This report presents the results of a quick-turnaround study conducted by RAND at the request of the U.S. government in the months leading up to the November 2000 presidential election in the United States. The study was intended to support a variety of internal reviews and briefings that took place around the time of the election.

The broad purpose of the study was to understand how India and Pakistan viewed the significance of the Kargil conflict, what lessons they drew from this conflict, and the implications of those lessons for future stability in South Asia. Consequently, this report is not an all-source document: it has deliberately avoided the use of all U.S. governmental documents and for most part many other open-source American materials as well. Instead, the source materials used are almost exclusively Indian and Pakistani.

Since the significance of the Kargil conflict as appreciated in India and Pakistan is a complex matter, with many different and often conflicting strands of opinion, this report focuses mainly on capturing thematically the dominant ideas circulating in the subcontinent on this issue. As a result, not every view pertaining to Kargil is recorded and, further, many nuances and variations on the main themes recorded here are excluded unless judged by the authors to represent viewpoints that ought to be of interest to policymakers in the United States.

It was initially intended that the lessons learned by India and Pakistan in regard to Kargil would be published separately, but the interesting symmetries in the perceptions of the two sides that were
discovered during the course of the research and interviews ultimately justified a unified publication.

This report is by no means intended to be the final word on Indian and Pakistani assessments about Kargil. In fact, it explicitly represents an early view of this issue, since Indian and Pakistani judgments may themselves evolve with time. As official documents on the conflict come to light, more systematic research on some of the key issues touched on in this report—the genesis of the conflict; the character of the operations; the perceptions, judgments, and decisions of the national leaderships; the significance of nuclear weapons; and the role of outside powers—will be possible, and more considered conclusions may be derived. Until that time, however, this preliminary assessment is offered for public consumption in the hope that it will contribute to a better understanding of the problems of stability in South Asia.

The information cutoff date for the material used in this report was March 2001. No effort has been made to update the analysis to account for events occurring after this date, for two reasons. First, any effort of this sort risks being overtaken by events, and second, updating the study would not have advanced the original objective of the U.S. government, which was to assess Indian and Pakistani perceptions in the aftermath of the Kargil war rather than to provide real-time analysis of changing India-Pakistan relations. Consequently, this analysis serves as a benchmark permitting the reader to assess how India-Pakistan relations have changed subsequent to our evaluation.

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