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Brasstacks Crisis 1986-87

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ABSTRACT

The 1986-87 crises arose from the unusually large Indian military exercise code named Brasstacks. This exercise was carried out very close to the Indian border with Pakistan which was again very unusual. It was a brainchild of the Indian Army. Moreover, the Brasstacks confrontation contributed to the incorporation of nuclear calculations in regional crisis behavior. This dimension is later believed to have contributed towards setting the milieu of the Kashmir crisis of 1990. The crisis, and perhaps the apparent success of its deterrent value, had undoubtedly confirmed to the Pakistani decision-makers the importance of nuclear weapons as a balance to Indian's conventional military superiority. The focus of this research is to highlight the main trends of crisis decision making both in Pakistan as well as in India. Present study explores the role of perception and misperception during the crisis situation between two rival states.

KEY WORDS: Conflict, military, nuclear, cricket diplomacy, decision making

Introduction

The 1986-87 crises arose from the unusually large Indian military exercise code named Brasstacks. This exercise was carried out very close to the Indian border with Pakistan which was again very unusual. It was a brainchild of the Indian Army Chief General Sunderji who was also involved in its planning and implementation stages. This large scale movement and activities of the Indian troops in the Rajasthan desert created an alarm in Pakistan. As a consequence, the armed forces of Pakistan were also mobilized and deployed in the forward areas. As a response, the Indian Army occupied its traditional defensive positions. Apparently, all elements for the precipitation of a crisis and its escalation were present. However, the decision-makers from both sides were successful in managing the crisis without reaching a point of unmanageable escalation and eruption of an all out war across the international border. It is also evident from a detailed study that the crisis resembled Richard Lebow's 'Brinkmanship crisis'. In such cases a crisis is initiated with the hope that an adversary will back down instead of fighting. War is not intended but is only a threat of force that is used to secure specific political objectives. Yet the outcomes of a crisis are unpredictable,

such is the case that India used the threat of force to orchestrate its nefarious designs in the region. Pakistan in response adopted such a policy which had a vivid similarity with the 'Hostile Interaction Model' of decision-making.

Nature of Issue

During the 1980s, growing military influence in the Indian polity gave birth to a serious consideration of a preventive war despite strong institutionalized civilian control. The crisis of 1986-87 began to precipitate when the Indian armed forces initiated a massive exercise in Rajasthan near the South-Eastern border of Pakistan. Fearing that the exercise maybe a disguised preparation for an immediate large-scale attack, the Pakistani leadership responded by immediately putting its armed forces on high alert and initiating their own military exercises very close to the Indian border. This led to counter-moves by the Indian armed forces along the international border combined with an operational alert of the Indian Air Force (IAF) (Sagan, 2002).

During the course of events, an attack against the Pakistani nuclear installations was also weighed at the highest level of decision-making in New Delhi in January 1987.

“Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi now considered the possibility that Pakistan might initiate war with India. In a meeting with a handful of senior bureaucrats and General Sunderji, he contemplated beating Pakistan to the draw by launching a preemptive attack on the Army Reserve South. This would have included automatically an attack on Pakistan's nuclear facilities to remove the potential for a Pakistani nuclear response to India's attack. Relevant government agencies were not asked to contribute analysis or views to the discussion. Sunderji argued that India's cities could be protected from a Pakistani counterattack (perhaps a nuclear one), but, upon being probed, could not say how. One important advisor from the Ministry of Defense argued eloquently “India and Pakistan have already fought their last war, and there is too much to lose in contemplating another one.” This view ultimately prevailed (Perkovich, 2001).

In this instance, the obvious cause of the crisis was the Indian initiation of Brasstacks, responded robustly by Pakistan, and finally diffused through intense diplomatic exchanges between the two countries. During the course of the crisis, external actors exercised a subtle influence on the crisis dynamics and this gentle pressure was actually facilitating a peaceful management of the crisis. Indian analysts felt that during this crisis Pakistan's attitude was more responsible than that of India. Another very important observation about the crisis was that no non-state actor was involved in the crisis (Sahni, 2004).

Crisis Escalation and De-escalation

Early in the year 1986, the Indian Prime Minister, Rajeev Gandhi, and the new Indian Army Chief General K. Sunderji mutually decided to stage the Brasstacks exercise, the largest military maneuvers in modern Indian history. These were spread over four phases:

Phase one, *Brasstacks 1*, was an exercise on the map, held in Delhi, which Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi attended.

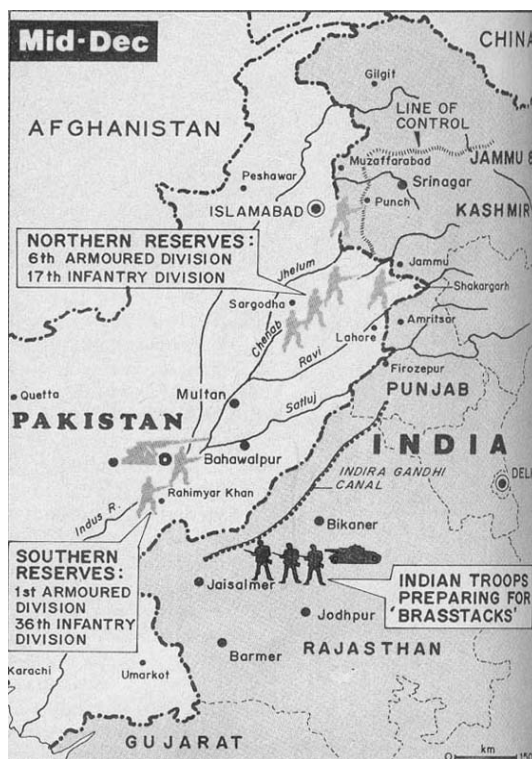
Phase two, *Brasstacks 2*, was an exercise for the military commanders in Chandigarh on a sand model.

The third phase, *Brasstacks 3*, was during which the details of the exercise were worked out in black and white.

The fourth phase, *Brasstacks 4*, during which the troops were actually mobilized for the implementation of the planned exercise focusing on the desert region of Rajasthan.

It was in December 1986, that exercise Brasstacks reached its full-blown crisis stage when India had a total of nine divisions and more than a thousand armored vehicles deployed in Rajasthan, adjacent to the Pakistani province of Sindh. The scale of these exercises was as large as some exercises conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Europe. The Pakistani leadership felt an air of suspicion growing around this activity and viewed it as a plan aimed at conclusively bifurcating Pakistan into two portions. Thus, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, the President of Pakistan, and the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) mobilized Army Reserve North and Army Reserve South, deploying them to locations close to the Indian borders where they could strike at areas in Punjab and Kashmir (Exercise Brasstacks, 2004).

Fig 3.1 Position of troops in mid December.

