

Coalition Warfare edited by N.B. Poulsen, K.H. Galster and S. Nørby, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp. 188, £39.99

*Y.M. Bammi**

The book contains 10 articles from presentations made by Western scholars (including officers from the defence forces) at the Royal Danish Defence College, in 2011, and has been edited by N.B. Paulsen, K.H. Galster and S. Nørby. Their historical research brings out that coalition warfare is not a new phenomenon, and has been practised by nations for different reasons. While, in most cases, countries came together when they faced a common threat and did not have the strength (manpower, finances or military power) to counter it, often it was to regain their pride and prestige in the world. Also, the coalition did not last forever and even while fighting together, there were differences of opinions and irritants which cropped up, at times leading to break-up of the coalition. Often, while fighting in an alliance, smaller nations accepted to be guided by a senior (more powerful) nation, but they tried to retain their sovereignty and command of their forces, which became problematic.

At the national and strategic levels, public opinion, culture, political aims and personalities of leaders and advice of military commanders had an impact on smooth functioning of the coalition warfare. At the functional level, differences in training doctrines, weapons and equipment, standard

* Lt. Gen. Y.M. Bammi, PhD, has wide experience of command and staff appointments during peace and war, including at Army HQ. He has researched and published five books on security matters, participated in international seminars, and lectured on strategic topics in the USA. He can be contacted at yogenderbammi@yahoo.co.in



operating procedures and logistics support systems in order to ensure smooth and efficient functioning. Most importantly, often nations set aside their individual goals, aims and objectives for those of the coalition. Most of them realised that 'mutual trust and confidence' were vital for meeting the common challenge.

The introduction to the book by K.H. Galster of the Royal Danish Defence College gives historical details of coalition warfare, from 480 BC to the post-Cold War period. Galster touches on the political and military aspects (including doctrine and strategy, C4I, planning, training and logistics), before highlighting constraints (culture, domination), and concludes with the downside of this warfare. Despite all its problems, he feels that the concept is not only applicable to fighting a common enemy. It is a 'Coalescence of Nations' of necessity, transcending national core values and beliefs, to facilitate positive outcome of a common cause. Galster feels that establishing coalitions will become more important, yet critical, by the day.

Illustrating case studies from European history, in the first article, 'Shifting Allies, Enemies, and Interests: The Fluidity of Coalition Warfare', P.W. Cecil of the University of Alabama brings out that in this type of warfare, there is nothing permanent or static. He feels that the coalition is the strongest when the dangers are high, and weakens, or may even break, once the common threat diminishes. Tracing events of the 1918 wars, Cecil points out how Britain and France overcame their mutual distrust and reservations when threatened by Russia, and agreed to form a common front under Foch. Cecil also brings out how the American forces under General Pershing fought as part of the coalition, overcoming reservations of sovereignty. The diplomatic episode threatening the coalition has also been commented upon.

T.H. Nielsen and A. Schwartz of the University of Copenhagen have dwelt on 'Coalition Warfare in the Ancient Greek World'. Their account of wars dating back to 458 BC makes for interesting reading, as they bring out the threats and compulsions faced by the city-states of Athens, Corinth and Megara. Their account of the Hoplite Army and the Sparta, formation of the Hellenic League, and the wording of the Treaty as inscribed in Olympia brings out that these coalitions were very specific and binding, overcoming religious differences but ensuring share of the war booty.

In his article, titled 'Coalition Warfare in Renaissance Italy, 1455–1503', P.M. Dover of Georgia University brings out that though the

five individual states of Italy in the fifteenth century—the Papal State, Venice, Florence, Milan and Naples—had territorial differences with each other, they came together to form the ‘Italian League’ when threatened by France, Russia and Turkey. However, once the external threat receded, not only did the coalition become weak but its partners formed different groupings to settle their own territorial disputes.

D. Delaney, a former officer with the Canadian Army, has titled his article ‘Balancing Acts: The Canadian Army Experience as a Junior Alliance Partner, 1899–1953’. He brings out the socio-cultural issues faced by Canada in providing Expeditionary Forces overseas. While the pro-British population favoured supporting Britain (in Europe), the people of Quebec (mostly of French descent) did not, which created socio-political problems. The country faced the first such crisis when it was asked to send forces to fight alongside those of the British Empire during the Boer War (1899–1902) and then during World War I. Besides the different perceptions of the two countries, their military structures were also not compatible. Their command and control structures were also different. Some of these issues were resolved after the Boer War, which resulted in better cooperation later between the two armies, and Canada accepted and remained a useful junior alliance partner of Britain. Thus, by the time World War II broke out, Canadian forces had adjusted to staff and logistics methods of the British, which proved very useful even after the war ended. Post-World War II, after joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the Cold War era, Canada was influenced to also study the US doctrines of warfare. Therefore, they were fully prepared when tasked to join the Korean War.

