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India's Deterrence Compellence Calculus: Imperatives for a Non-Nuclear Strategic Missile Force

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The strong do what they can; the weak suffer what they must

—Thucydides, Peloponnesian War, Book 5.89

Abstract

In today's multipolar world, the use of military force or brute force to achieve political objectives is dubious, especially so if both the countries are nuclear powers. In the context of India-China and India-Pakistan dyads, therefore, it is extremely difficult to achieve political objectives using brute force. This paper aims to discuss the strategy of coercion — with its twin pillars of compellence and deterrence —which can be effectively used to achieve the stated political objectives while avoiding an all-out conventional war. This paper identifies the existing voids and puts forth recommendations for force structuring with an aim to cull out strategic imperatives for India.

Introduction

War is not merely an act of policy, rather it is a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means (Clausewitz {tns}, 2017).[1] At the military level, war is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will (Clausewitz {tns}, 2017). However, war brings additional destruction along with it, that might pose a serious threat to the national security of any nation. Hence, in order to avoid 'clash of arms' between stakeholders, peaceful resolution of political objectives should be undertaken; in both peace and war, a perspicacious strategy is imperative.

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[1] In a general sense, Politik and policy/politics mean the same as 'policy' at the national level is indeed a subset of politics. During the 2005 Clausewitz conference at Oxford, Sir Michael Howard, in his usual matter-of-fact manner, said that he and Paret actually gave no systematic thought whatsoever to the choice of when and whether to use "policy" or "politics" when translating the German word "Politik". He went on to say, however, that he was biased in favour of the word policy primarily because of its grandeur: "Policy" is what great states do on the grand stage of history, whereas "politics" is a sordid process carried on incessantly, by everyone, but particularly by objectionable little men called "politicians"," in grubby, smoke-filled back rooms. For further reading, see Christopher Bassford's *Tip Toe Through The Trinity*, available at https://www.clausewitz.com/mobile/trinity8.htm#fn40.

There are many meanings and nuances of strategy. The word "strategy" is derived from the Greek word "*strategos*", meaning "General" or "the art of the General". In ancient Athens, the office of "*strategos*" existed in the 6th century BC. By fifth century BC it assumed its "classical" form viz. a board of ten *strategoi* who were elected annually. Later, the Roman historians introduced the term "*strategia*" to refer to territories under control of a "s*trategus"* - a military commander in ancient Athens and a member of the Council of War (Horwath, 2006). In the 6th century, the Byzantines made a level of analysis distinction between 'tactics' meaning "the science which enables one to organise and manoeuvre a body of armed men in an orderly manner", and 'strategy', as "the means by which the General may defend his own lands and defeat the enemy's" (Heuser, 2010). In their hierarchical conception, tactics were related to strategy, but subordinate in scope and scale.

As per the Indian Army (IA) Doctrine (2004), strategy is the 'art and science of developing and using elements of national power including political, economic, psychological, technological capabilities and military forces, as necessary, during peace and war to achieve national objectives. Military strategy is derived from the overall national or 'grand strategy' (IA Doctrine, 2004).

Basket of Strategies

There are various strategies, applicable in both war and peace. Selection and execution of apt strategy depends on various internal and external factors. Broad classification of strategies can be enunciated based on the perspective of war and peace (Bhardwaj, 2017). In this regard, important facets are enunciated below:-

- *Cyclic Process of War and Peace.* Since times immemorial, war is followed by peace, which is again followed by war. Sometimes there is a prolonged period of tensions after a war during which violence may escalate. This is an infinite cyclic process. Through this prism of infinite cyclic processes of war and peace, time can be divided into two main periods: war time and pre-war time (i.e. peace time) as under:-
  - o **War Time Strategies.** Some of the important strategies to be adopted during times of war are the strategies of annihilation, attrition and exhaustion.
  - o **Pre - War (i.e. Peace) Time Strategies.** These include war avoidance, dissuasion and coercion (which itself is of two types - deterrence and compellence). The basket of strategies is illustrated in figure below.

