In the spring of 1999, the world slowly came to know of Pakistan’s foray into the Kargil-Dras sector in a limited war that has come to be known as the “Kargil conflict.” (India’s military response to this Pakistani adventure was codenamed OPERATION VIJAY.) Although the “real” reasons for Pakistan’s prosecution of the Kargil war cannot be discerned with any certainty right now, a variety of Pakistani writings and public statements suggest that Islamabad likely had several motivations: a desire to redeem itself after its humiliating defeat in the 1971 war with India; India’s occupation of the Siachen glacier; a desire to punish India for its periodic shelling of the Neelum Valley road and its other “provocations” along the line of control (LOC) in Kashmir; a desire to energize what at that point appeared to be a flagging insurgency in the Kashmir valley; and, finally, a desire to exploit its newly confirmed nuclear capabilities to achieve those lasting political changes in Kashmir that had hitherto eluded Islamabad.

The Kargil crisis represents a watershed in India-Pakistan security relations. It demonstrated that even the presence of nuclear weapons might not appreciably dampen security competition between the region’s largest states. However, it remains an empirical question whether or not the Kargil war represents a foretaste of future episodes of attempted nuclear coercion if India and Pakistan believe that their nuclear capabilities provide them the immunity required to prosecute a range of military operations short of all-out war. Whether one side or both will act upon this belief depends in part on the particular conclusions and lessons they drew from the Kargil conflict.
The goal of this analysis is to assess both combatants’ perceptions of the Kargil crisis with a view to evaluating the possibilities of future Kargil-like events. To do so, we first elaborate the significance of the Kargil crisis from the perspective of each country. Second, we explore what key constituencies on both sides learned from the conflict and its aftermath. For example, what strategic and tactical lessons did the Indian and Pakistani military leadership draw? What did each country’s intelligence systems learn? What did the political leadership (both the government and opposition parties) in the two countries learn? How did the populaces respond to the crisis and how have their positions evolved? Will these popular perceptions influence the future taste for war and/or war-like operations? Finally, having laid this groundwork, we elaborate for both combatants some of the possible future options, which may or may not include Kargil-like scenarios.

METHODOLOGY

To answer the questions posed above, we conducted exhaustive literature surveys of the popular press and academic literature. Our review of the popular press tended to focus upon May to September 1999, the period over which the conflict occurred. This effort mostly relied upon the English media, for two main reasons. First, the vernacular press represents extreme views that are considerably at variance with those of the English press and often of little help to policymakers in the United States, South Asia, and elsewhere. The Urdu press in Pakistan is particularly vulnerable to this characterization. Second, there is the question of which vernacular press to use, especially in India, where the numerous vernaculars all reflect their own regional and local biases. Where possible, heavy use was made of electronic sources such as the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) and the archives maintained by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (New Delhi, India) on Indian and Pakistani media coverage during Kargil. Unfortunately, there is no such electronic archive maintained by any Pakistani institution. As the Pakistani

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1It is important to note that in the two years that have passed since the Kargil crisis, popular opinion may very well have shifted in both countries. A historical review of how popular opinion has changed over the course of this period unfortunately was beyond the scope of this effort.
papers represented in this archive tended to be from the Punjab, a region that is typically less critical of the government, we augmented this archive with a separate review of the Karachi-based newspaper, *The Dawn*. In selecting passages to quote, we often chose the most lucid view of a particular issue, which in the case of Pakistan often occurred in *The Dawn*. Thus, the reader should be cautioned that the citation base does not fully represent the comprehensiveness of the literature review efforts.

In addition to undertaking extensive literature reviews, in November and December 2000 we interviewed several key individuals from both India and Pakistan who are representative of the following constituencies:

- Serving military
- Retired military
- Leadership of principal political parties
- Non-state actors in Pakistan
- Civil servants and retired diplomats
- Media and public commentators
- Researchers at universities and think tanks

One of the interesting analytical problems that arose in explicating Pakistan’s perception stemmed from the disparity between information provided during interviews and evidence gathered from the Pakistani popular and academic press. Most contemporary Pakistani accounts of Kargil deny any direct role of the Pakistani Army apart from close support behind the LOC and are thus manifestly incongruent with the accounts published outside of Pakistan. Retired military officers and diplomats, academics, and journalists appeared to be rehearsing the government’s version of events when writing in the editorial pages of major newspapers, but generally spoke quite frankly of the Army’s involvement during our confidential interviews.

There are several possible explanations for these contradictions. One is that when the story of the occupation first broke in Pakistan, there was very little information available. The Foreign Office account was carried generally without question through most of the
conflict. Journalists and private individuals began writing op-ed pieces that obliquely challenged the government's version of events beginning mid- to late-July 1999. More candid rejections of the government's narrative occurred well after the crisis ended. Thus, the differences between the written accounts during the conflict and the interviews in the winter of 2000 may simply reflect an expanded access to information. Alternatively, the differences between public and private accounts may reflect the political stakes of the authors and deference to possible reprisals. Of course, a combination of both factors may account for the differences between public and private narratives of the crisis.

Thus, in this analysis we draw upon both sources of data for Pakistan and note their vastly different perspectives where appropriate. This problem did not arise in the Indian data. Generally, the Indian views obtained in personal interviews were consistent with views expressed in the public domain.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. The significance of Kargil for both countries is described in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, the political, military, and diplomatic lessons learned by both combatants are identified. Chapter Four explores some of the future options as perceived by various stakeholders in India and Pakistan. Finally, Chapter Five presents analyses of the impact of the Kargil crisis on nuclear deterrence stability and identifies several important analytical issues that merit further examination.