
Effect of Globalisation on Asymmetrical Warfare

R M Pandey

Introduction

In contrast to traditional warfare or “linear warfare,” asymmetric warfare refers to operations that do not rely on masses of troops or munitions to destroy and/or control an enemy. Asymmetric warfare most commonly refers to warfare between opponents not evenly matched where the smaller or weaker force must exploit geography, timing, surprise, or specific vulnerabilities of the larger and stronger enemy force to achieve victory.¹

This article analyses the trend in globalisation and the effect it is having on nations’ ability to fight this new type of war. Globalisation is proving to be a boon for terrorists’ and criminals’ organisations to organise and act on a global scale. These organisations are using asymmetrical means to target vulnerable areas and vulnerable points across the world. The events of September 11, the bombings in London’s suburban trains, the attack on the Indian Parliament and more recently in Mumbai; on July 11, 2006, are some of the major examples of their reach and increasing capability to cause destruction on a large scale. The culminating effect of this ominous trend has played an increasingly greater role in the world and has affected policy formulations at national and international levels. The negative effects of globalisation have continued to create a large disenfranchised population primarily concentrated in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. This disenfranchised population has become a rich recruitment pool and countries providing them shelter have become training bases for the networked terrorists and criminals who take advantage of the tools of globalisation.² The tools of globalisation include the Internet that provides secure means of communication, the technology that enables them to act, and

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the porous environment that allows them to move around the world undetected. The Indian government needs to develop a better national security structure to deal with this threat and solve longstanding foreign policy and other issues with its neighbours. This security structure must take advantage of a network architecture that would be much more suited to managing information which is the primary weapon in the globally connected world. Policy changes would address those issues that only fuel resentment and hatred towards the country and make it easier for our adversaries to plan and conduct asymmetrical attacks like the one we have been facing for over two decades in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Political brinkmanship often witnessed in our country has to rise above the level of petty party politics and truly work towards the nation building exercise to ensure that our country gains her rightful place among the comity of nations.

The basic purpose of this article is to investigate the effects of globalisation on asymmetrical warfare, the threats it is likely to pose in the coming decades, and to recommend policy changes to deal with the evolving threat. Globalisation has greatly increased the ability of adversaries to reach targets anywhere in the world, including India and other industrial nations, using asymmetrical means. The benefits of globalisation make it easier to use the facilities created to bring the world closer together to launch asymmetrical attacks on our informational, economic, military, and political instruments of power. Additionally, the unifying vision of globalisation often breeds resentment in the underdeveloped nations. While this phenomenon has gathered steam over the last decade, the world has not necessarily become “safer” that many envisioned just a few years ago². Ethnic fighting in the Balkans and Africa, the failure of the Middle East Peace Process, the compounding world financial crises from time to time like the latest sub-prime mess created in the US home mortgage market, the spread of diseases, environmental calamities, and the rise of global terrorism have brought a new reality home to all of us. Just because the world is becoming more connected, does not mean that it is becoming safer, or even more tolerant of other cultures. What is clear, however, is that “globalisation” has changed the way we live in this world. It has created new possibilities for people and nations to cooperate on a wide range of issues from trade, to humanitarian assistance, to the development of new technology. The opposite of this phenomenon is that globalisation is not completely progressive and technology is morally neutral. The same tools being used to advance world societies and economies can also be used to destroy them.³ Benjamin Barber describes a world that is both coming together and falling apart in his book *Jihad Vs McWorld*. He describes a world where the nation state is losing

its influence and where the world is returning to tribalism, regionalism, and the ethno-centric warfare that characterised much of the earlier human history.⁴ While many dispute his assessment, it is clear to anyone who cares that globalisation may be causing as many problems as it is solving. The negative effects of globalisation will continue to promote regionalism, tribalism, and conflict in the developing world. Secondly, nations with uncontrollable population growth, a scarcity of natural resources, and poor government systems will fail to benefit from globalisation regardless of its effects on the rest of the world. Thirdly, technology will continue to be exploited to benefit the developed nations and illicit criminal/terrorist networks, and will have little effect on the developing world. In all the scenarios, the power of the state will weaken and the power of the non-state networked actors will continue to expand with the help of the tools of globalisation. As globalisation continues to increase, it will further widen the gap between the rich and the developing world. As this gap widens, and information and latest technology continue to be transferred to the emerging world, we are going to have to deal with better-organised and equipped networked threats.³

An analysis of major terror strikes during the last decade in India and abroad makes it amply clear as to how these networked terror organisations have used the infrastructure tools created to promote globalisation to destabilise societies and nations. The analysis of events leading to the September 11, 2001, the attack on the twin towers in the US, the attack on the Indian Parliament and more recently, the attack on Mumbai suburban trains brings out the methodology adopted by these terror groups. In all these terrorist strikes, funds were transferred to the perpetrators using the global financial network, instructions were passed on using coded e-mail messages on the net and various means of transport were used to ferry the perpetrators and the explosives used in these attacks.

