After having studied various theories and doctrines of the limited war, this chapter, as a case study, is an attempt towards evaluating the validity of these strategic pronouncements by placing them in the heat and dust of an actual war. And as it is only the failure of a nation that very often leads to serious re-evaluation of its strategies—the historic defeat of the United States in the Vietnam war remains till date the only instance that breaks its long history of clean and cost-effective victories.1 Also, what makes this longest military involvement of the United States particularly significant in the present context is the fact that this period almost perfectly coincides with the gradual evolution and formulation of America's limited war theories and doctrines.

No doubt, following their experiences in the two world wars, the Korean Conflict (1951) had provided the first important challenge to the popular American axiom that "Modern war is a Total War", yet the way their simultaneous

involvement in Vietnam evolved in the years to come, and the magnitude of the complexities that emerged and the devastation that this superpower had to face in Vietnam made the first test in Korea look like a skirmish compared to the Vietnam war. Moreover, being first experiment a limited war in the twentieth century, the war in Korea was, in fact, fought by the Americans with a mind set of the total war era. For instance, even at the height of crisis in Korea, the Joint Chiefs of Staff at Washington were fully convinced that it was a Soviet-sponsored aggression and that it was only a feint to compel America to deploy its forces in the Far East while the Soviet Union prepared for launching total war in Europe. In fact, in December 1950, intelligence analysis had come to the conclusion that a sort of World War III was only two weeks away.\(^2\) To begin with, therefore, this Eurocentric orientation of American strategy was perhaps the single most important reason for making Korean war the first limited war of the twentieth century. Otherwise, as Bernard Brodie says, "...the kind of doctrine about limited war that is so completely familiar today not only did not then exist, but would have been utterly incomprehensible."\(^3\)

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The conclusion of the Korean war as a stalemate was a unique historical experience for the Americans. This was not only to prove as the greatest single stimulant for the evolution of limited war strategies but was also an essential first step which was to go a long way in preparing the Americans for digesting their first historic defeat. And from this angle, of course, the Korean war shall always remain the first reference point of all the studies into the operational aspects of fighting a limited war. Nevertheless, it is the Vietnam war that will stand out as America's greatest experiment with their limited war theories and doctrines. As Robert S. McNamara was later to pronounce: "The greatest contribution Vietnam is making is that it is developing an ability in the United States to fight a limited war." Even later experiments in the form of 'special operations' in Panama and Grenada and military action, as part of allied forces, in the Gulf War, owes much of their success to the long and painful slogging in the jungles of South Vietnam.

The final American withdrawal from South Vietnam after

over 25 years of active involvement with the net results of 58,000 dead, 300,000 wounded and $150 billion expended, and within one year the communists having taken over South Vietnam, the defeat in Vietnam was perhaps the most shattering experience for the Americans in their whole history of over 200 years.5 Beginning with their skirmishes and chasing of American Indians in the 1700s, through their battles of 1880s, the Spanish-American war and their imperial interventions in the Caribbean, Central America and also in the Philippines, the American combat forces had always returned home victorious. Even in the two world wars, the United States was perhaps the only country that had actually emerged victorious: Other Allied powers, even if victorious had been virtually decimated by the destruction during these wars. Thus, Korean war was the only occasion where an American conflict had ended in a stalemate. But the worst was yet to come.

5. Time, April 15, 1984, p.22 (Special Issue on the tenth anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam). Later estimates have shown American costs as high as $300 billion. Le Anh Tu, Vietnam: The Legacy of War (Philadelphia, 1979) cites Congressional Records which for 1965-1975 total of over $239 billion. The rate of inflation since then should at least double this amount for current value. Similarly, Vietnam veterans who died later in hospitals are not accounted for in the above figure. Moreover, statistics will never be able to measure the intangible impacts of the Vietnam War.
It naturally defies all common-place explanations as to how a small backward country that was nearly 50 times smaller to the United States and whose per capita income at the time of American defeat was forty times less than that of the United States and where peasant soldiers back in 1964 were paid less than $1 per month and which until 1940 had been successfully kept under control by less than 11,000 French soldiers, actually managed to defeat a nuclear superpower which had deployed a force of 550,000 Americans assisted by 1,000,000 South Vietnamese forces, tried all its modern technology and incinerated this ancient civilization by dropping over three times the total tonnage of bombs that were used during the whole of the second world war i.e. over 1,000 pounds of explosives for every Vietnamese man, woman and child. In fact, the bitter joke was that the frail little Vietnamese must have "died laughing" at the plight of hefty American soldiers. The United States had, at the peak of the Vietnam war, deployed over 40 per cent of all US Army combat-ready divisions, more than half of all Marine Corps Divisions, a third of the US Naval forces, roughly half of the fighter bombers, and between quarter and a half of all

B-52 bombers in the US Air Force Strategic Air Command.7

America's defeat in Vietnam war was, therefore, obviously labelled as the greatest failure of their warfighting-strategies and doctrines. The hurt to the society at large was naturally extremely deep rooted and widespread. A whole generation of Americans had received a severe jolt to their sense of superiority. Just like the victims of nuclear bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki have continued to show its impact even on the later Japanese generations, the imprints of their defeat in Vietnam have continued to gore succeeding American generations even till today. President George Bush's attempts at explaining American victories in the Gulf War in terms of having finally "got the monkey off the American shoulders" and the way issue of "draft dodgers" dominated America's 1992 Presidential election campaign clearly shows how Vietnam continues to haunt the American psyche. Whereas the generations of the 1960s and the 1970s had themselves lived through those traumatic years and had seen their friends and relatives dead or wounded, the younger generations of the 1980s have received their war images by equally powerful filmic, literary, televisual, photo-

7. Note 1, p.10.
graphic, musical and other audio-visual presentations. 8 And the far-reaching socio-political and cultural repercussions that these historical experiences had generated have also been greatly responsible for moulding and rectifying various concepts and of operations of limited war.

