

WHY AGNI MISSILES MATTER

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geopolitics

DEFENCE ■ DIPLOMACY ■ SECURITY

■ ARMY- AIR FORCE
**TUSSLE OVER
HELICOPTERS**

■ CONFESIONS
**OF A PAK
COMMANDO**



PLUGGING LOOPOLES?

Coastal defence is still in deep water because of
procurement delays and turf wars.

DEEPA KANDASWAMY:
Please introduce yourself.

AZAM GILL: I was born in Pakistan, in a Christian family that had been converted from Sikhism. My father was a magistrate, and my mother a High School Principal. Our house was full of English books and magazines, and we were encouraged to read, express our opinions and defend them. Our British and Pakistani teachers in our English medium school with a well-stocked library had the same attitude to learning. At University, I was a keen and popular inter-varsity debater and boxer. I was commissioned in a light infantry battalion of the Punjab Regiment of the Pakistan Army and spent several years on the Kashmir frontier. By Army Order, I was nominated the youngest Regimental Adjutant after having served as Intelligence Officer, Company Officer and Company Commander. My duties included training, operations and field intelligence. That meant I was responsi-

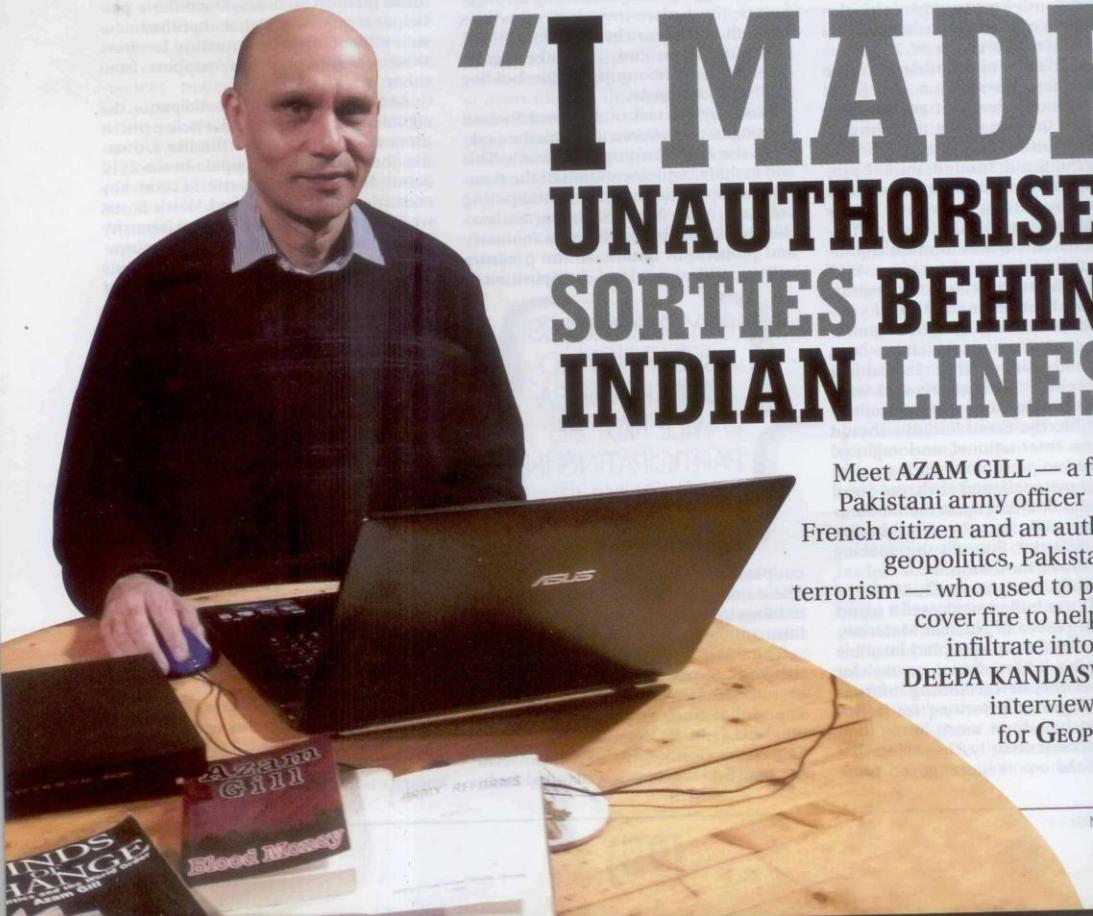
ble for patrolling on the Pakistani and Indian sides, which means raids and ambushes. There were also reconnaissance missions, the daily situation report (SitRep), which coordinated the sitreps of all spotters in towers on the Pakistani side and the debriefings of reconnaissance patrols. Every month I sent the MSIR - Monthly Security and Intelligence Report. When Pakistani Intelligence needed to infiltrate spies through my sector, I was responsible. Most operations were unacknowledged, and I myself took the initiative and made a certain number of unauthorized sorties behind Indian lines, for which I got into trouble with the Pakistan Army High Command. As punishment, I was sent on a Physical Training Course! My life was spent in an earth bunker linked with other bunkers by crawl trenches filled with snakes and slush. Despite the brotherhood of certain officers and the loyalty of my men, I suffered heartbreak at the discrimination practiced against a Christian in Pakistan