Figure: Basket of strategies
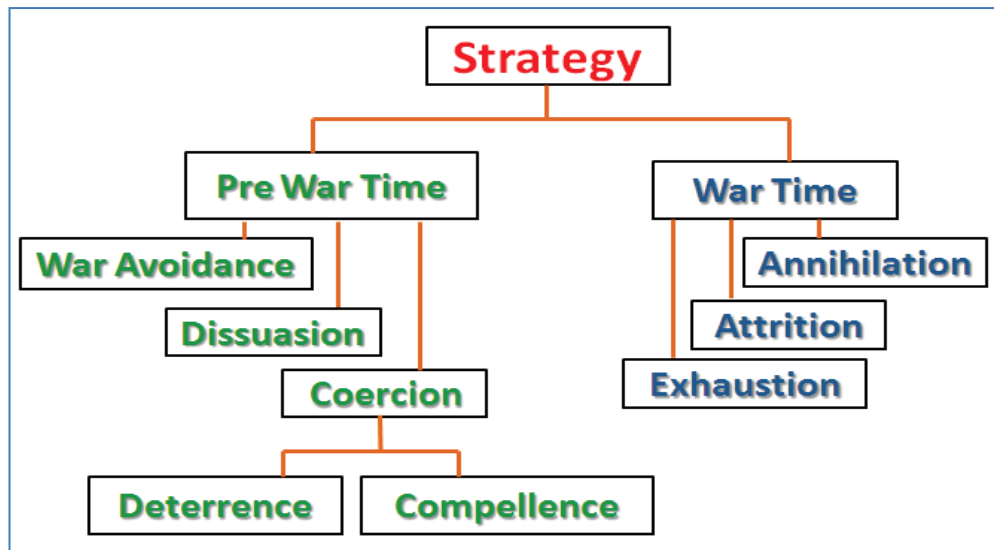
Source: Bhardwaj, 2017

War Time Strategies: Annihilation, Attrition and Exhaustion

Attrition, exhaustion, and annihilation are three major war time strategies. These are summarised as under:-

- ***Strategy of Annihilation.*** Annihilation seeks 'victory through complete destruction (often in a single battle or short campaign) of the enemy armed forces'. It aims to attack the enemy's armed forces and destroy them in order to impose the will of the conqueror on the conquered (Bowdish, 2013). This strategy was followed, inter alia, by Hannibal who produced its magnum opus in Cannae in 216 BC. The effectiveness of the strategy of annihilation was also demonstrated by one of the greatest "annihilators" of all time i.e. Napoleon. Force centric operations thus belong to this genre.

- ***Strategy of Attrition.*** Attrition seeks victory through gradual destruction (by a long campaign or series of campaigns) of the enemy's armed forces. A systematic attrition of the enemy's men and material leads to favourable force ratios and the attacker can then fight a successful war. Military history provides many examples of the bigger and richer side winning in war. In a study of 40 wars from 1815 to 1945, it was found that two powerful predictors for victory were the 'wealth of a nation' (79% of the cases) and 'population size' (70% of the cases) (Bowdish, 2013). Thus, a bigger and richer nation is more likely to win a war of attrition.

- ***Strategy of Exhaustion.*** The strategy of exhaustion is a favourite of the weaker sides in conflict, as it does not require a preponderance of force. However, it does demand perseverance and a great deal of resolve, as the strategy seeks to avoid decisive battle. The weaker side engages in 'death by a thousand cuts' physically and psychologically weakening the adversary over the course of time (Bowdish, 2013). This strategy of exhaustion was executed successfully by Frederick the Great, King of Prussia from 1740 to 1786, amongst others. Similarly, the political and psychological exhaustion led to the US defeat in Vietnam. 'Exhaustion' thus relates more to the cognitive domain while 'attrition' mainly relates to destruction of men and material in the physical domain.

Pre - War Time Strategies

There are three main pre - war time strategies, namely, war avoidance, dissuasion and coercion. These are summarised as under:-

- ***Strategy of War Avoidance.*** It simply means 'avoiding war'. In the Punic Wars fought between Rome and Carthage in 3rd century BC, Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus (266 - 203 BC) was a Roman general during the 2nd Punic War. He advocated avoiding open battle and refused to give battle to Hannibal, the Carthaginian military commander. As a result, Rome remained safe. However, his successor Varro sought battle and was defeated by Hannibal at Cannae in 216 BC and Rome was left defenceless. Thus, the strategy of war avoidance became known after Fabius as the Fabian strategy —a strategy in which one side intentionally avoids large scale battle for fear of the negative outcome.

