

“Post-Heroic Warfare” and Its Implications

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1. The International Context

When the Cold War ended some ten years ago, it was rather obvious that the conflictual energies that had previously been absorbed by the US-Soviet macro-conflict (resulting in nothing, because of mutual nuclear deterrence) would be released in lesser conflicts.¹

Far from obvious on the other hand, was the distribution of the conflictual energies released. One possibility was that armed conflict would be displaced by bloodless “geo-economic” rivalries between the major trading states previously united in bloc solidarity by the pressure of the Soviet threat. That, clearly, has not happened because the acute trade “frictions” and economic tensions of the immediate post-Cold War years (naturally between the US and Japan first of all, but also USEU, EU-Japan etc.) were soon dissipated by the US recovery, Japan’s recession and an increased effort of positive economic cooperation (as e.g. the creation of the WTO); within the EU, the Euro-currency plan was specifically meant to replace the lost Cold War solidarity of France and Germany.

The second possibility was that the conflicts previously repressed and absorbed inside each bloc would be released within them. In other words, that the end of the Cold War would reverse the millennial channeling of conflict outward & upward, from tribe against tribe, to nation against nation, to state against state, and finally to world-bloc against world bloc --a process which each time pressured former enemies into some degree of cooperation, practical solidarity, even harmony. Now political and even violent conflict would instead devolve downward and inward, all the way back to nation-to-nation, or even tribe to tribe. That has clearly happened inside the ex-Soviet bloc, once there was no longer a powerful USSR to suppress lesser conflicts, and impose solidarity. The separation of the six East European states was non-violent, the separation of the three Baltic states was only briefly resisted, but violence did break out when Moldavia separated; far more serious was the Azeri-Armenian state/nation-to-state/nation warfare, the nation against nation conflict inside Georgia, internal war in Tadjikistan, and then the Chechen conflict inside the Russian Federation itself.

¹Edward N.Luttwak, “Strategy: a New Era?” in Grethe B. Peterson, ed., *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values 1989* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991).

Inside the ex-NATO bloc, once the unifying pressure of the USSR was removed, there has been little violence and no re-emergence of old state-to-state conflicts (though Greek-Turkish relations deteriorated) but in the absence of external security pressures, solidarity and unity inside states has certainly declined. Belgium is now divided into two de-facto states. Separatist pressures, sometimes violent, inside Spain have forced Madrid to concede an increasing autonomy to the Basques and Catalans, and also to Galicians and Valencians in lesser degree. North-South tensions have forced Rome to accept the increasing autonomy of the northern regions. And Canadian unity has certainly not been strengthened.

But it was inside Yugoslavia that the devolution of conflict has had the most dramatic consequences. Previously compressed together by the two Blocs and rigidly controlled by Tito's strong central government, the nations of Yugoslavia reacted to the passing of both by seeking separation. Only little Slovenia did it almost peacefully; the other nations—Croats, Bosnian-Muslims, Kosova Albanians, went through years of bloody warfare, and even now there is more potential for conflict inside what remains of the Yugoslav federation (the world has learned about Kosovo, but not yet of the Sandjak).

It was in that context of the *internalization* of conflict that the "chief protagonists," the United States, its allies of Europe and Japan, the Russian Federation and China reacted to the end of the Cold War. But no consistent pattern of conduct was to emerge during the post-Cold War decade of the 1990s:

- a) at the beginning, the 1991 Gulf War was fought under the authority of the UN Security Council as a classic exercise in collective security against a state (Iraq) which had violated the sovereignty of another state (Kuwait). But at the end the 1999 Kosovo war was fought by NATO without UN Security Council authorization to violate the sovereignty of a state (Serbia-Montenegro) that had attacked no other state, and whose repression was carried out inside territories that all parties, including NATO, recognize as its own.
- b) While there were several UN-authorized collective interventions in response to internal violence, from Somalia to East Timor, there were no interventions by the "chief protagonists" with or without UN authorization in the internal violence of Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan etc, in which many more people were killed.

In other words, while the 1991 Gulf War *seemed* to establish a pattern, which the US President described as the "New World Order" (NWO), in which the sovereignty of *internationally recognized* states would be protected by collective security actions under UN Security Council authority, ie., with the consent of all of the "chief protagonists" including the Russian Federation and China, the Kosovo war has made it clear that there is no NWO, only *ad hoc* interventions.

