
Future of Punitive Operations in Cold Peace

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Historical records reveal that the British, Americans, Russians and Chinese are the world's leading exponents of punitive wars for promoting their national interests. Wars of punishment, revenge, retribution of the earlier ages, from the Rome and Carthage era to that executed by the Germans in Poland in 1941 during World War II for ethnic cleansing; imperialist Britain's interventions in Tibet, Afghanistan and Sinkiang in pursuance of the great powers' outdated warm waters / containment policies and even America's forays in Mexico and Latin America all come within the ambit of punitive operations. Likewise, the Soviet Union's interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, were carried out during the Cold War period. Though British intervention in the Falklands in 1981 was chiefly to teach Argentina a lesson, it was directed against a totalitarian regime for restoration of status quo. China's operations against India in 1962 and later against the Republic of Vietnam in retaliation of its support to Cambodian rebels in 1979 are other examples of punitive operations during this period.

Cold peace conditions as they exist today are similar to those in the Fifties, when the Cold War had not really commenced and the world had just concluded a World War. The only perceptible difference between then and now is that national interests today are based more on economic competition and globalisation, and a military conflict to achieve national interests is the last thing any nation would resort to, when there are better options available such as low intensity conflict. Use of the oil embargo by the Arab countries or the cut-back in oil production by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) are other options for promoting economic interests, though the reasons

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cited may be to curb increased world consumption and the consequences of the falling dollar in the world market.

Nothing has changed in the unipolar world today. Stronger nations continue to browbeat and bully the less powerful ones, in the guise of national interests. Russia under Putin, already smarting under the humiliations heaped on it by the West after the break-up of the Soviet Union, is hell bent to restore the past Soviet glory. Medvedev's election as the Russian president could not have provided Putin a better opportunity. China, too, on its way to becoming a global power has not given up the historical legacy on its lost frontiers. Globalisation and integration for these countries is a sham, even if it means risking a military conflict to further their national interests.

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Overview of Russian National Interests

The Russian Federation's primary national interests hinge on ensuring its sovereignty and territorial integrity and security on the external borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) members. Beginning February last year, when President Bush recognised Kosovo, the breakaway province of Serbia, a Russian ally, and sowed the seeds of another ideological divide. Russia is particularly sensitive to military conflicts within the Russian Federation, demographic and economic expansion into Russia and isolation of Russia by military blocs in the vicinity of its borders. On the economic front, taking advantage of the hike in crude oil prices, Russia upped its production and is now the second largest producer of oil and gas in the world. This appears to have given a new leverage to Russia's economic capability to wage war, when required. Other pillars on which its national interests rest are as follows:

- (a) Strengthen the military-political blocs and alliances, promote full integration of the republics within the Russian Federation and also the CIS, as a counter to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO's) eastward expansion. Russia perceives NATO's strategic doctrine as hostile to its interests and which could destabilise the region. This has recently been

- shown by the use of NATO's military forces outside its zone of responsibility in Afghanistan, without UN Security Council sanction.
- (b) Monitor closely the growth of regional powers such as Germany, Israel and France with enhanced weapons technology and military equipment. They could replace Russia as arms suppliers and cause economic losses and render Russia's equipment obsolete.
 - (c) Take measures to prevent weakening of Russia's political, economic and military influence in the world and restore its erstwhile superpower status. Threats to the Russian Federation's national security in the international sphere can be seen in attempts by other states to oppose Russia's position as an influential centre in Europe, the Middle East, Trans-Caucasus, Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific regions. Russia also believes that international terrorism is waging an open campaign to destabilise Russia in the guise of cross-border organised crimes, economic, cultural-religious expansion, and communal disturbances backed by its neighbours. The erroneous impression created in the West that Russia's armed forces have poor operational quality and that the quality of modern armaments and special hardware is suspect, affecting the overall security of the Russian Federation, needs rectification.
 - (d) Oppose establishment of NATO military bases / presence in five Central Asian and three Caucasus Republics which are in the immediate proximity of Russian borders.
 - (e) Prevent outbreak/ escalation of conflicts in the immediate vicinity of the Russian Federation, especially where the ethnic Russian population is threatened.
 - (f) Reject any future territorial claims on Russian territory after the recently concluded border settlement with China.
 - (g) Prevent UN / UN sponsored agencies, the US and European Union (EU) from meddling in the affairs of the CIS states. After Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, Georgia appears to be set to leave the CIS to join the NATO.
 - (h) Prevent proliferation of mass destruction weapons and their delivery vehicles within the CIS boundaries.
 - (i) Control vulnerability to hacking and other forms of intrusions of all information, telecommunications data storage systems, and of gaining unauthorised access to them by hostile powers such as the EU and US. Cyber warfare threat has increased recently due to the setting up of satellite imagery, surveillance bases and intelligence networks in and around Russia's border areas.

