NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND CONVENTIONAL WAR: A TEST OF INDIA'S NUCLEAR STRATEGY

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The essence of power is to know the limits upon power. The linkage between nuclear deterrence and conventional war rests upon this crucial understanding. While the relationship between the nuclear weapons of two nations and the establishment of credible nuclear deterrence is fairly well understood owing to the Cold War experience between the superpowers, the practice of nuclear deterrence with respect to conventional war is a subject that has been far less studied. The US and the USSR deterred each other at the nuclear level and any conventional wars between them were fought by their proxies, not by them directly.

India's practice of nuclear deterrence, however, deals with a unique predicament where its nuclear weapons are certainly meant to deter the adversary's nuclear use or blackmail. But, at the same time, India's nuclear deterrence, especially with Pakistan, is tasked to function in a fragile situation where Pakistan's nuclear weapons seek to deter India's conventional superiority even as it engages in sub-conventional conflict. Therefore, the interlinkages between sub-conventional, conventional and nuclear war are far more complex in the Indian case. In fact, India's nuclear strategy has to grapple with the challenge of building credibility of its nuclear deterrence in such a way as to counter the adversary's attempt to blur the lines between conventional and nuclear war. While it threatens to lower the bar for breakdown of nuclear deterrence in order to deter conventional attack, India must not only raise the nuclear threshold, but also devise adequate conventional responses that can be

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safely executed in the situation of nuclear overhang. Of course, this is easier said than done. As long as nuclear weapons exist, none can deny the potential danger of a conventional war escalating to the nuclear level. But, the true test of India's nuclear strategy lies as much in establishing mutual nuclear deterrence, as in tackling sub-conventional warfare with conventional tactics that are aware of the presence of nuclear weapons, but can operate without bringing them into the calculations.

Is this possible? What impact do nuclear weapons have on the conduct of conventional warfare? What are the relevant lessons that can be discerned from the experiences of Kargil and Operation Parakram? How does 'limited war' offer an option to create space between conventional and nuclear war? How best can India use this option to nullify the advantage of nuclear weapons that Pakistan seeks? These are some of the questions that the paper attempts to answer.

ADVENT OF THE 'ABSOLUTE WEAPON'

The dropping of the two atomic bombs, *Little Boy* and *Fat Man*, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki starkly illustrated the destructive potential of the new weapons. Even more significantly, the two bombs showcased the power they brought to the possessor to influence the behaviour of the adversary by implicitly or/and explicitly threatening the use of such horrific destruction. In one instant, therefore, nuclear weapons altered the criteria for measuring national power and the dynamics of conflict interaction in international politics.

Before the advent of nuclear weapons, states could risk war or even engage in it for a stake they felt was high enough to justify the action. After all, according to the Clausewitzian concept, war was only an extension of politics by other means. So when politics was unable to achieve a desired objective, war was the

tool to be employed. But nuclear weapons completely changed this equation by increasing the difference between the value of the interest at stake and the potential cost of war. In fact, war in a situation where nuclear weapons were present with both sides, led to the inevitable consequence of mutual assured destruction (MAD), thereby nullifying its use as politics by other means. Consequently, the purpose of the new weapon, for the first time in military history, became to avoid its use instead of crafting strategies to incorporate it into military operations. Bernard Brodie captured the essence of this thinking soon after 1945 in his seminal work, *The Absolute Weapon*. He argued that the purpose of the nuclear weapon, the absolute weapon as he described it, was to prevent wars, not fight them. This basic premise has remained unchanged since then. True to his original conclusion, over the last six decades, countries possessing nuclear weapons have used them for deterrence against other possessors of these weapons of mass destruction (WMD), or for compellence against non-possessors, but not for war-fighting.