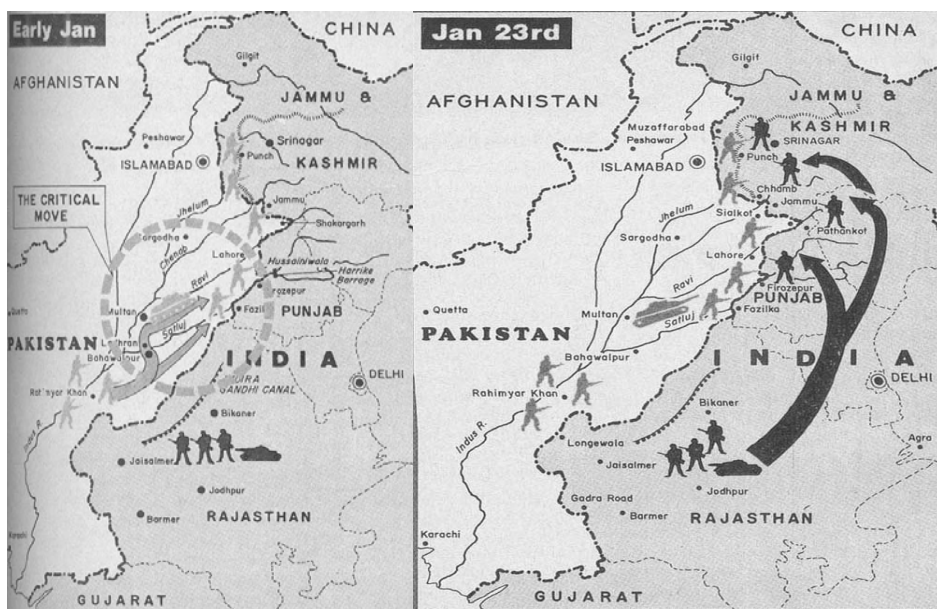


Source: Inderjit Badwar, Dilip Bobb, 'Indo-Pak Border Game of Brinkmanship, *India Today*, 1987, p. 26.

Poor communication and lack of information transformed the situation from bad to worse in January 1987, creating an atmosphere of extreme crisis on January 18, 1987. Both India and Pakistan placed their entire armed forces on high alert and engaged themselves in ominous maneuvers on either side of the border. Indian Prime Minister, Rajeev Gandhi's decision to begin airlifting troops to Punjab on January 20, 1987, threatened an escalation transforming the crisis into an all out war between the two countries (Exercise Brasstacks, 2004).

Crisis tensions were further heightened when on January 23, 1987, India demanded that the Pakistani troops be withdrawn to peace time positions. This was followed by India's decision to seal its border in Punjab (Pakistan Times, 1987). The Indian troops took up forward positions along the borders with Pakistan whereas the Army and the Air Force were put on high alert. The concentration of troops and heavy armor was especially significant in the Rajasthan-Sindh sector, the soft underbelly of Pakistan (Siddiqi, 1988).

Fig 3.2 Position of troops in early and late January



Source: Inderjit Badwar, Dilip Bobb, 'Indo-Pak Border Game of Brinkmanship, India Today, 1987, p. 27.

It was indeed a highly volatile and tense situation. The assembly of more than 200,000 Indian troops, with most of its offensive formations being deployed (two armored divisions, one mechanized division, a host of infantry divisions, independent armored, and infantry brigades), was as close as sixty kilometers from the Pakistani border. This was supplemented by an activation of all forward airfields of the Indian Air Force as well as the Indian naval units. Thus a real and credible crisis had rapidly developed. The intensity of the crisis was further increased because this multi-formation and multi-service exercise was taking place in an east-west direction, lending further credibility to the suspicion that the exercise might transform into a full scale attack on Pakistan, on the lines of 'la Egypt' attack across the Suez Canal in 1973. To make things worse the Indian Army Chief at the time, General Sunderji, had floated the idea of integrating tactical nuclear missiles into this exercise by which the crisis assumed a nuclear character (Rizvi, 1993).

Sensing the erratic nature of the situation, Pakistan took defensive measures and moved its offensive formations into forward positions. This escalation created panic as far as Jammu and people felt that war was imminent. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of people fled to the interior parts of India creating war hysteria. The temperature continuously increased due to over blown stories carried by the respective media and confrontational statements from the leadership of both

countries. It would be no exaggeration to state that the crisis had every potential to escalate into an all-out war between Pakistan and India (Matinuddin, 2002).

At this point in time Pakistan took the initiative towards resolution by offering consultations to India to de-escalate the situation (Matinuddin, 2002). Prime Minister Junejo had a telephonic conversation with his Indian counterpart, Mr. Rajeev Gandhi which was followed by a contact between the Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMO's) of both countries (Rizvi,1990). A diplomatic activity was also seen in the United States and the Soviet Union. President Reagan also telephoned Rajeev Gandhi and General Zia-ul-Haq, instructing the leaders to "cool it." These contacts prevented the crisis from escalating into a war (Kux, 2001).

Motivations for the Precipitation of Crisis

The crisis was a direct product of the Indian joint services exercise code named "Brasstacks," having both military and political motivations.

Military Motives

These exercises were among the largest ever staged by India. They originated in Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi's wish to test Indian capabilities for a large-scale war-time mobilization. Mr. Gandhi, who was also the Indian defense minister, appeared to be fascinated with the sheer enormity of the venture (Rizvi, 1993). However, the real architect was the hawkish and ambitious Chief of the Indian Army Staff, General Krishnaswami Sunderji who, had set for himself the task of making the Indian Army, "more combat effective in every way so that it can support a revitalized India in her rightful place in the world in the decades to come (Perkovich, 1988)".

As Chief of the Indian Army, he had planned Brasstacks to put his plan into practice to its fullest extent. The exercise was designed to test new operational concepts, particularly the mechanized infantry formations which General Sunderji had specially raised for the desert flatlands of the Rajasthan-Sindh sector along the Indo-Pakistani border which in his calculations were a likely venue for a war between the two countries. Other objectives of the exercise included providing senior commanders an experience in coordinating operations at multi-corps formation levels, testing a new communications system designed for command and control of units engaged on a fluid battlefield.

Political Motives

Besides the above mentioned strictly professional objectives, Brasstacks also had major political goals. Pakistan was continuously accused by India for sponsoring a militant Sikh separatist movement in the border state of Punjab (the breadbasket of India). Although for a while India was plagued by insurgent movements in various parts of the country, the Sikh insurgency was the most serious New Delhi had faced thus far. It also resulted in a large scale involvement of the Indian Army in an internal security operation for the first time in the country's history (Bajwa, 2005). By mid 1980's the uprising had claimed 4,500 lives and was indirectly responsible for Mr. Rajeev Gandhi's elevation as the Prime Minister of India. Also in June 1984, when General Sunderji was the chief of Western Command, army units under his control stormed the Sikh holiest shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, in the infamous, "Operation Blue Star," to flush out barricaded militants. The repercussions of this action extended farther than the approximately six hundred deaths resulting from the operation (Cohen, 1988). The Sikh community was enraged and led thousands of Sikh soldiers into mutiny thereby dealing a major blow to the cohesion of the Indian armed forces (Badhwar and Bobb, 1988). In the end, the operation had cost Prime Minister Indira Gandhi her own life at the hands of Sikh members of her bodyguards, an assassination that in turn sparked off mass killings of Sikhs all over India in the bloodiest communal rioting since the partition.

In addition, according to a leaked Indian document, the purpose of the maneuvers was to convey "to a belligerent and recalcitrant neighbor the power and strength of India's armed forces (Badhwar and Bobb, 1988)." There is a sensational account that the then Army Chief, General Sundarji, "had a secret plan to use Brasstacks to provoke Pakistan into war. It was to begin with a feigned attack at Kapalu in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK). But the real plan was to attack Pakistan's Punjab and cut off its access to Sindh. The objective was to pulverize Pakistan before its nuclear capability matured and made it nearly impossible for India to wage a massive conventional battle without risking an atomic war (Chari, 1995)."

