WHAT IF? ANALYSIS OF MILITARY DECISIONS

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Looking backward, reflecting on the past, in retrospect, or in hindsight are some phrases which, when applied to military decisions that were taken or not taken, throw light on the impact that these decisions would have had on the history of the world. As applied to the air forces of India and Pakistan, these become even more significant and hold several lessons. But, unfortunately, most of these have never been discussed. This piece is about some such decisions – and, if alternatives had been selected – how these could have changed the course of history. These decisions not only pertain to those taken in relation to various conflicts that the country has been involved in but also some that were taken in peace-time and which have had a major impact on the Service.

While the Royal Flying Corps was established in the UK in 1912, the "Indian Flying Corps" was established in India in 1914. Its officers, as in the rest of the Indian Army, were British. Most of the technicians or "airmen" were drawn from the Indian Army. The corps saw action in Egypt where it performed valuable service in reconnaissance connected with the Turkish attack on the Suez Canal. After the failure of the attack, the unit was relieved by a squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, and its personnel were released for service in Mesopotamia (present day Iraq). The unit, along with other British and Australian units, provided excellent support. However, the

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It is a little-known fact that the decision to seize J&K by hook or by crook had been taken by the Pakistani politicians and their supporters in the armed forces as early as in July 1947. This is evident from the fact that Col Akbar Khan, who was in Army Headquarters in India, took away all the maps of J&K from Army (HQ), leaving none for the Indians.

composite force suffered the loss of a great part of its stores, and some of its personnel, in the retreat to Kut and in the siege. By the middle of 1915, many more squadrons were inducted and the process of reorganisation saw the demise of the Indian Flying Corps as a separate body.[1]

What would have been the course of history had the Indian Flying Corps not been disbanded? It is more or less certain, that the Indian Air Force would have been established along with the Royal Flying Corps in 1918 instead of waiting for its rebirth in 1932.

"A" Flight of No.1 Squadron was formed on April 1, 1933. The flight lost three of its five Indian pilots within the first year of its formation: Pilot Officers Amarjit Singh and Bhupinder Singh were killed in an accident while Pilot Officer Sircar was cashiered following another accident. Immediately thereafter, in mid 1934, an offer was made to then Pilot Officers Mukerjee and Awan to give up the air force and instead become assistant commissioners as part of the Indian Civil Service. This offer was promptly rejected.[2] What if Awan and Mukerjee had accepted the offer? If it is assumed that similar offers would have been made to other officers who had by that time joined 1 Squadron, it is more than certain that it would have been perhaps the end of the Indian Air Force (IAF) and it would have taken many more years before it was revived again.

After independence, the first challenge that the Indian Air Force faced was in October 1947 when Pakistan invaded the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Lord Mountbatten had announced the decision on the partition of India on June 3, 1947. The Armed Forces Reconstitution Committee was

1. *The Army in India and its Evolution* (New Delhi:Anmol Publication), p. 175.
2. Wg Cdr AB Awan, *The Winged Wagon* (Self-Published, 1965), pp. 109-110

constituted on June 23, 1947, and its various sub-committees commenced work on the division of the assets of the armed forces between the two new dominions almost immediately. It is a little-known fact that the decision to seize J&K by hook or by crook had been taken by the Pakistani politicians and their supporters in the armed forces as early as in July 1947. This is evident from the fact that Col Akbar Khan who was in Army Headquarters in India and later took over as director, weapons and equipment at the Pakistan Army Headquarters and who was given the responsibility of planning and executing the plan to capture the state, took away all the maps of J&K from Army (HQ), leaving none for the Indians. Wg Cdr Mohammad Khan Janjua, the senior-most Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) officer to opt for Pakistan Air Force (PAF), also talks of the transfer of 4,000 rifles to the tribals well before the partition.

In hindsight, Pakistan made a big blunder by launching the invasion on October 22. If it had delayed its invasion by two or three weeks when the snow would have covered the Banihal Pass, the runway at Srinagar would also have been covered by snow, making it unfit for any air operation.

