INTRODUCTION

DETERRENCE AND DECISION MAKING FOR WAR IN THE
INDIAN CONTEXT: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

“Four elements make up the climate of war: danger, exertion, uncertainty, and change. If we consider them together, it becomes evident how fortitude of mind and character are needed to made progress in these impeding elements with safety and success.”

- Carl Von Clausewitz

Peace is the harbinger for economic growth, development, and prosperity of a nation while war causes incalculable casualties and destruction to infrastructure. All nations avoid war; however, wars do take place. History is replete with examples of nations going to war for myriad reasons. Each conflict has a casus- belli, a reason to shift from a state of peace to a state of war. But there is no generalization as to why nations and decision-makers wage war? A scan of all wars since humanity, reveals that the lack of military deterrence by the adversary was one of the important determinants for the decision to go to war. In a number of cases, the nation imposing the deterrent also resorted to war to make its deterrence stronger and more credible by achieving victory in war. World War I began as a dispute, between Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire which snowballed into a world war involving Germany, Russia, France, the United States, Great Britain, and the Ottoman Empire. The German and Austrian leaders believed their enemies were growing in strength and victory would not be possible in the future. Germany’s perception of the growing Russian threat convinced them of a relatively short window of opportunity to act before the rapidly industrialized nation becomes much stronger. A similar analogy was followed by Pakistan to wage a war against India in 1965. The period of 1964-65 was considered a ‘strategic window of opportunity’ before India’s military modernization programme initiated post the Chinese War assumes a deterrent proportion. India’s substantial military superiority in the next four to five years was perceived as a threat to Pakistan.

The failure of the Treaty of Versailles was considered as the principal cause of World War II due to its inability to deter the adversaries from waging war; though there were

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1 Singh, Harjeet, Colonel (Retired), Pentagon’s Military Quotes (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2012) p 54
other causes too like the rise of fascism in Germany, Italy, and Japan. The treaty imposed humiliating conditions on Germany such as paying all the war damages, which outraged the nation. Adolf Hitler, the German leader convinced his countrymen that war was the only mean to restore their honor. The Maginot Line and other extensive defences built after World War I did not deter Germany as it invaded France through the Ardennes forest. The invasion of Poland by Germany made the European powers realize that war was the only way to defeat Germany. Taking a cue from the Treaty of Versailles, India averted imposing any humiliating conditions on Pakistan in the Shimla Agreement signed between the two nations after the 1971 War, that led to the creation of Bangladesh and division of Pakistan. The Agreement ensured peace for nearly two decades till Pakistan after recovering from the humiliation of 1971, initiated another war against India- the Proxy War in J&K in 1990 and later the Kargil War in 1999.

Deterrence has been in existence since time immemorial to manage inter-state relations. The Oxford Dictionary defines deterrence “to discourage or prevent through fear or dislike of the consequences.” The purpose of deterrence in statecraft is to discourage an adversary from taking a decision to wage a war or undertake any hostile action(s) to achieve political objectives due to the fear of adverse consequences. In the olden times, deterrence between antagonistic tribes and states was based on the military capabilities of opposing sides and the coalition between the tribes/nations. In World War I, deterrence was based on the conventional military capabilities and the security alliances/partnerships amongst nations. Conventional military deterrence determined whether or not an adversary would opt for war to achieve political objectives. In the 1930s, the air-power, due to its capacity to cause extensive damage to economic and population centres deep inside the country was considered a sophisticated system of deterrence. The vulnerability of centrally important London had a profound impact on British leaders.

The dropping of the first atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, in August 1945, by the USA during the Second World War triggered a race amongst the advanced nations for developing nuclear weapons. The development of nuclear weapons by the USSR in the fifties transformed the ‘concept of deterrence’ to the

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‘concept of nuclear deterrence’. Deterrence thereafter, became, an essential component of security strategy of a nation and the holding of nuclear weapons by a country became a symbol of power. It was believed that the introduction of such weapons would reduce confrontation and ensure enduring peace. Nuclear deterrence was considered an inherently stable condition.\(^3\) No war of the scale of World War I and II having taken place bears testimony to the stability and peace induced by these weapons.

