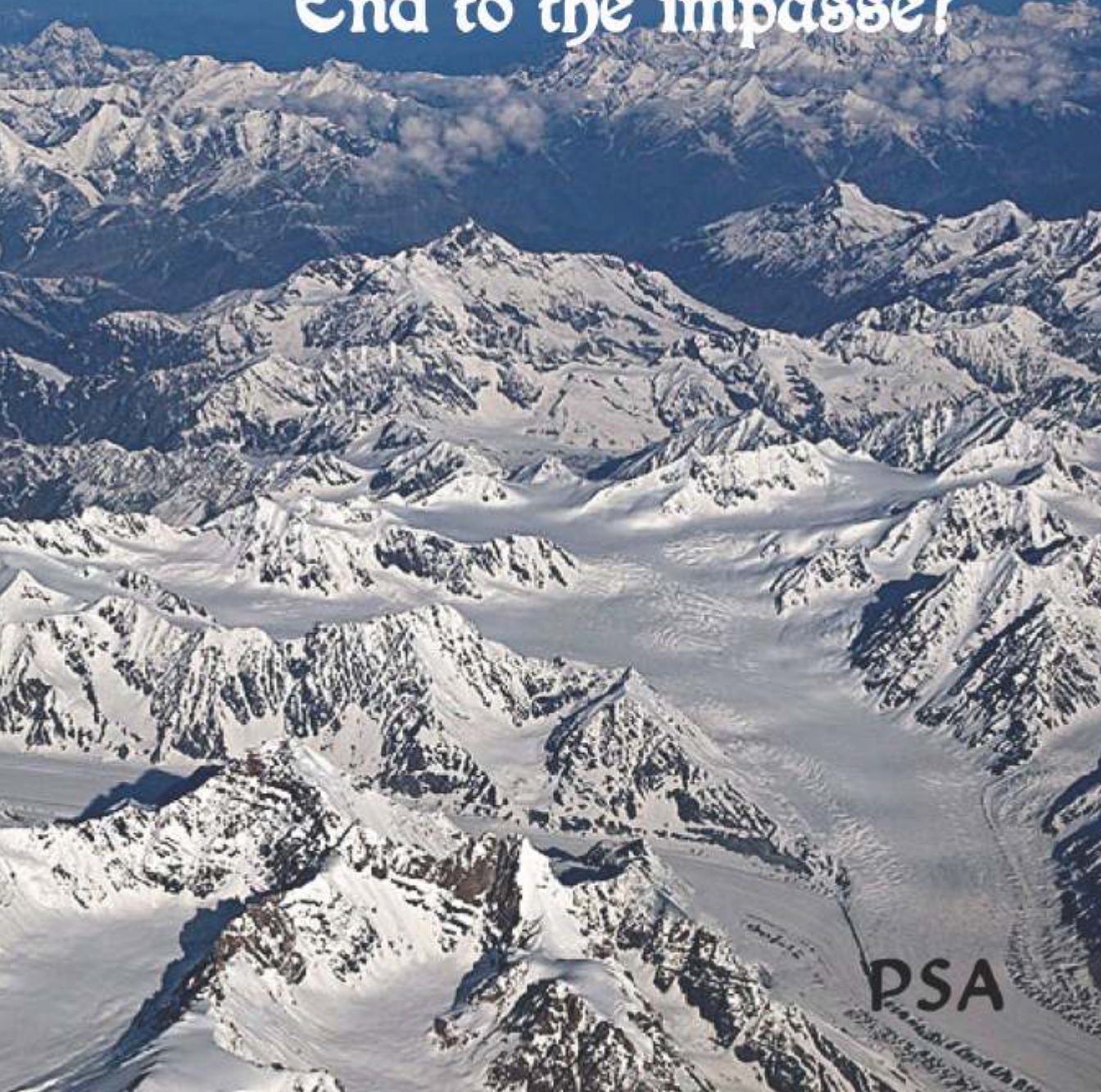


# Siachen

End to the impasse?



PSA



# **Siachen: End to the impasse?**

**Report & Compilation**

**January 2013**

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*Dialogue for Action*, an initiative by PSA, aims at asserting meaningful engagements between South Asian people with a belief that people and communities have an inherent capacity to work towards conflict transformation and such promotion of dialogue processes is the lasting solution to civil, political, economic and cultural conflicts. The objective is to create conducive people-centric spaces, legislations and judicial protection of citizens – through inter-community dialogue, advocacy with state and non-state actors, media interactions and popular action – for preservation of active democracy, peace, human rights and justice in South Asia. The specific areas taken up include: Indo-Pak fishers issue/conflicts, Siachen conflict between Indian and Pakistani Armies, Sir Creek conflict in Indo-Pak maritime waters, issues of prisoners between India and Pakistan, the larger battle of democratic movements in Central India's tribal region and the conflicts between different ethnic communities in North East region.

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# Needed: A Shanti 'Meghdoot' in the Highest Battlefield on Earth!

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## ***An introductory note to the dossier and our engagements on the Siachen issue***

When the *Dialogue for Action* (DA)<sup>#</sup> desk of *Programme for Social Action* (PSA) opted to work on the issue of Siachen, many friends enquired about the rationale for the same especially those, who have been associated for years, if not decades, with the work of PSA and its network of action groups across the country. We have always been a support and solidarity platform that worked closely with people's resistance and action groups across the sub-continent. Many friends failed to see the connection.

*Dialogue for Action*, an initiative with the objective of asserting meaningful engagements between South Asian people and countries, has been engaging with the issues of Sir Creek and fishworker prisoners held in Pakistan & India. At present, we are in the midst of developing a work-frame for some of the other conflict areas in the region, keeping in mind our close association with people's movements, especially in Central, East and North East India.

Theoretically, DA's focus is on people-to-people dialogue towards conflict transformation. This is indeed one of the core perspectives of PSA and our partner organisations. However, what is not understood is why we had to make some such intervention on the issue of Siachen. Why Siachen? Isn't it just a high war zone where armies, surviving on chocolates and rum, supposedly fight to secure national interests?

There are largely five key issues that help both the Indian and Pakistani establishments continue in the state of conflict that both these South Asian countries have been caught in since their independence in August 1947:

1. Kashmir imbroglio (the 'K' word holds the key to all failed negotiations – though both countries do not accept this)
2. Indo-Pak water disputes and agreements/treaties
3. Sir Creek dispute
4. Maritime boundary issue or in other words what is now the Indo-Pak fishworkers issue (arrests of fishworkers for crossing water borders has become the core of the issue but the underlying issue is the lack of a clear maritime boundary and monitoring mechanism)
5. Siachen conflict (especially since 1984)

*[Issues like 'terrorism' (or rather 'terror activities' with cross-border consequences) and 'cross-border infiltration' are linked to the above mentioned issues and can at best only become*

<sup>#</sup> *Dialogue for Action* (DA) was earlier referred to as *Dialogue in Action* (DiA)

*subsidiaries to the core conflict. It must be recognised here that terror activities and violence by state and non-state actors have held many a peace processes to ransom.]*

Among these there are two categories; familiar to the diplomats and political leadership who have dealt with these issues—hard issues and soft issues. Of course the main hard issue is that of Kashmir, which involves the fate of millions of people in Indian administered Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh and the Pakistani administered 'Azad' Kashmir. However, due to the nature of military involvement, issues like Siachen and even Indo-Pak fishworkers's arrests appear like hard issues, for which softening of positions looks difficult; if not impossible.

This is where the *Dialogue* initiative needs to be positioned. At a time when governmental peace initiatives have largely been a folly and when the 'civil society' and large segments of the media fail to even project the true issues, it is important to make efforts to convert hard looking issues into softer ones. It is important to make these two warring countries and our people understand that war and continuing conflicts are not resolutions by themselves and that we need to transform the state of war, which has been draining our economies and people beyond repair.

The roundtable on Siachen which was held in Mumbai on 14 August 2012, co-organised by DA and '*Sanctuary Asia*', with support and inputs from groups like *South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR)* and members of *Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace & Democracy (PIPFPD)* was an effort at engaging our respective governments, media and society on the Siachen conflict and the means to transform the same. The dream is to convince the South Asian community that peace in Siachen is not utopian, and that 28 years is long enough a period for these countries to have blown up billions of dollars on the conflict in the Himalayan high mountains.

## **Introduction to the Roundtable<sup>#</sup> (RT)**

The long-standing Siachen dispute has taken a toll on both lives and relationships for India and Pakistan. The issue was discussed under the composite dialogue initiated by both nations. It is our belief that the issue can be resolved without affecting the security of both countries.

Siachen is the world's highest battleground. The recent avalanche at Gyari in the Siachen area in April 2012 caused the death of more than 140 Pakistani soldiers. Both India and Pakistan have lost soldiers, not to bullets, but more to extreme weather conditions. An effective cease fire has been in place since 2003. Irrespective of which nation is to be blamed for the militarisation of Siachen, without question both nations will benefit from the demilitarisation process.

Statements from Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, PML-N Chief Nawaz Sharif and the Army Chief General Kayani, in the second quarter of 2012, lead us to believe that the time is right to press for peace in the Siachen Glacier region. The ambitions of both nations could simultaneously be channelled into restoring the ecological health of the glacier, which is going to remain a vital source of water and a climate moderator for future generations.



In light of several confidence building measures, and respecting the sovereignty and integrity of both nations, we are encouraged by the fact that the Indian government has moved Pakistan from the 'negative' to the 'positive' list. Pakistan had, in principle, decided to offer India the 'Most Favoured Nation' status, by the end of 2012. This is the context in which DA and *Sanctuary Asia* decided to organise the Roundtable on Siachen in Mumbai on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2012 – on Pakistan's Independence Day and on the eve of India's 65<sup>th</sup> independence celebrations.

## The Dossier on Siachen – An Overview

The dossier on Siachen was prepared as a context-setter to the Roundtable, but its position surely is not limited to it. The effort is relevant keeping in mind that, compilations on this issue that bring together important points, key discussions and a chronology along with historical explanations of country positions are a rarity. In this interest, we have reworked on the original dossier since the Roundtable, adding the RT report, the declaration from the August 14<sup>th</sup> RT and some additional articles that have appeared on the issue since then.

This work also attempts at bringing together diverse writings that have appeared in mainstream journals and media regarding the conflict, especially since its violent and war-like turn since 1984. While writings on the subject are plenty, with many scholars even doing their doctoral thesis on the diverse aspects around the issue, it was not easy to pick pieces for such a compilation.

*The Research Collective* (TRC)<sup>#</sup> unit of PSA has done a commendable job in piecing together the dossier. We owe it to our colleague and Research Associate, **Aashima Subberwal**, who worked relentlessly despite fighting a slip disk injury during the earlier course of this work. We thank **Lakshmi Premkumar** for her inputs, in her capacity as the Coordinator of TRC unit. If not for time constraints, this dossier surely would have been more exhaustive. Nevertheless, we are of the strong belief that the team did its best in bringing together a reasonably positioned dossier that dishes out the key issues and positions— both the academic and political viewpoints.

Through the academic, journalistic and sometimes nationalistic writings in this compilation, the dossier tries to do justice to:

1. The need for people to get multiple versions from a nationalistic but more importantly counter-nationalistic viewpoint.
2. Arguments that will help us move towards a meaningful transformation of the on-going conflict.
3. The need for this issue to be taken out of the 'hard' box – to take it beyond 'us' and 'them', on both sides.

<sup>#</sup>TRC was earlier referred to as *Research in Action*

The arrangement of compilations for this publication is as follows.

- I. **Introduction to the issue and an overview of present dialogue processes.**
  - A. **Siachen: Chronology of events (compilation)**
  - B. **Report of Pakistan-India people to people Round Table Conference- 'A Climate of Confidence: Siachen, a Shared Heritage' held on August 14, 2012, Mumbai, India**
  - C. **'Siachen Declaration' from the Roundtable of citizens and organisations from India, Pakistan and Jammu & Kashmir held in Mumbai on August 14, 2012**
- II. **The framework in which the articles in this dossier are arranged is as follows.**
  - D. **Siachen: History and Trajectory of the Dispute**
  - E. **Siachen: The ecological disaster**
  - F. **Conflict Resolution (nationalistic perspectives) & Demilitarisation**
  - G. **Linking Siachen to overall context of peace and confidence building**

Some of these are surely overlapping in nature and cannot be compartmentalised, but the effort is to help easy reading and reference.

The PSA collective is grateful to all the authors, for their respective writings on the issue as well as their long-term engagement with the issue. We regret that we were unable to seek prior written permission from the authors or the publishers in most cases. Our only explanation and defence is that this is a private circulation compilation aimed at only bringing together these writings to assist productive dialogue on the issue. For the purpose of the compilation, we have omitted some photographs and other non-text images from the original articles.

We thank Mr Dhritiman Mukherjee for allowing us to use his photograph for the cover page of this publication.

A special thanks to Mr Joe Athialy for the cover design.

Our gratitude to the PSA fraternity including *Delhi Forum*, *Sanctuary Asia*, PIPFPD, *South Asians for Human Rights* (SAHR) and *Heinrich Boll Foundation* (HBF) for supporting the initiative.

As we were preparing to send this compilation to the Press, border skirmishes and violation of LoC ceasefire agreement have once again upset the government and people on both sides. The unpardonable firings and killings also conveniently happened at a time when governments on both sides were struggling with internal issues and political turmoil. The blood of soldiers will surely save the governments in the interim and divert attention from other core issues. We are positive that this will not last and that both governments will get back to the dialogue table. We sincerely hope readers will find this useful in their ongoing and future engagements on the issue.

**Vijayan MJ**

General Secretary, PSA

**Jatin Desai**

Coordinator, *Dialogue for Action*

# I.

## Introduction and overview

### A. Siachen: Chronology of Events

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- The United Nations resolution in 1949 or the Karachi Agreement: The Ceasefire Line between India and Pakistan was demarcated by the Karachi Agreement signed in July 1949 with the backing of the United Nations. The northern-most part of the line ended at Khor and remained undrawn thereafter, with a remark that the line would run “thence north to the glaciers”. There was no habitation or patrolling to the north of the last demarcated point because of the inhospitable terrain. The agreement specified parts of the line which were inclusive to either party. The agreement further stipulated that such parts could be physically occupied up to the line by the owning party; the other party was to remain at least 500 yards away. Other parts of the line, not made inclusive to either party were to be jointly owned and troops could occupy positions on either side at least 500 yards away. The idea was to avoid an eyeball to eyeball confrontation. The last part of the line- Khor and beyond was not made inclusive to either party. The Karachi Agreement is still applicable.
- The July 1949 Karachi agreement established a ceasefire line (CFL) which left enough scope for divergent interpretations of the actual position of the CFL beyond the map coordinate, NJ 9842. This later became the Line of Control.
- Tashkent Agreement, January 10, 1966 was signed by the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and the President of Pakistan at that time, Ayub Khan; ending the 17-day war between Pakistan and India in 1965. A cease-fire had been secured by the United Nations Security Council on September 22, 1965. The agreement was mediated by Soviet Premier Aleksey Kosygin. The parties agreed to withdraw all armed forces to positions held before August 5, 1965; to restore diplomatic relations; and to discuss economic, refugee, and other questions.
- The Simla Agreement, 1972: The two basic points coming from the Indian position have throughout been that firstly, there must be no resort to arms in the settlement of all disputes between the two countries, and secondly, that there should be no third-party intervention in any of the Indo-Pak disputes and the two countries must adhere to the principle of bilateral approach. The very first chapter of the Simla Agreement elaborates both these basic points in great detail. The Simla Agreement committed both the sides to meet “to discuss further the modalities and arrangements for the establishment of durable peace and normalisation of relations” and these were specifically to include “a final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir”. (The Dawn. June 23, 2012)<sup>1</sup>
- The Suchetgarh Agreement, 1972: This bilateral agreement, a follow-up of the Simla Agreement delineates the line much in the manner of the Karachi Agreement. Due to the

<sup>1</sup> Forty years after Simla. A.G Noorani. The Dawn. June 23, 2012. <http://dawn.com/2012/06/23/forty-years-after-simla/>

change in the line at the terminating point, the last demarcated point on the map corresponding to Khor was referred to as NJ9842.

- September 1983: The decision to occupy the heights which dominate the Siachen glacier was taken by the then Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi after a military briefing held at Leh. The briefing was conducted by the Field Force Commander, Lieutenant General P N Hoon in the presence of the Northern Army Commander, Lieutenant General M L Chibber. Under normal circumstances, the Army Chief, General Arun Vaidya should have conducted the briefing in the presence of the Defence Minister with the Defence Secretary in attendance. Therefore, the fact that the briefing at Leh was conducted was an unprecedented breach of established procedure and in that the three top echelons in the hierarchy next to the Prime Minister were not present.
- By early 1984, after intelligence reports indicated extensive Pakistani preparations to occupy the area, the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered the Indian army to occupy the Siachen Glacier. It was on 13th April 1984, that a small body of troops were heli-dropped on Saltoro Ridge, which overlooks the Siachen glacier, along its western fringe. They occupied two mountain passes at Bilafond La and Sia La while the Pakistan Army could only reach Gyong La. Within a few days, a company-size force occupied three passes on the ridgeline located at altitudes between 18,000 and 20,000 feet. Meghdoot, the code name given to the operation, was to become the Indian army's longest running operation.
- Since then, the Indian army has been in physical possession of most of the heights on the Saltoro Range west of the Siachen Glacier, while the Pakistan army has held posts at lower elevations of western slopes of the spurs emanating from the Saltoro ridgeline. The Indian army has secured its positions on the ridgeline, now called the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL)
- The Indian interpretation of the statement is that the LOC should run north easterly from NJ 9842 along the Saltoro Range to the Chinese border. The Pakistani interpretation is that the LOC should run from NJ 9842 straight to the Karakoram Pass (KKP) on the India- China border.
- An agreement for military disengagement was reached in the fifth round of talks held in June, 1989. The joint statement issued after talks on June 17, 1989 outlined the core elements of a settlement: "There was agreement by both sides to work towards a comprehensive settlement, based on redeployment of forces to reduce the chance of conflict, avoidance of the use of force and the determination of future positions on the ground so as to conform with the Simla Agreement and to ensure durable peace in the Siachen area." "The army authorities of both sides" were to "determine these positions". This agreement was endorsed by Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi during the latter's July 1989 visit to Islamabad. (The News. April 17, 2012)<sup>2</sup>

- Meeting in 1992: *The Indian side's proposal dated November 3, 1992 contained the following elements: delineation of the Line of Control north of NJ 9842; redeployment of troops on both sides to agreed positions, but after demarcating their existing positions; a zone of disengagement subsequent to the redeployment, with both sides committing that they would not seek to intrude into this zone; a monitoring mechanism to maintain the peace in the Zone of Disengagement (ZoD).*

*Pakistan's proposal was as follows: Both sides would vacate their troops from the triangular area between Indira Col in the west, Karakoram Pass in the east and NJ 9842; troops on both sides would withdraw to a point south of NJ 9842, to the pre-1972 Simla Agreement positions; neither side shall attempt to alter the status of the demilitarised triangle pending delineation of the LoC north of NJ 9842 by a joint commission. The refusal to authenticate ground positions and the reference to Karakoram Pass — a point well to the east of NJ9842 and a red rag to the Indians — led to an impasse. As a way out, the Pakistani side, led by its defence secretary, offered the following compromise: “The armed forces of the two sides shall vacate areas and re-deploy as indicated in the annexure. The positions vacated would not for either side constitute a basis for legal claim or justify a political or moral right to the area indicated”. (The Hindu. June 10, 2012)<sup>3</sup>*

The two sides did reach an agreement which adhered to the proposal by the Indian side but the agreement was not signed.

- There was another meeting in 2005, where the two sides were once again said to be nearing an agreement to demilitarize the region, but it did not come through. Pakistan did not want to demarcate ground positions which had become a point of no negotiation for India. India was also firm on the demand for a mechanism to monitor any intrusions into a demilitarised zone in the Siachen region.
- Around 140 Pakistani soldiers died in April 2012 after which a statement was issued by General Kayani in favour of the demilitarization of Siachen. The related media reports and columns by lead analysts and peace activists did help in bringing back the Siachen issue to the forefront.
- Talks on Siachen between the Defence Secretaries of Pakistan and India were held at the Ministry of Defence, Rawalpindi, Pakistan from 11-12 June 2012. The Pakistan delegation was headed by Ms. Nargis Sethi, Defence Secretary of Pakistan and the Indian delegation was headed by Mr. Shashi Kant Sharma, Defence Secretary of India. The Defence Secretary of India called on the Minister for Defence Syed Naveed Qamar. Both sides reaffirmed their resolve to make serious, sustained and result-oriented efforts for seeking an amicable resolution of Siachen. It was agreed to continue the dialogue on Siachen. Both sides acknowledged that the ceasefire was holding since 2003. It was also agreed that the next round of talks on Siachen will be held in New Delhi on mutually convenient dates.

<sup>3</sup> Siachen was almost a done deal in 1992. The Hindu. June 10, 2012. <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/article3510758.ece>

**B. Pakistan-India people to people Round Table Conference**  
**'A Climate of Confidence: Siachen, a Shared Heritage'**  
**August 14, 2012, Mumbai, India**  
**Report<sup>4</sup>**

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A shared heritage is an idea that craves attention in today's times, leaders of different countries are preoccupied drawing concrete lines as borders on land and water and at the same time are searching for workable confidence building measures. In the context of India and Pakistan, it is clear that the range of issues include some that have reached a high level of severity that could be because of the extent of militarization, whereas, some others seem to be softer for which a resolution can be aimed at. To build a climate of confidence in such a scenario is a must. There have been numerous debates and deliberations on issues relating to the Siachen glacier, and consistent efforts over the years have led to it being included as one of the Confidence Building Measures (CBM's) identified and accepted by both the countries. A Roundtable Conference<sup>5</sup> was organized by *Programme for Social Action (PSA)* and *Sanctuary Asia* in Mumbai on August 14, 2012 in order to build a deeper understanding and engage with the dialogue processes pertaining to this issue. It was attended by 35 delegates who included military strategists, veteran service personnel, journalists, environmental activists, mountaineering experts and representatives from communities in Ladakh, senior politicians, civil society activists from Pakistan and Legal luminaries.

From the time that this issue has come to the forefront, there have been several rounds of talks and many have reached very close to a solution, particularly with the talks in 1992. This is despite the fact that the strategic, ecological and economic angle to the discussion suggest that the demilitarization of Siachen could be nothing but beneficial to both countries and this has been recognized by the governments of both countries. The melting of the glacier is going to lead to severe environmental catastrophes and a very recent example is the avalanche that killed around 140 soldiers.

### **History and political conflict**

The key issues in the historiography of the Siachen conflict were covered by three presenters. There were arguments saying that there was news from Pakistan and considering that both

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<sup>4</sup> Disclaimer 1: The views presented in the round table are of the speakers only.

<sup>5</sup> Disclaimer 2: The report only mentions names of four speakers out of the 15, mainly those who were from the neighbouring country, Pakistan- Asma Jahangir, Senior Lawyer and former President of Bar Association, Supreme Court of Pakistan; B. M. Kutty, Labour Rights Activist and Writer associated with Pakistan Institute for Labour Education and Research (PILER), along with, Motup Chewang, mountaineer and resident from the closest human habitation. Former Personnel Indian Armed forces, Lt. Gen (R) Vinayak Patankar's position has also been stated with his name mentioned since his strong position on certain accounts was the reason for him to have withdrawn his agreement with the declaration drafted at the end of the conference.

countries had already fought two wars in 1965 and 1971, it was only normal for Indira Gandhi to be suspicious of any repositioning done by Pakistan. It is a known fact that the Himalayas and this particular terrain is a key concern for India because on the one hand, India had fought wars with China and Pakistan and any hand shaking between Pakistan and Chinese armies across NJ9842 was bound to be disastrous from an Indian point of view. It was said that, Indira Gandhi cannot be blamed alone nor can her move to militarise Siachen be termed illogical or ill conceived.

However, there were counter views that, the democratic and military procedures that precede any army deployment were not complied with. For example, the Defence Secretary and Minister were not present in the meeting thus there was only the military point of view that she had heard in the crucial meeting held a month prior to the actual militarisation of Siachen.