Pakistan, in its wisdom, launched the attack on October 22, 1947. There is firm evidence of at least one PAF aircraft's involvement in a reconnaissance mission on October 4, 1947. Kashmir was saved by the massive airlift of the Indian Army into Srinagar on October 27, 1947. In hindsight, Pakistan made a big blunder by launching the invasion on October 22. If it had delayed its invasion by two or three weeks when the snow would have covered the Banihal Pass, the runway at Srinagar would also have been covered by snow making it unfit for any air operation. In these circumstances, the story would have been altogether different. Imagine the situation if the Indian Air Force Dakotas that went onto save Kashmir had not been able to land in Srinagar: the ground induction of troops and stores through the Banihal Pass would have been extremely slow and difficult. It is extremely doubtful if the J&K state forces would have been able to meet the challenges posed by the invaders. The raiders would have, thus, been able to consolidate

their position in the Valley, making its liberation a nearly impossible task for the Indian forces and the course of history would have been altogether different.

The siege of Skardu and its consequent fall is a black mark on the history of the Indian armed forces. Gilgit had been gifted to Pakistan on November 3, 1947, by the treachery of Maj Brown. On November 21, 1947, Lt Col (later Brig) Sher Jung Thapa was asked to move to Skardu from Leh and defend Skardu. His task was not easy as he had just 40 Sikh and 31 Muslim troops and hundreds of refugees. His force was somewhat augmented by the arrival of reinforcements from Kargil in February 1948 when the combatant strength grew to around 285. He had over 600 hostiles facing him and only limited amounts of rations, water and ammunition.

The Indian Army's two attempts to relieve and reinforce the force at Skardu had come to naught as the tribals located at vantage points were able to ambush and interdict the incoming force. The army soon realised that the air force was perhaps the only answer to save the garrison and thwart the immediate danger posed to it by the hostiles. Rightly, a request was made to No. 1 (Opl) Group to strike in the areas in the vicinity of Skardu any time between February 24 to 27, 1948. The Skardu fort in which Thapa and his force, along with the refugees, were located had not been fully besieged by this time. A major engagement between the defenders and the raiders took place on February 24, but the defenders were able to hold back the raiders. There is no doubt that any air action by the IAF at this juncture would naturally have relieved some pressure on the besieged garrison and demoralised the hostiles around Skardu. It is also quite likely that the latest reinforcing column would have been able to make its way to Skardu during this period when the hostiles would have been worried about air attacks. Unfortunately, the army's request was not agreed to by Headquarters No. 1 (Op1) Group. It cited two reasons for turning it down. Firstly, it was felt that a strike by a single-engine aircraft over a distance of 200 miles and flying at 20,000 ft over extremely hostile terrain was too risky – the ideal machine under the circumstances was a twin-engine aircraft which the RIAF did not have in its inventory. The second justification (though not

very plausible) for turning down the request was the likelihood of damage to the aircraft's oxygen system if the aircraft was flown for a prolonged period at these heights! These arguments were endorsed by the Chief of the Air Staff, and Air Marshal Commanding Royal Indian Air Force, Air Mshl Elmhirst. He also felt that after flying nearly 200 miles over the mountains with their tops at 17,000 ft or higher, the Tempest aircraft, fitted with long range tanks would be able to fire just two rockets and such a strike would hardly serve to check enemy pressure on the beleaguered garrison. He opined that such doubtful gains did not make it worthwhile to risk losing valuable aircraft and aircrew, and the risk of losses under these conditions was rather high.

The army took up the matter with Defence Minister Sardar Baldev Singh, who, after discussing the matter with Air HQ, turned down the army's plea. It was also appreciated by Air HQ that the diversion of the Dakotas for delivery of stores to Skardu would affect the air supply of Poonch, which was not desirable. There was also the risk of the Dakotas being shot down by the tribals who were positioned well above the height at which the Dakotas would have flown for the supply drop.

The situation in Skardu deteriorated in the next few days. The food and water stocks were running out. In May 1948, Thapa was cleared to withdraw but did not do so as there was no way the refugees could be saved. He requested for air support in April and again in May to alleviate his problems but the General Office Commanding (GOC), Maj Gen Thimayya, informed him that it was not possible for the Dakotas to fly over 4,570 m and that attempts were on to modify them to give them the requisite capability.

