CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The advent of nuclear weapons had heralded an altogether new era by presenting an unprecedented challenge of having rendered the age old institution of war obsolete and redundant. These weapons which for the first time had virtually no potential limit on their range and destructive power, and there was no rational purpose toward the achievement of which they could have been put to use, have not only been miniaturised, refined, and adopted in the force-structures of the nuclear weapon powers, War has also been modified in the light of this new situation and the nuclear arms race, the threat of their use, and even their 'non-use' have come to play such an important role in the contemporary thinking on war and peace.

War in the nuclear age, like any other sphere of human activity, has undergone tremendous expansion, both vertically i.e. in terms of its increased frequency and destructiveness as well as horizontally, which means that war today has come to gradually overshadow all other aspects of social activity; and, its influence on politics has been the greatest. Nations today continue to be obsessed with preparing for war even during peacetime; warfighting is no longer confined to troops fighting the hard way on the battle
grounds; instead it is being fought from many new platforms like terrorism, insurgency, guerrilla warfare, psychological warfare, political warfare, local war, limited war, trade war, cold war and so on and so forth. Along with this the traditional varieties and weapons of war have also been sharpened and expanded. Whereas the conventional technologies have also achieved marvels of accuracy and destructiveness of their own, the introduction of 'intelligent' and 'unmanned' weapons have added a new dimension to warfighting.

Philosophies of war have also undergone a similar transformation. Instead of waver between the Malthusian conceptions that envisaged war as "inevitable" and the view of anarchists like Nietzsche who described it as the "noblest of all human activities"; war today is generally visualised as "a necessary evil". With the end of cold war era, various pacifists schools are once again raising the bogey of evolving new alternatives to war by saying that the end of superpower rivalry has presented a unique occasion for, if not eliminating, at least undermining the importance of war in inter-state relations. The argument seems to be as much a wishful thinking as were the ideas during late 1940s, that

said that with the advent of nuclear weapons, war had ceased to be an instrument of policy. As has been explained elsewhere in the thesis war is an institution that precludes the existence of society; human civilization could not have evolved in the absence of war providing slaves in the ancient societies and thereby generating leisure and wealth that were essential to evolve any arts and ideas; and ever since it has also been the ultimate instrument for preserving these arts and ideas. To quote Prof. Gallie:

War, throughout history, has shown a capacity to break out anew in unexpected places from unforeseen causes and often at new levels of destruction. The nightmare of two superpowers blasting each other—and the rest of us—into extinction may have been lifted, but the possibility that they might be dragged by misadventure, misunderstanding, and failure of nerve into a nuclear exchange which neither of them wanted remains to be considered. Besides there are the three other acknowledged or self-proclaimed nuclear powers and perhaps more significant, at least five other rapidly developing industrial powers with barely concealed capacities and plans for future nuclear armament. And there are international terrorist groups which, we may be sure, would greedily accept any bits and pieces of nuclear knowhow which might come their way.²

The destruction in a certain war as well as the discovery of any new weapons has often been followed by debates about the viability of war as an instrument of state policy

but war has continued to survive: This had happened following Rome's annihilation of Carthage, following the religious wars and Napoleonic onsloughts, as also following the two world wars of this century as also after wars in Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War. It also happened at various breakthroughs in the field of war technologies, be it horseman's stirrup, the gun powder, aeroplane, submarine or the atomic bomb. John Chodes tells us an interesting story of how 700 years ago, the introduction of "a special breed of horse available only to the aristocracy", had made the "foot soldier... obsolete" and how as a consequence, the peasant war-fighting had "largely banished from the battlefield." This was followed by another "great revolution in warfare" wherein "a simple inexpensive weapon was invented that changed the history of western world." And this weapon which had restored the 'peasant' warfighting was nothing but "a steel tipped ashen shaft, 18 feet long" called the "pike". Any number of similar episodes can be picked up from histories of war to show how even though the initial reactions were one of panic and resignation yet all these new developments were gradually incorporated into the war machine.

