

Operation Gibraltar

Operation Gibraltar was code name for a military operation launched by the Pakistani military in the Indian administered part of Kashmir.

The objective was for Pakistani commandos to infiltrate the Line of Control and instigate the local population to revolt against the Indian government.

The operation was a disaster as the local population did not revolt and the infiltration was discovered. This led to the outbreak of the 1965 Indo-Pak war.

Operation Gibraltar was an important topic in the Modern Indian History segment of the IAS exam.

Background of Operation Gibraltar

The Indo-Pakistan war of 1947 resulted in Indian gaining two-thirds of Kashmir. However Pakistan kept looking for opportunities to gain the rest. That opportunity would come following the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict (Began on October 20, 1962). The defeat at the hands of the Chinese military led to major changes in the Indian army in terms of men and equipment.

Pakistan, despite being outnumbered, would use its qualitative edge to balance the scales of power before India completed its defence build up.

The Rann of Kutch clash (April 9th 1965) in the summer of 1965, where Indian and Pakistani forces clashed, resulted in some positives for Pakistan.

Moreover, in December 1963, the disappearance of a holy relic from the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar, created turmoil among the people in the valley, which was viewed by Pakistan as ideal for revolt. These factors bolstered the Pakistani command's thinking: that the use of covert methods followed by the threat of an all out war would force a resolution in Kashmir

Thus Pakistani Military command opted to send in both its regular army and an auxiliary force of Kashmiri locals on their side of the border towards Jammu and Kashmir.

Why was it named Operational Gibraltar?

The name for the operation 'Gibraltar' was chosen specifically because the Ummayyad conquest of Spain in medieval times was launched from the port of Gibraltar and the Pakistani command wanted to draw a parallel between the conquest of Spain and their military operation in Kashmir

Why was Operation Gibraltar carried out

The original plan for the operation, codenamed Gibraltar, was conceived and prepared as early as the 1950s; however it seemed appropriate to push this plan forward given the scenario.

Backed by then foreign minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and others, the aim was an "attack by infiltration" by a specially trained irregular force of some 40,000 men, highly motivated and well armed. It was reasoned that the conflict could be confined only to Kashmir.

The primary aim was to "weaken Indian resolve and bring India to the negotiating table regarding the future of Kashmir".

Execution of Operation Gibraltar

Operation Gibraltar was set in motion in the first week of August 1965 (some sources claim it was on July 24, 1965). Pakistani troops who were members of Azad Kashmir Regular Force began to cross the Cease Fire Line dividing Indian- and Pakistani-held Kashmir across the Pir Panjal Range into Gulmarg, Uri and Baramulla. Several columns were to occupy key heights around the Kashmir valley and encourage a general revolt, which would be followed by direct combat by Pakistani troops.

The plan was multi-pronged. Infiltrators would mingle with the local populace and incite them to rebellion. Meanwhile, guerrilla warfare would commence, destroying bridges, tunnels and highways, harassing enemy communications, logistic installations and headquarters as well as attacking airfields, with a view to create the conditions of an "armed insurrection" in Kashmir — leading to an against Indian rule.

It was assumed that India would neither counter-attack, nor involve itself in another full-scale war, and the capture of Kashmir would rapidly follow. Out of the 9 Infiltrating Forces, only Ghaznavi Force under command Maj Malik Munawar Khan Awan managed to achieve its objective in Mehndar-Rajouri area.

The operation as a whole ended in a failure with most of the infiltrating force being discovered by the India army. When it became apparent that the Pakistani army regulars were the ones who were part of the attacking force instead of insurgents, it prompted the Indian government under Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri to declare war. Thus, the 1965 Indo-Pak war had begun on 5th August 1965.

Reasons why Operation Gibraltar Failed

Military analysts have differed on whether the plan itself was flawed.

- Some have held that the plan was well-conceived but was let down by poor execution
- But almost all Pakistani and neutral analysts have maintained that the entire operation was a clumsy attempt and doomed to collapse.

- The Pakistani Army's failures started with the supposition that a generally discontented Kashmiri people, given the opportunity provided by the Pakistani advance, would revolt against their India, bringing about a swift and decisive surrender of Kashmir.
- The Kashmiri people, however, did not revolt. Instead, the Indian Army was provided with enough information to learn of Operation Gibraltar
- According to then Chief of the Pakistan Air Force, Air Marshal Nur Khan, there was little coordination amongst the military services on the impending operation.
- Many senior Pakistani military officers and political leaders were unaware of the impending crisis, thus surprising not only India, but also Pakistan itself.
- Many senior officials also were against the plan, as a failure could lead to an all-out war with India, which many wanted to avoid.