

May 31, 2009

Reflections on Modern Warfare

MY THESIS:

Conflict by West has changed in past
6 decades

Following applies to West only –
not universal

In summary: less like traditional
war, more like police actions

Exception: Iranian nuclear threat
to Israel does not fit this
scheme at all

But also: It has not happened

Ten changes

Imbalance of forces is now routine

West supremely confident

Unwilling to name the enemy

Regimes, not countries the enemy

Help the enemy economically

Winner now pays reparations

Allegiance now in play

Appeasement is respectable

Public opinion crucial

Victory rarely the goal

World War II

My point of comparison

List of then & nows, implications

1. ASYMMETRIC WARFARE THE

NORM

Then: rough equals - serried
troops, tanks, ships, aircraft
That now looks archaic

Now: War on Terror, Iraq,
Afghanistan deeply
imbalanced

Spain vs Napoleon, Algeria,
Vietnam, Afghanistan,
ex-Yugoslavia

Great powers not fighting each
other

Note the Cold War

Pattern of avoidance

Instead:

Insurgencies, terrorism

Israeli Gen. [David Ivri](#):

“Limited-scale, asymmetrical con-
flicts have become the norm. All-
out wars between states where
both parties invest all of their
national resources in an attempt to
achieve a decisive victory have
become less relevant.”

Note changes in Arab-Isr conflict:

Old: 1948-49, 1956, 1967,
1973

New: 1982, 2006, 2008-09

→ Implications:

Bean counting immaterial
 Not key: territory & economy
 No all-out wars
 Key: Understanding & morale

Welfare of the enemy
 population supreme

→ Implications: war as police work
 means Western powers
 always on the defensive

2. SUPREME CONFIDENCE ON W'N SIDE

Then: Worried about losing
 Outcome in doubt

Now: Not worried
 Outcome not in doubt

War as social work

National interests secondary
 "Operation Iraqi Freedom"
 Key: Iraq war judged by how
 Iraqis fare, not the allies

Akin to police action

US – police
 SH – criminal, fugitive,
 convicted, executed

Iraqis – victims

UBL also a fugitive, as was
 Milosevic and Radovan
 Karadzic

Note how military forces now
 expected to collect
 police-like evidence

Key question – how war carried
 out?

Legality – UN authorization in
 Iraq

Civilian casualties – Gaza

Victim's rights

No excess force

3. UNWILLING TO NAME THE ENEMY

Then: Call the enemy unpleasant
 names, "Huns," "Japs"

Now: multiculturalism, cultural
 sensitivity

E.g., "war on terror" — a
 euphemism, bad enough

Defense Department: Obama
 administration "prefers to
 avoid using the term 'Long
 War' or 'Global War on
 Terror' [GWOT.] Please use
 'Overseas Contingency
 Operation'."

DHS calls the war "A Global
 Struggle for Security and
 Progress"

Janet Napolitano, secretary of
 Homeland Security,
 explaining her first testimony
 to Congress: "I did not use
 the word 'terrorism.' I
 referred to 'man-caused'
 disasters.... [this]
 demonstrates that we want
 to move away from the
 politics of fear."

→ Implications:

Analogy: physicians have to name disease to cure it
Obstructs victory

4. NATURE OF THE ENEMY

Then: countries (World War II)
Not fight Nazis & Tojo regime
but Germany & Japan
Now: regimes; people are friends
Fighting Saddam, not Iraq
Bombs & food to Afghanistan
Operation Iraqi Freedom
fought on behalf of Iraqis
Iraqis given equal medical care
as Americans
Casualties gain for enemy of US
Enemy wants them, US not
Implication: Defeat more difficult
Valid distinction has gone
dangerously awry
Implies cannot achieve victory
Not done in Afghanistan or Iraq
Enemy more ready to assert
himself - Iraq
But must defeat enemy

