

# DEFEATING PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR STRATEGY

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Nearly three thousand years ago, Sun Tzu had said that in order to defeat a country, it is not necessary or even enough to defeat its armed forces. The key to the adversary's real defeat lies in trouncing its strategy. While this dictum has stood the test of time, it becomes even more applicable when nuclear weapons enter inter-state relations. In such a situation, it is practically impossible to *defeat* the adversary's military *without suffering grave consequences yourself* and, hence, the need to address the adversary's strategy in such a manner that one's objectives are met without allowing the adversary's threat of use of nuclear weapons to come into play.

It is natural that once a country acquires nuclear weapons, it strives for establishing credible deterrence that can allow it to pursue its national interests without the fear of nuclear coercion or blackmail. At the same time, it is also true that nuclear weapons enable a more risk prone state to undertake provocative acts against a status quo nation by projecting the threat of escalation to the nuclear level. It is for this reason that the latter class of nuclear weapons possessing nations are cautious, sometimes overly so, in the use of military force, lest the situation spins out of control and leads to an inadvertent and unwanted escalation.

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**Gen Mirza Aslam Beg, former Chief of the Army Staff wrote, "Oxygen is basic to life, and one does not debate its desirability... nuclear deterrence has assumed that life-saving property for Pakistan."**

In order to avoid, or at least minimise such risks, the country that faces the threat of being provoked by a nuclear armed state must devote careful consideration to the manner in which the *strategy of the adversary can be defeated*. All elements of state power, including the military component, have to be intelligently employed in order to make the 'use' – both political and military – of the adversary's nuclear weapon redundant.

This challenge stands starkly before India that faces an adventure prone and hostile nation in a nuclear armed Pakistan. Resentful since its independence of the fact that it "started its independent career as a weak nation,"<sup>1</sup> and for which it blames India, Pakistan has spent the last six decades looking for ways to equalise the perceived power asymmetry with India. This has been done in three ways: one, through alliance building with the USA and China and exploiting their equation with India to enhance Pakistan's own strategic relevance; two, through the acquisition – overtly or clandestinely – of modern conventional and nuclear weaponry; and third, through the use of proxy actors to wage terrorism against India to cause greater and greater damage to the Indian political and socio-economic fabric to keep the nation unsettled.

However, it is in the acquisition of nuclear weapons that Pakistan has found the best guarantee of meeting its objective of 'cutting India down to size', without having to run the risk of confronting a superior conventional military even while indulging in acts of proxy terrorism. It is no secret that Pakistan holds its nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantor of national survival. Tellingly, in fact, Gen Mirza Aslam Beg, former Chief of the Army Staff of Pakistan had avidly brought this out in one of his writings in 1994. In an article appropriately entitled "Pakistan's Nuclear Imperatives," he

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1. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, *The Armed Forces of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 34.

wrote, "Oxygen is basic to life, and one does not debate its desirability... nuclear deterrence has assumed that life-saving property for Pakistan."<sup>2</sup>

This article examines how Pakistan's nuclear strategy is used to provide the nation with 'oxygen' while seeking to debilitate India. Only by understanding the country's strategy, can India hope to craft its own set of measures that can defeat it. In fact, given the presence of nuclear weapons in both nations, a decisive military defeat cannot be envisaged without a huge loss to own self. How best, then, can India secure its national interests and bring about a change in Pakistan's policy behaviour? What kind of actions must India take? What type of military operations are possible in the presence of nuclear weapons? New Delhi is required to make a cost benefit analysis, sooner rather than later, while answering these questions to address the challenge posed by a nuclear Pakistan. The article is an attempt in this direction.

### UNDERSTANDING PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR STRATEGY

Pakistan's long-standing hostility against India and the sub-conventional conflict through terrorism that it has waged now for the last nearly two decades is not a secret. Its intentions and the concomitant build-up of nuclear and conventional military capability, as also the terrorist infrastructure meant for waging the proxy war against India, is today openly acknowledged by its military leadership as also by the United States.<sup>3</sup> In fact, while Pakistan has followed a strategy of covert warfare from the time of its creation in 1947, the acts of terrorism acquired a new lease of life, pace and intensity once the Pakistan Army became confident of its nuclear weapons capability.