The series of coordinated attacks of September 11, 2001, and closer home in the Mumbai suburban trains on July, 11, 2006, demonstrate how globalisation has increased the ability of terrorists and other non-state actors to project power in the

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global environment. In addition to simply causing terror, the 9/11 attack resulted in billions of dollars worth of actual physical damage to the city of New York and the Pentagon in terms of real property lost, billions of dollars in lost business, and lost investment value and, most importantly, loss of precious human lives, leaving behind a number of orphans besides the cost incurred in fighting the War on Terrorism for the US, estimated at a billion dollars a month, and the increased costs of homeland security, and future preparedness for such disasters for other nations.

Globalisation, Information and Power

Globalisation, thus, has greatly increased the ability of both state and non-state (terrorists, norco-terrorists, criminal organisations) players to project power on a global scale. Globalisation has directly contributed to the ability to inflict massive real damage in the target countries. Moreover, these attacks have worldwide ramifications for the financial markets because economies today are so globally interlinked. When US airports shut down for three days, it affected every industrial nation in the world. When the US stock markets were closed, it had a tremendous negative effect on the world markets. Had the US financial system collapsed, it is almost certain that world markets would have soon followed. Similar was the situation in India when the market tumbled immediately after the serial blasts in Mumbai on July 11, 2006.

There are two major schools of thought on globalisation. The first is that globalisation is a progressive movement that will only increase opportunities and raise the standard of living worldwide or, more simply, that globalisation is inherently good. As nations, cultures, and people interact with each other, they are bound to become more culturally aware, and more apt to cooperate and solve problems in a way that is mutually beneficial to all.⁵

The second school of thought is that globalisation has further widened the gap between the haves and have-nots of the world and that the information revolution simply allows the developed powers to flaunt their superiority on a global scale. The developed nations are getting richer not by helping the rest of the world develop through globalisation, but rather by exploiting the developing world for their own benefit.⁵

Globalisation generally refers to the rapid and largely unrestricted flow of information, ideas, cultural values, capital, goods and services, and people, leading to governments having less and less control over flow of information, technology, diseases, migrants, arms, and financial transactions, both legal and illegal, across their borders. Non-state actors ranging from business firms to non-profit organisations tend to play increasingly larger roles in both national

and international affairs. Globalisation is leading to states with ineffective and incompetent governance failing to not only benefit from globalisation, but, in some instances, giving rise to conflicts at home and abroad, ensuring an even wider gap between regional winners and losers.⁶

These insights contain common elements that are essential to understanding globalisation. These common elements are the explosion of people, capital and goods across international boundaries, the resentment and resulting ill effects caused by globalisation, the increase and proliferation of information and technology, and the rise of the non-state actor. These elements are critical in explaining the effect of globalisation in relation to its impact on the asymmetrical threats facing the world in which we live. It is clear that the rapid transfer of information technology is having tremendous impacts on our society. While it is evident that information is becoming universally available, it is less clear how that information will be used in the future. The intent of the information revolution is that information is used for “the collective good”, or to promote “prosperity” for all, but very often, that is not the case. It can be used to destroy just as easily as it can be used to build, to attack and to defend, and to exploit as well as to protect. It is this perversion of the revolution that is critical to our understanding of the future threat. International global connectivity is needed to support global trade, finance, travel, and communication. In order for the network to support these tasks, it must provide global, secure and private means to communicate. The network provides this identical capability to both potential perpetrators of crime as well as to legitimate users. They can communicate, move finances, and plan operations utilising the same tools as large corporations and states. The exploitation of the information revolution, aided by globalisation, is having a tremendous effect on the ability of groups to organise, proliferate and act globally.⁷