This brings us to another recurring debate as to whether weapons are the cause or only a consequence of violence in human societies. For us it seems more convincing to accept the argument of those who believe that it is the clashing of general interests of various social groupings that cause violence in societies and that weapons are only expressions of these ground realities. Weapons per se do not even enhance the frequency and destructiveness of wars. Otherwise how could one explain why the U.S.-Japanese naval arms race had ended up in a compromise in 1922 or how the existence of nuclear arms race between two superpowers not only did not result in war but has allowed such a great degree of cooperation between them at various levels. In fact limited war theories since 1945 are founded on the belief that the overwhelming commonality of interests of the nuclear adversaries to save human civilisation from the scourge of a nuclear war will compel them to restrain their warfighting to certain acceptable levels.

The uniqueness of the nuclear age lies in the fact that the nuclear weapons are uniquely self-restraining. However, whether this restraint can be maintained once a nuclear war has started remains a controversy. For some once such a war has begun the task of sustaining political direction and control becomes an almost impossible one. That is why nuclear weapons have been accepted not as weapons of aggres-
sion but as weapons of deterrence; that is to say that even after absorbing the first nuclear strike, a power should be able to retaliate in such a manner that the costs for the aggressor should far exceed any possible gains he can make. It is in this context only that as an attempt to extend this deterrence even into the warfighting - i.e. even after the aggression has taken place - and to achieve the impossible task of sustaining the necessary political control of wars in the nuclear age that the theories of the limited war have been evolved and this has often been described as a unique contribution of warfighting strategies of nuclear age. For the first time in nuclear age, the limitation in warfighting is no longer due to any technical constraints of money or weapons but is expected to come out of the overwhelming interests of the adversaries themselves. To quote Nordal Akerman:

Voluntary constraint, the insight that certain joint interests exist between enemies even during the actual violent struggle, failed to attract the attention of analysts on any scale until an advanced technology had produced a situation of stalemate so petrified as to make attention to alternative strategies the natural consequence. As we have seen, limitation by a genuine or created incapacity to expand the war existed both in

theory and practice. Limitation in the form of collaboration with the enemy was something that could not be conceived in the pre-nuclear world.5

As Bernard Brodie had observed, it was this distinction of having the 'limitation' which was both "massive", as well as "deliberate", that makes limited war in the nuclear age different from the limitations that had existed throughout the history of warfare. Otherwise moral, prudential and technical constraints had existed all along. In fact the moral and prudential constraints even today continue to be effective, though the technical constraints have virtually come to an end with the discovery of nuclear weapons.

The assumption is also very often made that restraint and limitation are obviously alien to the very nature of war. A strong case can indeed be built to say that if the belligerants can be reasonable enough to observe "massive" and "deliberate" constraints on their conduct of war, they should be reasonable enough to avoid fighting all together. The argument has some validity until we see that the limitation in warfighting is never observed entirely out of one's sympathies with the enemy. Instead, limitation has to be

5. Ibid. (Nordal Akerman), p.47.
maintained primarily to achieve efficiency and cost-effectiveness of military operations - and this has become particularly essential in the warfighting of the nuclear age. In fact, according to Michael Howard, developments of mass democracy and technological progress during the past hundred years have been particularly impressing upon us the necessity of keeping limitation in warfighting. But the advent of thermonuclear weapons that threaten to unleash total destruction have particularly become "incompatible with any criterion either of political calculations or of military necessity."  

To quote Prof. Howard,

"Military activity thus carries an intrinsic, imperative towards control; an imperative derived from the need to maintain material forces and to ensure that they are always responsive to direction.... To control and limit the conduct of war is thus not inherently impossible; indeed without control and limitation, war cannot be conducted at all."

This imperative of control and limitation has become particularly crucial in the nuclear age. As the military involvement of United States in Korea, and in Vietnam and later in the recent Gulf War clearly shows, even victory today is no longer the sole aim of a country's fighting a


war. The primary aim instead remains the pursuit of national interests, the achievement of which must not be obtained by paying any unacceptable costs. And in maintaining this cost-benefit-ratio, perhaps there is no other option available today except that of fighting only limited wars even at the cost of having to accept a limited defeat.

