

SOME ASPECTS OF OUR WARS IN FUTURE

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When we seek to discuss the nature and types of wars and the battlefield milieu of the future, it becomes necessary first to define war itself. This requires some fundamental factors to be kept in mind. Wars look different from different perspectives. For example, a purely army-centric view of war, or, for that matter, an air force/navy-centric view may well ignore the broader, especially political-military, implications of war that would depend upon the use of all three components of the military power of the nation. At the same time, we would make a fundamental mistake if we do not include a single Service-centric point of view in shaping the national joint defence/military strategy and the specific doctrine and tactics of the three components of the armed forces. After all, each of the three components of military power operates as a specialised force in its own medium, though for a synergised joint effect, coordinated operational planning and delegated execution of the plans would be necessary, and organisations and institutions should be systemised carefully to strengthen the joint role and not create disjunctions. At the minimum, we need to look at war from a military perspective, though that would also be insufficient since it could ignore the role of political and techno-economic factors in shaping the nature of war and the battlefield

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milieu. Hence, the appropriate approach should be to look at wars from a national perspective and as a national enterprise where even the media would play an important role.

Secondly, there is a tendency, especially in the developing countries, to ignore the factor that there is an adversary/enemy that is integral to warfare. That enemy would evolve its own political goals and military objectives, organisation, doctrine and strategy, besides weapons and tactics based on the level and nature of technological capability available to it, indigenously and/or acquired from external sources; and, above all, by the assumptions it makes.¹ The last part could change rather rapidly for obvious reasons and necessitates adequate intelligence assessment and flexibility in our own approach to warfare. Here we must note a perennial truth: **victory/success in war is not achieved by defeating/destroying the enemy's military forces, but by defeating its strategy.**

Thirdly, we need to keep in mind that while logic should be the driving force in warfare since even the survival of the state may be involved (as would inevitably happen in the case of nuclear weapons use), in reality, logic is the first casualty in warfare though it does not necessarily become redundant. Its rationale and application undergo change and that is why the old adage that 'no plan survives the first shots in war'. Hence, while there is need for doctrines, they must remain as a set of principles and concepts rather than become unalterable guidelines for action in war. Flexibility of the mind is essential to cope with the uncertainties and ambiguities that characterise war. This is why the search for "actionable intelligence" would appear infructuous, since it can rarely be obtained and ambiguity of information or its interpretation would remain the dominant factor in most situations. Hence, intelligence *assessments* are more critical than mere information since it is the assessments (with all their infirmities) that make intelligence actionable.

1. For example, an authoritative source in Pakistan had written soon after the Kargil War that his country had launched four wars based on the same assumptions which led to its defeat every time. See former Information Secretary to President M. Ayub Khan, Altaf Gauhar, "Four Wars and One Assumption," *The Nation*, September 5, 1999.

NATURE AND TYPES OF OUR FUTURE WARS

In this examination of future wars, it is assumed that nuclear war-fighting would not be a rational option for us and avoidance of nuclear use by the enemy would have to rest on credible nuclear deterrence. But the adversary may want to entice us into war by provocation with dramatic terrorism (like the December 13, 2001 and/or 26/11 Mumbai attacks). In principle, we must resist such moves for what they are and, hence, maintaining dialogue and restraint serves to nullify any provocation to war. Therefore, wars would have to be confined to a level of conflict below that of a nuclear exchange. We may identify them as follows:

- **Conventional Wars:** Such wars between two broadly similar military powers would have to be **localised, limited border wars** if risk of escalation to nuclear levels is to be avoided. Such limitation in a ground war is not likely to result in a decisive military victory without risking a nuclear response. Some important factors deserve attention:
 - The central issue that deserves serious attention is the paradox of employment of land forces in a nuclearised environment: a decisive victory increases the risk of escalation to nuclear levels, and without a decisive military victory, a military stalemate is almost inevitable. The problem is that in case of a stalemate, a smaller country is likely to be perceived to have won against a larger and more powerful one, especially if it manages to handle the media toward that end, as happened after the 1965 War in Pakistan's favour (or in the Sino-Vietnam War in 1979).
 - However, it needs to be noted that even shallow penetration and occupation of limited enemy territory without a decisive military victory would have a profound political impact since this would

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challenge the sovereignty of the adversary state.²

○ In spite of the above factor, a largely stalemated war would leave us with the problem of how to impose our will on the enemy. Hence, the **need to apply punitive force for political-military effects but with significantly reduced risk of escalation to nuclear levels** would remain. This can be achieved by calibrated use of air power and naval forces.

