

## OPEN WAR AS THE OPTION

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Following the terrorist attack on the Parliament House in New Delhi on 13 December, a heated debate is going on in the country today whether India should exercise its option of war with Pakistan as a means for combating the menace of terrorism. But the point that is often being missed at these debates is that India is already at war with Pakistan, even if at a war by proxy. This war is, in fact, a continuation of earlier wars that Pakistan has fought unsuccessfully with India, but of the type that affords an advantage to Pakistan, quite disproportionate to its effort and capacity to wage an open war. The question before the Nation today, therefore, is whether it should seize the initiative from Pakistan by confronting it with an open war or allow itself to be bled white with the "thousand cuts" that Pakistan has vowed to inflict on it through a proxy war that has terrorism as its integral part. The answer to this question would obviously be that India must convert the ongoing proxy war of Pakistan's making into an open war and thereby deprive Pakistan of the advantage it has in engaging itself in this kind of warfare. The fact that by taking recourse to such an action we would not really be starting a war but would only be changing the mode of countering the proxy war already thrust on us by Pakistan, would, perhaps, take care of the nagging conscience of the idealists in India, (masquerading as intellectuals), who seem to be still carrying the Nehruvian legacy of treating war as something abominable, which is to be shunned at all costs.

The other question that seems to be weighing upon the minds of the people is whether an open war would be worth the while in view of the limited possibility of the terrorists getting eliminated as a result of the war. Fears are also being expressed by some that with India's present force level vis-à-vis Pakistan, India may not be able to achieve anything beyond a stalemate on the war front like those that emerged during the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971. This war, if it comes, would, however, be different from the ones we have already fought. For one, Pakistan will be devoid of US support to bale it out of the mess that it may land in, to the same extent as it had been receiving in the past. Today the international opinion is generally with us and under pressure of this world opinion the US is unlikely to support Pakistan despite its present compulsions to do so. Besides there is much similarity between the terrorist attack against the US and the one against India and it would be very embarrassing for the US to set different standards for dealing with each. Secondly, the China factor that has been preventing India in the past from transferring troops from the Eastern to the Western front to deal effectively with Pakistan would not, hopefully, come into full play this time.

There could, however, be little doubt that even under the changed and helpful scenario in the east, the Indian Army would be required to maintain a sizeable presence there for meeting its various other operational commitments that cannot be wished away. Consequently, India will not be able to muster a force in the west that is strong enough to force a decisive, Afghanistan type of war on Pakistan. India would be, never the less, in a position, to take Israel type punitive actions, strong enough to deprive the terrorists of their safe havens across the LOC, and deter Pakistan from supporting the terrorists actively by making the exercise much more costly for it - both in terms of money and prestige. By adopting a defensive posture in Punjab and Rajasthan India could even make territorial gains in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) to meet its strategic requirements for blocking the routes used by the terrorists for their nefarious activities. This time there would be no pressure on India to vacate these positions after the war, like in the past. The added advantage would be that, in keeping with the precedence of the past, heads would roll in

Pakistan, if it suffers even limited reverses during this war. With their mentors suffering defeat and humiliation at the hands of the Indian Armed Forces, howsoever limited, the terrorists are likely to suffer considerable demoralisation. The war, if it comes, cannot, therefore be fruitless.

Many people also seem to be exercised about the possibility of such an action resulting in a nuclear war. Apparently Pakistan is deliberately giving air to such a possibility in an attempt to restrain India from taking recourse to war. It must be understood that the most trustworthy defence against a nuclear attack is the development of a second strike capability. The ability of a country to strike back with similar weapons acts as a very effective deterrent to the first use of nuclear weapons by another. It is because of the second strike capability having been developed by most potential enemies that no nuclear weapons have been used since after their first use by the United States in 1945 against Japan that did not possess a retaliatory capability. India has a very effective second strike capability against Pakistan and no amount of desperation or even madness on the part of Pakistan's military leadership can prompt it to make the first use of nuclear weapons, for fear of inviting Indian retaliation in kind.

The bane of the Indian political leadership in the past has been that in spite of the country having had to fight five regular wars during the last fifty years or so – the largest number fought by any country in the world during the same period – it has stubbornly refused to come to terms with the fact of inevitability of wars. India has always been pushed into wars in the past. Even the 1971 war, where India had strong reasons for taking the initiative, was started by Pakistan with its pre-emptive air strikes. If, therefore, India goes to war now it would be the first time in the course of its history that it would do so at its own initiative. With no precedence to go by, the decision by the present Government is a hard one. It must not, however, dither. It must be understood that though war is an evil, it is a necessary evil that forms an essential part of the nature's supreme law of Struggle for Existence. India's very existence is threatened today and if India goes to war on this count, it would be for the most righteous cause.

What the Indian Government's final decision would be is rather difficult to predict. There is tremendous American pressure against the war. Will India be able to stick to its policy of *Aar ya Par* or will it succumb to US pressure and opt for some face saving devices that are being offered in lieu. Pakistan too is under tremendous pressure of India's threat of war. Will Pakistan yield to Indian demand without fighting. These are all million-dollar questions difficult to answer. In the meantime let us bless the Indian Armed Forces, that are apparently all set to go for the kill, with the traditional *Vijayee Bhava*.