The use of terror is an accepted strategy in Pakistani military thinking. Brig S. K. Malik (Retd), in his *Quranic Concept of War*, a book for which Gen Zia, then the Chief Martial Law Administrator, wrote the foreword,

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2. Gen Mirza Aslam Beg, "Pakistan's Nuclear Imperatives", *National Development and Security*, vol. 3, no. 10, November 1994, pp.29-41.

3. Former Pakistani President and Chief of Army Staff accepted this in an interview in November 2010 and US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, too acknowledged the fact in the same month.

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identified terror as a basic tenet of Quranic military strategy. According to him, the Holy Quran “enjoins us to prepare ourselves for war to the utmost in order to *strike terror into the heart of the enemies*, known or hidden, while guarding ourselves from being terror-stricken by the enemy.”<sup>4</sup> It is his advice that “during peacetime, our ‘Will’ must find its expression through ‘Preparation’. The war of preparation being waged by us during peace is vastly more important than the active war.” And creating terror to destroy the ‘will’ of the adversary is part of this preparation strategy. As Malik says, “We should enter upon the ‘war of muscles’

having already won the ‘war of will’... Once a condition of terror into the opponent’s heart is obtained, hardly anything is left to be achieved. It is the point where the means and the end meet and merge. Terror is not a means of imposing a decision upon the enemy; it is *the decision* we wish to impose upon him.”<sup>5</sup> Premised on such logic, Pakistan seeks to use proxy actors to wreak physical havoc and terror in India, while also using the threat of use of nuclear weapons to psychologically terrorise the decision-making processes.

Clearly, therefore, Pakistan’s nuclear weapons are less for ‘nuclear’ deterrence and more for providing immunity to the country to wage other modes of conflict. Deterring the nuclear weapons of India is the least important function of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons. They are meant more for deterring a conventional attack which could possibly escalate from a border skirmish, given the unsettled border issues between India and Pakistan or might be triggered by a terrorist incident. The escalation of such a conflict to the nuclear level also remains theoretically possible since deliverable nuclear weapons are available with both nations.

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4. Brigadier S. K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War* (New Delhi: Himalayan Books, 1986), p. 58. Emphasis added.

5. Ibid., pp. 58-59. Emphasis in original.

Pakistan, in fact, uses this very risk of escalation to achieve two objectives: one, to deter India from using its superior conventional military capability in response to the proxy acts of terrorism executed by groups sponsored and trained by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI); and, two, to magnify the fears of the international community by suggesting the possibility of a nuclear exchange in the region. The Pakistan military works on the assumption that a 'concerned' international community (especially the USA) would restrain India from using military force. Therefore, its nuclear weapons, in Pakistani perception, give it the immunity to execute its strategy of bleeding India through a thousand cuts, while curbing India's response to merely dressing its wounds without being able to strike at the hand making the injuries.

By pursuing such a strategy, Pakistan is engaging in a policy of brinkmanship. It tries to deter not a nuclear but a conventional response from India by projecting the risk of loss of control over the situation. Thomas Schelling explained this as the suggestion of "a threat that leaves something to chance." In his words, "If brinkmanship means anything, it means manipulating the shared risk of war. It means exploiting the danger that somebody may inadvertently go over the brink, dragging the other with him."<sup>6</sup> He graphically described this with the analogy of two cars coming towards an intersection from different directions. As one of the drivers accelerates his vehicle, he gives a signal to the other of his determination to cross first. This places the onus of the decision on the other side to either slow down to let the other pass, or to ignore the signal and carry on at the same speed even at the risk of a collision that could be equally harmful to either side. If the second driver slows down, the first has successfully managed to deter him by his threat of collision.

It is easy to apply this to the Pakistan-India equation in order to understand the working of deterrence. Pakistan may be compared to the first driver who accelerates his speed (or indulges in provocative acts of sub-conventional conflict) and then seeks to deter India from speeding ahead (or launching a military response) by suggesting the possibility of collision

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6. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 98-99.

if both continue to head in the same direction at the same pace. Finding the cost of collision too high, India has, in the past, slowed its vehicle or refrained from a military response. This has led to the impression, certainly in the Pakistan Army and also in some circles in India, that a bigger and stronger country has been deterred.