Prime Minister Nehru, as early as in January 1948, had written to the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) Army, Gen Bucher that he should be kept informed about developments in Skardu from time to time. Nehru considered it to be important because "Skardu holds the pass to a large portion of Kashmir and should be held in sufficient strength." The army either ignored the prime minister's directive or failed to realise the seriousness of the situation. Skardu was vital and was the key not only to the defence of Kargil and Dras but could also have been the stepping stone for the recapture of Gilgit. Apparently,

the army brass did not bring these facts to the knowledge of their RIAF counterparts till June 18, 1948. It was only on that day that the two Cs-in-C met and the army chief confirmed that Skardu was not a "side show" (as was the perception of most of the commanders) and the situation was grim and needed to be saved. The army chief also confirmed that he was willing to forego some of the air effort earmarked for the Valley. The Chief of Air Staff (CAS) then directed that two Tempest aircraft be detailed to attack the besieging hostiles with guns and reconnaissance be carried out to confirm if a Dakota could drop arms and ammunition with at least 50 percent of the load falling into the Dropping Zone (DZ). The first such mission, with two Tempest aircraft, on June 19, was a resounding success and was followed by another one the next day. The pilots on these missions were flying without oxygen – the exact reason for doing so is not known. Supplies were urgently required but with the hostiles occupying all the vantage points at heights, the risks for any Dakota were too high. The RIAF innovated, and utilised the Tempests, with canisters hanging from their bomb racks to drop supplies on June 28 and July 1. Of course, these canisters had very limited capacity and each Tempest could carry just two of them. Some of the supplies landed outside the very small-sized DZ (Skardu fort with the besieged garrison served the purpose of DZ as well) and the defenders had to fight their way to retrieve the supplies falling outside the fort and, in the process, suffered casualties. Thereafter, such supply as well as strike missions were repeated whenever weather permitted – the good weather days were rather limited during that time of the year and these forays had to be restricted to the morning period due to cloud build-up later in the day. Unfortunately, even on the days when such missions were possible, only two aircraft were committed. These supplies were never going to be enough and provided only temporary relief and some hope for the future. The garrison finally ran out of supplies and tried to break out on August 14, 1948, but the hostiles captured all of them. Except for Thapa and his batman who had served directly under Gen Gracey, the Pakistan Army's C-in-C earlier, all the males were killed. The Pakistani commander in his message to Pakistan Army Headquarters signalled: "All Sikhs shot, all women raped"—evidence of how sadistic the hostiles were.

COULD THINGS HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT?

The RIAF had first ventured into the Skardu region as early as on January 26, 1948, but the mission had to be aborted as one of the two Tempests developed oxygen problems. The next mission could be executed only on February 9, 1948, because of bad weather during the intervening period. The target assigned was not Skardu but Rondu village which is slightly west of Skardu. But this attack had nothing to do with the situation at Skardu fort.

If the vital importance of Skardu had been conveyed to Air Cmde Mehar Singh and Air Vice Marshal (AVM) Mukherjee, one can assume that air support would have been provided right from November 1947 onwards. Secondly, the RIAF could have sent more than one mission per day whenever weather permitted, thus, providing badly needed supplies to the beleaguered garrison. Though only one of the three earmarked squadrons was deployed in J&K and committed for operational tasks at any one time, it is quite likely that Air HQ would have deployed some additional aircraft for supporting Skardu if only the RIAF had been briefed about its strategic importance.

ACQUISITION OF B-25 MITCHELL BOMBER

The need for a bomber aircraft was acutely felt right in the early stages of the war in Kashmir. India had only Spitfire and Tempest aircraft in its inventory and both these aircraft had limited weapon carrying capabilities. Col BM Kaul, India's defence attaché to Washington was specially directed by the prime minister to approach the United States government with a request for the sale of B-25 Mitchel bombers. India wanted to place an initial order for 12 B-25 for delivery by May 1948 and for an additional 31 aircraft for subsequent delivery.[3] The request was turned down due to the US embargo on arms sales to India and Pakistan. The United States suggested that India approach the UK for its needs. The British offer to sell the obsolete Blenheim

3. MS Venkataramani, "An Elusive Military Relationship" *Frontline,* April 9, 1999; and Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Chief of Division of South Asian Affairs (Mathews) dated April 2, 1948, File 711.45/248, United States Department of State/Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948. The Near East, South Asia, and Africa (1948), Part 1, pp. 505-508

The decision not to use the IAF's combat aircraft emanated from faulty analysis of the Chinese air threat which presumed that India would bear the full brunt of the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and the IAF would be unable to defend cities like Delhi and Calcutta from the Chinese air attacks. It was also feared that such attacks would lead to the wholesale exodus of population a la 1942 Japanese bombing.

bomber aircraft of World War II vintage was not acceptable to India. India had no choice but to utilise whatever aircraft the RIAF had in its inventory.