In retrospect, even militaristically it is indeed irrational to argue that by occupying some higher positions in the glacier, the Pakistani or Chinese have any advantage, because neither can huge militaries be deployed through Siachen nor can it be a strategic station considering the prevailing climatic conditions in the area. Thus, it was argued that it is an egoistic territorial positioning and not a positioning with strategic importance.

There was an agreement on this by some of the delegates who quoted a number of informal conversations happening at that time among journalists, in media circles and diplomatic ones, about how both armies and people are being subjected to the whims and fancies of authoritarian political leadership.

It was mentioned how continued militarisation also brought different possibilities of peace at different points since 1984. The last 28 years saw many windows of opportunity in 1989, 1992, 1995, 1998 and 2008. Narrations were also about how each time the near possibility of peace was thwarted by either jingoistic positioning from either side or by actual disruptions caused by non state armed groups or state intelligence agencies.

The few major deliberations brought into consideration as recommendations were the following:

1. Is third party intervention a possibility and a desirable move towards a solution?

Two of the speakers from Pakistan upheld the view that it was important to bring third party intervention, since a bureaucracy and bilateral diplomacy had failed to bring any long lasting solution to a jingoistic conflict. They believed that since nationalism is at play, a third party based delinking of the Siachen issue with others was important as a first step towards demilitarisation and conflict transformation. The Indian and Pakistani security apparatus was targeted saying that they have a continued interest in maintaining militarised status quo at the cost of sacrificing people, huge sums of money and ecology. However, a majority of the delegates present at the round table asserted that a *United Nations* like third party intervention or a United States mediated tripartite

talks could only negatively impact any country's sovereignty based resolution to the issue. Moreover, a third party intervention would only irk the bureaucracies further and many of the political parties from India might not agree.

2. What could be a common strategic consensus in terms of demilitarisation?

The agreed upon Draft<sup>6</sup> of 1992 between India and Pakistan was suggested as the closest that the two countries got to a common strategic consensus. The draft was read out and the parley that happened between the two countries was explained. It was mentioned that despite the fact that this agreement was drafted two decades ago, its strategic significance and its positional clarity still remain. Most delegates felt that it was important to base future dialogues around the 1992 draft.

3. Is it possible to go beyond history and history based political rhetoric?

The historical rhetoric was largely about blaming one leader or another or one country or another for the continued militarisation of Siachen. Thus, it was important to accept militarisation as a mistake and an additional burden on the exchequer of both countries. It was said that, if resolved, the impact of the consensus will surely lead to additional benefits on all other core issues including that of Kashmir and terrorism.

4. Can we cross the tide of the 'trust deficit'?

Many speakers pointed out the continuing trend of 'trust deficit' between both countries. It was mentioned that whenever the South Asian nuclear neighbours came close to any possible ways forward in any of the core conflicts including Siachen, at least one country (represented by vested interest agencies from either country) was deceitful through manufactured disruptions. The demolition of Babri Masjid (1992), the Mumbai blasts (1993), infiltration in Kargil and the Kargil War (1999), attack on Indian Parliament (2001), increased militancy in Kashmir (2001-2003), Samjhauta express blasts (2007), 'Mumbai terrorist attack' (2008), etc. being cases of repeated 'betrayal of good faith', have subsequently led to a collapse of many a peace initiative at both, a government to government and a people to people level. One of the suggestions that came about in the round table as regards covering the 'trust deficit' was to work on softer issues first, rather than moving to Kashmir or terrorism that are issues of higher intensity. Issues such as trade between both countries, economic cooperation agreements at both levels, a consensus based resolution of Siachen and Sir Creek etc. needed to be pushed for, keeping this objective in mind.

5. Will the political solution rope in the local communities in Jammu and Kashmir and their concerns?

Speakers from across boundaries including those from Kashmir and Ladakh were of the opinion that conflicts such as Siachen were not just a matter of pride for the respective countries or their military strength but also for those affected living communities, their



life and livelihood. However, in most situations, it was opined by one of the delegates from Kashmir, that local communities are thrown into situations of conflict and war without giving them information, leave alone getting their consent. A possible transformation of the conflict discussed was one that lies in the participation of these very communities in the tables of dialogue.

### **Economic and Budgetary issues**

The cost of continued militarisation in Siachen has been extremely high for both India and Pakistan. While some delegates believed that Pakistan was in a much worse situation as regards the proportionate military expenditure, it was commonly agreed upon that the economic cost of keeping alive the Siachen conflict was indeed bleeding both countries.

Conflicting figures were presented between different participants at the meeting. The Indian defence ministry was quoted with their response to a parliamentary question saying that India spends about Rs 3 crore a day or about Rs 1,000 crore a year to maintain the Siachen brigade.

The crux of the matter was that the amount of money spent on militarizing this area is massive which could be diverted to other sectors where both the countries seem to have a shortage of funds like health and education. There were certain disagreements on the excessively high defense budgets where a few people felt that the budget was appropriate but this was strongly countered by many. Thus, in terms of priority, the money spent here could instead be diverted to other sectors focusing on social welfare and infrastructure.

It was also pointed out that India and Pakistan in the quest for the arms race also figure among the top most military spending countries in the world while their human development index is despicable.

Asma Jahangir, Senior Lawyer and former President of Bar Association, Supreme Court of Pakistan highlighted upon the amount of money Pakistan spends per year to keep their troops in Siachen which amounts to 300 million dollars.

It was mentioned that the costs quoted are only reflecting the financial costs of troupe deployment in the world's highest battle field and are not including the actual socio-economic costs of the unending war. For instance, there are cases of early retirement by troupes due to their health deterioration and the economics of the social health cost is rarely calculated. Delegates also compared the existing budgetary calculation for social schemes, health and education programmes vis a vis the exclusive defence budget allocations for keeping up the vantage position in Siachen.

### **A shared cultural heritage**

The real essence of the discussions at the round table revolved around the need for developing an understanding of a shared cultural heritage. It was clarified that the Himalayan range where

the Siachen glacier is situated, is not an army post point of any one country and its geographical area is shared by India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and China. However, the point highlighted was that the geographical area is only one aspect, there are many more which need to be addressed in order to bypass the restrictions that border lines impose. The most significant out of these is focusing on the people in this entire region who have commonalities in terms of their culture, origins and habitat but the excessive militarisation has separated them which is a usual outcome in highly militarised zones. The militarisation in this region has also choked all joint mountaineering activities, explorations, archaeological excavations and palaeontology research.

### **Ecological Impact and Climate Change**

Four presentations made to the round table dealt with diverse aspects of the ecological impacts, climate change, threat to animal and plant species and pollution caused by human and military waste. Motup Chewang, mountaineer and resident from the closest human habitation to the glacier narrated experiences of his visit to the glacier in 2005 and said, "It was moraine all over till up to 16,000 feet. The glacier has receded so much. We can hear the water gushing underneath the thin layer of ice". He added, saying "we can see the solid waste getting accumulated in the glaciers. Today, the fear of avalanches occurring frequently discourages many of us mountaineers from venturing out for trecks." This set the message very clearly about the visible environmental impacts and ecological damages caused by militarization of the glaciers and the ensuing war.

The severe effects on the animal life were highlighted with an overview of the severe damage to the flora and fauna because of which many species are being affected like the snow leopards going extinct in the Himalayas.

It was asserted that deposits of waste are being accumulated on a monthly basis- chemical and military (military arsenal waste constitutes bullets and shells). Despite the fact that there is no war directly and no military attack, there is occasional firing which leads to accumulation of such waste. According to Motup Chewang and other eye witnesses present, "this has not just led to increased military arsenal waste accumulation but has actually created mountains of this waste and no one is thinking of clearing that waste. The heat generated by the heating mechanisms used by both armies as well as the continuous artillery use has contributed significantly to the melting of the glaciers. The constant movement of army positions on both sides has caused the thinning of the upper layers especially in summer months."

In addition to this, it was said that to conserve the Himalaya's is not just a requirement for India and Pakistan but it is a global requirement considering the fast changing climate scenario. It is an existential need of the future generations keeping in mind that the Himalaya's are a major source of water for a major part of the human population and the fast drying up rivers and other water bodies of South Asia would be one of the adverse effects for mankind if the Himalaya's are affected.

There were serious discussions about what could be proposed for the situation post demilitarization, and a trans-boundary Peace Park was envisioned which would be a “mountain of peace” that would be a symbol of the efforts of both countries and would be an epitome of not just mutual agreement but mutual willingness between the two countries for a move towards a solution.

It was agreed upon that there is a dire need for a campaign to be driven by environmental groups and social and peace activists which needs to be pictorial and target the younger generations. A need was expressed to look at multiple challenges and find answers that are imaginative, practical and creative.

### **Conflicting Military and Strategic Views**

The round table was presented with diverse and often contrary views regarding the positioning of the Indian and Pakistani armies on the glaciers. While a couple of speakers were of the view that there is no doubt that the Indian army's position has strategic advantages for the protection of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country, views contrary to this were represented by other speakers who equated such arguments as “jingoistic” and mere excuses.

Many of these disagreements mainly the ones which disregarded the strategic significance that Siachen has, led Lt. Gen. (Retd) V.G Patankar, Indian Army to not have his endorsement on the declaration as his views unlike the others, were in support of the strategic importance that the glacier has; even though he was in support of the issue at large.

Mr Patankar also disagreed with the support given to the 1992 draft since it is two decades old. However, it was felt by many that the 1992 draft texts had an intrinsic value in being official documents. Many of these issues were debated while the declaration was being prepared.

One of the presenters cited quotations from a book by Lt General (Retd) V R Raghavan (*Siachen, Conflict without End*, Viking, 2002) who was also the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) during the talks:

*It is apparent that neither India nor Pakistan secures a strategic advantage by contesting the possession of the Saltoro range. Neither also faces a military threat to the territory it occupies in Jammu and Kashmir from over the Saltoro range. India and Pakistan therefore portray the issue in terms of political or non-military compulsions. A strategic veneer is given to what is actually a political necessity for continuing the conflict...*

*It is useful to examine why the leadership in India and Pakistan allowed their nations to be drawn into an unending conflict in the Karakorums. The theatre of conflict, as is now widely accepted, did not offer strategic advantages, notwithstanding some comments to the contrary. It involved fighting in an area where the full force of the defence capability could not be applied. It exposed the two militaries to untold hardships and stretched their men and logistics arrangements to extremes. It was not necessary, after having got involved in such a conflict, to remain engaged in it despite the illogic of the military engagement.*

There were further discussions on why Siachen needs to be seen and treated separately. Colonel Pavan Nair's work was cited who asserted that there are serious problems in clubbing Siachen with other soft issues, including Trade & Commerce. Moreover, it was said that the corporations based in both countries are using cross border trade as an opportunity to increase their profits and that seems to be the inherent motive behind these proposals as well.

The speakers pointed to the sharp escalation of the Siachen rhetoric especially since the Kargil war. It was mentioned that it not only became an impetus to future trust building between both countries but indirectly added steam to the Indian official position about holding on to Siachen as strategically important. The reasons given by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in her defense for having taken certain decisions like those of militarizing Siachen and occupying the glaciers was also that of preventing the Pakistan and Chinese army's (both with whom India fought full fledged wars in the previous decades) from 'Shaking hands' with each other in the passes beyond NJ9842 and hence forming a strategic alliance against India. However, post 1999, the Indian position became more aggressive citing possibilities of direct infiltration by the Pakistan army into Indian territory through the mountainous terrain.

Excerpts from the Kargil review committee report were quoted.

**Kargil Review Committee Report** published in 2000 under the chairmanship of K Subrahmanyam states in its recommendations in Para 14.32:

*Misperceptions and ambiguities about the Siachen/Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) sector need to be dispelled and the facts of “cartographic aggression” here made known. There is no warrant for departing from the logic of extending the LOC from NJ9842 and “thence north to the glaciers” as set out in the delineation of the Ceasefire Line under the Karachi Agreement of 29 July 1949 which was subsequently converted into the Line of Control by the Simla Agreement in 1972. This broadly upholds the current Actual Ground Position Line. The fallacy of showing the LOC as running northeast to the Karakorum Pass must be exposed (emphasis added).*

The very next paragraph, 14.33 states (in part):

*The country must not fall into the trap of Siachenisation of the Kargil heights and similar unheld, unpopulated “gaps” in the High Himalaya along the entire length of the Northern Border.*

It was said that there seems to be a contradiction between the two paragraphs since the committee appears to endorse the continuing occupation of Siachen whilst recommending that the vacated Kargil heights remain unoccupied. The interpretation of the clause “thence north to the glaciers” also seems to suit the Indian position. This typifies the confusion in Indian strategic thinking. That the Kargil heights have indeed been “Siachenised” and a divisional size force deployed in a forward posture indicates the positional mindset of the military leadership as also the willingness of the political leadership to yield to military pressure. It was the same

mindset, which led to the occupation of the Siachen heights. Kargil was a tactical victory, but like Siachen ended up being a strategic failure. Kargil has also resulted in an unprecedented hike in defence spending as the defence budget has more than tripled in just over a decade without any accretion in force levels.

This is the height of hypocrisy that runs deep in our statecraft and conflict transformation strategies and this is where we need serious introspection. In fact, this coming after the 1992 positioning is nothing but short of new arguments for new forms for militarisation.

A key question regarding the possibility of either India or Pakistan opting for a unilateral withdrawal of troupes from Siachen was raised by one of the participants. This question also became significant in the context of General Kayani's statement about Pakistan unilaterally withdrawing troupes from the glaciers. Experts responded diversely to this. While the Pakistani delegates like B.M Kutty, Labour Rights Activist and Writer associated with *Pakistan Institute for Labour Education and Research (PILER)*, reaffirmed the need for Pakistani army to withdraw from the glaciers unilaterally (even if India does not concede to a consensus on this) – to save its men and money. They were strongly of the opinion that neither Pakistani sovereignty nor its territorial integrity can be challenged by India due to this unilateral withdrawal. The Indian opinion was indeed divided while the activists, environmentalists and senior journalists present opined in favour of India considering a unilateral withdrawal. Some of the defence strategists present were of the view that this was not just impractical but also could lead to further complicating of the issue, especially if a Kargil like situation happened once again.

Introspective pointers were raised regarding the ill health of the soldiers who serve their terms in the glaciers. It was narrated that many men, who managed to go back alive, are facing extremely poor health conditions sometimes even leading to termination of their active role in the defence services. Day to day casualties are also on the rise. Activists wondered that in a country where the request for withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was countered by saying that it would affect the morale of the army. Then, was not a situation where soldiers were getting killed and injured for defending a glacier amounting to the demoralizing of the prestigious armed forces.

Concerns were raised by a speaker on the armies stepping up their lobbying strategies and capacities with respective governments. The more recent comments of the Chief of Indian Army Staff, General Vikram Singh were quoted who said that the arguments for withdrawal of troupes need not be heeded to by the government. It was further asserted that the Indian army should continue its operation in Siachen, whatever is the cost of men and material. The speaker wondered as to why service personnel serving under the Indian parliament should make such a statement and that too, in a unilateral manner, which clearly appears to be contrary to the institutional framework of Indian democracy itself. It was questioned as to why the army or some of its officers become a lobbying group with the government of India for or against any position? It is a political decision that has to be taken at the highest levels of democracy.

A speaker from Pakistan shared the grief and agony of her nation when the avalanche near Siachen took the lives of around 140 Pakistani soldiers and an unrecorded number of porters and other local people who were assisting them. She opined that General Kayani's statements about a resolution of Siachen should be seen in the context of the human loss that Pakistan suffered in the avalanche.

It was asserted that Siachen is not just an ecological and environmental issue, nor that of strategic conflict resolution – but also that of an invisible people. During the recent avalanche, we came across figures of military casualties with numbers. However, there were no numbers attached to the civilians' casualties, civilians who are being used in war as porters and assisting soldiers. Who are these civilians and what are they doing in the highest war zone on earth? Isn't it important that the people there – the Gujjars and other forest/hills communities become an integral part of the conflict transformation, rather than being recipients of any deal?

The people of Ladakh, Kashmir valley and the hill people of other Himalayan mountain terrain also need to be part of the dialogue, since that will help in the long run and in future dialogues with regard to other issues that could follow like the water disputes which again, have a lot to do with the lives and livelihoods of these people. This is not about clubbing issues, but about having a larger civil strategy of making sure that one confidence building measure is followed with another. Recent conferences of the *National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers* (NFFPFW) were spoken about where a delegation of trade unionists and environmental activists discussed about a people's coalition on water issues.

A draft for the declaration was presented to the house. However, It was felt that the draft was in a different framework and did not reflect arguments on the floor and it was proposed that a drafting committee be appointed which consisted of Asma Jahangir (Senior Lawyer and former President of Bar Association, Supreme Court of Pakistan); Sukumar Muralidharan (Senior Journalist associated with the *International Federation of Journalists*); Vijayan MJ ( General Secretary, *Programme for Social Action*); Lalitha Ramdas (*Greenpeace International, Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy* (PIPFPD) and *Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace*); Bharat Bhushan (Senior Journalist and Commentator on Indo- Pak issues) along with other organisers.

### **Concluding Remarks**

A resolution to Siachen is definitely going to work as a central positive factor in future dialogues between the two countries. However, to reach such a stage, there first needs to be an acceptance of the political and military arrogance that both countries are speaking with since these positions are not backed by statistics of human loss or economic loss it is causing for both

countries. Recognising and dealing with this is important for positive and fruitful dialogue processes.

#### List of Speakers

Lalitha Ramdas, *Greenpeace International, Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD) and Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace*

Admiral (R) L. Ramdas, *Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD)*

Bashir Manzar, Journalist from Jammu and Kashmir

Asma Jahangir, Senior Lawyer and former President of Bar Association, Supreme Court of Pakistan

B. M. Kutty, Labour Rights Activist and Writer associated with *Pakistan Institute for Labour Education and Research (PILER)*

Sukumar Muralidharan, Senior Journalist associated with the *International Federation of Journalists*

Mani Shankar Aiyar, Political Activist and Member of Parliament, Indian National Congress

Vijayan MJ, General Secretary, *Programme for Social Action*

Lt. Gen (R) Vinayak Patankar, Indian Army

Jatin Desai, Senior Journalist and Coordinator, *Dialogue for Action (DA)*

Bittu Sahgal, Environmental Activist and Chief Editor, *Sanctuary Asia*

Kulbhushansingh Suryawanshi, Environmentalist and Wildlife Expert

Yashveer Bhatnagar, Activist and Expert on Environmental and Wildlife Issues

Motup Chewang, Mountaineer and Resident from the closest human habitation

Bharat Bhushan, Senior Journalist and Commentator on Indo- Pak issues

#### List of Discussants:

Ashok Choudhary, *National Forum for Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW)*

Ashok Sharma, *Delhi Forum*

Meena Menon, Journalist associated with the Hindu

Dr. Varsha Rajan Berry, Consultant, *Programme for Social Action*

Meena Menon, Activist associated with *Focus on the Global South*

Swati Hingorani, *Sanctuary Asia*

Pushpa Bhawe, National Committee Member, *Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy* (PIPFPD)

Asad Bin Saif, Independent Activist from Mumbai

Nasreen Contractor, *Women's Research and Action Group*

Nirja Bhatnagar, *ActionAid*, Mumbai

Axel Harneit-Sievers, Country Director, *Heinrich Boell Foundation* (HBF)

Geetanjali More, Programme Manager, *Heinrich Boell Foundation* (HBF)

Abhilash, *Heinrich Boell Foundation* (HBF)

Ritu Dewan, Educationist and Member, *Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy* (PIPFPD)

Sukla Sen, Activist associated with *Peace Mumbai* and *Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy* (PIPFPD)

Kalpana Sharma, Journalist associated with *The Hindu*

Zubin Nariewala, *Sanctuary Asia*

Nandita Bhavnani, Activist, *Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy* (PIPFPD)



## **C. Siachen Declaration**

### **From the Roundtable of citizens and organisations from India, Pakistan and Jammu & Kashmir held in Mumbai on August 14, 2012**

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[A Roundtable of interested citizens and groups on the Siachen conflict, was held in Mumbai on August 14, 2012. This declaration, which comes out of the round-table, is signed by representatives of mass organisations, journalists, academicians, former military personnel and environmentalists. The declaration is meant for information, solidarity to the cause and for the urgent attention of the governments in both India and Pakistan]

Siachen, the symbol of a common heritage of the people of South Asia, has been a battlefield since the 1984 occupation of the glacier by the armies of India and Pakistan and has gained the unfortunate and undeserved reputation since, as the world's highest battlefield. Siachen is also about the history of trust deficit, lack of statesmanship and highly militarised nationalism – that refuses to see the reality of the times - in both India and Pakistan. Moreover, soldiers from both India and Pakistan are put to great hardships in protecting their positions on the glacier.

**We realise** that the Siachen conflict has led to untold miseries for families of both army personnel and civilians on both sides of the border. Hill communities have seen their lifestyles transformed for the worse by the intense militarisation. Several among them have taken to higher terrain under livelihood compulsions, where they are liable to be caught in the crossfire between the rival militaries. The number of people killed and maimed in the war zone or those who have succumbed to extreme weather and calamities like avalanches is unacceptably high and unfortunately gets passed off as “collateral damage”.

A number of military veterans and experts have pointed out that this battle has no strategic purpose. It was born in mutual suspicion and has become over time, a show of strength by opposing armies and a contest of their relative powers of endurance in adverse conditions. We also realise that at a time when national budgets in the two countries should be making allocations for poverty eradication, subsidised mass education and healthcare for all, India and Pakistan have been spending precious resources in maintaining army posts at high altitudes.

The recent avalanche that caused untold misery to the armies and led to the death of more than a hundred and fifty soldiers along with many more civilians on the Pakistan side, is nothing but nature's reminder to both countries and its people to wake up to the truth of the looming climate crisis. We must remember that as glaciers melt and the ice becomes more unstable, humans positioned at these heights face unprecedented risks to life from avalanches and shifting ice. The damage and loss, not just to armies but all downstream people, will be unimaginable if we do not respect nature and end this battle in the near future. The glacier, which is melting at an alarmingly rapid rate, is a vital source of water for both India and Pakistan. A collapse of the glacier system could lead to a sequence of natural disasters, from flash floods

to droughts and a shift in weather patterns. Siachen is the shared heritage of the youth of India and Pakistan –and we urge both countries to take cognisance of the importance of this ecosystem and to work towards protecting it.

At a time when the negative impacts of global warming and climate crisis are intense, polluting or otherwise destroying this glacier will be a gross injustice on future generations and will only accelerate the civilisational crisis we are facing.

**We consider** it a great shame that a sensitive Himalayan ecological zone that has nourished lives and provided life-giving water to a quarter of humanity, and is home to pristine flora and fauna, is being turned into a dumping yard for military debris, and chemical and human wastes. The fragile state of the glaciers today calls for immediate demilitarisation, and a clean-up that would preserve South Asia's rivers and protect endangered species of birds and animals such as the snow leopard. It would also ensure the food, water and climate security of both nations.

**We assert** that the people and communities who live in proximity to the glaciers, in the high Himalayas, as also all the people of India and Pakistan whose lives and livelihoods depend on the waters from the rivers flowing from the mountains, have an important stake in the status of Siachen. We assert that this conflict must cease, putting an end to three decades of near-war and bloodshed that has destroyed nature, people and much else.

**We demand** from the governments of India and Pakistan that:

1. They agree to a phased withdrawal from the Siachen area. Such an agreement could embody the main points of the draft texts exchanged in 1992, which are now public. Further detailing if required, could be done by a group consisting of political representatives, people's representatives of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, military personnel, experts and environmental scientists;
2. They establish an India-Pakistan Joint Task Force to initiate the process of monitored and time-bound demilitarisation, followed by the detoxification and restoration of the Siachen glacier under the supervision of glaciologists, scientists and ecologists;
3. They seize this historic opportunity and create a Siachen Trans-boundary Peace Park. This "Mountain of Peace" will serve as a global example of our will to work together to benefit generations unborn whose water and climate security are at great risk;
4. They allocate adequate funds for rehabilitation of both civil and military personnel.
5. That they cut their enormously bloated defence budgets and reallocate resources towards poverty alleviation, education and health programmes that would be of substantive benefit to the mass of the people in both countries.

