

Daily Editorial Analysis 26 July 2025

July 26, 2025 • vajiramandravi.com

Kargil, Pahalgam and A Revamp of the Security Strategy

Context

- As India **marks the 26th anniversary of the Kargil War**, one of the subcontinent's most defining military engagements, the memories remain vivid, both for their strategic significance and their lasting impact on national consciousness.
- **Fought in the icy heights of Kashmir between May and July 1999**, Kargil was the first conflict in India to be 'live televised', **drawing millions into the immediacy of war's uncertainty and sacrifice**.
- Yet, **as recent events in Pahalgam in 2025 demonstrate, the lessons of Kargil continue to shape India's response to terrorism and cross-border aggression**, signalling a decisive shift in doctrine and preparedness.

Kargil: A Watershed Moment

- **In the wake of India's declaration as a nuclear power in May 1998**, and Pakistan's rapid reciprocation, **South Asia became home to two nuclear-armed adversaries**.
- **India, at the time, was geopolitically isolated**, threatened by economic sanctions and struggling with a weak, coalition government.
- **Strategic vulnerabilities were compounded by strained economic conditions** and neglected military modernisation, as resources and focus were divided by **persistent insurgencies in Kashmir and the North-East**.
- **Despite attempts at diplomatic rapprochement**, including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's historic bus trip to Lahore in February 1999, **Pakistan's incursion in Kargil shattered any illusions of peace**.
- The war demonstrated that **limited, conventional conflicts could occur under the nuclear shadow**, provided escalation was tightly controlled.
- The **conflict exposed severe intelligence lapses, inadequate preparedness for high-altitude operations, outdated equipment**, and a lack of coordinated command structures within India's security apparatus.

Structural and Strategic Reforms Post-Kargil

- **Sweeping Reforms in Security and Intelligence**

- Kargil spurred the Indian government to undertake **The Kargil Review Committee's recommendations.**
- It **led to the establishment of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) in 2002** and the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) in 2004.
- **These structural upgrades were complemented by efforts to improve synergy among intelligence agencies,** revamping the National Security Council Secretariat and the Joint Intelligence Committee.
- The **role of a National Security Adviser (NSA) became institutionalised,** centralising strategic decision-making.

• Realisation of Necessity of Military Modernisation and Self-Reliance

- Realising the absence of reliable allies, **India initiated ambitious plans to update its arsenal, enhance joint command structures,** and develop doctrines tailored to regional realities.
- Most notable was **the Cold Start Doctrine,** designed for rapid mobilisation and targeted conventional strikes.
- **The focus on home-grown military platforms,** evident in projects like indigenous artillery, BrahMos missiles, Rafale jets, Apache and Chinook helicopters, and S-400 air defence systems, **marked a turning point towards strategic autonomy.**

The Evolving Fight Against Terrorism and Pahalgam Aftermath

• The Evolving Fight Against Terrorism

- While **Kargil catalysed reforms in conventional warfare,** India's counter-terrorism posture evolved more gradually.
- For years, **Pakistan-based terrorism inflicted grievous wounds on India** with limited repercussions for the perpetrators.
- The **hijacking of IC-814 in December 1999, the Parliament attack in 2001, and the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack in 2008** illustrated India's restraint, as punitive measures remained largely absent.
- **It was only after the 2016 Uri attack that surgical strikes became a tool of calibrated retaliation,** followed by the Balakot airstrike in 2019, a bold demonstration of cross-border resolve.

• Pahalgam and Operation Sindoor: Setting a New Threshold

- India's response, **code-named Operation Sindoor,** was unprecedented in scope and impact.
- **Over four days, the Indian military struck nine terror bases and eleven military airbases** deep within Pakistan, reportedly crippling a key nuclear storage facility.
- Pakistan, confronted with the scale and precision of India's retaliation, requested an immediate ceasefire.
- **This operation established new deterrence:** India demonstrated a willingness to impose **devastating costs on the perpetrators and their patrons,** making clear that the era of strategic restraint was over.

Lessons and the Road Ahead

- From the heights of Kargil to the valleys of Pahalgam, **India's security doctrine has undergone a profound transformation.**
- The country has built **robust intelligence and military capabilities**, strengthened inter-agency coordination, and embraced indigenous technological development.
- Crucially, **the political and military leadership have signalled an unambiguous shift** from passive deterrence to proactive defence, where terror attacks will be met with overwhelming and direct retaliation.
- Yet, the **fundamental lesson from these decades of conflict is that vigilance and adaptability are indispensable.**
- While India's capabilities have grown, **the need for continual modernisation, jointness among armed forces, and unyielding political resolve remains paramount.**
- **India cannot afford another surprise on the scale of Kargil or Pahalgam;** the imperative is to stay ahead of emerging threats in an ever-volatile region.

Conclusion

- The **legacy of Kargil and the aftermath of Pahalgam encapsulate India's journey from hesitant responder to confident, self-reliant regional power.**
- As the nation commemorates **the sacrifices of its soldiers, it must also reaffirm its commitment to vigilance, unity, and relentless pursuit of peace** and security.
- The message is clear: **never again will India countenance another Kargil or Pahalgam.**

Kargil, Pahalgam and A Revamp of the Security Strategy FAQs

Q1. What was significant about the Kargil War in terms of media coverage?

Ans. The Kargil War was the first 'live televised' conflict in India, bringing the war into the living rooms of millions.

Q2. What major intelligence failure was revealed by the Kargil War?