Actors Involved In the Crisis and Their Actions

The key actors namely the government officials involved in the whole picture are detailed in the following table:

Table 3.1 Designations and Names of the Government Officials both from Pakistan and India Directly Involved in the Brasstacks Crisis 1986-87.

Sr. no.	Officials Involved	Pakistan	India
1.	Head of the State	President Zia-ul-Haq	President Zail Singh
2.	Head of the Government	Prime Minister M.K Junejo	Prime Minister R. Gandhi
3.	Army Chief	General Zia-ul-Haq	General K. Sunderji

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4.	Defense Minister	-	Arun Singh
5.	Foreign Minister	Zain Noorani	K. Natwar Singh

Source: Compiled by the Researcher

These elements of misperception and overreaction were visible on both sides. On Pakistan's part, its intelligence service was blamed to have erroneously concluded that Brasstacks was being conducted along an east-to-west axis instead of the south-to-north axis on which it was actually held. This misjudgment was the basis of the derived conclusion that the maneuvers were a prelude to an Indian attack on Pakistan. In much the same fashion, the Indian intelligence misread the ensuing movement of Pakistani troops. As a consequence, there was an alarm in New Delhi which led India to take action augment the crisis to its peak intensity. Mounting internal problems may also have contributed to prejudiced calculations. Islamabad's sense of the danger posed by Brasstacks was amplified by escalating ethnic strife in the strategically vital Sindh province during 1986, which it attributed to Indian connivance. Similarly, New Delhi received reports from its intelligence service that movements of Pakistan army units were actually timed to give demonstrative support to Sikh insurgents in Punjab (Krepon, 1996).

Nevertheless, those who were at the helm of affairs in Pakistan at the time insisted that they were not totally mistaken in their appreciation of the military actions New Delhi was initiating along with the maneuvers (Arif, 2001). According to these individuals, the documents of Indian planning of the exercise were obtained by Pakistan in early 1986, prescribing an east-to-west axis for the maneuvers, which was later on modified to a south-north direction (Bajpai, 1995). Perhaps, even with the change of axis, the positioning of the Indian forces on the ground did not change in any considerable way. The fact that an unusually large number of Indian Army formations were present within only 60-80 km from the border, led Pakistan's intelligence community to believe that these force levels could potentially be used to launch an offensive against Pakistan at a short notice regardless of their original orientation. Perhaps, a closer study reveals that while the intelligence authorities easily moved themselves in worst-case thinking (quoting reports that India had plans to convert Brasstacks into a full-fledge offensive against Pakistan), the military establishment held a less alarmist view.

Brasstacks also coincided with a series of incidents that shaped Pakistani threat perceptions. In addition to suspicions that opposition political movements and extremist groups were operating in collusion with New Delhi, a serious deterioration of the law and order situation in Sindh province was thought to be a product of Indian machinations (Hollen, 1987). General Sunderji had earlier indicated his intentions to exploit this Pakistani vulnerability when in June 1986, he had intimated to a Pakistani military officer that New Delhi could play the "Sindh card" if Islamabad continued to assist Sikh separatists.

Effects of Comments / Statements by Leadership and Media Reports

Suspensions were further fueled by comments and statements from prominent Indian officials and leaders. One example is a comment made by the Indian Army Chief General Sunderji's deputy that New Delhi expected another major war with Pakistan in which the mechanized formations being tested in Brasstacks would play a significant role (Bajpai, 1995). Then a British Broadcasting Corporations (BBC) broadcast in early November, 1986, reported that Rajeev Gandhi had threatened to "teach Pakistan a lesson for the fourth time." On November 11, 1986, the Indian home minister told the parliament that New Delhi was determined to take "strong action against those providing shelter to secessionists and terrorists in Punjab." Here it would be appropriate to present, in a tabulated form, the exchange of threats between the officials of the two countries. The tone and frequency of threats help in determining the character (serious or otherwise) and degree of hostility prevailing between the two countries at that point in time (Hindustan Times, 1986). Similarly, the total number of threats and the designation of threat issuing official can be a measure of how the leadership was responding to a situation which is a mix of stress, short decision-making time, and little or no information. In addition, the tone and wording of threats is very important, providing clues to their general mood, morale of leadership, readiness, and determination to take decisive action.

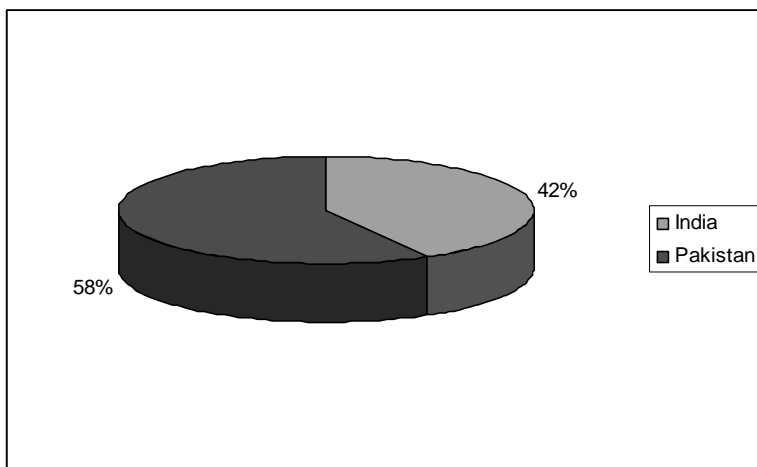
Table 3.2 Exchange of threats by the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and India during the Brasstacks Crisis 1986-87.

Date	Official	Threat/Warning to India from Pakistan.	Threat/Warning to Pakistan from India.
18.11.86	Prime Minister	*	*
30.11.86	Prime Minister	*	
03.12.86	Prime Minister	*	
12.12.86	Prime Minister		*
13.12.86	Prime Minister	*	*
14.12.86	Prime Minister	*	
16.12.86	Prime Minister		*
09.01.87	Prime Minister	*	
25.01.87	Prime Minister		*
26.01.87	Prime Minister	*	
28.01.87	Prime Minister		*
30.01.87	Prime Minister	*	
31.01.87	Prime Minister	*	
01.02.87	Prime Minister	*	

06.02.87	Prime Minister		*
07.02.87	Prime Minister	*	*
16 days		11(Total threats by PM Pak).	08(Total threats by PM Ind).

Abbreviations: PM: Prime Minister, Pak: Pakistan, Ind: India

Figure 3.3 Percentages of threats Exchanged by the Prime Ministers during the Brasstacks Crisis 1986-87



Source: Compiled by the Researcher

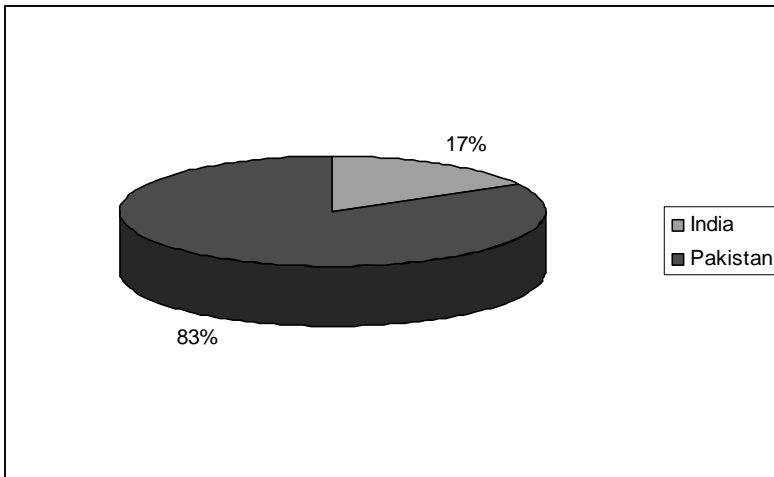
Table 3.3 Exchange of threats between the Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan and India during the Brasstacks Crisis 1986-87.