We the undersigned are committed to the protection and preservation of Siachen and towards building of the 'Mountain of Peace – the Siachen Peace Park'.

**We propose** that we will work towards this end through democratic public means – including awareness campaigns, political advocacy with the governments, publications, photo exhibitions, film screenings, social media, advocacy with political parties and mass organisations, trade unions and others. We also propose to undertake a joint youth campaign that will involve students and youngsters from urban and rural areas, for conservation of the Siachen ecosystem and for the restoration of peace between India and Pakistan.

## II.

# Dossier on Siachen Conflict

## D. Siachen: History and Trajectory of the dispute

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### The Siachen War: Twenty-Five Years On

Pavan Nair

Economic and Political Weekly

March 14, 2009

*Siachen has become a symbol of India's military capability and staying power, somewhat like the Pakistani incursion in Kargil, which achieved nothing for that country. The human cost is staggering, yet India and Pakistan continue to bracket Siachen with issues like Sir Creek, Wular and trade and commerce. This shows a lack of concern for the rank and file of both armies by their political and military leaders. Continuing with the occupation of the Siachen glacier heights not only amounts to poor strategy but also poor generalship.*

On 13 April 1984, a small body of troops was heli-dropped on Salt-oro Ridge which overlooks the Siachen glacier, along its western fringe. Within a few days, three passes on the ridgeline – Bilafond La, Sia La and Indira Col – located at altitudes between 18,000 and 20,000 feet were occupied by a com-pany-size force. Meghdoot, the code name given to the operation, was to become the Indian army's longest running operation. Within a few weeks, Pakistani troops occupied positions on the lower slopes of Saltoro to oppose the Indian occupation. Skirmishing commenced for better tactical positions. What started as a small operation soon became a major military confrontation between India and Pakistan. In just over a year, the force level on both sides reached brigade-plus size till the entire ridgeline covering a frontage of over a 100 kilometres was occupied.

Till the mid-1990s, pitched infantry battles were fought to gain dominating positions. Artillery duels were a part of the daily routine till November 2003 when a ceasefire came into effect. The logistics of maintaining troops at altitudes above 18,000 feet are mind-boggling. Posts have to be supplied by helicopters and evacuation of casualties is at times not possible due to bad weather. On the Indian side, over a 1,000 soldiers have been killed and over 3000 permanently disabled, mostly by the effect of the altitude and weather. On the Pakistani side, the casualties are heavier since most of the attacks were launched by them. In spite of a durable ceasefire, troops continue to occupy positions at punishing heights on both sides of the line and suffer casualties almost on a daily basis. Over a period of 25 years, the presence of thousands of troops in the vicinity of the glacier has caused severe environmental degradation of an

ecosystem already affected by climate change. Thousands of tonnes of military garbage and human waste lie dumped in the area. About 200 tonnes of carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere each day due to burning of fuel for cooking, warming and transportation of men and material by land and air (author's estimate). India and Pakistan spend a million dollars a day to maintain troops in Siachen when their human indicators are comparable with sub-Saharan Africa.

What prompted the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to give the go-ahead for an operation which was a clear and blatant violation of the Simla Agreement? Why did the military leadership of the day render advice which resulted in the occupation of an area which had remained vacant for 37 odd years during which three wars were fought between India and Pakistan? Is there a military imperative to continue with the physical occupation of the Siachen heights? It may be worth examining these questions 25 years down the line since India and Pakistan have not been able to resolve this complex and seemingly unending conflict in spite of several rounds of talks held over two decades.



### Background of the Dispute

The Ceasefire Line between India and Pakistan was demarcated by the Karachi Agreement signed in July 1949 under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). The northern-most part of the line ended at Khor and remained undemarcated thereafter with a remark that the line would run “thence north to the glaciers”. On the Indian side, the agreement was signed by lieutenant general S M Shrinagesh, the then military commander in Kashmir who would later become the chief of the army staff. There was no habitation to the north of the last demarcated point, nor was the area patrolled by either party since the terrain was extremely inhospitable, glaciated and not considered conducive for military operations. The agreement specified parts of the line which were inclusive to either party. The agreement further stipulated that such parts could be physically

occupied up to the line by the owning party; the other party was to remain at least 500 yards away. Other parts of the line not made inclusive to either party were to be jointly owned and troops could occupy positions on either side at least 500 yards away. The idea was to avoid an eyeball to eyeball confrontation. The last part of the line, that is Khor and beyond was not made inclusive to either party. The Karachi Agreement has not been abrogated by either India or Pakistan. It is still in force and the original document is lying in a safe vault in New York in the custody of the UN. A military observer group, United Nations Military Observer Group for India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) is deployed on both sides of the line to check the implementation of the Agreement.

During the 1962 operations with China, Jawaharlal Nehru asked for American military aid. US transport aircraft flew supplies and clothing into Leh (see the Sketch). The US Defence Mapping Agency noted that maps of the region showed a line ending in the middle of nowhere, so they extended the line in the general direction it was running as far as the Chinese boundary. This became the basis for various atlases to show the line running from the last demarcated point in a north-easterly direction to the Karakorum Pass (KKO on Sketch) on the Chinese boundary. Incidentally, the Karakorum Pass has nothing to do with the Karakorum Highway which runs over a 100 kilometres to the north and links Pakistan with the Sinkiang district of China. The published maps also became the basis for the erroneous Pakistani claim which thus included not only the Siachen glacier but also the entire stretch of the Salto Ridge atop which the passes dominating the Glacier are located. The fact is that there had never been any Pakistani presence in the area. During the International Geophysical Year in 1957, an extensive survey of the Siachen glacier was conducted by the Geological Survey of India.

In 1963, general Ayub Khan decided to resolve issues with China. This resulted in the ceding to China of the Shaksgam Valley, an area of about 4,500 square kilometres which forms a salient into China. The Shaksgam Valley is a glaciated and uninhabited region which lies across the northern watershed between India and China and has little strategic significance. The transfer of the Shaksgam Valley was a cartographic exercise and had no effect on the Indo-Pakistani situation. New Delhi did protest to Pakistan to the effect that the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir including the parts occupied by Pakistan had been legally ceded to India, hence the ceding of any part of the state by Pakistan to a third party was irregular. This aspect had however been noted in the Sino-Pak agreement which stated that the boundary would be finalised with the sovereign authority after the resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

In December 1971, India pushed the line in the Shyok Valley about 20 kilometres westwards from Chalunka to short of Siari. Chorbat La also came under Indian control. There were several changes in other sectors also. The new line came to be defined as the Line of Control or the LOC under the Suchetgarh Agreement of December 1972. This bilateral agreement, a follow-up of the Simla Accord delineates the line much in the manner of the Karachi Agreement. Due to the change in the line at the terminating point, the last demarcated point on the map corresponding to Khor was referred to as NJ9842, a map reference. Thus in accordance with the

Karachi and Suchetgarh Agreements, the line would run from NJ9842 “thence north to the glaciers”. This has never been disputed by either party. Several maps and a description were signed by military representatives on both sides. On the Indian side, the delegation was headed by lieutenant general P S Bhagat, a highly decorated soldier. The entire conflict could have probably been avoided, had the line been demarcated as specified beyond the last demarcated point either in 1949 or in 1972. Why this was not done by two senior and experienced military commanders is a matter of conjecture but it would suffice to point out that neither of them could have conceived that military operations would be contemplated in the glaciated areas to the north of the last demarcated point.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Pakistan granted permission to several mountaineering expeditions to enter the disputed area; the triangle formed by NJ9842, the Karakorum Pass and Indira Col, the northern-most point of the Saltoro Ridge which became the de facto tri-junction between India, China and Pakistan after 1984. The Karakorum Range could be approached more easily from the west due to gentler slopes and therefore expeditions preferred the approach from the Pakistani side. Reports of these expeditions were published in mountaineering journals. In any case, after the Sino-Pak. Accord of 1963, K2 (the second highest peak in the world) came to be jointly owned by China and Pakistan and the latter started controlling the movement of mountaineering expeditions into the area. Pakistan was testing the waters so to speak. Several Indian commentators have blamed Pakistan for breaching the Simla Agreement by sending mountaineering expeditions with army liaison officers into the disputed area. India also commenced sending reconnaissance patrols and military expeditions from 1978 to the Siachen glacier and Saltoro Ridge; a perfectly legitimate though delayed reaction since by the mid-1960s, several atlases started showing the line running in a north-easterly direction to the Karakorum Pass which gave substance to the Pakistani claim. In spite of presenting demographic data showing that several Muslim majority habitations exist in the Shyok and Nubra Valleys, the Pakistani claim to Siachen glacier has no historical or empirical basis since Buddhists and Muslims have coexisted in the area for centuries. In any case, the area was under Indian jurisdiction after the operations in 1948. The Indian claim, however, needs further examination.

### **Indian Claim Reviewed**

The Indian claim is based on the watershed principle. Since the last demarcated point NJ9842 lies on or near the Saltoro watershed, the line should follow the watershed that is the Saltoro Ridge line which runs in a north-westerly direction. Whilst there is some merit in this claim, we need to go back to the Karachi and Suchetgarh Agreements which specify that the line will run “thence north” from the last point that is NJ9842. This implies that the line should follow a straight-line configuration, in the direction of true north till it meets the border with China, which would then become the tri-junction. In this case, the north-western part of the glacier as also a part of the Saltoro Ridge would go to Pakistan and the south-eastern part to India. Most

Indian commentators ignore this aspect. Also, it has never been pointed out that the last part of the line was not made inclusive to either party and was therefore jointly owned. Even if we accept the Indian claim, it is legally indefensible to sit on a line which is jointly owned, since the other party has the same right. It is for this reason that the Karachi Agreement specified that both parties could occupy positions at least 500 yards away from a jointly owned line. The configuration of the Saltoro Ridge on the Indian side is such that a line running parallel to the ridgeline and 500 yards away would probably end up on the Siachen glacier, thousands of feet below, thus offsetting the advantage of occupying the high ground which facilitates observation of the lower Pakistani positions to the west of the Ridge. It is for this reason that the Saltoro passes gained importance for both sides. Thus, the belated Indian claim based on the watershed principle conveniently facilitates the occupation of the passes on tenuous legal grounds and ignores the fact that the LOC cuts across several other ridgelines including the Ladakh range without following the watershed.

It is interesting to note that the Kargil Review Committee Report published in 2000 under the chairmanship of K Subrahmanyam states in its recommendations in Para 14.32,

*Misperceptions and ambiguities about the Siachen/Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) sector need to be dispelled and the facts of “cartographic aggression” here made known. There is no warrant for departing from the logic of extending the LOC from NJ9842 and “thence north to the glaciers” as set out in the delineation of the Ceasefire Line under the Karachi Agreement of 29 July 1949 which was subsequently converted into the Line of Control by the Simla Agreement in 1972. This broadly upholds the current Actual Ground Position Line. The fallacy of showing the LOC as running northeast to the Karakorum Pass must be exposed (emphasis added).*

The very next paragraph, 14.33 states (in part),

*The country must not fall into the trap of Siachenisation of the Kargil heights and similar unheld, unpopulated “gaps” in the High Himalaya along the entire length of the Northern Border.*

There seems to be a contradiction between the two paragraphs since the committee appears to endorse the continuing occupation of Siachen whilst recommending that the vacated Kargil heights remain unoccupied. The interpretation of the clause “thence north to the glaciers” also seems to suit the Indian position. This typifies the confusion in Indian strategic thinking. That the Kargil heights have indeed been “Siachenised” and a divisional size force deployed in a forward posture indicates the positional mindset of the military leadership as also the willingness of the political leadership to yield to military pressure. It was the same mindset which led to the occupation of the Siachen heights. Kargil was a tactical victory, but like Siachen ended up being a strategic failure. Kargil has also resulted in an unprecedented hike in defence spending as the defence budget has more than tripled in just over a decade without any accretion in force levels.



## Strategic Significance of Disputed Area

The only definitive work on the tactical and strategic aspects of the Siachen War has been authored by lieutenant general V R Raghavan (*Siachen, Conflict without End*, Viking, 2002). Raghavan commanded the formation responsible for the Siachen sector during a time when several crucial battles were fought and was also the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) when the Siachen talks took place. After examining several aspects, Raghavan comes to the conclusion that no military purpose is served by continuing with the occupation of the Siachen glacier heights. On page 160, he states:

*It is apparent that neither India nor Pakistan secures a strategic advantage by contesting the possession of the Saltoro range. Neither also faces a military threat to the territory it occupies in Jammu and Kashmir from over the Saltoro range. India and Pakistan therefore portray the issue in terms of political or non-military compulsions. A strategic veneer is given to what is actually a political necessity for continuing the conflict.*

And again on page 184, he writes:

*It is useful to examine why the leadership in India and Pakistan allowed their nations to be drawn into an unending conflict in the Karakorums. The theatre of conflict, as is now widely accepted, did not offer strategic advantages, notwithstanding some comments to the contrary. It involved fighting in an area where the full force of the defence capability could not be applied. It exposed the two militaries to untold hardships and stretched their men and logistics arrangements to extremes. It was not necessary, after having got involved in such a conflict, to remain engaged in it despite the illogic of the military engagement.*

It is also worth quoting a letter written by lieutenant general Inder Gill to *The Hindu* on 5 March 1997. Gill, a highly respected officer, retired as the army commander of Western Command.

*The amounts of money wasted by both sides is very large indeed. There is nowhere that either side can go in this terrain. You cannot build roads on glacier, which are moving rivers of ice. We have no "strategic-tactical advantage" in this area and nor can Pakistan. Ask any officer who has been on the glacier what Pakistan will do if we pull out, and he will tell you at once that Pakistan will do the same. We must withdraw immediately and unilaterally and save wastage of money which we cannot afford – estimated at Rs 30,000 crore since 1985.*

Gill may not have got the figure right, since it has been confirmed by the defence ministry in response to a parliamentary question that India spends about Rs 3 crore a day or about Rs 1,000 crore a year to maintain the Siachen brigade; however, the point he made about unilateral withdrawal needs consideration. Finally, here is a quote from a young officer who served in Siachen. Writing in an army journal in 1993, major B A Prasad states, "A majority of those who served there believed that India was pushed into an avoidable situation by senior military commanders acting irresponsibly". Most commentators are unanimous in their view that the Siachen occupation does not provide any tactical or strategic advantage to India and Pakistan.

However, the vacation of the Siachen heights is considered a concession to Pakistan by the security establishment and hence a nonstarter till some concession is granted by Pakistan in return. The “authentication” or de facto recognition of the AGPL is one such concession.

### **Military Decision-making**

The decision to occupy the heights which dominate the Siachen glacier was taken by Indira Gandhi after a military briefing held at Leh sometime in September 1983. The briefing was conducted by the field force commander, lieutenant general P N Hoon in the presence of the northern army commander, lieutenant general M L Chibber. Normally, the army chief, general Arun Vaidya should have conducted the briefing in the presence of the defence minister with the defence secretary in attendance. Therefore, the conduct of the briefing at Leh was an unprecedented breach of established procedure in that the three top echelons in the hierarchy next to the prime minister were not present. It is possible that R Venkataraman the then defence minister did not attend due to the altitude at Leh; however it is inconceivable that the army chief was not present. In any case, the briefing could have been held in New Delhi to enable Venkataraman to attend. General Vaidya may have been travelling or indisposed but the schedule of the briefing could have been adjusted since the operation was well over six months away.

During the briefing, Hoon, who had taken over the command of 15 Corps just over a month before, conveyed to the prime minister that a direct threat had emerged to Khardung La and Leh via the Siachen glacier and Nubra Valley. Also, that the Pakistanis could be shaking hands with the Chinese at the Karakorum Pass, which was being shown as the tri-junction in Pakistani maps. The Karakorum Highway from Sinkiang to Pakistan was projected as a noose around India's neck. The Sino-Pak liaison at the Karakorum Pass discounted the fact that the Siachen glacier as also the Nubra Valley and Daulat-Beg-Oldi (DBO on map) which was the approach to the Karakorum Pass were all in Indian hands. The Indian air force would take a heavy toll of any Pakistani move which would need a viable military force to infiltrate over the Saltoro Ridge and into the Nubra Valley. Whether such a force could be supported over passes at altitudes of 18,000 feet and above, was not given due consideration. In any case terrain considerations ruled out the possibility of any such linkage between Pakistan and China. It was like the great-game being played again. Notes had been exchanged between the military commanders which were used to justify the Pakistani threat. In a book published in 2000 (*Unmasking Secrets of Turbulence*, Manas Publications, New Delhi), Hoon claims that he was the brain behind Operation Meghdoot. This is true, but only in part, since Chibber was also involved in the decision-making process. He was the DGMO in an earlier tenure as also the immediate superior officer of Hoon. In his book, Hoon blames the next army chief, general K Sundarji for escalating the conflict on account of his “forward policy”. This belies the fact that the occupation of the heights heralded such a policy. The escalation of the conflict should have been foreseen as also the implications of keeping troops over prolonged periods at extreme altitudes.

The unilateral military occupation of a part of the line, even if it was undemarcated was a blatant violation of the Simla Agreement. Indira Gandhi would have surely known that but she took a decision based on incorrect military advice. Why diplomatic channels were not used needs further study and examination. It is possible that Indira Gandhi did not want to parley with Zia ul Haq. It is also possible that her judgment was clouded by the effect of the altitude at Leh. Given the autocratic personality of the prime minister, cabinet clearance soon followed as a matter of course. There was no one in the cabinet who could question the wisdom of applying military force in a hitherto unmanned area at altitudes of over 18,000 feet. In an article written in 1990 ("Siachen, The Untold Story", *Indian Defence Review*, January 1990), lieutenant general Chibber candidly admits that he was not aware whether troops would be staying on during the winter. The operation was meant to be a show of force which went terribly wrong.

We now know from accounts of senior officers of the Pakistani Army (lieutenant general Jahan Dad Khan, *Pakistan – Leadership Challenges*, OUP, Pakistan, 1999) that Pakistan did have plans to occupy the passes in the summer of 1984. Had that happened India would have had the easier option of making a small push in the Shyok Valley from Turtok towards Khapalu which would cut off the support base at Dansam (see the Sketch) on the Pakistani side. Even if that push was not made, the Pakistanis would not have gained any advantage had they been left sitting on the passes, literally high and dry.

Operation Meghdoot was a strategic blunder and the turning point in India's relations with Pakistan. In 1987, as a reaction to the Siachen occupation, an intrusion was planned by the Pakistanis in Kargil. This was sensibly turned down by Zia ul Haq. A cheaper alternative was under consideration. By 1989, Pakistan had launched a full-scale proxy war in Kashmir. Siachen became a sideshow. After the incidents of 26 November 2008, Siachen is not on the screens of decision-makers. About 2,000 soldiers on the Indian side are deployed at punishing altitudes in what is a permanent face-off with Pakistan. Another few thousand are supporting the operation or are on their way up or down. On return, the soldiers look like zombies having lost a fifth of their body weight. Some would have cerebral edema. With a ceasefire in place, sitting on crags of rock and snow astride the Saltoro Ridge makes little sense. The ridgeline was occupied to dominate the Pakistani positions by observation and fire. Observation can be carried out in real time by satellites as well as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or UAVs. The military would be perfectly justified in advising the government that once given up, the positions on the Saltoro Ridge would be very difficult to retake. It would then be up to the political leadership of the day to take a decision. In any case, the probable solution discussed in several rounds of talks grants possession of the northern passes as also the upper half of the glacier to Pakistan. But before that, the agreement in-principle between the two countries to demilitarise the disputed area needs to be implemented. The final demarcation can then be discussed at length and implemented in due course.

Siachen has become a symbol of India's military capability and staying power, somewhat like the Pakistani incursion in Kargil which achieved nothing for Pakistan. The human cost is

staggering, yet India and Pakistan continue to bracket Siachen with issues like Sir Creek, Wular and trade and commerce. This shows a lack of concern for the rank and file of both armies by their political and military leaders. Continuing with the occupation of the Siachen glacier heights not only amounts to poor strategy but also poor generalship.

### **Environmental Degradation**

The Siachen glacier is the largest reserve of fresh water in Asia which feeds the Indus via the Nubra and Shyok rivers. Ten thousand soldiers from both armies are deployed in a restricted area in and around the glacier. Most of them occupy positions in glaciated areas and in the valleys formed by the Shyok and Nubra rivers. Several camps are located on the glacier itself. Temperatures go down to -50°C which necessitates burning kerosene to keep warm the entire year. Human waste cannot be disposed of, so lies preserved in the snow. Due to the rarefied atmosphere, helicopters perform at a fraction of their capacity. There is a constant buzz of activity of men, material, vehicles and aircraft moving in and out of the sector of operations. A forward base on the glacier is supported by air drops. Splinters and cordite from thousands of shells fired at positions from both sides lies buried in and around the glacier. A leaking pipeline is used to pump kerosene to the advance camp on the glacier. The glacier itself is receding. This is clearly visible from the base camp on the Indian side which is located at the glacier snout. The area has become a massive garbage and sewage dump.

The effect of the military occupation of a river source for 25 years will be felt for several decades if not centuries. Even if we ignore the heavy financial and human costs, on environmental grounds alone, the entire area of operations should be demilitarised without any further delay. Another 25 years down the line, the Siachen glacier as we know it today may cease to exist.

### **Conflict Resolution**

The genesis of the conflict lies in the interpretation of a phrase of the Karachi Agreement. The dispute could have been resolved diplomatically between the parties before getting their militaries involved. The matter could also have been referred to the UN at any stage since the Karachi Agreement was signed under the auspices of the UN. India has always been averse to any external mediation, though a precedent exists in the Indus Water Treaty being mediated by the World Bank. Formal talks have been going on for two decades to resolve the issue bilaterally. This is a record of some sort. Both sides have agreed in principle to demilitarise the disputed area and create a zone of disengagement pending the final demarcation of the line. This was done as far back as 1988 when Rajiv Gandhi and Zia ul Haq had almost inked an agreement. Unfortunately, Zia was killed in an air-crash. A similar disengagement plan was scuttled in 1989 since an election was in the offing. Since 2003, the Siachen talks have become a part of the composite dialogue. Some progress was made in back-channel discussions on all outstanding issues but there is little to show on the ground.

The problem lies in implementation. Pakistan had been refusing to authenticate the AGPL or the current position of troops on the grounds since this would amount to accepting the Indian claim. The strategic community has made this into a major issue even though Pakistan has agreed to an authenticated map being annexed to the formal agreement. Post the incidents of 26 November 2008, trust levels between India and Pakistan are at an all-time low, so the chances of a solution seem remote. There have been several proposals from think tanks with regard to converting the area into a peace-park. These efforts which bring out the human and environmental dimensions of the problem are purely academic in nature and have made little difference to the resolution of the conflict since the parties themselves show little or no interest. A G Noorani ("The Siachen Impasse", *Frontline*, 22 November 2002) in a review of lieutenant general Raghavan's book states,

Nationalism triumphs over objectivity. Raghavan misses the point that India wants to freeze the status quo it altered militarily to its advantage in 1984. Pakistan the revisionist, cannot accept that, either on the LOC or in Siachen. As always, even the best of us, like Raghavan himself, refuse to look beyond our own narrow interests whether on Siachen, Kashmir or the boundary dispute with China and despite the fact that compromise will be in India's larger, long-term interests.

### **Role of the Media and Civil Society**

Both the media and civil society have played a limited role in debating the issue, except to state the official position and in some cases bring out the difficult conditions faced by the soldiers. A few years ago, Shekhar Gupta of the *Indian Express* conducted a televised interview of the defence minister, George Fernandes on the glacier. Conflict resolution did not come up for discussion. Media persons are flown to the base camp in helicopters, given a briefing, shown some equipment and training and flown out. This is what embedded journalism is about. Not a single journalist has visited any post on Saltoro Ridge in the past 25 years. No one has spent even a single night to get a feel of what the soldiers undergo for several months. The press produces pictures and articles showing soldiers dressed in pristine white climbing vertical snow faces. This may be inspiring stuff for young people wanting to sign up for an adventurous life but hardly reflects the reality of the sub-human conditions the soldiers endure. There is even a television jingle based on the national anthem shot in Siachen. For the past two years, media persons have been allowed to trek up to Kumar base which is the advanced base on the glacier for reaching the northern passes. A few journalists have noticed the extensive pollution and the poor health of the soldiers who return from the posts. They have reported this, yet the reason for continuing with the occupation of the Siachen heights remains largely unquestioned.