Herman Kahn explained this behaviour of Pakistan through his theory of “rationality of irrationality.”<sup>7</sup> An irrational threat, such as of a collision or a war, can become rational and, hence, successful in imposing deterrence, if it achieves its objective. Pakistan employs the threat of an all-out nuclear war, which is irrational because of the damage that it would cause to itself in the process, if India was not deterred. But when Pakistan's irrational threat achieves its aim, it apparently comes to be perceived as a rational act.

This is a strategy of deterrence that nations use in a situation where both have a credible second strike capability. In fact, this concept of deterrence came up precisely to answer the dilemma that nuclear armed states faced when they felt that their nuclear weapons would be of no use since the availability of the same capability with the other side cancelled out the possibility of imposing deterrence by threatening the use of the weapon. The answer to this problem was then found in following a policy of brinkmanship. And, Pakistan is putting this to good use by suggesting that any response from India to the ‘proxy’ acts of terrorism would automatically lead to an escalatory spiral and result in a nuclear exchange.

The international community appears to accept this theory, and Pakistan's behaviour, at face value. Consequently, it urges restraint on India and presses for the resolution of the points of discord between the two as the only long-term means of establishing strategic stability in the region. For instance, in one of the many recent assessments of the danger from Pakistan's nuclear stockpile, one analyst concludes that while the arsenal is “largely safe and secure during peacetime,” the greater danger lies in when Pakistan “might place its nuclear forces on alert *during a crisis with India*.”<sup>8</sup>

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7. Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*, pp. 291-295.

8. Jeffrey Lewis, “Managing the Danger from Pakistan's Nuclear Stockpile”, *National Security Studies Program Policy Paper*, New America Foundation, November 2010. Emphasis added.

In analysis, such as this, and several such abound, especially in Western writings, greater emphasis is placed on averting a crisis with India. Interestingly, the onus for this is assumed to be on 'rational' India to resolve the issues that bedevil the bilateral relationship so that 'irrational' Pakistan does not have the pretext to push the region over the nuclear brink. The point that is missed in this interpretation is that there is great rationality in Pakistan's irrationality. Pakistan holds out its threat of nuclear use after a careful calculation

that its ability to successfully deter is actually derived from its image of being a determined deterrer, as viewed by those being deterred.

Of course, it must be conceded that the dangers from a mated, ready to use arsenal are enormous. But, the assumptions underlying the belief that Pakistan will ready its nuclear arsenal at the very outset of a crisis and reach quickly for the nuclear trigger are questionable on at least three grounds. The first issue to be debated is that every crisis with India will lead to Pakistan automatically making its nuclear arsenal ready for use. This is the impression that Pakistan has managed to create amongst the international community. It plays up the risk of automatic escalation to deter India, as explained earlier in the paper. The second notion that must be questioned is that Pakistan's hostility for India will end with a resolution of all issues of discord. This may not be true given that for the Pakistan Army, which is the primary and only decision-maker on the nature of relationship with India, the *idea of the issues* of conflict rather than their resolution, is more useful. Nothing, except a change in its own thinking, perceptions, ideology and purpose can reduce its apparent sense of discomfort with a geographically larger, economically buoyant, religiously secular and pluralist society. These are the real issues that are in conflict with the idea of Pakistan. Therefore, unless Pakistan changes its view of India, the points of conflict remain only symptoms of the problem, not the problem itself. The third debatable assumption is that Pakistan is 'irrational' enough to use the