Russian Model of Punitive Operations

The Russian model has the country's vital national interests in the forefront. It foresees Ukraine's and Georgia's bid to join NATO as on the verge of becoming reality. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, now outside the Russian orbit, joined NATO and the European Union in 2004. Ukraine, too has such ambitions, and annoyed Russia with the pro-democracy Orange Revolution in 2004. The Western world's threat of dissolution of membership of the G-8 to Russia and strengthening of NATO are other possible counters. The threats from three NATO bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the resources rich Central Asian Republics, wedged between China and Russia, have created a hostile situation in its area of interest.

The Caucasus Republics such as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are vital regions for the oil pipeline from Baku to Turkey's coastal city of Ceyhan via Georgia. The pipeline through Armenia has not been constructed due to hostile relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. If the West is nervous about the construction of the oil pipeline, north to south from Baku to the Persian Gulf, so is Russia, if the present pipeline is denied its envisaged role as a weapon for the CIS. Fortunately, Armenia accepts Russian protection and the Eastern Europe republics of Belarus and Moldavia have good ties with Russia. Georgia's aggression against Russian loyalists and Russian minorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions, and the US' and NATO's encouragement, were ploys to commence operations to restore Russian honour, because of the fear and interests as a consequence of the fragmentation of the Soviet Union.

Russia claims that its military help was to enable Georgia to force a military settlement on the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and that it had no choice but to intervene. The US began providing military assistance and training to Georgia from 2002 onwards and the Israeli sales of the Hermes-450 and Skylark unmanned aerial vehicles were also very significant. Georgia returned the favour by committing a contingent of 2,500 troops to the multi-national Coalition in Iraq.

The Russian model of punitive operations recently executed in Georgia was like using a sledge-hammer to swat a fly. It was executed on the following lines:

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- (a) Operations were preceded by the standard ploy for commencement of the offensive, i.e., annual military training manoeuvres in South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions for the impending operations. These commenced during the last week of July 2008 and were completed by August 3-4, 2008. The move forward of one mobile army, equivalent of three mechanised divisions, two into North Ossetia and one for Abkhazia respectively, was carried out right under Georgia's nose. This was in addition to the Russian peace-keeping forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, already in position to protect the ethnic Russian population. Air support to the mechanised forces was available well in advance and Russia claimed to have shot down Georgia's Israeli supplied drones before the offensive began.
- (b) On August 6-7, 2008, one mobile division comprising over 150 obsolescent T-72 tanks and BMP-2s of 1975 vintage headed straight for the provincial capital city of Tskhinvali, leaving pockets of Georgian resistance to be mopped up later by follow-up forces. The Georgian forces' tanks withdrew for the defence of Tbilisi the same day.
- (c) By August 7-8, 2008, the siege of the city was completed and smaller towns and military bases like Gori were pounded before Georgia could react with its small tank force. Russian forces pushed ahead with overwhelming concentration of force and achieved a superiority of 10:1. Russian jets relentlessly kept pounding targets in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia for three days. Roads leading to Tbilisi were cut off by the Russian forces in a demonstration of strength.
- (d) In Abkhazia region, on the same day, Georgian forces withdrew, with heavy pressure from the mobile group which headed straight for the strategic Caspian coast city of Sukhumi through the Caucasus mountains.
- (e) The naval task force, with air support, achieved extraordinary goals as Russia attacked Georgia from the south by speedy movement of combat troops by sea to seize the strategic Caspian coast city of Poti by amphibious assault. Except for damage to one of its cruisers by a stray Georgian missile boat, it was a complete surprise since sea control was always with the Russians. Link-up with land forces was established the same day.
- (f) The Russians declared a ceasefire on August 12, 2008, after pressure from France and the EU, and warnings from the US.