However, it is important to understand that limited wars are not small wars. As the U.S. involvement in Korea and Vietnam demonstrated, limited war can have profound effect on national resources and socio-economic patterns. 8 Also limited war of one belligerent may involve the question of national survival for the opponent. However, wars fought among smaller powers or wars which, during the cold war era, were fought within a bloc might be limited in their destruction and geographical parameters and might have only limited repercussions on international society, yet these are not categorised as limited wars. The concept of limited war in the nuclear age had evolved primarily during the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. It refers to wars in which the threat of expansion to a general nuclear war remains constant and omnipresent and, accordingly, the re-

8. n.5, (Seymour J. Deitchman), p.2.
strains maintained are massive as well as deliberate. Thus limited war broadly means a war in which the vital interests of nuclear powers are directly or indirectly involved and in which the threat of its escalation into total war was present all the time.

This, however, does not mean that the nuclear weapons were not seen as weapons of limited wars. In fact as the concept of limited nuclear war clearly highlights, not only the tactical nuclear weapons but even the controlled use of strategic nuclear weapons was accepted as a possibility. However, as experience has shown, though nuclear weapons have been thoroughly integrated into the military operations of five nuclear powers and NATO, the tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons and innumerable studies on the consequences of a nuclear war have ensured that the option of using nuclear weapons has not been seen as an acceptable one. As Col. Harry G. Summers Jr. observed in the context of the Gulf War, "Amongst Saddam Hussein's many concerns as he faced off against Allied forces in February, the threat of nuclear attack must have been ranked near the bottom." 9

Also the disintegration of Soviet Union and the disbanding

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of the Warsaw Pact have particularly diminished the threat of a controlled nuclear aggressions and this has significantly marginalised the option of fighting a limited nuclear war in the post cold war era. On the other hand, of course the focus of the U.S. warfighting strategy has now shifted to the emerging new threats from the Third World and this has considerably increased the importance of counter-insurgency and Low-Intensity Conflict doctrines in the U.S. limited war strategy. Thanks to the countervailing and pliant rivals of the cold war era, many smaller nations today can place in the field first-rate small arms, armour, artillery and anti-aircraft weapons. Also thanks to development of technology, especially in the field of precision-guidance, Third World soldiers can now carry with them the fire power to destroy such pointed and steady targets as bunkers. Man-portable missiles such as MILAN, Dragon and Tow are expensive but their use in certain situations has virtually removed foot soldier's dependability on external fire support. Above all the United States, while building its limited war strategy for its interventions in the third world, will have to take into account that, toughened by national fervour or ideological or religious commitments, armed forces in the third world will have the advantage of high morale during the conduct of an actual war. Wars which are limited in the perceptions of U.S. leadership become
invariably total for the smaller third world powers; and since it involves the question of national survival, the morale is bound to be high. And in case it is a low intensity conflict, the irregulars will always have the great advantage of being invisible enemy. As Robert Scales Jr. says, "No matter how proficient the technology of target detection becomes, it will never be able to locate an irregular enemy in dense enough aggregations for fire power to have decisive effect." 10

Outlining America's defence strategy for the next five years, the then Defence Secretary Richard B. Cheney, clarified to the House Committee on Armed Services as to how the new strategy marks "the most significant shift from the old strategy... that has dominated our planning for forty some years (sic).... That led us to adopt such strategies as the requirements to have 10 divisions in Europe within 10 days of a decision to mobilise." 11 The new strategy was to focus on, what he called, 'regional contingencies'. And in this


instead of having 'forward presence' and a chain of bases all over the globe, it was necessary to emphasize high air-lift and sea-lift capabilities to achieve mobility. 12 At the same time emphases were laid on taking preventive measures and to achieve stability in the Third World by integrating security assistance with economic development, called "peace-time engagement". 13 The latest budget proposals (1993-94) of the new administration, under President Bill Clinton, have been reported to carry no significant change from the policy framework that was laid down by the Bush administration except that there is greater emphasis in scaling down sophisticated nuclear programmes and in further improving their conventional capabilities. 14 The new Defence Secretary, Les Aspin, testifying to the House Armed Services Committee on the 1993-94 Defence Budget, has once again reiterated that the former Soviet Union "no longer poses the physical threat" and that instead "the likely future threats could be posed by former Soviet client states that take an aggressive stance and threaten U.S. national security interests." 15 He also underlined the fear of these

13. Ibid., p.23.
"rogue countries" acquiring nuclear weapons and he went in
detail to reiterate the same policy postures that had been
outlined by the Bush administration.