If this purchase had fructified, it would have had two implications. Firstly, the use of air power would have been far more vigorous and, in all probability, it would have changed the course of the war. Secondly, the Indians' ingenuity would not have come to the fore to meet urgent requirements and they would have not embarked on resurrecting the B-24 Liberators from their graves in Kanpur. Fifty of these were made serviceable and inducted into service and went on to serve the country for nearly two decades—the last of these aircraft was retired in 1968. Non-availability of bombers also led to a unique Indian innovation when the Dakota aircraft was converted into a bomber aircraft and utilised effectively in demoralising the hostiles and putting the fear of God in their minds.

NON-USE OF AIR POWER IN SINO-INDIAN WAR OF 1962

While the transport and helicopter force of the Indian Air Force did yeoman and commendable service prior to, and during, the Sino-Indian War of 1962, its combat elements were not permitted to see action. Why was this so has been shrouded in mystery though this author has dealt with the subject in detail in his book *Unknown and Unsung: Indian Air Force in Sino-Indian War of 1962*. It is generally believed that Prime Minister Nehru was influenced by a letter from Dr. BC Roy, chief minister of West Bengal on the threat of the Chinese bombing Calcutta if the Indians opted for use of air power against the Chinese. This does not seem to be correct as Dr. Roy passed away in July 1962 well before the emergence of the

Chinese threat. The decision not to use the IAF's combat aircraft emanated from faulty analysis of the Chinese air threat which presumed that India would bear the full brunt of the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and the IAF would be unable to defend cities like Delhi and Calcutta from the Chinese air attacks. It was also feared that such attacks would lead to the wholesale exodus of population a la 1942 Japanese bombing, resulting in very high casualties – not due to the air attacks but due to stampedes during the panic evacuation by the population of the city of Calcutta and, to a lesser extent, of Madras. What is also not commonly known is that Air Mshl AM Engineer, CAS, had proposed bombing of the Chinese targets in the Ladakh region in August 1962. At this meeting, BN Mullik, head of the Intelligence Bureau, gave out his highly exaggerated assessment of the capabilities of the PLAAF and Defence Minister Krishna Menon ruled against the use of air power. It has also been stated that the then Wg Cdr HC Dewan had written a note indicating a similar assessment and recommending that the IAF should not be used against the Chinese. However, the authenticity of such a note is doubtful as nobody seems to have seen it. If this was the view of Air HQ, then why was the combat fleet redeployed for possible action against the Chinese in both the eastern and western sectors?

The Indian intelligence authorities failed to take into consideration the high altitude of the airfields in Tibet as also the limited length of the runways and lack of infrastructure which would have greatly restricted the Chinese capabilities even if they had deployed all their resources against India.

What was the prevalent situation on the ground in October 1962? The declassified Chinese records show that not even a single aircraft of the PLAAF was deployed at airfields in Tibet; there were just three anti-aircraft regiments deployed against India covering both the eastern and western sectors. The Indian intelligence authorities failed to take into consideration the high altitude of the airfields in Tibet as also the limited length of the runways and lack of infrastructure which would have greatly restricted the Chinese capabilities even if they had deployed all their resources against

India. The American assessment of the Chinese capabilities was that one of the biggest problem that the Chinese would have faced was the supply of aviation fuel and even if the Chinese had deployed all their aerial transport resources for the provision of fuel for the air operations, the Chinese air effort would have been miniscule as compared to the assessed threats by the Indian intelligence.