Overview of Chinese National Interests

China's primary national interest is to maintain its sovereignty and to enlarge its economic interests, but it still sticks to its historical legacy of restoration of old

frontiers being its ultimate aim. It was extremely upset with the West, especially Great Britain, when its territorial boundaries underwent drastic changes due to the clever machinations of the Western powers, for example, Inner and Outer Tibet and Xinjiang.

China's national interests after the Cold War are directed towards seeking rapid economic globalisation by maintaining peace rather than seeking peace at the expense of development. For maintaining territorial integrity, it would rely mainly on peaceful negotiations and signing of agreements. However, it maintains that no international law can deter China from using force, whether conventional or nuclear, if it feels the need to do so. When China feels time has run out, it would launch punitive operations against smaller neighbours to correct any strategic imbalances.

China's attempt to forge common strategic interests with the US has helped avoid conflicts with the US on human rights, created huge trade imbalances in its favour, bolstered its military sales and has frozen the Taiwan issue. It would continue all out efforts to improve political relations with the US. This involves cooperation and toeing the American line at international conferences in order to avoid America seeing China as its number one international adversary. China has commenced wooing America's media, providing American journalists with more opportunities to do their job in China to effectively correct the bias against China in American society. Reorientation of public opinion in America has been attempted by expanding civilian exchanges, and by inviting well-known actors, journalists, writers, sportsmen, scholars and social activists to China.

China, now close to Russia also, has drawn strategic lessons from the US' and EU's lack of response to the Russian punitive operations in Georgia. It has attributed this to either a secret understanding between Moscow and the US, or US preoccupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which has given its options a new lease of life. As a counter to the Arab oil threat, China has reached an understanding with Moscow for uninterrupted energy supply, should West Asian/ African oil supply lines fail.

China's fast pace of economic development, based on its status as a developing country, has made other countries suspicious. China participates

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intensely in the world economic system, especially the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), though not necessarily in that order. It may quit the WTO to wait for an opportune moment to rejoin later.

The promotion of economic cooperation is heavily dependent on the solution of all its border disputes. Once they are resolved, China's neighbours will not be seriously concerned about its military modernisation. China can then further develop friendly relationships with its neighbours. However, there is also a rider. When resolving territorial disputes, the sovereignty issues of disputed areas cannot be forgotten. The West and Russia must not interfere in the Spratly Islands, Taiwan or Tibet or Xinjiang regions of China to force a military confrontation. The critical issues would be:

- (a) Declaration of de facto independence by Taiwan would inevitably lead to a war. The consequences on Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations/ASEAN Regional Forum (ASEAN/ARF) would also be far-reaching,
- (b) Any solution to the Spratly Islands dispute which does not include China would be an act of war.
- (c) Tibet has no international recognition which makes any case for sovereignty a non-starter. India's support to the Dalai Lama is without basis and is the impediment in all territorial disputes with India. As of now, border issues on the Tibetan plateau cannot be resolved because of India's continued belligerence. Punitive operations have their own aims and may have to be resorted to, to force India to accept the status quo ante in Aksai Chin and relinquish its possession of the whole of Arunachal Pradesh.
- (d) The security fulcrum has shifted south of the Himalayas towards the Indian Ocean. Hence, China must strengthen its naval presence by the addition of two or three aircraft carriers. China has improved inter-regional cooperation between its military regions and different arms of the Services. China's military training and joint operations capabilities have improved and rapid response and intra-theatre capability has improved exponentially.
- (e) India and Japan are the only two countries which can militarily oppose China in its quest for regional power status. India's quest for membership of the Security Council and its strategic nuclear deal with the US is not very palatable to China.

Additional Issues of Sovereignty

Since sovereignty comes before national interests, the Chinese government is harsh toward those who cause unrest and argue for independence or political autonomy in Tibet and Xinjiang Autonomous Regions. These constitute mainly

ethnic Tibetans in Tibet and Uyghur Muslims in the latter. Some *jihadi* groups from Afghanistan and Turkestan have used terrorism to push their agenda which has given the Chinese the opportunity to unleash draconian laws in the guise of counter-terrorism operations.