For David Kunzel, the war in Vietnam was unique in, at least, three important aspects: (1) No war since the American Civil War had caused such a rift in public opinion and led to such a massive and heated public debate for and against; (2) it was the first war in which the United States had conclusively lost; and, (3) never before did the Americans think that they knew so much about their enemy, only to discover that they knew very little. 9 The collapse of American warfighting in the Vietnam war had badly confounded the self-righteous American scholars of war who were to find

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themselves caught in the middle of pessimistic liberal conclusions on "the limits of power" and the relentless conservatives complaints about the "self-imposed restraint" in Vietnam whereas men in the defence forces had still continued to propagate how in retrospect occupying the chief port of Haiphong and the capital city, Hanoi, could have ended the war in favour of the United States.10

The conduct of American foreign policy and warfighting in Vietnam had moved from Franklin Roosevelt's disapproval of French colonialism during World War II to the American replacement of the French in 1954, from critical support to President Diem's government in South Vietnam to complicity in removing him in 1963, followed by US assumption of the major burdens of war for coming seven years. Throughout this prolonged and intimate involvement of the United States, illusion after illusion cherished by decision-makers and the public at large, had been shattered.11 Although, following defeat in 1975 the nation had abruptly moved from


obsession to amnesia, yet the very presence of wounded veterans, of draft evaders and deserters, of the families of fallen American servicemen or those missing in action, had all greatly discredited existing institutions and had severely affected American perceptions of warfighting in the nuclear age. Notorious terms like, My Lai, Operation Phoenix, the 'secret war', 'Special Forces', 'Cambodian incursion', Washington Special Action Group, the Tonkin Resolution, protection reaction strikes, defoliation, Public Safety Divisions' assistance programme, Requirement office, "guns and butter" budget etc. had all become part of a nightmare and greatly distorted the very understanding of limited war.

As a consequence, therefore, for a long time to come the subject of limited war remained taboo in all the military-academic institutions. But this, however, did not lead to America's abandoning of its strategies of limited war. In fact, Robert E. Osgood, one of the greatest scholars of limited war who was also the first one to re-examine limited war in the backdrop of the Vietnam experience, came to rather positive conclusions. For him, the rationale of limited war had not only "transcended" this traumatic experience but had continued to expand in application and ac-
ceptance. The Vietnam war had also been greatly responsible at the same time in generating an unprecedented interest amongst the armed forces, who had traditionally been regarded as primarily in favour of total war, towards understanding and examining limited war. A number of articles that were to appear later in journals like Military Review have today virtually buried the popular complaint of the 1970s, that "Military professionals are among the most infrequent contributors to the basic literature" on the limited war and that the strategy of flexible response was a creation "of civilian, and not military thinking". And of course, this gradual acceptance of limited war doctrines has greatly increased its credibility and has also led to some basic modifications in the relevant traditional concepts. To give one major example, limited war today is much more inclined towards conducting warfighting using counter-insurgency tactics of limited war and is now much less concerned with traditional ideas of fighting a limited nuclear war (tactical or strategic). To quote Major Michael Brown of the US Army:


"For nearly a decade following its withdrawal from Vietnam, the US Army did everything it could to forget that traumatic war.... As time passed, it became increasingly apparent that the concepts of limited war and low-intensity conflict (LIC) would not go away." 14

Accordingly, this gradual acceptance by the Americans of limited warfighting following the Vietnam war was facilitated by the relative success of this strategy in Grenada (1983), Panama (1988) and in the Gulf War. Also, the passage of time has partly healed the wounds. Moreover, vast amount of deep and detailed analyses of the Vietnam war have clarified many thorny issues.

"The primary purpose of any theory", said Clausewitz long ago, "is to clarify concepts and ideas that have become, as it were, confused and entangled." 15 Following this spirited advise, this chapter is an attempt at clearly understanding the value and validity of various limited war theories and doctrines by studying their actual operations during the Vietnam war. However, to properly appreciate the success or failure of limited war strategy in Vietnam,


it would perhaps be appropriate to first briefly survey America's conduct of its Korean war - which was the first encounter with fighting limited war - and to elucidate as to how much and what kind of knowledge and experience in limited warfighting the United States had already obtained before becoming involved in Vietnam.

Korea: America's First Limited War:

The Korean war was the first important war in American history that was not a crusade.16 It was also the first large foreign war that was fought by the United States without congressional authorization, something that would have been inconceivable for the Americans in the absence of their experiences of two world wars that was responsible for effecting necessary changes in their perceptions about their nation's role in international affairs.17 And this was so also because, at the time of North Korea's attack on 25 June 1950, American troops were already stationed in South Korea - first as occupation forces to disarm Japanese forces following the World War II and since then as military advisors to the Republic of South Korea (ROK). And still, as the progress of events was later to show, the Americans,

17. n.3, p.58.
despite their immediate experiences in Greece and despite British successes in Malaya, were not prepared for fighting a limited war.

Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from North Korea by December 1948, the United States had lost much of its interests in Korean crisis and had gradually shifted its efforts towards faster rehabilitation of Japanese polity which, it had expected, would emerge as a bulwark against communist threats in Asia—an area in which the western threat perceptions had been reinforced following the fall of Nationalist China. Beginning with the May 1947 proposal of US Secretary of War, Robert Patterson, urging the State Department to consider withdrawal of US divisions from Korea for budgetary reasons, numerous proposals had been made highlighting how "from the standpoint of military security, the United States had little interest in maintaining the present troops and bases in Korea....." Similarly, in his widely publicised speech to the National Press Club on 12 January, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson had outlined what he called America's "defense perimeter" in the Pacific in which both Korea and Formosa were shown falling outside

and were left to the mercies of the world community and the United Nations.\textsuperscript{19} Dean Acheson had also been one who, along with George F. Kennan and Charles Bohlen, had been propagating a great deal that the communist bloc was no a single monolith and that frictions were emerging in Sino-Soviet relations. Such a relaxed view of Washington was clearly responsible for encouraging a Soviet-sponsored aggression on South Korea, and it is generally agreed today that this had taken American intelligence networks by surprise none of which had visualized that any such attack was imminent.\textsuperscript{20}

Still as the reports reached Washington that 90,000 North Korean troops along with 150 Soviet built T-34 tanks had crossed 38th Parallel and were fast closing in on the capital city of Seoul, the Truman administration could not have abandoned its much advertised sweeping policies of containment nor was it any position to betray these "free people" of Asia threatened of communist subjugation that so loudly had been promised unconditional American help by the

