The Changing Nature of War

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Abstract

War has been one of the key institutions of the practice of international relational, and has always been a central focus of the study of international relations. War, like diplomacy, Propaganda, etc., is an instrument of national policy. It has been used by states to achieve their national goals and aspirations and fulfill their national interests. Questions of war and peace are central to the understanding of international relations; these are the questions that involve the problem of survival. In the post- cold war period, many observers have suggested that the nature of war is undergoing fundamental changes, or even that in some parts of the world at least, it has become obsolete.

Today the term 'war' is used in many different ways. We speak of Cold war, hot war, limited war, total war, conventional war, and unconventional war, civil war, guerrilla war, preventive war, and so on. Wars have also been labeled as imperialist wars or wars of national liberation depending on the perceptions of the users. Elsewhere, however, war has continued to existed, and to take a number of different forms. For some countries such as the USA the use of advanced technology to achieve dramatic victories against conventional armies has led to suggestions that a revolution in military affairs is under way. Although there has been peace between the great powers in the last half of the 20th century. It all most likely, there has been no year without war since.

Introduction:

Today the spectrum of war has expanded from the traditional military dimension to areas like political and economic warfare, etc. But the traditional definitions of war still use the narrow point of reference. Hoffman Niclerson in the Encyclopedia Britannica states that "war is the use of organized force between two human groups pursuing contradictory policies, each group seeking to impose its policies upon the other". Yet another scholar, Malinowski defines war as an 'armed conflict between two independent political units, by means of organized military force, in pursuit of a tribal or national policy.' A mention must be made of Karl Von Clausewitz's argument of 'war is only a part of political intercourse, therefore by no means an independent thing in itself. War is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse with an admixture of other means'. This definition helps in understanding the broader setting in which war is located.

The British strategic thinker Basil Liddell Hart once wrote that 'if you want peace, understand war', while the revolutionary Marxist Leon Trotsky declared confidently that 'you may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you'. This advice remains appropriate in the contemporary world. Around 14400 wars have occurred throughout

recorded history, claiming the lives of some 3.5 billion people. War has not disappeared as a form of social behavior and shows no signs of doing so, though it is not necessarily an inevitable form of human behavior. Since the end of the cold war, the annual number of wars, the number of battle deaths, and the number of war related massacres have all declined sharply compared with the cold war period. Between 1989 and 1992 nearly one hundred wars came to an end, and in terms of battle deaths, the 1990's were the least violent decade since the end of the second world war (Human Security Report 2005: 17). Despite the overall decline in the incidence of war, however, in many regions it is very much present and is displaying some novel features in comparison to those typical of the cold war period.

In the contemporary world, powerful pressures are producing changes to national economies and societies. Some of these can be seen to reflect the impact of globalization, others are the result of the broader effect has been to bring about significant political and social changes, which have in turn been reflected in changed perceptions of the nature of threats coming from the external environment. This in turn has influenced beliefs regarding the utility of forces as an instrument of policy, and the forms and functions of war. In the past two centuries, the modern era of history, war has traditionally been seen as a brutal form of politics, a way in which states sought to resolve certain issues in international relational, and an outcome of their willingness to amass military power for defense and deterrence, and to project it in support of their support for foreign and defense policies. The two world wars of the twenty century typified this approach to the instrumentality of war. However, in the post- cold war periods, the kinds of threats that have driven the accumulation of military power in the developed world have not taken the form of traditional state to state military rivalry, but have been a response to rather more amorphous and less predictable threats such as terrorism, insurgencies, and internal crises in other countries that seems to demand the projection of military force to resolve them. The nineteenth- century strategist Carl Von Clausewitz argued that the fundamental nature of war as the use of violence in pursuit of political goals is immutable. The nature of war refers to the constant, universal, and inherent qualities that ultimately shape war as a political instrument throughout the ages, such as violence, chance, and uncertainty. The forms of war relate to the impermanent, circumstantial, and adaptive features that war develops, and that account for the different periods of warfare throughout history, each displaying attributes determined by socio-political and historical preconditions, while also influencing those conditions.

Modernity and Warfare:-

Although many observers have suggested that the character of war is changing significantly, their reasons for coming to this conclusion are often quite different. One school of thought focuses on the so called revolution in military affairs (RMA). The concept of the revolution in military affairs became popular after the dramatic American victory in the 1991 Gulf War. The manner in which superior technology and doctrine appeared to give the USA an almost effortless victory suggested that future conflicts would be decided by the possession of technological advantages such as advanced guided weapons and space satellites. RMA involves a radical change or some form of discontinuity in the history of warfare. The former US Secretary of

Defense, William Cohen, defined an RMA as "when a nation's military seizes an opportunity to transform its strategy, military doctrine, training, education, organization, equipment, operations and tactics to achieve decisive military results in fundamentally new ways".

RMA proponents argue that recent breakthroughs and likely future advances in military technology mean that military operations will be conducted with such speed, precision, and selective destruction that the whole character of war will change and this will profoundly affect the way that military/ political affairs are conducted in the next few decades. Most of the RMA literature focuses   on the implications of developments in technology. In the conflicts in Kuwait (1991), Serbia (1999), and Iraq (2003), American technology proved vastly superior to that of its opponent. In particular, computing and space technology allowed the US forces to acquire information about the enemy to a degree never before seen in warfare, an advanced communications allowed generals to exercise detailed and instant control over the developing battle and to respond quickly to developments. The speed, power and accuracy of the weapons employed enabled them to be carefully targeted so as to destroy vital objectives without inflicting unnecessary casualties on civilian population. Opponents lacking counters to these technologies found themselves helpless in the face of overwhelming American superiority. In addition, most of the literature and debate on the RMA has been American and has tended to take for granted the dominance conferred by technological superiority. The current RMA is based upon a particularly Western concept of war fighting and may well be of utility only in well-defined situations.

The danger in the emphasis on technological aspects that is central to the RMA literature is that it can lead to an underestimation of the political and social dimensions of war. The outcomes of wars are influenced by a wide range of factors in addition to technology, and in most parts of the contemporary world, the current and potential wars are not being influenced by elements of the RMA, such as specific technologies. The conventional fighting between India and Pakistan in the late 1990s involved highly advanced weapon systems and the use by India of satellite technology. A major part of the RMA concept in Western societies is that it suggests the possibility of using so-called smart weapons to achieve quick, clean victory in war. The RMA technologies allow the battle field to be controlled in a way that was not possible in previous eras, so that the tempo of battle can be orchestrated and wars won without massive loss life. Yet the reality of war is that it is never clean or bloodless in conflicts such as the 1991 Iraq war and the 1999 Kosovo war, smart weapons often proved inaccurate or were delivered against the wrong targets. Even in the age of computer-guided weapons and space technology, war remains a brutal bloody undertaking, where political objectives are achieved through the deliberate infliction of human suffering on a major scale.

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