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nuclear weapons in easy, early use and thereby bring upon itself a sure state of nuclear decimation. Pakistan's military, that exercises complete control over the country's nuclear strategy, is a professional, rational force. In fact, it is rational enough to understand the benefits or uses of irrationality for enhancing the credibility of deterrence. The consequences of a possible first use of its nuclear weapon against India would be well known to the Pakistan Army. However splendid it might make its first strike, it is a certainty that it could neither be disarming nor decapitating for India. Nuclear retaliation, therefore, is an assured certainty and the consequences cannot stand up to any test of a rational cost-benefit analysis. Well aware of this reality, but yet keen to use the shield of the nuclear weapon to carry out proxy acts of terrorism against India, Pakistan has found the perfect foil in the use of 'rationality of irrationality.' As was stated by one analyst, "Islamabad is convinced that the mere *threat of approaching the nuclear threshold* will prevent India from seizing the strategic initiative and military dominance of events, permitting Pakistan to escalate the crisis at will without the fear of *meaningful Indian retribution*."<sup>9</sup> Even amidst the fighting in Kargil, Pakistani military leaders were convinced that nuclear deterrence afforded the country near-assured immunity against a forceful conventional response because of the risk of nuclear conflagration. By suggesting this linkage, the army was sure it could continue its strategy of proxy war to raise the military and economic costs for India without endangering its own security.

### THE DILEMMA BEFORE INDIA

In the face of such a nuclear strategy, the impression gaining ground within India is that New Delhi is being deterred from responding to the threat from Pakistan. The lack of tangible results from the response to the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001, and the lack of response to the many acts of terrorism since then, especially the Mumbai attack in November 2008, have added to this sense of failure of Indian strategy in contrast to a successful use of Pakistan's nuclear weapons for furthering its objectives.

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9. Yossef Bodansky, "Pakistan's Nuclear Brinkmanship," Freeman Centre for Strategic Studies, Israel. Available at <http://www.freeman.org>. Emphasis added.



The challenge before India, therefore, is to defeat the Pakistani nuclear strategy, certainly not by the use of nuclear weapons, but by making these weapons useless for Pakistan. Indian execution of diplomatic, and if necessary military moves, has to be undertaken in such a manner that the nuclear weapons of Pakistan are not allowed to enter the equation. Pakistan claims that this is not possible. But India has demonstrated in the case of Kargil that this is viable. More such options, and if necessary, demonstration of these would be needed to dispel the notion that Pakistan has managed to create of immunity against use of force.

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India can respond to Pakistan's strategy of covert warfare under the nuclear shadow in three ways. One of these, which has largely been followed since 1989, is to remain defensive and respond to the terrorist strikes by fencing borders to block the entry of terrorists, who are increasingly well trained and well equipped, into the country or intercepting as many of them as possible on Indian soil. Sometimes, timely intelligence inputs and necessary action have been able to prevent a terrorist strike, but at other times, innocents in different cities and locations have borne the brunt of surprise and brutal attacks.

A second way of handling the situation would be to reach out to those constituencies in Pakistan that are willing to be reasonable, that harbour no animosity nor perceive an existential threat from India and are willing to change the course of Pakistan's behaviour from a largely negative to a positive line of action. Unfortunately, these do not hold much sway in national decision-making and, hence, despite India's attempts in this direction, no great results are evident and not much can be expected unless there is substantive change in the domestic polity of the country.

A third way of dealing with the situation for India would be to act more proactively in order to impose punishment not merely on the proxy actors but on the manipulators of these proxies. This would inevitably mean striking at the hand that feeds the terrorists. It is well established today that this involves the highest seats of military authority in Pakistan. Can

India punish them and if yes, how? This question needs to be carefully considered and answered before another 26/11 type of attack takes place again on India.

As is evident, the Indian government has been engaged in the first and the second types of responses in dealing with Pakistan's nuclear strategy. While these have to necessarily continue, there are limits to the success that can be obtained by purely following these approaches. Fighting terrorism defensively can never bring about a change in Pakistan's behaviour. For Rawalpindi, the seat of military power in Pakistan, proxy war is a low cost strategy that pays sufficient enough dividends for the country. It certainly falls in the category of 'preparation' that Brig Malik referred to in his book and which he emphasised was necessary to weaken the adversary by breaking its faith – in the system, in the government and in the country's capability and will. Meanwhile, by officially exercising deniability, Pakistan is able to shake off any responsibility for the acts of terrorism. At the same time, by projecting a low nuclear threshold, it averts the possibility of a conventional conflict with India. It is a win-win situation for Pakistan either way and India's muted response can never hope to make a dent in Pakistan's strategy of covert war. In fact, given that it can now execute it from behind the skirt of its nuclear weapons, the strategy can continue into eternity.

