

Books

Operational Lessons of the Wars of 21st Century

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The publication under review is No12 in the monograph series of IDSA. The author is a Research Fellow with IDSA since 2005, who retired after serving more than 29 years in the Army and is a veteran of 1971 Indo-Pak war in Bangladesh and Operation Meghdoot (Siachen). He has authored several publications on Military topics.

According to the author the nature of war is fear, chance, passion, fog and uncertainty and it remains unchanged. However, the character is dynamic and changes with time and technology. The 21st century has witnessed a diminishing pattern in inter-state as well as civil wars despite a tripling of number of states and doubling of population in the past 60 years. Major factors which account for such diminution of wars are, increase in democracies, increase in economic interdependence and decline in economic utility of war. Nuclear deterrence coupled with single-super-power global political system and access to information due to rapid growth of information technology (IT) on the excesses and fallout of World Wars and major inter-state wars have probably led to states to solve bilateral

issues by peaceful negotiations. Most conflicts across the globe involve Islamist insurgents, militant groups and terrorists. However, where inter-state wars have been on the decline, US, UK and France, under the NATO flag have stepped up military exploitation after the end of the cold war and disintegration of the USSR. Panama, Gulf-wars, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria are some examples of US intervention. The US is the sole superpower who plays the role of global policeman, undeterred and unchallenged, while it also decides the rules of engagement. In Iraq and Afghanistan the US intervention which began as conventional inter-state war became long drawn and converted to counter- insurgency by the occupying forces.

Nations and their Armed Forces have to analyze these wars constantly and draw strategic and operational lessons which may apply in their context. Most nations and their defence forces do not get combat experience even though they may need to see action at some stage in the future, for them it becomes imperative to study, analyze and draw lessons from wars fought by other states. What concerns India is that our Army is getting exercised in counter insurgency and anti-terrorist operations, the Navy has experience in anti-piracy operations and inter-state Naval exercises, whereas the Air Force has the least chance of gaining combat experience and has to contend with air exercises, firing on the ranges and training on simulators. On the other hand, Pakistan Army is the most experienced and has got exposure to large scale and intense counter insurgency and terrorist operations over a prolonged period of time. They have also witnessed the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV's), missiles, heavy weapons, attack helicopters, satellite technology, surveillance systems, precision guided munitions and weapon systems. In contrast the PLA Army of China has the least combat experience amongst our potential adversaries. The PLA's concept of war is based on the idea of utilizing information warfare for psychological impact on espionage, subversion and sabotage; towards this aim, China has created the Ministry of National Defence Press Affairs Office in 2008.

Troops of Western countries have seen combat action at regular intervals; thereby concepts of warfare and weapons & equipment are battle tested and experience gained is used to draw lessons and redesign or upgrade systems for future action. To ensure that our combat forces do not get outdated there is a need to study all military actions and the exploitation of weapons & equipment and their effectiveness. Presently, individuals with experience and vision who find time often publish articles in various magazines and newspapers or write books on the future concepts of warfare. Some such issues are, Aerospace management for both conventional and nuclear war, use of space for communication, intelligence, command and control of troops, weapons & equipment, use of UAV's, SMART Munitions, precision guided weapon systems, cyber warfare, use of stealth fighter aircraft, bombers, attack helicopters, and Naval vessels. The country probably needs to set up an institution which can carry out studies on all operations and advise military, administrative and political authorities on policy issues. The expertise of veterans must be incorporated and studies by think -tanks could also be outsourced.

In this booklet the author has very vividly covered the Operational Lessons of the Wars of Afghanistan and Iraq, Lebanon-(Israel-Hezbollah war), Russo-Georgia war, the Ubiquitous Cyber war and Libya.

The author emphasizes on professional reading by Defence Officers at each level of service. This must also extend to officers of the Administrative and Allied services, as well as Politicians who deal with Defence matters in their official capacity.

The Monograph Series of IDSA is published at a very affordable cost and it is recommended that the series be subscribed by Military libraries at Unit and Formation level. I appeal to Senior Defence Officers in the capacity of Colonels of Regiments, who may like to educate Regimental Commanders of the benefits of reading such professional magazines to train and develop the careers of their officers who are to be groomed as future Commanders.