- **Sub-Conventional Wars:** Proxy wars at the sub-conventional levels, especially through religious extremist/*jihadi* terrorism, present another type of milieu, especially where such a war is being waged from a sanctuary state possessing nuclear weapons and a competent conventional military power. This is the type of war that the superpowers with eyeball-to-eyeball military confrontation and a stockpile of over 66,000 nuclear weapons resorted to in third countries during the Cold War, making sure that a direct military confrontation was avoided.
- **Political Constraints:** It needs to be recognised that regardless of the type of war we get engaged in, political constraints would be an inevitable and important factor in the employment of military forces. It would be difficult to forecast such constraints in advance since the leadership in a parliamentary democracy is subject to many pressures and changes. Political constraints of different types and extent were a regular factor in every war India had to fight in the past. Some of them appear to have been conditioned by debatable reasons. For example, the restriction on the Indian Air Force (IAF) from taking offensive action against the solitary fighter squadron in East Pakistan appears to have had no rational reason though it was justified later that such an attack would alienate the population [even when the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) had clearly affirmed to the Prime Minister (PM) and

2. We may here note the major political impact in Pakistan leading to the military coup after the defeat of its forces on our side of the Line of Control in the Kargil sector when the Indian military had not even crossed the Line.

Defence Minister that civilian targets would not be attacked by the IAF]. This forced the IAF to remain on the defensive which in the absence of adequate radar cover became inadequate and we lost a large number of aircraft and some lives on the ground. The presence of nuclear weapons with both our major adversaries is likely to increase rather than decrease political constraints, and is more difficult to predict.

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- In view of the foregoing, it is important that a balance of military necessity and political compulsions and aims is achieved through regular dialogue between the political and military leadership on a continuing basis.³ In a way, the establishment of the Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC) and the location of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) in the Cabinet Secretariat (with a Military Wing to provide secretarial support) was the logical institutional arrangement which has not been available since the mid-1950s. It is ironic that the Cabinet has an Accommodation Committee but not a Defence Committee! The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) is useful, but given the range and priorities of security challenges, it can hardly provide the institutional dialogue necessary between the political and military leadership for the complex nature of future wars and development of our military capabilities toward the desired goals.
- **Reaction of Dominant Powers:** Received unquestioned wisdom states that the international community, especially the dominant powers,

3. In 1965, this was achieved through informal but direct dialogue during the months Pakistan was pushing toward its war for Kashmir. Similarly, frequent dialogue among the three Chiefs and the Prime Minister and her colleagues during the eight months in 1971 served a vital purpose in achieving greater synergy among political and military aims and actions.

would inevitably intervene in any war we get involved in.⁴ But the reality is that this may not necessarily happen except when they perceive the likelihood of the situation moving toward a nuclear exchange. Hence, much will depend upon the circumstances of the war, the way we fight that war, and our diplomatic efforts and posture on a continuing basis before, during and after the war. Here we face another disjunction in terms of the gap between the military leadership and our diplomats, essentially because the Ministry of Defence has, over time, become an unnecessary buffer between the military and Ministry of External Affairs for this purpose. Unfortunately, we see the gap between the soldiers and diplomats even in most of our embassies.

- **Legitimacy for Application of Military Power:** One of the most important factors that now affect the use of military power in wars is **the purpose for which it is applied and whether this is seen as legitimate or not.** This is not merely the issue of a just war; rather, it implies that the legitimacy would depend upon how domestic opinion sees the war. This legitimacy is easier to achieve when reacting to an aggression (nuclear or conventional military attack), as we have seen in the past. But if India wants to initiate a punitive war (even in retaliation to a major terrorist attack), it would have to pay serious attention to the issue of legitimacy and the extent of this may well also influence the reactions of at least a part of the international community. Here the media and elites dealing with public information play a critical role in generating the legitimacy of a particular political-military vector or undermining it.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Military technology has been advancing almost dramatically in recent decades. Superior technology, from the days when the stirrup and

4. In fact, the Army's Cold Start doctrine has been interpreted to imply that it must defeat the enemy within 4-5 days before the international community can intervene. If this is indeed the strategy, then the rapid goal of defeating the enemy is more likely to destabilise the enemy's perceptions and its propensity to reach for nuclear weapons would increase significantly. Hence, the international community, if it wants to stop a potential escalation to nuclear levels, is more likely to intervene *before or as soon* as the offensive is launched, thus, nullifying the very purpose for which the new doctrine was evolved.

gunpowder were invented as the then Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) has historically been a major factor in warfare. But mere possession of superior technology weapons and equipment does not necessarily provide success in wars. Some issues that need consideration are:

