

Changing Face of Modern Conflicts: Shaping the Indian Response

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Introduction

One of the few constants in the world has been the prevalence of change in virtually all facets of human existence. Conflicts and wars through the ages have evolved in keeping not only with a state's or a leader's political, territorial or economic ambitions but societal norms, behavioural patterns, value systems and importantly the growth of human thought. If changes in warfare in early millennia were more evolutionary, the 20th century was witness to revolutionary changes driven by the advent of rapid technological advancements. The last two decades of the 20th century saw unprecedented marvels in Information Technology Revolution, impacting deeply the nuances of conflicts and wars globally. Though, many principles of war have remain unchanged since years; amazingly today, some states through a new phenomenon of non-state actors are taking recourse to older covert forms of warfare with formidable destructive power, namely; terrorism, insurgencies and various forms of sub-conventional war or what is popularly referred to as asymmetrical warfare.

Evolution of Modern Warfare: The Generational Model

In the study of the evolution of modern warfare, some military scholars have conceptualised four generations in modern war, with the fifth currently on the threshold.¹ The First Generation followed the tactics of 'line and column' which developed in the age of the smooth-bore musket and culminated in the massed manpower armies of the Napoleonic era. The Second Generation adopted the tactics of 'linear fire and movement'. With the dawn of industrial age, this era made firepower, including indirect fire a dominant form of war in the First World War phase. The Third Generation evolved in the 30's of the 20th century and was in full flow right through the Second World War. In this the lethal fire power, with the 'advent of mechanisation and airpower', was supplemented by the 'blitzkrieg' tactics of mobility and manoeuvre, which involved outflanking, infiltration and deep strikes aimed at enemy objectives in depth, instead of frontal assaults across fortified enemy defences.

The Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) covers the post Cold War period, when failing weak states and non-state actors or both in tandem took on the might of stronger states by employing the tactics of terror, insurgency, intimidation in pursuit of their goals. This generation of warfare is normally characterised by the violence of covert non-state actors taking on the might of nation states e.g. the successful fight of Mujahideen against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, current Hezbollah confrontation with Israel or till recently, the Tamil Tigers fight against their own government in Sri Lanka. The 4GW is decidedly set for a long term duration. It is highly decentralised and dispersed in its operations, and may also comprise disaggregated forces such as terrorists, guerillas and rioters lacking a centre of gravity, thus multiplying the counter terror operational problems of the forces of the state they are in confrontation with. Computer hacking, cyber crimes, illegal money laundering, drug smuggling are tactics of this generation of warfare. The 4GW makes use of the revolution in the current information/electronic age to maximise the power of terrorism, insurgency and other acts of violence against a legitimate government.

Most experts feel that the Fifth Generation, in the evolution of modern warfare has not really commenced. Noted military scholar Dr TX Hammes has opined that it would unfold, "super-empowered small groups that fight for a cause rather than a nation using off the shelf technology to attack nation states or even the entire international system. The 2001 anthrax attack in Washington DC may have been the first example of this attack." He further amplifies that "it will truly be a 'nets and jets' war. The network will bring the key information, a field to recruit volunteers and the jets will provide for worldwide inexpensive, effective dissemination."² Presently, militarisation of Space is in a stage of infancy, but Space warfare would be added to the Fifth Generation. Although chemical and biological weapons like mustard gas were used as early as the First World War, the threat of biological weapons in the hands of technology driven terrorists is a real threat to mankind.

Spectrum and Characteristics of Future Conflicts

Unquestionably, there has been a paradigm shift in the spectrum and nature of warfare. Clear-cut distinctions between conventional and unconventional wars are getting blurred and there is not much to separate the periods of peace and war. Conflicts in the foreseeable future are likely to be both varied and complex; however, a few aspects stand out. Firstly, the existence of nuclear weapons now with a growing number of states has successfully deterred powerful nations from engaging in outright warfare. Even the enormous destructive power of conventional weapons, and consequently the unacceptable collateral damage in an all out war is a prohibiting factor. Thus a 'Total War', even if it is purely conventional in nature, would give way to limited war or restricted war and an array of low intensity conflicts. Recent events like the 2006 Lebanon conflict, the 2008 Russian campaign in Georgia in 2008 and the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009 are examples of such conflicts. Even the ongoing Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and the US intervention in Iraq are restricted conflicts in many ways. All out wars are inexorably giving way to "wars by other means" – sub-conventional and asymmetrical across a wide range in the spectrum of conflict. Weaker states, sub-state and non-state actors are moving to unconventional and other irregular means of warfare to achieve their political

objectives. Some non-state groupings are acquiring conventional capabilities which earlier existed only with nations, e.g. the Hamas today has conventional weaponry which even most smaller countries do not possess. The erstwhile Tamil Tigers boasted of an arsenal which took on the might of the regular Sri Lankan Armed Forces. Not surprisingly the Chinese People's Liberation Army speaks of Unrestricted Warfare in which every sphere of the state is attacked and the aim is to restrain the enemy's development without physically going to war! ³ In addition, even most established governments seek to settle differences diplomatically and with economic sanctions rather than using military force. International acceptance, prior to launch of military operations, has since assumed great importance. Though conventional conflict, owing to major differences between states, cannot and must not be ruled out, trends portend a shift from it. Nevertheless, the possibility of Hybrid War (a combination of the conventional and proxy war where non-state actors join up with the state to confront the common enemy) always exists.

