

# PAKISTAN ARMY

## PERSPECTIVE: 1965 WAR

While the narrative of 1965 as seen through Pakistan's lens is sometimes contentious, the perspectives presented in Pakistani publications serve as a crucial reference point in contemporary debates over Indo-Pak relations and regional security. In the pages of newspapers, military journals, and scholarly analyses, the war is remembered as an enduring lesson in the complexities of modern statecraft. As such, the **1965 war remains a powerful symbol**-one that embodies both the aspirations and the enduring challenges of a nation striving to assert its rightful place on the international stage. This overview of the 1965 War through Pakistan's eyes, draws on published memoirs, official military commentaries, and retrospective analyses by senior officers - highlighting their collective interpretation of the conflict.

### Contextual Backdrop

The Indo-Pak War of 1965 continues to evoke complex emotions and vigorous debate amongst Pakistanis. Apparent in the perspective presented in national publications, the war was neither a clear-cut military victory nor defeat but rather a multifaceted confrontation marked by both heroic defence and missed opportunities. The primary causes of the conflict-the unresolved Kashmir issue, perceptions of Indian aggression, and geopolitical miscalculations following the 1962 war-are inextricably linked to Pakistan's national narrative. Similarly, the twin operations of **Gibraltar** and **Grand Slam** remain subjects of detailed military analysis, representing both the audacity and the inherent risks of Pakistan's strategic approach.

Notable engagements, such as the tank battles near Chawinda and the naval action at Dwarka, have been enshrined in the annals of Pakistan's military history, celebrated for their demonstration of valour in the face of formidable odds. At the same time, the eventual ceasefire and the resultant Tashkent Agreement have prompted a dual legacy: on one hand, the **affirmation of Pakistan's defensive resolve**; on the other, a **persistent sense of frustration** at the failure to decisively settle the Kashmir question.



*Pakistani militiaman in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, standing guard during the 1965 War (credit en.wikipedia.org)*

In the aftermath of the war, the lessons learnt have reverberated through Pakistan's military reforms and strategic doctrines. The war catalysed deep introspection regarding the balance between military ambition and political pragmatism, the management of intelligence, and the vital need for continuous modernization of defence capabilities. It also fostered a **renewed sense of national unity and identity**-a unity that remains a foundation of Pakistan's approach to external security challenges.

A book titled *Indo-Pakistan War of 1965: A Flashback*, produced by the Inter-Services Public Relations of Pakistan, is used as the official history of the war, which is a highly adapted account, omitting any mention of the **Operations Gibraltar** and **Grand Slam**, and begins with the Indian counter-offensive in the Lahore sector. In this chronicle, the Pakistan Army is claimed to have put up a "**valiant defence of the motherland**" and halted the Indian attack in its tracks. The significance of the 1965 war on Pakistan's military can be gleaned from the fact that its **Defence Day** is observed on **06 September** (date of Indian counter offensive in the Punjab sector) and **Air Force Day** on **07 September**.

### Casus Belli: The Kashmir Conundrum

A recurring theme in Pakistani writings on the 1965 conflict is the unresolved issue of Kashmir. Since the partition of British India in 1947, Kashmir has been framed not merely as a territorial dispute but as **a symbol of national honour**, religious identity, and the legitimate rights of a predominantly Muslim population. According to several Pakistani military analyses, Kashmir was “*the epicentre of Pakistan’s struggle for justice*,” arguing that the issue had been deliberately sidelined by international diplomacy following the 1947–48 war. Prominent op-eds in newspapers such as Dawn have emphasized that Pakistan’s decision to engage militarily in 1965 was rooted in the belief that **negotiations were rendered ineffective by political inertia** and what was perceived as an unwillingness on India’s part to accommodate the aspirations of Kashmiri Muslims.

Another critical element emphasized in Pakistani publications is the sense of Indian hegemonic ambition. Pakistani writers have argued that India, buoyed by its post-independence political consolidation and military modernization, was increasingly determined to assert its dominance in the region. The memory of India’s unilateral decision-making in the aftermath of Partition, coupled with policies that were seen as repressive in Kashmir, contributed to an enduring perception that India was pursuing an expansionist agenda at the expense of its smaller neighbour. As expressed in military commentaries in the Pakistan Defence Journal, Indian actions in Kashmir were considered provocative.