The right to citizenship by blood or soil had no de facto recognition. I was a mercenary in the Pakistan Army, driven my circumstances to earn my living in this time honored fashion.

After my departure from the Pakistan Army I wrote a pamphlet in Pakistan called "Jail Reforms" about the draconian state of human rights in prison. That was followed by a book "Army Reforms".



GEOPOLITICS
SPECIAL INTERVIEW



"I MADE UNAUTHORISED SORTIES BEHIND INDIAN LINES"

Meet **AZAM GILL** — a former Pakistani army officer now a French citizen and an author on geopolitics, Pakistan and terrorism — who used to provide cover fire to help spies infiltrate into India.
DEEPA KANDASWAMY interviewed Gill for **GEOPOLITICS**

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SPECIAL INTERVIEW

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Basically, the entire Christian Community of Pakistan has sufficient grounds for mass political asylum. In my case, "Jail Reforms" and "Army Reforms" made me the target of harassment and threats.

After my departure from the Pakistan Army I wrote a pamphlet in Pakistan called "Jail Reforms" about the draconian state of human rights in prison. That was followed by a book "Army Reforms", about the state of human rights in the Pakistan Army due to the communication gap between officers and troops. The Preface was written by General Bakhtiar Rana. Basically, both were a cry for secularism in a functional theocracy.

Q: What were the circumstances that made you flee Pakistan and join the Legion?

A: Community of Pakistan has sufficient grounds for mass political asylum. In my case, "Jail Reforms" and "Army Reforms" made me the target of harassment and threats. I was called to Islamabad by then General Zia-ul-Haq's personal secretary, who'd been one of my instructors at the Pakistan Military Academy. He advised me to leave the country urgently within the forty days it took to circulate the order banning me from leaving the country. When I got back to Lahore, the order was in the post box! I went back to Islamabad, and the French were kind enough to give me a visa for political asylum. France has earned my eternal gratitude by this graceful gesture. My mother gave me a few thousand dollars and the Gospel of Saint John. She told me to spend that money seeing the sights of Paris, and agreed that joining the French Foreign Legion was the right choice. If France opened its doors to me, I should honor the gesture by offering my life for five years. The Legion also offered anonymity, and in my case, my family could tell the government that there was no risk of Azam Gill organizing anti-Pakistan demonstrations in Paris, since he'd be too busy lugging a rucksack in some godforsaken part of Africa! She said, "If God brought you back alive through the Kashmir trenches, fighting your blood brothers in Indian uniform, He'll get you alive out of the Legion too. Don't forget to say your prayers!"

Can you tell us a little about the French Foreign Legion?

The French Foreign Legion consists of eighty to ninety per cent foreign nationals under an initial five year contract. One in ten applicants is selected, and out of those, a large number never make it past basic training. Physically, it's no harder than any other professional army. Psychologically, you're serving under a foreign flag, under an assumed identity, with no family, your past wiped out, an uncertain future, and a tenuous present, singing marching songs encouraging the death wish! And there are no French lessons, you speak pidgin French, and often communicate by grunts and gestures. It works to the advantage of France, since the intense ethnic competition leads to a natural synergy that keeps standards very high and there is a constant search of excellence. Legion recruits bring different talents and experience to the Legion - beggars, doctors, army officers, racing car drivers, princes, bandits, locksmiths



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etc. When the Legion needs to put together a team for a special operation, all this prior talent comes into play. It is Special Forces capable, outperforms all French Army Units, and is the first to be launched in a combat situation. So the Legion is a highly professional force of very tough soldiers. The Legion has never claimed to be the best, says it is among the best, probably the best, recognizes equals but knows of no superiors. It does not acknowledge all operations.