How, then, must the Pakistani strategy be defeated? Greater thought needs to be invested to put into action the third response strategy listed above which has been ignored because of the fear of entering into a conflict that may result in inadvertent escalation. To avoid being self-deterred, it is imperative that the military and political leadership in India is absolutely cognisant with the nature of the shadow that the presence of nuclear weapons casts on the use of military force.

It must firstly be acknowledged that nuclear weapons do impose constraints on the range of military options and the nature of coercive force that adversaries can indulge in. Obviously, weapons of such enormous devastation potential should only be expected to have a deep impact on warfare. And, not in ways that armies are traditionally used to, which is by integrating new weapons into war-fighting strategy. The integration of

nuclear weapons into military strategy is required to be undertaken with a different sensibility and understanding. In fact, the very nature of the weapon – its ability to inflict such high damage – becomes a limiting factor on its own use since nations are forced to recalculate the value of the objective of war and the potential cost to be borne in the process. Every rational cost-benefit analysis of a nuclear war, especially when both sides have such weapons, weighs against nuclear use. In the times when nuclear weapons had not yet entered inter-state equations, nations could go to war if they attached enough value to something they were willing to risk damage and destruction for.

But with the kind of destruction that nuclear weapons promise, nations are compelled to recalculate whether anything could qualify as being valuable enough to risk a nuclear exchange.

Therefore, the high destruction capability of the nuclear weapon becomes a limiting factor for not only its own use in conflict but also for the use of other military capabilities in its presence. Nuclear weapons change the complexion and character of conventional wars. The fact that India had acknowledged this reality was evident in the manner in which it responded to the covert occupation of Indian territory in Kargil in 1999. Even at the risk of incurring higher casualties and severe operational challenges, the Indian political leadership imposed strict constraints on the military to limit its theatre of operations to own side of the Line of Control (LoC). Speaking only a few months after the end of the conflict, on January 05, 2000, at a National Seminar on “The Challenges of Limited War: Parameters and Options”, then Defence Minister George Fernandes made this clear when he said, “Nuclear weapons did not make war obsolete; they simply imposed another dimension on the way warfare was conducted... conventional war

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Two major points can be drawn from this statement: one, that war, especially in the case of an unstable relationship such as India-Pakistan, cannot be ruled out. While it may be true that the presence of nuclear weapons has considerably pushed up India's threshold of tolerance, and so many acts of provocation go unanswered, or inadequately so, it remains equally true that even a high tolerance level can be breached and India might be reaching that level. Post-26/11, the voices demanding action were many and loud. In case another such incident was to take place, it would place immense pressure on the Indian government of the day to undertake some sort of retaliation. Pakistan's projection of a low nuclear threshold and the risk of a nuclear exchange might not then deter. Outbreak of hostilities remains a possibility.

The second aspect of the former Defence Minister's statement that deserves attention is his description of the nature of the conventional war that must be executed in the presence of nuclear weapons. It would have to be undertaken with 'definite limitations'. The challenge, then, for India is to conceptually contour and war-game the conduct of such a military operation. This is important for three reasons: one, to disabuse Pakistan of the assumption that its nuclear weapons have tied India's hands and provided Islamabad, or rather Rawalpindi, with a *carte blanche* for provocative acts; two, to turnaround the widely prevalent view within India that the country is unable to exercise credible deterrence against a smaller and weaker nation; and third, to expose the brinkmanship inherent in Pakistani strategy to the international community.

### **CONVENTIONAL WAR IN THE PRESENCE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

The conduct of a limited conventional war in the presence of nuclear weapons is a challenging proposition demanding adequate thought to operational details as well as the necessary investments in immediate and long-term military capabilities. During the Cold War, it was presumed that the breakout of any conventional hostility between the two superpowers

would rapidly escalate to the nuclear level. Given this presumption, the focus then shifted to the very conduct of *nuclear war* itself and on issues specific to such war-fighting, e.g the use of tactical nuclear weapons, efficacy of first strike or counter-strike doctrines, calculation of numbers of nuclear weapons to prevail and claim victory, etc. Caught in this maze of issues, little attention was paid to the conduct of conventional war in the presence of nuclear weapons. Therefore, the task before India is unique.