(a) Tibet. The harsh reality is that Chinese history has been managed and manipulated to create the necessary ideological paradigm to rule Tibet. The principle of sovereignty does not apply in this case. China needs to look to history to validate its occupation and to justify its territorial ambitions.. Sound geo-political reasons and good governance provide China with better reasons than territorial claims. The following facts would decide the Tibetan issue:

- Conflict between the indigenous Tibetan culture and the immigrant culture was intensified from the beginning of independence in 1912 till the Communists took over in 1949.
- After invading Tibet in 1950, the Chinese Communists killed over one million Tibetans, destroyed over 6,000 monasteries, and turned Tibet's northeastern province into one of its autonomous regions.
- Although the Chinese government had promised a policy of cultural and religious preservation, the forced settlement of Han immigrants in effect disrupted the indigenous culture of Tibet and reduced the Tibetans to a minority in their own state.
- Tibetan demonstrations on the eve of the Olympics at Beijing, the uprising in Lhasa in March 2008 and the continuing violence in areas of China populated by ethnic Tibetans created a series of moral issues for China, including the right of self-determination. One hopes that the day is not far when the rest of the world also will play its assigned role to secure some semblance of democracy for the Tibetans in their own homeland within China's frontiers.

(b) Xinjiang Autonomous Region, the massive western province that occupies one-sixth of China's landmass, is connected to China's interior via Tibet. The Western Highway runs from Lhasa to Urumqi through Aksai Chin in Ladakh and then on up the foothills. It is China's most porous zone which shares 5,400 km of international frontiers with Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan,

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Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and Tibet. Known for the old Silk Route, in more recent centuries, Xinjiang fell within the sphere of influence of three competing powers: British India, Russia and China. With the Communist takeover in 1949, Xinjiang also became an unresolved issue like Tibet.

- China encouraged the Han Chinese to settle in Xinjiang which gave them a 40 per cent share of the 17 million population in comparison with the ethnic Uyghurs at 48 per cent, who are still ahead. Forty years of demographic transition could not stop the Uyghur Muslims from taking recourse to terrorism, aided by the newly Central Asian Republics and Islamic groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- During the 1990s, Beijing's neutralised the rebellion with half a million People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops, including a special division called the Xinjiang Construction Brigade. Tight control by the Han Communist governor of Xinjiang, always an Uyghur and the real power centre, has ensured that China's interests are intact.
- Setting up of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), with China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as members, was a master stroke to monitor religious fundamentalism. Trade deals initiated in SCO included Chinese consumer goods for members' energy resources, opening up of the vast energy reserves to multinational corporations (MNCs), and activation of old border posts. Half of Xinjiang's \$1.3 billion exports are to neighbouring countries. Other long-term measures include investments in Kazakhstan, with the second largest oil company, shopping malls, the 4,167-km-long gas pipeline to Shanghai, and the Urumqi-Alamaty bi-weekly train ferrying oil. In addition, investment in Xinjiang's infrastructure development plans are also underway.
- With Russia also showing nervousness towards terrorist movements in the Central Asian Republics, China hopes that separatist trends would also be kept in check in its own backyard.

Possible Model for Punitive Operations

It would be naïve to think that China seeks only friendship based on the principles of *Panchsheel* and not for economic domination of India. India is poised to threaten China's economic progress. China's future vulnerabilities are the loss of markets for consumer goods, the armaments industry and technical manpower, fluctuations in demands, and disruption of its shipping lanes in the Strait of Malacca, as 61 per cent of its oil imports from Africa and

West Asia pass through the Indian Ocean. An alternative source of supply of 30 million tonnes of crude oil annually from Russia is almost ready with the completion of the 4,000-km pipeline from Irkutsk in Siberia to Daqing in north China.

As the security fulcrum shifts south towards Tibet and India, Xinjiang has been relegated in importance to Tibet. Tibet holds the key for both India and China. China's control over Tibet is much easier now than in the early Sixties. Its logistics are in place and traffic on its Western Highway is passing unhindered through India's Aksai Chin. China knows that the world has serious doubts about the legitimacy of its annexation of Tibet and it is playing for time to complete Tibet's integration. The Dalai Lama has a good following and has now mellowed down for limited autonomy under Chinese rule. The US also cannot retract from its earlier stand, having recognised Chinese suzerainty over Tibet way back in the Fifties.