By the end of the cold war, are you saying militants were actively sent into India by Pakistan with the help of its army? How did Pakistan — when you were there — send extremists into India?

Yes. Take the period of the most intense militant activity in Kashmir, then do a bit of reverse engineering asking yourself all the while how long it would take to achieve such intensity. The intensity is a culmination of the preparatory phase. And in proportion to the intensity of the culminating phase, how long do you think the preparatory phase was? And what do you think its components were? I witnessed people crossing the LOC without visas or passports. In any case, eyewitnesses are important for police and not necessarily military operations. Clandestine operations are murky, and take place in a grey area. The western expectation of police procedures to tackle clandestine military operations is naive, and this naïveté seems to be overwhelming a culture that gave birth to sophisticated scholarly works such as the Arthashastra.

Can you describe in detail how terrorist cells form and operate? How does it all begin?

It all begins with the choice of guerrilla over conventional warfare. Sometimes this choice is imposed by circumstances, but not always. Organization is in small watertight cells, and the level of motivation is very high. Recruitment is by word of mouth spread in the centers of ideology. Thinking is long-term, and the cult of leadership is ever present, fuelled by visionary theoreticians, mainly academics. Like the German Baader Meinhof, the Italian Red Brigades terrorist nuclei are composed of highly intelligent people, often academics. The same is true of Islamic organizations, although there is a reluctance to concede it. When they achieve a spectacular coup

in a western country, there is a rush to explain how they couldn't have outsmarted a western government without the active or passive connivance of that western government or its decision making bodies. This gives rise to a plethora of conspiracy theories. If it is accepted that Islamic terrorists are as intelligent as the European terrorist organizations, it would lead to more accurate analyses. By a process of reverse engineering, it is possible to obtain a sharper picture.

Why is there so much Islamic terrorism and is Middle-East really the hub or is it somewhere else? What is your opinion? A number of Muslims discount the effects of the thirteenth century Mongol invasion of Iraq, which left the Caliphate in ruins. Enough Muslims are convinced that because their destiny was hijacked by the West as part of a concerted plan, their only resort to protect their way of life and make it available to others is by terrorism. Western socialist discourse posits that terrorism is solely a result of economic conditions, and that once the economic environment is improved; people will abandon terrorism as a means. This approach discounts ambition, sense of destiny and greed. Even this discourse admits that it will not be the end of competition, but that the adversary will then play be more acceptable rules. That is not a given. The competitor might well set up other rules nobody's prepared for!

The hub of Islamic terrorism is a mobile base that changes location subject to the level of security available in a country and the willingness of its government or elements within, to provide it. So this hub has been moving from Syria, Iraq, Libya to the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon to Somalia to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Radical Islamic organizations reason in terms of one Islamic space under different flags, and they are free of any deadline to achieve the ultimate goal. In contrast, Western Generals plan for operations within deadlines, and each nation state is assessed as a distinct sovereign

space. This hidebound view of warfare works to the advantage of terrorist organizations.

How do you see the politics in Pakistan play out now?

The urban elite would like to see a strong, efficient and honest democracy, with the military under civilian control. Unfortunately, honest politicians are not always vote pullers, and vote pullers not always honest.

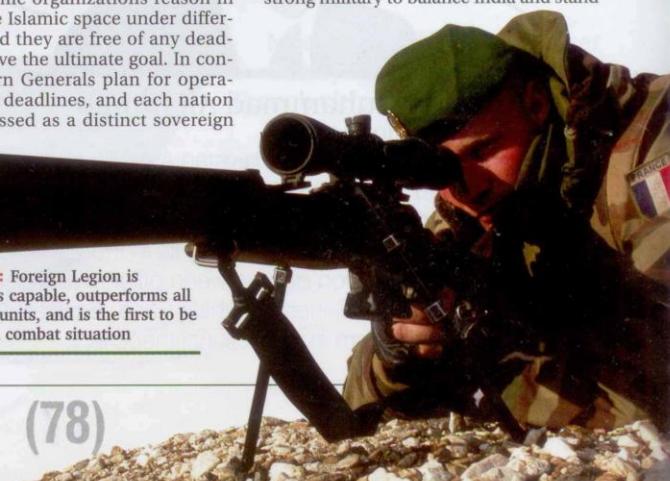
Pervez Musharraf did lay the groundwork for a free press, but the digestive process of that liberty is still underway. That facilitates outside observers' tendency to impose wishful thinking on their analyses retrieved from press reports and editorials. Their ears are not at ground level, and they can only access the literate urban population through the press. The potential for violent instability comes from the urban illiterate / semi-literate and the rural masses. They comprise the rank and file of militant groups, as in southern Punjab.