The **skirmishes in the Rann of Kutch** were initiated by Pakistan, possibly emboldened by the 1962 Indian debacle, which got further reinforced by the tepid Indian response to these provocations.

India’s military performance in Ladakh and NEFA had convinced Pakistan that ‘*Hindu India*’ would hardly be a match especially since, as part of the Western alliance against communism, Pakistan was bristling with US weapon systems that purportedly gave it an edge, both on land and in the air. However, General Musa Khan, Pakistan Army’s Chief of Army Staff (COAS) during the War, writes that military hardware from the United States did enhance Pakistan’s operational potential, but that assistance was limited in nature.

Pakistani military planners interpreted India’s setbacks in 1962 as indicative of **lingering strategic deficiencies**. Intelligence reports circulating in Pakistan suggested that a revival of hostilities in Kashmir could force India into a reactive posture. In various analyses published in periodicals such as *The News International*, scholars argued that Pakistan had an opportunity to challenge India’s regional primacy in 1965 before India could fully recover from the defeat of 1962.

In May 1965, Indian forces captured three posts in the Kargil Sector of Kashmir sparking a reactive urgency in Pakistan. Consequently, President Ayub of Pakistan directed the Foreign Minister and the Army Chief to take actions to resuscitate the Kashmir problem, weaken Indian resolve, and bring her to the table to negotiate **without provoking a general war**. Pakistan’s underlying assumption was that the military actions in Kashmir would remain limited to it and an all-out war was considered unlikely. As per the assessment of Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, India was not in a position to risk a general war, thus any provocation in Kashmir would remain limited to Kashmir.

In his book ‘*My Version*’, General Musa states that he informed the President regarding conditions not being suitable for an uprising in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and Pakistan should not stick its neck too far as it could lead to a general war with India. Despite the



Pakistan celebrates 06 September as Defence Day (image nation.com.pk)



*Pakistani soldiers in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa (representational image photo via RFERL)*

Army's advice, the foreign office, led by the Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was adamant on an offensive approach on Kashmir. General Musa, in his book, states that the policy makers thwarted the military assessment and advice on a matter having serious military implications because of their miscalculation of the politico-strategic situation and ambition of few individuals.

Beyond the strategic imperatives of Kashmir and regional recalibration, internal political dynamics also played a role in shaping Pakistan's perspective of the war's origins. The Pakistani establishment, comprising the military leadership and a segment of political elites, felt an urgent need to bolster national pride and demonstrate the resolve of the country's Armed Forces. Publications in Pakistan often depicted the 1965 war as a "defensive struggle" undertaken to protect the honour of a nation and its people. This narrative of defensive jihad against external aggression has continued to influence Pakistan's historical memory of the conflict.

category of platforms. **Qualitatively Pakistan had tangible advantage** by virtue of possession of relatively superior tanks and artillery. The Centurion tank which was the backbone of the Indian Army was concentrated in the Armoured Division while the vast bulk of Indian infantry divisions were equipped with the obsolete Shermans. None of this is talked about in Pakistani writings.

In early 1959, Pakistan Army leadership evolved a doctrine suited to the country's peculiar operational environment. The new doctrine called for holding ground with firepower instead of dense physical deployment while maintaining the bulk as a strike force. **New US military equipment along with changes in doctrine gave the Pakistan Army increased firepower and mobility.** Based on the US model, the Pakistani infantry divisions shrank in size, yet fielded more firepower than the earlier British model.

The armoured divisions were equipped with the redoubtable Patton tanks and armoured personnel carriers (APCs) for the infantry to keep pace with armour. Pakistan also received modern guns for an independent artillery brigade, providing longer ranges, heavier shells, locating devices, and increased mobility. Pakistan's Air Force got **F-86 and F-104 fighter aircrafts along with radar systems.** With these modern weapons, the Pakistani military acquired a limited qualitative edge over the numerically larger Indian Army. From 1954 to 1965, Pakistan received around \$630 million in direct American grant assistance and over \$670 million in concessional sales and defence support assistance.