Border talks between India and China have gone on for 20 years now and there is no solution in sight. The Peace and Tranquillity Agreement signed in 1992-94 is no guarantee that China will not go to war over Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin. Recent statements by hawks like President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jia Bao fully justify retraction of its earlier stand on Sikkim. Besides, Chinese transgressions across the Line of Actual Control indicate that they have scant regard for international borders.

A short punitive operation on the lines of what their erstwhile mentors, the Russians, launched in Georgia, would suffice to put India in its place to ensure that China's status as an economic superpower thereafter remains unchallenged.

Chinese punitive operations against India would be preceded by the following diplomatic/economic measures:

- (a) Disruption of the hydropower resources of the adversary by excessive silting, diversion and damming of the Brahmaputra, Sutlej and Ganges waters. Next, neutralisation of soft targets such as financial and banking institutions, commercial establishments and administrative infrastructure nodes like electric/water supply/sewerage and telecom networks by massive and continuous cyber intrusions; cracking computer codes and inserting viruses over complete business establishments and nuclear/space organisations, as

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- also targeting some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and semi-government links.
- (b) Isolating India from other South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries by pumping massive aid into Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan and seeking military bases, in return. Weaning away Myanmar from India totally, seeking military bases in the Shan states bordering Yunnan. Ensuring that contact is maintained with Indian insurgents groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Maoists in Bangladesh, for assistance in future operations inside the Siliguri Corridor.
 - (c) Taking diplomatic measures to block India's existing good relations with the Central Asian Republics by strengthening the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.
 - (d) Increasing trade and civilian intelligence presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and preventing interdiction of the move by *jihadi* organisations on the Karakoram Highway through the Khunjerab Pass.
 - (e) Increasing presence in the Indian Ocean, especially the move of its South China fleet and nuclear forces.

Going by the Russian as well its own previous experience of 1962, punitive operations against India will not be as easy as it was for Russia in Georgia, but could be on the following lines:

Phase I

Execute safeguards in Tibet and Xinjiang Regions against insurgent elements. Commence build-up of force levels and permanent logistics bases already in position and activate forward airfields. Infiltrate elements for takeover in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and for the Chip Chap and Galwan Rivers Valleys, in concert with land-air operations to provide depth to Aksai Chin. Simultaneously, China would endeavour to engage naval forces at Port Blair to prevent the eastward move of forces towards the Strait of Malacca. Keep nuclear forces in readiness for engagement of civilian targets in Kolkata, Chennai and Bangalore, should an unfavourable situation develop.

Phase II

Move and occupy Siliguri Corridor from Chumbi Valley, Tawang Tract up to its claim line and Sikkim from Dokala Pass; two forward armies and rapid deployment airborne forces from the Tibet region to occupy the areas mentioned within three days, before a UN ceasefire becomes effective.

Phase III

Declare all of Sikkim and Tawang Tract of Arunachal Pradesh independent sovereign states and establish pro-Beijing regimes.

China has drawn positive lessons from the Russian punitive operations in Georgia. First, the passivity of the US on account of its commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan precludes any reaction from the US. Secondly, the essence of punitive operations is the use of overwhelming force to seek quick decisions in a short time before world bodies like the UN can react. China believes that the time is ripe for it to demonstrate its military might and expose to the world that India's claims for membership of the Security Council are too ambitious. Though China has not openly opposed the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) support to India, it has supported the US on the nuclear deal. China's insistence on India signing the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is very clear. China is favourably inclined to sign a similar nuclear deal with Pakistan, at a suitable opportunity, when the US' ambivalent position on Pakistan in its war on terrorism becomes clearer.

China has assured uninterrupted energy supply from Russia in the event of West Asian and African supplies being stopped for various reasons. Further, China wants the US to get the message that punitive operations to resolve territorial disputes against India could still be carried out by China in spite of the recently concluded nuclear deal. The strengthening of the SCO with Russia and the Central Asian Republics would be an effective counter to growing Indo-US cooperation. Both Russia and China have totalitarian and hawkish regimes in power, hence, punitive operations are here to stay.