Nuclear deterrence may be described as a strategy that stops an adversary from indulging in any nuclear use by instilling the fear that the cost of the action would entail assured damage of a kind that would be much more than the gain sought to be made. Of course, it is a different matter that in order to prevent breakdown of nuclear deterrence, countries project the image that they are prepared to handle just such a situation, which means being ready to use the weapon. As per the strange logic of nuclear deterrence, the equation is simple: better planning for deterrence failure leads to higher credibility of deterrence, which in turn reduces the possibility of deterrence failure. Driven by this paradoxical reasoning, the superpowers during the Cold War, consistently expanded and upgraded their nuclear arsenals and altered doctrines and strategies to accommodate new capabilities. While deterrence was the primary focus of their foreign policy and bilateral interactions, nuclear capabilities were

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nevertheless always shown as being ready to be pressed into military use, if required. Elaborate standard operating procedures were adopted in both nations to indicate an almost automatic launch of nuclear weapons once the decision had been made.

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However, the fact that no actual use of nuclear weapons[1] ever happened is taken as the success of nuclear deterrence. It is widely assumed that the presence of these WMD and the concomitant fear of MAD kept the superpowers from engaging in any direct confrontation. Of course, the nuclear stability at the level of the two rival superpowers contrasted with a more volatile situation at lower levels of their allies. This came to be known as the "stability-instability paradox" and was used to explain the proxy wars that happened between the two ideological blocs. But the risk of escalation and cost of miscalculation cast a constraining influence on states' behaviours and kept them away from any direct confrontation.

The only instance of two nuclear countries fighting a direct war with one another, prior to 1999, was the Ussuri river conflict between China and the Soviet Union in 1969. Triggered off by an ambush of Soviet troops by Chinese forces at Zhenbao Island along the Sino-Soviet border, it led to the killing of 31 Russian soldiers. The Chinese action which, according to their accounts, was a response to Soviet provocations along the border from the mid-1960s onwards, was taken in the belief that "the border clash was a *controllable military conflict*" that would serve the "larger domestic political purpose of mobilising the Chinese people for further revolution."[2] However, the Chinese act was not perceived as a limited attack in Moscow and the Soviet leaders did consider a number of military options, including a disarming strike on China's nuclear arsenal. The tension lasted several months, during which the Soviet Union even probed the US on

1. There are several instances, however, of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapon for blackmail and coercion.
2. David Ochmanek and Lowell H. Schwartz, *The Challenge of Nuclear-Armed Regional Adversaries* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), pp. 33-34. Emphasis added to highlight the perception.

their response if the Soviets were to attack China's nuclear facilities. The US remained ambiguous, and both China and Russia refrained from taking very provocative actions. The crisis finally wound down after Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai categorically stated to the Soviet premier that China had no aggressive intentions and that its nuclear weapons posed no threat to the USSR. As the crisis subsided, it revealed the overarching influence of nuclear weapons on two adversaries when both possess nuclear weapons.

CONVENTIONAL WAR IN PRESENCE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

In 1991, Martin van Creveld, a well known analyst on war, wrote, "From central Europe to Kashmir, and from the Middle East to Korea, nuclear weapons are making it impossible for large sovereign territorial units, or states *to fight each other in earnest without running the risk of mutual suicide*."[3] Of course, a number of factors other than nuclear weapons are also responsible for changing the nature of warfare from total to limited wars in contemporary times.[4] However, the most important limitation on war in situations where both adversaries possess nuclear weapons is cast by the presence and impact of these weapons. While wars may still have to be fought, the shadow of nuclear weapons, nevertheless, imposes constraints on the range of military options and the nature of coercive use of force that nations can indulge in. It demands greater caution so as to avoid potential costs of miscalculation. Leaders of nuclear-armed nations must be constantly aware of the risks involved, especially in the show of force, and are required to walk a tightrope in case of a crisis. On the one hand, the desire to win the dispute requires a demonstration of resolve and a willingness to fight. But simultaneously, the fear of nuclear war demands caution and restraint in the use

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3. Martin van Creveld, *On Future War* (London: Brassey's, 1991), p. 194. Emphasis added.
4. For a detailed analysis of the many factors that are leading the trend to limited wars, see Jasjit Singh, "The Dynamics of Limited War,"*Strategic Analysis*, vol. 24, no. 7, October 2000.

of force. Unrestrained coercive manoeuvring by either or both sides could end up committing them to a war neither wanted in the first place. And the risks of such unplanned and uncontrollable escalation in the presence of nuclear weapons could be catastrophic for both.