Like most matters military, civil society is hardly aware of the Siachen impasse. There is little knowledge or understanding of the strategic issues involved. Most are unaware that the battle is not being fought for the glacier but for the passes on Saltoro Ridge. The numbers of soldiers

who die or are wounded are just a statistic. No studies have been carried out on the long-term effect of the extreme altitudes on the physical and mental health of soldiers. There is yet a sense of pride that our soldiers are dominating the Pakistani positions. Whether or not there is a need for the soldiers to be there is not a matter for consideration. The right side of the political spectrum is against any withdrawal from Siachen, irrespective of the cost. The political centre has no particular view though the prime minister has stated that the region would be made a “mountain of peace”. That this has not happened during the tenure of the ruling United Progressive Alliance is purely on account of political expediency since the government would then be open to the charge of being soft on Pakistan. During Pervez Musharraf’s presidency, there were indications that an accord on Sir Creek and Siachen would be signed during a visit of the Indian prime minister to Pakistan. Unfortunately, the visit never took place. The Siachen occupation is considered at par with the deployment of troops in Kashmir by almost the entire political class and is therefore linked with the solution of the Kashmir problem.

An important reason for the shortage of officers in the army is the number of conflicts which have remain unresolved since independence. A young officer getting commissioned is most likely to be posted to the north-east, Assam, Kashmir or Siachen.

Fortunately, the army has not yet been deployed against the Naxalites. An officer posted to such areas could end up getting shot, blown up by an improvised explosive device (IED) or frostbitten. Whilst these are contingencies soldiers are prepared for during war, there is a choice which democracy offers its citizens; that is to choose their profession. India has a volunteer army and if citizens are choosing not to join it, then the state needs to seriously examine the reasons, especially when it is the officer cadre which is severely affected. It has taken a plucky British journalist Myra MacDonald who has written an aptly titled book *Heights of Madness* (Rupa, 2008) to bring out the extreme conditions in which soldiers on both sides have fought and died for the honour of their regiments in Siachen.

## Conclusions

Siachen is now a forgotten war. At some point when the composite dialogue is resumed, another round of talks will be scheduled. Very little is likely to emerge unless a political directive is issued to conclude the talks. This is difficult for any incumbent government since the opposition will make political capital of any move to give up territory. Here lies the obstacle to demilitarisation – a sad commentary on the sagacity of the leadership. It is high time that civil society on both sides debates the issue and brings pressure on their respective governments to do their duty by negotiating an honourable withdrawal from an area which should not have been occupied in the first place. Considering the fact that a clock of destruction has been ticking for 25 years, there is a need of some urgency to be injected into the process. India and Pakistan can ill-afford the additional expenditure of maintaining thousands of troops at extreme altitudes. A million dollars a day could go some distance in the fight against poverty and hunger.

In the meantime, there is an alternative. General Inder Gill had recommended a unilateral withdrawal back in 1997. India could pull out from the posts on Saltoro while suggesting to Pakistan to do the same. In other words, disengage troops on both sides to lower altitudes without any preconditions. This is an unlikely scenario due to the prevailing situation. Here is a quote from a letter written by a retired air force officer, group captain A G Bewoor to the *Indian Express* on 8 May 2003. "Siachen is not worth another dead soldier, it never was. Siachen and only Siachen has the ability to get sorted out without any impediment and without being linked to the other part of J&K." It is a matter of deep regret that at least another 100 Indian soldiers have been killed and some 500-odd wounded since this was written.

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## Siachen : ten questions

Dr Maleeha Lodhi

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The writer is special adviser to the Jang Group/Geo and a former envoy to the US and the UK. It was in April twenty-eight years ago that the seeds of the Siachen conflict were sown. This April nature struck a cruel blow when an avalanche hit the area, burying 139 Pakistani soldiers and civilian workers. The tragedy is a poignant reminder of the need to settle a long-standing, costly dispute. Because facts have been sparse in recent TV discussions of Siachen it would be useful to recall the dispute's military, political and diplomatic history. One way to do this is to ask ten key questions even if they are not exhaustive.

### 1. What is the source of the dispute?

Agreements between Pakistan and India that followed the wars of 1948 and 1971 did not demarcate or determine a dividing line in Kashmir's northeastern reaches – one of the world's most inhospitable and desolate regions. The July 1949 Karachi agreement established a ceasefire line, which after minor modification became the Line of Control under the 1972 Simla Agreement. This went as far as a point known by its grid reference NJ9842, south of the Siachen Glacier. From here on, the agreement said, the line continues “thence north to the glacier”. The area beyond NJ9842 was not delineated because it was deemed too harsh and inaccessible for habitation. Neither side at that time thought the region had any military or strategic importance. It was not anticipated that the glacier would later become a contentious issue and that modern mountain warfare or shifting strategic calculations would make it disputed.

In the mid 1970s Pakistan began to allow international mountaineers and expedition teams to visit the glacier's peaks. Pakistan's administrative control of the area also received cartographic backing. International map publishers started showing the Line of Control proceeding north-eastward towards the Karakorum Pass and the Siachen area in Pakistani territory. Because of the treacherous terrain Pakistan established no permanent posts. Only scouting missions periodically went there.

How did the conflict start?

With India occupying key peaks in April 1984 in a major airborne operation named 'Meghdoot'. A failure of intelligence meant that Pakistan discovered this and dispatched troops only to find Indian forces occupying almost all the high ground positions along the Saltoro range. Pakistan's efforts to dislodge the Indians did not succeed. Both sides gradually came to deploy more soldiers and create more posts.



## **2. When did diplomatic efforts start to resolve the conflict?**

Soon after the first clashes. But it wasn't until the December 1985 meeting in Delhi between General Ziaul Haq and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that a serious effort was made to pursue a settlement. Since then twelve rounds of talks have taken place, the last in May 2011.

## **3. Was agreement for military disengagement ever reached?**

Yes, in the fifth round held in June 1989 after the advent of Benazir Bhutto's government and an upswing in relations with India. The joint statement issued after talks on June 17, 1989 outlined the core elements of a settlement: "There was agreement by both sides to work towards a comprehensive settlement, based on redeployment of forces to reduce the chance of conflict, avoidance of the use of force and the determination of future positions on the ground so as to conform with the Simla Agreement and to ensure durable peace in the Siachen area". It added: "the army authorities of both sides will determine these positions".

## **4. How significant was the June 1989 breakthrough?**

It produced the outlines of a solution. For the first time the Indians agreed to relocate forces away from the disputed heights although in subsequent talks between military officials in 1989 differences emerged over where they would pull back. The language 'redeployment of forces' rather than 'withdrawal' was a Pakistani concession aimed at enabling Rajiv Gandhi to sell the agreement to his military and to political opponents in an election year. The agreement was endorsed by Prime Ministers Bhutto and Gandhi during the latter's July 1989 visit to Islamabad.

## **5. Was Pakistan keen to turn this understanding into an agreement?**

Absolutely. Pakistan's defence secretary was mandated for the sixth round of talks in November 1992 to discuss modalities for implementation of the 1989 agreement.

## **6. What prevented an accord?**

Indian backtracking on the 1989 understanding and subsequently changing the terms for a settlement largely on the urging of its military, which continues to oppose a pullout. The 1992 talks ended in deadlock when Delhi insisted on 'complete' authentication of 'current' positions prior to redeployment and sought to reopen previously settled issues. Pakistan saw this as resiling from the 1989 agreement that obliged both sides to stand down to pre-1972 positions. Pakistan held that India violated the Simla agreement by occupying an area that may have been undemarcated, but was under Pakistan's administrative control. The Simla Agreement prohibited unilateral alteration of the status quo whatever the differing legal interpretations.

## **7. Has 'authentication' been the main sticking point?**

Yes. The 1989 joint statement made no mention of marking 'current positions', referring only to determining 'future positions.' Pakistan rejected authentication because a) it meant legitimising an illegal act and b) provided India the basis for a legal claim in negotiations later to delineate the area beyond NJ 9842.

India's demand for authentication of an Agreed Ground Position Line (AGPL) on the map and on the ground rested on the argument that this would provide a legal or diplomatic safeguard if Pakistan later went back on commitments and captured the Saltoro ridge. Other than being a vehicle to formalise 'current positions', authentication has, over the years, served as an alibi for the Indian army to resist military disengagement. Former Indian officials have argued that withdrawal from Siachen will facilitate Pakistan's access across Saltoro to the Karakoram Pass on the Chinese border. In what reflects the defence establishment's thinking, they have also presented a strategic rationale for the LOC's delineation beyond NJ9842 that provides India both a key location on the Chinese border and permanent control of heights overlooking Gilgit and Baltistan.

## **8. Were there other missed opportunities in the 1990s?**

Possibly. In the November 1992 talks Pakistan showed readiness to record 'present' positions on an annexure to the agreement provided the main text contained the proviso that this would not constitute the basis for a legal claim or justify any political or moral right to the area. But the Indians insisted on 'complete' authentication and exchange of maps. Pakistan refused. Thereafter the January 1994 talks explored ideas about a Zone of Complete Disengagement based on an Indian non-paper. Delhi continued to press for acceptance of the AGPL before demilitarisation. The dialogue began to run out of steam. The mid 1990s saw BJP leaders calling to retain Siachen for 'strategic and security reasons' while Pakistan started to link Siachen to resolving Kashmir.

## **9. Did the 1999 Kargil episode have implications for talks on Siachen?**

Inescapably. Any escalation of tensions or confrontation inevitably sets back diplomatic efforts, but Kargil did more. It gave Delhi an added how-can-we-trust-Pakistan justification to toughen terms for a Siachen settlement and put Islamabad in the dock for violating the Simla accord. It helped the Indian army argue that disengagement would risk Pakistan seizing the posts it vacated.

## **10. Did the last round in May 2011 make progress?**

No. Pakistani officials detected a hardening in the Indian position. Delhi insisted that the line beyond NJ 9842 be delineated before any disengagement or withdrawal. This reversed the

sequence proposed by Pakistan and earlier agreed by India: disengagement and moving outside the zone of conflict followed by talks on demarcation. A package proposal was conveyed in a Pakistani non-paper handed during the twelfth round. This reiterated redeployment and joint monitoring of the disengagement process. It also reiterated that once withdrawal schedules were prepared, 'present' and 'future' positions could be incorporated, subject to the earlier proviso. The talks ended in an impasse.

This unedifying diplomatic history should not however dampen efforts for a settlement but instead intensify the search for imaginative ways to untie the Siachen knot. Not only will this end a confrontation that exacts such a high price but it will also set a powerful precedent to solve other more vexed disputes.

## Forty years after Simla

A.G Noorani

The Dawn

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<http://dawn.com/2012/06/23/forty-years-after-simla/>

**THE agreement on bilateral relations between the governments of India and Pakistan, signed by president Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and prime minister Indira Gandhi at Simla, is probably the only international agreement to bear a wrong date — July 2, 1972.**

It was actually signed at 00.40 am the next day. A small matter; but it symbolises the false myths that grew up and the false claims that were later made over the accord.

Now, 40 years later, it is not only appropriate but necessary to dispel the myths and expose those claims. Especially since relations between the two countries have improved to a significant degree. The core dispute on Kashmir reached the gates of a settlement in 2006-07 but it was denied entry by a quirk of circumstances.

One might begin with putting aside the controversy over a 'tacit understanding' which P.N. Dhar, Indira Gandhi's principal secretary claimed was reached between the two leaders at Simla. According to P.N. Dhar, the understanding was reached between the two leaders at the last minute and thus facilitated the accord. Thereafter Aziz Ahmad and he settled the text for signature. Abdul Sattar, later foreign minister of Pakistan, flatly rejected the claim. P.N. Dhar and Abdul Sattar are the only two surviving witnesses to the parleys at Simla. P.N. Dhar's book *Indira Gandhi, the 'Emergency' and Indian Democracy* and Abdul Sattar's book on Pakistan's Foreign Policy contain detailed expositions of their respective views. Aziz Ahmad was then secretary general of the foreign ministry.

Dhar's own account renders a detailed analysis unnecessary. He wrote: "The tacit understanding, no doubt was that gradually the Line of Control would emerge as an international border, and thus the Kashmir question would be settled. But this remained only a tacit understanding."

A few pages earlier, Dhar spelt out in direct quotes the terms of that understanding — "the line would be gradually endowed with the characteristics of an international border (his [Bhutto's] words)". Thus, there was no accord on an immediate partition of Kashmir. It was to be a 'gradual' process.

More to the point. The ceasefire line or the Line of Control was not accepted as an international border proper. The claimed promise was to endow it with the 'characteristics' of such a border. To say that A has the characteristics of B is, indeed, to assert that A is not B but has its characteristic. An integral part of this claimed understanding was free movement across the line, which never happened.

Para 6 of the accord is crucial. It says: “Both governments agree that their respective heads will meet again at a mutually convenient time in the future and that, in the meanwhile, the representatives of the two sides will meet to discuss further the modalities and arrangements for the establishment of durable peace and normalisation of relations, including the question of repatriation of prisoners of war and civilian internees, a final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir and the resumption of diplomatic relations.”

Neither the 'heads' nor their 'representatives' met in order to arrive at 'a final settlement' of the Kashmir issue as Para 6 required. On Dec 18, 1972, Bhutto repeated his appeal to Indira Gandhi to visit Pakistan. Dhar provides a clue to her refusal. “We had thought of a second summit after reaching an accord with Sheikh Abdullah.” The Indira Gandhi-Sheikh Abdullah accord was concluded only in February 1975. By then the situation had changed. It was unwise to think that an accord with the Sheikh would have silenced Pakistan. Progress in recent talks on Kashmir was possible only when this approach was discarded.

Indira Gandhi insisted that, as the agreement required, all disputes should be settled bilaterally; but only to add that the Kashmir question was already settled. Pakistani foreign minister Sahibzada Yaqub Khan said on June 3, 1986, that neither country had proposed a discussion on Kashmir in pursuance of the pact. Pakistan's first formal proposal for a meeting “to initiate negotiations on the settlement of Jammu and Kashmir in terms of Article 6 of the Simla Agreement” was made in a letter which prime minister Nawaz Sharif wrote on July 14, 1992 to prime minister Narsimha Rao after militancy had erupted in Kashmir.

On Oct 28, 1993, the US assistant secretary of state Robin Raphel said: “It is a simple fact that the Simla Agreement has not been very effective up to this point ... it's fine to discuss the Kashmir dispute under the Simla accord, but it needs to happen and it hasn't thus far. Therefore ... it has not been very effective” — 20 years after it was concluded, an eloquent comment on its irrelevance to a solution.

The agreed text of the Agra Declaration of July 16, 2001, on which the Vajpayee government backed out, did not make even a ritual obeisance to the Simla pact either in the preamble or in the text proper. The pact was now history. The provisions on restoration of the status quo before the war were worked out. The rest fell by the wayside.

The UN Charter did not preserve global peace. The US — Soviet balance of power did that contrary to the myth, it is not the Simla Agreement which preserved the peace between Pakistan and India in these last 40 years but the good sense of their leaders and the military balance, including the nuclear deterrent.

The crises of Exercise Brasstacks (1987), the military build-up (1990), Kargil (1999) and India's massing of troops along the Line of Control in Kashmir in 2001-2002 and along the international boundary were resolved by sensible diplomacy and also a measure of international mediation sought and accepted by both sides. So much for the bilateral cordon sanitaire of the agreement.

Gen Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh did not chant the mantra “Simla, Simla as they made such impressive progress in the talks from 2004-2007. In the days ahead it is not that accord of 1972 but the understanding that grew up between the leaders and completion of the unfinished work, which the two countries so courageously undertook since 2004, that will help in arriving at a settlement of the Kashmir dispute which the people yearn for; especially the hapless people of Kashmir.

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## Was Indira Gandhi low on oxygen in Leh to have ordered Siachen fiasco?

Jawed Naqvi

The Dawn

<http://archives.dawn.com/archives/18622>

A seemingly intractable problem stalking India and Pakistan is their inability to say sorry, mea culpa, and move on. The mulish tendency has led to absurd levels of crises, including nuclear close calls, which would be considered anathema in most cases even among very hostile neighbours.

Conciliatory efforts are discouraged. I remember the bemused face of a Pakistani delegate at a Track III peace conference in Delhi weeks after both countries went crazy with their nuclear tests. He tried to confess that Pakistan had made mistakes by fomenting terrorism in Kashmir. Then he waited for someone from among the Indians to comfort the Pakistanis with their confession. That never happened.

What he got instead was a pat on the back "You are right, Pakistan has been seriously remiss in helping terrorism. They need to stop it." There was no word about India being guilty over human rights or anything else that would have helped the conversation to continue productively. The drought of a balanced and sensitive Indian narrative seems to have ended after a long time with a trenchant critique by a former Indian army officer of his country's Siachen policy.

The title of this week's dateline flows from a remark by Colonel Pavan Nair in his biting analysis in the latest issue of the Economic and Political Weekly of the unending fiasco in the Siachen glacier. Nair is a retired officer of the Indian army who served for 30 years in the army corps of engineers and saw active service in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Kashmir. His views on Siachen were fortified by his visit to the glacier, which is commonly known as the world's highest battlefield.

It was on 13th April 1984, close to a quarter century ago, that a small body of troops was heli-dropped on Saltoro Ridge, which overlooks the Siachen glacier, along its western fringe. Within a few days, a company-size force occupied three passes on the ridgeline located at altitudes between 18,000 and 20,000 feet. Meghdoot, the code name given to the operation, was to become the Indian army's longest running operation.

Nair's account of the events has come at a time when the two countries are experiencing a bad trough in their turbulent relationship. But that is precisely what makes the account so rivetting. It brings out the absurd and self-defeating politics, mostly bereft of any military logic that underpins key aspects of their ties.

Within weeks of Indians landing there, Pakistani troops occupied positions on the lower slopes of Saltoro to oppose the Indian occupation. Skirmishing commenced for better tactical positions. What started as a small operation soon became a major military confrontation between the two. In just over a year, the force level on both sides reached brigade-plus size till the entire ridgeline covering a frontage of over a 100 kilometres was occupied.

In Nair's own words till the mid-1990s, pitched infantry battles were fought to gain dominating positions. Artillery duels were a part of the daily routine till November 2003 when a ceasefire came into effect. The logistics of maintaining troops at altitudes above 18,000 feet are mind-boggling. Posts have to be supplied by helicopters and evacuation of casualties is at times not possible due to bad weather.

On the Indian side, over a 1,000 soldiers have been killed and over 3,000 permanently disabled, mostly by the effect of the altitude and weather. On the Pakistani side, says Nair, the casualties are heavier since most of the attacks were launched by them.

In spite of a durable ceasefire, troops continue to occupy positions at punishing heights on both sides of the line and suffer casualties almost on a daily basis. Over a period of 25 years, the presence of thousands of troops in the vicinity of the glacier has caused severe environmental degradation of an ecosystem already affected by climate change. Thousands of tonnes of military garbage and human waste lie dumped in the area. Nair estimates that about 200 tonnes of carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere each day due to burning of fuel for cooking, warming and transportation of men and material by land and air. India and Pakistan spend a million dollars a day to maintain troops in Siachen when their human indicators are comparable with sub-Saharan Africa.

Nair has looked for reasons that prompted prime minister Indira Gandhi to give the go-ahead for an operation which in his view was a clear and blatant violation of the Simla Agreement? Why did the military leadership of the day render advice that resulted in the occupation of an area, which had remained vacant for 37 odd years during which three wars were fought between India and Pakistan?

Giving the background to the dispute, Nair recalls that the Ceasefire Line between India and Pakistan was demarcated by the Karachi Agreement signed in July 1949 under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). The northern-most part of the line ended at Khor and remained undemarcated thereafter with a remark that the line would run "thence north to the glaciers".

It is interesting to note that the background to the Siachen dispute may have been entirely clerical in nature. As Nair observes, during the 1962 operations with China, Jawaharlal Nehru asked for American military aid. US transport aircraft flew supplies and clothing into Leh. The US Defence Mapping Agency noted that maps of the region showed a line ending in the middle of nowhere, so they extended the line in the general direction it was running as far as the Chinese boundary.



Nair comes down hard on the media as well as the civil society for not doing their bit to bring to tragedy of Siachen on the public radar. Both the media and civil society, he says, have played a limited role in debating the issue, except to state the official position and in some cases bring out the difficult conditions faced by the soldiers. A few years ago, Shekhar Gupta of the Indian Express conducted a televised interview of the defence minister, George Fernandes; on the glacier. Conflict resolution did not come up for discussion. Media persons are flown to the base camp in helicopters, given a briefing, shown some equipment and training and flown out.

This, says Nair, is what embedded journalism is about. Not a single journalist has visited any post on Saltoro Ridge in the past 25 years. No one has spent even a single night to get a feel of what the soldiers undergo for several months. The press produces pictures and articles showing soldiers dressed in pristine white climbing vertical snow faces. This may be inspiring stuff for young people wanting to sign up for an adventurous life but hardly reflects the reality of the sub-human conditions the soldiers endure. There is even a television jingle based on the national anthem shot in Siachen.

For the past two years, media persons have been allowed to trek up to Kumar base which is the advanced base on the glacier for reaching the northern passes. A few journalists have noticed the extensive pollution and the poor health of the soldiers who return from the posts. They have reported this, yet the reason for continuing with the occupation of the Siachen heights remains largely unquestioned.

The decision to occupy the heights which dominate the Siachen glacier, was taken by Indira Gandhi after a controversial military briefing held at Leh sometime in September 1983. Neither the army chief nor the defence minister was present. The unilateral military occupation of a part of the line, even if it was undemarcated, was a blatant violation of the Simla Agreement, says Nair. Indira Gandhi would have surely known that, but she took a decision based on incorrect military advice.

Why diplomatic channels were not used needs further study and examination. It is possible that Indira Gandhi did not want to parley with Zia ul Haq. It is also possible that her judgment was clouded by the effect of the altitude at Leh.

In this season of drought of worthwhile and positive ideas to bring the old adversaries together, Nair not only breaks new ground but also raises the prospect of a wider discussion on what is to be done. We await a meaningful response from a knowledgeable analyst from Pakistan.

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## The Siachen impasse

A.G. Noorani

Frontline

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LIEUTENANT-GENERAL (retd.) V.R. Raghavan is highly qualified to write on the Siachen issue. He was Director-General of Military Operations (DGMO) at the Army HQ till 1992; was Commanding General of the Siachen sector and was involved in negotiations with Pakistan on the Siachen dispute. After retirement he earned high repute as an analyst on strategic affairs.

This is by far the most comprehensive work on the subject. It is now 18 years since armed conflict between India and Pakistan erupted in 1984 in that forbidding region. Excellent maps designed by the author himself, rare photographs, and appendices containing texts of pertinent documents enhance the value of the book.

Pakistan intended to acquire a permanent presence in the Siachen. India sensed it and moved in first. "There is a growing body of military opinion that the strategic value of holding defences in the Saltoro is not matched by the effort required for it."

Lt.-Gen (retd) I.S. Gill, Director of Military Operations during the 1971 war with Pakistan, observed: "The amounts of money wasted by both sides is very large indeed. There is nowhere that either side can go in this terrain. You cannot build roads on glacier, which are moving rivers of ice. We have no 'strategic-tactical advantage' in this area and nor can Pakistan. Ask any officer who has been on the glacier what Pakistan will do if we pull out, and he will tell you at once that Pakistan will do the same. We must withdraw immediately and unilaterally and save wastage of money which we cannot afford — estimated at Rs.30,000 crores since 1985" (*The Hindu*, March 5, 1997).