5. HELP THE ENEMY ECONOMICALLY

Then: Deprive enemy of means
Siege, boycott, sanctions
Now: Offer economic aid
Oslo – enfranchise the poor
[“Sunshine Policy”](#) in Koreas

[“Female Engagement Teams”](#)
in Afghanistan

→ Implications: Makes defeat less likely

6. WINNER PAYS REPARATIONS

Then – Loser pays (WWI)
Now – Victor pays (WWII)
WWII changed paradigm
Afghanistan, Iraq e.g.s
“You broke it, you fix it”
→ Implications: Paying losers
makes war less likely

7. ALLEGIANCE NOW IN PLAY

Then – geographic
loyalty assumed to rulers
Now - political
British “Croakers,” Lord Byron,
in Napoleonic Wars
Boer War, Algeria, Vietnam
Loyalty a matter of choice
Political, not social
Many Iraqis want US victory
“I love you,” one young girl yelled
in English at U.S. soldiers in
northern Iraq soon after the war
began in 2003
Some Am’ns want US defeat
March 2003: Nicholas De Genova, a
Columbia University professor:
“U.S. flags are the emblem of the
invading war machine in Iraq today.
... The only true heroes are those

who find ways that help defeat the U.S. military. ... I wish for a million Mogadishus” (an ambush in Somalia in 1993 that killed 18 U.S. soldiers)

Hasan Akbar in 2003: “You guys are coming into our countries and you’re going to rape our women and kill our children.”

- Implications: Governments must appeal to own and enemy populations
Moral, political dimensions more important

8. APPEASEMENT IS RESPECTABLE

WWI lead to anti-militarism
Appeasement looked like solution
Munich, WWII, Cold War reversed this, emphasize toughness
But now have [returned to 1920s](#)

9. PUBLIC OPINION CRUCIAL

Put several factors together:
Disparity in strength
Unwilling to name enemy
Regimes, not countries
Free-floating allegiance
Appeasement is respectable
And public opinion emerges as key factor
[Topsy-turvy logic](#)
Weakness is strength

Death is desirable

Goal to provoke Western power to over-react

when West fights non-West, the outcome on the battlefield is a given. That settled in advance, the fighting is seen more like a police raid than traditional warfare. As in a police raid, modern wars are judged by their legality, the duration of hostilities, the proportionality of force, the severity of casualties, and the extent of economic and environmental damage.

10. VICTORY RARELY THE GOAL

Then: Victory was paramount goal

- [Sun Tzu](#), about 350 B.C.: “Let your great object be victory.”
- [Raimondo Montecuccoli](#), 1670: “The objective in war is victory.”
- [Karl von Clausewitz](#), 1832: “War ... is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will.”
- [Winston Churchill](#), 1940: “You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.”
- [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#), 1944: “In war there is no substitute for

victory.”

- [Douglas MacArthur](#), 1952: “It is fatal to enter any war without the will to win it.”

Common assumption: War ends with one side defeated

It gives up on its war goals

Now: Goal of victory virtually absent in all three wars

Slogans: “[There is no military solution](#)” and “[War never solved anything](#).”

Barack Obama in July 2009, asked to define a U.S. [victory in Afghanistan](#), offered this mush:

I'm always worried about using the word "victory" ... when you have a non-state actor, a shadowy operation like al-Qaeda, our goal is to make sure they can't attack the United States. ... What that means is that they cannot set up permanent bases and train people from which to launch attacks. And we are confident that if we are assisting the Afghan people and improving their security situation, stabilizing their government, providing help on economic development so they have alternatives to the heroin trade that is now flourishing.

Instead: Negotiations

Vietnam; Oslo; Koreas

Implies: Wars go on without

closure

CONCLUSION - PROFOUND CHANGES

Increasingly murky

Who's on which side

Who combatants are

What the goal is

Defeat & closure less attainable

Wars drag on longer

Koreas, Iran-Iraq

AIC, Iraq, War on Terror

Prediction – just the start

More changes to come