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Therefore, the conduct of war in the presence of nuclear weapons has to follow a different set of rules. At one level, in fact, nuclear weapons mean the end of classical conventional war of the kind envisaging acquisition of large swathes of territory, or a *blitzkrieg* effort to cause high attrition. Any such measure is certain to breach the threshold of the adversary's levels of tolerance, especially one with weaker conventional capabilities. This could increase its dependence on the resort to use of nuclear weapons, thereby leading to deterrence breakdown. If deterrence is to be maintained, then the war needs to be fought differently, in a manner where the risk of escalation to the nuclear level is minimised because the targets are so chosen so as not to threaten the survival of the state or its critical elements.

This obviously has an impact on how victory and defeat can be defined in such a situation. In an all out conventional war, the difference between the victor and the vanquished is clearly evident, based on the estimation of which side has suffered greater losses and damage. But, in limited wars, in which the level of destruction has to be carefully calibrated and imposed, this distinction is blurred. In fact, as explained by Jasjit Singh, "As war starts to move down the intensity spectrum, victory and defeat shift more into political and psychological dimensions."[5]

An illustration of this is manifest in the experience of India and Pakistan during the Kargil crisis in 1999 and Operation Parakram in 2001-02. Coming soon after the overt demonstration of nuclear capability by India and Pakistan in May 1998, the start of these crises was greeted by strategic analysts everywhere with great pessimism and they were quick to dub them as the realisation of their worst fears

5. Singh, Ibid. It is also worth noting here that in modern warfare, the media plays a very important role in declaring who the winner is. It shapes perceptions and public mood that could be sometimes quite different from the reality on the ground. The 2007 Israel-Lebanon War presents a good illustration of this point.

when regional powers acquire nuclear weapons. Given the prevailing regional reality where nuclear-armed adversaries shared unsettled territorial disputes, a relationship marked by mutual hostility and distrust, routine border skirmishes and terrorist violence as a result of Pakistan-fomented proxy war in India, the apprehensions of the international community of conventional war quickly escalating to the nuclear level were perfectly understandable. However, the manner in which Kargil and Operation Parakram unfolded holds several lessons for Pakistan, India and the larger international community on how use of force is possible even in the shadow of nuclear weapons.

THE EXPERIENCES OF KARGIL AND OPERATION PARAKRAM

In May 1999, barely one year after going nuclear, Pakistan infiltrated approximately 5,000 soldiers in the guise of Mujahideen across the Line of Control (LoC) separating the Indian and Pakistani controlled regions of Kashmir. Their mission was to seize strategic pieces of territory and then compel the Indian government to negotiate the future status of Kashmir. Pakistani leaders believed that their recently demonstrated nuclear capability would deter India from using its conventional military superiority against Pakistan. Indeed, Pakistani leaders, military and even civilian, believed that the danger of nuclear escalation insulated them from Indian conventional attack, thus, allowing them to not only ensure their national security, but also pursue a provocative strategy in Kashmir.

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Accordingly, the Pakistani nuclear doctrine encapsulates a more offensive form of deterrence that seeks to change the status quo by holding out the threat of nuclear blackmail while deterring an Indian conventional attack. According to 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."[6] Even amidst fighting in Kargil, the Pakistan Army leaders insisted, "There is no chance of the Kargil conflict leading to a full-fledged war between the two sides."[7] Interestingly, this was similar to the advice given by senior US military officers to President Kennedy during the Cuban crisis in 1962. They believed that the US could afford to launch a limited attack on Cuba because the USSR would not dare counter-attack in Germany. Pakistani military counsel to the civilian government too dismissed the chance of a total war because nuclear deterrence afforded it greater impunity and immunity. As a senior Pakistani official maintained, "The Indians cannot afford to extend the war to other areas in Kashmir, leave aside launching an attack across international boundaries" because of the "risk of nuclear conflagaration."[8]