Nuclear and conventional military capabilities of a nation are considered important determinants to deter war and prevent an adversary from initiating any hostile activity, normally by the threat of military retaliation. Nuclear weapons are not for fighting wars, but to deter wars due to their enormous destructive power, while conventional weapons are required to fight wars. Thus, both nuclear and conventional capabilities are required to maintain peace and stability. While nuclear capability averts war, conventional military capability achieves victory in war by inflicting severe punishment on the enemy, capture or deny territory and minimize attrition to itself. However, Iraq was not deterred by the military capability of the USA when it invaded Kuwait that led to the 1990-91 Gulf War. Iraq perhaps miscalculated US reaction who had also not tried to pose any threat to deter it. “Had Saddam known that invading Kuwait would spur Washington to launch a decisive war against him, he surely would have refrained.”\(^4\) As the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was unexpected, the US had not prepared to make a deterrent threat. In contemporary history, the reasons for launching and sustaining the war and justifying war will always vary.

India and Pakistan have gone to war four times and were on the brink of another one while India and China have fought one war. China invaded India in 1962, considering, among other reasons, the military weakness of the latter. Pakistan launched a military invasion against India in 1965, perceiving low morale of the Indian Army after the humiliation of 1962 War with China. The conviction of the Indian political leadership that purely diplomatic deterrence was adequate to safeguard the country was shattered convincing it to acquire a military capability of sizable proportions to deter its adversaries. Pakistan’s motive to launch the Kargil intrusions in 1999 was based on

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the assumption that the Indian Army, due to its continuous deployment in counter-insurgency operations would be incapable of evicting the intrusions and its nuclear capability would deter an all-out-war.

China acquired nuclear capability in 1964, while India and Pakistan became overt nuclear powers in May 1998. The nuclear weapons, unlike the stability provided at the global level, have not ushered the desired peace in the case of India-Pakistan relations. Instead, they have intensified the confrontation, as Pakistan is blatantly employing the shield of nuclear weapons to export terrorism into India. Nuclear weapons have, however, deterred full-scale conventional wars in 1999 and 2001-02. The ongoing proxy war in J&K and the Kargil intrusions in 1999 are manifestations of Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent capability. Nuclear weapons have not deterred acts of terrorism worldwide. Israel, since its independence in 1948, faced problems of terrorism and non-state actors patronized by its neighboring Arab states. Israel developed deterrence through military retribution across the borders against terrorist organizations like the Hezbollah and Hamas. The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York, in September 2001, triggered the global war on terror (GWOT) led by the USA. The Taliban, after suffering initial setbacks, has rejuvenated and the USA is contemplating complete withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In world politics, having military force alone may not be sufficient to end rivalries and conflicts. It needs to be made more effective by statecraft in synergizing other elements of national power and policies which include economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, strong political alliances or partnerships, UN resolutions, and shaping of the international environment to resolve confrontations without war or even through sponsored acts of terrorism. The end of the cold war, the globalization phenomenon and economic interdependence have reduced the erstwhile pre-dominant significance of nuclear weapons. A visible shift is taking place on the reliance on a ‘Non-Nuclear Strategic Deterrence (NNSD)’. NNSD comprises economic power, demographic profile, cultural strength, technological advancement including cyber and space capability, media control, leadership, and security alliances/ partnerships. The relative strength of these instruments of power with military might as a pivotal force and the willingness to leverage them to pursue national interests collectively comprises national power and provides the desired deterrence against an adversary.
War is an act of policy intending to achieve a political objective. The decision for war is part of the overall domain of the grand strategy of a nation. It is the last resort when all other means, i.e. diplomacy, economic sanctions, international pressure, alliances, and threat to use force fail to achieve political objectives. However, war is not an isolated act that springs up suddenly, it normally follows the paradigm of Peace - Confrontation - Crisis - Conflict - War - Resolution. Wars are generally fought to restore peace and seldom to further improve a prevailing peace, but very rarely the wars have resulted in establishing enduring peace. A confrontation occurs due to a conflict of interests between nations. During the confrontation period, political and diplomatic means take precedence over military means. A crisis occurs when a nation initiates some sort of conflict behavior leading to conflict at the tactical and war at the strategic level. Crisis do not generally have a pre-crisis period but develop through certain reiterative patterns, ultimately leading to a narrowing down of options available. Crisis represent some sort of a reminder to the decision-makers that the deterrence is yielding ground to decision-making for war. Threat or use of force conversely supports deterrence in the future. The cold-war confrontation between the US and the erstwhile USSR, and their allies, from the conclusion of World War II till the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1992 was a confrontation at the global level that ended peacefully. In the Indian context, the ongoing India-Pakistan confrontation is intense while the India-China relationship lies at a lower level of confrontation.

