

Research Methods in Defence Studies: A Multidisciplinary Overview

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*Wankhede Rahul Bhojraj**

Since World War II, the academic study of issues related to wars, security, military, peace and conflict, etc. has gained traction the world over. After being taught as a part of world history, the subject of ‘defence studies’ shifted under the domain of political science and international relations. Gradually various institutions started dedicated courses in subjects such as defence studies, war studies, national security studies, etc.

This created a need for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of defence studies by incorporating political, social, normative, legal, economic, historical and geographic perspectives. Delphine Deschaux-Dutard addresses this need in her book by presenting an analysis of research methods from other disciplines that could be useful to researchers in the field of defence studies. The book has been contributed to by multiple authors, each focussing on a specific theme of multidisciplinary research.

The first chapter introduces the relationship between defence studies and geographical methodology. It highlights the dual nature of geography as

* Mr Wankhede Rahul Bhojraj is a Ph.D. Scholar at the Special Centre for National Security Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

both a physical and human science capable of providing expert insights into the interactions between humans and their environment, as well as critically examining how knowledge and control of places can reinforce and legitimise power in society. It discusses the distinction between military geography, geostrategy and geopolitics. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the influence of Marxism on geography, leading to critical political analyses that consider socio-spatial inequalities and challenge traditional state-centric perspectives.

The post-1945 era witnessed the signing of numerous treaties and international agreements, accompanied by the establishment of various international organisations spanning diverse fields, including defence. However, defence issues have traditionally received limited attention in most international law handbooks, despite collective security and peacekeeping being inherent goals of the United Nations.

The second chapter delves into this intricate relationship between public law and defence, highlighting their significance in understanding the establishment and continuity of the state. The chapter also explores the investigation of defence issues by relying on external laws. It highlights the United Nations Charter, particularly Article 51, which addresses legitimate defence and the existence of regional collective or mutual defence clauses such as Article V of the Washington Treaty, which pertains to NATO. It underscores the historical context of war and peace among nations, emphasising defence as a crucial aspect within the realm of international public law.

The third chapter explores the development of defence studies in France, particularly focussing on the efforts to promote historical approaches within the field. The author highlights the growing interest in war studies and defence studies among French scholars and research institutions, with a specific emphasis on the multidisciplinary nature of these fields. It acknowledges the distinction between war studies and defence studies, noting that while war studies primarily focusses on armed conflict, defence studies encompasses a broader range of disciplines and perspectives related to defence policies, the changing nature of war and their societal impacts. The chapter also mentions the need for researchers to gain approvals and an understanding of military society and its specific codes when accessing research materials and conducting fieldwork in military environments.

The fourth chapter explores the potential benefits and challenges of conducting secondary analysis of qualitative data in the field of defence studies. The authors discuss the growing trend of using existing data for research purposes distinct from the original study's objectives. They highlight

the scarcity of research on this topic, particularly in the context of defence studies, and present a case study to examine the practical implications of secondary analysis in this field.

Despite criticisms of the 'policy cycle framework', it serves as a useful device to categorise and explore relevant questions. The fifth chapter studies this field of public policy as it offers a diverse range of theoretical and methodological approaches, which have been applied to the study of defence policy. It examines the contributions of public policy to defence studies, organising the discussion around the stages of the policy cycle.

Defence studies is distinguished from military studies by its interdisciplinary nature, incorporating political science, sociology, economics, international relations, social anthropology, human geography and organisational studies. In the sixth chapter, the author discusses this application of sociological methods in defence studies and argues that sociological approaches to this field often rely on macro-level theories, which can lead to either overly general conclusions or hypotheses that are difficult to test empirically due to their high level of abstraction. To provide an alternative perspective, the author also suggests looking at micro-sociological theories and methods, particularly those developed during World War II.

The seventh chapter explores the application of quantitative methods in the field of defence studies. It discusses the evolution of quantitative methods in defence studies compared to other social sciences, particularly economics. It highlights the role of economics in fostering the development of quantitative approaches in defence studies and addresses the challenges faced by defence studies in adopting quantitative methods such as hypothetico-deductive method, statistical modelling and the importance of falsifiability. Additionally, the chapter provides an overview of various quantitative methods used in defence studies, such as risk analysis, war simulation and defence economics. It discusses the application of statistical modelling techniques to estimate risks associated with different defence scenarios, assess the likelihood of conflicts, simulate war outcomes and analyse defence economics. The chapter encourages researchers to be cautious in interpreting quantitative results and to consider them as complementary pieces in a broader analytical framework.

Various think tanks and universities have built their own databases that provide quantitative and qualitative data on arms trade, regional conflict, events of terrorism, etc. The eighth chapter delves into these databases and recognises the value of sharing data openly, which not only promotes transparency but also facilitates collaboration among researchers.

The concept of defence as a public good has been proposed by some scholars while presenting an economic analysis of defence studies. It also touches upon the involvement of the private sector in defence provisions, including outsourcing and the rise of private military companies. The author acknowledges that defence spending is an imperfect measure of power and security as it doesn't reflect the actual military capabilities of a country, and that factors such as depreciation are not considered. The ninth chapter explores this economic aspect of defence studies and provides a review of the main themes in the academic literature of defence economics. The author emphasises the importance of understanding the economic implications of defence activities, given the significant levels of defence spending worldwide. The chapter provides insights into various economic models and methodologies used in analysing the defence sector. The concept of public goods and market failures is explored, particularly in the context of defence as a public good.

The tenth chapter discusses the challenges related to data indexing, classification and the value of a comparative agenda in the field of foreign policy analysis. It argues that the role of ideology and party positions in foreign policy, particularly in defence and security, has gained attention in recent years. This chapter highlights the need for comparative analysis and the development of analytical tools to capture politicisation in research on parties and foreign policy. It explores the role of parliaments in security and defence policies and the challenges of establishing a voting database for comparative analysis. It also discusses the varying degrees of parliamentary involvement in foreign policy across different countries and the proliferation of deployment votes since the end of the Cold War.

Since the days of World War I, public opinion polls have been a valuable tool for gathering background information, stimulating public debates and conducting academic research. The eleventh and last chapter of the book focusses on this aspect of public opinion and its impact on security and defence policy. It discusses the importance of public opinion for political decision-makers and military leaders in Western democracies. It also outlines the history of quantitative surveys in collecting and measuring public opinion, dating back to the 1930s in the USA and the late 1940s in Germany and other European countries. It notes that the armed forces and ministries of defence regularly commission surveys to inform political decisions and policymaking. The text emphasises that research on public opinion in the context of security and defence policy is multidisciplinary, encompassing military sociology, political science, communication science and political psychology.

Research Methods in Defence Studies: A Multidisciplinary Overview thus fills a huge gap in the existing literature on defence studies by advocating the use of interdisciplinary methods and encourages researchers to embrace multiple approaches. The book emphasises the cross-fertilisation of various methods to enhance the understanding of complex defence issues in the 21st century. Since no such book exists in the Indian academia, the framework laid down by this book can very well be adopted by Indian researchers. This book will thus be valuable for students, researchers and professionals working in the field of defence studies.