CHAPTER THREE
DOCTRINES OF LIMITED WAR:
NUCLEAR VERSUS CONVENTIONAL

Ever since the advent of nuclear weapons, it has not only been the theorists of limited war but the policy-makers as well who have been grappling with the most fundamental problem of assigning these weapons an appropriate role in their future scheme of things. However, to make it clear at the very outset, the choice has never been question one of either nuclear or conventional weapons. Therefore, the question has much more been one of shifting emphasis, and this tussel between nuclear and conventional weapons can be clearly seen in all the warfighting doctrines of the nuclear age. Over the decades different formulations for the use of nuclear and conventional weapons have been given a bewildering variety of names by the historians and journalists of the nuclear age: 'Atomic Diplomacy' under Truman, 'Brinkmanship' and 'The New Look' under Eisenhower, 'Flexible Response' and 'Controlled Escalation' under Kennedy, 'Limited Nuclear Options' under Nixon, 'Nuclear Warfighting' under Carter and 'Star Wars' and 'Defensive Deterrence' under Reagan and Bush administrations.

Seen in retrospective, the nuclear weapons, at least for once, had threatened to make war no longer a usable instrument of state policy. But notwithstanding these
doubts the nuclear powers had continued to formulate their warfighting doctrines and plans and building their forces still asserting that war had not ceased to be the ultimate arbiter of inter-state disputes. For instance, Stalin's thesis of 'Permanent Operating Factors', at least at the declaratory policy level had sought to dismiss nuclear weapons as of no great significance. Similarly, even the United States had also disbanded its large conventional armies with a view that in future wars its nuclear capabilities would compensate for numerical inferiority at the conventional level. It had continued to strengthen and expand its conventional capabilities. In fact, until the appearance of the hydrogen or fusion bomb in 1952 the United States had continued to plan and train forces as if nothing had fundamentally changed, envisaging lengthy major campaigns on land, at sea, and in the air, conducted on the same lines as they had experienced between 1941-1945.1

Not only America's political leaders had not expected any wars once they had acquired the atomic bombs even those who had expected them had only visualised total wars.

Accordingly, the nuclear weapons were assigned a role for unleashing 'massive retaliation' at the very first Soviet aggression in Europe. But as we know, the military conflict occurred instead in the periphery, and this surely did not justify a nuclear confrontation. The Americans were, therefore, in spite of their nuclear capabilities, restrained to fight only limited conventional wars. It was not until the Kennedy administration came to power that a declaratory policy was announced assigning nuclear weapons a role in fighting even less-than-all-out conflicts. President Kennedy for the first time proposed that the United States should try to build its warfighting capabilities and doctrines at three different levels of aggressions in the nuclear age: nuclear, conventional, and sub-national guerrilla warfare.

Under the first category of limited nuclear war come those doctrines which propose to utilise nuclear weapons as if they were no different than the other weapons of warfighting. The second category, Limited Conventional War, would include those warfighting doctrines which seek to preserve the sanctity of the nuclear threshold and for which nuclear weapons are only political weapons and therefore their "non-use" is the only use in actual warfighting operations. Then there is a third category of limited war doctrines in the nuclear age which seeks to defend America's vital interests against what are commonly described as unconventional
wars, called Counter Insurgency warfare.

LIMITED NUCLEAR WAR

Pronouncements of a 'declaratory policy' of limited war were made for the first time in January 1960 by the incoming Kennedy administration. In fact, the origins of the ideas about a limited nuclear war can surely be traced to suggestions for production of tactical nuclear weapons. According to a survey by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: "The theoretical studies in the area of 'limited nuclear war' began in 1948... (Project Vista) at the Californian Institute of Technology." 2 This anti-thesis of total war had first presented itself to scientific advisors of the Truman administration. For instance, the father of atomic explosion, Robert Oppenheimer, himself campaigned in favour of tactical nuclear to the US Atomic Energy Commission weapons. The General Advisory Committee to the US Atomic Energy Commission of which Oppenheimer was chairman and whose controversial report of 30th October, 1949 had recommended against the crash development of the Hydrogen bomb, had instead recommended for "an intensification of efforts to make atomic weapons available for tactical pur-

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poses.\footnote{York, Herbert, *The Advisors: Oppenheimer, Teller and the Superbomb*, (San Francisco: Freeman and Co., 1976), p.152.} Similarly, the father of Hydrogen bomb, Edward Teller, who for various reasons was initially obsessed with building bigger weapons was also later emerges as a great vocal champion of tactical nuclear weapons, expressing the view that limited nuclear war "would do no more damage to the face of a nation than conventional weapons" and therefore recommending the development of "small, 'clean' nuclear weapons that would be needed for limited nuclear conflicts."\footnote{Teller, Edward and A. Brown, *The Legacy of Hiroshima*, (London: Mcmillan, 1962), pp.281, 287.} It is today a well known fact that it was only the personal forays of Robert Oppenheimer into the adament officialdoms of Europe - all were determined to involve America's nuclear forces at the very first stages of a European war - that had finally convinced the NATO Council to accept deployment of tactical nuclear weapons beginning in the winter of 1954.

The most important factor among these was surely the Soviet atomic test of August 1949 had shell-shocked the Truman administration which was hardly prepared for such an eventuality. According to best American estimates the Soviets could not have obtained atomic capability for at
least another 5 or 7 years. Another major factor was the June 1950s invasion of South Korea. This clearly Communist sponsored invasion had to be seen in the backdrop of America's recent military confrontations with the communists in Greece, China and West Berlin and especially in the backdrop of Moscow's newly acquired atomic capability. As Bernard Brodie was later to recall: "The Korean war demolished the basis for the glib axiom that all the modern wars must be total, and demonstrated conspicuously some of the major constraints necessary to keeping the war limited." It was the Cold War that "eventually led to the incorporation of atomic weapons into America's warfighting doctrines." This incorporation was effected despite the clear unease on the part of then President Harry S. Truman.


7. Truman told David Lilienthal in 1947: "I don't think we ought to use this thing unless we absolutely have to. It is a terribly thing to order the use of something that is as terribly destructive beyond anything we have ever had" in The Journals of David E. Lilienthal, Vol.2 - The Atomic Energy Years 1945-50, New York, 1964, p.391.
The formal incorporation of nuclear weapons into America's defence strategy which was later effected by Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles' famous massive retaliation speech before the Council on Foreign Relations in New York January, 1954 was later to prove a single most important stimulant in initiating a pioneering debate on nuclear warfighting doctrines. It compelled the greatest minds in the United States to exploring newer forms of possible military contests between nuclear armed antagonists wherein nuclear weapons could still achieve some political purpose. Following the US Army's announcement in 1953 of its plans to discover the effects of nuclear weapons upon infantry, Bernard Brodie wrote an article in Foreign Affairs outlining the uses of nuclear weapons in a tactical nuclear war. This was followed by a controversial report by Richard Leghorn in US News & World Report that urged the United States to adopt nuclear warfighting postures in order to overcome the communists' manpower advantage. Similarly, a study group on nuclear warfighting had also been meeting


at the Council on Foreign Relations, the preliminary report on whose deliberations was published by Henry Kissinger the *Foreign Affairs* and was later expanded into his *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* - a book that was to make him one of the greatest exponents of limited nuclear war.

The debate, however, had not only produced interest. It had also presented a great body of the critique of massive retaliation and engendered some of the most valuable criticisms of limited nuclear war. And these criticisms, as also the existing ground realities, like increasing disagreements within NATO and development by Soviet Union similar tactical capabilities, would ultimately compel Her

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10. For instance, James King, "Nuclear Plenty and Limited War", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.35 (January 1957), pp.22-56; James King, "Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy - Limited Annihilation", *The New Republic*, 15th July 1957; James King, "Limited War", *Army* (August 1957) wherein James King maintains that nuclear adversaries can have peace only in stalemate: "Properly considered then, limited wars are but episodes of increased tension and irritation, in this ceaseless striving to ret a political position and to gain political advantage also see William Kaufman's *Military Policy and National Security* (1956), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956); William Kaufman, "The Crisis in Military Affairs", *World Politics*, Vol.X, No. 4 (July 1958); "his (Kissinger's) version of warfare, airmen do not become panicky and jettison their bombs, or hit the wrong targets, missiles do not go stray, and heavily populated areas - whether rural or urban - do not suffer thereby. Surely this is a wishful thinking." (p.594)
Kissinger into confessing that the United States had failed in developing a coherent doctrine of limited nuclear war and to recommend that "the years ahead must therefore see a substantial strengthening of the conventional forces of the free world."\(^{11}\)

This, however, did not mean that the strategy of limited nuclear war had hit a dead end. Even during the 1960s Thomas Schelling was still working on his thesis about the role of bargaining in a limited nuclear war and Herman Kahn was trying to sell his idea of nuclear war in which there controllable degrees of nuclear destruction. Therefore although in the late 1950s there was a clear cut swing in favour of building conventional capabilities yet limited nuclear war was never completely discounted. Only the general consensus did not accept its exclusive dependence on tactical nuclear weapons or could not accept it as an ideal substitute for conventional capabilities. Most of nuclear strategists of that time, however, continued to regard nuclear weapons as an integral part of American defence posture but for them these weapons were to be weap

ons of "the last and not the only recourse." And most of them continued to stress that their use should be made primarily for symbolic rather than military purposes.