This assumption was based on the Pakistani projection of a carefully cultivated strategy that escalation to the nuclear level was inevitable if India were to launch a major conventional attack. By suggesting this linkage, the military was sure it could raise the military and economic costs for India without endangering its own security to the risk of retaliation against the proxy war. In Western literature, this has been described as the "risk maximizing approach" that relies on the enemy's fear that pressure exerted from its side could "provoke a viscerally violent response rather than a rationally restrained one."[9] By making nuclear threats, it seeks to manipulate risks to its advantage even if following through on them would be nothing short of suicidal for itself. Whether this would really happen or not, Pakistan banks on uncertainty or irrationality about its actions for deterring India.[10]

6. Yossef Bodansky, "Pakistan's Nuclear Brinkmanship," Freeman Centre for Strategic Studies, Israel. Available at http://www.freeman.org
7. Ihtasham ul Haque, "Peace Linked to Kashmir Solution," Dawn Weekly Wire Service, June 26, 1999. As cited in Peter Lavoy, Scott Sagan, J. Wirtz, eds., *Planning the Unthikable* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 248-249.
8. Quoted in Zahid Hussain, "On the Brink," *Newsline*, June 1999, pp. 24-25.
9. Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).
10. Interestingly, in his book *In the Line of Fire*, Gen Musharraf has alluded to his commando personality that prodded him to be a risk taker.

Subscribing to this logic, Islamabad assumed that India would find its military options checkmated by the presence of a nuclear overhang and would be compelled to negotiate. The achievement of a rough nuclear parity was considered enough to offset asymmetry in conventional capabilities. Also, given that ever since May 1998, an anxious US had consistently described South Asia as a dangerous nuclear flashpoint, Pakistan hoped that Washington would not hesitate to intervene to resolve the crisis and even formalise a new status quo in Kashmir, which could then be claimed as victory for Pakistan. This internationalisation, it was naturally believed, would work in Pakistan's favour.

However, that is not how the saga unfolded. India's response, hesitant in the first two weeks whilst the military still believed that the action in the area was by unusually well armed irregulars and terrorists, became far more considered and calibrated as soon as greater clarity about the ground situation emerged. The army and air force undertook coordinated actions with a clear objective of dislodging the Pakistani forces without foreclosing any future options. But the political leadership imposed on them the constraint of confining their military operations to the Indian side of the LoC. While this imposition came with its challenges, two factors worked in India's favour. Firstly, having first claimed that the intruders were not really its own troops but independent Mujahideen, Islamabad found itself constrained to provide its troops with any reinforcements to fight the Indian military offensive that came in the form of artillery barrages as well as air attacks. Secondly, once the international community knew of the subterfuge, Pakistan was seen as the aggressor and pressured, even by its traditional friends, Washington and Beijing, to withdraw from the occupied heights. In fact, the US, which had shied away from assigning blame to a particular party for having initiated a crisis in previous wars between India and Pakistan, squarely condemned Pakistan's incursions and intentions across the LoC and refused to mediate. China too counselled

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Prime Minister Sharif, during his visit to Beijing, that Pakistan should abandon its plans. A more sympathetic response from its traditional allies might have emboldened Pakistan to carry on. But faced with escalating casualties, economic losses due to sanctions and diplomatic isolation, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was compelled to reconsider continuing military operations, even in the face of advice to the contrary by his own military commanders.[11]

The war highlighted the politico-diplomatic dimensions of modern wars, especially where nuclear weapons are concerned. 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, a line whose sanctity had long been upheld as the very basis of a negotiated settlement for the disputed territories in the region. In fact, Kargil, for the first time, made India reap the benefit of "internationalisation" of the Kashmir issue, a ploy often used by Pakistan and desisted by India. In this instance, the US intervention sought by Pakistan turned to India's advantage for two reasons: one, as the Indian Army routed back Pakistani forces and moved closer to the LoC, the risk of extension of war across the LoC increased. With this also increased the fear of military escalation. Having already limited the Indian Air Force (IAF) to operating in a difficult situation on its own side of the border, New Delhi was willing to