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Truman Doctrine of March 1947. Moreover, the confrontation-
al stance that had been outlined by the just submitted NSC-
68 (and the fact that its author Paul S. Nitze had replaced
The moderate George F. Kennan as head of the Polity Planning
Staff in the State Department in January 1950) and the
pressure of maintaining US credibility with its allies in
Europe and Asia (that had been declining following the
defeat of nationalists in China) as also the unprecedented
support of the United Nations21 (in the absence of Soviet
Union who were boycotting United Nations demanding that PRC
be given China's permanent seat in the Security Council) had
all been responsible for emboldening President Truman for
ordering US forces in defence of South Korea - a decision
that he later described in his Memoirs as "the toughest
decision I had to make as President."22 But as the Ameri-

21. The Truman administration had explained its decision
to send forces in defence of South Korea as if it was
so mandated by the United Nations and this confusion
has till date continued. Truman had ordered his forces
on June 25 whereas the Security Council on this day had
only 'condemned' the aggression and it was only on June
27 that the Security Council had invited member-states
"to furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as
may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to
restore international peace and security in the area."
However, later US forces had become part of allied
forces in Korea. See UN SC documents S/473 dated 25

22. n.18, p.359.
cans were soon to discover it was not sheer possession of courage, commitment and an advanced warfighting capability that was enough for fighting this first limited war of the nuclear age; American perceptions of war had, however, continued to be dominated by their visions of fighting a total war.

It was the obsession of American leadership with having to fight a general war in Europe - which made them conduct their military operations in Korea as if it was only a peripheral distraction - as also the military intervention of the People's Republic of China in November 1950 which were responsible for keeping the American warfighting essentially limited; geographically speaking, within the Korean borders and in terms of intensity and weapons only a non-nuclear war, even though the tradition of "non-use" of nuclear weapons had not yet emerged and atomic bombs had only recently been used in the neighborhood in Japan. And it was so not because the American military operations were guided by the tenets of limited war, instead it was because of this absence of limited war doctrine and the lack of coordination and understanding of limited war among the political leaders and field commanders that the United States had to so severely compromise on its war aims and accept a stalemate situation even after fighting such a
bloody war - a war that had cost America over 140,000 casualties (45 per cent of them after the US had accepted negotiations), bring out a wave of anti-Communist hysteria and add impetus to McCarthyism that itself was responsible for destroying lives and careers.23

Much unlike the Communists who had been rather good at mixing their war and politics, the Americans in Korea were fighting a mini total war. Mao-tse-tung, for instance, had all the time been referring to his troops in North Korea as only "volunteers" yet at the same time he had continued to propagate that the nuclear weapons were only a paper tiger and China had the capability to survive even a nuclear attack.24 The Americans, on the other hand, especially its Army, despite being deterred by the Soviet atomic test of August 1949, had continued to think in terms of fighting a nuclear war and the US Far Eastern Commander General Douglas A. McArthur had not only continued to campaign for expanding the war into China but on December 24, 1950 had actually submitted to the President "a list of retardation targets


which he considered would require 26 bombs."25 As the testimonies before the Jenner Sub-Committee in 1954-55 were later to show, McArthur was not alone, and in fact, except Generals Mathew Ridgeway and Maxwell Taylor perhaps most of senior US Commanders in the Far East during the Korean War had similar "absolutist ideas" and these ideas also had great support in Congress and amongst the people at large.26 The political leadership had felt so threatened by this rising opinion that despite US constitution clearly providing for political control of the military, they had to resort to the extreme measure of ordering recall of General McArthur, an incident that had also initiated what was later to be called congressional 'Great Debate' on the Korean war.27 But this, however, is not to mean that armed forces were all to be blamed whereas the political leader-
ship was fighting only a limited war. Rather until the Chinese intervention compelled them to reconsider their war aims, these political leaders had also been all set to crush North Koreans and to establish united Korea. To quote, Secretary of State, Dean Acheson:

"In the period from shortly after the Inchon landings until the intervention of the Chinese communists, it looked as though both of these objectives could be attained....McArthur's military mission was to pursue them and to round them up.....We had the highest hopes that when you did that the whole of Korea would be united. That did not come to pass, because the Chinese intervened.28

Apart from the Chinese intervention which everyone agrees was the most important factor, Bernard Brodie enumerates five other factors which were responsible for keeping the American warfighting in Korea limited. These are:

1) The nuclear stockpiles were limited, and were earmarked entirely for the European theater, against Soviet Union; ii) Nuclear weapons were visualised under doctrine of 'strategic bombing' and therefore US Strategic Air command were strictly against using such weapons tactically; iii) America's U.N. allies in Korea, especially Britain, were strongly against the use of nuclear weapons; iv) Soviet Union had tested their own first nuclear device in 1949 which had

heightened the fear of retaliation; and, v) there were talks about the social overtones of America's using of atomic weapons against Asians, (e.g. Japan and not Germany were bombed in World War II) and any attack against Koreans or Chinese could have generated adverse public opinion against the United States. However, seen in retrospect, all these factors may not have been brought to light had the Chinese not intervened in favour of North Korea. Therefore, to mention the a single most important factor, it was the American perceptions of the Korean war as only a battle in their overall global confrontation with the communists that was responsible for moderating American warfighting in Korea and the Chinese intervention had, of course, was the most important factor in re-inforcing this American belief.

It was this sharpening of America's perceptions that the communist nations had actually started their expansionist drive that was to colour their visions and depict the French conflict with Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam not as a struggle between colonialists and anti-colonialists, but as an integral part of an anti-communist crusade, a burden that the United States must bear. Highlighting this intercon-

29. n.3, pp.64-65.
30. n.23, p.246.
nection between these two limited wars, Henry Kissinger wrote:

"...we had entered the Korean war because we were afraid that to fail to do so would produce a much graver danger to Europe in the near future. But then the very reluctance to face an all out onslaught on Europe severely circumscribed the risks we were prepared to run to prevail in Korea....

Ten years later we encountered the same dilemmas in Vietnam. Once more we became involved because we considered the warfare in Indo-China as manifestation of a coordinated global Communist strategy. Again we sought to limit our risks because the very global challenge of which Indo-China appeared to be a part also made Vietnam appear as an unprofitable place for a showdown....31

**Limited War in Vietnam:**

The perception of American leadership about both the Korean and Vietnam war was that they are an integral part of their global confrontation with the communists. But apart from being an important turning point in the history of twentieth century warfighting and as a warning to the United States that the era of fighting total war had come to an end, the experience in Korea at the operational level was not to prove of any great significance. As for the Vietnam war, the American political leadership had perhaps so

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hurriedly got involved and then so severely entangled in the Vietnam war that hardly any serious attempt was made towards learning from their experiences in Korea.

