

**Book Review
By
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**General V.P. Malik, India's Military
Conflicts and Diplomacy: An Inside
View of Decision Making (Harper
Collins Publishers: India, 2013), 300**

Indian Military Conflict and Diplomacy by General V.P. Malik would be of interest to many Pakistanis as it discusses civil-military relations in India and several operations carried out by the Indian armed forces inside and outside the Indian territories. The author had been a part of them and gives Indian perspective on these operations.

General V.P. Malik is a retired Indian army chief and had served in many important positions before taking over his responsibilities as head of the army. He, therefore, had the advantage of observing many events, in which Indian army played a role, from close quarters. The author describes Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka (1987), and Operation Cactus in Maldives (1988) in some detail. However of more interest to Pakistani readers would be the chapter on Kargil Conflict (1999).

Operation Pawan and Kargil have been discussed at length as. The author blames lack of timely and actionable intelligence, on ground situation in Sri Lanka and activities of Tamil supporters in India's Tamil Nadu state for failure of operation Pawan. The author is all praise for successful operation by the Indian military in the Maldives which thwarted an attempted coup d'état for taking over power by Abdullah Lutfee, a businessman with the support of People's Organization of Tamil Elam (POLTE). The aim was to establish a safe base for the POLTE to operate from outside Sri Lanka. Operation Cactus was not a major military operation with regard to the strength of forces opposing Indian military as only eighty odd civilian mercenaries were involved in the coup attempt. Its significance, according to the author, lay in the rapidity with which Indian forces acted and the fact that they carried out the operation so far away from Indian shores. The author's praise for the successful completion of this operation seems exaggerated as Indian forces had almost negligible opposition confronting it. With regard to Kargil conflict the author describes what is already well known to

Pakistani readers. He has copiously quoted selected Pakistani analysts to support his views on the subject.

On nuclear issue General Malik reiterates Indian government's stand and supports India's decision to acquire nuclear capability. On India's nuclear doctrine he seems to deviate a little from his country's official position of No First Use by stating, "It would be irresponsible on the part of any leader – civil or military – to sermonize that these (nuclear weapons) are political assets only, never to be used. If in spite of diplomatic effort, a crisis escalates beyond the acceptable security threshold and the existence of nation state is at stake, nuclear weapons, if available, may come into play."

Author's views on civil-military relations in India and organization of higher defense management are worthy of greater attention and may have a few lessons for us in Pakistan. In a democratic dispensation political leadership of the country directly exercises control over the military. Many here believe that military in India works under the political control. That does not seem to be the case. General Malik resents the fact that instead of political leaders bureaucrats control the decision making process with regard to strategic matters with little or no input from the military. This, according to the author, has led to disastrous results in the past. "Military's role in threat assessment and military acquisitions has been unduly restricted." He quotes Kanti Bajpai, a well known Indian strategic analyst, to support his argument. In order to further emphasise significance of this argument he quotes K. Subrahmanyam, a renowned Indian strategists. India's civil-military structure according to K. Subrahmanyam became where 'politicians enjoy power without any responsibility, bureaucrats wield power without any accountability and military assumes responsibility without any direction.' General Malik suggests that better co-ordination between India's political and military leadership can achieve quicker and lasting results. He narrates how this co-ordination worked to India's advantage during the Kargil conflict. Co-ordination in wake of Kargil, according to him, was however ad hoc, which needs to be institutionalized.

General Malik believes that India has the potential to become a regional power, if not a global power but is handicapped by its ineffective higher defense management structure in which bureaucracy plays an undue role, and its prevailing strategic culture which impedes extension of Indian's influence

internationally. Strategic culture or lack of it, in the author's opinion, has often resulted in India's inability to drive home the tactical advantages gained by its armed forces in the past. He quotes 1948 Kashmir war, 1971 war and Kargil as examples of lack of strategic clarity in India's national thinking.

The author recommends aggressive military diplomacy in order to increase India's influence beyond its borders. He elaborates his own role in building military ties with Myanmar, Nepal, Israel and the United States.

India's Military Conflicts and Diplomacy: An Inside View of Decision Making is an important contribution on available literature on Indian military. It gives an insider's view on the decision making process in India during military conflicts and existing higher defense management. The book's major flaw, however, is that descriptions of many conflicts included in the book give only the Indian perspective. Inclusion of views of India's adversaries in these conflicts would have provided greater insight to the reader with regard to operations carried out by the Indian armed forces.

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