Secondly, transnational and non-traditional security challenges like energy security, maritime privacy now growing by the day, climate change, water disputes, pandemics, natural disasters are the more pronounced imperatives of international security. Thirdly, there appears a discernible trend towards the militarisation of Space by some countries. The Chinese exhibited their Space capabilities in January 2007 by shooting down one of their old satellites which prompted the USA to carry out their own test in February 2008 even though it was a signatory of the Anti-Ballistic Treaty in 2001. Concerned at these developments even India has set up an Integrated Space Cell. Japan, concerned at the Chinese foray into Space, has now changed the interpretation of peaceful uses of outer Space from 'non-military' to 'non-aggressive.' Space could thus become the new frontier of conflict in future.

Another technological endeavour that looms on the horizon is the quest for ballistic missile defences. Though the USA has taken a lead in this highly technological yet operationally questionable pursuit, both China and Japan and now India too have shown interest in deploying missile defences. The impact of missile defence on nuclear deterrence will need to be analysed. In addition, the Revolution in Military Affairs(RMA) attributable to advances in information technologies will enable new war-fighting synergies through enhanced command and control, precision weaponry, foolproof surveillance, artificial intelligence and robotics. In the next 10-15 years or so, some nations, would deploy weapons, designed to destroy or disable information and communication networks and systems including anti-satellite, radio frequency and laser weapons, to disable an adversary's critical economic, energy, military and other information infrastructures. According to the eminent futurologist Alvin Toffler, "The full implications of what we termed 'Third Wave Knowledge Warfare' have not yet been digested. The wars of the future will increasingly be prevented, won or lost based on information superiority and dominance."⁴

Finally, one of the most serious danger that haunts everyone, is the looming threat of non-state actors acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). It can lead to catastrophic consequences for any country. In addition, technology has now empowered even an individual terrorist or a very small group to create havoc through bio/chemical/cyber attacks, using inexpensive off-the-shelf technologies e.g. a nuclear device or Anthrax spores attack can be easily set off from a small suitcase.

Conflicts: Other Global Trends

Some other global trends in the shaping of emerging conflicts are easily discernible. Irregular Warfare capabilities are set to rise exponentially. The spread of light weaponry including portable, precision tactical weapon systems coupled with communication technologies would substantially increase the threat posed by irregular forces. Satellite and cellular phones with global coverage are enhancing the capabilities of irregulars as witnessed in the operations of Al Qaeda in the Af-Pak region and Pakistan trained 'jehadi' terrorists operating in Jammu and Kashmir. The prominence of non-military aspects of warfare such as cyber, economic, resource, psychological and information based forms of conflict would gain more importance in the coming decades. In future, states and non state adversaries may engage in media warfare to manipulate public sympathies to gain popular support for their cause e.g. the Naxals/ Maoists in the Indian hinterland are employing this stratagem and have managed to elicit sympathies of certain so called human rights activists; notwithstanding, the fact that the Naxals and Maoists are indulging in brutal killings and criminal activities even against poor villagers and petty government functionaries.

Conflicts in future are likely to expand beyond the traditional battlefield with the advancements in range, clean destructive power and total precision in weapon capabilities. Apart from Space Warfare, Cyber space is the next arena for intensive conflict both during periods of peace and war. Cyber warfare is a potent constituent of Unrestricted Warfare. It is pertinent to note that till now there were no international conventions or laws to prevent Cyber warfare even during peace and this warfare is not restricted to national boundaries either. The ability of a nation or a group of technology savvy hackers to electronically paralyse the information networks, military grids, banking and transportation systems and above all the command and control systems of a nation, can easily wreck havoc even to a militarily strong country. The growth and spread of Information Technology will increase the vulnerabilities of all users of these technologies. Perception Management is also an important constituent of Information Operations now. It is designed to influence logic, emotions and decision making process and perceptions on both sides. This would grow in sophistication in the coming years.

Geopolitical Trends Impacting Future Conflicts

Globally strategic trends are shaping with alacrity and world power equations in the coming decades are likely to be distinctly different than even a few years earlier. Firstly, the epoch of American dominance, which lasted for over 60 years since the end of World War II, is drawing to a close. A unipolar world is slowly but surely giving way to multipolarity. The rise of China, Russia, India, Japan, Brazil, South Africa, Iran and the European Union among many other growing economies in the world will increase economic inter-dependence and enhance political linkages among nations. However, China, more than any other nation, is using its vast and rapidly growing wealth to build a formidable

military machine to become the dominant military power not only in Asia but also for global power projection. Economic forecasters predict that keeping GDP as a benchmark, China would overtake the USA as the leading economy by 2020 or so. The gradual eroding of the US pre-eminence has strategic ramifications for all democracies.

