

MASSIVE RETALIATION AGAINST UNEQUAL MILITARY POWERS (UMPS)

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ABSTRACT

The 21st Century wars are mainly between the Unequal Military Powers (UMPs), in which the US-led West wages a war against an Islamic State, destroys it completely, and then leaves it in haste, without a worthwhile Marshall Plan. Afghan War II and Iraq War II amply justify the assertions that the sole superpower with the strongest military in the history of warfare, the United States (US) massively reacts against the relatively weaker opponent. However, what is intriguing is to note that the US, despite its military might and technological prowess, has never fought a war against an Equal Military Power (EMP), or even a Near-Equal Military Power (NEMP). The US politico-military leadership carefully selects a weaker enemy that is far away from its territory and puts the boots on the ground only after it has leveled the ground by bombing the target country’s nominal air defense systems. This article aims to understand the logic behind US wars against UMPs in which it retaliated massively thus defying the logical introduction of hybrid warfare at the onset of the 21st Century by American theorists.

Keywords: Massive Retaliation, Flexible Response, Mutually Assured Destruction, Unequal Military Powers, Hybrid Warfare

INTRODUCTION

The first nuclear deterrence doctrine of massive retaliation, coined by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on January 12, 1954, under the Eisenhower administration, was meant to deter the erstwhile Soviet Union with a massive response in case the Communist regime in Moscow carried out any misadventure in western Europe. Secretary Dulles thought that “America’s foreign policy toward the communist threat had been timidly reactive during the preceding Democratic administration of President Harry S. Truman..... Second was President Eisenhower’s belief that military and foreign assistance spending had to be controlled.” (Massive Retaliation, 1954) However, the essence of the doctrine lay in its communication and resolve of massive retaliation at the time and place of its choosing.

However, the doctrine did not last long during the Cold War, because the Soviets quickly developed their response capability, and the US understood the consequences of such strategies and climbed down to announce a revised doctrine of Flexible Response. The rethinking and flexibility adopted by President John F. Kennedy were far more practicable to deal with the rising nuclear power of the USSR. The doctrine of massive retaliation had been overtaken by events because of the growing Soviet nuclear capability, and that nuclear weapons, or at least strategic as distinguished from tactical nuclear weapons, by themselves, did not constitute an effective response to low-level aggression.” (Taylor, 1960). Moreover, the Cold War rivals: the US and the USSR, soon understood the consequences of a nuclear war between the two. By that time,

the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), had been established, which meant that “both nations would launch their full arsenals of nuclear ballistic missiles to wipe each other out.” (Flexible Response, 1960). The doctrine of MAD was built around the possibility of flexible response, “including a limited nuclear response to a Soviet conventional attack across the North German plain, relying on nuclear weapons to overcome an assumed Soviet conventional superiority.” (Taylor, 1960).

By 1967, “the Europeans recognized the U.S. requirement for an extended conventional stage, so that the first shots across the Iron Curtain would not lead automatically to nuclear holocaust, and the United States accepted the need for a clear link between a land war in Europe and its strategic nuclear arsenal.” (Duffield, 2008). While MAD ensured that the two superpowers did not engage in a direct military clash, their proxies continued to lay down their lives for their masters during the entire period of the Cold War until December 25, 1991. However, since the demise of the Soviet Union as a challenger to the military might of the US, it has engaged in military conflicts directly with several Unequal Military Powers (UMPs). Gulf War I, Afghan War II, and Gulf War II are only a few examples in which the US has led full-fledged military operations with a much weaker adversary and destroyed it completely.

Interestingly the US lost a worthwhile adversary when the Soviet Union disintegrated into several small independent states and the remaining big power out of the Union: Russia needed time to recover from shock and consolidate its residual power to be able to play the role of the global player again. At that stage in 1991, perhaps US strategists realized that it must have an adversary so that wars and conflict continue unabated for the want of arms and ammunitions of its Military Industrial Complex (MIC). Since China was no threat at the time, the US created much weaker adversaries to ensure that wars and conflicts continued in parts of the world without too many losses to its armed forces.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To determine the veracity of the author’s assertions, deductive reasoning will be deployed in concert with qualitative analysis. Some of the ideas may have been published in authors earlier writings but the

same is being referred properly. The descriptive and opinionated lines are reflective of the author’s personal experiences of interacting and participating on numerous forums with US experts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Cold War-era literature on the evolution of nuclear deterrence will be refreshed to rediscover the early US nuclear doctrines and strategies. This would help in understanding the logic of employing similar strategies in the conventional domain against the UMPs.