There is now talk of establishing a New New World Order (NNWO), this time based on universal principles of human rights rather than on the principle of state sovereignty.

But practical difficulties include the inherent opposition of China, which has at least two potential Kosovos of its own in Sinjiang and Tibet; that automatically precludes UN Security Council authorization, which means that the NNWO precludes any UN-based world order. Difficulties of principle include the definition of human-rights' violations that justify the armed interventions of other states; e.g. , in many countries the death penalty is *constitutionally* declared inhuman, yet it is practiced in countries such as the US. Moreover, NATO's Kosovo war set a very high standard because the US and its allies did not intervene to assure the survival of the Kosovo Albanians but rather their *political* rights. If that standard were to be applied universally, as opposed to a “genocide” standard, the list or prospective interventions would be just as long as the number of non-democratic governments.

In practice, while the old principle of state sovereignty is very limiting (it forces the world to remain passive while people are being massacred inside state borders), the NNWO “human rights” principle would logically require wars against China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia....

By itself, the NNWO would be a prescription for constant warfare in a multitude of interventions, with a Kosovo every month, an East Timor every other day. But the undigested NNWO concept coexists with an historically new phenomenon: the military and political incapacity to wage war...unless it can be done by remote bombardment alone without any casualties.

With a few exceptions, there are now two kinds of countries: (1) over-populated/large-family countries such as Iran willing to accept casualties even in huge numbers but too poor and too disorganized to keep armed forces that can fight effectively beyond their borders; (2) high-income/small-family countries that keep very costly armed forces that have all sorts of theoretical capabilities which they cannot use, except for remote no-risk/low-risk bombardment, unchallenged naval operations etc. The story of the *Apache* attack helicopters ordered to Albania in the first week of the Kosovo war but never used in combat during the next ten weeks of war because the risk of losses was judged too high, tells all that is necessary to know.

2. Military Incapacity for War

During the Cold War, conflictuality at every lower level was first channeled outward and upward from tribes to blocs, and then funneled into the paralyzed inaction of mutual nuclear deterrence, instead of being expressed in actual, real-life, warfare—except for “proxy” wars in the Middle East etc., where pre-existing conflicts were instrumentalized by

the US & USSR, just as local parties exploited Cold War rivalries to obtain US and Soviet military aid and diplomatic support.

The “freezing” of conflict in the paralysis of nuclear deterrence had two major consequences, one military and the other political, in the broadest sense of the word.

Military consequences of the Cold War paralysis: For almost fifty years, both NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries continued to maintain, build-up at times, and update the inherited force-structures validated in the real-life combat of the Second World War (WWII): ground forces still centered on tank/anti-tank combat; naval forces still centered on submarine/anti-submarine combat, plus WWII-style amphibian & aircraft carrier forces in the case of the US and a few others on a smaller scale; air forces still centered on air-to-air jet fighters, plus heavy bombers in the case of the US and USSR.

The past was bureaucratically preserved because no serious *and* prolonged war intervened to bring about true modernization, i.e., the emergence of new force-structures. In the 31 years between 1914 and 1945 there was a drastic displacement of old forces by new ones: battleships > aircraft carriers; cavalry > armored forces; all-new airpower; all-new submarine warfare. By contrast, in the 45 years between 1945 and 1990 nothing old was displaced, hence there was little room for the new.

Instead of creating new force *configurations* as in 1914-1945 (*Panzer* divisions, aircraft-carrier task forces...), in 1945-1990 so-called “modernization” consisted of:

- super-imposing nuclear weapons on the preserved WWII force-structures;
- adding new weapon systems, sub-systems and ordnance *if* they were easily accommodated by the bureaucratically-preserved WWII structures: e.g. helicopters, yes; RPVs/UAVs mostly no; air-to-ground precision weapons yes, but only very, very, slowly;
- computerizing WWII force-structures & weapons.
- replacing WWII-style equipment (e.g. MBTs) with upgraded WWII-style equipment (e.g. even today the latest tanks are just updated *Tigers* of WWII).