Secondly, the proliferation of WMDs would remain a source of perpetual concern to the world community. Thirdly, the cancerous growth and lethality of international terrorism across the globe remains a major concern for the civilized world and it is imperative that both the global war against terror and monitoring of WMDs is conducted with sincere cooperation by the international community. Fourthly, it is a sad fact of today's world that many Islamic nations are falling prey to radicalisation and extremism. International linkages among extremists and fundamentalists, is a harsh reality and it would continue to be inimical to the international order. Fifthly, it is also an adverse commentary on today's times that the UN is losing its grip in resolving conflicts across the world. The UN can regain its relevance in tomorrow's world only if it is realistically re-structured, to include in the Security Council, those nations too who matter in the world affairs today.

India: Meeting Future Challenges

India today faces myriad and complex security challenges. Notwithstanding the fact that its national security objectives, derived from its core values of democracy, secularism and peaceful co-existence, have neither impelled it to export its ideologies nor to have any extra-territorial ambitions. Nevertheless, it faces formidable challenge to its security, economic resurgence, and opportunities it has now to play a larger role on the world stage, from China and its nuclear armed proxy Pakistan. Threats to its internal security, in the last two decades, have seriously manifested from Pakistani sponsored terrorism; and now, since the last few years, from ultra - left Naxals/ Maoists who have managed to infect nearly 220 districts out of 619 in the Indian hinterland. This calls for re-vitalising the Para Military Forces (PMF) and the State Police set-ups and strengthening Intelligence, especially at the grassroots levels. In addition, though Internal Security is not the Army's main role yet, it must be prepared to pro-actively assist the Government in stabilising the situation when called upon to do so. This would necessitate raising of additional Rashtriya Rifles units, specially equipped and trained for counter- insurgency operations.

It must be factored in our security calculus that, overall, India has multi-front obligations and, not being a member of any military alliance/grouping, has to ensure its own security. This requires building up of additional military capabilities for creating a credible deterrence and force projection. The latter would also contribute to imposing caution on belligerent nations.

Though a nuclear exchange between India and any of her nuclear armed adversaries is highly improbable but it is not entirely impossible. Thus our nuclear doctrine of "No-first use" and never to use nukes against non-nuclear states is a mature and rational policy. Our nuclear weapons policy will only be able to deter a nuclear war in case any potential adversary fully understands our national resolve and more importantly the robust capabilities of the triad of Indian Strategic Forces. We thus need a credible and fool-proof 'second-strike' retaliatory capability to deter any nuclear misadventures.

For the Armed Forces to gear up for multi-front, multi-spectrum and multi-operational capabilities, it is imperative that adequate budgetary support is accorded to it. The current abysmally low figure of 1.98 percent of the Gross Domestic Product, from nearly 3.4 percent in 1997-98, is woefully inadequate. Modernisation of the Armed Forces has suffered and our desired combat profiles vis-à-vis our potential adversaries have slipped to unacceptable levels.

In keeping with our growing role, both in the immediate region and globally, it would be in India's interest to further intensify Defence cooperation with friendly foreign countries. Apart from cooperation and assistance in training and disaster management, India must foster intelligence cooperation among such nations to combat the common threat of terrorism in the region. In addition, Defence diplomacy is another area in which the Armed Forces must engage both bilaterally and multi-laterally to further the nation's interests both globally and in the region.

A peninsular India with approximately 7600 km coastline, an EEZ of over 2 million sq km and nearly 15000 km long land borders with seven countries; which include a 7000 km land border with two countries with whom serious differences still exist, may call for operations involving all the three Services apart from tri-service operations in other contingencies. Thus synergising the war-potential and interoperability of the three Services is sine-qua-non. The Indian Armed Forces must take radical steps to synthesize effectively their concepts, doctrines and capabilities for victory in battle.

As the Armed Forces strive towards harnessing state of the art technology, it is important for determined steps to be taken for indigenisation in the manufacture of military equipment for the three Services and other security organs of the State. The Government must provide all encouragement for tapping the vast reservoir of talent existing in the Country, especially in the private sector and various world class educational institutions that exist in India. Cooperation with industry from abroad to set up joint manufacturing hubs in India must be further explored and Foreign Direct Investment in Defence manufacturing should be encouraged.

Conclusion

The varied future security challenges for India can be met effectively only by having a clear and steadfast national vision, alongwith, a synergetic political and diplomatic approach and by also incorporating the professionalism of the Indian Armed Forces in national security decision-making. India is on the threshold of becoming a reckonable power on the world stage. For continued resurgence of our economic growth, the desired secure environment can be guaranteed

only by maintaining robust Armed Forces – capable of operating multi-dimensionally and in the entire spectrum of conflict to preserve India’s core national values to safeguard our national interests.

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