations.

8. IAF had hoped to draw the enemy by flying offensive sweep missions in enemy area even without radar cover. Some of the air-to-air kills were scored in these missions but in hindsight, armed recce over the battlefield would have proved more fruitful.
9. In the absence of adequate radar cover, IAF had no option but to fly CAP sorties over own airfields located close to the border.

Night Bombing

As seen earlier, the Canberra medium bomber aircrew proved their mettle by carrying out night bombing strikes against PAF airfields located deep inside Pakistan. They flew these missions with dogged determination knowing full well that they were totally defenceless against the prowling F-104 Starfighter. Their perseverance, meticulous planning and a bigger than normal share of luck kept Canberra attrition to very low levels.

Air Power Effectiveness

On 1 September 1965, IAF, in response to an SOS from the Indian Army, hastily launched 12 Vampires and 14 Mysteres to blunt the Pakistan Army's offensive in Chhamb and succeeded in greatly reducing its momentum. Although IAF's use of Vampires has invited much criticism, eight of the 12 Vampires had, in fact, successfully completed their tasks. The 14 Mysteres had also returned unscathed.

From 3 September onwards, the new tactics devised by IAF bore fruit and the first two PAF Sabres were shot down. But for Squadron Leader B.S. Sikand mistakenly landing at Pasrur and IAF unnecessarily losing a fully serviceable Gnat to the enemy, the victories over Chhamb would have been without any loss. In an attempt to restrict the scope of the conflict, the Indian government did not allow IAF fighters to cross the IB, but could not in fact contain it. It is a moot point whether IAF could have actually stopped the Pakistani offensive if it had carried out relentless air strikes in Chhamb from the 2 to 5 September.

With the benefit of hindsight, not undertaking a pre-emptive strike against PAF airfields at Sargodha and Peshawar on the morning of 6 September proved to be a costly mistake. Not anticipating PAF strikes against own airfields on 7 September and not launching a CAP of two or four Gnat fighters at dusk (as urged by one of the Gnat squadron commanders) at Pathankot, resulted in an unmitigated disaster.

IAF retaliatory air strikes against Pakistan airfields, though bold, were planned without keeping in mind the time difference and hence, the first two waves reached the target in near-total darkness. Both the Mystere and Hunter aircraft operated at the limits of their ranges that left them with little allowance for evasive or offensive action.

Since these strikes were not followed by a damage assessment sortie, even after half a century, the extent of damage that IAF fighters actually caused to PAF assets is not known. The Starfighter and the Sidewinder that were among the biggest concerns before the war did not prove effective. The Gnat, though beset with many technical problems, especially gun stoppage, proved the most effective; and but for this problem, would have claimed at least four more kills.

Air power is effective only when an offensive is sustained over time. Slow and incremental increase in tempo does not usually pay dividends. To be fair, IAF did not actually possess long-range fighter bombers to strike at the heart of the enemy.

PAF fighters were relatively free to strike Indian ground positions because IAF was unable to establish a favourable air situation. As one knowledgeable commentator has said, 'Strike when an opportunity arises because there would be no second chance.'¹⁹ As was the case 34 years later in 1999 in Kargil, the Indian leadership continues to believe that use of air power would inevitably lead to an all-out war. The Israeli Air Force proved in the Six-Day War in June 1967 that speed is of the essence. In the case of India and Pakistan, international pressure will always inhibit offensive action. It is, therefore, even more critical to try to use all available offensive assets to obtain a quick result. Piecemeal, desultory actions do not help. The decision to not allow IAF to retaliate against PAF in the east was mainly to avoid provoking China, but PAF made full use of this opportunity and took a heavy toll of IAF aircraft at Kalaikunda, Barrackpore, Bagdogra and Agartala.

The IAF learnt its lesson and built a large number bomb shelters at all the forward airfields in the next three years. New airfields with parallel taxi tracks for emergency air operations were also built at Awantipura near

Srinagar in J&K, Amritsar, Bhatinda, Suratgarh, Sirsa, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Naliya and Bhuj. It also purchased some 100 S-22 fighter bombers from the Soviet Union and increased the pace of MiG-21 induction so that by 1971, it had a fairly large number of new aircraft, albeit of relatively limited range. With a chain of six high-powered American radars, the air defence radar and communication network was also developed all along the northern borders by the early 1970s. But until the arrival of the Jaguar Deep Penetration Strike Aircraft (DPSA) in 1979, IAF fighter G/A aircraft continued to suffer from very short range/radius of action. In the 1971 war too, IAF was not able to effectively target PAF airfields located deep inland.

FIFTY YEARS ON

The IAF, today, is far superior in its capabilities to what it was in 1965. With its Su-30MKI, Mirage-2000, Jaguar and to a lesser extent, MiG-29 and MiG-27, supported by Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), EW aircraft, air-to-air refuelling, a robust air defence network and a strong transport and helicopter compliment, it is now capable of effectively carrying out all its missions. Given the complaints that are often heard, understanding with the army leaves much to be desired.

CONCLUSION

Could IAF and the Indian Army have done better in 1965? The answer is an unequivocal yes. With joint planning, consultation and mutual understanding, the results would have been better but not dramatically different because of the inherent limitations of the India's arms and equipment and the constraints imposed by a highly defensive strategic mindset of its leadership. To be sure, India was, at the time, not in a strong position to take risks. The army and the air force certainly thwarted Pakistani designs to grab Kashmir and to that extent, it was no mean achievement. Until the Indian government declassifies all files related to this episode in our history, writers and analysts will have to depend on personal memoirs and anecdotal accounts.