- Empirical evidence in history clearly proves that superior technology by itself does not lead to victory; rather, it is force employment that tilts the balance between victory and defeat. Force employment obviously also implies how technology is synergised with strategy and tactics in relation to those of the enemy. Here the scope for a false sense of superiority/inferiority by either side, going by what technology promises (rather than how it is employed), can have a significant impact on the outcome. During the 1965 War, the Indian Army and Air Force were highly sensitive to the higher technology weapons and equipment acquired from the United States and absorbed by the Pakistan military. But during the war, after the initial setbacks, the Indian Army and Air Force succeeded in achieving an unambiguous victory over the higher technology armed Pakistan military forces although they fought well.
- **Higher/ new technology normally takes far more time to mature than what the promise of technology tends to portray;** and even more time and effort after that to be fully absorbed in the military forces to become operationally effective. No military becomes “high-tech” across its full spectrum. Operational maturity of technological advances is critical to its optimum force employment. Doctrine and strategy, therefore, need to take into consideration the maturity factor and the time horizon needed to absorb it sufficiently to become operationally advantageous. This is a simple truth, but one that is often ignored by military forces worldwide. There is a corollary to this: there is a tendency to believe that because force multipliers would enable the same systems to produce much greater effect, the force size itself can be reduced. But force multipliers

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are no substitute for force. Napoleon's dictum that God is on the side of the bigger battalions may not be true any more; but it also is not completely obsolete, especially when the adversary has similar or more force multipliers, as we already see in our defence environment.

- **Operational impact of technological advancement** requires rigorous and objective assessment. The trends in technology and warfare are inexorably moving toward non-contact warfare. Their effects are most obvious in the technology intensive components of military power. Hence, air dominance, both in the air-to-air as well as the air-to-surface dimensions provides the capability for air forces to play a crucial role in warfare. Precision strike (which rests crucially on accurate and timely air intelligence) at increasingly longer ranges provides capabilities that were not possible earlier. Similarly, naval power is becoming an important factor in warfare because of the expansion of its operational effectiveness due to modern technology. This is not to suggest that naval forces would replace the land forces in their primary role with "boots on the ground." Here we need to be very careful in drawing the right lessons from wars in the past two decades which have been fought with the heavy advantage of technology, air power and naval capabilities on one side only, providing dramatic advantages and freedom of action with air and naval dominance. However, in our case, air dominance would have to be contested.

The brief examination above leads to the following conclusions:

- Unanticipated political constraints would impact military strategy and objectives in future wars in all likelihood much more than ever in the past. Hence, regular dialogue between the political and military leaders is critical.
- Military-to-military conventional wars among countries with similar capabilities (even if asymmetrical), especially under the shadow of nuclear weapons, if they take place, are likely to be localised, limited border wars with significant political restraints.
- Land warfare under these circumstances would more likely lead to a

stalemated situation in spite of occupation of territory to even shallow depths. Smaller countries are likely to gain an advantage in perceptions of having been the winner against a larger and more powerful country, particularly depending upon the role of the media.

- Legitimacy for war would play a major role in the operational strategy and plans for war. Frequent dialogue between the political and military leadership on the nature of war and the limits and capabilities involved from the military perspectives is essential.
- Superior technology is important for winning wars. But it is force employment that would tilt the balance, especially since it would synergise technology with the operational environment.
- Air dominance should be a key objective in our armed forces joint doctrine and the Indian Air Force's central doctrine and strategy to win the wars imposed on the country.

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THE LOCAL BORDER WAR?

At the outset, we must emphasise that it is in India's unambiguous and central interest to build and strengthen friendly cooperative relations with China. But given the substantive territorial (not mere border) disputes between the two countries, going back at least to the time of Indian independence, the potential for a clash of arms, however theoretical, will continue between the two giant neighbours since their civilisational values, national and strategic interests diverge significantly and even compete in many ways. This, in turn, could manifest in the shape of armed conflict and a conventional war on the high Himalayas. All the three leading sovereign powers of the world — the USA, China and India (in that order) — are cooperating and competing at the same time in pursuit of their national and strategic interests. Hence, it is important to study the potential way China could possibly conduct a war in the future for whatever reasons,

even though the chances of such an eventuality between the two rising powers, “strategic partners” and nuclear weapon states are remote and their interests, at least for the foreseeable future, lie in devoting all their energies to human development.

China has been furiously modernising its military for more than two decades and has been increasing its military spending at an average of over 13 percent every year *in real terms* during this period. It has already shed its legacy systems and the inherited institutions and organisations of the past. In the process, its military has moved dramatically toward becoming a modern high-technology force which, though lagging behind the US military, is at par with the best of its neighbours, and would soon outpace them in many crucial ways.⁵ It is in this context that we need to carefully study how China might conduct its next war.

