



# *Policies & Perspectives*



VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

## *Who is Better at Avoiding Wars: Hawks or Doves?*

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*Wars between states are increasingly become rare. It takes something 'unprecedented' for a responsible state to go out for war. This is precisely because the costs of war are just 'too huge'. It's never easy to exactly predict the outcome of a war however good an analyst is. The repercussions of war are often unimaginable. But still, states try to build up a perception to satisfy their domestic constituencies that 'war' might prove to be a long time solution to the problem.*

*Take the case of India and Pakistan, both nuclear power states. Both sides are having more 'hawkish' people than 'dovish' ones. Hawkish people are those who believe in going out for war, like the hawks do literally. On the other hand, the 'dovish' population believes in avoiding war, they are by nature 'peaceful'. In the case of India and Pakistan, the 'hawks' have always been popular, to the extent of being 'glamorous'. This is because they believe that by going on a full scale war, they will teach a lesson to the 'enemy state' and secondly, that war would be final and decisive.*

*Because of this nature of thinking, war sounds like a good idea to many civilians, politicians and the media. These groups shout out the most for the war because none of them have to live in 'war zones' where their lives would be directly at stake. Yes, sometimes states are left with no choice but to opt for the option of war but war should always be the last resort, not the first idea.*

*Unlike 'war mongering' citizens, who just love watching war sequences in their living room or the media, for which gaining Television Rating Point (TRP) is the ultimate goal by presenting war as a glamorous idea to a great number of naïve citizens, government of the day can't think like that. This is because government of the day is the most responsible actor amongst many actors in the system. One needs to understand that armies march on the orders of the government. Armies in democracies have no personal selfish interests, that's why it is said that good armies fight for their citizens and the land on which the citizens live i.e a nation.*

*One must have observed that in the last few weeks there has been a great demand in the public that India should take offensive measures against Pakistan considering that we are losing our soldiers frequently. People's expectation with the current government is that they will defend the interests of the country 'aggressively' not just in words but in action too. Why has been such an expectation from this government? Does this expectation come equally with every government or is there a variation of expectation depending upon who is in power?*



*The answer is simple yet complicated. Every government is responsible for maintaining the 'integrity' and 'sovereignty' of the state which is precisely what is expected by the citizens too. But here is the catch, the above statement is about 'defending' the nation's sovereignty where 'war' is seen as a last option. Though, the scenario changes when the people, who have voted for those 'set' of people who had aggressive postures regarding foreign policy issues when they were in opposition.*

*When this 'set' of people come into power, citizens naturally expect them to remain 'hawkish' in their approach as they used to be earlier. This is where the citizens commit mistakes, political representatives in government can't be expected to behave in the same way as they used to do while in opposition. All responsible governments, who value their citizens as well soldiers' lives take restraint in going up the 'escalation ladder'.*

*Therefore, those who say that BJP and PM Modi while in opposition used to take such aggressive 'hawkish' positions and attack the then government in power about not doing anything, are now themselves behaving in the same way as the previous governments did. This shows almost all governments behave in a similar manner when it comes to the conduct of foreign policies. Critiques must understand that political parties while in opposition have the luxury of taking strong stance, but when they are in power this luxury is not there.*

*Secondly, if 'Hawks' are in power, then they are more likely to avoid war than the 'doves'. This sounds incorrect but it is the truth. This is because when 'hawks' are in the government, they take the usual path of restraint and look for the solutions based on dialogues, discussions, diplomacy, conciliations etc. It is easier for a 'hawkish' government to make a public opinion for peace because the 'doves' in opposition are ever ready to be at peace. Therefore, a united opinion of going for 'peaceful efforts' is seen.*

*However, if the 'Doves' are in power, they face a real challenge of building a united public opinion to go for peace with the adversary state. This is because a 'Dovish' government would be under extreme political pressure created by a 'hawkish' opposition to go out for war. Because people like the glamour quotient of war, a large domestic constituency starts rallying around the 'hawkish' opposition creating further pressure for the 'dovish' government to go for war. In this case, two things can happen for the "doves in power" and both are 'negative'.*

*The first one is that the government stands up to all the criticism and still doesn't go to war. This would prove very costly to them in upcoming elections where they would have a high chance of losing out to the opposition and in general public would view them as a 'weak government' who couldn't fight with the enemy. The second thing can happen, is that the 'dovish' government indeed buckles up under the pressure of 'hawkish' opposition and public demand to go for war and they indeed go for war, just to show that they too care for national interests. This step of going to war under pressure might prove extremely costly because as*



*mentioned earlier “war is not a solution to any problem, war in itself is a problem”.*

*To sum up, it's better to have a 'hawkish' government in power than a 'dovish one' because hawks don't get pressurized easily by the opposition doves to go for war and they don't have to prove like doves, that they care about 'national interests'.*



## About VIF

*Vivekananda International Foundation is a non-partisan institute for dialogue and conflict resolution from a nationalist perspective. Some of India's leading experts in the fields of security, military, diplomacy, governance, etc have got together under the institute's aegis to generate ideas and stimulate action for greater national security and prosperity, independently funded.*

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