11. In fact, there has been a war of words between Pakistan's political and military leadership of the time, with each blaming the other for the Kargil debacle. Gen Musharraf has never tired of recounting the "political mishandling" of the situation and the attempts to "spin the events disingenuously." See Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 95-98. On the other hand, then PM Nawaz Sharif has maintained that he was never briefed on the military operations in Kargil. Meanwhile, Benazir Bhutto has stated that the army had shared the plan with her when she was PM, but that she had vetoed it even though she had sensed that the army chief was taken in with the "brilliance of military strategy." See Samina Ahmed, "Nuclear Weapons and the Kargil Crisis," in Lowell Dittmer, ed., *South Asia's Nuclear Security Dilemma: India, Pakistan and China* (London: East Gate, 2005), p. 143.

accept US intervention to control Pakistan; secondly, flowing from the show of Indian maturity and self-control in handling a provocative situation, the US' perception of India and its nuclear status underwent a change. This enabled the blossoming of a strategic relationship that has been far more understanding of the Indian security environment and compulsions.

Kargil ended in July 1999, roughly two months after it had started, as an ill thought out misadventure by Pakistan. However, it was useful to the extent that it illustrated (to those on both sides of the border who are willing to rationally assess it) the limits that nuclear weapons cast on the actions of nations. Pakistan realised that the acquisition of nuclear weapons had not provided it with a *carte blanche* on disruptive actions across the border. Rather, the presence of nuclear weapons placed clear limits on how far it could, or should, go, so as not to breach the limits of Indian tolerance. This, in fact, has several lessons for the major assumptions that underlie Pakistan's nuclear strategy.

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Meanwhile, the Kargil episode made India realise the constraints that the presence of the adversary's nuclear weapons cast on its own exercise of military options. Despite the widely expressed opinion to strike against Pakistan, once the identity of the Mujahideen as regular Pakistani soldiers was established beyond doubt, the political leaders imposed upon the military to undertake operations in such a way that the threat of escalation was minimised. Therefore, in an unprecedented gesture, the use of air power was limited to the Indian side of the LoC in order to oust the illegal occupants of the heights. No strikes were authorised across the border, not even at the terrorist infrastructure known to exist in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). This was in stark contrast to the Indian response to Pakistan's Operation Gibraltar in 1965. Even then, Gen Ayub Khan's military regime had sent Pakistani regular forces disguised as Kashmiri dissidents into the region. This operation was premised on the belief that India would not have the stomach to spread the conflict beyond the disputed territory and, thus, enable Pakistan to

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succeed with its revisionist plans of occupying some chunks of territory. But, at the time, India, despite its weak military position so soon after the 1962 defeat at the hands of China, had not hesitated to extend the conflict beyond the international boundary.

The case with Kargil was just the opposite since despite its position of conventional superiority, India exhibited the ability to wage a war with self-imposed limits. This proved to be as much a revelation to Pakistan as to the larger international community that had described this very region as the most dangerous flashpoint. The sense of responsibility and maturity in action displayed by India did help to shape a range of perceptions across several capitals. The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) ordained nuclear weapon states realised that nuclear weapons in the possession of regional powers were no more or less dangerous than when in their own arsenals. Islamabad and New Delhi, meanwhile, realised the strengths and limitations of nuclear weapons.

Some of these lessons were again put to test in December 2001 after the Pakistan-supported terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament. It is a striking coincidence that this incident took place three months after 9/11 when a hijacked airliner was believed to be headed for a collision with Capitol Hill, the seat of the American Parliament. While the aircraft failed to reach the target, the terrorists in New Delhi partially succeeded in breaching the security of the Indian Parliament and managed to reach till one of its gates before being shot dead. However, a strike against a potent symbol of Indian democracy, and at a time when Parliament was in session, the incident ignited aggressive sentiments from the Indian polity, public and military. A significant section of the political voices, military advice and editorial opinion clearly argued in favour of targeting terrorist training camps in POK. In a show of resolve, the political leadership did authorise the mobilisation of military forces on the international border and the LoC in Kashmir. The move elicited a reciprocal response from across the border. The international community

watched with concern as Operation Parakram unfolded. At one time, some governments even issued travel advisories to their nationals visiting or residing in this part of the world to indicate the seriousness of the situation between two nuclear-armed nations with fully mobilised militaries on high alert on the borders. However, despite the high level of military preparedness, India and Pakistan did not actually go to war. While this is attributed to a range of reasons, including external influence, diplomatic parleys, economic constraints, etc., the presence of nuclear weapons is not something that can be overlooked.