In his article, ‘Arms Race and Cooperation: The Anglo-French Crimean War Coalition—1854–1856’, A. Lambert, a British naval historian, traces why England and France set aside their bitter mutual differences and formed a coalition to face Russia and the threat from the Ottoman Empire. Lambert’s chapter brings out that despite being partners, differences at strategic and operational levels remained between the two alliance partners, as both wanted to follow a path which would give them greater power in Europe. The statement made by the British Prime Minister Lord John Russell in 1848—‘We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal, and those interests it is our duty to follow’—underlines this essence. Lambert points out that the war strategy also suffered as, while the British were keen to capture Malta and dominate the seas, France was more inclined to the

war on the continent. Giving details of the battle for Sevastopol (a port dominating the Mediterranean), he brings out how the French and British friction impacted the operations. Differences also impeded chances of the peace negotiations, and continued to simmer even after the war.

A Dutch perspective of the coalition war is provided by J.G. Andersen, a historian and curator of the Royal Museum, who has also served as an infantry officer in the Royal Life Guards (an old unit having a rich record of serving the country) and on United Nations (UN) assignments. Besides tracing the history of the regiment and how it has distinguished itself in the service of Denmark–Norway (from 1689–1713), he brings out its role in the coalition warfare along with England in Europe, from 1689 to 1697. From 1701 to 1713, the Guards also fought in the War of Spanish Succession alongside the British. Living up to their traditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the regiments of Denmark continued to operate as part of the coalition forces, even in twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In the next chapter, M.S. Muehlauer, a historian, narrates how coalition warfare was conducted in New England during the seventeenth century. He brings out various temporary alliances formed between the British, French, Spanish and Mexicans with the local chiefs, and how they influenced the economy and culture of America. He concludes that though there were major cultural and ethnic differences between the local inhabitants and the outsiders, often these were overlooked to fight common adversaries by forming mutually beneficial alliances.

A.T. Cate, a reserve Major of the Royal Dutch Army, covers the participation of his country in Afghanistan post-9/11. Highlighting that since the end of the Cold War, the Western world has seen many alliances being formed to face common threats, Cate points out that the US has shared the maximum burden as the senior alliance partner, while the contribution of others has been of ‘political symbolism’. While Danes have also been in the ‘premier league’, as shown in Helmand, he points out that smaller nations are concerned more with the ‘symbolic partnership’ and avoid the fight. He explains why Denmark did not join in the US-led operation, ‘Iraqi Freedom’, in 2002–03, but sent troops after the war under Security Council Resolution as part of Coalition Provisional Authority. He also highlights the successful strategy adopted by the Danes in ‘wining hearts and minds of the local people’, and its impact back home. He brings out the differences of opinion between coalition partners on methods adopted in handling of suspects and prisoners of war (PoWs)

at Abu Gharib and Bagram, and how the Dutch still proved to be useful, both in Iraq and Afghanistan.

'A War Coalition Fails in Coalition Warfare: The Axis Powers and Operation HERKULES in Spring 1942', is contributed by T. Vogel, a serving Lieutenant Colonel in the German Army. He brings out how differing strategic aims of Germany (which was more focused on defeating Russia and Britain on land) and Italy (which was keen to capture Malta, thus securing safe sea routes) resulted in weakening their combined potential. He attributes it to the historical suspicion between the two Axis allies, the personalities of Hitler and Mussolini, and the influence of military commanders (like Rommel) on strategic decisions and conduct of war by the opposing sides. The military structure of the Axis forces also did not allow for full integration of all elements of the forces and their cohesive application, which resulted in operations of the army being adversely affected by Allied air power. The personalities of Rommel and Kesselring also resulted in differing advice to the High Command, which had inherent disadvantages. Vogel concludes that failure of Operation Herkules shows that complete cohesiveness and trust at all levels are the two vital aspects for success in coalition warfare.

The chapter, 'The French Battalion in Korea—1950–53: France Asserts its Status as a Permanent member of the UN Security Council at Minimal Cost', has been contributed by I. Cadeau, a war veteran and historian of French Army. Cadeau elucidates on his country's motivation for joining the Force and their experience in coalition warfare as part of the UN Force. He argues that while still recovering from the after-effects of World War II, France agreed to participate in the UN-led coalition, mainly to stake her claim as a permanent member of the Security Council, and thus place the country at the centre stage of international nations. Hence, Paris agreed to send a force of around 3,000 (based around one battalion group) to fight alongside Allied partners—the US and the United Kingdom (UK), besides others. This also gave the French soldiers experience of fighting with new weapons and equipment, and learning new strategic and tactical warfare, which could come handy in future. To study and evolve future military doctrines, a special staff cell was also attached with the battalion. Though it often created irritants and confusion, it did achieve its objectives. Besides fulfilling her international obligation by sending her troops, the French government made a positive impact on her Allies and partners, as well showed her willingness to share international responsibilities.

The book brings out differing analysis and views of Western researchers on a current topic. All authors have carried out detailed research of their topics, and give exhaustive bibliography and references. The book will be useful to military scholars. It is recommended for libraries of institutions of higher military learning.