First of all, the involvement of the United States in case of both Korea and Vietnam had evolved almost simultaneously as part of the globalisation of the American foreign policy following World War II. And in fact, it was this failure of the Truman administration in even delaying the success of Mao's communist revolution, followed by the Chinese military intervention in Korea which was responsible for making even the struggle in Vietnam, initially only an anti-colonial struggle of the Indochinese people, appear as another anti-communist confrontation in which the United States could settle its scores of the Korean stalemate. Along with their military action in Korea in June 1950, the United States had began to send arms to the French forces and were eventually to supply some $4 billion of the total expenses of the French for the war, estimated at $7.5 billion. By end of the Korean war in April 1954 the United States was footing 78 per cent of the French war bill in Vietnam.32 Later the relative success of John Foster

Dulles' 'massive retaliation' in actually hastening 'negotiations' on Korean crisis as also the conclusion of a peace treaty with the Japanese had both encouraged the United States to gradually replace the French and once again to reinforce their resolve of containing communism. The role of the Americans at the Geneva Conference of April 1954 had made it amply clear that the United States was all determined to intervene in Vietnam if necessary and to take all steps necessary to prevent Communist conquest of Southeast Asia. The Korean experience this way was responsible for building an anti-Communist hysteria amongst the younger second tier leadership of the US military and polity who were later to occupy important decision-making positions during the Vietnam war. Therefore, the American experience in the Korean war was greatly responsible for colouring American perceptions and thereby influencing the American conduct in the Vietnam war.

The most apparent distinction between these two military engagements of the United States is perhaps the distinction of their separate time frame. Whereas active warfighting in Vietnam had continued for nearly a decade, operations in Korea did not last for more than a year. By

the time the United States got militarily involved in Vietnam, the world had changed. The nuclear arms race had been intensified. The strategy of nuclear deterrence had been developed. Any implicit tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons had slowly been evolved. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 had a sobering effect on the nuclear establishment. The Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 represented the new formula of arms control. The Soviets had also gathered experienced in their limited interventions in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). The H-bombs, the ICBMs, the Spy Satellites had made both the superpowers more powerful and at the same time more vulnerable. The threats of mass-destruction and the consequent pressures of international public opinion had made the use of nuclear weapons extremely difficult. Political constraints on President Nixon's long held belief in the use of nuclear threat had naturally increased by 1969 compared to Harry S. Truman's untroubled choice of dropping two atomic bombs in Japan and even from Eisenhower's choice in 1953 in threatening the North Koreans. World public opinion could no longer be ignored by American governments.

The Communist leadership in North Vietnam, learning from the earlier experiences in Malaya, Greece and Korea, had also matured a great deal, and as a result had opted
for greatly improved and modified warfighting strategy and tactics. The most important distinction between the operational strategy of the communists in Vietnam, compared to those applied in Greece and Korea, is that whereas on these earlier occasions the Communists had decided to face the United States in an open conventional war and as a result had withdrawn and neglected their underground guerrilla activities of subversion and sabotage, by the time of Vietnam war, learning from the success of Mao 'peoples' revolutionary war' the leadership in North Vietnam was determined to keep their warfighting below the level of an open conventional war. And this strategy was to prove a great success for the communists. For one thing this strategy was highly intriguing to the conventional big unit, high-tech. armies of the United States and at the sometime these covert operations, even when most damaging, did not justify large-scale intervention by a great power like the United States. As a result, they had a great deal of trouble justifying their intervention in Vietnam, both at home and abroad. Also even when the United States had succeeded in compelling the North Vietnamese to open an overt conventional battle front, the Communists did not relent on their efforts towards exhausting and frustrating the US forces by their covert guerrilla operations which ultimately compelled this great power to accept a historic defeat and withdraw from Vietnam.
There were some other differences as well. Whereas in the case of Korea, the South Korean leader Syngman Rhee personified their national movement, the North Korean leader Kim II-Sung was seen only as a Soviet puppet and hardly had any ground in South Korea to operate upon. However, the case in Vietnam was entirely different: Ho Chi Minh had emerged as a father figure during his struggles against the Japanese and French whereas the South Vietnamese successive regimes where mostly temporary and fragile and were surrounded by the civil service and military structures inherited from French colonialism. But the greatest disadvantage for the Americans was perhaps this: Whereas in Korea the Americans had intervened as great liberators first from the Japanese and then against attack by the Communist North, in case of Vietnam they were identified with the imperialism of the former French regime. And this was to go a long way in confusing a great nation that was used to visualizing war in the form of great crusades. Therefore, even though their experience in Korea had taught the Americans a great deal about limited war - which with the advent of Nuclear Revolution had replaced, once and for all, the options of fighting total war - their military involvement in Vietnam

was the one which was to bring to the fore more complex aspects and issues of limited war in far greater detail and it was also a war in which both the combatants were far more aware of warfighting in the nuclear age. America had initiated and later directed its operations in Vietnam fully equipped with the theories and doctrines of limited war following the debates of the 1950s and the 1960s. Vietnam became a vast laboratory for experiments in limited war. But as the preceding discussion shows these experiments were ultimately to become too costly to be successful. The following discussion has been devoted to examining the operational aspects of limited war and here we have followed the same pattern of limited war's classification as has been done in the preceding chapters i.e. limited nuclear war, limited conventional war and counterinsurgency warfare.

The Nuclear Option - limited or otherwise

Notwithstanding the use of nuclear weapons by the United States in bringing about an early end of the Second World War as also their use during the Korean war in form of President Eisenhower's "ultimatum" which, according to Henry Kissinger was able to enforce on North Korea "a rapid negotiated compromise."35 and in spite of their having achieved

35. n.31, pp.284-88.
far greater perfection in the lethality and accuracy of their nuclear weapons and delivery systems, the American leadership, by the time of the Vietnam war, was far more constrained in considering any use of their nuclear option.

Apart from America's adversaries the USSR and the PRC having achieved similar capabilities by this time, domestic public opinion was perhaps another great factor that was responsible for discouraging all the four US Presidents (John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Geral Ford) from accepting the libel of having considered initiating a nuclear exchange, howsoever limited it might be. The experience of Chinese intervention in Korean war and the ever-increasing domestic opposition to even a conventional war in Vietnam were other two reasons that explain why the nuclear option was never seriously considered in case of the Vietnam war. As well known expert McGeorge Bundy was later to observe:

...the greatest single fact about Vietnam is one that is evident beyond argument: In seven years of warfare, from 1965 to 1972, and again the final assault from Hanoi in 1975, not one of the three American Presidents ever came close to using a nuclear weapon. Between the one war that the Americans lost and the tens of thousands of thermonuclear weapons in the massive American arsenal able to fire at almost any range, in any desired numbers, from land, sea, and air, there is no operational connection whatever. While that war was being lost, the nuclear forces always at the presidents
command were kept out of it.  

