

Guest Editorial

*Vivek Chadha**

India is one of the oldest civilisations in the world, but as yet a young country. For a country that has evolved over the millennia largely on the premise of not employing force to extend boundaries, the immediate aftermath of freedom in 1947 marked by a war that was imposed on the country, came as a shock. The senior political leadership, which had won independence on the basis of a non-violent struggle, was forced to contend with the idea of resolution of differences in the sub-continental context, through the use of force. However, the lessons of 1947–48, which led to a prolonged war with Pakistan, did not adequately reinforce the need for preparing for similar situations along unresolved borders. The defeat in the India–China War of 1962, finally changed this perception.

India, despite being inadequately prepared militarily and reacting to a Pakistan-initiated war, acquitted itself commendably in 1965. From blunting the sub-conventional intrusion by raiders seeking to cause capitulation of the government in Kashmir, to stalling the armour-led offensive, the military leadership led by Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and the Defence Minister Y.B. Chavan, brushed aside the shadow of 1962 to force a stalemate on Pakistan.

However, despite the perceptible improvements on the battlefield, weaknesses in a number of spheres remained. From an obvious disconnect in the planning and execution of operations by the three wings of the armed forces to obsolescence of equipment, especially in contrast with the

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adversary, were evident. However, this did not take away from a number of remarkable actions at the tactical level that more than redeemed the honour of the soldier after 1962. From Haji Pir to Khem Karan and from the Battle of Raja Rani to Dograi, the armed forces displayed their fighting prowess despite existing constraints.

The learnings of three wars were not lost upon the political and military leadership over the next few years. This reflected in the military preparedness that continued during the intervening period until 1971 and was accompanied by an acknowledgement of realities in India's neighbourhood. Resultantly, the events of March 1971 in Pakistan which were triggered by the refusal to accept electoral results, followed by a brutal crackdown on the Bengali population in East Pakistan, came as a challenge in the form of millions of refugees and an opportunity to cut Pakistan to size.

The political leadership, led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram, ensured the requisite political and diplomatic support, in addition to freedom of action to military commanders. On their part, the military leadership utilised the time available to them to ensure that jointness was achieved as part of the planning process and was carried forth during the implementation phase as well. In addition, the Mukti Bahini was also integrated into the national endeavour when all attempts of the political leadership to seek a fair resolution for the Bangla people failed.

The results reflected this cohesive national effort. Not only did tactical actions suggest the highest standards of military professionalism, timely strategic decisions ensured that fleeting opportunities could be captured within the limited window of opportunity that was provided to the country to achieve its objectives.

The far-sighted actions at the political and military level ensured that flexibility of terminal objective could be retained. Accordingly, when the progress of military operations allowed a dash to Dacca, the option was exercised despite a tight timeframe for implementation. Similarly, an isolation of the Eastern Theatre from air and seas ensured that the psychological collapse of the military leadership could be orchestrated in conjunction with special operations undertaken by the Mukti Bahini. The paradrop at Tangail, bombing of the Governor's residence and deft negotiations by Major General JFR Jacob, the Chief of Staff at HQ Eastern Command, created the very opening that led to the surrender of 90,000 Pakistani soldiers—the highest since World War II.

This Special Issue makes an attempt to capture some of these aspects of the 1971 Indo-Pak War, commemorating its 50 years. In view of a similar initiative through Manohar Parrikar IDSA's other journal, *Strategic Analysis*, the focus of this issue remains largely on military operations. However, since these operations are neither planned nor executed in isolation, an attempt has simultaneously been made to provide a balanced perspective. This has been achieved through a politico-military interpretation of events and the impact of political churning within Pakistan. It did not only include the immediate trigger in the form of electoral results, but also a deep-rooted disdain for Bengali language and culture that manifested over the decades.

From the military perspective, this Special Issue highlights the role of each major constituent of the conflict. This includes detailed narratives describing actions of the armed forces as well as the Mukti Bahini. The 1971 Indo-Pak war is also an interesting case study in the employment of special operations in support of the main military effort. There is an effort to capture its implementation and impact as well.

This Special Issue will reinforce the memories of those who already have an in-depth understanding of the war. However, it is more for others who may have read about it in the passing but would like an opportunity to explore military aspects in more detail. It would be ideal for them to read these articles in conjunction with books written by participants and analysts who bring a deeper understanding of events. In that sense, this special issue can become a good starting point for a broader perspective of military events related to the war.

In the past, emphasis has mostly remained on the land warfare part of the 1971 war. An attempt has therefore also been made to simultaneously explore other areas which had not received similar prominence. The Naval special operations in conjunction with the Mukti Bahini is one example that features as a perspective by someone who has written a detailed book on the subject. Similarly, a first-hand account of a Bangladeshi officer who not only witnessed events, but was also subjected to the horrors of the genocide, provides a unique perspective.

This issue is a culmination of the efforts of all the contributors who have written for this Special Issue. It is also the result of the guidance of Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy, Director General, MP-IDSA, and Major General Bipin Bakshi, Deputy Director General, MP-IDSA.