- ***Strategy of Dissuasion.*** Dissuasion is an act of advising or urging somebody not to do something which may result in war. In this sense, it is the antonym of persuasion, which promotes a particular course of action. In this strategy, the aim is to dissuade the adversary from initiating steps to compete with one's nation i.e. preventing future military rivalries. Such dissuasive influence can be exerted through varied elements of national power to include Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Political, Economic, or Technological (DIMPET) domains. Thus, dissuasion aims preventing potential geopolitical rivals from becoming real rivals. Dissuasion is thus applied prior to the development of overt antagonism between two nations.

- ***Strategy of Coercion.*** As opposed to use of brute force to kill or conquer, coercion is the 'threat of damage, or of more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply' (Troxell, 2012). Coercion is the ability to get an actor — a state, the leader of a state, a terrorist group, a transnational or international organisation, a private actor —to do something it does not want to do. Coercion between states, between states and non-state actors, or between non-state actors is exercised through threats or through actions, or both, and usually, but not always, involves military threats or military actions (Art & Greenhill, 2018). Thus, strategic coercion is a type of bargaining where the opponent's expectations are influenced by the threat to hurt him. The threat must be understood and compliance rewarded. In other words, the opponent must be persuaded through manipulation of threats. With force one may kill an enemy but with a threat to use force one may get an enemy to comply (Slantchev, 2005).

If dissuasion fails, then the way is paved for coercion —deterrence (both deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment) and compellence — to ensure a favourable outcome, without resorting to war. The two essential components of coercion are outlined as under:-

- ***Deterrence (Freedman, 2021).*** Deterrence aims to prevent the opponent from initiating action. It implies the threat with a consequence i.e. "don't do this or else…". In the military context, deterrence employs the 'proportionate threat of force to discourage someone from doing something', by convincing them that the costs of their actions will outweigh any possible benefits (UK, MoD, 2014). Deterrence thus prevents the enemy from acting without fearing the consequences. Deterrence is primarily of two types:-
    - **Deterrence by Denial (Dissuasive Deterrence).** Deterrence by denial seeks to avert an action by convincing the actor that he cannot achieve his purpose (Troxell, 2012). The objectives of the opponent are denied by various measures and hence the opponent is deterred from taking any action.
    - **Deterrence by Punishment (Punitive Deterrence).** Deterrence by punishment involves a threat to destroy what the adversary values. It implies that the response will be so undesirable that the opponent

decides against acting (Troxell, 2012). The aim is to make fighting extremely painful and economically unviable to the adversary. The adverse consequences deter the opponent from taking any action.

- *Compellence (Schelling, 1966).*[2] Compellence is the actual use of force i.e. military power to change an adversary's behaviour. It simply means "do this or else…". Physical force is often employed to harm the enemy until the latter abides by the compeller's demands. The success of compellence is thus easy to see because it entails the reversal or halt of ongoing behaviour (Slantchev, 2005). The use of coercive diplomacy falls under the purview of compellence.

India's Coercion Calculus and Existing Arsenal

Executing the strategy of coercion i.e. deterrence and compellence, implies certain pre-requisites, which includes inter alia political will, communication of intent to the adversary and the military capability to execute the intended threat. Therefore, if the redlines enunciated are crossed by the adversary, it is imperative to have the requisite capability to execute the threat. This implies, apart from the presence of requisite political will, suitable force structures, appropriate doctrinal tenets, robust and technologically advanced weapon platforms, professional training etc.

India today possesses certain capabilities in terms of force structures to effect coercion. These capabilities are spread across DIMPET domains. In some domains, India has advanced capabilities while in others India is lagging. In the military domain, India possesses capabilities like a strong and potent Indian Air Force (IAF), nuclear submarines in the Indian Navy (IN), and various force structures like Special Forces (SF), Long Range Vectors (LRVs) like GRAD, Pinaka, Smerch, Brahmos, etc. in the Indian Army (IA) which can cover ranges up to 290 km.

