

Monkey Cage

# Are there lessons from Pakistan for future of fighting in Ukraine?

---

By Yelena Biberman

May 27, 2014

*The following is a guest post from Brown University political scientist [Yelena Biberman](#), who is preparing a book manuscript tentatively titled “Gambling with Violence: Why States Outsource the Use of Force.”*

\*\*\*\*\*

The novelty of Russia’s involvement in eastern Ukraine has been both overplayed as “[reinventing](#)” warfare and underplayed as “stealing” from the [CIA’s playbook](#). Russian President Vladimir Putin is either a military genius or a CIA copycat. The reality is far more banal. Russia’s covert military tactics in eastern Ukraine are neither new nor exclusive to the CIA.

No other country offers as many lessons in covert warfare as does Pakistan. Pakistan practiced covert warfare long before the CIA engaged its Pakistani counterpart, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), in [training Afghan mujahedin](#) to fight against the Soviet Union. Pakistan started its first covert operation within three months of its independence, in 1947.

Pakistan’s Operation Gibraltar, carried out in 1965 to gain control of India-controlled Kashmir, carries significant resemblance to Russia’s maneuvers in Ukraine. The former princely state of Kashmir and Jammu seemed destined to become [an Asian Switzerland](#). Its maharaja sought to fashion an independent neutral mountain state, world-famous for its scenic landscapes.

Pakistan’s botched covert operation to take over the Muslim-majority region led the panicked Hindu ruler to accede Kashmir to India. The ensuing war between India and Pakistan resulted in what was to be a temporary division of Kashmir, pending a plebiscite. The plebiscite is [still pending](#), and Kashmir is now the world’s oldest unresolved international conflict.

Pakistan could not imagine allowing India to control a Muslim-majority region in its own backyard, just as Putin does not want to lose eastern Ukraine to “the West.” Pakistan’s then-president and military dictator Ayub Khan set up the “[Kashmir Cell](#)” to brainstorm a means of

taking Kashmir from India. In December 1964, he instructed the cell to jumpstart a Kashmiri uprising. The covert operation, code-named Operation Gibraltar, involved using roughly 7,000 Kashmiri civilians from the Pakistan-controlled Kashmir territory. The goal was to make it seem like it was the “four million downtrodden and oppressed Kashmiris” who wanted to liberate themselves from India’s “occupation forces.” As the leading Pakistani newspaper Dawn put it: “Enslaved Kashmiris forced to revolt: Azad area people bound to help them.” Of course, the story had the real sequence of events all wrong. The Pakistani infiltrators were to create chaos and ignite an indigenous uprising. This would, in turn, create the conditions necessary for Pakistan officially to intervene and aid the rebels, as well as generate international pressures to force a settlement before the conflict with India got out of hand.

Roughly 70 percent of the “Gibraltar Force” consisted of Kashmiri civilians; the rest were regular army personnel whose job was to train, arm and manage the irregular forces. Most were trained for seven weeks, but some as little as three weeks. The infiltrators were supplied with forged registration cards, propaganda for local distribution, and civilian clothes. Some were even issued women’s clothing and wigs to help them to avoid detection by Indian authorities.

The infiltrators’ tasks included the establishment of parallel administrations, with local residents nominated to hold posts as revenue and police officials. “Inqlabi” (“Revolutionary”) councils were to be set up to run some of the local administrations. The plan for the Kashmir Valley required the infiltrators to mingle unnoticed with thousands of people congregating to celebrate the festival of Pir Dastgir Sahib on Aug. 8, 1965. On the next day, which coincided with the anniversary of the first arrest of a popular Kashmiri leader, a processional demonstration was to take place in the capital city of Srinagar. The infiltrators were to participate in these processions and attack government buildings, police on duty and markets, so as to compel the police to resort to force and thus start a chain reaction of further protests and violence.

Putin’s use of the local pro-Russia population to sow the seeds of an uprising and create enough chaos to elicit a heavy-handed response from the Ukrainian forces, which would then justify Russia’s direct military engagement, is straight from the playbook of not only the CIA, but also military dictators. Operation Gibraltar ultimately failed because, at the time, the local Kashmiris opted for India over Pakistan. Ayub misread the popular sentiment. Operation Gibraltar failed to spark a popular uprising, and instead led to Pakistan’s second war with India.

What happens in eastern Ukraine will also largely depend on the eastern Ukrainians. The Russian language connection and propaganda are unlikely to be sufficient to convince the neutral elements in eastern Ukraine to choose authoritarian Russia over the, albeit bumpy, European route. It would take overt force, greater than the one used in the Crimea, to annex eastern Ukraine. It would also involve taking a serious risk, not only with the international community but also of potentially creating another Kashmir.

\*\*\*\*\*

Past Monkey Cage posts on developments in Ukraine, Russia and Crimea [can be found by clicking here](#). Recent posts include:

*Erik Herron: [Is Ukraine ready to vote?](#)*

*Joshua Tucker: [Despite problems, Ukrainians favor unity](#)*

*Kimberly Marten: [Ukraine and the problem of local warlords](#)*

*Dmitry Gorenburg: [Opposition in Ukraine: A tale of two maps](#)*

*Kyle Dropp, Joshua D. Kertzer and Thomas Zeitzoff: [The less Americans know about Ukraine's location, the more they want U.S. to intervene](#)*



**6 Comments**

The Washington Post

Reporting the facts for over 140 years.

Try 1 month for ~~\$10~~ \$1

Send me this offer

Already a subscriber? [Sign in](#)