EDITOR'S NOTE

While it is more than a decade since India and Pakistan overtly declared their nuclear weapon capabilities, anybody who had anything to do with national defence knew that in fact the weapons capability had been acquired by both two decades ago. While India went about seeking a solution through universal and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament, Pakistan, on the other hand, stepped up its covert war through terrorism, expanding it from just two districts of Punjab to the state of Jammu and Kashmir and later beyond that. With the combination of nuclear weapons and covert war through terrorism, India's strategic deterrence began to be eroded (some would say it began to fail). South Block somehow failed to take note of the two concurrent developments: that of the increasing role of air power for coercive punitive application of military force (perhaps the only viable option in a nuclearised environment) with dramatically enhanced capabilities for longer range precision strikes, and, secondly, the use of covert war by Pakistan as its strategy of indirect approach.

Nuclear deterrence has been one of the esoteric subjects that have received enormous attention over the decades. However, its deep linkages with conventional wars have not received adequate attention in comparative terms. Pakistan's publicly stated aim of acquiring nuclear weapons was to neutralise superior Indian military capabilities which its former foreign minister had described as the "Sword of Damocles" hanging on his country; except that its army saw this as an opportunity to pursue a successful covert war without provoking a military response across the borders. We, on the other hand, continued to fight that war defensively, killing terrorist and losing lives of civilians and security personnel. Less than adequate attention was paid to the combination of the above two factors with the combat force level of the Indian Air Force (IAF) being allowed to wind down by as much as 23 per cent in a mere five years.

Perhaps we had failed to understand the linkages between nuclear deterrence and conventional deterrence (especially of air power) in the new framework of Pakistan pursuing a sub-conventional war. It is time to rethink our strategy of deterrence in order to rectify this situation.

Over two decades ago, India sent its armed forces into Sri Lanka on the invitation of the democratic government of that country to help maintain the peace. But the peace-keeping mission rapidly deteriorated into a peace-enforcement task against the separatist violent movement, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which proved to be an elusive and ruthless enemy which had mastered the art of guerrilla warfare in a forested terrain. While there is significant literature on how the ground war was fought, the role played by air power does not appear to have received adequate attention. It was a crucial factor in strengthening the army's ability to fight a terrorist organisation. And this makes the strategy followed to deal with the terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir all the more inexplicable. Undoubtedly, there was a lot of difference in dealing with a terrorist organisation in our own country and that in a foreign friendly country (which sought the elimination of that threat rather than promoting it).

The period when the covert war in India began under the nuclear umbrella and the separatist movement had grown in viciousness and scope, interestingly was also the period when Indian air power directly became an instrument of foreign policy. One incident was what came to be known as the "rice bombing" of Jaffna and the other was the rapid dispatch of a small force by air to curb the separatists and terrorists aiming to overthrow the legitimate government of Maldives. But looking at the literature since then, one wonders whether those who planned the two operations and/or executed them saw them as the conduct of foreign policy through the use of the air force. A military blockade of Jaffna by the Sri Lankan military was lifted after the IAF An-32s (escorted by Mirage 2000s) dropped rice and other humanitarian support material to the besieged population. This led to the lifting of the siege and the Colombo government entering into an agreement with New Delhi to find a political solution to the ethnic violence in the island. The Maldives operation ensured the stability of the government.

Over the same two decades, the country had agonised over what came to be known as the Bofors Syndrome which has stymied military modernisation since then. The turn of the century saw efforts being made to introduce structures and procedures for defence procurement, and that process is continuing. Unfortunately, one of core problems was that acquisition and procurement of military weapons and equipment is a complex issue and mere adding more complexities through procedural innovations is unlikely to meet our long-term interests. On the other hand, it is necessary that procurement procedures be better understood in the country if we are to finally put the Bofors Syndrome behind us.

With this issue, AIR POWER Journal enters the fifth year of publication. It is for this reason that we decided to repeat the picture on the cover of the first issue. We have a sense of satisfaction that the demand and readership of the journal had dramatically increased, allowing us to send a personal copy to every student officer undergoing higher command courses at our major military training institutions like the College of Air Warfare, Army War College, Naval War College, not to talk of the College of Defence Management and the Air Wing of DSSC. We are grateful to our sponsors who are willing to advertise in the journal; and to Knowledge World Publishers for maintaining the quality and timeliness of the journal. Above all, we are happy that an increasing number of serving officers are now writing for the journal. We look forward to greater readership and increasing number of authors from the armed forces in the future.