It is on the diplomatic aspect that the book disappoints us. The author skirts the issue of responsibility for the failure and maintains studied even-handedness in what is otherwise a very sound work, indeed. He carefully traces the origins of the problem in its historical and geographical setting. Unfortunately, both the July 27, 1949 agreement defining the ceasefire line and the December 11, 1972 agreement defining the Line of Control (LoC) stopped at grid point NJ 9842. They trusted the glaciers to keep the peace.

Once Pakistan's map stretching the LoC to the Karakoram Pass gained currency and it began granting permits to mountaineering expeditions, Indian fears were rightly aroused. It decided to move into the area before Pakistan could. Shortly before his assassination in May 1991, Rajiv Gandhi told the Foreign Correspondents Association in New Delhi: "We don't want to sell out,

we want to be friendly. I was friendly with Zia, we almost signed a treaty on Siachen with Zia. The only reason it wasn't signed was that he died (in August 1988). At no time were we soft with Pakistan, but we got our work done" ('A role for India', *Frontline*, May 11, 1991, page 116). Note the fear of being accused of a "sell-out" and of being "soft". Granted the failure in 1988, he offered no explanation for the failure to conclude an accord with Benazir Bhutto in June 1989.

We swear by the Simla Agreement but merrily imply that it does not apply to Siachen since the LoC does not cover that region (it stops at NJ 9842). *The impression is utterly wrong*. Para 1 (ii) of the Agreement embodies an overriding commitment, independently of respect for the LoC. It says "neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation," in regard to "any of the problems between the two countries".

Rajiv Gandhi tacitly acknowledged breach of the Simla Agreement when he said on November 16, 1989 in Kolkata: "We have *recovered* about 5,000 square kilometres of area *from occupied Kashmir* in Siachen. We will not forgo one square kilometre of that." It was this mindset that wrecked the June 1989 understanding. There have been seven rounds of talks between representatives of the two countries from January 1986 to November 1998. "There seemed no urgency on either side to seek an end to the conflict or to be ready to make the concessions needed to obtain a positive overall outcome."

The even-handedness is laboured. The last three rounds of talks between the Defence Secretaries reflect poorly on India's leaders — the fifth (June 1989), sixth (November 1992) and the seventh (November 1998).

The joint statement issued on June 17, 1989 recorded: "There was *agreement* by both sides to work towards a comprehensive settlement, *based on redeployment of forces* to reduce the chances of conflict, avoidance of the use of force and determination of future positions on the ground *so as to conform with the Simla Agreement* and to ensure durable peace in the Siachen area. The army authorities of both sides will determine these positions" (emphasis added, throughout). The fact of an "agreement" was explicitly mentioned, so also the two basic principles on which it was based — "redemption of forces" (that is, withdrawal) and "determination of future positions on the ground so as to conform with the Simla Agreement". In sum, return to positions held by the parties at the time of the Simla Agreement.

This was in striking contrast to all previous joint statements. The next day, separate talks between the Foreign Secretaries concluded. At a joint press conference, Pakistan Foreign Secretary Humayun Khan referred to the Defence Secretaries' meeting. According to the Voice of America's tape, he called it "a significant advance" and spoke of a joint commitment to "*relocation of forces to positions occupied at the time of the Simla Agreement*. The exact location of these positions will be worked out in detail by military authorities of the two countries." Foreign Secretary S.K. Singh said: "I would like to thank the Foreign Secretary, Dr. Humayun Khan, and endorse everything he has said."

The very next day Aftab Seth, Joint Secretary and official spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in New Delhi, said that no agreement had been reached on troop withdrawals. "There was no indication of any such agreement in the joint press statement issued at the end of the talks." This statement was palpably untrue. The two meetings of military representatives during July 11-13 and August 17-18, 1989 did not help.

In the sixth round held in New Delhi from November 2 to 4, 1992, India proposed (a) the demarcation of the LoC in the area as a matter of priority; (b) redeployment of troops on both sides to agreed positions, but *after recording existing positions*; (c) definition of a Zone of Disengagement which would come into being consequent on the redeployment and (d) undertakings by both sides not to 1. reoccupy vacated positions; 2. occupy new positions "across the alignment determined by the vacated positions", 3. undertake any military or mountaineering activity in the zone.

The Zone and the alignment of existing positions marked a clear retreat from the June 1989 agreement to India's former position. The monitoring would have been along the existing positions. The zone itself was defined to accord with the existing Actual Ground Position Line.

Pakistan's riposte was to propose a triangle whose points were Indira Col in the west and the Karakoram Pass in the east, both joined to NJ 9842. Troops of both countries would be withdrawn from the area within this triangle. The *status quo* would be maintained pending demarcation of the LoC by a Joint Commission.

Both proposals were non-starters. Put off by the Indian proposal, Pakistan made one that India could not possibly have accepted. However — *and this is to fact which has not been publicised*— confronted by the deadlock, Pakistan sought to revive the 1989 agreement by *formally making a proposal which was a major concession to India; namely, that existing positions would be recorded, albeit in an annexure* and on the understanding that it would not constitute a basis for a claim to the area legally, morally or politically. The annexure would mention the points at which the troops will "redeploy" (read, retreat). Demarcation of the LoC will follow thereafter. *India did not respond to the proposal, and the talks ended.*

However, in the technical talks in November 1992 it was agreed that: (a) India would withdraw to Zingrulma and Pakistan to Goma at the base of the Bilafond Glacier, and (b) surveillance would be undertaken by helicopter.

On November 6, an MEA spokesman acknowledged that "there was a certain progress made in terms of technical details of the disengagement". He claimed that the 1989 talks foundered on this point but that was not the case this time. He did not claim that any accord had been reached. Thereafter reports appeared in the press that India's concessions would not go beyond "minor adjustments" on the Saltoro Range.

A year later, K.K. Katyal reported in *The Hindu* of January 25, 1994: "As regards Siachen, India has veered to the view taken by Pakistan towards the end of 1992. There is an element of

frankness in New Delhi's explanation that the *domestic political environment of that period came in the way of acceptance*. In doing so, India may have exposed itself to criticism that decisions on crucial issues were allowed to be influenced by narrow domestic considerations."

The Non-Paper India gave Pakistan on January 24, 1994 unctuously claimed: "1. During the discussions between India and Pakistan at the Sixth Round of Talks held at New Delhi, 1992, on Siachen, *a broad understanding had been reached* on disengagement and redeployment, monitoring, maintenance of peace and implementation schedule. 2. It was agreed that immediate focus should be on restoring peace and tranquillity in Siachen. Towards this end, without prejudice to the positions taken by either side in the earlier rounds of talks (India's position: Point NJ 9842 should extend to Sia Kangri; Pakistan's position; Point NJ 9842 should join with Karakoram Pass), both sides agreed that the delineation of the LoC beyond NJ 9842 shall be examined by a Joint Commission later. 3. Both sides agreed that to reduce tension in Siachen, the two sides shall disengage *from authenticated positions* they are presently occupying and shall fall back to positions as under: ... ." This was sent with Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit's approval, obviously. He retired from service on January 31, 1994. India was to disengage from its positions on the Saltoro Ridge to those east and north of Zingrulma. Pakistan was to withdraw from its positions to a defined line to the west. The area so vacated was to constitute a Zone of Complete Disengagement. Pakistan's Non-Paper of February 19, 1994 flatly denied that any such agreement was reached in 1992 and relied on the 1989 accord. It sought, obviously, to whittle down its major concession in 1992 — recording the existing positions in an annexure.

No sooner did George Fernandes become Defence Minister in March 1998 than he decided to wipe out the fundamental principle on which the talks had proceeded for over a decade; namely, disengagement based on mutual withdrawal. He declared on July 18, 1998 that "India needs to hold on to Siachen, both for strategic reasons and wider security in the region". Lt.-Gen. Raghavan's book ably refutes this absurd view. Fernandes adopted it to secure political mileage and to court the hardliners in the Bharatiya Janata Party as well as the Army. He left the seventh round of talks held on November 6, 1998 doomed to certain failure. The four-point proposal made by India on November 6 was crafted to ensure its rejection — comprehensive ceasefire based on a freeze of "present ground positions", discussions on the modalities for implementing the ceasefire within an agreed time-frame, a "bilateral monitoring mechanism" and authentication of existing ground positions. Earlier, inspired press reports had it that the talks would be "dominated by one issue — the control of strategic positions along the Saltoro Range". In short, the *status quo* should be preserved.

Having resiled from the 1989 agreement and aborted an accord in 1992, India itself made an offer in 1994 based on the fundamentals of 1989 and 1994. In 1998 it abandoned all these and insisted on preserving the *status quo*. At the end of the talks, on November 6, 1998, the DGMO, Lt.-Gen. Inder K. Verma, claimed that the area north and east of grid point NJ 9842 where the LoC ended, had been under India's control even before the Simla Agreement was signed on July 3, 1972. The claim was as novel and belated as it was utterly untrue. It flew in the face of the

incontrovertible facts about the 1984 Operation Meghdoot and of Rajiv Gandhi's statement on November 16, 1989.

The author grapples with the record on these three episodes of 1989, 1992 and 1998 with remarkable delicacy. In 1989 "there had been some informal contacts established between the two Prime Ministers. These had led to the understanding that a mutual pullback by the two militaries from the Saltoero would not be difficult to accomplish. *The Indian delegation had therefore been given a mandate to work for a disengagement by both armies.*" But Pakistan sought "to retain its position unchanged". He blames it for the failure and deals thus with S.K. Singh's remarks in endorsement. "He had in fact only endorsed the sentiment that there had been progress during the bilateral talks. Confronted with Pakistan's interpretation of the talks as amounting to an Indian pullback, the Indian government denied that there had been any such agreement." This is contrary to the joint statement as well as the record of the 1989 episode.

On the 1992 talks the author does little better. "It was now the turn of the Indian side to *find* (sic.) a stumbling block to progress on the Zone of Disengagement idea. Senior members of the Indian team briefed the top political leadership about the outcome of the talks. The outcome had been on lines which had been discussed during pre-talk sessions at the highest levels. The Zone of Disengagement, which had been approved, was *now* found to be unacceptable. Either the support of major political parties to the outcome had not been forthcoming, or the political executive had second thoughts in view of the violence that was being instigated by Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir. Relations between the Congress government and the BJP were also beginning to harden due to differences on the Babri Masjid issue. These developments had not been anticipated." This defensive explanation is followed by an assertion that is untrue.

*"The Pakistanis were in any case unwilling to concede the need for marking the current deployment, and were extremely hesitant about a Zone of Disengagement which even remotely indicated the ground reality before the pullback commenced."* This is grossly misleading. The truth is that, true to form, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao went back on the brief he had given the Indian team. Pakistan's delegation was kept waiting only to be told that — *despite its vital concession on recording the existing positions* — no further talks would be held. This, incidentally, was repeated by Vajpayee in Agra in July 2001. The author remarks: "In India, it was essential that the major political parties in Parliament agreed to the disengagement plan. It would *as such be unfair to entirely blame the government of the day in New Delhi* for the failure of negotiations in the sixth round." Who else should share the blame, pray? Public opinion, apparently, does not exist in Pakistan or China. The author, likewise, puts a gloss on India's stand in the Seventh Round (1998). He notes, *but does not criticise*, the fact that India's proposal "indicated a significant shift in positions taken earlier". Yet, he criticises Pakistan for rejecting a ceasefire based on the rejection of the decade-old agreed principle of withdrawal by both sides.

Raghavan asserts that the "new dimension to these (Indian) proposals was that they referred to the Saltoro Range. There was no mention of the Siachen glacier". The official press note, which he cites in support, however, said: "We have proposed an agreement on ceasing fire *in Siachen*." He ends, predictably, with Kargil. His solution is simple. "A freeze on fighting through an agreed ceasefire, a commitment to stop changing the status quo on ground, and reducing some forces over an agreed period after informing each other, can provide the basis for a deliberate and carefully planned exercise."

Nationalism triumphs over objectivity. Raghavan misses the point that India wants to freeze the *status quo* it altered militarily to its advantage in 1984. Pakistan the revisionist, cannot accept that, either on the LoC or in Siachen. As always, even the best of us, like Raghavan himself, refuse to look beyond our own narrow interests whether on Siachen, Kashmir or the boundary dispute with China and despite the fact that compromise will be in India's larger, long-term interests.

J.N. Dixit was India's High Commissioner to Pakistan in 1989 and Foreign Secretary in 1992. His versions are tabulated below:

1. "The fifth round of talks on Sir Creek and the sixth round of talks on Siachen were held in Delhi between 2 and 6 November (1992). Both the meetings were resultless because Pakistan refused to budge from its highly technical stance on the issues involved" (Dixit's book, *Anatomy of a Flawed Inheritance* 1995; page 168).

2. Asghar Ali Engineer in *The Hindu* of February 24, 1996 reported Dixit's claims at a seminar. In 1992, he along with his then Pakistani counterpart had evolved an agreed draft to solve the Siachen issue. However, the Prime Minister had said that though it was good he could not accept it as he was not sure whether Parliament would support him."

3. Dixit's *Memoirs of a Foreign Secretary* (1996, page 125): "The sixth round of talks between the Defence Secretaries of India and Pakistan regarding Siachen had been held from 2 to 5 November 1992. My colleague, Defence Secretary N. N. Vohra and Pakistan's Defence Secretary Syed Salim Abbas Jallani almost finalised an agreement for the redeployment of Indian and Pakistani forces. I expected that this would put an end to a strategically futile and economically costly confrontation. Three factors prevented the agreement from getting governmental approval from India and Pakistan. First, for its part, Pakistan continued to harp on the precondition that India should agree to the line of control notionally being accepted as running north-eastwards from the grid reference point known as NJ 9842. Secondly, Pakistan continued to express reservations about finalising a *joint cartographic document* which would pinpoint positions from which troops of both countries should pull back. Thirdly, our own government had reservations at the political level about approving the agreement reached at that point of time, because of increased levels of Pakistan-sponsored violence in Jammu and Kashmir and also because of the intensity of the hostile diplomatic and publicity activities against India in which Pakistan was engaged. It was felt that Indian public opinion and

Parliament would not be supportive of any positive move forward on Siachen at that point. At the official level, we felt if this was the case, we need not have got into the very detailed discussion which we had with Pakistan in November 1992."

The first two assertions are untrue. Pakistan had agreed to record existing positions. Narasimha Rao's refusal to ratify the understanding was not due to the factors Dixit cites but due entirely to the unworthy ones that Katyal mentioned.

4. Dixit's article in *Outlook* of November 2, 1998 put forth a totally different version altogether. "One wonders why both countries do not implement the agreement already arrived at and *initialled* on Siachen and the Tulbul navigation project finalised between 1990 and 1994." A professional diplomat, he used the word "initialled" advisedly, one would think. However it is untrue. No accord on Siachen was reached let alone reduced to writing and — "*initialled*". This novel assertion is contradicted by his own earlier accounts. The Non-Paper of January 23, 1994, given after the Foreign Secretaries' talks from January 1 to 3, 1994 in Islamabad made no such claim.

5. Dixit's book *India, Pakistan in War and Peace* (2002) repeats (page 288) what he wrote in his memoirs in 1996; *not the claim of initialling*. Dixit, no doubt, considers his versions from 1995 to 2002, to be consistent with one another. Others may be forgiven for holding a different view.

Pakistan's version of the May 1989 understanding is set out in Benazir Bhutto's National Security and Foreign Affairs Adviser Iqbal Akhund's memoirs *Trial and Error* (Oxford University Press, 2000; pages 99-112). During his visit to Pakistan in June 1989, Rajiv Gandhi remarked: "If only your Foreign Secretary had not mentioned the 1972 positions in talking of redeployment, we would not be having all this trouble." Akhund remarks that this was "a confirmation that he was having problems with the Opposition and, probably, with the Army". The year 1989 was an election year. In 1992, Narasimha Rao had no such excuse. He lacked leadership, a quality that did not grace any of his successors either — H.D. Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral, or Atal Behari Vajpayee of the Agra fame.

Akhund confirmed Rajiv's version (page 105). His able aide, Ronen Sen, now High Commissioner in London, proposed splitting the difference. The LoC would have "run due north, that is, up to the Chinese border in a ruler-straight line"; between Indira Col in the west and Karakoram Pass in the east.

Thanks to Narasimha Rao's attitude in 1992, Pakistan withdrew its concession in 1994 and linked Siachen to the 'K' issue. It must be delinked now. Both sides must withdraw from the Siachen.



## Siachen was almost a done deal in 1992

The Hindu  
June 10, 2012

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/article3510758.ece>



Pakistan and India had reached a near agreement in 1992 on the Siachen dispute after Islamabad assented to recording the existing troop positions in an annex, but the deal was never operationalised because the Indian political leadership developed cold feet.

Pakistan Army Chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani said recently that it was time the two countries resolved the dispute. He said this during a visit to the region after an avalanche earlier this year on the Pakistani side killed more than 100 soldiers and civilians.

The text of the 1992 negotiating drafts — obtained and reproduced by *The Hindu inside*<sup>1</sup> — shows just how close the two sides were to such a resolution two decades ago: the Pakistani delegation offered a proposal that met India's demand of recording existing

ground positions before withdrawal of troops from a proposed zone of disengagement.

The talks that year, the sixth round both countries had held on the issue, took place in New Delhi from November 2-6, 1992.

Pakistan's proposal of indicating in an annexure the areas the armed forces of the two sides would vacate and redeploy to found immediate acceptance among Indian officials. The Indian delegation was led by N.N. Vohra, then the defence secretary. "We had finalized the text of an agreement at Hyderabad House by around 10 pm on the last day", Mr. Vohra, who is now the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, told *The Hindu*. "Signing was set for 10 am. But later that night, instructions were given to me not to go ahead the next day but to conclude matters in our next round of talks in Islamabad in January 1993". "Of course, that day never came", Mr. Vohra added. "That's the way these things go," he said. Narasimha Rao was Prime Minister at the time and the BJP's campaign against the Babri Masjid was in high gear. Siachen quickly receded from the government's list of priorities.

<sup>1</sup> The 1992 draft on the inside page of the Hindu on June 10, 2012 is added as an Annexure.

The 1949 ceasefire agreement delineated the Line of Control until point NJ9842, after which, it said, it would run “thence north to the glaciers”. In 1984, fearful of adverse Pakistani moves, Indian soldiers moved north and eventually occupied most of the highest points on the glaciers. The 'Siachen conflict' was born.

The Indian side's proposal dated November 3, 1992 contained the following elements: delineation of the Line of Control north of NJ 9842; redeployment of troops on both sides to agreed positions, but after demarcating their existing positions; a zone of disengagement subsequent to the redeployment, with both sides committing that they would not seek to intrude into this zone; a monitoring mechanism to maintain the peace in the ZoD.

Pakistan's proposal was as follows: Both sides would vacate their troops from the triangular area between Indira Col in the west, Karakoram Pass in the east and NJ 9842; troops on both sides would withdraw to a point south of NJ 9842, to the pre-1972 Simla Agreement positions; neither side shall attempt to alter the status of the demilitarised triangle pending delineation of the LoC north of NJ 9842 by a joint commission. The refusal to authenticate ground positions and the reference to Karakoram Pass — a point well to the east of NJ9842 and a red rag to the Indians — led to an impasse. As a way out, the Pakistani side, led by its defence secretary, offered the following compromise: “The armed forces of the two sides shall vacate areas and re-deploy as indicated in the annexure. The positions vacated would not for either side constitute a basis for legal claim or justify a political or moral right to the area indicated”.

Mr. Vohra said that by the time the talks concluded, an agreement had been reached which fully adhered to the Indian negotiating brief of troop positions being recorded one way or the other and that the Pakistani proposal that the LoC would run to the Karakoram Pass had been dropped. But the agreement was never signed.

In 2005, the two sides were once again said to be nearing agreement to demilitarize the region, but the deal fell through — Pakistan was no longer interested in demarcating the ground positions. After Pakistan's Kargil adventurism, such a demarcation became for the Indian side a non-negotiable, especially to the Indian Army, along with a mechanism to monitor any intrusions into a demilitarised zone in the Siachen region.

On Monday, the two countries will hold yet another round of talks on Siachen with no sign of a softening of attitudes on either side.

<http://dawn.com/2012/04/20/solution-to-siachen/>

**WITH Gen Kayani's statements in favour of the demilitarisation of Siachen, there is now a publicly stated consensus on the political – government and opposition – and military sides that the world's highest theatre of conflict should come to an end.** His remarks followed a visit with President Zardari to the site where Pakistani soldiers and several civilians are believed to be buried under enormous amounts of rubble and ice. With another round of talks on the Siachen issue due with India soon, this may be the time to push for a political settlement to a conflict that few even in India believe makes sense. The realist school of thought may be sceptical about whether the tragedy could be the catalyst for a better outcome but perhaps the overall thaw in relations between the two countries in the recent past could help create the right environment for a resolution of the Siachen conflict.

A key point is that Gen Kayani's statements were not limited to Siachen but referred to the overall framework in which the defence of the country should be ensured. To hear an army chief so openly talk about how the defence of a country was not dependent on just soldiers and weaponry but also on the robustness of its society and economy was a welcome nod to reality. To actually arrive at a situation where Pakistan spends less on defence, however, remains a major challenge. A major factor would be to what extent the fears and suspicions on the country's eastern border can be reduced. Direct trade is a potential game-changer but as with any move in which there will be winners and losers, there is still some way to go before it becomes an irreversible reality. A deal on Siachen or Sir Creek have long been presented by the Pakistani side as the so-called 'low-hanging fruit', but India has been disinclined to share that view — though the tragedy in Siachen could propel talks on a deal there. Beyond that, in the near term, there is the post-war future of Afghanistan and India's involvement in that country that could present an opportunity for both countries to break out of the zero-sum mindset that so often characterises ties between the two countries.

What should be clear is that if ties between India and Pakistan are to be improved, it will require an equal amount of commitment and input from India. Many of Pakistan's national security and foreign policy choices may be hard to defend but Indian intransigence or churlishness has certainly played its role in the past in keeping ties from improving meaningfully and irreversibly.

## **E.Siachen: The ecological disaster**

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### **Melting of Siachen Glacier- don't blame global warming**

**Arshad H. Abbasi**

**The News**

**April 22, 2012**

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-14094-Melting-of-Siachen-glacier-%20-don%20t-blame-global-warming>

Siachen is the only Glacier of Karakorum range melting with unprecedented rate, the cause of which is the military presence in the area and not global warming. The high-resolution images of the Siachen glacier show deep cracks every 10 feet (crevasses), both in longitudinal and transverse directions. The retreat of the glacier is also visible by horizontal expansion of glacial lakes throughout the glacier, but the most alarming sign is the vertical thinning of glaciers, which is aggravating the widening of crevasses at a massive scale.

India's and Pakistan's claim over Siachen glacier has turned the region into the highest battleground on Earth. Since, April 1984, both the countries have maintained permanent military presence up to the height of over 22,500 ft. To facilitate the forces to defend their position, both countries, especially India, has developed cantonments, forward base-camps, training schools, aviation workshops and huge ammunition storages in the area. The infrastructure, including several bunkers has also been developed by cutting and melting of glacial ice through chemicals. To facilitate troops, in the inhospitable terrain and extreme weather conditions, a kerosene pipeline has also been laid down on main glaciers by the Indian Army. Kerosene is then supplied for stoves provided at every igloo (post) for heating and cooking purposes.

All these extraordinary activities of war at Siachen glacier, coupled with hourly helicopter flights, the only mode of transport in the region — for carrying supplies like ration, kerosene, medicines, fibre huts and snow scooters to the glacier has aided melting on an unprecedented rate, by reducing the glacier's icy mass balance, the most sensitive indicator of climate change. In first year of occupation, Siachen glacier started losing ice, which created deceptive crevasses hidden by fresh snow, coupled with sudden blizzards and avalanches, the landscape has caused heavy casualties on both side.

Acknowledging the Siachen glacier melting and thinning, Northern Command at Simla in 1985, requested College of Military Engineering, Pune, to quantify the rate of melting and glacial ice mass loss. Five meteorological stations were set-up including one at an elevation of 21000 feet just two-kilometre below Sia Kangri (height 24,370 feet). These stations, compiled the data

over years and the results were published after strict scrutiny by Directorate of Military Intelligence, Delhi. Military presence had raised the temperature of the glacier i.e. prior to the occupation it was 2.6 C which rose to 10.2 C 1991. To quantify the melting of glacier, measurement of mass balance (MB) method is used, which is the difference between the amount of snow and ice that melts. The mass balance of glacier was found negative. In subsequent years the related data was not made public.