Date	Official	Threat/Warning to India from Pakistan.	Threat/Warning to Pakistan from India.
14.11.86	COAS	*	
16.01.87	COAS		*
27.01.87	COAS	*	
28.01.87	COAS	*	
30.01.87	COAS	*	
06.02.87	COAS	*	
06 days		05 (Total threats by Pakistani COAS	01 (Threat by Indian COAS)

Abbreviations: COAS: Chief of Army Staff

Source: Compiled by the Researcher

Figure 3.4 Percentages of threats Exchanged by the COAS during the Brasstacks Crisis 1986-87



Source: *Compiled by the Researcher*

In relation to the above mentioned threats and warnings it is very important to note that the first warning came from the Pakistani COAS around mid November 1986. This means that Pakistani military leadership was aware of all movements made by the Indian armed forces. Then on the 18th of November 1986, the political leadership of the two countries exchanged warnings/threats. These were later continuously exchanged with short intervals between the end of November 1986, to the mid of December 1987, which was followed by silence. Then a second burst of warnings/threats starting from the 9th of January 1987 appeared. This phase of warnings continued until the first week of February 1987. During the first phase, there was an exchange of ten warnings out of which one was from the Pakistan COAS and 5 from the Pakistani Prime Minister. While during the same phase, there were 4 warnings/threats from the Indian Prime Minister. In the second phase, the overall number of warnings drastically increased to 15. Out of these 10 came from the Pakistani side, 4 from the COAS, and 6 from the Prime Minister. During this phase, 6 warnings/threats came from the Indian side. Out of these, 1 came from their COAS and 4 from the Indian Prime Minister. In addition, during this second phase, the first Pakistani warning came from the Prime Minister and from the Indian side the first warning came from their COAS. During the second phase of warnings, the warning by the Indian COAS reflects his concerns about the Pakistani countermeasures. Then, a flurry of warnings from Pakistan from the last week of January, 1987, to the first week of February, 1987, show increasing concerns on the part of Pakistan. Apparently, fewer warnings came from the Indian side which may be a sign of less stress. However, a closer study of this crisis would reveal a picture contrary to this belief. Similarly, from the record of

warnings and threats it is clear that Pakistani civilian and military leadership handled this crisis with great confidence. There are multiple reasons including the availability of credible information, weaknesses in General Sunderji's planning and the availability of a nuclear option.

Media reports also play a decisive role in aggravating or dissipating a crisis situation. Reports appearing in the Indian press suggested that the assembly of forces for Brasstacks had resulted in major disruptions in civilian rail service. Such reports sparked widespread speculations and rumors of an imminent outbreak of hostilities between Pakistan and India. As a consequence, stock prices got depressed on the Bombay and Calcutta

Pakistan took a suspicious view of the Indian rationale that the redeployment was intended to provide relief to the troops completing their tour of duty in a hard area. Pakistan's suspicions were founded on the fact that such rotational movements usually involve individual units and not an entire formation (Sirohey, 1996). Efforts to elicit information through diplomatic channels proved equally frustrating. In Pakistan's view, Indian failure to share timely and adequate information about its multi-service exercise Brasstacks, (Pakistan already being in possession of the Brasstacks planning papers), not only violated an informal agreement which both sides had reached in 1984 (under which both countries were to notify each other in advance of any exercises taking place unusually close to the shared international border) but also served to reinforce suspicions of India's roguish intentions (Rikhye, 1988).

Pakistan's Response to the Crisis

Pakistan's response to the perceived Indian buildup had begun well before the Bangalore Summit. Military readiness was accelerated in order to deal with any eventuality, army units were ordered to gear up to full combat readiness. Thousands of reservists were called up and service leaves of the troops were cancelled. More importantly, the duration of the exercises that were already underway was extended. Army Reserve South (ARS) comprising Pakistan's 1st Armored and 37th Infantry divisions were conducting their routine exercise called Saf-Shikan concluded in early November 1986. The troops remained in the exercise area, instead of returning to their respective garrisons near Multan. Similarly, the Army Reserve North (ARN) was also on routine exercises composed of the 6th Armored and 17th infantry divisions. They were engaged in maneuvers codenamed 'Flying Horse.' The traditional venue for staging these formation level exercises was the corridor between Jehlum and Chenab rivers, the main consideration being the proximity of their respective garrisons. As a response to Brasstacks, exercise 'Flying Horse' was relocated closer to the Pakistan-India international border, to the area between the Chenab and Ravi rivers, which is the actual area of deployment of these formations in the event of a war. These exercises were extended and renamed 'Sledgehammer', in early December, when

ARN was moved closer to the cities of Gujranwala and Sialkot. Both the southern and northern reserve forces were augmented with additional elements drawn from the 11th Corps and the 12th Corps (headquartered at Peshawar and Quetta respectively). The Pakistan Air Force also continued at a heightened operational tempo after its own exercises called 'High mark' ended in November 1986.

The hot line between the respective Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMO's) either remained inoperative during the crucial period that led up to the crisis or was used by the junior officers who were unable to take any meaningful decision. During the run up to extreme escalation of Crisis, the first meaningful use of hotline was made by Pakistan on December 8, 1986.

January 1987: Climax of Crisis and De-escalation

Right from the beginning of the crisis, there was an increasing pressure on General Zia-ul-Haq to undertake major troop redeployments. For several weeks, he resisted this advice but in late December, 1986, the formations of ARS marched out of the Bahawalpur area, where it was almost opposite to the Brasstacks exercise area, and took up new positions north of Sutlej River in the area east of Multan. Such a movement on the part of Pakistani forces was not wholly unanticipated for the Indian Army, however, this repositioning of the ARS surprisingly escaped Indian detection for a critical two-weeks. This intelligence lapse still lacks an adequate explanation (Arif, 2001). In addition, it has been contradicted by evidence that Indian Signals Intelligence was successful in tracking movements of Pakistani troops. According to one Indian journalist who was well acquainted with General Sunderji, "Indian Signals was able to provide real-time information, on the movement of Pakistani armored formations at the time of the Brasstacks exercise (Joshi, 1987)."