Flexible Response:

It was at this juncture of strategic confusion that the Democratic administration of John F. Kennedy came to the White House. Having hardly overcome America's humiliations in Korea, Americans were already getting sore about their bloody engagements in Vietnam. The strategy of massive retaliation had been soundly condemned by its critics yet

12. Ibid., p.146; also Bernard Brodie, "Strategy Hits a Dead End", Harpers (October 1955), p.38; Robert Osgood, Limited War: A Challenge to the American Foreign Policy, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957), p.230. Morton Halperin, Limited War in the Nuclear Age, (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1963): "...United States should not introduce nuclear weapons. But this should not be taken as absolute: There might be some situations in which the United States ought to initiate the use of tactical nuclear weapons." (p.74); William Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964): "Even in limited war situations, we should not preclude the use of tactical nuclear weapons, for no one can foreshow how such situations might develop. But the decision to employ tactical nuclear weapons in limited conflicts should not be forced upon us simply because we have no other means to cope with them." (pp.59-60)

the alternatives were not yet clearly proposed; and, in the face of all this turmoil, General Eisenhower had continued with his programmes of building three independent types of strategic nuclear force structures (ICBMs, SLBMs and manned bombers) called "the triad". The Kennedy administration reacted to this situation by first of all advocating an aggressive modernisation and expansion of America's conventional forces. In the field of nuclear strategy Kennedy's Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara began by recruiting his erstwhile friends at the RAND Corporation and assigned them the task of exploring new alternatives in warfighting strategies that should be responsive to ground realities, should be militarily viable and politically plausible to operate. And the policy that was finally adopted by the Kennedy administration came to be known as 'flexible response'. Since 'limiting the damage' was the central concern of this strategy it has also often been called strategy of 'Controlled Escalation' or 'Controlled Response'.

As a first step, in order to increase popular confidence, attention was given to the country's civil defence programmes in order to minimise civilian casualties in war. Thousands of Americans had their backyards dug up and blast shelters installed. At the same time more centrally controlled alternatives for saving American cities were also
examined. And this led to the initiation of programmes to build Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABM) that were to provide an active defence against the incoming enemy nuclear missiles. It was after his first whirlwind tour and secret parleys with the NATO countries that the first public exposition of new administration’s warfighting policy came at McNamara’s Commencement Address to the University of Michigan graduating class at Ann Arbor on 16th June, 1962. Outlining, what was to be America’s first official enunciation of fighting limited war in the nuclear age, McNamara laid a great deal of emphasis on confining attacks on military targets rather than civilians populations. He said:

The US has come to the conclusion that to the extent feasible basic military strategy in a possible general nuclear war should be approached in much the same way that more conventional military operations have been regarded in the past. That is to say, the principal military objectives in the event of a nuclear war stemming from a major attack on the Alliance, should be the destruction of the enemy’s military forces, not his civilian population.14

The main thrust of this idea, which was later also come to be called by various other names like 'no-cities', 'city-avoidance' or 'counterforce' doctrines, was at building

nuclear defence postures with a view to targeting primarily enemy's nuclear forces and military capabilities. It was believed that it would greatly dilute the intensity and effect of any nuclear attack on the United States. They targeting strategy of the Kennedy administration was enshrined in what was called the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP-1962). This new idea of fighting a 'limited nuclear war' was greatly applauded by the military strategists all over the world as it had "provided the possibility of making this form of warfare more military (in the traditional sense) and less genocidal." The idea was obviously a great relief to them as it projected a clear possibility of bringing warfare back into the arena of practical politics and of making war, once again, what Clausewitz had described as 'instrument of state policy'. At the popular level as well this doctrine was seen to be providing great hope of liberating the Americans from the dangerous and long discredited strategy of massive retaliation as also of


providing a new political role to America's costly nuclear arsenal.

This optimism, however, was not to last very long. Attempts to implement the new strategy soon resulted into severe technological constraints. Counterforce targeting, for instance, required in the first place delivery systems of an extremely high accuracy and efficiency that could perform during the chaos of actual war but the long doctrinal neglect of tactical nuclear weapons had left them totally ill-suited for effecting any kind of limitation or control in war. The early generation rockets of late the 1950s were simply not up to the requirements. The circular error probable (CEPs) - the radius in which at least 50 per cent of the warheads should land - was still measured in miles. With such delivery systems nuclear weapons could hardly "ensure destruction against anything but the 'soft' (i.e. most vulnerable) counterforce targets, and could not reasonably have been expected to destroy 'hardened' targets like missile silos." And examined in the context America's newly acquired thermonuclear weapons even the most accurate of such attacks "would produce large scale damage and civilian casualties from direct weapon effects, to say nothing of delayed effects from residual radiation." 17 Apart from

17. Ibid.
these outmoded delivery system, the weapons as well were not suited to fighting a limited war. According to Laurence Martin: "Despite the term 'tactical' most so-called weapons were of at least Hiroshima proportions; some had yield of hundred kilotons." And therefore in his opinion, the whole infrastructure for implementing limited nuclear war doctrine of McNamara was lacking during those days:

The inaccuracy of delivery systems, inadequacies of target acquisitions, the long delays and uncertainties in securing permissions to fire from the complex command and control mechanism understandably required for nuclear weapons, all compounded to introduce errors into the process of hitting targets, particularly those that were mobile.18

The main problem, according to most commentators on McNamara's limited war doctrine, was that with the given state of technological developments the it was not possible to control, let alone avoid, what was technically called the "collateral" damage. Besides, there had also been dissensions within the Kennedy administration. For instance, National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, tough McNamara's 'Counterforce' doctrine offered a highly expansive and dangerous option. Dubbing this doctrine as "word of art" he concluded that the revised SIOP-II (of 1963) was nothing but

an anti-thesis of limited war: "We are planning to shoot everything off at once," he explained to President Kennedy.19 Although the Soviets had built a great nuclear arsenal their nuclear forces were still in a soft configuration, helplessly vulnerable to the US attack. This obviously made everyone believe that the Soviet Union was not as yet capable of maintaining the requisite restraints and therefore any outbreak of war would compel them to launch an all-out attack regardless of the restraints observed by the United States. These sentiments were later to be echoed by McNamara himself: "Under today's circumstances I personally believe any nuclear attack by the Soviet Union on the United States will include an attack on the major urban areas of the United States."20 This led McNamara to assert that only a "second strike" capability that could destroy at least one-fifth or one-fourth of Soviet population and nearly half of its industrial capacity was a strong enough threat to provide the US with an effective deterrent against any Soviet aggression.21 These ideas were later formulated into


a new doctrine called 'Assured Destruction'. Under this new doctrine emphases were laid at maintaining a 'second strike' capability which was essential for obtaining a stable balance of terror in which neither side will initiate a war. Targeting plans were also redirected into hitting primarily war supporting industries as also the enemy's political leadership. It was also described as a strategy based on keeping enemy cities hostages for one's own defence.22 Apart from aforesaid limitations, changes in international situation - especially the Berlin and Cuba crisis - had also been greatly responsible for this change from controlled warfare to what his critics described as Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). The net result was that the US administration was back at building its strategic TRIAD.

