

## **Were India and Pakistan on the brink of missile warfare amid recent hostilities?**

*NSA Ajit Doval had reportedly spoken with Pakistan's ISI chief Asim*

*Munir over a secure line hours after the dogfight in February*

*By Prathapan Bhaskaran*

A reported Indian threat to hit at least six targets with missiles and Pakistani vow to retaliate with "three times" the force set off alarm bells in western capitals triggering their intervention to prevent the catastrophe and de-escalate the tensions in the wake Indian bombing of Balakot to avenge Pulwama terror strike and Pakistani raid across the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir, media reports say. During the conflict, New Delhi said it shot down a Pakistani F-16 fighter jet in a skirmish and lost a MiG-21 plane whose pilot Abhinandan Varthaman was taken alive after ejecting from the burning plane and was later returned to India.

Though Indian officials have denied knowledge of such a missile threat, a Reuters report said a Pakistani minister and a western diplomat separately confirmed the threat and avowed retaliation, a report in The Hindu said. The sources did not specify who delivered the threat or who received it. "We said if you will fire one missile, we will fire three," the Pakistani minister said.

India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had reportedly spoken with Pakistan's ISI chief Asim Munir over a secure line hours after the dogfight over the LoC to tell him India was not going to back down. Doval told Munir that India's fight was with the militant groups that operated from Pakistani soil and it was prepared to escalate, a government source told Reuters.

A Pakistani government minister and a Western diplomat in Islamabad separately confirmed a specific Indian threat to hit six targets inside Pakistan, according to the report. They did not specify who delivered the threat or who received it, but the minister said Indian and Pakistani intelligence agencies "were communicating with each other during the fight, and even now they are communicating with each other".

Pakistan said it would counter any Indian missile attacks with many more launches of its own, the minister told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We said if you will fire one missile, we will fire three. Whatever India will do, we will respond three times to that," the Pakistani minister said.

Reports of the threat and counter threat set western diplomatic circles buzz and US National Security Advisor John Bolton was forced to intervene despite his preoccupation with President Donald Trump's summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Vietnam. Washington, Beijing, and London reportedly joined hands to put pressure on the two countries to back down.

With two nuclear-armed nations arraigned across one of the world's most militarized borders and the LoC in Kashmir, there is always a threat of a misunderstanding and escalation, which keep world powers on edge.

Though sources confirm the exchanges did not go beyond threats and that at any point there was the threat of use of weapons other than the conventional ones, they did create tensions in world capitals.

Revealing the hectic behind-the-scenes action, the report said that Bolton was on the phone with Doval on the night of Feb 27 itself, and into the early hours of Feb 28, the second day of the Trump-Kim talks, in a bid to defuse the situation, a Western diplomat in New Delhi and an Indian official told Reuters.

Later, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was also in Hanoi, called both sides to seek a way out of the crisis. "Secretary Pompeo led diplomatic engagement directly, and that played an essential

role in de-escalating the tensions between the two sides," State Department deputy spokesperson Robert Palladino said in a briefing in Washington on March 5. Pompeo spoke to Doval, the Indian and Pakistani Foreign Ministers Sushma Swaraj and Shah Mahmood Qureshi, respectively, Palladino said.

US Indo-Pacific Command Admiral Phil Davidson told reporters in Singapore last week that he had separately been in touch with the Indian navy chief, Admiral Sunil Lanba, throughout the crisis. On the morning of Feb 28, Trump told reporters in Hanoi that he expected the crisis to end soon. "They have been going at it and we have been involved in trying to have them stop. Hopefully, that is going to be coming to an end."

The Pakistani minister said China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) also intervened in the matter. The government of the UAE said Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan spoke to both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan. His announcement in Pakistan's parliament that the Indian pilot would be released helped thaw the situation further, and Abhinandan was sent back the next day. "I know last night there was a threat there could a missile attack on Pakistan, which got defused," Khan said. "I know, our army stood prepared for retaliation of that attack."

The two countries have gone to war three times since they gained independence in 1947, the last time in 1971. The two armies are trading fire along the line of control that separates them in Kashmir, but the tensions appear contained, reports say.

The militaries of both India and Pakistan regularly flight test missiles of different caliber and have claimed to have inducted ballistic missiles and terrain-hugging cruise missiles of different ranges. These missiles are regular items of display in national day parades in both capitals. Many of the missiles in their arsenals are capable of reaching any part of the other country and wreaking havoc.