The first instance when India explicitly acknowledged awareness of developments within the Pakistani borders was in mid-January 1987. Indian Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi and his Army Chief General Sunderji publicly drew attention to Pakistan's deployments. (Reddy, 1987). General Sunderji also disclosed that additional ammunition stocks were being issued to Pakistani forces. Civilians had been evacuated from certain frontier towns in Pakistan and a curfew had been imposed in others. These actions were reported as causing considerable anxiety in New Delhi. As far as the Indian army was concerned, General Sundarji informed that except for the units in the Brasstacks area, the army was placed at usual locations. The fact, however, is that at this point in time plans were being drafted to dispatch reinforcements to the Punjab frontier (Reddy, 1987). Still later at a press conference on January 20, 1987, the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Rajeev Gandhi expressed "tremendous concern" over the build-up of Pakistani forces along the border but added that "we have not reciprocated so as not to heighten tension which may snowball. We are trying to get in touch with Pakistan and

others to see what the problem is.” He claimed that such a provocative action from Islamabad was not a consequence of the Indian military exercise Brasstacks (Times of India, 197). No more than two days later, however, the crisis which was gradually gaining momentum showed signs of sudden escalation. The immediate cause being the news that Pakistan’s ARS formation had crossed the Sutlej River around Bahawalnagar, moved into the Minchinabad salient, and was assembling perilously closer to the Indian cities of Abohar and Fazilka which produced a panic among the Indian political and military circles (Reddy, 1987).

The simultaneous movements into the Minchinabad and Shakargarh salients enabled Pakistan to initiate a two-pronged pincer attack in Punjab cutting off Kashmir from the rest of India in the process. The Indian officials fully appreciated the effectiveness of such a strategic plan of action, later a senior Indian official explained that Islamabad’s actions had created a “total imbalance ... With all Indian troops and aircraft not involved in Exercise Brasstacks and still at peacetime stations, the Pakistani troops located at the Suleimanki headworks on Sutlej could have walked into Punjab (Ghatta, 1987).” It was further reported that bridges around the border city of Lahore were being mined for demolition. The greatest fears were created by the specter raised by the Indian intelligence which caught on the information that the Pakistanis, capitalizing on the chaotic situation in Punjab, might assist in a cross-border raid on January 26, 1987, when militant Sikh leaders were scheduled to gather at the Golden Temple in Amritsar and consequently issue a call for an independent Sikh **homeland**. In a Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) briefing about the border situation on the night of January 22, 1987, Indian military chiefs recommended an immediate dispatch of troops to the Punjab frontier (Rikhye, 1987). The army was placed on high alert and a massive redeployment effort, codenamed “Operation Trident,” was undertaken to rush reinforcements to Punjab from the Brasstacks exercise area as well as from other parts of the country. “Indian Airlines announced the cancellation of flights to Jodhpur in Rajasthan for a week and the rescheduling of a number of other flights in northern India (Badhwar and Bobb, 1987).” The air force was also placed on operational alert and ordered to move its squadrons to forward bases in order to forestall preemptive attacks. A high ranking Indian official later commented, “We call this a minimum essential total state of readiness.” Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi afterwards observed that Pakistani intentions were unclear at that point in time and he could not afford to wait for clarification via diplomatic channels (Badhwar and Bobb, 1987).

By nature, this crisis involved an action-reaction chain. The mobilization of Indian forces resulted in a corresponding alert of Pakistani forces (Hindu, 1987). On January 23, 1987, the day when Indian mobilization was made public, Pakistan’s Ambassador to New Delhi was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was told that if his government did not withdraw its forces within the next 24 hours along the Punjab border, then India would occupy positions along the border in Kashmir and Rajasthan (**Gull 2005**). **Initially**, Pakistan felt that the

Indians were delivering an ultimatum. However, as the crisis escalated, the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Rajeev Gandhi stressed the importance of cooling things down in his meeting with the Pakistani Ambassador (Khan, 2007). Alongside these developments, the American and Soviet ambassadors were also summoned for meetings with senior Indian officials and were asked to provide New Delhi with satellite information about Pakistani troop movements (Joshi, 1987).

Meanwhile, in Islamabad a meeting of the Cabinet's Defense Coordination Committee (DCC) was convened at the Prime Minister's residence. Prime Minister Junejo initially disagreed with a suggestion that he should personally talk to the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Rajeev Gandhi to peacefully manage the situation but later took a softer line when President Zia indicated that he would do it himself (Badhwar and Bobb, 1988). This meeting finally concluded late in the night after which the Indian Ambassador to Pakistan was summoned to the Foreign Office and was conveyed Pakistan's readiness to hold immediate talks for the de-escalation of the crisis. In addition, the military hotline was reactivated when Pakistan's DGMO contacted his Indian counterpart to assure him of Islamabad's peaceful intentions and its genuine resolve for de-escalation.

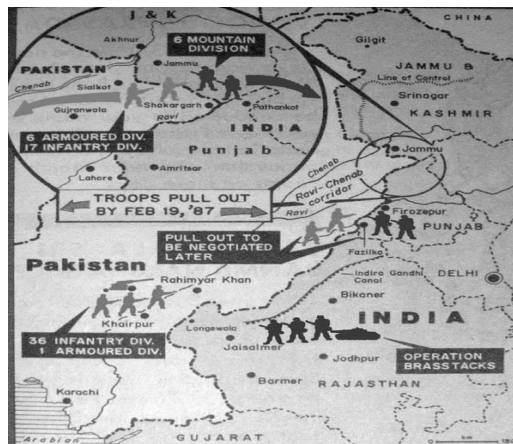
Apart from these official bilateral interactions, General Zia-ul-Haq proposed the idea of paying a personal surprise visit to India with the express purpose of watching a cricket match. Initially, the General's advisors could not grasp the wisdom of this effort in personal diplomacy. For them it was below the dignity of Pakistan's Head of State to visit India without a formal invitation. General Zia-ul-Haq later admitted his ignorance of the basic rules of cricket and told a visiting American official that he developed a personal equation with the Indian Prime Minister during the time he had spent with him, which later helped ease tensions between the two countries (Reddy, 1987). Zia decided to project a reasonable and peace-seeking image of Pakistan despite the military tensions. Rajeev was equally desirous of normalizing relations whatever the duality of Zia's motives. An invitation was extended to Zia by the Board of Control of Cricket in India to come and witness the Indo-Pakistani cricket series. Zia visited India between 21 and 23 February accompanied by 68 government officials and public personalities. Though his discussions with the Indian leadership did not yield any concrete results, his visit was projected as a major diplomatic initiative. The second round of discussions to de-escalate border tensions was held in Islamabad within four days of Zia's return, from 27 February to 7 March. The secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, Alfred Gonsalves, along with the additional secretary (Defense), N .N. Vohra, and senior officials from the Directorate General of Military Operations went to Islamabad and met their counterparts who were led by Abdul Sattar. In contrast to the comparative reasonableness in approach during the 30 January — 4 February discussions, this second round was characterized by acrimony and truculence on the part of Pakistan. Perhaps the withdrawal of Indian troops earlier in February led to this stance. Gonsalves cautioned the Pakistani side about the implications of stemming the momentum of de-escalation. Nonetheless,

the talks concluded more or less successful and tensions which had considerably heightened since September-October 1986 got defused (Telegraph, 1987).

Consequently, New Delhi responded, on January 25, 1987, with a set of proposals for de-escalation and suggested that delegations from both countries should meet to discuss these proposals. By the time negotiations started on January 31, 1987, the threat of war had largely diminished.

On February 4, 1987, a reciprocal withdrawal of forces along the northern segments of the border was announced with both sides pledging to exercise “maximum restraint and to avoid all provocative actions”. They also agreed to immediately deactivate forward airfields and lower the operational readiness of their naval forces. Accords pertaining to other parts of the border were subsequently concluded.

Fig 3.5 Steps agreed by the armies of both sides to de-escalate the crisis



Source: Inderjit Badwar, Dilip Bobb, 'Indo-Pak Border Game of Brinkmanship, India Today, 1987, p. 27.