Bernard Brodie, Thomas Schelling, and George Kenan provide the foundational studies on the concept of nuclear deterrence in the early years. However, as the US strategies evolved after the establishment of MAD, Henry Kissinger and Kenneth Waltz took charge to guide successive US administrations through the rough years of the Cold War. However, Lawrence Freedman (2003) provides an extremely useful summary of nuclear strategic thought in the post-Cold War era. Scott D. Sagan (2009) points out the gravity of the situation in South Asia due to nuclear weapons proliferation. He thinks that the deterrence may fail. On the other hand, Kenneth Waltz, the nuclear optimist has proffered that ‘more is better.’ (Waltz, 1981). Waltz argues for the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapon states, primarily because of the efficacies of nuclear deterrence. (Sagan, 2003). Waltz’s arguments are of immense interest to this research to support this author’s argument that the US engages militarily only with the UMPs and destroys them using its arms and ammunition to give business to its MICs.

THEORETICAL PRECEPTS

The doctrine of massive retaliation introduced by Secretary John Foster Dulles was primarily aimed at strengthening the deterrent value of the US against its Cold War rival, the USSR. However, the thought process was reviewed as soon as the Soviets achieved nuclear capability and challenged the efficacy of massive retaliation.

The introduction of flexible response once the MAD had been established gave the US a lot more flexibility in terms of deployment and employment of its strategic weapons in Europe and elsewhere in the world. However, the Cuban Missile Crisis (CMC) of 1962 proved to be a game changer and

remains the most dangerous event in the history of warfare with the potential of an Armageddon. The Cuban Missile Crisis started when the US discovered that the Soviet Union was placing its intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) in Cuba. Perhaps, a nuclear war was minutes away and therefore, the US considered this action as a threat to its national security and demanded that these missiles must be removed immediately. Noam Chomsky also quotes Clawson that '26 October was "when the nation was closest to nuclear war."' (Chomsky, 2021).

The 13-day threat to world peace and the existence of mankind was ultimately avoided through a combination of deterrence and diplomacy. The post-CMC era saw a better relationship or a period of *Detent* between the arch-rivals and the Arms Control Talks were initiated to avoid the recurrence of CMC. The traditional meaning of deterrence mainly focused on the cost-benefit analysis; capability, intent, and communication remained the most vital pillars of the concept of deterrence and perhaps would remain so in the future. The concept of deterrence served its efficacy by preventing the two superpowers: the US and the USSR from directly engaging themselves in an armed conflict during the entire Cold War era.

According to Henry Kissinger, Deterrence is the attempt to keep an opponent from adopting a certain course of action by posing risks which will seem to him out of proportion to any gains to be achieved.... The higher the stakes, the more absolute must be the threat of destruction which faces him...But, the reverse is also true; the smaller the objective, the less should be the sanction. (Kissinger, 1957).

According to Arvind Kumar, "Classical Deterrence Theory posits a greater probability of war under asymmetry." (Kumar, 2007). Structural Deterrence Theory is another important strand of this theory which deals with the cost-benefit analysis of a nuclear war and suggests that "the probability of crises and war among states will be especially high in an asymmetric relationship; and, that the probability of war decreases under conditions in which there is an increase in the absolute costs of war." (Kumar, 2007).

In the olden days, deterrence meant to convince the adversaries that undesired actions would be responded to in a manner resulting in damages that may outweigh any likely benefit. The proliferation

optimists, Kenneth Waltz leading, were of the view that the spread of nuclear weapons would deter the states from going to war against other states. (Karl, 2011). "The weapons would, it is argued, provide weaker states with more security against attacks by stronger neighbors." (1997). However, this view assumes that states would think rationally and would not consider using these weapons, and therefore, nuclear arms races will not invite a nuclear exchange. (1997).

The terminology of hybrid warfare was introduced by Major William Nemeth in his paper on the Chechnyan conflict in 2002, (Nemeth, 2002), even though the concept dates back to Sun Tzu's time when he prophesied that one must aim to win wars without fighting. The majority of the academics agree with these assertions. "Hybrid warfare is nonetheless an old strategic concept, reminiscent of compound warfare, which consisted of a regular force increasing its operations with irregular means." (Chifu and Gabriel, 2017). Also, "Hybrid warfare is not a new concept, but its potential is becoming more sophisticated and deadlier and requires novel action." (Raigh, 2016).

Like any other strategic terminology, hybrid warfare was also defined differently by academics and practitioners of different regions and societies. However, most of the writings come from American schools, and without any dissent on the views that the kinetic application will come as a last resort.