The second globalising effect, the media, has had a tremendous effect on nations’ ability to pursue their national objectives in modern times. We see the positive as well as negative effects of this aspect regularly. The nation states are often forced to take certain decisions under the influence of the media which may not always be in keeping with their national policy and, thus, are against their overall national interest. Media companies like CNN, Fox News, BBC, and closer home, many news channels, arguably exist for one reason and that is to make money. They do not work for, and are not controlled by, governments. They will report on a story if they believe it will cause viewers to watch. These news channels relish airing the excesses of the security forces but do not take pains to cover the excesses of the terrorists with the same vigour. The same media gave Bin Laden access to Muslims worldwide and allowed him to plead

his case, condemn America and Britain, and call for further attacks. Governments do not control the media, but the media has demonstrated that it has an increasing ability to influence the actions of governments.⁷

Proliferation of Technology and the Rise of the Network

The second key aspect of globalisation that is affecting the asymmetrical capabilities of our potential adversaries is that of advances made in the field of information technology. Technology was once the weapon of the strong, as the US demonstrated with its overwhelming defeat of the numerically superior Iraqi Army during Operation Desert Storm. The stunning defeat in less than 100 hours had many talking of the revolution in military affairs (RMA) that had forever changed the ability of modern, technologically advanced nations to wage war. The debate still rages about whether we have had, or are in, an RMA, but what is increasingly clear is that the technology that enabled the US to defeat Iraq, is now becoming universally available.⁸

Transfer of Technology

Technology transfer has universal access to space-based imagery, the global positioning network, and worldwide secure communications network. It is now extremely easy to purchase technologically advanced systems such as global positioning system (GPS) jammers, radio direction finding equipment and night vision devices. The cost of modern weapons has become so great that it has increased the dependence on joint military and civilian ventures where technology transfer to the civil firms is increasingly difficult to control.

Space-based imagery is now widely available on the Internet. While this imagery does not reach the level of real-time imagery available to forces from the developed countries at the tactical level, it does provide a tremendous resource for someone who is planning an asymmetric attack. If one is willing to pay, the information can be sent worldwide in near real-time. In many of the instances of terrorist attacks in the past, terrorists have been known to use this resource with deadly result. For such militarily related technologies as the global positioning system, satellite imagery, and communications, technological superiority for any country will be difficult to maintain for very long.

The Rise of the Terror Organisations

In today's world, as Van Creveld in his article "In the Wake of Terrorism, Modern Armies Prove to Be Dinosaurs of Defense," published in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, has written, "The main threat to many states, including specifically the

US, no longer comes from other states. Instead, it comes from small groups and other organisations, which are not states. Either we make the necessary changes and face them today, or what is commonly known as the modern world will lose all sense of security and will dwell in perpetual fear.”⁹

The last 10 years have seen the rapid advance in networked terrorist and criminal organisations worldwide: the Al Qaeda which is said to operate in some 60 countries, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Central, South American and Asian drug lords who operate networks spanning the globe, and a network of loosely connected smugglers who move contraband worldwide. While it is not clear as to what extent these organisations are connected, it is becoming increasingly difficult to define the thin lines between the terrorist, drug smuggler, and insurgent. It is known that the Al Qaeda used the same networks to smuggle weapons, drugs and money as it did to plan terrorists operations. The fact that terrorist trained in Afghanistan are fighting in the Philippines, China, Indonesia, Somalia, Kashmir, and Algeria adds another dimension to the inter-connected terrorist world.

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Asymmetrical Warfare and Threats to India

The article will now focus on identifying how globalisation will further increase the threat, and recommend certain policy changes to deal with the growing menace of terrorism, drug trafficking and other crimes aided by the forces of globalisation.

Asymmetrical warfare is not a new or particularly revolutionary concept for India. The guerrilla techniques employed by Shivaji against the Muslim rulers comprise an apt example of this kind of warfare. The high effectiveness and low cost of asymmetric warfare has led to the inclusion of smaller and more agile units within large power forces that can specifically disengage from the larger force so as to allow larger force commanders to use asymmetric techniques. Special forces raised by many countries, including India, are examples of this kind of force. By attacking infrastructure and civilian populations, terrorist groups hope to cause political turmoil, dissent, and ultimately to change our policies without exposing themselves to the might of our military forces.

Nuclear Terrorism

Nuclear terrorism is the greatest single threat that not only India but other nations, including the US, face in the coming years. That terrorist organisations will not hesitate to use any weapon they can acquire to achieve the greatest possible effect in terms of casualties and property damage has been realised by many states, including India. Many instances of terrorist organisations trying to acquire both weapon and non-weapon grade nuclear material, and atomic waste that can be used in dirty bombs have been reported. With so many incidents being reported, it is only logical to expect that some transactions may have been conducted successfully. Terrorist attacks using these dirty bombs against critical infrastructure seem to be the most immediate threat in the near term.