However, the devastating floods in Nubra River, which emerges from the glacier, speaks for itself and is indicative of the rate of abnormal melting. In 2010, Indian Army officially notified that 33 soldiers were washed away in flash floods. On the Pakistani side, dead bodies of three soldiers were returned to Indian authorities.

If the reader can recall that Siachen and Lea City also received an unprecedented cloudburst in August 2010 that claimed 200 lives coupled with extensive damage to property and infrastructure. Then it must be asked what caused the cloudburst? And if the root cause was discovered, why has it not been addressed?

The Siachen conflict has changed the climate within the region. In Ladakh, three new airports have been developed, for logistical support to Indian troops at Siachen. Leh, the district headquarter of Ladakh was connected with Army Head Quarter Delhi through Manali-Leh-Highway; a project undertaken by the Indian army. All these war specific developments changed the climate. Recently, Geres-India, an NGO, released a report on Climate Change in Ladakh Region based on data collected over last 35 years. It was observed that rainfall and snowfall patterns have changed significantly. Temperature at Leh has risen by nearly one C, less snowfall in winter along with a significant change in summer precipitation has also been recorded. Less snowfall has caused drying of natural springs forcing inhabitants to leave their native villages. One such example is Zanskar, a sub-district of Kargil, where the entire ancient village of Shum Shadey was forced to migrate due to climate reasons.

While the climate of Ladakh changed considerably, the climate of neighbouring Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), a political entity within Pakistan, has also behaved differently during same time period. This inconsistent phenomenon was documented by The University of Newcastle, UK in 2006. The report titled "Conflicting signals of climatic change in the Upper Indus Basin" is an unbiased, neutral testimony that proves that it is not global warming but Siachen conflict that is not only causing melting of glacier but has also changing the climate of Ladakh. In the study, the temperature data of six towns of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and three towns of Indian held Kashmir has been analysed and compared for seasonal and annual trends over the period between 1961-2000. The report found that, there is a strong contrast between the behaviours of two parts of same region having same geographical features. It was noted that while the temperature in Srinagar and Leh is continually on rise, the mean annual winter temperature in GB is decreasing.

The declining temperature has helped glaciers to grow in Karakorum. One of the obvious factors that cannot be ignored is that over past two decades, the declining trend in high-altitude mountaineering expeditions relieved direct human intervention. The records of mountaineering expeditions in Pakistan shows that in seventies, the average per annum mountaineering expeditions were around 65, a number that had dropped to 35 by 2011.

This expansion of glaciers was also confirmed by a research funded by NASA, published in 2008. The team comprising six renowned glaciologists conducted an extensive investigation of 265 glaciers to estimate average retreat rates and mass balance during period 1980 to 2004. The result shows that 65 percent of the glaciers either advanced or showed no change. The study concluded that the glaciers in the Karakorum are behaving differently than the other glaciers of eastern Himalaya.

The study also confirms the results of the world renowned glaciologist Dr Kenneth Hewitt,, whose work involved research on Karakorum Glacier over decades. He initiated his research, 'Snow and Ice Hydrology Project' with financial assistance from Canada in 1981. Under this project, 23 high altitude metrological stations were established, which disseminate real-time data via satellite daily. In science of glaciology this unusual trend is known as the 'Karakorum Anomaly.'

Global warming cannot be biased, so that it may only impact Siachen glacier and not the rest of glaciers in Karakorum. The unchallengeable precedence of 62km Baltoro Glacier, joining its head with Siachen presents itself is an evidence that military presence is the major cause of melting Siachen. The Baltoro glacier, free from any burden has remained stable during the last 100 years. This is a result of two-year exclusive research on glaciers, finalized by three research organization of Italy, Germany and Austria in 2006. The report (Annals of Glaciology 43) concluded Baltoro glacier has maintained the mass balance during the last one century.

The last, the very latest research report of University Grenoble, France, released in March 2012 concluded that Karakorum glaciers have grown over last decade. University used the latest technique of 3D altitude maps and satellites images between 1999 and 2008 and showed that the mass balance of glaciers is positive.

All these results clearly demonstrate that the glaciers in the Karakorum are behaving differently, except for the Siachen. The reports with legitimate data confirm that Siachen is melting simply because of army presence. Whosoever claims it is because of global warming, let them conduct an independent audit by a panel of creditable glaciologist for the International Court of Justice so that the responsibility of 32 years-long adventure can be fixed, which has caused colossal human, financial and environmental loss. Civil societies of both the countries, and world community at large, ought to take this case to demilitarise the third polar cap of the planet.

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## Siachen standoff taking environmental toll

The Hindu  
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<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-in-school/article3312675.ece>

*Military presence is speeding up the melting of the glacier, leaching poisonous materials into the Indus river system.*

A huge avalanche devastated Pakistan's Gayari army camp on the fringes of the Siachen Glacier last Saturday, where Pakistani and Indian soldiers brave bitter conditions in a long-running territorial dispute.

Environmental experts say that the heavy military presence is speeding up the melting of the glacier, one of the world's largest outside the polar regions, and leaching poisonous materials into the Indus river system. Faisal Nadeem Gorchani of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute in Islamabad said that the glacier had shrunk by 10 kilometres (six miles) in the last 35 years. "More than half of the glacier reduction comes from the military presence," he said.

Pakistani hydrologist and Siachen specialist Arshad Abbasi said "More than 30 percent of the glacier has melted since 1984, while most of the Karakoram glaciers on the Pakistani side expanded."

### Biggest dumpyard

Waste from the military camps is also a major problem, harming the local environment and threatening to pollute the water systems that millions of people across the subcontinent depend on. "Indian army officials have described the Siachen as 'the world's biggest and highest garbage dump'," US expert Neal Kemkar said in an article for the Stanford Environmental Law Journal. The report quoted estimates from the International Union for Conservation of Nature saying that on the Indian side alone, more than 900 kilos (2,000 pounds) of human waste was dropped into crevasses every day.

Kemkar said that 40 percent of the military waste was plastics and metal, which simply merge with the glacier as permanent pollutants, leaching toxins like cobalt, cadmium, and chromium into the ice."

"This waste eventually reaches the Indus River, affecting drinking and irrigation water ," the report said. Kemkar also warned the conflict had affected wildlife, with the habitat of animals such as the endangered snow leopard, the brown bear and the ibex -- a type of wild goat -- all threatened.

An estimated 8,000 troops have died in the glacier's freezing wastes since conflict over the area flared in 1984.

The rest have succumbed to frostbite, altitude sickness, heart failure and inadequate cold weather equipment —as well as avalanches and landslides.

Military experts quoted in local media say a Pakistani soldier dies around every three or four days in Siachen.

"India and Pakistan are not fighting each other in Siachen, they are both fighting the glacier, and nature takes its revenge by killing soldiers," said Abbasi.AFP



## Siachen...Ecological Peace between India and Pakistan

Dr Saleem Ali

Sanctuary Asia

February 2005

<http://www.uvm.edu/~envprog/k2peacepark/siachen.pdf>

Borders might make sense for national affiliations but they are senseless for environmental conservation. Ecological processes happily defy the vagaries of ethnicity and the petty politics of family feuds. Humans are certainly territorial animals and South Asians are no exception to this raw natural proclivity. However, as stewards of some of the world's most precious ecosystems we can surely transcend our territoriality.

I arrived in Mumbai, as a Pakistani-American, to try in my personal capacity to explore ways of using ecology as a peacebuilding tool between our nations. The focus of my visit was to be a meeting organised by the Himalayan Club and Sanctuary Asia on a proposal for a joint conservation zone in the Karakoram Mountains that straddle the disputed territories controlled by both countries. Apart from the majesty of the mountains, the lower altitudes of this region are also home to the highly endangered snow leopard, Marco Polo sheep and numerous rare flora. The glaciers of the Himalaya also supply water to several hundred million people. Yet, because of the standoff on the Siachen Glacier (the world's largest non-polar glacier), scientists have no access to study the impact of climatic changes or glacial recession.

Mountaineers on both sides who love the Himalaya are also keen on climbing peaks on the 'other side'. The situation around the peaks is downright dangerous. In the words of Bittu Sahgal of Sanctuary Asia, "boys with big toys," on both sides are making this pristine environment the victim, not only each other. Humour aside, there is of course a somber and poignant reality to the conflict. More than 15,000 lives of young army officers have been lost by both sides on the glaciers. Army families certainly deserve sympathy and respect and any peace park or conservation zone must memorialise the lives lost in this tragic conflict. Harish Kapadia, one of India's most distinguished mountain explorers and a strong supporter of the peace park effort, lost his young soldier son in army operations in the north. One of the most moving moments of my visit was hearing him relate how this tremendous loss had motivated him further to think about using the environment as a peace-building tool.

On the Pakistani side, there are also numerous families with similar accounts of grief and resulting grievance. This is clearly a no-win situation for both sides, militarily and environmental considerations might be a respectable exit strategy. There are some comparable examples of hope from other acrimonious areas. The Sharm-al-Shaikh region on the Sinai peninsula in Egypt and the adjoining marine ecosystem has been designated a peace zone. No one needs a visa to enter the area and the marine sector is jointly managed by Egypt, Israel and

Jordan. Sovereignty has not been relinquished, yet conservation has been positively embraced. On the other side of the planet, the resolution of a territorial dispute between Ecuador and Peru was facilitated by bringing environmental conservation of the Cordillera del Condor ecosystem into the strategic equation.

The Mumbai meeting on December 14, 2004 discussed such cases while acknowledging the unique characteristics of the Indo-Pak conflict. There was a recognition that national identities on both sides are firmly entrenched and that any peace effort must not try to atavistically rewrite history as many Bollywood and Hollywood movies have been provocatively suggesting. The goal must be to live as independent, yet friendly, countries perhaps analogous to my adopted homeland America and its neighbour to the north, Canada. Living in Vermont, only 64 km. from the US-Canadian border, I can appreciate the differences and similarities between both countries, which had a common heritage but an amicably divergent national identity.

We also discussed how conflict situations can lead to a sense of cynicism and entrapment. Parties in protracted conflicts such as the Indo-Pak case tend to feel that too much time and too heavy a price has been paid and that any sign of compromise is unacceptable and would in any event be tantamount to losing face. This is a classic psychological-trap, which I always ask my students in environmental conflict resolution to recognise. Often, in my classes, I use the example provided by the late Jeffrey Rubin, an eminent conflict psychologist and mountaineer, who ironically perished in a mountaineering accident in the Himalayas more than a decade ago. Dr. Rubin used the example of a wolf trap that operated by Canadian trappers in the winter to explain the process of entrapment. Trappers would use small bait attached to a knife's edge and buried in the snow. A wolf that tried to eat the bait would cut its tongue and would taste some of its own blood and go on licking the knife's blade, eventually bleeding to death. Such is the peril of psychological entrapment – for it seems so compelling and is yet so cruel and condemned to failure. When we contemplated the peril of entrapment and indeed the peril of environmental devastation caused by conflict, all cynicism at the meeting evaporated.

We started to think of solutions and how the military could also play a constructive role without necessarily involving immediate withdrawal. There was discussion of training the armed forces on both sides to play the role of conservation rangers who would assist scientists in studying the area as well as maintaining a clean working environment. Currently there are literally tons of human excrement and military waste lying on the ice masses that have very slow biodegradation rates. Cleaning up this mess would be a Herculean effort but environmentalists and mountaineers are ready to be the first to initiate this challenging exercise. Foreign donors are also able and willing to help financially but must receive the 'green light' from the governments. In a world where conspiracy theories have high currency, foreign involvement or indeed even United Nations involvement is considered interference. We must therefore display abundant caution, lest the 'hawks' on either side feel obliged to dismiss our effort. Nevertheless, leadership and courage are the only way out of this mess, which the former Indian military commander in Siachen, General V. Raghavan has termed a "conflict without

end,” in his authoritative book on the subject. He too is a supporter of a peace park along with some retired Pakistani army people, including General Talat Masood. Statesmanship is what is now required to dare to move towards peace in the Siachen at all levels – governmental and nongovernmental.

2004 was an auspicious year on many accounts – it was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first ascent of K2 by the Italian mountaineer and university professor Dr. Ardito Desio and his team. It was also the year in which the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded for the first time on environmental grounds. The work of Kenyan academician, government official and activist, Dr. Wangari Maathai, in forming the Greenbelt movement was acknowledged by the Nobel committee as a peace-building venture. Awarding the prize was itself a mark of leadership as the cynics in many European media venues, including the Economist, scathingly criticised the Nobel committee for giving the prize to such a 'low politics' issue, and to someone who has questioned conventional wisdom about conflicts. At the end of my visit to India, I felt confident that there is positive environmental leadership, though resources are scattered. Amidst the cell-phone interruptions and relatively scarce time that Indian environmentalists offered for this meeting, there was palpable warmth towards this cause and towards peace-building with Pakistan. Across the border, notable Pakistani environmentalists are moving the agenda forward as well. IUCN (the World Conservation Union) has one of its largest field offices in Pakistan, as does the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-Pakistan). Both are willing to facilitate the process.

Whether this will translate into leadership from these organisations and their counterparts in India remains to be seen, but Sanctuary and the Himalayan Club believe that positive initiatives will be matched step for step. Civil society has traditionally galvanised languid governments to action – let's see if we environmentalists in South Asia can also serve this cause – Insh'Allah!

## Siachen Glacier shrinking, says study

Faiza Ilyas

The Dawn  
January 4, 2013

<http://dawn.com/2013/01/04/siachen-glacier-shrinking-says-study/>

KARACHI: The Siachen Glacier has been reduced by 5.9km in longitudinal extent between 1989 and 2009 because of rising temperatures, says a study published recently.

Human presence at Siachen may also be affecting the neighbouring glaciers of Gangotri, Miyar, Milan and Janapa which feed Ganges, Chenab and Sutlej rivers.

The study, Climate Data and Modeling Analysis of the Indus Ecoregion, has been written by Dr Ghulam Rasul of the Pakistan Meteorological Department as part of a project titled Building Capacity on Climate Change Adaptation in Coastal Areas of Pakistan. It was a European Union-financed project of World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan.

According to the study, Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindukush together make the largest mountain chain on earth and they are the custodian of the third largest ice reserves after the Polar Regions. The glaciers in these mountain ranges feed 1.7 billion people through seven large Asian river systems, including the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Mekong and Yangtze.

These ranges are a blessing for South Asia as they protect it from the cold surges in winter associated with northerly winds.

“Since temperature maxima have been increasing at a greater rate, the thinning of ice and retreat of glacial extent has taken place simultaneously at an alarming rate. The decay estimates calculated by remote sensing techniques show that Siachen Glacier has reduced by 5.9km in longitudinal extent from 1989 to 2009. Thinning of its ice mass is evaluated at 17 per cent,” the study says.

A sharp decline in the mass of all glaciers has been seen since the 1990s. Accelerated melting process of seasonal snow and that of glacier ice from mountain glaciers have been adding to greater volume of water into the sea than normal discharges, it says.

Both precipitation and thermal regimes in Pakistan have suffered changes, especially in the recent two decades in line with a sharp jump in global atmospheric temperatures. Visible changes in hydrological cycle have been observed in the form of changing precipitation patterns, cropping patterns, droughts, water availability periods, frequency and intensity of heatwaves, precipitation events and weather-induced natural disasters.

According to the study, both minimum and maximum temperatures have increased in summer and winter almost throughout Pakistan.

Late onset and early winter ending will reduce the length of growing season for crops which will complete their biological life quickly causing reduction in yields as plants will gain accelerated maturity without reaching proper height and size. Early winter means that temperatures will start rising in February when wheat crop reaches the grain formation stage.

“Sharp rise in temperature will cause forced maturity of grains as a result neither grains will attain their proper size or weight nor will they accumulate optimum levels of starch thereby reducing the grain yield; pollination in banana, another important crop of the Indus delta, will be affected due to early winter and high spring temperatures. Thermal stress will result in a poor fruit set and dwarf yields.

“Such adverse effects are already visible and there is a dire need for adaptation strategies by introducing crop varieties which require shorter span and are resistant to stress conditions,” the study says.

The study lists recent extreme weather events which caused great losses to the socio-economic sector. They are: cloudburst events (2001, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011), prolonged droughts (1999-2002), historic river flooding (2010), tropical cyclones (1999, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011), severe urban flooding (2001, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011), heatwaves in spring (2006, 2007, 2010), snowmelt flooding (2005, 2007, 2010) and drought at sowing stage (2004, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011).

About the floods of 2010 and 2011, the study says that such back-to-back occurrence of the history's worst flooding is at least a unique phenomenon in case of Pakistan. In 2010, intense precipitation concentrated over the elevated plains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to interaction of three weather systems from east, south and north.

“Such interactions are very rare in the pre- and post-partition meteorological history of this region. Nor was it the heavy precipitation zone of monsoon season,” it says.

Similarly, another historic climatic anomaly occurred in 2011 when the monsoon axis set its orientation from head of Bay of Bengal to southern Sindh which was commonly found parallel to the Himalayas in case of heavy precipitation in Pakistan.

“Rains storm persisted for a couple of weeks over the Indus delta and adjoining areas experiencing arid climatic conditions.

Generally, this region receives less than 200mm rain during the year but in a couple of weeks some eastern parts gathered precipitation exceeding 1000mm. Poor slope of land, heavy soil and abandoned drainage infrastructure exaggerated the situation and a disaster occurred in the area,” the study says.

## F. Conflict Resolution (Nationalistic Perspectives) & Demilitarisation

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### Settle the Siachen dispute now

A.G Noorani

The Hindu  
June 11, 2012

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article3512524.ece?homepage=true>



*The 1992 draft agreement for demilitarising the glacier must be revived*

A textual analysis of the drafts presented by India and Pakistan during the talks on the Siachen issue in New Delhi in November 1992 reveals how a virtually done deal on this costly dispute was scuttled exactly 20 years ago. *The Hindu* could not have published them at a more opportune time (June 10, 2012). On April 18, 2012, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, referred to the several rounds of talks since and said, "You know that they were close to a solution but then nothing came out of it. We want this issue to be resolved and it should happen. It is a tough mission for us and them, which has its costs." In sum, he is prepared for a settlement — based necessarily on a fair compromise.

That was precisely what the 1992 drafts and the unsigned agreement that followed had ensured. Initially, each side's offer was a non-starter. Pakistan proposed an upturned demilitarised triangle — marked by Indira Col in the northwest; point NJ9842, where the Line of Control (LoC) ends in the south, and the Karakoram Pass in the northeast. A joint commission would delineate the LoC beyond NJ9842 after the troops withdrawal.

India agreed to the delineation of the LoC, but insisted on the definition of "existing positions" of both sides and the places where they would deploy. The area so vacated would be "a Zone of Disengagement" bounded by the specified "existing positions."

## Amended offer

Faced with deadlock, Pakistan amended its offer to read: "The armed forces of the two sides shall vacate areas and re-deploy as indicated in the annexure. The positions vacated would not for either side constitute a basis for a legal claim or justify a political or moral right to the area indicated. The delineation of the LoC from point NJ9842 to the Karakoram Pass will form part of the comprehensive settlement to follow the re-deployment of troops." According to Indian negotiators, the idea that the delineated LoC must end up at the Karakoram Pass was not pressed by the Pakistani side.

Now, surely to specify existing points to be vacated and record them in an annex is to "authenticate" them. This does not differ from India's draft, which provided: "India: The Indian Army shall vacate their existing positions at ... and ... redeploy at ... Pakistan: The Pak. Army shall vacate their existing positions at ... and ... redeploy at ..."

Pakistan's revised proposal fully met India's insistence on authentication of existing positions. The deal was struck between India's delegation, led by its Defence Secretary at the time, N.N. Vohra, and his Pakistani counterpart. The then Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit repeatedly testified to the accord in public. Matters did not end there. In the technical talks that followed thereafter, it was agreed that: (1) India would withdraw to Dzingrulma and Pakistan to Goma, at the base of the Bilaford Glacier; and (2) surveillance was to be conducted by helicopter.

On January 24, 1994, India confirmed in a non-paper to Pakistan that in 1992 "a broad understanding had been reached on disengagement and redeployment, monitoring, maintenance of peace and implementation schedule. ... Both sides agreed that to reduce tension in Siachen, the two sides shall disengage from authenticated positions they are presently occupying and shall fall back to positions as under: ..." Ancillary details were set out.

P.V. Narasimha Rao scuttled the deal in 1992. Benazir Bhutto followed suit in 1994, resiling from the concession on authentication. She denied the agreement and cited, instead, the India-Pakistan Joint Statement on June 17, 1989, which India had earlier resiled from: "There was agreement by both sides ... on redeployment of forces ... The future positions on the ground so as to conform with the Simla Agreement ... the Army authorities of both sides will determine these positions."

At that time, in 1989, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Humayun Khan, had told the media the accord envisaged relocation of forces "to positions occupied at the time of the Simla Agreement." India's Foreign Secretary at the time, S.K. Singh, said he would "endorse everything [Humayun Khan] has said." The very next day, however, the Ministry of External Affairs was instructed to deny the deal. The then Army Chief insisted in the talks being held on July 10, 1989, that existing positions be identified. An effort was made during Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Islamabad on July 16, 1989, to resolve the deadlock by extending the LoC northwards. India's offer, described by Iqbal Akhund, Pakistan's National Security Adviser, was a

fair one. The line “should run due north, that is, up to the Chinese border in a ruler-straight line,” dividing the zone. But nothing came of it.

### **'Peace mountain'**

From 1985, the basis of all the parleys was mutual withdrawal. On July 18, 1998, Defence Minister George Fernandes subverted it. “India needs to hold on to Siachen both for strategic reasons and wider security in the region.” None of the Prime Ministers or Defence Ministers had made such a claim before.

Lt.Gen. M.L. Chibber, former GoC-in-C Northern Army Command, who was responsible for planning and mounting Operation Meghdoot on April 13, 1984, in Siachen, emphatically declared, “Siachen does not have any strategic significance. The strategic importance being talked about is all invention.”

Mr. Fernandes' stand wrecked the talks on Siachen held on November 6, 1998. The DGMO, Lt.Gen. Inder K. Verma, dutifully declared that day, “How can you ask us to vacate this position? We don't care either about money or the number of casualties we suffer.” But, of course, this violates the Simla Agreement. It says, “Pending the final settlement of any of the problems between the two countries, neither side shall unilaterally alter this position.”

Hopes were revived when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told the jawans at the Siachen base camp on June 12, 2005 that “the world's highest battlefield” should be converted into a “peace mountain.” He added: “Now the time has come that we make efforts that this is converted from a point of conflict to a symbol of peace.” In the talks with Pakistan, he said, “the security of our nation would be kept in mind.”

The then Army Chief, Gen. J.J. Singh, who had mounted a campaign on Siachen, said on June 21, 2005, “We have given our viewpoint to the government on converting the Saltoro ridge and the glacier into a demilitarised zone.” He spelt out two demands — authentication of existing positions and a monitoring mechanism. Ironically, on November 4, 1992, both these demands had already been conceded.

Trust is a political decision for the highest leadership to take, based inter alia on military advice. No government can allow a veto to the army.

The last paragraph of India's non-paper of January 24, 1994, said, “An Indian delegation at Defence Secretary level is willing to visit Islamabad in February 1994 with a view to negotiate a formal agreement on Siachen on the basis of the agreement reached (in 1992).” Now, 18 years later, India should revive that offer and put the sad episode behind us.

Gen. Kayani hinted at much more than a Siachen settlement. He said that “peaceful coexistence is necessary for both countries. There is no doubt about that.” This explains Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar's repeated statement that “we are not going to be bogged down by



an older mindset.” This is precisely the impression this writer formed in February from extensive interviews with officials, diplomats and others in Islamabad. Centuries ago Demosthenes said: “In important transactions, opportunities are fleeting; once missed they cannot be recovered.” Only Prime Minister Singh's visit to Pakistan can shape the relationship for a promising future.