Photographs taken by the Indian helicopter and transport pilots in the eastern sector indicated that one Chinese division in that sector was spread out in the open over a wide area and was extremely vulnerable to any air attack. While it would have not been possible to provide "intimate close air support" to our troops at Namka Chu Valley due to the terrain constraints, interdiction against the Chinese divisional assets not far from there would have ensured the slowing down of the Chinese build-up, if not altogether halted it. The Indian Air Force had been redeployed and was ready for strikes in both the Ladakh and North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) sectors and would have had a free run. There is no doubt that the course of the war and that of Indian history would have been totally different, and India would have not suffered the humiliating defeat it did had the combat aircraft of the IAF gone into action against the Chinese.[4]

THE TRAGEDY OF HF-24

Though Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) performed a remarkable feat when India's first indigenous fighter aircraft – the HF-24 Marut – made its maiden flight on June 17, 1961, in less than five years from the time the project was conceived, and just 15 months from putting together the prototype to its first flight, the aircraft failed to achieve its full potential mainly due to lack of an appropriate engine for the aircraft. All aircraft designers base their airframe design around a known and, if possible, proven engine and Dr. Kurt Tank, the designer of the HF-24 was no exception. He had planned to have the 3,700 kg afterburning Orpheus B.Or 12 (Bristol Orpheus) engine – normally referred to as Orpheus 12—which was under development for

4. Air Mshl Bharat Kumar, *Unknown and Unsung: Indian Air Force in Sino-Indian War of 1962* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2013).

the Royal Air Force. The development of the engine came to a halt after the British government decided not to fund the same as it did not need it. Bristol Orpheus wanted three million pounds—not a large sum even by the standards of 1961—for its development which the Government of India did not agree to. It was a short-sighted and wrong decision. India also failed to procure alternative engines like the RB-153, SNECMA Atar 09K-53, Super Atar M-53 and, finally, the RB-199—then available in the world market. It did evaluate the Soviet Tumansky RD-9F that had a thrust of 3,750 kg but rejected it for technical reasons. In the meanwhile, HAL adopted the non-afterburning 2,200 kg Orpheus 703 which powered the Gnat as an interim solution. These engines which were well short of requirements to meet the needs of the aircraft, continued with the aircraft throughout its short service life of mere a 15 years. Much later, a Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE) designed reheat version of the Orpheus 703 engine was tried out but the same was given up after the accident in which HAL's legendary Chief Test Pilot Gp Capt Suranjan Das was killed. India joined up with Egypt and tried to develop the E-300 engine – it was a case of the blind leading the blind, and the effort was soon abandoned.

This was not the end of the story. In August 1961, Pakistan acquired the F-104 from the United States. India did not have anything to counter it. The United States refused to sell the F-104s to India, the British Lightning did not meet the Indian requirements and the French Mirage III was just too costly. India had no choice but to opt for the Soviet MiG-21s which were required to be paid for in Indian currency and could also be manufactured in India. The induction of the Soviet aircraft into the Indian inventory alarmed the USA. President Kennedy wrote to Prime Minister Nehru, offering to subsidise the cost of the UK's Lightning aircraft and the development of the Orpheus engine to the extent of around 75 percent of the cost. The US Congress tried to pressurise India by its threat to cut aid to India. These efforts failed as the West could not provide an acceptable alternative and India wanted only the F-104s. The Indian search for a suitable aircraft continued after the 1962 Sino-Indian War. The United States once again offered to help India develop the HF-24 as a supersonic combat aircraft provided India gave up its plan

to manufacture the MiG-21s and freeze its inventory of these aircraft to just one or two squadrons worth of aircraft. India finally accepted the American offer of help in the development of the HF-24 Mk II in January 1965, but subsequent events in April (Kutch) and the Indo-Pak War of 1965 ensured the end of negotiations on the American aid to the Indian armed forces.

Looking back, if India had accepted the Bristol Orpheus demand of 3 million pounds and had got the Orpheus 12 for its Marut fleet, the story of the Indian aircraft industry would have been altogether different. India could not afford two aircraft manufacturing lines simultaneously. It meant that India had to opt for either a MiG-21 or an HF-24 line. Obviously, it would have been a Mach 2 HF-24 line. These aircraft could have then been produced in large numbers and would have been the mainstay of the Indian Air Force much like the MiG-21 of which nearly 900 were procured by India in various variants. The HF-24 would have been upgraded from time to time to keep up with the latest technologies. This success would have enabled the designers and manufacturers to design and develop its successor aircraft. India would have then become self-sufficient for its need for combat aircraft or at least would have minimal need for the import of additional aircraft.