Briefly, as it started its four modernisations after the Sino-Vietnam War which demonstrated serious deficiencies in its war-fighting capabilities, China modified its traditional doctrine of “people’s war” initially to “people’s war under modern conditions.” By the mid 1980s, serious thinking went on about its war doctrine, along with reforms in the military and military-technological areas. Finally, the Central Military Commission (CMC) approved a new doctrine of “local border war” in 1985.⁶ While this has undergone a number of changes (like high-technology modern war) since then, largely as a consequence of the employment of military power in armed conflicts and wars by the United States and other Western countries (in particular Israel’s 1982 War, the US air strikes on Libya in 1986, 1991 Gulf War, 1999 War in Kosovo, 2001 War in Afghanistan, 2003 War in Iraq, and so on), the centrality of “local border” has persisted. This evolution of China’s war-fighting doctrine took into account the existence of nuclear weapons, the limited advantage (especially against a nuclear weapon armed state) of

5. For example, its strategic forces are already equipped with very large numbers of IRBMs with MaRV which could be armed with nuclear or conventional warheads, making it the third country to possess such capability that is expected to neutralise almost all types of BMD systems. This would increase the ambiguities for the defender.

6. Ka Po Ng, *Interpreting China’s Military Power: Doctrine Makes Readiness* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), p. 82.

any deep thrust by land forces,⁷ and maximum reliance on a fundamentally altered doctrine for the employment of aerospace and missile power.

The doctrinal changes provide the key to understand the development and modernisation of the Chinese military forces and how China plans to fight the next war. The heightened emphasis on aerospace power (with a shift from territorial defence to long-range precision strike, while catering for territorial air defence) began after the 1991 Gulf War where the US decimated Saddam's surface forces in a 42-day persistent air campaign with nearly 117,000 sorties flown which was followed by the barest exchange between the two ground forces after the US had announced the intention to cease fire four days ahead of the contact war, which itself followed a wide detour to bypass Kuwait to directly engage the deployed Iraqi armour before the ceasefire came into being. In a way, the US-coalition fought a local border war on land; and in 1999, Kosovo did not even use ground forces. China, particularly after 1989, and the consequent sanctions/arms embargos by the Western countries) would have faced major handicaps in implementing a strategy based on the new doctrine. But by sheer historical coincidence, the collapse of the Soviet Union provided a unique opportunity to rapidly upgrade China's military technology to restructure its armed forces and move forward in operationalising the new doctrine and even refine it further.

China had started the series of reforms in its military since the early 1980s ranging from education, military industry, organisation, manpower policies (where the effects of the Cultural Revolution were sought to be eliminated and numbers were reduced dramatically) and weapon systems and technology. The officer corps and introduction of the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) system has been the bedrock of manpower reforms which even laid down the upper age of commanders at different levels, in the process reducing the average age of top military commanders from 76 years in 1986 to nearly 56 years now. China's force reduction (in the army) was critical to the reforms and building modern technology armed forces heavily biased toward air

7. One must look back and wonder whether the Chinese would have actually advanced to Bomdila (or even Sela Pass) in 1962 if India had possessed nuclear capabilities at that time?

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and naval power, besides some fundamental changes in the nuclear missile arena [where much larger numbers of Manoeuvrable Reentry Vehicles (MaRV), missiles with conventional warheads and supersonic cruise missiles are being introduced]. While the stated doctrine changed a number of times based on the experiences of wars waged by the US, the 1985 formulation of “local border” has remained the bedrock of China’s military doctrine, strategy and reforms.

Although some people argue that China’s nuclear doctrine has undergone some changes over the decades, there is little evidence to support that in substantive forms. The Chinese government has often stated that it maintains a policy of unconditional “no first use.” By using the term strategic counter-strike in the military strategy, as reflected in its 2004 White Paper on National Defence, it has again reaffirmed by implication the no first use doctrine. In fact, it would be difficult to objectively identify a politico-military scenario where China — or, for that matter, India — would actually need to use nuclear weapons first. The only conceivable scenario that might lead to the Chinese use of nuclear weapons would be if the Indian Army advances to occupy the Aksai Chin plateau in accordance with the unanimous resolution of the Parliament after the Sino-Indian War of 1962 to regain all Indian territories. But a lot of water has flowed down the Brahmaputra since then. Both countries possess credible nuclear weapons capabilities, and both need an extended period of peace for human development. No doubt, this was a major factor in China’s adoption of the military doctrine and strategy of local border wars.

ROLE OF AIR POWER

There is a basic military logic that in a limited and/or local border war, land forces would normally be restricted to areas close to the border and

not attempt a deep strike and penetration if the other country possesses nuclear weapons since escalation to nuclear levels would then be almost inevitable. While air power could play a major role in supporting the advance of military forces into hostile territory, in a local border war, air power becomes an inescapable necessity for the simple reason that it is the only instrument of military power that can engage and destroy military (and civil) targets deep inside hostile territory without having to engage or defeat the enemy's land forces first. Hence, modern air power integrated with space capabilities becomes crucial for both sides in a local border war and the main instrument of choice for victory and coercive impact. It may be recalled that when some sort of strategic stability had been reached during the Cold War by end 1980, the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) had adopted the doctrine of Follow-on-Forces Attack (FOFA) by air interdiction to ensure that the land war remains localised without reinforcement by any reserves moving forward.