Pakistan's strategic objective in the 1965 War, as enunciated by President Ayub, was to **resuscitate the Kashmir problem by starting**

## Military Planning and Strategy

The 1965 war was not just a battle between two States but also a test of strategic planning, operational effectiveness, and national resolve. In their later writings, Pakistani generals often emphasize that the war was fought under conditions of relative parity, where rapid mobilization and tactical ingenuity allowed a smaller force to hold its ground against a numerically superior adversary. While technically this may have been true but due to Indian security commitments on the Chinese front, the numerical ratios on the active battle grounds on the Western front during 1965 were either comparable or favouring Pakistan in the



**an uprising in J&K** aimed at weakening Indian resolve, and bringing her to the negotiating table without provoking a general war. Pakistan's underlying assumption was that the military actions in Kashmir could remain limited and that an all-out war was unlikely. In case of a general war, the military strategy was to absorb the initial Indian offensives and subsequently transition to the offensive when the situation permitted. Consequently, the military strategy of the Pakistan Army was **defensive-offensive in the conventional spectrum**.

In order to implement this strategy, Pakistan planned to infiltrate around 7000 freedom fighters into J&K to initiate a local uprising. In case of a general war, the Army planned to deploy two armoured divisions, three infantry divisions and three independent infantry brigades in Punjab, the main theatre of operations; holding both armoured divisions in their strategic concentration areas one North of the Ravi River and one South of it, poised for counteroffensive. The areas of psychological-social importance in strength, which included Sialkot and Lahore, were to be held in strength. In Azad Kashmir (POK), Pakistan planned to adopt a defensive posture and conduct tactical offensives when opportunities arose. Likewise, the Pakistan Army planned a defensive posture in East Pakistan employing minimum forces due to minimal perceived threat. Overall, the **operational approach was in line with the policy of catalysing the Kashmir dispute through guerrilla operations, with the military strategy premised on a defensive-offensive posture**.

The Pakistani senior leadership considered their planning to be superior at the strategic level, with the initial offensive launched with an infantry division-tank brigade size force against Akhnur - deemed

adequate to cause a strategic level crisis in the Indian Army. The capture of Akhnur would have been disastrous for India as Indian offensive plans would have been disrupted, with the entire war focussed on redressing the adversity caused due to the loss of Akhnur. On the other hand the Pakistani counter offensive in Khem Karan would have bottled up three Indian Infantry divisions in the Beas-Ravi corridor, possibly forcing them to surrender. The 1965 War would have then been a **strategic Pakistani success rather than a tactical draw as it turned out to be**, if the operational and tactical execution had been competent.

The Pakistani military writings stress that the **initial intent was not to wage an all-out war but rather to inflict enough pressure on India to force a revision of the status quo over Kashmir**. In editorials from *Pakistan Today*, commentators have argued that the operations were aimed at sending a strong political message while avoiding a full-scale confrontation that could drag both nations into a protracted conflict.

As events unfolded, the strategic calculus became increasingly complex, with the war rapidly exceeding the confines of a "limited" engagement.

### Operation Gibraltar and Operation Grand Slam

**Operation Gibraltar** was conceived as a covert operation aimed at infiltrating pro-Kashmiri forces into J&K to foment a popular uprising against Indian rule. Pakistani planners believed that a swift, guerrilla-style campaign could destabilize the region and force India into negotiations. President Ayub believed that military action was the only way Pakistan could solve the Kashmir issue. Descriptions in leading Pakistani military journals recount that **Operation Gibraltar** was designed with the intent of "liberating" Kashmir through unconventional means, anticipating a **cascade of local insurgency that would complement the actions of regular Pakistani forces**.

