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OPERATION BRASSTACKS
A Thread
Type: Major Indian Combined Arms Military Exercise
Target: Southern/Central #Pakistan
Goal: Military provocation leading to armed conflict
Result: Pakistani Counter Deployment; Exercises halted; Standing down of Indian Forces.
Date: 1986-1987
#India

Operation Brasstacks was the brainchild of then Indian Army Chief General Krishnaswamy Sundarji who wished to provoke a Pakistani response to a massive planned Indian army mobilisation in the guise of military exercises near Pakistan’s border. General Sunderji's strategy was

to provoke Pakistan to respond and this would provide India with an excuse to implement existing contingency plans to go on to the offensive against Pakistan and take out its atomic bomb projects in a series of preventive strikes.
It was the major and largest mobilization of

Indian forces on the Indian Subcontinent, involving the combined deployed strength of two Army Commands (Western and Southern)- almost 500,000 troops , plus 200,00-300,000 more reservists amounting to over 2/3rds of the Indian Army. The exercises would also involve a series of

amphibious assault exercises by the Indian Navy near to a Pakistan naval base in Korangi Creek. All these exercises were meant to be done within 100 miles of the Pakistani border.

The Indians knew that the military strategists of the Pakistan Armed Forces would regarded this

war game as a threatening exhibition of overwhelming conventional force, and they did, some even viewed this war game as a reprisal of a war of attrition against Pakistan.
Pakistan military analysts and strategists regarded this as a "blitzkrieg-like" integrated deep offensive

strategy to infiltrate into dense areas of Central Pakistan, on the other hand, India maintained that "[the] core objective of Operation Brasstacks was to test new concepts of mechanization, mobility, and air support devised by Indian army."

After the success of the Israeli Air Force's surprise Operation Opera air strike on the Iraqi nuclear power plant in Osirak in 1981, the Pakistan Armed Forces had been in a constant state of alert. According to memoirs of nuclear strategist and theoretical physicist

Munir Ahmad Khan, hectic discussions took place every day between the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs, amid concerns that India’s belligerent Army Chief might attack Pakistan, who was on route to becoming a nuclear power. Since 1981, the commanders of the

Pakistan Armed Forces were given standing orders to mobilize their forces at once, from all directions, as quick as it could to divert such attacks.

The Indian Army Chief, a hawkish man hell-bent on instigating military instability with Pakistan, had long been advocating for practicing modern methods of land-based warfare. He was granted permission by India’s government, and ordered a large scale military exercise to test

new concepts of mechanization, mobility, and air support. He issued orders to mobilize the mechanized and armoured divisions, and armed tanks were sent to take position in the Thar desert. In December 1986, there were more than ten thousand armoured vehicles spread across

India’s western desert on the border with Pakistan.

The scale of the operation was bigger than any North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) exercise and the biggest land exercise since World War II. Initially, around 600,000–800,000 troops were mobilized and stationed on

Rajasthan state's western border, less than 100 miles away from Pakistan. The commander of the Indian Army's Western Command, Lieutenant General Prem Nath Hoon, maintained that, "Operation Brasstacks was a mobilization of the entire Army of India." General Hoon also stated that

he warned the Indian Army Chief that "when such a large exercise is conceived, the movement of Indian forces is going to attract the attention of Pakistan.” General Hoon wrote in his memoir: "Brasstacks was no military exercise. It was a plan to build up the situation for a

fourth war with Pakistan” and that the Indian Army Chief hid the details and exact numbers of the deployments from the civilian government of India. This was an alarming display of the Indian military side-stepping the civilian government and essentially becoming war mongers.

Pakistan quickly responded with maneuvers of its own forces, first mobilizing the entire V Corps and then the entirely of the Pakistan Air Force’s and Pakistan Army’s Southern Commands, near the Indian state of Punjab. Additionally, the Pakistan Navy's combat ships and

submarines were deployed for the purpose of intelligence management, in the northern Arabian Sea. The Government of Pakistan viewed the military exercise as a direct threat to Pakistan's physical existence. The government ordered the deployment of the entire Armoured Corps, with

the V Corps, to move to the front lines. By mid-January 1987, the Pakistani Armed Forces and Indian Army personnel stood within firing range along an extended border area. The Foreign Office of Pakistan of summoned the Indian Ambassador to Pakistan, S. K. Singh, at midnight,

to meet with Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Zain Noorani, who had just returned from an emergency meeting with Pakistan's President. Noorani advised the Indian Embassy that he had an important message from the President. Noorani officially advised Singh that in the

event of violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity by India, Pakistan was "capable of inflicting unacceptable damage on it." When Singh asked Noorani whether this implied an atomic attack on Bombay, Noorani replied: "it might be so". (It is pertinent here to

mention that even though Pakistan tested atomic bombs in 1998, Pakistan had fully developed atomic bomb capabilities since 1984).

During this time, Abdul Qadeer Khan gave an interview to Indian diplomat, Kuldip Nayar in which he made it clear that "Pakistan would use its atomic weapons if its existence was threatened". Indian diplomats claimed that their diplomats in Islamabad were warned that Pakistan

would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons if attacked.
The President of Pakistan Zia Ul Haq visited India for a cricket match and the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was disinclined to personally welcome him but was left with no choice and had to go to the airport.
A former

diplomat reports that “after greeting Mr. Gandhi, President Zia said, ‘Mr. Rajiv you want to invade Pakistan? Ok fine go ahead! But please remember one thing that after that people will forget Changez Khan and Hilaku Khan and will remember Zia and Rajiv Gandhi only. Because it

will not be a Conventional War. Pakistan may possibly suffer annihilation but Muslims will still survive because there are several Muslim countries in the world. But remember there is only one India and “I shall wipe out H!nduism and H!ndu religion from the face of the earth!”

And if you don’t order complete de-escalation and demobilisation before my return to Pakistan, the first word of mouth I will utter will be “Fire”!’ Rajiv Gandhi started sweating at the forehead, and I was feeling sensation over my spine.
At this moment, Zia looked to me as

the most dangerous person of the world. He appeared stone-faced and his words sounded horror. Looking in his eyes, I was conveyed clearly that he will turn the whole of sub continent into ashes with nuclear strikes.
Instantly the smile returned to Zia’s face and he warmly shook

hands with the rest of the people there. Except for me and Rajiv, no one knows as to what the soft looking and smiling Zia had conveyed to the Indian prime minister."

The media, particularly the Western media, became involved after this and intense diplomatic manoeuvres followed preventing any further escalation in hostilities.

Soon after that, the Indian government buckled under immense pressure and seeing Pakistan's counter deployment,

with tails between their legs, the Indian Forces started pulling back. The Indian government even signed an accord to reduce troop numbers in Indian Occupied Kashmir.