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China has been placing great emphasis on the role of air power in such wars based on the experiences of wars since the end of the Cold War. As it is, the history of wars leads to the unambiguous conclusion that air power played a dominant role in achieving victory.⁸ Once China adopted the doctrine of local border war, its dependence on air power naturally increased. However, it still did not possess technology for modern air power systems. But the collapse of the Soviet Union opened up new unprecedented opportunities for acquisition of selected high-technology weapon systems for China's military modernisation. As a consequence of new capabilities coming in, the air force leadership sought a larger budget (which was provided by slashing the strength of the land forces) and clearly started to expound their plans in public.⁹

8. John Andreas Olson, ed., *A History of Air Warfare* (Washington DC: Potomac Books Inc., 2010) besides many others.

9. "PLA Officer Complains About Budget," *FBIS-CHI-1999-0309*, March 09, 1999.

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By the end of the 1990s, the Chinese Air Force commander was publicly expounding the new strategy for the air force. He publicly sought a greater role for the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), declaring that the Chinese Air Force will strive for a transformation from the air defence type to an offensive and defensive type as soon as possible. He announced, "At the turn of the century and in the early part of the new century, the Air Force will have a batch of new-types of early warning aircraft, electronic-equipped fighter planes, and ground-to-air missiles" and that the air force "*must give more prominence to the air offensive, gradually integrate offensive and defensive, and build up a crack, first-rate air strike force*"¹⁰ (emphasis added). His forecast goal can be seen to have generally materialised by now. It is not surprising, therefore, that a study by Germany's leading think-tank has concluded that the "Chinese Air Force is the only branch for which the 2008 Defence White Paper identifies offensive capability."¹¹ However, the centre of gravity of the Chinese military will remain the army because of its predominant role of underpinning the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party, thus, making it primarily domestically oriented. Projection of military power outside the state, however, would rest with the air force, navy and strategic forces.

The result could be clearly seen a decade later in China's bold and unambiguous announcement of military strategy in its 2004 White Paper on National Defence. The crucial section candidly stated is reproduced below:¹²

While continuing to attach importance to the building of the Army, the PLA gives priority to the building of the Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force *to seek balanced development of the combat structure, in order to strengthen*

10. "Air Force Commander Liu Shun Yao on Air Force Transformation" *FBIS-CHI-1999-1107*, dated November 07, 1999.

11. Sophie-Charlotte Brune, Sascha Lange and Janka Oertel, *Military Trends in China: Modernising and Internationalising the People's Army* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, February 2010), translated by Meredith Dale, pp. 13-14.

12. "Revolution in Military Affairs with Chinese Characteristics" in *White Paper on China's National Defence in 2004*, Chapter III, p.1, published to illustrate China's national defence policies and the progress made in the previous two years, *China Daily*, December 28, 2004.

the capabilities for winning both command of the sea and command of the air, and conducting strategic counter-strike (emphasis added).

Notice the term “command of the air” which has not been used by any country since the early 1920s; and the inclusion of strategic strikes in a local border war! The reason for the former is that the Chinese Air Force by that time possessed a large number of 4th Generation aircraft like the Su-27 (and had begun its copy, the J-11/ J-11B) and Su-30MKK, had upgraded its J-10/J-10B, JF-17, claimed to have the design of the stealth fighter, and acquired the initial batch of Airborne Warning and

Control System (AWACS) — the ZDK-03 — and aerial refuelling, besides a vast range of supersonic cruise missiles, air-to-air Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles and an array of Precision-Guided Munitions (PGMs) capable of strikes from longer ranges. Rapid progress in space capabilities added to the air force capabilities to undertake a significant portion of the stated strategy though it remains aspirational but moving toward the ultimate goal. Further down, plans to build 500-1,000 Jian-10 fighters (developed with Israeli assistance and believed to incorporate Lavi technologies) may fructify.¹³ At the same time, it mastered the technology for MaRV launched on ballistic missiles (of which over 1,300 intermediate range missiles are reportedly deployed along the coast opposite Taiwan and other places). At present, no other country has larger combat aircraft manufacturing projects in the advanced stage than China.

At the same time, China has focussed heavily on (ballistic and cruise) missiles and modernised them. It has developed the MaRV in addition to the earlier Manoeuvrable Independent Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) capabilities for the warheads for its ballistic missiles. It has been developing and testing its own Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system based on the Russian

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13. *Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB)*, dated August 28, 1999, p. 19.

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supplied S-300 and S-400 air defence and anti-missile systems. In January 2007, China destroyed its own obsolete satellite at around 700-km altitude by a ground-based missile, mainly to showcase its Anti-Satellite (ASAT) capabilities.