The introduction of computers and a broad array of new electronic subsystems for observation, aiming and guidance certainly increased the *tactical* performance of WWII-style force-structures but could not change *operational-level*, let alone strategic, capabilities; for that force-structures must be changed, not just weapons. (Incidentally, that means of course that there is now a vast suppressed potential for operational-level innovation, as there was eg. in France in 1789, or in Europe in 1939; the question is whether the RMA could express that potential).

In the meantime, the conduct of warfare was greatly distorted:

- In the 1991 Gulf War, less than 200 US/allied aircraft *usefully* launched precision weapons to destroy Iraqi combat capabilities, while thousands of other aircraft, almost a million troops, hundreds of warships were on the scene with scant effect

—but their massive presence did prevent the continuation of precision bombing till victory.

—In the Kosovo war, not only US allies but also the USAF/USN were severely constrained by their limited stocks of precision weapons, including cheap laser-guided bombs. They had collectively bought more than 2000 billion dollars of upgraded WWII-style equipment since laser-guided bombs became widely available in the late 1970s...but had chosen not to spend the 20-40 billion dollars needed to fully apply the most important innovation since WWII: *routine* precision and simultaneous strike of high-priority targets, as opposed to sequential bombardment.

But there was one thing that bureaucratic conservatism could not preserve: combat realism. Instead of reality, there was ritual. Many bad habits became ingrained during half a century of passive deterrence. Because nuclear escalation was the catastrophic remedy for any and all military shortcomings, with few and limited exceptions the armed forces of both NATO and Warsaw Pact countries did not truly prepare for combat. It was enough for them to be large, and to have enough modern equipment to make a good impression. Accordingly, some armed forces saved money by skimping on logistics so that they had the aircraft, armored vehicles, artillery and warships, but not the ammunition stocks and spare parts needed to keep them operating in combat. Others saved money in a more subtle way, buying the highly visible major weapons, but not the costly ancillary electronics and advanced munitions needed to realize their potential in combat. (When British *Tornados* went to war against Iraq in January 1991, thousands of millions of pounds had been spent to buy the aircraft, but they could not use laser-guided bombs because a few million pounds had been saved by not equipping them with laser designators; Italian *Tornados* did not need laser designators because no laser-guided bombs or indeed any other precision weapons had ever been purchased for them. And ten years later, in the 1999 Kosovo war, the shortage of precision weapons was still crippling).

Many countries saved money in the worst way of all, by spending very little on training. Enough training to *seem* effective is cheap; but real combat training is very expensive. Yet without it, armed forces still cost a lot of money, while being almost useless in war. Except for the British armed forces and some elite units, most NATO armed forces still do not receive enough ammunition, fuel, and replacement parts to train seriously, or else they lack training areas of adequate size at home and will not seek them abroad, or they are short of officers and NCOs skilled enough to train others, or all of those things. Under the presumption of nuclear escalation, everyone could maintain the polite pretense that all NATO and Warsaw Pact forces were capable of combat. Moreover, after decades of staged exercises and rigged maneuvers, many officers simply could not distinguish between pretense and reality.

Actually the displacement of reality by ritualism was inevitable because during the Cold War successive generations of military officers completed their careers without ever exercising their profession in combat. Instead of being promoted for their proven military skills in battle, generals and admirals earned promotion for their managerial talent, their tact in handling politicians and foreign allies, or simply by avoiding any controversy while slowly gaining seniority. The eternal realities of combat – death and bravery, fear and cohesion, morale and leadership – became ever more distant. Even the elemental fact that war is about killing and being killed was forgotten. The Kosovo war came as a great shock for NATO: it turned out that if they were operated effectively against Serbian units on the ground, fighter-bombers and armed helicopters might actually be shot down, pilots might actually be killed.

As for the US armed forces which did fight a long, potentially educational war in Vietnam, they managed to do so without much benefit, partly because of constant rotation, and partly because their focus remained throughout on the US-Soviet confrontation. The one thing that the US officer corps did learn and continues to apply is that US civil society likes lots of military power...but only if it is not used, or used only in short and victorious wars with few or no casualties. That formula suits the Swiss Red Cross much better than the armed forces of an interventionist super-power. As for the armed forces of the Russian Federation, they are much in the same position: when fewer than 1,000 Chechen hotheads “invaded” Daghestan, massive airpower was used even though air power is not very effective against dispersed guerillas in mountain terrain; but of course to use the infantry would have required combat-trained troops, and a willingness to accept casualties...