Ans. The war revealed a lack of real-time intelligence and aerial surveillance, leading to delayed decision-making.

Q3. What was Operation Sindoor?

Ans. Operation Sindoor was India's military retaliation in 2025, striking terror bases and airbases across Pakistan in response to the Pahalgam terror attack.

Q4. What was one key structural change in India's security set-up after Kargil?

Ans. The establishment of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) in 2002 was a key change for better intelligence coordination.

Q5. How did India's military strategy evolve post-Kargil?

Ans. India developed the "Cold Start Doctrine" for rapid, limited incursions and focused on modernizing equipment and joint force coordination.

Source: **The Hindu**

The Scientist Who Made 'Mangroves' a Buzzword

Context

- **Mangroves, once primarily valued by local communities** for their vital role in providing fishery resources and supporting livelihoods, **have steadily ascended to the forefront of global environmental discourse.**
- Today, their **significance spans disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, carbon sequestration,** fisheries enhancement, and the safeguarding of biodiverse shoreline habitats.
- **This transformation in perception is the result of a series of scientific recognitions,** policy interventions, and the **tireless advocacy of pioneers such as M.S. Swaminathan.**

Shifting Perspectives: From Margins to Mainstream

- Historically, **communities living alongside mangroves understood their importance** intimately, relying on these ecosystems for sustenance and income.
- However, **broader recognition came only in the late 1980s.**
- Landmark initiatives, including the United Nations Development Programme and **UNESCO's 1988 regional mangrove research project, set the stage** for an explosion in research and policy focus.
- **Crucially, at the 1989 Climate Change and Human Responses conference, M.S. Swaminathan articulated the potential of mangroves** to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on coastal societies.
- He **highlighted the threats of rising sea levels and cyclones, advocating for immediate, sustainable mangrove management** rooted in ecology, economics, and equity.
- **His pioneering vision included genetic research aimed at transferring mangrove** salinity tolerance traits to crops such as rice.

Key Contributions of Dr Swaminathan

- **Institutional Leadership**
 - **Founding the International Society for Mangrove Ecosystems (ISME)** in 1990, with Swaminathan as Founding President, provided a vital institutional anchor for global mangrove conservation.
 - He **co-authored the Charter for Mangroves**, integrated into the World Charter for Nature at the 1992 United Nations Conference, which continues to underpin global mangrove conservation standards.
 - **The ISME's initiatives, such as economic and environmental evaluations,** international workshops, restoration manuals, and the influential World Mangrove Atlas, redefined mangroves **from marshy wastelands to irreplaceable multi-use ecosystems.**
 - The creation of the **GLObal Mangrove database and Information System (GLOMIS)**, and the establishment of genetic resource centres across Asia and Oceania, have **institutionalised**

mangrove research, conservation, and restoration.

• A Transformative Impact on Indian Policy and Practice

- India's mangrove management journey began as early as 1783, but throughout the colonial and early post-independence era, **the emphasis was on clear-felling for agriculture and settlement.**
- **Restoration attempts by government agencies often failed**, and local communities were unfairly blamed for degradation.
- Under Swaminathan's guidance, **participatory research in the 1990s, particularly with the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, revealed that destructive management practices**, not community resource use, were to blame for mangrove losses.
- This led to the development and pilot-testing of the **hydro-ecological "fishbone canal" method** for restoration in several Indian states.
- Over time, **this approach blossomed into the Joint Mangrove Management programme**, which was officially recommended for adoption nationwide in 2000.

Mangroves as Coastal Shields

- The **demonstrated ability of mangroves to reduce devastation during major natural disasters, such as the 1999 Odisha super cyclone** and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, solidified their value in disaster mitigation.
- These **events catalysed large-scale restoration efforts by both central and state governments**, affirming mangroves as essential coastal infrastructure.

Measuring Progress: India's Growing Mangrove Cover

- According to the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023, the nation's mangrove cover is now **4,991.68km², 0.15% of its land area**, up by 16.68km² since 2019.
- This **tangible growth reflects the success of sustained, science-based policies** and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Conclusion

- **World Mangrove Day** serves as a timely occasion to assess progress.
- The **evolution of mangrove conservation from local stewardship to an urgent global mandate underscores the value of visionary leadership**, robust science, and participatory management.
- **Thanks to champions like M.S. Swaminathan and the dedicated efforts of researchers, policymakers, and local communities, mangroves are now recognized not only as natural resources, but as vital assets in the quest for environmental security** and climate resilience.

The Scientist Who Made 'Mangroves' a Buzzword FAQs

Q1. Who played a key role in bringing global attention to mangrove conservation?

Ans. M.S. Swaminathan played a pivotal role in promoting global mangrove conservation.

Q2. What major method was developed in India to restore degraded mangroves?

Ans. The hydro-ecological “fishbone canal” method was developed to restore degraded mangroves in India.

Q3. How did mangroves help during natural disasters like the 1999 Odisha cyclone and the 2004 tsunami?

Ans. Mangroves reduced the loss of life and property during these natural disasters.

Q4. According to the ISFR 2023, what is the total mangrove cover in India?

Ans. India’s mangrove cover is 4,991.68 km² as per ISFR 2023.

Q5. What organisation did M.S. Swaminathan help found to support mangrove research and conservation?

Ans. He helped found the International Society for Mangrove Ecosystems (ISME).

Source: **The Hindu**

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/daily-editorial-analysis-26-july-2025/>

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