
UNIT 5 TYPES OF WAR: CONVENTIONAL WAR, LIMITED WAR AND NUCLEAR WAR

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

Discussion about contemporary warfare in the nuclear age is usually done at two levels: One that seeks to explain the continuation of conventional warfare that continued to dominate the pattern of conflicts after the Second World War. In this discussion one sees the manner in which conventional warfare continued despite the induction of the nuclear weapons that were supposed to make conventional warfare obsolete. Discussion is also focussed on the way in which nuclear weapons did, however, seek to put limitations on the concepts of total war that had been the feature of the two great wars. This brought forward the concept of 'Limited War'. Further one would also have to look at the concept of nuclear war. While one may recognise that in the post Hiroshima-Nagasaki day's nuclear weapons have not been used, one would have to look at the reasons as to the avoidance of the use of these weapons of mass destruction. In seeking answers to this question, one would have to look at the concepts of nuclear strategy that made this peculiar situation of building up of a nuclear arsenal for its non-use a reality.

Thus, when we seek to categorise wars we make a distinction between 'total' wars and 'limited' wars. The basis of this categorisation was the position of the two superpowers, USA and USSR on concerned war. A total war was one which involved attacks on the homelands of the two superpowers. It was total because there was no limitation placed on either the objectives of war or the means used to conduct it. A limited war on the other hand was a conflict in which the homelands of the two superpowers were not involved in.

the conflict. The war was limited both in the objectives of the war and the means used to fight it: The alternative **terms** used to describe these wars are 'general war' for the term total war and 'local war' for the **term** limited war.

The second level of discussion focuses on an entirely new pattern of warfare that has emerged in the post-war era. This warfare is within the broad ambit of 'internal security' and covers such types of wars like revolutionary wars, civil wars, insurgency, and the modern era asymmetric warfare of and on terrorism. This unit focuses on the first level of 'thinking on warfare and as such discusses the following types of warfare: Conventional war (in the nuclear age), Limited War, and Nuclear War.

5.2 WARS IN THE NUCLEAR AGE: AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Approaches to understanding warfare in the immediate years after the Second World War had a residual impact of the experiences of the two Great Wars. These wars were 'total wars' that the **countries** had put in all their productivity into the war effort and the war was waged almost globally. Theories of air power and mechanised warfare were most significant during the inter-war years. General Arnold of the United States had argued that atomic energy had made air power all-important. The Finletter Report (USA, 1948) also focussed on air power as the base of military security. One of the first books on nuclear strategy published in 1959 by Bernard Brodie had emphasised the links between World War theories of strategic bombing and post-war nuclear strategy. In fact, until the appearance of the hydrogen bomb in 1952, the victors of the Second World War had continued to train **their** forces in the traditional patterns of air, sea and land campaigns.

But the introduction of nuclear weapons in the United States and the Soviet Union **had led** to two beliefs: that conventional land warfare had now become obsolete and that the possession of the atomic bomb conferred immunity from attack or exceptional power base to the countries concerned. The Korean War (1950-53) shattered both these myths. The Americans sought to keep the war limited for two reasons. They wanted to avoid a direct **confrontation** with the Soviets and also avoid a long drawn out war with China. Consequently the Korean War was fought on traditional lines – the war stabilised around the 18th Parallel with both sides seeking to gain and consolidate their positions along the parallel. Still, it is the lessons of Korea and related developments around the early 1950 that led to an effort to integrate nuclear weapons in military strategy.

The developments of the 1950s were to contribute to a rethinking on **the** way countries **were** to use their armed forces in the future. The Americans were determined to ensure that they would now not get bogged down in an outdated **form** of warfare and suffer casualties as they did in Korea. On the European front, the Americans faced Soviet reluctance to withdraw their forces from Eastern Europe. The **communist** revolution in China brought Mao Tse-tung to power, while the imperial powers were fast losing their colonies in Asia. The Soviets entered the atomic age and within a short period the Americans were confronted with a reality of nuclear weapons on both sides of the ideological divide.

In 1950, Liddell Hart, in his collected essays titled, 'Defence of **the** West', argued that nuclear weapons had not **made** other weapons obsolete. He also cautioned that the West

must not place too much reliance on the nuclear weapons. He argued that the Soviets were far less vulnerable to nuclear attacks than the Western countries. In any case, the possession of nuclear weapons by both the sides had ensured that they would deter the countries from using them. Hart disagreed with the perception of Field Marshal Montgomery who had talked of an Allied victory in a possible World War III. He recognised that an all out total war with nuclear weapons would be disastrous. He argued in favour of trying to limit war.