As has been discussed in Chapter 3, the strategy of massive retaliation which sought to provide "a maximum deterrent at a bearable cost" had already lost much of its charm by the time it was officially enunciated by John Foster Dulles in January 1954. Among other things the US failure in applying any such strategy despite having to accept a compromise had clearly discredited the status of American armed forces in general and of nuclear weapons in particular. Disillusion with massive retaliation's inability to tackle less than-total situations had, according to historian Russell Weigley, led these armed forces to join hands with interested civilian strategists "in creating the strategy of limited war and flexible response". By the time Kennedy came to power, Henry Kissinger's thesis of limited nuclear war (proposed among other places in his Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy) was the most favoured


nuclear doctrine in the United States. Accordingly, along-with giving great boost to his counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam, Kennedy was also to lay the foundations of limited nuclear war strategy. On taking over as President, Kennedy outlined his administration's defence strategy as follows:

"Our defence posture must be both flexible and determined. Any potential aggressor contemplating any attack on any part of the free world, with any kind of weapons, conventional or nuclear, must know that our response will be suitable, selective, swift and effective."

The Field Manual of the Army was accordingly amended in 1962 to modify the definition of limited war in order to underline the importance of limitation of both the "means" and "objectives" in war. It clearly outlined the "essential objective" of US Armed Forces, which was "to terminate the conflict rapidly and decisively in a manner best calculated to prevent its spread to general (nuclear) war". But Kennedy's administration itself did not last very long.

The main burden of determining whether and how to use nuclear weapons in Vietnam was therefore borne by Lyndon

40. FM-100-5, September 1954, Department of Defence, p.7.
Johnson and Richard Nixon who were the two presidents to be actually thoroughly involved in the Vietnam war. One great instance that is often cited when the nuclear weapons could have been used in Vietnam is the case when American forces at Khe Sanh were thought to be in danger of suffering the same fate that had overtaken the French troops at Dien Bien Phu. This was the time when General Westmoreland, well known for keeping restraint, had proposed to President Johnson a nuclear strike to save the American forces. But as the General himself recalls, Johnson was very clear in his mind and wanted no such proposal and when General persisted and "established a small secret group to study the subject", he was "told to desist".  

Much unlike his successor Richard Nixon -- who as Vice-President had closely followed the role of a nuclear threat in hastening the conclusion of the Korean war -- President Johnson was convinced, right from the beginning against the use of nuclear weapons. So much so that even when at the height of crisis in Vietnam, during the presidential election campaign of 1964 his opponent, Barry Goldwater, had whipped-up this issue of nuclear weapons, Johnson firmly de-

clined all such suggestions. To quote from one of his press conferences, he observed:

Make no mistake. There is no such thing as a conventional nuclear weapon... For 19 peril-filled years no nation has loosed (sic) the atom against another. To do so now is a political decision of highest order. And it would lead us down an uncertain path of blows and counter blows whose outcome none may know. No President of the United States of America can divest himself of the responsibility for such a decision.42

Of all the four presidents during the Vietnam war, Richard Nixon was perhaps one who strongly believed in the value of nuclear diplomacy. As late as in 1985 he recalled how he had used nuclear threats in the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 and in 1973 when Brezhnev had suggested that he might dispatch Soviet troops to Egypt.43 However, it is interesting to note that nowhere in the memoirs of either Nixon or Kissinger or even elsewhere does one come across any reference to any planning during their tenure in the White House of using the nuclear option in Vietnam. Nor is there any record of the North Vietnamese regime ever feeling threatened by the US nuclear capabilities. It seems that even when the Nixon administration was issuing warnings no one


43. Time, July 23, 1985, p.50.
ever took them very seriously. Nixon told Rosenblatt in 1985 that he "didn't find any targets in North Vietnam that could not had been as well handled by conventional weapons". But he told Haldeman that he wanted the North Koreans to believe that "I might do anything to stop the war" which included the use of nuclear weapons and that then Ho Chi Minh would come running for peace negotiations. For instance, at the 1968 Republican convention answering a question about ending the Vietnam war Nixon had said "I will tell you how Korean war ended" and then went on explaining how Eisenhower had told Dulles to talk to Krishna Menon, then India's ambassador at the United Nations, that unless the longjam was broken in Vietnam, it would compel the United States to use its last option of nuclear weapons. But whether his atomic diplomacy and secret plans were not only a bluff cannot be today established, neither can these be ignored. Whether and how far Nixon had been discouraged by the Watergate scandal and the domestic backlash and whether in absence of these he would have used his nuclear


option also remains uncertain.

The chances of the United States exercising its nuclear option were far more bleak during the tenure of Gerald Ford. Even if the provocation was greater and direct— as North Korean troops crossed in to South Korea in 1951— the one thing on which every American agreed then was "No more Vietnams". Also, in the debate that followed American involvement in Vietnam and which continues even till today one thing is conspicuous by its absence is the question why nuclear weapons were not put to use in Vietnam. The Vietnam war, therefore, was fought by the United States at distinctly two levels— limited conventional war and counterinsurgency operations — and accordingly much of the debate concerning US strategy of limited war has since been around these two aspect only.

**Limited Conventional War**

As the table below clearly shows, America's conventional war with North Vietnam had been conducted primarily during the tenure of Presidents Johnson and Nixon. Starting in the context of, among others, the Tonkin incident (August 1964) it had gradually been withdrawn following the infamous Tet Offensive (January 1968). Leaving aside the inconclusive debates of what preceded what and who was
United States Troops Strength in South Vietnam
(an annual average)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Troops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>800 troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>3,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>11,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>16,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>23,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>1,84,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>3,97,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>4,85,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>5,49,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>4,74,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>3,39,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1,61,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

first to initiate aggression as also leaving aside as to how many and for how long were the US clandestine operations going on, the initiation of operation Rolling Thunder (February 1965) had officially committed the United States to an open conventional war against North Vietnam. Of course, in reality they had crossed this line much earlier. However, what remains most important for us here is neither the over-researched details of various war operations (for these see Annexure II) nor for that matter their causes or consequences. Instead, what is the most puzzling is as to why the United States, despite having the largest and most advanced war machine at its disposal, accepted such a humiliating defeat at the hands of this tiny country. Among other factors, it is this predominance of limited war
thinking in the American warfighting strategies of that era that perhaps most successfully explains this dilemma.