India can make the nuclear weapons of Pakistan ineffective and unusable by preparing for the use of military force in a manner that is punitive and yet not threatening enough for Pakistan to reach for its nuclear weapon. Or, in other words, resort to the same tactic of 'salami slicing' that Pakistan uses. Pakistan's plan in Kargil in May 1999 was to seize strategic pieces of territory and then compel the Indian government to negotiate the status of Kashmir. The Pakistan Army assumed that India would find its military options checkmated by the presence of a nuclear overhang and would be compelled to negotiate despite facing the prospect of losing a slice of its territory. In the case of India's use of this strategy, the 'salami' would not be territory but Pakistani assets and infrastructure that are used to inflict damage upon India. Nine caveats, however, need to be kept in mind in the conduct of such operations:

- At the very outset of the conflict, Pakistan will try to cast the shadow of nuclear weapons. Its intention would be to threaten nuclear use to deter India from escalating its conventional strategy while also indirectly summoning international help to bring an early end to the hostilities.
- Pakistan's strategic modernisation – in the numbers and yields of warheads and range and accuracies of delivery systems – is aimed at equipping itself with improved options at each level of warfare and to shift the escalation burden onto India. Therefore, India needs to maintain a high level of conventional capability in order to leave escalation to Pakistan but gain leverage from its superior conventional forces.
- Pakistan's relationship with China does cast another, and indeed a very ominous shadow, on the Indo-Pak equation. Some recent statements of Indian military leaders have referred to the possibility of having to face

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a two-front war. Theoretically, such a contingency cannot be dismissed and the country's military modernisation must cater for it. However, going by past experience, it is evident that China has not really come to the military aid of Pakistan in an Indo-Pak conflict. During Kargil, in fact, the Chinese advice for then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was to withdraw from the heights. The Chinese are astute enough to realise the limits of the benefits that

Pakistan can bring to them as far as constraining India is concerned. They would, or should, calculate that providing military and moral support to Pakistan could become counter-productive beyond a point since it would push India towards greater military build-up which would also impinge on China's own threat perceptions. Therefore, the triangular relationship must be carefully examined for a correct assessment of the situation.

- India's response will call for a restrained and calibrated use of military force instead of an all out employment of military capabilities. Militaries the world over loath the idea of the political leadership placing limits on the use of resources available with them. But in the conduct of military operations in the presence of nuclear weapons, the most appropriate instruments of force will have to be chosen by the military through joint planning and execution in order to enable the effective utilisation of those arms of the military that offer maximum possibility of highly calibrated escalation, and even more importantly, the ability to de-escalate. Therefore, use of Special Forces (specially raised and trained for the purpose), or air power, or even maritime power with the requisite capabilities would be preferred options because they enjoy, in varying measure, the advantage of flexibility of employment, calibrated control over military engagement, and, hence, over escalation. Air power provides obvious benefits in this regard while land forces offer little advantage in terms of escalation control. Once engaged in combat, the army cannot be disengaged unless one side either concedes defeat or

a ceasefire is agreed to. Meanwhile, the use of air power demonstrates resolve while simultaneously offering flexibility of disengagement, thereby facilitating retention of control with own self. Therefore, for the effective, precise application of force, it is necessary that an objective analysis be made of the advantages and limitations of every Service in different scenarios. Such issues need to be adequately considered and deliberated upon in peace-time in order to provide rapid and ready options during crisis.