The morale of this story is not as if McNamara was wrong in propounding the doctrine of limited war but that he was a little too early to succeed. There was absolutely nothing wrong with his formulations per se, and given more propitious circumstances he might well have succeeded. However, his contributions have played a significant role in

the of the limited war strategy and as one scholar of limited nuclear war says "the seeds of that abortive policy were to bring forth a richer harvest in the course of 1970s." 23

Limited Nuclear Options

And the opening of the 1970s indeed brought about a rich harvest of the seeds that McNamara's abortive policy had sown. It surely does not seem to be a coincidence that the coming of Nixon to the White House had also brought a large number of country's nuclear strategists into the administration. For instance, Henry Kissinger - then the greatest exponent of limited nuclear war - was appointed as National Security Advisor to the President. James Schlesinger - who had spent the whole of the 1960s at the RAND Corporation was appointed Secretary of Defence. It was the first occasion where a professional civilian strategist had been appointed to such a high position in matters of national defence. Paul Nitze - who had described atomic devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as acceptable and had since been advocating for military use of nuclear weapons - was made Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Secu-

rity Affairs. William Kaufmann - the mentor and, of course, defender of McNamara's Counterforce strategy - and Andrew Marshall, also another RAND analyst, were consultants to the National Security Council and Fred Ikle was made Director of Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA).

The technological advancements of late the 1960s and early 1970s especially the ABM and MIRV technologies, precision guidance munitions and the miraculous breakthroughs in making possible of "tailored warheads to hit the given objectives formulation of limited nuclear war doctrines.

The arrival of multiple warheads atop single missiles, the reduction of yield to weight ratios, the ability to tailor nuclear effects, the growing capabilities of communication, command, control and intelligence systems and, most of all, the ability to hit small and protected targets with astonishing accuracy all contributed to the sense that nuclear weapons were increasingly becoming instruments that could be used with precision and discrimination.24 There can hardly be any better illustration of this technological transformation than the fact that though the absolute number of US nuclear missiles had stayed at 1,750 since 1967, the total

number of their warheads had crossed over 7,000 by mid-1970s. This had already resulted in a country-wide debate seeking revision and updating of NATO’s warfighting doctrines. And then there was this signing of Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT 1) in May 1972 which severely curtailed Nixon’s programmes on Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) technologies and thereby further accelerated and channelised the administration’s efforts in developing warfighting technologies and of course also new warfighting doctrines.

However, all these favourable events were surely not a matter of any coincidence, not all of them. Just like his nomination of strategic experts into important positions in his administration, Nixon’s surrendering of his programmes for R&D in BMD technologies was also intentional – a bargaining chip for SALT 1. In fact right from the days of his election campaign Nixon had emphasized on building up America’s warfighting capabilities and this area idea had quietly been simmering during the initial years of Kissinger-dominated foreign policy and found expression in Nixon’s Annual.

25. Ibid., p.760.
Reports on his administration's foreign policy:

I must not be - and my successors must not be - limited to the indiscriminate mass destruction of enemy civilians as the sole possible response to challenges. This is especially so when that response involves the likelihood of triggering nuclear attacks on our own population.27

As a result, there was a great upsurge within the scientific community as also bureaucracy for developing sophisticated technologies in precision guidance and survivable C3I capabilities. And it was only in view of the progress made in this field that in the middle of 1973 Nixon finally decided to formally launch his administration's policy of building limited nuclear war capabilities. The Nixon's decision of January 1974 came to be known as National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM)-242 and it among other things "directed that further plans for limited nuclear operations be developed and formally incorporated into the SIOP."28 It was also around this time only in 1973


that James Schlesinger was now assigned the responsibility of implementing this warfighting doctrine of limited nuclear war. Schlesinger immediately took up this challenge and became an ardent defender of the decision before the Congress, the Press and the public at large. So much so that even when this new policy was hardly his own creation, it soon popularly came to be known as the 'Schlesinger Doctrine'.

Schlesinger was greatly concerned with Moscow's growing capabilities of fighting a strategic nuclear war in which the American homeland was as much vulnerable as the frontline European states. Moscow's MIRVed ICBMs (SS-16, SS-17, SS-18 and SS-19s) as also of its new Delta class submarines and accompanying SLBMs, were clear proof of Soviet capabilities for conducting a limited nuclear war. For Schlesinger, Soviet nuclear attack on the United States was no longer an impossibility though it remained as yet quite improbable. Accordingly, his advocacy of the doctrine of limited nuclear options was based on two principal grounds: Firstly such a


posture was believed to "serve as a more credible deterrent" and secondly "in the event of deterrence failing, it would provide a better guarantee against the rapid escalation of fighting to an orgy of destruction."31 And this new thesis was strongly defended by Schlesinger before the US Congressional committees. For instance, at one such hearing during March 1974 he declared:

If we were to maintain continued communication with the Soviet leaders during the war, and if we were to describe precisely, and meticulously the limited nature of our actions, including the desire to avoid attacking their urban industrial base, than in spite of whatever one says historically in advance that everything must go all-out, when the existential circumstances arise, political leaders on both sides will be under powerful pressure to be sensible. Both sides under these circumstances will continue to have the capacity at any time to destroy the urban industrial base of the other. The leaders of both sides will know that. These are the circumstances in which I believe the leaders will be rational and prudent. I hope, I am not being too optimistic.32

Schlesinger was confident that the actual use of even three or four nuclear bombs will make political leaders "look around aghast... and say let's stop right here." He did confess that this limited use of nuclear weapons might


mean some million people dead but for him compared with an all-out nuclear war these casualties "must be regarded as relatively few in number." 33 Presenting his Annual Report for the year 1973 which was released on 14th March 1974 Schlesinger wrote:

What we need is a series of measured responses to aggression which bear some relation to the provocation, have prospects of terminating hostilities before a general nuclear war breaks out, and leave some possibility for restoring deterrence. It has been this problem of not having sufficient options between massive response and doing nothing, as the Soviets build up their strategic forces, that have prompted the President's concern and those of our Allies. 34

Speaking at another hearing of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on 3rd May 1974 he warned potential aggressors to be aware that the US would continue to have both the resolve and the capability to act in the face of aggression in all circumstances. He promised that US President will no longer remain in a position where his only option in meeting limited nuclear aggression was an all-out nuclear response. And in order to achieve this spectrum of capabilities he said, "the deterrence in 1970s requires

33. Ibid., p.11.

greater flexibility."35 Once again 'flexibility' had come to be the key word of the administration's new war-fighting strategy.

As had been directed by Nixon's National Security Decision Memorandum-242, the postulated 'flexibility' of Schlesinger soon led to widespread revision of the administration's targeting plans. A revised Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP-V) was adopted in January 1975 which widely increased President's options: the new SIOP-V now had over 40,000 targets in the USSR alone. These targets were classified into four different categories: Main Attack Options (MAO), Selective Attack Options (SAO), Limited Nuclear Options (LNO), and Regional Nuclear Options (RNO). Barring the first category, the MAO, all other options were planned to conduct nuclear war in a controlled and limited manner. The two concepts of 'escalation control' and 'withholds' were the basic elements of SIOP-V as it was designed to exempt certain sanctuaries from destruction - political leadership, C3I systems, population centres etc. - and thereby compel the other side to exercise control and limitation. It also aimed at avoiding use of nuclear weap-

ons on or adjacent to neutral and allied territories or on places which were soon to be captured by friendly troops.  

Similarly, McNamara's Nuclear Strategic Targeting List (NSTL) was also thoroughly revised to represent Nixon's new priorities. Apart from the revision of these warfighting operational plans, Schlesinger also laid great emphasis on the development of 'hard target kill capability' as well as on 'residual forces' with the United States. He also emphasized the need to maintain 'essential equivalence' in order to have capabilities to respond in kind. This essential equivalence was required "not only in numerical improvement of forces, but also in throw-weight, accuracy, yield-to-weight ratios, reliability and other factors that contribute to the effectiveness of strategic weapons."  