The mid fifties provided some other experiences that were to contribute to the understanding of war in the nuclear age. The Korean War had proved that possession of nuclear weapons had proved irrelevant to the direction that the war eventually took. In Vietnam, the French suffered a humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The eventual withdrawal of the French from Vietnam and the entry of Americans did not see the use of nuclear weapons here. The considerations that had led President Truman to avoid the deployment of nuclear weapons in Korea and those that persuaded President Eisenhower to desist from using them in Vietnam in 1955 were essentially the same. Both sought to limit the war for strategic reasons: in order to avoid a direct confrontation with either Soviets or a long drawn out war with China. In the Suez war of 1956, the Anglo French forces were under similar constraint. They could not use nuclear weapons; they also could not direct air strikes against civilian targets due to domestic and international pressures.

5.3 CONVENTIONAL WAR IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

Conventional warfare has witnessed three important watersheds in its evolution during the last three hundred years. The first generation warfare reflected the tactics of the era of the smoothbore musket, the tactics of the line and column. These tactics were a product of the technology of the days – the line maximised the firepower. The second-generation warfare was a product of the rifled musket, breechloaders, barbed wire, machine gun and indirect fire. Tactics were based on the ability of movement that the new technology provided. There was an increased reliance on artillery in the second generation, as compared to the infantry that had been the mainstay of the first generation. Firepower had replaced manpower. The third generation warfare continued to use the technological base of the earlier period. Its reliance on massive firepower continued to become more sophisticated with better technology. The real change in the third generation came in the concepts and ideas of warfare. The Germans for example developed radically new tactics based on manoeuvre rather than attrition: the blitzkrieg is one classic example.

Today, we are entering into the fourth generation warfare methods. This era is likely to see the battlefield include the entire society rather than the restricted battlefield of the earlier generations. It would also see a decreased dependence on centralised logistics. The military machine is likely to be leaner and technologically sophisticated as compared to the mass armies of the earlier days. Another important tactical change is the efforts made at collapsing the enemy internally rather than defeat in an all out war. This warfare will see an advance in both ideas and technology.

It is in the late 1950s that a perception about the status of conventional war in the age of nuclear weapons starts to become more articulate. The Americans and French were frustrated with their experiences in the East. The British were equally frustrated in their attempts to retain influence in the Middle East. The growth of national liberation struggles

and the spread of the anti-colonial movements had an impact on the perception of the Western powers. This was further complicated by the overt and covert support that these movements received from the Soviets and the Chinese.

The British position was that large forces raised through conscription on the lines of the world war experiences had now become obsolete. Military forces of the day were not meant to win wars but to prevent them. The campaigns of the earlier days and the concept of total war were no more relevant today. Liddell Hart was to argue that if war could not be prevented by deterrence it was best kept limited so as to avoid total destruction. Henry Kissinger had argued that a nation's military strength was to be employed to support its policy. He had favoured the concept of limited nuclear wars; but eventually argued in favour of limiting the scope of war. American policies regarding nuclear war and the strategies designed to tackle the Soviet threat were to evolve over the years. These are discussed in greater details in the section on Nuclear War.

Andre Beaufre in his book, *Introduction to Strategy*, has listed five choices of total strategy. He advocated that the West pursue a 'total' strategy that would embrace the political, economic, and diplomatic activity, backed by the threat to use force or the actual use of it. The five choices were as follows:

- i) Direct threat may be employed when one has ample resources and objective is not of overwhelming importance. Such a threat may be exercised by a nuclear power on a non-nuclear power, though in reality this may not be practicable (as was seen in Korea).
- ii) The second choice is of indirect pressure. This is used when the objectives are of relatively less importance and the resources available to exert a threat are also not adequate. This is done by a sustained diplomatic, political, and economic pressure backed by the threat of use of force. Beaufre cites Hitler's example in this regard.
- iii) The third choice is a series of successive actions, a nibbling process against one's adversary. The presumption here is that the resources available are relatively less and an all out action may be suicidal.
- iv) A low intensity protracted struggle that is long drawn is the fourth choice. The revolutionary wars of the Third World have used this strategy. Mao Tse tung's approach to war may be one of the best example in this context. Here there is a recognition that the resources are really limited and that they have to deal with the adversary in a low intensity conflict and not with a direct confrontation.
- v) Finally there is the choice of an all out battle. The aim is military victory, the presumption is of total force superiority and here the fear of nuclear confrontation or risk does not exist.