The limited war thinking in the United States at the beginning of the 1960s i.e. when their conventional forces were fast becoming the most important element of America's warfighting in Vietnam, was dominated by McNamara's doctrines of Controlled Escalation. And here apart from having observed the most vital limitation of warfighting in the nuclear age, non-use of nuclear weapons, America's conventional warfighting was also limited in various ways. The first most vital limitation was, of course, that of having very specific and limited war aims. Unlike the case of Korea where Dulles and others had talked of uniting the two Koreas in case of Vietnam the objectives of US warfighting were clearly defined as only helping South Vietnam in sustaining its stability and independence. In fact, following the Korean experience the very concepts of victory and defeat had been modified. Victory no longer was defined as absolute or total victory. The 1954 Field Service Regulations, while introducing the concept of "wars of limited objectives" had removed 'victory' as an aim of war. The

manual said: "Victory alone as an aim of war can not be justified, since in itself victory does not assure the realization of national objectives".48

The other important limitation which partly came out of the first was the geographical limitation. Unlike, the Korean war, which was the first limited war of the nuclear age, the war in Vietnam was further restricted in the sense that neither the United States was fighting as part of any larger grouping of its allies nor was it militarily confronted by any great power like China and therefore the fighting was primarily one between the United States and North Vietnam. Also despite massive involvement of Soviet Union and China on the opposite side, United States never even contemplated expanding its operations beyond North Vietnam. One reasons, of course, was that both China and the Soviet Union possessed nuclear capabilities which must have worked as a deterrent. The United States also did not expand it into neighbouring states until it became militarily necessary to restrain Cambodia and Laos that were openly providing sanctuaries to the communist insurgents that were creating chaos in South Vietnam. So much so that even bomb-

The bombing of North Vietnam was highly selective. Unlike in case of Korea where UN forces had run over large part of North Korea, in Vietnam even this bombing was kept confined to areas bordering South Vietnam. This is because the motive here was not that of achieving victory but only limited to stopping guerrilla infiltration into South Vietnam, and therefore the primary targets were not civil or economic installations but defence installations and airfields, roads and bridges.

Although the prestige of the United States was at stake in Vietnam, for the US leadership their military involvement in Vietnam was limited to being only one dimension of containment of communist expansion in which Vietnam never could have the significance attached to military deployments in Europe. This partly also explains why there was so much domestic opposition within the United States to prolonging and expanding their operations in Vietnam. This was also why often decisions of dispatching more US troops to Vietnam as also other operations were not immediately made public, and why most of America's warfighting in Vietnam was kept confined to the level of counterinsurgency warfare that

49. n.47, p.221.
50. Ibid., p.211.
although the US military involvement in Vietnam remained its dominant mode of fighting communists of North Vietnam.

Counter-insurgency Operations

Counterinsurgency was one mode of U.S. operation which had far preceded their initiation of the conventional war, had continued in parallel with it and had also continued to be effective even when their limited conventional war had gradually resigned in favour of counter insurgency. Counter insurgency had established its pre-eminence in the US war fighting doctrines and had established for itself a permanent place in the spectrum of limited war thinking of the nuclear age. But since, the US armed forces, following their experiences in the two world wars, were greatly biased towards the concept of total war, it was much too late by the time the insurgency problem was actually detected and recognised, and a serious response was evolved by the United States. Especially following their experiences in Greece and Korea, the US Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) had continued to organise and train South Vietnamese forces concentrating against a possible conventional attack by the North Vietnamese across the Seventeenth Parallel.

By the time counter-insurgency operations were actually put into effect, the problem had become far too serious. The corruption and inefficiency of local regime and the threat of guerrilla attacks had completely confounded the population at large which was the first stumbling block for counter-insurgency operations. Accordingly, the first thing that was learnt by the United States in Vietnam was that fighting against guerrilla forces was not simply a law and order problem but rather it was a far wider and deep rooted malaise having its various other socio-economic, cultural dimensions. Thus the 'pacification' aspect was also for the first time so much highlighted in the case of the Vietnam war. As Arthur Schlesinger has so aptly described, "....counterinsurgency meant a good deal more than teaching soldiers, to blacken their faces and strangle enemies in the night." The three major things, that, according to him, were required for fighting a successful counterinsurgency included: tough military action against the enemy, generous provisions for amnesty, real and sweeping social reforms. In fact according to Gabriel Kolko, in the case of Vietnam,


53. Ibid.
"the counter insurgency and pacification efforts became interchangeable conceptions" which for him were the two primary means, "for physically controlling the population" which Mao had described to be as essential as water for the swimming of communist guerrillas.54

The victory of John. F. Kennedy -- himself a torch bearer of counter-insurgency -- in the presidential elections of 1960 had provided a great boost for the revival of America's counter-insurgency in the context of Vietnam. Insurgency in South Vietnam had perfectly evolved under the slogan of a "war of national liberation".55 A National Liberation Front (NLF) had been formed which for quite some time had been harassing the Diem government's forces and facilities and had even established its authority in many remote areas. Despite the widespread belief that this front was only a stalking horse of Hanoi, the MAAG had continued to ignore these disturbances as an internal law and order problem. The provincial authorities, on the other hand, were themselves too disorganised and had too many other problems to solve in this completely fragmented nation.

55. n.51, p.89.
The first major response from the Kennedy administration during its first year in office included among other things the Counter Insurgency Plan (CIP), the Geographically Phased National Plan (GPNP), and the NSAM52.\textsuperscript{56} Though all these programmes were primarily meant at increasing the quantities of equipment, advice and training, they also for the first time encompassed a good deal of non-military matters including the necessity for the Diem regime to broaden his base, to cleanse it of corruption and to reorganise it for greater efficiency.\textsuperscript{57} The visit of Kennedy's military advisors, General Maxwell Taylor and Walt. W. Rostow in October 1961 was also greatly responsible for bringing in information on the necessity of civic action. Besides at home the reports of the Draper Committee had also greatly emphasized the need for adopting bilateral and regional arrangements for furthering US interests.\textsuperscript{58} However as it turned out, the Diem regime was not in a mood to accept any reforms and all these US-sponsored programmes


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p.25.

were abandoned in the end. Instead the regime, at the same time, had initiated a new programme, called Strategic Hamlets, in which the United States became an active partner.