His emphasis on flexibility in America's warfighting strategy was also clearly visible in his Annual Report for 1975. According to this report the Soviets had already acquired strategic counterforce capabilities and were now in a position to conduct a limited nuclear war by attacking the United States without touching its cities. Schlesinger once


again proposed that America must be prepared to face this increasing possibility of having to face a limited nuclear attack any time. He wrote:

Flexibility of response is also essential because despite our best efforts, we cannot guarantee that deterrence will never fail.... To the extent that we will have selected response options... we should be able to bring all but the largest nuclear conflict to a more rapid conclusion before cities are struck. Damage may thus be limited and further escalation avoided. 38

Right from the beginning Schlesinger's propositions for building capabilities for fighting nuclear war in a limited and controlled manner had found widespread support, especially amongst scholars and strategists of nuclear warfighting. Lynn Davis, for instance, in her Adelphi Paper no.121 greatly recommended Schlesinger's doctrine of limited nuclear options which she believed carried great hope of achieving two basic objectives of America's national security. Firstly, it would "stop the aggression immediately and create a pause to allow time for diplomacy to work" and secondly, it might help "change the enemy leader's perceptions about the prospects for a quick, cheap victory."39


Both put together would hardly leave any incentive for any potential aggressors. The idea had also found unanimous support of his colleagues inside administration, whose combined creation this idea had in fact been. William Kaufmann perhaps had his particular reasons to be pleased with Schlesinger's Limited Nuclear Options: this was for him a second chance after the tenure of Robert McNamara to get his thesis of 'flexible response' turned into official policy. In fact it would have been an issue of debate if Schlesinger's Limited Nuclear Options doctrine was anyway different from McNamara's 'flexible response' and majority of experts were of the opinion that despite alterations at the declaratory level or in its wordings no substantial changes had been effected in government's warfighting operational plans, force structures and targeting priorities. The major difference was that it was now technologically possible to implement the policy. According to one scholar the most striking three differences between the limited nuclear warfighting doctrines of McNamara and Schlesinger were the following:

First the technologies of precision and guidance were now at hand. It is arguable that the requisite capabilities were emerging through the impact of the micro-electronic revolution, almost independently of political choice. Secondly, both sides possessed secure second strike forces. Third, the Russians were on the way to achieving a comparable, controlled counterforce capability.40

40. n.29, p.380.
Some other scholars had grounded the genesis of Limited Nuclear Options to the concepts of 'city-sparing' of the 1950s. Nuclear strategy has been evolving over the years with each new doctrine only further clarifying and updating the requirements. And accordingly no wild changes could have been made by individual doctrines. For instance no significant doctrinal changes were made during the Ford administration except that greater emphases were laid upon developing better C^3/I systems like early warning satellites and Phase Array radars so that a more accurate analysis of enemy attack could be available. President Carter during his election campaigns and in his early years in office, of course, has appeared as if capable of breaking the rule of evolutionary growth of strategy and introducing some fundamental changes. For him, with his vision of building a nuclear weapon free world, limited nuclear war doctrine represented a dangerous philosophy that was making nuclear war look like a practical instrument of policy. At one time he even toyed with the idea of building a sufficient deter-

41. n.31, p.114.

rence with some 200 to 250 missiles. Also his Secretary of Defence, Harold Brown found it equally "difficult to visualize any nuclear exchange which could be kept from escalating to all-out attacks on cities." But with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 which was popularly described as beginning of a Second Cold War, these lofty ideas of building a peaceful world were forgotten. The Presidential Directive 59 (PD-59) which was signed by Carter on 25th July, 1980 promulgated a subdued 'countervailing' strategy that proposed to face the full range of contingencies through what was called 'deterrence by denial' i.e. "aggression would either be defeated or would result in unacceptable costs that exceed gains." In a way it was only a negative approach to defending national interests. The realisation was also soon to dawn that deterrence-by-denial would invariably involve wars of attrition and therefore in addition to flexibility, the endurance of


defensive forces had also to be improved. This soon changed the administration’s orientation and in accordance with these ideas emphases were once again shifted to attacking enemy’s military targets. Finally, with Carter’s Nuclear Weapon Employment Policy (NWEP-2) the position was back to the old McNamara’s Counterforce doctrine, refined and updated.46

"Star Wars":

'Window of Vulnerability and 'building a stronger America' were the two popular planes that had brought Reagan’s Republican administration to power in 1980. Carter had to loose because of his pacific image in face of US failures in Iran and Afghanistan. Towards the end of his four year term President Carter quietly accepted the indispensability of warfighting counterforce doctrine. There was widespread unease about these developments. NATO was in crisis. There were also great pressures from within the American scientific community and military-industrial complex. Carter had cancelled an important B-1 bomber project saying that programmes for air-launched cruise missiles and new stealth technology had made this expenditure unnecessary.47


However, apart from these immediate circumstances, Reagan had throughout his career, been personally in favour of building stronger American defences incorporating nuclear technology into actual warfighting operations. Right from 1960 when as Governor of California Reagan had been visiting Edward Teller's Lawrence Livermore Laboratory and had been greatly fascinated by sophisticated space weapon systems. Also as a member of the Committee on Present Danger (1976) he was an advocate of greater military build-up. Reagan had also been one of the forces that had compelled the pacifistic Carter towards the end of his tenure to modify his policies postures.48

Besides, the US strategic community of 1970s was also of the opinion that a limited nuclear war cannot only be fought but also can be won by the United States. Influential nuclear strategists like Paul Nitze, Richard Pipes, Colin S. Gray etc. - who were later to be Reagan's team members - had campaigned for the adoption of a defence strategy that emphasized fighting and winning a nuclear war. For instance, Richard Pipes, in his famous article in Commentary in 1977 deliberately titled "Why the Soviet Union

Thinks It Can Fight and Win Nuclear War?" had warned US policy makers to be aware that unlike the United States, the Soviets had continued to believe in fighting and winning a nuclear war, and that they did not regard its outcome as being suicidal: "the country better prepared for it and in possession of a superior strategy could win and emerge a viable society." 49 He believed the Soviet nuclear capabilities were not aimed at deterrence alone, they were rather aimed at expanding Communist influence as well. He asserted that such a dangerous doctrine of the Soviet Union surely called for a policy diametrically opposite to the one that had been adhered to by the United States: Not deterrence but victory, not sufficiency in weapons but superiority, not retaliation but offensive action should be, he said, the policy of the United States. 50 Paul H. Nitze, the well known proponent of nuclear warfare and who had even been called by some as "an absolute mad" 51 had all the same continued with his commitments. When Carter was thinking about building his minimum deterrence with 200-250 ICBMs,


50. Ibid., p.31.

Nitze wrote an article in *Foreign Policy* according to which a mere 50 per cent use of Soviet ICBMs in their first strike would easily destroy over 90 per cent of the US ICBMs. Accordingly, in this article he prescribed for a force structure that would enable US to make its nuclear war an extension to its policy of deterrence. But Colin S. Gray was the man to emerge as the real spokesman for Reagan's ideas. In his famous article in summer of 1980 entitled "Viceroy Is Possible" he declared that nuclear strategy continued to be Clausewitzian and therefore just like traditional warfighting the United States should not only build nuclear doctrines for deterring Soviet attacks by denying them success but should also prepare to defeat and destroy them with only a limited damage to the United States. According to him:

> If US strategic forces are to be politically relevant in future crisis, the American homeland has to be physically defended.... If escalation discipline is to be imposed upon the Soviet Union, even in the direst of situations, potential damages to North America has to be limited. Damage limitation has to involve both counterforce action and active and passive defense.


"Star Wars" doctrine which formally transformed Carter's warfighting nuclear strategy into a "war-winning" one. However, apart from these scholastic campaigns Reagan's ideas were also greatly influenced by the ongoing developments in the field of technology. Research and development in the field of Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) technologies had been virtually closed with Nixon's signing of the SALT I agreement. However, this was not to be the end of it and the BMD technologies had slowly been developing into a new form of anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons. 55 Although research in this extremely uncertain field was further discouraged by restrictions that were placed by various other treaties like the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 (that banned any detonation of nuclear-tipped ASAT of BMD weapons in space), the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, the anti-Ballistic Missiles Treaty of 1972 and so on. Yet as long as satellites in the space were vulnerable and were to play a decisive role in the conduct and control of future wars, building ASAT weapons was obviously one the most sought after technology of the mid-1970s. Over 75 per cent of the satellites in space were those of the two superpowers. 56 It was also natural

56. Ibid., p.1.
therefore that serious efforts were made by both the super-
powers to reach an agreement on an ASAT ban. But negotia-
tions under Carter's PD-37, however, abruptly ended in his
defeat. 57

The scene, of course, changed entirely with the coming
of the Reagan administration. It began by ordering the
National Security Council in August 1981 to review the
country's space policy. Soviet proposals for ASAT ban
agreements at the United Nations were rejected and testing
for new ASAT weapons started in late 1981. By September
1982 the Air Force Space Command had been established. The
formal announcements of Reagan's Strategic Modernisation
Programme was made by his Secretary of Defense, Casper
Weinberger on 5th October 1981 wherein he argued for the
need "for effective and survivable early warning, communica-
tion and attack assessment systems was essential if the
administration's declared policy of being able to fight and
'prevail' in a nuclear war was to be credible." 58 This was
followed by administration's Defense Guidance Plan 1984-88

57. Smith, Steve, "US Offensive Capabilities and Nuclear
Strategy" in Stephen Kirby and Gordon Robson (ed.), The
Militarisation of Space, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Pub-

1945-84, (New York: Ithaca: Cornell University, 1985),
p.217.
which was leaked to the Press in May 1982 and which laid great stress on the requirements of US 'prevailing' in a protracted nuclear war that would involve an attempt to "force the Soviet Union to seek earliest termination of hostilities on terms favourable to the United States." It was a clear step towards building nuclear war-winning capabilities.