The story of not selecting an appropriate engine was to be repeated when the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) project was taken up. The Kaveri engine had been under development for some time though there were doubts if the GTRE would be able to overcome the various problems that it was facing. It was, thus, incorrect to design the LCA around this engine, thus, delaying the project inordinately and having the same problem of poor thrust-weight ratio as the HF-24 aircraft. It is imperative that any future aircraft design is around a proven engine with more than sufficient thrust and catering for weight over-run which is more or less a certainty in any aircraft design and development.

RESTRICTION DURING INDIA-PAKISTAN WAR OF 1965

The likelihood of a full-scale war between India and Pakistan emerged in April-May 1965 when Pakistan launched an offensive in Kutch. Indian policy-makers had not learnt their lessons from the non-use of air power

during the Sino-Indian War of 1962, and the fear of aerial attacks against Indian cities still loomed in their minds. Despite the best efforts by then CAS, Air Mshl Arjan Singh, the government directed that the IAF would not launch attacks against Pakistani air bases until the PAF took the initiative. Secondly, the IAF was prohibited from attacking Peshawar, the PAF's citadel, unless specific clearance was given by the government. Indian Air Force aircraft, thus, provided close air support to the army in Chhamb-Juarain sector from September 1, 1965, onwards and carried out airborne patrols trying to entice the PAF into aerial combat. While the IAF did manage to get the better of the PAF in these skirmishes, it did not take the initiative of attacking PAF airfields and installations. The IAF went into action against Pakistani air bases only on September 7, 1965, and that too after the PAF attacked Indian airfields in the western sector in the evening of September 6 and on the morning of September 7, in the eastern sector. It was during these strikes on September 6, that the debacle at Pathankot occurred where as many as seven aircraft were lost. At Halwara, both sides lost two aircraft each.

Imagine the scenario if the PAF had also launched its operations against Indian airfields on September 1, simultaneously along with its army thrust in Chhamb sector. That morning, at Pathankot, besides the Mysteres of 3 and 31 Squadrons, which were mostly in open blast pens, there were 11 Vampires of 45 and 220 Squadrons parked in one line on one of the tarmacs – the twelfth aircraft of the units fetched up that afternoon. There were no additional blast pens to accommodate these Vampires. Besides the Vampires, there were C-119 Packets of 48 Squadron operating from Pathankot, and parked in the open; they flew out of Pathankot that afternoon just before the first formation of four Vampires got airborne. Since the war had not started, there was no standing combat air patrol over Pathankot. In the absence of mobile observer posts and low level radars, Pathankot was devoid of any warning of approach of enemy aircraft flying at low level. There is no doubt that if the Pakistan Air Force had attacked on that day, it would have been able to knock out almost all the Vampires and Packets that were at Pathankot airfield besides any Mysteres that may have been

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on the ground and in the open. Such an event would have stunned not only the IAF but the entire country. The catastrophic event did not take place as Pakistan believed that it would be able to restrict the operations to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and any air attacks outside the state would result in an all-out war which it wanted to avoid at all costs.

Let us see the second scenario. India opened a second front in Punjab with its forces advancing in three parallel thrusts. Initially, the most successful of these was the one across the Amritsar-Lahore sector where the Indian forces managed to reach Icchogal Canal but were beaten back mainly due to air attacks by the Pakistani Sabres. If the Indian Air Force had launched attacks on Pakistani air bases simultaneously along with the Indian Army's thrust in the Punjab, it is doubtful that the PAF would have been able to divert any forces for close air support of its army or against the advancing Indian Army columns. Most of its air effort would have been directed towards the air defence of the airfields. In any case, the quantum of force sent to repel the Indian advance would have been much less and the Indian Army would have been able to continue its advance though at a somewhat slower pace.