In sum, US allies on the continent of Europe were thoroughly habituated by the Cold War to keep essentially symbolic forces: there are still several hundred thousand soldiers in uniform in the ground forces of France, Germany and Italy, but only a few thousand are combat-capable in each (the British Army is the exception – its “combat forces” *are actually trained for combat*, a world-wide rarity nowadays).

The combined result of the ritualistic preservation of WWII force-structures and the refusal to accept casualties is to limit *effective/useable* military strength to a mere fraction of theoretical capabilities. The forces that can be used (cruise missiles, remote-bombardment air units.), are only available in small amounts because most of the money is spent on forces that have no real missions (e.g. ASW) or on forces that cannot be used in combat because of the fear of casualties.

Moreover the forces that can be used (cruise missiles, remote-bombardment air units...) are only useful against enemies that offer *high-contrast targets of value*.

That finally is the reason why there was an intervention for Kosovo but not in Sierra Leone or Rwanda – nothing could be done by no-risk remote bombardment in those

countries, which lack high-contrast targets of value.

3. Political Incapacity for War

Historically, an ability to lead the nation in war was a prerequisite for national leadership. But during the Cold War because it was believed that any combat would quickly become nuclear, when the Americans/Russians alone would be in charge, the political elites of most other bloc countries did little or nothing to prepare themselves for the decisions and stresses of war. Still less did political leaders prepare public opinion for the exigencies of war by explaining the choices it presents, the different ways in which it can be fought, the sacrifices it might require. Instead they much preferred to speak of their efforts for peace. Even the politicians who successively served as defense ministers did not bother to educate themselves about the *operational content* of their armed forces, to determine how they planned to fight, and what their real strengths and weaknesses might be. Until 1945, almost all bloc politicians had a minimum of military experience through their conscript service. Most of today's presidents, prime-ministers and defense ministers by contrast, managed to avoid military service even in countries where conscription remains in effect. As for war leadership, that became an irrelevant quality during half a century of nuclear deterrence under super-power control.

Even the administrative machinery of national command was allowed to atrophy, as all strategic responsibilities were left to the super-powers. Only in France and the United Kingdom, which continued to fight their own post-colonial wars, was an experience in war-leadership preserved, as was some system of national command. Elsewhere, defense ministries and foreign ministries remain distinct entities, without any “national security organization” to link them. When crises do happen once in a while, politicians and high officials improvise as best they can from their separate offices, without even having a war-room in which all information coming can be consolidated, to formulate joint decisions and issue coherent orders. (When the Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro* was seized by Palestinian terrorists in October 1985, the Italian Prime Minister B. Craxi was neither in his office nor connected to a secure telephone during the most critical hours, while defense minister Spadolini, who was in Florence for a speech, did not think it necessary to return to Rome, even though he too had no access to a secure telephone. The situation remains the same today, in spite of the many interventions in which Italy has taken part and the Kosovo war in which Italy played a large role: still no NSC or coordinating body, still ministers going off on their own. And most other ex-bloc countries are much in the same position.)

But perhaps nothing of this matters in the end because of the deep-rooted social realities that so greatly restrict the use of military power nowadays.

The Great Powers of history (now there are only “chief protagonists”) were distinguished by one characteristic, their ability to wage war, not just to defend themselves but also to protect rather minor and peripheral interests. Their readiness to fight, even when there were no “vital national interests” at stake, is what separated them from Small Powers, which can only fight to defend themselves. And of course it was the known readiness of the Great Powers to fight to assert even minor interests that allowed them to claim much while rarely having to fight at all, except against other.

It is enough to recall the Somalia debacle caused by the loss of 18 US soldiers, and the Haiti failure caused by the fear that some US troops might be killed in defeating that country’s military dictatorship, to expose the unreality of the Great Power concept in our own days. Americans may believe that they are especially sensitive to casualties but in fact their attitudes are no different from those of other high-income/low birth-rate societies. During the long Bosnia war, the governments of Britain, France, Germany and Italy refused to risk their forces to resist Serbian aggression. And because they feared the possibility of reprisals against their own troops, it was only with great reluctance, after almost two years of horrific outrages, that the four countries finally consented to the carefully circumscribed threat of NATO air strikes that was issued in February 1994.