The present international environment driven by the phenomenon of globalization is creating a complex web of interdependence amongst nations. The global strategic architecture driven by ‘balance of interests’ is paving the way for new bilateral and multi-alliances/ partnerships that inherently deter war. Geopolitics, geostrategy, and geo-economics have assumed centre-stage. Countries today are increasingly engaging each other on a vast spectrum of activities related to economic development that inherently induces cooperation and avoids confrontation.

India’s emerging security environment has numerous challenges and opportunities. The unresolved boundary dispute with China, in the backdrop of its growing regional and global power aspirations, is leading to the frequent display of aggressive posturing along the border. Pakistan’s continuous export of cross-border terrorism and abetment of an ongoing proxy war in J&K, with no resolution in sight, poses a serious

challenge. The development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are manifestations of the growing China-Pakistan collusion aggravating India’s security challenges. At present, these are low-level threats well-within the capability of diplomacy to manage, but their escalation to conflicts along the LAC and LoC are within the realms of possibility. The probability of further escalation of conflicts to war with either of the neighbors is low, but cannot be entirely ruled out. While diplomacy strives to resolve disputes, it needs the support of a strong military capability. The long gestation period for capability-building encumbered by endless procedural requirements underlines the need for long-term perspective planning.

There are opportunities for India at the regional and global level, to leverage its growing economic strength and geo-strategic location. India is seen as a significant player in the evolving politico-economic and security architecture in the Indo-Pacific as part of the US policy of rebalancing Asia. India’s ‘Act East’ policy reflects its deepening engagement with the states of the Indo-Pacific region. India has also restored its erstwhile friendly ties with Russia and build up its existing partnerships in Europe, Africa, and West Asia. It is making efforts to give a fresh thrust to initiatives like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

**The Significance of the Study**

The Constitution enjoins upon the nation to protect its national interests of safeguarding its sovereignty and promoting international peace as well as security. For this, it is necessary that a nation attains a level of internal, economic and military strength to create a viable win-win situation. However, history stands testimony to the fact that an environment of peace and stability needed for the growth and development of a nation is often disturbed by military conflicts including Low Intensity Conflict Operations (LICO) and wars. The war in today’s environment will give a notion of victory for a limited time and space but will set back the economy of both the warring nations. This highlights the inescapable necessity of developing a viable deterrence capability, not only in terms of military strength alone but developing all other elements of national power to prevent war and ensure enduring

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6 Dwivedi, GG, Major General (Professor) SM, VSM and Bar, (Retired), *Global Geo-Strategic Security Scan* (New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, 2017) pp 30-31
peace. It is incumbent upon the policymakers to assiduously evolve plans for capability development that enhances the deterrence against adversaries.

In the modern context, deterrence comprises soft and hard power. The former is power to persuade by all means, less military might, and the latter is power to coerce largely by application of military might. In the Indian context, where unresolved problems exist with hostile neighbors, it is imperative to develop a military capability in conjunction with other elements of national power to be able to deter war. In this era of information, soft power is applied consistently over the long term and is designed to encourage cooperation and accommodation and thus prevent war. However soft power is not all soft but reflects hard power. Without power, there is no such thing like soft power. Deterrence or soft power needs to be backed by hard power. It is only when deterrence is not working or losing its utility/purpose, that the challenge of decision making for war is triggered. The study will enable the policymakers to identify meaningful determinants for sizing up our deterrence and decision making for war in the future.