Cyber Attack

Cyber attacks will both support and increase the state's, and non-state actor's ability to inflict both hard and soft damage. The ability of state and non-state adversaries to purchase state-of-the-art computer systems will increase the already significant number of cyber attacks against the country. As the country becomes more dependent on computers for both military and civilian applications, our adversaries will become more adept at using the computers we depend on as a tool to attack our economic, industrial, and military sources of power. The advantage of a cyber attack is that it can be conducted without fear of retribution. It is the perfect attack within the scope of asymmetrical warfare since it allows the weak to attack the strong with very little fear of retribution.¹⁰

Threat of Economic Terrorism

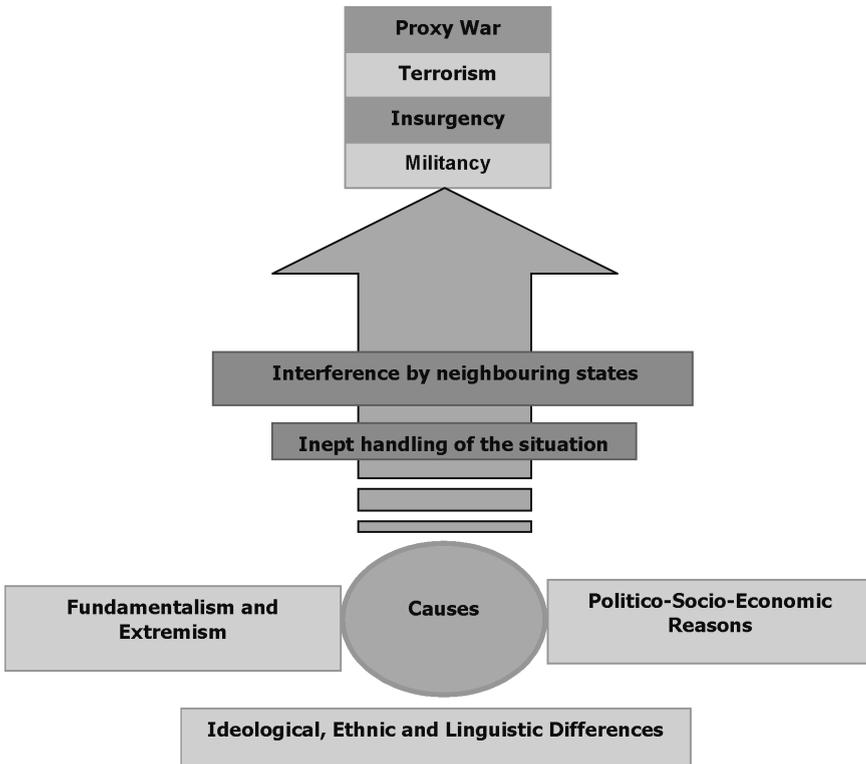
A huge amount of high quality fake currency being caught by the police and other security agencies from terrorists and anti-social elements is proof enough that these non-state actors are attempting to destabilise our economy. With the number of cases being reported, it is only logical to presume that a huge amount of this fake currency is already in circulation in our economy. This, if not checked in time, can prove to be a body blow to our fast growing economy. Evidence of insurgent attacks on economic targets has been clearly demonstrated in places like Corsica (banks, court houses), Greece (banks, car dealership, and businesses), Colombia (multiple oil pipeline bombings), India (attacks on multiple commercial buildings in Bombay), and Sri Lanka (banks and commercial building attacks).¹⁰

Terrorism and Naxalism

On the internal front, there is significant threat posed to India by non-state actors. Terrorism has not only threatened the peace and stability of India and its region, but countries across the world. Naxalism is another scourge which has the potential of delaying India's progress by many years. Our political systems are either unwilling or unable to deal with these elements. Peace and stability are the key ingredients for sustained economic growth for the country, and terrorism and Naxalism seem to threaten this very peace and stability in the region.¹⁰

There are causes for the vitiated internal environment within a country. These range from poor governance to politico-socio-economic reasons. Fig 1 below shows these causes and their fallouts clearly.¹¹

Fig.1
**Causes for the Vitiating of
 Internal Security Environment**



Recommended Policy Changes

Global terrorist activity is one of the by-products of the globalisation trend that has been ushered in by technological integration. Compared to these adversaries, professional armies are like gigantic dinosaurs, which lack strength commensurate to their size in this new age. Their adversaries, then, are rodents with great powers of survival, which can use their sharp teeth to torment the better part of the world.¹²

— Liang Qiao and Wang Xiangsui in *Unrestricted Warfare*

If the trend in asymmetrical attacks is the greatest threat facing India and the world and is being fuelled by the effects of globalisation, then we must change our policies to deal with this threat. The areas where policy interventions are needed are covered in the succeeding paragraphs.