Reviewing the above discussion, some extremely important questions may arise. For instance, how serious was the possibility of war at the height of the Brasstacks crisis or what factors contributed to the precipitation of the crisis. As far as this first question is concerned, it would not be presumptuous to say that given the high degree of tensions, the situation had all the potential for transformation into a physical confrontation. This was amply clear to the top decision-makers of both the countries. Soon after the de-escalation, General Zia publicly claimed, “neither India nor Pakistan wanted war but we could have easily gone into war (India Today, 1987).”

Defects in Indian Decision-Making

The curious trajectory of the crisis – its slow gathering, abrupt outbreak, and rapid dissipation – rebounded to New Delhi's embarrassment. Not only did the sudden Indian turnabout – from an ultimatum of reinforcing the Punjab border to proposing de-escalatory measures – allow Pakistan to claim that a firm response had deterred Indian mischievousness, it also exposed a high level of confusion within Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi's government. New Delhi's calculated insensitivity to the multiple signals of concern that Pakistan had conveyed about Brasstacks raised suspicions about both the Indian Prime Minister's operating style and the intentions of his military leadership. Impatient with details and unwilling to follow up on decision, he did not concern himself closely enough with the particulars of Brasstacks, trusting that matters were being looked after by General Sunderji and Mr. Arun Singh (Prime Minister's close friend who he had appointed as minister of state for defense), both of whom later acknowledged that they too did not anticipate Pakistan's strong reaction. Self assumed consequences of Brasstacks adventure totally blurred the rational dimensions of Indian foreign policy. It brought confusion and embarrassment not only for the leadership but also a surprise for regional and international community.

Tussle Between the Indian Prime Minister and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)

In December 1986, the ministry's policy planning chief resigned amid reports that he was being constantly ignored by the Prime Minister on key issues. MEA was not only excluded from the critical talks between India and Pakistan held in the summer of 1986, focusing on the disengagement of forces on the Siachen Glacier in Northern Kashmir, but also its skill was not sought by the Brasstacks planners. One assessment of the crisis found that MEA "appears to have known little about Brasstacks (Chari, 2007). It was not involved in any way in the planning of the exercise and appears not to have tendered any advice on its diplomatic impact or repercussions (Badhwar and Bobb, 1987)."

In fact, when the crisis started escalating in December 1986, Indian diplomats were engaged in a dialogue with Pakistan in pursuit of normalization of relations between the two countries. These talks were so productive that the Indian foreign secretary announced that Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi would soon visit Islamabad and New Delhi's ambassador to Islamabad even publicly stated that bilateral ties were poised at the "take-off point." Similarly, the MEA was never taken into confidence on information which the defense officials passed on to the press in mid-January 1987. After this, the Foreign Secretary protested over this

lack of coordination and Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi unceremoniously sacked him in public two days later (Badhwar and Bobb, 1987).

Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi, Arun Singh, and General Sunderji's Contribution

Gandhi's lack of interest and inadequate knowledge of the ongoing developments in relation to exercise Brasstacks was a major factor in the spiral of events he could not initially anticipate and, in the end, he confessed to the Pakistani leadership that he was not in total control of his own government.

While Gandhi may have unconsciously contributed to initiating the crisis owing to his inactivity and lack of interest, General Sunderji was perhaps the person most responsible. There are serious credible apprehensions that he had ulterior motives in staging the exercises. After the crisis, numerous individuals within the Indian military were vocal in blaming him as a reckless adventurer who brought the country to the brink of war. According to them, the General orchestrated the exercises in the hope that Pakistan would be provoked into some action which would then give India an excuse to launch an offensive. The overconfidence of General Sunderji's personality and the unparalleled military activism India was engaged in lend credence to these accusations (Tariq, 2005).

Some observers believe that General Sunderji, with an eye on Pakistan's advancing nuclear program, was motivated by preventive war logic (Sagan, 1997). Arguing that this is the most plausible explanation for the crisis, one scholar hypothesized that the episode illustrates the dangers of preventive war between nuclear proliferates, especially in cases in which strict civilian control of the military cannot be assured. Notwithstanding what is said of the General, there are many questions about his precise role in the escalation of the crisis. There is evidence to suggest that he was not as adventurous as some believe (Joshi, 1988). A journalist who is close to General Sunderji argues that while the General was "raring to have a go at Pakistan" in the garb of the Brasstacks crisis, it is unfair to blame him for its development (Dixit, 2002).

It is also important to observe that Prime Minister Gandhi saw no reason to dismiss him. If he had ruptured India's solid tradition of civilian supremacy over the military by deliberately acting to keep Rajeev Gandhi in the dark about the true scope and purpose of Brasstacks or in a way that grievously defied the Prime Minister's intentions, then it is curious why Prime Minister Gandhi allowed him to continue playing a leading role in strategic policymaking. Not only were the Checkerboard exercises (which, however provocative, quite likely suited Gandhi's anti-Chinese mood at the time) allowed to proceed but General Sunderji also directed India's military intervention into Sri-Lanka's civil war. Likewise, the argument that Sunderji consciously invented the crisis implies a high degree of connivance within the top leadership of the Indian armed forces. However, as one study makes it clear that the hawkish view that Pakistan needed to be cut down to size through war was not universally shared in the armed forces. Perhaps this is

what is implied when the author of the above mentioned study writes, “the suspicion that India had larger objectives in conducting Exercise Brasstacks needs to be seen against this backdrop of conflicting beliefs (Bajpai, 1995).”

Pakistan’s Decision-Making: A Mix of Diplomacy and Counter Military Moves

In 1986-87, without informing the Pakistan Army High Command, India concentrated its forces along Pakistan’s Eastern border, particularly in the Rajasthan sector. Live ammunition had been issued to the troops. India had given its forces a capability to overrun the Southern sector of Pakistan causing strategic dislocation and isolation of the Sindh province from the rest of Pakistan. Pakistan had two possible options:

1. To aggressively utilize diplomatic channels,
2. To resort to counter military moves.

Now as far as the first option was concerned there was no direct bilateral communication between Pakistan and India for a crucial 45 days. At the same time, for diplomacy to be successful, the attitude of the US government was of crucial importance (Kux, 1999). In this regard, it is worthwhile to quote the observation of a foreign writer. According to him, during the crisis triggered by the massive Indian military exercise Brasstacks, the US government reacted in a low-key manner (Mughal, 2005). The Government of Pakistan arranged a special briefing for the ambassadors and military attaches of all friendly countries about the Indian movements and likely threat emanating from the Indian maneuvers close to Pakistan’s border (Mughal, 2005).

Under the above mentioned circumstances, Pakistan’s decision-makers were forced to initiate counter military moves to deal with the Indian threat. The speed and superiority of these counter moves had left the Indians completely stunned. While assembling all their strike formations down south on the Pakistan-India international border, the Indian high command had left strategic imbalance in the north which Pakistan exploited by locating its strike formations across Marala Ravi Link (MRL) canal. Consequently, Pakistani forces were well poised for dealing a devastating blow to India by cutting off Kashmir in the vulnerable and un-balanced northern sector if the need arose. As discussed by Major General Rahat Latif, India was so rattled by this superior strategic move by Pakistan that it had to call off the exercise (Shami, 205).