*(A.G. Noorani is a lawyer, author and commentator. His latest book, Article 370: A Constitutional History of Jammu and Kashmir, was published by Oxford University Press in 2011.)*

## Demilitarisation of Siachen

Gurmeet Kanwal

Observer Research Foundation

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<http://www.orfonline.org/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/analysis/AnalysisDetail.m?cmaid=2316&mmaid=261>

Indo-Pak rapprochement has been stuck in a rut for some time with Pakistan insisting on tangible progress on Kashmir and India reiterating that it is necessary to first build confidence by resolving relatively less intractable problems. While offering a treaty of "peace, friendship and security" to Pakistan a few weeks ago, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh hinted that issues like the dispute over the Siachen glacier region, the boundary dispute in Sir Creek and the Baglihar dam issue could be resolved soon. Present indications are that the PM may visit Pakistan for a summit meeting in August 2006 to sign agreements on these issues.

Discussions to demilitarise the Siachen conflict zone as a prelude to a final agreement to extend the Line of Control (LoC) beyond map reference NJ 9842 have been proceeding slowly but surely towards reaching an agreement as both the parties to the conflict are now willing to accept that the disputed area does not have adequate strategic significance to justify a prolonged conflict. However, till recently, both were finding it difficult to overcome deeply entrenched negotiation mindsets and are unable to look for an innovative approach.

India was continuing to insist that the Indian army's present defensive positions on higher ground on the Saltoro Range along the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) should be accepted by the Pakistan army and demarcated on both ground and map so that there is a reference point in case a dispute arises in future. Pakistan's position was that by suddenly occupying the Saltoro Range west of the Siachen Glacier, India violated the 1972 Shimla Agreement and must, therefore, undo its "aggression" without insisting on legitimising its illegal occupation. A glimmer of hope has now been provided by news reports that Pakistan has agreed to let India annex maps showing its forward posts on the Saltoro Range with the demilitarisation agreement without prejudice to Pakistan's stated position. This should be acceptable to India even though Pakistan will not authenticate the marked maps.

So far the Indian army's position was that the forward posts held by both the armies must be jointly verified and demarcated on the ground and then authenticated on maps. The military advice given to the political leadership was that if Pakistan violated the demilitarisation agreement and occupied positions vacated by Indian troops, because of the nature of terrain, extremely adverse climatic conditions and the super-high altitude with low oxygen levels in the region, it would not be possible for the army to evict the intruders. This is balanced and completely justified military advice. Army Chief General JJ Singh has now said that the army has

a positive approach to the issue. He has also pointed out that the army has stated its position, is convinced that the decision made by the government will be in the national interest and will abide by the government's decision.

Apparently, the government has decided in favour of taking the political risk necessary in order to take the peace process forward. In case Pakistan does venture to occupy vacated Indian posts, a la Kargil 1999, it will be a breach of trust that will push Pakistan into a corner as an international pariah. India should insist on building into the agreement the clause that in case of a violation, both sides reserve the right to take whatever action they deem fit including military measures. On the Siachen issue the right thing to do would be to trust Pakistan in order to give peace a chance and simultaneously enhance military preparedness to open another front on the LoC at a time and place of India's choosing in case Pakistan violates the demilitarisation agreement.

Soon after a political agreement to demilitarise the Siachen conflict zone is reached, the disengagement process can begin with the Indian and Pakistani armies negotiating its basic framework. The two DGMOs can together chair a Joint Working Group to work out the modalities of the disengagement and monitoring process along with civilian representatives. This JWG will decide the extent of the area to be included in the demilitarised zone where there will be no military presence from either side. The JWG will also work out an outline time frame for the process of disengagement to be completed.

Monitoring of the disengagement process to ensure compliance with the demilitarisation agreement can be done by using national technical means such as aerial and satellite imagery, including aerial reconnaissance through manned fixed wing and helicopter sorties, side-looking airborne radars and by using UAVs while flying well within one's own airspace. Certain ground-based sensors that are suitable for the terrain and climatic conditions obtaining in the area can also be used. The monitoring process could be initially unilateral and could slowly graduate to joint and cooperative monitoring with a jointly manned monitoring centre established at the LoC between Chalunka and Siari on the south bank of the Shyok River.

It will be up to the military negotiating teams of India and Pakistan to discuss these operational issues in much detail and reach an agreement based on factors rooted in the deployment on the ground and the likely tactical and logistics impact of each issue. The demilitarisation of the Siachen conflict zone will act as a confidence building measure of immense significance. It is an idea whose time has come. The last stumbling block can be resolved by the Indian and Pakistani leaders finding the political will necessary to accept ground realities.

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*\* Views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Observer Research Foundation.*

## Siachen and Civil-Military Relations

Srinath Raghavan

Economic and Political weekly

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***The defence ministry's endorsement of the army's opposition to withdrawal of troops from Siachen is in line with the trend in Indian civil-military relations – that of civilian leaders acquiescing to military writ on operational matters. This has to be reversed; civilian supremacy should be re-established by setting an exemplar on the issue of troop withdrawal from Siachen.***

Of all the disputes between India and Pakistan, the Siachen issue is the most susceptible to progress. The area is of little strategic value to either side. This was one of the reasons why the Line of Control (LoC), defined in 1972, stopped south of Siachen, at grid point NJ9842. It was expected, mistakenly as it turned out, that the glaciers would keep the two sides out of the area. Both India and Pakistan now agree that withdrawal of troops is a prerequisite for further negotiations on delimitation of the LoC in the Siachen area.

Several rounds of talks on demilitarisation have been held, but to no avail. Recent discussions indicate that the nub of the problem is New Delhi's insistence that Islamabad must record the current deployment of Pakistani and Indian troops on a map that will be attached to the agreement on troop withdrawals. The Indians consider this an essential hedge against the possibility that Pakistan might occupy the areas vacated by Indian forces; retaking the glacier militarily would be a costly affair. The Pakistanis are concerned that such an authentication would prejudice their position when negotiations on delimitation commence. For India contends that the line should run north of NJ9842 along the major watershed, while Pakistan claims that it should extend north-east towards the Karakoram Pass, so placing the glaciers on its side of the LoC.

The problem has become all the more intractable because the Indian army has come out in opposition to withdrawal without authentication. The army chief, general JJ Singh, has publicly expressed his views on more than one occasion. The army has also aired its position through the media. For instance, before the defence secretaries' talks on Siachen last November, senior army officials claimed that glacier was important not just strategically but also as a "5,000 square km water reservoir" that would be critical for the "water wars" of the future. Retired military officials have also chimed in with their views. As a former vice-chief of the army wrote, "Are we to just up stick and come back? Surely, the nation will not accept it." Furthermore, the political leadership is loath to override the army's advice. Visiting Siachen in early May 2007, defence minister A K Anthony reportedly made it clear that there would be no withdrawal without the consent of the military. The positions adopted by military and political leaders highlight a long-standing, if neglected, problem in Indian civil-military relations.

Political control of the military is seldom considered problematic in the Indian context. India is routinely (and rightly) lauded for being one of the few post-colonial states where the military has not intervened in political issues. However, civilian control of the military is more nuanced than the mere absence of coups. After all, the military could never indulge in a coup, and yet systematically oppose or resist civilian direction. Indeed, most appraisals of Indian civil-military relations tend to overlook the one area where civil-military relations are usually fraught with – the potential or actual use of force.

## **Role of Nehru**

In establishing the norm of civilian supremacy in the republic, Jawaharlal Nehru played a key role. But, paradoxically, it was in Nehru's time that the fabric of civil-military relations began to fray at the edges. The origins of this can be traced back to the disastrous war against China in 1962. In the aftermath of the war, the political leadership came under intense attack for having interfered in military matters. Curiously, a two-member military committee tasked with inquiring into the army's operational performance reinforced this perception. Although the Henderson-Brooks report was never declassified, its gist was released in Parliament and subsequently parts of the report were accessed by journalists and writers. The report told a cautionary tale of meddling civilians, timorous military, and ensuing, but avoidable, catastrophe. This narrative, at best radically incomplete and at worst critically misleading, became a morality pageant for the military. The principal lesson drawn from it was the importance of “standing up” to politicians who sought to intrude in professional matters. More importantly, in the loss of nerve induced by the war, the civilians too came to believe that the military must be given a free hand.

The political leadership's lack of confidence could be seen in its handling of the Henderson-Brooks report. Despite clear instructions from the then defence minister, Y B Chavan that the inquiry should restrict itself to operational aspects, the committee exceeded its mandate. Moreover, despite being denied access to documents from the ministries of defence or external affairs, the committee went ahead to pronounce on the civilian leadership. Indeed, the report made a thinly veiled attack on the prime minister when it claimed that the higher direction of war was “out of touch with reality”. Chavan knew that this was substantively as well as procedurally incorrect. Yet, in order to avoid friction with the military, he did not formally reject the conclusion.

The changing dynamics of civil-military relations were evident in the months following the war. In January 1963, after China's unilateral withdrawal, the prime minister directed the army to move back into the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). But the army chief, general J N Chaudhuri, and the corps commander, lieutenant general Sam Manekshaw, decided against the move, believing that it would provoke a renewed Chinese offensive. Although Chavan subsequently learnt of the army's tardiness, he refrained from confronting the army chief on

the matter. In the event, the Indian army entered NEFA only in early 1964. The civilians' reluctance to intervene in military matters could be carried to absurd lengths. Consider a little known incident from the war with Pakistan in 1965. India's decision to strike across the border in Punjab was leaked to a journalist by a military source a day before the operation commenced. The ministry of defence learnt of it soon afterwards, and was naturally alarmed at the leak of such sensitive information. In fact, to maintain secrecy, the government had not even informed president Radhakrishnan and the representative at the UN. On enquiring, it was found that the source was none other than general Chaudhuri. Although the defence minister was aware of the matter, the army chief was not even asked for an explanation, let alone being reprimanded. As the then defence secretary, P V R Rao, explained later, "In the view of the public outcry since the 1962 debacle about the relative role of politicians and the services and their chiefs", the military leadership had been given "a long rope".

The defeat against China thus prompted both the politicians and the military to avoid the bruising discussions and arguments that are par for course in civil-military interaction over the use of force. The consequences could be seen on several occasions when India employed the armed forces. Think of Manekshaw's offer to resign in 1971, if he was not granted several months to mount a campaign, and Indira Gandhi's unquestioning acceptance of his assessment. Civil-military relations in the early stages of the Brasstacks crisis is yet another case in point. The developments over Siachen, then, are merely indicative of a trend that has long been in existence.

Nevertheless, the assumption that civilians should abide by the military's views on "operational" matters is untenable in a democratic polity. The chain of accountability is clear: the military is responsible to the political leadership, who in turn are answerable to the people. If in disregarding military advice, civilians jeopardise national security, it is for the people to take them to task by voting them out.

The military must realise that the line between advising against a course of action and resisting civilian efforts to pursue it is a rather fine one. In issuing statements opposing a withdrawal from Siachen without recording existing positions, the Indian army comes perilously close to transgressing this line. The military, moreover, is competent only to assess risks. It is the politicians who must judge them, and decide what chances are worth taking. The defence minister's assertion that the government will go by military advice on Siachen is tantamount to an abdication of responsibility.

It is the task of the civilian leaders to consider whether the dubious risks attached to a withdrawal without authentication outweigh the decided benefits of improved relations with Pakistan. In so doing, they ought to remember that the advice proffered by the military is just that – advice. The political scientist Peter Feaver puts it well: in a democracy, civilians have the right to be wrong.

## The Siachen Imbrolio

S. G Vombatkere

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### Immediacy for Peace

The title and contents of A.G. Noorani's article "Settle the Siachen dispute now" [Ref. 1] strongly suggests peace-by-demilitarisation of Siachen on an immediate basis. His quest for peace is unexceptionable. Every Army jawan and most officers would not dispute this aim for, after all, they bear the brunt of military operations on Siachen. The huge amounts of money spent on these military operations are amounts that would be better spent on roti-kapda-makan for 80 per cent Indians who live (or rather, survive) on less than \$ 1 per day. But this argument, while valid in principle, is not convincing with regard to the immediacy that it insists upon. Another writer on strategic matters, Gurmeet Kanwal, also pitches strongly for early demilitarisation. [Ref. 2]

The arguments for immediacy in settlement of the Siachen dispute cannot be delinked from the fact that it stems from Pakistan Army Chief General A.P. Kayani's initiative, which in turn stems from the loss of 139 Pakistani troops in an avalanche at Gayari. We need to understand that General Kayani's initiative is not the initiative of the Government of Pakistan (GoP). The Government of India (GoI) reacting, that too with unbecoming alacrity, to the Pakistan Army Chief's "peace" initiative obliquely legitimises Army control of Pakistan's establishment. It has been suggested that General Kayani's "peace" initiative is driven by his urgent need to cover up the long-standing lie sold to the Pakistani people that their soldiers are dying on Siachen Glacier while facing Indian troops. Gayari is merely in the Siachen region and not on the Siachen Glacier, while Indian troops occupy the glacier and its commanding heights. Demilitarisation involves India losing both strategic and tactical advantage, while for Pakistan it is a strategic gain traded off against a small tactical loss. Indian strategists should not neglect this fact that Pakistan chooses to gloss over.

### Pakistan's Peace Song?

GENERAL KAYANI'S, not Pakistan's, "peace" initiative is, on the face of it, a sincere peace offer to get both Pakistani and Indian troops off the Siachen Glacier. But it can also be seen as a move to reduce Pakistan's tactical disadvantage when Indian troops pull back. Whether or not demarcation of the present ground positions is done, demilitarisation of the Siachen Glacier (which is at the core of what is being broadly referred to as the Siachen region or simply Siachen) at the present juncture calls for hard-nosed reconsideration.

It would be unwise for Government of India (GoI) to delink Siachen from other places in the region in which Pakistan does not speak of peace. Taking this call for “peaceful co-existence” from a Pakistan Army Chief at face value would be a strategic folly. The Pakistani establishment—sometimes civilian, sometimes military, but always anti-India—has gone back on its word more than once, making a mockery of India's several initiatives for genuine peace. It is true that India wants peace, but it would be imprudent to buy that peace at any cost. All that General Kayani needs to do for peaceful co-existence without immediately demilitarising Siachen is to order his Army not to open fire without provocation as frequently happens at Siachen and many other places on the LoC, and not to repeat Kargil-like adventures. In view of Pakistan's unstated anti-India policy and track record concerning peace with India, we need to look at reasons for being wary of its present moves to demilitarise Siachen, and not jump into what could be a strategic trap. Moves for immediacy with respect to demilitarising Siachen can be at best from strategic gullibility, naivete or ignorance.

### **Unseen Factors**

ACCORDING to reports in the open media, Pakistan is negotiating or has already negotiated leasing the Gilgit-Baltistan region, which is part of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), to China for 50 years. [Ref. 3] This includes the area now occupied by Pakistan, facing us at Siachen. If India pulls out of Siachen, re-occupation of the posts will be almost impossible especially if China sneaks into the commanding heights vacated by Indian troops. A Chinese military commander with the least bit of initiative would move his troops into forward posts presently occupied by Pakistani troops. In such a circumstance, hostilities will be between India and China, which is not a party to any “peace” agreements between India and Pakistan. In the context of China having moved several divisions of troops into its Tibetan border with India including missile units within easy missile strike range of New Delhi, hostilities on Siachen could trigger unacceptable military response from China. Also noteworthy is that this October marks 50 years since China humiliated India; with their sense of history, they may contemplate a repeat performance. Demilitarising Siachen at this stage would be strategically and militarily suicidal. Though in the long run, demilitarisation of Siachen may be desirable, it should not be done now when India is not in a position of strategic advantage. Today and in the near future, India will be on the backfoot [Ref. 4] because of the growing security liability in Afghanistan (principally due to the impending NATO pull-out), having been sucked into the region because of our strategic alignment with the USA following the India-US nuclear deal and Hyde Act which assumes “congruence” in foreign policy matters. Intrusion onto the Siachen Glacier by Pakistani or Chinese troops sneaking into tactically strong posts vacated by India after demilitarisation will lead to loss of the Shyok and Nubra valleys and permit a Pakistan-China link-up between Gilgit area and the Aksai Chin area already under Chinese control and areas illegally ceded to China by Pakistan. Their sneaking in cannot be ruled out, whether or not a binding international treaty exists. Occupation is nine-tenths of the law.



Also pressing for early agreement to demilitarise Siachen, strategist Gurmeet Kanwal suggests an India-Pakistan demilitarisation agreement including a clause that allows either side to take military action in case of violation by the other side. Thus if Pakistan (or its Lessee, China) encroaches into the Zone Of Disengagement (ZOD). India will “be at liberty” to take military action to win back the high ground all over again. Thus, while the agreement envisages violation, it suggests the remedy of re-opening hostilities! It cannot be over-emphasised that an India-Pakistan agreement does not include China. Whichever way one looks at it, demilitarisation of the Siachen Glacier now will make Pakistan or China the gainer and India the loser. Strategic negotiation should always be from a position of strength and never from ignorance of history or naivete regarding ground realities. Further, Kanwal argues that air and electronic surveillance will suffice to detect small intrusions which can be attacked from the air. The difficulty of spotting small groups of troops in that high-altitude wilderness is immense, and our aging helicopters which are already working above their altitude limit (flight time and fuel load are a delicate daily compromise, ask any Army pilot who has operated in Siachen) cannot detect and engage such groups. Kanwal's suggestion is unworkable. Detection will have to be followed by a full-scale military operation that can and will spread to other zones. But let us turn our attention to Noorani's pitch for settling the Siachen dispute by demilitarisation now.

### **Noorani's Arguments**

NOORANI begins with saying that a “virtually done deal” for demilitarising the glacier was scuttled 20 years ago. The use of the word “glacier” is very important, as in the foregoing discussion. But apart from that, we need to recall that much has happened between Pakistan and India since 1992. For example, Kargil happened in 1999 and Mumbai happened in 2006, and then there was the attack on India's Parliament House, to name just the serious issues. If the deal had gone through in 1992, would it have obviated these breaches of peace by Pakistan? That is, would such an agreement have made Pakistan look at India with less animosity? Why is India attempting to grasp the bait of “peaceful coexistence” suggested by, of all persons, Pakistan's Army Chief?

Next, Noorani approvingly writes that in 1992, Pakistan did not press its claim that the “delineated LoC (from point NJ9842 to the Karakoram Pass) must end up at the Karakoram Pass”. Are we to give credit to Pakistani negotiators for not pressing what is plainly an unreasonable and illegal claim? He goes on to argue that “Pakistan's revised proposal fully met India's insistence on authentication of existing positions”, and “surely to specify existing points to be vacated and record them in an annex is to 'authenticate' them”. In his eagerness to argue for peace-by-demilitarisation “now”, Noorani appears to slip into arguing Pakistan's point! The point made in the 1992 negotiations regarding surveillance by helicopter was impractical then even as it is now, as argued above.

Let us give some credit to India's Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao for understanding the prevailing circumstances when he “scuttled the deal” in 1992. It is noteworthy that soon after

(1994), Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto “denied the agreement”. True, the “agreement” had not been signed, but denial by Ms Bhutto displayed the mindset of the Pakistani establishment then. Its mindset has not changed with respect to India in any substantial way, except that show of military force is not possible any more and so they are resorting to guile by donning dove's wings of peace.

The 1972 Simla Agreement says: “Pending the final settlement of any of the problems between the two countries, neither side shall unilaterally alter this position.” Noorani argues that by occupying the Siachen Glacier (in 1984), India violated the Simla Agreement. Would it be unfair to ask whether Pakistan, violating the same Simla Agreement by sending its military-cum-moun-taineering expeditions to Karakoram Pass pre-dating India's occupation of the Siachen Glacier, was not the provocation for Indian occupation?

Here we come to two very important points argued by Noorani. One, he writes: “Trust is a political decision for the highest leadership to take, based inter alia on military advice. No government can allow a veto to the Army.” It is true that trust in international relations is a political decision. But when the military is not involved in national decision-making by carefully being excluded from the National Security Council in favour of a bureaucrat as the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, can it be said that the military advice has been sought except perfunctorily? In a democracy like ours, the military must necessarily be ruled by the Cabinet, but omission of the military from the nation's highest security decision-making body, and trusting Pakistan's “peace” overtures over India's own military advice may not be in India's strategic best interest.

Two, Noorani approvingly writes: “General Kayani hinted at much more than a Siachen settlement. He said that 'peaceful coexistence is necessary for both countries. There is no doubt about that'.” It is strange that an Indian with the standing of Noorani should fall for General A.P. Kayani's “peace” spiel and brush off Indian military advice by disallowing it a veto that it never had. Why did it take five years for General Kayani (he took charge as the Army Chief in 2007 and has earlier commanded Pakistan's ISI) to discover that “peaceful coexistence is necessary for both countries”? Is he talking “peace” because he is in trouble? Are there also other factors at play, like Pakistan's recent antipathy to the USA and its need to cement stronger ties with China?

### **On Trusting General Kayani**

PROPOSERS of immediate or very early demilitarisation of Siachen to settle the Siachen dispute “now” need to re-think the matter. The Indian Defence Secretary, in this writer's humble view, needs to work in tandem with India's Army Chief when negotiating the Siachen imbroglio. India may make a very serious mistake by agreeing to demilitarising Siachen at the present juncture, even though in the long term, peace between India Pakistan is desirable for both countries. Noorani concludes with Demosthenes' advice that “In important transactions,

opportunities are fleeting; once missed they cannot be recovered". That is true, but equally true is Aesop's advice in his Fox and the Goat fable: "Never trust the advice (in this case General Kayani's peace offer) of a man in difficulties."

Finally, the sub-title of Gurmeet Kanwal's article [Ref. 2], namely, "A low-risk option to test Pak Army's sincerity" betrays acceptance of "low-risk" of Indian troops withdrawing from the Siachen heights to test the Pakistan Army's sincerity. Which military man with first-hand knowledge of Siachen would play down Indian troops' huge sacrifice of life and limb to weather, avalanche and Pakistan military action? In another article [Ref. 5] Kanwal writes: "Trust begets trust and it will be well worth taking a political and military risk to give peace a chance." He neglects the strategic risk and the fact that India's trust of Pakistan has been repeatedly betrayed. For a trusting Kanwal, George Santayana's quote is appropriate: "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

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S.G. Vombatkere retired as a Major General after 35 years in the Indian military, from the post of Additional DG in charge of Discipline and Vigilance in the Army HQ, New Delhi

# Issues of National, Ecological and Human Security in the Siachen Glacier Region

P. K. Gautam

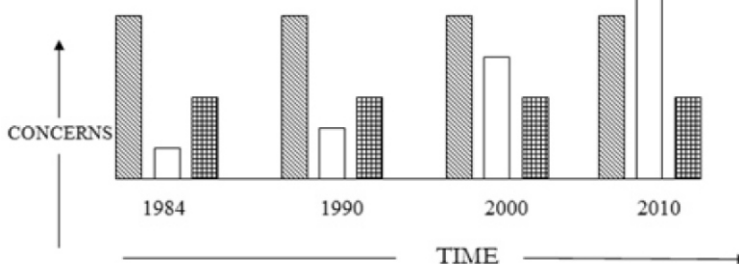
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
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In an earlier work published almost a decade ago<sup>1</sup>, I had visualised three perspectives that would drive the issue of the future of the Siachen conflict: national security, human security, and ecological security. From the point of view of national security, the issue is ideational, cartographic, and intimately linked to the unresolved issue of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). It is unlikely that policy elites will make any concessions on that. This national security is maintained by the professional militaries of both India and Pakistan, who too are unlikely to concede to the other; all units will seek combat under the institution of the strong regimental system. When viewed against the issue of individual human security, it appears that the regimental system would be resilient enough to sustain Operation Meghdoot (or Operation Ababeel in Pakistan). The threshold for acceptance of casualties due to weather or firepower is the key. The third driver is ecological reasoning and concerns. Here, I argued that what the battle brings out clearly is that for the first time in the history of wars, the degradation of the terrain and a larger ecological threat due to war would be the reasons for an end to hostilities. I had then conceptualised the inter-se comparison of national, ecological and human security in a figure which is reproduced below (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Siachen Glacier Inter-se Comparison of National, Ecological, and Human Security



- Notes: -
-  National security concerns do not change
  -  Ecological security concerns keep increasing
  -  Human security or troop morale remains unchanged due to change over of units and professionalism of both armies.