The MaRV capability so far was possessed only by the United States and Russia and it holds the promise of defeating BMD systems. China's MaRV capability is seen as anti-access for the US Navy, as ballistic missiles to defeat the Aegis class destroyers and also as Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles (ASBM) to target US carrier task forces. Its possession and the candid statement of strategic counter-strikes in the White Paper cited above (with non-nuclear ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and combat aircraft) aims to caution China's neighbours that while the ground war may remain local, aerospace power would be the real sword arm of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

In the context of the brief overview of China's military power and strategy outlined above, if an armed conflict and use of military force does break out between China and India, what is the most likely scenario that we are likely to face? Here it may be useful to remember that China has historically used its military power when certain of victory, used force for rapid effect, and very often with politico-military goals that may have little to do with the country that it was using force against. In other words, "China could use force for reasons that have little to do with its territorial disputes."¹⁴ For example, Chou En Lai, within a few weeks after withdrawing from Indian territory that China had captured in Arunachal Pradesh, is on record stating that territory was not the main cause for its launching the 1962 War; but it had become important to "teach lessons" to India and Nehru who were shifting too close to the United States. At the same time, there is enough evidence that China launched the war to complicate Soviet foreign policy

14. Michael D. Swaine and Ashley Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2000), p. 133.

on the eve of the Cuban missile crisis, while, at the same time, challenging the Soviet leadership of the socialist camp, and to try and paint Moscow as an unreliable friend.

China has had double-digit economic growth for the best part of three decades. Yet it has a long way to go to ensure a better quality of life for its people, assimilate its western provinces which constitute 40 percent of its territory and build military power anywhere close to that of the United States. Hence, the repeated emphasis in most of its White Papers on National Defence, issued every alternate year since 1996, on its priority for a peaceful environment and developing cooperative relations with other countries. It has adopted the precept of “strategic partnership” with India. Trade between the two countries has risen from a couple of hundred million dollars in 1999 to nearly \$60 billion in 2010. On the other hand, it has adopted a posture of increasing assertiveness against India since the early years of this century, becoming more marked after 2005, when it became clear that India was growing in power, even if lagging behind China. Lately, it has adopted a posture of treating Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as disputed territory but only on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC). It appears almost totally unwilling to establish peace and tranquillity on the borders as agreed upon in the bilateral agreements of 1993 and 1996.

Broadly speaking, it can be generally concluded that China (i) would not risk a military conflict unless the stakes are very high like serious turmoil in Tibet¹⁵ or Xinjiang; (ii) it is seen by Beijing as necessary to take that risk to sustain its great power image; (iii) to create serious complications for US foreign policy and through that, undermine its influence in Asia and the world while, at the same time, delivering a serious blow to India and, hence, adversely affecting its rise to greater power to rival it; or (iv) a conflict that evolves through escalation and miscalculation possibly from a dispute/ clashes on the Sino-Indian frontier [where China refuses to enter into serious measures to demarcate the Line of Actual Control (LAC) stipulated in the

15. It is often ignored that the real Sino-Indian conflict started in 1959 after the Tibetan revolt and led up to 1962. There have been serious disturbances in Tibet on the 50th anniversary of that revolt. For a perceptive analyses, see Prem Shankar Jha, “India’s Tibet Problem” , *AIR POWER* Journal, vol. 4, no. 2, Summer 2009, pp. 9-22.

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1993 and 1996 bilateral agreements when China had not recovered from its vulnerabilities after 1989, and the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and its “peaceful rise” needed India].

Considering what by now is a vast amount of literature on China’s military power, one can hypothesise how China might fight a local border war with India if it decides to do so. Broadly, and without going into details, one can assume high probability for the following integrated joint campaigns:

- **The PLA land forces would aim to fight a local border war along the approximate frontier**, strategically remaining in a defensive posture and tactically adopting an offensive strategy. China is holding the territory it wanted in the first place in Aksai Chin since it alters the frontier from the Karakoram Range to the Kunlun Range. This has been the main reason for China to deny any obligation to the McMahon Line which really was meant to demarcate the boundary between Inner and Outer Tibet and included the Tibet-India boundary only incidentally. However, we cannot assume that China may not try to occupy Tawang (in Arunachal Pradesh) although it had gone way beyond it in 1962 but had unilaterally vacated it and returned to the generally accepted border along the McMahon Line. PLA land forces may be expected to employ heavy firepower in the mountains, especially against the Indian Army’s artillery.
- **The PLAAF would undertake long-range precision strikes into India** aiming to dominate Indian Air Force and Army formations. Toward this end, it can be expected to attempt to (i) neutralise IAF bases; (ii) engage the IAF in air warfare; (iii) neutralise the Indian Army’s artillery units in the mountains where siting locations will be limited; and (iv) interdict logistic lines of communications. The PLAAF would also provide territorial defence against IAF strikes and aim to protect its vulnerable lines of communication (like the Golmud-Lhasa railway line, etc).