In contemporary times, hybrid warfare is defined as the synergetic employment of numerous warfare mechanisms: a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic elements to quickly accomplish politico-military objectives. However, the essence lay in the successful employment of non-kinetic elements with kinetic elements to remain and standby mode and be employed as a weapon of last resort. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also defined hybrid threats as those "posed by opponents with the capability to employ non-conventional and conventional means to pursue their aims simultaneously." (Chifu, 2017). Whereas, according to Colin S Gray, "the character of warfare in a period is shaped, even driven, much more by the political, social, and strategic contexts than it is by changes integral to military science." (Gray, 1996).

Another definition suggests, "Hybrid threats are activities that target the vulnerabilities of opponents

as they relate to legislation, history, societal polarization, outmoded practices, ideological differences, technological disadvantages, and other geostrategic influences.” (Bachmann and Gunnariussun, 2015). The characteristics of hybrid war have manifested as a combination of violent acts with irregular forms of confrontation, such as terrorist activities, cyberattacks, economic and diplomatic sanctions, intelligence sabotage, and several other components. (Joseph, 2016).

The 21st Century Wars

The 21st century wars between UMPs have achieved nothing but cause deaths, destruction, and disorder in targeted regions and it was a deliberate doing by the US-led West, at least in Afghanistan and Iraq. A similar kind of military action is being conducted by Israel in Gaza with the fullest support from the US. These actions are in contravention of Divine revelations that “Do not kill a soul which Allah has made sacred except through the due process of law ...” (6:151). "And whoever saves a life it is as though he had saved the lives of all mankind" (5:32).

The 21st century wars have proved to be far more destructive and devastating particularly for the UMPs, even though the century started with a lot of fanfare, claiming that the deadliest century of human history during which two World Wars took place with several proxy wars, is behind us. Now the world will be a lot safer place to live, because Communism has been successfully contained, and the US has emerged as a sole superpower; its core values include Life, Liberty, Freedom, Democracy, Justice, and the common Good, etc., which are universally accepted as ideals, in a civilized world. Therefore, the expectation was that in a unipolar world led by the US, with the onset of the information revolution, life would be much easier. However, there could be a few hybrid wars, but the kinetic application will be a last resort, meaning there will be fewer deaths, destruction, and devastation.

However, exactly the opposite has happened. The century started with the unfortunate and tragic events of 9/11, after which, Afghanistan was destroyed, Iraq was punished on fake folders, and perhaps Ukraine will never be the same either. There is very little probability of a secure Palestinian state, and Kashmir also continues to bleed.

There have been many other tragic events since the beginning of this century, where the US had total control of events, and freely deployed its values of Freedom, Liberty, and Common Good, in many regions. While the US was busy on so many fronts, there were other middle powers, who were either consolidating themselves or quietly rising. Perhaps, the successive US administrations ignored it or did not perceive it to be serious enough to care about it, and therefore, it has reached a debt level where each American is under debt over 110, 000 USD.

Evaluating Wars Between UMPs

It is extremely disappointing that history’s most advanced and powerful military often resorts to massive retaliation against UMPs, and follows the strategy of revenge, instead of self-defense, against the diktats of the hybrid warfare concepts. This happened in post 9/11 attacks on Afghanistan, and now happening by Israel against the Palestinians. The US punished the poor people of Afghanistan for their alleged support to Al Qaida, and Israel is committing genocide of Palestinian people, for Hamas attacks on Israeli settlements on October 7, 2023, with the full support of the US-led West. Both these actions were taken under the title of self-defense, whereas these actions are out of proportion and fall in the domain of revenge, instead of self-defense.

A critical analysis of the two decades-long Afghan War that started in the aftermath of the tragic incidents of 9/11 reveals that initially, the US objectives were to eliminate al-Qaeda from Afghanistan to ensure that Global War on Terror (GWOT) was won, and there was no danger of recurring terror activities, particularly against the US. However, the war continued even though al-Qaeda was neutralized much earlier than anticipated by the US. Two decades later, President Biden withdrew from Afghanistan after the US had signed an Agreement with the Taliban in Doha-Qatar on February 29, 2020, under the Trump Administration. In the process, Afghanistan was destroyed and the people have suffered immensely in the domains of psycho-social security, economy, life, and living. Moreover, the US left Afghanistan at the hands of the same people whom it ousted two decades ago, yet continues to denounce them for holding their much-

needed funds based on violating the Doha Agreement.