The strategic army reserves play a vital role in evolving the defense policies of countries and in their implementation at the decisive time and place. These are the trump cards in the hands of army chiefs to be used sparingly but decisively to achieve results of strategic dimensions. They are too precious an asset to be used in a fixed defensive mode. To commit them in this form is to deny oneself the inherent advantage of their immense power and potential. It is always time

consuming and expensive to move strategic reserves, for reasons of convenience and military necessity the army reserves of Pakistan were kept in close vicinity of their training areas. Had their exercise areas been located at distant places, it would have been naïve to think of moving them back to their permanent locations in a short span of time, especially when the entire Indian army was threateningly poised on Pakistan's borders. The initial deployment of the strategic reserves is as important as their subsequent employment in combat. It must radiate appropriate signals to all concerned to make their presence felt.

India claims that it detected the location of the Pakistani strategic reserves in the middle of January 1987, a full two weeks after their arrival at the assigned locations. This inordinate delay in identification is intriguing and inexplicable because India possessed safe high altitude photo cover capability (Mig 25-Rs) which flew beyond the high altitude reach of the Pakistani fighter aircraft. Much after the event, characterizing the outcome of the Pakistani move Rikhye wrote, 'In other words, instead of Pakistan getting coerced, India got coerced ...' and 'This simple (Pakistan Army) move so panicked the Indians that we immediately decreed general mobilization and simultaneously agreed to begin disengagement with Pakistan (Bajpai, 1995). General Sunderji's staff had reportedly rushed to the Indian Air Force, the Indian railways and the road transport authorities to help the army re-deploy its units quickly to plug the vulnerability that had suddenly appeared across the Indian northern Punjab. It was reported that General Sunderji had been rebuked by Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi for his failure to accurately anticipate Pakistan's reaction. Pakistan's Chief of Air Staff (CAS) at the time observes that:

"The timely recognition by the Army Chief that while the intimidation motive of Brasstacks was primarily political, its power to coerce derived entirely from the threatening deployment of the Indian Army close to Pakistan's border. Owing to the on-going Afghan war, the potential power of India's Soviet ally already stood counterbalanced by the American support for Pakistan. In this situation, it was not possible for Pakistan to generate, through diplomacy alone, additional dissuasive power to deter India. The Pakistan Army needed, therefore, to neutralize the Indian threat, essentially through an effective military counter-move. Since a force-against-force deployment would have seriously risked escalating the crisis, an exploitation of the Indian Army's vulnerability in Punjab was chosen for creating the defensive deterrent

effort. The unadvertised placement of the Pakistan Army's armor posed an unsolvable time-space problem for General Sunderji that compelled him to seek an early retrieval of the situation. The Pakistani General Headquarters' (GHQ's) operational staff was able to correctly assess the gravity of the threat as well as to offer a telling response which cannot but be attributed to the imaginative leadership of the Army Chief, General Arif (Arif, 1987)."

The Defense Committee of the Cabinet (DCC)

An emergency meeting of the Defense Committee of the Cabinet (DCC) was held at the Prime Minister's residence at 2200 hours on January 23, 1987. Besides others attending the meeting, the military commanders present included the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) General Rahim-ud-Din Khan, the Chief of Air Staff (CAS) Air Chief Marshal Jamal A. Khan, the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Iftikhar A. Sirohey, and General Arif representing the Pakistan Army. Foreign Secretary Mr. Abdul Sattar read out the two telegrams received from Ambassador Humayun Khan and explained details of the diplomatic initiatives taken during the day. He supported Humayun's view that a personal contact between the opposing army commanders could be useful in restoring peace and tranquility.

Director General Inter Services Intelligence Directorate (ISID) General Akhtar Abdur Rehman beamed with confidence because the ISID had accurately forecast Indian moves and its intelligence assessment was proving correct. With a visible touch of professional pride, he argued that India had deliberately created panic to cover up its own faults. A general discussion ensued. The participants expressed the view that India had deliberately politicized the military situation; they had over-reacted in an unprofessional and arrogant manner. It was proposed that Pakistan's response should reflect dignity with firmness. Prime Minister Junejo asked General Arif about Humayun Khan's suggestion to speak to the Indian Army Chief on the military hot-line. General Arif replied, that he was prepared to talk to General Sunderji if the Prime Minister so desires, adding, that given a choice he did not support this proposal because it would be taken by India as a sign of weakness. Instead, he proposed that the Pakistani DGMO might speak to his counterpart in the Indian Army as per normal practice in the past. The hot-line could and should be used for this purpose (Agha, 2001).

Prime Minister Mr. M. K Junejo retired to an adjoining room for a few minutes and on return announced that in view of the gravity of the situation he had

invited General Zia-ul-Haq to join the deliberations. General Zia, residing nearby, arrived within minutes and virtually “took over the proceedings (Kux, 2001).” The discussions continued until past midnight, and they reiterated the view that the hot-line be used to establish military contact between the two DGMO’s. A detailed analysis covering the military, diplomatic, political, intelligence, and media aspects was undertaken and a working strategy was evolved. All the concerned agencies were tasked to take immediate steps for implementing the decisions taken in the meeting. The finalized strategic initiatives were:

- a) DGMO Pakistan to speak to DGMO India over the hot-line and inquire about the red alert imposed in the country,
- b) Military vigilance to be maintained by all the three defense services,
- c) ISID to monitor Indian moves to optimal levels,
- d) Press note to be issued about the latest developments proposing bilateral discussions between Pakistan and India. The major inputs for the text were identified, however its drafting was left for the Foreign Office,
- e) Pakistan’s High Commissioner in India to be suitably briefed,
- f) All friendly countries to be kept informed.
- g) Pakistan’s measured response starkly contrasted from the angry alarm bells rung from across the border. A tit for tat approach might have prompted the decision-makers in Islamabad to declare a state of emergency and order the military to take appropriate counter measures. This was avoided and despite provocations, Pakistan adopted a cool and mature approach to ease tension. It was statesmanship in its pristine form. Here it is noticeable that Pakistan’s decision resembled much with the Hostile Interaction Model. According to this model, those involved in a crisis have the potential to effectively interrupt hostility directed towards them and hence are capable of giving a suitable response. Pakistan could have adopted a tit for tat approach but despite provocations, it avoided exercising the military option and reexamined the crisis situation and the consequences of hostile interaction between both countries. This became possible because perceptions of decision-makers were clear about the aggressor’s moves, and their potential.

Exercise Brasstacks had been effectively handled in Pakistan from all politico-military and diplomatic angles. This effort paid dividends, as Pakistan not only seized the initiative from India but also made them react to Pakistan’s advantage at critical moments. The decision-making institutions and mechanism worked like a well-oiled machine under the Zia-Junejo leadership and the inter-services effort at the professional level achieved notable success.

Another important dimension of the decision-making in Pakistan during the Brasstacks crisis was pointed out by Lieut. General (Retired) Hameed Gull, who was one of the Corps Commanders at the time. In his view (expressed in a personnel interview), Islamabad had totally misinterpreted Brasstacks. He explained that had India meant to launch a war it would not have left the strategic points to its north vulnerable. While another Pakistani defense analyst explains

that Pakistan moved a division to the area in Punjab opposite the Fazilka-Akhnoor and Gurdaspur-Pathankot Sector. This move unnerved New Delhi and the exercise was called off. She further discussed that the Indian military exercise exposed Pakistan's strategic weaknesses and India's military strength, especially the force it could muster. The nuclear deterrence factor, which was a joint Zia-Arif strategy, was indeed important and was used during the exercise to offset the Pakistan military's weak conventional capabilities during Brasstacks.

