

# Why the West is not prepared for the New Kind of War

By T V PAUL

Both policy-makers and scholars in the West have for too long been focused on nation-States as the central makers or breakers of security. Sub-State actors could engage in nibbling activities in the periphery, often causing limited security challenges. But they were not perceived as a threat to the domestic security of States in the western world.

The attacks on vital US targets, and the mass casualties they produced, have somewhat changed this situation, although the long-term patterns are yet to emerge.

Most national military organisations, especially western, are not well equipped to meet the new security challenge. Their defence policies have been very much State-centric as it is States that have traditionally posed territorially-orga-

nised States, often for rational purposes, and peace has been attained through post-war settlements.

The four foundations of defence strategy – offence, defence, deterrence, compellence – all assume that the opponent is a rational actor who would make cost/benefit calculations and would not engage in war if the costs of attacking are higher than the payoffs.

Being a status quo world power, the US has made deterrence and compellence the most salient features of its defence policy. War against terrorism poses fundamental problems in both areas. The adversary does not hold the same rationality assumptions, although one can argue that a form of instrumental rationality is inherent in the calculations of terrorists as well.

Deterrence may not work with sub-State actors of this

nature, because the terrorist is prepared to die for the particular ideological cause that he/she expounds while committing the act.



Massive retaliatory strikes on the State or the population that supports terrorism would simply make the terrorists' cause gain an even wider appeal among hitherto ideological fence-sitters. Such retaliation may not even touch the centre of gravity or focal point of terrorist preparations, which

may be a basement in a western city.

Compellence also has its limitations in this situation as the opponent, knowing the larger power's inability to execute a war, could ignore the retaliatory strikes altogether. Further, the opponent could retaliate years later when, from the perspective of the status quo power, the military operations have ended.

There is the additional problem of the virtual impossibility of a negotiated settlement with terrorists who may be holding millenarian ideological objectives. Their strategy is war by indirect means, which implies avoiding direct contacts by all means. The post-Cold War globalised (for lack of a better term) world system has given most policy-makers, especially in the West, a false sense of security.

The semi-unipolar order, in

which the US dominates the world's economic and military power structures, is assumed to provide collective goods fairly uniformly to all.

However, we often ignore the masses of people who are not beneficiaries of this order even when the elites in their countries may be successful in gaining their own economic and political objectives.

It is precisely the small splinter groups in these societies that are outside the global order who intensely hate it for all kinds of political, religious or ideological reasons.

The easy flow of people, money, weapons, and ideas in the post-Cold War world has provided these groups an unprecedented global reach for their particular form of power in asymmetrical warfare.

Any effort to solve the problem of terrorism purely through a traditional state-centre-

red military approach is likely not to succeed. On the other hand, not taking any military action also holds risks as groups may become emboldened by their "victory" and pursue even greater terrorism. Either way, the stability of the regions in question is at considerable risk.

The challenge for national security planners is to find balanced short-term and long-term policies that effectively address the military, diplomatic, economic and political dimensions of the problem. Any quick-fix solutions and scapegoating, however tempting, will breed further terrorism and insecurity and challenge to the global order.

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