To be sure, neither Britain nor France nor any other European power had any “vital” interests in the former Yugoslavia. But that is the essence of the matter: the Great Powers of history would have viewed the disintegration of Yugoslavia not as a problem to be avoided but as an opportunity to be exploited. With the need to protect populations under attack as their excuse, with the restoration of law and order as their declared purpose, they would have intervened in force to establish zones of influence for themselves. Thus the “power-vacuum” would have been filled, to the disappointment of Serbian ambitions, to the great advantage of local populations.

As for the reason why, it is not in dispute: no European government was more willing than the US government to risk its soldiers in combat.

Nor is the new refusal to tolerate combat casualties confined to democracies. The Soviet Union was still a totalitarian dictatorship when it engaged in the classic Great Power venture of Afghanistan, only to find that Russian/Soviet society would not tolerate the resulting casualties. At the time, outside observers were puzzled by the minimalism of Soviet theater strategy in Afghanistan. After an initial effort to establish territorial control, that strategy defended only the largest towns and the “ring road” which connected them, otherwise conceding almost the entire country to the guerillas. Likewise, observers were astonished by the inordinately prudent tactical conduct of Soviet forces on the ground. Except for a few commando units, they mostly remained confined inside their fortified garrisons, often failing to sally out even when guerillas were known to be operating nearby. At the time, the explanation most commonly offered was the reluctance of Soviet

commanders to rely on their poorly trained conscript troops. We now know better: Soviet field commanders were under intense pressure from Moscow to avoid casualties at all costs.

The same example allows us to eliminate the standard explanation for the novel refusal to accept even modest numbers of combat casualties: the impact of television coverage. The American experience with full-color, instant-replay television reportage of wounded soldiers and grieving relatives in every episode of combat from Vietnam to Somalia, looms so large that it might seem foolish to dismiss it as fundamentally unimportant. Yet the Soviet Union never allowed its population to see any US-style television images of war, yet the reaction of Soviet society to the casualties of the Afghan war was essentially identical to the reaction of American society to the casualties of the Vietnam war. In both cases, cumulative totals over the span of many years that did not reach the casualty figures of one day of battle in past wars had a traumatic impact. We must therefore look for another, more fundamental, explanation that can be valid with or without democratic government, with or without uncontrolled television war-reportage. And indeed there is one: the demographic base of modern, post-industrial societies. In the families that composed the populations of the Great Powers of history, four, five or six live births were common, with seven, eight or nine children much less rare than the present one, two or three. On the other hand, infant mortality rates were also high. When it was entirely normal to lose one or more children to disease, the loss of one more youngster in war had a different meaning than it has for today's families, with their 2.1 children, all of whom are expected to survive, each of whom represents a much larger share of the family's emotional economy.

Moreover, death itself was a much more *normal* part of human experience when it was not yet confined to the very old. To lose a young family member for any reason was always tragic no doubt, but death in combat was not the extraordinary and fundamentally unacceptable event that it has now become. Parents and relatives who approve when their children decide to join the armed forces, now react with astonishment and anger when they are actually sent into combat, and they view their wounding or death as an outrageous scandal, rather than as an occupational hazard.

Present attitudes to life, death, and combat losses that derive from the new family demography, are so powerful a factor because they are not confined to the relatives and friends of servicemen on active duty. They are shared throughout society so that there is an extreme reluctance to impose a sacrifice that has become so much greater than it was when total populations were smaller, but families were much larger.

The two often cited counter-examples, the 1991 Gulf War and Britain's war to reconquer the Falklands, suggest different and simpler explanations: that the willingness to accept casualties depends on the perceived *importance* of the war, on the objective value

of what is at stake, or at least on the ability of political leaders to justify the necessity of combat. It is pointed out that even during the Second World War, servicemen greatly resented assignments to “secondary” fronts. And of course combat casualties will arouse more opposition if their justification is less compelling.