The Indian response to the Pakistani attacks on Indian airfields on September 6, was to attack almost all the airfields where the PAF could have deployed its aircraft, the exceptions being Peshawar and Kohat. The available intelligence had indicated that the PAF had its maximum assets at Sargodha, Karachi and Peshawar. If the Indian air effort had been directed against these airfields instead of taking on airfields like Pasrur, Chander, etc. the IAF would have been able to neutralise the PAF. With continuous and relentless attacks at Sargodha and the Karachi complex, Pakistani aircraft would have been tied up in air defence but there was a bigger possibility of greater losses on the ground, resulting in the demoralisation of the PAF.

India launched its attack on Peshawar on September 13, 1965. The IAF was unlucky that despite almost the entire fleet of B-57s being on the ground at Peshawar that night, there were many near misses and most of the Pakistani aircraft got away unscathed. The next raid took place on September 15, but with a much reduced force. If the attacks on Peshawar had been launched right in the beginning, the PAF B-57s would have suffered far higher attrition and their sortie generation would have been much lower than the three sorties per aircraft per night that they were able to achieve, thus, easing pressure on the Indian airfields.

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PAF'S STRATEGY IN 1971

Pakistan had always believed that the key to the defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan and this belief led to the formation of its war strategy in 1971. Accordingly, only one combat squadron was left in Dacca and the remaining air force was in West Pakistan. It was also planned to carry out limited counter air operations as part of preemptive strikes and thereafter to preserve the resources to the extent possible. This policy was apparently based on the experiences of 1965 wherein the PAF had been faced with shortage of spares – the same story was to follow during the Kargil War when the PAF had to cut down the combat air patrols flown by its F-16s within a week of commencement of operations as it was running out of spares. It was different that in the 1971 War, the USA was absolutely pro-Pakistan and anti-India, unlike in 1965 when there was an embargo against both India and Pakistan. Jordan's loan of one F-104 Squadron to Pakistan in 1971 was with the tacit approval of the USA.

Pakistan had planned to launch a massive armoured thrust supported by the PAF in the southern sector of Punjab in the hope that the successes in this sector would serve Pakistan well at the negotiating table. The PAF,

in its wisdom, decided to hold back a major portion of its fleet in reserve to support this thrust. Since the reasons for holding back and not committing this portion of the PAF have not emerged in Pakistani writings, one can only speculate about the reason for the same. It could have been the PAF's apprehensions of likely spares shortage or rather high attrition of aircraft in counter air operations as well as support to the Pakistan Army in other sectors. The defection and desertion of the Bengali ground crew also may have had its psychological impact and may have led to this decision. It is also quite likely that the decision was forced by the Pakistan Army brass who did not want to take any chances with their trump card. It is different that this planned *blitzkrieg* did not materialise for reasons that need not be gone into here.

What impact, if any, would the commitment of this element of the PAF in the early stages of the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 have had? As already stated, the PAF did not carry out any counter air missions after December 3. If attacks on the IAF airfields had continued, it would have suffered heavy casualties as the IAF air defence was able to plug the various holes in its air defence network and all the shortcomings of 1965 had, more or less, been overcome. The uncommitted force of the PAF would have been used for air defence and support to the ground forces and, in the process, would have suffered a high rate of attrition. The attrition rate would have been higher if the PAF had embarked on counter air missions against Indian airfields; India would, in all probability, have also retaliated in a similar manner. Of course, the IAF would have needed to step up its air effort for both air defence and ground attack missions. However, it must be remembered that the IAF had planned an aircraft utilisation of 3 sorties per aircraft per day for the entire duration of the war and had sufficient reserves to sustain this effort for the expected duration of the conflict. However, the actual utilisation was 1.1 sorties per aircraft per day or just 1/3rd of the planned effort. Hence, it can be said with certainty that there would have been no major impact if the PAF had committed its entire fleet of combat aircraft against India in the western sector. This is one situation where the "if" question does not bring out any new scenario.

There are many instances in equipment acquisition where the "if" question can be applied. For example, would India have opted for the purchase of Toofani aircraft if the UK had not intentionally slowed down the delivery of the Goblin engines for the Vampire being built in India – this was to enable Pakistan to catch up with India. Another instance was the Indian decision not to manufacture the Mirage-2000 and instead procure the MiG-29. Yet another one was the acquisition of the Westland helicopter after an assurance to the company had been given by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the Parliament. Such instances – and there are many more – have not been discussed here because there were political implications in most of the cases and they were well outside the decision-making by the Service Headquarters.