Death by computer – or how to win a nuclear war from your living-room.

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For the larger part of the last 25 years the United States have been utterly frustrated for being held hostage by a 'primitive' and 'antiquated' war-waging technology - the nuclear bomb. American primacy could always be questioned by nuclear capable countries, large or small. Using force or the threat of force against a nuclear power could not yield much benefits. Non-proliferation was, and still is, a major concern for the US strategists as it protects, and ultimately enlarges, its margin of manoeuvre.

Furthermore, in its classical American approach towards waging a 'total-war', a nuclear exchange has been a major hinderance as would expose the country to nuclear retaliation. As Mankhen suggested, American strategic culture could never fully absorb nuclear weapons. An 'alien device' for a nation thriving for total war, the Atomic Bomb turned out to be a Janus-faced ally. After kneeling Japan in the sole display of atomic total war known to mankind, the 'Bomb' was to sabotage *de facto* the very core of American way of war.. One remembers America lost its military technological supremacy twice during the Cold War. Atomic and thermonuclear supremacy has been matched by the Soviets in distressing short periods of time. As such, the ultimate weapon lost its utility. Consequently everything nuclear has been demonised, stigmatised and ultimately turned into a morally and socially indefensible weapon severely restricting its use in a first-strike situation. The nuclear taboo has been finally internalized by the political and military establishments and institutionalized in arms control agreements. Even today deterrence remains, by far, the most palatable of the nuclear strategies.

Since the end of the Cold War the US has intensely work to reverse this trend, not by making nuclear weapons acceptable in war but rather by 'outsmarting' nuclear weapons altogether. The US military and political complex has seen in the advent of electronics, computers and communications the opportunity for just that. America would not repeat twice the nuclear mistake. Backed by enormous R&D budgets, the US military witnessed giant leaps forward in a very short period of time. With almost complete monopoly over integrated chips production facilities, software and a consistent network of communication and satellites the US has taken a significant lead into technological military advancement. This explains the US's propensity for developing sophisticated, atrociously expensive, hard to replicate war waging technologies. Not allowing the enemy to catch up and match, even remotely, American technology advancements in weaponry and systems has become almost a strategy in itself. For instance, missile defence programmes went through five different stages, one more sophisticated than the other, still never good enough for the purposes intended. New weapons and systems have been continuously tested in real-world situations twice in Iraq, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Yemen. New doctrines integrating the new technologies have also been trailed and tested in the same scenarios. The once hilarious 'Star Wars Initiative' of the mid-eighties has become a very dangerous reality.

Unfortunately, betting on the limitations of human imagination when it comes to destruction is a losing proposition. In the light of the overwhelming technological superiority of American military weapons and systems, including now the notorious missile defence program new scenarios are surfacing. Among them the most distressing is the result of a computer-based modelling for a

counterforce first-strike that would annihilate an opponent's capabilities for a retaliatory nuclear response thus allowing for successful nuclear engagement followed or not by conventional deployment and operations. Such a far-fetched scenario would not draw much attention if it would not be for the peculiar interest of US in limiting nuclear strategic arsenals and delivery systems under 1000 warheads. Since 2010 in Prague president Obama has constantly pushed for a reduction in strategic arsenals while missile defence systems are getting closer and closer to the Russian borders. Russian strategists, politicians and generals are increasingly nervous and have repeatedly asked for maintaining a strategic balance and inclusion in the US missile defence strategy in Europe.

It may very well be that the computer has already given a satisfactory solution to addressing a retaliatory nuclear strike. In that case any protest from the Russians will fall on deaf ears as the US is continuing is policy of encircling them with its sophisticated interceptors. There are already worrying predictions about a possible new nuclear arms race headed by the Russians that, painfully aware of their technological retard, will try to compensate with increasing warhead numbers. Incredibly as it sounds the MAD paradigm was a better choice for peace.

What probably the computer-based model does not take into consideration is that all this technological advancement and sophistication were designed primarily to give the US an edge over its competitors and buttress the US grand strategy of primacy. The computer models of the Cold War era were designed to evaluate the balance of power and the capabilities of US defences. Nowadays, American primacy is based on an outstanding combination of economic, military and technological might. However, even a very limited penetration of strategic missiles into US territory will hit hard on multiple levels and *de facto* clip American primacy ambitions for the near and medium future, a scenario no politician in Washington is willing to accept.