Then came Reagan's landmark speech on taking a Strategic Defence Initiative (popularly called "Star Wars") which proposed for fighting and winning limited nuclear wars by no longer basing his arguments on any 'deliberate hobbling' of nation's military power and compelling the adversary to doing the same but, for the first time, by building what was later to be called 'defensive deterrence' by building an 'umbrella' over the United States and thereby disallowing enemy warheads to enter United States whereas keeping the pace of enemy's destruction by the US at the same scale. In his famous Star Wars speech of 23rd March 1983 Reagan called upon the scientific community "to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete." In a nation-wide televised speech he declared:

What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant US retaliation to deter a Soviet attack, that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our soil or that of our Allies.\textsuperscript{60}

Reagan recognised very well that such a defence would take a long time to be built and that in the interim US would continue making efforts at arms-control and modernising its strategic forces including its non-nuclear capabilities. But he was very confident of the ultimate success of such a defence. That is how despite unexpected decline of the Soviet power under Andropov, Chernenko and finally under Gorbachev and despite the Soviets opting out of the arms race by announcing various test moratoriums and unilateral arms control and disarmament proposals, Reagan till the very last of his eight years in office continued to be adament about his SDI programme. That is why despite widespread criticism and opposition to SDI both at home and abroad, even amongst US scientific community Reagan continued his effort at giving his SDI sufficient momentum so that even if a hostile President came to the office after him he would not be able to easily reverse the situation.\textsuperscript{61} However, the

\textsuperscript{60}. The entire speech has been reprinted in \textit{Daedalus}, Vol.114, no.3 (Summer 1983), pp.369-71, quoted from p.371.

Republicans continued to be in power and Reagan was succeeded by his Vice-President George Bush who himself had always been one of the strongest supports of SDI.\(^{62}\) And even Bush, despite the unbelievable decline and disintegration of the Soviet Union continued to provide necessary funding for the SDI activities.

There is a common agreement today that "Star Wars" has proved to be an extremely expensive project and also that the development of its components will take still long years of patient funding and research which ultimately might still remain vulnerable to the enemy's cheap countermeasures.\(^{63}\)

But the United States has its own compulsions and in order to sustain its leadership in the coming century where it will be surely threatened by the emerging two economic superpowers - Germany and Japan - it has to maintain its technological warfighting superiority. Moreover, though Russian empire has disintegrated as a political system, the

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62. Scheer, Robert, *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush and Nuclear War*, (New York: Random House, 1982). In one of his interviews on SDI Vice President George Bush says: "You have the survivability of command and control, survivability of industrial potential, protection of a percentage of your citizens, and you have a capability to inflict more damage on the opposition than it can inflict upon you. That is the way you can have a winner...." (p.29)

63. n.48, pp.1-21.
nuclear weapons are still there. Also increasing proliferation of nuclear weapons amongst the developing nations is being seen as the new emerging threat to the United States and its allies. And in such a scenario the value of SDI - and its nuclear war-winning capabilities - can hardly be undermined. SDI surely envisages "mechanisms for limiting a nuclear war through the interception of ballistic missiles warheads. A nuclear war involving a nation with such defensive systems would be", according to Steven Lee, "in some sense of the word, a 'limited' nuclear war."64 This new strategy was also aptly explained by Reagan's Secretary of Defence, Casper Weinberger in his Annual Report to Congress in 1984:

Should deterrence fail, our strategy is to restore peace on favourable terms. In response to an enemy attack, we must defeat the attack and achieve our national objectives while limiting to the extent possible and practical, the scope of the conflict.65

To conclude our discussion on the warfighting doctrines for a limited nuclear war, it seems opportune to quote


Robert Tucker. According to him ever since the doctrines for fighting a limited nuclear war were formally announced for the first time by the Kennedy administration,

...no administration has been able to disavow the prospects, howsoever, skeptically it may have viewed that prospect, of the controlled use of the nuclear weapons. Equally, no administration has been able to disavow the prospects of emerging from a nuclear conflict with some kind of meaningful victory. Unable to disavow the prospects, no administration has been able to disavow the force structures that might make possible fighting a limited nuclear war.\footnote{66}

Apart from other reasons all these successive regimes have found it politically too costly to withdraw from the development of limited nuclear war capabilities and doctrines. But they have also been lacking at the same time any moral authority or political conviction for actually initiating a nuclear war. Invariably, popular criticisms have shown them lacking any concrete justifications. Surely, it is impossible to disregard the most popular thesis that these warfighting doctrines by making a limited nuclear war look like a possible and practical instrument of policy have made its onset all the more an imminent threat. Besides it is also true that whether or not there will ever be an actual nuclear war, the very development and debate of

\footnote{66. Tucker, Robert W., "The Nuclear Debate", \textit{Foreign Affairs} (Fall 1984), p.9.}
these warfighting doctrines and the consequent demonstration that nuclear weapons are the most useful weapons for a future war will surely accelerate the process of nuclear proliferation. 67 What is particularly dangerous is the fact that according to the doctrines of limited nuclear war the criterion of bargaining for 'limitation' extends even to the actual fluctuations of the battlefield. 68 Even US Government's own studies have underlined that there is no guarantee as to whether a nuclear war can be kept limited. For example, the main finding of the Office of Technology Assessment's report on The Effects of Nuclear War published in 1979 was that the "impact of even a 'small', or 'limited', nuclear attack would be enormous." 69 To quote Desmond Ball, one of the well known contemporary scholar on limited war, any such war in future "would involve so many novel technical and emotional variables that predictions about its course - and especially about whether or not it could be controlled - must remain highly speculative." 70 Many other

67. Laurence, Martin, Limited Nuclear War, 18, p.119.
68. n.23, p.207.
69. Ibid., p.223.
scholars have also been arguing on the same lines.\textsuperscript{71} And in fact it has been the main theme of all the peace movements and arms control campaigns. For instance, Robert Jervis, in his latest book entitled \textit{The Meaning of Nuclear Revolution} writes:

"Although escalation is not automatic, advances in technology still leave a large danger of explosion remaining. The difficulties of controlling emotions and military force, of knowing what one's side is doing and of correctly interpreting the other's actions are enormous.... At very best, the enormous uncertainties would remain....\textsuperscript{72}"

Survivability of the C\textsuperscript{3} systems has been the other major handicap on which almost every scholar has expressed serious misgivings.\textsuperscript{73} This requirement of survivability of

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\textsuperscript{71} For example, Carl-Friedrich von Weizacker, "Can Third World War be Prevented?", \textbf{International Security}, Vol.5, no.1. He asserts that "as soon as we use nuclear weapons, there are no limits". (p.205); Leon Sigal in \textit{Fighting to Finish: The Politics of War Termination in the United States and Japan 1945}, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988) talks of the uncontrolable "collateral damages" as so on (p.299). The list can be exhaustive.


America's national command facilities, especially of its attack-assessment centres, is essential for the effective management and control of US warfighting capabilities. Without their survivability ensured even the most sophisticated defence build-up will make no sense. And obviously these will also be the most attractive targets for the enemy. To quote Robert Jervis once again, in any future war between nuclear weapon powers these "C3I systems would be such lucrative targets that it is highly unlikely that they would remain immune; it is equally unlikely," according to him, "that restraint could be maintained once they were attacked." 74 Even nuclear war in space or at sea which Reagan administration had believed to be areas in which war could be controlled have also been proved as being equally


prone to escalation.\textsuperscript{75}

Notwithstanding the aforesaid difficulties, as long as nuclear weapons are there the danger of a nuclear war will also continue to persist. Also, it will be surely absurd to believe that such powerful weapons of destruction can ever be wholly and permanently divorced from actual political conflicts. Therefore to believe that nuclear war will be horrible and to recommend against building of any nuclear warfighting doctrines or capabilities will be only too naive. Such an unpreparedness, in fact, will make United States easily vulnerable to nuclear blackmail by even a small reckless nuclear opponent. It is this dilemma that limited nuclear war seeks to resolve. Or as Laurence Martin says, "The proper question may therefore be not, should we contemplate limited nuclear war, but should we consider ways of limiting the nuclear war which is henceforth always a possibility."\textsuperscript{76} But the situation is not as if no efforts have been made to develop warfighting doctrines: In fact the problem is that there are too many. According to Stephen J. Cimbala there are as many as five different 'generic

\textsuperscript{75} For details, see Desmond Ball, "Nuclear War at Sea", \textit{International Security}, Vol.10 (Winter 1985-86), pp.3-31.