Strategic Hamlets was a unique programme in the sense that it marked an abrupt break with the strategies that the MAAG had practiced so far. Instead of aiming at the elimination of Viet Cong guerrillas by military means, this programme was an attempt to directly hit at their source of strength and try to win over the rural population which was providing the Viet Cong the necessary intelligence, food, money, and recruits for its armed units. This was to be achieved by cutting off the contact of these people with the Viet Cong by strengthening village government and building local defence forces. In some cases scattered people had to be resettled for achieving optimum results and in those cases they were to be paid compensation. Though some improvement did take place, yet partly due to the involvement of President Diem's influential brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, as also due to the excesses that had resulted from widespread corruption and from the pressure for achieving targets for resettlement, the programme soon lost its track and had become a rather convenient facade for rather different
The next operation in which the US government was actively involved was called Citizens Irregular Defence Groups (CIDG) confined primarily to the tribal population in the Vietnamese highlands, in Darlac and Kontum, the programme was meant for arming the tribal people for self protection against the Viet Cong together with such programmes as training for medical aides, education and similar small-scale civic activities for improving their lives. U.S.A.I.D. and CIA were the nodal US agencies involved in this operation. This programme was particularly successful because these tribesmen were equally suspicious of the Vietnamese. But following its uninterrupted success beginning from November 1961, Ngo Dinh Nhu gradually became convinced that this programme threatened Vietnamese control on their tribal population. Also the American decision to transfer this responsibility from CIA to the Special Forces proved to be another stumbling block for its programme. Given the improved training, weapons, uniforms


60. n.51, p.106.

and organisation, these forces were soon converted into strike Forces that were no longer meant to be defenders of their village. Moreover Robert Thompson's Delta Plan for Binh Long province had also diverted all attention away from this programme.

Another effort that was to engage both the Vietnamese and the US government until the collapse was operation named Sunrise. Concentrating in the Binh Duong province, which was heavily infested, and incorporated important cross roads of Viet Congs lines of communication, was to face problems right from the beginning.62 A few hamlets which were moved and rebuilt turned out to have only few able bodied male inhabitants as they were all with the Viet Cong. People were sullen and uncooperative and therefore this often resulted in excesses by the security forces. The criticism in the US press back home was tremendous but the programme continued, though it was virtually abandoned following the assassination of President-Kennedy and the killing of Diem brothers which was followed by the success in of a number of incompetent and corrupt leaders in South Vietnam. And this had provided a great opportunity for the Viet Cong to acti-

62. n.56, pp.143-44.
vate its offensive and recapture its control of much of the countryside.

The two major elements which guided President Johnson's war fighting efforts in Vietnam were: (i) a major escalation of the war and, (ii) a deliberate deception of the American people. Making full use of the Tonkin incident for achieving Congressional support, the President had introduced tremendous escalation in the form of an open conventional attack on the North and though most of counter-insurgency operations continued, they virtually stood marginalised at least during the initial years of the Johnson administration. Accordingly despite launching of operations like People's Action Teams (PATs), Counter Terror Teams (CTTs), Prisoner Interrogation Centre (PIC), it was not until the Honolulu conference that the counterinsurgency efforts were revived again. The Special Group (CI) which had been disbanded on the advice of General Maxwell Taylor was revived once again in March 1966 under the NSAM 343. Robert W. Komer was appointed as special assistant to President Johnson and was entrusted with the responsibility for


providing general direction, coordination and supervision of US counter-insurgency effort in Vietnam.65

The single most important accomplishment of Komer was the establishment of a new structure that came to be called Civilian Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) which was intended to control and coordinate counter insurgency activities of various US agencies, including the Office of Civilian Operations (OCO) and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV).66 And it was this US mission that, in the face of Tet offensive which had completely demoralised US armed forces, was responsible for maintaining stability in Vietnam. Within the very next year, its budget had been doubled to $891 million and it had an authorised personnel at the level of seventy-six hundred.67 The mission had reached the pinnacle of its success in 1970 when the Hamlet Evaluation Survey for June that year had rated 91 per cent of hamlets in the country as "secure" and "relatively secure", 7.2 per cent as "contested", and only 1.4 per cent as "VC-controlled".68 But as Douglas Blaufarb

65. n.56, p.568.
66. n.51, pp.235, 239.
67. Ibid., p.269.
says, successful counter-insurgency could not have survived in the absence of a sound political system, which had continued to elude Vietnam for a very long time. Therefore despite relative success in the field of counter-insurgency, the United States was to face such a humiliation in Vietnam which made their compromise for stalemate in Korea appear like a perfect victory. And this was, for sure, partly because the Americans had not seriously learnt lessons from the Korean war. Comparing the war termination scenarios in Korea and Vietnam, Seabury and Codevilla, say:

"But there was a vital difference between the Vietnam and Korea negotiations: the nature of the American demands. In Korea, the United States had held off the Democle's sword in exchange for the enemy effectively giving up the fight. The US Eight Army had remained in Korea to guarantee that result by threatening war against the North Korea regime lest in renege. But in Vietnam the price for withholding doom was simply to allow the United States to withdraw from the entire area with semblance of honour—that is, the return of some, if not all, US prisoners plus a "decent-interval" between America's withdrawal and North Vietnam's final, victorious offensive."70

Lessons of Vietnam War

The war in Vietnam had ended much the same way as the

69. n.51, p.278.