The first and most important issue which needs to be dealt with is security of own nuclear material. India has had a sterling record so far of ensuring safety of its weapon as well as non-weapon grade nuclear material. However, with the ever expanding threat of terrorism and Naxalism, foolproof measures need to be incorporated in the handling and transportation of nuclear material. These measures will gain more prominence since our country will be in a position to import uranium from the countries forming part of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. India must also take part in all international efforts to safeguard nuclear material and deny its reach to rogue elements.

The next issue is safeguarding against cyber attacks. A lot of work has to be done by the country to ensure safety against cyber attacks. The developing economy of the country is becoming more and more dependent upon information technology and, hence, reliance on computer networks for the government as well as the private sector has increased manifold. All these networks are susceptible to cyber attacks. A lot of work, from creating awareness to ensuring foolproof security of information technology (IT) systems, and networks is required to be done to guard against this threat.

As India experiences rapid economic growth, economic security and trade security will be increasingly more important. In other words, geo-economics, rather than geo-politics, will become the priority. The new threats to India will involve threats to its economic interests, and this, in turn, will imply that India would have to forget geographical boundaries and actually prepare itself to protect its interests even beyond its geographical borders. The menace of fake currency needs to be checked by introducing plastic notes with high security features and other measures required to defeat this threat.

The other security implication of India's economic resurgence would be in the arena of energy security. As India's energy needs grow dramatically, India's basic security interest would clearly lie in ensuring a free, uninterrupted flow of energy to fuel its economic growth. The signing of the 123 Agreement with the USA is an important step in this direction. The country has already realised this need and formulated the necessary policy for private sector participation in power generation as well as transmission and distribution. Recent action being taken by the government to set up mega power plants in different parts of the country is a welcome step in this direction. However, more non-conventional sources of energy like wind, solar and bio need to be given a further boost to meet the ever increasing energy needs of the country to reduce its dependence on imported oil from the Gulf states. Physical security of these assets also needs to be beefed up to defeat any evil designs on the part of terrorists and Naxals.

On tackling terrorism, India carries its burden of combating terrorism on its own. It would need to act alone to force a change of attitude and conviction in Pakistan; international opinion can help only to a certain extent. For this reason, India's peace initiatives with Pakistan must be pursued with renewed vigour. Pakistan now also finds itself increasingly vulnerable to major terrorist attacks. Musharraf and some of his top military commanders have repeatedly experienced assassination attempts. Such developments have, in turn, led to a new understanding of the need to stabilise Indo-Pak relations. The present momentum in improving Indo-Pak relations is required to be maintained to capitalise on Pakistani realisation of the problems it is facing after the storming of the Masjid Lal on July 10, 2007.

Modernisation of paramilitary forces and central police organisations is a crying need. The central government has approved a five-year modernisation plan for six central police forces under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in February 2002, with an outlay of Rs. 3,470 crore, with a view to ensuring that these forces have superior weaponry, communication equipment, surveillance equipment, mobility, etc. vis-à-vis their adversaries.¹³ However, what is needed is integration of these forces by bringing the representatives of these agencies/forces under a single umbrella of a homeland defence force. The military should provide the resources, command and control (people and facilities), and operational expertise. The primary weapon in homeland defence is going to be information. The homeland defence force needs to be a network that facilitates the rapid transfer of information nationally and internationally when required to prevent terrorist attacks in the country. It should have computer, intelligence, crime, weapons of mass deduction and industry experts to enable this force to eliminate

any threat the moment it is detected. Our problem has not been the ability to destroy the threat, but gaining actionable information prior to the attack. The homeland defence force should consist of a network of operating locations dispersed nationally to leverage information to identify threats, provide actionable intelligence to military commanders, provide public warning and crisis response, and act as a national information coordination centre.

Lastly, the government has to ensure that the benefits of economic growth reach right down to the poor strata to ensure that feelings of alienation do not grow in any segment of society. The politics has to rise above the level of caste, creed, religion and language for overall peaceful growth of the country as also to strengthen the internal fibres to be able to fight this new kind of war.

Notes

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