It might therefore seem that the new 2.2 child-per-family demography is irrelevant after all, and that what counts is only what has always counted, namely the importance of the interests at stake and political leadership in war.

There is merit in these contentions, but not much.

First, if lives can only be placed at risk when problems have already exploded in dramatic crises of national importance, that already rules out the most efficient use of force - earlier rather than later, on a scale smaller rather than larger, to prevent escalation rather than cope with crises at full strength.

Second, to use force only if there is an immediately compelling justification, suits only threatened Small Powers. For a Great Power, that condition is much too restrictive. No Great Power can be such unless it can do much more than protect its “vital” interests: it must protect allies and clients as well as less-than-vital interests. It must therefore risk combat for purposes that are *not* compelling.

Third, it is true that exceptionally determined leaders exceptionally skillful in the arts of political leadership can overcome at least in part the effects of the new family demography; that obviously happened in the case of both the Gulf intervention and the Falklands reconquest - impossible undertakings without the exceptional leadership of President Bush and Prime-Minister Thatcher. But the leadership factor cuts both ways: the routine functioning of a Great Power cannot depend on the fortuitous presence of exceptional war-leadership. It will be recalled, moreover, that a very low estimate of Argentine military strength (and a notable under-estimation of Argentine airpower in particular) was crucial to Britain’s commitment to war in the Falklands. Likewise, the imperative of minimizing casualties governed the entire conduct of “Desert Storm” operations in 1991, from the initial deployment of forces to the sudden decision to call off the ground war as soon as possible, leaving Saddam Hussein still in power in Baghdad. (Although there was also the fear that Iran would become the next threat if Iraq’s army was utterly destroyed).

In sum, while exceptional leadership increases the ability to use force, the freedom of action gained is still very limited--it is not hard to guess what would have happened to President Bush and his Administration if the casualties of the Gulf War would have reached the levels of one day of serious fighting in either world war.

If the family-demography thesis is accepted, it follows that none of the advanced low birth-rate countries of the world can play the role of a classic Great Power anymore, not the United States or Russia, not Britain or France, not Germany or Japan. They can possess

the physical components of military strength even on a very large scale, but their societies are so resistant to casualties that they cannot use any forces seriously exposed to combat losses. Of course much can be done by remote air-power alone with few lives at risk or none; sea-power can still be useful, and robotic weapons are coming. But Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, East Timor and finally Kosovo too remind us that the typical Great Power business of “restoring order” still requires ground forces.

4. Are there any remedies?

The remedies so far attempted are not persuasive. To keep the armed forces as “combat-ready” as possible - the preferred US *military* remedy - is ineffectual when intimidation fails, as it failed with Milosevic (and Saddam Hussein since 1991).

There is a fine irony in the insistence of the US Joint Chiefs & CINCs that their forces be kept at very high states readiness at great cost, and their concurrent refusal to send them into combat unless a long list of conditions is met, beginning with the demand that US troops should only fight when “vital” interests are at stake and victory is 100% assured. But of course the refusal to accept casualties is society-wide and by no means limited to the JCS & CINCs.

(Much more questionable is the reluctance of all-service “joint” commands to offer the no-casualty/v. low-casualty military options that do remain, notably the use of air power alone. In the Bosnia tragedy, it took years for the JCS to allow the precision-bombing strikes at the end; in the Kosovo war, there was much unhappiness with the only-airpower solution, which threatens the bureaucratic/budget equilibrium between the services - in the long run, forces unused will not be funded).

Collective military action organized by NATO, by the UN or ad hoc groupings may provide a useful “political cover,” but cannot finally overcome the refusal of individual member states to actually expose their forces to combat.

Moreover, collective military action organized by the United Nations comports least common-denominator standards, chaotic command arrangements, inefficient/corrupt support staffs, and a chronic prevalence of troops neither able nor willing to fight. Given the impossibility of imposing any quality control over the military units offered by member states, active peace-enforcement against enemies of any strength is impossible under the aegis of the United Nations. The prolonged failure of UN action in Bosnia-Herzegovina is remarkable only because so many troops achieved so little, routinely surrendering to pressures & provocations.