\textsuperscript{76} Laurence Martin, \textit{Limited Nuclear War}, n.18, p.120.
ideas' of this concept and this surely will create great problem for adversaries during the war for they will be unable to find out as to which of these forms the rationale that matters most for the given crisis. 77 This has also led some to say that "the greatest virtue of limited nuclear war doctrine is that it seems to provide justification for the arms-race, by giving an impression that nuclear weapons are usable." 78 And the truth that the option of limited nuclear war was no longer acceptable to the United States was clearly advocated at the historic Geneva Summit of 1987 where both President Ronald Reagan and President Gorbachev declared to the world that nuclear wars cannot be won and therefore should not be fought. Ever since this idea has been constantly repeated at various similar summits which have, of late, become quite fashionable.

LIMITED CONVENTIONAL WAR

Scholars exploring the possibilities, which might eventually one day lead our world to its nuclear annihilation, have invariably agreed that apart from some human


mistake or mechanical error, escalation of a conventional conflict between the nuclear weapons powers presents the most likely scenario that might explode into the outbreak of a nuclear war. In fact, it is not merely a question of escalation from conventional to nuclear warfighting: conventional weapon technologies today have by themselves obtained such high levels of survivability, lethality and accuracy that even a full-fledged conventional war amongst great powers can degenerate into indiscriminate destruction. Besides, this escalation of a conventional conflict is bound to provide greatest of all the pressures, pushing the combatants into crossing the nuclear threshold and initiating a nuclear war. Therefore, the warfighting doctrines in the nuclear age have not only tried to sustain the sanctity of the nuclear threshold but, in order to preserve the essence of war as an instrument of policy, have emphasised the need to keep even conventional conflicts amongst nuclear weapon powers limited and controlled. This is what makes these conventional conflicts of the nuclear age different from their counterparts of the pre-nuclear age era as well as

from other conventional wars that are being fought continuously even today.

Limited conventional war also remains the most acceptable category of limited war in the nuclear age. Most scholars have been inclined towards keeping any conflict between nuclear weapon powers only conventional as according to them introduction of nuclear weapons makes a conflict highly unpredictable, and of course dangerous. Even those scholars like Kissinger, Brodie, Osgood etc. who were initially greatly enamoured with the potential and viability of tactical nuclear weapons were later to embrace the primacy of conventional weapons in the US defence strategy. Accordingly, the doctrines of limited nuclear war remain essentially an exercise in building necessary capabilities for the worst contingencies wherein the United States might be compelled to fight with nuclear weapons. There is also one more reason for the limited conventional war being 'the most acceptable' category: This is the only category that so much resembles our traditional concepts of war on which we have a great body of experience and knowledge available with us. And this, unlike in the case of nuclear weapons, gives us a great hope of making a limited conventional war quite predictable and therefore manageable. The other two

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80. n.29, pp.106-7.
categories of limited war - limited nuclear war and counterinsurgency warfare - are perhaps not as familiar to western histories of war. This also makes limited conventional war most acceptable of all the limited war categories. Limited conventional war also provides us with an essential linkage for understanding these other two newer categories of limited war in the nuclear age on the basis of our traditional knowledge and experience. There is no denying the fact that conventional conflicts continue to be the most likely form of formal war between the nuclear weapon powers which might at times, degenerate into counterinsurgency warfare and might one day even escalate into limited nuclear war. In sum, therefore, apart from being 'the most acceptable', limited conventional war also remains the most imminent category of limited warfighting in the nuclear age.81

81. Professor Gabriel Sheffer in his "Introduction" to the Special Issue of The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations, Vol.17, Nos.1-2, 1984 offers three important reasons for his contention: "Firstly, although nuclear escalation and major nuclear war would be unimaginably disastrous for the mankind, conventional wars are being actually fought and are decimating vast populations... Second, conventional wars may escalate into nuclear confrontation... Thirdly, while in the recent past a number of serious attempt were made to check the possibility of a major nuclear war... the situation as far as conventional wars are concerned is vastly different; major powers in fact themselves involved in various local arms races." (p.1)
But have the Americans evolved any defence strategy so as to cope with such limited conventional wars? At least at the declaratory policy level it has not been found very fashionable by successive US administrations to launch any limited conventional war doctrines. In fact, apart from McNamara's 'flexible response', there has hardly been any discussion at the declaratory policy level about evolving limited conventional war doctrines. But surely the United States has continuously prepared for coping with limited conventional aggressions. All these great efforts at building newer technologies of precision guidance, sophisticated and survivable C^3 I centres, quick and smart delivery systems, radar-evading stealth bombers, cruise missiles and so on surely speak for America's continued emphasis on keeping abreast with conventional warfighting.

It perhaps remains quite a mystery as to what is so special about limited conventional war? What does one mean by it? Is it not the same form of war that has always been fought and continues to be fought amongst various nations even today? Do geographical limitations or other constraints of men or material resources make these conventional wars limited or does it requires any particular limitations on means or ends to qualify as a limited conventional war. Is the non-use of nuclear weapons the most
important yardstick for declaring a conflict as limited conventional war or does it allow small tactical weapons of land forces to be part of it? Answering these and many more questions remains the greatest challenge to any theoretical study of limited conventional war. We can perhaps begin by citing a definition by John C. Garnett who aptly locates the place of limited conventional war in the whole spectrum of violence in the nuclear age:

Conventional limited wars...are located in the middle of the 'limited war' spectrum of violence; that is to say, that they exist below the level of limited nuclear war, be it theater or strategic, but above the level of insurgency or guerrilla warfare. They are to be distinguished from the former simply by the non-use of nuclear or thermonuclear weapons and from the latter by the use of organised armies engaged in formal battles using sophisticated equipment according to established tactical and strategic doctrines.82

However, this definition does not explain what is it that distinguishes a limited conventional war from other ordinary conventional wars that are routinely fought by various nation-states and why it should not be confused with them. The most distinguishing feature of a limited conven-

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tional war is that it is a conflict in which the threat of an all-out nuclear war remains omnipresent and imminent. Therefore, it is a conflict which directly or indirectly involves a clash of vital interests amongst the opposing nuclear weapon powers. But in no way a limited conventional war involves any actual use of nuclear weapons. As Andrew Rasiulis, a great exponent of limited conventional war says: "...the nuclear weapons, even if used in small numbers, can not be considered an extension of the conventional armory." For him the only acceptable role for nuclear weapons in a limited conventional war is as a 'threat' which must be both horrifying as well as credible. It must clearly bring home to both the belligerents that any undue escalation of the conflict would surely open the doors for mutual suicide and therefore is highly undesirable. Or as Thomas Schelling says to engage in a limited conventional war is to threaten the enemy with a general nuclear war: "(It) is to start rocking a boat, to set in motion a process that is not altogether in one's control." Thus it is this


continuous threat of mutual annihilation amongst the opposing combatants that makes a limited conventional war qualitatively quite different from other ordinary conventional wars. Limited conventional war can therefore be defined as a conflict wherein the belligerents deliberately refrain from using whole of their available military power and it is this inherent possibility of escalation that changes the ground rules in case of a limited conventional war in a profoundly significant way.  