The general view in American strategic circles is that
most of the future conflicts will be taking place primarily
in the Third World and that the United States will invaria-
ably find itself involved in these conflicts.16 Political
turmoil, economic constraints, demographic burdens and the
reluctant march of technology in the Third World countries
will keep most of the future wars confined to this area.
The Third World today has over 75% of the world's population

16. See for instance, James Berry Hotley, Beyond the Soviet
Threat: The U.S. Army in the Post-Cold War Environment,
R. Greentree, "The United States and the Politics of
Conflicts in the Developing World", Centre Paper
(Centre for Study of Foreign Affairs, U.S. Department
of State), No.4, Sept. 1990, p.6; Stephan Blank and
others, Responding to Low Intensity Conflicts Chal-
lenges, (Maxwell Airforce Base, Albama, Air University
Press, 1990), p.318; Charles Renold, The Politics of
War: A Study of Rationality of Violence in Inter-State
Loren B. Thompson (ed.), Low Intensity Conflict: The
Pattern of Warfare in the Modern World, (Lexington,
and Peter Kornbluh (eds.), Low Intensity Warfare:
Counter Insurgency, Proinsurgency and Anti-terrorism in
Patrick J. Garriety and Sharon K. Veiner, "U.S. Defence
Strategy After the Cold War", The Washington Quarterly
(Spring 1992), p.58; Brien Michael Jenkins, "New Modes
of Conflict" R-3009-DNA, RAND, Santamonica, June 1983,
p.v1.
but only 25% of the globe’s combined gross national product and the gap between these few haves and many have-nots is increasing constantly. By 2010, the world’s population will have grown from 4.9 billion in the mid-eighties to 7 billion, 80% of whom will be citizens of the Third World. Although it is estimated that current technology and agricultural techniques would comfortably feed 6 billion people, 10% of mankind will be at or near starvation. By the year 2000, 42% of Africans and over 60% of all Latin Americans will be urban slum dwellers. And here the desire of United States to sustain its leadership in the comity of nations will require it to be all the time ready to step in and resolve the local disputes. As the recent World Press Review, carrying articles on the role of the United States in the post cold war era, commented in its editorial, “the U.S. is the single biggest power now and so has the biggest obligations”. One great example of these obligations can be seen in America’s conduct of its warfighting in the recent Gulf War which was projected in western media as


18. Ibid.

successful, clean, precise was despite having dropped over 88,500 tons of bombs in 109,876 aircraft sorties of which only 7.4 percent were precision-guided ordnance. Compared to the per month average of 22,000 tons in Korean War and 34,000 tons in the Vietnam war, this dropping of 59,000 tons of bombs in a month in the Gulf war is hardly any indication of America's increasingly precise Air-Land Warfare. So much so that over 25,000 of Iraqi soldiers were killed while retreating following the ceasefire. And their pounding of Iraq has continued ever since. If America's wars in Korea, Vietnam and now the Gulf War have any lessons to be learnt, it is to see how destructive these limited wars can actually be. And with the cold war era having come to end America's strategic focus has shifted now to the Third World countries. This means that countries like India, who value and have persisted with having an independent stance of their own have to be particularly careful about the pace, processes and perceptions in the American strategic community. Nuclear deterrence of the Cold War years had been


21. ibid.

the most important factor in the evolution of the limited war. Gradually various other factors like world public opinion and cost-benefit ratio had emerged as great restraining forces. With the end of the Cold War confrontation, the fear of unknown - clandestine nuclear capabilities - is emerging as a factor compelling all powerful aggressors to keep restraint. And the way nuclear nonproliferation has emerged as top agenda for the new US administration under President Bill Clinton the confrontation between the United states and the Third World is likely to grow much more severe and unpredictable. And in this fluid situation covert and cheap counter-insurgency warfare seems to be emerging as the most viable dimension in America's limited warfighting in the years to come.