

# A grand tragedy looms

**R**AWALPINDI, Pakistan — Rawalpindi, once the headquarters of the British Northwest Frontier command, conjures up images of the Khyber Rifles marching off to fight fierce Pathan tribesmen in the jagged, dusty hills of the wild Afghan border. Talking to Pakistani generals, with their pukka English accents, clipped moustaches and swagger sticks, recalls the days of the British Raj.

But if war breaks out this fall between India and Pakistan — as most military and intelligence experts here believe — it will be very different from the mountain ambushes of the old Northwest Frontier.

Both nations are among the world's leading military powers and are armed to the teeth. India has 1.3 million men in its regular armed forces, and a similar number of paramilitary troops. After years of massive defense spending, India is by now the world's fourth-ranking military power.

The 1.1-million Indian Army has two armored, one mechanized, 20 infantry and 11 mountain divisions, plus six more division equivalents. Only the armies of China and the USSR are larger.

India has more main battle tanks — some 3,650 — than France, Britain and Italy combined, including large numbers of late model Soviet T-72 tanks. India's artillery arm numbers over 3,800 guns — equal to that of the U.S. Army.

India's growing air force has 836 combat aircraft, among them the newest Soviet MiG-29 agile fighter, the French Mirage 2000, and squadrons of Soviet MiG-23s, MiG-25s and MiG-27s. The air force is supported by a wide array of ground-based radars linked to a centralized air combat system with Soviet advisers.

At sea, India has lately become one of the world's leading naval powers. Its powerful fleet is based around two Soviet-supplied nuclear-powered attack subs, 15 conventional subs, and two aircraft carriers, supported by 28 destroyers or frigates and 13 fast-attack missile craft. Five long-ranged Soviet TU-142M Bear bombers equipped with anti-shiping missiles can range as far south as South Africa or Australia.

## Punch



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## ERIC MARGOLIS



This potent naval force is causing deep concern among nations bordering the Indian Ocean. Many fear that India is determined to rule the entire ocean as the British fleet once did, imposing a sort of *Pax Hind* on the region. The fact that India has two more carriers and more nuclear subs on order deepens such fears.

What is the purpose of such a naval buildup, neighbors ask, when India faces absolutely no threat from the seas?

Equally worrisome is India's missile program, which is now in high gear. In recent years, India has produced both short- and medium-range missiles, capable of carrying nuclear warheads that India has developed. Indian Jaguar fighter-bombers are also armed with nuclear bombs and at operational readiness at bases near Pakistan and China.

Increasingly frustrated over the growing rebellions in Kashmir and Punjab, the Indian government is threatening to launch a general war against Pakistan, which it erroneously blames for its domestic troubles.

If war comes, it will likely begin this fall with limited Indian attacks across the border into Pakistani Kashmir, allegedly in hot pursuit of Muslim Kashmiri rebels whom the Indians claim, without any evidence, are based in Pakistan. India will then try to goad Pakistan to attack further south into Indian Punjab.

India probably won't risk international condemnation by simply staging a massive attack on Pakistan. Instead, it must be made to look as if Pakistan started the fighting. Then India will launch a major offensive.

The Pakistanis are doing their utmost to be non-provocative, fully aware that any war with India would be a disaster for them.

Pakistan's forces are outnumbered more than two-to-one by India and lack the ability to fight a long war. India, thanks to its Soviet-supplied defense industries and larger size, can outlast Pakistan in a sustained war of attrition.

In fact, Pakistan cannot win a war against India. The best it can hope to do is thrash the Indians in a short war and then conclude a favorable peace.

India, on the other hand, cannot lose a war against the Pakistanis in any strategic sense, but could face heavy losses against the crack Pakistani forces.

More important, war would be an economic catastrophe for both sides. Power plants, rail heads, bridges and even nuclear reactors would become targets. The two old foes would be bankrupted. Just replacing lost jet fighters, for example, at \$35 million each, would take years.

And yet, India and Pakistan, two of the world's poorest nations, seem set to fight a major war that neither can really win, bringing new miseries to their already miserable peoples. It would be a tragedy on a grand scale.