Beaufre maintained that the objective of strategy was to achieve and maintain freedom of action and to try to limit that of the enemy.

The Soviet position after the 1917 revolution was influenced by ideological debates of the times. The need of the time was a disciplined, trained, professional army; but this went against the fundamentals of the revolution that called for a proletariat army. Eventually, the urgency of the need of the hour prevailed and Czarist officers were called back into service.

The Soviet view of conventional war has traditionally stressed on the utility of offence as the best form of strategy. The ability and the willingness to take the offensive in order to pre-empt the enemy had been a consistent theme in Soviet thinking. Until Stalin was alive, the traditional concept as symbolised by the Great Patriotic War continued to dominate; nuclear weapons did not seem to alter this perception. The Soviet concept of strategic culture is used to discuss specific national approaches. It is grounded in geopolitical and historical circumstances. It views the Soviet Union as having faced aggression over past several centuries and today being surrounded by hostile powers.

5.4 REGIONAL CONFLICTS

One of the important dimensions of conventional war in the nuclear age is the concept of regional conflicts that were either supported directly or indirectly by the superpowers. One may look at two types of such conflicts: one that have seen an indirect intrusion by an extra regional power and one that has a Super /Great power in direct confrontation with the regional power.

One may consider some selective cases in this context. At the first level one may include wars of the Middle East and wars fought by India (with China and Pakistan). At another level, one would have to consider wars fought by Super/Great powers against smaller powers like the Falklands conflict and Iraq war (1990 and 2003).

Middle East has seen several wars between the Arab states and Israel. The first of the war took place at the time of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948; followed by the wars of 1967 and 1973. The United States has been a traditional supporter of Israel. This support has come in terms of armaments, logistic support and finances. The Arab states have had Soviet support during the wars. Egypt and Syria in particular had benefited from Soviet support in their fight against the Israelis.

The case of Indo-Pakistani wars is in a sense similar. While one may not have seen an explicit American and Soviet support in the wars of 1947-48 and 1965; the 1971 war did see a clear positioning of the Americans and the Soviets. The American 'tilt' towards Pakistan as articulated by Resident Nixon of the United States and the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation (1971) symbolised respectively the interest of the superpowers in the subcontinent. But India had also benefited from American help in the 1962 war with China.

At another level are wars fought by great powers against small powers. The Falklands war between the British and Argentina is one such example. The issue at stake was the island of Falkland that was under the British trusteeship and was taken over by Argentina. The Argentinean argument had been that it was a part of the process of decolonisation: while the British argued that the Falkland islanders were to be given the right to self-determination and eventual independence.

The key feature of all these wars was the local/regional nature of its geopolitical scope. The wars did not spill over into a global confrontation within a cold war framework.

5.5 LIMITED WAR

Ever since the world wars it was assumed that war would always be a total war. In the age of nuclear weapons, especially during the years of nuclear monopoly of the United States, this perception was expressed as a policy of 'massive retaliation'. (See next unit for details of this and related concepts). Eventually, with both the United States and the Soviet Union having emerged as nuclear weapons powers, 'deterrence' became the key to security policy of these countries. The logic of deterrence was based on the idea of mutual vulnerability to attack. To put it simplistically, a possible strike by one country would be countered by a retaliatory strike by the other. This capability of a retaliatory strike was to prevent the first country from striking in the first place.

However, the Korean War (1950-1953) showed that the existence of nuclear weapons and deterrence on both sides of the Cold War leaders did not prevent a conflict between the two cold war rivals. It was true that the conflict did not involve the two superpowers in a direct state of confrontation, but their attempts at exploring and testing the determination of each other with limited rather than unlimited manner as would have been the case in the age of the world wars. The war was fought with restraint and with channels of communications open to ensure that it does not escalate into a major confrontation. Thus the age of 'limited war' had begun.

The concept of limited war as it originally developed focussed on the conflicts between the two superpowers that were fought, not on their soil or directly fought in other areas of the world. Therefore, when one tries to understand the 'limited' nature of limited war, the focus is on of the abundant military power that both the superpowers have but do not actually use in such a war.

How is a limited war different from a general war? The most important feature that makes limited war different from a general war is the deliberate restraint that is exercised by the warring parties in the conduct of the war. This restraint is directly related to the capability of the nation to fight a war. In case the capability is limited then the restraint is not a deliberate one, it is a product of the limited capability. It is precisely because of this that the concept of limited war was used mainly in the context of wars in which the great powers were involved – they had the capability to fight an unrestricted war but they decide not to do so for a variety of reasons that we shall see later. Logically, the nuclear doctrines that called for strategic bombing of cities would also not be applicable here. The best description would be calling it a deliberate hobbling of oneself in the conduct of war.

