

SYNOPSIS: WEBINAR ON KARGIL VIJAY DIWAS 2021

The CASA (Current Affairs & Strategic Analysis) Forum was honoured to feature Gen V P Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) who as the COAS had led the Indian Army to one of its finest moments in the May-July 1999 war with Pakistan at the icy heights of Kargil in Jammu & Kashmir. The then Chief was in conversation with one of the illustrious members of CASA, Lt Gen Satish Dua, PVSM, UYSM, SM, VSM, our erstwhile Chief of IDS and Corps Commander, 15 Corps in Srinagar.

The webinar got underway with Lt Gen Gautam Moorthy, PVSM, AVSM, VSM introducing both General VP Malik and Lt Gen Satish Dua to the audience. His introduction of our erstwhile Chief included the often quoted words of Gen Malik in an address to troops during the Kargil War: *“The enemy has started the fight, but it is we who will fire the last shot. The war will end only on our terms. It is not important how a conflict starts; it is important how it finishes.”* Gen Moorthy also recalled that Gen Malik being a realist had also said *“We will fight with what we have”*, while making mention of the most authoritative book on the Kargil War ***From Surprise to Victory*** penned by Gen Malik himself.

Gen Dua began the session by paying tributes to our martyrs on the 22nd anniversary of Kargil Vijay Divas and remembered the losses our army had suffered - 527 KIA and 1367 wounded in action. He invited Gen Malik to make his opening remarks. Gen Malik began by thanking and greeting everyone at the webinar especially the CASA team that had invited him to speak on this auspicious occasion of celebration and paying homage to our departed braves. He made brief introductory remarks as to how both the PMs of India & Pakistan, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Mr Nawaz Sharif were making efforts to reduce Indo-Pak tensions in the backdrop of the world condemning both nations for conducting nuclear tests in 1998. However, unknown to them, the newly appointed Pak Army Chief Parvez Mushraff with his close coterie of 2-3 officers was planning to ingress and occupy our territory in the general area of Kargil by infiltrating and occupying heights from where they could interdict our sole life line to Siachen & Leh, via the road from Srinagar-Dras-Kargil-Leh. The enemy's aim was to choke off supplies to our forces deployed in Siachen and Eastern Ladakh and thereby secure our withdrawal from these areas during talks to end the fighting. Gen Malik mentioned that it was the first time that such large forces were involved in hot

war at high altitudes ranging from 15,000 to 18,000 feet with all concurrent terrain challenges. Further, the Indian Army was hobbled by the political leadership's diktat to conduct operations against the invaders without crossing the LOC. This Gen Malik felt was because the political leadership wanted to avoid escalating the conflict to a nuclear dimension and because of pressure from Western nations. The General also bemoaned the fact that the Army was constrained due to poor intelligence assessments. All their assessments negated Pakistan's preparedness to wage a war with India. Till the end of war, they kept harping that infiltrators were Jehadi militants. Our surveillance too failed to detect infiltration, primarily due to lack of resources and poor patrolling. He felt that our intelligence agencies were completely fooled by the enemy's deception plans. With divergent ground situation reports and intelligence inputs from our agencies, it took time to convince the Cabinet to accord approvals for our tri-service military counter actions. About the overall military strategy, Gen Malik stated that it was decided to exert maximum pressure on Pakistan using the assets of all three services. The Indian Navy moved its Eastern Fleet to the Arabian Sea and together with the Western Fleet threatened Pakistan's cargo and tanker traffic. The dual tasked army formations were moved to the Western borders. The Strike Formations were kept ready to be able to cross the IB or LC at 6 days' notice. Overall the General opined that at the strategic level there was a commendable blend of the military, diplomatic and political forces which resulted in our glorious victory that we commemorate as Kargil Vijay Diwas.

During his conversation with Gen Dua, Gen Malik answered an important question as to what he thought were the lessons from the Kargil war impacting our armed forces today as they face the Chinese incursions in Eastern Ladakh, and how those lessons had shaped our thinking today. Gen Malik began by recalling the setting up of the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) by the Govt just four days after we declared victory over the Pakistani forces. He made a reference to Mr K Subhramanyam who headed the KRC, and journalist BG Varghese with Gen K K Hazari, who were the members of the KRC. This Report was made public. After a very detailed study, the KRC had brought out that political leadership had not given any clearly defined national security objectives to our armed forces. There was crises of confidence between the civilian officers and the military in the MOD. The KRC also pointed to the lack of synergy amongst the three services. Duplication of processes at many levels in different parts of the Govt further lowered the efficiency of our forces. In the absence of a clear directive from the