U.S. limited war theorists had thought it would begin. A conventional attack by the North Vietnamese forces had crashed into Saigon and turned it into Ho Chi Minh city. The lessons that had been, according to Harry G. Summers, Jr., learnt by the United States in Korea were to orient U.S. forces to the external rather than the internal threat, and the problems that the U.S. was to face in Vietnam were all primarily internal. Accordingly, apart from the problem that the lessons of Korean war were not learnt very soon, there were many reasons why the U.S. experience in Korea had not come very handy while fighting in Vietnam. 71

The first important problem that had also presented itself to a smaller degree in Korea, was the fact that limited war thinking in the U.S. during 1950s and 1960s had evolved on the presumption of having to fight a possible war in Europe against the Soviet super power. And here believing that the advent of nuclear weapons had once and for all closed the option of nuclear powers fighting total war, they had continued to rely on limited war strategies. Therefore the most important lesson to be learnt in Vietnam was that not only an adversary can choose a non-European theatre, the actual enemy on the ground, which might be only

71. n.48, p.75.
a surrogate power may also not be bound to fight a limited war alone. Another basic presumption of U.S. political leadership was that being militarily a superior power, they could coerce any small third world country into accepting a reasonable compromise. What the U.S. had failed to anticipate in Vietnam was that "for the enemy this was not a limited war in which mutual constraints would be observed and some compromise worked out in the end." 72 For the North Vietnamese, for instance, the question of unification was central to their national survival and for this they were willing to bear any amount of sacrifice and pain. These concerns, when combined with the Communist propaganda and the apprehensions of Chinese intervention were to compel the United States to freeze operations at a 'medium level of violence'. 73 As Gabriel Kolko was later to conclude:

Applying its existing weaponry and technological potential to define and develop a limited and counter-insurgency war strategy applicable to Third World contexts was far more complex, than the United States had ever imagined in the early 1960s. America's leaders and generals... failed to make an accurate assess-


ment of their prospects for success, or even the economic costs of their doctrines, until they were well into the war.\footnote{74}

Eventually, of course, the United States had to increase its commitments in Vietnam to the point that military and economic costs of war became incommensurate with American interests at stake and many Americans had started challenging its purported objectives.\footnote{75}

Frustrations and excesses by the American forces were the other important reason for the tremendous domestic oppositions that the U.S. leadership had to face. Accordingly, the second lesson for the limited war theorists was one of taking the public at large into confidence and building a favourable public opinion by clearly articulating America's national objectives for intervention. Contrary to this requirement, however, a large portion of America's politico-military leadership had continued to argue that "Vietnam was an area of marginal importance" and had "a rather remote relationship to American security."\footnote{76}

\footnote{74. n.54, p.549.}


According to Henry Brandon, the two primary reasons for American defeat in Vietnam were that militarily the U.S. forces did not equip and train the South Vietnamese as an essential component of their war fighting until 1967-68, and politically the Johnson administration thought that they could ignore public opinion. It was in this era of "elite inspired foreign policies" and highly abstract limited war theories that were, by and large, "incomprehensible to the people" and which were "followed by them largely out of blind ideological fear and misapprehension" that the war in Vietnam had come as a clear demonstrator of "the inevitable and necessary connection between foreign policy and domestic politics." As late as during Reagan's tenure, his Secretary of Defence was to declare that Vietnam had not been "vital to American national interests and that in future, the United States would fight only if war was vital to national survival, if the American people supported Washington's policy and fully intended to win. As General Max-


well D. Taylor - a man who perhaps had the longest practical experience in the Vietnam war - was later to conclude:

the national behaviour showed a tendency to premature war-weariness and precipitate disenchantment with a policy which had led to a stalemated war. This experience, if remembered, could have given some warning of dangers ahead to the makers of subsequent Vietnam policy. Unfortunately there was no thorough-going analysis even made of the lessons to be learned from Korea, and later policy makers proceeded to repeat many of the same mistakes.80

At the operational level as well, American defeat in Vietnam, was not, in any way, a failure of its arms, or even failure of its limited war theory per se. Instead the problem was that America's political leaders and strategic circles could not presuppose what battlefield scenarios they were to confront in Korea and Vietnam. The task of intervening in entirely unknown cultures for defending highly inefficient and often unpopular regimes which were threatened by highly proficient, professional, popular, and propagandist communist movements was in itself a monumental challenge. And, in this context, the American approach of propping up dishonest puppets even at the cost of credibility was the first fundamental mistake of the United States.

80. n.64, pp.135-136.
The American military leadership expecting a conventional attack from the north had continued for long to treat guerrilla activities in the South as primarily a law and order problem. Even when they became active in this area, the approach was primarily of chasing the guerrillas, while the Viet Cong infrastructure was left virtually untouched during the initial years of America's military involvement in Vietnam. As Dale Andrade observed, "anti-infrastructure operations are an indispensable part of counterinsurgency." For him, "if the enemy's political infrastructure is successfully targeted during the early stages of insurgency, then half the battle is won."81

However, as the battles proceeded the vast demographic and human upheavals that this limited war resulted in, was not within the capability of U.S. surrogates in Saigon, and this failure clearly far outweighed whatever military victories the United States had recorded.82 Thus it would not be incorrect to conclude that the U.S. humiliation in Vietnam was not as much a military failure, as it was a political defeat. And even in the field of military operations, it


82. n.54, p.548.
was not perhaps as much the failure of America's warfighting doctrines and capabilities, as perhaps it was the manner in which these were put to use. According to Robert E. Osgood, for instance, the general frustration over the U.S. defeat in Vietnam "did not manifest a general rejection of the conception of limited war, but only opposition to the particular way of applying that conception in Vietnam." As he concludes:

Thus the popular disaffection with the Vietnamese war does not indicate a reversion to pre-Korean attitudes toward limited war. Rather, it indicates a serious questioning of the premises about the utility of limited war as an instrument of American policy, the premises that originally moved the proponents of limited war strategy.... In Korea the principal motive for limitation was the fear that an expanding war might lead to general war with China or nuclear war with the Soviet Union; but in Vietnam the limits were motivated as much by the sense that the political objective was not sufficiently valuable and the prospect of winning the war not sufficiently promising to warrant the costs of expansion. This change of emphasis reflects more than the unpopularity of the war in Vietnam. It also reflects the acceptance of limited war as an operational concept in American foreign policy.

To conclude, the American defence policy following the Vietnam war has clearly vindicated Osgood's prophacy about the relevance of limited war theory. Surprisingly it has

83. n.47, p.222.
84. Ibid., pp.222-23.
not only survived the Vietnam war, but learning from that fateful debacle, refined and modified, it has emerged as a much more subtle and viable doctrine of warfighting and examples of its success can easily be seen in all the post-Vietnam U.S. military interventions abroad including those in Greneda, Panama and to a great extent even the Gulf War. However, responding to the growing public opinion against the use of nuclear weapons, (especially now with the collapse of Soviet block end the Cold War) the limited war theory is no longer the same as it had existed before America's military involvement in Korea and Vietnam.