However, beyond these tactical and operational depths, India lacks the requisite conventional tools for effecting coercion in the non-nuclear military domain. To deter the adversary in the non-nuclear domain, India runs short of options to target the enemy's strategic depth i.e. ranges beyond 290 km to about 1,000 km. This implies that, with the existing arsenal, deterring and/or compelling Pakistan purely in the non-nuclear conventional military domain may be feasible (due to its limited geographical depth) but vis-à-vis China, there emerges a void while executing the deterrence and/or compellence matrix. This void is mainly due to

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[2] It was Thomas Schelling who pioneered the study of coercion, in his classic study *Arms and Influence*. This study introduced the term 'compellence'. See Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Yale University Press, 2008 edition.

limited range of the missiles and LRVs in the non-nuclear kinetic domain. Therefore, there is a need to look towards raising a requisite kinetic force structure in the non-nuclear domain with strategic effects with ranges up to 1,000 km.

Thus, in India's arsenal, for affecting strategic coercion to achieve desired national objectives without resorting to a conventional war, many tools are available to effect 'deterrence by punishment' for the western adversary. However, the same is extremely difficult for the northern adversary. This is mainly due to absence of a non-nuclear kinetic force structure which can execute punitive strikes across the northern borders in the strategic depth, thereby imposing caution in the Chinese security planning calculus, and aiding strategic coercion to achieve political outcomes.

Let us analyse the situation by a thought wargame.

Thought Wargame: India's China War and a Likely Two Front Scenario

Imagine the following scenario:-

- Under the guise of talks from April 2020 till date, while keeping India engaged, China ramps up its military infrastructure in Tibet thereby gaining crucial capabilities. By end 2023, adequate capabilities have been built up and China feels confident of settling the border issue by force.

- Having decided to up the ante, China thus initiates skirmishes and walk-ins in early 2024 and the extant situation along the northern front deteriorates.

- In the "Phase Zero" of operations, China launches numerous Cyber Network Attacks (CNA) across India. Banking, railways, airlines, government websites, Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), National Stock Exchange (NSE), etc., all report website defacements —Denial of Service (DoS) attacks, bot attacks etc. Despite a robust Cyber Network Defence (CND) architecture, there is panic and mayhem across India. However, India picks up an appropriate tool in its arsenal and responds in kind to China with massive CNA and chaos reigns across Chinese airlines, railway, banking networks and stock exchanges. **Score - one all.**

- In "Phase Preliminary", China destroys two Indian navigational satellites in space by their Anti Satellite (ASAT) weapons, leading to disruption in the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) and Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC), causing friction in military networks. India too

responds by using its ASAT capabilities to destroy three Chinese satellites thereby executing 'deterrence by punishment' strategy and retaining escalation control without upping the ante. The Chinese are stymied in their objectives. **Score – two all.**

- Continuing with the "Phase Preliminary", China launches limited infantry attacks duly supported by artillery and armour (wherever possible) in selected areas along the northern front. In this case, the robust Indian defensive architecture based on 'deterrence by denial' is hardly tested. These minor attacks are easily beaten back. India picks and utilises appropriate tools from its existing arsenal without upping the ante and executes compellence strategy by launching SF operations in selected points as per the overall plan. This results in tactical gains with strategic psychological impact on the Chinese military and civilian leadership. **Score – three all.**

- Thus rebuffed, now China climbs another rung on the escalatory ladder and in their "Phase One", launches some non-nuclear long range missiles like DF-15, DF-21, etc. on many Indian cities, especially in the North East like Siliguri, Bagdogra, Hashimara, Jorhat, Dinjan, Guwahati, Tezpur, Gangtok, Kalimpong, Sukhna, etc. hitting some civilian and military targets. Although, this causes limited damage and minimal destruction in these cities but it creates exponential panic amongst the *hoi polloi*. India again decides to strike back at China. However, at this juncture, due to non-existence of a non-nuclear strategic missile force, India does not respond in kind. Nevertheless, India does launch a few Brahmos missile strikes and LRV fire assaults in selected places across the northern frontier. The military effects of these LRV fires degrade the combat power of the deployed Chinese forces. However, due to limited range and limited availability of these missiles and LRVs, the effects are not pronounced. Also, being away from the media glare, these strikes do not generate any narrative traction in the cyberspace. As a result, panic spreads across Indian cities. Consequently, due to combined adverse effects, India cannot execute coercive strategies of deterrence and/or compellence anymore and loses escalation control, yielding the initiative to China. **Score – four: three in favour of China.**

- The Indian armed forces are not materially affected and continue to operate as per the overall operational design. However, because of the adverse psychological impact on the citizens — courtesy missile attacks, which India could not respond in kind— India loses the battle of narratives in the cyberspace. Hence, China gets an advantage in the battlespaces, in the hinterland and in the cyberspace. **Score – five: three in favour of China.**