The post-9/11 Afghan war was grossly mismanaged in terms of its initiation, execution, continuation, and even culmination. The US failed to evaluate the resolve of the Afghan people in that they did not accept foreign occupation and had defeated two global powers of the time earlier: Great Britain and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The continued war did not have well-thought or clearly defined political or military objectives that were doable or preferable. The fight continued for years and years against the same ill-equipped but determined fighters until the US and NATO decided to call it a day. Likewise, the hasty withdrawal of the world's best-armed forces demonstrated clearly that the occupation was without a purpose and unethical. The US military fails to answer if it achieved its politico-military objectives by destroying a UMP that was unable to respond at a similar plane or the end of a failed campaign, was it worth putting the boots on the ground against a UMP? Perhaps, the US repeated the mistakes that were made by the British Empire and the Soviet Union that the invaders could enter Afghanistan using the might of their armed forces, but could not remain in power without suffering unbearable losses and ultimately leaving the place. Afghan society is averse to foreign occupation and has proved that they would jealously guard their identity as an independent nation.

Iraq may not have caused the US so many losses as much as the Afghans have. The people of Afghanistan may have reminded the US of a lesson from the Chinese sage Tzu's precepts (Clavell, 1983, and Shamsi, 2013) that, know your enemy, and know yourself; perhaps US experts did not give too much consideration to Sun Tzu's precepts and the historical accounts of failed attempts of the British and Soviets.

While the US was still looking for an excuse for its failures in Afghanistan, Russia decided to enter Ukraine, to extend its perimeters to block NATO forces on its doorsteps. For years, the Kremlin had been pushing against NATO's expansion, particularly against Ukraine's joining the military alliance was seen as a genuine security threat. It is evident now that Ukraine was Russia's red line. However, it is yet to be concluded if the Russia-Ukraine war can be categorized as one between

UMPs because Ukraine is getting all kinds of support from NATO: financial, political, military, training, and even real-time intelligence and surveillance. Moreover, NATO is providing its state-of-the-art equipment to Ukraine to continue fighting the Russians in the domain of air defense, drones, and cyber technology.

Also, Russia is not retaliating to Ukraine's counteroffensives which are well supported by NATO in a massive way as the US and Israel do against UMPs. Even though the Russia-Ukraine war is well into its second year, Russia has not resorted to causing massive degradation and destruction to Ukraine's critical infrastructure, as has been the strategy of the US and Israel against their relatively weaker adversaries.

Brief Analysis of the US War Economy against UMPs (Afghanistan)

Interestingly, the US economy revolves around its participation and support for wars and conflicts across different regions. For instance, the US has spent over \$2.3 trillion (2021) since the attacks on Afghanistan began in 2001 following the events of 9/11. The US uses this money to order its Military Industrial Complex (MIC) to support its war effort by manufacturing and distributing the required arms and pieces of equipment by all its four services: Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines. Another study suggests that as much as \$1 trillion went straight to the Department of Defense (DoD) for Overseas Contingency Operations. (Sabga, 2021). The next \$530 billion went back to the US government as interest payment it borrowed to fund the war. Whereas \$443 billion went back to DoD as an Additional Defense Budget, and the remaining \$296 billion was for the care of veterans, with \$59 billion to the State Department for war diplomacy.

This author is of the view that the amount shown above against the war effort that lasted for two decades was primarily to keep the US economy afloat. The funds allocated by the DoD ultimately come back in the form of the acquisition of arms and equipment, pay and allowances of the personnel, and corporate taxes. Moreover, the administration boasts of creating jobs due to these orders, which in turn activates the money rotation within the country through the demand and supply cycle of the consumers. The consumers pay the General Sales

Tax (GST) and the Value Added Tax (VAT) which also helps in the reimbursement of spent money shown as war expenditure.

CONCLUSION

This author is of the view that the US objectives of wars and conflicts against UMPs are primarily based on its efforts to support its highly debt-based economy and maintain its relevance as the sole superpower by creating fear of punishment for non-compliance with its political objective, particularly by the UMPs. Otherwise, there is no reason for the US to employ its Cold War doctrine of massive retaliation against the UMPs in an era of hybrid warfare, which insists on the use of kinetic elements as a last resort. Moreover, the US had no historical or territorial enmity with Iraq or Afghanistan, yet it invaded both these countries at will and systematically destroyed them to satisfy its doctrinal teachings of the Cold War era defying the diktats of hybrid warfare.

This means the dream of a relatively more peaceful world under a unilateral power that has universal values of life, liberty, and common good would remain unfulfilled in times to come. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the global community that it must react to force the US and Israel to mend their ways of dealing with UMPs so that the non-combatants do not have to suffer with their lives and properties. The massive retaliation against UMPs does not reflect bravery but the cowardice, only.

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