- **The PLA Navy would play a minimal role in the Indian Ocean, at least for the coming decade, primarily due to limitations of naval assets to operate so far away** even though ports like Gwadar, etc. may be available. Little politico-military advantage is likely to accrue to China by attempting naval warfare in India's backyard.
- **Strategic strikes by the Chinese Strategic Forces with Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) armed with conventional warheads and MaRV** which would pose a serious challenge to BMD when it becomes operational) with a range of around 1,500 km against fixed targets (especially air bases), essentially for interdiction of road/railway lines and junctions to restrict the movement of logistics and reinforcements. China is already reported to have deployed some 1,300 such missiles on the east coast against Taiwan/USA to deny access to the US naval armada. These are mobile missiles and there is no reason to believe that a large number cannot be deployed on the Indian frontier.

PAKISTAN'S FIFTH WAR AGAINST INDIA?

Pakistan has reached a tipping point into serious instability which its army may find difficult to control in spite of robust military and economic aid from the US and other Western countries on one side and China on the other. The internal struggle for power and ideology amongst multiple groups seeking a dominant role in the future may be expected to exacerbate during the coming three years when the US starts to wind down its commitments to the war against terrorism in the AFPAK theatre. Once it realised that its proxy war through terrorism in J&K had started to be counter-productive after 2001, Pakistan and its semi-state and non-state actors began to organise and support groups within India to engage in terrorism.

Pakistan's economy has been stagnant at a little over 2 percent for quite some time in spite of robust external assistance. With a population growth of about 3.1 percent, Pakistan is incessantly adding to its poverty loaded population. *Jihad* has finally started to impact its core heartland of Punjab, including its capital, Lahore, which carries an immense psychological value to the country. On the other hand, it has been rearming furiously

after its defeat in Kargil in the summer of 1999, with a focus essentially on air power, both in the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and in the naval/maritime domain.¹⁶

The Muslim League and, therefore, Pakistan adopted an ideology which denies equality of human beings. Hence, the need for partition; and since then, Pakistan has moved along the hardening and radicalisation of its ideological foundations through the Bhutto-Zia Islamisation, legitimisation of terror in the name of religion,¹⁷ inclusion of the term “*jihad*” in the army’s motto in 1976, blatant use of religion in pursuit of Cold War geo-politics by the US (the most powerful democracy), with Pakistan as its frontline state to fight the war in Afghanistan during the 1980s by creating eight groups of guerrilla fighters called “Mujahideen” (those who carry out *jihad*). And when the Mujahideen finally acquired power to rule over Afghanistan, their policies were not seen in Islamabad as very docile and friendly, hence, the raising of an even more radical entity called the Taliban which ruled from Kabul after defeating and dislodging the Mujahideen with Pakistan’s help in 1996 till they were dethroned by the US’ war against terrorism and Al Qaeda. The space and theme of this article does not allow a more detailed analysis. Suffice it to state that the ideological radicalisation of Pakistan, and its population split into various groups of *jihadis*, many of them like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, waging a terrorist war against Pakistan itself have grown immensely. Some of them have tasted actual power both in ruling Afghanistan and in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. International and national security is consequently affected seriously, because “...the combination of religion and politics is potentially explosive. The combination of religion and nationalism is stronger, but a blend of the three has an extremely destructive potential.”¹⁸

16. For details, see Shalini Chawla, *Pakistan Army and Its Strategy* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2009), especially Ch. 7 and 8, pp. 207-254.

17. See Brig S. K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War* (Lahore: Wajidalis, 1979) and Gen Zia-ul-Haq’s endorsement of the misguided concept in his Introduction recommending the book to all Pakistanis and the army.

18. Faliq Abd al Jabbar, “The Gulf War and Ideology: The Double-Edged Sword of Islam,” in Haim Bresheeth and Nira Yuval-Davis, eds., *The Gulf War and the New World Order* (London: Zed Books; 1991), p. 217.

As the world moves toward 2014, the declared date of US (and NATO) withdrawal from Afghanistan, we may be witness to increasing violence in the struggle for power under the garb of radical ideological struggles in the name of Islam. Pakistan now has all the ingredients of an unstable state and polity. Fortunately, it is unlikely to collapse completely and/or become a “failed state” though it has failed its own people for six decades. Looking at all this and much more, there appears a serious risk that the elites and leaders of Pakistan may turn to a war against India to divert the disparate groups and opposition to the Pakistan Army, the dominant source of the power structure in Pakistan and, thereby, divert attention from domestic problems. The deep-rooted, burning desire to defeat India has been a major factor in all the four wars that Pakistan has fought with India.¹⁹

Conscious of the risks associated with nuclearisation, Pakistan’s basic goal would be to fight a limited war under the nuclear umbrella and expect the international community to intervene early on and pull most of its chestnuts out of the *jihadi* fire.