In this instance, India practised compellence or what has been described as "coercive diplomacy"[12] that involved a combination of diplomatic and military pressure. The basic aim was to force the Pakistan government to accede to India's demands of halting all support to cross-border terrorism and to take action against terrorist outfits known to be operating from its soil or else be prepared for military action. However, Jaswant Singh, then foreign minister has listed three aims for the mobilisation[13]:

(a) To defeat the cross-border infiltration/terrorism without conflict. To this end, the government tried to contain Pakistan diplomatically.

(b) To contain the national mood of 'teach Pakistan a lesson.' This required managing the country's sense of outrage and desire for revenge and retaliation by not necessarily waging a war but providing a sense of achievement to the country by diplomatically defeating the enemy.

(c) To destroy and degrade Pakistan's war-fighting capabilities in the event of war. In readiness for such eventuality, the military was placed on a state of high alert. However, the challenge lay in getting the armed forces leadership to recognise the value of restraint as a strategic asset.

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However, as is often the case in any war, these aims appear far more clearly articulated in retrospect than when they came out at the time of the crisis. At that time, the Indian

12. Jaswant Singh, *A Call to Honour* (New Delhi, 2006), p. 266.
13. Singh, Ibid., p. 268.

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policy seemed a bit rudderless, especially once Islamabad denied its involvement in any such activities and reciprocated with its own military preparations. At this juncture, the presence of nuclear weapons did compel India to reconsider and reevaluate its military options because neither could it ratchet up the crisis, given the possibility of the conflict escalating to the nuclear level and leading to destruction far higher than anticipated, nor could it wind down the mobilised war machinery without having achieved the political objectives first articulated. Some of these were claimed to be met on January 12, 2002, when President Musharraf, in an address to the nation, announced that Pakistan would no longer be used as a base for terrorism of any kind, and that it would ban the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, implicated in the attack on the Parliament. However, the Indian military remained mobilised and the Indian resolve to take action against Pakistan strengthened after the Kaluchak terrorist massacre in May 2002 when families of troops mobilised at the border were killed. Help from the US at this point to coerce President Musharraf to make a public statement decrying terrorism and banning the outfits came in useful in defusing the tension. After Pakistan's commitment, made in a public announcement in early June 2002, to halt its support for cross-border terrorism, the war machinery wound down after a half-year-long mobilisation, and it was business as usual.

In both cases, Kargil and the attack on the Indian Parliament, Islamabad was emboldened to take the step in the belief that the hands of India's military would be tied, preventing it from taking any decisive military action against Pakistan. Simultaneously, Pakistan played the nuclear card at the international level, leaning heavily on the international community to restrain India if it wanted to avoid nuclear use in the region. Pakistan's ambassador to the UN made it clear

in May 2002 that Pakistan would not "expend our limited resources on building up a conventional defence which will completely debilitate our development... We have to rely on our means to deter Indian aggression. We have that means and we will not neutralise it by any doctrine of no first use."[14]

Indeed, India did feel the weight of nuclear weapons on its possible courses of action. But it also discovered that there was scope for retaliatory action that had to be intelligently discovered and exploited and astutely meshed with politico-diplomatic measures best suited to the prevailing international political environment. This, if effectively employed, brought the possibility of achieving important political gains without actual resort to military action, or use of force without war. Pakistan failed to understand this basic feature of modern warfare during Kargil and Operation Parakram. As stated by one American strategic analyst, "The loss of its vital US ally and the non-appearance of Chinese support suggest a poor appreciation for alliance considerations and international reactions to the attack."[15]

India needs to understand the role of external players in a bilateral relationship between two nuclear-armed neighbours. While such interference and the possibility of "internationalisation" of the Kashmir dispute were considered anathema to the Indian administrations in the past, the experiences of the two crisis situations post-1998 have shown the benefits of US mediation. This is not to suggest that India should depend on the US or other states to deal with its security concerns vis-a-vis Pakistan, but to highlight that in the Indo-Pakistan relationship, especially in the presence of nuclear weapons, the role of external powers would be greater, given that their apprehensions of nuclear use are more. Nevertheless, India would have less to fear

