

Countering Asymmetrical Warfare in the 21st Century

By : Yousef Zaher

Abstract:

Asymmetrical warfare has been a topic of discussion since the mid 20th Century during the Vietnam war (1955 - 1975) and the Soviet-Afghan war (1979 - 1989), in which parties involved were not engaging with the opposition directly, but with smaller armed groups that do not follow conventional warfare tactics, and do not abide with the laws of war. These smaller armed groups that are not restricted by the international humanitarian laws can be violent, and can blend in with the civilian population quite effortlessly.

Introduction:

Asymmetric warfare has been used as a method of attacking opposition nations using proxies, which has been seen in past and current events. This style of warfare has been proven to be extremely effective due to the immense difficulty in separating civilian from foe, and so it can drain a nation's resources as evident by the Soviet-Afghan war, which burdened the soviet economy, and hence became one of the primary causes of the Soviet collapse. Asymmetric warfare is now a key tactic used by strong actors by funding allied weaker non-state actors with the same desired outcome, however can lead to inhumane actions as these groups do not uphold the laws of war, and are thus not subject to them allowing them to be more violent and destructive. Those involved in the small arms groups that are against the opposition are often called terrorists, rebels, or insurgents and are usually resilient, and motivated. They tend to fight for legitimacy, and influence over their respective populations.

History of Issue:

Asymmetric warfare has been a tactic that was always used in warfare. A historical war that featured the asymmetrical warfare is the American Revolutionary War, more commonly known as the American War of Independence, where the Americans fought Great Britain using irregular warfare tactics. After the fall of Nazi Germany, two emergent super powers (the United States of America and the Soviet Union) came head to head in a war that was never fought directly, but indirectly through the use of proxy warfare tactics which included the use of asymmetric warfare, an example of this strategy being used is when the United States of America funded & supported (financially & with arms) the Mujahideen in Afghanistan during the 1980's under the CIA operation 'Operation Cyclone', to counter the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan from 1979 - 1987. The mujahideen, however, launched an attack on the civilian population of the United States on the 11th of September 2001, which only displays the lack of humanity within these groups, but also that there is no boundary for violence, and no moral code. Asymmetric warfare has also been used in various other places in the world, such as in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and the Iraq War. The Iraq War highlighted the brutality and difficulty that could arise when engaging with a non-state actor, as any civilian could be a foe. These non-state actors engaged with the use of civilians as suicide bombers to eliminate the enemy, a crime that violates the laws of war but the non-state actor that is behind the act does not uphold them. Since these non-state actors do not comply with the laws of war, but state actors do, they have an upper hand as they can disguise themselves as medics or use the human population as human shields. They have no boundaries, and do not need to stop at any limit to achieve their desired goals.

Current Situation:

A modern day example would be the conflict in Yemen in which Iran is *allegedly* funding Hamas in their war against the Israelis, where Hamas fires rockets in densely populated areas in Israel, and Israel responded by creating the Gaza fence, blockading gas and fuel deliveries, and conducting airstrikes in Gaza. Israel has also shot over 6500 Palestinian protests in 2018.

Another case of asymmetric warfare would be in Syria in which Saudi Arabia, Qatar, The United Arab Emirates, Israel, The United States of America and Turkey are or were funding opposition parties. Asymmetric warfare that takes place in Syria displays how the non-state actors are able to use outlawed, inhumane tactics such as when the Syrian rebels utilised Sarin, a lethal chemical that has been used against pro government forces and civilians, as well as executing civilians & taking others hostage. The war has now lasted for approximately 8 years (since 15/03/2011), and major powers have involved themselves directly such as Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. It has displaced over 10.9 million people, in which 3.8 million are now refugees. The war in Afghanistan, which started following the September 11 attacks in 2001 and is still ongoing features asymmetric warfare tactics by the Taliban and have attacked both civilians and security personnel using improvised explosive devices. The Taliban continue with these attacks as a form of retaliation to the presence of foreign military personnel in Afghanistan. These different conflicts that involve asymmetric warfare tend to drag on and tend to involve the misuse of banned weapons by rebel forces, as the entity that is held accountable is often unknown. The biggest threat to national, regional, and international security is when these rebels capture weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. These weapons should not and must not get into the hands of insurgents due to their extreme lethality.

Glossary of the Issue:

- Asymmetric Warfare: a war where the two different sides have a significant difference in power, or which the strategy differs between both sides.
- Proxy Warfare: A conflict between two state or non-state actors, which is fought indirectly by supporting opposing sides in other conflicts.
- Soviet-Afghan War: The conflict between the Soviet Union and the Mujahideen in Afghanistan that lasted from 1979 to 1989.
- Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD): a nuclear, biological, or chemical weapon that can cause widespread devastation and loss of life.
- Hamas: Palestinian organisation that is the governing authority over the Gaza strip.
- September 11 Attacks: a series of 4 coordinated attacks conducted by the Al-Qaeda against the United States of America.
- Sarin: A lethal toxic chemical weapon that is colourless and odorless and can cause death and is used as a military chemical nerve agent.
- Taliban: A Islamic political movement and military organisation that are currently in Afghanistan.
- Gaza Fence: A Israel-Gaza barrier constructed in 1994 that was setup by Israel to control the movement of people between Gaza and Israel, as well as arms.
- Improvised Explosive Devices (IED): a bomb that is created and deployed in unconventional methods, and are commonly used in roadside bombs.
- Non-State Actor: An entity that has major political influence but is not allied to a specific country or state.
- State Actor: An individual that acts on behalf of the government.

“The guerrillas must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea.” - Mao Zedong.

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