Two rather improbable schemes have been suggested to circumvent the societal refusal to accept casualties in situations where combat is unavoidable & cannot be performed by remote bombardment alone, naval operations, etc...

Both schemes could be organized quite efficiently given the will to do so but both would be strenuously opposed by military establishments, and both have unpleasant moral connotations. One scheme would be to copy the Ghurka model, recruiting troops in some suitable region if not Nepal itself. They would be mercenaries of course, but they could be of high quality and a common ethnic origin could assure basic cohesion. In practice, such "Ghurkas" would provide the infantry, with "native" forces providing technical, naval, and air support as well as the logistics. The alternative scheme is to copy the Foreign Legion model, with native-officered units manned by "de-nationalized" individual volunteers, perhaps attracted by the offer of citizenship after a term of service. Under both schemes, political responsibility for casualties would be much reduced, even if not entirely eliminated. The US, by the way, did raise ethnic mercenary units in Indochina, with rather good results, and did recruit individual foreign volunteers for its Europe-based Special Forces. So neither scheme is as outlandish as it may seem. Still one would not want to bet that they would be seriously examined, let alone adopted.

How much more could be done with technology, RMA etc.?

Many things are being proposed for the RMA but its essence remains the original "Reconnaissance-Strike" system proposed by Soviet Marshal Ogarkov many years ago. He envisaged global, all-source, real-time, intelligence collection to acquire & designate targets for an overall command system that would prioritize targets and assign them variously to manned and unmanned attack systems of all services and all ranges from AT missiles (<18km) to full-range ICBMs, with non-nuclear MIRV/MARV warheads. No such system exists, and any RMA must go some way towards building it, though probably without all the components envisaged by Ogarkov.

One can see that a global Reconnaissance Strike System (RSS) which included high-confidence deep-earth penetrators could be very useful indeed for "armed counter-proliferation" or to provide a rapid non-nuclear pre-emptive capability against imminent nuclear-weapon use (the politics of near-instantaneous decision are another matter).

But what more could a RSS achieve against the Serbias & Iraqs of this world? (Or even to stop a Chinese invasion of Taiwan). Nothing much actually.

As of now, the purchase or production of rather simple precision weapons, plus the implementation of intelligence collection methods feasible even without satellite ownership, plus air force platforms with an adequate combination of SP-ECM and or SEAD and or "stealth" is sufficient to deal with enemies that:

a) Lack effective air defenses

and

b) offer high-contrast, high-value targets (Serbia yes, Sierra Leone/Rwanda, no)

Neither today's routinely precise airpower nor a RSS can offer answers to deal with

enemies that offer no concentrated targets at all (Islamic armed bands, genocidal neighbour-killers, E. Timor “militias”), let alone high-contrast, high-value targets such as bridges, power stations, presidential palaces, etc.

Thus only questions remain, with no answers from the RMA or anything else:

–How long will the pretense be maintained? That is, how long will non-useable manpower-intensive/casualty exposed forces be kept for sentimental reasons (US Marines, e.g., are still very useful for no-risk/low-risk peacekeeping, but their entire amphibian structure that accounts for much of their cost is unnecessary for that purpose – and in fact they have been deployed “administratively” ever since Okinawa 1945, except for show landings and...Grenada in 1983).

–Will non-combat “combat” forces be widely institutionalized? They are already a reality in some cases (e.g. Italy). In the past, when nations were no longer willing to accept casualties they hired mercenaries. Now they just participate in “peacekeeping.”

–Will advanced/low birth rate countries seek proxy/client/auxiliary forces from less advanced/higher birth-rate countries to do the ground fighting

And finally, is an historical reversion to “heroic” warfare (war with casualties) possible?

In the meantime the great question is how much opportunity does post-heroic (no casualty) warfare leave to less inhibited enemies? Who is less inhibited: Iran? China??? -- in spite of the one child policy, plus non-military culture?

The answer is: only in peripheral areas such as Somalia, Chechnya etc. That fits. We already have a world with rather large “no-go” areas, abandoned to disorder, or chronic petty warfare, with zero development & increasing misery, including Afghanistan, Haiti, parts of Africa..., with more to come.

That is the future with post-Heroic “chief protagonists” that are no longer true Great Powers, and that future is already present.