The logical questions to ask are why this limitation and how is it achieved? The first focuses on the determinants of policy while the second on the actual process of limitation.

5.5.1 Determinants of Policy

The Seminar on Capabilities and Techniques of American Armament for Limited War, held in 1957, defined the war as follows: 'A limited war is fought to achieve a limited objective.' In the achievement of this objective a nation may be expected to plan to expend a limited

amount of its national resources and in carrying out the war it may be expected to plan to hold the war to a limited geographic area'.

Therefore, limited war is one that is fought to achieve limited objectives. One must understand that the restraint necessary to keep the war limited is on **means** and not so much on the **ends**. One must also understand that there is a willingness to limit the objectives because of the need to keep the war limited and not the other way round. These limitations are not because of the feeling that the objectives to be pursued through the war are relatively less important and hence the willingness to limit them. The rationale is in the problems that may arise if the war is not limited and it eventually escalates into a bigger war.

It is this fear of a general war that had been a matter of great concern amongst the Western powers in the 1950s. This fear was referred to as the fear of 'escalation'. The desire to avoid a general war that may have been a product of escalation of a limited local conflict was the central theme in keeping to the limited nature of objectives and the deliberate restraint that was sought to be exercised.

One of the debates that came to be conducted in the context of the objectives of limited war was the role of force in international relations in general. The Americans argued that force should not be used offensively by the United States to alter boundaries and that only that much force should be used to resist **opposing** forces as was necessary. The Soviets and the Chinese, on the other hand, have considered force as a legitimate instrument of policy and have justified its use for expanding the area of socialist control. These different perceptions have had an impact on the approach to limited war.

Another factor that has an influence on the objectives of a limited war is domestic public opinion. In case of both, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, domestic public opinion had an impact on the American approach to these wars. One may argue that Soviet action in Afghanistan after 1979, American actions in Iraq during 1990 and 2003 had seen a similar deliberate restraint. In all these events, domestic compulsions had played a role in varying degrees.

5.5.2 The Limitation Process

The limiting process of a limited war focuses on the operative dimensions of the war. The limitations of policy are seen in real terms in the limitations placed on the geography, targets, weapons and the extent of participation by the great powers.

The geographic limitations refer to the area that comes under conflict. The Korean War was restricted to the Korean peninsula; the Vietnam War to Indochina; the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to those countries. These wars also did not impinge on the homeland of the superpowers. Further, there was a limitation on the targets of attack. The targets were either military installations or industrial and infrastructure facilities. Except, perhaps, in some cases in Vietnam, the targets were not civilian population. The targets were also not

beyond the geographic area of the conflict. They did not include the homeland of the United States, Soviet Union or China.

There has been a lot of debate on the question of use of nuclear weapons in a limited conflict. At one level there was a realisation that the domestic public opinion would have been extremely critical of their use in the post **Hiroshima-Nagasaki** period. There was also the fear of escalation into an entirely uncharted arena of weapons system. Three reasons have been given for the non-use of nuclear weapons by the United States in Korea. First, was the American military assessment that Korea was a diversionary tactic encouraged by the Soviet Union and that the real battle was to be fought elsewhere. Second was the ground assessment made that stated that there were no clear-cut target for the use of such weapons. Such an assessment had depended upon the perception of nuclear weapons use as ultimate weapons of mass destruction and not as tactical weapons of small intensity. Third, was the strong opposition from its ally the United Kingdom. Today, with the emergence of tactical nuclear weapons and the possibility of restricting the fallout of a nuclear bomb to a specific geographic area, the relevance of nuclear weapons in such a conflict is bound to be discussed as a probable reality.

On the issue of participation by different states, it needs to be pointed out that in so far as the two superpowers are concerned their participation has ranged from indifference to support on to actual combat. In **Indo-Pakistan** wars these countries have participated only in an extremely indirect way. This may include diplomatic pressure or economic sanctions. On the other hand, Americans have committed troops in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq and the Soviets in Afghanistan.