- And now, taking the 'hyena approach'—Pakistan joins the bandwagon and launches an attack with its Army Reserve North (ARN) across the International Boundary (IB) in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) sector with its Army Reserve South (ARS) mobilising to its default locations opposite India's Punjab and Rajasthan borders along the Western Front, thereby compounding the overall strategic and operational situation. The two-front war becomes a nightmarish reality. **Score – six: three in favour of China-Pakistan collusivity.**

The Void

The above hypothetical thought wargame and resulting scenarios can be further tweaked and continued to one or the other conclusion(s). However, what emerges is that, due to the void in India's organisational structures, in the form of a non-nuclear strategic missile force, India loses the edge in initial days of the escalatory dynamics itself. Also, as these force structures are not present, India loses the leverage of escalation control and escalation dominance in the deterrence-compellence dyad by suitably locating these assets in dispersed locations to threaten important Chinese targets and thereby adversely affect the operational and strategic Chinese military planning calculus.

It is thus obligatory for India to retain escalation dominance in the pre-war phases, in accordance with the overall politico-military strategy. It is therefore imperative to develop a strategic non-nuclear kinetic capability to counter not only a single front but a two-front war scenario and enhance leverage in the deterrence-compellence dyad with the two inimical hegemonistic nuclear armed neighbours.

This implies the possession of a strategic non-nuclear kinetic organisation—call it the Bharat Prakshepastra Sena (BPS) i.e. the Indian Missile Force.

Filling the Void: BPS

As I see it, the BPS should be both robust and malleable enough to withstand the rigours of strategic deterrence and compellence, not to mention its strategic and operational leverage

during operations along both the frontiers. Accordingly, the following should be considered as some of the important facets of the BPS:-

- *Quantum.* Three regiments of BPS at the front level can be raised i.e. two regiments for the northern front and one regiment for the western front.

- *Structure.* Each BPS regiment can have two - three batteries with two troops of three launchers each, thereby mandating total number of launchers to 12-18 per regiment, as per the operational requirements. These launchers can be independently deployed in battery/troop configuration with adequate dispersion for each front, as per the overall strategic framework. This structure will ensure achievement of desired strategic outcomes and will cater for adequate numbers, dispersion, strategic reach and inherent reserves.

- *Command and Control (C2).* The BPS can be headed by Force Commander BPS (FCBPS) of the rank of Lieutenant General (with rich and varied technical and operational experience in handling all type of guns, rockets and missiles). The staff can include two Major General rank officers — one for the strategic planning and one for the operational logistics. Suitable staff organisation can be further worked out to ensure decision making, dispersion, adequate redundancies and efficient execution. The total staff should not, in any case, exceed 12-15 officers. The FCBPS can be co-located with say the overall Front Commander Northern Front or Western Front (FCNF or FCWF) and be co-opted in the planning, preparation and execution of targeting options for different contingencies.

- *Inventory.* Each BPS regiment can have missiles ranging from 250 km to about 1,000 km. This will ensure its employment along the western and northern frontiers with enough range to tackle areas from fringes of operational to the strategic depth. Both ballistic as well cruise missiles can be considered to meet different strategic deterrent or compellent options. Prahaar, Prithvi, Brahmos and Nirbhay are some of the ongoing/completed projects which can be considered. Requisite holdings and stockpiles can be worked out as per the operational requirement for each front. Some distributed reserves can also be accordingly stocked.

- *Dedicated Satellite.* For strategic targets and peace time profiling, one dedicated satellite each must be made available to the three BPS regiments. The satellite can pick up the targets even during peace time through its Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability. Thus, when the dynamics of coercion (deterrence and

compellence) are being played out, this intelligence can be accordingly leveraged advantageously.

- *Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).* One battery of UAVs consisting of a minimum of four UAVs and minimum of three Ground Control Stations (GCS) will enable adequate 'eyes in the skies' over each front. This will ensure flexibility, redundancy and appropriate employment for operational targeting during war.

- *Air Defence (AD) Protection.* Dedicated AD protection in terms of suitable AD assets like Akash can be considered, under the overall proposed Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) cover and the AD umbrella of IAF and S-400.