**Statement of the Problem**

Deterrence is an interim condition between peace and war to maintain a status quo by deterring war. It is only when deterrence fails, that a decision is taken to go to war. Conflicts amongst nations are common but can be contained and managed by deterrence which is accommodative (a give and take approach) with a shadow of the threat of war at the background. Deterrence deals with the prevention of war and decision-making for war lend itself to decisive employment of military force with the political objectives being the same. Deterrence while preventing the application of military force, provides more time to prepare and enhance its effectiveness with minimum collateral damage as and when it is employed. A decisive victory in war provides credibility to deterrence in the future. A definite linkage thus exists between deterrence and decision-making for war. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin with deterrence manifesting to prevent war and the decision prosecuting the war. Deterrence decisively influences the decision-making for war. Deterrence should succeed in convincing the enemy that the cost of exercising an option of war will outweigh manifold the perceived benefit accruing out of it.

Decision-making for war is a complex and difficult task as war entails large-scale irreversible loss of lives and destruction, and the outcome impacts the nation’s
prestige besides political/diplomatic gains. The biggest challenge to decision-making for war is the uncertainty of escalation from conventional to nuclear war, particularly between nuclear-powered countries. Lack of information, gaps in understanding the situation, difficulty in knowing and doubts (or fears) of the consequences of the decision-making for war or use of force impact the decision for war. For instance, the use of force for the elimination of Bin Laden was aborted on five to six occasions before it was successfully accomplished in 2011. The primary objective of national security during peace is to create capabilities that deter a potential adversary from undertaking any inimical activities that are detrimental to the vital interests of the other nation. The capabilities developed over a period of time are the sum total of a nation’s comprehensive national power. The destructive power of the war enjoins upon the countries to avert it by developing viable military deterrence.

**The Scope of the Study**

The study will examine and analyze various determinants and decision-making for war and their application, in the Indian context. Determinants for deterrence and decision-making for war will generally be the same with marginal variation. The present state of the determinants for effective deterrence will be examined along with recommendations to improve them. For a better understanding of the linkage between deterrence and decision-making in the Indian context, an in-depth study of the following wars will be carried out to understand the relevance and significance of various determinants:

(a) India-Pakistan War 1947-48.
(b) India--China War 1962.
(c) India- Pakistan War 1965
(d) India-Pakistan War 1971.
(e) India-Pakistan Kargil War 1999.

A critical analysis of decision-making for war will provide an insight into the logical reasoning for application or non-employment of force with the concomitant lessons and ramifications for the future. Recommendations necessary to strengthen the decision-making process will be inferred from a holistic examination and application of India’s decision-making mechanism in various wars and crisis situations.
Objectives of the Study

The study will focus on the following aspects: -

(a) Analyze the various components of deterrence.
(b) Understand the application of various determinants for deterrence and decision making for war in the Indian context.
(c) Examine challenges to deterrence and responses with respect to the use or non-use of military force.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be validated: -

(a) Deterrence is an essential part of ‘Decision Making for War’ in the Indian context.
(b) Vacillation in the use of force/other instruments has impacted deterrence in India.

Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted was historical, exploratory and analytical for which extensive survey was conducted utilizing both primary and secondary sources. A questionnaire was built up including interviews of a wide spectrum of experts in the field of diplomacy, military and bureaucracy to get a broad spectrum of the nuances of deterrence and decision-making. The author examined relevant primary and secondary sources to substantiate points of view.

Chapters

The study is structured in the following manner: -

(a) Introduction.

(b) Chapter 1. Determinants of Deterrence in India. It traces the evolution of deterrence to the present-day concept of NNSD, drawing linkages of nuclear with conventional military capability. Concepts, strategies, forms of deterrence and challenges have been discussed. Various determinants of deterrence are deliberated on, along with their application in the Indian context.
(c) **Chapter 2. Decision Making for War in the Indian context.** It discusses the paradigm of war with possibilities of appropriate decisions to diffuse the crisis. The various determinants for decision-making have been discussed with examples taken from India’s wars.

(d) **Chapter 3. Case Studies of India’s Wars fought post-independence.** India’s wars with Pakistan in 1947-48, 1965, 1971, 1999, with China in 1962 and also the mobilization of 2001-2002 have been analyzed from the perspective of deterrence and decision-making.

(e) **Conclusion and Recommendations.** Discusses recommendations to build up deterrence and strengthen decision-making for war.