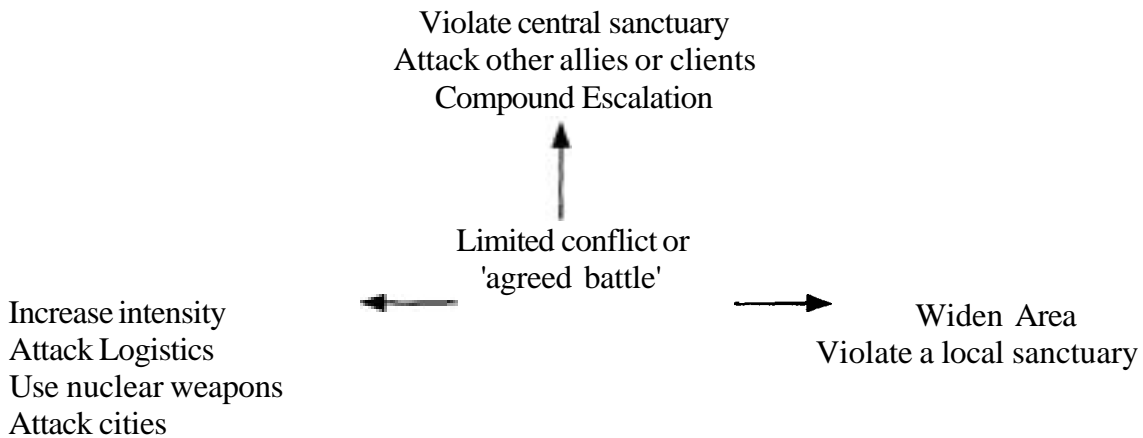
5.5.3 The Concept of Escalation

It is true that the central concern of a limited war is over the degree of restraint that can be exercised as has been discussed above. Yet there are many reasons why a nation may want to escalate a limited conflict. Escalation may be used as a threat to the other side of an all out war; it may be done for preventing a total defeat; or simply as a reaction to the possibility of the other side escalating.

Herman Kahn has presented a diagrammatic pattern of escalation of a limited conflict. There are three ways to escalate:

- i) Increase the intensity of the conflict by a quantitative increase like attacking logistic centres, use of nuclear weapons or attack cities. These would be stages by which the intensity of a limited war may be increased in terms of the intensity of the battle.
- ii) The second way would be to widen the area of conflict. This refers to the geographic expansion of the area of conflict.
- iii) The third way is to compound escalation by creating a new crisis. This would include attack on allies or attacking establishments of the enemy that are outside the boundaries of the enemy state or states.

Three ways to escalate a limited conflict



Source: (Kahn, 1970).

Is there a victor in a limited war? This would be a **difficult** question to answer. Since both sides are fighting with limits on their objectives and with deliberate restraints, such wars are unlikely to have 'final' results. General Douglas **MacArthur** had remarked in the context of Korean War that there was no substitute to victory. However, this statement fails to reflect the pattern of conflict in today's times.

5.6 NUCLEAR WAF?

Hiroshima and **Nagasaki** have been, as of today, the only instances when nuclear weapons were actually used in war. They were used at a time when the Americans had a monopoly of such weapons. The Soviets were to develop their first nuclear weapon in 1949, followed by the British in 1952, then the French in 1960 and the Chinese in 1964. Of the recent countries that entered openly this nuclear weapons club are India and Pakistan in 1998. Today, Israel and North Korea are suspect of having nuclear weapons and some other countries like Iran of aspiring for them.

While **atomic** weapons **have** not been used since the end of the Second World War, there has been a significant improvement in their design, their destructive power and their sophistication of design. Given the phenomenal destructive capability of such weapons if used by the warring countries, and a realisation that any conceived nuclear war would only end up destroying **both-the** warring countries along with a general destruction elsewhere, strategic thinking about nuclear war has revolved around their non-use rather than their use. Earlier theories of deterrence and brinkmanship have evolved into sophisticated **arguments** on how to avoid a nuclear confrontation.

This section on nuclear war focuses on the evolution of nuclear strategy, with special reference to American and Soviet strategies, wherein nuclear strategy is really a study of the non-use of nuclear weapons.

5.6.1 Understanding Key Concepts

Before we examine the nuclear strategy of these two superpowers it is necessary to **understand** some of the key concepts that are used in the discussion on nuclear strategy..

Deterrence: The advent of nuclear weapons changed the perceptions about approaches to security. Traditional approaches to security had argued for a strategy of defence or offence. Thus a nation could **achieve** security through its ability to defend itself from an attack or take an offensive posture to repel an attack. The introduction of nuclear weapons changed the strategies to be used for security of the **nation**. The presumption here was that both the parties to the dispute possessed nuclear weapons and had the ability to use them against the adversary.