A recurring theme in the Pakistani military writings is the emphasis on a



*Dissertation of Major Muhammad Bakar-Operation Grand Slam*



Pakistani Infantry advance with support from M4A1E6 (Sherman) tanks during the 1965 war (photo Pakistan Army commons.wikimedia.org)

(CFL) at Akhnur, which was a critical supply line for Indian forces. By seizing key communication and supply routes, Pakistan could isolate Indian forces and compel a favourable military and diplomatic outcome, while technically restricting the conflict to J&K. Detailed post-war analyses published in *The Express Tribune* have noted that the operation was emblematic of Pakistan's aggressive military doctrine of the time, which placed **heavy reliance on fast-moving armoured units and rapid exploitation of tactical breakthroughs.**

### Key Engagements

carefully calibrated defensive strategy. They argue that Pakistan's operational doctrine during the war was built around the idea of **limited warfare-a measured response intended to repel aggression without provoking an all-out conflict.** For instance, in his memoirs, General Muhammad Musa Khan noted that the strategic plan of 1965 was less about territorial conquest and more about compelling India to the negotiating table by demonstrating the resolve and capability of Pakistan's Armed Forces.

**Operation Grand Slam** in the Pakistani narrative was an outcome of Indian offensive operations in Azad Kashmir (POK) leading to capture of Bedori Bulge (Hajipir), triggering its offensive into Chhamb and Jaurian. According to General Musa and General Sher Bahadur, Pakistan launched **Operation Grand Slam**, when India captured some territory in Kashmir, and there was a real danger of Muzaffarabad falling. The main aim of this operation was ostensibly **limited to relieve the pressure against the Pakistani 12 Division deployed in Kashmir.** The plan was an armoured thrust by 12 Division against Indian forces across the Cease Fire Line

the 1965 war, both the President, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, and his handpicked Army Chief, General Musa are accused of lacking the resolution to provide strategic direction to a well-oiled machine which had the potential to inflict a severe strategic defeat on the enemy. He further states that the job of an Army Headquarters (HQ) was not just to formulate plans but to effectively supervise the execution of plans. He goes on to say that Ayub in words of a British contemporary was devoid of "operational experience" "organizational understanding" and "lacked tactical flair". Thus, Field Marshal Ayub and General Musa saw no need to have an intermediate Corps HQ to ensure the success of Pakistan Army's main attack involving a force of an infantry division and an armoured division, along with a plethora of supporting elements.

Major Amin also adds that 12 Infantry Division's organizational stretch, one of the main reasons for **Grand Slam's** failure, was another glaring case of lack of organizational insight on the part of Field Marshal Ayub and General Musa. In comparison, he says that, while the Indians had bifurcated their forces in Kashmir North and South of Pir Panjal Range right from 1948 and the early 1950s, Pakistan depended on one divisional HQ to manage a front of 400 miles in mountainous territory spanning the Himalayas, Karakoram and the Pir Panjal.

At the strategic level Major Amin comments that **both India and Pakistan got an opportunity to win decisively.** Pakistan got it twice, first at Akhnur and then at Khem Karan. India got it once at Gadgor on 8th September. **Both the sides failed.** On the Pakistani side the failure had more to do with lack of strategic insight at Akhnur, in ordering a change of divisional commander in the middle of a crucial operation. Then at Khem Karan the Pakistani failure was at the armoured division level in failing to induct all five armoured regiments on 8th or 9th

September for achieving a decisive breakthrough, due to **poor staff work and planning** at the divisional level. The situation was made worse by the absence of a Corps HQ.

From the Pakistani perspective, the Indian failure at Gadgor had more to do with **lack of drive at the brigade and divisional level** in actual execution despite having the means to achieve a breakthrough. The reading of the battle by Indian 1 Armoured Division in fearing a threat from the flanks which in reality was a tank squadron of 62 Cavalry that had lost its way came in for professional criticism. The lack of success of Indian 1 Armoured Division in the Sialkot Sector was attributed to dearth of coup d'oeil and resolution at the brigade level. Thus Major Amin posits that failure in achieving decisive outcomes by Pakistan was due to staff and planning failure, in which all from the brigade to the General HQ (GHQ) were culpable, while the Indian failure was a command failure in which the prime culprits were the armoured brigade and divisional commanders.

The **Battle of Chawinda** has been frequently discussed in Pakistani accounts. Often described as one of the largest tank battles in history, **Chawinda has been celebrated in Pakistan as a symbol of valour and military prowess**. Pakistani military analysts point to Chawinda as an example of how disciplined armoured formations, when coordinated under challenging circumstances, were able to blunt an enemy advance. Chawinda is dissected round-by-round, with numerous citations emphasizing the bravery of Pakistani tank crews and the effective use of terrain for ambushes and defensive posturing.