It is conceivable that as Pakistan goes down the slippery slope to greater instability, it may consider an attack on India to divert the domestic and international opinion and as a way out of the morass it has got into. Conscious of the risks associated with nuclearisation, Pakistan’s basic goal would be to fight a limited war under the nuclear umbrella and expect the international community to intervene early on and pull most of its chestnuts out of the *jihadi* fire. Hence, the land forces are likely to maintain a strong defensive posture (though threatening a major armoured offensive), with longer range firepower (artillery and conventionally armed missiles) being used extensively to inflict as much damage on the Indian Army as possible and employ the longer range (ballistic and cruise) missiles with conventional warheads to target the IAF air bases. Hence, the main thrust would rely on the PAF and missiles, seeking air dominance over the IAF. Here we must note the likelihood

19. Gauhar, n. 1.

of assumptions (as so often before, especially in 1965 and 1999) that the IAF with its unplanned drop of combat force level from nearly 40 squadrons to perhaps as low as 38 squadrons would be hard put to manage a potential threat from the north as well as fight a competent PAF in the west. As in the past, in 1965 and 1971, a significant part of the Air Force would have to be deployed for the northern frontier, leaving a force on the western front which numerically would be smaller than that possessed by Pakistan by 2015.

Pakistan has paid special attention in its modernisation since Kargil to the Pakistan Air Force and maritime aerial strike capabilities. It has acquired six Swedish Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEWC) aircraft and four Chinese KJ-2000 AWACS. Its further plans to acquire aerial refuelling aircraft along with a large complement of maritime patrol and strike aircraft and supersonic cruise missiles indicate a desire to (i) extend its sea denial boundaries as far as possible; and (ii) achieve long range precision strikes against high value targets in the Indian peninsula all the way down to Kanyakumari.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The Sino-Pakistan strategic nexus has been obvious since 1965 when Mao was reported to have offered nuclear knowhow to Pakistan. China subsequently supplied a whole range of nuclear designs, technology and materials which made it possible for Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons capability (with the US facilitating this process further). China supplied nuclear capable ballistic missiles to Pakistan in 1987 (when it had in all probability built its first nuclear weapon)²⁰ and later via North Korea. China has also been reported to have supplied it supersonic cruise missiles. More than 60 percent of Pakistan's conventional weapons have come from China or been manufactured under licence in Pakistan.

20. For China's supplies of ballistic missiles to Pakistan, see Pakistan Prime Minister Moeen Qureshi's statement on August 26, 1993, cited in *The Nation*, August 27, 1993; and Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar's statement to the Senate, August 26, 1993, cited in *The Nation*, August 27, 1993 where he said, "These missiles were bought keeping in mind Pakistan's security needs" which he went on justify in relation to missile attacks across the borders from Afghanistan.

The big question that Indian strategic experts are looking at is the likelihood of a coordinated military action by the two countries against India. The Chief of Staff of the Army was quoted in December 2009 to have advised the Indian Army to be prepared for a two-front war, besides undertaking counter-terrorism duties. Historically, China gave not only political-diplomatic support to Pakistan in its military aggression against India, but also raised the stakes when President Ayub and Foreign Minister Z. A. Bhutto paid a secret visit to Beijing, pleading for help against India. However, China remained apparently neutral in 1971 though it continued military supplies to Pakistan. During Kargil, China maintained near total neutrality.

If China triggers a military clash, Pakistan may be expected to take advantage on the western front.

Hence, what conclusion can we draw from the past history? If China triggers a military clash, Pakistan may be expected to take advantage on the western front. **But if Pakistan (believing that there is a window of vulnerability of the IAF till the end of this decade after which it would not be able to match the IAF) launches a military adventure, overtly or covertly, China may not necessarily undertake any hostile action unless Pakistan is seen to be losing the war (as, indeed, happened in 1965).** But in any case, New Delhi has to remember that (i) it has been facing a two-front military modernisation at a rapid pace; (ii) collusion between China and Pakistan may be situation specific, but India's defences would have to cater for two theatres each requiring significant numbers and quality of armed forces for defence; and (iii) China will continue to supply nuclear-missile technologies, BMD technologies and even potentially its MaRV armed ballistic missiles directly or through North Korea to help Pakistan target IAF air bases and missile delivery capability. Any further delays in force modernisation in the Indian armed forces would only enlarge the existing window of vulnerability which diplomacy may not be able to manage adequately and nor should we expect external assistance in case of a conflict on our frontiers.