- *Communications.* It is imperative to have secure, reliable and redundant communications, from the launchers to the front commander, for information and decision flow loops and the same must be catered for accordingly.

India's Non-Nuclear Strategic Missile Force

There are myriad advantages of possessing the BPS. These are enunciated below:-

- *Perspicacious Execution of Coercive Strategies.* Once BPS regiments are raised, the highest politico-military authorities can then exert scalpel strategies to employ strategic coercion against the enemies in pursuance of national aims and objectives, without resorting to war. The deterrence and/or compellence strategies can then enable the achievement of political aims without resorting to an all-out conventional war.

- *Exert Escalation Dominance and Retain Control.* With the BPS in place, India can 'retain escalation control' with China and 'exert escalation dominance' over Pakistan in a deterrence-compellence mode, prior to the last leg of compellence (i.e. limited force application) and consequent escalation to war.

- *Concealing Strategic and Operational Intent.* With the deployment of these at selected and dispersed locations, across the northern and western frontiers for coercive diplomacy as part of the compellence framework, own strategic intent and operational plans are concealed leading to definite tactical and operational surprise, with all the accruing benefits.

- *Strategic Degradation.* In the present day scenario, sans any BPS, the capability to execute strategic degradation, to target enemy's operational and strategic reserves, is

seriously hampered, thus denuding India of a significant psycho-military advantage. This lacuna will duly get addressed consequent to the raising of BPS.

- *Sword and Shield.* Presently, while the strategic defensive shield in the form of BMD project is underway, there is a lack of offensive sword to take the war into strategic depth of the enemy. This void will get filled by raising the BPS. India will thus have both i.e. the strategic sword and the strategic shield to achieve the desired politco-military outcomes, both during pre-war time and during operations.

- *Calibrated Responses Short of War (CRESHOW) Capability.* With ranges of about 250 km to approximately 1,000 km — well within the strike capability of the proposed BPS, adequate flexibility is available to execute CRESHOW and attain desired outcomes, without resorting to war.

- *Release Artillery Division for Operational Targeting.* Presently, artillery division is restricted to the strike corps but its employment is catering to the operational needs of both the strike corps and the command. This places severe constraints at both the levels, thus resulting in sub-optimal employment of its limited resources and leaving much to be desired. Once BPS is raised, artillery division can then focus purely on the operational degradation up to a depth of 90-120 km with its integral resources, thereby generating exponential effects at the corps level and consequent cascading strategic effects at the theatre level.

- *Winning Cyberspace Narratives.* By suitably exploiting the visuals and sound effects, India can win the battle of narratives in a calibrated manner and execute cascading psychological degradation over Chinese and Pakistani populace.

- *Impetus to Atmanirbhar Bharat.* With the proposed organisational structure, the requisite fillip to the Indian Defence Industrial Base (DIB) will be given and numerous industries will get enmeshed into defence production, which is an important self-reliance milestone considering the lesson(s) learnt from the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict about the paucity of Russian origin spares for some items in the Indian inventory.

- *Export Base and Forex Reserves.* Once these missiles are fielded and the requisite expertise developed, then these can be exported to our friendly countries in sync with Chanakya's 'Mandala Theory' in order to enhance own regional and global clout and influence, apart from earning forex reserves.

Conclusion

Achieving political objectives through wars is not a prudent option in the Indian sub-continent. Other tools like coercion can be effectively utilised to achieve political objectives. Accordingly, in order to enhance strategic coercion capabilities in terms of deterrence-compellence dyad, especially in the military domain of DIMPET, it is *de rigueur* to raise suitable non-nuclear kinetic force structures to employ strategic coercion effectively. It is therefore a strategic imperative to own such a force structure and fill this void.

The time has come for India to secure its desired political objectives through deterrence and/or compellence and without fighting. Raising of a non-nuclear strategic missile force i.e. BPS is the first step towards that horizon.

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About the Author

Brigadier Kulbhushan Bhardwaj is serving in the Indian Army since June 1995. An artillery officer, he has served in varied terrain including Siachen Glacier and Counter Insurgency operations in both J&K and North East. He has attended various courses, tenanted a few staff appointments, has been a Directing Staff at the Army War College and has commanded an artillery brigade. He is presently posted in staff at a Corps HQ in J&K. He is an avid writer and has a few published articles to his credit.