Another prominent operation widely discussed was the **engagement around Kasur**, where Pakistani forces, facing

incipient Indian manoeuvres intended to break through into Pakistan's heartland, managed to stem the tide. Retired Pakistani military officers acknowledge that the fighting around Kasur underscored the **unpredictability of the war**, with both sides experiencing tactical wins and losses. They vividly recount how Pakistani troops, utilizing well-conceived defensive lines, repelled Indian attempts to exploit the element of surprise, thereby averting a dire strategic outcome.

Pakistani articles also highlight effective use of offensive forces by the Pakistan Army through **two counter offensives**; the first against Akhnur after the failure of **Operation Gibraltar** and capture of Haji Pir Pass by India, to generate a pull on Indian forces operating in Kashmir; the second in Punjab to threaten Amritsar, a city of social-psychological importance consequent to the Indian 1 Corps offensive in Sialkot sector.

However, in sum, Major Amin writes that 1965 was **a failure of offence and triumph of defence**. Except in **Grand Slam** where the initial overwhelming superiority enabled Pakistan to achieve a breakthrough, on both sides defence triumphed as an operation of war. Both the armies were more used to defence because of the British colonial military experience. The attackers failed at Gadgor, Chawinda, Asal Uttar and Valtoha. **Both the armies lacked the dynamism to conduct successful attack operation**, a far more complex form of war and totally outside the pre-1947 experience.

### The Ceasefire and the Tashkent Agreement

After nearly 17 days of fierce engagements, both India and Pakistan

found themselves at an impasse. International diplomatic pressure, particularly from the erstwhile Soviet Union and the United Nations, eventually led to a ceasefire on 22 September 1965. From the Pakistani perspective-as chronicled in numerous op-eds in Dawn and retrospective interviews in *The Express Tribune*-the **ceasefire was seen not as a defeat but rather as a necessary measure in the face of international realities**. Pakistani leadership contended that although the military objectives in Kashmir had not been realized, the ability to maintain defensive positions against a *'numerically and technologically superior'* adversary was a testament to the resilience of the nation's Armed Forces.

Following the ceasefire, the Tashkent Agreement signed in January 1966, required both nations to withdraw to pre-war positions, **essentially rendering the conflict "a draw" in military terms**. The Agreement was met with mixed reviews in Pakistan. Critics argued that while Tashkent helped avoid further escalation, it failed to address the root causes of the conflict-most notably, the Kashmir issue-and left Pakistan's strategic ambitions unfulfilled.

### Military and Psychological Outcomes

Within Pakistan, the conclusion of the war was imbued with a nuanced mix of pride, introspection, and the cautious optimism of national resilience. Military commentaries published in the *Pakistan Army Journal* stressed that the conflict, despite its strategic ambiguities, had **proven that Pakistan could hold its own in a modern, mechanized war**. The valour exhibited by Pakistani soldiers in





*Soldiers in a defensive position during the 1965 War (credit dawn.com)*

battles such as Chawinda and Kasur was widely celebrated, and subsequent military training programmes were reportedly reoriented to incorporate the hard-earned lessons from 1965.

Opinion pieces in mainstream newspapers reflected on the heavy toll the conflict took—not only in terms of casualties but also on the national psyche. Intellectuals and retired officers alike debated whether the war had achieved its desired political objectives or whether it had inadvertently **entrenched a cycle of conflict in the subcontinent**. Such reflections contributed to a broader discourse in Pakistan regarding the limits and opportunities of military intervention in pursuit of national interests. The war underscored the critical need to balance limited warfare with the potential for escalation into full-scale conflict. Retrospective studies in *Pakistan Defence Journal* argue that the 1965 war served as a wake-up call, prompting a **thorough reassessment of operational doctrine, inter-service coordination, and the management of intelligence**.

### Aftermath and Lessons Learnt

**Shifts in Geopolitics.** In the post-war era, one of the most enduring discussions in Pakistani publications pertains to how the conflict affected regional geopolitics. The 1965 war, despite its ostensibly inconclusive military outcome, is credited with altering the strategic landscape of South Asia. Authors in *Pakistan Today* have argued that the war redefined the balance of power, influencing alliances and shaping the future trajectory of Indo-Pak relations. The **strengthening of ties with China**—a development that many Pakistani publications herald as one of the silver linings of the conflict—is often cited as a direct consequence of Pakistan's need

to counterbalance a resurgent India.