- The contemporary belief gaining ground is that wars of the future would be short and intense. However, this kind of a military operation might actually play out in slow motion, with small gains and long gaps. The idea would be to “affect the opponent’s will, not crush it” as Henry Kissinger had once articulated.
- This will call for precise and well-articulated political and military objectives to be framed at every level of conflict. These must not only be well conveyed to the domestic audience but also to the enemy for two essential purposes: one, to provide a clear indication to the adversary that the goals of the operation are strictly limited and, hence, there are no intentions to breach its stated or perceived nuclear thresholds. This obviously would reduce the potential for miscalculations and misperceptions. Secondly, the clarity in objectives would also enable better management of domestic expectations, thereby providing the much needed legitimacy and support for the operations. Total military victory defined as occupation and conquest is not a possibility and should not be the objective of such an operation.
- The strategy will call for diplomatic and military synergy for its successful execution. For instance, in the case of Kargil, even as the Indian military moved on the ground to oust the infiltrators, attempts were simultaneously mounted to diplomatically isolate Pakistan and expose its offensive designs to alter the status of the LoC.
- It will call for tremendous show of resolve by the political leadership – both in the government and in the opposition. Sophisticated signalling would have to be employed to convey the determination of the political

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leadership to support the military operations. This would essentially enhance the credibility of deterrence. Meanwhile, a lack of resolve would almost certainly lead to deterrence failure. In fact, display of military preparedness in the absence of political resolve sends wrong signals to the adversary, thereby degrading deterrence at every level. Therefore, the politico-military action must together exhibit enough decisiveness from the beginning of the action when conventional operations are still at lower levels so that a miscalculation of resolve by the adversary does not tempt him to take escalatory actions. The

deterred, in estimating the seriousness of the threat made against him, would be looking for signs of hesitation. If he senses any lack of firmness in the deterrers, escalation would be far quicker, and more difficult to control.

- Political resolve in a democracy will be strongly influenced by public opinion. Where public opinion is divided or hesitant about the carrying out of the threat, the hand of the government would be weakened and the threat would lose its effectiveness. On the other hand, where public opinion demands that a threat of use of military force be carried out, the government's hand to take action will be forced. Sensitivity to public opinion is, therefore, liable to limit the government's freedom of action. This makes it all the more necessary that governments invest enough thought and action during peace-time to raising the awareness and understanding of the public to gain its support and legitimacy for actions during moments of crisis.

## CONCLUSION

Given the nature of India's relationship with a nuclear-armed Pakistan, the possibility of conventional war cannot be obviated. However, the Indian military faces the challenge of planning the conduct of conventional



operations in the presence of nuclear weapons in such a manner that India's superior conventional capability is not checkmated by the adversary's nuclear weapons.

India will be able to deter and defeat the Pakistani nuclear strategy of fomenting sub-conventional conflict only if it can hold out the threat of executing a limited conventional war with conviction. Projection of determination, at both the military and political levels, would be of utmost necessity to convince the opponent. Meanwhile, the execution of this threat in circumstances that have been envisaged for action such as in case of a Mumbai II would serve two purposes – raise the credibility of deterrence for the future and instill confidence in itself.

To achieve this, the war must follow a different set of rules. A classical war envisaging occupation of large swaths of territory or a *blitzkrieg* to cause high military attrition is sure to breach the adversary's nuclear threshold, especially when it perceives itself as the weaker conventional power. If nuclear deterrence has to be maintained, then the military has to conduct the war in such a manner that the risk of escalation to the nuclear level is minimised.

Engaging in a limited war where the level of destruction is carefully calibrated on the basis of precise and clearly articulated military and political objectives that do not threaten the survival of the state has to be the *sine qua non* of such operations. Military strikes restricted in depth into enemy territory and spread over a geographical expanse, or deeper, narrow thrusts offer one way of staying well away from the enemy's perceived/expressed red lines. Action and attacks must be conducted in a way as to place the onus of escalation of hostilities on the adversary while retaining the initiative with oneself. This obviously calls for meticulous conceptualisation, planning and preparation.

Normally, armies do not like constraints on the use of their resources. They consider achievement of victory in war as the final and singular objective and all their weaponry is to be used as a potent tool in the pursuit of this goal. However, an all out war when both sides have nuclear weapons would be self-defeating, if not downright foolish.

The conduct of a limited conventional war between two nuclear-armed nations of unequal capabilities (conventional, nuclear, and of pain infliction and absorption) would be a new experience for the world. However, the challenge for India lies in nullifying the advantage that the adversary seeks to exploit from the linkage between nuclear deterrence and conventional war.