Even the so-called official history that is available on the Internet is based largely on open sources, interviews and unit histories and hence, the author has relied on the diary of then Defence Minister, Y.B. Chavan, published by his private secretary in two books in 1998 and 2007, as also the recollections of L.K. Jha, the Principal Secretary to the Prime

Minister, and P.V.R. Rao, the Defence Secretary. The Indo-Pak War of 1965 was a Pakistani misadventure to grab Kashmir by force, in which it failed spectacularly. India tried but could not avoid a full-scale war and in trying to exercise restraint till the eleventh hour, lost all initiative.

India also failed in getting the world to name and shame Pakistan as the aggressor and found that it had few reliable friends. The soft-spoken and diminutive Lal Bahadur Shastri did his best in resisting the immense pressure of the United Nations Security Council for an early ceasefire but did not succeed at Tashkent in retaining control of the hard-won areas of Kargil, Tithwal and Haji Pir. Even after half a century, Pakistan's attitude towards India has not changed and the combined threat from China and Pakistan remains undiminished. With steady improvements in its economy and overall development, today India is in a far better position to face any security challenges.

It must, however, be reiterated that excessive dependence on the so-called strategic restraint can prove extremely costly when air power has become far more effective and accurate. A surprise or pre-emptive strike can prove fatal. As recent conflicts in Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen have shown, air power can prove very effective in containing and controlling a fast deteriorating situation provided air operations are launched and sustained with necessary determination and vigour.

From the pages of Chavan's handwritten diary:

06 September 1965

A historic day. Our troops marched in Lahore Sector early morning. IAF also did a good day's work. To begin with we are not a war minded nation; and I think I am proud of it. Yet there comes a moment in the nation's life when it has to stand up against a bully and teach him a good lesson. This is what we are out to do.²⁰

It is clear that Chavan is at pains to convince himself that the final course—resort to force against Pakistan—was indeed the right thing to do.

22 September 1965

So the first round is over—where is the second round and when?

I have a feeling that this is the real beginning of trouble in this part of the world. How we utilise the respite that we are getting is going to decide the future of the country. The dangerous process of encirclement of India by hostile countries is complete. The leading

powers of UNO including USSR are not with us on the (Kashmir) issue. We are tragically alone.

This is the achievement of our Foreign Policy—The issue (Kashmir) is basically political. Its solution will have to be political.

We have with good luck come out of it (the conflict) well. But if we try to make it again purely military, it will be a disastrous mistake. Unless we make quick and radically new moves to break the political isolation that we find ourselves in.

The ball is now in the political court again—where it should be—and not the military one.

I hope we have the vision and courage to accept this challenge to (our) political leadership.²¹

Prophetic words since the disputes with Pakistan and China remain unresolved even after 50 years. One also detects a note of frustration with the failure of India's policy of pacific resolution of disputes.

NOTES

1. G.M. Hiranandani, *Transition to Triumph: History of the Indian Navy, 1965–1975*, published in 2000, available at <http://indiannavy.nic.in/book/1965-indo-pakistan-war>, accessed on 23 April 2015.
2. Shekhar Gupta, '1965 in 2005', *The Indian Express*, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/oldStory/71688/>, accessed on 9 May 2015.
3. R.D. Pradhan, *Debacle to Revival*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1998, pp. 185–86.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–203, 229–32.
5. Hiranandani, *Transition to Triumph*, n. 1, p. 5.
6. D.R. Mankekar, *Twenty Two Fateful Days*, Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966, p. 15.
7. P.V.S. Jagan Mohan and Samir Chopra, *The Indo-Pak Air War 1965*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2005 (reprint 2006), p. 60.
8. Hiranandani, *Transition to Triumph*, n. 1, p. 6.
9. S. Krishnaswamy, 'Out of the Blue', 13 February 2014, available at <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/1965War/1151-Kicha.html>, accessed on 23 April 2015.
10. R.D. Pradhan, *1965 War: The Inside Story*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributers, 2007, p. 32.
11. George Tanham, *The Indian Air Force: Trends and Prospects*, Santa Monica: RAND, 1995, p. 25.
12. Pradhan, *1965 War: The Inside Story*, n. 10, pp. 26–27.
13. Mankekar, *Twenty Two Fateful Days*, n. 6, p. 98.

14. Flight Lieutenant Trilochan Singh (later Air Marshal), 'Tank Busting in Chamb', 13 February 2014, available at <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/1965War/1160-Tango.html>, accessed on 23 April 2015. His account clearly brings out the inherent reluctance at the highest level of Indian leadership to employ air power even after the army was given the go ahead to launch attacks across the IB in Punjab.
15. See Hiranandani, *Transition to Triumph*, n. 1. Also, see J.K. Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969, p. 487.
16. See Gupta, '1965 in 2005', n. 2.
17. Harbaksh Singh, *War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict of 1965*, New Delhi: Lancer International, 1991, pp. 170–76.
18. P.C. Lal, 'A Critical Look at the 1965 Operations', USI National Security Lecture, 1973, available at <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/history/1965war.html>, accessed on 10 May 2015.
19. Krishnaswamy, 'Out of the Blue', n. 9.
20. Pradhan, *Debate to Revival*, n. 3, p. 15.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 296–97.