**Economic and Social Implications.** Beyond the strategic and military dimensions, the legacy of the 1965 war had significant social and economic ramifications within Pakistan. The conflict forced the nation to divert scarce resources towards defence spending, which in turn **affected economic development** and social welfare programmes. The financial strain experienced during and after the war had long-term implications for Pakistan's developmental trajectory. However, alternatively many commentators also point out that the rally-around-the-flag effect during the war helped in cementing a sense of national unity and resolve that would eventually contribute to subsequent economic and social initiatives.

**Institutional Reforms and Military Doctrine.** Another major lesson emphasised by Pakistani authors was the need for institutional reforms within the military. In the wake of the 1965 conflict, a series of studies published in defence journals called for improved inter-service coordination, better communication networks, and more robust training regimens for modern warfare. These calls for reform were not merely technical; they represented a broader ideological shift in Pakistan's approach to national security. Retired officers interviewed in *The Express Tribune* often recalled that the war prompted a **reassessment of both strategy and tactics**, leading to doctrinal changes that would later prove pivotal in subsequent conflicts.

**Public Discourse, National Identity, and the Legacy of Valour.** The cultural and psychological aftermath of the war is perhaps one of the most deeply felt aspects in Pakistan. Over the decades, the 1965 conflict has been mythologized in Pakistani literature, cinema, and

commemorative events. Patriotic narratives—often featuring accounts of heroic last stands, daring manoeuvres, and personal sacrifices—are a staple of public discourse. In annual commemorations and state-sponsored publications, the war is portrayed as a symbol of Pakistan's resolve to defend its sovereignty against overwhelming odds. Such narratives **influence how subsequent generations interpret the events of 1965.**

**Dichotomy of Successes and Missed Opportunities.** A recurring motif in the post-war debate is the dichotomy between tactical successes on the battlefield and the ultimate failure to achieve strategic objectives. Many Pakistani analysts agree that while the military demonstrated remarkable courage and operational acumen, the overarching political goals—most notably, a definitive resolution on the Kashmir issue—remained elusive. Editorials in *Dawn* and analytical essays in military periodicals alike have lamented that the cost of the conflict, both in human lives and in geopolitical opportunity, was too high given the limited strategic gains that eventually emerged. This introspection has fuelled debates on whether a **more restrained approach might have yielded better results.**

**Strategic Implications for Future Conflicts.** The lessons drawn from the 1965 war have profoundly influenced Pakistan's strategic thinking in the decades that followed. In academic circles and policy think-tanks, discussions have centred on how the conflict reaffirmed the necessity of maintaining robust defence capabilities while also exploring innovative forms of warfare that could offset India's numerical superiority. The **evolution of Pakistan's missile programmes, investment in modern armoured technologies, and the reorientation of military academies** towards contemporary doctrines are

frequently justified by invoking the lessons of 1965. Military strategists have argued that the war underscored the need for a flexible and adaptive approach—a doctrine that would guide Pakistani defence policy in later crises.

### Conclusion

When considered as a whole, Pakistani accounts of the 1965 war have a **surprising balance in the self-assessment.** While there is an undeniable sense of pride in the performance of the Armed Forces, there is also an awareness of the limitations and areas where they fell short. Through their memoirs, essays, and public commentaries, Generals like Muhammad Musa Khan and Mirza Aslam Beg—and their peers—have shaped not only the historical narrative of the 1965 conflict but also the strategic thinking that guides the Pakistan Army today.

Interestingly, one of the reasons for the less than satisfactory performance of both armies in the 1965 war in Pakistani writings, has been attributed to the failure or inability to develop a

doctrine of decisive warfare, a colonial legacy. The Indian Army of pre-1947 was an internal security machine designed for defence while the main forces of the empire's allies came into action on other decisive fronts. The focus of both sides in the 1965 war was to have tactical concepts, however no doctrine integrating tactics with operational strategy and national strategy existed to give coherence to the whole business of warfighting.

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