**Major Munawar: an Unsung Hero of Indo-Pak 1965 War**

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September 6, 2021

Indo-Pak War of 1965 is replete with examples of miraculous bravery and unprecedented achievements. Today, I wish to introduce another great Mujahid whose victories enabled Pakistan to regain its lost territories of Lahore/Sialkot sectors and Azad Kashmir at the time of the UN-mandated ceasefire. At the onset of Operation Gibraltar, ten independent forces were launched in Occupied Kashmir in the first week of August 1965.

Unfortunately, nine of those forces could not sustain the pressure of the Indian Army and retreated after suffering heavy causalities, in the second week. It was only the Ghaznavi force under Major Munawar Khan Awan, which, from the very outset, gained dominance over the Indian Army. On August 5, 1965, the Ghaznavi force conducted a raid on Narian Ammunition Dump; ambushed several Indian convoys and infiltrated deep into Rajouri Valley-all the way up to Budhal-undetected. During an initial hard blow, Ghaznavi Force librated over 4000 Kashmiri women and children from Indian Army/Police camps. These activities of Major Munawar won the will and hearts of the local population and they vowed to accompany him till their last. By the end of the war, the number of Muslim youth of IhK that had joined the Ghazanavi ranks had reached 3000.

By August 18, 1965, Major Munawar’s Ghaznavi Force had occupied many areas of Indian Kashmir, including Thannamandi, Darhal Malkan, Mehndar, Poonch, Kundi and Budhil. Consequently, the Indian Army had been besieged in their camps after suffering heavy losses of men and material. Now, the next target was Rajouri Garrison and Town. It was occupied by the Indian 25th Infantry Division and two reserve Brigades. Major Munawar attacked Garrison of Rajouri on the night between September 15 and 16.

Major Munawar knocked out Indian security forces and taught them unforgettable lessons with the help of gallant Kashmiri Muslims.

Resultantly, over 200 Indian soldiers were killed and hundreds of others managed to escape. Soon, both town and garrison fell into the hands of Major Munawar. By the end of the war, he had hoisted the green flag of Pakistan on all official buildings and was exercising his complete administrative control over an area of two thousand square miles, including Naushera, Rajouri, Thannamandi, Darhal Malkan, Kundi, Budhal, Riasi, Mehndar, Mandi, Poonch, and established his government over there. He appointed his own DC, SP Judges and other administrative staff. The UNO Military observers visited Rajouri town and Garrison after its capture by the Ghaznavi force. After the UN ceasefire declaration, Major Munawar was ordered to withdraw back to Azad Kashmir. He protested and showed his determination to fight till his death. Besides this, he shared his apprehension that if he returned, the Indian Army would take revenge from the local Muslim population for supporting his force during the war. On the other hand, Foreign Minister Z A Bhutto had rejected the Indian demand in the UNO that the forces of both countries should go back to their pre-August 5 positions. Bhutto wanted the armies of both countries to get back to the prior positions but only at the international borders. Since Kashmir was a disputed territory, this should not apply to its areas. In this way, a vast territory of occupied Kashmir would have been with Pakistan. But India refused to accept Bhutto’s proposal. As India had captured some areas of Pakistan in Lahore / Sialkot sectors and Haji Peer Pass of Azad Kashmir, it refused to vacate them until Pakistan accepted its demand. Thus, Bhutto was asked to sign the cease-fire pact. Just after the vacation of these areas, Indian forces, in revenge, killed over two thousand Kashmiris. Children and women were subjected to great violence and over 1700 young women were kidnapped. As a result of this barbarism and ferocity, some 86000 Kashmiris were forced to migrate to Pakistan.

In recognition of Major Munawar’s miraculous and unprecedented victories and achievements, he was awarded Sitara-e-Jurat. He was also given the title “The King of Rajouri” by President Ayub. Although Gen Akhtar Malik (The Commander of 12 Div at that time) recommended Ayub Khan to award “Nishan-e-Haider” to Major Munawar, he turned down this recommendation on the plea that this award was admissible to the Martyrs only. Few ill-informed writers call “Operation Gibraltar” an unsuccessful operation. But this is quite far from reality.

In brief, Major Munawar knocked out Indian security forces, brought them to their knees and taught them unforgettable lessons with the help of gallant Kashmiri Muslims. He had liberated the largest tract of territory in Indian-held Kashmir during the 1965 war. Indian Army not only accepted that the Ghaznavi force caused them a maximum but even gave a unique honor to its commander by displaying his photographs in two photo galleries with the caption, “A brave enemy.”

Names of such heroes always remain alive in history. It is our duty to keep their great contributions alive in our memories as well.

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