Limited conventional war is also a kind of conflict which most guarantees to preserve the original definition of war as primarily a political activity. Once again, this primacy of politics is also, in a way, a natural corollary to the presence of nuclear weapons. These weapons make it an imperative for the successful execution of limited conventional war that the control over escalating the conflict lies in the hand of the Central political leadership which can consider coolly and rationally as to when and how to escalate a given war. By appreciating this 'inherent possibility of escalation' it provides an ideal scenario

86. no.82, p.83.
where belligerents try to relate their use of military force to the sanctity of their political ends. Whereas in an ordinary conventional conflict the progression is determined primarily by military considerations or even by one's military capacity, in a limited conventional war it is the political implications that make a limited conventional conflict much more conjectural, much more subtle and much more indeterminate affair.\textsuperscript{88} Therefore, in a limited conventional war particular tactics should not be judged simply in terms of their military implications because they are not only decided primarily on the basis of their political objectives but even when they are done for certain military reasons they tend to have profound political implications.\textsuperscript{89}

The ouster of General McArthur from Commanding the UN forces in the Korean war provides an ideal example for illustrating how 'primacy of politics' continues to remain the essence of limited conventional war. The experienced General was fully convinced of his strong military reasons for bombing vital targets across the Yalu river (i.e. in China) but since such an act was bound to have dangerous political implications of legitimising Soviet and Chinese direct intervention into


\textsuperscript{89} n.82, p.85.
Korean war, this impending threat of escalation of Korean war into a nuclear conflict compelled restraint and McArthur had to go. Similarly in the case of Vietnam, American bombing of North Vietnam was not intended to defeat them militarily or to capture their territory but was an attempt only at terrorising native people to withdraw their support to the Vietcong guerrillas. Thus the basic task in a limited conventional war is not military victory but to communicate and pressurise the opposing political regime to bring about a political compromise - an exercise that has been variously described as 'coercive diplomacy', tough bargaining or 'diplomacy of violence'.

In fact quite like an exercise in diplomacy and perhaps that way quite unlike the ordinary conventional conflicts, the limited conventional war is conducted more in spirit of political compromise and mutual understanding between the belligerents: traditional goals of victory or defeat and stern attitudes towards one's objectives are not only highly dangerous but also quite inappropriate tools for any understanding of limited conventional war. For instance, when in a ordinary conventional war an adversary achieves a breakthrough it will most probably peruse the retreating enemy

90. n.85, pp.1-34.
forces and try to destroy them or at least prevent them from re-grouping. But in a limited conventional war which carries the danger of its escalation into a nuclear war such breakthrough can be dangerous as they may compel the adversary to further escalate the conflict. Curiously enough, says Kissinger, in this situation, the psychological advantage lies with the army which is losing rather than the one which is winning.91

Deployment of forces is also entirely different in case of a limited conventional war. According to Otto Heilbrunn: "The troops fighting a conventional war against a nuclear power must also be deployed as if they were fighting a nuclear war i.e. they must be dispersed over a greatly extended battlefield."92 The reason for this is simple: the belligerents can never be sure as to when, where and in what circumstances the enemy will escalate to nuclear level. In fact Kissinger defines this situation of dichotomy as a difficult choice between either "accepting military ineffectiveness by employing formations which have been dispensed as "if the nuclear weapons might be used, or courting disas-

91. n.88, p.168.

ter by concentrating forces." 93 For him any troop concentrations are likely to be turned into 'killing zones' by the enemy who might decide to use nuclear weapons, yet he cautions that in such a conventional combat between the two dispersed forces, the side which is less dispersed will have greater advantage. Besides there are many more operational hazards in fighting a limited conventional war which are not there in ordinary conventional wars. For instance, the current generation of tactical nuclear weapons have a very short range: less then 20 miles for nuclear artillery and under 100 miles for short-range missiles. This limited range naturally dictates their deployment closer to the enemy's frontiers and this proximity will always but great pressure for escalating a limited conventional war into a nuclear one. On the smallest advance by the enemy forces these weapons will either have to be pulled back to be later used within one's own/allied territory or will have to be abandoned to be overrun by the enemy. Also there will be the danger of a conventional warhead hitting the enemy's nuclear arsenals and thereby inadvertently igniting a nuclear war. 94

93. n.88, p.178.

Then there was another great hazard to the feasibility of fighting a limited conventional war: It is alleged that none of the successive Soviet regimes ever believed in the possibility of fighting 'limited' wars. Any successful execution of limited war, first and foremost, requires at least a tacit, if not explicit, agreement to that effect amongst the belligerents.95 There has hardly been any consensus even among the western strategists on the nature and scope of a limited conventional war and even the successive US administrations have thought it appropriate to regularly modify preceding regime's warfighting doctrines by changing emphasis here and there.96 Very often even contradictory reasons have been cited for building America's limited conventional capabilities and warfighting doctrines. For instance, according to one school of thought building a limited conventional capability is essential for the United States because, in the event of nuclear deterrence failing, this is the only sensible alternative compared to either surrendering or fighting a suicidal nuclear war. But according to another school of thought a limited conventional


war capability is only complementary to the doctrine of deterrence because by filling the essential gaps for fighting non-nuclear aggressions it makes US deterrence all the more credible and effective. There is yet another group of deterrence theorists who regard America's inclination towards limited conventional war as the greatest threat to its time-tested policy of nuclear deterrence. For them, this capability does not in any way enhance the credibility of deterrence but actually undermines it by projecting the possibility of making war, once again, controllable, manageable and survivable, and therefore a feasible and practical instrument of state policy. This, for them, obviously makes war, not less, but more likely. And lastly, there is another school of thought - primarily dominated by European strategic thinkers - that altogether disregards limited conventional capability and labels it as merely a waste of resources. According to them any conflict amongst nuclear weapon powers - especially one in Europe - is bound to go nuclear and therefore, for them, there is hardly any role for building limited conventional capabilities.

However as for the official US doctrines of the limited war even a brief survey of official pronouncements would show that limited conventional war had always been an important element of United States' defence postures. Just like the limited nuclear war doctrines the resurgence of limited
conventional war had occurred as a consequence of the then popular reaction to the doctrine of 'massive retaliation'. Also like the limited nuclear war the Kennedy administration was the first one to enunciate limited conventional war doctrines. As Robert Osgood says, ever since the last years of the Eisenhower administration, there had always been a strong demand seeking "that the US must rely increasingly upon the capacity to fight limited conventional (including unconventional or guerrilla) wars in order to support its far-flung interests in the Third World and even in Europe." 97

Seen in retrospect, America's military confrontations with communists had clearly established the futility of atomic weapons and conventional wars had continued to be the order of the day. This had also generated great fears that America's reliance on atomic war may not really substitute its conventional inferiority in Europe and in 1955 formulation of Warsaw Pact had only further increased the awesome strength of the Soviet military by adding to it troops of its East-European satellites. This had obviously created panic amongst America's NATO allies. These sentiments were clearly echoed by Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan's welcome

97. Ibid.
speech in 1957 at the arrival of new Supreme commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, General Lauris Norstad, where he said: "Let us be under no illusions; military forces today are not designed to wage war; their purpose is to prevent it."98 The groundswell therefore in favour of building conventional capabilities was already surging in Europe towards the end of 1950s. And these forces for change were ideally led by then Senator John F. Kennedy himself who, perhaps for this very reason, came to power with a landslide victory in January 1961. The brain behind Kennedy's great initiatives in the field of US defence strategy was his Defence Secretary, Robert S. McNamara who has often been even described as father of limited conventional war. However, his pioneering efforts towards moderating the obsession of US regimes with nuclear weapons were possible only because of the large scale of ground-work that had already been completed by the efforts various experts, officials and leaders that preceded McNamara and that had already set a favourable scenario for him to work upon. In fact, the events that followed McNamara's pronouncements on limited conventional war only further proved that he was in every way a child of his circumstances: Towards the end of

his tenure as Secretary of Defence McNamara was far more sobered and modified man who doubted his own convictions and finally took refuge under the same old 'massive retaliation' doctrine - giving it now a new name Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) - of which he had been an ardent critic.99

The genesis of America's Limited Conventional War in the nuclear age can perhaps be traced to the enunciation of the Truman administration's drive to severely slash American conventional forces following the conclusion of the second world war; a decision that had far preceded any understanding on the part of US leadership as to what role will be assigned to their newly acquired nuclear weapons.100 The first major conventional build-up, therefore, in had actually started as far back as the summer of 1950, in response to the US involvement in the Korean war.101 This military


100. According to then Secretary of Defence, James Forrestal they were still "without resolution of the question whether or not we are to use the A-bomb in war." See Walter Millis (ed.), The Forrestal Diaries, (London: Cassell & Co., 1952), p.45.

build-up is projected by the sharp rise in the overall American budget from $17.7 billion for fiscal year 1950 to $52.6 in 1953. Similarly at the NATO level this shift had led to German re-armament; the adoption of a 'Forward Strategy' and by the adoption of ambitious Lisbon Goal February 152 which had intended to expand NATO forces within a matter of two years from 25 divisions to 96 divisions. But soon these projects proved to be too ambitious to be practical. Firstly, American experiences in the Korean war proved that the conventional weapons offered no easy and painless route to victory. This was very frustrating for the generation that had been fed on the fairy tales of nuclear weapon's potential. And still more all these projects were extremely expensive and inflationary. 102 The West European members of NATO who did not want to have a limited nuclear war in Europe for it was "tantamount to a nuclear holocaust limited to Europe" they were also not willing to spare requisite amounts of human and financial resources that could stand upto the Soviet conventional might. 103 Obviously, Eisenhower's 'New Look' that promised