India has inducted short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) Prithvi 1, 2 and 3 missiles of ranges 150km to 350km, Dhanush, a ship-launched SRBM and vehicle launched Agni-1 of up to 1,200km range. Its arsenal also has medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) Agni 2 of up to 3,500km and intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) Agni-3 of up to 5,000km range. Hypersonic cruise missile BahMos that can hit targets up to 500km away are also part of Indian arsenal.

Pakistani missile arsenal is equally impressive with SRBMs Hatf-1 that can hit targets 100km away, Hatf-2 'Abdali' of up to 200km range, Hatf-3 'Ghaznavi' that can reach up to 200km away, and the 700km-range Hatf 4 'Shaheen-1'. MRBMs include Hatf -5 'Ghauri' that can travel up to 1,500km and Hatf-6 'Shaheen-2' that can hit targets 2,500km away. Hatf-7 'Babur' is a cruise missile that can seek out targets up to 700km away while the Pakistani military has also deployed an anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM) Exocet that can hit targets up to 180km away.

<https://www.ibtimes.co.in/were-india-pakistan-brink-missile-warfare-amid-recent-hostilities-794118>



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## **‘A simple, honest and inspiring man’**

*Classmates, teacher recall Parrikar’s can-do attitude and sense of fairness*

*By Shubha Sharma*

Mumbai: Bakul Desai remembers the time he arrived at IIT Bombay on a rainy day in 1977, a big steel trunk in one hand, a “holdall” in another. He saw a man roaming barefoot outside the hostel warden’s office, and presumed he was a hired help.

The man readily helped him offload his things, and Mr. Desai pulled out ₹2 as a tip, “a princely sum in those days.” The man politely declined, saying, “*Main paise nahi leta, saheb* [I don’t take money, Sir].”

A short while later, to his horror, Mr. Desai saw the man sitting with a bunch of other students in the mess. He pointed to Mr. Desai, saying he was the man who tried to tip him. The students promptly ganged up to rag him, but the man came forward and pulled him away to safety. And that is how a lifelong friendship began between Mr. Desai and the man, who was later to become India's defence minister. "Manohar Parrikar taught me my first life lesson that day: 'Seek help but don't tip or bribe anyone'," says Mr. Desai.

More lessons were to come through his years at IIT, especially as the secretary of the canteen, working under Parrikar: how he got 40 to 50 students to work in the kitchen when the mess workers struck work, or how he went all the way to the Byculla wholesale market to bring back provisions, cutting down the mess bill. "I might resort to calling him Manu through our conversation," the Hyderabad-based entrepreneur says, "as that is how we knew him. Manu was one of the most diligent people I knew." His sense of fairness and discipline were strong, sometimes "carried to ridiculous extremes".

"When he was a minister, he had two mobile phones, one that he used to call the 'government phone' and the other a 'personal phone.' If I ever called him on the government phone, he would ask me to call on the other one."

### **'More than a friend'**

Mr. Desai says he has lost more than a friend. "I have seen all sides of him, through ups and his downs. I miss his wit, his funny anecdotes."

Amol Gokhale, professor in the mechanical engineering department at IIT Bombay, says he saw the seeds of what Parrikar was to be in his later years, back in 1973, as his classmate. "When the Emergency was declared in the late 1970s, he started mobilising the student population, and had to go underground. He would emerge suddenly, at 1 a.m or 2 a.m, in my room and I would take him through the portions covered in class. He got all of us registered as voters when elections were subsequently declared. Although he was highly intelligent, he was not as devoted to studies. Still, he did fairly well in academics."

Much later, Mr. Gokhale closely saw how his friend worked professionally, when he was in the DRDO and Parrikar was the defence minister. "He understood the inner workings of the DRDO from me, not just as a picture painted to a politician." The two things that stood out for him then — how Parrikar always did his homework: "he read every word of every file and went a couple of layers beyond what he read", and how he could see through the "dealers" in Delhi: "he would throw them off guard with one technical question."

### **'Had a spark in him'**

Krishna Mohan Gupt, who taught Parrikar industrial design at IIT, says he could "see the spark in him, his commitment and his sense of focus," back then. "He was the kind of person who was very particular, once he took on a responsibility. He would never leave things half-done."

Besides his can-do attitude, his friends and his teacher also recall his simplicity. In Mr. Desai's words: "Just like Albert Einstein once said about Mahatma Gandhi, I say about Manu: 'I can't believe such a man walked the earth.' I can't believe he was for real; someone as simple, as clear, as honest and as inspiring."

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/a-simple-honest-and-inspiring-man/article26572917.ece>