Defence as a strategy simply meant that **one** would deny the opponent what he seeks to gain from the conflict. Deterrence was a different strategy. If the opponent was seeking for some gain then one would **thwart the** opponent from using force by projecting a possibility of some sort of reprisal for the original action. Simply put, it meant that the opponent would have to pay a price for the action that he has planned. This is a threat that one gives to the opponent to desist from use of force. One would argue that if the opponent was seeking territorial gains he would have to pay a price for that; it was a sort of a punishment for the action that he would take. What is more important is that one would have to be clear in communicating to the opponent what price he may have to pay for his proposed action. This price **that** one is asking from or the punishment that one would impose on the opponent would have to be credible. The threat has to be credible. The opponent must believe that if any action is taken he would have to pay the price and that the threat that is issued is not a **bluff** or a hoax. Finally, one would also have to keep certain options open for the opponent to seek a face saving solution. This process consists in influencing the mental **calculations** of the opponent. The entire process is conducted prior to actual action being taken by either party. One establishes a psychological relationship with the opponent. This psychological relationship is called deterrence. It is useful only before the actual breakout of war. Deterrence seeks to avoid a conflict; a war breaking out is a failure of deterrence.

In a sense deterrence has two contradictory concepts ingrained **in** it. At one level, both the opposing countries are in a state of readiness, **armed** with nuclear weapons. Both have the capability to strike and destroy the other; and also to retaliate if struck in the first place. Both are aware of each other's capabilities as these are not hidden but are well exposed and exhibited. The communication between the rivals is kept open to indicate all the possible scenarios of threat that may be used. Yet at another level, simultaneously to all of this, both seek to avoid the very conflict for which they are preparing. This is because both are unwilling to pay the massive 'price' for their original actions. They are aware of the **mutual** vulnerability that they live under. They **are** thus prepared for a war that they both would **try** to avoid. If war does break out, deterrence would have failed and then defence would have to take over.

Brinkmanship: The term brinkmanship draws its origin from the analogy of a glass of water. Any glass of water has a limit to which water can be filled. That limit is its brink. If one continues to pour water beyond its **capacity** the water would overflow. Similarly, any

two nations have a certain limit up to which they can contain mutual tensions. If tensions continue to increase beyond a certain **limit**, which is beyond the brink, they would overflow into a war.

There is an implicit meaning as also an assumption in the concept of brinkmanship. Both the opposing nations are **aware** of the rise in tensions. Perhaps, both are interested in increasing them for their own benefit. Both are aware of the brink up to which they can raise the tensions. At the point that they would reach the brink they would ensure that tensions are de-escalated to **avoid** a possible war.

The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) presents a classic case of brinkmanship. Both the **Americans** and the Soviets were in confrontation with each other over the naval blockade that the Americans had imposed over Cuba. Both took the tensions up to the brink. At that point they suspected and feared that a war was likely to break out – and such a war would conceivably have been a nuclear war. Then the process of de-escalation was initiated.

Coercive diplomacy: There are four elements in coercive diplomacy:

- a) Punishment: Raise the cost of resistance to one's demands by inflicting direct or indirect **suffering on civilians**.
- b) Risk Target civilian economy and society. While punishment may involve a sudden **attack** on the enemy, risk strategy is a gradual punishment that one inflicts over a **period of time**.
- c) Denial: This is a demonstration of one's ability to defeat the enemy in a battle.
- d) Decapitation: This is a strategy to kill or overthrow top leadership or destroy the command and control system of the enemy.

Compellence: The strategy of compellence is used if and when deterrence fails. This strategy is the use of force to make the **opponent** take some specific course of action. Deterrence requires that the opponent desist from initiating a **particular** action. Compellence comes as a strategy to force the opponent to change the course of action initiated by him. Compellence optimally requires positive compliance by the enemy. This is **different from** deterrence as deterrence simply calls for inaction, while compellence calls for positive action, as one wants it. Compellence also calls for inflicting punishment if the compliance does not occur.

5.6.2 Strategies

What are the various strategies that can be used to either fight or deter a nuclear war? The following strategies have been identified for this purpose: (i) Minimum deterrence; (ii) credible first strike and (iii) assured destruction. The last strategy has various versions to it that depend on the capability of a nation.

The strategy of minimum **deterrence** implies that a small strategic nuclear force is to be used to attack the enemy population centres. The purpose of this attack is to convince the enemy that if the enemy commits the first strike, retaliatory force would be used. This

implies that the country must have a capability to strike back if attacked in a first strike. This **capability** means that the nation must be able to absorb the first strike and survive to be able to strike back in retaliation. This retaliatory capability is the key to the creation of a minimum deterrence situation.