Govt for defence planning, the three Services made their own plans which were later added together. The Chief of Staff System was found to be woefully inadequate while prosecuting a war in modern battle field conditions that demanded a whole of Govt approach and reactions in super quick time. He said it took us 20 years to get a CDS to oversee joint planning of the three services and creation of the two departments in the MoD ie Dept of Def and Dept of Military Affairs (DOD & DMA). Gen Malik said that it was too early to comment on the effectiveness of the changes wrought in our higher defence management in recent months following the Chinese intrusions into Ladakh to which Gen Dua agreed. Once again it was stressed that we need a national security objective sanctioned by the nation and not a self generated one based on the directives of the RM etc. That more work was needed to be done in this direction was emphasised by Gen Malik.

During Kargil war, the teething problems at the strategic levels were resolved by 23-24 May 1999 but some issues continued to plague jointness at lower levels. General Malik felt that due to much changed political and military circumstances, it would be unfair to compare the events at Kargil in 1999 with what is ongoing for the past year and more in Eastern Ladakh. However, while Kargil was characterised by very defensive political attitude even while clearing the enemy from our territories by imposing conditions like not crossing the LOC, in Ladakh our defensive actions were also pro-active when necessary. He cited the Galwan clash and occupation of the Kailash Range as examples. While the intelligence and surveillance inputs continued to remain sub par with poor assessments of enemy intentions, patchy HUMINT and TECHINT inputs, the jointness between Services had improved considerably. In the initial days during Eastern Ladakh face-off, both the Army and Air Chiefs spent days together at Leh and ironed out jointness issues. They came up with least loss of time thereby making our riposte more efficient and effective.

In reply to a question from a participant the General felt that any and every transgression by Pakistan must be countered by us in the strongest way possible manner without crossing the obvious red lines due to the nuclear overhang. Our messaging to our foes must be clear and without any ambiguity. Though China is technologically far ahead of us, we must strive harder to close the gap through initiatives like *Atmanirbharta*, etc. China is fully embroiled with Taiwan and in East and South China Seas. Use of trade as a pressure point, diplomacy in the Indo-

Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, and initiatives like the QUAD will make China cautious. It will be hesitant to open another front against us in the Himalayas. Another questionnaire wanted to know if the US not interceded with Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif, would we have come out victorious? Gen Malik made it very clear that we accepted the ceasefire only after we had cleared the enemy from most of the areas which the enemy had occupied after intrusions. He revealed that President Clinton had summoned both Nawaz Sharif and Vajpayee to Washington on 4th July to discuss ceasefire, withdrawal, etc. But PM Vajpayee refused that invitation. Nawaz Sharif had asked for an urgent meeting with the US President to seek help in extricating Pakistan from the mess its COAS had created. Before that meeting on 4th July 1999, our forces had re-captured Tiger Hill after inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. In fact, we kept evicting the intruders even after that date. Finally, on 26th July 1999, after we had cleared the enemy from our side of the LC, we declared that the mission given to the armed forces had been successfully completed.

Gen Malik also faulted the US for not sharing the intelligence they had in a timely manner with us. He also disclosed that on 16th June 1999, our NSA met their NSA Sandy Berger in Europe. A clear message was conveyed to the US that India will not hold back its forces if Pakistan refused to vacate the aggression.

Lastly when Gen Dua posed a question as to how Gen Malik sees the paradigm shift to fifth dimension warfare, Gen Malik mentioned the need for us to change our thought processes and methods in keeping with the changes in technology, the changing nature of conflicts, and the rapid shifting of geopolitical alignments. Though we suffer from a lack of state of the art technology, we cannot allow the gap with our foes from widening further. An aspect of better quality of men and officers who can understand and operate in the high tech “information focused” battlefields of the future was also touched upon.

Gen Malik mentioned that the Kargil conflict lasted three months because of the slow nature of our processes to collect intelligence and to stabilise an unfavourable situation, and then take any initiatives to counter the enemy. Our infrastructure too was very basic- as an example the General mentioned was that troops took 3-4 days to march from the road heads to their piquets in the Batalik sector. To another question, the General replied that the Pak army is obsessed with Kashmir because it is only when it is in a state of constant tension with India

that the Pak army retains its high status in the Pakistani polity and continues to enjoy its lucrative perks in Pakistan.

The webinar was brought to a close and some questions could not be fielded as the General was running out of time since he had another engagement soon after. Both Gens Dua and Moorthy thanked Gen Malik for having taken out the time to speak on the CASA forum and enlighten all its members.