102. n.29, p.74.

robust deterrence at manageable costs and to offset NATO's numerical inferiority in conventional forces by introducing tactical nuclear weapons as also John Foster Dulles's calls for implementing containment with nuclear threats of massive retaliation carried a great advantage and brought this new regime to power. At another level America's think tanks had also been arguing in favour of building conventional capabilities. For instance, on the very eve of Kennedy's coming to power Kissinger wrote his second famous book, appropriately titled The Necessity for Choice wherein he argued that a defence would be reckless if it turned the conflict at once into a nuclear war instead of awaiting developments and fighting a conventional war in the meanwhile. To this can be added efforts of many of the critics of 'massive retaliation'. NATO Council meeting at Paris in December 1960 had also clearly underlined that "there must be a proper balance in the forces of the Alliance of Nuclear and conventional strength to provide the requisite flexibility" and this position was, once again, re-iterated at their next meeting at Ottawa in May 1963. In the meanwhile at their Nassau Conference of December 21, 1962, NATO leaders had agreed at reversing the roles.

signed to the nuclear and conventional weapons and had established the primacy of its conventional forces and warfighting instruments. The final communique of this Conference declared that henceforth "in addition to having a nuclear shield it is important to have a non-nuclear sword."\textsuperscript{105} It is in this context that one has to read McNamara's Commencement Address at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) on 16th June, 1962 that among other things about the US defence strategy declared:

> the Theatre nuclear capabilities are a necessary complement to but not a substitute for non-nuclear capabilities which are large enough to meet and withstand a major Soviet non-nuclear assault in Central Europe for a reasonable period of time.\textsuperscript{106}

What was particularly significant in McNamara's limited conventional war doctrine was its intention of extending deterrence even to the operational aspects of war i.e. when a war had actually started it could be still controlled in a way that each combatant might realise that "sheer destruct-

\textsuperscript{105} For details, see Otto Heilbrunn, \textit{Conventional Warfare in the Nuclear Age}, n.79, pp.11 and 26; also see Robert Osgood, \textit{The Entangling Alliance}, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p.28.

ition of enemy's people and cities would serve no decisive purpose but that a continued threat to destroy them might serve a purpose. 107 Thus in its essence the new strategy was "pleading for time - for a prolonged period of conventional conflict - which could be used by crisis managers to resolve the political deadlock." 108 However, the version of 'flexible response' that was finally adopted by NATO in 1967 was quite an emasculated form of McNamara's original propositions. 109 For instance, in the event of a major conventional attack on NATO there was absolutely no resolve of keeping the war conventional and avoiding escalation. This was merely a resolve to best at postpone the decision to escalate. And if the conflict was not soon terminated by political negotiations NATO would go nuclear. The position is atply summarised by Garnett:

...it is important to realise that the flexibility implied by the phrase 'flexible response' does not relate to the decision of whether to escalate, but only to the timing of escalation. The relevant question is not whether to escalate but when to escalate. 110

108. n.82, p.91.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
There has since remained this greater thrust of conventional warfighting in NATO's strategic war-plans. Whereas of late there has not been much of a development in areas of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons which in some cases are being even disbanded and withdrawn (e.g. INF, START etc.) the conventional capabilities have instead been greatly developed in forms of precision guidance missiles, 'intelligent' and 'smart' bombs, stealth bombers and other sophisticated support systems. One common factor for this increasing preference for limiting conflicts to conventional level is what Otto Heilbrunn calls 'backfire effect' of nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{111} According to him the greatest force in favour of observing the limits of nuclear threshold is the fear that resort to nuclear weapons would inevitably invite a nuclear response from the enemy, making war highly dangerous, unpredictable and unmanageable. Unprecedented improvements in the destructiveness of conventional technologies obviously put a great premium on the utility of conventional weapons.\textsuperscript{112} But the US has not accepted the policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons and accordingly nuclear capabilities form an essential element of limited war doctrines.

\textsuperscript{111} Heilbrunn, Otto, Conventional Warfare in the Nuclear Age, n.79, p.21.

\textsuperscript{112} n.87, p.69.
However, all these years, there has been a debate questioning this First-Use-of-Nuclear-Weapons stance NATO's 'flexible response'. Invariably, doubts have been expressed as to whether there are any circumstances in which it would be in the NATO's interest to deliberately cross the nuclear threshold. There have been suggestions that NATO should formally declare its commitment towards 'no-first-use' of nuclear weapons and make greater efforts to strengthen what has been called its 'conventional deterrence'. In fact, these advocates of 'no-first-use' have continuously been campaigning ever since the early 1960s when the Soviets had achieved strategic capabilities of retaliating directly against the United States.113 McGeorge Bundy, George F. Kennan, Robert McNamara, Gerald Smith—all important pillars of American establishment—have been since advocating for adopting a posture of 'no-first-use' by the United States.114 Conventional deterrence has invariably been


cited as essential first step in this regard. It was argued that stronger and more effective conventional deterrence will automatically raise the threshold at which a decision to use nuclear weapons may have to be faced. Samuel Huntington argued that in case NATO's nuclear deterrence was losing its credibility conventional forces should be developed to instill greater confidence. Yet the fear amongst NATO countries of former Soviet Union's conventional superiority has continued to resist any change.

However, the situation today is altogether different. With the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, and disbanding of the Warsaw Pact, the security requirements of the United States as also of the NATO are no longer the same. In fact NATO has lost its raison d'etre and its relevance today has been seriously jeopardised. Americans defence strategy and arsenals are


also today searching for newer justifications. With the kind of chaos that the Russians have inherited they are not in a position to control even their internal crisis, leave alone threatening any other power outside. War in Europe has today ceased to be any imminent possibility. Instead, wave of revolutions in whole of Eastern Europe has ignited the new fire of ethno-nationalism that has diverted the crisis from inter-state to intra-state violence. And it is this threat of ethno-nationalism along with the threats from emerging third world powers the necessity to continue maintaining their superpower weapons arsenals.

In this regard, Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in August 1990 had come very handy for the United States. For President George Bush, who had all these years been much too overwhelmed by trying to keep pace with Gorbachev's 'peace offensives' and disarmament proposals, it had brought a unique opportunity to lay down his New National Security Strategy. Speaking at the 40th anniversary of the Aspen Institute (Colorado) on 2 August, 1990 (virtually hours after the Iraqi forced had marched into Kuwait) he outlined the key components of America's post-cold-war defense strategy. Here, evolving his thesis in the backdrop of the revolutionary changes that were taking place in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe and responding to the immediate stimulant of crisis in this highly sensitive oil-rich Persian Gulf
(where the US had only recently been involved in fighting, first with the Libyans and then with the Iranians), President George Bush placed it on record that with the collapse of the Soviet empire, the strategic spotlights of the United States had been shifted away from their traditional preoccupation with the possibilities of a global conflict with the Soviets in Europe and will be focussed on "regional contingencies" which he said could present themselves in the forms of "terrorism, hostage taking, renegade regimes and unpredictable rulers". 118

Though there was much speculation with the change in administration in January 1993 but as the record of Presidential campaigns show it ample clear "Bush's and Clinton's views on defence are similar in many respects". 119 Both, for instance, have been supporting reductions in military spending, both plan to slow down the modernisation of nuclear forces while preceding with the developments of high-tech


conventional weapons and retain the significant capabilities for military interventions abroad. President Bill Clinton, for instance in an essay in Defence News, while talking of "the new dangers that could threaten over interests and potentially require the use of force" says,

These include: the risk of new threats from the former Soviet republics, should democracy fail; the spread of weapons of mass-destruction; historic tensions in various regions, especially the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East, as well as the growing intensity of ethnic, fundamentalist and separatist violence that could spill across borders in Yugoslavia or elsewhere.120

Therefore, as for trends in American defence strategy the general feelings seems to be growing in favour of the third category of limited war—the one that is meant for dealing with various sub-national unconventional conflicts that occur mainly in the developing world—countries urgency warfare. And it is this area of US warfighting strategy that will need to be watched most carefully in the future.