The capability of **first strike** calls for a large strategic force that will be able to inflict a significant damage on the enemy in the first attack itself. The country must be able to destroy most of the strategic forces of the enemy in its first strike. The utility of the first strike is to convey to the enemy that any grave provocation will lead to such a strike that would destroy the strategic forces of the enemy.

Assured destruction strategy is based on the assumption that if the enemy makes a first strike attack, one must have the ability to absorb the strike and conduct a retaliatory strike that would destroy the enemy's society. This retaliatory strike is not a minimal strike as mentioned **above**, but a large-scale strategic attack. In other words it is the ability to absorb a surprise attack and survive with sufficient power to inflict unacceptable damage on the aggressor.

The US believed that the vague threats of the possibility of use of nuclear weapons had finally ended the Korean War (see details of Korean War in earlier section) and brought the Chinese to the negotiation table. President Eisenhower later had sought the use of deterrence strategy to tackle the problem of security. In 1954, John Foster Dulles of the United States spelt out his doctrine of **massive retaliation**. The goal of this strategy was to maximise deterrence at bearable cost. The argument had been that local defences need to be reinforced by the fullest deterrent of massive retaliation so that the potential aggressor cannot choose the place of aggression. Thus, in the event of another proxy war like Korea, the United States would retaliate with the use of nuclear weapons against the Soviets or the Chinese.

But the doctrine of massive retaliation had its critics. The most important criticism came from the Europeans who questioned the credibility of this treat that the United States was posing to the Soviets. Would the Americans risk an all out nuclear war if a local conflict did start in the European sector? This rethinking was to result in the revision of the original doctrine. Robert MacNamara did this revision in his strategies of **assured destruction, damage limitation, and flexible response**.

The concept of massive retaliation had but limited options. Now MacNamara argued that it was necessary to plan strikes against various other assets and not strike the cities as the massive retaliation had planned for. There was also the need to look for a flexible response to the initial attack. Such a flexible response would involve a conventional and a nuclear retaliatory strike and not simply a massive retaliation against any suspected aggression. Given the fact that both the Americans and the Soviets had second-strike (retaliatory) capabilities, this strategy of assured destruction was spelt out. By 1970s, the Americans also conceded that they no longer possess superiority over the Soviets in the nuclear field. This became the starting point of discussions on limiting nuclear weapons, and the dialogue culminated in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT).

The Soviet nuclear doctrine and strategy had four basic components to it:

- a) The general balance of political, economic and military power and socio-psychological characteristics of the society and population are to be considered as important **determinants** of strategy. This is based on the ideological basis of Soviet policy. Soviet understanding of socialism as interpreted by **Lenin**, Stalin, **Khrushchev** or Brezhnev, would be material in understanding how strategy is crafted.
- b) The military doctrine and strategy had certain important tenets. The Soviets believed that the war between the US-led NATO forces, and the Soviet-led Warsaw forces, would be a third and decisive war between the socialists and the imperialists. It would be a 'just' war for the Soviets. The Soviets would not initiate it or indulge in a surprise attack. At the same time revolutionary movements and other just wars would continue to gain Soviet support. Soviets had the capability of deterrence; but war is not considered as inevitable. Especially **Khrushchev's** arguments of peaceful coexistence had changed the Soviet perspective about the inevitability of war. To **Khrushchev**, given the nuclear scenario in the world, any war would be mutually destructive. He had argued in favour of the two systems coexisting peacefully with each other. This, however, did not rule out the Soviet need to continue to work for the spread of socialism and towards that goal use the benefits of strategy.
- c) The Soviets argued that the war was likely to begin with a surprise attack on the Soviet Union and not result in a protracted conflict. Soviets would go for a **pre-emptive** strike only if there is a clear warning of a NATO strike, or the Soviets could **rely** on their second strike capability. The targets would remain military centres or communications bases and not population centres. Given the nuclear threat, the Soviets would continue to **prepare** for a **qualitative** and quantitative superiority in nuclear weapons.
- d) In **terms** of military balance, the **Soviet** objective had always been 'superiority', both qualitative and quantitative. It is only with the SALT dialogue that the Soviets were willing to give up the position of superiority vis a vis the US.

The basic difference between the American and Soviet perceptions of nuclear war and doctrine were on the definitions of what constituted 'victory'. To the Soviets, victory encompassed the military, the political and economic objectives. It stood for limiting the damage to the Soviet Union, defeat the NATO / United States and dominate the post-war world. American perception of 'victory' had more of status quo **overtones**. It sought to retain the global balance as it was, with an inherent American superiority and work for global order through the policy of deterrence.