This view is endorsed by Pakistan's former ambassador to India, Dr. Humayun Khan, in his book while expressing his own view. Military and Intelligence circles claim that, "The tactically bold military step of moving our forces to the Punjab border gave the Indians cold feet and they were forced to abandon the true objective of Exercise Brasstacks." However, I find it difficult to accept this thesis.

Conventional Capabilities of Pakistan and India

Before assessing the importance of Pakistan's nuclear capability in the backdrop of the Brasstacks Crisis of 1986-87, it is pertinent to point out the conventional disparity between the two countries. This can be gauged from the defense expenditures of the two countries and their military imports as a percentage of their total imports.

Table 3.4 Military Expenditures, Pakistan and India, as Percentage of Annual GNP, 1977-87.

Years	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Pakistan	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.4	5.5	5.8	6.9	6.5	6.8	6.7	6.5
India	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.5	3.6	3.9

Source: Arms Control & Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1988 (Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, June 1989), pp. 46,

Figure 3.6 Pakistan and India's Military Expenditures as Percentage of Annual GNP 1977-87

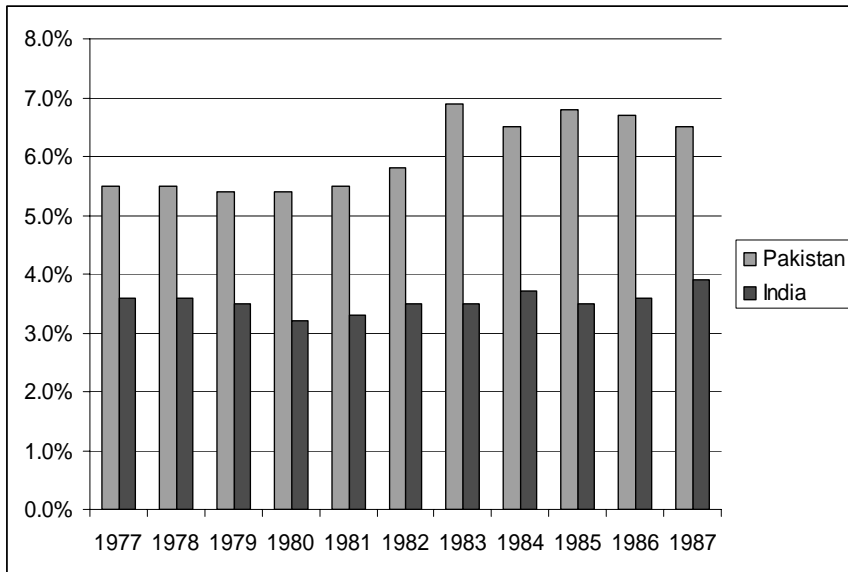


Table 3.5 Arms Imports, India and Pakistan, In Value and as a Percentage of Total Imports, 1977-87 (in millions of current US\$)

Years	1977	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87
Pakistan											
Value in \$	230	210	240	420	300	480	370	575	470	370	150
%-age	9.4	6.4	5.9	7.9	5.3	8.8	6.9	9.8	8.0	6.9	2.6
India											
Value in \$	950	360	600	825	1100	1700	1300	1100	2300	3000	3200
%-age	14.3	4.6	6.1	5.6	7.1	11.5	9.5	7.7	14.3	19.5	19.1

Source: Arms Control & Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1988 (Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, June 1989) pp. 88, 98.

Nuclear Dimension of Brasstacks Crisis

Pakistani Capability

Two different opinions were there about the nuclear dimension of this crisis. Both Pakistan and India possessed nuclear weapon capabilities of some sort. "It is clear that the crisis accelerated the nuclear programs of both states." Pakistan's uranium enrichment project chief, Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan stated in an interview with Kuldip Nayar (a prominent Indian journalist accompanied by Dr. Khan's friend Mr. Mushahid Hussain, a well-known Pakistani journalist) that Pakistan has developed a nuclear bomb and further adding "Pakistan will not use (a nuclear weapon), but if it driven to the wall, there will be no option left in that eventuality. Nobody can undo Pakistan to take us for granted. We are here to stay and let it be clear that we shall use the bomb if our existence is threatened (Hussain, 1987)." Mushahid Hussain was of the opinion that the nuclear factor played a critical role in the resolution of the Brasstacks crisis (Hussain, 1987). U.S Intelligence reports also claimed that Pakistan had the capability to produce weapons-grade uranium and could assemble a nuclear bomb on a relatively short notice (Hagerty, 2005). Indian Intelligence authorities were also reporting about Pakistan's success in enriching uranium to military usable levels and being in possession of a nuclear bomb. Information disclosed in Nayar's meeting with Dr. Khan still remains vague as the circumstances surrounding it are blurred. The nuclear environment created did act as the prime factor in the de-escalation of the crisis. Even the US Intelligence believed Pakistan to have produced weapons grade uranium and confirmed its ability to create a nuclear bomb in a short period, as early as 1986 (India Today, 1986).

Role of US in the crisis

During the crisis US role remained debatable. At the initial stage US did not show any concern about the crisis because they were also busy in watching the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Congress played a marginal role in the crisis. At the later stages American President Regan called Pakistani and Indian leadership to cool down. Americans could not have ignored Pakistan because of the strategic role in the region. They needed Pakistan to counter Soviet Union.

Effects on Crisis Outcome

If it is plausible to surmise that policymakers in New Delhi were aware that the Brasstacks crisis had at least an implicit nuclear dimension, then how much weight should it be accorded for the peaceful outcome of the crisis? On balance, it seems reasonable to believe that this factor did not loom large in the Indian decision-

making caucus. The available evidence indicates that misperception, rather than the dissuasion of adventurous behavior, was the essential dynamic running throughout the crisis. New Delhi's abrupt decisions, first heightening the crisis by rushing troops to the Punjab border and then a reversal, agreeing to de-escalation talks – seems less a product of Pakistani deterrence and more a function of third-party reassurances about Islamabad's intentions and Rajeev Gandhi's cooler judgment.

Many analysts emphasize that this crisis heralded the surfacing of a regime of "non-weaponized" deterrence which operated in South Asia from the late 1980s, to the early 1990s. This system was believed to be working because it had not only helped in averting the outbreak of a war but also because Pakistan had successfully sought to harvest the presumed benefits of such a regime. This was acknowledged when in late 1989, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) asserted that his country's nuclear program was already acting "as a deterrent to the enemy (Bajpai, 1995)".

Moreover, the Brasstacks confrontation contributed to the incorporation of nuclear calculations in regional crisis behavior. This dimension is later believed to have contributed towards setting the milieu of the Kashmir crisis of 1990. The crisis, and perhaps the apparent success of its deterrent value, had undoubtedly confirmed to the Pakistani decision-makers the importance of nuclear weapons as a balance to Indian's conventional military superiority. Finally, coming in the backdrop of rumors about India's interest in destroying Pakistan's nuclear facilities, this crisis had further strengthened American apprehensions over South Asian war-proneness and the possibilities of an Indo-Pakistani nuclear conflict. This fear was evident three years later in American actions during the 1990 crisis erupting in Kashmir.

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