While researching in 2002, I did not visualise that a ceasefire may be declared. But it occurred in 2003 post Operation Parakram. While the end of exchange of small arms and artillery fire was welcome, high altitudes lead to unavoidable casualties due to extreme cold, lack of oxygen, terrain, climate and weather. Despite this, all units posted there performed exceedingly well. In fact, an indicator of a good unit was one which did not suffer any weather- or altitude-related casualty. Although I had served on the divisional staff dealing with logistics in the 1980s, I did visit helicopter-maintained posts such as Amar and felt the privation of troops at that height, and was impressed with the capacity of the Indian military to defend the glacier, irrespective of the cost. Barring individual cases of poor health and low mental toughness, units on the whole see the tenure as a challenge. Though exhausting on troop health, it was accepted as routine.

In a subsequent article published in 2008<sup>2</sup>, I drew attention to the ceasefire in place since November 2003 and argued that demilitarisation in the Siachen region was held up due to suspicion, as India did not trust Pakistan to not occupy the Saltoro ridge if the actual ground position line (AGPL) were to be demilitarised and vacated by the former. Further, while negotiations would continue, it is important to visualise what the situation would be if there is a sudden and accelerated meltdown of glaciers in the Himalayas over the next 10–15 years. Once the glacier/snow caps melt, only the rocks would remain. Like a skeleton, the ridges and spines of the feature would need to be occupied. But rapid melting is bound to cause flash floods and a series of mini disasters downstream. It is unlikely that the existing defence works and elaborate communication infrastructure, built originally on ice as hard as rock, would last. Artillery gun platforms which have become ice pillars would melt rapidly, making re-deployment necessary—a demanding task. Unexpected melting would make movement by foot extremely dangerous, if not impossible, on existing glacial paths on moraines. Level and firm dropping zones and helipads may crumble with the rapid snowmelt. In sum, the impact of rapid degradation of the Himalayan glaciers, such as Siachen, would be phenomenal.

In this regard, we were witness to a recent example in the form of a massive avalanche on April 7, 2012, in which over 100 Pakistani soldiers and defence staff were killed. In 2003, an event such as this was far from my mind. It would now have to be included in all calculations.

Siachen is just one of the glaciers in the Karakoram region. While the human and material waste in the area is piling up and needs to be removed or reduced (bringing back equipment and other material may be impossible), the ecological argument is region specific. Of course, black carbon and other emissions from military transport impact on glacier and snow, but a greater threat is posed by global warming due to the greenhouse effect resulting from excess fossil fuel use emission by developed countries. The entire third pole region, including Tibet, is thus under indirect threat. Siachen, of course, is the symbolic stage for the human drama. A recent study in *Nature Geoscience* shows that some glaciers in the Himalayas have gained a small amount of mass between 1999 and 2008, thus bucking the global trend of glacier decline. *Current Science*, the flagship journal of the Indian Academy of Science, likewise has published a number of articles on the unending debate among geologists on whether the melting of the Siachen is

<sup>2</sup>“Changing Geographical Factors in Planning and Conduct of Indian Military Operations [5],” *Strategic Analysis*, March 2008.

hype or not. While the ecological health of any natural system is important, the discourse has now swung towards human security—or value of the life of soldiers.

The April 7, 2012, avalanche at Gyari resulted in the tragic loss of 127 Pakistani soldiers and 10 civilians. After the incident, the Pakistani Chief of Army Staff, General Ashfaq Parveez Kyani, called for demilitarisation of the Siachen glacier for the development of Pakistan and environmental reasons. A new paradigm has now entered the discourse, but do South Asian countries value human life?

Policy-makers now have to re-evaluate national security, ecological security, and human security. Which is most important? It is unlikely that the three can be separated, as they are all entwined. A pull back without trust may lead to another bout of fighting if Pakistan were then to occupy the heights on AGPL. This will be a greater ecological and human disaster.

Glacier outburst flows, extreme weather conditions, and events such as avalanches, it seems, may increase due to global warming in the near future. In Figure 1, the timeline ended at 2010 with a question mark for subsequent years. It would augur well for both sides to conduct more joint scientific studies and, without any loss of face on either side, put in place an AGPL agreement within a reasonable time frame.

## The Siachen story: Why Indian Army cannot withdraw from the glacier

Maharajakrishna Rasgotra

The Tribune  
May 18, 2012

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2012/20120518/edit.htm#top>

IN July 1982, under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's direction, I had restarted the India-Pakistan Foreign Secretary's talks which had remained stalled for over two years. Before my departure for Islamabad the Prime Minister's instructions to me were typically laconic: "Talk to them about everything they want to talk about, including Kashmir; what I want to know from you when you come back is whether there is a grain of sincerity in him".

President Zia-ul-Haq had been making noises about wanting peace with India. My very first meeting in Islamabad was with President Haq, who advised me to work out with his officials a Treaty of Peace and Friendship, including a No-war Pact. Over the next two and a half years we did successfully negotiate such a treaty, but at the last minute under American advice, Pakistan backed off from signing it. But I shall not dwell on that long story here.

On return from Pakistan, I told Prime Minister Gandhi that while my talks with the officials had gone off well, I could not really vouch for much sincerity on Zia-ul-Haq's part. For I had picked up information from other sources in Pakistan that many Kashmiris from both sides of the LOC were being trained by ISI agents for armed jihad in Kashmir at the end, in success or even failure, of the ongoing jihad in Afghanistan. In another visit to Pakistan in 1983, I had heard some vague talk about the Pakistan army's plans to extend its reach to the Karakoram Pass and link up Pakistan-occupied Baltistan with Chinese Occupied Aksai Chin inside J&K's Laddakh region. When I mentioned this to Prime Minister Gandhi she asked me to speak about this with some people in our Defence establishment, which I did. Our Army already had information about some such schemes being hatched in Pakistan and was monitoring developments.

In early March 1984, I accompanied Prime Minister Gandhi to a meeting in the Defence Ministry's high-security Map Room. There were no more than six or eight other persons there, including the Defence Minister and the Chief of Army Staff. On a large map were flagged the positions of the Pakistan army's base – posts below the Saltoro Range, which constitutes the Siachen glacier's western flank, and the routes the Pakistan army's so-called "scientific" expeditions had been treading in the region for the last one year or two. Meanwhile, Pakistan's two allies – China and the US – had been publishing maps showing the entire glaciated region up to the Karakoram Pass as territory under Pakistan's control. This was a blatant violation of the Cease-Fire Line (CFL) Agreement of July 1949. Under that agreement the CFL from point NJ 9842 onwards was to run "north to the glaciers", which would leave the larger part of the Siachen glacier and the region east of it in India. Perhaps, the US and China viewed this as a sort of consolatory recompense for Pakistan's losses in 1971.

Particularly vexing for us was the thought that our two difficult neighbours, already in illegal occupation of large chunks of J&K territory, would link up to surround Central Ladakh on three sides within our own territory. Such a juncture would give them dominance over the Shyok Valley and easy access to KhardungLa Pass, and from that vantage point their forces would threaten Leh, a mere half days' march from the Pass. The myth about Siachen, the adjoining glaciated areas and the Karakoram Pass being of no strategic importance is a recent invention: now that the region is secure, such myth making comes easy. Things looked very different to us when a clear danger loomed on the horizon.

So, the Army was given the order to move in and prevent the Pakistan army from occupying any part of the Saltoro Ridge or the Siachen glacier. The risks were carefully weighed; the Pakistan army's plans to gain territory and strategic advantage in Ladakh, by stratagem or stealth, had to be forestalled and defeated, and if that led to war, so be it. The one post the Pakistan army had succeeded in occupying on the Saltoro Ridge was quickly removed, and ever since no Pakistani soldier has been allowed to set foot on the Siachenglacier: a reality which Pakistan's army and governments have assiduously kept away from their people.

I was asked to be at that critical meeting, because I was to go to Islamabad a few weeks later to continue with the ongoing treaty negotiations. Sure enough, General Zia-ul-Haq's Chief of Staff, General Khalid Mahmud Arif, in a private meeting with me gently chided India saying that Siachen was Pakistan's and what we were doing was not right! I suitably rebutted his claim; the matter was not raised with me again, and there was not the least hint of the ongoing negotiations being broken or stalled. General Arif and I have remained good friends and have been engaged, poste-retirement, in the search for India-Pakistan peace and reconciliation in a forum called the Neemrana Initiative.

I am a firm believer in the mutual need of our two countries for peace, friendship and cooperation. I also think that in view of the Pakistan army's changing perception of India, New Delhi should creatively respond to Islamabad's positive gestures. I think it is time for military leaders of the two countries to meet from time to time to inform each other of their respective security perceptions. I also think Prime Minister Manmohan Singh should now pay his long over-due visit to Islamabad. Siachen does not appear to me as ripe for settlement just now, but a mutually satisfactory agreement on the Sir Creek is within easy reach. The visit should also be used to allay Pakistan's suspicions and fears on water-related issues.

Scrutiny of the records of discussions surrounding the demarcation of the ceasefire line in 1949 will show that leaving the glaciated region as a 'No-Man's Land' or an 'International Peace Park', etc, was never in anybody's thoughts; for invariably always such areas become playgrounds for adventurers, spies and trouble makers. It should also be remembered that the entire line that divides India and Pakistan in J&K has resulted from armed conflicts followed by ceasefires. That is what has happened in the Siachen region also. In due course as this reality finds recognition in Pakistan, demilitarization of the region should become possible. Meanwhile, if requested, we could even consider allowing genuine Pakistani scientific expeditions to the glacier.



After the recent tragedy in which Pakistan lost 150 soldiers in an avalanche, if its army wishes to withdraw from these treacherous heights, they should feel free to do so. Prime Minister Singh can assure them that while the prevailing public opinion in India does not permit his government to agree to immediate withdrawal of the Indian Army from the Saltoro Ridge, it will not step beyond its present positions.

*The writer was India's Foreign Secretary from 1982 to 1985.*

## Siachen issue unlikely to be resolved in near future: experts

Waqar Ahmed

The News

June 20, 2012

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-6-115570-Siachen-issue-unlikely-to-be-resolved-in-near-future-experts>

**Security management experts and defence analysts at Islamabad's leading think-tanks are of the opinion that the Siachen issue between Pakistan and India will not be resolved in the near future. For this they blame the Indian Army which, they say, is the main stumbling block to the resolution of the issue.**

“While the Pakistan Army chief has been talking about ways to resolve the issue and the government doing all it can to improve the bilateral relations, there is no such desire from the Indian Army,” said an analyst who also pointed out to the Indian Army chief VK Singh's statement on General Kayani's proposal on demilitarizing the glacier. The Indian general had claimed that “these are all gimmicks that keep coming from the establishment in Pakistan and we will be fools if we fall for them”.

Similarly, he said, the Indian Army's Northern Command chief Lt Gen K T Parnaik declared that since Pakistan had stressed on the involvement of China in future talks on the glacier, therefore, it had doubled the threat to Indian strategic assets. Parnaik also pointed at the alleged presence of Chinese troops in GB and AJ&K, which according to him was a worrying scenario for the Indian Army.

“It has been 13 years since the Kargil issue but the Indian Army has failed to come out of the debacle it had then faced and adapt to the new ground realities,” said the analyst.

Another analyst, when asked about the Siachen issue, repeated the statement of Lt Gen M.L. Chibber, former GoC-in-C Indian Northern Army Command, who had conceded that, “Siachen does not have any strategic significance. The strategic importance being talked about is all invention.” Chibber was the man who was responsible for planning and mounting Operation Meghdoot under which the Indian Army had occupied the glacier on April 13, 1984.

According to Indian journalist AG Noorani, Pakistan and India had almost reached an agreement in 1992 on the Siachen dispute after Islamabad agreed to recording the existing troop positions in an annex, but the Indian political leadership developed cold feet.

The analysts said they did not believe the Indian media reports that it was the Pakistan Army that was responsible for postponement of talks on Sir Creek and deferment of signing of Bilateral Visa Agreement to pressurize India on Siachen but it was the Indian Army that was the real hurdle. “It is actually the other way round as the Indian Army has emphatically suggested to Indian government not to accede to Pakistani suggestions,” said a defence analyst.

## G. Linking Siachen to overall context of peace and confidence building

### Understanding the thaw

Prem Shankar Jha

The Hindu  
June 12, 2012

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/article3517443.ece>



At long last the ice in which India-Pakistan relations have been locked is beginning to melt. Pakistan has granted Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to India's exports, bringing nearly 6,000 items onto the regular list of permissible imports. India is hastening to remove a host of non-tariff barriers to Pakistan's exports: a Joint India-Pakistan committee is even now pruning the forest of regulations enacted by 24 Indian standards organisations that had become India's answer to Pakistan's denial of MFN.

Pakistan began to buy petroleum products from India in March and is eyeing the purchase of 500 MW of power to feed its industries. Last month, 600 Pakistani businessmen visited a trade fair in Delhi to sell their products, and earlier this month India lifted its ban on Direct Foreign Investment from Pakistan. Sensing the birth of a new market, Indian steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal announced the commissioning of an oil refinery at Bhatinda, not far from the Pakistan border. Indian investment to generate power from the

Thar coalfields in collaboration with Pakistani and other enterprises could be the next step. In the past 64 years there had been only one visit by a Pakistani commerce minister to India and none by his Indian counterpart to Pakistan. Since last September, the two have met four times in seven months.

The thaw is evident in our political relations as well. It was set off by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's spur-of-the-moment invitation to President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani to attend

the India-Pakistan World Cup semi-final cricket match at Mohali. This year, when President Zardari invited himself to lunch with Dr. Singh while on his way to Ajmer, instead of being pelted with brickbats at home, he was showered with bouquets. Mian Nawaz Sharif, the head of the PML(N), not only applauded Mr. Zardari's initiative but supported what he termed the promotion of ties with India "in a positive way."

The most significant endorsement came, however, from the Pakistan Army Chief, General Kayani, who remarked while visiting victims of the Skardu earthquake a week later that "peaceful coexistence between the two neighbours is very important so that everybody can concentrate on the well-being of the people..... The decades of enmity between India and Pakistan should be resolved through negotiation."

### **Call for help**

Is the change of heart in Pakistan's ruling elite genuine? B. Raman, the noted Chennai-based security analyst thinks not, and sees only another attempt to mount international pressure on India to de-militarise Siachen. The logic behind his reasoning is hard to discern for Siachen is the least of the international community's present concerns and Pakistan is not exactly in its good books at the moment. But there are a score of other reasons for India to mistrust Pakistani intentions — from the mindset of its army, to the fragility of its besieged democracy, to the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)'s constant protection of its home-grown terrorists.

All these, however are reasons for caution, not inaction. India-Pakistan relations have reached a historic turning point where India's most inveterate enemy is asking India for not just help but trust. This is a turning we must not miss.

Pakistan is turning to India because its very survival as a modern state is now in jeopardy. It was partly forced, partly lured into America's War on Terror in Afghanistan. In the eyes of its people, it has been used by the U.S. and NATO like a dirty dishrag, and is now about to be casually thrown away as they prepare for their exit from Afghanistan. And it has nowhere else to turn.

The steep deterioration in its relations with the U.S. during the past 18 months makes it virtually certain that it will lose all military and most of the economic aid it is receiving from the U.S. Without this, Pakistan will not be able to service its external debt and its economy will collapse.

The Pakistan Army is feeling equally betrayed. When George Bush's attention wandered away from Afghanistan to Iraq, it realised that the war in Afghanistan would be prolonged and would probably end in failure. This would leave Pakistan to face the full wrath of the victorious Taliban and its al-Qaeda linked associates within Pakistan. It therefore took out one, possibly two, insurance policies: the first was the creation of a sanctum within the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) for the Haqqani network of Islamist fighters; the second was to give sanctuary to protect Osama bin Laden. The Pakistan Army had intended to use both as powerful political tools to extend its sway over Afghanistan after the U.S. and NATO left, but its strategy

collapsed when, after dismissing Gen. Stanley McChrystal in 2010, President Obama decided to strengthen the Karzai government and allow his forces to enter Pakistani airspace with drones to attack the Haqqanis in North Waziristan.

When the succession of events in 2011 — CIA operator Raymond Davis' killing of two ISI shadowers in January, the killing of bin Laden in May, and the U.S.' inadvertent killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers inside Pakistan territory in November brought peoples' anger to fever pitch but failed to elicit an apology from Mr. Obama, and when Pakistan's northern neighbours rushed in to fill the supply gap left by Pakistan's closure of its supply routes from Karachi, the Army too realised that Pakistan was truly alone.

Even then the change of direction has not come easily. The Army's reaction to the U.S. turnabout in 2010-11, was to insist upon going it alone. To do this it was prepared to keep the supply lines closed, continue supporting the Haqqanis, and help them to retaliate against the U.S. drone attacks by stepping up their attacks on high profile U.S. and NATO targets in Afghanistan.

## **Trade issues**

This is where the Army and the Zardari government seem to have parted ways. For Mr. Zardari and Mr. Gilani saw that this would further deepen Pakistan's isolation and hasten its economic ruin. Only a very high level of tension between the government and the Army can explain the bizarre drama that followed — with Pakistan Ambassador to the U.S., Husain Haqqani, dictating an unsigned memo to the U.S. Army Chief warning of an imminent army coup in Pakistan, to the one man, Mansur Ijaz who, he must have known, would take it straight to the ISI. The Army attempted to use the memo to discredit the government in Pakistan but the hostile public reaction to the very idea of a military coup, and its subsequent failure to get the Supreme Court to oust Mr. Zardari and imprison Mr. Gilani, showed the Army that the days of military rule were over. It could determine security policy, but only as part of a democratic government. It is this little noticed victory for democracy within Pakistan that has opened the portals for a rapprochement with India.

How far the rapprochement goes will depend on the sagacity of the leaders, especially ours. While Pakistan's foreign exchange outgo will actually drop when smuggling, and third party trade through Dubai is replaced by direct, legitimate trade, the imbalance between Pakistan's exports to and imports from India will appear even larger than it does today. New Delhi would therefore do well to think of ways in which to reduce this apparent gap lest it become fodder for the hate-India lobby in Pakistan. The least that is required is a rapid dismantling of India's non-trade barriers against Pakistan, but New Delhi would do well to consider lifting restrictions on the imports to textiles, which make up three fifths of Pakistan's exports, as well as cement and light engineering goods, as part of its commitments under the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

In its own best interests, Pakistan would do well to reciprocate by granting India the transit rights to central Asia that it has long been requesting. The transit fees on this trade alone would go a long way towards bridging Pakistan's balance of payments deficit. A speedy implementation of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Gas Pipeline Project followed, hopefully, by one to Iran would meet Pakistan's foreign exchange and energy needs while giving India its much needed access to central Asia's energy supplies.

But the rapprochement will remain incomplete and fragile if it does not address the political and security concerns of the two countries. The thaw in fact began only after the two countries decided not to let the punishment of the terrorists of 26/11 and Kashmir stand in the way of resuming the search for peace. This search requires us to assuage the Pakistan Army's fear that India's quest for influence in Afghanistan is aimed at maintaining the capacity to present it with a hostile neighbour to its west. A quiet reassurance that India supports the continuation of the Durand line as an approximate border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and an offer to coordinate our aid to Kabul with Pakistan's, would go a long way towards doing so.

Some in India may be inclined to gloat over Pakistan's discomfiture and regard its overtures to India as a form of Indian victory. This would not only be unwise but short-sighted. Pakistan has approached India because it knows that a stable, even if sometimes fractious, Pakistan is essential to India's own security. An improvement in its security and a strengthening of its democracy will serve the interests of both. Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Hina Rabbani Khar, has frequently mentioned the need for trust. But what she has actually implied is that a measure of trust is essential for both countries to better understand where their true interests lie.

*(The writer is a senior journalist.)*

## Annexure

### 1992 India, Pakistan drafts on Siachen

The Hindu  
June 10, 2012

#### Text of draft Indian and Pakistani proposals on Siachen, November 1992:

Indian and Pakistani delegations headed by their respective Defence Secretaries met in New Delhi from November 2-6, 1992.

Indian draft (first) – 3rd Nov 1992

Consequent to discussions in the VI Round of Talks on the Siachen issue, both sides agreed to the following:

- (i) Delineation of the Line of Control beyond NJ 9842: It was agreed that the immediate focus should be on restoring peace and tranquillity in the glacial region. Towards this end, without prejudice to the positions taken by either side in the earlier round of talks, both sides agreed that the LOC in this area shall be determined on a time bound basis.
- (ii) Disengagement and Re-deployment: To secure enduring peace and tranquillity in this area both sides agreed to redeploy as follows:-

India: The Indian Army shall vacate their existing positions at ..... and..... and redeploy at .....

Pakistan: The Pak Army shall vacate their existing positions at ..... and ..... and redeploy at .....

- (iii) Zone of Disengagement: Consequent to disengagement from existing positions and redeployment to agreed positions, as noted in para (ii) above, both sides commit:
  - (a) that they shall not seek to re-occupy the positions vacated by them or to occupy the positions vacated by the other side or to occupy new positions across the alignment determined by the vacated positions.
  - (b) that they shall not undertake any military or mountaineering activity whatever in the Zone of Disengagement bounded as follows:

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- (c) that if either side violates the Zone of Disengagement, the other side shall be free to respond through any means, including military.

(iv) Monitoring maintenance of peace in the Zone of Disengagement: Having committed themselves to maintain peace and tranquillity in the area comprising the Zone of Disengagement, both sides agree to the following monitoring measures to ensure against any violation of this zone:

(v) Implementation Schedule: In pursuance of their commitments in paras (i) to (iv) above, both sides agree to disengage and re-deploy as per the following schedule:

#### Pakistani Draft

Recognizing the need to bring to an end the enormous human and material losses being suffered by both countries in the Siachen area;

Noting that the Line of Control between the point NJ 9842 and the Karakoram Pass is yet to be delineated and that an understanding of the Siachen issue will eliminate an area of tension;

Considering that a settlement of the issue will constitute a major Confidence Building Measure;

Reiterating the desire to settle issues peacefully through negotiations in the letter and spirit of the Simla Agreement;

The two sides have agreed as follows:-

- 1) The area within the triangle Indira Koli - point NJ 9842 - Karakoram Pass will be vacated by the armed forces of the two sides.
- 2) The armed forces of the two sides will be re-deployed south of point NJ 9842 so as to conform with the Simla Agreement.
- 3) The modalities and time-frame of the re-deployment as well as the monitoring arrangements worked out by the military experts are annexed.
- 4) Neither side shall attempt to alter the status of the area within the triangle Indira Koli - point NJ 9842 - Karakoram Pass, pending delineation of the Line of Control.
- 5) A Joint Commission comprising experts from both sides will be set up in order to examine the question of delineation of the Line of Control. The Joint Commission shall commence work immediately after the completion of the re-deployment of forces and submit its report to the two governments within a period of six months thereafter.

#### Alternative para 1 & 2 (fall back position)

The armed forces of the two sides shall vacate areas and re-deploy as indicated in the annexure. The positions vacated would not for either side constitute a basis for a legal claim or justify a political or moral right to the area indicated. The delineation of the Line of Control from point NJ 9842 to the Karakoram Pass will form part of the comprehensive settlement to follow the re-deployment of troops.\*

[\* According to N.N. Vohra, then the Indian Defence Secretary, the Pakistani side dropped its reference to the Karakoram Pass]





“ Like most matters military, civil society is hardly aware of the Siachen impasse. There is little knowledge or understanding of the strategic issues involved. Most are unaware that the battle is not being fought for the glacier but for the passes on Saltoro Ridge. The numbers of soldiers who die or are wounded are just a statistic. No studies have been carried out on the long-term effect of the extreme altitudes on the physical and mental health of soldiers. There is yet a sense of pride that our soldiers are dominating the Pakistani positions. Whether or not there is a need for the soldiers to be there is not a matter for consideration.”

*Col. Pavan Nair*



Photo Credit: Dhritiman Mukherjee