In a widely publicized speech in 1983, American President, Ronald Reagan, questioned: "Would it not be better to save lives than to avenge them?" He called for a long term research programme that would lead the United States to the goal of eliminating the threat **posed** by offensive strategic nuclear weapons. Since the time the Soviets had become nuclear, both the US and the Soviet Union had been vulnerable to nuclear attack. The logic of first strike and of the capability of second strike had ensured that stability is achieved through deterrence. Now the Americans planned to devise means of defence against a possible missile attack from the Soviet Union by creating a high-tech space-based defence capability based on entirely new technologies. By **asking** the scientific community to provide the means of rendering the attacking nuclear missiles obsolete, Reagan was in fact questioning the **very** basis of deterrence as a security strategy in the nuclear age. The new American

argument was that deterrence based on the ability to defend **rather** than retaliate with a predictable devastation of the enemy was a better option. This research programme has come to be called the **Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI)**, otherwise called as the Star Wars programme.

SDI was a research programme that was to investigate the feasibility of new defensive technologies based in space. The new technologies aimed to detect, track and destroy the Soviet missiles. The detection would be done from the point of its takeoff; the tracking would continue throughout its flight path and the destruction of the attacking missile would be done any time from its take off until its last stage of zeroing onto the target. This entire mechanism was to be achieved through space based detection systems and the weapons to do this would be non-nuclear; including laser beams, high energy particle beams, kinetic energy, etc. This programme was much more ambitious than the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty, 1972) that had sought to **protect** the command and control centres of the US and the Soviet Union with anti-ballistic missile defence systems. The ABM had formally recognised the development and the deployment of defensive systems for one command and control centre in each country; the SDI was aiming to protect the entire nation.

The Soviets appeared to take the U.S. programme very seriously and felt that with this the Americans were trying to regain the monopoly of the 1950s. The technological advances claimed by the proponents of the programme did not materialise and eventually the programme was reduced in scope and size. Eventually, the SDI programme was to **lead** the United States to develop the **Theatre Missile Defence System** and the **National Missile Defence System**. The former defence system looked after the defence of specific geopolitical theatres like Western Europe while the latter was to look to the defence of the mainland United States and Canada.

5.7 SUMMARY

More than half a century after the introduction of nuclear weapons, weapons which were supposed to make conventional war obsolete, conventional warfare continues to dominate the pattern of conflicts. In the context of the two superpowers, nuclear weapons, however, did place limitations on the concept of total war that had been the feature of the two great wars. This brought forward the concept of 'limited war'⁷.

The unit also examined the place of conventional war in the nuclear age. As we saw, conventional warfare has evolved along with the technological changes. We have entered into the fourth generation warfare methods where unlike the earlier generations of warfare, the entire society is seen as a battlefield. In this phase, there is a decreased dependence on centralised logistics and use of leaner and technologically sophisticated armies. The objective of this warfare is on collapsing the enemy internally rather than defeating it in an all out war.

We have also examined the thinking on nuclear weapons, particularly focusing on the concepts and elements of nuclear strategy that made the peculiar situation of building up of a nuclear arsenal for its non-use a reality. It should, however be noted that, despite the emerged of new nuclear weapons states and the spread of nuclear capability, nuclear

strategists continue to debate on the methodology of use of nuclear weapons in time of war. The modern day sophistication that has come in the weapon systems has meant that these weapons have a 'tactical' use. One can predict the degree of destruction in terms of geographic limits to some certainty. Yet, one may **not**, **perhaps**, be able to quantify the subsequent ill effects of the bombing. What happens if deterrence fails? The fundamental dilemma of nuclear strategy remains –that with the failure of deterrence one may have to turn to conventional rather than **nuclear** weapons as the next option. In the next unit, we will focus on an entirely new pattern of warfare that has emerged in the post-war era. This warfare is within the broad ambit of 'internal security' and covers such types of wars like revolutionary wars, civil wars, insurgency, and the modern era asymmetric warfare of and on terrorism.

5.8 EXERCISES

- 1) Trace the evolution of **conventional** war over the ages.
- 2) Write a note on Andre Bsaufre's choices of total strategy.
- 3) What is Limited War? How does a limited war escalate?
- 4) Explain the following concepts: Deterrence; brinkmanship; coercive diplomacy and **Compellence**.
- 5) Write a note on American Nuclear strategy since 1945.
- 6) What are the key features of Soviet nuclear doctrine?