Besides which, they operate in secrecy, as do their supporters. Even the passive support can only be assessed by an ear to the ground. This lacuna is substituted by the availability of strident tones of the urban elite through the press, leading analyses to a qualitative dead end.

Would China prefer the military or Pakistan Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani?

China and Pakistan balance each other in relation to the United States and India. Unlike the US, China does not help to pay Pakistan's bills, but provides military and civilian support. China is also worried about the spill-over of Islamic fundamentalism from Pakistan within its own borders. While China would like to see a strong military to balance India and stand

ELITE UNIT: Foreign Legion is Special Forces capable, outperforms all French Army units, and is the first to be launched in a combat situation





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up to the US from time to time, it would not like to see the secret services further strengthened, which would be the case under military rule. In that scenario, the vilified elements of these secret services that created and sustain fundamentalist groups would feel more secure. If Gilani plays his cards right, he might be able to muster Chinese backing, but that by itself would not be enough. He also needs Washington's gift packages. The icing on the cake would be Indian support!

How do you see the increasing Chinese incursions into India?
Signals of friendship to Pakistan, preempting the possibility of Indian games in Taiwan, and an exploitation of Indian laxity and indecisiveness, in varying and overlapping proportions.

With a deep-water port in Sri Lanka, China has completed the SAARC surrounding of India! Do you think France, UK, US or Russia would be supportive of the Indian predicament?

China's deep-water port in Sri Lanka is India's failure with Sri Lanka, and the island's own balance of power policy to obtain some strategic elbow room. An Indian port in Taiwan would be a reaction in which case, the initiative would stay with China. China is purportedly a threat to American military satellites, or is trying to be one. That's an area where India should take the initiative. The second

area is in cyber warfare. The third area should be in detection and anti-detection on land, air and sea. This way the Chinese would have no excuse to step up their incursions on the Indo-Chinese border. Furthermore, India needs to act in such a way that the Chinese react as desired and predicted to their own initiative.

With Kim Jong dead, North Korea is now ruled by the son of whom we know little about. Do you think the Korean situation will keep China occupied enough to keep its eye off Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh?

Perhaps, but it will not be a long-term window of opportunity. Indian intelligence and think tanks should estimate the duration of this diversion and see how it can be used to their advantage to outpace China in space, in cyber warfare and detection and anti-detection. Perhaps strengthen its northern and north-eastern frontiers, and concentrate on internal security.

The war on terrorism of the US has proved to be a damp squib. Do you think we will see a replay of the late 80s and early 90s when Western nations encouraged dictators as long as their corporate interests were protected?

This time it would appear to be a semantic reinterpretation of Islamic fundamentalism to vindicate the results of the Arab Spring in which they apparently had some part to play.

► While China would like to see a strong military to balance India and stand up to the US from time to time, it would not like to see the secret services further strengthened, which would be the case under military rule.

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With Kashmir's strategic importance in the South Asian and Chinese equation in the long term, do you see PoK being occupied by China as it already has installations there?

In case of fragmentation, perhaps, but I think the Indian Army might even beat them to it!

Do you think Pakistan will ever become a nation which is relatively stable? If yes, how?

Yes, if it makes peace with India in a way that allows average Pakistanis to maintain their self-image. Peace with India means radically reduced defence expenditure that can be channelled into the economy and education. An educated work-force and Foreign Direct Investment would reduce the misery of the poor. Otherwise Pakistan is liable to tragically muddle along like Albania, hoping for the Big Break.

Kindly let us know your affiliations and current position - do you work for the French Navy or have you retired?

A teacher in France obtains tenure and grade-A civil service status by passing a national competitive exam. After receiving my PhD suma cum laude, that is what I did, and was shortly afterwards seconded to the French Navy. I am now a Lecturer in English at one of the Toulouse University colleges.