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14. As quoted by Timothy D. Hoyt, "Strategic Myopia: Pakistan's Nuclear Doctrine and Crisis Stability in South Asia", in Dittmer ed., n. 11, p. 120.
15. Hoyt, Ibid., p. 130.

from this influence in the future since a mature handling of the situations by India has helped create the distinction in American mind on the behaviours of the two nations. Therefore, the US that earlier never tired of straitjacketing its nuclear policies into the same mould for India and Pakistan, is today willing to treat them differently. An adept use of growing Indian influence with the US could certainly help to keep Pakistan from playing the game of nuclear brinkmanship.

THE CONDUCT OF LIMITED WAR

As explained in the previous section, the nature of warfare changes with the entry of nuclear weapons into the calculations, and, hence, the concepts, doctrines and capabilities must also keep apace. Of course, at one level, the regional reality for India remains unchanged as its security grapples with two adversaries, both of whom are nuclear armed and close to one another, and with both of whom India has unsettled territorial disputes, mutual hostility and distrust, and routine border skirmishes. None of this has diminished with the establishment of nuclear deterrence. Rather, the challenges have been further complicated since the presence of nuclear weapons considerably raises the threshold of provocation. So, Pakistan, for instance, is able to exploit far greater space at the lower level of sub-conventional conflict to indulge in acts seeking to destabilise India. It derives immunity against conventional war by raising the risk of escalation to the nuclear level. This is a strategy that Pakistan has crafted to perfection. The challenge for India, therefore, lies in nullifying the advantage that the adversary seeks to exploit from the linkage between nuclear deterrence and conventional war.

Limited war offers one possible response to the situation without the danger of nuclear escalation. As the very term indicates, limited war means a restrained, calibrated use of force instead of an all out employment of military capabilities. Normally, militaries do not welcome constraints on the use of their resources. For them, the achievement of victory in war is the final and singular objective and their military might is meant to be effectively used as a tool in the pursuit of this goal. However, if an all out war was to be fought with nuclear weapons, then victory at the cost of losing a nation would appear self-defeating if not downright foolish. Hence, the significance of limited war. Obviously, this would involve a

revision of conventional warfare tactics that hold the risk of breaching the adversary's nuclear threshold to a version where short, sharp wars, limited in time, scope and intent, are undertaken. Therefore, military strikes would either need to be restricted in depth into enemy territory and spread in geographical expanse, or limited in scope to carry out deeper, narrow thrusts into adversary territory in order to remain well away from the expressed/perceived 'red lines' of the nuclear threshold.

In the case of Pakistan, with whom the chances of deterrence breakdown are deemed to be higher than with China[16], red lines of some sort were spelt out by Gen Khalid Kidwai of the Strategic Plans Division, the organisation in charge of Pakistan's strategic assets and policy in 2001. These were: loss of large parts of territory (space threshold); destruction of large parts of land or air forces (military threshold); economic strangulation (economic threshold); and political destabilisation or large-scale internal subversion (domestic destabilisation threshold). Evidently, the broad areas covered by this articulation are clearly meant to indicate a very low nuclear threshold for Pakistan's nuclear use. However, it is imperative that the Indian national security establishment draws up its own estimation of the credibility of these threats. For instance, on the space threshold, it can be safely determined that even a deep penetration by India into the barren desert area of Pakistan is unlikely to breach its nuclear threshold though a similar depth in the populated areas of Punjab would be viewed differently. Similarly, air strikes against terrorist infrastructure and assets in POK are likely to evoke less response than targeting of military assets elsewhere in Pakistan. Such

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16. Even though China is considered the larger potential threat for Indian security owing to the possibility of clash of interests for resources and spheres of influence in the coming decades, it is with Pakistan that the dangers of deterrence breakdown are more pronounced owing to its pursuit of asymmetric warfare with India and a more aggressive offensive defence military strategy. Meanwhile, the doctrinal similarities of no first use and the acceptance of nuclear weapons as a political tool of deterrence rather than war-fighting, make nuclear deterrence between India and China appear far more stable.

Display of such military preparedness in the absence of political resolve to use even limited capabilities also sends wrong signals to the adversary, thereby degrading the deterrence at even the conventional level.

assessments are necessary in the case of every threshold if India is not to be self-deterred from undertaking action against provocative conduct of sub-conventional war by Pakistan. The possible military response, meanwhile, would have to be in keeping with the concept of limited war along the following parameters.

One, there is an urgent need to reconsider the existing model of troop mobilisation. As was learnt from the experience of Operation Parakram, full mobilisation of that kind in the presence of a nuclear-armed adversary is hardly an effective proposition, besides being dangerous. Moreover, display of such military preparedness in the absence of political resolve to use even limited capabilities also sends wrong signals to the adversary, thereby degrading the deterrence at even the conventional level. Therefore, the Indian military has to look for options that allow it to undertake short, shallow strikes/thrusts into adversary territory in areas that would make a difference.

Those arms of the military that offer the maximum possibility of highly calibrated escalation and the ability to deescalate must undertake these operations. Therefore, use of such instruments as special forces (especially raised and trained for the purpose) or air power or even maritime power with the requisite capabilities would be preferred options. Such employment of force could be best conducted with maritime or air power because they enjoy, in varying measure, the advantage of flexibility of employment, as well as better control over military engagement and, hence, over escalation. Air power provides the greatest benefits in this regard while land forces have little advantage in terms of escalation control. Once engaged in combat, the army cannot be disengaged unless one or the other side either concedes defeat or a ceasefire is agreed upon. Meanwhile, air power helps show resolve and, at the same time, offers the flexibility of disengagement, thereby making it possible to

control escalation. Therefore, as a second measure, adequate attention must be given to understanding the advantages and limitations of each Service in different scenarios. Such issues need to be adequately considered and deliberated upon in peace-time in order to meet the requirements during a period of crisis.

Thirdly, India must consistently build up its conventional capability in order to keep the nuclear threshold as high as possible. The thrust areas for modernisation must include reconnaissance, surveillance, and intelligence capabilities that can enable precise target acquisition and attack, as well as air attack capabilities with precision guidance in order to minimise risk of collateral damage. This would not only reduce chances of escalation but also garner greater acceptance from major powers that could then be counted upon to bear down upon the adversary to see reason and temper its responses accordingly.

Fourthly, and most importantly, it is imperative that India continuously works at enhancing the credibility of its nuclear deterrence. This demands moving towards a survivable second strike capability. Given its no first use posture, India has committed itself to a retaliation only policy and, hence, is required to concentrate on increasing the survivability of not just the warhead or the delivery vehicle but also the entire command and control structure, communication networks and, above all, the survival of the political will to retaliate. Survival of the weapon would mean little in case the political leadership is not adequately prepared to understand the demands of nuclear deterrence. Also, it must be appreciated that political will in a democracy depends a great deal on the perceived legitimacy of action. National will arises from, and can be built by, articulating and encouraging a clear understanding of national interest and policy options to pursue them. These are challenging issues and must be accorded the attention they deserve.

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In conclusion, it may be stated that while nuclear deterrence imposes restraints on conventional war, it is not possible for all

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wars to be obviated in their presence. In difficult regional circumstances such as the kind that India finds itself in, the possibility of conventional wars exists. Theoretically, therefore, there is also the possibility of escalation of a conventional conflict into an unwanted nuclear exchange. However, if India was to be self-deterred by this thought, it would mean complete erosion of both its conventional and nuclear deterrence capabilities. In order to deter war, India must maintain and project a high level of conventional capability that would be intelligently applied in a calibrated manner to keep the use of coercive force well below the assumed red lines of the adversary. In order to deter nuclear war, India must illustrate its ability to handle deterrence breakdown and retaliate against the adversary with enough capability and resolve to inflict damage that would impose a cost far beyond the value of the stake that made the first use of nuclear weapons against India thinkable.